Radicalizing Realism in Political Theory

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Abstract

This thesis intervenes into the current debates about realism in political theory. Realism is a new challenge to the liberal mainstream in political theory. However, the extent to which realism, in its heterogeneity, actually has the potential to pose such a challenge, has thus far remained largely unexplored. The thesis offers the first differentiated assessment of this potential of realism and, finding it limited, embarks on a radicalization of realism. Having established a critical foil through a political reading of Rawls' *Political Liberalism*, I divide contributions to realism into those who aim to revise, reform and reject liberal-normative political theory. This 'ordering perspective' of realism allows analyzing the thus far neglected similarities between realists and their liberal-normative opponents. This analysis suggests that the less critical subdivisions of realism limit themselves to be internal correctives to the liberal mainstream. However, even the most critical and challenging of the prevalent subdivisions of realism, which I call 'vision of politics' realism, remains caught in tensions between realist and liberal-normative commitments. In reaction to this limitation, my re-interpretation of Raymond Geuss' realism as a modification of early Critical Theory through Foucauldian elements provides the basis for the development of a radical realism. This radical realism departs radically from the prevalent understandings of liberal-normative political theory and transcends the limitations of realism through changing the relationship between political theory and its political context. Radical realism brings the tensions and entanglements between normative and descriptive aspects of political theorizing into view and bases its critical purchase and practical orientation on the diagnostic examination of the political context. A discussion of the criteria for legitimacy in public justification liberalism, realism and radical realism finally ties together the argumentation of the thesis and offers a reflection on its bearing on a key question of contemporary political theory.

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Contents

List of Abbreviations

BMR: Sleat, Matt (2014a): Legitimacy in Realist Thought: Between Moralism and Realpolitik. In: Political Theory 42 (3): 314-337.

FDD: Geuss, Raymond (2013a): Die Fibel der Dystopie. Unpublished manuscript, permission for citation granted by author, 28 pp.

GP: Geuss, Raymond (2004a): Glück und Politik. Potsdamer Vorlesungen, edited by Christoph Menke and Andrea Kern (Berlin: Berliner Wissenschaftsverlag).

HIP: Geuss, Raymond (2001): History and Illusion in Politics (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press).

IBD: Williams, Bernard (2005): In the Beginning was the Deed. Realism and Moralism in Political Argument. Selected, edited and with an introduction by Geoffrey Hawthorn (Oxford: Princeton University Press)

LR: Sleat, Matt (2013a): Liberal Realism. A Realist Theory of Liberal Politics (Manchester: Manchester University Press).

OE: Geuss, Raymond (2005): Outside Ethics (Oxford: Princeton University Press).

PI: Geuss, Raymond (2010a): Politics and the Imagination (Oxford: Princeton University Press).

PL: Rawls, John (2005) [1996²]: Political Liberalism (New York: Columbia University Press).

PRP: Geuss, Raymond (2008b): Philosophy and Real Politics (Oxford: Princeton University Press).

WWW: Geuss, Raymond (2014): A World without Why (Oxford: Princeton University Press).

Introduction

This thesis examines the potential of recent realist developments in political theory to challenge liberal-normative political theory and, in response to its limitation, tries to make good on a radical interpretation of this potential.

The thesis is motivated by a twofold frustration. Firstly, a frustration with liberal-normative political theory's peculiar lack of reflection on its relation to politics. In the case discussed here, Rawls' *Political Liberalism*, the reflection on the relationship between political theory and its political context is insufficient in view of the tension between generating critical purchase through abstraction and idealization, normatively narrowing what politics is, and aiming to intervene into a particular political context. Secondly, a frustration with the realist criticisms of liberal-normative political theory, at least with the prevalent forms of realism which do not, or so I will argue, succeed at posing a radical challenge to liberal-normative political theory, but rather turn out to be more or less incisive internal correctives.

In reaction to these frustrations, I will offer the first critical analysis of the potential of realism to pose a challenge to liberal-normative political theory. Finding the potential radicalism wanting or unrealized, the theory-building contribution of the thesis lies in developing and trying to make good on a radical interpretation of this potential, which is particularly inspired by a reinterpretation of Raymond Geuss' realism.

Research Context and Relevance

In the past five or so years discussions about how to do political theory have gained new momentum. From the debates which dominated the 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s, the communitarian, multicultural and agonistic challenges to liberal political theory, a 'new' challenge under the label of 'realism' has risen to prominence.

The literature on realism in political theory and by realists is steadily growing. The label 'realism in political theory' unites a wide range of heterogeneous positions under its umbrella. Realism as a movement to change (the self-conception of) political theory has been popular especially with those who hope to make political theory more attentive to and thus more relevant to 'the realities of politics' and those who are frustrated with the post-Rawlsian mainstream of political theory (Galston 2010; Stears 2007). The realist suggestions for reorienting political theory towards the realities of politics range from

questions of methodological detail to the more or less full scale rejection of liberal-normative political theory and the drafting of a distinctive realist political theory.

Arguably realism in political thought is not a recent phenomenon at all, but goes back to those who have been viewed as founding fathers of modern political thought such as Machiavelli and Hobbes (or, for those more empirically-naturalistically minded realists, to Aristotle). Realism has been viewed as trying to sever politics from morality (Larmore 2013) or from any kind of normativity (Kelly 2011). On the one hand, it is especially the connection to the tradition of realism in International Relations Theory (Bell 2009; LR: chapter 3; Scheuerman 2013) and its caricature as *Realpolitik* which has given rise to such claims. Whilst realists in political theory deny the connection to *Realpolitik* (Geuss 2010b; BMR; IBD: chapter 1), they claim that a more nuanced account of the tradition of realist thought about politics is helpful for underwriting a more realistic account of how moral and political concerns bear on theorizing about politics (LR; Coady 2008; see M. Williams 2005 for an attempt within International Relations Theory). On the other hand, the charge of rejecting moral or even normative concerns stems from the realist opposition to political theories which operate with moral or legal lenses on political questions, using moralization and idealization as key tools (Galston 2010; PRP; IBD: chapter 1). This charge also suggests that there are different spheres, a political sphere as against a moral or legal sphere, and that non-realist political theories are hence committing a category mistake by not giving more weight to distinctively political concerns – the exact meaning of which, however, is contested amongst realists, but certainly is linked to a notion of politics as conflictual as well as historically and contextually embedded.

However, discussing the claim that realism makes a category mistake in trying to sever politics from morality or in trying to sever political theory from normative content is not the most fruitful way of engaging realism. Rather the question of what realism in its heterogeneity has to offer for theorizing the relationship between political theory and its political context beyond the artificial separation (or union) of politics and morality (or the normative) sets the argument of this thesis in motion. In order to get the different ways of theorizing the relationship between taking morality and normativity *and* taking politics seriously into view, realism in political theory cannot be approached as a monolithic entity, because this would mean paying insufficient attention to the many different views which have been subsumed under the label of realism. The heterogeneity

of the realist criticism of liberal-normative political theory and realist positive theorizing may have become a commonplace in the realist literature, however, surprisingly little has been written on how the heterogeneity relates to the distinctiveness of realism in political theory. This is especially surprising given that a few years into the debate the question of what realism in political theory means, particularly with regard to its challenge to the liberal mainstream, is far from settled. The dispute between those who view questions of non-ideal theory as the framework for realism (Valentini 2012) and those who view the question of the sources of normativity and the conception of politics as the main questions of realism (Rossi and Sleat 2014) is a recent illustration of this competition for discursive power.[1] I will hence assess the distinctiveness of realism by distinguishing and ordering prevalent understandings of realism with regard to their potential to challenge the liberal-normative political theory mainstream. And whilst the contours of realism will be interpreted throughout the thesis, these discussions will unfold against the background of the (albeit brief) account of my understanding of this mainstream as *liberal-normativist political theory*.

The term liberal-normativist political theory is supposed to cover a broad range of what are now mainstream political theories which have been dominating political theory for at least the past four decades (see Vincent 2004). It is also supposed to serve as an umbrella for the variety of terms with which realists describe the perspectives which they oppose, including "ethics first-views" (PRP), "high liberalism" (Galston 2010: 386), and "political moralism" (IBD). My use of the terms 'liberal' and 'normativist', however, requires qualification. With regard to the former there is first the question of delimiting the understanding of liberalism (which I, however, cannot do justice here). Which political theories are liberal is not something that could be set in stone through an ahistorical definition. Whilst there have been attempts to outline the "theoretical foundations of liberalism" (Waldron 1987) which would serve as a potential basis for a definition of liberal political theory, the understanding of what qualifies as liberal is subject to change in the course of time (see Bell 2014). Whilst the work of Immanuel Kant was long viewed as standing in opposition to liberalism, it has recently been

[1] Whilst the discussions about realism and about the relationship of ideal to non-ideal theory, certainly if the latter is understood as committed to elaborating a Rawlsian understanding of these terms, should be separated, in many contributions to the debates about realism they are not. Recently the need for the differentiation of these questions has become a subject of reflection (see Sleat 2014b; Jubb 2014; Rossi and Sleat 2014). In the critical, first part of the thesis I will operate with an inclusive understanding of realism and will also discuss subdivisions of realism which primarily are concerned with non-ideal theory.

viewed as providing important conceptual, (some) methodological and moral-political inspiration to liberal political theory (see OE: 1-18 for a critical note on the relationship between Kantian philosophy and liberalism).

The second issue with regard to liberalism is the discrepancy between what liberal means in a political theory and what liberal means in politics. This is especially important if an emphasis is placed on the reflection on the relationship between political theory and politics. Whilst liberal political theories have traditionally focused on questions to do with the concepts of individual liberty, freedom and autonomy, and more recently equality and justice, the history of liberal politics, including current Western liberal democracies, has an ambiguous relationship to the values which characterize the lens of liberal political theory (see Losurdo 2010) and is not best understood as their instantiation. A brief and schematic example is the endorsement of "free market strong states" (Gamble 1988; Bonefeld 2010), in which a strong state oversees the deregulation of a capitalist economy, in recent liberal politics. This endorsement is in tension with the political goals of both the more classical and recent social liberals in political theory. The term liberal-normativist political theory here denotes the methodological and substantial doctrines of liberal political theories. Through reflection on the relationship to its political context and through contesting the separation of methodology and theory and hence understanding political theory as a potential intervention into politics, it also denotes the politics of these theories which have to be evaluated against the background of actual liberal politics.

With regard to normativism, I am committed to the view that any political theory, even if it aims to be exclusively descriptive, cannot help making evaluative judgments, which express normative commitments, if only in the selection of what it describes and how it describes it. This only means that political theories are always normative in a minimal sense. The normativity which is involved here, however, could be called inherent to the context or to the theorist-participant's reaction to this context. This leads to the distinction between normative and normativist theorizing. Normativist theorizing is based on a stronger understanding of normativity. I would like to offer a minimal sketch, according to which a 'normativist' understanding of normativity is arguably based on two main ingredients: First the view that only moral principles external to the problem discussed by the political theory are acceptable sources of normativity on which to base decisions (Sluga 2011: 822). Second, such external principles depend on the prior

grounding of a conception of normativity. The dominant forms of grounding in recent years, e.g. in the work of Korsgaard (1996), Habermas (1983, 1991) or Forst (2004), and arguably the early Rawls (1951), have been inspired by a Kantian theory of autonomy which leads to a universally binding conception of morality (Flügel-Martinsen 2010: 143). On this understanding normativity needs to be *introduced* into a specific political context by the political theory. I take that the political theories of e.g. John Rawls, Charles Larmore, Joseph Raz, Brian Barry and other prominent liberal political theorists of different strands have advanced theories which introduce either substantive or procedural norms and principles external to the addressed political context which makes their political theories liberal-normativist.

Envisaged Contributions

Against the background of this research context, the principal goal of the thesis is to show and overcome the limitation of realism to yet another corrective of liberal-normativist political theory. Developing a radical realism on the basis of the critical investigation of the current debates about realism in political theory has not hitherto been attempted and is the main envisaged theory-building contribution of this thesis. Radical realism aims to redirect the debates about realism. One goal is to redirect the debates about realism away from methodological concerns toward reflecting on the entanglement(s) between political theory and politics. This requires activating the thus far sidelined potential which could be invoked – through reinterpretation and expansion especially of Raymond Geuss' work – to radicalize realism, and making it speak to the debates about realism *and* to liberal-normativist political theory. Another goal is to use the current popularity of realism in order to make space for (or revive) a subversively critical and reflexive theoretical perspective on politics which defies the dichotomic choice between critical purchase and concrete relevance that has become somewhat characteristic of realism. This perspective can be understood as one mosaic piece of a larger challenge to the hegemony of liberal-normativist political theory.

The development of a radical realism, however, cannot start from scratch. Rather, in order to provide the critical foil for radicalizing realism, a critical investigation of these debates from a perspective focused on the potential of realism to challenge liberal-normativist political theory is required. This perspective and the criticism of the realist criticisms of liberal normativism also aspire to enhance our understanding of the debates

about realism. Offering such a perspective for the first time marks the second most important envisaged contribution of this thesis.

The third envisaged contribution is also instrumental to the development of radical realism. Radical realism takes its inspiration to a considerable extent from the work of Raymond Geuss. However, thus far, Geuss has been viewed as a figurehead of the prevalent subdivisions of realism which is exemplary of the often truncated reading of his work. In contradistinction to these readings I will offer a reinterpretation of Geussian realism (in chapter 4). This will be the first sustained discussion of Geuss' realism which looks to explore its potential for underwriting a radical realism, which could be interpreted as a sympathetic development of distinctive aspects of Geuss' work.

The fourth envisaged contribution of this thesis lies in its critical and interconnected discussion of how the understandings of political theory treated in this thesis – political liberalism, realism and radical realism – conceptualize legitimacy, or rather, the evaluation of political regimes. Whilst legitimacy is the pivotal criterion for political liberals and, even more so, for realists for this purpose, I offer a sketch of how radical realism could transform their conceptualization of legitimacy.

Reflections on Methodology and Chapter Outline

Reflections on Methodology

The question of to what extent the debates about realism are limited to or exceed methodological concerns is itself subject to debate (and will be touched on in chapters 2 and 3 below). Further the question of whether a political theory depends on a systematic analytical methodology, clearly separated from its normative or even political commitments, or could have critical purchase through an eclectic combination of tools which bring the entanglement of the methods and normative and political commitments into the discussion, is an issue of contention between liberal-normativist political theory and the radical realism to be developed in this thesis. This thesis is hence not primarily an inquiry into the methodology of political theory but rather contests such a compartmentalization through bringing to bear a mixture of tools on getting the relationship between political theory and politics into view, from political liberalism, via realism to radical realism.

The close reading of Rawls' *Political Liberalism* and the analysis and interpretation of the potential of realism to pose a challenge to liberal-normativist political theory build on textual study, in the sense of hermeneutically engaging with the relevant texts, to give an accurate account of the horizon of the text in exchange with the horizon of the interpreter. The goal of this textual study, however, is not a rational reconstruction of *Political Liberalism* or of realism in political theory; rather it aims to set up the background for the assessment of realism's potential for challenging liberal-normativist political theory. In this sense the exegesis in this thesis is critical from the beginning. The emphasis of this thesis on the relationship between political theory and its context requires reflection on how the philosophical arguments which are the subject of and are developed from critical textual study can be linked to their political context and how their often implicit political commitments can be explicated and interpreted. In this sense, this thesis is committed to reflexivity in textual study and argumentation.

Developing a radical realism against the critical foil of the limitations of the prevalent subdivisions of realism is driven by a practical interest in expanding the possibilities for mutual and self-understanding in a specific political context. Concretely, this is reflected in the goal of this thesis to intervene into current debates about the self-understanding of political theory with the hope to inspire a higher awareness for radical alternatives and for self-reflection more generally. So whilst I remain committed to a critical and reflexive perspective on texts and in argument throughout, in the second part of the thesis, the practical interest guides the structure of the theory-building. Key aspects for the radicalization of realism are discussed in a way which is tailored to this practical interest. This does not mean that these aspects are caricatured or are being torn from their context, but rather that the discussion of these aspects, which are chosen because of their high level of compatibility with the goals and commitments of radical realism, will be focused on what they contribute to radical realism. Self-reflection on the difficulty of controlling the political consequences of theorizing, and the commitment to contextual diagnosis as the basis for normative recommendations limit the scope of theory-building of radical realism and lead to less systematic and more eclectic guidelines for generating criteria for evaluating a political regime or order. The assessment of the articulation of radical realism and choice of tools for this purpose can then not sensibly rely on liberal-normativist standards, but requires a philosophical judgment based on the genesis and goals of radical realism. However, both radical realism and the judgment of its

appropriateness take place against the background of the hegemony of liberal-normativist political theory. This is reflected in the attempt, in view of radical realism's goal of expanding the possibilities for mutual and self-understanding, to make radical realism speak to the concerns of the prevalent understandings of liberal-normativist political theory through the discussion of legitimacy from political liberalism via realism to radical realism.

Chapter Outline

The goal of the first part of the thesis (chapters 1-3) is to set out a critical foil for the development of radical realism in the second part (chapters 4-6). The critical foil consists of three parts – the political reading of Rawls' *Political Liberalism*, the analysis of the potential of realism to pose a challenge to liberal-normativist political theory, and the critical discussion of the similarities between realism and liberal-normativist political theory.

In chapter 1, I offer an analysis of the understanding of politics and of what is political in Rawls' *Political Liberalism*. This analysis informs my interpretation of how *Political Liberalism* relates to its political context. Over the past two decades political liberalism has become prevalent amongst liberal-normativist political theories, especially with regard to its account of legitimacy (see chapter 6). The analysis of political liberalism which is the version of liberal-normativist political theory which lays most claim to paying attention to its political context by focusing on the particular forms of doctrinal pluralism in Western liberal democracies serves the purpose to offer a twofold critical foil for the following discussion of realism. Firstly, the reconstruction of a politically oriented liberal-normativist political theory provides the background for the realist departure from liberal normativism and, secondly, it provides a canvas for viewing the similarities between some subdivisions of realism and liberal-normativist political theory.

After a brief introduction to the debates about realism chapter 2 develops an ordering perspective for them. More precisely, I distinguish a number of subdivisions of realism with regard to the depth of their criticism of liberal-normativist political theory and to the meaning with which they fill the term 'realism'. The prevalent subdivisions range from non-ideal theory realism to vision of politics realism whereas the sidelined are Geussian realism and interpretive realism. Combined with a reflection on claims to

distinctiveness in political theory, this ordering perspective results in a differentiation of three levels of challenge to liberal-normativist political theory ('revise, reform and reject'). The upshot of this discussion is that most of the prevalent subdivisions of realism have a limited potential for challenging liberal-normativist political theory and might even be viewed as correctives internal to liberal-normativist political theory, whereas only the sidelined subdivisions are potentially radical. Vision of politics realism has the most potential of the prevalent subdivisions which, however, requires further clarification. This will be undertaken through the investigation of the similarities between realism and liberal-normativist political theory, which is also motivated by the understanding of the prevalent subdivisions as different kinds of correctives to liberal normativism.

Chapter 3 brings the similarities between realism and liberal-normativist political theory in the focus of a debate which is usually characterized by the emphasis on their differences. I analyze concrete and structural similarities to liberal-normativist political theory and differentiate them with regard to the prevalent subdivisions of realism. Whilst the similarities are especially prominent with the methodologically oriented 'non-ideal theory realists', an in-depth analysis of Bernard Williams' realism, one of the most influential exponents of 'vision of politics realism', clarifies the potential of vision of politics realism to pose a radical challenge liberal-normativist political theory. On the one hand, Williams' understanding of politics which lies at the heart of his realism offers a high potential for challenging liberal-normativist political theory. On the other hand, he is still committed to key aspects of liberal-normativist political theory through his normative understanding of politics and his distinction between politics and successful domination (which are further in tension with each other). This underscores the need for the radicalization of realism to make good on a radical challenge of liberal normativism, for which I turn to the sidelined Geussian realism.

The second part of the thesis (chapters 4-6) develops a realism with the potential to pose a radical challenge to liberal-normativist political theory. Radicalizing realism means advancing an understanding of political theory and its relationship to its political context which can take seriously the contextualist and action-guiding commitments of realists without compromising on its ability to present potentially radical, however, non-normativist criticism of the respective political context. This requires a novel understanding of the relationship between political theory and its political context, more

specifically an understanding of the normativity of criticism based on the diagnosis of the political context.

Chapter 4 starts the development of radical realism with an interpretation of Raymond Geuss' work of the past 30 years as a principal inspiration for radicalizing realism. Here I first proceed mainly exegetically by outlining key features of Geuss' realism whose originality and radicalism I work out in comparison to the subdivisions previously discussed. This provides the basis for my interpretation of Geussian realism as a sympathetic modification of early Critical Theory. My development of the specific Foucauldian modifications not only addresses lacunae of Geuss' realism but also provides a basic orientation for sketching radical realism as one understanding of realism which could make good on a radical challenge of liberal-normativist political theory.

In chapter 5, I first flesh out the central building blocks and commitments of radical realism. Then I develop an operational perspective appropriate to radical realism, diagnosis-critique. This perspective demonstrates the critical, self-reflective and negativist outlook of radical realism by creating critical distance not through abstraction and idealization but through a close engagement with a particular context, more precisely through its interrogation and questioning. I argue that radical realism becomes radical and particularly realistic through changing the basis of the normativity of criticism central to political theory, which is accomplished by focusing on the entanglement between political theory and its context. I finally offer a brief account of how radical realism redeems the goal of posing a radical challenge to liberal-normativist political theory.

In chapter 6, I tie together the main argumentative threads of the thesis through a discussion of the concept of legitimacy from political liberalism via realism to radical realism. Legitimacy is arguably at the center of realist political thought and normative criteria for legitimacy are highly contested between political liberals and realists. After outlining key tenets of public justification liberalism, I conduct an analysis of the understanding of legitimacy developed by 'vision of politics realists'. I particularly discuss the problems with the realist goal of upholding the difference between legitimate and illegitimate regimes, without taking recourse to a justification based on moral criteria. For this purpose I examine the accounts of Bernard Williams and of Matt Sleat. I question the latter's attempt to walk a fine line between aiming for normative criteria

for legitimacy and taking the idea of congruence between the legitimation story on offer and the views of those subject to it seriously. Following a brief interpretation of the limits of the understanding of legitimacy in realist accounts, I will attempt a sketch of how radical realism could transform this understanding.

Chapter 1: Reading *Political Liberalism* Politically

1 Introduction

The realists in political theory, broadly speaking, criticize how liberal-normativist political theory relates to politics and how it understands politics. Thus, at least *prima facie*, the form of liberal-normativist political theory that is most outspoken about its claims to be 'political' appears to be the most suitable object to test their criticism: at present the main contender for this role is 'political liberalism', a form of liberal-normativist political theory which shares a focus on pluralism and disagreement with the realists and explicitly claims to be political. It is of vital importance for assessing the purchase of the realist criticism to provide a strong and differentiated analysis of what is political about political liberalism, since if the realist criticism is successful against political liberalism, it is likely to have critical purchase against most liberal-normativist political theory.[1] The reconstructive and critical analysis of political liberalism conducted here will focus on John Rawls' *Political Liberalism* (PL). This is due to its influence on contemporary political theory – many contemporary liberal political theorists such as Bruce Ackerman (1980, 1994), Charles Larmore (1987, 1999) or Jonathan Quong (2011) have developed political liberalisms closely related to Rawls' account –, to its attempt to take the political aspects of political theory seriously and to practical reasons of scope.

The analytical lens of this chapter consists of two main questions. First I will ask what is political for political liberalism and then, on the basis of the answers to this question, how political liberalism relates towards its political context. I will start this discussion by asking why Rawls took a 'political turn' with *Political Liberalism* and how making conceptions of justice political responded to the problems he saw with the framework developed in *A Theory of Justice*. I will then analyze different definitions of (the) 'political' in *Political Liberalism*. This analysis will focus on the features that make a conception of justice *political*. Reducing the 'political' of political liberalism to the

[1] Most realist critics seem to assume that the scope of their criticism includes political liberalism. This assumption can be supported by the interpretation that political liberalism is another internal turn within the overall model of liberal-normativist political theory since the 1970s. The most explicit treatment of political liberalism (rather than of more self-confidently abstract universalist political theory) that is regarded as sharing the realist impetus is possibly Jeremy Waldron's *Law and Disagreement* (1999); more recently Freyenhagen (2011) and Sleat (2013b) have also engaged with political liberalism from a broadly realist perspective.

understanding of the political conception of justice is justifiable, as the construction of the political conception of justice is decisive for realizing the principal goal of political liberalism, which is to "work out a political conception of political justice for a (liberal) constitutional democratic regime that a plurality of reasonable doctrines, both religious and nonreligious, liberal, and nonliberal, may endorse for the right reasons" (PL: xxxix).[2] Each definition of (the) 'political' will be critically discussed (**2**). Based on these definitions and their criticisms I will reflect on how political liberalism relates to its political context (**3**).

The hypothesis which serves as a leitmotif for this chapter is that Rawls limits what is political to a set of specific normative liberal assumptions, which exclude not only non-liberal forms of politics but also other popular liberal views such as liberal perfectionism or comprehensive liberalism. For Rawls, as for many of his liberal followers, the political seems to be defined by the content and limits of liberal political theory, however, how political liberalism is political through relating to its political context is not sufficiently reflected.

2 What Makes *Political Liberalism* Political?

2.1 Understanding Rawls' Political Turn

The argument for the two principles of justice in Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* (1999a: 47-101) had the ultimate goal of providing a framework for a "well-ordered society" of rational and reasonable citizens understood as free and equal, engaged in a fair system of cooperation that would be stable in the long run. In *Political Liberalism* Rawls hoped to show how the achievement of this goal can become more plausible under conditions of Western liberal democracies (see PL: 14). Here, it is first important to recall that a

> "society is well-ordered when it is not only designed to advance the good of its members but when it is also effectively regulated by a public conception of justice. That is, a society in which (1) everyone accepts and knows that the others accept the same principles of justice, and (2) the basic social institutions generally satisfy and are generally known to satisfy these principles." (Rawls 1999a: 4-5, see also PL: 36)

In the course of the 1980s he became less convinced that the conception of justice at the heart of *A Theory of Justice*, "justice as fairness", could provide the basis for such a

[2] Note that a "political conception of political justice" is a curious formulation (on the verge of tautology), as it may be hard to imagine a nonpolitical conception of political justice unless one follows the premise of philosophical neutrality to a (purely) philosophical conception of political justice.

well-ordered society. His concerns did not center on the two principles of justice, but on the question of stability (PL: xv-xvi) that becomes relevant only once the principles have been chosen.[3] These concerns led Rawls to change his understanding of "justice as fairness" as embedded in a "comprehensive philosophical doctrine", i.e. as part of a doctrine which includes "conceptions of what is of value in human life, and ideals of personal character, as well as ideals of friendship and of familial and associational relationships, and much else that is to inform our conduct, and in the limit to our life as a whole" (PL: 13). The change of his understanding of "justice as fairness" was expressed by probably the most important distinction introduced in *Political Liberalism*:

> "In *Theory* a moral doctrine of justice general in scope is not distinguished from a strictly political conception of justice. Nothing is made of the contrast between comprehensive philosophical and moral doctrines and conceptions limited to the domain of the political. In the lectures in this volume, however, these distinctions and related ideas are fundamental." (PL: xv)

For Rawls the realization that "justice as fairness" was presented as part of a comprehensive moral doctrine of justice became especially problematic with regard to the account of doctrinal pluralism offered in *A Theory of Justice* in view of the goal of stability:

> "An essential feature of the well-ordered society associated with justice as fairness is that all its citizens endorse this conception on the basis of what I now call a comprehensive philosophical doctrine. […] Now the serious problem is this. A modern democratic society is characterized not simply by a pluralism of comprehensive religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines but by a pluralism of incompatible yet reasonable comprehensive doctrines. No one of these doctrines is affirmed by citizens generally." (PL: xvi)

This problem is further aggravated by Rawls' view that this specific, "reasonable" form of pluralism is not a contingent or temporal state, but rather the "natural outcome of the activities of human reason under enduring free institutions" (PL: xxiv; see also xvii, 36).[4] In contrast to "simple pluralism", which can involve destabilizing views, striving to suppress rivaling views (PL: 64-65), "reasonable pluralism" is limited to disagreements about "reasonable comprehensive doctrines" between "reasonable people" (PL: 64). The concept of "reasonable pluralism" especially hinges on the understanding of what makes

[3] There is now a plethora of interpretations of Rawls' move from *A Theory of Justice* to *Political Liberalism* the detailed discussions of which lies beyond the remit of this thesis. In most of them arguments about the stability of "justice as fairness", which I emphasize here, play a key role (for a recent treatment see Weithman 2011).

[4] He maintains that under these circumstances a "shared understanding of one comprehensive religious, philosophical, or moral doctrine can be maintained only by the oppressive use of state power" (PL: 37).

people "reasonable". In order to count as reasonable for Rawls, people must first share a "willingness to propose fair terms of cooperation and to abide by them provided others do" (PL: 54), and have (realized their) "two moral powers", i.e. to develop a conception of the good and a sense of justice. At this point one may want to ask, with the argument of *A Theory of Justice* in mind, if people would still disagree once these conditions were fulfilled (and if so, why)? Here the second feature of the reasonable, the "(bearing of the consequences of the) burdens of judgment" (PL: 58-59), provides the answer. These burdens complicate even fully reasonable judgments, be it because of "conflicting and complex" evidence, disagreements about the salience of considerations to be factored into the process of reasoning, conceptual indeterminacy and interpretive openness, embeddedness of our reasoning in our necessarily different "course[s] of life up to now", conflicting normative considerations, or because "some selection must be made from the full range of moral and political values that might be realized" (PL: 56-57). Rawls regards these burdens as responsible for the perseverance of disagreement among such reasonable people.

At the same time, "bearing of the consequences of the burdens of judgment" also "limits the scope of what reasonable persons think can be justified to others" (PL: 59), thus containing disagreement to "reasonable doctrines" (as Rawls assumes that "reasonable people only affirm reasonable comprehensive doctrines" (PL: 59)). This is why Rawls wrote about "reasonable disagreement" (PL: 55) under conditions of "reasonable pluralism". He further assumed that under these conditions reasonable people are driven to "endorse some form of liberty of conscience and freedom of thought" (PL: 61), given how the burdens of judgment limit what "can reasonably be justified to others" (PL: 61).

Against this background Rawls came to see an inconsistency between "justice as fairness" as embedded in a comprehensive liberal doctrine and its account of stability for a well-ordered society:

> "The fact of a plurality of reasonable but incompatible comprehensive doctrines – the fact of reasonable pluralism – shows, as used in *Theory*, the idea of a well-ordered society of justice as fairness is unrealistic. This is because it is inconsistent with realizing its own principles under the best of foreseeable conditions." (PL: xvii)

The revisions of the framework that he developed in *A Theory of Justice* which he undertook in *Political Liberalism* "arose" from the attempt to remove this inconsistency between "the account of stability" and the "view as a whole" (PL: xv-xvi) of justice as

fairness. In order to address this inconsistency and accommodate the "fact of reasonable pluralism" (PL: xvii) into his revised framework, Rawls introduced the above quoted distinction between a "moral doctrine of justice general in scope" (i.e. a "comprehensive doctrine") and "political conceptions of justice" (PL: xv). If "justice as fairness" could be represented as a political conception of justice, so Rawls assumes, then *Political Liberalism* would strengthen the argument for the stability of "justice as fairness" and hence increase the plausibility of achieving his goal of a well-ordered society.

In light of the burdens of judgment Rawls cannot assume that all reasonable people would endorse the same conception of justice, e.g. "justice as fairness", under the circumstances of "reasonable pluralism" on the grounds that they share the same comprehensive moral or philosophical doctrine. The hope for stability under conditions of reasonable pluralism must hence rest on a device which constructs a conception of justice which can be endorsed from within each of the comprehensive moral or philosophical doctrines that reasonable people hold (for their internal, moral reasons). For Rawls the suitable device is what he calls an "overlapping consensus of reasonable comprehensive doctrines" with a "political conception of justice" as its focus (PL: 40; see also 10). This political conception of justice is understood as "a module […] that in different ways fits into and can be supported by various reasonable comprehensive doctrines that endure in the society regulated by it" (PL: 145).

The basic idea of a political conception of justice is that "in a constitutional democracy the public conception of justice should be, in so far as possible, presented as independent of comprehensive religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines" (PL: 144). It is further characterized by three main features which distinguish it from comprehensive moral doctrines of justice (as one of which Rawls retrospectively regards "justice as fairness" as presented in *A Theory of Justice*): First, the subject of the political conception, as in *A Theory of Justice*, is the "basic structure of a modern constitutional democracy", which means its "main political, social, and economic institutions" (PL: 11). Second, it is presented as a "freestanding" view, derived independently from, even if related to, comprehensive doctrines. Third, it is expressed through "certain fundamental ideas seen as implicit in the public culture of a democratic society" (PL: 13; see also Rawls 1999c: 143 for a restatement of these features). These specific features of the political conception of justice and how they make it political will be the subject of the following subsection.

For Rawls the main task of *Political Liberalism* is then to transform "justice as fairness" into one of the "political conceptions of justice" (which are both liberal and reasonable (Rawls 1999c: 141)). Each of these can be affirmed by the respective "reasonable comprehensive doctrines" to be found in democratic societies (Rawls 1999c: 179-80). Thus, the success of answering the inconsistency found in *A Theory of Justice* depends to a considerable extent on this transformation and the political conception of justice itself:

> "[T]hree conditions seem to be sufficient for society to be a fair and stable system of cooperation between free and equal citizens who are deeply divided by the reasonable comprehensive doctrines they affirm. First, the basic structure of society is regulated by a political conception of justice; second, this political conception is the focus of an overlapping consensus of reasonable comprehensive doctrines; and third, public discussion, when constitutional essentials and questions of basic justice are at stake, is conducted in terms of the political conception of justice." (PL: 44)

In Rawls' view the introduction of the political conception of justice makes the convergence of reasonable people on a conception of justice possible, without expecting them to share a commitment to one comprehensive moral or philosophical doctrine as well. This convergence can become stable, as reasonable people are able to affirm the political conception of justice for reasons from within their respective comprehensive moral or philosophical doctrine. As the gist of the conceptual structure of *Political Liberalism* has now been set out, we can turn to the question of what political means in a political conception of justice which is crucial for finding out what makes *Political Liberalism* political.

2.2 What Makes the Political Conception of Justice Political?

On first sight, there are several terms against which the political conception of justice is pitted in *Political Liberalism*. "Political conceptions" are distinguished from "comprehensive doctrines" and "metaphysical" from "political" conceptions of justice (PL: 10). In order to make sense of these distinctions a better understanding of the political conception of justice is required. To this end I will turn to the three features that Rawls regards as definitive of a political conception of justice.

2.2.1 Political through the Limitation of Scope: The Basic Structure

The first feature of the political conception tries to define what is political by limitation of scope. Rawls attempts to characterize the political conception through limiting its

scope to a specific area of political, social, economic, and legal institutions. This assumes that one can, in Rawlsian terms, clearly distinguish the (political) "basic structure" from (nonpolitical) "background culture" with regard to conceptions of justice (PL: 14). This focus on the "basic structure" is a core characteristic of Rawls' political theory, which he continuously upheld despite other modifications of his framework. The classic statement of Rawls delimiting the basic structure appeared in *A Theory of Justice*:

> "For us the primary subject of justice is the basic structure of society, or more exactly, the way in which the major social institutions distribute fundamental rights and duties and determine the division of advantages from social cooperation. By major institutions I understand the political constitution and the principal social and economic arrangements." (Rawls 1999a: 6-7; see also the slightly amended formulation at PL: 11)

The reason why "the basic structure of society" is chosen as the "primary subject of justice" is that "the justice of a social scheme depends essentially on how fundamental rights and duties are assigned and on the economic opportunities and social conditions in the various sectors of society" (Rawls 1999a: 7). Rawls stresses that the basic structure is responsible for "background justice" (PL: 268) and hence does not apply directly to individuals or associations. He adds the qualification that "[t]here is no reason to suppose that the principles [the two principles of justice] satisfactory for the basic structure hold for all cases. These principles may not work for the rules and practices of private associations […]" (Rawls 1999a: 7). This qualification maps onto his distinction between "basic structure" and "background culture" in *Political Liberalism*. The "background culture" is understood to be the complementary "culture of the social, not of the political" (PL: 14), at home in the "daily life" and "its many associations" (PL: 14) to which "comprehensive doctrines of all kinds – religious, philosophical, moral – belong" (PL: 14).

The scope of the political conception of justice is further limited as Rawls assigns "two coordinative roles" to the basic structure of society which both "express political values" (PL: 229), but of which only the first covers constitutional essentials:[5]

> "In the first role that [basic] structure specifies and secures citizens' equal basic rights and liberties and institutes just political procedures. In the second it sets up the background institutions of social and economic justice appropriate to citizens as free and equal. The first role concerns how political

[5] Constitutional essentials are of two kinds for Rawls: The first kind concerns "fundamental principles that specify the general structure of government and the political process", the second concerns "equal basic rights and liberties of citizenship that legislative majorities are to respect" (PL: 227).

> power is acquired and the limits of its exercise. We hope to settle at least those questions by reference to political values that can provide a public basis of justification." (PL: 229)

Via the first role of the basic structure the political conception of justice is hence limited to those features that are part of the constitutional essentials (and questions of basic justice), with a focus on the constitutional essentials specified by the "basic freedoms" rather than on principles of social and economic justice, as it is more urgent to settle the former. Furthermore it is easier to tell whether the former have been realized and agreement on the latter principles' success is less likely to be achieved, because they are "always open to wide differences of reasonable opinion" (PL: 229).

So, the first feature of the political conception of justice limits it to "specif[ying] and secur[ing] citizens' equal basic rights and liberties and institut[ing] just political procedures" (PL: 229), understood as a matter of constitutional essentials. Other questions of economic and social justice that are also covered by the definition of the basic structure cannot be answered by reference to "political values" only and hence cannot "provide a public basis of justification" (PL: 229). To answer these "it is often more reasonable to go beyond the political conception and the values its principles express and to invoke nonpolitical values that such a view does not include" (PL: 230). Thus, it is actually only a specific part of the basic structure that is covered by a "political conception of justice".

There are at least two problems with using the limitation of scope via the basic structure argument for defining a feature of the political conception of justice. Firstly, the argument already presupposes a definition of the political to be in place, which is used to delimit the basic structure. The distinction between political institutions and nonpolitical institutions that belong to the "background culture" is not self-evident. The assumptions on which the distinction relies would need to be explicated and discussed. Secondly, the understanding of what makes some institutions "political", on which the account relies, is unduly narrow and legalistic: The only way that his "political" institutions are different from the "social" background culture is that they are institutions of "higher", constitutional lawmaking and so structurally regulate these areas of public culture which Rawls regards as most salient for the conditions of background justice. This seems to be a dichotomist and narrow view of the diversity of institutions and their impact.

In *Political Liberalism* Rawls regards the basic structure as one of the fundamental ideas implicit in the public political culture of a democratic society from which "justice as fairness" starts (see PL: 14, n.16), thus 'cross-linking' it to the third feature of a political conception of justice (see below). One may wonder whether regarding the "basic structure" as one of the fundamental ideas implicit in the public political culture, especially if it entails the idea of society as a fair system of cooperation (PL: 14), does not lead to the presupposition of (at least the possibility of) consensus instead of conflict as one of the basic conditions for (democratic) politics.[6] Not only would this again narrow the understanding of (democratic) politics pre-politically, it would also be in tension with Rawls' revisions in *Political Liberalism* being motivated mainly by what he came to see as problems of pluralism and disagreement (and not least the grip on and abuse of the basic structure by incumbent politicians and corporations in current democracies).

2.2.2 Presentation of the Political Conception of Justice as a "Freestanding" View

The second feature of the political conception pertains to its presentation. In *Political Liberalism*, Rawls regarded the presentation as one of three features of a political conception of justice (PL: 11-15), whereas in his later "Reply to Habermas" (reprinted in PL: 372-434) he states that all the three features taken together "illustrate the way in which a political conception of justice is freestanding" (PL: 376). Viewed against the overall framework of *Political Liberalism* the latter interpretation makes more sense, as "freestandingness" must count as the primary goal of a political conception of justice to which each of the three features contributes (with the second feature possibly contributing the most).

Presenting a political conception of justice as "freestanding" is one of the ideas developed in reaction to the "fact of reasonable pluralism" which makes it seem unrealistic that any conception of justice based on controversial moral or philosophical doctrines would be endorsed by all, or even the majority of reasonable citizens. The construction of a political conception of justice understood as "freestanding", i.e. "independent of the opposing and conflicting philosophical and religious doctrines that

[6] The reply that in view of the goal to design just political institutions and the just distribution of primary goods Rawls needs to look at politics through the lens of consensus and fairness rather than conflict and power seems less convincing in *Political Liberalism* which addresses the problems of (reasonable) pluralism and legitimacy than in *A Theory of Justice*.

citizens affirm" (PL: 9), is crucial for political liberalism to achieve a stable "well-ordered society". Fabian Freyenhagen provides a succinct summary of this feature:

> "[Rawls'] key idea is to formulate a conception of justice which is freestanding in a double sense: (1) it is freestanding from moral and ethical values beyond the political sphere (for example, it is agnostic about whether surfing or monastic devotion leads to the good life) and (2) it is also freestanding from philosophically controversial questions (such as the nature of truth or the sources of normativity)." (Freyenhagen 2011: 324; see PL: 10-15, 154-158)

What does the presentation of the political conception of justice as "freestanding" say about how it is political? The first sense in which the conception is meant to be freestanding can be related to the distinction between political conceptions and morally comprehensive doctrines, the second to the distinction between political conceptions and philosophically comprehensive, "metaphysical" doctrines. However, it is not clear from these opposition-pairs what political means, especially as neither the concepts of "comprehensive doctrine" nor of "metaphysics" are easy to be defined without controversy (see Gaus 2003: 180-187).

I will focus here on the distinction between a political conception of justice and other moral conceptions which can at first sight be read as helping to clarify what is political about the political conception of justice (and how the political is limited) against the background goal of advancing a "freestanding" conception of justice:

> "[T]he distinction between a political conception of justice and other moral conceptions is a matter of scope: that is, the range of subjects to which a conception applies and the content a wider range requires. A moral conception is general if it applies to a wide range of subjects, and in the limit to all subjects universally. It is comprehensive when it includes conceptions of what is of value in human life, and ideals of personal character, as well as ideals of friendship and of familial and associational relationships, and much else that is to inform our conduct, and in the limit to our life as a whole. A conception is fully comprehensive if it covers all recognized values and virtues within one rather precisely articulated system; whereas a conception is only partially comprehensive when it comprises a number of, but by no means all, *nonpolitical values and virtues* and is rather loosely articulated." (PL: 13; my emphasis)

Rather than clarifying what is political this distinction highlights the importance of the question of *which values are political and which are not*. The distinction offers a negative foil of the conceptions of justice which are not political, but the positive definitional work seems to be deferred to the distinction between political and nonpolitical values.

However, Rawls does not offer a direct definition of political (or nonpolitical) values either, but rather hopes that "questions about constitutional essentials and matters of basic justice […] so far as possible […] be settled by appeal to political values alone" (PL: 137-8). These "political values" are understood to "have sufficient weight to override all other values" (PL: 138) when invoked for answering these questions, because political values are "very great values" (PL: 139). The understanding of 'political' which is invoked here seems to refer to the "domain of the political" (PL: 135-140), another concept which Rawls introduces to define the political by further specifying the subject of application of a political conception of justice.

He claims that "the conception of justice affirmed in a well-ordered democratic society must be a conception limited to what I shall call 'the domain of the political' and its values" (PL: 38). The "domain of the political" is characterized by two normative features: It is a closed society, which is neither entered nor left voluntarily (PL: 135-136), and political power "is always coercive power backed by the government's use of sanctions" (PL: 136). More specifically, in a "constitutional regime the special feature of the political relation is that political power is ultimately the power of the public, that is, the power of free and equal citizens as a collective body" (PL: 136).[7] This means for Rawls that in the "domain of the political" the liberal principle of legitimacy, which prescribes that "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), is the only way of "appropriately" exercising this power.[8] This stands in close connection to the idea of public reason which within political liberalism has the task to "specif[y] at the deepest level the basic moral and political values that are to determine a constitutional democratic government's relation

[7] Citizens are thought to exert this power "by voting and in other ways" (PL: 217-218), which Sheldon Wolin finds a rather "anticlimactic" characterization (1996: 105). Wolin further holds that the coercive power that citizens are thought to have within the Rawlsian framework is very limited, whilst the "real coerciveness, which ensures how 'coercive power' will be exercised, lies in practices that acculturate citizens" (1996: 116).

[8] It has been suggested that this strong version of the principle possibly leads to tensions within *Political Liberalism* between the goals of reaching overlapping consensus and of taking reasonable pluralism seriously. A weaker version (as proposed by Gaus 2003: 195; Wenar 1995) might be more suitable, e.g. "[t]he exercise of political power is legitimate if it accords with a constitution the essentials of which all free and equal citizens *can see* as reasonable" (Gaus 2003: 195; my emphasis), but such is not endorsed by Rawls and would face problems in its own right. Whilst Gaus' suggestion is based on a notion of intelligibility, Rawls' is stronger in as far as it could be read to include a motivational component (see Rossi 2014a for a critical comparison of Rawls' and Gaus' views on justification and legitimation).

to its citizens and their relation to one another" (Rawls 1999c: 132).[9] Any principles that could be sanctioned by the liberal principle of legitimacy seem to require hypothetical consent among reasonable citizens to pass as a non-oppressive form of the exercise of political power. This illustrates that the concept of the "domain of the political" operates with a specifically liberal view of politics (for further discussion of the concept of legitimacy see chapter 6 below).

It is this view of politics that is implied when Rawls distinguishes political from nonpolitical values. And in fact in his discussion of public reason Rawls offers an explicit list only of "*liberal* political values" (PL: 224; my emphasis), which fall into two kinds: First, "the values of political justice" which "fall under the principles of justice for the basic structure: the values of equal political and civil liberty; equality of opportunity; the values of social and economic reciprocity; […] values of the common good as well as the various necessary conditions for all these values" (PL: 224). Second, "the values of public reason" which "fall under the guidelines for public inquiry, which make that inquiry free and public. Also included here are political virtues such as reasonableness and a readiness to honor the (moral) duty of civility, which as virtues of citizens make possible reasoned public discussion of political questions" (PL: 224).

The distinction between political and nonpolitical values depends on a prior understanding of what is political set out in the definition of the "domain of the political" (which may raise the question of circularity). This definition rests on an assumption of and normative commitment to a liberal, consensus-oriented and non-oppressive view of politics as demonstrated by the liberal principle of legitimacy, which reinforces the impression that what is political, for Rawls, must be liberal. The distinction between political and nonpolitical values hence does not add any content to what is political about the political conception of justice (and political liberalism).

One could think of Rawls' attempts to give content to the political in the "freestanding" political conception of justice in such a way that there appear two main understandings of the political in *Political Liberalism*, which are both problematic in their own right. First, there is the "'a priori' interpretation" of the political which Gerald Gaus criticizes as inconsistent. Take e.g. the difference between fully and partially comprehensive doctrines, which defines them as appealing to "non-political values and virtues" (PL:

[9] For Rawls the main example of public reason is the Supreme Court, which is surprising as it is not a citizens' organization (see Gaus 2003: 197-200).

13). This appeal assumes that the distinction between political and non-political values is already in place, as it is "logically prior to the distinction between the comprehensive and the political" (Gaus 2003: 187). This leads to an inconsistency within *Political Liberalism*, as the idea of presenting political conceptions of justice as "freestanding" implies that it is known what comprehensive doctrines are (so that they can be distinguished from political conceptions). As that seemingly depends on the distinction between political and non-political values, which does not offer a positive definition either, the argument is circular and not especially informative. If one regards the answer to the question of what is political as always contested and in flux, then it is generally impossible to distinguish comprehensive doctrines and political conceptions in this way.

Second, avoiding the problem of relying on notions of what is inherently political, "the political" here is the sum of what is shared between (reasonable) comprehensive doctrines by reasonable people in a "constructed realm of reasonable agreement" (Gaus 2003: 190). Apart from problems with the normative understanding of terms like "reasonable" (discussed above), this route is marred by the problem that "reasonable pluralism" applies to political conceptions of justice as well. Hence there will be no straightforward agreement *which* political conception can define what is political. Rawls can only point to agreement at the highest level of abstraction, that of the "concept of liberal order" (Gaus 2003: 192). There will be (indefinite) disputes which of the different reasonable conceptions is the most reasonable and following the liberal principle of legitimacy that Rawls wants to uphold, enforcing any of these is unjustified and in consequence there is no well-ordered society (Gaus 2003: 193). Rawls finally faces the replication of the problem for which he sought a solution: why should people agree more about what is political than about which conceptions of justice are political, especially if the criteria for them being political are open to contestation?

2.2.3 Fundamental Ideas Seen as Implicit in Public Culture

The third feature of the political conception consists of drawing on "fundamental ideas seen as implicit in the public political culture of a democratic society" (PL: 13) which is another feature introduced in order to address the "fact of reasonable pluralism". These ideas refer to "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). Rawls regards these as "implicitly

shared" by citizens of a democratic society. This sets them apart from ideas which are subject to controversy between adherents of different "reasonable comprehensive doctrines". In Rawls' preferred test case of political conceptions of justice, "justice as fairness", the fundamental ideas considered are "society as a fair system of cooperation", "citizens (engaged in cooperation) as free and equal", and "well-ordered society as a society effectively regulated by a political conception of justice" (PL: 14).[10] These ideas (see PL: 15-40, 257-289) seem to contribute to 'the political' of the political conception of justice in so far as they provide the basis of a justificatory discourse that all (reasonable) citizens can reasonably be expected to accept. This links the third feature of the political conception of justice to the concept of public reason.

Against the assumption of a commitment to reciprocity, also referred to as the moral "duty of civility" (Rawls 1999c: 135-136), the idea of public reason serves as a procedural standard constructed from the liberal principle of legitimacy for restricting arguments permissible in public.[11] It is the way for reasonable citizens and, importantly, for "government officials and candidates for public office" (Rawls 1999c: 132), to deliberate about "'constitutional essentials' and questions of basic justice" (PL: 214), to which its application is limited:

> "A citizen engages in public reason, then, when he or she deliberates within a framework of what he or she regards as the most reasonable political conception of justice, a conception that expresses political values that others, as free and equal citizens might also reasonably be expected reasonably to endorse. […] The limiting feature of these forms [of public reason] is the criterion of reciprocity, viewed as applied between free and equal citizens, themselves seen as reasonable and rational." (Rawls 1999c: 140-141)

Rawls regards "the constraints of public reason, as manifested in a modern constitutional democracy based on a liberal political conception" as most widely acceptable and hence adequate for the construction (and stability) of political liberalism, especially because these constraints "are ones that holders of both religious and nonreligious comprehensive views can reasonably endorse" (Rawls 1999b: vi). Rawls considers public reason a necessary element of any political liberalism (PL: 254) and hopes that it

[10] Rawls mentions the basic structure and the original position as "two other fundamental ideas" (PL: 14, n.16).

[11] Public reason is public in three ways: "as a reason of citizens as such, it is the reason of the public; its subject is the good of the public and matters of fundamental justice; and its nature and content is public, being given by the ideals and principles expressed by society's conception of political justice, and conducted open to view on that basis" (PL: 213).

stands in a mutually sustaining relationship with the political conception of justice (PL: 252).

The specific understanding of the "fundamental ideas" (and of the discourse that they may help establish) is closely connected to the overall framework of political liberalism and precludes contestation of the fundamental importance of these ideas. Given the empirical language of "ideas *seen as implicit*" and the idea that "[w]e start [the construction of a political conception of justice], then, by looking to the public culture itself as the shared fund of implicitly recognized basic ideas and principles" (PL: 8; my emphasis), one starts wondering about how much attention *Political Liberalism* pays to actual public cultures of democracies and whether the idea of seeing above mentioned ideas as "implicit in [their] public culture" is ambivalent between being a normative assumption about the "public political culture of a democratic society" *per se* and at least in part an empirical claim.

If one takes the "fundamental ideas" in a more empirical interpretation, one needs to ask: which aspects of the public culture of, say, the USA at the time of writing, does Rawls take seriously in *Political Liberalism*? Then one may argue that his focus on the conflict between reasonable doctrines is too narrow and can neither incorporate doctrinal conflicts between "unreasonable" doctrines of which there are many in the USA (see Scheffler 1994; Wenar 1995; Waldron 1999), thus reducing the chances for stability, nor can it represent the stratification of public culture, mostly due to unequal economic positions, which has an impact on the perception which citizens have of their public culture.[12] Doctrinal conflicts may also turn out not to be the most pressing conflicts that threaten stability. What about conflicts of interests for instance?

Another important question which concerns the perspective is *who* is to read which ideas are implicit in public culture? The observations are most likely to be different depending on one's judgment of the respective public culture and may be influenced by one's normative understanding of terms like 'public culture' or 'democratic constitutional regime'. Moreover, even if Rawls regards these ideas as *implicit* in public culture, why does he not try to back up his perceptions? He assumes e.g. that citizens of a democracy know "*a* tradition of democratic thought" (PL: 14, 18; my emphasis) and that this entails

[12] The frequency with which controversial moral and religious ideas are introduced into public discussion in contemporary America urges one to doubt that there is widespread commitment to the ideal of public reason.

the above mentioned ideas, which includes the idea of society as a fair system of cooperation. This is surprising in two ways: First, why does Rawls assume the existence of such a monolithic tradition given his focus on pluralism (see Stears 2010 for a more diverse interpretation of the American political tradition)? The answer is found in his normative definitions of pluralism, disagreement and citizens as reasonable. It is still an open question how these normative definitions, even if coherent within Rawls' framework, justify this assumption.[13] Second, why does he assume that this tradition carries the idea of "cooperation" and a "well-ordered society" rather than ideas of contestation or conflict (see also Wolin 1996: 115)? Rawls does not reflect upon any of these potential challenges for his use of the "ideas seen as implicit in public culture". Rather, the three fundamental ideas which Rawls regards as implicit in public culture could plausibly be seen to be rather at home in the American narrative of constitutional order which, as at least partly based on myth (Schlag 1997), does not depend on empirical study of public culture.[14] This feeds into the more general relationship of Rawls' theory to its political context which will be discussed in the following section.

3 *Political Liberalism* and the Relationship between Political Theory and Politics

The preceding inquiry into what makes *Political Liberalism* political via the analysis of the features of a "political conception of justice" has shown that what is political about political liberalism is rather unclear. This is so because any definition of what is political is either negative and/or depends on another, mostly controversial, definition, or is highly normatively qualified, narrowing what is political to the content of a specific version of liberal theory.[15] In the end, it is not clear how to divide what is political from what is not, e.g. "political conceptions" from "comprehensive doctrines" or "political values" from "nonpolitical values" in Rawls' terms. However, this is not exhaustive of the ways in which *Political Liberalism* is political and how it relates to its political context.

[13] This is a hint at the circularity of Rawls justificatory endeavor (Schlag 1997; Rossi 2014b). This is particularly striking with regard to the notion of reasonableness. Rossi (2014b) argues that the notion of reasonableness has the presupposition inbuilt that reasonable people seek an overlapping consensus which ensures the preferred liberal outcomes (and hence leads to a circularity of political liberalism). This is especially salient with regard to the justificatory endeavor of Rawls, because on this interpretation it is not in the end the criterion of consent which ensures the liberal outcomes that Rawls needs to fulfill his condition of moral stability ("stability for the right reasons"), but the understanding of reasonableness.

[14] One may be tempted to ask to what extent *Political Liberalism* is after all also an exercise in ideal theory.

[15] This seems to defeat at least part of the purpose of Rawls' turn to *Political Liberalism*, as it is no more plausible that a stable well-ordered society can be achieved.

In order to address these issues it is first important to recall the overall framework of Rawlsian political theory. It is a form of justificatory philosophy which aims at providing an argument that should give rise to "rational hope" for widespread agreement on principles of justice amongst reasonable citizens leading to a stable "well-ordered society". Following this goal, the first task of political theory is to work out principles of justice, then conceptual tools (such as the "overlapping consensus" or "political conception of justice") to give rise to the hope that citizens, normatively qualified as reasonable, can be expected to reasonably, i.e. cognizant of the "burdens of judgment", endorse these principles as well as public standards of discussion ("public reason") for means of evaluation of these principles. All of these tasks, in Rawlsian terms, belong to "ideal theory", assuming "full compliance" of the involved agents, and are carried out without analyzing contemporary politics and relations of power. The application of the normative principles arrived at in "ideal theory" is the task of "non-ideal theory" (see Gledhill 2012 for a discussion of the compatibility of the model Rawls uses for the relationship between "ideal" theory and "non-ideal theory" with realism in political theory). Against this background, how does *Political Liberalism* relate to its political context?

Political Liberalism – prima facie – engages with the political context by situating itself in contemporary liberal democratic constitutional regimes (PL: lviii-lx). It quickly further limits its audience to the reasonable, which implicitly means liberal, citizens of these regimes. However, the most obvious engagement with the political context, its focus on the "fact" of "reasonable pluralism", is somewhat misleading. Rather than marking an engagement with the vicissitudes of politics, this highly technical term focuses on doctrinal conflict only which is further limited to "reasonable" doctrines. This narrow focus steers away attention from other, e.g. economic or social conflicts within (or even beyond) the state. This is not just a question of Rawls taking a controversial standpoint but rather a question of "whether the 'standpoint' justifies omissions so damaging to the theory that they cannot afford to be included" (Wolin 1996: 105). This way of engagement shapes what is defined as political in *Political Liberalism* which is mostly derived from philosophy. The definitions do not depend on the sociological or historical study of its political context which is at most superficially important for their generation. This problem is illustrated by the criticism that Rawls has received for making the conditions for a political conception of justice (reasonableness,

reasonable moral psychology, political constructivism and its understanding of objectivity, and the burdens of judgment) too demanding to be met by many candidate "comprehensive doctrines" of (then and now) constitutional democratic regimes, e.g. Catholicism, Humean and Hobbesian views (Wenar 1995; Scheffler 1994), or perfectionist liberalism.[16] An overlapping consensus which is so limited that it cannot accommodate such widely held "comprehensive doctrines" possibly weakens the case of *Political Liberalism*.

Political Liberalism's engagement with its political context further tends to be marked by some unexpectedly positive identifications with the status quo, e.g. with regard to the US constitution and its interpretation by the Supreme Court (PL: 231-240). Rawls regards the Supreme Court as an example of public reason, referring to the longstanding history of the American constitutional regime as a supporting point. The way that Rawls sets out "reconciliation" as a goal of political philosophy (Rawls 2001: 3-4; see Schaub 2009 for an illuminating interpretation in a Hegelian light) further illustrates this tendency: In *Political Liberalism* the goal of reconciliation becomes important for the idea of public reason which is supposed to reconcile conflicts stemming from citizens' "different status, class position, and occupation, or from their ethnicity, gender, and race". It is also supposed to "mitigat[e], but cannot eliminate […] conflict deriving from citizens' conflicting comprehensive doctrines" (PL: lviii). With regard to the latter, from Rawls' point of view, that is the best one can hope for. This indicates that *Political Liberalism* is oriented toward some degree of reconciliation with the status quo. One question which this raises but which is not addressed by Rawls is what particularly one is supposed to be reconciled *with*. If this was spelt out in more detail, it would probably have to lead to a deeper engagement with the socio-economic developments of liberal

[16] Rawls' test case for the overlapping consensus includes views which endorse the political conception of justice "because its religious doctrine and account of free faith lead to a principle of toleration and underwrite the fundamental liberties of a constitutional regime", "on the basis of a comprehensive liberal moral doctrine such as those of Kant or Mill", within "a pluralist view" (PL: 145), and as a "satisfactory, perhaps even the best, approximation to what the principle of utility […] would require" (PL: 170). These "test cases" do not fulfill their task of demonstrating the plausibility of the overlapping consensus reaching a *broad* base of support, "[f]or the three views it contains are not fully representative of the diverse schemes of value one finds in modern liberal societies; instead, all three appear to be drawn from the same relatively narrow portion of the broad spectrum of evaluative conviction. Although it seems plausible enough that these three views might converge on a liberal conception of justice, that tells us little about the prospects for a more inclusive consensus." (Scheffler 1994: 9) The fourth, utilitarianism, is a peculiar candidate, as the argumentative framework Rawls uses in *Political Liberalism* works with many of the arguments specifically made against utilitarianism in *A Theory of Justice*. I contend that the test case exemplifies the lack of connection between the concept of "reasonable pluralism" and the reality of disagreement in contemporary democratic public culture.

democracies in recent decades, or, with regard to Rawls's project, in the years between the first development of the key elements of Rawls' theory of justice and the finalization of *Political Liberalism* (see also Wolin 1996: 113-114).[17] The fact that is not discussed in more detail opens the field for criticism of ideology which could address this lack of reflection (OE: 19-29). These reflections on the engagement of *Political Liberalism* with its political context point to ways in which it is political which are not covered by the definitions of "political" in the text. These ways are further brought to the fore by exploring the entanglement between the philosophical and political aspects of the theory.

Rawls may not claim any more 'political authority' for his theory than for the views of citizens (PL: 383) or 'philosophical authority' in terms of truth either, replacing truth with the concept of reasonableness (PL: 126-127), but he aims for an understanding of liberalism instrumental to the process of successfully engaging the challenge of reasonable pluralism and the quest for stability of contemporary liberal democracies. Whether or not one takes the preceding inquiry to suggest that *Political Liberalism*'s understanding of what is political lacks consistency or philosophical rigor, it has revealed that the argument advanced for political liberalism does not lead to an understanding of what is political which can support these goals, which may be summed up as follows: What is liberal is political, what is political is liberal. This circular, highly normative and limiting (and also exclusionary) understanding reveals a tension between the (implicit) political and (explicit) philosophical outlook in *Political Liberalism*: Given that *Political Liberalism* understands itself as providing a normative vision of "how citizens need to be conceived" (PL: lx) for political conceptions of justice to be stably forming an overlapping consensus, it is surprising to find that Rawls also seems to hold that for the liberal audience in liberal constitutional democratic regimes more or less everything that is needed is already there (Baier 1989 advances a similar criticism from a different perspective). It is difficult to fathom if this tension is part of the politics of Rawls' theory, as a way to motivate the audience to embrace political liberalism as a feasible and accessible option. More importantly, it brings up the question (again) of whether one can disentangle the contingent-historical-political from the philosophical

[17] If the political theory advocated by Rawls' model is still supposed to be successful at reconciliation in the early 21st century one has to ask how this is possible, given that many benchmarks of the society one is supposed to be reconciled with have changed. This is even the case if one understands Rawls' political theory as (potentially) radical and countering the status quo – how can it still do that (and be successful) if it works with the framework developed by Rawls in the 1950s and 1960s which lead to the system of *A Theory of Justice* and is (only) revised in *Political Liberalism*?

reasons for the neat fit of Rawls' theoretical framework with the liberal-democratic context to which he addresses *Political Liberalism*.

Against the background of the preceding inquiry it does not appear to be too far-fetched to suggest that Rawls provides an at times self-referential and circular description of the superiority of liberal philosophy and liberal politics and their philosophically most plausible union in *Political Liberalism* (for criticisms in a similar vein see Schlag (1997), Wolin (1996) and Hurd (1995)). Rather than improving Rawls' framework of *A Theory of Justice* by connecting it more closely to its political context, *Political Liberalism*, on this interpretation, explicates – against its own goals – why its political context, liberal constitutional democracies like the USA, could be viewed – despite major problems of detail – as an answer to the problem of modern disagreement. This would be a further way in which *Political Liberalism* is political which is not reflected upon in the text. The politics of theory of *Political Liberalism* would then be both partisan and ideological: Partisan because Rawls' theory corroborates a specific type of regime and ideology mainly since his theory at times presents as rational what is actual, at least in part because it is actual. *Political Liberalism* leaves this aspect of its relationship to its political context unexplored, as it does not reflect on itself as a political intervention.

How does *Political Liberalism* further (potentially) become relevant to actual politics? The conceptual problems with the features that are supposed to anchor the political conception of justice at the heart of *Political Liberalism* foreshadow difficulties with connecting them to politics. How can e.g. an understanding of what is political which is tied to a specific understanding of what is reasonable at all connect to actual politics? However, given the focus on "constitutional essentials" and the discussion of the "higher law" (PL: 231ff.) it seems that *Political Liberalism* becomes most relevant to politics through its resemblance and appeal to constitutional lawmaking. On this interpretation the politics of *Political Liberalism* would appear to be legalistic and potentially contribute to the juridification of politics, which potentially leads to the prepolitical decision of political questions by removing them from public political discussion into either the courts or the constitution itself.[18]

[18] This reading is corroborated by the view that the main relevance of *Political Liberalism* lies in the "motivation" of reasonable liberal citizens (Hurd 1995). Rawls points to the US Supreme Court as an example of existing political institutions, which can be interpreted as already practicing important

4 Conclusion

The analysis of what is political about *Political Liberalism* and how it relates to its political context has led to rather surprising findings. The mostly negative definitions of what is "political" (non-comprehensive, non-controversial about philosophical or ethical questions, non-metaphysical etc.) as well as the "scope"-based definitions of what is political ("basic structure", "domain of the political" etc.) which Rawls provides in the text are intricately linked to a number of normatively conditioning concepts, most of which finally contribute to narrowing what is political to Rawls' understanding of liberal.

However, this is – or so the interpretations presented in the third part of this chapter argue – not all that is political about *Political Liberalism*. When asking how *Political Liberalism* relates to its political context, there are two findings to report: Unsurprisingly it is addressed to contemporary liberal constitutional democratic regimes, albeit only to their reasonable and (self-consciously) liberal citizens. *Political Liberalism* could even be viewed to present a description of the success of liberal constitutionalism rather than advancing an argument, even though it proceeds as if an argument was presented which makes it political in a different, partisan and ideological way. On this interpretation *Political Liberalism* is very political – just not in the way one would expect at first.

The ways in which *Political Liberalism* is political are marked by a tension and an entanglement between the philosophical, highly normatively conditioned definitions of the political and the partisan and ideological way of being political. The tension lies between two poles: On the one hand, there is the re-presentation of American liberal constitutional democracy in philosophical terms for a liberal audience which might be best understood as an attempt to motivate liberals to adopt the principles that they are prone to adopt anyway (see Hurd 1995). In this case Rawls' *Political Liberalism* has a more direct relationship to politics than previously thought as a partisan and ideological intervention. However, this is concealed by the claims of *Political Liberalism* about aiming for both an "uncluttered view […] of the fundamental question of political philosophy" (PL: 20, 136) and for a "fully moral justification" (Freyenhagen 2011: 324), which requires that "both the content of what is justified and the reasons supporting it are moral, that is, they are based on values and principles, not on group- or self-interest".

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elements of political liberalism (here especially public reason), in order to motivate citizens to endorse political liberalism (PL: 231-240).

The lack of reflection about this entanglement is highly problematic. Had Rawls advertised *Political Liberalism* as a partisan defense of liberal "property-owning democracy" with a US constitutional model (see contributions to O'Neill and Williamson (2012) for elaborations and criticisms of this idea), there would most likely have been space for this entanglement to be addressed.[19]

On the other hand, there is a strongly normative justificatory picture advanced through highly abstract "ideal theory" resembling the one presented in *A Theory of Justice*. This picture is thought to be somewhat strengthened through an increase in the plausibility of the realization of the outcome, mainly by accommodating pluralism about comprehensive doctrines that could support "justice as fairness" (or similar "political conceptions of justice") and by invoking ideas seen as implicit in public political culture *without* becoming caught up in the messiness of politics. To break this tension down to the question of justification: Rawls gives pride of place to his ambitious goal of "stability for the right reasons" and consequently aims for a "fully moral justification" of political conceptions of justice. This explains his emphasis on avoiding anything related to self-interested trade-offs, compromises, or "modi vivendi", in his terms anything that is "political in the wrong way" (PL: 142). What is, say, "political in the right way" then has to be defined in highly normatively qualified terms to be compatible with the goal of "fully moral justification". However, Rawls is left "empty-handed" (Freyenhagen 2011: 333) to enforce these norms due to the goal of their "freestanding" presentation. Rawls thus attempts to strengthen the purchase of his *Political Liberalism* on constitutional democratic regimes without conceding any of the moral 'high-ground' of the conditions of justification and the definition of what is political. However, he can neither enforce the norms on which the success of his project depends, nor can he cover a sufficiently broad range of pluralism with his highly normative qualifications of disagreement, citizens, pluralism, doctrines, etc. to take pluralism seriously enough (see Rossi 2012: 151-154 for how such a reliance on pre-political norms curtails the engagement of a political theory with its context).

Rawls' *Political Liberalism*, in contrast to *A Theory of Justice*, tries to square the circle between political situatedness and a methodology based on the demands of moral

[19] This reflection should also address how analytical philosophy, strongly influenced by moral theory (see Williams 2006b: 159-160), is entangled with the status quo through its conditions of possibility (which might make the resulting theory ideological even despite flawless use of the analytical methods).

principles. Thus Rawls inadvertently draws attention to the question of how to keep the normative outlook of political theory whilst taking the politics of the context which one addresses as seriously as possible. So whilst one cannot charge *Political Liberalism* with not attempting to pay more attention to the distinctively political aspects of political theorizing, the result leaves nearly all questions open. *Political Liberalism* lacks reflection both on the potential remoteness from *and* on the ideological proximity of its normatively qualified understandings of what is political to the context to which it hopes to relate more closely in comparison to *A Theory of Justice*. *Political Liberalism*, however, offers an insight into the ways which are open to liberal-normativist political theory to become more politically oriented. It offers an appropriate target for the realists, who need to demonstrate that their reflections on how political theory is political and on how it relates to its political context go beyond *Political Liberalism* as one of the most politically oriented proponents of liberal-normativist political theory. For the following two chapters, the analysis of *Political Liberalism* will be the backdrop against which the (limitations of the) potential of realism to challenge liberal-normativist political theory will be investigated.

Chapter 2: Beyond the Heterogeneity of Realism. On the Potential of Realists to Pose a Challenge to Liberal-Normativist Political Theory

"Realism may not quite be a 'spectre' haunting political theory but it has some of the same qualities." (Philp 2012: 629)

1 Introduction

In 2015 a general taxonomy of the recent phenomenon of realism in political theory is less pressing than five years ago. In these past five years the accounts of realism in political theory have increased in number and sophistication. However, further research into realism in political theory is still pressing. Realism in political theory is far from a clear-cut position. Realism is an umbrella term which unites a number of heterogeneous criticisms of liberal-normativist political theory and (some near incompatible) positions about how to do and understand political theory (and in many cases politics). Whilst the heterogeneity is routinely acknowledged (Galston 2010; Runciman 2013; Sleat 2011, LR), there is little scholarship available on the questions of how the internal differentiation of realism affects how the realists stand to their political context and to what extent realism has the potential to pose a challenge to liberal-normativist political theory. My perspective on the current debates is hence occasioned by the lack of attention paid to these questions by previous attempts at characterizing, or rather constituting (Galston 2010; Stears 2007), as well as "conceptually mapping" (Valentini 2012; Hamlin and Stemplowska 2012; Zuolo 2013), realism in political theory. So rather than offering another taxonomy with the goal to be as comprehensive as possible, I will draw on the now sizeable literature in order to offer a clearer perspective on the heterogeneity of realism with regard to these questions, in particular to its potential to pose a challenge to liberal-normativist political theory.[1]

The main aim of this chapter is to elucidate the phenomenon of realism in political theory by developing what I call an ordering perspective. After the discussion of the

[1] There have been several special issues in journals related to realism (European Journal of Political Theory 2010, Social Theory and Practice 2008 (focused on ideal and non-ideal theory however much discussed in the orbit of realism), Deutsche Zeitschrift für Philosophie 2010), edited books (such as Floyd and Stears 2011, Ceva and Rossi 2012b), monographs (including LR) as well as numerous research articles (Larmore 2013; Sigwart 2013; Rossi 2012, 2013; Sleat 2010, 2013b, BMR, 2014b; Waldron 2012; Jubb 2012, 2014) and review articles (Stears 2007; Galston 2010; Runciman 2012; Floyd 2009, 2010; Sleat 2011; Rossi and Sleat 2014; Zuolo 2013; Valentini 2012; Baderin 2014; Hamlin and Stemplowska 2012).

heterogeneity of the understandings of realism (**2**), the development of the ordering perspective will at first locate key features of realist positions, with the help of which the heterogeneity of the contributions to realism in political theory will then be broken down and analyzed. The ordering perspective will then outline different levels of critical stance that realists take toward liberal-normativist political theory and introduce the importance of investigating the more positive, (political) meanings which are behind the different usages of the term realism. This results in the sketch of the prevalent (and two sidelined) subdivisions of realism (**3**). In order to shed light on the extent to which the different prevalent subdivisions of realism have the potential to pose a challenge to liberal-normativist political theory, a reflection on claims to distinctiveness in political theory is briefly sketched, which is then mapped onto the prevalent subdivisions. This completes the ordering perspective and results in the distinction of three levels of the challenge of the prevalent subdivisions of realism to liberal normativism (**4**).

2 The Heterogeneity of Realism in Political Theory

Realism in political theory is the latest focus of attempts to challenge the dominant self-conception of the discipline, as it takes issue with how to do political theory. Realism brings together a heterogeneous set of critics of the framework that has been dominating the discipline since the mid-1970s: the liberal-normativist political theory exemplified by the work of mostly American theorists like John Rawls, Bruce Ackerman and Ronald Dworkin (and, coming from a different background, also Jürgen Habermas). The group of realists is further united in its attempt to reorient liberal political theory back to "the world of politics as it really is" (Stears 2007: 553). Realists argue that liberal-normativist political theory has become too distanced from politics and/or misjudges how politics works and what is at the heart of politics, namely disagreement, not consensus, and institutions, not principles. This is more or less where the agreement amongst realists ends, apart from the recourse to forerunners in the history of political thought (or in more specific disciplinary histories, e.g. of political science) which at least share an emphasis on the importance of power considerations for theorizing politics. However, even with regard to the forerunners of realism there is a heterogeneity of candidates, or rather of interpretations of these candidates, to be observed. Several are proposed, including the canon of realism in International Relations Theory (Hobbes, Machiavelli), some 'critical' social and political theorists of the 19th and 20th centuries (such as Marx, Nietzsche, Foucault), and thinkers who were much gripped by the gaps between theory

and practice, such as Weber and Lenin; still others include the Greek writer Thucydides (Bell 2009: 3-8), who is also claimed to be a forefather of IR realism, David Hume or Carl Schmitt. So, one characteristic of the phenomenon of realism in political theory that most commentators agree on is the *heterogeneity* of its contributions.

Given the many contexts in which the term realism has been used, even only within the context of politics and philosophy, it is not surprising that there are many understandings of realism to be found in current debates. In some cases, including Bernard Williams' *In the Beginning was the Deed* (IBD) or Raymond Geuss' *Philosophy and Real Politics* (PRP), the label 'realist' is self-chosen (as in Newey 2010; Sleat 2010), whereas many texts are (re)read as 'realist' contributions (see Galston 2009, 2010 and Stears 2007 for examples).[2] The most popular early attempts to construe and assess the realist debate (Galston 2010; Stears 2007) have so far received little *critical* scrutiny and it is at least an open question to what extent these initial treatments can be regarded as doing an "excellent job" (Sleat 2011: 470). Each of these review articles views realism through a specific prism, in which certain aspects carry more and others less salience, and from which some that play an crucial role in other accounts are omitted. Examples include Galston's (2010) stress on the ideal/non-ideal theory debate as against Sleat's (2014b) attempt to divide the debate about realism from the one about ideal/non-ideal theory, or the emphasis on questions of social psychology that surfaces in Floyd (2010) as against the focus on ideology as found in Raymond Geuss' short clarification of his understanding of realism (Geuss 2010b); or compare the focus on institutions (in Waldron 2012) as against the focus on individual agency and leadership (Philp 2010). This is after all unavoidable and not *per se* a problem, however, with regard to the goal of inquiring into the potential of realism to pose a challenge to liberal-normativist political theory (the differences between) these prisms need to become a subject of reflection.

'Realism' is one of these terms which is both extremely malleable and usually carries strong connotations. Any reconstruction of what realism is taken to mean will necessarily be at least minimally selective, partisan and contestable. However, it is possible to reflect on the commitments that one may have to a specific understanding of

[2] Geuss (2010b, 2010e, 2012a) has recently stated that using the label realism was a mistake because the term has so many meanings. This problem can be addressed by carefully differentiating the uses of the term in current debates.

realism, and explicate them as much as possible. This is less an issue of bracketing personal preferences than of transparency and self-reflection. If the perspective and the commitments which one's understanding implies are not explicitly discussed, there is a danger of reading diverging contributions to realism through one, unduly narrow understanding of realism. An example of this problem is reading realism through the prism of non-ideal theory (Valentini 2012). What is needed to improve our understanding of this debate instead is a perspective which takes seriously the differences between understandings of realism broadly understood.[3]

The following foci of realist scholarship offer a succinct (albeit not exhaustive) overview of the wide range of understandings of realism, including as an intervention into non-ideal theory. These foci include making the crucial concepts of liberal-normativist political theory more realistic, i.e. asking how e.g. 'public reason' can become more applicable and practicable (Humphrey and Stears 2012) or how principles of justice can be applied globally (Bell 2010); reevaluating the purposes of different levels of theorizing within liberal-normativist political theory, which translates into asking what is ideal theory, what is non-ideal theory, what is each good for, and how do they relate to each other (Hamlin and Stemplowska 2012; Jubb 2012; note the conflicting understandings of non-ideal theory); refocusing on legitimacy rather than justice and exploring its conditions (Rossi 2012; Newey 2010; Sangiovanni 2008); discussing the starting point and the assumptions of theorizing in political theory (Honig and Stears 2012; Finlayson 2015a) – with special attention to the motivational sets of people (Floyd 2010) or to the importance of historical context and historical development (Williams 2002); reexamining liberal-normativist conceptualizations of and answers to political disagreement (Sleat 2011, 2012, LR, 2013b); reassessing the moral goals of liberal-normativist political theory, i.e. asking whether it is possible to have e.g. a fully moral justification of a "well-ordered society" or of political coercion in a political theory oriented toward the realities of politics (Freyenhagen 2011); asking what a realistic relationship between political theory and its political context would look like (PI, FDD, PRP) which includes the question of whether political theory can create a body of moral principles that can guide political action (Geuss 2011a); reassessing the role of and refining distinctively political judgment and conduct (Dunn 2000; Philp 2008, 2010) and

[3] Arguably in the past two years more critical assessments of the realist debates have emerged (Runciman 2012; Baderin 2014; Philp 2012; Freeden 2012; Rossi and Sleat 2014). This suggests an increasing degree of self-reflection.

analyzing the (ideological) political function of political theory in current political thinking and action (PRP, PI).

This overview of the heterogeneity of realist orientations spurs the question of what goals the increase in realism in political theory should serve. What is the purpose of realism? After all, challenging liberal-normativist political theory is not a goal in itself, but only makes sense if it is embedded in the pursuit of other goals which are either at odds with liberal-normativist political theory or not realized fully in liberal-normativist political theory. If one holds that there are no definite criteria for laying out what is real – in the sense of philosophical (deep) realism which has not played a significant role in the debates about realism thus far –, then the question of how to evaluate the criteria and orientations offered becomes ever more pertinent (see also Gunnell 2011: 54). The claim to 'the real' in the debates about realism in political theory is better understood in terms of connecting to the respective political context, e.g. through interpretation, explanation or normative guidance than in terms of ontology and hence in terms of a political theory's ability to give an account of this society and its own position within this society. Then it seems warranted to ask how does the 'real' come to bear on the different understandings of realism in political theory (rather than asking what the 'real' really is)? As indicated by the overview of the orientations within the realist debates, some realists hope to improve the use of political theory for policy-making and then the real, as in real politics, often comes in as a limiting factor to be considered, which restricts the ambitions of theory, either in terms of feasibility concerns or in terms of anti-utopian pleas; others hope to clarify the relationship between theory and practice (as different spheres). Yet others hope to make political theory more responsive to the deepest questions of politics (i.e. coercion and disagreement), develop a better perspective on the entanglement between political theory and politics, or a better view of political illusion and ideology at work in political theory. Now it is time to offer a perspective which orders these orientations with regard to their potential to challenge liberal-normativist political theory.

3 Developing an Ordering Perspective for Realism in Political Theory

I will take the two characteristics that were highlighted in the previous section as shared by most realists, one each from the two most influential overview articles of realism in political theory, to start my development of an ordering perspective for realism in

political theory. The first shared aspect is the critical stance towards liberal-normativist political theory. Pointing to the heterogeneity of the realists' positions, Galston (2010) maintains that they share a critical position toward what Samuel Freeman has described as "high liberalism" (Freeman 2011), which is usually associated with the liberal, normativist and principle-based arguments of post-Rawlsian political theory. The second shared aspect, understood as the 'positive' counterpart to the negative characteristic of the kind of criticism that realists advance, is the realist goal to reorient political theory to the "world of politics as it really is" (Stears 2007: 553), which leaves much space for interpretation of how this should be achieved, but usually entails the commitment to paying attention to considerations of power, especially as a question of (il)legitimate coercion, conflict, and context.[4] Both characteristics are widely shared even across the different positions not discussed by Galston or Stears which makes them adequate building blocks for the kind of ordering perspective to be developed here. I will now discuss each in detail.

3.1 Three Levels of Realist Criticism

Much of the coherence of the perception of realism in political theory as a phenomenon stems from its shared critical impetus. This seems to be welcomed by all those political theorists who have been waiting for a renewed challenge to the currently dominant liberal-normativist political theories, as recent contenders for such a challenge – think of communitarians, multiculturalists, theorists of the political/agonists, and radical pluralists – have not succeeded at unsettling their dominant position. Yet emphasizing the shared critical impetus of the different realist orientations may lead to downplaying the differences between these criticisms. In order to evaluate to what extent the realist criticisms challenge liberal-normativist political theory, it is important to initially distinguish the criticisms with regard to their depth.

First, on the low level of criticism, there are those theorists who criticize the relation of liberal-normativist political theory to politics as problems of application and limitation. They work within 'non-ideal theory' and on applying the framework of liberal-normativist political theory to the 'realities' of politics, preferably to issues not

[4] Stears' article actually refers to the "politics of compulsion" rather than to realism and his views on the formation of a conflict- and compulsion-centered way of looking at politics come from a pool of thinkers which at least in part differs from Galston's. However, Stears has later (2010) used the term realism to describe the same group of thinkers.

(sufficiently) covered yet by liberal-normativist political theory, including global ethics, intergenerational justice, or disability etc. They focus on questions of feasibility (see Gilabert and Lawford-Smith 2012), or on reevaluating the purposes of different levels of theorizing within liberal-normativist political theory, debating how the application of ideal theory principles to non-ideal theory and to real politics should work. These criticisms do not categorically reject abstract theorizing on the basis of legal or moral philosophy if it is connected – via division of labor – e.g. to a social science toolkit (see Social Theory and Practice 2008; Swift and White 2008; Farrelly 2007). Overall, these realist criticisms can be understood to apply mostly to questions of the extension or improved application of the liberal-normativist framework.

Second, the realist criticisms on the medium level involve questioning aspects of the methodology (universalism, moralism) and certain key concepts of liberal-normativist political theory. This second level of criticism can be further divided. On the one hand, there are those realists who particularly criticize liberal-normativist political theory for failing to capture the empirical realities of politics. They view this as due to the reliance of liberal-normativist political theory on moral or legal philosophy, which is e.g. remote from what really motivates agents to act politically (Floyd 2010; Shapiro 2005). On the other hand, there are those who criticize the tension or disconnect between the specific moral commitments of liberal-normativist political theory and the requirements of actual politics: either for failing to take into account the distinctiveness of the moral or ethical standards appropriate for political action and judgment (Philp 2010; Dunn 2000) or for failing to recognize the importance of order and stability for politics and for failing to provide any guidance on how to achieve or uphold them. The latter criticism is advanced e.g. by proponents of the liberalism of fear or of *modus vivendi* liberalism (McCabe 2010; Horton 2010; Gray 2000). Additionally, one could locate realists who criticize the predominance of the concept of justice in liberal-normativist political theory as giving in to potentially dangerous utopian hopes on this level of criticism.

Third, the high level of criticism is characterized by the questioning of liberal-normativist political theory on the whole, especially with regard to its relationship to its political context. Realists here especially criticize key methodological and value assumptions of liberal-normativist political theory such as the optimism that politics can be driven by a consensus of any ambitious scale, on which even political liberalism arguably relies (LR: chapters 1-2). Realists on this level of criticism also charge liberal-

normativist political theory with lacking self-reflection. Their criticism is e.g. directed at the connection of liberal-normativist political theory to liberal politics in terms of ideologically supporting the status quo (which also leads to criticisms of the circularity of its arguments) (OE: chapter 2; Mills 2005). Realists on this level further criticize liberal-normativist political theory for failing to address distinctively political concerns (such as power, conflict, and interest) and for failing to offer an account of the relationship between political and moral concerns in political theorizing (LR). They also criticize the high ambitions of liberal-normativist theory-building (Horton 2012).

It is difficult to draw clear lines between these different levels (maybe one can say that these levels build on each other from bottom to top, in as far as e.g. the highest level also incorporates the criticisms typical of the medium level); however, the most important point for this preliminary approximation is that different levels of depth of the criticism can be roughly discerned. Attention also needs to be drawn to the respective backgrounds against which the criticism is formulated. Whilst the criterion of the depth of the realist criticism of liberal-normativist political theory reinforces the view that liberal-normativist political theory is the default position to take in political theory today, it also offers a first step for getting into the position to assess the potential of realism to challenge liberal normativism. This cannot be fully explored without knowing more about how the meaning of 'realism' is constructed in the debates.

3.2 The (Political) Meaning of Realism

The way in which the term realism is being filled with specific (political) meaning connects to the question of how to reorient political theory to politics.[5] Whereas most commentators have started their assessments of realism by studying the criticisms that the realists have formulated – this is most likely due to the dominance of liberal-normativist political theory to which these criticisms are clearly relatable –, and only rarely take issue with the wider political commitments involved in these views and visions, much more attention needs to be paid to the latter. I would like to do that by focusing on the different positive (political) meanings that have been given to realism.

[5] Arguably virtually any political theory, including liberal-normativist political theory, is oriented toward politics in some way. The point of the realist criticism hence is that political theory, through focusing on moral principles derived from ideal theory, is oriented toward politics in a way which does not actually connect to politics.

This is an especially important aspect in order to be critically reflexive about the relationship between political theory and its political context and about the senses in which it is political when analyzing the debates about realism.

With regard to how its meaning is being filled, I see realism in a similar way as Slavoj Zizek (1995: 12-13) views so-called "free-floating signifiers", terms such as "democracy" or "ecology". His perspective enables one to acknowledge that these terms are subject to being filled with a specific meaning depending on the struggle between rivaling meanings within a political and historical context. What makes this idea especially adept for the analysis of the use of the term realism in current debates is that it allows one to view the 'liquidity' of its respective meanings in part as a reflection of the politically partisan way in which they are understood. This does not only apply to how the term realism is finally being used on each respective view, but also to how the importance, need and function of the respective meaning of realism is construed: if we mean X by realism, why do we need realism (see Zizek 1995: 13)? One of the assumptions that comes with such an approach is that all of the meanings given to realism are somehow political. This has been met with different levels of reflection in the debates about realism.

The debates about realism have often been viewed as having to do with methodological questions (Schaub 2010; Sirsch 2012; Swift and White 2008). This is not a neutral assessment. One could even argue that understanding the debates as 'methodological' is an ideological move, reducing any of the explicit purchase of it to the domain of methodology of political theory which (in liberal-normativist political theory) is assumed to be clearly separable from political theory and from politics (see Finlayson 2015a). Whether to assume 'consensus' or 'conflict', to use 'abstraction and principles' or 'contextualism and judgment' as the starting assumptions for political theory are – on this reading – understood as predominantly methodological decisions. However, this does not seem to exhaust their meaning. All of these decisions carry some commitment to what liberal-normativist political theory often terms 'substantive positions'.

The label 'methodological' also seems to carry the assumption that methodological inquiry that is rigorously carried out (which, for the majority of liberal-normativist political theory, means according to the standards set by analytical philosophy) will in one way or other improve or correct political theory. From the point of view of a

reflexive and political reading of the debate the answer to this can only be that the 'better' involved here (in the sense of improving political theory) is a *political* judgment and that the 'more correct' also makes use of a standard tied to political commitments and judgments. The issue is one of partisan perspective: Depending on which perspective one has chosen, a certain change in the framework of political theory appears as an 'improvement', because it furthers the goals congenial to this perspective, whilst to another perspective this 'improvement' will appear to be quite the opposite or not a salient change at all. This should not be taken to mean that it is impossible to tell better from worse ways of pursuing a respective approach. It merely means to question the separation of methodological concerns from political commitments (and bias). I will now sketch a number of popular meanings that fill realism in the current debates. These underline that there are different views about what realism in political theory is supposed to be and to do.

3.3 The Prevalent Subdivisions of Realism

3.3.1 Realism as a Political Vision

Realism here is overtly meant as a political vision (rather than a methodological question) rivaling what Sleat terms the "liberal vision of politics" (LR: chapter 1). On this view realism offers an answer to the question of what is political, and following from that, what the ends of politics are and how these can be achieved, and, most importantly, how liberal political authority (which implies a 'fully' normative authority (see HIP: 37-42)) can be realistically justified. It is on the issue of justification that realism as a political vision as presented by Sleat most deeply differs from liberal approaches, even if Sleat's goal is to present what he calls a "realist theory of *liberal* politics" (LR; my emphasis).[6]

Sleat claims that liberal political theory does not take disagreement and conflict seriously and that it downplays the need to revert to coercive measures that cannot be justified to each citizen. Disagreement and conflict are not only more deeply seated than liberal political theory admits but also possibly affect any question which can be

[6] It is telling that realism mostly rivals the liberal vision of politics rather than e.g. a socialist vision of politics. This is most likely due to the fact the realism in question is situated in the disciplinary context of Anglophone political theory, in which the default position has been a liberal one for decades now, and that the current political organization of Western liberal democracies – the audience of most contemporary political theory – is predominantly liberal.

construed to be political (LR: 52-56). The question of coercion is no less important. Recent liberal theory, notably political liberalism, has been engaged in establishing a division between those citizens that are reasonable and hence will either obey or reasonably disagree, and hence accept their potential coercion as justified, and those that disagree unreasonably with the legitimation offered (and may not obey). The latter group seems to be excluded from the political relationship so central to liberal theorists, i.e. the relationship that is based on rational or reasonable consent and which establishes the conditions of legitimacy for the political authority (see the discussion of Bernard Williams' realism in chapter 3). Sleat asks how a liberal political authority is to treat this group, or, more importantly maybe, in what sense can the political order be seen as legitimate or authoritative vis-à-vis these people (LR: 126)? Neither does it seem possible to treat this group of citizens in keeping with the liberal principle of fully (morally) justified coercion nor is there any developed view in terms of justification if the relationship is understood as one of domination. Neglecting the problems which arise from these questions leads to a gap of liberal theories of justification and legitimacy (Sleat 2011). The remedy for this gap is to incorporate the coercive aspects of liberal politics explicitly into its self-conception, hence gaining reflexivity and – in Bernard Williams' term – "truthfulness". On this view, liberal political theorists and liberal politicians need to accept that the distinction between legitimation and successful domination is not a categorical one. Sleat (LR: chapter 7) concludes that liberals should cultivate a form of "restrained mastery" in the face of perennial deep disagreement. Sleat's account echoes many of the arguments found in other recent realist writings about the importance of disagreement and coercion (Stears 2007; Philp 2008; Newey 2001), however, uses them to furnish a slightly more comprehensive meaning of realism.

This is based on linking it back to the less studied political judgments of the early 20th century IR realists, such as Niebuhr and Morgenthau (LR: chapter 2; see also M. Williams 2005), which brings to the fore questions about the origins and the normative standing of conflict and disagreement. Sleat seems to want to distance his position from the overall pessimistic (and static) views of these thinkers about human nature and, like other contemporary political theorists, "to link disagreement and conflict to theories of the nature of normative value and judgement" (LR: 54). For Sleat it is crucial to emphasize that "political unity, order and stability are not natural features of the human condition but must be worked out through the sort of coercive political power that the

state (as the primary form of political association in modernity) has at its disposal" (LR: 62). This does not seem to be a controversial view, despite being in tension with the views of Locke, who is now viewed as a forefather of liberal political theory (see Bell 2014), on generating political unity through accommodating power according to a pre-political consensus. Sleat rather holds that disagreement is a pre-condition of politics, whereas the particular disagreements depend on the historical context.

In view of this predicament Sleat is open about his endorsement of a partisan political bias (LR: chapter 6) which at times even leads to accepting tautological argument:

> "There is something obviously tautological about this condition of realist legitimacy: the liberal state is legitimate because it pursues liberal ends, values, and moral commitments. The same condition provides a partial basis for justifying the legitimacy of other forms of political order also (socialist orders are legitimate because they are directed towards achieving socialist ends, fascist orders because of fascist ends, and so on). This is inevitable, according to the realist view I am expounding here, insofar as competing claims to legitimacy, and different accounts of the goods or values in which a legitimate state would be grounded, are necessarily part of the struggle and conflict between different visions of the political ideal that characterises politics." (LR: 155)

His realist political vision of liberal politics could then be viewed as having a tendency to contribute to the affirmation of the status quo (not just the liberal one he explicitly discusses) because its foci on the ineradicability of political conflict and disagreement and order and stability could be read as constraints on the possibilities of political change (to which his theory of legitimacy as based on the congruence between the rationale offered by those claiming authority and the beliefs of those subjected to it, which will be discussed in detail in chapter 6, further contributes). This is potentially problematic if one agrees that political theorizing should approach its political context with a critical attitude featuring the goal of preventing status quo affirmation (which Sleat (see 2014b; Rossi and Sleat 2014) does not deny).

3.3.2 Political Conduct and Political Judgment Realism

Realism on this view is centered on a "deeply contextual analysis of political agency". This focus is necessitated by the assumption that the "appropriate" evaluation of political agency cannot be carried out with reference solely to "states of affairs that result from the actions or from the principles upon which [people in politics] act" (Philp 2008: 389). Rather the question of political possibility is crucial: "On this picture, political possibility is a function partly of structural constraints that arise from the exigencies and

compromises that political office necessitates, but partly also of the political will, tenacity, courage, imagination, and flair that politicians bring to bear." (Philp 2008: 389) This emphasis supplements the dominant consequentialist and deontological theories of ethics with a theory of political virtue. This theory understands political action as arising from a set of skills, which are turned into virtues, and constraints that are not best captured in moral terms:

> "[…] the judgments will be of the form: how did X read a particular situation, and what aspects of agency or inattention, callousness, or concern were involved in that reading and how far, having read the situation in that way, did X live up to that reading and see through the commitments made and realize the values to which he or she aspired?" (Philp 2008: 395)

The contextualist orientation toward political possibility does not have to lead to reducing political theory to political history. Rather certain "features of the political context" are found across contexts, including the need to resolve conflict (Philp 2008: 397).[7] Philp uses terms like competence, political integrity and probity, and a distinction between the moral standing of the political actor as a "domestic" person and as a public figure, as part of a language for assessing political conduct (Philp 2008: 399-401). This view of realism hence calls for developing further (or redeveloping) an understanding of the specific challenges of political actors that require forms of assessment different from what they are held accountable for in their "domestic" life (whatever that mean will depend from context to context). The understanding of politics which underlies Philp's account could, however, be thought to be unduly narrow, focusing on personal agency and political leadership (see Finlayson 2015a for a critique of understanding politics in this way).

Recently Philp (2012) has restated these arguments as a basis for a realism "without illusions", criticizing what he regards as the attempt of current realists to sever politics from morality (2012: 633). He suggests a "pragmatic account of realism" which "looks more like a code of honour with respect to arguments about political possibilities in given contexts" (2012: 636) than an appeal to meta-theoretical views about the political which Philp sees at work in much of current realist debate. He holds that

> "realism is not interest rather than value, particularity rather than universality, causality rather than agency. It is a commitment to recognizing that the political world is local and powerfully causal,

[7] This view is subject to the criticism that such claims to taking history seriously only take history in separate slices and do not look at the long-term *development* which may change how certain values are understood even if the same concepts remain important (however changed in content).

> not least through generating a lively sense of interest amongst its participants, whilst acknowledging that it is not fully determined, that people bring to their activity ideas and commitments that shape their conception of their interests as well as reflecting them, and that their agency can create and realize possibilities that may be, on occasion, dramatically emancipatory for some." (Philp 2012: 636)

Still Philp (2012: 646) does not side squarely with his pragmatic account of realism, as – he argues – the philosophical compass that considerations of normative value might offer provides the necessary counterpart to the pragmatic aspects of assessment in order for political theory to be able to say anything about what we should do.

3.3.3 Empirical Social Science and Institutionalist Realism

This understanding of realism is characterized by attempts to connect normative political theory with the empirical social sciences which are supposed to provide background knowledge for the development of principles and their conditions of application. Such realists are opposed either to the "flight from reality of the human sciences" (Shapiro 2005) or, more specifically, to the lack of attention which political theorists pay to the formal institutions of politics (which are usually the object of study of the sub-disciplines of political science of comparative politics or domestic politics).

There are two variations of this realism: The first which is opposed to intuitionism and moral theory-casuistry in political theory stresses the importance of social sciences other than political science, such as psychology, for supplying political theory with empirical grounding (Floyd 2011; Shapiro 2005; Gunnell 2011); the second stresses what could be called institutionalist political science. This involves a rather narrow view of politics, with a focus on the politics of parliaments and other institutionalized bodies of government, and seems to regard the reconnection between political science's empirical branch and political theory as its favored corrective of the latter's abstractionism (see Waldron's (2012) "*political* political theory"). There is some overlap with the political conduct and judgment realism on the second variant, as here, too, political agents in their institutional roles are deemed a crucial object of study for a more realistic political theory. The emphasis of the first variant, however, is on the 'facts' established by social science to which political theorists should accord more weight in their development of normative evaluations and recommendations. An example of this view is Jonathan Floyd's (2011) "normative behaviourism" which hopes to read off the applicability or acceptance of norms from people's behavior.

3.3.4 Realism as a Question of Methodology

Realism here is the label for the combination of a number of methodological views about how to do political theory. Realism thus understood is a position in debates about the methodology of political theory. This view entails the separation between the methodology of political theory, political theory and politics. An illustration of this view is Swift and White's (2008) division of labor between political theorists, empirical social scientists and politicians or policy implementers. This division of (intellectual) labor reinforces a specific view of what the spheres of the respective activities are: Here political theorists clarify the questions of principle from a viewpoint uncluttered from the vagaries of politics (ideal theory), there the more empirically minded social scientists find ways to apply these principles (in non-ideal theory) and finally the non-ideal theory (depending on one's view about the relationship between ideal and non-ideal theory) needs to be negotiated with those actually in the 'muddle' of politics. This methodological understanding of realism comes in two different levels of ambitiousness:

First, *the non-ideal theory version*: Realism does not explicitly carry a political vision on this understanding, but rather serves as an evaluative term to judge how well a political theory takes in factors from the real world of politics as constraints on its theory-building, or, likewise, how well the political theory is suited to address those (theoretical) problems that non-ideal theorists deem to be most worthy of the attention of political theory (feasibility, practice-dependency, application etc.). The implicit assumptions behind this view are the following: First, political theory is somewhat separate from politics. Second, the general framework within which political theory is currently practiced is not problematic and the aspects of it that call for revisions are omissions and shortcomings that can be amended in the spirit of that framework. This view is mostly concerned with questions of the application of political theory rather than with rethinking the framework of theorizing and roughly corresponds with the low level of criticism outlined above.

Second, *the liberal-realist version*: Realism on this account is more wide-ranging than on the non-ideal theory understanding. Typical of this view which is connected to the medium level of depth of criticism set out above is the intention to reform liberal-

normativist political theory. On this view realism is mostly concerned with questions of conceptual reform, e.g. how can one understand the question of legitimacy or how can one understand equality more realistically (in a more or less unchanged liberal-normativist framework)? The aspects which are the target of the reform are separated from the normative commitments of the liberal-normativist framework which are retained. So when for example Humphrey and Stears (2012) propose to change the understanding of deliberation they do not question that deliberation plays a central role within the context of liberal democracy; nor do they question that deliberation is an adequate means for advancing norms such as consensus, freedom or autonomy which are accepted as the appropriate focus of political theory. The separation of methodological questions from questions about how the theory is political and how it relates to its context makes this view appear to be 'politically innocent'. However, leaving most of the liberal-normativist framework untouched translates into an accommodation with the status quo of the relationship between political theory and politics.

This closes the interpretation of the prevalent subdivisions of realism. Even though the following understandings of realism have been largely sidelined in the debates, they are important for assessing realism's potential for challenging liberal-normativist political theory.

3.3.5 Two Sidelined Understandings of Realism

The first sidelined understanding is Geussian realism which is based on a comprehensive interpretation of Raymond Geuss' realism.[8] Realism here aims to be a radically critical perspective that addresses the entanglement between liberal-normativist political theory and politics. Being realistic on this view then means pursuing an

> "approach to political philosophy […] that is reflective about [the following] three dimensions. A realistic political philosophy is one that tries to dispense with wishful thinking and […] tries to analyze ideologies, not to be caught up in ideological illusions and […] tries not to take the self-evident stereotypes at face value and argue from them, but tries to see what lies behind them." (Geuss 2010e)

[8] Geussian realism might rightly be viewed as prominent in the debates about realism, however, I submit, only in a truncated understanding, which is why I am discussing the more radical interpretation presented here as sidelined in the debates (see chapter 4 below).

This requires replacing the framework of liberal-normativist political theory, including its focus on normative principles and its philosophical toolkit, with a (less systematic) set of questions centered on an understanding of politics as an art or craft (see PRP: 15-16; the latter view is shared by political conduct and political judgment realism). Questions of power, often in their indirect impact on ways of thinking such as ideological illusions, wishful thinking, and the taking for granted of day-to-day evaluations shape this outlook, which has the goal of developing different concepts and tools to evaluate what is relevant today for questions with collective consequences (see PRP: 42-50, GP, PI). This could also be read as an attempt to overcome the view of the concept of power as normatively negative, or even as 'poisonous', which prevents its discussion and evaluation beyond the division between legitimate and illegitimate power (see chapter 4 for an attempt to 'detoxify power' and chapter 6 for the sketch of the transformation of legitimacy by radical realism). Power is, however, not the only relevant factor, but nearly always a relevant factor, for the perspective of Geussian realism. Skepticism with regard to the possibility of the fine separation between the methodology of political theory, political theory, and politics is a characteristic of this view which requires a closer scrutiny of the relationship of political theory to its political context. Geuss particularly emphasizes the question of how liberal-normativist political theory is ideologically connected to the current political status quo. Further, this understanding of realism regards political theory as partisan (like realism as a political vision) and potentially as political action. This involves a questioning of the action/thought divide, which is found e.g. in the debates about action-guiding vs. thought-guiding political theory (see Social Theory and Practice 2008). On this understanding, realism needs to be self-reflexive in so far as it recognizes that partisanship is unavoidable and hence great care must be taken to make implicit assumptions explicit. It is also aware of the difficulty involved in pinning down a shared meaning of the term 'realism' when debating its merits and problems (Geuss 2010b).

An interesting feature of this view is its position toward utopian political thought. Whereas most of the commentators of the debate agree that realism is a way to restrain utopian excesses, on this view realism aims to also contribute to a reinvigoration of the political imagination, including utopian thought (and here goes beyond the political conduct and judgment realism which also tries to put more emphasis on the political imagination). This is due to the critique of liberal-normativist political theory as being

both not realistic *and* not utopian enough (Geuss 2010b: 429; 2010c). Most other realist views would hold that it is too utopian and not realistic enough (see the discussion of two dichotomizations in chapter 3). This does not mean that realism on this view embraces a traditional understanding of emancipatory politics which may come with an emphasis on the utopian and which would undermine Geussian realism's emphasis on contextual political possibility and on the need for improving political judgment, but rather that emphases on realism and the utopian imagination can be combined (see also Johnson 2015/forthcoming).

The other intervention which is usually sidelined in the debates, because it seems to stand mostly orthogonally to them, is Michael Freeden's "interpretive realism" (Freeden 2012; see also 2005, 2008, 2009). Here the study of the structure of political thinking is the way to reach a more realistic political theorizing. This lens of "thinking about politics" (Freeden 2008) claims to be distinct from its object, "thinking politically", and is interested in conceptual morphology, in the way concepts change over time when used in thinking politically. This approach is not limited to the study of political officeholders or the academic politics discourse, but aims to include vernacular manifestations of thinking politically. What realists often call the anti-political or depoliticizing features of liberal-normativist political theory, are here interpreted as part of a *political logic* of depoliticization (Freeden 2005). Conceptual morphology hence lends support to the interpretation of liberal political theory as ideology. However, ideology is here understood in a descriptive sense (Humphrey 2005). Philosophical tools such as conceptual analysis are used here under the premise of offering a purely descriptive perspective. Freeden's position marks an attempt to separate the structure of political thinking from "ethico-political philosophizing" which looks at politics from a predominantly normative point of view (Freeden 2009). This is the basis for Freeden's critique of other realists as sharing the orientation toward prescription of ethical norms or at least guiding action in any normatively relevant way with the liberal-normativist mainstream (Freeden 2012).

The preceding analyses and interpretations of the different realist criticisms and the ways in which the term realism is filled with (political) meaning within the phenomenon of realism in political theory have attempted to deepen the understanding of this phenomenon. The subdivisions of realism sketched on their basis illustrate how realism is linked to a variety of political, intra-disciplinary and philosophical agendas. The task

which the following section will take up is to interrogate the preceding analyses and interpretations of the ordering perspective with regard to the extent to which they pose a challenge to liberal-normative political theory.

4 Realism as a Challenge to Liberal-Normativist Political Theory?

A first step for this assessment is to clarify what it means for the subdivisions of realism to pose a challenge which requires taking both the differences and the similarities between the realists and their opponents into consideration. I will approach the assessment of the claims to distinctiveness through setting up a distinction of several levels on which claims can either be (internal) correctives or rivals with potential for distinctiveness. If one turns the focus from the differences to the similarities between realists and their opponents, the concept of 'corrective', as it implies differences – corrections as changes – against a background of similarities – corrections as means to steer back to an otherwise approved path or goal –, is an important one to explore. I understand the term 'corrective' to apply to views or arguments which are directed at or primarily used for revising or adding to an already existing framework. In the case of the debates about realism the understanding of realism as a 'corrective' springs from the view that realism corrects excesses of liberal-normativist political theory, that realism brings the focus of political theory back to the 'essentials', in a way corrects through redirection, and that realism can help find a middle way to incorporate both normatively critical moral ambitions and a sense of the contextual limitations (in the sense of (re-) balancing them).

4.1 Differentiating Claims to Distinctiveness in Political Theory

At this point it is helpful to introduce a distinction of three levels of claims – a realist method, realist theoretical program and an overarching philosophy of a fully-fledged realist political theory – which is mapped onto three levels of claims of distinctiveness, in order to help understand what kinds of difference and/or similarity are at issue in the debates about realism.[9] In contrast to a corrective, a distinctive method, theoretical program or overarching philosophy is based on the notion that the change does not just affect the operationalization, the application or the details, but the self-conception or structure of the object of criticism. When what is at issue is the potential of a new

[9] This distinction is inspired by Raymond Geuss' essay *Fibel der Dystopie* (FDD: 5-6) where this distinction is introduced for analytical philosophy.

contender for distinctiveness, such as realism in political theory, this contender is usually viewed against the context of the discursive hegemony from which it tries to break away. One question which will be important is on what level the new contender intends to break with the discursive hegemony.

I will outline three levels on which claims to such a break could be advanced. First, on the level of method, which is internal to a theoretical program of political theory. Here the claim would be to constituting a distinct method within a certain theoretical program (which is again part of an overarching philosophy). This claim is self-consciously limited to adding to an existing theoretical program of political theory and does not entail a challenge to it. If this is applied to the debates about realism the following problem comes up: Whilst serious disagreement about the methods which are more or less realistic in political theory may constitute a core aspect of the debates, these disagreements do not stem from the introduction of, or the existence of, methods which are *in essence* realistic as what is viewed as realistic depends on the goals of the respective theoretical program of political theory. The predicate 'realist(ic)' does not have any defined analytical content here. Rather, already existing methods are deemed more (or less) realistic for reasons such as offering either a clearer way to see through the thicket of politics through abstraction or a lens to engage this thicket in its complexity. These reasons, however, go beyond a methodological discussion, as their appropriateness depends on other building blocks of theoretical programs of political theory, such as goals. Providing reasons for the appropriateness or preference of certain methods over others, e.g. as more realistic, thus depends on a theoretical program. This means that distinctive methods do not suffice to challenge a theoretical program, as the methods are always linked to this level of theorizing.

Second, claims to distinctiveness could be advanced on the level of theoretical program. On this level, contenders for distinctiveness try to stake out their claim to presenting a distinctive account of the goals and means adequate (and necessary) for a political theory. On this level the development of a theoretical program needs to provide the reasoning why certain methods are preferable and/or distinctive, whilst the consolidation of this program needs to spell out the underlying commitments and goals, the available means and arrange them all into a minimally coherent structure. The reasons for the importance of this level are, first, that methods cannot themselves arbitrate which ones are most suitable in different contexts and for different purposes, and hence a theoretical

program is needed to offer reasons for the choice of methods. Second, the compatibility of most of the (at least the more radical) understandings of a realistic theoretical program for political theory with the theoretical ambitions to an overarching philosophy is likely to be questionable, at least in cases in which this overarching philosophy claims exclusivity and comprehensiveness (see below), because at least the more radical realists reject the levels of systematicity and separation of theory from practice required on this level. Hence for realists the theoretical program level is the most appropriate level on which to make claims to distinctiveness. Furthermore, unless it turned out that the changes that these realists seek only affect methods within a similar understanding of the theoretical program or the overarching philosophy, it would seem to be a contradictory move for a realistic theoretical program to the study of politics to try to emulate the theory-building (ambitions) of their liberal-normativist opponents (however, see chapter 3).

The third level pertains to overarching philosophy which refers to the goal to offer an alternative on the level of a philosophical system. Here claims are potentially self-consciously exclusivist and aim to be comprehensive (which is not opposed to 'political' as in Rawls' *Political Liberalism* but rather to 'reflexively selective and partial'). The difference between the second and the third level lies in the maximalist ambitions of 'overarching philosophies', not in the questions and problems which matter on these levels. Claims on this level are currently relatively seldom in the debates about realism as political theory has firmly settled into a 'paradigm', to borrow a term from the philosophy of science, of liberal-normativist analytical political theories of justice and rights. Whilst how to interpret and practice this overarching philosophy is highly contested and results in a great number of conceptions and theoretical programs, these remain *within* this overarching philosophy. The discursive hegemony of liberal theories of justice and rights is arguably so strong that the claims to distinctiveness in the debates about realism are mostly advanced on and between the first and second levels. Realists may be viewed as offering a challenge, even an alternative to the overarching philosophy of liberal-normativist analytical political theories of justice and rights, however, I hold, they are still operating mostly within this overarching philosophy. Even if realistic theoretical programs of the study of politics did not follow the emulation of the overarching philosophy of liberal-normativist political theory, but tried to develop a realist overarching philosophy, its ambitions to be exclusive – only 'realistic' political

theory is adequate –, and comprehensive – realistic political theory is sufficient to cover everything which is important in political theory – would be likely to clash with the impetus which started the realist critique of liberal normativism. It is then already a step forward to self-reflection to find key contributors to the debates about realism, such as Bernard Williams, labeled or even self-labeling (as Sleat in LR) as liberal realists who (at least implicitly) realize the limited scope of their challenge to liberal-normativist political theory.

When working with this three-level-perspective, tensions and entanglements between these levels are to be expected: methods could be in tension with the theoretical program and/or the overarching philosophy, the theoretical program with both methods and the overarching philosophy, whilst all levels are also potentially entangled with each other. I will now integrate this perspective into my interpretation of the potential of the different subdivisions of realism to challenge liberal-normativist political theory. This is led by the view that whilst most of the contributions to the realist debates – with differences according to the different subdivisions – differ only in terms of method (level 1), however, in order to pose a minimally substantial challenge to liberal-normativist political theory, the theoretical research program (level 2) would have to be different. The level of 'overarching philosophy' (level 3) does not seem to be applicable, given that a self-reflexive theoretical program would try to avoid such a level of theory-building (assuming it includes the claims to exclusivity and comprehensiveness outlined above).

4.2 Realism between Revision, Reform and Rejection of Liberal-Normativist Political Theory

Now the task is to combine the elements of the ordering perspective of realism developed above into an overall scheme for charting the potential of the different subdivisions of realism to challenge liberal-normativist political theory. A categorization of contributions into soft, medium and hard realists would be misleading. Against the background of the manifold connotations of the term realism it would give the impression that the 'hard' realists are somehow more successful at being realistic. Rather I would like to order realists into three groups: first, those who hope to revise, then those who hope to reform and finally those who reject liberal-normativist political theory. Here I would also like to draw attention to how the different subdivisions could be seen

to serve as different kinds of correctives to liberal-normativist political theory. Raising awareness of this issue which is hardly discussed by realists contributes to the assessment of the potential of the respective subdivisions to pose a challenge to liberal-normativist political theory.

4.2.1 Revision

First, there are those realists who mainly hope to revise liberal-normativist political theory. The depth of their criticism of liberal-normativist political theory is low and for them realism is a question of more effective and wider application of liberal-normativist political theory. On this view there is a gap between the methodological and the political dimension of political theory. The underlying assumption seems to be that these aspects are neatly separable. This leads to a lack of reflexivity about the relationship to their political context and about the senses in which the respective political theory is political. This view, which is often expressed in terms of considerations of feasibility, is compatible with the views of realism as innocent question of methodology, in particular with the realism as non-ideal theory variation. I will take a closer look at the latter, given it has been popular and is regarded by some as characterizing realism (Valentini 2012).

The subdivision of non-ideal theory-realism is concerned with questions of non-ideal and ideal theory and is situated within the framework of Rawlsian political theory. Further, two main versions of this kind of realism may be distinguished: One which upholds the connection between ideal and non-ideal theory through a component of directionality, which expresses the dependence of non-ideal on ideal theory, and one which does not and regards ideal and non-ideal theory as separate spheres which are both necessary and/or useful in their own right (see the contributions to the special issue of Social Theory and Practice (2008) on ideal and non-ideal theory). Overall the similarities between non-ideal theory and liberal-normativist political theory are deep-seated and outnumber the differences by far and there is little to no potential to pose a challenge. The correctives with which this kind of realism is concerned are limited to the *application* of principles and are hence only revisions. The claims to distinctiveness to which this corresponds, if any, are on the method-level outlined above.

4.2.2 Reform

Second, there are the realists who hope to reform liberal-normativist political theory. Their criticism goes deeper as they reject many of the methodological premises of

liberal-normativist political theory, however, they still identify with some of the goals such as providing normative *principles*, even if they aim to change the way to get to them and their application. In terms of the subdivisions introduced above, the empirical social science realism and the political judgment and conduct realism fall under this label which I will discuss here with regard to their tendencies to be a corrective rather than a challenge:

The empirical social science realism is characterized by attempts to connect normative political theory with the empirical social sciences which are supposed to provide more realistic background assumptions for the development of principles and conditions of application of principles. Empirical social science realism's claims to distinctiveness are situated between the method and the program level. The problem with this kind of realism is mostly that this takes on the form of adding further considerations which have been brought up by the social sciences to the agenda of liberal-normativist political theory without rethinking the framework for this operation which, in its currently dominant forms, is premised on the separation of the normative from the social scientific approaches (at least for the political theory which sprang from political science (see Gunnell 1987, 1998)). So whilst empirical social science realism hopes to correct excessive remoteness from empirical realities, it does not offer sufficient reflection on how deeply the understanding of political theory would need to be reformed in order to accommodate (a critical discussion of the potential contributions of) the empirical social sciences. The potential to pose a challenge on the theoretical program level is limited, whilst there is more potential on the method level.

The political conduct and judgment realism could be described as a different kind of virtue ethics, centered on political conduct and linked to the moral specificity of political office and political conduct in general. This realism is often focused on the question of what makes political ethics different from other kinds of ethics, and on finding what it is about the political mode of action that requires using different standards of evaluation. The claims to distinctiveness of political conduct and judgment realism are mostly on the program level. Whilst the focus on the individual agency of political actors and the distinctiveness of political ethics requires thoroughgoing reforms of liberal-normativist political theory, political conduct and judgment realism could be viewed as compatible or even, through a division of labor between the theory of ideals and the theorizing in concrete circumstances, as complementary to the (reformed) practice of liberal-

normativist political theory. This leads to a medium potential to pose a challenge on the theoretical program level. The corrective it seeks to provide is to find a way for political agency and specifically political judgment to enter into political theories with heavily structure-centered principles at their base which often use examples that do not adequately portray the complexity and specific requirements of political conduct (as discussed by Dunn 2000; Philp 2008, 2010; Bourke and Geuss 2009).

4.2.3 Rejection

Third there are those realists who (at least have the potential to) reject liberal-normativist political theory. Vision of politics realism and the sidelined understandings of realism fall under this headline. Vision of politics realism is best understood as an attempt to beat liberal political theorists at their own game of positing what the political is (see LR: chapters 1-3) and developing a rival understanding of politics, focused on conflict and disagreement, and other key concepts of liberal-normativist political theory such as legitimacy. The claims to distinctiveness of vision of politics realism are mostly on the theoretical program level. What sets vision of politics realism apart from the reform-oriented realisms is its admission that political theory is a partisan intervention which means that it at least offers the potential to understand the relationship between political theory and its political context reflexively. However, vision of politics realism pursues similar goals to the liberal normativists, i.e. finding criteria for legitimacy or the justification of the liberal state, and cannot free itself from with the liberal-normativist conceptual vocabulary and toolkit used for these purposes (IBD; LR, BMR). In the end, realist and liberal-normativist commitments often remain in tension (which is a key theme to be taken up by the discussions of Williams and Sleat in chapters 3 and 6). This might lead to a limitation the radicalism of its challenge. Notably it is mostly liberal political theorists who hope to advance a vision of politics realism.[10]

The first of the sidelined understandings of realism provides a more thoroughgoing rejection of liberal normativist political theory. Geussian realism is characterized by worries about the self-conception of political theory which go beyond the worries about methodology and include the disciplinary practices of political theory in a broad sense, with particular attention paid to the relationship between political theory and its political

[10] Of course it makes sense to focus on liberal forms of politics if those are nominally the context to which a realist political theory is addressed. However, the focus on liberal realism often begs the question of a bias in favor of liberal politics.

context and the relationship between theory and practice. This realism inquires into how theorizing about politics, politics and their relationship are being practiced and understood in a specific historical context. Raymond Geuss has thus far offered the most developed account of such a realism. The claims to distinctiveness of Geussian realism are mostly on the program level, however at times also on the overarching philosophy level, even if only negative (see chapter 5 below): Geussian realism hopes to problematize the way political theory works with its central concepts and the way this political theory is connected with the political status quo (see also Geuss 2012c) whilst understanding itself not only as an exercise of self-critique, be it political and methodological, but also as a political action (PRP: 29).

Despite their differences vision of politics realism and Geussian realism share an emphasis on the impossibility of separating the methodological from the political aspects of political theory. Methodology is more or less explicitly recognized as political; the tensions built into the assumption of their separability are hence viewed as a worthwhile object of study. This recognition leads to a higher degree of reflexivity about the relationship to their political context and about the senses in which the political theory they endorse is political and speaks to the degree of their departure from liberal-normativist political theory.

The second sidelined understanding which has the potential to reject liberal-normativist political theory is Michael Freeden's 'interpretive realism'. The introduction of the descriptive mode of (what he calls) "thinking about politics" (Freeden 2008), with specific focus on ideologies in the descriptive sense, certainly marks a divergence on the theoretical program level from liberal-normativist political theory. However, if political theory is artificially split into a division of labor between "thinking about politics" and "thinking politically", the entanglement between these modes, the philosophical and the political, is blanked out.[11] As Freeden's "interpretive realism" does not require focusing on these entanglements and introduces a division of labor between an interpretive, mostly linguistic, inquiry and a predominantly normative ethical philosophy (which he calls "ethico-political philosophy"), its challenge is limited because it allows liberal-normativist political theory to continue as before as "ethico-political philosophy".

[11] The distinction between "thinking about politics" and "thinking politically", however, might be impossible to keep, as Gaus (2012) has argued, which would complicate Freeden's perspective.

Now what does the above mean for the question of the potential of realism to pose a challenge to liberal-normativist political theory? The ordering perspective of realism enabled a differentiated assessment of the potential of realism to pose a challenge through outlining subdivisions of realism – on the basis of the different levels of criticism and the meaning with which the term realism is filled –, which were then viewed through the lens of their claims to distinctiveness (as well as their similarities to their opponents expressed through their functioning as correctives to liberal-normativist political theory). With regard to the potential of realism to challenge liberal-normativist political theory it then emerged that realists who aim to revise and reform the latter have a limited potential to pose such a challenge. This would largely limit realism to distinctiveness only on the method level. At most on such a view one could combine some insights of realism relevant for the theoretical program level with liberal-normativist political theory which would allow for a limited distinctiveness on the program level. This seems to reinforce assessments of realism as a useful corrective for how (liberal-normativist) political theory is practiced. A growing number of commentators, including those sympathetic to realism (Erman and Möller 2015; Larmore 2013; Runciman 2012; Sangiovanni 2009; Baderin 2014, Koopman 2011) argue that it is best to integrate the realist correctives (of varying intensities) into the mainstream liberal-normativist political theory (and go no further).[12] However, realism is not necessarily limited to serving as a corrective. Of the realists who reject liberal-normativist political theory vision of politics realism and Geussian realism have most potential to pose such a radical challenge. Vision of politics realism, however, is in danger of having its potential to challenge limited by remaining committed to key goals and aspects of liberal-normativist political theory and by stopping short of a criticism of the politics with which the kind of political theory it criticizes is linked. As vision of politics realism, in contrast to Geussian realism, has not been sidelined, but rather could be viewed to be at the heart of the debates, I will follow up on the danger of the limitation of its potential to challenge liberal normativism through an investigation of the similarities between realist and liberal-normativist political theory.

[12] Even some of the proponents of vision of politics realism who try to defend the novelty and distinctiveness of realism such as Sleat (2012, LR) use the idea of realism as a corrective.

5 Conclusion

The ordering perspective for realism which this chapter set out to develop aimed to meet two principal goals: To advance a more differentiated understanding of the phenomenon of realism in political theory and to prepare an assessment of the extent to which realism has the potential to challenge liberal-normativist political theory. With respect to the first goal the analysis of the criticisms formulated by realists contributed to the understanding of (the heterogeneity of) the phenomenon through the distinction between three levels of depth. The exploration of the ways in which the term realism has been filled with (political) meaning brought the thus far neglected question of what realism is realistic about into focus. The resulting subdivisions of realism ranged from realism conceived as a question of methodology to a realism which aspires to offer a political vision or even a radical criticism of how political theory relates to its political context. The question of the realist potential to challenge liberal-normativist political theory was then discussed through the lens of claims to distinctiveness of interventions into political theory.

Here three different levels of distinctiveness were outlined (method, theoretical program and overarching philosophy) which were then mapped onto the subdivisions of realism. Together with taking into consideration how the subdivisions could serve as correctives to liberal-normativist political theory this led to the differentiation between realists who aim to revise, to reform and to reject liberal-normativist political theory. The subdivisions which fall under the revise and reform orientations do not have the potential to pose more than a medium challenge either to the methodological framework of liberal-normativist political theory or to the political and value commitments that it is based on (realism as a question of methodology; political conduct and political judgment realism; empirical social science realism). Even though this suggests investigating the similarities between realism and its opponents more closely, it does not mean that realism is necessarily limited to a corrective. Those realists who reject liberal-normativist political theory still seem to have the potential to pose a radical challenge. Of those subdivisions, only vision of political realism is arguably at the heart of the debates, whereas Freeden's interpretive realism and Geussian realism are sidelined. Vision of politics realism, however, is in danger of having its potential to challenge limited, particularly by remaining committed to key goals and aspects of liberal-normativist political theory. The next step will be to investigate in more detail how the similarities between realism and its opponents limit the potential of the prevalent

subdivisions of realism, particularly vision of politics realism, to challenge liberal-normativist political theory.

Chapter 3: The Limitation of the Realist Challenge. The Similarities between the Prevalent Subdivisions of Realism and Liberal-Normativist Political Theory

1 Introduction

The preceding chapter highlighted that most of the subdivisions discussed within the realist debates do not have the potential to pose any radical challenge to liberal-normativist political theory. This urges a change of focus from the much discussed issues about which realists and liberals apparently disagree – including the understanding of politics – to what they share in terms of theorizing politics. Whilst mostly absent from the radar of current debates, this is an extremely important issue for clarifying the status and potential of realism in political theory. Hence the questions of what the similarities are and what they mean for the ambitions of the prevalent subdivisions of realism will be considered.

I will first concentrate on how the way the debates about realism are set up limits the realist challenge. When assessing the extent to which realist theories replicate or revise counterparts familiar from the liberal mainstream, an internal differentiation between different subdivisions of the realist contributions is important, for which I will draw on the distinctions worked out in the previous chapter. I will start this inquiry by analyzing some conceptual moves, e.g. from an emphasis on consensus to an emphasis on conflict, from optimism to pessimism, and commitments to different conceptions of politics which are at the heart of debates about realism. These interpretations will form the basis for a more abstract discussion of the similarities between different versions of realism and their alleged opponents (**2**). This broadly gathered initial evidence and the interpretations which have been construed on its basis will lead to choice between abandoning the realist criticisms as lacking bite and accepting the hegemony of liberal-normativist political theory or to radicalize the prevalent understanding of realism. An in-depth analysis of Bernard Williams' realist approach from his *In the Beginning was the Deed* will take the analyses and interpretations to the test and clarify the radical potential of vision of politics realism as the most promising candidate of the prevalent subdivisions of realism (**3**).

2 The Similarities between Realism and Liberal-Normativist Political Theory

There has been a recent upsurge in taxonomies of the debates about realism (Rossi and Sleat 2014; Valentini 2012; Baderin 2014; Sleat 2011; Zuolo 2013). Whilst these taxonomies have improved the grasp of the different facets and understandings of realism, the *set-up* of the debates about realism has seldom been *critically* discussed (apart from recent Freeden 2012; Sleat 2014b). The set-up of the debates encompasses how the discussions are delimited in terms of the scope of realism, its purposes and goals, and the opponents of realism. Whilst it seems uncontroversial that the set-up has been heavily influenced by early articles about the trend of realism in political theory (see chapter 2), the set-up has not often been interrogated with regard to how conducive it is to the realist goal of posing a challenge to liberal-normativist political theory. In what follows I will present three main aspects of the set-up which point toward (structural) similarities to liberal-normativist political theory and contribute to preventing realism from exploring a more radical departure from liberal normativism. First, I will consider two dichotomies which limit the radical potential of realism, and then I will argue for realism's twofold conservative bias. These examples will form the backdrop of more general reflections on similarities between different subdivisions of realism and their opponents.

2.1 Two Characteristic Dichotomizations

The dichotomization of critical but impotent and action-guiding but status quo affirming approaches to political theory is a common trope within debates about realism. For many realists, political theory seems to be either 'idealist', then it is critical and uses context-transcending standards for this criticism, but it is also politically impotent; or political theory is realist, i.e. it focuses on 'facts' of politics in a specific context, guides action, but remains essentially unable to criticize the status quo. If political theory is idealist (on this understanding), then it fails on the dimension of concrete guidance. If political theory is realist, it fails on the dimension of critical distance. This is the shorthand for the dilemma which is the basis of an argument for the division of labor which can be found in the debates (Valentini 2012: 659; Farrelly 2007; Freeden 2012; Hamlin and Stemplowska 2012; Stemplowska 2008: 332-333; Swift 2008: 387; see also the discussions of the dichotomy in chapter 5, and, applied to the question of legitimacy, as a tension between realist and liberal-normativist commitments, in chapter 6).

Different ways to react to this dichotomy come to mind: First, a mixture of the idealist and realist aspects, second to try to keep the horns of this dilemma apart, doing idealist and realist political theory separately – this is more or less the choice of the division of labor – and, third, to find a novel approach to conceive of idealist and realist properties and of the scope of their criticism. Only the first two are discussed by the non-ideal theory, empirical social science, political conduct and judgment, and vision of politics realists in political theory via models of 'division of labor' (Swift and White 2008; see Finlayson 2015a) or of finding the right mixture (Farrelly 2007; Honig and Stears 2011). This particular dichotomy limits the horizon of the debates about realism by inhibiting the discussion of a radically critical *and* contextualist view.[1] Whilst this affects non-ideal theory realists the most, the other prevalent subdivisions of realism are also affected, given that they are usually only critical of liberal political theory and only have critical resources for self-reflection on liberal politics at their disposal which requires a return to liberal-normativist theorizing. With regard to the action-guidance-oriented non-ideal theory realists the dichotomy could also be regarded as serving as a reinforcement of the view that lack of critical perspective is the price one has to pay if one wants to offer an action-guiding political theory.

There is another dichotomization prevalent in the debates to which I would like to draw attention. This regards the way in which realist political theory is opposed to utopian political theory. Realism is often introduced as anti-utopian (Galston 2010: 394-395). The anti-utopian character of realism seems to be one of the basic features which are derived from its opposition to Rawlsian political theory whereas 'utopian political theory' denotes theories which are overly ambitious with their agenda for change (Galston 2010: 401-402). Utopianism is both seen as a problem in terms of the action-guidance of a theory, e.g. through its lack of feasibility – this concern is found in the non-ideal theory realism (Social Theory and Practice 2008; Gilabert and Lawford-Smith 2012) – and in terms of the potential spiral of violence following disappointed hopes triggered by the foundering of utopian projects – this concern is more typically found in

[1] Whilst Williams offers remarks which could be interpreted as hoping to combine a contextual and potentially critical perspective in *In the Beginning was the Deed* (IBD: 29-39), these remarks are unfortunately very brief and the criticism envisioned is not radical. Yet these remarks, if taken together with his *Truth and Truthfulness* would warrant the view that a radicalization of realism could also be read as an engagement with Williamsian concerns (see below).

vision of politics and political conduct and political judgment realists (Galston 2010: 401f.; Honig and Stears 2011; IBD: 25, 55-61).

This dichotomy, however, is problematic for a number of reasons. First, it is questionable whether Rawls' and post-Rawlsian political theory is utopian at all (Arnsperger 2006) and which understanding of utopian is at play here, given his own notion of "realistic utopia". Geuss' claim (2010b: 429) that Rawls' theories are both 'not utopian and not realistic enough' captures the problem with this dichotomization. Geuss holds that whilst Rawls fails to be realistic enough, because his writings do not reflect as much as they could on how his theories relate to their political context and thus exercise an ideological function through supporting the political status quo, Geuss holds that Rawls fails to be utopian enough because part of the ideological support of the status quo stems from the abstractions and idealizations which Rawls developed in order to gain the critical distance needed for a 'realistically utopian' departure from the status quo (FDD, OE: 19-29; but see Gledhill 2012 for an argument for the compatibility between Rawls and realism).

The orthodox view of utopian political theory as providing a blueprint of a perfect society (see Forst 2011) seems to be behind the realist worries about feasibility or a spiral of violence following disappointed hopes; whilst this may indeed be objectionable for a realistic political theory, it is not without alternatives, e.g. the utopian could be thought beyond blueprint agendas and could be trying to sever the link to the present more thoroughly (Johnson 2010, 2015/forthcoming; PI) – these alternatives also point toward the importance of utopian thinking in politics which an anti-utopian normative stance might sideline.[2] Second, the question why anti-utopian political theory should be understood as more realistic, is worth asking. After all, what kind of place and function utopian thought may or may not have arguably depends on the respective political context (see Geuss 2014b). In the end the dichotomy says more about the limited means of the realists to define themselves and to set themselves apart from their liberal

[2] Geuss (2012a) has stated this claim in a more general form in a lecture in November 2012: "Everyone thinks if you are a realist you cannot be utopian, but for me realism and utopianism are not incompatible with each other, for me realism and ideology are incompatible with each other. I am not against people having a hope for major changes in the society, what I am against is people describing the current society in ways that seem to me to distort that way of understanding the society. Realism in the sense I understand it is directed against that ideological vision of the world; that is completely compatible with utopianism and in a way the one thing in Rawls that I would endorse is the idea that we need realistic utopias. I think his realistic utopia is not really a realistic utopia, it is not realistic and not utopian enough, but the description is one that I can endorse."

opponents, than about the form of political theorizing which is more engaged with what motivates people politically (potentially including utopian schemes), which is arguably one of the shared areas of interest of realists.

Both dichotomizations are indicative of and contribute to the limitation of the departure of the respective subdivisions of realism from the liberal-normativist mainstream. Including features which negatively mirror their opponents, as discussed for the pairs of 'utopianism/anti-utopianism' and 'idealism/realism' inhibits reflection on ways to avoid being caught in these dichotomies through reconceptualizing the meaning of the utopian in and for political theory and reconceptualizing the relationship between criticism and context. These circumstances limit how the idea of a contextualist and critical (and even utopian) political theory can be further pursued (I will argue in chapter 5 that being far from contradictory, it can underwrite a radical realism).

2.2 The Twofold Conservative Bias of Realism

The assumption that politics is characterized by conflict, not consensus, is a key feature of realism and has important political repercussions especially for vision of politics realists: The conflictual nature of politics which is often inferred from philosophical anthropology – if not to say disagreements about the conception of 'human nature' to use this controversial term – is taken to impose restrictions on the scope of what politics can achieve and what political theory should hence aim to achieve (for two different positions on this question see the critique of realism in Estlund 2011 and Sleat's account of the realist vision of politics in LR: chapter 2). This focus on conflict is the background assumption behind the emphasis on the anti-utopian form of most realist theorizing. Instead of utopian fantasy the appropriate focus of political theory is deemed to rest on order and stability (Galston 2010; Horton 2010; IBD: chapter 1; LR) which may lead to *political* conservatism in the literal sense: a tendency to affirm the status quo, given how difficult it is to predict the effects of political change so that change could be known to be compatible with order and stability. (So this tendency in part builds on the limitations which follow from the dichotomizations discussed above.)

I would like to illustrate this point by dwelling on the usage of anthropological assumptions. These assumptions usually refer to the realists' views on the roots of phenomena that they aim to rehabilitate as important building blocks of politics and political theory, including disagreement and conflict, the passions and the lack of

perfection of rationality of actual political agents. It is not these presuppositions themselves which potentially contribute to a conservative political bias but the way in which they are used. In an extreme reading – following Finlayson (2015b) – one could argue that realists take the view that politics is conflictual as fixed and use references to history in support, hence employing history in the search for constants. Realists then take these fixed characteristics of politics to limit what is politically possible which leads to the espousal of order and stability as the best what a historically informed realist view of politics can responsibly aim to achieve.

This indictment of realism, however, does not capture the internal differentiation of the debates. Whilst this view may at least in part apply to the realism of Galston (2010) or *modus vivendi* theorists (Horton 2010), the work of Bernard Williams, especially his *Truth and Truthfulness* (2002), offers reflections on the question of the historical construction of constants. Other vision of politics realists also have room for such reflection on the historical conditionality of politics (such as LR) and the need for a critical inquiry checking the realist espousals of order and stability (Sleat 2014b; Rossi 2012). However, the danger of the conservative bias springing from connecting assumptions like the importance and fixity of conflict or imperfection of rationality with the limitation of what is politically possible is still problematic in as far as vision of politics realists tend to look for liberal realist solutions to current problems of liberal democracies. This implies the view that the politically possible is here and now limited to (at most) reforms of the status quo. However, why should the realization that human views are often half-baked, or that politics is characterized by conflict, in most instances be understood as an argument for the status quo? After all, the ways in which conflict is understood and expressed in a specific context may be rather a catalyst for political change than limiting the possible. It is also important to entertain the thought that how conflict shapes politics may drastically differ between liberal (and capitalist and democratic) and non-liberal (and non-capitalist and non-democratic) political orders.

Let me now turn to *methodological* conservatism which is related to the conservative political bias, because the assumptions about conflict are actually the mirror-image of the liberal assumptions of consensus. The view that conflict is a more appropriate way of approaching politics than consensus does not say much itself about why and how this view is more realistic. Indeed, why should a political theory be any more realistic which holds that politics is always about conflict unless one can lay claim to authority on the

interpretation of politics or the political. This is especially problematic if it is questionable whether the content or even essence of politics or the political can be settled, even *within* the camp of realists (see Newey 2001 on the intractability issue). If the content of the political and/or the criteria for realism cannot be authoritatively determined, then we just have two dichotomous asserted positions – consensus vs. conflict.

In order to vindicate their position realists may respond by arguing that the difficulty of understanding what is and is not politics is part of the very problem that actual politics is there to address. However, in order to know that politics is about conflict one would have to be able to determine what politics is. That this is a question of conflict does not say much about politics specifically, but rather something about characteristically contested concepts, or even about the problem of the standing of the assertion of philosophical assumptions in political theorizing which is not robustly foundational (see Vincent 2004). If there is no foundation or essence to which one can take recourse, what can then be done by the realists to vindicate their position other than engaging with phenomenal reality in some way? Does this problem also obtain, if the disagreement about the 'nature' of realism is less seen in ontological, but in terms of explanatory potential which means seeing it less as a question of delimiting what politics is but as a question of how (and which) political theory can explain (or interpret) a context more comprehensively? One could argue that the shift from ontology to explanatory potential only pushes the ontological question one step back. Even if one does not go down this route, it seems clear that an orientation towards explanation would necessitate a closer examination of the views actually exhibited in the relevant context (see chapter 5), as an abstract and general vision of consensus with which realists charge their opponents is not – before the fact – necessarily a less accurate description than a realist abstract and general vision of conflict. This examination is likely to bring to the fore a mixture of views which would not readily lend themselves to such clear-cut categories:

> "[T]o be able to face the absence of determinate 'facts' in a given domain is also a sign of a realistic attitude toward the world, and is something to be aspired to; inability to tolerate vagueness, ambiguity, indeterminacy, the shifting, unbounded, amorphous nature and sheer randomness of much of human life and of human language is also a serious human weakness." (Geuss 2009: 244)

The argument here is not that using a conception of politics as the basis for political theorizing is wrong, rather, the problem with the reliance on conflict as a concept

underpinning the conception of politics of realists is that this concept is supposed to be similar in scope to typically liberal conceptions of politics, which reaches as far as informing normative goals and judgments. I do not claim that realists mischaracterize politics; rather, I argue that their expectations from their conception of politics are similar to their opponents. The similarity lies in that realists expect their conflict-conception of politics to deliver a similar kind of normative recommendation or explanatory depth as liberal normativists do with their conception. From the point of view of a more radical realism, realists of the prevalent subdivisions expect their conflict-based conception of politics to provide too much of the framework for positive theorizing which then could become reliant on the assumption of constants or normative assumptions which inhibits them from problematizing the appropriateness of either a consensus- or conflict-conception of politics.

As much as realism often claims to have a conflict-centered view of politics, it is also often portrayed as opposing liberal optimism (Stears 2007; Galston 2010) – the realist views are then described as pessimistic about politics and human nature to varying degrees (Honig and Stears 2011; Finlayson 2015b; see Dienstag 2009 for a general discussion). If the ascription of pessimism is correct, the methodological problem with using pessimism as a component of an overall claim to being realistic is that, somewhat similar to the issues just outlined regarding consensus and conflict, unless one has recourse to a foundationally secured knowledge about politics the correspondence of politics to either term – optimism or pessimism – seems equally (un)warranted. Optimism and pessimism, if they are to carry any analytical value, furthermore are both views which carry a problematically closed view of a moral order rather than descriptions of actual political dispositions which clashes with realist commitments to contextualism:

> "[…] optimism and pessimism, hope and despair are equally inappropriate philosophical attitudes to life as a whole, because each depends on antecedently attributing to human life a kind of potential 'completeness' which is drawn from logical inference, that is, from thought, and which is not true even of unformalized thought, much less of a human life. This is related to the Nietzschean insight that without God neither pessimism nor optimism as they were traditionally construed namely as attitudes that are appropriate because grounded in a correct appreciation of the very nature of reality, makes much sense. Either optimism or pessimism, if they are to be more than merely psychological categories, requires a theological framework which no longer exists." (OE: 243)

If choosing pessimism over optimism because one opposes optimism implies accepting the assumptions outlined by Geuss on which this dichotomy relies, it will lead to a replication problem: how can pessimism be vindicated as more realistic than optimism if they share at least some of the features which led the realists to reject (liberal) optimism, e.g. the "potential 'completeness'" mentioned above? Further the involuntary potential readmission of a theological framework, which the endorsement of pessimism may entail, can only be described as clashing with any realist understanding of political theory.

So, to reconnect the two issues discussed in this section, one could say that the move of many realists to reverse the liberal optimism about consensus leads to a pessimism of conflict about collective action. Yet should not a more realistic political theory give up the attempt to settle for an essentialist account of the nature of politics, if only on the basis of the intractability of the quest for settling on a conception of politics? The point I would like to emphasize, however, is that what is an appropriate view of politics is nothing that can be readily deduced from more or less constant conditions but has to be analyzed. Now one of the major disagreements between the political theory to be developed in this thesis, and both Rawls' and of those who champion the prevalent subdivisions of realism in political theory outlined above, concerns the story one tells about how 'we' got where we are in Western liberal democracies. Neither the still hopeful story about the striving for consensus in the face of the fact of reasonable pluralism, nor the version of this story that many realists tell – the striving for stability and order through compromise – is sufficient to vindicate their respective outlook as more realistic. In sum, the prevalent subdivisions of realism are in danger of political conservatism, because they takes their assumptions about politics as restricting what is politically possible to the search for order and stability, and of methodological conservatism, because they often take recourse to the mirror-images of the assumptions of their opponents which limits their potential to challenge them.

2.3 Structural Similarities between Realists and their Opponents

The preceding analyses have illustrated how influential markers of how the debates about realism are set up lead to a limitation of the potential of realists to challenge their opponents. However, this is in need of further exploration. The goal of this sub-section is to provide a deeper, more detailed, but necessarily selective overview of the

similarities between realists and their opponents and of how they limit (the exploration of) the radical potential of realism.

The most important structural similarity concerns the *goals*: The majority of the liberal-normativist literature is dedicated to the problem of designing and/or justifying a coercion-free, or coercion-minimizing, and just state. Realists usually take over the interest in finding the best way to justify the state and its wielding of coercive power, even if they criticize the ambition of freedom from coercion or disagreement. In this respect, the political goals of liberals and realists show important similarities. The problem here can hardly be the engagement of realists in a – broadly conceived – project of evaluation of political rule. Rather, given their criticisms of liberal-normativist political theory, the problem lies in the form this evaluative project takes. To achieve their goal of building a realist political theory most realists most of the time turn to the existing theoretical programs of political theory which are part of the overarching liberal-normativist philosophy: non-ideal theory realists, for example, make use of the Rawlsian framework of ideal and non-ideal theory (even if many diverge from Rawls' understanding of these concepts) and ask what a realist point of view could add (Social Theory and Practice 2008; Swift and White 2008; see Schaub 2012b for a critical discussion). Vision of politics realists may focus on legitimacy rather than on justice, however, they also take recourse to the conceptualization of legitimacy set out in the debates about theories of justice.[3] The emulation of the dominant post-Rawlsian model in the realist attempts to build a distinctive theoretical program of political theory may be a major reason why problems with typically liberal concepts, if not the well-studied liberal solutions, resurface when realists attempt to present their own positive normative postulates, e.g. the conditions for legitimate rule (see the discussion of Williams in chapter 3 and Sleat in chapter 6). Even if this is not due to thought experiments in moral theory, but to the cultural-historical context of liberalism, as Rossi (2013: 566-567) argues with regard to the example that a realist (-voluntarist) account of legitimacy based on compromise requires consensus here and now in Western liberal democracies, this does not detract from the point that the self-avowedly realist accounts of theory-building are strongly oriented toward their liberal-normativist opponents. Instead of guiding realists to questioning the coherence of the project of the justification of the

[3] When Sleat (2013b) asks how liberals should legitimize rule toward non-liberal citizens the perspective on this question may differ from standard Rawlsian views, yet the question is set up as an extension of this framework.

liberal state (exemplarily undertaken in Geuss' *History and Illusion in Politics*), the self-limitation of the realist theory-building weakens the realist claims to distinctiveness.

Whilst the first order methodology of all prevalent subdivisions may differ from liberal-normativist political theory, what about their second order methodology? This second order methodology, which could be viewed as an aspect of the theoretical program level outlined in the previous chapter, concerns how the development and choice of methods is framed, e.g. what they are good and bad for. The means of a political theory are chosen in view of the (political and theoretical) goals, so that the goals will shape the means considerably. Second order methodology thus strongly shapes the range of positions available for a political theorist to take, including critical positions, without being questioned in her disciplinary identity.[4] The discussion of the way the debates about realism are set up suggested similarities between the revision- and reform-oriented realists and liberal-normativism with regard to their adherence to a similar kind of understanding of how political theory relates to politics. This includes the way in which the discussion of different methods and theory-building blocks is carried out, delimiting the boundaries of what counts as methodological, and not political (Bell 2010; Farrelly 2007; Schaub 2010), and the kind of authority (realist) political theory can hope to gain for its normative proposals (but see Rossi 2012). From this similarity in terms of the political goals springs *the orientation to liberal solutions*: The goals of the liberals still serve as a canvas – despite the view of the vision of politics realists that they are not fully attainable. Yet one cannot help noticing that realist solutions are framed as second best solutions to decidedly liberal problems, that is problems which have originated from a discourse about (the justification of) the liberal state, like stability for non-moral reasons; this orientation at least hinders realists from considering alternative problematizations and might be viewed as another aspect of its function as a corrective to liberal normativism.

The second most important structural similarity concerns the *conceptual toolkit*: Whilst many realists shift the focus from justice to legitimacy, or from consensus to compromise this change is less drastic than it appears. Not only do realists often face replication problems (see Newey 2001 for the shift from justice to legitimacy and Rossi 2013 for the shift from consensus to compromise), also the conceptual vocabulary for

[4] Concerns of disciplinary identity have been mentioned but not further investigated in the current debates on realism (see Runciman 2012; Rossi and Sleat 2014; Sleat 2014b).

describing their approach is taken over without sufficiently investigating whether it is still appropriate – my worry here is related to the concerns about the coherence of the vocabulary of normatively theorizing the liberal state in a rights-framework as e.g. presented by Raymond Geuss in *History and Illusion in Politics,* or by John Dunn in *The Cunning of Unreason* (2000) and in a less directly confrontational vein, by Bernard Williams in *Truth and Truthfulness* (2002) and *Shame and Necessity* (1993). Even though all realists are worried about the way in which liberal-normativist political theory operates which includes questioning the conceptual preeminence of justice, methodologically inspired realists do not extend their worries to concepts like political authority, philosophical justification which are taken over without further problematization. And whilst the critical discussion of the latter concepts is a mainstay of vision of politics realism, this discussion does not usually question their appropriateness (in contrast to a radical realism; see chapter 5 and the final section of chapter 6).

The problem here is at least twofold: First, as has been illustrated by the examples of the dichotomies prevalent in the debate, it is doubtful whether the readily available conceptual alternatives support any radical challenge of realism to liberal-normativist political theory; second, the success of conceptual changes (or innovations) in terms of amounting to a claim to distinctiveness as part of a theoretical program of political theory depends on how much the concepts affected are framed by concepts which are taken over unchanged. If the framework of political theory is left more or less unchanged except for the change from the primacy of justice to legitimacy or switching assumptions about the nature of politics, the resulting changes will likely be negligible on the level of the theoretical program of political theory (unless the number of small changes will lead to internal contradictions which make the framework difficult to operate).[5] In the prevalent subdivisions of realism the unquestioned and hence stabilizing concepts (which are relevant for the theoretical program of political theory) outnumber those which are challenged and reconceived.

This is also illustrated by the *account of the history of the present*. Realists differ from liberals in their reaction to the modern challenge of pluralism, however, they do not question the account beyond asking for a more explicit self-awareness of the importance

[5] Even the change from justice to legitimacy could be viewed to be actually rather in line with the mainstream of liberal-normativist political theory, especially political liberalism (see chapter 6).

of such an account. Most realists, as their opponents, regard modern pluralism as *the* challenge for political theorists to engage, and they also both subscribe to an account of the history of the present which is held together by the goal of justifying the state which uses only the minimum of coercive force (to be specified in each case).[6]

In conclusion, the set-up of the debates about realism – the dichotomization of consensus and conflict and of realist and utopian theorizing, as well as the choice of pessimism over optimism which leads to the focus on order and stability – at least contributes to limiting the potential of realist challenges to liberal political theory. This became visible through the example of how the debates about realism exhibit a conservative bias, both in terms of their normative recommendations for politics stemming from their range of understandings of politics as characterized by conflict, which many realists take to restrict what is politically possible, and in terms of the methodology the revisionist and reformist subdivisions tend to endorse. Political and methodological conservatism go hand in hand and might be mutually reinforcing in their status quo affirming tendencies. In some cases this view feeds into a normative pessimism, which allows aiming only for order and stability. The examples of how realists take over key building blocks for their theory-building as well as the discussion of similarities throughout this section showed how especially revisionist and reformist subdivisions of realism are limited to correctives within the overarching philosophy of their opponents. This does not mean that realism should engage in a purging frenzy and cleanse itself of any similarities with liberal-normativist political theory. Rather, the underlying concern has been, as throughout the thesis, to assess the potential of different realists to pose a challenge to liberal-normativist political theory and detect potential for the radicalization of realism.

[6] Alternative accounts of the history of the present which would draw a less direct line from the invention of the concept of state in the 17th century to today and would even open up questions like the interpretation of what it means to be modern, which could have repercussions for the kind of rationality at play in attempts to justify the (liberal) state or other governing institutions, are hence sidelined by both realist and liberal-normativist discourses, as Geuss argues with fervor: "The philosophical heirs of Hobbes, Descartes, and Kant have ruled the occidental imagination and thinking for too long. There was a short interval in which one could catch one's breath, linked to the names of Montaigne, Rabelais, Marlowe, and Grotius. For one moment there was a prospect of a 'modern world' in which there might be skeptical tolerance, the affirmation of life, and a conception of liberty not limited to disciplined self-regulation, the internalized policeman. A politics that arose from a realistic estimation of the possibilities of peaceful human coexistence also seemed possible. Certainly we did not have to wait long for the reaction: in the form of the modern state (Hobbes); Descartes's epistemology; and Kant's restoration of a vulgar Christian ethic based upon fideism. To recognize this as a reverse, to see it for what it was and is, is one of the most important tasks for political philosophy at the beginning of the twenty-first century. An indispensable part of this analytic task is to rewrite the history of modernity." (PI: 77) So a dispute about the appropriate interpretation of the historical trajectory of pluralism can easily widen into a full-blow discussion about what modernity is and what it does to human life.

The upshot of the analysis of the similarities between realist criticisms and the object of these criticisms (and theory-building) presented in this section is a choice: Either to abandon the realist criticisms as lacking bite and accept the hegemony of liberal-normativist political theory or to try out what a (self-) critique of the current realist critique could achieve in terms of providing a radicalized version of the realist critique, which could problematize these similarities and inspire a radically realist political theory. The following analysis of Bernard Williams' realist approach is a first answer to this choice. I will put my analysis of and claims about the similarities to a test and clarify the radical potential of (his) vision of politics realism (for the radicalization of realism).

3 Bernard Williams' Realist Approach. The Limitation of the Challenge of Vision of Politics Realism

3.1 Why Look at Williams?

The late work of Bernard Williams has received possibly the most critical scrutiny in current debates about realism (see e.g. Bavister-Gould 2013; Flathman 2010; WWW: chapter 10; Frazer 2010; Forrester 2012; Sleat 2010, LR, BMR). Williams is often regarded as the realist who has done the most for the development of realism not just as a criticism of, but also as an alternative to, liberal-normativist political theory (which he chose to call "moralism"); hence his approach is often mentioned as the best starting point from which to develop realism as what I have called a distinctive theoretical program of political theory (evaluations of his efforts in this direction include: Sleat 2010, LR: chapter 5; Hall 2013a, 2013b; Honig and Stears 2011). I will concentrate here on his attempts at sketching a realist approach to political theory which are assembled in the post-humously published collection of his political essays, *In the Beginning was the Deed* (2005). The focus on Williams is especially adequate because there is currently a debate going on about whether Williams can be viewed as failing to leave liberal-normativist political theory (Sleat 2010, LR; Freeden 2012; for a defense see Hall 2013a). Furthermore, Williams' has possibly the most to offer of the attempts at sketching a realist political theory in terms of the criticism of liberal-normativist political theory (based on his critical analyses of analytical political and moral philosophy, see exemplarily Williams 1985, 1993, 1996, 2002, 2006a, 2006b) and hence arguing that his work still suffers from the similarities which limit realism's potential to challenge may

be bold, yet, if vindicated, would go some way in establishing this claim for the most critical of the prevalent subdivisions of realism, vision of politics realism.

I will hence pursue Matt Sleat's judgment further that Williams' "realism shares significant features with liberal theory" (Sleat 2010: 486) and that his "realist theory [is] of a certain sort of politics, one which reflects and replicates familiar liberal normative concerns and structures" (Sleat 2010: 498). I will argue that Williams' realism mirrors liberal-normativist political theory in terms of using a normative conception of politics and that it creates a tension with his understanding of a political relationship and his distinction between politics and successful domination. A brief reconstruction of Williams' realism will provide the context necessary for the discussion.

3.2 A Brief Account of Williams' Realism

The concept of legitimacy is at the heart of Williams' realist approach to political theory and, arguably, his conception of politics is the key ingredient to the originality of his views on what kinds of (political) rule are legitimate. Both are guided by his goal to start political theorizing from within politics and not – like most liberal-normativist political theory – from the outside with a detached exercise in moral or legal theory. Whilst there have been elucidating treatments of Williams' concept of legitimacy (Sleat 2010, LR; Hall 2013a; Schaub 2012b), to which my discussion here is indebted throughout, my brief account will focus on those features which are relevant for clarifying its potential for challenging liberal-normativist political theory.

Williams approaches the question of political legitimacy through a conceptual examination of the conditions for politics to arise. For politics to occur an answer to "the first question of politics" about the "securing of order, protection, safety, trust, and the conditions of cooperation" (IBD: 3) needs be offered. For Williams, this question permanently requires a solution and has to be answered before any other political questions can sensibly be asked. To answer the first political question first and foremost means the establishment of a political relationship between a claimant for political authority and their addressees, and this ties the question to his conception of politics (which will be discussed in detail below), as for Williams, "[t]he situation of one lot of people terrorizing 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 (replace)" (IBD: 5).

Whilst he regards answering the first political question as a necessary condition for the legitimacy of any state, in order to establish a political relationship, it is not sufficient. In order to keep the solution as separate as possible from the problem – which consists of more or less the assumption of the Hobbesian state of nature – further conditions have to be fulfilled. Williams specifies these through the tool of the Basic Legitimation Demand (BLD), as meeting the BLD is conceived as providing an "*'acceptable'* solution to the first political question" (IBD: 4; my emphasis). What this entails can be derived from his conception of politics (and his understanding of a political relationship).

Williams regards politics as clearly distinguishable from successful domination. This distinction heavily depends on Williams' understanding of a political relationship. For Williams, the domain of political relationships between a state and its subjects, those over whom the state claims authority, needs to be distinguished from the domain of non-political rule over those over whom the state does not claim political authority but who are still within the (geographical) bounds of the state, e.g. because the state remains in a state of war with them. This distinction provides the basic criteria for distinguishing a political relationship, for which considerations of legitimacy matter, from successful domination, for which no standard of legitimacy can be given, as Williams stresses that the demand for (politically normative) justification of coercion only comes in if the relationship between the coercer and the coerced is political, not e.g. one of warfare (for which other kinds of justifications may, however, apply):

> "A coerces B and claims that B would be wrong to fight back […]. By doing this, A claims that his actions transcend the conditions of warfare, and this gives rise to a demand for justification of what A does. When A is the state, these claims constitute its claim of authority over B. So we have a sense in which the BLD itself requires a legitimation to be given to every subject." (IBD: 6)

It is against this background that Williams states that "merely the idea of meeting the BLD implies a sense in which the state has to offer a justification of its power *to each subject"* (IBD: 4), hence justification is only owed to those over whom it claims to have political authority.

For Williams, it is up to the state to decide over whom it claims to exercise authority and hence has to offer a justification of its coercion. This account implies that the coercer, the (usually more powerful) state, which through its claim to political authority comes to transform the relationship to the coerced from warfare to politics, and not the coerced, who should – given their position – have a stronger claim to being an appropriate arbiter

in this situation, decide which relationships are political (see also the discussion in LR: 124-126 which brings in the perspective of the coerced; see Hall 2013a: 8-10 for a defense). At the same time, Williams rejects successful domination as an acceptable answer to the first political question:

> "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." (IBD: 5)

However, all this means is that might does not make right for those over whom the state claims authority and hence further demands and inquiries about the legitimacy apply, yet for those over whom the state does not claim authority, there is only 'might', so the problem of 'right' does not come up.

Williams' realism is marked by its sensitivity to historical developments (IBD: 12-13) displayed through his historical-contextualist and hermeneutical notion of what "makes sense" politically. This means that the actual views of those subject to the rationales of legitimation presented by the state are crucial for deciding whether the BLD has been met. Williams holds that the question of the legitimacy of a political relationship, when it comes up through the claim to a political relationship, is best answered through historical-contextualist inquiries which use a hermeneutical perspective to see to what extent this order "makes sense" to those affected by it (IBD: 10-11; for further discussion see my criticism of Williams' Critical Theory Principle in chapter 6). For whom exactly the rationale needs to make sense, according to Williams, depends on the circumstances and leads him to qualify the condition that the claimant to authority needs to offer a rationale to every prospective subject:

> "when it is said that government must have 'something to say' to each person or group over whom it claims authority – and this means, that it has something to say which purports to legitimate its use of power in relation to them – it cannot be implied that this is something that this person or group will necessarily accept. This cannot be so: they may be anarchists, or utterly unreasonable, or bandits, or merely enemies. Who has to be satisfied that the Basic Legitimation Demand has been met by a given formation at one time is a good question, and it depends on the circumstances. Obviously, the people to be satisfied should include a substantial number of the people;" (IBD: 135-136)

This qualification distances Williams from the universal consent condition typical of much liberal-normativist political theory. Williams stresses against this background that "[w]e can accept that the considerations that support LEG are scalar, and the binary cut LEG/ILLEG is artificial and needed only for certain purposes" (IBD: 10). His approach to legitimacy succeeds in not reducing political theory to normative concerns. However, it also complicates Williams' distinction between politics and successful domination.

To sum up this exposition briefly, Williams' approach to legitimacy attempts to spell out what is "inherent in there being such a thing as politics" (IBD: 5), and hence it is in this sense that he claims that the BLD does not "represent a morality which is prior to politics" (IBD: 5). Politics is characterized by a political relationship between those who claim political authority over others, however, their rule may also include yet others to whom the rulers do not stand in a political relationship. (For considerations of legitimacy only those over whom the state claims the right to rule are then to be taken into account.) The distinction of the political and non-political relationships, for the latter of which Williams' term "successful domination" may be one possibility, internal warfare another, is derived from Williams' conception of politics. This is the complex and interconnected core of Williams' realism to which I will now turn.

3.3 Williams' (Normative) Conception of Politics

Arguably the conception of politics particularly lies at the heart of Williams' approach, as it is crucial to the main aspect of his approach, his understanding of legitimacy. If his conception of politics, to which I will now turn, could be shown to share important features of liberal-normativist political theory, this would affect the approach as a whole, and suggest that Williams' realism does not pose a radical challenge to liberal-normativist political theory.

Williams aspires to build his conception of politics on what he argues is inherent in any politics (IBD: 5, 8), or, alternatively, one could say that his conception of politics provides an "account of political rule and the ethic *internal* to it" which "attempt[s] to explain what must be in place for politics, as opposed to war, to be occurring" (Hall 2013a: 11; my emphasis).

However, this interpretation of Williams' conception is not as uncontestable as the preceding claim suggests. His sketch of a conceptual analysis of the idea of a political

relationship – what is inherent in any politics – seems rather to refer to what *he views* as inherent in politics, i.e. inherent in politics, if by politics is meant a mode of action which is clearly different from successful domination. As there is widespread disagreement about what is inherent in politics and whether one can settle this question after all, one should add the qualifier 'if politics is supposed to do what Williams thinks it *should* do' to Williams' claim of explicating what is inherent in any politics.

It is this sense of 'normative' which is at play when I claim that Williams presents a normatively qualified understanding of politics. As outlined above, from his understanding politics starts with a claim of authority – in the case of the modern state this usually means that a legitimation for the use of force needs to be offered to all subjects (IBD: 5). The condition of the universality of the offer, even if it does not rely on either of the two typically liberal conditions of (universal, hypothetical) consensus of the addressees or on being initiated by the subjects, still makes this understanding of legitimacy broadly liberal, because it first assumes equality of the subjects, even if Williams (IBD: 136, see above) limits according to circumstances from whom an acceptance is relevant (and can be expected). This qualification, however, actually shares at least the concept of the "unreasonable" with liberal-normativist political theory and could be construed to normatively qualify the notion of a political relationship.[7]

Sleat (2010: 499-500) has argued that Williams' normative qualification of politics ultimately depends on the presupposition of a pre-political consensus about what politics is. He criticizes Williams for expressing through these presuppositions, firstly, a consensus view of politics, which Sleat regards as incompatible with a realist account of politics based on conflict (which includes the view that consensus is after all the result of non-consensual politics), and, secondly, a commitment to pre-political moral norms like equality of persons which leads to a wider scope of the BLD than seems compatible with Williams' internal differentiation between political and non-political relationships and his goal to limit his realist approach to a morality inherent to politics (Sleat 2010: 500-501).

[7] Williams' conception of politics also has the liberal state as its goal, however for different reasons than in liberal-normativist political theory – Williams justifies the liberal state instrumentally. He starts with the fact of the liberal state (because it is a fact) and then looks for resources we can draw upon for its justification. This connects Williams' project of distinguishing politics (conceptually) from other activities – for which his answer is legitimacy – to the project of the justification of the liberal state today.

Yet this is not the only possible interpretation of what the 'normative' in the conception of politics stands for, as Hall's defense of Williams against Sleat's criticism underlines:

> "Williams […] endorses a 'normative' conception of politics in so far as answering the first question enables us to enjoy the political goods he associates with so doing. This does not mean that Williams is tacitly a political moralist, because he does not prioritize a set of pre-political moral norms in the way the enactment and structural models do. The problem with political moralism is not that it sees politics as a normative enterprise (per se) but that it does not give autonomy to distinctively political thought." (Hall 2013a: 4 n.2)

Whilst I agree with the closing statement, I am not otherwise convinced by this reading. Instead I will argue that there is a tension between the way Williams understands a 'political relationship' and the distinction between politics and successful domination – both necessary features of his conception of politics – and that this implies that his conception of politics is normative in a 'thicker' sense than Hall suggests.

3.4 The Distinction between Politics, Political Relationships and Successful Domination

In order to fully understand this tension, let us turn again to the problem of what constitutes a political relationship for Williams. Williams is keen to eschew the standard of universal consent which is usually invoked by liberal political theory to determine the legitimacy of rule – that is, he rejects that the legitimation story offered has to be universally accepted, but the legitimation story has to be universally offered to those over whom the state claims authority. This is decisive here, as it is the claim to political authority by the coercers which turns their relationship to the coerced into a political (not necessarily a legitimate) one. The establishment of a political relationship, through offering a justification for coercion, also makes the resistance by the coerced unjustified (and subject to rightful coercion). Here it is worth recalling that for Williams legitimacy is a concept which only makes sense within political relationships. Where there is no political relationship, as in the case of successful domination, there cannot therefore be judgments of legitimacy in terms of rightful coercion through a political authority (again, in the case of warfare other considerations of legitimacy may apply). Rule based on successful domination is primarily non-political, which entails that standards of legitimacy are not met (if at all attempted).

The main problem with this account is that the 'political' relationship is skewed, because it is one-sided to the extent that those in power are also in the position to determine

whether and when to enter into a political relationship, as Williams first bases the distinction between politics and successful domination on the claims of the state and yet at the same time is adamant to uphold the distinction between politics and successful domination (see also LR: 125-126). In defense of Williams, Ed Hall (2013a: 5-7) has developed a reading of the internal distinction in Williams' view between citizens who are owed justification of authority and other groups under the state's rule who are not, to argue that Williams uses his understanding of what constitutes a political relationship to limit the scope of those entitled to justification to those from whom the state expects their allegiance (IBD: 95), absolving him from the need to take recourse to pre-political norms to settle the scope of those owed justification:

> "With this in mind, there is little reason to hold that Williams' account is premised on the acceptance of some external moral principle of basic equality, because, as I have intimated, his basic aim is to delimit the nature of political authority, and the state need not stand in political relations with all of those persons whom it coerces." (Hall 2013a: 6)

However, to argue that the rulers have political relationships to some within the state and non-political relationships to others, including war (see Hall 2013a: 6), and to admit that "any social order, which effectively uses power, and which sustains a culture that means something to the people who live in it, must involve opacity, mystification, and large-scale deception" (Williams 2002: 232) is in tension with Williams' goal to clearly distinguish political relationships from successful domination (even if only conceptually). The tension lies between Williams' distinction between political relationships and successful domination, i.e. non-political relationships, his normative view of politics, based on a conceptual analysis of what needs to be in place for politics to occur, and his admission that politics usually contains elements of successful domination. For politics to be a distinctive activity, Williams needs a categorical distinction between politics and successful domination (even if he admits that political reality is usually a mix of politics and successful domination). This seems incompatible with his criteria for meeting the BLD which seem to invite politics which also contains successful domination as the state is at the same time the coercer and the body to decide over whom to claim authority. Here it is first up to the state to decide to whom a political relationship exists which then may or may not be sanctioned through people recognizing that it makes sense to them. The question is whether those subject to these judgments will not disagree about how they are made. If Williams hopes to keep a categorical

distinction between politics and successful domination, it seems necessary to hear their voice as early as possible in the process. This requirement would lead to an account of legitimacy based more firmly on the liberal model of consensus which Williams hopes to avoid.

The tension further reflects the focus of current liberal political theory on the state's claim to political authority, which does not accord any space to politics which does not conform to the thickly normative understanding of normative authority or for politics which takes place outside the justificatory statist framework. Either there is a claim by the state for authority and hence the scalar notion of legitimacy applies or the rationality of domination obtains. This is similar to typically liberal understandings of how to distinguish political from non-political relationships through normatively qualifying what is political, as e.g. the reasonable versus the unreasonable in Rawls' *Political Liberalism*. In this sense, Williams' understanding of politics replicates the sidelining of the question of how to deal with non-liberals, 'unreasonable' people, and dissenters (and of power relations beyond normative authority). Sleat (2013b, LR: 126) takes this problem to be indicative of the lack of attention that both liberal theories of politics and Williams' approach pay to elements of successful domination within politics which need to be addressed, not sidelined, in order to be controlled. At the same time, highlighting this tension leads to the recognition that the question of how to distinguish politics and successful domination without recourse to a thickly normative understanding of politics needs to be addressed by a radicalized realism and can serve as an inspiration for its development.[8]

In reaction to this tension Sleat has developed Williams' realism further and one of his key arguments holds that politics is best understood as containing some degree of successful domination (LR: chapters 6-7). Politics, in Sleat's understanding, is not neatly separable from successful domination, as conditions of modern pluralism do not allow for purely political or purely dominating forms of rule. There may be consensus in politics, however, this is an artifact of processes which are not shaped by a (pre-) political consensus. The way in which successful political order requires mastery, though as restrained as possible, for it to still be effective brings the question of

[8] For this purpose, one may interject, Williams has developed the Critical Theory Principle which could be viewed to attempt a sketch of a context-dependent distinction between politics and successful domination which does not depend on a normatively laden understanding of politics. I will offer a critical discussion of the Critical Theory Principle in chapter 6.

controlling forms of domination rather than separating and banning them from politics on the table. An important issue to confront here is that those who rule need to speak to those who reject their claims of authority on them, or to whom they did not offer a justification in the first place, in this sense attempting a political relationship beyond the bounds Williams sets up. In Sleat's model (2013b) the claimants for political authority cannot speak to their dissenting subjects or enemies on their own, dissenting terms, but only on the terms which are the basis of the political order. In this way the relationship contains some successful domination which may be transformed into a political relationship over time. Then the important question becomes where to draw the line between politics and successful domination without recourse to a (thickly) normative conception of politics.

In conclusion, the problems of structural similarities which I have sketched in this chapter do not generally hold for Williams' approach which raises important questions about resources for establishing the distinctiveness of politics internal to the activity of politics. However, his conception of politics is characterized by a tension between eschewing typically liberal standards for legitimacy and keeping a categorical distinction between politics and successful domination at the cost of a more or less thickly normatively qualified understanding of politics. The way in which what counts as politics is normatively narrowed pushes him towards a liberal understanding of politics which is an important (structural) similarity to liberal-normativist political theory and prevents the potential of Williams' realism to pose a challenge to liberal-normativist political theory from becoming radical.

4 Conclusion

Realism in political theory has often been characterized through its differences to the liberal mainstream. The ordering perspective developed in the previous chapter, however, led to the questioning of its potential to pose a challenge to liberal-normativist political theory. This, in turn, led to an inquiry into the similarities between realism and their opponents. The results of this inquiry are threefold.

Firstly, the recent realism in political theory has formed in the intellectual climate of the hegemony of post-Rawlsian analytical political theory. The power of interpretation of the latter in terms of designating key concepts and questions is clearly visible in the way that realists have tried to build their theories. The set-up of the debates further

contributes to domesticating the realist criticisms through including features into their understanding of political theory which make them similar to their opponents' and exhibit a conservative bias. This comes to the fore through the prevalence of dichotomic choices between critical but impotent and action-guiding but status quo affirming approaches, between consensus and conflict, and between optimism and pessimism in the debates about realism. Realism may look as if it departs from the liberal-normativist understandings by choosing conflict over consensus, however, it remains trapped in a framework which only offers consensus or conflict and in which the decision for either does not otherwise upset the framework of theorizing – consensus or conflict are expected to do very similar 'work' in either realist and liberal-normativist political theory. The explication of the often overlooked similarities between realists and their opponents, particularly with regard to the structural similarities of goals and conceptual toolkit, suggests that they are at least as salient for the theoretical programs and understandings of political theory at issue in these debates as the often overstated differences currently found at their center.

Secondly, despite the difficulty of assessment a next step has been made towards a more sensitive understanding of where realists depart and where they do not depart from liberal-normativist political theory. The analysis of Williams' realism – a vision of politics realism which bases its conception of politics on a conceptual analysis of what needs to be in place for politics to occur – supported the view that vision of politics realism has a high potential to challenge liberal-normativist political theory. The concrete similarities outlined in the previous sections of this chapter did not generally apply and with regard to the structural similarities of the conceptual toolkit Williams introduces substantial challenges to the prevalent liberal-normativist understandings of these concepts. Williams' approach, however, is still caught in a tension between his conception of politics and his categorical distinction between politics and successful domination. This, I argued, could be viewed to drive him toward a conception of politics which is normatively narrowed and hence limits the radical potential of his realism.

Thirdly, if the question is whether realism is best understood as an attempt to offer internal correctives to current liberal-normativist political theory on the method level, as offering a number of rivals to the theoretical programs of liberal-normativist political theory or as seeking to challenge the overarching philosophy of liberal-normativist political theory, this chapter has offered evidence for how and why the potential of the

prevalent subdivisions of realism to pose a challenge to liberal-normativist political theory is rather limited. The limitation of revision- and reform-oriented subdivisions of realism to mostly internal correctives on the method level is in part due to a lack of self-reflection about the construction of realism as a contender for distinctiveness in political theory on more than a method-level. The limitation of the otherwise high potential of vision of politics realism, however, is due to a tension between realist and liberal-normativist commitments.

This does not mean that realism is inherently unable to challenge liberal-normativist political theory, and so still the reaction to take is not to abandon the realist criticism as lacking bite and accept the hegemony of liberal-normativist political theory. It is rather to offer a radicalization of realism which could problematize these similarities and overcome the tension between realist and liberal-normativist commitments as displayed in the discussion of Williams. The construction of this radical alternative, which needs to capture the complex entanglements between a political theory and its political context and between the descriptive and evaluative aspects of political theory, will unfold in the second part of the thesis via the reinterpretation of the sidelined realism of Raymond Geuss.

Chapter 4: The Realism of Raymond Geuss as an Inspiration for Radicalizing Realism

1 Introduction

Raymond Geuss' recent work has been received as an important contribution to realism in political theory (Runciman 2012; Scheuerman 2013: 798; Freeden 2012; Honig and Stears 2011; Floyd 2009, 2010; Galston 2010; Owen 2010; Sleat 2011; Sigwart 2013).[1] One could go as far as to claim that second only to Bernard Williams, Geuss counts as a figurehead of the recent debates about realism in political theory. If my argument of the previous two chapters that the prevalent subdivisions of realism in political theory do not pose a radical challenge to liberal-normativist political theory has any standing, one may ask: how can an interpretation of the work of one of the figureheads of realism be inspirational for radicalizing realism?

This procedure only makes sense because my interpretation of Geuss' work is based on the view that the characterization of him as a figurehead of realism in political theory is mistaken and leads to a truncated understanding of his positions, which in turn is linked to the domestication of his critique of liberal-normativist political theory. Realism as represented by the prevalent subdivisions discussed above does not accommodate the most interesting (and original) aspects of Geuss' position in political theory. As far as Geuss has featured in realist criticisms of 'high liberalism' it has been at the cost of a differentiated and nuanced account of his position (examples include Honig and Stears 2011; Galston 2010; Floyd 2009). The characterization of Geuss as a realist is not unfounded, however. Geuss shares a number of the core criticisms of the prevalent subdivisions of realism, including the rejection of ideal theory and idealization, moralization and the legalism of liberal-normativist political theory (compare Galston 2010 and Stears 2007 with Geuss' *Philosophy and Real Politics*). In Geuss' case, these criticisms are embedded into a distinct perspective which I will call 'Geussian realism'.

Even though Geuss has become popular since the publication of *Philosophy and Real Politics*, the judgment of Glyn Morgan (2005: 111) that "Geuss' writings have attracted far less critical attention than they deserve [...]" still more or less holds true. Despite the

[1] I will regard the corpus of Geuss' work as a more or less coherent project, not least on the basis of my personal conversations with Geuss (one of which has been published in German, see Prinz 2012b) since 2010 in which he established connections between some of his earliest and most recent work.

earlier judgments that his writings are refreshing for political theory (Markell 2010: 174; Freeman 2009: 184; Bird 2003: 881) or even radically innovative (Morgan 2005: 111) and pose a challenge to the current orthodoxy in political theory (Sherman 2009: 497; Markell 2010: 174; Konrath 2008: 1081; MacIntyre 2006; Bird 2003: 881), the distinctiveness of Geuss' writings has thus far not been discussed in depth. Even if one is to count the few more comprehensive discussions of his work (Freyenhagen and Schaub 2010; Menke 2010; Owen 2010; Morgan 2005; Prinz 2012a), at least the radical potential of Geussian realism still awaits closer scrutiny. My presentation of Geussian realism as a key inspiration for the radicalization of realism will take up this task. It consists of two parts: I will first outline the distinctive and inspiring features of Geussian realism (**2**). Then I will develop Geussian realism further, in line with my interpretation of it as a sympathetic modification of early Critical Theory, by expanding on two important pointers from Geuss' writings (**3**).

2 The Distinctive and Inspiring Features of Geussian Realism

2.1 The Critical Task of Political Theory and the Rejection of the Constructiveness Condition

Geuss differs from the prevalent subdivisions of realism in as far as he retains the goal of criticism as central for political theory (GP: 136-137), despite his reservations about what could be viewed as the normative maximalist aspirations of much of occidental philosophy (Geuss 2011a), i.e. the goal to supply normative principles to politics derived from 'pure' philosophy. The whole endeavor of Geuss' political theory is based on the commitment to (self-) examination. Arguably it is the commitment to an ethos of critique, or examining one's present self and context, which drives Geuss' work. I will hence briefly discuss what he views as some of the appropriate motivations for engaging in political theorizing and how these commitments influence the form this theorizing can sensibly take.

First of all, under current political circumstances, political theory should mainly "contribute to enabling thinking 'differently' (*penser autrement*) […]. A philosophy which is true to the best of its traditions, should refrain from delivering additional 'philosophical grounding' for what already exists, for our contemporary liberal-

democratic social order." (GP: 135-137; my translation)[2] This commitment to the resistance to the dominant (neo-liberal) political order and systems of thought unites the efforts of genealogy and criticism of ideology in the versions preferred by Geuss, i.e. respectively, Foucauldian genealogy and Adornian criticism of ideology, which both "view the overpowering intellectual conformism of contemporary societies as a serious political and ethical danger" (GP: 135; my translation).[3] These 'methodological choices' speak to Geuss' commitments to self-reflection (also about the relationship between methods and goals of his realism) and to negative criticism. Rather than pursuing the goal of using even radical criticism for drafting blueprints of a better alternative society or of expecting a synthesis of the contradictions possibly brought to the fore by the diagnosis of one's present, Geuss limits himself to the goal of enabling and supporting thinking (and acting) differently, an anti-conformism which springs from the goal of self-examination. His evaluation of political theories is principally driven by the criterion of whether the theory in question reinforces or questions those aspects of the political order which are taken for granted (GP: 136).[4] His limitation to the questioning of the status quo further points to his commitment to negative criticism, which can be grasped through his rejection of the condition of constructiveness of criticism.

Geuss' rejection of the constructiveness condition of criticism is pivotal for understanding not only the specificity of his position but also how it contains the potential to radicalize realism. This may on first sight seem only a sub-aspect of his commitment to the critical orientation of political theorizing, however, it is actually an important element which distinguishes Geuss' position. This principally has to do with the development of negative forms of criticism as a reaction to the rejection of the constructiveness condition. The most salient argument for Geuss' rejection of the constructiveness condition of criticism is that this condition, in practice, supports the

[2] The original reads: "Widerstand zu leisten, und dazu beizutragen, daß wir ‚anders' denken (penser autrement) können. Eine Philosophie, die ihren eigenen besten Traditionen treu bleibt, sollte es unterlassen, für das, was ohnehin schon ist, für unsere zeitgenössische liberal-demokratische Gesellschaftsordnung, zusätzlich noch ‚philosophische Grundlagen' zu liefern."

[3] The combination of genealogy and criticism of ideology on Geussian terms forms part of my suggestions for expanding Geussian realism as a sympathetic modification of early Critical Theory below.

[4] For him, "theories like hermeneutics and consensus-centered philosophies (Rawls, Habermas) are hopelessly conformist" (GP: 136; my translation). One may retort that both Habermas and Rawls aim to break the hold of conformism – however, one does not even have to go this far, as Freyenhagen and Schaub (2010) show similarities in the motivations of Geuss and Rawls. Nevertheless, from Geuss' point of view, the decisive difference between him and them is arguably not one of motivation, but whether their perspectives on politics actually put one into a position to question and resist the status quo.

repression of radical criticism (see also Geuss 2003: xviii-xx, PRP: 95-96, WWW: chapter 4):

> "In the political realm appeals to the need for 'constructive' criticism can in principle represent a (generally laudable) attempt to remind those involved in some evaluation of human action of the need to remain aware of a kind of internal demand under which such criticism operates, namely of the need to keep Tschernyschevsky's (and later Lenin's) central question 'What is to be done?' firmly in mind; in fact, however, the demand for 'constructive criticism' in general functions as a repressive attempt to shift the onus probandi and divert attention from the possibility of radical criticism." (WWW: 90)

Geuss sees this as connected to the tendency of human societies to inertion, which generates status quo-conserving mechanisms including the constructiveness condition of criticism:

> "[A]ny society has a tendency to try to mobilize human inertion in order to protect itself as much as possible from radical change, and one main way in which this can be done is through the effort to impose the requirement of 'positivity' or 'constructiveness' on political critics: to accept it is to allow the existing social formation to dictate the terms on which it can be criticized […]." (PRP: 96)

For Geuss the constructiveness condition of criticism is especially problematic because it leads to a more or less tacit acceptance of the frameworks of reference of the target-agents of criticism (WWW: 80), which means the domestication of the criticism, given that it must be comprehensible for those target-agents: "[According to the constructiveness condition] I must criticise them (and their actions, the institutions in which they participate, etc.) in a way that conforms to what 'they' define as what they can 'reasonably' be expected to do and results they can 'reasonably' be expected to accept" (WWW: 80). This should be understood as an explicit attack on the Rawlsian language of the liberal principle of legitimacy (PL: 137; see chapters 1 and 6 for a more detailed discussion) – the point Geuss is trying to make is that the radical potential of criticism is lost if it has to conform to the demands for constructiveness if understood in such a strict way.

The rejection of the constructiveness condition, however, does not mean that Geuss is not interested in how criticism relates to its specific context, how it becomes intelligible, as what is 'constructive' for us may not be so for others (WWW: 80; for an example see 81-82). To the contrary, he stresses

> "the extreme importance in criticism of notions like possibility and necessity, alternative identities and courses of action, which points in what framework are taken to be fixed and which are taken to be variable. This in turn raises important general issues about the malleability of human nature and institutions, and the possible limits of such malleability, utopianism, tragic or otherwise irresolvable forms of conflict, and the 'substitutivity' of goods, services, practices, and institutions." (WWW: 82)[5]

This shows that Geuss' position is not simply a flat-out rejection of the idea that criticism can or even should be action-oriented and -orienting, but rather an attempt to operate criticism in political theory at a higher level of self-reflection. The (rejection of the) constructiveness condition requires substantial self-examination with regard to who we are and what can, for us, count as constructive and how this limits the radicalism of criticism. The tension between the goal of action-oriented political theory and political theory as radical criticism hence does not need to lead to a dichotomy.

The form which Geuss' negative criticism actually takes is an eclectic mix of tools for questioning, interrogating and problematizing the present use of concepts and their history as well as selected aspects of the political present. What Geuss calls – in reference to Foucault (1997, 1982b) – the ethos of enlightenment, "[a] set of attitudes, habits, and practices connected with continual criticism and self-criticism, and in general an openness to new experience" (PI: 110; see also OE: 155-157), could be viewed as framing Geuss' work on the "exercise of analytic abilities, of the imagination, especially the constructive imagination of alternatives to present ways of doing things, of discriminatory skill, and of judgment" (PI: 110; see e.g. PI: 77). Geussian realism is propelled by its emphasis on the centrality of this understanding of criticism which underlies its examination of the status quo, and which is instrumental to the goal of opening up ways for thinking and acting differently.

2.2 The Entanglement between Description and Evaluation

The combination of the emphasis on the diagnostic examination of one's political context and the view that the purpose of political theory is principally critical leads to a tension with the rigid distinction between descriptive and normative forms of political

[5] Substitutivity is an important element for practicing what Geuss (with Nietzsche) views as the characteristically human tendency to evaluate (PRP: 39-40). Whilst Geuss claims that "[e]ven completely radical forms of political criticism will need at least to some extent to be committed to some kind of substitutivity" (WWW: 85), this may be stretched quite far, so that the substitution may be realized "only retrospectively" (WWW: 85) or the substitution might take place on an abstract level.

thinking common in liberal-normativist political theory. Geuss programmatically rejects this distinction (PRP: 16). This is due to the temporal and perspectival aspects of politics and political thinking and the futility of the idea of purely normative ideas – ideas whose normative authority is based on their claim to be maximally distant from the particularities of politics – in the face of day-to-day phenomena which need to be dealt with, understood and evaluated: "[P]olitical action takes place in an arena in which the standards for evaluating what is 'success', what is a good idea, what is a desirable outcome, are themselves always changing and always in principle up for renegotiation." (PI: 12)

In order to assess the specific horizon for these changes and renegotiations, which for Geuss are such a central aspect of political theorizing that he terms it "a kind of experimental science (of concepts) [*eine Art (begriffliche) Experimentalwissenschaft*]" (Geuss 2010b: 422; my translation; for a similar idea see Sluga 2011), a deep grasp of the context in question is required. Rather than engaging in the mastery of principles and theories, Geuss holds, diagnosis is key for understanding what is happening in the present and for theorizing about it:

> "Instead of looking for general principles, one should rather engage in the diagnosis of one's current context (Zeitdiagnostik treiben): What are the pressing problems, what the most acute dangers of the present? [...] Only in conjunction with an always quite complex diagnosis of the current situation, which interprets given facts in relation to possible, future developments which are partly dependent on our actions, and in relation to our factual structure of hope and fear, is, I hold, a somewhat defensible and politically relevant ethics thinkable." (Geuss 2011a: 10; my translation)[6]

Drawing also on Sluga (2011), I further understand this philosophical-political diagnosis as an interpretive practice (rather than as a science as which medical diagnosis, for that the term is most commonly used, could be understood). Diagnosis combines phenomenological and genealogical elements in order to produce local, practical knowledge about and for a specific context. This diagnosis is oriented toward (identifying) problems and hopes to provide some orientation for how to address these problems. The diagnostic process requires the examination of a mass of phenomena

[6] The original reads: "Statt nach allgemeinen Prinzipien zu schielen, sollte man zunächst lieber Zeitdiagnostik treiben: Was sind die anstehenden Probleme, was die akutesten Gefahren der Gegenwart? [...] Nur im Zusammenhang einer stets ziemlich komplexen Diagnose der gegenwärtigen Situation, die gegebene Tatbestände relative auf möglich, zum Teil handlungsbedingte zukünftige Entwicklungen und auf unsere faktische Angst- und Hoffnungsstruktur deutet, lässt sich, so meine These, eine einigermaßen vertretbare, politisch relevante Ethik denken."

which will always remain minimally incomplete, indeterminate and contestable. The challenge of the diagnostic examination is further complicated by the fact that contemporary societies are "hyper-complex structures", i.e. structures which contain an account of themselves as structures, in which the diagnostician is herself embedded (Sluga 2011: 830-831). How the focus of the examination is selected and how the phenomena in it are classified and compared will depend to a considerable extent on the presuppositions which are brought into the diagnostic process. This is why the application of diagnosis to political questions especially requires self-reflection on and explication of these presuppositions. These conditions underscore that the diagnostic process is an exercise of interpretation, which is rather reflective and conceptual – depending on the experimentation with concepts in order to be able to identify problems – than a collection of empirical data (Sluga 2011: 829).

For the purposes of diagnosis, the dichotomy between an ideal world and (a real) one corrupted by power – a choice which the realist literature at least views as possible (think of the dichotomization discussed in chapter 3) – cannot provide orientation for making decisions (e.g. between true and false). Rather these decisions always take place within a welter of half-baked views and incomplete knowledge:

> "The difference between truth and its opposites, and between more admirable and less admirable forms of politics, is not a difference between a disembodied realm of ideal discourse and the sordid world of interests, powers, and complex motives but a distinction within this latter world – the real one which we in any case always inhabit." (WWW: 143)

Geuss also rejects the force of the 'ought' typical of normative political theory in the face of this human condition. If one takes the historical genesis of people's outlooks, which leads to present decisions, into account, then the appeal to the 'ought' or 'ought not' becomes meaningless, at least in this specific context:

> "Unless we are completely deluded, human emotions and passions are, at their base and in their basic structure, extremely primitive and inert: What moves us, are often archaic fears, contingent preferences or dislikes and nearly fully incorrigible hopes. It is an error to believe, that the decisions and reactions of people only accommodate the present situation and its inherent potential. Rather they depend on one's past, on past ways of living and the opinions, dislikes, and mind-sets connected to them. The present is viewed through the past passions (and possibly future hopes). It

> does not make sense to claim: 'But people should not react this way.' What sense could be connected to this 'should'?" (Geuss 2011a: 9; my translation)[7]

The rejection of the hold of the abstract normative brings the entanglement between descriptive perspectives and evaluations into Geuss' focus. How do descriptive accounts of a context relate to the normative claims advanced therein? This in turn can be studied best through a combination of diagnosis and criticism of the power relations entailed by the normative claims in day-to-day life in the form of what with Michael Theunissen could be called the "inner normativity of historical reality" or of the present (Theunissen cited in Jaeggi 2005: 76). This could be viewed as one of the reasons for Geuss' rejection of the abstract quest of normative grounding or (even) justification:

> "Ethics is not a closed, nor at all finalizeable set of doctrines, as long as human life, as we know it, does not change its basic structure. Ethics is a perpetual practice, namely a continuous activity of reflection. As we de facto are always already moving in a field full of seeming authorities, it is not as important to ask abstractly how one could at all submit to something like an authority, as to direct specific questions at concrete claims to authority and validity [gegenüber konkreten Geltungsansprüchen]. Asking questions, after all, is also one way to act and – as Socrates felt on his own body – one which is not always free of danger." (Geuss 2011a: 10-11; my translation)[8]

If there is already a welter of authorities present, because of the already existing, often unsystematic normativity of the present, then the pressing issue is not to ask abstractly how an authority could be justified, but rather to interrogate the normative claims of these alleged authorities by posing specific questions. The examination of the present on which the ability to ask such questions depends will already be characterized by selections of foci and reactions to the normative claims of the present which make this superficially descriptive task entangled with normative aspects. The asking of particular

[7] The original reads: "Wenn uns nicht alles täuscht, sind menschliche Emotionen und Leidenschaften in ihrer Grundschicht und in ihren Grundstrukturen äußerst primitiv und auch äußerst träge: Was uns umtreibt, sind oft archaische Ängste, zufällig entstandene Vorlieben oder Abneigungen und fast gänzlich unverbesserliche Hoffnungen. Es ist ein Irrtum, zu meinen, die Menschen stellten sich in ihren Entscheidungen und Reaktionen *nur* auf die gegenwärtige Situation und deren Potenziale ein. Vielmehr hängen sie an der eigenen Vergangenheit, an vergangenen Lebensformen und den mit ihnen verbundenen Einstellungen, Abneigungen und Gesinnungen. Die Gegenwart wird durch die Brille vergangener Leidenschaften (und womöglich zukünftiger Hoffnungen) gesichtet. Es ist sinnlos zu behaupten: ‚So sollten die Menschen aber nicht reagieren.' Welcher Sinn könnte mit diesem ‚sollten' verbunden werden?"

[8] The original reads: "Die Ethik ist weder eine abgeschlossene noch überhaupt abschließbare Lehre, solange das menschliche Leben, so wie wir es kennen, seine Grundform nicht verändert. Ethik ist demgegenüber eine fortwährende Praxis, nämlich eine kontinuierliche Tätigkeit der Reflexion. Da wir uns faktisch immer schon in einer Landschaft voller vermeintlich gültiger Autoritäten bewegen, kommt es nicht so sehr darauf an, sich abstrakt zu fragen, wie man überhaupt dazu bereit sein kann, so etwas wie eine Autorität anzuerkennen, sondern gegenüber konkreten Geltungsansprüchen gezielte und spezifische Fragen zu stellen. Fragen zu stellen, ist schließlich auch eine Art zu handeln und – wie Sokrates am eigenen Leib zu spüren bekam – keine immer ganz ungefährliche."

questions, for Geuss, counts also a kind of political action and marks the practical orientation of critical and self-reflexive political theory. This may seem an extreme position denying the possibility of finding anything but very local criteria for evaluation and might seem to question the point of philosophical criticism. However, Geuss' point is rather that the specific claims to authority in question cannot be reduced to being an instantiation of a (more) general set of principles, but that the criteria for their evaluation should be generated from the diagnosis of the specific context. This view does not preclude the possibility of criticism with transformative goals (which, if successful, will likely contain a context-transcending outlook), but this criticism develops itself (and the context-transcending outlook) from within the specific context (see also the discussion of the reconceptualization of critical distance in chapter 5).

The most important concept and set of actions for a negatively critical and self-reflexive diagnosis of the present are relations of power (and here one could draw links between Geuss and Foucault on which I will expand below; see also Sluga 2011: 829). Even if Geuss states in *Philosophy and Real Politic*s that "to think politically is to think about agency, power, and interests, and the relations among these" (PRP: 25), this does not imply that he subscribes to a monistic view of power (as Honneth (1993) has claimed for the early Frankfurt School), which entails that there is a substance of power which could be shown to move society e.g. through unmasking its guises via criticism of ideology – whatever is behind the 'mask' of legitimation stories is itself to be further analyzed and can be evaluated (FDD, GP: 126-128). Further, these inquiries will yield local and not total explanations (Geuss 2010c). The focus on relations of power does not imply a view of power as a kind of totalizing iron cage or as a materialist antidote to culture (see Geuss in Prinz 2012b: 102). Geuss further rejects the view of power which is usually somewhat crudely attributed to classical realists as proponents of a kind of *Realpolitik*, i.e. power as the capacity to push through one's interests by any means which makes power a crudely understood commodity. In contrast to the view of power which characterizes most of the history of Western political thought, power as right, which binds the normative hold of power to it being rightful (see Hindess 1996), for Geuss, power is not in itself normatively problematic (PRP: 26-28, 97). This leads him to the view that power is omnipresent and plural and needs to be closely studied by political theory because of its importance for collective action – hence his emphasis on the question 'who does what to whom for whose benefit?' (PRP: 25). For Geuss power is a

concept which is a useful canvas for analyzing historical (genealogy) and sociological (criticism of ideology, to be appropriated for local, not global criticisms of ideology (Geuss 2010c)) limitations of the perspectives that people can have on themselves and their specific context.[9] Altogether, the key to his position on power arguably is his attempt to 'detoxify the concept of power' (Geuss in Prinz 2012b: 102) which I will discuss in detail in conjunction with the interpretation of Geuss' position as a sympathetic modification of early Critical Theory below.

Recognizing the involvement or rather entanglement of political theory in relations of power underscores for Geuss the need for self-reflection of realism in political philosophy:

> "A realistic attitude has to put the possibility on the agenda that one can become engaged in a certain society in one way or another. As taking a realistic attitude is in itself an action, for which one needs to decide – nobody becomes a theorist, let alone a critic, of one's society without his or her own involvement – realism always needs to reflect upon itself and its possibility, otherwise it would be naïve." (Geuss 2011a: 11; my translation)[10]

Geuss is well aware that purging all illusions is itself an illusion and that political theory is itself always potentially ideological in a pejorative sense (PRP: 50-55, FDD: 28). However, this is compatible with viewing the redemption of the lack of reflection on historical, sociological or psychological issues as a principal task of political theory (Geuss 2010b: 427).

In sum, Geuss rejects the ideas of an abstract ought or a realm of purely normative ideas, according to which normative claims can be (or need to be) introduced into a political context. His contention that these normative claims are already there and need to be examined and how this requires relating to the normative claims inherent to this context in a way which is both descriptive and normative, particularly brings the entanglement between descriptive and evaluative aspects of political theorizing to the fore. For such an examination of the present Geuss places special emphasis on the importance of

[9] As detailed below, this connects directly with Foucault's goal of the analysis of relations of power, and Geuss' comments in *Philosophy and Real Politics* (PRP: 21) suggest that he also shares the view that even in repressive regimes there are spaces of freedom (as agency) which would then meet Foucault's account of agency required for the exercise of power (see Foucault 1982b).

[10] The original reads: "Eine realistische Einstellung muss also die gegebenen Möglichkeiten, sich in einer bestimmten Gesellschaft auf die eine oder andere Weise zu engagieren, thematisieren. Da die Einnahme eines realistischen Standpunktes selbst eine Handlung ist, zu der man sich entschließen muss – niemand wird von selbst oder ganz ohne eigene Beteiligung zu einem Theoretiker, geschweige denn zu einem Kritiker der eigenen Gesellschaft –, hat der Realismus immer auf sich selbst und seine eigenen Möglichkeiten zu reflektieren, sonst wäre er naiv."

contextual analysis, which then cannot be separated from his understanding of the purposes of political theory, i.e. to be radically (and non-morally) critical of the status quo (Geuss 2008a). In comparison to most realists Geuss takes the importance of contextual analysis to another level, partly through his focus on power relations whilst questioning the normatively negative understanding of the concept of power.

2.3 The Understanding of Politics and of what is Political

What counts as political cannot be generally defined – rather what is viewed as a political question depends on the historical context. Geuss regards politics in the wider sense as "a way of seeing or considering the world", not "a special domain, like biology or astronomy" (WWW: 147). "'This is a political matter' means it is a matter considered in some sense to be potentially in our power and up for decision, and which we have some potential interest in dealing with in one way rather than another" (WWW: 147). Geuss' narrower understanding of politics adds to the above "at least the threat of recourse to coercion, force, or violence" (WWW: 150), which is "presented as being not merely a fact to be accepted but in some way 'legitimate'." One could argue that Geuss' understanding of politics is not especially unusual when he claims that "[p]olitics depends, to a great extent, on judging what is actual relative to what is possible" (OE: 39).

To make this judgment on the basis of this phrase alone would, however, miss the mark. The understanding of the key terms 'actual' and 'possible' and of how philosophical inquiry can add to their understanding is a useful key to a more nuanced view of Geuss' understanding of politics. Here it makes sense to start from the emphasis on the diagnosis of the present political context as a central element of Geuss' political theorizing.

The actual for Geuss is not easily grasped. Political theorists are advised to approach their surroundings with suspicion, to be wary of what is alleged to be actual and to inquire into how this has come to be viewed as actual:

> "I would contend that what is 'out there' is usually a farrago of truths, half-truths, misperceptions, indifferent appearances, and illusion that needs to be seriously processed before one can accept any of it as 'real'. […] One specifically modern form of social control is to allow free expression of all opinions, thus creating a chaotic landscape of informational overload in which potentially

> important facts simply get lost in the welter of surrounding nonsense, and important connections cannot be made." (WWW: 140)

Geuss does not, however, embrace an essentialism of the real, but rather uses this attitude of suspicion in order to motivate criticism through diagnosis, the suspension of judgment or distancing of oneself, e.g. from the conglomerate of liberal democracy (Geuss 2003: xvii, GP: 125, HIP: vii-viii).[11] Rather than trying to unmask the 'real', Geuss is interested in attempting as thoroughly as possible to account for the history of the present, including the contingency (through genealogy) and the forms of distortion (through criticism of ideology) which could offer 'us' a different perspective on the questions within our collective agency (HIP: 9-10). For Geuss it is hence important to take the extant claims to authority and the implicit normative orientations which guide the everyday practices of people as seriously as possible.

In contrast to many of the contributions to the debates about realism in political theory Geuss' understanding of politics does not view the propensity to conflict and disagreement as a kind of constant of human nature, but rather asks how categories like conflict and consensus are construed and used in the first place. This could be taken as a commitment to the claim that only that which has a history is relevant for political theorizing leads to the view that what is concretely political can only be determined in and for a specific context. This hangs together with the question of agency. Politics is about the reflection on the limits of agency *in a collective mode* in a specific situation and "to fail to appreciate the radical difference between individual action and institutionalized forms of collective action is to miss the point of politics" (Geuss in Skinner et al. 2002: 7). Political theory needs to ask how the institutionalized forms of action in question have become the centre of the possible actions for structuring living together (Geuss 2011a: 3). For the diagnosis of the actual and the possible thus premised, Geuss views actions and contexts of action as much more salient than opinions or assumptions, especially if these opinions are of individuals (which he alleges to be an – even if exaggerated – characteristic of liberal political theory (PI: 5-6)). This opens up the possibility of expanding the scope of political theorizing beyond the written

[11] Geuss rejects the necessary unity of theory and practice and emphasizes the advantages of skepticism whilst also stressing the structural differences between politics and scholarship. He thinks a politics fully guaranteed by scholarship is an illusion (GP: 126).

and spoken word toward a closer look at the non-verbal.[12] This is in line with Geuss' claim that, "[p]olitics is a craft or skill, and ought precisely not to be analysed, as Plato's Socrates assumes, as the mastery of a set of principles or theories" (PRP: 97).

Similarly, the possible is not easily limited either. To what extent can one, from the point of view of the present, predict the limitations of the possible for the future? Geuss is concerned with the danger of a too narrow understanding of the possible and invites utopian thinking in political theory. However, how he understands 'utopian' needs to be further qualified. The utopian is not the drafting of blueprints. Rather, similar to the rationale for negative criticism and contextual diagnosis, it is primarily a tool for reflection about one's present situation.

The originality of Geuss' view of the utopian with regard to the discussions of realism lies in his attempt to break the hold of the view that a realistic political theory should be non- or even anti-utopian: "A realistic assessment of the situation means one which is not marred by wishful thinking, ideology or being stuck in taking for granted the quotidian evaluations (*Befangenheit in den Wertselbstverständlichkeiten des Alltags*). 'Realism' in this sense is not at all necessarily anti-utopian." (Geuss 2010b: 428; my translation, see also 2010e) Rather, realism is not primarily opposed to utopian thought but to ideological thought (and action) (Geuss 2010b: 429) and should be open to the cultivation of the utopian imagination:

> "There is a pole of realism and there is a pole of utopianism. There is a pole which tells you don't be a victim of wishful thinking, don't be a victim of ideological illusion, don't be a victim of various kinds of repressive identities, and then there is a pole of cultivating what you want and taking your desires seriously and clarifying them, even if they are utopian in their content, even if they can't be satisfied in the life that we lead. And it seems to me that both of these things are an important part of [realism]. […] Political philosophy has to be both fully realistic and fully utopian." (Geuss 2010c)

This emphasis on the interplay between diagnosis and the utopian imagination needs to be related back to the view that politics is a kind of craft or art. From this point of view a political theory needs to be able to accommodate the emotional, the non-rational and non-systematic elements of politics (GP: 52-57), and the kind of intervention into

[12] Geuss uses the attack of 9/11 as an example of non-verbal political act (PI: 16). In his essay *Celan's Meridian*, he elaborates on this theme: "That there is no philosophy without language might not mean that the only thing, or even the most important thing, one had to understand in the history of philosophy was its language. Song is not speech, and political action, even if it 'can be understood,' can take place *without a word being spoken*." (PI: 154)

politics which it cannot help but make. Really significant political action (including political theory) thus understood does not conform to existing rules:

> "Really significant political action, however, is action that, for better or for worse, neither simply conforms to existing rules, nor intervenes […] to find craftsmanlike solutions to specific problems, but that changes a situation in a way that cannot be seen to be a mere instantiation of a preexisting set or [sic] rules. It creates new facts, violates, ignores, or even changes the rules. Such action may, like significant original art, be extremely rare, but the fact that such disruptive change of existing systems of action is always at least a possibility is one of the things that gives politics its special character." (PI: 41)

In summary, for Geuss a realistic political theory should not focus only on the actual, but should – through the orientation toward the possible – connect to the possibility of thinking and acting differently, i.e. to criticism. This again links the examination of the present to its criticism and makes Geussian realism distinct from the forms of realism thus far discussed in the thesis. Geussian realism in its understanding of politics interrogates both the actual and the possible in order to enhance 'our' understanding of our present situation and so allows for the consideration of the tension between the actual and the possible as an important (though not exclusive) focus of political theorizing.

2.4 On the Originality of Geussian Realism

Against the background of the exegesis of key features of Geuss' position in political theory, it is possible to formulate – on a higher level of abstraction and more specifically related to the debates about realism – what makes Geussian realism original and gives it the potential to radicalize realism.

Geuss avoids the abstract and reductive dichotomizations between descriptive and normative, consensus- and conflict-centered, optimist and pessimist approaches due to his emphasis on the need for close examination of the 'actual', i.e. the political context broadly understood and examined through a variety of perspectives which make use of philosophical tools such as conceptual analysis, criticism of ideology or genealogy. In order to get to a perspective through which one can make informed judgments of one's political context, Geuss invites the student of politics to approach her political context not through a thought exercise of comprehensive abstraction, but through the examination of the empirical realities as well as, based on this examination, through a thought exercise of making the familiar strange. The latter could be understood as

questioning not only of the coherence of conceptual schemes but the tension between their claims to authority and their contingency. This is especially visible in his writings on the conceptual history of key terms of contemporary liberal democratic theory such as 'rights', 'freedom', 'the state', 'the public', 'the private' (HIP, GP, Geuss 2003).

These diagnoses and thought exercises are driven by a negative impulse to start from problems or with the problematization of the status quo. Geuss stands orthogonally toward the dichotomization of critical but impotent and contextually concrete but status quo affirming political theorizing. His writings are characterized by engaging the tension between these impulses. From his point of view political theory should aim to be practically oriented and orienting (OE: 27-28, FDD: 15ff., WWW: chapter 4), yet at the same time should try to achieve this through the diagnosis of the respective political context led by potentially radical criticism. Whilst Geuss rejects philosophical claims to objectivity as a basis for political authority (Geuss 2011a, HIP: 37-42, GP: 126), he reserves space for philosophical tools to offer a somewhat superior perspective on and thus to affect the self-conception of the agents involved and their assessment of their situation (see the remarks about the tasks of political theory in Geuss 2013b: 89-90). The importance of this tension for Geussian realism points to the need for the development of a different understanding of critical distance, led both by the critical impetus of philosophy to examine oneself and one's environment and by taking seriously the everyday actions (verbal and non-verbal) which form the object of the political context as the basis for offering practical orientation. In the following chapter I will develop this understanding of critical distance further into a perspective for political theory to relate to its political context. This will be called diagnosis-critique, following the dual emphases of Geussian realism.

These elements of his approach enable Geuss to go beyond the current realists in his challenge of liberal political theory: He questions the coherency of the 'basic structure' of their discourses which is the moral and political vocabulary centered on concepts like justice, rights, political authority, and legitimacy. Geuss does not offer a remedy from the past (compared to MacIntyre 2005) for this problem other than the intensification and opening of our self-examination. For this endeavor he takes seriously the importance of discursive power, or rather, the power of interpretation, viewed as a kind of action. This further underscores the depth of his (self-) examination which starts with

problematizing and questioning the present.[13] His rejection of the constructiveness condition of criticism enables more radical (speculative) criticism, but also leaves open a tension between the practical orientation and radically critical outlook of his realism.

Overall the originality of Geussian realism consists of his focus on the entanglement between the normative and the descriptive in political theorizing, for example the dialectical consideration of the tensions between the empirical and transcending aspects of political concepts (Geuss 2012a), between the impulses of a political theorist for intervention and reflection, and between the analysis of seeming political necessities and the potentially utopian political imagination. How these entanglements and tensions are best addressed is still open to question, yet bringing them into view provides a potentially fruitful starting point for engaging them in a radicalized realism. His focus on the relationship between theory and its political context in terms of how they influence each other – political theories are not seen as independent thought edifices and so cannot be purely normative, but are in part effects of and interventions into a specific political context and so cannot be purely descriptive – further distinguishes his position.[14] Together with his commitment to the critical stance of political theory, these tensions point to the need for the change of the basis for the critical purchase of political theory. (Translated into the question of critical distance, or rather, the normativity of criticism, this crucial pointer of Geussian realism will be addressed as part of the development of radical realism in the following chapter.)

However, in order to prepare the more abstract development of radical realism, I will first try to embed Geussian realism in key orientations taken from predecessors in the philosophical-political study of society and attempt to develop it further against this background. More specifically, I will propose that this minimal sketch of Geussian realism could be further developed against the background of its interpretation as a sympathetic modification of early Critical Theory. Two undeveloped pointers of Geuss' realism, the idea of the detoxification of (the concept of) power (Geuss in Prinz 2012b:

[13] However, this negativist critique may not be the last word (and hence suspicion not enough): Geuss seems open to the idea of working toward a life-affirming perspective against the background of coming to terms with a view of the world as not designed to conform to human purposes (WWW: chapter 11; for a similar interpretation see Freyenhagen and Schaub 2010: 474-475).

[14] This should be read in contradistinction to the separation of the problems internal to theory and the problems of the application of theory which for Geuss – following Adorno (see Freyenhagen 2012: 185-186) – are always inextricably connected.

102) and the combination of the criticism of ideology and genealogy, will be taken up here.

3 Developing Geussian Realism as a Sympathetic Modification of Early Critical Theory

If the key aspects of his position are taken together, the early Critical Theory of the Frankfurt School, as outlined in *The Idea of a Critical Theory* (1981), could be viewed as an appropriate canvas against the background of which Geuss' works of the past three decades unfold as a coherent philosophical project of sympathetic modification (see Prinz 2012a; Geuss 1981, OE: 9). Like the early Critical Theory, Geussian realism is not only a tool for understanding politics and society, it is at the same time social criticism and a criticism of any rival approaches to politics and society with conformist tendencies (whereas the focus has shifted from the critique of positivism in the 1950s and 1960s to the critique of neo-Kantianism, see Geuss 1981: 93-95, GP: 135-136, and neo-liberalization, see Geuss 2011b-d, 2012a, 2012b, FDD: 25-28). Geuss uses a negativist form of critique, explicitly rejecting demands for constructive criticism on several occasions (WWW: chapter 4, PRP: 96-97), which is could be viewed to be inspired by Adorno (Freyenhagen 2013: 217-220). The importance for Geuss of Adorno's views on criticism, the self-understanding of (political) philosophy and its perspective vis-à-vis society and politics (see e.g. Adorno's *Minima Moralia* (Adorno 1951), *Soziologische Schriften I* (Adorno 1972), and *Kulturkritik und Gesellschaft* (Adorno 1977a and 1977b)) is reflected in these commitments.[15]

Geuss' recent comment (in Prinz 2012b: 97-98) that what has been received as his realist political theory since *Philosophy and Real Politics* can already be found in his first monograph, *The Idea of a Critical Theory*, is a curious pointer for exploring the relationship between his recent writings and early Critical Theory. Arguably *The Idea of a Critical Theory* was a first, mostly preparatory step into the direction as a sympathetic modification of early Critical Theory by pursuing two goals: first, to offer an analytical exposition of the structure of (mostly Habermasian) Critical Theory after 1960, and,

[15] Fabian Freyenhagen's treatments of Adorno's practical philosophy (2013a) and politics (2014) offer a condensed account of the originality of Adorno's position, with special emphasis on the importance of negativism in ethics and with a discussion of how Adorno can uphold the goal to offer normative guidance whilst rejecting the Kantian understanding of normativity. Freyenhagen's reconstructions strike me as a plausible explication of Adorno's position and a useful approximation to much that Geuss finds inspirational in Adorno (a discussion of which is beyond the remit of this thesis).

second, to provide an argument for understanding Critical Theory as a kind of social philosophy with an empirical research program rather than a social science as well as an argument for why the historically contextualist and (mostly) immanent-negativistic perspective of Adorno is to be preferred to post-*Theory of Communicative Action* Habermas. The latter two arguments remain important for Geuss' later writings in the form of his sustained rejection of binary choices between either normativism or positivism and relativism, and his preference for political theory construed without transcendental conditions (Geuss 1981: 94-95). They could be seen to guide his modifications of Critical Theory.

These modifications principally concern the understanding of rationality, of ideology, of power and the widening of the 'methodological' apparatus. As Geuss' preferred version of Critical Theory "contains a stronger Nietzschean component than most other versions" (OE: 9), these modifications all have to do with the stronger admission of Nietzschean, or rather, of Foucauldian elements – as Geuss actually seems to prefer Foucauldian to Nietzschean genealogy (GP: 115-120, OE: 154-159) and has been particularly interested in Foucault's study of power relations (Geuss 2010b: 422-423, WWW: xv-xvi) – to early Critical Theory. There are two direct consequences of this preference for Geussian realism. First, this leads to a doubt about human rationality and hence to the recognition of the necessary incompleteness of theory, which implies a rejection of the possibility of the unity of theory and practice through totalizing theories (see also Menke 2010). Second, it leads to an emphasis on real historical perspectives to complement criticism of ideology. This, in turn, leads to a refocusing on conceptual analysis which is arguably the dominant tool in use in Geuss' writings. He hence combines criticism of ideology, genealogy and conceptual analysis as tools to serve the purpose of questioning the naiveties, *fables convenues*, taken-for-granted-harmony of and consistency between concepts which play an important functional and legitimatory role in current social and political orders (see GP: 106-121 for a discussion of his methods).

As the purpose of this chapter is to offer an interpretation of Geussian realism as a key inspiration for radicalizing realism, I will not embark on a historical comparative exegesis of (mainly) Adorno's and Geuss' writings in order to detail the latter's modifications. Rather I will try to develop Geussian realism further by making good on two undeveloped, yet important pointers in Geuss' writings. These lacunae – his idea to

"detoxify the concept of power" (Geuss in Prinz 2012b: 102) and his intention to combine genealogy and criticism of ideology – are both inspired by early Critical Theory concerns, namely the importance of the study of power and of historical-contextualist criticism of ideology. I will develop them mainly through adding Foucauldian elements. They thus contribute to the development of Geussian realism viewed as a sympathetic modification of early Critical Theory through the stronger admission of Foucauldian elements.

3.1 The Detoxification of Power

Geuss has offered the idea of the detoxification of power as a key to his understanding of political theory (Geuss in Prinz 2012b: 102), but has thus far left it undeveloped. I submit that it makes most sense to develop this idea against the background of the shift of the understanding of power which can be found in Foucault's later work on governmentality, in which techniques of power and the rationalities of governing are in focus, not the questions of legitimacy and rightful power (see Hindess 1996: 111-112, 135). In a characteristic passage Foucault formulates the change of perspective on power as follows:

> "Not to ask oneself: is power good or bad, legitimate or illegitimate, a question of right or of morality, but to try, simply, to strip the question of power from all the moral and juridical framework, which has affected it up to now, and ask this naïve question which has not been asked that often, even if effectively a certain number of people have been asking it for a long time: what do relations of power, at their base, consist of?" (Foucault 1978: 540; my translation)[16]

The detoxification of power then means to understand power not as (necessarily) normatively negative, not as to be evaluated in moralized terms, but in terms of first asking what power means in a specific context and then analyzing its effects, both creative and limiting or destructive. Power is not *per se* good or bad but potentially dangerous. If living in societies is characterized by what Foucault calls "conducting conduct" of oneself and others (Foucault 1982a: 1056; see also Foucault 2007a: 195ff.), and if power is present in quotidian practices such as communication (Foucault 1982b), then the question is not how to be free from power, but how to problematize, make

[16] The original reads: "Non pas se demander: le pouvoir est-il bon ou est-il mauvais, légitime ou illégitime, question de droit ou de morale? Mais, simplement, essayer d'alléger la question du pouvoir de toutes les surcharges morales et juridiques dont on l'a jusque-là affecté, et poser cette question naïve, qui n'a pas été posée si souvent, même si effectivement un certain nombre de gens l'ont depuis longtemps posée: au fond, les relations de pouvoir, en quoi cela consiste-t-il?"

visible and eventually minimize domination relationships.[17] For this purpose, the strategies and techniques of power require close analysis, beyond the relationships between state and citizens (especially if understood as a conflict between authority and autonomy) (Foucault 1980, 2007a). In Geuss' writings this is expressed in the centrality of the question, "who does what to whom for whose benefit?" (PRP: 25), which has to be read as a guideline for the negative-critical diagnosis of certain aspects of the political present, e.g. what power techniques propel the distinctions between wants and needs (Geuss 2012b), or what are the power techniques and strategies which allow liberal political theory to be viewed as advancing egalitarian goals (Geuss 1999: chapter 3, HIP)? The concentration on techniques and strategies of power in the way that they affect how people govern themselves and others, on such relations of power in quotidian realities does not mean a 'flight from philosophy'. Rather philosophical tools are used to enable the perception, understanding and interpretation of these power relations.[18]

Thus understood, the detoxification of power potentially has important implications for the understanding of political theory. Here I will briefly discuss how it affects the idea of political theory as a critical project. Whilst the detoxified view of power does not come with an inbuilt condemnation of power, it still does not describe and analyze relations and techniques of power for the sake of description only. This raises the question of the criteria for evaluating relations of power. Does the detoxified view of power then not need to rely on political or other commitments which guide the judgment about which forms of power are more or less worrying and what should be done about them? At least according to liberal-normativist political theory, criteria for such judgments need to be provided with reference to (universalizeable) philosophical arguments which usually depend on moral principles in order not to drift into a lack of normativity or even into 'relativism'. Providing an answer to the question of how an understanding of power close to the later Foucauldian view is compatible with the critical project, as which Geussian realism has been presented thus far, would be a way to counter this worry

[17] This has implications for the understanding of freedom and the relationship between power and freedom, leading to a minimally normative understanding of power which depends on agency for those over whom power is exercised. (Minimally mediated) power is hence distinguished from violence, not from domination (see Han 2005 for a lucid discussion of the dynamic between power, mediation and freedom).

[18] Genealogy will be a key tool for the study of power in a detoxified sense, especially if it is understood as a kind of critique (see below and, for an interpretation of Foucauldian genealogy in this vein, Koopman 2013).

about the lack of normativity. Actually Foucault himself offers a way to reconcile these two elements:

> "Maybe philosophy can still play a role on the side of counter-power, on condition that, in facing power, this role no longer consists in laying down the law of philosophy, on condition that philosophy stops thinking of itself as prophecy, pedagogy, or legislation, and that it gives itself the task of analyzing, elucidating, making visible, and thereby intensifying the struggles that take place around power, the strategies of adversaries within relations of power, the tactics employed, and the sources of resistance, on condition, in short, that philosophy stops posing the question of power in terms of good and evil, but poses it in terms of existence." (Foucault 1978: 540; translation quoted from Sennellart 2007: 374)

Foucault's view of how the critical potential of philosophy, despite the rejection of its ambition to 'legislate' through moral principles, could be retained lends support to the view that is compatible with a detoxified understanding of power, however, only if the self-conception of philosophy, in our case more specifically political theory, is revised. As this reconceptualization is at the heart of Geussian realism (e.g. 2011a), we can accept Foucault's suggestion as one possible answer to the potential objection levied against the detoxification of power that it would be incompatible with understanding political theory as a critical project because of a normative lack. Foucault's emphasis on self-reflection and self-critique of philosophy (and political theory), with regard to its relationship to different techniques of power as its main task, further underscores the compatibility of criticism with the idea of detoxifying power: "After all […] the task of philosophy today could well be [to ask the following questions]: What are the relations of power in which we find ourselves and in which philosophy has become, at least for 150 years, embroiled?" (Foucault 1978: 541; my translation)[19]

In short, the detoxification of power shifts from understanding power as a normatively negative influence (on potentially autonomous agency) to the analysis of the effects of techniques of power and relations of power on a political and social order. Detoxified power is central to Geuss' aspirations for political theory to help provide a contextual understanding of politics, which is the prerequisite of concretely practically guiding criticism. The detoxification of power leads to changes in the way criteria for evaluating political regimes are generated, however, this is not only compatible with the project of

[19] The original reads: "Après tout […] la tâche de la philosophie aujourd'hui pourrait bien être: qu'en est-il de ces relations de pouvoir dans lesquelles nous sommes pris et dans lesquelles la philosophie elle-même s'est, depuis au moins cent cinquante ans, empêtrée?"

political theory as a critical activity, but even serves the Geussian goal of changing (the sources of) the normativity of criticism (see chapter 5 below).

3.2 The Combination of Genealogy and Criticism of Ideology

Geuss has recently suggested a potentially important methodological modification of early Critical Theory consisting of the combination of criticism of ideology and genealogy (Geuss in Prinz 2012b: 103, or also in HIP: 160-161). Genealogy and criticism of ideology feature heavily in Geuss' methodological toolkit. What is more, in nearly all major recent writings one finds traces of the combination of genealogy and criticism of ideology, whilst even the explicit discussions of his methodological premises (GP: 106-121, Geuss 2003: vii-xxiii, HIP: 156-162) do not accord any space to the specificities of this combination. It is hence the goal here to explore how they can complement each other in Geussian realism. If one starts from *The Idea of a Critical Theory* which is focused on criticism of ideology, it becomes clear that over the past 30 years the historical and contingent aspects of philosophical perspectives on politics have become more and more prominent in Geuss' work. His attempts to establish connections between the history of ideas, through conceptual histories, and real histories may serve as an example (Geuss 2003, GP, HIP, OE, PI; see Menke 2010 for a similar thought).[20]

Geuss views genealogy and criticism of ideology as complementing each other as they cover different aspects of the kind of self-examination and reflection which he regards as the most appropriate way to study one's society (and one's place therein) through political theorizing. In a recent interview Geuss has sketched two arguments for the combination of genealogy and criticism of ideology. The first is about keeping political theory (which is committed to the goal of critically examining the status quo) open to a plurality of methods (see Geuss in Prinz 2012b: 103). The second is about the "very close relation (*Wahlverwandtschaft*) between criticism of ideology and genealogy […] in as far as most ideological edifices both are historically taken for granted and ideologically laden" (Geuss in Prinz 2012b: 103; my translation). This very close relation is backed by the shared practical orientation of Geuss' preferred Adornian criticism of ideology and Nietzschean/Foucauldian genealogy against "the suffocating

[20] The relationship between conceptual history and real history, however, at least according to Martin Saar (2007: 146), remains a lacuna of Geuss' account and requires further elaboration.

intellectual conformism of contemporary societies [which they view as] a serious political and ethical threat" (GP: 135; my translation).

Genealogy has the potential to contribute to forms of self-examination through tracing the history of taken for granted concepts, institutions or practices. Questioning the origins of these concepts leads to the admission of an unexpected plurality of ingredients and of the contingency of their interactions which 'effected' the current use of the concept. Here genealogy operates both in an analytical and historical mode, as it takes apart historically developed and transitory concepts and institutions into their (analytically) separate ingredients. As a historical explanation of these ingredients genealogy has to be measured by a standard of historical truth. As a contribution to practically relating to the concepts and institutions that have developed from these ingredients, genealogy does not directly pronounce evaluations – Geuss is aware of the danger of the genetic fallacy and does not employ genealogy to discredit concepts –, but rather opens up new avenues for interrogating these concepts and, driven by the importance that these concepts have for the current configuration of society, to interrogating the present political and social order (see his understanding of perspectivism in Geuss 2003: vii-xxiii). Geuss' understanding of genealogy could hence be viewed as a kind of ideologically critical conceptual analysis (see Saar 2007: 143-147) which illustrates how closely criticism of ideology and genealogy are often connected in Geuss' writings.

Criticism of ideology is not primarily interested in real history but takes issue with forms of consciousness whose historical development and 'functionalization' it traces (GP: 111-113). In contrast to genealogy, criticism of ideology traditionally is oriented toward an idea of full emancipation which implies not only the change of consciousness but the change of reality (Geuss 1981: 73-75) and 'Truth', from both of which Geuss, however, distances himself (Geuss 2004b: 136). He, however, remains committed to the idea of 'enlightening emancipation' which aims for making problems (expressed e.g. as illusions or contradictions) graspable as stemming from a kind of distortion of a particular aspect of their environment, e.g. of particular interests portrayed as universal interests (see Geuss 1981: 45-54). Such enlightening emancipation may be able to empower people diagnostically, but cannot itself bring about actual change (see Geuss 2003: xx, PI: 184-185, Geuss 2004b). This hints at Geuss' complex relationship to the idea of clearly demarcating what is true and what is false. Geuss rejects the idea of

universal truths in political theory (FDD, Geuss 2011a), yet he works to uphold the distinction between true and false in more local contexts and in a less emphatic understanding (2010c, 2013b: 89-90). The 'Truth' is then, apart from obvious aspects of the human condition (WWW: 104) usually something which is determined relative to an understanding of one's context and goals and/or commitments which one further hopes to pursue. An illustrative case is Geuss' argument against the importance of 'lying' in contemporary political discourse (see WWW: chapter 7). The question which guides Geussian political theory is hence not the classical 'what is the Truth?' but rather 'is it true that the focus on telling the truth is an useful tool for understanding how politicians operate today and to evaluate their actions?'

The combination of criticism of ideology with genealogy contributes to Geuss' attempt of offering a more engaged diagnosis of the present which in turn allows a better distancing and renders the aspects which have been subjected to such scrutiny criticizable. The prominent concepts of our current political vocabulary have a history as concepts (and, as the interaction of these concepts, with real history). These concepts are also the vehicles for individuals and groups to comprehend their interests and/or to introduce distinctions in society to the benefit and detriment of themselves and others. The combination of genealogy and criticism and ideology here has the advantage of being able to take seriously the idea that "illusions under certain circumstances can be quite useful" (GP: 118; see also OE: 146-152). Here the genealogical suspension of the judgment of the truth or falsity of a historical phenomenon as a necessary means for offering an accurate account thereof is combined with the distinction between true and false on the basis of the assessment of the functioning of the object in question. One could then conclude that for Geuss genealogical inquiry can offer supplementary diagnostic accuracy and historical depth to the diagnosis of the present context in order to enable thinking and acting differently in the face of ideological distortions of one's perspective (which does not imply that there is one non-distorted (and total) master perspective). However, does this attempt at combining genealogy and criticism of ideology not risk conflating the distinctive limitations of a perspective which they respectively study?

David Owen has claimed that this conflation is what usually happens when genealogy is appropriated by critical theorists (Owen 2002: 216-220). Owen stresses the differences between criticism of ideology and genealogy in terms of the kinds of problems they

address. Genealogy addresses the problem of the contingent historical limitation of one's perspective whilst criticism of ideology usually is taken to address a distortion of consciousness for the benefit of particular agents (Owen 2002: 219).[21] Owen's point about the distinctiveness of genealogy and criticism of ideology is well taken. However, this does not preclude the combination of genealogy and criticism of ideology in Geuss' sense. The distinctiveness of the kinds of limitations of people's perspective which genealogy and criticism of ideology study is not compromised, but rather, as argued above, Geuss emphasizes the historical element of ideological thinking present in the use of taken for granted ideas. This needs to be addressed through an adequately historical perspective like genealogy.

There are, however, further problems to which Owen draws attention. One is the problem of the different normative orientation of genealogy and criticism of ideology. Whilst genealogy abstains from normative evaluations, they are usually taken to be a principal purpose of criticism of ideology. In reaction to this problem, genealogy and criticism of ideology need to be understood in a specific way to make their combination possible. Firstly, genealogy needs to be understood as a kind of critique – this is again dependent on one's understanding of critique, which in the present case of Geuss, is a negativist and normatively minimalist form of critique. Secondly, criticism of ideology needs to be understood in a non-objectivist way, i.e. not as revealing the 'Truth', and the emancipation which can be expected from carrying out criticism of ideology needs to be limited to "enlightening" rather than "full" emancipation (see Geuss 1981: 73-75). This means that criticism of ideology does not in itself lead to a change of "historical reality" (Geuss 2003: xx; see also PI: 184-185, Geuss 2004b), but, like genealogy, enables ways of thinking and eventually acting differently through the dissolution of an illusion, of the 'naturalness' of a perspective in the case of genealogy and, typically, of the universality of some interest in the case of criticism of ideology (GP: 115). Geuss meets these criteria as he accords an at least indirectly critical function to genealogy – that suspension of judgment can lead to rejection (Geuss 2003: xvii, GP: 125) – and he rejects the view of criticism of ideology as directly emancipatory or enabling glimpses of a universal truth. Rather, he sees both genealogy and criticism of ideology as contributing to the self-reflection on one's perspective on the present context (HIP: 9-10).

[21] Even if Geuss' views of criticism of ideology and genealogy do not fully match Owen's understandings, they are similar enough to admit Owen's argument as relevant to Geuss' use of them.

In short, the development of Geussian realism interpreted as a sympathetic modification of early Critical Theory enhances how Geussian realism understands the activities of questioning, interrogation, or problematization of certain features of a political context. Such diagnosis of the current political situation can now be understood as having subversive potential without being in danger of adding to the questionable historical track record of radical social criticism with universal ambitions (see PI: 167-185; Geuss' position here strikes me as close to Adorno's politics as reconstructed by Freyenhagen 2014). The combination of criticism of ideology and genealogy offers further historical depth to the goal of Geussian realism to address various forms of lack of reflection. Thus far Geuss has mostly questioned, interrogated and problematized contemporary *conceptual schemata* using conceptual analysis, genealogy and criticism of ideology. Whilst these schemata are an important element of the exercise of power and wider techniques and strategies of power (as a kind of governing in Foucault's sense), the development of Geussian realism would greatly profit from being supplemented by broader criticisms of techniques and strategies of power, which Geuss has thus far only attempted tentatively in shorter pieces (Geuss 2007, 2009, 2011b-d, PI: 17-42).

4 Conclusion

The goal of this chapter was to offer an interpretation of Geussian realism as a key inspiration for radicalizing realism. I embarked on this task against the background that Geuss has thus far mostly provided pointers and sketches of his realism which may facilitate that he gets lumped into the pool of the realists in political theory discussed in previous chapters. I then offered an original interpretation of these pointers and sketches which showed that Geussian realism poses a more radical challenge to liberal-normativist political theory than the prevalent subdivisions of realism. The radical aspects of Geussian realism I singled out were, first, his emphasis on the entanglement of the descriptive and the normative aspects of political theory, which enables him to overcome a self-imposed limitation common in the debates about realism to the choice between being critical, but impotent or being contextualist but status quo affirming; and, second, the emphasis on the need for realism to take the power of the imagination seriously, i.e. to give the importance of the utopian imaginary its due in the way political questions are construed and argued out. Further the triangle of his emphasis on the entanglement between the descriptive and the normative, his commitment to bringing together the critical impulses to reflection and intervention, and the way he uses negative

criticism for the interrogation of the status quo opens up the possibility of developing an alternative understanding of the normativity of criticism and its relationship to practically oriented political theorizing. This will be pursued in the following chapter through the development of the operational perspective of radical realism via the reconceptualization of critical distance. My development of Geussian realism as a sympathetic modification of early Critical Theory attempted a first step at further substantiating it through developing Geuss' pointers on the detoxification of power and the combination of genealogy and criticism of ideology through the admission of Foucauldian elements. Geussian realism then emerges as a self-reflexive, (self-) critical, and contextualist approach to political theorizing. Through these not only methodological but also political orientations, Geussian realism offers the inspiration for a more abstract development of a radical realism. It is the task of the following chapter to construct such a perspective which poses a radical challenge to liberal-normativist political theory on the basis of developing further the distinctive aspects of Geussian realism.

Chapter 5: Radical Realism

1 Introduction

The reinterpretation of Raymond Geuss' realism undertaken in the preceding chapter provides an orientation for the radicalization of realism in political theory. This orientation now will be developed into a 'radical realism'. I will approach this task in three interconnected steps:

First, I will spell out the central commitments of radical realism and relate them to some disciplinary expectations of normative political theory. Radical realism is driven by an ethos of critique. This ethos is complemented by a negativistic form of criticism, both in terms of starting with problems and in terms of rejecting the condition of constructiveness for criticism. Radical realism is further characterized by an understanding on the normativity of criticism which starts from the 'normativity of historical reality'. It aims to offer (practical) orientation and evaluate concrete claims in specific contexts (**2**). I will then develop an operational perspective for radical realism to relate to its respective political context. This perspective, which I call diagnosis-critique, aims to overcome the tensions and limitations of the prevalent forms of realism in this regard. Diagnosis-critique is conceived as a further development of Geuss' distinctive foci on the entanglement in political theorizing between the descriptive and normative and between (self-) reflection and intervention. The reconceptualization of critical distance draws on Rahel Jaeggi's understanding of criticism of ideology (**3**). Finally, I will offer a brief reflection on how radical realism and diagnosis-critique pose a radical challenge to liberal-normativist political theory (**4**).

2 Radical Realism: Key Commitments and Goals

I will open this 'high-altitude sketch' of the central commitments of radical realism by situating it vis-à-vis some disciplinary boundaries and expectations of political theory. Given its indebtedness to Geuss' work and the frequent claims that Geuss is somewhat leaving political theory or even philosophy (see Honig and Stears 2011; Kersting 2011; Kelly 2011), it is important to clarify that radical realism is a perspective within political theory.

2.1 Radical Realism as a Political Theory

Radical realism is a political rather than a social theory because it is set up in order to analyze how we govern ourselves and others, and how the relations of power which ensue stand toward our endorsed (and possible) goals of social cooperation and toward the means that are (thought to be) available to realize them. This means that it looks at questions which could also be viewed as social, moral or ethical questions *in a political way* (see the discussion of Geuss' understanding of politics in chapter 4). This does not imply that morality, ethics and politics can or should be separated as different, juxtaposed domains. Radical realism can further – due to its self-reflection on the historical (and material) context of theory construction – bring into view the separation between politics and morality or ethics as itself an artifact of politics. This political lens is characterized by deep disagreement, imperfect knowledge, limited time (-windows) and resources for making decisions, by the recognition of the need for at least minimal orientation and by taking seriously the history of the present political context (in which it finds itself and which it addresses).

The interest in distinguishing political power from brute violence is another aspect which qualifies radical realism as a political theory. This, however, does not mean that politics cannot lead to or manifest itself in forms of brute violence, but rather that the mode of governmental power – whereas government is understood in the wide sense introduced by Foucault in his lectures on governmentality (Foucault 2007a) as the guidance of both individuals and the population at large through conducting their conduct – depends on the subject in question having some (minimal) freedom of agency (Foucault 1982b; see also PRP: 21-22).[1] This, however, should not be mistaken for the kind of normative understanding of politics typical of liberal-normativism. Such an understanding of politics is normatively qualified in the sense of having to meet certain standards of rationality or morality (such as reasonableness). In contradistinction, radical realism tries to offer an understanding of politics which is less normatively demanding,

[1] This does not mean that radical realism cannot think 'domination', e.g. with Foucault "we must distinguish the relationships of power as strategic games between liberties – strategic games that result in the fact that some people try to determine the conduct of others – and the states of domination, which are what we ordinarily call power. And, between the two, between the games of power and the states of domination, you have governmental technologies" (Foucault 1988: 19). Thomas Lemke (2002: 53) further clarifies that "states of domination are not the primary source for holding power or exploiting asymmetries, on the contrary they are the effects of technologies of government. Technologies of government account for the systematization, stabilization and regulation of power relationships that may lead to a state of domination."

and more interested in studying the exercise of power and the strategies of the governing of collective agency. Here, radical realism is less interested in generating criteria for normative authority than in the evaluation of relations of power from a non-moral point of view. However, it aims to be normative by providing an evaluative orientation with regard to the exercise of power in a specific context (see below and the final section of chapter 6). So, in these senses radical realism is a political theory, and neither a social theory nor an analysis of organized violence.

If one tries to situate radical realism in the recent disciplinary (and supra-disciplinary) history of political theory (as offered in Gunnell 1986, 1998; Vincent 2004), the point of its radicalism will emerge as consisting in its attempt to stand orthogonally to the prevalent forms of liberal-normativist (analytical) political theory. This manifests for example in its rejection of the distinction between normative and descriptive political theory perspectives and the rejection of the assumption of the (potential) harmony of the concepts underlying current liberal political discourse (state, freedom, authority, autonomy, rights, justice). Radical realism further rejects viewing a 'political relationship' as a question of the singular relationship of legitimacy between the state and its citizens which could be termed the 'juridical mode of subjectivity' (see Foucault 2004) concomitant to this concept of legitimate government: the autonomous individual whose confrontation with claims of authority by the state is usually regulated via a (non-positive and positive) rights framework. Instead radical realism connects to the traditions of political thought as social criticism and as practically oriented, reflexive and subversive theorizing (which aims to take in a much wider scope of relations of power).

2.2 The Key Commitments and Goals of Radical Realism

Radical realism is driven by the ethos of critique (e.g. Foucault 1982b, 1997; see also OE: 153-160; Tully 2008: chapter 1). For radical realism, critique and understanding are co-dependent. The ethos of critique can be viewed as setting in motion a process of (self-) examination of one's political context.[2] The ethos of critique is not about commitments to certain doctrines but a stance toward the present, an "attitude, an ethos, a philosophical life in which the critique of what we are is at one and the same time the historical analysis of the limits imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of

[2] It is important to stress the motivational power of political affect for getting this examination started (Lemke 2011: 40).

going beyond them [*de leur franchissement possible*]" (Foucault 1997: 319; see also Geuss 2011a: 12). This means that radical realism starts with the question of who we are politically with the goal to open up space for going beyond or subverting the limits of this present. Answering this question requires a historical analysis of how we have become who we are in order to trace the development of currently held concepts, institutions and patterns of action which involves showing their contingency, heterogeneity, and internal tensions. The process of the examination of one's political context (which, from the point of view of radical realism, should include the questioning and reevaluation of the 'institution' of political theory as an exercise of self-reflection) does not have a fixed end point, as the continuous development of social reality keeps creating new challenges.

It is important to note here that radical realism is driven by the goal to offer practical orientation at the same time. For radical realism, a critical examination of one's political context is a necessary requirement for offering practical orientation, as only a context-specific examination can adequately inform normative guidance (see the development of diagnosis-critique below). The kind of guidance which it will provide, however, is different from the prescriptive forms of action-guidance familiar from liberal-normativist political theory. More precisely, its forms of action-guidance are more contextually limited and negative which means that they may be limited to recommendations for resistance.

This leads to two further central commitments: The first is that the analysis of power relations as a political salient expression of relations of government in the wide sense of the term (which presupposes an understanding of power as sketched in discussion of the 'detoxification of power' in the previous chapter), is a focal point of the critical interrogation of our political context.[3] This analysis aims to deliver (a necessarily selective) overview of the possibilities and limitations of political agency in a specific context. Through making visible and problematizing certain power relations, it opens up an imaginative horizon for modifying them which does not depend on a separately grounded normativity, but stems from transforming the perspective on the current

[3] If one takes Foucault's idea of an 'analytical philosophy of politics' (1978) seriously as one of the inspirations for developing his views of power, then one could view my usage of his work here as a re-radicalization of analytical methods in political theory (which, even if not exclusively – think of analytical Marxists –, have for the past four decades been closely associated with various versions of liberal-normativist commitments (see Vincent 2004)).

context through its close diagnosis. The specific foci of this analysis cannot be determined in detail in advance. They are likely to fall on concepts, institutional structures and practices as expressing certain power relations. One focus could be to ask how the conceptualization of legitimacy as rightful power became possible (see Geuss' discussion of the genealogy of the concept of 'authority' in WWW: chapter 6). The focus on the analysis of power relations also underscores the practical focus of radical realism, which means that radical realism pays particular attention to how the specific context in question is practically organized and what this means for the possibilities of individual and collective action.

The second commitment to which the ethos of critique leads radical realism is negativism.[4] Radical realism does not start with its own ontology of what is political. Rather radical realism addresses this question through the relationship between political theory and its political context. In this regard it is negativistic in several ways. First, echoing Adorno and Foucault, it is negativistic in starting from the view that social reality is problematic and its analysis should focus on negative experiences and on phenomena viewed as problematic. Second, the critical perspective set in motion by the first commitment to negativism also operates in a negativistic way: This criticism does not have a positive ideal as its foundation and is not committed to being constructive, but rather engages in problematization and questioning.[5] Third, the normative recommendations which it may issue are focused not on what should be done, but on what should be avoided, or, differently put, how to resist what we are.[6]

These commitments lead back to the question in what way radical realism is normative. After all, normative recommendations are one of the key expectations of political theory

[4] Negativism, however, does not provide a *foundation* for radical realism (and negativism is not freed from the danger of becoming somewhat exaggerated in its claim to producing meaning). The goal is to use negativism without a claim to replacing the role of moral foundations in the great tradition of normative political philosophy, but as a tool to study its problems and the modes of production of philosophical meaning (in dealing with day-to-day politics) (see FDD: 23-24).

[5] The (seldom noted) parallels between Foucault and Adorno on this point give further backing to my development of radical realism as – in part – a modification of early Critical Theory with Foucauldian elements: Adorno (1977b: 787-792) rejects the demand for constructiveness as unduly limiting the radical and questioning force of critique. Foucault shares this view: "Under no circumstances should one pay attention to those who tell one: 'Don't criticize, since you're not capable of carrying out a reform.' That's ministerial cabinet talk. Critique doesn't have to be the premise of a deduction that concludes, 'this, then, is what needs to be done.' It should be an instrument for those who fight, those who resist and refuse what is. Its use should be in the processes of conflict and confrontation, essays in refusal. It doesn't have to lay down the law for the law. It isn't a stage in a programming. It is a challenge directed to what is." (Foucault 2002b: 236)

[6] This view also connects both to Adorno (see Freyenhagen 2013) and to Foucault (e.g. 2007b).

with which radical realism – despite challenging the distinction between normative and descriptive perspectives – does not break and cannot break, if it hopes to retain a practically orienting perspective. The decisive difference to liberal normativism is that in radical realism normativity is not introduced externally into the discussion, but rather is oriented toward what one could call the "inner normativity of historical reality" (Theunissen cited in Jaeggi 2005: 76; see also Theunissen 1993 and Jaeggi 2009, 2014). In short, this means that normative questions such as how one should live, who should rule, what are the criteria for authority etc. are already, even if only implicitly, answered in a specific social context. The political, social and economic forms of order contain answers and/or limit the possible alternative answers.

The inner normativity of historical reality is a key concept for the radicalization of realism as it shifts the attention of political theory from the abstract justification, e.g. of authority, in general to the evaluation of concrete, even if implicit, normative claims of our present, including those to authority. The emphasis on the entanglement between descriptive and normative aspects is a reaction to this normativity and the rethinking of the normativity of criticism is a key step to show how radical realism is after all a normative perspective. The experience of this normativity, the confrontation both with its negativity and with the concrete claims to authority, is the basis of the diagnosis and the critique that in combination allows challenging the limits of what is experienced (more on this 'diagnosis-critique' below). On the whole, 'experience' is an important concept for radical realism's central task of relating to its political context. Foucault's understanding of experience could be viewed to fill a lacuna in Geuss' work on the concept of experience.[7]

In Foucault's terms, critique is based on the experience (of the negativity) of the historical context, or rather, initiated by a (not necessarily fully rationalized) reaction to this experience of being governed in a specific way (Foucault 2007b: 46, 75). It "is always already involved in what it addresses. It relies on the existing normative and institutional system while seeking to expose its limits in order to explore ways to transform it" (Lemke 2011: 33). Following Thomas Lemke (2011: 27) one could argue that for Foucault, "[e]xperience is conceived […] as existing background of practices and transcending event, as the object of theoretical inquiry and the object of moving

[7] I will draw specifically on the interpretation of the middle later and later Foucault as being compatible with the goal of criticism (see Lemke 2002, 2011).

beyond historical limits". This understanding of experience is closely linked to the question of how radical realism hopes to change the normativity of criticism and could be appropriated for this purpose by viewing experience and critique as standing in an 'angelic circle': Whilst its dependence on experience clarifies that critique is relational and embedded in collective practices and always connected to existing forms of government as well as the "local and 'experimental'" (Foucault 1997: 316)[8], critique also opens up new possibilities for experience which then leads to further critical investigations without fixed end point:

> "The experience through which we grasp the intelligibility of certain mechanisms (for example, imprisonment, punishment, and so on) and the way in which we are enabled to detach ourselves from them by perceiving them differently will be, at best, one and the same thing." (Foucault 2002a: 244)

This is another way of expressing the view that critique is normative, but not normativist, in either an immanent or dissociating variant. This means that radical realism, whilst starting from the experience of the present and its system of norms, does not have to be limited to "taking up a position on an already existing 'chess-board' that allows certain moves whilst forbidding others" (Lemke 2011: 35). However, this also points to the gap between the goal of detachment from one's context and the need of close diagnosis in order to be able to actually appropriately act toward this context (see the discussion of diagnosis-critique below). Radical realism works on widening the imaginative horizon and through engaging the experience of the present political context through engaging the "dynamic interplay between games of truth, forms of power and relations to the self" (Lemke 2011: 27) and thus takes seriously whilst trying to go beyond the existing concepts and categories of a political context.

This understanding and use of experience could also be viewed as an elaboration of a "normative richness or a more complex concept of normativity" (Lemke 2011: 40) which "bring[s] to light the compulsion that binds each critical intervention to a proof of justification or to a norm of identity" (Lemke 2011: 40) in the foundational or justificatory understandings of the normativity of criticism typical of liberal-normativist

[8] The choice for the local and experimental is – similar to Geuss' worries about the track record of radical criticism as conceived in post-idealist philosophy (PI: 167-165) – not primarily theoretical, but based on the historical experience with critique that claimed to be universal and promised a near complete break and renewal: "we know from experience that the claim to escape from the contemporary reality so as to produce the overall programs of another society, of another way of thinking, another culture, another vision of the world, has led only to the return of the most dangerous traditions." (Foucault 1997: 316)

political theory (see Vincent 2004; Freyenhagen 2013). Radical realism is inspired by the idea to "expose normative categories, to put them to the test in order to assess and assist the development of a new normative grammar that might make it possible to spell out alternative forms of rights and different modes of subjectivity beyond the juridical horizon" (Lemke 2011: 40).

So if normativity is inherent in the social reality, if it is already there, the questions of political theory shift from externally generating normativity to how to get access to this normativity and how to position oneself toward this normativity. Radical realism is normative through examining this normativity. Its evaluations depend on the quality of the actual processing of experience through diagnosis and critique. Radical realism thus needs to spell its key commitments out into a perspective through which it can operate. The following section will gradually develop such a perspective, which I call 'diagnosis-critique'.

3 Diagnosis-Critique. The Operational Perspective of Radical Realism

3.1 Critical Distance and the Realist Dichotomy

This sub-section prepares the development of diagnosis-critique through a reconceptualized understanding of critical distance. It will explicate how diagnosis-critique builds on different interpretations of key elements of realism and briefly examine selected problems and limitations of the understanding of critical distance in the realist literature.

Critical distance centrally addresses the understanding of the relationship between political theory and its political context and to this end contains views about how critical purchase is generated and what this means for the action-guiding aspirations of the political theory. Critical distance is then in part about the normativity of criticism. This makes it a central concept to the ambitions of radical realism to pose a radical challenge to liberal-normativist political theory. Critical distance could be viewed to fall into two main components: The first is the diagnosis or analysis component which plays a crucial role in any political theory committed to basic realist goals. The second is the critical or evaluative component which also is central to all those theories which hope to not limit themselves to description (as far as this is at all possible), hence virtually all forms of political theory. These components will form the focal points of the reconceptualization

of critical distance. For the generation of critical purchase the question of how these components (should) interact is particularly important.

Radical realism is based on the radicalization of realism and so it makes sense for the operational perspective to be developed here to get started by engaging (and then radicalizing) related realist limitations. A principal problem to be found across the prevalent subdivisions of realism in political theory concerns the tension between the goals of being action-guiding, which is translated into starting with analyzing how politics operates in a specific context, and the goal of not letting this contextual and practical orientation limit realism to be status quo affirming by default. This problem is potentially very instructive for the development of an operational perspective for radical realism, because it makes explicit the tension between the realist departure from idealizing theory and the worry about falling back into status quo affirmation. In the debates about realism in political theory, this tension has often been translated into a dichotomy between the contextually sensitive, action-guiding, and practical *and* the abstract, idealizing and critical aspects of a political theory.[9] This tension has been understood either as taking place within a continuum, as by Farrelly (2007) who holds that what he calls 'fact-sensitivity' and critical scope cannot be co-maximized, or as a categorical rift (Thaler 2013; Freeden 2012). In the latter case, the categorical incompatibility of radically critical and deeply contextual perspectives of political theorizing is postulated. This dichotomy has even been viewed as somewhat characteristic of the debates about realism (Valentini 2012). With regard to the question of critical distance – of how to relate the diagnostic and critical components – the dichotomy suggests that realists are not only keen to take a contextually sensitive perspective, able to guide action and to speak to a specified audience, but also worried about the lack of critical purchase and the corollary of status quo affirmation or ideological distortion.[10] Realists are looking for criteria for public justification without an inbuilt status quo affirming bias which still meets their realist commitments (Farrelly 2007; Mills 2005; Hendrix 2013), or, in particular, for criteria for disqualifying the legitimacy of regimes which is predominantly due to the use of its power (IBD; BMR; Schaub 2012b), without taking recourse to moral criteria external to politics.

[9] The problems with this limitation will be taken up again in the discussion of the tensions between realist and liberal-normativist commitments in realist accounts of legitimacy in chapter 6.
[10] If the diagnosis of their tendency to conservatism (see chapter 3) is at all correct, this should count as a reason to worry about status quo affirmation.

The solutions for this dichotomy offered by the revision- and reform-oriented realists are usually a division of labor between critical but abstract philosophizing, responsible for the principles or ideals, which is more or less taken over from liberal-normativist political theory, followed by a separate social science application (Swift and White 2008; Hamlin and Stemplowska 2012). Freeden's interpretive realism can be viewed to suggest a division of labor between the interpretive study of political language and rhetoric and normative philosophizing (Freeden 2005, 2008, 2012, 2014) which follows a similar model. These solutions reinforce the (categorical) schism between the descriptive and the evaluative, either in the working out of principles by liberal-normativist political theory which are then handed over to empirically minded social scientists, who apply them with their social science-toolkit to specific historical contexts, or in the separation between the normatively charged 'ethico-political' philosophizing and the ethically non-evaluative interpretation of political language in order to detect what politics is in a specific context. A third way in which particularly vision of politics realists could be viewed to have responded to this dichotomy is the thoroughgoing endorsement of contextual embeddedness and partisanship as restricting the scope of criticism to questions internal to a specific context (LR). However, thus far, the resources for this kind of criticism have not been spelt out, and, in the case that comes to mind as such a development, Bernard Williams' Critical Theory Principle (Williams 2002: 219-232; IBD), the compatibility of its key assumptions taken from (unmodified) Critical Theory to visions of politics realism is doubtful. For a radicalized realism none of these solutions is acceptable. The first is not, because it reintroduces liberal-normativist political theory as guiding how to do political theory. The second seems to give up on the critical goals of political theory altogether and lacks clarity on the entanglements of the normative and descriptive on the interpretive side its divisions of labor (see Gaus 2012)), whilst allowing for liberal-normativist political theory to continue as before. In the third solution, tensions between realist and liberal-normativist commitments are likely to arise, given the structure of vision of politics realism (further see the discussion of Sleat's and Williams' accounts of legitimacy in chapter 6).

The dichotomy between idealist, critical but impotent, and realistic, action-guiding, but status quo affirming political theorizing is not a useful conceptualization of the tensions and entanglements between the impulses for critique and analysis, as it tries to keep them apart and precludes the study of their relationship. As neither embracing a

tendency to status quo affirmation nor reverting back to a liberal-normativist political theory perspective to gain critical distance would be satisfactory for (the operational perspective of) radical realism, the development of an alternative understanding of critical distance is the necessary next step.

3.2 The Reconceptualization of Critical Distance (with Criticism of Ideology)

The reconceptualization of critical distance needs to spell out one way in which a radical realism could get the tensions and entanglements between the realist ambitions of concrete analysis/action-guidance and critique/evaluation into view, without reverting to status quo affirmation or liberal-normativism. The reconceptualization will try to meet these goals by starting with questioning the understanding of distance in critical distance. In liberal-normativist political theory, distance is commonly gained through abstraction, idealization, and remoteness, as briefly discussed above for the example of the 'uncluttered view' in liberal-normativist political theory. This, at least in the eyes of realist (and other) critics, potentially leads to the problems of practical irrelevance or ideological distortion (e.g. OE: 1-29, Geuss 2011a, PRP; IBD; Mills 2005; Finlayson 2015a, 2015b).[11] The reconceptualization of critical distance stands this model on the head by taking recourse to the understanding of critical distance found in Rahel Jaeggi's (2009) account of criticism of ideology: distance is here gained through diagnostic engagement with the particularities of the respective political context. The diagnostic inquiry is at the same time inextricably linked to forms of examining and questioning critique which are characteristically negative and immanent.

The interpretation of Geussian realism (in chapter 4) already offered an initial orientation for the reconceptualization of critical distance through the refocusing on the

[11] In Rawls' political theory, the perspective of an "uncluttered view" (PL: 20), to be achieved through the device of the 'veil of ignorance', is supposed to help those involved in the thought experiment of the original position to gain critical distance from their place in a specific historical political power structure. The success of such ideal theory devices for gaining critical distance considerably depends on the basis on which they are construed. In Rawls' case, these devices heavily depend on 'our considered judgments'. This answer, however, leads to the problem of what Geuss calls "an unreflective and uncritical relation to 'our' concepts or 'our (moral) intuitions'" (PRP: 59-60), on which our considered judgments are based. As Rawls himself realizes that considered judgments are affected by the status quo of social conditions in a way which is not intelligible to us (Freyenhagen and Schaub 2010: 462, see also Rawls 2001: §16), one could even argue that our considered judgments are "unfit to serve as the neutral starting point for the justification of a political conception of justice" (Freyenhagen and Schaub 2010: 462; my translation). If one further considers that Rawls holds that illusions and ideologies, against which justice as fairness should serve as a protection, are especially likely to become "psychologically necessary" in societies which are not well-ordered (Rawls 2001: §35), the resulting distorted assessments of the current 'non-ideal' state of society are highly likely to shape the design of normative principles for an ideally just society and hence disqualify this "uncluttered view".

entanglement between the diagnosis and the critical evaluation of a political context (with particular focus on phenomena of ideology, illusions, and wishful thinking). An elaboration of Geussian realism, which could serve as a core feature of the operational perspective of radical realism, would need to clarify how an understanding of critical distance (and the normativity of criticism) could be conceived which does not take diagnosis and critique to be two perspectives which are potentially incompatible, but gains its particular normative purchase from their fusion. A close link between diagnosis and critique is already present in the understanding of critical distance of criticism of ideology. Jaeggi (2009), I submit, offers an account of criticism of ideology which is apt to serve as an inspiration for the envisioned reconceptualization of critical distance. Her account connects to Geussian realism, as it is not only influenced by Geuss' understanding of ideology (see Jaeggi 2009; Geuss 1981: 4-44), but can also be viewed to share the goal to offer a non-objectivist (Celikates 2006) and practically oriented understanding of criticism of ideology with Geuss. This understanding is usable beyond an orthodox Marxist understanding of ideology as false consciousness and is specifically concerned with combining (potentially radical) criticism and concrete practical guidance without taking recourse to normativism.[12] So how does this understanding of critical distance of criticism of ideology transform the tensions of the realist dichotomy between excessively remote critique and contextual but status quo affirming guidance?

First, criticism of ideology 'necessarily' combines diagnostic analysis and critique. It straddles normative and non-normative forms of theorizing. This means that "criticism of ideology as analysis means to be critique, and not just a description of the status quo, and as critique to be analysis, and not just a set of norms with which the status quo is confronted" (Jaeggi 2009: 280; my translation). Analysis is "not only the precondition of critique, but itself part of the critical process" (Jaeggi 2009: 270; my translation). This opens up the possibility of the focus on the entangled relationship between diagnostic analysis and criticism. The necessary combination of analysis and critique is indicative of how criticism of ideology can overcome the tension which characterizes the realist relationship to the political context: Whereas the component of diagnostic analysis covers the contextually-immersed ambitions to relevance, and critique covers the

[12] I assume that the 'forms of consciousness' at issue most likely go beyond what is usually understood as 'consciousness', but rather, as Jaeggi suggests (2009: 275; my translation), "a complex web of norms, ideals, and practices, which influence each other".

ambitions of realists for evaluation, only taking them together can redeem the practical ambition to guide future-oriented action.

Second, criticism of ideology is normative but not normativist. For criticism of ideology thus understood to get started, an analysis of the relevant aspects of the political context in question has to be carried out in the way which realists have stressed on the one side of the tension: concentrate on, to mention only a few central concerns, real political institutions, motivations of agents, and structural power relations. The normative element of criticism of ideology is already present therein through taking issue with the inner normativity of the context in question. The normative element does not need to be externally introduced, hence it is not a normativist understanding of criticism (see Jaeggi 2009: 283-284). Criticism of ideology mostly relies on immanent critique (Jaeggi 2009: 286-288). This stands in stark contrast to the (understanding of critical distance of) prevalent forms of liberal-normativist political theory which are not only normativist in as far as they base the normativity of criticism on externally derived norms but also normativistically limit options for action and constrain the imagination (as has been argued by Williams (IBD: chapter 1) and Geuss (PI) respectively).[13]

Third, criticism of ideology combines the goal of epistemic clarification with the goal of political transformation and hence (especially if successful) is a kind of practical philosophy. The status of ideologies (in the pejorative sense, see Geuss 1981: 12-22) is peculiar in as far as they are at the same time true and false, that is they are at the same time "adequate and inadequate, appropriate and inappropriate toward 'reality'" (Jaeggi 275-277; my translation), because they are not simply a cognitive error, but an error which is caused by the phenomena of this 'reality'. The point is that the critic of ideology has to criticize the *perception* of a political or social reality and at the same time this reality, too (Jaeggi 2009: 276). Criticism of ideology is hence engaged in addressing ideologies which are always at the same time a normative, a practical and an epistemic problem.

These three aspects show how the normative and the non-normative elements of criticism of ideology are combined and how this combination potentially satisfies both

[13] Even if this does not hold to the same degree for realism, particularly not for the more critical of the prevalent understandings of realism, remnants of normativism are still present – as argued in chapters 2 and 3 and underscored with regard to critical distance by the dichotomy discussed above – and so these views also mark a departure from realism.

sides of the tension outlined in the discussion of the dichotomy above: The realists' ambitions for criticism and for diagnostic analysis and action-guidance can be combined and their tension and entanglement can become the subject of self-reflection. The specificity of the way criticism of ideology approaches itself and its context – in contradistinction to the empirical social sciences and normativist political theory – through its emphasis on self-reflection, as being an effect of social processes and as intervening in both the perception of practices and in these practices themselves, provides a basis for the operational perspective of radical realism. This perspective also informs radical realism's understanding of the relationship to its political context.[14]

Neither occupying a subjectivist perspective on the validity of criticism, as represented e.g. by ethnomethodology or Bruno Latour's idea of 'critical proximity' (Latour 2013), nor an objectivist perspective, as represented by e.g. Bourdieu's critical social theory (see Celikates 2009 for a discussion of this problem against the background of critical social theory), the critic of ideology, according to the understanding of criticism of ideology presented above, cannot take recourse to an external standard of truth, but has to reconstruct the perspective from within the context at issue. This process is part of societal self-understanding, which also connects to Geuss' idea of political theory as 'a kind of experimental science (of concepts)'. For the understanding of critical distance this means that it matters how the subjects to ideology view the situation, in order to avoid an objectivist model of "break" (Celikates 2009: 39-98). Their views, even if they turn out to be false, are in part constitutive for the understanding of the situation. The political theorist hence has to try to use a contextualist immanent perspective without thereby losing the critical purchase (Geuss 2013b: 89-90): for the understanding of criticism of ideology presented above, this is possible as it starts from views within a specific historical context, however, with the intention to transform both the views and the reality. In contrast to internal understandings of criticism, the diagnostic-critical process also affects the norms, the appeal to which might have initiated the process, in as far as they are not restored but rather transformed (Jaeggi 2014: 277-309).[15] The

[14] This is relevant for its evaluation of itself and other understandings of political theory, especially if radical realism entails a critique of the 'modes of production' of (philosophical) meaning which are common in current political theory (and in current politics in the respective context) whilst at the same time trying to address the 'mode of production' which it is using itself (see FDD).

[15] This is a specificity of immanent critique (at its limit): "In contrast to internal critique, immanent critique is not only directed against the contradiction between norm and reality (the lack of the realization

understanding of criticism of ideology which I have employed thus leads to a consideration for political theory as a kind of practical philosophy through instilling what Jaeggi (2009: 277) calls a "process of transformation of social reality and its perception". This is congenial to the goal of radical realism that philosophical criticisms not be easily separable and best not be separated from political criticisms.

In short, the lens of criticism of ideology, especially the focus on the entanglement between analysis and critique, can lay claim to getting the relation of (social and political) reality and its norms so into view that both the reality and the norms could be potentially transformed in the process which could be viewed to fuse diagnosis and critique. Thus it can become a hallmark of a self-reflexive, contextually sensitive, yet critical approach with practical ambitions – and this is what the operational perspective of radical realism needs. This leads to the following key orientations for the conception of critical distance of radical realism: Political theory should then at the same time be diagnosis and critique in its attempt to comprehensively grasp the criteria, valuations and processes of change within this context and remain self-reflexive about its position within this context. Now the task is to further substantiate the accounts of the main components of the operational perspective for radical realism, diagnosis and critique (in as far they can be separated).

3.3 The Diagnosis Component of Diagnosis-Critique

Building on the understanding of diagnosis developed in chapter 4 and in the preceding sections of the present chapter, I will focus my attention here on how it could be translated into a set of orientations for the diagnosis component of diagnosis-critique. Jaeggi's (2014: 240-250) understanding of how diagnosis and criticism intersect in working on second-order problems could serve as a helpful starting point.[16] Analogous to the ambition of Jaeggi's problem-solving critique, the diagnosis component of diagnosis-critique aims to muster as complete a view of the respective context in question as possible. This means that diagnosis does not just mean reading off how things are (in an empiricist manner) but rather to respond to existing (problem) constellations, as well as to work on their further development at the same time. The

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of norms in reality), but it is rather directed against the internal contradiction of reality and of the norms which constitute reality." (Jaeggi 2014: 291; my translation)

[16] Second-order problems are problems which are reactions to prior problems, and, here in particular, problems of how human societies deal with (natural, social etc.) problems (see Jaeggi 2014: 241-247).

focus of diagnosis on problems strengthens the linkage between diagnosis and critique, given the negativistic understanding of criticism of radical realism. An important question for diagnosis then is to address what is viewed as problematic (or contradictory) and what the criteria are for capturing the problem in appropriate comprehensiveness and sophistication. These criteria cannot be determined universally, as one needs to take the history of the matter in question into consideration as well as the values, goals and available means involved, both in the object and in the subject of the theorist. Irrespective of how these criteria are determined the diagnosis of the political context must be reflexive and bring itself into view as part of the object through interrogating its conditions (as a kind of metacritique). In terms of the choice of focal areas of diagnosis, there will be a tension between diagnosis which is directly responsive to existing concepts, institutions and practices, and the kind of diagnosis carried out to enable dissociation, to make certain patterns of thought and practices visible, understandable and tangible as exercising power. The latter may require the coining of new concepts for these purposes (for a similar thought see Sluga 2011: 830). The choice, which one of the two to emphasize, will not be one of 'mere preference', but rather will be strongly influenced by the conditions of the diagnosis.

One consequence of this understanding of diagnosis is that in political theory diagnosis should not be reductionist, be it through an abstracting focus on a few key concepts or be it exclusively based on (quantitative) empirical social science data. Rather it pushes diagnosis in political theory toward an, at the same time, broader and deeper, reflective and interpretive engagement with the context in question. An example from current debates concerns the focus usually placed by proponents of political liberalism on the 'fact of reasonable pluralism' in modern liberal democracies. The 'fact' is of crucial importance for the construction of the principles which guide the normative recommendations of the respective variations of political liberalism. The diagnosis of this 'fact' as indeed such, and its centrality for how to think about how to minimize coercion by the state and legitimize the necessary residual coercion as well as possible, is often vindicated through a schematic account of the historical development of religious forms of pluralism in 17th century Europe (see e.g. Rawls 2000: 5-10). The point here is not to go into the details of the accounts given in each case, but rather to point to the problematic symmetry between the supposedly diagnostic aspects and the abstract theory-building of political liberalism: The main problem is that the decision for

the appropriateness of an 'uncluttered view' perspective (of critical distance) to address reasonable modern pluralism relies on a kind of diagnosis which is similarly 'uncluttered', which here (and often) means reductionist (but see Müller 2006). Of course some measure of selectivity and abstraction is inevitable. However, this needs to be subject to self-reflection and be explicated. As Wolin (1996) argued with regard to *Political Liberalism*'s focus on doctrinal pluralism rather than on other sources of disagreement, some omissions are so striking that one cannot help wondering whether they are purposeful so that the whole edifice does not collapse.

Diagnosis carried out in order to achieve critical distance in radical realism would take a different form. With regard to the present example, it would try to inquire why certain foci, e.g. on reasonable pluralism *of doctrines* are set in political theory. It would look at the political liberals' attempt to vindicate reasonable pluralism as a diagnosis of modern liberal democracies as revealing something about the way their political liberalisms are constructed, both their functioning and their norms. Engaging these foci, always also through their history, would lead to an expansion of the purview of political theoretical diagnosis from abstract concepts to the interaction of theoretical accounts of concept with everyday practices as mediated through relations of power. One interesting way to get these into view is to try to evaluate how societies deal with political problems, by which I specifically mean problems, no matter how they are originally caused, which could be viewed to require a political solution. Dealing with these problems involves not only devising solutions and specifying changes required to meet these solutions, but first of all a sufficiently comprehensive account of what the problem is (see e.g. Jaeggi 2014: 337-340).[17]

As far as the specifically diagnostic aspects of critical distance are separable from the critical ones – diagnosis and the questioning and interrogating form of critique to which I will turn now depend on each other – the diagnostic aspects which are most important for the reconceptualization of critical distance are the expansion of the range of political theory diagnosis, the self-reflexive stance of this diagnosis and the recognition of the

[17] So there cannot be 'perennial problems' of diagnosis on this view (see Geuss in Skinner et al. 2002: 1).

inextricable relationship of diagnosis to the goals, means and historical development of the object of theorizing and the theorist in question.[18]

3.4 The Critique Component of Diagnosis-Critique

Taking inspiration from the understanding of critique as presented thus far in the discussion of Geussian realism and from the key commitments of radical realism, I will now draw on accounts of (the normativity of) critique in political theory, which arguably have a very close relationship to diagnosis at their center, in order to develop the critique component of diagnosis-critique further. Jaeggi (2014), Flügel-Martinsen (2010) and Sluga (2011) present understandings of critique, which are practically oriented and do not depend on the prior development of normativist standards for critique, but rather build on a stance of interrogation and questioning that depends on contextual diagnosis. For all of them, the understanding of the normativity of criticism currently dominant in political theory is problematic. For Jaeggi this "normativist" understanding leads to ethical abstemiousness, which means that a sphere above the fray of ethical particularities, a sphere of universal moral reason or, in the case of the later Rawls, the overlapping components of reasonable conceptions of justice, has to be delineated. The critical scope of criticism is then limited to this sphere. More contextual, particular-ethical questions, or, in different terminology, questions of the good, not the right life, fall by the wayside of such accounts of normativity (Jaeggi 2014: 30-51). This move, however, limits the depth of the engagement with the context in question, which may undermine the capacities for contextual, practical action-guidance. Sluga (2011: 823-4) describes such normativism as unhelpfully reducing moral-political questions to questions about decisions (between alternatives which only appear to be clear at the price of idealization or reductionism) to be made according to universal rules. Flügel-Martinsen (2010: 143-144; 2012: 112) worries about the pressure of constructiveness usually attached to normativist political criticism and holds – following Adorno (e.g. 1977b: 792-793) – that criticism which bows to these pressures is already undermined in its challenge to the status quo.

In reaction to these problems with normativist approaches, the conception of critique for diagnosis-critique builds on the understanding of critique not as an exercise in the

[18] Recently Hans Sluga (2014) has offered a fuller account of what he calls a diagnostic tradition in political thought. Whilst the monograph appeared too late to be taken into account in this thesis, it incorporates Sluga's previous work (2011), on which the recent book expands.

abstract grounding of principles, but rather based on interrogation or questioning. This makes critical distance not only compatible with both an emphasis on the study of the phenomena of a political context, but, rather, similar to what was presented above as a characteristic of criticism of ideology, makes a questioning and interrogating critique dependent on diagnosis. What is at issue here are forms of critique which are non-normativist (rather than non-normative) in the sense of not bringing in external, transcendental normative criteria (such as a noumenal self in harmony with the categorical imperative). This implies that a form of critique which challenges through interrogation and questioning does not need to commit itself to a normativist conception of normativity to get started. How does such a questioning and interrogating critique operate as part of diagnosis-critique?

The questioning and interrogating critique in question here oscillates between immanent and negativistic forms of critique on the one hand and dissociating forms of critique on the other.[19] Immanent and negativistic forms of critique are important as questioning and interrogating critique starts from within an already ongoing process specific to a historical political context. It intervenes into this process through the diagnosis of problems and their further problematization and then tries to build conceptual resources for evaluating and overcoming these problems. Dissociating forms of critique proceed from a similar starting position and share a negativistic perspective. However, here the diagnosis is used to contribute to the goal of dissociating oneself as much as possible from one's context without abstracting from the contingencies that characterize this context. Importantly, the latter understanding of critique also does not draw on some kind of developmental model – of rationality or of problem-solving capacities – which is common to forms of immanent critique. For this form of critique the suspension of judgment is already an achievement, the further consequences of which cannot be determined by the critique itself (see also Foucault 1984: 68).

For the immanent variant of this understanding of critique it is contradictions within certain practices rather than contradictions or inconsistencies between the practices and their norms which are most relevant (Jaeggi 2014: 287, 291). This means that one does not need to have at least unproblematic norms in place for this immanent critique to

[19] I view this as an expansion of my development of Geuss' modifications of early Critical Theory. If one wants to use labels one could see the former as a Hegelian-Frankfurt School line and the latter a Nietzschean-Foucauldian line. A connection of these lines consists in their emphasis on the importance of diagnosis for political thought (Sluga 2011: 830).

work. This is relevant for the critique of normativist liberal political theory's relationship to its political context. One could for example criticize the liberal-normativist political theory through arguing that the envisioned result of critical purchase on the status quo through abstraction- (and idealization-) based critical distance is potentially inverted because it relies on a division of labor between achieving critical distance through abstraction to work out principles which are then to be applied, e.g. by social sciences. Despite the postulated critical distance and critical purchase on the status quo and the capacity to guide action, conformism and a lack of practical orientation are produced (as argued by Geuss for the case of Rawls in OE: 29-39). This potentially has wide-ranging consequences for actual politics, including the virtual impossibility to guide the limitation of inequality in a well-ordered society or the orientation of social justice toward what the wealthy can bear (Read 2011). Finally, in contrast to versions of internal criticism looking to reconnect a society to its (restored) values, this understanding of immanent critique is negativistic in as far as it does not confront reality with a prefabricated ideal (for the Marxian roots of this idea see Celikates 2012: 115), but needs to develop future orientations from its critical practice.

For its practice diagnosis-critique will likely combine its distinctive features with the base existing tools which are already mostly in line with the commitments of radical realism. The combination of the modified Geussian notions of criticism of ideology and genealogy with conceptual analysis is an important starting base for diagnosis-critique. In this sense, radical realism and, particularly, diagnosis-critique should be viewed as a sympathetic development of Geuss' perspective through bringing together the critical impulses to reflection and intervention. Radical realism can further draw on works (of amongst others, Foucault and Adorno) which display an interest in developing practically, contextually oriented criteria for evaluating the historical continuity and change of political concepts, norms, and practices. This includes investigating the history of dealing with what is perceived, possibly as the outcome of the diagnostic-critical inquiry, as political and social negativity. These evaluations, which are underwritten by a focus on particular forms of conduct of oneself and others in response to existing power relations, can be focused on e.g. the capacities of agents to problematize and to react to these power relations, or on the reflection on experience which leads to their conceptualization as a problem to be understood and addressed through a kind of learning process (see also Sluga 2011: 829-831).

This set of ideas – one may interject – stems from a broadly Hegelian line of thought which is rooted in the idea of a positive dialectic. However, all of the thinkers considered for radical realism more or less explicitly reject such a view (which is problematic for them for a host of reasons, including the underlying philosophy of history, the claim to totality of view, or universality of scope).[20] Rather they emphasize the local, experimental, reversible, and ambiguous (or even tragic) character of such developmental processes and their evaluation. This kind of evaluation of forms of conduct of oneself and others, with the goals of expanding spaces for ethical development, of asking more complex questions, and of achieving more comprehensive problematizations, informs the subversive, negative practice of diagnosis-critique of radical realism (for further discussion see the final section of chapter 6).[21]

Having outlined the key commitments of radical realism and the contours of the operational perspective of radical realism, diagnosis-critique, I will now briefly summarize how radical realism poses a radical challenge to liberal-normativist political theory.

4 Radical Realism's Challenge to Liberal-Normativist Political Theory

Radical realism can be understood as a radical challenge to liberal-normativist political theory in several ways. Radical realism's preferred understanding of criticism is negativistic, depends on diagnosis and comes either in an immanent or a dissociating variant. It starts from within a political context, but rather than trying to reconstruct or reinstate the goals or values which are already to be found therein (however currently defunct they may be) it aims for their transformation on the basis of a problematization of particular aspects of the context. The understanding of the relationship between diagnosis and critique as entangled enables diagnosis-critique to forego the grounding of

[20] In detail, for Adorno, see his *Negative Dialectics* (Adorno 1970); for Jaeggi, see her *Kritik von Lebensformen* (2014: chapters 9 and 10); for Geuss, see WWW, PI; for Foucault, consider the following statement: "Dialectical logic puts to work contradictory terms within the homogeneous. I suggest replacing this dialectical logic with what I would call a strategic logic. A logic of strategy does not stress contradictory terms within a homogeneity that promises their resolution in a unity. The function of strategic logic is to establish the possible connections between disparate terms which remain disparate. The logic of strategy is the logic of connections between the heterogeneous and not the logic of the homogenization of the contradictory." (Foucault 2008a: 42) This statement also strengthens the link between Foucault and Geuss who holds that political theory should "attempt to see connections between apparently different things" (Geuss' views reported in Skinner et al. 2002: 1).

[21] I view this as compatible with Geuss' (PI, WWW) and Foucault's (see Lemke 2011; Nehamas 2000; Foucault 2008a, 2008b) critique of rule-governed and codified morality and their pleas for a more practical, experimental ethics.

a conception of normativity prior to getting the diagnosis started. Radical realism rather takes its starting point from the 'inner normativity' of the present. In its focus on this kind of normativity, radical realism undermines the distinction between description and evaluation. Together these aspects mark a radical break with the understanding of normativity (especially of criticism) of liberal-normativist political theory. This leads to a multifaceted change of the relationship between political theory and its political context. The commitment of radical realism to self-reflection on its conditions of possibility opens up questions about the relationship between the goals and the means of political theory as well as about the scope of political theory, and leads to continuous reflection also on the question of the senses in which political theory is political.

The perspective of radical realism has the potential to combine (potentially radical) critique with practical action-guidance (and thus to meet the unfulfilled ambitions of many realists). Its understanding of diagnosis-critique means that it is not only possible but congenial to combine radical criticism with starting with a contextually and practically orientated diagnosis of the context into which political theory hopes to intervene. The questioning and interrogating perspective of radical realism which follows the impetus to criticize through engaging with particular problems, such as power relations, of the respective political context, guides action at least in as far as it suggests resistance and potentially produces novel points of view or problem-constellations. The diagnoses and evaluations of diagnosis-critique are practically helpful for agents to orient themselves in a particular context through inspiring reflection which ranges from suspension of judgment via re-problematizations to transformations of the evaluations of one's context. These forms of political thinking are a form of action as they potentially change the perception of the context of the agent, which is in itself a radical challenge to liberal-normativist political theory (FDD: 18-19).

The radical challenge is furthered by the at least partial rejection of the conceptual toolkit of liberal-normativist political theory. The concept of power is especially salient for the concerns of how radical realism questions the framework of thinking about political relationships. Against the view of power as bad or evil, radical realism tries to detoxify power and to open up a more differentiated study of power relations, based on the admissions that those (positively and negatively) sanctioned relationships of consensus and of violence are still related to the exercise of (techniques and strategies of) power and hence are in need of scrutiny. However, radical realism is unwilling to

give up its normative and critical purpose (and hence stands somewhat orthogonally to the binary division between sociological and normative theories of politics) and works toward offering an orientation which may involve a subversion of the status quo and a process of (local) transformation.

5 Conclusion

Radical realism needed to meet two major expectations. To show how it can overcome the limitations and tensions typical of realism and to show concretely how it poses a radical challenge of liberal-normativist political theory, including supplying the tools for reflecting on the differences between radical realism and liberal-normativist outlooks. For this purpose I elaborated on the self-understanding of radical realism as a political theory driven by an ethos of critique, operating with a negativistic and subversive outlook, which starts from the inner normativity of historical reality. This is based on my interpretation of Geussian realism presented in chapter 4, of which particularly the Foucauldian elements are further explicated. The development of diagnosis-critique as the operational perspective of radical realism united these commitments in the reconceptualization of critical distance.

Radical realism departs radically from the prevalent understandings of liberal-normativist political theory and overcomes the limitations of realism through changing the relationship between political theory and its political context. Radical realism depends on and opens political theory for a much stronger component of self-reflection about its partisanship and potential interventions into politics, the ways in which political theory is political, and about the relationship between the conditions, means and goals of theorizing. Diagnosis-critique, as the operational perspective of radical realism for which critique and diagnostic understanding are dependent on each other, leads to a contextually developed non-normativist form of evaluation. Diagnosis-critique can lay claim to addressing and overcoming the limitations and tensions which have become a characteristic of the prevalent subdivisions of realism in political theory, as diagnosis-critique is both potentially radically critical through critique as interrogation and questioning, contextually sensitive through intensive diagnoses *and* practically action-guiding. Taken together, these aspects testify to the radicalism of radical realism. (In this sense, diagnosis-critique can be also viewed as a bringing together the critical impulses

to reflection and intervention behind Geussian realism.) At last, in terms of the three levels of distinctiveness – the method level, the theoretical program level and the overarching philosophy level (introduced in the chapter 2) – radical realism leads to a rethinking of political theory on all three levels. However, because of its eschewal of demands of systematicity typical of liberal-normativist political theory, a grounding of an overarching philosophy will not be available to a radical realism and hence the substantive development will mostly be limited to the second level of theoretical program which is, however, conceived as not depending on an overarching philosophy.

Radical realism is still primarily a theoretically and philosophically guided perspective, not political advocacy, as it has normative evaluations to offer with regard to specific contexts, even if here and now they are mostly negative. Most importantly, it enables rethinking normative orientation through the suspension of the prevalent systems of thought or of normative frameworks for evaluation. This may count as worthy of a perspective of political theory across many of the discipline's divides.

The next and final chapter will tie together the main argumentative threads of the thesis and will illustrate the difference radical realism can make to the practice of political theorizing through a discussion of the criteria for legitimacy from political liberalism to radical realism.

Chapter 6: The Question of Legitimacy. Criteria for the Evaluation of Political Rule from Political Liberalism to Radical Realism

1 Introduction

The goal of this chapter is to tie together the main argumentative threads of this thesis in order to further flesh out radical realism. Here I will focus on the answers of realism and radical realism to the question of the criteria for legitimacy against the background of the currently highly popular answers from public justification liberalism. Apart from engaging a focal topic of the debates about realism, the discussion of legitimacy is also useful for developing how radical realism understands and operates with regard to 'relations of power'.

The discussion will start with a brief interpretation of aspects of the later Rawlsian account of public justification and a condensed account of the realist criticism thereof (**2**). This is followed by an analysis of how the theories of legitimacy developed by vision of politics realists depart from public justification liberalism. The focus of the discussion will be on the problems with the realist goal of upholding the difference between legitimate and illegitimate regimes, without taking recourse to a justification based on moral criteria. For this purpose I examine the accounts of Matt Sleat and Bernard Williams. This leads to a brief interpretation of the limits of the understanding of legitimacy in realist accounts which points to the need for its transformation (**3**). This will be pursued in the final section of this chapter.

Radical realism offers a transformation of public justification discourse focused on understanding, interpreting and evaluating relations of power in a specific political context. Radical realism's perspective on legitimacy means challenging the prevalent conceptualization of legitimacy and exploring the evaluative potential of diagnosis-critique. I will elaborate on the reconceptualized understanding of critical distance, which is characterized by the combination of two ways to engage with the political context which are usually kept distinct in contemporary political theory. These are critique – questioning and interrogating, negative critique of an immanent or dissociating variation – and contextual diagnosis (**4**).

2 Realism's Relationship to Public Justification Liberalism

2.1 Political Liberalism and Public Justification Discourse

When considering what difference radical realism makes for (finding criteria for) the assessment of the legitimacy of regimes, which in the debates about realism means assessing the 'right' by which regimes employ coercive political power (Horton 2012; BMR; Rossi 2012), a look at the framework in which realists have discussed the question of legitimacy is necessary. Realists focus on legitimacy because they take it to be a political source of normativity – and hence a basis for thinking politically about politics. Realist discussions about the legitimacy of liberal democracies cannot help engage with the currently most popular forms of justification in liberal political theory, as expressed through the projects of public justification or public reason. These projects are associated with political liberalism, which may be viewed as the most politically oriented current version of liberal-normativist political theory. Against this background the discussion will focus on the criticisms which realists have voiced against public justification liberalism. Given that public justification liberalism is highly differentiated, I cannot possibly cover the criticisms of all different strands of this discourse. In view of the popularity and the internal complexity of Rawls' *Political Liberalism* with regard to his commitment to a combination of what have become known as consensus and convergence views of public justification (Vallier 2011, more on which below), I will limit myself mainly to Rawls' and post-Rawlsian accounts of public justification. (This has the further advantage of being able to draw on the background of the political reading of *Political Liberalism* in chapter 1.)

Recall that for Rawls "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). The procedure to achieve such a constitution is one of public justification. For Rawls the scope of his envisioned device, the overlapping consensus, is limited to the specific context of liberal democracies and to a constituency of 'reasonable' persons. Here I would like to spell out the underlying principles of public justification to which the principle of liberal legitimacy commits Rawls. Following Kevin Vallier (2011: 261-263), I see two principles of justification underlying his principle of liberal legitimacy: The first could be described as the "liberty

principle", which means that (mostly negative) liberty is viewed as the desirable norm and hence any coercion requires justification; the second is the "public justification principle" which means that "[a] coercive action C is justified if and only if each and every member of the public P has (a) conclusive reason(s) R to endorse C" (Vallier 2011: 262).[1] These two principles are basic commitments of public justification liberalism. They are taken as the standard against which the departure of the realists from public justification liberalism will be tested.

The question to which I will now briefly turn is Rawls' understanding of the acceptance conditions for public justification on which meeting the principle of liberal legitimacy depends. This is in some sense exemplary of the tensions of this discourse between stressing the need for a justification based on (moral) reasons which may require the strong idealization of the agents involved, which also entails stressing the importance of (hypothetical) consent by those agents, *and* aiming for the stability of a concrete context by addressing actual agents in this context.

On the strong idealization end of the spectrum of acceptance conditions for public justification one can find the 'consensus view', which not only requires that citizens engaged in public justification have a shared evaluative framework for the claims to authority, e.g. a constitution with a political conception of justice at its heart, offered by the state, but also have actual shared reasons to endorse them. On the contrary, on the 'convergence view' a shared conception of justice may be affirmed from within the respective different 'comprehensive doctrines' (as discussed in chapter 1). Here the reasons for endorsing the shared conception of justice may not be accessible to other reasonable persons who, however, also endorse this conception of justice for their own reasons. In the extreme case there is neither a shared framework for assessing reasons nor are there actually shared reasons, yet still a shared conception of justice on this view. Against this background one could argue that Rawls operates with two different requirements for the criteria for a view to count as publicly justified (see also Sleat 2013b). The first concerns the justification of what Rawls views as a family of political conceptions of justice which seems to require a type of justification closer to the consensus view, as here the reasons for endorsing a political conception of justice need to be accessible to all involved. Here he seems committed to the view that whilst there

[1] I take the term 'conclusive reasons' here to refer to reasons that are not overridden in the case in question, however, could be in other cases.

are unshared reasons, there is (and needs to be) a shared evaluative framework (PL: 12-13, 175-176, 190-195) which distinguishes political from comprehensive conceptions of justice. The second, concerning the creation of an overlapping consensus in a society divided by reasonable pluralism, seems to require 'only' a convergence type justification, as here reasons for endorsing the overlapping consensus do not have to be accessible to all involved: there are neither shared reasons, nor is the framework for assessing reasons shared (PL: 144-172). Rather, it is sufficient, if these reasons are intelligible to all others as reasons for those who actually have them (further see D'Agostino 1996 for the distinction between intelligible, accessible and shareable reasons in public justification). The tension between these two understandings of the acceptance conditions for public justification expresses the tension between the moral-philosophical and practical-political justificatory goals of political liberalism. This tension and the demandingness of the acceptance conditions is among the targets of the criticism of realists in political theory.

2.2 The Realists' Relationship to Post-Rawlsian Public Justification Liberalism

How do realists stand to the project of public justification liberalism and how do they understand the notion of legitimacy involved in this project? Given the emphasis which realists place on deep disagreement, they are by default opposed to those understandings of public justification which tend towards the consensus end of the spectrum of acceptance conditions (see the criticisms of the 'consensus view of politics' in e.g. Stears 2007; Sleat 2010, LR). These would hence not make for the most appropriate object of criticism. Rather, with Rawls' *Political Liberalism*, I will focus on those understandings of public justification which tend more towards the convergence end of the spectrum. However, this does not mean that there are not features that are shared across the board by public justification liberals – often because they are independent of this division, or, as in Rawls' case, through the combination of consensus and convergence elements – which are subject to realist criticism. These prominently include the various forms and degrees of idealization of the addressees of public justification. Rawls' account of public justification further offers a useful canvas for assessing the relationship of realists to public justification liberalism, both with regard to their similarities and differences, as it is committed to taking pluralism and disagreement seriously, but cannot give up on the requirement of elements of (moral) reason-based

justification (see Freyenhagen 2011). Justification is tied to legitimation (see Scanlon 2002) and hypothetical consent is viewed as an important source of authority (which suggests viewing Rawls' *Political Liberalism* as part of a tradition of hypothetical consent-based social contract theory).

The realist criticisms mainly address two areas: first, the presuppositions and the structure of public justification liberalism, such as excessive idealization, moralization, and circularity and, second, the practical relevance and standing in politics, such as arbitrarily limited constituency, the tension between moral and pragmatic goals, and the reliance on pure proceduralism (for a realist criticism of proceduralism see Newey 2012). Rather than discussing these objections abstractly, I will focus on how realists criticize the commitments which underlie Rawls' principle of liberal legitimacy, the liberty principle and the public justification principle. Most of the prevalent subdivisions of realism – the discussion will focus on the vision of politics realists for the most part, especially those principally inspired by Williams – could be viewed to endorse the liberty principle, however, only with a number of qualifications: Whilst for political liberals like Charles Larmore (2013) wielding coercive power without legitimation is "antecedently morally wrong" (BMR: 321), for realists "the demand for legitimation arises simply because power is not self-justifying, meaning that there is a crucial difference between political rule and successful domination" (BMR: 322). Vision of politics realists also do not conceptualize the situation in which a public justification is owed as one in which those over whom coercive power is being exercised have a (moral) 'right to justification' (unlike Forst (2011) who, even if not commonly discussed as a realist, tries to combine realist concerns with a liberal-normativist outlook). Rather, they acknowledge that (usually) the state decides through its claim to authority with whom it wants to enter into a political relationship (contra Schaub 2012a: 19-20 who argues that for Williams the 'right to justification' is central). The addressees then need to respond positively that this political relationship 'makes sense' to them for the claim to authority to be legitimated. For realists, the question of whether unjustified coercion is *morally per se* wrong is not the most relevant one to ask, however, coercion without legitimation is always wrong if the goal is to establish a political relationship with those over whom authority is claimed (so that one can enjoy the benefits of having politics, see Hall 2013a: 5-6).

Williams and Williamsian realists further separate the scope and purpose of legitimacy from the 'pre-political' values which underlie the conditions of legitimacy and which a legitimate regime is supposed to instantiate. Moral and political justifications, typically united in liberal-normativist political theory, seem to come apart in as far as realists argue that for political liberals there are moral standards extrinsic to politics which are supposed to justify political authority, whereas realists aim to generate standards (moral or otherwise) from within politics.[2] The justification which a state owes to those over whom it claims authority, that they in Williams' terms (IBD: 6) not "fight back" against its exercise of coercive power, is not limited to moral reasons and hence stability may be achieved for the 'wrong reasons' from the perspective of Rawls' *Political Liberalism* (see Freyenhagen 2011). This also marks a sign of departure from the pure proceduralism of Rawls' public justification discourse, as substantive considerations are admitted as acceptable reasons, e.g. in Williams' case the respecting of basic human rights (IBD: chapter 6). Even if the required standards for legitimacy in contemporary liberal societies might end up being very similar to a pure proceduralist account (see Rossi 2013), what matters here is the realist route to getting there which takes the specific contextual demands into account for the assessment of legitimacy rather than moral criteria external to politics.

With regard to the public justification principle realists are worried about several elements of this principle: They highlight that the condition that all persons need to (hypothetically) accept reasons is usually only met by public justification liberals through highly idealizing the agents in question, e.g. through narrowing the relevant public to those who are reasonable or through assuming the reasonableness of all involved. This leads to the problem that the theory might be so remote from the actual audience that its normative recommendations are not practically guiding. Against this

[2] Realist discussions of legitimacy usually concern the question of the justification of the wielding of coercive power by the state rather than the question of the justification of the state *per se*. However, most realists, notably Williams (IBD) – like post-Rawlsian political liberals – tie the question of the legitimation of the wielding of coercive political power by the state to the justification of the authority of this state (for a discussion of the difference between these approaches see Ripstein 2004). Some realists (Horton 2012: 138) hold that justification of a state and the legitimacy of a specific political community can still be viewed as separate questions (for a now classic discussion of the separation of these questions see Simmons 1999). The important distinction to draw here is that for Rawls arguably legitimation is entailed by justification (unless one holds a particularly voluntarist reading of Rawls (see Rossi 2014a)), whereas for realists legitimation entails justification. For political liberals moral justification is the maximal goal which, if achieved, includes legitimation. For realists legitimation takes precedence, which means that if a state is legitimate then it is also justified, however, not necessarily from a moral point of view.

background vision of politics realists reject the condition of hypothetical consent. Realists further highlight that, due to deep disagreement, the reasons of others may not even be intelligible as carrying normative force. This is directed against the convergence view of acceptance conditions. From a realist point of view one may suspect that even on this view a strong idealization is involved in the idea of the intelligibility of reasons (see above). The justificatory appeal of the convergence view of public justification could be viewed, as argued above for Rawls' case, to depend on being supplemented by an account which admits the stronger view that people have a shared evaluative framework available for judging which of the views that are in deep disagreement count as reasonable enough to qualify as part of a political conception of justice.

The more specific criticisms which vision of politics realists make of public justification in political liberalism follow from the worries outlined with regard to these two principles which underlie the public justification discourse of political liberals. Realists push further a number of issues that have already been discussed in internal debates of public justification liberalism such as the question of idealization, the scope of the public, the depth of disagreement, the usurpation of politics by political theory through trying to offer not only a better understanding of legitimacy but reasons for deciding on the legitimacy of a particular claimant to authority (Horton 2012: 145), the anti-democratic bias, the tension between moral and democratic requirements and the problem of the lack of determinate action-guidance (for a recent overview see Quong 2011: 259-289). I will limit myself here to briefly setting up the problem of idealization in Rawls' political liberalism with regard to the question of legitimation, as it is important for the realists' departure from public justification liberalism in their theory-building.

With regard to the level of idealization, nearly all realists are interested in achieving what Galston (2010: 398-399) has called "motivational realism" so that the normative recommendations of political theory have a sufficient fit with what is motivationally possible for agents. They are looking for what actually moves agents politically and hence their goal is to take as much as possible from a specific historical context into account for the evaluation of a public justification rationale (which then leads to the question of who gets to count as the relevant public). Whilst public justification liberals try to mitigate, if not solve, the problem of radical idealization (of agents as perfectly rational or morally capable) through the concept of reasonableness, this creates further

problems. The introduction of reasonableness may make radical idealization with regard to the rationality of agents dispensable. However, this comes at the price of controversial moral idealizations.[3] The moral idealization involved here refers to charging the concept of reasonableness with central moral commitments of political liberalism (see chapter 1 above). If the justificatory project of Rawls' political liberalism depends on hypothetical consent by reasonable persons and if the concept of reasonableness is so construed that the hypothetical consent of reasonable persons to political liberalism is presupposed, then the justification project of political liberals appears to be circular (for a similar argument see Rossi 2014b). The requirement of reasonableness further leads to an exclusion of potentially large parts of the population of the actual target audience of political liberals (an argument already developed by Wenar 1995; see also Sleat 2013b). However, it is important not to offer an uncharitable interpretation of the reconciliatory project of the later Rawls here. Arguably, certainly if we follow Rossi's (2014a: 12) interpretation, Rawls' *Political Liberalism* could be viewed as trying to strike (exactly) the difficult balance between outlining normative criteria, which also offer the procedural criteria for public justification the acceptance of which would legitimate the wielding of coercive political power, and connecting these otherwise abstract criteria to the practical identities of the addressees:

> "On this reading, coherence with the constitutive requirements of reasonableness is only a necessary, but not sufficient, condition for legitimacy. Reasonably justified norms become legitimate for a given polity only if they also happen to have been developed and put into place within that polity's own democratic political culture and practices—organically, as it were. So if (say) a foreign power invaded that polity and imposed equally reasonably justifiable norms, those would not be legitimate;" (Rossi 2014a: 12)

Yet there is still a tension within this interpretation of Rawls' approach between the voluntarist elements and the standing of the normative criteria which is vulnerable to a host of criticisms. On the one hand, there is the charge of potential ideological distortion, as the 'fit' with the views that are being held in a certain society does not say much about their normative standing. On the other hand, there is the charge that, on this view, philosophy does not offer a normative justification, but rather an explanation (see James 2005 for an interpretation of Rawls' project in this vein). In the end the question is

[3] According to Rawls, ''[b]eing reasonable is not an epistemological idea (though it has epistemological elements). Rather, it is part of a political idea of democratic citizenship'' (PL: 62). The idea of 'democratic citizenship' however is, as stressed by Rossi (2014a), heavily morally charged.

whether Rawls' account can plausibly be viewed to address actual agents or whether it is more plausibly viewed as a kind of potentially universal regulative principle (within liberal democracies), given that it elaborates a tradition of the social contract based on the idea of hypothetical consent, which has a difficult relationship to actual voluntariness (see on the problems with this tradition with regard to legitimacy Bohman and Richardson 2009).[4] Now, how do realist accounts of legitimacy try to go beyond this position?

3 Realist Accounts of Legitimacy

Where have (vision of politics) realists who have developed accounts of legitimacy taken their criticisms of public justification liberalism? Getting a clear view of (a selection of) the realist modifications will support the assessment of how far they depart from Rawlsian public justification liberalism.

3.1 Realist Modifications of Post-Rawlsian Public Justification Liberalism

The first point to note is that realists have made it their goal to shed light on the particularly political dimension of legitimacy (as against a moral justification). The following changes should be viewed as expressions of this goal. Realists demand to admit even more deep-seated forms of disagreement, including disagreement about the framework of evaluating legitimacy, than political liberals (see the exchange between Matt Sleat and Andrew Mason: Mason 2010; Sleat 2012; Mason 2012). For some realists this takes away the basis for a domination-free legitimate form of wielding coercive state power (see the discussion of Sleat below). They reduce the degree of idealization involved and start from actually existing agents (Horton 2012: 139-140) and actual claims to authority (see Schaub 2012b). They deny the possibility of a universal theory of legitimacy without, however, questioning the idea of legitimacy itself (Horton 2012: 143-144). They change the (under)standing of consent from 'source of authority' to 'acknowledgement of the criteria for authority having been met' (see Horton 2012: 141-143). This could be interpreted in different ways: either as leading to the rejection of

[4] This underscores the entanglement in public justification liberalism between the emphasis on the search for criteria for what could be called 'normative justifiability' (following Beetham 1991: 16-20) which could also appeal to substantive understandings of legitimacy and the criterion of (hypothetical) consent which leads to a procedural and (potentially) voluntaristic interpretation of public justification liberalism. The criterion of consent, however, seems to be subsumed under the normative justifiability, which suggests a problematic form of circularity with regard to the legitimating function of consent (see Rossi 2014b for a similar argument on the function of the concept of reasonableness in Rawls' *Political Liberalism*).

the condition of consent altogether (see BMR: 325) or as giving only a secondary role to consent and mix it with substantive considerations. These readings open up three further related routes of exploration: first, the shift from the focus on the consent of individuals to what the claimant to authority offers and how it can be related to those over whom authority is claimed (see also my discussion of Williams in chapter 3); second, to focus on the substantive conditions (and here one could see a minimalist *modus vivendi* strand develop, see McCabe 2010; Horton 2010); third, to explore further the sociological dimension of legitimacy without collapsing into a Weberian model of legitimation as assent (see Beetham 1991).

It is important to note then that whilst realists bring out weaknesses of public justification liberals with regard to considering the actual motivations and capacities of agents and their excesses of idealization and moralization, they are still in search of (normative) justification, rather than just a rationalization or populist assent. Like at least political liberals among public justification theorists, most realists reject the standards of truth or objectivity as unobtainable or irrelevant (see e.g. Waldron 1999: 164-187) and the standard of empirical consent, too, as its acceptance runs the risk of normatively sanctioning the abuse of existing power as legitimate (which would be hidden from a purely 'behavioral' perspective). So rather than looking for justification based on actual consent or moral reasons only, realists focus their search for normative criteria of legitimacy on evaluating how the rationale of legitimation relates to the beliefs and principles actually held by its addressees.

The demand that justice and legitimacy be separated is another very important strand of realist criticism and theory-building (see Ceva and Rossi 2012a). They criticize that conflating justice and legitimacy precludes an adequate assessment of unjust but potentially legitimate regimes.[5] Another is that their conflation implies that legitimation is bound to depend on meeting moral criteria that are set out antecedently to the political context from which the 'demand' for legitimation may arise. Further, and in a sense following from this criticism, realists question the typically close link between justification and legitimation in public justification liberalism (Horton 2012: 135-137).[6]

[5] Horton (2012: 132-134) even views this as true for most states now and around here.

[6] One may think that with *Political Liberalism* Rawls' attention had also shifted from justice to legitimacy, however, his view that "[i]n justice as fairness, and I think in many other liberal views, the guidelines of inquiry of public reason, as well as its principle of legitimacy, have the same basis as the substantive principles of justice" (PL: 225-6) gives reason to doubt this and worry about a conflation of justice and

The demand to separate justice from legitimacy could also be viewed to have a deeper meaning for the realist challenge to the self-conception of political theory. Whilst predominantly methodologically motivated discussions of realism are still to a considerable degree situated within the liberal-normativist framework that assumes that political theory's primary task is to advance and guide the application of theories of justice, the vision of politics realists' turn to legitimacy may be read not just as the replacement of justice as the most important concept of political theorizing, but as a reorientation of the task of political theory from the construction and application of an ideal to evaluating and addressing the concrete problem of legitimacy in contemporary democracies (see also Tomlin 2012: 40-41, however, Tomlin otherwise seems to view realism reductively as a question of "what facts we should allow to constrain our theorising" (41)).[7]

Altogether, realist alternatives and modifications of public justification discourse are heterogeneous and vary in depth, however, as realists still aim to offer a normative account of legitimacy, of how to distinguish legitimate from illegitimate wielding of coercive power, the crucial question for realists is what could be called the 'political question of legitimacy': which claim(s) to authority should be viewed as legitimate? Irrespective of the variety of answers that is offered to this question with variations amongst others in scope, foundation, position of the theorist on the different realist foci outlined above, all the modifications and alternatives which realists suggest could in the end be channeled into how to answer (and ask) this question.

I will discuss Matt Sleat's attempt to offer a realist answer to this question in detail below. His account of legitimacy concentrates on evaluating how the rationale of legitimation offered by a claimant to authority relates to the beliefs and principles actually held by its addressees. Like most realist accounts of legitimacy, Sleat's builds on Bernard Williams' account sketched in *In the Beginning was the Deed*. The aspects

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legitimacy in his political liberalism. The demand to separate justice from legitimacy is also related to the criticism of the moralized account of legitimacy in Rawls' *Political Liberalism*, especially of "stability for the right reasons". Again, here this depends on the interpretation of the later Rawls, who could be viewed to sit somewhat in the middle between popular, consent-centered accounts and normative justifiability-centered accounts, e.g. in comparison with Gerald Gauss' justificatory liberalism, as the critique of the latter underscores (e.g. Gaus 2011: 389-408; see Rossi 2014a).

[7] In a related vein, Rossi argues that the priority in theories of justice should be reversed with legitimacy, as legitimacy "concerns the *purpose* of the exercise of political power in a given polity" (2012: 157) and can hence specify the scope of the theory of justice without relying on the pre-political moral values on which theories of justice are usually based.

of Williams' account which are central to Sleat's, especially of those that the latter develops further, need to be briefly set out and discussed. Against the background of the introduction of Williams' realism in chapter 3, I will try to keep repetitions to a minimum and concentrate on Williams' attempt to combine his 'make sense' condition with normative criteria for legitimacy, which means particularly on his Critical Theory Principle.

3.2 Williams and the Critical Theory Principle

Williams' account of legitimacy could be viewed as "negativistic-minimalistic" (Schaub 2012b: 445) in terms of its substantive conditions as it focuses on "central core evils" (IBD: 74) which it assumes to be universally recognized as to be avoided. Showing that a regime successfully works toward avoiding these evils is part of passing the necessary condition of legitimacy by offering an answer to the first question of politics – the "securing of order, protection, safety, trust, and the conditions of cooperation" (IBD: 3). This is the bulk of the substantive content of Williams' account of legitimacy, which, however, is supplemented by the sufficient condition that those who claim to offer a solution to the problem of the first political question, can offer a legitimation "to the less empowered" which clarifies "what the difference is between the solution and the problem, and that cannot simply be an account of successful domination" (IBD: 5). Any claimant to political authority needs to meet this sufficient condition, which Williams calls the Basic Legitimation Demand (BLD), to legitimate its authority. Whilst the state owes a justification to every person over whom it claims authority, through the act of which they establish a political relationship to them (IBD: 6), for this justification to be accepted it needs to "makes sense" to those subject to it.

For Williams, "making sense" is "a category of historical understanding, […] a hermeneutical category" (IBD: 11) which assesses whether the legitimation being used can be understood within the context (including its concepts) to which it is addressed. More precisely, however, the idea is about checking whether an "intelligible order of authority make[s] sens[e] to us *as such a structure*" (IBD: 10) which "requires […], that there is a legitimation offered which goes beyond the assertion of power". Williams adds that "we can recognize such a thing because in the light of the historical and cultural circumstances […] it [makes sense] to us as a

legitimation" (IBD: 11). This qualification furthers Williams' realist commitments to contextualism and to trying to stake out criteria for legitimacy without taking recourse to moral criteria (external to politics). However, it also invites worries about the standing of the idea of "making sense" to evaluate rationales of legitimation. This idea relies on 'our' ability to differentiate legitimations based on assertions of power from legitimations for the endorsement of which there are reasons other than their hold of power over us. This comes close to assuming a point of view which presupposes that we have sufficient critical distance to our context. However, whether this assumption holds true is doubtful from a realist point of view, which takes the hold of existing power relations on people's abilities to judge very seriously and so, on this reading, the criterion of "making sense" alone would be unable to prevent rule based on existing power relations from passing as legitimate because it, e.g. through processes ideological indoctrination, can make sense to its subjects. This points to a central problem inherent in Williams' account: (How) is it possible to "uphold the difference between accepting rule for (any kind of) reasons and accepting rule as a result of existing power relations, without recurring to a justification based on moral criteria" (Schaub 2012b: 447).[8]

Williams is clear about the fact, that the lack of a demand for legitimation, which could be due to the lack of critical distance to an illegitimate regime, is no reason to assume that the regime is in fact legitimate (IBD: 6). Rather "the acceptance of a justification does not count if the acceptance has been produced by the coercive power which is supposedly being justified" (IBD: 6). This criterion is at the heart of what Williams calls the Critical Theory Principle (see Williams 2002: 219-232), which has the task to disqualify regimes as illegitimate whose acceptance as legitimate is based on their use of "coercive power which is supposedly being justified". For Williams, "the difficulty with [this principle], of making good on claims of false consciousness and the like, lies in deciding what counts as having been 'produced by' coercive power in the relevant sense" (IBD: 6). This commits Williams to looking at the actual beliefs of people, who

[8] It is a contested question in how far Williams' "make sense" condition should be understood as requiring giving reasons. However, given that Williams at times stresses the distinction between politics and successful domination in a nearly categorical way (see also chapter 3 above), it seems warranted to think that what can be said about why the political solution is not part of the problem will involve giving reasons of some kind. The reasons involved here must of course exclude the reason for a belief only being that "somebody's power has brought it about […], when, further it is in their interest that one accept it" (Williams 2002: 231).

accept the legitimacy of a regime only because they have not come to realize yet that there are no other reasons than the power of this regime over them to accept it as legitimate (Williams 2002: 231), from the point of view of their transformation (and not simply as they are now):

> "If we are supposing that the background is simply these people's current set of beliefs, then almost anything will pass the [Critical Theory Principle] test (except perhaps some cases of extreme internal incoherence). If we suppose, on the other hand, an entirely external frame of reference, then nothing very distinctive is achieved by the test. We need a schema by which we start with the people's current beliefs and imagine their going through a process of criticism, a process in which the test plays a significant part." (Williams 2002: 227)[9]

The schema which Williams (2002: 226-227) endorses and which helps with clarifying what "counts as having been 'produced by' coercive power in the relevant sense" (IBD: 6) is based on an idea which has been called 'reflective unacceptability' (Geuss 1981). This entails encouraging a process of reflection in people on whether they would still hold on to their beliefs (directly or indirectly about the legitimacy of the regime), once they had realized how they came to hold them. This process will lead to contextual decisions, based on internal reasons (or immanent critique in the vocabulary of Critical Theory), but is oriented toward a goal which is in danger of readmitting moral criteria external to politics. Whilst the Critical Theory Principle enables Williams to offer a protection against internalized oppression making sense and passing as legitimate, this comes at the price of a tension with Williams' realist commitments, including the avoidance of a framework of justification based on moral criteria (external to politics). The moral criteria come in through Williams' morally charged assessment of the situation in which the state fails the Critical Theory Principle as one of "injustice" (Williams 2002: 231). This assessment arguably relies on an idea about the moral standing of agents which is unjustly violated through the abuse of power. This could be linked to the understanding of 'power as right', which holds that authority only springs from power if power is exercised in accordance to moral and legal right (Hindess 1996).

This assessment of "injustice" could also be viewed to connect to the moral ideal of autonomy which Williams might have more or less accidentally brought in from Critical Theory when constructing the Critical Theory Principle – the moral ideal of autonomy

[9] Radical realism takes a similar perspective on this problem, however, in contradistinction to Williams' account, an important goal of radical realism is to make this process of criticism real and to analyze its limitations and possibilities in a specific process of criticism and contribute to its development.

has not just since the Kantian turn of Habermas been seen as a normative basis of Critical Theory. This is particularly visible in Williams' (2002: 231) hope that the Critical Theory Principle help the disadvantaged realize the "most basic sense of freedom, that of not being in the power of another". This seems to imply a near total lack of freedom in a situation in which the Critical Theory Principle is failed. This may be a problematic assumption about the totality of power typical of key texts of Critical Theory and the early Foucault (see Honneth 1993). Williams' hope, even rather minimalist, could be construed to receive at least some of its appeal from the moral ideal of autonomy, especially in cases where "being in the power of another" is not a matter of physical captivity but rather a limitation of the (mental, social etc.) development of the persons in question.

Arguably this interpretation is in tension with Williams' understanding of the *political* (rather than moral) value of liberty (IBD: chapters 6 and 7). However, as Williams did not further discuss the compatibility of the Critical Theory Principle with his realist commitments, this tension between Williams' realist commitments and the presuppositions of the Critical Theory Principle as the tool to prevent sanctioning self-justifying power as legitimate remains. Within Williams' project of realism, the injustice might be viewed to refer to the fact that the abuse of power makes it – in the long run – impossible for those suffering from it to enjoy the benefits of politics. Those benefits at least entail that the first question of politics – the "securing of order, protection, safety, trust, and the conditions of cooperation" (IBD: 3) – is answered. Still, this does not solve the problem that the device, which Williams introduced to protect his "make sense" criterion of legitimacy from being susceptible to pass orders whose acceptance is based on (the abuse of) their existing power, succeeds at the price of at least putting into question whether this distinction does not rely on moral criteria (external to politics).

3.3 Sleat's Congruence Theory of Legitimacy between "Moralism and Realpolitik"

The realist theory of legitimacy which Matt Sleat has developed over the past five years aims at developing "normative criteria for legitimacy but without collapsing into a form of moralism" (BMR: 314). Sleat could be view to respond directly to the tensions just discussed, as he takes his inspiration from Bernard Williams, however, parts ways with Williams through a critique of the latter's distinction between politics and successful domination (Sleat 2010; LR: chapter 5; see also discussion in chapter 3 above). He

argues that for Williams "any coercive relationship that is sustained purely through the use of power is illegitimate and hence non-political" (LR: 113). He regards this view as incompatible with the realist acknowledgement that "successful domination has a role to play in the creation and maintenance of any (legitimate) political order. There is no political order without successful domination." (LR: 113) That legitimate politics and successful domination cannot be neatly separated becomes particularly visible with regard to the treatment of dissenters (by Williams):

> "It surely matters that dissenters themselves take the political order to represent a form of successful domination not legitimate authority. It is hard to know what sort of argument one could provide in order to effectively overrule the dissenters' judgement on this matter while maintaining the definition of 'politics as distinct from domination'. And this problem would be further exacerbated if it is reasonable to expect disagreement regarding whether the [Basic Legitimation Demand] has been met. If people can reasonably disagree as to whether the political order makes sense in the relevant way, then it cannot be an appropriate condition for determining legitimacy. Yet if we do take into account the judgement of the dissenters, then it would seem that we also have to accept that politics does include instances of successful domination." (LR: 126)

Sleat takes this to point to the pressing task of developing an account of legitimacy which, in view of the impossibility of perfect legitimation, modifies the understanding of what is required for legitimation. Against this background, he bases his account of legitimacy on his interpretation of Williams' condition that the regime to be legitimated "make sense" to those over whom it claims authority. In Sleat's account the notion of "making sense" is hence one of congruence between the rationale of legitimation offered and the beliefs of those to whom it is addressed: "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" (BMR: 322). This translates into the view that "[j]udgements 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" (BMR: 326).

His "making sense" as congruence account should be viewed as the upshot of his attempt to depart from the political liberals' accounts of legitimacy which depend on pre-political moral commitments and the criterion of hypothetical consent. In contrast to such accounts where the criteria and the demand for legitimacy are based on a commitment to a moral principle, e.g. respect for persons, Sleat's realist account of

legitimacy views the legitimation demand to be initiated from within politics. Sleat is still open, again following Williams, to the idea that within politics moral considerations are likely to play a role, albeit only one amongst others (BMR: 319).[10] Sleat's account develops the recasting of the understanding of the role of consent for legitimation that has also been proposed by other realists (notably Horton 2012): (hypothetical) consent is not what grounds or justifies the authority of a state, but rather views the (hypothetical) consent to a regime as the expression of the acknowledgement of its legitimacy. This opens up the path for Sleat to see a normative dimension in the idea that "the regime can be presented in a manner consistent with the citizens' beliefs, values, principles, and norms" (BMR: 326). What matters in terms of legitimation is not the consent, but the consistence or congruence between these beliefs and the political order. On this view, the condition of (hypothetical) consent is dropped (BMR: 325).

Whilst this view of legitimation may be more descriptively accurate for processes of legitimation, it does not meet Sleat's ambition to provide normative criteria for legitimacy. His account lays claim to trying to bring together sociological aspects with normative aspects of legitimacy (see Fossen 2013; Thornhill 2011 for the tensions with their combination). This is done through linking the idea of the congruence with actual beliefs with normative aspects of legitimacy. The latter translate into the goal of upholding the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate regimes (even if any political order contains some degree of domination) and between political and non-political forms of rule, without recourse to moral criteria (external to politics). However, there is the danger that his account collapses into a status quo affirming, descriptive account of legitimacy (which could underwrite the acceptance of the status quo due to the incumbent regime's (abuse of its) existing power and hence could not serve as a basis for the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate regimes): The criterion of congruence with the beliefs, principles etc. of the people in question cannot sensibly be normatively assessed through taking a synchronic snapshot. Once one takes its historical development into account, the congruence could easily be imagined as stemming, at least to a considerable extent, from the power of the state which is supposed to be legitimated through references to this congruence. A historical-diachronic perspective on these processes as is pursued by Foucault (2008a: 1-50) in his work on governmentality

[10] Note Sleat's emphasis that rationales of legitimation are not above the fray of power and that the justification of a state is in itself (typically) an exercise of (even if only discursive) power.

and is integrated into radical realism – which would ask: what is the cost of this congruence? How did this criterion come to be viewed as appropriate? – could bring this to light and problematize the outcomes.[11] This worry is further substantiated by the fact that Sleat elsewhere tries to fill the gap of imperfection in legitimation by strengthening the importance of the often overlooked issue of partisanship which he regards as crucial for recognizing and controlling the residual elements of domination in politics (see LR: chapters 6 and 7). In view of the impossibility of impartiality he argues for a self-restrained, liberal mastery now and around here which needs to be aware of its partisan and partial position towards those being ruled. It seems doubtful that such liberal masters could be trusted with distinguishing congruence which (predominantly) stems from existing power relations from congruence which only contains residual traces of such power, given the track record of liberal self-critique (see Losurdo 2010). How can one then, on Sleat's account, distinguish between legitimations which are based on (the abuse of) existing power relations and those which are based on other reasons, without recourse to moral criteria?

Sleat (BMR) rejects moral criteria for distinguishing between legitimate and illegitimate regimes. Even the toolkit which Williams developed to avoid relying on moral criteria for this distinction, the Critical Theory Principle, is too restrictive for him, in as far as "any use of coercive power in motivating individuals' acceptance of a regime instantly disqualifies it as illegitimate" (BMR: 331).[12] If my interpretation of the Critical Theory Principle above is at all correct, his rejection of the Critical Theory Principle as a model is warranted, as there are worries about its readmission of moral criteria (as a critique of which Sleat's congruence account of legitimacy was considered in the first place). However, given his goal to provide normative criteria for legitimacy, he remains committed to developing further criteria for distinguishing legitimate from illegitimate regimes for a fuller account of realist legitimacy. He argues that "the development of a critical realist theory that can provide the distance from which judgements about

[11] One may concede that even if there is some congruence between the views of those subject to the regime and the content of the regime's rationale of legitimation, there is still vast space for disagreement, e.g. about ranking and ordering, or about differing interpretations of the same values (BMR: 328). This arguably makes status quo affirmation a little less likely.

[12] Whilst there is arguably some textual support for Sleat's interpretation (IBD: 6) that in Williams' view *any* use of coercive power involved in the acceptance of a legitimation story makes it illegitimate, it seems a little extreme. Williams elsewhere actually concentrates on cases where he speaks of "methods of belief formation which are *simply* coercive" (Williams 2002: 221; my emphasis) or cases in which "the *sole reason* one accepts some moral claim is that somebody's power has brought it about that one accepts it" (Williams 2002: 231; my emphasis).

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" (BMR: 331).

The understanding of critical distance appropriate to Sleat's congruence account cannot be based on abstraction (thus avoiding the return to into liberal normativism), but has to be based on a close engagement with the context without, however, taking the views therein as they are (at least with regard to their standing for judgments of legitimacy). This is further complicated by the admission that, from Sleat's perspective, problems of deep disagreement and pluralism also apply to trying to find the right critical distance from the process of legitimation in order to assess to what extent the fit between the views of the people and the regime's rationale of legitimation is not (exclusively, mostly, disproportionately, at all) the result of its (coercive and interpretive) power. Unfortunately, Sleat has not thus far offered an account of critical distance that addresses these concerns.[13]

3.4 The Limits of Realist Legitimacy

Jörg Schaub's (2012b) account of realist legitimacy, even if it is not as fully developed as Sleat's, could be seen to address just this set of problems whilst remaining committed to the question of how to uphold the difference between accepting rule for (any kind of) reasons and accepting rule as a result of existing power relations, without recurring to a justification based on moral criteria. Schaub also develops Williams' account of legitimacy and is particularly interested in the problem of how to tell when the acceptance of a regime is due to the abuse of its existing power. He aims to get into the position in which one could supplement a congruence account of legitimacy as favored by Sleat through questioning the congruence and not treating the beliefs and principles

[13] That Sleat in the end, despite his considerable critique of and departure from political liberalism's framework for assessing legitimacy, returns to critical distance with hopes of providing normative criteria for legitimacy, however, lacks a plan for how to construe or achieve this without violating his realist commitments, might question the ability of his theory to transcend the dichotomy between abstract, critical but impotent and contextualist but status quo affirming tendencies in realist views of political theory. Sleat's argument (BMR: 324) that to situate realist legitimacy between moralism and *Realpolitik* is walking a fine line between falling back into normativism and collapsing into a might-is-right view now seems a skewed portrayal of what is at issue. First of all, the might-is-right view usually ascribed to *Realpolitik* is not an option for political theorists who have normative ambitions at all – there is simply not enough to *theorize* about if one takes this view. As much as Sleat tries to admit that politics contains elements of successful domination, for which nothing succeeds like success, in the end these admissions are actually instrumental to his development of a – albeit less abstract and ambitious – *theory* of legitimacy. This theory will be closer to the normativist camp from which Sleat tries to wrest it away than to *Realpolitik*, as Sleat aims at finding normative criteria for legitimacy.

on which the congruence is based as a kind of 'black box' filled with a mix of politics and successful domination, but as effects of specific power relations. This returns one to Williams' Critical Theory Principle which, as discussed above, was based on the idea of reflective unacceptability. Williams' account of this idea, however, remains abstract in his political writings (IBD) and does not explicate the commitments to Critical Theory which might likely be incompatible – unless modified – with his realist approach. Schaub could be seen to anticipate this criticism by suggesting a more sociologically oriented inquiry in order to be able to say more about which views might turn out to be reflectively unacceptable (see also Celikates 2009: 217-219). Such an inquiry, he maintains, can come up with a more concrete evaluation of political order by relocating the process of achieving critical distance away from the theory or the theorist to those who are the subjects in question:

> "If one hopes to seriously pose the question of the legitimacy of a political order […], one cannot but take issue with its social order. Only on the basis of intensive engagement with its social order, e.g. with the predominant mechanisms of legitimation (school system, conditions of knowledge production, media etc.) can one get a picture of how close the exercise of power in this society comes to the limit case of unjustified domination." (Schaub 2012b: 448; my translation)[14]

This turn gives Schaub's account of legitimacy a depth at the sociological end which Williams' and Sleat's accounts are lacking. It also offers more resources for replacing the dichotomous legitimate/illegitimate distinction, a view which Schaub regards as a radicalization of Williams' account which already introduced a scalar understanding of legitimacy (Schaub 2012b: 448; IBD: 10). By turning away from the abstract question of legitimacy which, even if contextually asked, still features in most realist accounts, Schaub's account opens up the shift to interrogating concrete claims to authority and their "system of acceptability" (see Foucault 1978) which marks a possible starting point for a more radically realistic approach to studying relations of legitimation (which could also be read as an attempt to make good on, or rather, radicalizing a combination of Williams' realist commitments and the Critical Theory Principle). However, whilst Schaub is challenging the normative orientation of realist accounts of legitimacy, he has

[14] The original reads: "Will man ernsthaft die Frage nach der Legitimität einer politischen Ordnung stellen, so bleibt [...] nichts anderes übrig, als sich mit dieser sozialen Ordnung zu befassen. Denn nur auf der Basis solcher Auseinandersetzungen, etwa mit den vorherrschenden Legitimationsmechanismen (Schulsystem, Bedingungen der Wissensproduktion, Medienlandschaft etc.), kann man sich ein Bild davon machen, wie nahe die Ausübung der Macht in diesen Gesellschaften an den Grenzfall einer ungerechtfertigten Gewaltherrschaft heranreicht."

not developed his suggestions further as a challenge to the conceptualization of legitimacy.

The example of Sleat's and Williams' attempts to present a more realistic account of legitimacy shows the problems with their goal of upholding the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate regimes, without taking recourse to a justification based on moral criteria. I suggest that the understanding of political theory as outlined in radical realism and diagnosis-critique is one way to still offer normative evaluations of a political and social order, without taking recourse to a justification based on moral criteria (and without violating realist commitments). This may, however, require a move away from the conceptualization of legitimacy at the centre of the evaluations of regimes, as long as legitimacy is understood primarily in terms of a relationship between the authority of the rulers and the autonomy of the subject, toward a broadening of considerations of how relations of power govern those subject to them in problematic ways in a specific context.[15]

Before turning to a sketch of how radical realism could transform the search for a more realistic account of legitimacy, I will point to the problems of (not only) Sleat's Williamsian realist account of legitimacy as at least partly stemming from sharing important aspects of public justification liberalism. Even if the public justification process is greatly modified in comparison to public justification liberalism in realist accounts of legitimacy, the conceptualization of the relationship of legitimacy as the most important test for political authority is shared between realists and public justification liberals. This conceptualization could be viewed to rely on – what one could call following Foucault – a juridical understanding of subjectivity (and subjectivation) (Foucault 2004: 37; see also 1978, 1980: 122). This means that the relationship between citizen and state is encapsulated in a juridical relationship of rightful, legitimate (or abusive and illegitimate) power and that the question of legitimacy nearly exhausts the ways which need to be considered (by political theory) to assess how citizens are governed by the state. This leads to a limitation of the perspective on the wielding of political power which radical realism seeks to question.

The limited understanding of the relationship between state and citizen which is focused on the juridical dimension of rights (and freedoms, duties, obligations etc.) will likely

[15] In this sense, the inquiries of realist theorists of legitimacy and of radical realism could stand next to each other as examples of different perspectives on a political and social order.

leave many aspects of power relations between the state and citizens underexamined, especially with regard to how these contribute to how the citizens govern themselves and others. The point is maybe not as strong as arguing that the prevalent conceptualization of legitimacy is utterly unrealistic, but rather the question is if it provides the most realistic political theory perspective on a political and social order. Consider here Raymond Geuss' (PRP: 35) view on the expansion of the question of legitimacy beyond the organization of coercive violence:

> "So a more realistic understanding of what is at issue in politics in a wider variety of circumstances would connect it with attempts to provide legitimacy not simply for acts of violence, but for any kinds of collective action, such as deciding to build a new road or change to a new unit of measurement […], or for that matter for any arrangements that could be seen as capable of being changed, controlled, modified, or influenced by human action." (PRP: 35)

Finally, if realists like Sleat admit that legitimate regimes may involve domination, it remains extremely questionable whether their framework of legitimacy is apt to diagnose what the kind and intensity of domination actually is, and hence in the end to assess whether or not the degree of domination still falls within the legitimate (even if one assumes that they eventually succeed at finding criteria solve the tension between their commitments). Transforming the framework of legitimacy might then be the best way forward for political theorists to study the effects of relations of power between citizens and the state (and other institutions) in order to develop guidelines for normative evaluation. Now I will turn to the question of how radical realism can transform the study of legitimacy as it has been discussed with regard to public justification liberalism and its realist critics.

4 Transforming the Conceptualization of Legitimacy through Radical Realism

Radical realism turns to the concrete examination of the exercise of power in the present as displayed in power relations which include relations of legitimation. The premise of radical realism's evaluation of this present – a regime, or rather a political and social order – is that this present generates and influences ideas of the good life and contains contextually limited normative recommendations. This motivates the questioning of the primacy of the concept of legitimacy for evaluating the relations of power from a political point of view. The primacy of the abstract justification of normative authority is problematic, as there are always already claims to authority to be analyzed and questioned, and questions to be put to those who claim authority (Geuss 2011a: 10-11;

see chapter 4 above). Radical realism is oriented toward this inner normativity of the present. This should be understood as an argument against the concentration of liberal-normativist political theory on the universal-moral form of justification rather than engaging ethico-political problems in their particularity (e.g. through diagnosis-critique). Questions of the good life then cannot be bracketed by political theory because they are already implicitly posed and at least partly answered in this present reality, including the question of right (politics) which is less controversially thought to fall under the purview of political theory. The ethical (and moral) quest of pursuing the good life is relevant to political theory as the "quest for the right life is the quest for the right form of politics" (Adorno 1996: 262, quoted with amended translation from Freyenhagen 2013: 173). Radical realism, following its commitments to the ethos of critique and to negativism, aims to connect to social criticism which means the question of the right life is politicized. Now, how does the concern with the inner normativity of a specific context lead to a transformation of the focus on legitimacy? How is this spelt out through the turn away from the universal-moral, juridical understanding of legitimacy to the evaluation of ethical-particular problems, to the diagnosis-critique of power relations?

Whilst the realist accounts of legitimacy discussed above could be described as trying to conduct a search for criteria for normative authority through concentrating on finding criteria for normative justifiability which also meet their realist commitments – thereby dropping the emphasis on consent, which in its hypothetical understanding featured prominently in public justification liberalism – radical realism subverts the understanding of normative authority to which realists remain committed. Radical realism cannot solve the tension between realist commitments and the goal to offer normative criteria for legitimacy discussed in the previous section, but it may dissolve this tension. To this end, radical realism transforms the question of normative justifiability and transforms the framework in which it is used by realists and public justification liberals. This includes challenging the distinction between normative authority and power (of which the juridical understanding of legitimacy is an expression). The transformation of the perspective on legitimacy then consists of a reorientation from justifiability of normative authority towards pluralizing the foci of the evaluative study of a political and social order, of which the relations of legitimation, however, remain an important part. This focus is not a capitulation before existing relations of power or a limitation to descriptive theorizing. Rather the goal of radical

realism is to provide practically useful tools for evaluating the exercise of power, as expressed through the power relations in a specific context, with the goal to open up space for resistance. Once power relations beyond the question of whether the state has normative authority over its citizen are being addressed (through diagnosis-critique), it may become possible to react to the strategic and normative goals which underlie these exercises of power. In the face of the impossibility of escaping normative evaluations, radical realism has the goal to contribute to positioning oneself toward this normativity of the historical reality and even contribute guidelines for evaluative criteria for this task so that one can react to the exercise of power, e.g. through expressing that one does not share the presuppositions and/or goals which underline and/or drive the respective exercise of power and that one does not want to be 'governed' in this way.

Concretely, Foucault's (2007a) late conceptual innovation of governmentality, briefly introduced in chapter 4 above through the discussion of the detoxification of power, offers one more developed way to understand at least some underlying tendencies of modern politics in a way that is congenial to radical realism. The interrogation of the rationalities and strategies of power – understood in a detoxified sense – with regard to the subjectivation of people to relations of power contributes to answering what politics is in a specific context, where potential for collective agency is increased and where it is limited, and so contributes to unearthing the sometimes implicit presuppositions of political practice. This inquiry is still driven by a subversive and practical goal (Foucault 1978: 540).

This outlook goes beyond the prevalent understanding of legitimacy and the juridical model underlying it and works toward getting the exercise of power, e.g. in relations of legitimation, in view in non-moral terms.[16] The relationship between the state and its citizens is – without doubt – centrally important for politics today (Geuss 2010b: 422-423; WWW: 150). However, the abstract conceptual analysis of legitimacy as in public justification liberalism and realist accounts of legitimacy does not exhaust the diagnosis-critique of the way in which relations of power between government and citizens problematically govern the citizens. The relations of power of government, in the sense

[16] Arguably in his earlier work Foucault, through emphasizing war and struggle, took a position "exactly opposite" to the juridical model which was focused on law and consensus. This meant accepting the self-imposed limits of this discourse (similar to the discussion in chapter 3 of the realist critique of liberal-normative foci on consensus and optimism, on this point see also Geuss 2011a: 12) and is to be avoided by radical realism.

of governmentality of 'conducting conduct', go beyond the normative concepts of 'legitimacy', 'authority' and 'political relationships'. The understanding of *problematization* of Foucault could be another important aspect of the movement away from the focus on normative authority of legitimacy toward investigating the "system of acceptability" of the exercise of power. The focus on the system of acceptability could open up reflection on the discourse of legitimacy through analyzing the "power-knowledge nexus that supports it" (see Foucault 2007b: 57-8, 61). Radical realism's diagnosis-critique of relations of power in a specific political and social order could then more specifically concentrate on

> "the system of differentiation, […] the types of objectives pursued by those who act on the actions of others, the means of bringing power relations into being, […] forms of institutionalization, [and] the degrees of rationalization. [T]he analysis of power relations within society cannot be reduced to the study of a series of institutions, not even to the study of all those which would merit the name 'political.'" (Foucault 1982b: 792-793; see also Geuss' remarks in Skinner et. al 2002)

However, even though radical realism tries to transform the conceptualization of legitimacy as the chief evaluative criterion for assessing the wielding of political power from a normative point of view, it still has to take the claims to legitimacy and the rationales of legitimation as well as the criteria for validating such rationales seriously as an object of diagnosis-critique (PRP: 34-36, HIP: 31-42). 'Legitimacy' is only one of several forms and elements of the rationalization of power or of the political rationality of government, of 'conducting conduct'. Radical realism views legitimacy as the result of power relations and inquires how the evaluation of an order as legitimate became possible in the specific case (which includes inquiring into how the criteria, on the basis of which the evaluation was carried out, were developed). This does not mean that the question of legitimacy and the accounts of legitimation developed to answer it become irrelevant, but rather that they should be integrated into the interrogation and questioning of the political rationality to which such accounts of legitimacy are central. This inquiry needs to include the view that the prevalent conceptualization of legitimacy is characterized by a tension between the context-transcending notion of normatively grounded authority and the notion of legitimacy as a political artifact only comprehensible from within a particular context (see also Rosanvallon 2011). From the perspective of radical realism, it makes sense to view even the context-transcending notion of normatively grounded authority as an artifact of politics which is the effect of

relations of power. Whereas such a perspective, which assumes the ubiquity of power relations in a political and social order, may make it impossible to generate and meet normative standards for living well together from a liberal-normativist viewpoint, radical realism follows Foucault (1982b) and holds that it is an impossibility to live together without power relations. The point then is to detoxify them, and, once they are acknowledged, to subject their workings to further scrutiny. This involves asking questions which prominently include: Who are we in terms of organizing government? What is the cost of legitimacy, order and stability to serve as guidelines for evaluating politics? What would alternative evaluative practices look like? These questions would address the presuppositions of the understanding of legitimacy of public justification liberalism and realists which crucially depend on these presuppositions remaining unquestioned (even if at least Sleat also acknowledges the contribution of power relations of domination to the maintenance of political order (LR: 113)). They also depend on subjects who have internalized these concepts, or rather, have made them the basis for their judgment of their context of action under the assumption of a minimal coherence of the relations between several key concepts of current liberal democracies (state, rights, autonomy, equality, freedom). Radical realism insists on interrogating the tensions (if not contradictions) between these concepts and stresses their historical contingency and revisability.

Whilst for the purposes of the detoxification of power a strong descriptive element is necessary, from the point of view of the goal of subversion it could not take precedence. The potential criticism of descriptivism against radical realism as reducing legitimacy to considerations of power, to strip political theory of its normative orientation, can be deconstructed from within radical realism. If power does not have the stigma of being bad (violating the conditions of liberal legitimacy, as being alien to an order of consensus) or as at least standing in need of being analyzed principally under the question of 'right' – even despite the acknowledgement of the inevitability of some forms of domination in politics by certain realists – but is instead viewed as omnipresent and as displayed in e.g. any governmental rationality, the focus on the relationship between descriptive and normative elements in the diagnosis-critique of the exercise of power becomes crucial and offers an escape from the criticism of descriptivism.

The purpose of political theory then is no longer to vindicate an authority, or to reconcile 'us' with the present through a concept of legitimate rule, but rather to interrogate and

question and potentially resist current relations of power. This implies a critique of the focus on the universal-moral and a turn to the ethical-particular embedded in a concrete political context.[17] Radical realism questions the ability of criticism based on moral values, under which one may include much of liberal-normativist political theory here, to offer meaningful understanding of and evaluations and recommendations for politics. Whilst the strength of such criticism is its universalizeability, this is, however, achieved at the cost of the lack of diagnosis of the specificities of the context at hand. If we grant that the political liberalism (and justice as fairness) presented by Rawls is also a critique of current injustice, it cannot get the specific problems of current capitalist Western societies into view (even if one tries to address particular disagreements about values in these societies as in *Political Liberalism*), as these problems are hardly only about *disagreements* about *values* (see Wolin 1996).

How does radical realism react to the usage of moral criteria as trumps in finding criteria for evaluating politics normatively? Radical realism, in reaction, does not try to sever politics from morality and moral values, but rather takes morality seriously in its manifold effects on politics. For radical realism morality and moral values do not operate above the fray of politics, hence they are subject to the same kind of diagnostic inquiry. It is not critiques of the intricacies of the systems of moral values (of which Williams 1985 is a trenchant example), which matter most here, but the critique of their hold on the imagination in their direct and indirect consequences for politics (e.g. for concepts which have political salience such as rights and legitimacy).[18] More concretely this could be started by confronting a specific morality-based outlook or concept (e.g. Rawls' notion of reasonableness) with the following question: "If the morality in question *systematically* presupposes a set of purported basic facts about the world, and its prescriptions rely on these presuppositions, then showing that the purported facts are no such thing would presumably count as criticism of the morality." (Geuss 1999: 74)[19]

[17] This is not a (Hobbesian) question of using politics to solve 'our' disagreements about ethics but rather of viewing particular problems of the good life embedded in concrete politics.

[18] This critique of morality (of which Geuss' work, especially *Outside Ethics*, could be viewed as an exponent) can be linked to a tradition of criticism of morality in 'continental' philosophy, in particular to Marx' critique of morality (Leiter 2007: 750-751) which sees in morality the reflection of the monopoly of the ruling class over intellectual resources, and the Nietzschean critique (Leiter 2007: 743) that the adherence to morality is a problem for political theories if they are in fact compatible with outcomes that undermine this morality.

[19] This criticism could be viewed to be based on an explanatory account of normativity, in which the standing of the presuppositions depends on their explanatory success rather than on their justificatory foundation (see Freyenhagen 2013: 199-205).

Linking the normative standing of a political theory to the scrutiny of its presuppositions is one way how radical realism would practically operate (not only) with regard to the trumping claims ascribed to moral criteria in political theory and politics.

These reflections on how radical realism could transform the study of legitimacy are however only one actually rather abstract example of how the focus of political theorizing informed by radical realism could change. Based on each concrete set of diagnosis-critique including interrogation, questioning, and problematization, radical realism as a political theory "functions as a 'proposal' and an 'invitation'. It seeks 'to invite others to share an experience of what we are, not only of our past but of our present, an experience of our modernity in such a way that we might come out of it transformed'" (Lemke 2011: 39; see Foucault 2002a: 242-245; see also my interpretation of Geuss in Prinz 2012a). An important function of such a perspective is to search for a way to allocate more space to the ethical development of individuals and collectives beyond the question of to what extent they conform to or try to subvert the moral codes and morality-based law (on which notions of normative authority partly depend). Political theory then appears as an interdisciplinary research program in the social sciences and humanities which – on the basis of a philosophical toolkit with a (subversive) practical-critical outlook – tries to create space for translating reflections on daily life into political questions. Radical realism is open to discussing already formulated questions about the exercise of power from a different point of view through interrogation, problematization, and questioning and to using its tools to work towards asking novel questions (and offer some help in assessing which question are pressing). This includes reflection on the practices of what has been called political theory (and political philosophy) and on current political trajectories relevant for understanding and evaluating the respective political situation. Through the historical, self-reflexive character of this interdisciplinary-oriented research, radical realism could establish connections between seemingly disparate issues or loosening established links between concepts. Radical realism is experimental and open-ended, as "the diagnostic project of responding to 'power' is ongoing, collective, and emerging at myriad discontinuous sites" (Nealon 2008: 110). It would be one of the achievements of the arguments presented in this chapter to see the statement that political theory is then a collection of "philosophical fragments put to work in a historical field of problems" (Foucault 2002b:

224) not as a sign of its lack of importance, but as a claim to its renewed emphasis for practical orientation in the force field of politics.

5 Conclusion

This chapter offered a sketch of the consequences of a turn to radical realism for the practice of political theorizing, through a discussion of the question of legitimacy. This discussion spanned the width of the thematic foci of the thesis and tied together key argumentative threads, such as the relationship between political theory and its context, the normativity of criticism and the understanding of power, which – at least on the interpretation that I have presented here – not only drive realism in political theory but are also useful tools for exploring the tensions between political liberalism, the prevalent subdivisions of realism and radical realism. This required recapitulating a few of the positions of political liberals and realists which had already been touched upon in previous chapters, however, this time focused on the question of legitimacy.

The analysis of the realist critique of and alternatives to public justification liberalism followed the argumentative pattern of the thesis taken thus far and did not limit itself to outlining the departures of realists; rather the discussion focused on the tensions between realist and liberal-normativist commitments in Bernard Williams' and Matt Sleat's theories of legitimacy. The conclusion of the analysis of realist accounts of legitimacy was twofold. First, it became clear that realists depart substantially from public justification liberalism: They mainly reinterpret the role of consent, from grounding authority to expressing an acknowledgment of the legitimacy of a political regime. They reduce the idealization involved in theorizing and reconnect the acceptance conditions of legitimacy more strongly to the specificities of the respective political context.

The second point concerns the problems with the realist goal of upholding the difference between legitimate and illegitimate regimes, without taking recourse to a justification based on moral criteria, particularly with regard to the difference between accepting a regime as legitimate for reasons and for (its abuse of) existing power relations. The problem of Bernard Williams' account was that the main device which he introduces to realize this goal, the Critical Theory Principle, could be viewed to be likely to readmit moral criteria of justification. Matt Sleat's theory of legitimacy "between moralism and *Realpolitik*" is focused on the congruence between the legitimation offered by a regime and the actual beliefs of the addressees. Sleat's theory rejects any normative

understanding of politics (which he regards as problematic in Williams) and admits successful domination as a part of politics. However, it develops insufficient resources (which would also be compatible with Sleat's realist commitments) for critical reflection about the self-justification of power in view of his goal to offer a normative criteria for legitimacy. Jörg Schaub's very briefly discussed account suggested turning Williams' Critical Theory Principle toward a more concrete study of power relations. This pointed toward the perspective of radical realism which, however, does not solve the problem of the tension between realist and liberal-normativist commitments, but rather transforms the conceptualization of legitimacy, to which this tension is a response.

The transformation of the prevalent conceptualization of legitimacy which radical realism has to offer is a reorientation of the evaluation of a political regime toward a focus on the diagnosis-critique of the exercise of power. The particular focus lies on the analysis of power relations not only between the state and citizens, but more generally on how relations of power 'conduct the conduct' (of oneself and others, in Foucault's terms), and on their problematization. This leads to a reinterpretation of the relationship between political theory and its context which leads away from universal-moral to ethical-particular questions. This does not imply the eschewal of any normative orientation of political theory. Radical realism retains the ambition to improve the understanding of the specific context in which one finds oneself as well as to offer normative guidance for how to react to being governed in a particular way in this context. Radical realism's commitment to the 'inner normativity' of the present means that there is no option for a political theory not to be normatively oriented. The task of explicating normative orientations and responding to how they limit or enable political agency is hence central to radical realism. Here the goal is to be as transparent as possible about how the evaluation of power relations is carried out including the impact of the goals and viewpoints held by the theorist on such interventions. The result, however, cannot be universal criteria but rather guidelines for how to get an evaluative process started (the details of which have to be vindicated in the specific context in question and the outcome of which remains open). Rather than trying to lay down the limits of the present through a set of prescriptive norms, radical realism's normative guidance is about testing the limits of the present in the process of a diagnosis-critique of this present. The liberal-normativist conceptualization of legitimacy and the

understanding of the role of political theory in the present context of liberal democracies are hence important objects for the diagnosis-critique of radical realism.

Conclusion

This thesis examined the potential of realism in political theory to challenge liberal-normativist political theory and, in response to its limitations, developed a radical interpretation of this potential.

As a first (preparatory) step I investigated the version of liberal-normativist political theory which can lay claim to taking realist concerns about the political aspects of political theory most seriously. This meant undertaking a close analysis of what Rawls' *Political Liberalism* understands as political and how *Political Liberalism* as a political theory relates to its political context. The understanding of what is political turned out to amount to the view that what is political is normatively narrowed to meet Rawls' liberal presuppositions. With regard to its relationship to its political context, *Political Liberalism* does not offer the engagement with the particularities of Western liberal democracies which the approach to its goal of improving the stability of its normative recommendations could give one reason to expect. In view of its conceptual toolkit, it has tendencies to legalism, i.e. to view political questions through a legal perspective and to resolve them through legal institutions (like the Supreme Court in the case of the USA). The analysis of *Political Liberalism* set up a critical foil against which to measure the efforts of realists to pose a challenge to liberal-normativist political theory.

There are currently no taxonomies of the debates about realism which are explicitly dedicated to assessing to what extent realism in political theory has the potential to pose a challenge to liberal-normativist political theory. The thesis addressed this gap through developing an ordering perspective for realism. The judgment of the internal heterogeneity of realism in political theory marked the starting point for studying the depth of the criticism of liberal-normativist political theory and the way the term 'realism' is positively filled with (political) meaning. The resulting subdivisions of realism offered an overview of the variety of, both prevalent and sidelined, understandings of realism and already gave indications of how the potential for a challenge to liberal-normativist political theory is stratified. The addition of a reflection on claims to distinctiveness in political theory led to a division of the potential for challenge into realists who hope to revise, reform and reject liberal normativism. The following closer analysis of the similarities between the prevalent subdivisions of realism – methodologically oriented non-ideal theory realism, political judgment and

political conduct realism as well as empirical social science realism and vision of politics realism – and liberal-normativist political theory confirmed the differences between these subdivisions against the background of an analysis of a host of similarities between realism and liberal-normativist political theory which limit the former's potential to challenge the latter.

What I termed 'non-ideal theory realism' and 'political judgment and political conduct realism', as well as 'empirical social science realism', all showed key similarities, shared political goals or a strong compatibility with liberal-normativist political theory and hence only have a limited potential for challenging liberal-normativist political theory. This is partly due to only aiming to revise liberal-normativist political theory or to reform only some of the methods and/or key commitments whilst keeping others which greatly influence the overall perspective of the respective subdivision of realism. 'Vision of politics realism' showed a stronger potential due to its emphasis on the entanglement of political theory with political partisanship and the need for political theory to accept imperfect forms of legitimation. I engaged the explicitly realist work of the most influential vision of politics realist, Bernard Williams (in chapter 3), in order to assess to what extent his vision of politics realism can redeem its potential to pose a challenge to liberal-normativist political theory. This analysis brought to the fore that his vision of politics realism does not share as much with liberal-normativist political theory as the other prevalent subdivisions, however, it also does not depart radically from liberal-normativist political theory. Rather it remains stuck in the tension between the goal to offer a normative political theory which distinguishes clearly between politics and successful domination and the realistic commitment that politics contains forms of domination. This problem was taken up again (in chapter 6) and pushed further in the context of the question of legitimacy. This analysis concluded the first part of the thesis.

It thus became clear that an important question for the realization of the radical potential of realism is how to combine its goal to offer a normative, however, not normativist political theory with a radical departure from liberal-normativist political theory. Against the backdrop of the criticism of the similarities between the prevalent subdivisions of realism and liberal-normativist political theory, the second part of the thesis developed such a radical realism. The process of the departure from the debates about realism was initiated by a reinterpretation of the realism of Raymond Geuss as the key inspiration for the radicalization of realism, which has been popular in the debates about realism,

however, mostly represented through truncated interpretations. Especially Geuss' focus on the tensions and entanglements between the descriptive and the normative, the utopian and the realistic aspects of political theorizing and the emphasis on the need for both criticism and practical guidance, make his realism distinctively radical on my interpretation. My development of Geussian realism through the examples of the 'detoxification of power' and the combination of genealogy and criticism of ideology, which contribute to the interpretation of Geussian realism as a sympathetic modification of early Critical Theory through the addition of Foucauldian elements, set the scene for a condensed programmatic account of radical realism.

Radical realism is driven by an ethos of critique which means that radical realism approaches its political context with the means of negative criticism. This includes interrogating and questioning other political theories as well as practical politics, as radical realism aims at bringing the gaps (and contradictions) between current (liberal) political theory and (liberal) politics into view. Radical realism starts from experiences of negativity, with problems and frustrations and works to gain an understanding of them through a diagnosis which includes a history of the present situation. There are no abstract norms which radical realism brings to into the political context in question, but rather radical realism starts from within the context.

The concept of critical distance functioned as a core concept for the radicalization of realism and at the same time enabled a contrastive comparison to the prevalent understandings of realism and even liberal-normativist political theory. Overcoming the dichotomy between critical, but impotent and action-guiding but status quo affirming political theory through the reconceptualization of critical distance served as an illustration of developing a perspective appropriate to the radicalization of realism. This dichotomy which has become somewhat characteristic of realism blocks the combination of potentially radical criticism and an emphasis on deep contextual diagnosis (on which to base concrete practical guidance) in political theory. The radicalization of realism with regard to the dichotomy consisted in changing the understanding of distance involved in critical distance and thus changing the sources of the normativity of criticism from being remote from the context in question to being gathered through the diagnosis of this very context. The resulting interface between political theory and its political context rethinks their relationship and was termed 'diagnosis-critique' (and offers a sketch of a different normativity of criticism). Diagnosis-critique achieves distance

through the close diagnosis of its context, through interrogating and questioning the particularities of this context with the goal of problematizing and transforming negative experience. This process is at the same time already criticism by needing to position itself toward the normativity inherent in the practices of the political context. Diagnosis-critique further is a radical way of understanding the relationship between political theory and its political context, because it breaks with the view that criticism needs to be constructive and/or based on external normative foundations. The model for this relationship is taken from criticism of ideology which emphasizes the entanglement between descriptive and normative aspects of relating to a political and social order. This also led to a higher level of self-reflection on the political involvement of political theory as its choices of the contents and the procedure of the diagnoses are viewed as political actions. Its negative view of criticism and its emphasis on diagnosis as a key task of political theory could be viewed to connect diagnosis-critique to a line of past political theorists from (the early) Marx via Adorno to Foucault.

The operational perspective of radical realism, diagnosis-critique, incorporates the key commitments of radical realism in practice and offers one way to move on from discussions on the meta-level of the self-conception of political theory to concrete political theorizing. One could even say that the key commitments of radical realism can only come to fruition through the critical practices of interrogation and questioning one's context. These key commitments are intentionally minimal which means that radical realism potentially remains open to other operational perspectives. It also emphasizes the understanding of political theory not as an abstract thought edifice safe from the transitory reality of politics or from political partisanship, but as a tool which offers a sensitivity toward the tension between taking the empirical realities seriously and the ambition for transcending these realities.

The radical challenge which radical realism poses to liberal-normativist political theory then emerges as consisting of several aspects: Radical realism starts from the negative experiences and problems within a political context, but rather than trying to reconstruct or reinstate the goals or values which can be found therein, it aims for their transformation on the basis of their problematization. Radical realism's orthogonal position toward key divisions of liberal-normativist political theory between descriptive and normative theorizing or between political and philosophical criticism further contributes to its radical challenge of liberal-normativist political theory, particularly

through focusing on their tensions and bringing them to bear on the understanding of the relationship between political theory and its political context. The understanding of diagnosis and critique as entangled allows foregoing the grounding of a conception of normativity prior to getting the diagnosis started and undermines the distinction between description and evaluation. Radical realism's commitment to self-reflection on its conditions of possibility further enables the continuous reflection on the question of the senses in which it, as a political theory, is political.

Thus radical realism has the potential to combine (potentially radical) critique with practical action-guidance: The questioning and interrogating perspective of radical realism which problematizes power relations in a specific context guides action at least in as far as it potentially produces novel points of view and may also be viewed as 'constructing' redescribed or even new problem-constellations. The diagnoses and evaluations of diagnosis-critique are practically helpful for agents to orient themselves in a particular context through inspiring reflection which ranges from suspension of judgment via re-problematizations to transformations of one's evaluations. This entails that the recommendation of specific forms of resistance as well as changes in the evaluation of the current political and social order count as forms of action-guidance.

The at least partial rejection of the conceptual toolkit of liberal-normativist political theory, illustrated by the discussion of (the criteria for) legitimacy in public justification liberalism, vision of politics realism and radical realism (in chapter 6) furthers radical realism's radical challenge. Radical realism does not deliver the clear-cut, often dichotomist criteria for evaluating political regimes typical of liberal-normativist political theory. The radical realist transformation of the prevalent conceptualization of legitimacy means rejecting legitimacy as understood in juridical terms, which arguably leads to a limitation of the study of the relations of power between state and citizens to the relationship of authority, replacing this limitation through broadening the understanding of what it means to be governed, in order to get a wider range of potentially problematic relations of power into view (see also Owen 1994: 197-201). Radical realism then does not solve the problem of vision of politics realists, of upholding the distinction between accepting a regime as legitimate for reasons and for its (abuse of) existing power relations, without recourse to a justification based on moral criteria. Rather, radical realism dissolves this problem by admitting the omnipresence of power relations and changing the perspective on them – which power relations come

into the focus of radical realist diagnosis-critique, however, depends on the particulars of the situation, including the goals and the means available to those who are using radical realism as a perspective on a regime and a political and social order. The commitment to practicing the ethos of critique entails continuously questioning and interrogating one's present context which means that the development of evaluative criteria is an ongoing process rather than a question of indefinitely using criteria once deemed appropriate.

In an era in which social criticism with a philosophical-theoretical apparatus that operates from the ground up is a rarity, in which abstract concepts like equality, freedom, liberty, rights or justice dominate the discussions of political theory, radical realism hopes to contribute to a closer examination of the political present, including its history, which should answer some questions about the importance of the above mentioned concepts and suggest alternative ways of understanding what is at stake when people look at their lives from a political point of view, from the point of view of (potential) collective agency. Radical realism hopes to contribute to the project of not taking for granted who we are politically and the stories of how we have become who we are politically. It is thus part of a subversive venture of reclaiming philosophical perspectives not for reconciling us with the present or for limiting our goals to stability but for unraveling resources of the political imagination through a diagnosis-critique of our present political situation.

Whilst this thesis has only briefly practiced radical realism with regard to its transformation of legitimacy, it has opened up pathways for substantiating and developing radical realism in future research. I will briefly suggest three such pathways here. First, take radical realism to the test through the application of diagnosis-critique to certain aspects of a current political context. Through diagnosis-critique radical realism is always a kind of practice, which cannot realize its evaluative and action-guiding capacities in abstraction of a specific political and social order. So in order to reconnect political theory to political criticism, concrete experiences of negativity in a chosen political and social order would be taken up, problematized and evaluated. In this thesis, for example, I have only critically discussed liberal normativism with regard to the debates about realism in political theory. Future work led by radical realism should aim to offer a much more comprehensive diagnosis-critique of liberal normativism and its entanglement with concrete power relations.

Developments in this vein would also mark a distinctive take on reviving and modifying the perspective of early Critical Theory, focused on the idiosyncrasies of power relations in daily life and the question of historically grown patterns of social and political relations as a 'second nature' of people which at the same time need to be taken seriously and be viewed through the goal of their potential transformation from within themselves. This perspective is likely to generate a tension between the claim of radical realism to offer a perspective which is superior, in terms of cognitive capacity, to those involved in the context which it studies and the claim to take the statements and actions of those agents, who make up the political and social order of this context, as seriously as possible. The radically realist understanding of political theory as an intervention into politics will have to be further refined in order to respond to this tension.

Second, elaborate on the toolkit and key concepts of radical realism and diagnosis-critique. As one of the main goals of radical realism is to develop evaluative criteria specifically for concrete political problems, the guidelines for the process of the development of such evaluative criteria are in need of further elaboration. The search for resources for the development of such guidelines will likely require engaging in conceptual experimentation (and ideally successful conceptual innovation) with regard to the vocabulary used to capture how people are being governed today (in the respective situation) and how they assess these power relations. It will be vital for such experimentation to take radical realism beyond the disciplinary boundaries of political theory (and political science). Especially anthropological work on political and social orders or rather on the question of theorizing political power relations beyond the state could prove to be a fruitful resource here. Such a turn should in the long run aim at and facilitate taking radical realism beyond the boundaries of Western liberal democracies, too. Another fertile ground for resources to explore would be the history of diagnostically oriented political thought (which directly connects to the third pathway outlined below).

Of the key concepts of radical realism, negative criticism, the inner normativity of historical reality as well as the understanding of political theory as an intervention into politics certainly require further elaboration. To this end, an important step could be to combine questions which are crucial for the understanding of normativity of a political theory but which have not been asked together in recent debates about how to do political theory. These are the questions of the relationship between theory and practice,

between political theory and its political context, and between descriptive and normative aspects of theorizing (about) politics. Reflecting on the relationships within and between these three questions could bolster radical realism's account of how political theory can generate critical resources and how it can become practical in its diagnostic engagement with a particular political context.

Third, connect radical realism more intensely to the tradition of diagnostic political thought (e.g. as outlined by Sluga 2011). Re-reading the writings of political thinkers like Machiavelli, (the early) Marx, Nietzsche, Adorno, or Foucault, with special attention to how they bring out the entanglements between description and evaluation and how they link diagnosis to criticism, would be a fruitful way to expand the resources of radical realism. This includes exploring the synergies of studying links between thinkers of this diagnostic tradition which have hitherto not been comprehensively investigated. A prominent example would be comparing the goals and means present in the work of Adorno and Foucault. This particular comparison would also lead to a reconsideration of the early Critical Theory, which has recently been sidelined in favor of the later Habermasian developments. This would not be only of historical interest, but rather, offer resources for fleshing out the combination of aspects of Adornian early Critical Theory with Foucault which is highly relevant for the self-conception of radical realism.

In summary, this thesis offered a critical perspective on the debates about realism which came to the conclusion that the prevalent subdivisions of realism only have a limited potential to challenge liberal-normativist political theory. Reflecting the heterogeneity of the debates, they show similarities of varying significance with liberal-normativist political theory which limit their distinctiveness. A radical departure from liberal-normativist political theory, to radicalize realism, is, however, possible. Once re-interpreted as going beyond the framework of the prevalent realists, Geussian realism offers a basis for this radicalization. The proposed development of radical realism – via the key commitments of radical realism and the reconceptualization of critical distance – challenges the distinctions between description and evaluation and between concrete action-guidance and radical criticism. Radical realism modifies the focus of political theory from normative justification to diagnosis-critique of power relations which brings the tensions and entanglements between political theory's impulses of reflection and intervention into focus. Together this amounts to a radical challenge of liberal-

normativist political theory. The account of radical realism presented in this thesis is, however, only a first step in the development of this distinctive way of practicing political theory. Still, it may inspire future developments of radically critical and practically oriented political theorizing.

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