Following Your Heart with Eyes Wide Open: the Moral Failure of Political Realism

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Abstract

Recently, there has been a resurgence of self-proclaimed realism in normative political theory. Authors like Williams, Guess and Galston criticize liberal theories for being insufficiently attentive to the distinctly 'political' aspects of political life, primarily the ineradicability of conflict. This paper traces these views back to Carl Schmitt and argues that political realism exhibits a moral failure: by focusing on power struggles and violence and by being suspicious towards ideals and utopianism, political realists exacerbate and perpetuate the woes of the world that they warn us from. At best, their stance is tantamount to a status quo bias; at worst, it is a celebration of violence and conflict that not only acquiesces in it but also confers on it legitimacy. Moreover, the failure is partly due to realists' misconception of the role of political philosophy vis-à-vis political activity: by insisting on the autonomy of the political they effectively eliminate the autonomy of philosophy. I argue, in the spirit of J. Cohen's remark that "political philosophy is continuous with politics", that the role of political philosophy situates it near the political sphere but outside of it. I explain the role of political philosophy as a personal engagement to form convictions on important matters as well as an effort to communicate these views to fellow citizens and human-beings. Lastly, I try to save a valid concern of the realists from their moral failure; there is no simple straightforward way of applying normative principles to political reality and blindly pursuing ideal goals may actually undermine them. With this caveat, I discuss and defend the role of ideals in political philosophy.

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> *Some people idealize force and pull it into the foreground and worship it, instead of keeping it in the background as long as possible. I think they make a mistake, and I think that their opposites, the mystics, err even more when they declare that force does not exist. I believe that it exists, and that one of our jobs is to prevent it from getting out of its box.*

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E. M. Forster

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Political realism is the outlook that political life is characterized by ineradicable violent conflict and that normative political theory, also known as political philosophy[1] ought to remain close to this pessimistic picture of reality. While there are many varieties of realism, this paper focuses on the recent resurgence of self-proclaimed realists in political theory (Galston 2010; Geuss 2008; Williams 2007). These thinkers insist that political philosophy should be more attentive to the features that they think are distinctly 'political', which include a focus on conflict and its inevitability. These thinkers are all self-proclaimed realists - by which they claim both the allegiance of the realist tradition and the presumption of that tradition, namely the contention that it represents a theory that is superior in virtue of its closeness to reality, or 'facts'. And like the many writers of that tradition, these thinkers favor a skeptical outlook towards utopian or ideal theories (sometimes criticized as 'liberal', 'moralist' or 'legalist'), which fail, to their account, to take political reality seriously or create demands that are too high. The critical attitude of these thinkers require some discussion, though my main focus here will not be to discuss the realist critique or to defend liberal and ideal theory from it.

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[1]Though there are arguably differences between political theory and political philosophy, I use those terms interchangeably in this paper.

I argue that political realism exhibits a moral failure. Political realists purport to warn us from a woeful warn but they perpetuate and exacerbate those very woes by focusing on power struggles and violence; by being suspicious towards ideals and utopianism; by deriving moral and normative principles from the uniquely political sphere and by advocating a pessimistic outlook. At best, their stance is tantamount to a status quo bias; at worst, it is a celebration and even legitimation of violent conflict. This is not a novel criticism and though some of these thinkers, Galston for example, address it, I do not find their response compelling. Furthermore, I hold that the failure of political realists is partly due to their misconception of the role of political philosophy in political action: by insisting on the autonomy of the political (usually as opposed to the 'moral') they effectively eliminate the autonomy of philosophy. They end up subjecting our moral convictions to political calculation. In the world of the realists, we are not even allowed to condemn wrong when we would not act upon it for political reasons. This failure, as will be discussed further below, is often manifested as excessive sensitivity to public opinion and willingness to revise moral judgments according to their popularity; a consideration which, I hold, is appropriate for political activism but not for political philosophy. I argue that the role of political philosophy, rightly understood, situates it near the political sphere but outside of it; as Joshua Cohen (2009, p. 4) says, "political philosophy is continuous with politics".

However, there is a kernel of truth to the realist critique that is some-

times ignored, or at least not explicitly discussed, by political theorists. The truth is that there is no simple straightforward way of applying moral judgments (or principles of justice) to our political life as it is. That is not to say, as some realists seem to believe, that devising principles of justice should be done only within the constraints of foreseeable or likely applicability. It does mean that that it is part of the role of political philosophy to explain its 'continuity' with politics - where does it touches it? How exactly? J. Cohen goes on to mention two ways in which his work reflects the idea of continuity. The first is that political philosophy often grows out of existing political discussions or disagreements, dealing with the same issues that occupy political activists, politicians and other public figures. That is to say, it makes judgments on controversial topics that occupy politicians. In this sense, the relevance of political philosophy is that it includes voicing an opinion on publically controversial issues . That continuity, though important, does not exhaust the tasks of political philosophy. The second aspect of continuity is that political philosophy is informed by political reality with concerns about the way in which its notions and ideas "might be realized in the world" and is therefore sensitive to empirical social sciences; "sensible political ideas should be workable in the political world as it might be, and concerns about such workability are part of a reflective assessment of their reasonableness and correctness" (Cohen 2009, p. 5). But what weight should the 'workability' of an idea play its evaluation? This statement is somewhat vague, and its meaning depends on our understanding of the word 'might' in

4

'the political world as it *might* be'. It implies that there should be a trade-off between the feasibility of the an idea and some other attractive features, but it does not tell us what kinds of implementation hurdles are important to the normative evaluation of a political ideal and whether such differences matter (as I think they do). Moreover, it does not address the particular concern raised by realists concerning 'ideal' political theory: that attempting to implement it may sometimes lead to terrible results, more unjust and unbearable than the injustice the principles were designed to address in the first place. If realists are right about this point (and I believe they are), then it is all the more important to explain the role of political philosophy and its relationship to political action.

The paper proceeds as follows. The first section discusses the moral failure of political realism as its attachment to actual politics translates into the well-known status quo bias. The second section discusses political realism's misconception of the role of political philosophy and the way in which it subjects it to irrelevant considerations of political activity, especially to the test of popularity. The last section concludes with final remarks on the role of political philosophy which make an attempt to rescue the valid concern of political realists from their moral failure. That it attempts to do by clarifying some crucial points about the relationship between political philosophy and political activism in the spirit of J. Cohen's assertion that political philosophy is 'continuous' with politics.

The Autonomy of the Political and the Status Quo Bias

Carl Schmitt and the roots of political realism

A major strand in the realist literature is an insistence on the 'autonomy of the political', that is the idea that politics is a distinct sphere of human life that has distinguishing features, and that political philosophy should therefore be attentive to these features. The idea can be traced back to Carl Schmitt (2007), in his *The Concept of the Political*.[2] Schmitt argues that the concept of the political is independent from, and primary to, other outlooks which serve to characterize human interactions. The political outlook is fundamentally based on the distinction between friend and enemy, which people apply to themselves as members of a collective and to others, foreigners, that do not belong. The important part is that the distinction between friend and enemy does not trace any other 'antitheses' - religious, social or moral; it has a unique meaning (ibid., p. 26).

The analytic-conceptual contribution of this distinction is undoubted. That human life could be seen through the friend-enemy distinction is obviously true, and the power of that simple insight is due to the fact we[3]

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[2]By 'could be traced back' I mean that it both could be traced back historically, as a major influence of the contemporary literature, and that the notions of the contemporary literature have theoretical similarity to that core Schmittian idea. The historical connection is partly due to Schmitt's influence on Hans Morgenthau, who became a prominent thinker of the realist school in the field of International Relations and an influential intellectual in the US. On the influence of Schmitt on Morgenthau, see Akbik 2010; Scheuerman 2007.

[3]The use of 'we' in the kind of political philosophy that I am here engaged to explain and pursue is prevalent. It is contested by the realists I'm interested in, and see section below.

recognize that people often do. It is therefore not a surprise that the Schmittian insight stayed with us for as long as it did: it is a succinct presentation of an existing feature of human life, as any football game between national teams (especially in the world cup) reminds us.

But Schmitt is not merely making an analytic point but claims that the concept of the political is both ineradicable and enjoys a certain primacy over other ways of examining the social world. The ineradicablity of the political distinction is fundamentally an empirical claim about the psychological tendencies of people, which Morgenthau correctly described later as an assumption about human nature.[4] When discussing it, Schmitt makes usage of a common 'realist' language - the argument that he is responding to facts about the reality that his opponents, realists or liberals or utopians, ignore. He says,

> *it cannot be denied that nations continue to group themselves according to the friend and enemy antithesis, that the distinction remain actual today, and that this an ever present possibility for every people existing in the political sphere. (Schmitt 2007, p. 28)*

It is partly on this basis that Schmitt criticizes liberalism as excessively 'unrealistic' for it requires the elimination of the political as it does not admit the distinction between friend and enemy. For example, he criticizes

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[4]Morgenthau too thought that this attentiveness to 'human nature' is partially responsible of giving his theory the credence of 'realism', see Morgenthau and Thompson 1993, p. 4.

pluralism (which he says 'revolves in a liberal individualism') for it leads to the destruction of the 'political itself' (Schmitt 2007, p. 45).

I have no problem with the inerdicability of the friend and enemy distinction as a prevalent psychological phenomenon, except when it comes coupled with claim about the primacy of that 'political' distinction. The problem becomes evident when Schmitt says that the political entity is 'decisive' (ibid., p. 38). It is hard to decipher what exactly Schmitt means by that, and I shall not try an extended exegesis here. However, it is important to note that though Schmitt concedes that there are other ways in which people see themselves and society, he insists that these other distinctions, rightly understood, are subordinated to the political. Economic interests or religious sentiments can motivate us, but we will always be under the grip of the political distinction as it is tied to the extreme situation: that of fighting a violent conflict to the death. That extreme possibility, as a possibility, is important here - for the political distinction is situated on the extreme end of the dimension of intensity, transforming whatever sentiment that happens to group people around a certain goal into a political unity. The problem is of course that in virtue of that claim, the collective now understood as a political unit now enjoys certain prerogatives such as the right to "wag[e] war and thereby publicly disposing of the lives of men" (ibid., p. 46).[5] This seems to me unwarranted; in any case, I do not see how Schmitt can ground this

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[5] Schmitt attaches the political unity exclusively to the state, almost as a necessity. This seems to me like a mistake and in any case Schmitt provides very little explanation for it. However, I do not pursue this line of criticism here.

on grounds of 'reality' as against 'normative ideals' (Schmitt 2007, p. 28). But it is important to see why Schmitt thinks that this 'decisive' nature of the political association is a necessity; for he seems to think it comes more or less with the definition of the political, as a deductive argument. He says,

> The real friend-enemy grouping is existentially so strong and decisive that the nonpolitical antithesis, at precisely the moment at which it becomes political, pushes aside and subordinates its hitherto purely religious, purely economic, purely cultural criteria and motives to the conditions and conclusions of the political situation at hand. In any event, that grouping is always political which **orients itself towards this most extreme possibility**. This grouping is therefore always the decisive human grouping, the political entity. If such an entity exists at all, it is always the decisive entity, and **it is sovereign in the sense that the decision about the critical situation, even if it is the exception, must always necessarily resides there.**
> (ibid., p. 38, emphases added)

There is much to say about this pregnant passage. First, as a purely empirical observation it is obviously false: it is not true that people will always act in response to the most extreme situation which threatens their existence as a collective. It is not true that the so called 'political' sentiment is so strong in people's minds that their religious and moral sentiments get 'pushed aside' in favor of a 'kill or get killed' attitude on the basis of an 'us and them'

9

distinction. It is not true, empirically, that the decision 'must reside' in the political distinction as it often does not. The word 'must' can only be understood normatively - Schmitt is actually saying that it *should* reside there. And indeed, as we shall soon see, he thinks that this normative claim is justified due to the danger of annihilation which awaits anyone who ignores it, a common realist claim. Second, the proviso 'if such an entity exists at all' is not one that can sincerely be given - as Schmitt insists that 'state and politics cannot be exterminated' (Schmitt 2007, p. 78). The state can fall into civil strife and be overcome by fools with false liberal illusions, but there can be no escape from belonging to such an association. Lastly, and most importantly, the political crucially depends on the orientation towards the possibility of a factor threatening the existence of the uniting group. It is in virtue of that possibility that the political unit gains its 'sovereignty', which I take to mean the legitimacy to exercise violent power. Of course, the reality of such a *possibility* is not challenged; it is always possible, even if improbable, that someone will act to eliminate the political unit and, as Schmitt seems to imply closely followed, kill its members. The dubious aspect is the justification of such a paranoid collective existence, where we are justified in living according to the belief that an existential threat is ever-present and even imminent: "What always matters is only the possibility of conflict" (ibid., p. 39).

In the orientation towards the extreme threat Schmitt reveals the motivation behind his normative demand that sovereignty reside in the hands of the political outlook. Here we see the claim for the ineradicablity of the

political distinction between friend and enemy comes coupled with the understanding that it does not only entail an 'us and them' mentality or a psychological outlook but also that "men could be required to sacrifice life, authorized the shed blood, and kill other human beings." (Schmitt 2007, p. 35).The only thing that ties together the psychological tendency of the 'friend and enemy' distinction with the authorization to kill is the claim that the constant possibility of war is not a chimera - it is a real and justified belief about how the social world works. Indeed, Schmitt (ibid., pp. 50-3) reveals the real basis of his normative attitude when he discusses what happens to a people that refuses to live according to the friend and enemy distinction. In his discussion of such a policy Schmitt bases his claim of its impossibility on its likelihood to fail. Schmitt attempts to show that this is an 'analytic' impossibility - that declaring that you wish to avoid war is a declaration that has to be backed by force, that is by a threat of war. However, this is true only if there's someone who will challenge it. And of course, Schmitt is committed to this idea as he thinks that the political distinction, which is inevitable, comes with this outlook towards seeing the others in terms of 'kill or get killed'.

Schmitt is trying to make this argument to be non-normative; a common trademark of the realist argument. Hence he says, "If a part of the population declares that it no longer recognizes enemies, then, depending on the circumstance, it joins their side and aids them. Such a declaration does not abolish the *reality* of the friend-and-enemy distinction." (ibid., p. 51,

11

emphasis added). But if you believe, like me, that the distinction between 'us and them', albeit being common among people's minds, does not necessarily guide their actions, especially not when it is coupled with the constant orientation towards the most extreme possibility - you will see no reason to see this statement as pertaining to reality, except as a guidance to action. Schmitt reveals it as a normative concern when he goes to explain that any other behavior would lead to the extermination of a people:

> *If a people is afraid of the trial and risks implied by existing in the sphere of politics, then another people will appear which will assume these trials by protecting it against foreign enemies and thereby taking over political rule... If a people no longer possesses the energy or the will to maintain itself in the sphere of politics, the latter will not thereby vanish from the world. Only a weak people will disappear. Schmitt 2007, pp. 52-3*

If Schmitt is wrong about the consequences of not orienting oneself towards the supreme possibility of annihilation, as I think he obviously is, then his attitude is a moral failure: for he himself, with his encouragement of that outlook, perpetuates the state in which his predictions are right.[6] Schmitt's classical text is therefore the most egregious and clear version of the moral failure of political realism: he makes dubious assertions about the possibility

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[6] Schmitt's error is not only a moral one but also an empirical one. Compare my criticism with a prominent criticism of the realist approach to empirical political science in the field of international relations: "the realist-rationalist alliance denies or brackets the fact that competitive power politics help create the very 'problem of order' they are supposed to solve–that realism is a self-fulfilling prophecy." (Wendt 1992, p. 410)

and impossibility of social interactions, and makes direct policy recommendations on their basis which in turn make his assumptions real. The 'realism' of this stance is only its self-prophesying feature - the only way to make sure that everybody else is your enemy, is to treat them as such. This assumption does not take into consideration the simple fact that our attitude towards other people is partly responsible to whether they see us as enemies and whether they consider seriously the supreme possibility of annihilating us. This is the well known 'prisoners' dilemma'; and people on a daily basis solve this dilemma, to the great surprise of many theorists. There is not reason why we should think getting stuck in that dilemma is an inevitability; it does plague out life and we work really hard to get out of it, but experience shows it is possible. The possibility of escaping from makes Schmitt's false empirical claim into a moral failure for he perpetuate the situation with his proposed outlook.

Bernard Williams and the 'first' political question

It seems easy and anachronistic to criticize Schmitt - writing before World War II, almost a century ago, he was informed by different realities and probably had grounds for beliefs that we find preposterous. Moreover, his reputation is, to say the least, tarnished by his association with the Nazi regime in Germany. However, contemporary self-proclaimed realists took the autonomy of the political with many its Schmittian features, including the belief that violent conflict is inevitable. And when such a belief becomes

13

the basis of a normative theory, as it does for the political philosophers I discuss, it becomes a moral failure: accepting the existence of violent conflict when designing principles of justice is not only acquiescence in it but also conferment of legitimacy on it. At best, it is an unwarranted status-quo bias; at worst, a celebration of violence and conflict. J. Cohen alludes to this failure in the discussion of political philosophy mentioned earlier. While rejecting the realist view as 'cynical', he adds "its tireless reiteration threatens to turn it into a self-fulfilling prophecy" (Cohen 2009, p. 2).[7] This understates the problem - the self-fulfilling nature of the claim does not only make its proponents 'right' on the matter at hand, but it also makes them complicit in perpetuating it if - and that's an important if - an alternative world is possible.[8] I will return to this issue when discussing of Galston, in subsection . The possibility, indeed the prevalence, of conflict is one of the most important motivations behind the pursuit of political philosophy. One can believe that conflict is not likely to disappear from the world without assuming it for the purpose of figuring out what morality, or justice, demand.

I now turn to discussing the contemporary realists that are my main interest here. Its most plausible version, it seems to me, is the one presented by Bernard Williams (2007) and it is his view that stands at the center of William Galston's (2010) favorable review. Williams promotes his view of

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[7] J. Cohen here is discussing the position which sees 'normative ideas in political argument' as 'high-minded sham' as opposed to genuine expressions of beliefs concerning normative ideas. Though this is not the stance I am considering here, they are both dubbed realist and they often come together (as in the case of Schmitt).

[8] These considerations parallel the ones in the discussion of the realist approach in empirical international relations, and see note 6.

political realism on the ground that it is more distinctly political (Williams 2007, p. 3). But what makes Williams's theory more distinctly 'political'? Williams openly admits that he has very little to say on the meaning of the concept of the political, though he does say that he wants "a more realistic view of the powers, opportunities, and limitations of political actors, where all the considerations that bear on political actions-both ideals and, for example, political survival-can come to one focus of decision"(ibid., p. 12). That political actors are only partially motivated by ethical motivation is undisputed. But what does that imply for the content of moral demands? Williams does not answer this question directly, but we will see his answer as it is reflected in his theory. Beforehand, I only want note that Williams acknowledges, not without reservation, his debt to Schmitt's notion of 'friend and enemy' in his understanding of the political. He says "Schmitt famously said that the fundamental political relation was that of friend and enemy... it is basically true in at least this sense, that political difference is of the essence of politics"(ibid., p. 78). I am unsure what exactly Williams means by 'political difference' which here is the essence of politics, but it seems to me that he too believed that something like the 'us and them' mentality which Schmitt so acutely characterized should play a foundational role in political theory. Surely, this is not a celebration of conflict and Williams considers his disagreement with his opponents as a respectful one(ibid., p. 13), but it seems that Williams inherited from Schmitt the copulation of the 'us and them' distinction with the supreme possibility of annihilation, the 'kill or

get killed' mentality. This intellectual inheritance played a part in leading Williams to his unwarranted emphasis on order (which Schmitt also shared) and is therefore a source of williams's entanglement with the status quo bias, which I discuss below.

I cannot discuss Williams's theory in full; instead, I will elucidate what makes his theory distinctly political. Williams offers one fundamental principle which he calls the Basic Legitimation Demand (BLD). The BLD is the requirement that the state[9] provide justification to the people that it subjects to its power. Williams insists, importantly, that power itself is not a justification - he takes as an 'axiom' the old maxim that 'might does not make right' (Williams 2007, p. 5). The BLD is a moral demand, as Williams reluctantly concedes, but it "does not represent a morality which is prior to politics. It is a claim that is inherent in there being such a thing as politics:

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[9]Like Schmitt (and see note 5 above), Williams's discussion of the political assumes the state. The fact he does not present a justification for the state is not necessarily a problem, since his account could assume some other account (perhaps elaborated elsewhere) on the justification of the state. However, in a brief discussion internal warfare, Williams makes a set of remarks that suggest he thought states enjoy some special normative status. In brief, Williams holds that state power requires justification only towards 'anyone over whom the state claims authority' and that there is no such claims against enemies, including 'internal' enemies such as a class of slaves; Williams notes that preventing such warfare may have its reasons but 'these are not the same reasons' (Williams 2007, p. 6). This seems wrong: first, it is perverse to argue that the attitude attached to coercion can undermine the demand of its legitimacy. The problem with coercion by the state remains the same problem whether or not the state claims authority over the subjects its power. Demands of legitimacy can be different for members and non-members only if the state membership has an explanatory moral role. Second, the attachment to the state is an aspect of the status quo bias. It is a failure to examine, doubt and ultimately justify the normative scheme of states as monopolies of coercive power in a territory. For a related account which reveals much of the same failures in the literature which attempts, unsuccessfully, to justify special duties to compatriots, see Abizadeh 2007. For an empirical outlook which explains how the notion of sovereign states gains hold as an international institute, see Wendt 1992.

in particular in there being first a political question" (Williams 2007, p. 5). The BLD then rises in response to the 'first political question' which is the attempt to find a way of "securing order, protection, safety, trust, and the condition of cooperation", which Williams calls 'first' because "solving it is the condition of solving, indeed posing, any others" (ibid., p. 3). While trying to create a political system that secures order we find that we have to provide legitimation - if we subject people to coercion in attempt to secure order without legitimation, we create disorder instead of solving it. This is what Williams means when he says that "the state-the solution-should not become part of the problem" (ibid., p. 4) - the demand for legitimation is ever present in the existence of a political order, in the background of every system which employs coercion.

I do not wish to delve deeper into Williams's theory, though I find many of its aspects normatively appealing. Williams gives a plausible view which 'gets', or so I believe, many moral questions right. Nonetheless, I dispute his claim that his theory deserves any more credit due to its distinctly 'political' character or that his 'political question' is in any sense, 'first'. First, the claim that the political question is 'the condition of solving, indeed posing, any other' questions is false, both as an empirical observation and as assumption for a normative theory. While safety and security seem necessary to much of the life of an industrialized, modern world - experience of life under all sorts of 'disorderly' regimes prove that this is not the case. Quality of life is reduced when security is uncertain, but many questions can be posed (and indeed,

17

answered!) in various situations of disorder, when the question of order and safety is not considered or the situation is openly in disorder (as it is in places where this is an ongoing political conflict concerning the legitimate power). It is not likely that people in dire conditions, where security is severely lacking, would have no interest in solving the so-called first question; but they do not have to solve it in order to solve many other questions that are of interest to human beings and many of them, despaired by political prospects, would turn their attention away from 'solving' it.[10]

Moreover, there is no basis to the normative requirement that they give attention to that question before anything else. And this is the second point - Williams's theory gives us no reason to attend 'first' to this question. Even if Williams is right that it distinctly political and that it is inherent in the practice of politics, what is the basis of looking at this question first and deriving from it the BLD? Making this question 'first' in that sense means that disrupting order and acting in a way that jeopardizes security can only be justified on the grounds that the order itself has not be appropriately justified, namely that it is power exercised without justification. This is venerable position, but what hides behind the claim that this political philosophy is more distinctly 'political' is an unjustified, and probably excessive, concern with security and order.[11] Galston, I believe, characterizes Williams's view

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[10]As an empirical claim, this could also be traced back to Schmitt (2007, p. 52), who says: "No form of order, no reasonable legitimacy or legality can exist without protection and obedience."

[11]Considering order and stability as sources of justification is at the basis of what Avishai Margalit calls the 'decisionist picture of God' - a conception of authority which is, he

correctly when he says, "in his [Williams's - TP] view, the first virtue of politics is order, not justice, and justice purchased at the expense of order is likely to prove self-defeating"(Galston 2010, p. 388). It may be that we must sometimes sacrifice justice for some other value, and even that there is a principle which can guide us about such cases,[12] but the reason is not merely that pursuing justice first is not 'political' enough and in any case, I do not see why pursuing justice on the expense of order is necessarily 'self-defeating'. Indeed, I cannot think about any struggle for justice that does not come at the expense of order - injustice is often institutionalized (and legalized) and it is all the more troubling for that reason.

Lastly, the focus on securing order as a primary demand exemplify Williams's status-quo bias. For Williams, the paradigm of injustice is coercion without justification and there he looks for resistance that triggers coercion. Without resistance, there is no demand for justification and the BLD is, ostensibly, satisfied. This would mean that the worst forms of coercion, which cruelly quench any opposition would be justified as there would be no standard to criticize them: there would be no opposition. Williams is aware of this problem and he therefore adds the 'critical theory principle', according to which "the acceptance of a justification does not count

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believes, influenced by theological theories about God's authority, and which he ascribes to, among other people, Carl Schmitt, see Margalit 2005

[12]For an account which argues, as a matter of principle, that justice should be sacrificed for the sake of lasting peace, see Margalit 2009. It seems to me that Margalit's argument is very much in the spirit of Williams's concern, though 'lasting peace' is much more plausible as a candidate for the value that should outweigh justice then order or even security.

if the acceptance itself is produced by the coercive power which is supposedly being justified"(Williams 2007, p. 6). This principle is meant to make good on the promise to prevent might from making right - from allowing the powerful to force people into accepting it by the use of violent means. This principle would also allow, under some understandings, to condemn the 'false consciousness' of people that are subjected to power even when they do not actively resist it and even if they accept it. Williams is rightly wary about that possibility but his discussion of 'other societies' nonetheless shows that judgment passed according to his theory would be 'significantly' sensitive to the question "who does and does not accept the current legitimation" (ibid., p. 14). Williams conjectures that non-liberal regimes would have a hard time sustaining themselves without coercion, in which case we would see coercion that would provoke the BLD. It is in this context that Williams invokes Goethe's Faust's quote which gave the book its title: *in the beginning was the deed.* I find this unsatisfactorily conservative, in the literal sense: it holds a great power to conserve any stable regime of coercion. From a constant demand to justify coercion, promised by the 'first question', Williams's theory transforms into suspicious outlook which searches for resistance as signs for the absence of legitimacy. As long as the existing account of legitimation is broadly accepted, there is very little ground to condemn it. Williams is unwilling to condemn without reservations non-liberal regimes simply because they fail to live up to a standard that we liberals believe. But his stance allows very little room for criticism of even liberal regime from within. Is lib-

eralism really the best way for us? Should we continue to accept the existing practices of, say, representative democracy, as an appropriate manifestation of that idea? No one forced us to accept it yet some of our state officials offer such a story as justifying one for our system. Should we accept it? William's theory provides us with no tools to address these questions.

Galston's response to the status-quo bias

William's cautious about condemnation of non-liberal societies and his slogan 'in the beginning was the deed' reflect his view regarding the role of political philosophy, which I hold is 'too close' to politics. Before I turn to this issue in the next section, I wish to discuss Galston's view and his response to the criticism that realism is tarred by the status-quo bias. Galston constructs a sympathetic account which joins together several realists thinkers in their criticism of idealist theories. "Realists see political conflict as ubiquitous, perennial, ineradicable, and they regard political moralists as being far too sanguine about the possibility of achieving either normative or practical consensus."(Galston 2010, p. 396). Therefore, Galston acknowledges, their the theory focuses on "ordering and channeling of conflict ." (ibid., p. 397). He summarizes his stance by saying that "the proposition that civil order is the *sine qua non* for every other political good" (ibid., p. 408) is one of the 'building blocks' of the realists' view that he finds 'strong'. This provokes the same question: why should order get such primacy? Surely stability and order are important goods, but what makes them the most important

good of a regime? Why not challenge order and stability when they perpetu-
ate atrocities? Of course Galston, like Williams, *expects* people to challenge
order when things are bad (and, in Williams words, people are 'severely dis-
advantaged') but their theory does not give these people the tools to make
such assessments. Indeed, their theory *always* give their opponents a way
to respond by saying that they are simply maintaining order, the *sine qua
non* of every other political good.[13] This focus on order flies in the face of
Williams's (and other realists') claim that he makes political disagreement
more civilized by expecting the existence conflict. There will always be dis-
agreement, no doubt. And on its basis, it is likely that some sort of conflict
might revolve. But focusing on maintaining order and securing people may
not always be the right way of dealing with it and in any case - though order
and security are important, they are only one piece of the puzzle. The con-
cern is exacerbated when Schmittian concepts creep in, as is the case when
Galston (2010, p. 392) says: "In circumstances of political fragmentation and
disorder, restoring order and the possibility of decent, fear-free lives for cit-
izens will often require leaders to employ means that would be forbidden in
other contexts". As a platitude, this is correct - restoring order would allow
for *some* means that would not be allowed otherwise, that is simply because

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[13]As a historical note, it is interesting to note that many regimes (from the Ten Com-
mandments to modern democracies) have made stability their 'first' goal (or first com-
mandment), and that can be reflected by the fact that betrayal against the state/regime
is considered such a terrible crime which merits severe punishment, and see "The am-
biguities of betrayal." It is that same sentiment that makes anarchism such intolerable
stance in much of the political discourse, though space does not permit here a discussion
of philosophical Anarchism and its merits.

order is a good and can therefore justify efforts: we put people in jail though we would not otherwise limit their free movement. However, if we assume order to be the *sine qua non* of every political good, or we think that solving the first question is a condition of solving any other questions - we are led to believe that it would justify almost *any* means for solving. After all, if we do not solve it, how will we attend to anything else? This mindset is very dangerous, and the status-bias is not the worst, though the most common among the thinkers I discuss, version of it.[14]

Galston enumerates a number of reasons why he, and other realists, think some specific prominent theories such as Rawls's are 'utopian in the wrong way' (Galston 2010, p. 387), that is they include requirements that are not feasible, most of which relate to this conflictual nature of politics.[15] But Galston takes note that often this disagreement is actually an empirical one - committed to the 'ought implies can' maxim, both realists and their interlocutors simply disagree on what people 'can' do. In this sense, my claim that a world without conflict is possible is a contested empirical one. However, I see no reason to accept its impossibility. If by 'political conflict' Galston means simply 'disagreement', I see no reason why we should want to eliminate it. However, if he means violent conflict - I do not see why

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[14]It is not a coincidence, it seems, that Williams characterizes the 'first' question as a Hobbesian one. Though Williams, and many other realists (as Gaslton notes), reject Hobbes's answer as a recreation of the problem, it seems to me that the logic of their argument lends itself to Hobbesian answers, who prefer order under a single united sovereignty over the provision of 'destabilizing' liberties.

[15]I do not deal here with the various ways in which Galston misrepresents the stances which he criticizes, except when it pertains my argument about the role of political philosophy.

we should assume that it would be impossible to eliminate it. Galton cites Parfit's distinction between two types of infeasibility, noting that eliminating conflict may not be 'deeply impossible' as it does not violate any physical law, but rather 'technically impossible' - not feasible in the conditions of the world as we know it (Galston 2010, p. 401). Galston then acknowledges the status-quo bias which is the outcome of failing to take into account possibilities that are not 'deeply' but only 'technically' impossible. He makes the point by discussing the civil rights movement in the US - it proved that change, once thought impossible, is indeed possible; "and the United States would be a worse society today if their doubts had prevailed half a century ago"(ibid., p. 401).

Galston then acknowledges the status-quo bias - he admits that succumbing to doubts (even justified ones) can discourage political action that may lead to just reform. Why, then, does he insists on circumscribing the debate of political philosophy? The reason is that he believes there is a danger in leaning the other way - advocating optimistic theories may lead to tyrannical attempts to 'force' the change on a recalcitrant world. "If we must lean in one direction or the other, history does suggest a preferable course. Over the two centuries, anyway, theories of politics that expect too much of human beings have done even more damage than have those that expect too little." (ibid., p. 401). Interestingly, this too is an empirical claim - about the prevalence of certain kinds of theories and their implications. Consider the opposing remark by J. Cohen (2009, p. 15): "My own experience is not that

24

we are constantly yielding to Panglossian temptation. Quite the contrary, we are often too quick to suppose that important values cannot be jointly realized, that political life is filled with tragic conflicts between and among important values. So we respond to political ideals with a knowing irony of the intellect and a lassitude of the heart". These two comments contrast on empirical grounds - what kind of mistake are we more prone to do? I do not know the answer to this question. I take the realist's concern in this regard to be a valid one and I take it up in section ; we ought to be aware the danger of causing more harm by attempting to promote an unlikely ideal. I agree that both of these concerns should be considered when evaluating political plans. However, this discussion has been done under the realist assumption that the value of political thought is exclusively tied to its implementation in the political arena. Though I agree that much of the value of political philosophy is tied to its relevance in the political sphere, this seems to me like a misunderstanding of the role of political philosophy, which construes its role too narrowly.

The Autonomy of Philosophy

Underlying the preceding discussions lies a broad agreement that political philosophy is primarily, if not exclusively, a task aimed at guiding political action. I argue that political philosophy is a form of political activity that should be attentive to political problems as well as political constraints.

What exactly I mean by 'attentive', I will try to explain in the next section. For now, I wish to discuss and reject the realist's view which construes political philosophy's role too close to politics, subjecting it to impertinent constraints of political activity. By insisting on the autonomy of the political, political realists encroach on the autonomy of the philosophical.

Guess and the tasks of political theory

A strong version of the thesis that the value of political philosophy is exclusively tied to its direct influence on political plan could be found in Geuss (2008, pp. 9-10), who says "these ideals and aspiration influence their [humans' - TP] behavior and hence are politically relevant, only to the extent to which they do actually influence behavior in some way. Just because certain ideal or moral principles 'look good' or 'seem plausible' to us... it does not follow that these norms, cannons, or principles will have any particular effect at all on how people will *really* act" (emphasis added). This strong thesis is implausible, and Geuss himself provides reasons to be suspicious about it. In his discussion of the 'tasks of political theory' Geuss (ibid., pp. 37-55) enumerates several tasks which make his claim about 'actually impacting behavior' an excessively stringent requirement. Geuss's tasks for political theory are not necessarily disconnected from guiding behavior but they seem, at least sometimes, orthogonal: pursuing them successfully does not promise any impact on behavior, even if such impact ordinarily results from it. Consider the task of evaluation, which Geuss (ibid., p. 39) says is

"at least as deeply rooted as in our human nature as is any natural 'desire to know'... we naturally compare one thing with another in the interests of finding out which one is 'tastier,' 'more pleasing to the eye,' 'more useful,' and so forth." This task may indeed impact our behavior, for our evaluations could, and probably often does, guide our actions and inform our decisions. However, this is not a necessity: I can decide that this blue bottle is 'more pleasing to the eye' than this pink one without purchasing either, and can evaluate two possible political plans against one another even I intend to adopt neither. The same goes to the task of orientation, which (Geuss 2008, pp. 40-42) takes to entail finding my place in the world in a way that bestow meaning to my life. To the extent that my understanding of myself as part of a larger structure sets goals for my action, it is more likely to directly influence my action. However, one may pursue the same goals with or without a perception of those goals as part of a large structure or as part of various different structures. One may come to adopt, for example, a religious world view that grounds the secular values that guided their life previously.

Of particular interest is the task of 'conceptual innovation' (ibid., p. 42). Geuss gives a rich account of the unique character of conceptual innovation and the ways in which philosophical reflection can create concepts that then, indirectly and over time, influence political reality. Interestingly, Geuss criticizes 'some forms of Kantianism' (which is Geuss's preferred term for the liberal/utopian/moralist view that he criticizes) as putting too much weight

on 'what we can imagine'[16] because it invokes a point of view which is *not imaginative enough* (Geuss 2008, pp. 48-9). The importance of imaginative conceptual innovation, even if it is aimed at ultimately changing behavior, is a complicated process which include many steps until it gains a hold of reality in the way Geuss expects it. We may therefore be careful to judge hastily the influence of ideas too soon: some ideas may take a long time to 'imprint themselves on the world' (ibid., p. 46). Friedrich Hayek and Milton Friedman published much of their important works on market economy by the end of the 1950s, yet they won their Nobel prizes in the 70s, and it wasn't until the Reagan administration in the 80s that a political program in line with theirs gained primacy of American politics. It is therefore quite surprising that Geuss so quickly dismisses the idea that Rawls's theory contribute to politics as a 'conceptual innovation'. Though he says that the success or failure of such an outlook is 'still an open question' (ibid., p. 86), he goes on to describe Rawlsian political philosophy as 'idealogical', which for Geuss means "a set of beliefs, attitudes, preferences that are distorted as a result of the operation of specific relations of power; the distortion will characteristically take the form of presenting these beliefs, desire, etc., as inherently

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[16]I do not know of any Kantian puts weight on the question 'what we can imagine' and Geuss does not cite anyone aside from Kant and his discussion of space and time. I know, however, that Kant mentions 'What may I hope?' as one of the three great philosophical questions (see Cohen 2004 for further discussion and application of the question to a conception of human rights). Those questions seem close, there is an important difference between 'imagine' and 'hope': what we can hope for is not something we can necessarily imagine in any straightforward way. Moreover, if we can hope for someone we may be required to make an effort to imagine it.

connected with some universal interests, when in fact they are subservient to particular interests." (Geuss 2008, pp. 52,89). The rising interest in Rawls's theory around the recent Occupy movement suggests that Rawlsian ideas are providing conceptual innovations for political actions (Maze 2011; Seth 2011) and that Geuss's dismissal of them as ideological is, to use his words, 'a failure of [his][imagination - TP] powers about which [he] should feel mildly apologetic' (Geuss 2008, p. 49) .

Inappropriate considerations: political philosophy and political activity

Thus, political realism conceives political philosophy merely in terms of working out plans that should then be implemented in political reality. Once a conclusion has been reached it is assumed the author now wishes to push for its implementation regardless of other considerations, perhaps imposing it if needs be. That, it seems, motivates part of Williams's concern about judging non-liberal societies as unjust (or, in his terms, illegitimate). Williams is reluctant to condemn a society where the subordinate role of women is widely accepted without protest as a violator of human rights (Williams 2007, p. 27). He holds that this question depends on a further question of the 'critical theory principle' which is 'notoriously problematic' but nonetheless necessary to reach a conclusion whether the regime violate human rights. His position is that simply in virtue of the fact that there is a subordinate role for women, no human rights have been violated - we would have to present a plausible

interpretation that shows that the women's acceptance of that subordinate role is itself a product or device of domination.

I find this stance implausible - our moral judgment is held hostage to that 'notoriously problematic' principle which raises the standard of proof before we can even condemn the practice as unjust or illegitimate. But my contention is not about the content of the stance but with the way it is justified; Williams says,

> *The charge that a practice violates fundamental human rights is ultimate, the most serious of political accusations... in order for the practice to come to be seen as resembling manifest crimes, it will almost certainly have to be made to change in actual fact so that more are committed. Whether it is a matter of philosophical good sense to treat a certain practice as violation of human rights and whether it is politically good sense cannot ultimate constitute two separate questions. (Williams 2007, pp. 27-8)*

Three points are made apparent by this passage. First, Williams is reluctant to throw around accusations concerning human rights violations due to the graveness of the accusation. He does not say so explicitly, but his concern seems to assume that it comes with the expectation of some action - perhaps intervention. Despite being a strong accusation, I do not think that making it necessarily entails backing it with the threat of force. Consideration of justice and morality are relevant for political decisions - but saying 'X is the

moral thing to do' does not necessarily entail 'I am going to try to implement X right now' and most certainly not 'it is justified to coerce people who do not agree with X'. Second, Williams's assertion about the joint nature of the philosophical and the political are an expression of the subordination of the philosophical to the political. If, for some reason, it does not make political good sense to characterize the subordination of women as a human rights violation (say because the power holders of that country would react violently against those women in response to the mere suggestion that they violate human rights), why should it bear on the philosophical investigation? Philosophical investigation is a form of reflection that aims at clarity, coherence and sensibility. Why should the political consideration override the philosophical? Lastly, the passage betrays a concern for public opinion - it is only when the practices of the regime become more manifestly criminal, says Williams, so that it *they will come to be seen* as criminal. But why should we be concerned so much about whether or not the practice is *seen* as criminal when we consider its criminality?

The answer, I hold, is that political realism subordinates political philosophy to political practice, and in particular to political activism, and therefore imports to political philosophy impertinent concerns about popularity of opinions. In Williams's work, it is evident; the concern about the popularity of an opinion is built deeply into the BLD with its focus on actual acceptance of rejection of the proposed legitimation as a starting point for the debate about the 'critical theory principle'. Moreover, it could be seen in

both Williams's and Geuss's works when they seem to consider the fact that most, or many, or even some, people would reject a theory as a reason against it (Williams 2007, p. 16; Geuss 2008, p. 87). In Geuss's case, this comes in the context of Rawls's usage of the first person plural pronoun 'we'. This is a common practice in political philosophy which appeals to a shared background between the author and the reader.[17] This usage does not assume a consensus and it definitely does not entail that the existence of a dissenter undermines the plausibility of a theory or a claim. The usage of 'we' means that if you do not share the description that the author attributes to 'us', you may not be the right audience of the text. It may also be that the author is wrong about the prevalence of a certain sentiment but she or he would probably still hold that belief, albeit as a minority opinion. This seems like a tedious terminological spat, but I think it is revealing: the usage of the plural pronoun 'we' stands for something in the practice of philosophy, and it is not the expectation that everybody adopt everything that is asserted on its name by pains of punishment, or coercion or something of that sort.

Political activism is the work that is associated with pushing ideas in the political arena and attempting to make them into reality. Due to the purpose of political activity, the popularity of a political plan is crucially important - any dissenting person is one whose opinion is being disregarded, should the plan be adopted. This gives rise to Realists' concern with coercion: trying

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[17]Geuss himself uses it, see for example p. 21: "even in the most repressive societies *we* know". What would Geuss say to someone who rejected this claim on the basis it is not true in the most repressive society that *they* know? Would that diminish the power of that claim?

to promote a political plan despite its lack of popularity (say by proposing a bill in the parliament or going on strike) is a display of the commitment to force that policy on dissenters. The protesters against the war in Vietnam knew that a large portion of the population do not share their conviction that the war in Vietnam is wrong, yet they tried their best to stop the war immediately.

Even political activity is not necessarily so pernicious - much of it is aimed at persuading people and making voices heard, contributing to a larger debate. Some forms of political activity can be seen as a plead for action rather than the call to coerce it on the dissenters. But if political activity is often the actual attempt to enact a policy, political philosophy is always a step removed. It exists near, though outside of, the sphere of politics; continuous with politics but autonomous from it.

The autonomy of the philosophical

Geuss's strong thesis is false - the value of political theory is not exclusively, even if primarily, tied to the way it influences behavior. There is certainly no linear relations between the value an idea and the extent to which it influences behavior, because influence is indirect, complicated and uncertain. Nonetheless, there are reasons to be suspicious even towards the weaker thesis that only requires that idea have 'some impact' or more accurately to have 'visible impact'. Consider a strong opposite thesis:

> *[S]uppose that, like me, you think that political philosophy is a*
>
> *branch of philosophy, whose output is consequential for practice,*
>
> *but not limited in significance to its consequences for practice.*
>
> *Then you may, as I would, protest that the question for political*
>
> *philosophy is not what we should do but what we should think,*
>
> *even when what we should think makes no practical difference.*
>
> *G.A. Cohen 2008, p. 268*

G.A. Cohen wants to discuss political philosophy separately from questions of practicality. Can we discuss moral principles as inforamtive about what we should think even if they make no difference for what we intend to do?

I believe so. Political philosophy has two fundamental aspects, one of which is personal, the other public. The personal aspect of political philosophy is that it is, partially, an effort to form more reflective views on issues that matter. We subject our normative view to the reflective scrutiny of philosophy: "an engagement that aims to bring greater coherence, comprehensiveness, and-most importantly-reasoned consideration to that morality" (J. Cohen 2009, p. 3). This is why the usage of the first singular pronoun is appropriate to such work: I explore my convictions and use the instrument of writing it, among other things, for the purpose of arranging my convictions in a coherent, comprehensive and compelling way. I may spend time and efforts considering my views on abortion or gay marriage, even though these reflections are unlikely to impact how I vote or anything else I intend to do. I may consider these topics, among other reasons, because I think it

is possible that in the future they would impact my behavior - for example, if there's a referendum on one of these issues. But I wish to pursue these issues regardless - I wish to examine my own convictions and clarify them for myself. Partly because, as Geuss rightly suggest, these are important for my orientation: my finding my place in the world in a way that confers meaning on my existence. In this sense, political philosophy is biased *against* public opinion: as I want to form an opinion for myself, I wish to resist the pressures of peers and public opinion. I want to affirm my convictions, and not merely hold them "in the manner of a prejudice" (Mill 1998, p. 59). I want to find a develop my own, and perhaps even a new, way of looking at things. Ground-breaking philosophical works are often produced by people who diverge from common outlooks of their time and create their own theory and terms, later to become commonplace. I will therefore be suspicious of popular opinions, looking for justifications that I can endorse; in no case will the absence of such popularity, in and of itself, stand against the adoption of a stance. If freedom of thought means anything, it means that I have the freedom, as an individual, to form whatever opinion I am able to find appropriate, even if I am the only person in the world to hold it.

But there is a public aspect to political philosophy: unlike other fields of philosophy, political philosophy discusses issues that concern other people . The writing of political philosophy is therefore not merely an exercise in arranging thought but also a form of communication: I want to subject my convictions not only to my own scrutiny, but also to others'. First, because

they may find errors that I have not, thus aiding me in my quest. They may point out to lacunae that I would come to recognize and accept, thus reshaping my convictions in response to their stance. Second, I want to persuade the reader, and others, that my opinion is correct, and get their feedback on it: Where are the points of agreement and disagreement? What are the objections? Can I respond to them? answering these questions would help me situate my opinion in the public sphere and figure out whether my opinion is popular and accepted or am I a minority opinion. I would like to know that not so much because it is an independent consideration for or against my opinion but because it tells me something about the society I live in - is it unjust, according to my views? There are lessons to be learned from these questions, and they may guide my actions. But these are important engagements of their own and they are distinct from that of forming a political plan for the purpose of political activism. My attempt to persuade the reader should not be understood as the same kind of persuasion that goes on in political debate: I am not trying to win votes here but rather to convey my message. I should not treat my audience as Williams (2007, p. 12) says, as "the audience of a pamphlet". Rather, I take the reader to be a fellow human being that walks with me on this path of life; she or he shares something with me, for else they would not be reading my essay (in the very least,we share a language; which is not a small thing to share). For the purpose of discussion I would usually assume some background understandings; I do not doubt these shared assumptions in this particular argument since it is too

36

much to doubt them all at once and anyway, or so I believe, they are not as controversial as my main thesis. This is the deeper source of the use of 'we' which raised Geuss's objection. It is not an assumption of consensus, but the setting of a table on which the argument is then laid. For this reason the writing of political philosophy is political - it is a serious discussion on controversial issues that matter to people and have impact on their lives. It is not merely an intellectual exercise, but political communication between fellow citizens and human beings. However, it is not a political pamphlet - its job is not recruit the reader but to serve as an interlocutor in their personal journey to form their opinion. Political philosophy therefore resides right next to politics; it is continuous with politics, but not subordinated to it.

Concluding Remarks: Following Your Heart with Eyes Wide Open

Political realists insist that political philosophy be attentive to real political problems and play a role in guiding the actions of political actors. In part, they are concerned because they believe that trying to implement ideas of justice without such concerns would not promote justice; it may even lead to worst results. I am sympathetic to this concern. Normative ideas, formed by political theory, should play a role in guiding political action. But how should they do that? Political realists take these ideas too literally - policing the sphere of thought with the requirements of political activity. They

therefore confine political theory to the realm of the political, where they believe conflict is ineradicable. This makes them normatively too attentive to existing political structures, too willing to perpetuate matters as they are in the name of 'realism'. How can we save the valid concern from the moral failure?

In an interview, J. Cohen attributes to Gramsci the following advice: " be a pessimist of the head and an optimist of the heart"; Cohen explains his take on this position,

> [I]f we make determined efforts to improve things, then it is not unreasonable to expect improvement. When I look at the historical record that you cited, I don't see a reason to be optimistic and relax. Instead, I see it as the foundation for reasonable hope. Our efforts at improvement are not doomed to failure. We are not banging our head against the wall; a world of human beings cooperating in society is not recalcitrant to improvement. (Cohen and Eiermann 2011)

Political activity's requirements are different from those of political philosophy. The goals are different and so are their means: the first aims at implementing political plans while the latter is the process of forming fundamental normative commitments and convictions. Political activity requires firm conviction and unwavering commitment, political philosophy requires skepticism and self-doubting. Political activity requires recruiting people, political philosophy demands scrutinizing popular opinion for fear of faddish

38

beliefs. Political activism requires simplifying complex issues in order to facilitate wide agreement, political philosophy is sensitive to subtle differences and aims at complex general constructions.

There is therefore no simple way to implement moral principle; they are not immediately applicable and they might backfire. "It can be bad policy to promote justice, whether because that would not in fact promote justice, or because seeking to promote it would prejudice other values" (G.A. Cohen 2008, p. 381). But if we are to know when and how an implementation of a program would backfire or when it would not in fact promote justice, we need to know what justice demands - we need to have the world picture we wish to promote. Political philosophers cannot, on their own, determine the translation of principles to policy. They must also rely on the knowledge and experience of specialists - the politician, the economist, the sociologist. And people, in general, should be cautious when they attempt to implement ideals: some realists have been right to warn us against excessive confidence in our ability to implement our plans. There are many factors out of our control and we can never predict all of them. Modest plans have the virtue of being more possible, but this virtue is only one of many. We might have to trade-off likelihood of success against desirability of success. If we are not likely to succeed, the realists say, why bother? But why pursue it if that's not the desired goal?

Ideas of justice are not dispensable. We should not pursue political activity without a moral compass that directs our way. Without it, we might

fight for the wrong things: we might accept conflicts we should not or prefer order over justice when we should not. We need to have a reflective practice which examines our ideals, allowing their 'workability' to feature in their considerations but not take overriding importance. Whatever political program we pursue we still have to hope, to be optimists of the heart and believe that a better world is possible. Indeed, that belief is important for it enables us to pursue the approximation of justice in the world. Reinhold Niebuhr, a prominent realist, was aware of this requirement:

> In the task of that redemption the most effective agents will be men who have substituted some new illusions for the abandoned ones. The most important of these illusions is that the collective life of mankind can achieve perfect justice. It is a very valuable illusion for the moment; for justice cannot be approximated if the hope of its perfect realization does not generate a sublime madness in the soul. Nothing but such madness will be do battle with malignant power and "spiritual wickedness in high places." The illusion is dangerous because it encourages terrible fanaticism. It must therefore be brought under the control of reason. One can only hope that reason will not destroy it before its work is done. (Niebuhr 2002)

Hope for a perfect justice pushes us to get closer to it beyond anything we could reasonably expect; the hope which creates a 'sublime madness' in the soul. Sticking to our reasonable expectations and devising our account

of desiered outcomes according to them is overestimating our ability to know what is possible; realists are right that our ordinary conceptions of our abilities are exaggerated and misguided, and so they are regarding our estimation of the 'feasibility' of political schemes. We need to follow our hearts, but keep our eyes wide open - for we have to be on our guard not to allow our sublime madness to blind us, when we rely on it to maintain the totally unjustified, but valuable, belief that perfect justice is possible.

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