

TABLE OF CONTENTS

0	INTRODUCTION	7
1	REALITY	13
1.1	Introduction	13
1.2	Political Realism and Political Idealism	15
1.3	Four Features of political realism	17
	Anti-idealism	18
	Pragmatism	22
	Contextualism	25
	Adaptability	30
1.4	Effectual reality	32
1.5	A model fit for realism	36
1.6	Effectual Reality and Metaphysical Realism	39
	Knowability	40
	Independence from Beliefs	43
	Independence from Desires	48
2	POSSIBILITY AND NECESSITY	53
2.1	Introduction	53
2.2	On what there could be	55
	Galston's Worry	55
	First Reply: Biting the Bullet	56
	Second Reply: Reversing the burden of proof	62
	Third reply: realistic possibility	65

2.3	On what there must be.....	78
2.4	The Transformative Power of Necessity.....	80
3	CONFLICT AND ORDER	85
3.1	Introduction	85
3.2	The Circumstances of Politics.....	87
3.3	From Disagreement to Conflict	91
	Defining Conflict.....	92
	Conflict and its Fellow Concepts	93
	Conflict and Realism.....	96
	Features of Conflict	98
	The inevitability of conflict	100
3.4	From Cooperation to Order	103
	The Need for Order	103
	The Need for Order as a real and necessary feature	105
	The Need for Order and Realism	106
3.5	A Taxonomy of Political Theories	108
4	RATIONALITY AND NORMATIVITY	119
4.1	Introduction	119
4.2	A Meta-preference	123
4.3	A Realistic perspective on practical rationality	128
4.4	Political calculus	130
4.5	More than instrumental rationality?.....	133
4.6	Irrational agents	138
4.7	Realistic Rationality and Ideal Theory	148
4.8	A model fit for realism	152

5 REFERENCES 158

Acknowledgments

If this thesis ended up being of any value, the credit has to go to the many people that made its realization possible.

First and foremost, Antonella Besussi, to whom goes my admiration and gratitude. Her support was not only invaluable, but also extremely generous.

Similar thanks are due to Francesca Pasquali and Giulia Bistagnino, who thoroughly read this thesis, provided useful criticisms and helped clarifying ideas I did not know I had.

A special thank goes also to Raymond Geuss, whose enlightening discussions inspired this work, even though it took a direction I suspect he won't approve.

My fondest thanks go to Chiara Destri, who was always there to offer both comfort and insights. Our unending discussions of this thesis truly influenced my work deeply.

I also need to thank my family, for their excessive confidence in me, and my friends for providing the necessary relax that allowed me to keep my sanity in all of this.

0 INTRODUCTION

This dissertation is twice heretical. It is heretical among political philosophers, because it concerns political realism, a tradition that strongly criticizes the dominant strand of Rawlsian idealism. It is also heretical among political realists, because it aims at providing an affirmative analytical account of their arguments.

Thus, one would do well in wondering why this dissertation is at all worth reading.

In my view, political realism is relevant for political philosophy, because it attempts to rescue politics from morality. Reducing political philosophy to applied ethics, as idealists do, is both theoretically misleading and practically hazardous. The problem with this moralistic approach is that it is rigidly deductive. It starts with some abstract and universal rules of ethics, and deny politics its autonomy. Perhaps in a perfect world, idealism would be a perfect political philosophy. However, the more imperfect the world, the more political realism is needed. We are at a point right now, after what were possibly the most blissful 60 years in the history of western societies, where the world seems to be moving away from what little perfection we had built. Current events, at a national and international level, present an impressive amount of political, economic and social crises. The more this tendency continues, the more political idealism becomes a dangerous compass to guide us in the real world. However, while on this ground many critiques have been raised against this dominant paradigm, a substantive and constructive alternative view has yet to emerge. Political realism could thus be a promising path to help formulating an alternative view, which is not merely critical of the dominant strand, but that is capable of standing on its own and offering independent, and clear, normative guidance.

On the other hand I suppose that my thesis is also relevant for political realism. First, because political realism has often been accused, and sometimes with reason, of not being a genuinely normative approach to political philosophy but a mere description, or even celebration, of the status quo. Second, because political realism is often seen as a

non-systematic view. Currently, a renovated interest in this tradition has led various scholars to try and organize it into a consistent normative account, in order to prove that its critics were wrong. However, the debate on how political realism could be condensed in a positive analytical view is still at its beginning. Thus, it seems to me that this thesis might offer some contributions in this direction.

Driven by these concerns, my research question requires to make clear what the normative logic of political realism is. Thus, I have two goals to accomplish. First, and foremost, I want to offer an account of what it means to be a political realist. Secondly, I want to inquire why one should be a political realist.

As, for the first question, what are the defining features of a realistic political philosopher? Given that realists tend to defend a variety of positions and that they are not often systematic in their arguments, this question is not as simple as it might seem. Thus, in the first three methodological chapters I develop a possible systematic account for political realism. While I am evidently sympathetic with the tradition of political realism, my aim here is merely reconstructive. However, such rational reconstruction aims to fix a significant flaw in this tradition: a lack of clarity and structure.

In the first chapter, I argue that realists rely on a specific account of reality, in the second that from this account they derive a particular view of possibility and necessity and in the third one that the most important necessities in politics are the recurrence of conflicts and the need for order. My aim here is to provide a rational reconstruction of political realism by outlining a possible consistent interpretation of its basic commitments.

More specifically, Chapter 1 focuses on the notion of reality adopted by political realists. I open the chapter by introducing a preliminary discussion of the commitments a realistic political philosophy seems bound to subscribe. I then argue that a metaphysical view matching these commitments is one that links reality with causality. This view, which I call 'effectual realism', is partially drawn from *Alexander's dictum* and the '*ad lapidem*' argument in metaphysics, and claims that something is real if and only if it causally interacts with the world in some way. I close this chapter by observing that

this view of reality is a form of metaphysical realism, because it satisfies three conditions: reality is knowable, independent from desires and independent from beliefs. These conditions, I conclude, fit very well with the idea common throughout the literature of political realism, that reality is something that resists our actions.

From this causal account of reality, Chapter 2 draws a causal account of possibility and necessity. While political idealists focus on conceivability or compatibility with the world as criteria for possibility, a more realistic criterion would be one that links possibility and causality. I call this relation of realistic possibility 'trackability': a state of affairs is trackable if and only if there is some causal chain to move there from the actual world. I debate the implications of this view, and conclude that it allows to account for the contextual importance of the starting point, the inclination to prudence, and the focus on action. From this conception, I can derive a symmetric notion of necessity, whereby something is necessary, if there is no causal chain to avoid it. By the same argument, something is impossible, if no causal chain allows us to realize it. These two arguments can be neatly derived from effectual realism and the additional assumption that we are not omnipotent. Given that reality is independent from our beliefs and desires, and assuming that our power is limited, some states of affairs will lay beyond our ability to change.

Among these necessary states of affairs, I argue in Chapter 3 that there are two, which are particularly relevant in the political sphere: the inevitability of conflict and the need for order. Conflicts, in my definition, emerge among actors with different views when one wants to impose his will against the resistance of others. Given that there is no causal chain to consistently avoid neither the different views nor the will to prevail, conflict appears a necessary feature in the sense specified in the previous chapter. The second necessary element is the need for order. As men need to feed, whether or not they want to, so they need a cooperative order, whether or not they want to. This is a weaker necessity compared to that of conflict, because it holds only conditionally. While conflicts are always inevitable and therefore necessary, order is necessary only provided that we want to survive. I conclude the chapter by suggesting that these two necessities

of politics can be used as a criterion to determine whether a political theory is realistic or not.

Clearly not every political realist would recognize himself in this reconstruction. 'Isms' are always more discordant than their adversaries believe them to be, and political realists are particularly diverse in their reflections. Thus, any unified account is likely to leave some disagreeing. This is inevitable, and thus one cannot *realistically* be blamed for it. Nevertheless, I think it is important to try to develop a consistent positive view of political realism.

To summarize, in the first three chapters I defended the following conception of political realism:

1. Realism → Reality
2. Reality → Possibility and Necessity
3. Political Necessity → Conflict and Order

Being realist means, in this view, paying attention to reality. Paying attention to reality means identifying accurately what is possible and what is necessary. Thus, being realist means that we should acknowledge that conflict and order are the two cardinal necessities of politics.

The fourth and last chapter is intended to tackle the question of why one ought to be a realist and, thus, to turn the results of the first three chapters from reconstructive into normative claims. Political realism, I argue here, offers a set of hypothetical imperatives based on the conditional assumption that one wants to realize one's own preferences. This, I maintain, provides the driving force behind normative political realism.

In fact, if it is true that one wants to realize one's own preferences, then, contrary to idealism, one ought not to choose between end-states, but among courses of action. I suggest that a more realistic account of rationality is one that tempers the value of a desired state of affairs with the costs or benefits of the best available means to reach it, their likelihood of success, and the unintended consequences of one's action.

If this is how a realistically rational deliberation works, then the distinctive features of political realism I reconstructed in the first three chapters are shown to have an

important normative force, as they are revealed to be the path realists point at in order for political actors to realize their preferences.

In short, if you want to realize your preferences, you ought to be a realist. Differently from what I do in the previous chapters, here I try to put forward a justificatory argument for political realism.

Notwithstanding this difference between the first three chapters and the last one, they all combine to provide a possible answer to my research question. If we put together the first three chapters with the conditional assumption that you want to realize your preferences, we get the following hypothetical imperatives:

1) You ought to be rational, and for realists this means that when you deliberate what is best you should not limit yourself to consider the value or disvalue of the ideal that you want to realize. Along with this, you ought to ponder the costs of the best means available to you, their likelihood of success, and the cost of their consequences.

2) You ought to acknowledge reality. This means that any descriptive theory of the world is normative for the agent, insofar as it sets the background conditions of his action. Reality determines the means he has at his disposal, his likelihood of success in reaching what he desires, and the consequences of his action. It thus gives him reasons to do something instead of something else.

3) You ought to pinpoint possibilities and necessities accurately. Reality sets the conditions of what is possible and what is necessary. Necessary states of affairs are of paramount importance for action, and political realism rightly emphasizes them. A necessary state of affairs is a state of affairs whose avoidance is impossible and thus any desire that requires that this be abandoned is unrealistic. This does not mean that there is nothing we can do in such cases. Rather, realists claim that necessities give us reasons to contain their negative consequences instead than eliminate them at their root, and to reallocate our efforts in alternative goals which can actually be reached.

4) You ought to acknowledge that the recurrence of conflicts and the need for order are necessary features of the political sphere. This is the substantive and defining claim of political realism. Any desire that requires one to be done with conflict or the need for

order is unrealistic, whatever one wants. Moreover, any political theory that pays insufficient attention to this fact is bound to be of inadequate guidance in political matters. Any actor who does not satisfy these requirements risks being irrational insofar as he would be self-undermines his own preferences, whatever they are.

Thus, we end up with the following claims:

0. If you want to realize your preferences, then you ought to:
 1. Evaluate courses of action instead of states of affairs
 2. Pay attention to reality
 3. Individuate its possibilities and necessities
 4. In politics, consider specifically the inevitability of conflict and the need for order

In synthesis, political realism as an affirmative, analytical, normative theory would be, in my opinion, committed to these claims.

1 REALITY

1.1 Introduction

This chapter serves two purposes. First, it proposes a preliminary sketch of political realism, as opposed to political idealism. Second, it reconstructs the implicit account of reality assumed by political realists. This is a preliminary step, but a fundamental one, to develop the account of the nature of normativity political realism is suggesting.

Machiavelli famously claimed that he wanted to give an account of 'the effectual truth of the matter, rather than the imagination of it' (Machiavelli 2010, 61). Thus, it seems critically important to understand what the 'matter' is, in order to see what finding out its 'effectual truth' means. This is a methodological question: I inquire what realist thinkers mean by 'reality' when they ascribe the property 'real'. In order to give an answer, I will start with some preliminary notes on what makes a political theory realistic and how its requirements differ from those proposed by the Kantian liberal tradition inaugurated by John Rawls. Then, I shall try to uncover what conception of reality underlies these assumptions.

This chapter will be structured as follow. First, I introduce some peculiar features of political realism. I observe that the substantive positions of those who fall under the label of political realism are different, but converge on the array of critiques raised again political idealism. I identify thus some methodological remarks, which can be shared by various political realists. This preliminary sketch is not intended to provide a systematic account of what counts as political realism, which I shall outline in chapter 3, but rather to investigate what view of reality could fit political realism.

Following Raymond Geuss, I identify and discuss four specific guidelines for a realistic political theory, which lies in sharp contrast with the Kantian liberal approach. First, realistic political theory is *anti-idealist*, meaning that its object is not how we ought ideally to value and to act, but it is about actual behaviour and real institutions. Second, realistic political philosophy is *pragmatic*: in politics actions matter the most, not mere

beliefs or intentions (which are of interest only insofar as they lead to action). Third, realistic political theory is *contextual*: abstract universalizations are either mistaken or uninteresting, especially when anachronistically projected onto past history. Fourth, realistic political theory is *adaptable* and acknowledges that politics is more akin to a skill than to a science. Excessive 'systematicity' is thus bound to misrepresent it. Each of these four theses exhibits a variety of implications, which will be debated in light of what has been said by other political realists. Then, I shall confront them with Rawls's position, in order to highlight their characteristic importance: the prominence of actual internal reasons vs. ideal external reasons, of actions vs. beliefs, of legitimacy vs. justice, of historical contextualism vs. abstract universalism.

I will then proceed to tackle the methodological question of this chapter: what does reality mean to realists? I introduce my hypothesis: that political realism seems to suppose what I call 'effectual realism'. By effectual realism I mean the claim that:

'x counts as real if and only if x is causally effective'.

I will try to show that all the four features defined above match well with this metaphysical view. Drawing a parallel with the 'ad lapidem' argument in metaphysics, I will suggest that political realism adopts an approach to reality similar to the philosopher who rejected immaterialism by kicking a stone. While in metaphysics this pragmatic view is seen as a fallacy, I will propose that it is a fruitful assumption to adopt with regards to politics. I will conclude this part by suggesting that this implicit and rough account of reality is a form of metaphysical realism, as it exhibits three important features: it implies that reality is knowable, that it is independent from our desires and independent from our beliefs. Political realism can thus be qualified as a kind of metaphysical realism regarding the external world. As I shall show in the concluding chapter, the emphasis of political realists on facts and reality has a decisive role in the substantive normative claims that they put forward. Thus, inquiring this reality is of fundamental importance in order to reveal its normative logic and to evaluate its validity.

1.2 Political Realism and Political Idealism

It might be hard to spell out precisely what political realism is, but it is quite easy to see what it is not. Political realism is a motley tradition but it shares a common polemical target. The names given to it may vary, and in some cases it might look like slandering: ‘high liberalism’ for William Galston (Galston 2010, 385) ‘political moralism’ for Bernard Williams (Williams 2005, 1), ‘ethic-first approach’ for Geuss (Geuss 2009a, 1), ‘liberal humanism’ for John Gray (Gray 2002), or simply ‘idealism’ in the tradition of international relations¹, its characterization is always the same.

Given the emphasis on critiques, political realism has thus often been seen by its opponents as a negative position, which is only able to criticize the dominant strand of political idealism, but not of providing a stand-alone normative theory.

The classical realists are assuming Plato as a negative reference, as it is evident from Machiavelli’s remark that philosophers focused their attention on republics born from their dreams that would never see the light of day. More recently, Rawls has become the target. After he revamped political philosophy (Rawls 2009), giving new life to a dying discipline (Laslett 1956), many thinkers enthusiastically joined his new approach. However, notwithstanding his many admirers, some philosophers started to oppose him. Among his critics, some thought that his theory was not idealistic enough (Cohen 2009), while others believed it was not realistic enough.

The target is ‘mainstream contemporary Anglo-American political philosophy [that] tends to conceive of itself as a branch of applied ethics: the task of normative political theory would be that of guiding politics so as to promote or honour certain pre-political moral commitments’ (Rossi 2012, 1).

However, realists do not oppose liberalism *per se*, but rather the specific kind of liberalism, of Rawlsian tradition, which claims both the right and the power to moralize

¹ Here all these names will be taken as synonyms.

politics. This philosophical liberalism is born from the combination of classical liberalism with Kantian ethics operated by Rawls.

It is thus not an odd coincidence, that many authors who nowadays have been called realists are liberals - with the notable exception of Geuss (Finlayson 2015, 4–5) -, and recent efforts have been directed to offer a realistic account of liberalism (Sleat 2013). The kind of liberalism realists object to is its Kantian version, most eminently championed by Rawls. The dissent with his philosophy is both methodological and substantial. It is labelled as uninteresting because it is conducted in such a way that leads some important political questions to disappear from public debate. Problems like legitimacy or power distribution are overshadowed by questions of fairness and equality. It is also labelled as damaging, since its persuasive justificatory role acts – hopefully unintentionally - like a powerful ideological tool and important substantive concerns, which are methodologically ruled out, are perceived as illegitimate or misplaced.

This Rawlsian tradition of liberalism revives a way of doing philosophy that has been practiced by authors, which were not liberal in the strict historical sense of the term. Plato's belief was that the polis is the soul 'writ large' (Barnes 2012), thus we can infer that for him politics is mainly ethics 'writ large'. The same morality which applies to the individual could and should be applied to political institutions. Rawls, however, tapped into this tradition mainly through the moral and political philosophy of Kant, whom, according to some realists, he turns into something he is not: a liberal. Geuss, in particular, argues that the idea of liberty as autonomy, which Kant endorsed, is quite different from the negative liberty of the first liberals. This may be a provocative exaggeration on Geuss's part. As he overstates how much Rawls's thought is akin to Kant, which weakens the point he wants to make. Moreover, autonomy as positive liberty is certainly far from Locke's idea, but other liberals like Mill might, under a perfectionist interpretation, find Kant not excessively strange.

According to political realism, moralism - or ethics-first approach - is flawed in an important way: it considers the moral prior to the political (Williams 2005, 2; Geuss 2008, 39; Rossi and Sleat 2014, 1) Political moralism misrepresents politics and tries to

twist it into applied morality. The intuition of the political moralist is that ethical principle can and must be applied to the political object (Plato's polis), thus characterizing political philosophy as an epiphenomenon of morality. Contrary to this view, political realists reclaim the autonomy of politics (Galston 2010) as an independent discipline which is not dependent on ethics but has its own genuine questions and standards. It is not just 'the application of moral principles to political questions, whatever they are' (Frazer 2010, 497), but the recognition that political questions cannot satisfactorily be answered by moral principles. Political problems, thus, cannot be truly solved and dissolved by moral principles, but we need to look for their solutions within politics, not outside of it.

I will now discuss the account proposed by Geuss, who attempted to condense and flesh out political realism into four specific features.

1.3 Four Features of political realism

In one of his recent books, *Philosophy and Real Politics* (Geuss 2008), Geuss makes the significant methodological endeavour to list four theses for doing political philosophy in a realistic way. These theses are not meant to provide a rigid list of requirements for something to count as political realism, as this is deemed undesirable by the author, but rather to highlight some important features of it. This effort, however, is particularly commendable, for it is rare in the tradition of political realism. Many political realists have a tendency to avoid systematic reasoning and therefore they do not often discuss their methodological assumptions. Indeed Geuss himself is guilty of this and this sometimes prevent people from appreciating the insight he puts forward, as his 'lack of conformity to the expository conventions of mainstream political philosophy may also frustrate some, despite being a theoretically motivated stance' (Rossi 2009, 504–505). For this reason, I do not want to claim that my discussion of these four features constitutes the one, correct, interpretation of his thought, which is often both evasive and very sophisticated. Instead, I want to use Geuss's list as a set of preliminary assumptions of what doing realistic political philosophy might mean in order

to discuss what notion of reality realism presupposes. Geuss's conception is not rigorously laid out, but it will be a useful starting point to elaborate a more systematic conception of what political realism is and why it differs from other philosophical tradition in political theory, which will be the object of chapter 3.

In his list, Geuss argues that realistic political philosophy exhibits the four features referred above: anti-idealism, pragmatism, contextualism and adaptability. Since these are meant to counteract the Rawlsian approach, I will debate how and to what extent each of these constitutes a fair critic of Rawls. I will show that – actually - Rawls shares some of the same concerns expressed by political realists. However, these realist insights are not as coherently developed in his methodological approach and are actually at odds with his substantial theory. The opposition between political realists and political idealists is clearly not black or white, but on the contrary 'some realist elements are already present in mainstream political philosophy [...] yet they are often entangled with if not dwarfed by moralist elements' (Rossi and Sleat 2014, 9). However, the weight and relevance those realist elements are assuming is not significant as it should. It often seems as if they are not coherently implemented, and stand aloof over the rest of moralist theory without bearing any effect on it. In order to see how this is the case, let us analyse Geuss's claims more deeply.

Anti-idealism

'First, Political philosophy must be realist. That means, roughly speaking, that it must start from and be concerned in the first instance not with how people ought ideally (or ought "rationally") to act, what they ought to desire, or value, the kind of people they ought to be, etc., but, rather, with the way the social, economic, political, etc., institutions actually operate in some society at some given time, and what really does move human beings to act in given circumstances' (Geuss 2008, 9).

The first thesis is an explicit rejection of the kind of the idealized assumptions that appeal to the moralists. Realism denies the commitment to a kind of philosophy, which puts forward a list of categorical imperatives that prescribe individuals how they ought to behave. It must worry about what motivates actual human beings in a specific context and how actual political institutions constrain individuals, rather than about how ideally

placed and ideally motivated human beings should act. Realists claim that we can understand political reality and hope to change it only if we switch the focus from an idealist conception of motivation to a realist conception of motivation, that is, to what actually motivates people to act.

This, however, does not necessarily imply an anti-normative position: it does not mean that we have to refrain from evaluating facts or recommending actions altogether. Rather, what they claim is that there are no objective standards that allow us to evaluate things from the perspective of god. They argue that political idealism is wrong when it deduces from the absence of a single and absolute framework of knowledge, that no knowledge is possible. It is a fallacy of moralism to claim that since there is nothing that we categorically ought to do, then there is nothing that we ought to do. This false alternative frames political theory in a way which is necessarily unsatisfactory: the moralist way.

The emphasis on distinguishing ideal from actual motivation shared by Bernard Williams in his famous distinction between internal and external reason (Williams 1981) follows the same line of thought. He observes that reasons for action can be interpreted in an internal or external way. An internal reason means that there is some motive, which is served by the action and explains it. External reasons, on the contrary, are reasons for action, which do not refer to the agent's motivation. Williams suggests with this distinction that only internal reasons are real, since what matters is only what can motivate us to act and external reasons can do that only insofar as they are internalized by the agent. However, internal reasons for Williams are not static, but susceptible to deliberation processes, which can introduce new reasons for actions or eliminate old ones. Thus, external reasons must be rationally derivable from internal reasons, given that they must be possible explanations for that action. Yet they must also not be reducible to them, or otherwise they would be just internal reason dynamically deliberated. Williams concludes that these conditions cannot hold simultaneously, therefore: 'external reason statements, when definitively isolated as such, are false, or incoherent, or something else misleadingly expressed' (Williams 1981, 111). Kantian moralism would formulate moral principles as categorical imperatives, i.e. universal and

abstract reasons for actions that hold regardless of wants and beliefs. However, this does not seem possible, since they are either motivating internal reasons of individual actors or not reasons at all. Williams does not claim that we never follow reasons that seem universal. However, we follow reasons for action because we, as individuals, endorse them and act on them, not because they externally apply in the same way to all people, whether they acknowledge them or not.

The biggest problem with Rawlsian moralist theory, for realists, is that it is developed under the assumption of strict or full compliance. Everyone, according to Rawls, is reasonable (or at least so his theory assumes); i.e. he has a capacity for the good and for a sense of justice. This means that everyone is capable of being motivated by considerations of justice, so that is willing to hold his end of the bargain provided that others do the same. In *A Theory of Justice* this is taken as a premise. If people under the veil of ignorance believed they were not going to have a sense of justice in the real world, they would not have any reasons to deliberate something they were not bound to follow. Later in the book, it is explained in many details how a well-ordered society is going to reinforce the sense of justice of its citizens and even induce it in the new generations. However, a well-ordered society is an approximation from the principles of justice, and the principles of justice are deliberated by presupposing full compliance. Therefore, the relation is circular². In *Political Liberalism* on the other hand, reasonableness, and thus full compliance, is just supposed to be a commonly shared attitude of democratic citizens, which is groundless nonetheless.

Realists strongly object that full compliance is exactly the kind of requirement that make a political theory fully utopian. It is certainly not realistic to expect people to hold their side of the bargain on the moral ground of reasonableness. Rawls perceives the problem when he says that rational persons might be tempted to opt out of political agreements or flat-out violate them when it is convenient for them to do so. However,

² Or the well-ordered society needs to be interpreted as a contingent phenomenon produced by extrinsic historical reasons, which provided the self-enforcing structure replicating the sense of justice. Sometimes Rawls himself seems to endorse this interpretation. If it were true, however, the sense of justice would be explained by the well-ordered society, rather than providing its justification it.

claiming that they are nonetheless reasonable, he argues that they won't do so. Political realism finds this treatment of the problem to be deeply unsatisfactory. While we may concede that some people can sometimes be motivated to act on considerations of justice, it is implausible to conclude that most people would do that most of the times and downright false to assume that all people do it all the time. Therefore, principles fits for reasonable people are not necessarily well fitted for actual people, who often are not reasonable. Furthermore, with this assumption Rawls bypasses one of the main problems of politics, motivating compliance, and thus drastically oversimplifies the task of establishing the political order. As William Galston puts it:

'principles cannot serve as standards for political life unless their implementation is feasible in the world as we know it. At first glance, it seems that this point is not fundamentally at issue between realists and their adversaries. [...] But the appearance of agreement is illusory. Rawls focuses on 'strict' or 'full' compliance – what justice is under the assumption that everyone abides by agreed-on principles. Realists deny that this assumption is anything close to feasible, and they contend that this fact affects the way we should think about justice'. (Galston 2010, 305).

Jean Jacques Rousseau famously stated that the project of political philosophy must take 'men as they are and laws as they can be made to be' (Rousseau 2002, 155). Indeed Rawls quotes this exact passage in *Political Liberalism*. His intuition is that men are what they are and cannot be changed indefinitely. On this point there is no opposition, since it is true that political realism insists that some features of men are impervious to change and they cannot be modified in order to fit moral philosophy. The second part of the quote, however, is supposed to leave some breathing space for utopias. Laws, being created by men, can be made in whatever fashion men desire. Thus the possibilities for utopia expand again, encompassing societies as machines perfectly engineered to allow the best lives to flourish. However, laws cannot be stretched indefinitely either, because they have to fit men and their need. And since men cannot assume any form, but must be taken as they are, laws too are limited in their scope and potential. This is why political realism has been criticised for having a negative anthropology. Thucydides and Machiavelli, for example, were not ashamed to argue that the nature of man is a given constraint on the moralization of politics.

The first point of critique Geuss raises against Rawlsian political moralism is that it adopts an overly idealistic account of the agent and his motivations. On the contrary, political realism claims that we should focus on actual motivation.

Let us now introduce his second recommendation for doing realistic political philosophy.

Pragmatism

‘Second, and following on from this, political philosophy must recognise that politics is in the first instance about action and the contexts of action, not about mere beliefs or propositions [...] the study of politics is primarily the study of actions and only secondarily of beliefs that might be in one way or another connected to action’ (Geuss 2008, 11).

Geuss’s second point is that political idealism concerns itself too much with theory. Being a realistic political thinker means, among other things, to acknowledge the importance of practice in politics. Political realism exhibits a pragmatic bend. Politics is essentially a practice and this means that what counts is action not beliefs, consequences not intentions. Political philosophy, according to the realist, is not to be understood as a purely theoretical enterprise but it must be an attempt to intervene in the world of politics. It needs to be concerned with actions and facts, not only with beliefs and with proposition. It cannot be just a list of principles, which is to be given to politicians with the hope that they will recognize them as ‘true’ and suddenly implement them. Purely contemplative moralism is attractive only as a form of ‘compensatory fantasy’ (Geuss 2009a, 34) and political philosophy becomes in this case just a highly sophisticated case of ideological self-deception.

A significant implication of this view is that facts about the world are very important, because we do not only need to ask questions about ‘what’, but also questions about ‘how’. Realist thinkers are not interested in describing what a good society is. Rather, they want to know how we could – effectively, not theoretically – reach it. Therefore, we need to focus on political facts like the actual interests of actors, the respective distribution of power, any ideological constraint on actions, the political institutions in place etc. It is not just a question of ‘fact-dependency’ of principles (Cohen 2009) but of

scope of the theory. The point of realism is not just that principles are dependent on facts, but rather that just listing principles is not sufficient for doing useful political philosophy.

Another important implication of this emphasis on the practical character of politics is that consequences of actions are not irrelevant. Realism clearly is a consequentialist approach, given its emphasis on results rather than dispositions. Consider Machiavelli on this point. One of the claims most commonly attributed to political realism is that it is better to violate a principle in order to get a valuable result, than to give up the result and preserve the principle. This kind of reasoning might not apply to every sphere of life, but it is extremely relevant in politics, where actions are aimed at producing real consequences and not just testify our own moral resolve. Christians who seek an immaculate souls, argue Machiavelli, might be good man but poor politicians, insofar as they sacrifice a good result that benefits all for a pure conscience of themselves.

It is true that Rawlsian approach to political philosophy is compatible with this emphasis on consequences. Rawls strongly praises the importance of consequences: 'all ethical doctrines worth our attention take consequences into account in judging rightness. One which did not would simply be irrational, crazy' (Rawls 2009, 30). However, his philosophy is still a highly theoretical enterprise and little in his theory is devoted to the importance of practice in politics. The normative character of *A Theory of Justice* is instantiated in just two principles that apply in a lexicographical order to the basic structure of society. Hence, on the one hand Rawls conceives the philosopher's work as focused on providing a justification for a conception of justice; while on the other the attention is moved away from political actions towards political institutions.

The question that remains open for realists is what kind of consequences are relevant or worth considering. Regarding this point, Williams actually puts forward a significant critique of consequentialism: 'I take it to be the central idea of consequentialism that the only kind of thing that has intrinsic value is state of affairs. [...] The trouble with the term 'state of affairs' is that it is altogether too permissive to exclude anything' (Williams 1973, 83). If it is not established what specific feature of the consequences over state of affairs is the one that justifies evaluations and prescriptions, than consequentialism is

not a very useful paradigm. The simplest version of Utilitarianism, for example, attempts to resolve this problem by employing the notion of aggregate utility. Actions, laws or institutions are justified or praised whenever their consequences increase the amount of utility in the world. However, this clarification may be made in any sense and it can be stretched to include what normally are not considered consequentialist doctrines. Rawlsian and Kantian philosophy for example, can be considered to praise actions, laws or institutions whose consequences increase the amount of rights or rationality, in the world. However, Williams's critique here is relevant in pointing out that if consequentialism, so understood, can be showed to encompass practically everything, then it is a useless frame of reasoning. If every moral theory – even Kant's – is consequentialist, then consequentialism as a paradigm lacks any distinctive property.

What kinds of consequences then are important for political realism? Value of actions for realism is instrumental, since it resides in the ability to produce what the actor deems valuable. The key opposition, to understand realists' point on consequences, is that of consequences vs. intentions. A realist prefers a politician that has bad intentions but gets good results than one that has good intentions but gets bad results. Just holding the appropriate intentions is not enough. Rather, realism stresses the fact that whatever our intentions may be, realizing the desired consequences means affecting the world with our actions. In politics, what counts is the way one is actually affecting the world, rather than the way one judges it. From this point of view is more valuable a person who strives for a modest improvement, than one who contemplates the perfect world. Here political realism is remembering Weberian heavy critique of the deontological ethical beliefs '*fiat iustitia, pereat mundum*' (let justice be done, even if the world were to perish), revamped by Kant (Kant 2007, 56) to clarify his anti-consequentialist move. This kind of justice that destroys the world is not only clearly of no value to political realism, but also it possesses negative value, since preserving the world is certainly much more important than justice. If some justice is valuable for the realist, it is in the variation: '*Fiat iustitia ne pereat mundum*' (let justice be done, so that the world is not to perish) (Von Mises 1951).

Summing up, the second feature of political realism Geuss chooses to emphasize is its pragmatic focus on individual action and consequences. Let us now move to the third feature of realism.

Contextualism

‘The third thesis I want to defend is that politics is historically located: it has to do with humans interacting in institutional contexts that change over time, and the study of politics must reflect this fact [...]. Looking for a set of formulae that are as historically invariant as possible and assuming that those formulae will allow us to grasp what is most important will point one in the wrong direction’ (Geuss 2008, 13–15)³.

The third point Geuss intends to make is that historical contextualism has to be preferred to abstract universalism. Moralistic political philosophy is deluded and unhealthily unaware of its limits. One cannot discover the principles of a just society in the present – assuming one can successfully do such a thing - and just apply them retrospectively to all societies that came before and to all those that will come in the future. When a political theory generalizes too much it ends up being uninformative, and not telling us anything useful either about today or about the past. Abstract universalism is thus a bad tool for evaluating political practices.

According to Geuss there are no eternal answers in philosophy, and even if there were they are certainly not interesting ones. Political evaluations, according to Geuss, need not even be consistent through times. One may well believe that gladiators were justified or desirable in ancient Rome and unjustified or undesirable today (Geuss 2009b, 59). It is thus a pointless universalization to ask if gladiator’s games were unfair, because political judgment must be relative to the historical context, which frame the political question.

Williams conveys a similar point when he suggests the curious image of Kant at the court of King Arthur: ‘one can imagine oneself as Kant at the court of King Arthur if one

³ This thesis pertains specifically contemporary versions of political realism (most notably of Geuss, Williams and Gray). Classical realists sought to discover the immutable laws of politics, regardless of time and space, and of the will of individual actors.

wants to—but [it is] useless and [does] not help one to understand anything’ (Williams 2005, 10).

Gray also emphasizes how values change through times and argues that there need not even be coherence in different areas of one’s life: ‘there is nothing wrong in applying different values in different contexts. People who belong in more than one way of life can accept and apply different moral practices in different contexts of their lives (Gray 2002, 56). Historical context is important because it helps us understand both what function a specific practice played in a society and how it could have been arranged otherwise. Changes of circumstances, can make possible something, which was unfeasible in the past, or make impossible something that was feasible in the past. This is the reason why political realists, from Thucydides and Machiavelli to Geuss and Williams, have always been keen to emphasize the importance of history.

This third point also stands in opposition to the Rawlsian tradition, which follows the Kantian model of ‘moral thought [that] requires abstraction from particular circumstances [...] except insofar as they can be treated as universal feature’ (Williams 1981, 2). Rawls himself models behaviour with the ‘veil of ignorance’ (Rawls 2009, 136), imagining an ideal situation in which abstract agents are unaware of all their specific properties and preferences, in order to translate the impersonal character on morality in the language of self-interest. Such actors choose their favoured basic rules for the society, as if they were concrete persons (since we, as concrete persons, are doing the work for them), while truly they are just abstract and completely interchangeable simulacra. As Williams puts it: ‘the self-interested point of an abstract agent is intended to model precisely the moral point of a concrete agent’ (Williams 1981, 3). Realist thinkers believe that this point of view radically misrepresents the concrete character of moral choice.

An example of how political judgment can change through history is given in Williams’s discussion of legitimation (Williams 2005). In the past satisfying the basic legitimation demand (i.e. to provide for order and cooperation) was hard enough a requirement to be considered sufficient to deem a political institution legitimate. However, Williams recognizes that liberalism has expanded the limits of what we can

expect from the behaviour of political institutions to such an extent, which was impossible in the past. Historical development, according to him, has moved way beyond this Hobbesian threshold. Now in order to considerate a state legitimate, basic order and cooperation are insufficient. One thousand years ago, this Hobbesian threshold might have been enough to grant legitimacy to a regime. However, nowadays, where historical development allows us to build much more complex and beneficial political institutions, liberalism is the new standard. A political arrangement, according to Williams, can be both legitimate and illegitimate, depending on the historical context, and thus it is only meaningful to attribute legitimacy relatively to its actual context. This does not mean, however, that the concept is useless. Legitimacy is relative to the historical context, but it may still be objectively true or false for each context.

Notwithstanding contextualism, in fact, political realism needs not embrace relativism. Many thinkers who proposed some form of contextualism had to face the charge of relativism. In pragmatism, Richard Rorty castoffs the infamous label of relativism, by claiming that his approach is rather ethnocentric (Rorty 2002), while even in political liberalism there are those who emphasize the role of contexts in the application of principles (Miller 2002). In the tradition of political realism, Williams, for example, certainly rejected relativism because he thought it incoherent given the distinction between first and second order principles (Williams 1981). Geuss rejects relativism as well, arguing that this charge is a form of blackmail from absolutists. He refuses the false alternative that you either subscribe to some form of absolute knowledge or you have no knowledge at all. Gray proposes a similar argument to show that value pluralism is not a form of relativism. The same argument applies to contextualism as well. He asserts that 'the claim that value pluralism is a species of relativism depends on a radically holistic view of ethical life' (Gray 2002, 81). It is a wrong view to assume that there is only one possible answer to moral or ethical questions. There may indeed be other possible answers, depending on the contexts and the persons involved, but from the fact that more than one answer turns out to be valid, it is wrong to conclude that all answers are. This systematic view, which assumes we have just one pertinent principle and just one way in which it is to be applied, is highly

problematic. Political realism claims that this is a double simplification; we never have only one relevant principle and only one way to apply it. Both Williams and Gray seem to agree on another point against relativism: they believe that in action and practices the incommensurable exclusivity implied by relativism does not hold. It may be that I have two beliefs that imply different actions. Choosing to act one way or the other does not imply abandoning the opposite belief. However, it resolves the indeterminacy in favour of one of them.

But how sharp is the contrast with political idealism on the issue of contextualism? Rawls's political philosophy is usually finely distinguished between the universalism of *Theory of Justice* and the more modest contextualism of *Political Liberalism*. In his first work, his argument 'split individuals from interests and values in order to define the as choosers of goals and values, or chooser of selves' (Besussi 1996, 180). However, this radical universalism is tempered in his later works where he appears to concede more relevance to contextual consideration. In *Political Liberalism*, in fact, Rawls seems to accept the critique of Kantian universalism concerning the unencumbered noumenal selves (Sandel 1984, 86) he introduced in *A Theory of Justice*, and concedes defeat on a 'methodological level' (Hampton 1989, 794) by accepting that a political philosophy needs to start from historically conceptualized values. He declares explicitly that 'the aims of political philosophy depend on the society it addresses' (Rawls 1987, 1). Therefore he develops his new political theory by starting from three values, which are commonly shared in liberal democracies: freedom, equality and fairness. The aim of this work is more to 'extract ideals that are present in the underground of a tradition, in order to make them compatible with each other' (Besussi 1996, 175). The starting assumption here is that all agree that politics pertains a fair system of cooperation between free and equal citizens, and the aim is to coherently hold these three values together and build a political theory from them. This is indeed a contextual move, but does it really address our realistic concerns? My impression is that the answer is negative. There are different problems with Rawls's perspective; first of all, the assumption that all – or even most – democratic citizens agree with these values is open to debate. More importantly, however, is that even if they were to believe them it would

not follow that they are always willing to act on them. The biggest problem with this view, however, is that it might be too contextual. The justification mechanism is wholly circular: it provides a justification of liberal democracy to people sharing liberal democratic values, which does not seem a particularly remarkable conclusion. The Rawlsian aim of 'reconciliation' (Rawls 2001, 3), is here reduced to mere rationalization. Rawls would need to assume that the current starting point – liberal democracies - is indeed morally positive, and the context to which his theory refers is indeed more than adequate. This might certainly be the case. However, such an assumption would make him susceptible to the same critiques he received in his first work. Nevertheless, not conceding this assumption leaves little room in his theory to address those who were not already liberal democratic citizens, and it remains open the question how those who reject liberal democratic values ought to be treated. In *A Theory of Justice* he states that a minority of unreasonable people should be left in peace because it is of no danger to justice; however, when it grows big enough to threaten our well-ordered society, it must be dealt with. In *Political Liberalism* he goes as far as saying: 'that there are doctrines that reject one or more democratic freedoms is itself a permanent fact of life, or seems so. This gives us the practical task of containing them - like war and disease – so that they do not overturn political justice' (Rawls 1993, 64). Political realism certainly would not demonize this kind of enforcement; indeed most thinkers recognize its very importance for any kind of political order. However, there is something mischievous about hiding such a grave conclusion in the fine prints of a footnote, without discussing it explicitly. One may be led to suspect that it is carefully concealed because it plays a much bigger role in the theory than explicitly suggested: the role of external justification.

We have seen how the third point Geuss was keen to make was that a politically realistic theory would emphasize the importance of circumstances and of the historical context. Political idealism, on the contrary, is to be criticized for trying to give a universal a-historical ground for evaluation, which ends up being empty. On the other hand, contextualism needs to avoid the charge of nihilism and it might also lack critical power, insofar as one cannot apply his own reasoning and values to other contexts.

The fourth thesis, we shall now see, is not too different from the third.

Adaptability

‘The fourth assumption that lies behind this essay is that politics is more like the exercise of a craft or art, than like traditional conceptions of what happens when a theory is applied. It requires the deployment of skills and forms of judgment that cannot easily be imparted by simple speech, that cannot be reliably codified or routinized, and that do not come automatically with the mastery of certain theories [...] A skill is an ability to act in a flexible way that is responsive to features of the given environment’ (Geuss 2008, 15).

The nature of politics, according to realist philosophers, is such that it is impossible to give a rigid comprehensive account. This last point is an appeal for modesty in political theory and it follows closely from contextualism. If political philosophy cannot be developed in abstract, but only in conjunction with a specifically historical framework, then there is no absolute knowledge of politics, which one can apply to any situation. One must avoid ‘the ethical attitude that holds moral conduct to be a matter of rule following, and moral relationships to consist of duties and rights determined by rules’ (Shklar 1964, 1). Political philosophy cannot be able to provide guidance to the agent through a rigid structure of rules and principles. It needs to be flexible in order to conform to the contextualism discussed above. Rigid deontological principles, which admit of no exception and have to be applied in the same way regardless of the circumstances, can prove catastrophic in politics.

The famous quotation of German chancellor Otto Von Bismarck comes to mind as he defines politics ‘*die Kunst des Möglichen*’, i.e. the art of the possible (Von Bismarck 1895, 248). The intuition is the same, because arts, as skills, stand in direct opposition to science. A similar argument is given by Von Clausewitz (Clausewitz 2008, 98) in regard to war. War, as politics, is an art not a science because it is highly variable and highly dependent on context. In both fields, thus, action is to be taken swiftly and without sufficient knowledge. One cannot have a science, where evidence is usually insufficient to weight in favour or against most hypotheses. One must then rely on analogies, experience and intuitions in order to act when it is required.

Geuss’s fourth feature recalls also the classics of political realism, most notably the thought of Machiavelli. The Florentine philosopher is very famous for redefining the

Christian notion of 'virtue' (Machiavelli 2013) with an instrumental meaning instead of a moral one. A '*virtuoso*' politician is a successful one, one that it is capable of adapting to the ever-changing circumstances of the world, to win the resistance of reality and achieve its political goals. Virtue for Machiavelli has exactly the same meaning as skill for Geuss. However, the Florentine chose a word with an unmistakably evaluative connotation because he is convinced that skill is a normative concept in politics. In fact, it can be argued that for Machiavelli 'political philosophy itself must be *virtuous* [...] it must be sensible to contingency and propose [...] flexible solutions' (Pasquali 2012, 75).

On this fourth point, a strong disagreement with Rawls and the moralist tradition transpires. They would not regard virtue, skill or craft as something political philosophy should be interested in. The aim of political philosophy is to elaborate a conception of justice, not to apply it and certainly not to realize it. Craft is for politicians, philosophers need not bother discussing it. Rawls argues that justice, in a democratic society, is based on an overlapping consensus, meaning a convergent agreement on what is right independently grounded on each comprehensive theory of the good. Rawls specifies that it is not by analysing these actual beliefs that we find the theory of the right, which underlies them all. That is what a politician might try to do, but it is not philosophically interesting, because it can only provide a limited and contingent agreement – a 'mere modus-vivendi' (Rawls 1987, 9). He describes the task of the political philosopher as follows:

'we start from the conviction that a constitutional democratic regime is reasonably just and workable, and worth defending. But given the fact of reasonable pluralism, we try to design our defense of it so as to gain the allegiance of reasonable people and to win wide support. We do not look to the comprehensive doctrines that in fact exist and then frame a political conception that strikes a balance between them expressly designed to gain their allegiance. To do that would make the political conception political in the wrong way' (Rawls 2001, 37).

The philosopher, therefore, needs to find out the correct theory of the right independently from people's substantive ideas of the good. Only later he will discover that this, independently right, overlapping consensus happens to be acceptable by all

their comprehensive views – at least Rawls has a reasonable faith that it will. After all his hard work, the philosopher, tired but content, can just show politicians his results and wait for them to figure out how to realize them in practice. Besides, there is no need of craft for politicians either, since the philosopher previously discovered and laid down in principles what every reasonable citizen already agrees about.

This relation between philosophers and politicians is obviously implausibly simple: the political philosopher discovers what the just structure of society is and then the politician is tasked to realize it⁴. This is the core of what has been called ethic-first view, or moralism, the idea that the work of the philosopher, who has to design a just structure for our society, comes first. Only later comes in politics, whose only role is to take the given design and build it right.

If the theory fails to be implemented, it is because the politicians are not ‘good’ enough: they are either too ignorant or too corrupt to realize the perfect utopia given to them. Realism fiercely opposes this position, arguing that only common sense is needed to understand that the whole idea of this philosophical project is flawed. On this view, politicians seem both diminished in their role of actors and entrusted with too much confidence in their motives.

As I have showed, the fourth point of Geuss is that a categorical view of political philosophy is inadequate to capture the contextual variety of the circumstances, and potentially catastrophic in its consequence. Political idealists, on the contrary, are seen as mistaken insofar as they seek principles, which would provide guidance independently from the context.

1.4 Effectual reality

⁴ Rawls would reject the critic of falling prey to the siracusean syndrome. Indeed he claims that philosophers are no more authoritative than common citizens (Rawls 2008). He also thinks that it is wiser to apply democracy to philosophy than philosophy to the democracy. These claims would have constituted an appropriate defence if they were coherently carried out.

These four features of political realism supply some interesting preliminary considerations about what distinguishes genuinely realistic political theory from the political idealism of Rawls. I now tackle the question of what view of reality these features presuppose.

This is not a purely methodological argument. Rossi and Sleat are indeed right when they claim that 'while realism is politically indeterminate, and in that sense not a substantive political position, it would be mistaken to characterise realist thought as simply a set of methodological concerns directed towards correcting any overly unrealistic political theory' (Rossi and Sleat 2014). However, it is undeniable that part of the substantive worries of political realism is due to a different framing of the questions. Later I will try to give an account of how this metaphysical question of reality can be given a substantive content.

What I want to argue here is that realist arguments seem to share a strong metaphysical assumption about reality, and that this assumption is not neutral regarding substantive positions. Rather, all the features we identify as characteristic of political realism require it.

The realist's emphasis on facts and reality does not appear to be very sophisticated at first glance, since it is never discussed and often taken for granted. We might then suppose that their position is just common-sense realism, some kind of 'impatience' with abstraction and utopias (Frazer 2010, 493). Surely the vehemence against the moralists and the lack of clear systematic explanations could lead one to think that their position is a kind of unreflective reaction. However, I believe that their stance is more complex than that, even more substantial than they would care to admit. Many political realists would regard this enquiry as irrelevant at best and misconceived at worst. Many in fact regard excessive theorizing as one of the flaws of political idealism (even though, Rawls famously tried to 'avoid' metaphysical questions). First, in fact, rejecting metaphysics is a metaphysical position. Thus, one cannot reject metaphysical arguments on the ground that they are controversial. Rejecting metaphysics is itself a metaphysical position, and just as controversial. Whether we argue for metaphysics or against it, we would be employing metaphysical arguments. Realistic political thinkers can thus claim

that they are uninterested in metaphysically conceptualizing what they mean by reality, but not that the question is irrelevant. At best, they can argue that such an investigation is bound to be unfruitful, but this cannot simply be presumed. The second reply to the metaphysically abstinent realist is that the meaningfulness, effectiveness and accuracy of the discussion and the object discussed. Even if you refuse to expose a comprehensive view of the object of your analysis as long as your analysis has an object, you will also have some conception of it – however vague it might be and whether or not you are aware of it. Therefore it is possible, and probably useful, to reconstruct the implicit account of the object of a theory, in order to better clarify what the theory assumes but gives no argument for.

My claim here is that the metaphysical view, which is implicitly adopted and unreflectively defended in political realism, may be called ‘effectual realism’⁵. According to this view, only what is causally effective counts as real: something is real *iff* it has an effect.

This view is customarily attributed by scholar of metaphysics to the view expressed by the famous Alexander’s dictum: ‘To be is to have causal powers’ (Alexander 1920, 8). To be sure, the idea is not new, and in some form is present already in Plato, who argues in the Sophist that: ‘whatever has a native power, whether of affecting anything else, or of being affected in ever so slight a degree by the most insignificant agents, even on one solitary occasion, is a real being’ (Plato 2014).

More recently, Peter Geach has elaborated the notion developing what he called the ‘actuality-sense’. In his view ‘a provisional explanation of actuality may be given thus: x is actual if and only if either x acts, or undergoes change, or both’ (Geach 1968, 7).

This view has the advantage to fit quite well with the commonsensical use of the attribution of the property “real”. As Berto and Plebani claim, ‘laymen can take as non-

⁵ One of the most well know realists of all times, Machiavelli famously remarked: ‘mi è parso più conveniente andare drieto alla verità effettuale della cosa, che alla immaginazione di essa’: ‘it seemed more useful to follow the effectual truth of the matter, rather than the imagination of it’: (Machiavelli 2013). Therefor it seemed just fitting to name the implicit ontology of political realism ‘effectual reality’.

existent such things as Pegasus, Santa Claus, a golden mountain, Thomas Jefferson or one hundred imaginary dollars'. (Berto and Plebani 2015, 106). We cannot interact causally with any of these. We cannot ride Pegasus, fly on Santa's sledge, mine a golden mountain, debate philosophy with Jefferson, nor invest imaginary dollars. All of these names do not denote anything real.

It is worth noting that the original debate is centred on the notion of existence, not of reality. The two concepts are related enough that we can sensibly recast the same argument for reality. However, some fine points are different. One of these is actually advantageous. The actuality-sense of existence has to face the objection of abstract object, because there is a sense in which Sherlock Holmes exists, even if he is causally inert. Thus, the actuality sense of existence has to account for that. On the contrary, abstract objects are no objection to effectual realism, as there is no sense in which Sherlock Holmes is real.

However, other objections may rise against this view nonetheless. We may ask, for example, what does the effect pertain to? To the subject? To the world? And whatever the answer we could then ask: well then, is the subject real? Or is the world real? Effectual realism seems logically weak, as the answer would be circular. The subject or the world cannot be real if being real means having an effect on the subject or the world, because the thing in question cannot possibly have an effect on itself. However it is not self-defeating, as many other kinds of pragmatist arguments. If we apply it to itself we get a tautological definition: the idea that only what is real is effective can be very effective and thus real.

Another order of metaphysical problems could spring from trying to determine if 'having an effect' is a dichotomy or counts as a scalar variable. In some places political realists seem to suggest that having a bigger effect counts as being more realistic. When they criticise moral theory for having merely an ideological effect they seem to imply that a theory that considers facts and tap into motivation is more effective and thus more realistic.

From this few critical points we can gather that effectual realism, if it is indeed the implicit metaphysics of political realism, is not very satisfactory from a formal point of view. However, it is important to notice that realists do not seek to justify it in a theoretical way. If any strong argument can be given in favour of this view, it must be a kind of '*argumentum ad lapidem*'. Samuel Johnson, disapproving Bishop Berkley's immaterial account, answered to him 'I refute it *thus*' (Alexander 2000, 119) and kicked a stone. A similar disproof of political idealism is implied by political realism. Realists do not actually need to resort to kicking moralists. They can claim that if our look is sharp enough, we can see everywhere moralists being kicked by reality.

From a strictly logical point of view, it might be correct to consider as fallacies this arguments *ad lapidem*, because they just point at a thesis but do not bother arguing for it. However, as pragmatists observe, there are some merits in employing 'nonphilosophical language' (Rorty 1982). In the ontological case about reality, in fact, one cannot deny that this kind of argument has a certain persuasive force. Kicking a stone seems actually a relevant reply, although one that – like the realist's position - implies a lot more than what it says. *Ad lapidem* replies suggest either that our sensory input is relevant in determining what is outside us, or even that it is actually all that matters to answer the question. One might go as far as saying that a more appropriate argument cannot be given. Metaphysical accounts that deny reality its role might be best refuted with deeds rather than words.

1.5 A model fit for realism

Such methodological thesis seems a good fit for the four features of political realism discussed above. I discussed Geuss's argument that a realistic political theory is going to be anti-idealist, pragmatic, contextual and adaptable. Let me now clarify how each of these features seems to presuppose effectual realism.

The first thesis, anti-idealism, easily fits into effectual realism. Its emphasis on the importance of actual motivation rather than ideal motivation supports effectual realism.

While actual motivation allows us to interact with the world, ideal or hypothetical motivation does not. If I have a reason to go to school, I will be going to school. But if I ought to have a reason to go to school, but I do not have a reason to go to school, I won't go to school.

In this sense, the philosophy of the moralists is real only insofar as it causes someone to act in a certain way that they would not have done if not for the theory. It is in fact real what can influence the world by being believed to be the truth, either by someone to act on the belief or by someone who reacts to it. In fact, while we noticed that Pegasus, Santa Claus, a golden mountain, Thomas Jefferson or one hundred imaginary dollars are not causally effective, we did not say that the belief in them was not causally effective. Indeed I could be motivated to behave in a good way by the belief in Santa Claus. It would not follow, however, that Santa Claus is causally effective, but that the belief in Santa Claus is causally effective. To see why one needs to keep an object and the belief in the object separated, imagine a mirrored situation. Without anyone knowledge, Devil Claus exists. Devil Claus rewards people who behave badly. He is real, because he interacts effectively with the world, by rewarding such people. However, none believes he is real. Therefore, the belief in Devil Claus does not exist, and in fact none is causally caused to partly change his behaviour from good to bad in order to get Devil Claus's good rewards.

Thus, a belief in something which is not real can be real. Some people do believe that ghosts are real and thus they are moved by this belief to avoid old and desolated mansions. In fact, one does not even need to believe in some fantasy in order for it to influence his behaviour. Indeed, the fact that others believe in it may be reason enough to adapt. Consider the case of romans facing the spread of Christian faith. Let's assume, for the sake of the argument, that Christianity is not the one true religion, like most pagan romans surely must have thought. However, Christianity was real in two senses: it was real for Christian followers because it caused them to become martyrs, and it was real for the romans because it forced them to act in such a way as to prevent its spreading.

Ideal principles, then, are only real insofar as we believe in them. It is not the case that we act according to their prescriptions because they are real. We act according to their prescriptions because we believe in them. Only internal reasons are real, if we follow Williams terminology (Williams 1981). Internal reasons are real because they actually motivate actions, while external reasons are real only insofar as they are also internal reason: they are internalized by the subject. This allows realists not to deny the importance of ideals in politics, but tempers their force. We cannot expect everyone to conform to a principle because we believe that it is true. But we have to take actions in order to cause them to believe in what we believe in.

The second thesis, pragmatism, also seems to fit into this conception of reality. The importance of consequences for political realism is trivial: they are the result of our causal interaction. Consequences do matter because they are the way the world has changed through action. Only the definition of consequence is needed here to show how this fits effectual realism. Purely contemplative ideals and intentions are uninteresting for political realism because if they do not motivate one to act they are unlikely to induce the world to change.

Contextualism, the third thesis, is also related to effectual realism. Both Geuss and Williams argue for it stating that abstract universalizations are either uninteresting or flat out misleading. It is because they dampen our ability to change and affect the world, that we ought to avoid them. Realists find misleading the presumption that 'ethics can be studied alone without locating it within the rest of human life' (Geuss 2008, 7). This argument seems to fit well within effectual realism as we come to see that abstract universalizations are useful neither in comprehending nor in justifying. Actions have different effects in different contexts, thus moralism is highly subjected to historical variances. If we take an action at the most general level we cannot see what specific effects it can have, because its contextual variance is too high. Thus, abstracting or generalizing can have only the effect of making us misunderstand the world, and thus we are going to be unable to influence it in practice. As Geuss himself puts it: 'the further away from our present contexts of action we get, the less of a grip our apparatus of moral reflection will give us on the situations we encounter' (Geuss 2009b, 42).

The last characteristic of political realism, adaptability, supports effectual reality in a similar way of contextualism. Given the variety of political situations and contexts, any form of predetermined behaviour would be an excessively rigid strategy to change the world. If the one thing that matters is the effect on the world, an adaptable approach has a higher probability of success. The optimal behaviour in a complex and chaotic world, such as the one of politics, is surely hardly standardizable in principle. Any kind of normative guidance must be highly adaptive to the circumstances of the action, in order to produce acceptable commands.

1.6 Effectual Reality and Metaphysical Realism

As I have shown, there are many similarities between the notion of reality implicit in political realism, which we have named 'effectual reality', and the pragmatic attitude. Only what is casually effective counts as real. A realistic political philosophy must thus focus on facts, not norms, actions, not beliefs and consequences not intentions. Norms, beliefs and intentions as we will see, are not always casually effective and realists are interested in them only as far as they can actually influence the world. We have furthermore tried to show how this interpretation is compatible with all characteristic points of political realism and how it could be defended with '*ad lapidem*' kind of arguments. However, something remains to be said about the substantial implications of such a position, for developing a concrete political theory. I will try to expand on this point by arguing that effectual political reality is characterized by being (1) knowable, (2) independent from our beliefs and (3) independent from our desires.

These three theses, altogether, seem to indicate that political realism implies a commitment to metaphysical realism. Some thinkers are quite explicit in recognizing this connection. Frazer, for example, states that: 'factuality is relevant to realism by way of the matter of givenness and its implications. That something is given, cannot be changed and must be accepted as factual' (Frazer 2010, 495).

One can rightfully be sceptical about this confusion. Most contemporary political realists are deeply uninterested in metaphysics and would probably refuse to be labelled as metaphysical realists. This is true for Williams and Geuss, and for most other contemporary realists. Contemporary thought puts a dangerous stigma on metaphysical realism. Classical realists, like Thucydides and Machiavelli, on the contrary, would have had no problem with such definition. With the following explanation I hope to shed light on why effectual realism is a form of metaphysical realism.

Knowability

The first implication of effectual realism is that we can have knowledge of reality: it is possible to know things about the world around us. Indeed the main effort of realism since Thucydides was to better understand the political world, whose knowledge was to become ' *κτῆμα ἐς αἰεὶ* ', i.e. ' *everlasting possession* ' (Thucydides 1954). This, he hoped, would provide guidance for political actors on how to cope with its difficulties.

The realist approach to this point is similar to that of the pragmatist: there are some propositions about the world that, once understood, allow us to interact with it. However, while most pragmatists conclude that there is no such thing as an external reality, political realists suppose there is. They are inclined to conclude that there must be something, which makes it the case that believing some propositions allows us to manipulate the world around us while believing other propositions does not. A thoroughgoing pragmatist will not concede this point, however. Rorty, for example, argues against James, who was a less radical pragmatist, that truth has no explicative power. This means that it is not the case that some propositions are more useful because they are true or because there is something out there that reflects them. On the contrary, it is the case that their usefulness leads us to consider them true. Yet the question of what there is outside the subject is complicated for pragmatists. On one side they are not sceptical and they admit that the outside world really exists. They judge, correctly, that reality has a way of resisting us; therefore, they are not willing to deny its

role. However, they reject the idea that knowledge is anything like the correct way our language mirrors reality⁶.

Pragmatists, in a sense, take Kant's theory of knowledge and substitute transcendental and objective schemes with Kuhn's idea of worldviews. They agree wholeheartedly with Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason* (Kant 2008b): that we can never know reality in an unmediated and direct way (the '*noumenon*' or '*das Ding an sich*'). However, they are more radical. For the German philosopher this concession does not compromise objectivity, because this is granted by the fact we all access reality in the same way, although a biased one. There are objective conceptual schemes (time and space, cause and effect...), which we all share, that allow us to talk about reality and agree with each other. However, a pragmatist denies that such conceptual schemes are fixed. If there is any structure that allows us to perceive and grasp the external world it is not something transcendental and objective. On the contrary, the only criterion to distinguish what we perceive as real is that of utility. The concepts through which we decode the world are something that we temporarily take for granted until some massive change occurs to which we are unable to adapt unless we switch our perspective. Thomas Kuhn (Kuhn 1997) calls such concepts worldviews ('*Weltanschauung*') and calls scientific revolutions the way we change them.

There are a few problems with this radical pragmatist outlook that a political realist could criticize. One is that the notion of utility is still fixed. Although it may assume different shapes in different persons and in different contexts, it is the same concept nonetheless. Moreover, the fact that pragmatism recognizes that reality resists to what we do, is already an important, if small, concession to objectivity. Indeed, the resistance of reality is a recurrent idea of political realism: reality resists to our actions, to our beliefs and to our desire. It does not matter how harsh are the epistemological problem

⁶ In philosophy of language those two opposing positions are known as the coherence theory and the correspondence theory of truth.

we face when we try to ground our knowledge. These do not prove that all knowledge is impossible, but simply that its attainment is plagued by uncertainty and doubts.

Political realism is sympathetic with this pragmatic outlook, but it does not go as far. The focus of the discussion is not the beliefs, propositions and truths, which according to pragmatists cannot relate to reality. The centre of the discussion is even more 'pragmatic' than that of the pragmatism: it is, to recall our previous example, the concreteness of our '*lapidem*' itself, taken as a fact, which affects us. An adequate correspondence theory need not be fully endorsed. Since political realism is akin to pragmatic reasoning on metaphysical questions, it does not endeavour to have more than a common sense understanding of the relationship between knowledge and reality. Remember the *ad lapidem* argument we gave in the previous chapter: kicking a stone is proof enough that reality exists. One does not need to develop a deep philosophical theory to explain why my belief that there is a stone in front of us is an adequately 'justified true belief' (Gettier 1963) Indeed a search for such a transcendental standard for knowledge may be unfruitful and even persuade us that knowledge – *true* knowledge – is impossible. Too much Philosophy⁷ might have the nefarious effect of obscuring the stone in front of us. However, if the stone is concealed, we will still stumble on it. In fact, if we cannot know anything to be true, why bother with the proposition that there is a stone where we are about to lay our feet? Indeed, that belief is just as interesting as the opposite one: that there is actually no stone on our path. However it does make a difference to us whether the first or the second is true (whatever we mean by true). The concession that there are some things that we do know seems like one we owe to our common sense.

A final clarification. It needs to be stressed that this point has to be understood with a certain degree of modesty. It is not the case that we know what we know in an assured

⁷ Pragmatic thinkers like to distinguish 'philosophy' and 'Philosophy' in the effort of trying to make 'antiphilosophical points in nonphilosophical language' (Rorty 1982), Rorty introduces a distinction between philosophy as a property of sentences ('an attempt to see how things, in the broadest possible sense of the term, hang together, in the broadest possible sense of the term' Sellars) and Philosophy as a proper name ('asking questions about the nature of certain normative notions, e.g. "truth", "rationality", "goodness", in the hope of better obeying such norms' (Rorty 1982). I briefly note that this is in itself a very Philosophical distinction.

and absolute way, that we can know everything or that we can know everything in a systematic way. This position certainly means the explicit rejection of absolute scepticism (i.e. knowledge is impossible), but it is compatible with fallibilism (i.e. knowledge is difficult and always plagued by doubts and flaws in many topics). Realists just take it to be plausible, that there are some things, which we can know about the world.

I will not provide any fully-fledged defence of such a position, because of reasons of competence, opportunity and – most importantly – of relevance. First, despite our common sense's intuitions, this is one of the oldest and most controversial topics in the whole history of philosophy. Therefore, I am not competent enough to discuss it. Moreover, the amount of space an appropriate discussion of this subject would occupy vastly exceeds the one I have here. Most importantly however, if absolute scepticism were true, my conclusions would indeed be unwarranted. But if absolute scepticism were true, a lot of other theories and conclusions would be unwarranted (including – paradoxically – absolute scepticism). Overall, even though this is a philosophically controversial point, I think the burden of proof weights more heavily on those who reject common sense than on those who approve of it⁸.

Independence from Beliefs

The second important substantial implication of the implicit metaphysical assumption of political realism is independence of reality from beliefs. The effects of reality apply whether or not we believe in them. Therefore, if we want to move successfully in the political realm, we need our beliefs to approximate reality. Let us discuss an example taken from the realist tradition of international relations: the '*stopping power of water*' (Mearsheimer 2001, p. 84). According to John Mearsheimer,

⁸ Wittgenstein is an interesting defender of the opposite position. He argues in his 'On Certainty' (Wittgenstein 1991) against G. E. Moore's 'A defence of common sense' (Moore 1925) against the reality of our own hands, employing sophisticated reasoning to deny the obvious. He was also well known for infuriating Bertrand Russell at a famous Cambridge's pub by daring him to prove beyond doubt that there were no pink elephants in the room. Wittgenstein theorized that he could always add ad hoc hypothesis (i.e. that the elephant is very fast, or invisible, or immaterial) in order to avoid Russell's sensible conclusion.

large bodies of waters have a draining effect on our ability to project political power and military force, mainly for logistical reasons. An equal distance, in water, is much less manageable, than the same distance on land. This consideration has obviously many implications on the world of politics, especially when international relations are concerned. It does not matter if I believe such description to be true. If it is accurate, then its effects will apply whether or not I believe it. If I try to plan an invasion, and I happen ignore the stopping power of water, I will find myself subjected to its effect nonetheless. Reality, as we have often remarked, resists our actions with its own attrition.

Furthermore, political realism dampens the role of beliefs as effectual tools of political change. It is true, that in the last example, even if the 'stopping power of water' were a false belief, it would still influence my decisions. I would act, as-if it were true, thus adapting my actions to my incorrect theory, in order to prevent what would not in fact happen. Political realism does not naively deny this role of beliefs. However, it argues that they are less effective than actions. Since one suffers a competitive pressure for his beliefs to mirror reality, a realist might argue, then, in order to affect reality, concentrating on beliefs proves generally to be a poor strategy. A political actor who wants to be effective must judge others by their actions in the political arena, rather than by their professed beliefs. It will be too easy however to conclude that beliefs are not at all real, according to our definition of reality. Indeed realist thinkers, especially those akin to critical theory, emphasised that a descriptive political theory always influences the political world, which is describing. If a prediction matters to political actors, then they will adapt their behaviour in order to facilitate the outcome if they like it or actively oppose it if they dislike it. These well-known phenomena are named self-fulfilling and self-defeating prophecies and are well studied in political science and sociology (Merton 1968). Therefore, beliefs do influence the political world in a significant way.

In political philosophy, Raymond Geuss devoted much time to the study of ideology and its active role in shaping politics and society (Geuss 1981). He considers himself both a political realist and a critical theorist, and there is no contradiction in that. He is in fact

a keen observer of the Rawlsian tradition of liberalism he has come to denounce as an acute form of ideology (Geuss 2009a, 34). As Menke acutely observed, for Geuss

‘the need for this critical project, in turn, is due not simply to the philosophical predominance of [liberalism]—a predominance which in itself may not cause too much concern to a realist—but rather to its social predominance: to the social reality of the ethical ideology. The ideology has become reality, so that reality itself has become ideology. Therefore neither ideology critique nor a realist ‘sense for the facts’ is sufficient by itself. Only their combination can dissolve the intertwinement of ideology and reality’ (Menke 2010, 144).

Geuss argues that even if Rawls’s liberalism formally prescribes equality, it does so in an abstruse and hypothetical way: the question ‘does A have grossly more than B?’ is substituted with the question ‘Would B have even less if A had less?’ (Geuss 2009a, 23). Even if this position seems sensible – and for Geuss clearly it does not – one can easily see that it would be exceedingly difficult to apply it in practice. It is really difficult to deal with such hypothetical questions on an empirical basis (how would one go to prove that I would have less if B had less?).

Therefore even if the new question may seem more workable from a theoretical standpoint it makes very little sense as guidance for actions. Thus, concludes Geuss, its only real effect on the political world is to obscure the issue and provide a comfortable ideological cloak to the *status quo*. This is confirmed, he thinks, on an empirical level: no other political philosopher has ever been as influential on policy makers as Rawls, and yet inequalities have grown steadily. It will be false, then, to conclude that the Rawlsian tradition of philosophy, despite being depicted as unrealistic and utopian, had no effect on reality. Indeed, Geuss recognizes that it had a tremendous effect on the political world as a conservatory force. However, he concludes with a sigh that ‘*philosophy has in the past often aspired to be something more than [ideology]*’ (Geuss 2009a, 35). Rawls on his parts is certainly aware of the risks when he notes:

‘the idea of political philosophy as reconciliation must be invoked with care. For political philosophy is always in danger of being used corruptly as a defence of an unjust

and unworthy status quo, and thus of being ideological in Marx's sense. From time to time we must ask whether justice as fairness, or any other view, is ideological in this way; and if not, why not? Are the very basic ideas it uses ideological? How can we show they are not?' (Rawls 2001, 4).

However, he does not seem to strive too hard to answer his own worry.

In what sense, then, should realistic political theory ignore beliefs? Principles that we believe are true, but that do not motivate us to act, have very little effect on the world. Realism emphasizes the social effect of shared principles, but it also insists that there are always limitations: on what principles are in fact capable of influencing behaviour, on the effect of our individual beliefs, on what other people can be made to believe.

The first limitation of principles is the one about which realists are most vocal in criticizing the moralist idea, that is, that principles only matter when they prompt a specific action. Therefore, it is not the case that categorical principles are effective independently from our willingness to act on it. Williams, for example, argued that principles are reasons for actions only when they are internal. Only when they have motivating force, they can be considered real. External reasons may be believed to be true but that alone does not mean that we are consistently willing to act on them. Kant's practical reason, according to Williams, is highly susceptible to this critic, even if Kant meant such reason to be already willed by the actor. Williams's idea presupposes and implies the Humean view that desires and beliefs are two radical different things. In no case, Hume thought, a belief is capable of motivating an action without the corresponding desire. A realist needs not necessarily go as far as Hume in disqualifying the role of beliefs as motivating forces; however, he will emphasize the fact that to hold a belief and acting on it are two very different things.

It is true that when many hold a specific principle, it is likely going to have an influence on the real world. However, my holding a belief in a principle does not, by itself, cause others to adopt it. If I hold a principle I can certainly try to convince others: but it is only by actively engaging with them and trying to convince them that my belief can cause others to share it, and thus affect the world.

The second limit is that individual beliefs are irrelevant, and a false belief about the political world can be very damaging for the actor. I may strongly believe, as many Marxists did, in 'the progressive tendency of the general rate of profit to fall' (Marx 2006, 319) as the most important law of political economy which will inevitably lead capitalist countries to decline and wage war against each other. However, this does not change the fact that they will not decline. I may feel comforted by the fact that I stand on the right side of history. This belief does not matter at all on a political level if it does not help to reach the change I envisage and desire. It may serve to motivate me to act, feeling that my acts are bound to be successful. Nevertheless, I may as well grow lazy and complacent in my conviction that my idea will surely be eventually vindicated by history itself. Why take risks to cause a result, which will happen all the same? In politics, moreover, it is not just the individual point of view that matters. Thus if I care about the decline of capitalism it is usually not just because I think it is good for me, but because I think it matters for others too. I may favour my self-indulgence to the actual result, but others will most likely not prefer my self-indulgence to an actual result they would enjoy. In this case, a belief may inhibit action, and when the action is needed for a specific goal, this belief is actually self-defeating. Even while I may personally revel in it, I fail my intent, which was to implement the change. If others share my goal but not my belief, they will suffer from my inaction.

The third limitation to beliefs is that we may not presume that others are capable or willing to accept them, especially when these challenge what they think they know or what they think they want. Here again, realists stress the idea that even if men are indeed very malleable beings, they are not infinitely malleable. They can be persuaded to believe many things, but it is hard to 'fool all the people all the time' (Lincoln 2008) Extreme displays of conviction, like for example dying for one's own belief, can shock others and persuade them to believe things they would not normally accept. However, again, it is the extreme action, not the belief *per se* that caused the change. And it is only when beliefs are coupled with powerful desires that extreme actions are possible. Not the ideal of freedom, but the will to free other. Not the ideal of justice, but the desire to treat others fairly. Not the ideal of equality, but the yearn for a more equal society.

Let us now look again at our *ad lapidem* example: it does not matter how confident I am that there are no stones in front of me. This belief still does not change the fact that there are and that I might stumble on them. The effects of reality apply whether or not I believe in them. Even if I may rejoice in thinking that I have nothing to fear because my path is truly clear of debris, I will still stumble and fall. I might value the vain joy of self-deception more than the actual suffering of falling, but others might not. Since in politics my behaviour always influences others, the social dimension is never marginal. Others will fall because of me and I have to consider this fact. Reality, to conclude, may not be overridden by our false beliefs about it, it fights back and resist our actions when we do not get it right.

Independence from Desires

The third and last substantive implication of effectual reality is that it appears independent from conative attributions. It does not matter how we would like the world to be, it still will not change the way it is. This is the most resounding thesis in the history of political realism. The classics of realism all originate from a strong rejection of moralizing political thought, and Machiavelli attacks Plato explicitly on this point by saying: *'many imagined republics and principates like there were never seen; for he who leaves what is done for what ought to be done, learn rather his ruin than his preservation'* (Machiavelli 2013). This point connects the anti-idealist position with the rejection of wishful thinking. The priority of the 'is' over the 'ought' is the equivalent of the priority of the world as it is over how one might want it to be. Raymond Geuss uses the notion of *'moral cosmos'* (Geuss 2014), to address this ethic-first *Wunschvorstellung* (wishful thinking). A moral cosmos is the belief that the world must be ethic-friendly on three dimensions. First, moral values must be compatible with each others (e.g. equality and freedom must be realizable at the same time); then they must be compatible with individuals (e.g. equality must be possible given human nature); and finally, they must be compatible with society (e.g. freedom must be possible, given the possible structures of cooperation). Only when all these conditions apply we can really have moral philosophy as a theory of the good or the right. On all these dimensions, unfortunately,

he sees reasons to be sceptic. Moral philosophy, concludes Geuss, is a gospel for the faith that all these conditions apply or can be made to apply in the actual world. Political realism, on the contrary, has always been keenly aware of the uneasy condition of discontent and conflict.

It is in the field of international relations that this realist critic of moralism stroke the harshest blows (Morgenthau 2005; Waltz 2001; Mearsheimer 2001). Dealing with the dramatic reality of war, liberalism, as a theory of international relations, tried its best to claim the contingency of conflict. In order to eradicate war altogether, liberals focused on aggressive strategies that increased the risk of wars. Realists on the other hand, by accepting war as inevitable, thought wiser to accept its existence and focus on its containment (Carr 1939).

Hence, a common critical point against moralism and ethics-first approaches is that they misrepresent the world by overstating the viability of moral action, however defined. Moralism – so depicted – is just considered pure and vain wishful thinking. The discomfort caused by a reality of unavoidable conflict is so disagreeable that we prefer to hide it from ourselves. We dislike it so much that we prefer not to see it, and we convince ourselves that the situation truly isn't so dire: that even if we disagree on what is good we must at least agree on what is right, that disagreement can be composed by (long enough) rational discussion, that even if utopia is still far away it won't be forever out of reach. Thus the previous quotation from Machiavelli becomes pertinent: it connects wishful thinking with the practicability of morality and shows that it is only by falsely depicting the political world that we can pretend that the Kantian caveat of '*ought implies can*' (Stern 2004) does not have a lethal effect on moral philosophy.

However, all wishful thinking is ultimately vain. Moral wishful thinking is a result of the vainglory of philosophers, overjoyed by intellectual victories they have yet to win. Political realists accept the duty of reminding them that nobility of desires is commendable, but it must not cloud our judgment about the reality around us. It does not matter how deeply we might want the world to be in a certain way, no conviction is strong enough to break reality and adjust it to our will. In a sense, there is something normative – and noble - in this position of political realism. It depicts the austere

strength to accept the harshness of reality as a tragic and heroic choice that one must make in order to be successful. Gray makes this point explicitly when he says:

‘realism is the only way of thinking about issues of tyranny and freedom, war and peace that can truly claim not to be based on faith and, despite its reputation for amorality, the only one that is ethically serious. This is, no doubt, why it is viewed with suspicion. Realism requires a discipline of thought that may be too austere for a culture that prizes psychological comfort above anything else, and it is a reasonable question whether western liberal societies are capable of the moral effort that is involved in setting aside hopes of world-transformation’ (Gray 2002, 75).

Echoing the same arguments we gave for the independence on beliefs, preferences alone do not change the facts around us. It is indeed true that, like we admitted for beliefs, widespread preferences are capable of affecting the world profoundly. But - realists remind us - our individual preferences alone do not change the world in the slightest way, and there are limits to what people can be made to desire. We must recognize that desires, once they are widespread enough, do allow the political world to be changed in profound ways. However, the realist considers a mistake to conclude that political reality can be altered in any way we want. There are still limitations: how much desires influence action, how many people hold them, and how much other people can be made to share them.

In facts, most realists conclude that the inevitability of conflict and the need for cooperation are not correctly diagnosed by moralism. These are true limits of political possibility, but moralist thought seems unprepared to recognize their undesirable reality. Possibility for them is morally rigged from the start. Indeed these very facts are normatively changed: it is not pluralism (the moralist’s name for conflict), it is ‘reasonable pluralism’; it is not cooperation, it is ‘fair cooperation between free and equal citizens’ (Rawls 1993, 24). Political realism claims that it is not wise to pose such limitations. Conflict and cooperation are part of the political world just as much as the stone of our metaphor is part of the physical world. Declaring religious disagreement unreasonable or autocratic decision-making to be unfair cooperation is as much sensible as imagining a stone to be unreasonably solid, or stumbling to be an unfair way of walking. We have seen before that not wanting to know about our ‘*lapidem*’ and having

false beliefs about it are negative attitudes. We have now tried to show that wishful thinking is very damaging as well. It does not matter how deeply I might desire that there were no stones on my way, I will still stumble on them. It is still possible to balance wishful thinking and the practical consequences of the illusion (including the eventual shattering of said illusion) and to prefer the first. Indeed, given such preference, it might be rational to do so⁹. However, we must always remember that our decisions in politics hold consequences for others. Therefore, even if we would prefer to hold on to our illusion and let the world perish, we might still lead others, who might not share our illusion, to the dramatic consequences of it. Political

and it is not entirely confident that moralists could stand up again after falling. At the very least, it thinks people lured by moralistic arguments will quite dislike their unforeseen fall.

⁹ See the fourth chapter on this topic.

2 POSSIBILITY AND NECESSITY

2.1 Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to reconstruct and enquire the validity of a way of deriving norms from facts, typical of political realism. Crucial for this argument is the concept of necessity. Here I make another methodological point: I argue that political realism has a distinctive notion of possibility and necessity, just as it had a distinctive notion of reality.

In the last chapter, I have introduced a preliminary discussion of the elements that characterize a political theory as realistic, and I have argued that these imply a specific metaphysical view: effectual realism.

In this chapter, I argue that the previous causal view of reality leads to a causal view of possibility, which is different from the one of many political idealists. In fact, criteria such as conceivability and compatibility with the physical laws are too loose to be useful in politics. I propose that instead of those, a more realistic criteria would be 'trackability': some desirable state is possible if there is a causal chain to move from where we are now to the desired state. From this causal view of possibility, I derive a causal view of necessity: something is necessary if there is no way to move to a state of affairs, which does not instantiate it. Symmetrically, something is impossible if no causal chain leads to it.

The structure of this chapter will be as follows.

I open with an analysis of what counts as politically possible, for political realism. Trying to formulate a reply to William Galston's worry that political realism may fail to differentiate itself from moralism on more than empirical grounds, I discuss three possible replies.

First, one might bite the bullet and claim that yes, political realism does have a more accurate account of what is possible than moralists do. However, given how unclear modal epistemology is, one would have no decisive reasons to support either realism or moralism on this ground.

Second, political realism should revert the burden of proof about possibility against moralism. If one claims that some radically discontinuous state of affair is possible, he should be giving reasons for why he thinks that's the case, instead of requesting realists to prove him wrong.

Third and finally I argue that political realism can argue that possibility has to be linked with causality, rather than conceivability. A state of affairs is politically possible if and only if there is some causal chain to move from the actual world to the desirable one. It is not enough for a world to be conceivable or compatible with the actual one, as Rawls's conception of realistic utopia seems to imply. It needs to be 'trackable' from the state of affairs we are in now.

In the next part I am going to argue that, in light of the previously described notion of possibility, some things will turn out to be necessary. When no causal chain is available to avoid a certain state of affairs, this is to be deemed necessary. By the same argument, when no causal chain is available to reach a certain state of affairs, that is to be deemed impossible. Here I discuss how this interpretation of necessity derives from the metaphysical view I presented in the first chapter. If reality is independent from our beliefs and desires, it will exert a certain pressure on us. If we grant that we are not omnipotent, then we should conclude that some feature of the world fall beyond our power to change, and should be acknowledged as necessities.

Finally, the tension between what must be and what can be reveals that the notion of necessity is not merely negative. I conclude that necessities have a transformative role, since precisely because they point out that some causal chains are absolutely blocked, they give us reasons for taking those sideways which we can track as realistically possible.

2.2 On what there could be

Galston's Worry

In his well-known review article on political realism, William Galston identified what seemed to him a fatal flaw in this approach: it is apparently unable to distinguish itself from the tradition it opposes. Since both realists and idealists accept that 'ought implies can', the only difference appears to be how much change is deemed possible in the political realm. However this is an empirical question and, if Galston is right, there is no genuinely philosophical difference between the two traditions, only 'deep empirical disagreement [...] yet to be clarified' (Galston 2010, 2).

Moreover, it is not really clear how one could solve such an empirical disagreement, because the epistemology of modality is generally unclear. As Geuss, remarks, for example: 'we have an inherently weak grasp on what is "possible" and most societies are not set up so as to naturally improve this, or actively to make us aware of possibilities we may have ignored or taken with insufficient seriousness' (Geuss 2003, 289). Even if possibility and necessity are questions regarding states of affairs, observation is certainly not enough to assess them. One can clearly infer what is possible from what is actually the case, but this would not exhaust the realm of possibilities - otherwise possibility would not be different from actuality. As it is well known, the fact that all the swans that I observe are white does not prove that black swans are impossible (Popper 2002, 4). As moralists often remind us, a society without slavery has been as rare as a black swan for a significant historical time, but this has never meant that it was impossible. Conversely, it is just as obvious that not everything is possible: there are states of affairs that cannot ever be realized (e.g. a society where everybody's income is above the average). The question is thus how to discriminate between what is possible and what is not. In order to answer Galston's concern, I intend to propose a conception of possibility that I believe clarifies what is to count as possible, and how one is to find out.

If Galston is correct, the difference is that realists are more pessimistic about the amount of desirable change that we can deem possible, while moralists are more

optimistic about it. If this were right, the debate between them would seem pointlessly factual. However, it seems odd that a mere empirical disagreement would prompt a controversy so divisive and long-lasting. I believe that the distinction between realism and moralism is genuinely philosophical and by considering three possible answers to Galston's charge, I intend to show that political realism employs a notion of possibility distinct from the one of the moralists.

There are three possible ways a realist could go in order to answer Galston's critique: they could deny that moralism is consistent with its supposed acceptance of 'ought implies can', they could argue that the burden of proof lays on those that argue against the status quo, or they could claim that possibility be linked to causality, rather than conceivability. While the first two ultimately fall prey to Galston's objection, the third one appears to offer a valid response.

First Reply: Biting the Bullet

The first answer is to concede Galston's worry that there is only a difference of empirical judgments between realism and moralism, and yet claim that moralists fail to appropriately estimate the limits of ought implies can. A moralist may swear acceptance to 'ought implies can', but ultimately fail to do so by relying on some crucial idealized assumption that is not feasible. Otherwise, realists would not have felt the need to voice their critical concerns at all. Thus, it is not true that between realism and moralism there is no genuinely philosophical distinction, because, while the first accept 'ought implies can', the second really does not. This response falls back on the traditional critiques against moralism and thus, I suspect, it may seem the easiest way out of the problem.

In order to clarify the first response, consider John Rawls as an example of moralism's acceptance of 'ought implies can'. In *Political Liberalism* he explicitly claims that 'we view political philosophy as realistically Utopian: that is, as probing the limits of practicable political possibility' (Rawls 2001, 4). This definition accept 'ought implies can', although it challenges us to investigate the true limits of the possible, in order to make sure that we do not fail to consider desirable options, which may seem almost impossible but are not quite so. In *The Law of the People*, Rawls states that 'political

philosophy is realistically Utopian when it extends what are ordinarily thought to be the limits of practicable political possibility and, in so doing, reconciles us to our political and social condition' (Rawls 1999, 11). This definition claims that its limits are usually misplaced and the aim of political philosophy is to expand them. Rawls wanted his theory to be moderately – he would say reasonably – realistic, he saw the risks in utopian thoughts and subscribed to the 'ought implies can' principle.

Rawls thus is interested in the possible, more than in the actual. Here a political realist would not be inclined to disagree. Rawls in fact pretends to have a very modest notion of the possible, which is akin to what we could appropriately call realistically possible. Some were convinced by these arguments. Judith Shklar, who in 'What is the use of Utopia?' (Shklar 1994) made clear that she was no supporter of excessively idealized theory, was persuaded that Rawls's was moving in the right direction. According to her, as long as the normative aspirations were grounded in facts and reality, they were not unrealistic. The problem of utopias is the 'expansion of the realm of the possible beyond what we sensibly know to be true' (Forrester 2012, 260). This is a charge that can be however raised against Rawls. Realists, on the contrary, tend to be more pessimistic regarding the extent of change they deem possible.

Nevertheless, within the idea of a realistic utopia there is a conceptual tension that it might not be possible to mediate. As Rawls recognizes (Rawls 1999, 6), realists like E. H. Carr do not deny the role of moral judgments in political matters, but claim that these need to be balanced against consideration of powers. According to Rawls, this compromise fails because its result is determined by power alone, as Carr himself admits (Carr 1939, 222). Rawls's idea of a realistic Utopia, on the contrary, 'doesn't settle for a compromise between power and political right and justice, but sets limits to the reasonable exercise of power' (Rawls 1999, 6). By rejecting the compromise, Rawls reveals that the utopian side of a realistic utopia is clearly the most prominent. While the very name suggests that Rawls is trying to balance realistic considerations and utopian goals, he admits that justice trumps all considerations of power. Not much is left for realism, and one might wonder if a less eloquent naming like 'reasonable utopia' wouldn't perhaps have been more appropriate to describe his intentions.

This conclusion is confirmed if one considers that a conception of justice, according to Rawls, can be realistic when two conditions apply: if it is stably compatible with human nature and if it is not metaphysical.”

The first condition (which is really two conditions in one: stability and compatibility) is laid down as follows: ‘the first is that it must rely on the actual laws of nature and achieve the kind of stability those laws allow, that is, stability for the right reasons. It takes people as they are (by the laws of nature), and constitutional and civil laws as they might be, that is, as they would be in a reasonably just and well-ordered democratic society’ (Rawls 1999, 12). On this point Rawls borrows heavily from Rousseau, whom he quotes a few lines later: ‘my purpose is to consider if, in a political society, there can be any legitimate and sure principle of government, taking men as they are and laws as they might be (Rousseau 2002, 155). This condition expresses a compatibility requirement: the theory needs to be compatible with human nature, in order to be considered possible. Moral constraints that require us to go against what is humanly possible are bound to fail and are ultimately pointless. Given that laws need to fit men, the way men are is an immediate constraint on the way the laws might be. A realistic theory is thus one that never takes men as they cannot be, even if it advocates stretching the laws to their possible limit. Rawls wants here to avoid that his theory ends up ‘utopian in the pejorative sense, if it describes a form of collective life that humans, or most humans, could not lead through any feasible process of social and moral development’ (Nagel 1995, 61).

This is coupled with a conception of stability, normatively qualified (‘for the right reasons’): only stable institutional patterns are to be considered politically feasible. If a political system is self-undermining, given human nature, then it is not an acceptable one. These two constraints, compatibility and stability, might be considered surprisingly realistic, but Rawls conceives them in a very relaxed way. There is much that human nature allows, thus the space left for political possibility is not overly restricted ‘for we can to a greater or lesser extent change political and social institutions and much else’ (Rawls 1999, 12).

The second condition for a liberal political conception of justice to be realistic is that 'its first principles and precepts be workable and applicable to ongoing political and social arrangements' (Rawls 1999, 13). This passage suggests that a realistic theory needs to be very practical. Rawls almost seems to imply that a realistic theory needs to be implementable here and now. This impression is however wrong, as Rawls immediately clarify what he means with an example of his own conception of primary goods (basic rights and liberties, opportunities, income and wealth, and the social bases of self-respect), which according to him are 'openly observable and makes possible the required comparisons between citizens', contrary to 'unworkable ideas as a people's overall utility, or to Sen's basic capabilities for various functionings' (Rawls 1999, 13). If this is true, then with 'workable' Rawls just means that a realistic theory needs to be 'political not metaphysical' (Rawls 1985). His principles needs to be somewhat observable and measurable, in order to be appropriate as criteria of judgment, and not obscured by overly sophisticated high-level abstractions.

Even if we grant that Rawls intends his conception of a reasonably realistic political theory and subscribe to 'ought implies can', one might argue that in at least two decisive points he stretches the notion of possibility in a unrealistic way.

First, he develops his theory under the assumption of full compliancy. The principles of justice are agreed to under the veil of ignorance knowing *ex hypothesis* that the decision will be binding once we lift it. If our abstract selves behind the veil were to believe that there was no way for their decisions to be binding, then it would not make much sense for them to even deliberate. In fact, what is the point to decide which rules are the best if there is no expectation that anyone would follow them? Thus, they are assumed to know that people would be willing to abide to them.

According to Galston 'realists deny that [full compliance] is anything close to feasible, and they contend that this fact affects the way we should think about justice' (Galston 2010, 395). Assuming full compliance is a move that realists strongly oppose, as it reduces politics to 'applied ethics' (Geuss 2008, 1), it displaces it (Honig 1993) and deny its autonomy (Rossi and Sleat 2014). Indeed, what need would there be to have political institutions if we were to expect full compliancy to moral principles? Political problem

would be reduced to epistemic ones: once the puzzles of ethics are figured out, everybody will happily agree to the solution and act according to it¹⁰. If this were truly the case then there would not be any real need for politics. As Madison put it: ‘if men were angels, no government would be necessary’ (Hamilton et al. 2005, 281).

This problem has led within the tradition of Rawlsian liberalism to the debate about ideal and non-ideal theory. While the ‘high’ theory of politics is ideal, and aims at figuring out what justice is under idealized conditions like full compliance, the ‘low’ theory is non-ideal, and aims to apply ideal theory to real cases. However, the problem with this method is that it is too rigidly deductive: it assumes that the right approach is to start from principles ‘in a vacuum’ and then figure out how they apply to real cases. Moreover, potential non-compliance is not a side problem of politics, it is an essential feature of politics. Principles discovered without considering the possible consequences of non-compliant behavior can aspire at best to be moral principles, certainly not political ones. This has led many people to conclude that ‘by assuming full compliance, ideal theorists violate the constraints of a *realistic* utopia’ (Farrelly 2007, 845).

Rawls’s discussion of ‘realistic utopias’ comes after ‘A Theory of Justice’, in which the emphasis on full compliance is most present, thus it may be thought not to apply to his early theory. There is another way, however, in which political realists can claim that Rawls fails to appropriately judge what is empirically possible. This new critique can be raised against ‘Political Liberalism’, where it is pluralism that sets the limits of possibility: ‘the fact of reasonable pluralism limits what is practically possible here and now’ (Rawls 1999, 11–12).

A similar critique could be proposed here, as Rawls addresses reasonable persons. The meaning of this complex concept is that individuals can be motivated by moral and political reasons (they possess ‘a capacity for a sense of justice’), that they recognize the

¹⁰ Unless one agrees with Kavka that due to cognitive limitations, pluralism, the structure of interactions, and motivated beliefs even morally perfect individuals would still need government (Kavka 1995). However, while Kavka successfully argues that morally perfect individuals could still disagree, he fails to prove that they would also conflict. Morally perfect individuals might disagree, but due to their perfection, they will try to solve or work around their disagreement willingly in such a way that would not prompt the need for public coercion.

epistemic limits which make us unlikely to grasp the whole truth (the ‘burdens of judgment’), and that they are willing to keep their end of the bargain as long as others do. It is obviously not overly realistic to assume so much from every citizen. Rawls does not actually claim that all people are reasonable, but political liberalism as a justificatory device just works for reasonable individuals. Thus, it can only work for everybody if everybody is reasonable: Rawls’s justification is universal only if everyone is reasonable. Indeed Rawls acknowledges that there are going to be unreasonable individuals, but his treatment of this problem is not detailed enough to be satisfactory. He expresses hope that, they will eventually turn reasonable, but it has been rightfully pointed out that ‘under actual circumstances, Rawls’s hope may be misplaced’ (Sala 2013, 259). If the unreasonable are no threat to the well-ordered society we can safely tolerate them, otherwise we should worry about ‘containing them – like war and disease – so that they do not overturn political justice’ (Rawls 1993, 64). His theory thus appears an attempt of reconciliation and internal justification (i.e. justifying liberalism to liberals) and as such, Rawls himself admits that it always risks being ‘ideological in Marx’s sense’ (Rawls 2001, 4).

Thus, according to this brief discussion, that “deliberately stays on the surface” of Rawls’s theory, full compliance and reasonableness seems to fall outside the two definitions of realistic utopia we have considered. It seems that Rawls tends to considerably stretch the limits of practical political possibility instead of simply probing them or assess them more correctly.

This first possible reply to Galston’s worry, however, is not very satisfactory. Indeed his critique was not precisely that realism is the same as moralism, but that it fails to distinguish itself on a philosophical level. This clearer understanding of politics and its necessities and possibilities, which realists claim to have, amounts to mere empirical disagreement. I believe that Galston is correct in thinking that realism ought to do more than this, and I am going to argue that it actually can.

Second Reply: Reversing the burden of proof

The second way a realist could answer Galston's worry, is by claiming that the burden of proof as far as the questions of possibility are concerned does not lie on them, but on those who argue against the status quo and in favor of some radical discontinuity. The intuition is that if we are debating whether some desirable institutional design, fundamentally different from the actual one and from those that have been tried before, is possible or not we should assume that it isn't and try to argue that it is. The point is that the status quo, according to realism, holds a certain primacy: if we do nothing to change it, it will persist. Vice versa, what is possible, if we do nothing, would hardly become actual by itself. Thus, if we are examining a desirable institutional framework, which is significantly different from the current one, we should try to provide a compelling argument for its possibility, and not ask those who are skeptical to tell us why they think it is not possible¹¹.

First, consider a non-moral claim of discontinuity like 'starting tomorrow, all grass can be turned blue (assuming this is desirable)'. This would immediately prompt us disbelief or, if we are inclined to be charitable, to ponder how and why such an extraordinary phenomenon is possible. The contrary announcement 'that tomorrow's grass can remain green' would puzzle us and leave us wondering why someone would bother to specify such an obvious thing. The important point is that this second announcement would not prompt a need for justification and it would easily be accepted without questions. We would not ask the announcer to provide reasons to believe that grass tomorrow will still be green. On the contrary if we had to think seriously about the possibility of blue grass, we should ask 'why is this the case?' and especially 'considering that grass has always been green, what changed?'. It would be reasonable to believe the

¹¹ Some philosophers, among which Hume, considered the continuity of reality (i.e. the idea that the same cause will always have the same effect, everything else being equal) to be a philosophically unsound assumption. According to Hume there is no way to prove this continuity, because it is presupposed by any empirical induction and as such can never be observed. This also undermines the role of induction as a sound tool to investigate reality, because in order to work it presupposes something that we cannot prove. However, no scientist seemed to be particularly convinced by this argument. As long as the assumption of continuity is proved reliable in practice, because it allows us to interact with the world successfully, the metaphysical argument that it begs the question can be ignored.

statement only if a compelling causal argument is given for why this is the case. Imagine some credible biologist and physicist team up and tell us that if we launch a huge nuclear bomb into the sun, the radiation of solar rays would change. This would in turn prompt a biological reaction on the pigments present in the chlorophyll of plants that would make them look blueish. One might be inclined to believe such an extraordinary explanation, but not many people would believe such a massive discontinuity in the world. Without putting a lot of trust in these scientists, or without being able to evaluate a scientifically plausible causal account ourselves many would rightfully remain skeptics towards the claim for discontinuity.

Now let us consider a more difficult political claim of discontinuity. A naïve anarchist says: 'starting tomorrow, state coercion can be abolished (assuming it is undesirable)'. This claim would be, considering the history of human societies highly suspicious. Similarly to the blue grass situation, we would ask: why is this the case? Considering that societies always have had coercive mechanisms, what changed? Assuming one has a strong philosophical case for why coercion should be abolished, one should also provide a very strong explanation for why it can be. One could have an argument that the rising rate of moral progress made coercion unnecessary and damaging, and that all people can be expected to do their due without any fear of punishments. However, in order to believe such a strong discontinuity, one would need to place a lot of trust on such a causal account - perhaps more trust than it could reasonably be expected to bear.

A second political example could be made by a radical pacifist: 'starting tomorrow, military forces can be disbanded, (assuming they are undesirable)'. This claim too should appear quite puzzling. We may look forward to the day that marks the end of all wars, but that does not make it any more likely. We should better ask: why is it the case? Considering that we have always been plagued by wars, what changed? One could argue – as Wilson did (Snell 1954)– that international public opinion is going to make war impractical and useless, a relic of a barbaric past, but one would need to be extremely confident on this causal theory to plausibly believe the possibility of said discontinuity.

One could object that ‘what is possible could never have been achieved unless people had tried again and again to achieve the impossible in this world’ (Weber 2013, 93). To this Weberian objection, I would give a Weberian answer: ‘what kind of a human being one must be to have the right to grasp the spokes of the wheel of history’ (Weber 2013, 73)? While dedication to one’s goal is important to shrug off the friction of reality, it ought to be tempered by prudence and responsibility. If a goal is truly impossible it may never be prudent or responsible to try to realize it. The conception of possibility I presented is indeed very demanding on epistemic grounds, because it requires us to know what we are doing. However, given that politics is a risky business, because it regards the public use of violence, it is well that we demand so much. In this light we can understand political realism’s emphasis on prudence: unless we can be reasonably sure about what the results are going to be, it is better not to do it as the consequences may be highly dramatic. For example, one could argue that unilaterally disbanding our armies might signal others that we are ready for a world without violence and favor a move towards global peace. However, the possible results of such a move are so dramatic, that as long as we have reasonable doubts on our envisaged result, we should refrain from acting.

Cases like blue grass, political anarchy, and international peace are certainly imaginable. However, since they are substantial discontinuities, we should consider them credible possibilities only if we have a compelling argument explaining what changed and why. I do not want to claim that such changes are impossible, only that they need to be considered impossible until a persuasive reason is provided that they aren’t. Realism is more skeptical about political possibilities than idealism precisely because it reasons from the status quo and the history that led to it and demand solid justifications for discontinuities. This is not, I believe, a status quo bias, as there is a certain epistemic difference between the actual world and a possible one: the actual world does not need to be proved possible. By definition, what has never happened before does not need the same amount of proof for its possibility as what has always been the case. This, I believe, is a philosophical distinction, not a mere empirical one.

To sum up the second objection, I believe realists could reply to Galston that their position is genuinely distinct from moralism because they emphasize that the burdens of proof regarding the possibility of discontinuous events hang on moralists. Discontinuity requires justification more than continuity, and thus realists are right in rejecting those moralist theories, which do not provide enough evidence for the possibility of the radical discontinuities they invoke. However, this second reply is not completely satisfying either, because moralists might cite examples – like the abolition of slavery – where reforms, previously thought impossible, have been realized. Laying the burden of proof on discontinuity, they could say, might prove correct in pointing out impossibilities in most cases. However, this might prove excessively pessimistic, as it leaves out those few but relevant cases like the abolition of slavery, which would be left out and thought impossible. As this counterargument is correct, it seems that this second reply is not completely successful in dealing with Galston’s worry. The difference between realism and moralism is still about different empirical judgments.

Third reply: realistic possibility

I am now going to present a third counter argument, one that more comprehensively claims that realism has a specific notion of possibility which is more restrictive than that supplied by idealistic theory.

Possibility is sometimes broadly thought of as conceivability or compatibility. Some desirable state of affair must be logically consistent and compatible with the laws of nature as we know them, in order to be considered feasible. For example Rawls, as we have seen, consider the two main criteria of a realistic conception of justice are a stable compatibility with human nature and a workable account of what justice requires. Conceivability means that what is possible is what I can imagine. Only if some hypothetical state of affairs implies a contradiction, it is to be judged impossible: a world where everyone is immortal, for example, is possible. In the second sense, what is possible is what is compatible with the world as we know it. A state of affairs will be deemed impossible, if its actualization is thought to violate the law of physics and biology: a world where everyone always does the right thing, has shining white wings

on the shoulders, and lives on clouds is compatible with the laws of physics and thus possible.

The intuition I want to develop is that a possible world, in a reasonably realist sense of the word, is a world which is not merely conceivable or compatible, but also accessible from our actual world. A world of immortals, or of angels, is not realistically possible in this sense because we have no clue how to get there starting from where we are now. How do we transform our world of 'earthlings' (Miller 2013) in a world of immortals or angels? The 'ought implies can' principle for the realist is, I argue, best interpreted under this light. Political philosophy is not acceptable when it just tells us that world B is better than world A. And not even that world B is possible because we can conceive it or is compatible with the world as we know them. This is not enough. It must tell us – at least vaguely – how to go out from our world A to the better world B. Otherwise, the marvelous world B is just not worth thinking about.

My claim is not that this view fits the common use of 'possibility' better than conceivability or compatibility. Rather, I want to argue that such notion would constitute a sounder and more realistic constraint on political theory. But why is this a more realistic conception of possibility? I believe that this is the case because it fits the four methodological theses of realism, which were discussed in the first chapter: anti-idealism, pragmatism, contextualism, and adaptability. This view is clearly anti-idealist, as it restricts the realm of the possible to what may be actually brought about, compared to wider moralistic conceptions like conceivability or compatibility. It is also pragmatically oriented, as emphasis is put into actions and the transformation of the world, not so much onto beliefs and intentions. This notion also explains why realism is much concerned with contextual arguments. Where we are now is at least as important as where we want to go, if we want to know if it is possible to get there. And finally, this notion of possibility is a-systematic; there is no optimal single path to reach our desiderata.

The idea that a world is practically possible if it is 'accessible' is not new. For example John Dunn considers a vital political skill that of 'judging how far, and through what actions, and at what risk, we can realistically hope to move this world as it now stands

towards the way we might excusably wish it to be' (Dunn 1990, 193). Gilabert and Lawford-Smith also argue that some form of accessibility is the basic element of practical possibility: 'very roughly, some state of affairs is feasible if there is a way we can bring it about' (Gilabert and Lawford-Smith 2012, 809). Buchanan too mentions a 'practicable route from where we are now to at least a reasonable approximation of the state of affairs that satisfies its principles' (Buchanan 2007, 61) among the requisites for practical possibility.

I claim that the notion of possibility as accessibility is understood more clearly when accessibility is conceptually linked to the notion of causality. Specifically, since 'the limits of the possible are not given by the actual' (Rawls 1999, 12), talking about possibility only makes sense if we presuppose that the world has something which resembles a causal structure, and that we are capable to influence some of its variables. Any account of possibility needs to ponder the question of what makes it the case that some things are possible and some are not. I shall argue that the answer lies in the causal accounts, i.e. in the fact that some things lie connected by causal chains and some do not. I shall claim, as Wiens boldly put it, that 'Philosophers must do causal analysis if they are to establish that we are subject to a moral demand to implement their proposed institutional reforms' (Wiens 2012, 300).

A crudely naturalistic analogy could be of use to clarify what is meant. Consider the ideal gas laws, which tells us that the temperature, pressure and volumes of a given gas always stand in a proportional relation. For example, if I raise the temperature the volume will rise or, if I raise the pressure, the volume will get smaller. Letting aside the specific combinations between these three elements, the important idea is that this law establishes what is possible. The operation of the natural law of ideal gases has two effects: first, it limits many conceivable combinations of volume, temperature and pressure; second, it tells us how to operate on a variable in order to cause a specific result we might desire.

This analogy is obviously far from an adequate representation of what goes on in politics. Clearly none claims that politics is just like chemistry. However, the metaphor is helpful because it illustrates how causality and possibility are connected. The simple

fact that we do not observe some combinations of volume, pressure and temperature in a gas does not mean that they are *ipso facto* impossible. However, once we understand the true causal structure behind the variations of data we get a framework that excludes some results as impossible, and tells us which variables we need to operate in order to reach the possible combination we desire. The limits of the possible are 'not given by the actual' but by a causal chain, which we can influence in some ways.

This does not necessarily mean that our actions are predetermined. Different chains might be available in order to reach our goal, and it is left to us to figure out which one we want to follow or even if we want to start one at all. A chain might be longer than another one and thus less reliable, or maybe one leads to some other consequence, which we might find undesirable. It is left to the political actor to move across the different paths that are open to him. He ought only be mindful that not all conceivable paths are possible ones: some of them may be blocked or lead the agent elsewhere.

This is, as I said, a crude natural example and its application to the social and political world is by no means straightforward. However, I do believe that our intuition of political possibility only makes sense if we suppose something akin to laws operating in the world. Indeed it might still be the case that even if there were no such laws, our linguistic conventions presuppose them. Some authors boldly claim that 'political realism believes that politics, like society in general, is governed by objective laws that have their roots in human nature' (Morgenthau 2005, 4).

This claim is very bold and not everybody, not even all political realists, would go along with it. However, it is true that some realists saw human nature as unchanging, and derive some general deductions, sometimes akin to laws, from it. The classics perhaps were more inclined towards such considerations. Thucydides make Athenians claim to believe in the universal law of nature that the strong prevail and the weak obeys, for example. Machiavelli use history as a source of knowledge, in a strong objectivist sense. Hobbes tries to provide an entire catalogue of various laws of nature. However, contemporary realists are more skeptic on this point. On the opposite side of the spectrum, however, we find realists like Geuss who, influenced by critical theory, would strongly reject this view.

The existence of objective laws of politics is thus highly controversial; therefore I shall leave it aside for now. I shall note however that even if it turns out that there are no laws of politics, this analogy shows that a conception of possibility has to concede the existence of something akin to causal laws. If there were no physical laws it would not make sense to say that unaided human flying is impossible, or that breaking speed of light is possible. This is why causal analysis is crucial, and 'making effective prescriptions requires understanding the causal logic of the situations we seek to redress' (Wiens 2012, 337).

This view exhibits certain relevant epistemic limits: we are assuming that there are laws operating, that we can come know them, that they are fully deterministic, and that we may operate them. Of course, we would most likely never have anything close to such a perfect account of the political world in practice. However, this should not mean that we are free to tamper casually with our political institution, in the vain hope of randomly coming to the right result.

This epistemic indeterminacy has thus two relevant consequences: first, we must think in terms of probability. Given that we might not know any law for certain, we must operate based on our estimate of its soundness: the more we trust our knowledge of the law (and thus the likely consequences of our actions) the more we should be willing to engage a certain plan of action which presupposes it. Secondly, this high degree of epistemic uncertainty should prompt us to be prudent in what we are doing, because of the potentially dramatic consequences that might follow. We should be very wary of trying to seek out a specific state of affairs, which we do not know even vaguely how we can causally reach. Indeed we should only entertain political change if we can elaborate a minimally satisfactory plan to move through the causal chain. These epistemic burdens explain why realists are modests in their ambitions. Political plans, which purport to lead us very far away from where we are, are not very likely to be causally satisfactory and we would be better off by limiting ourselves to small progressive improvements.

I propose to call this causally connoted notion of accessibility 'trackability'. A world is trackable if we know what needs to be done in order to get there from here and now. We could claim that a state of affairs is possible in a realistic sense only if we know how

to realize it, i.e. if we could specify some sort of vague causal chain that would lead to it becoming actually the case. The logical structure of this concept would be the following:

A world X is trackable iff by doing Y the actual world A would become X.

This is, in a sense, a forward-looking counterfactual. To clarify, consider a simple example. I want to lose weight. Is it realistically possible? Is the world where I am thinner trackable? Yes. And how do I know it? I know that if I were to exercise or eat less I would lose weight, therefore it is trackable. It is not necessary to know precisely what to eat or how much to exercise, I just need to know more or less what kind of behavior would lead to the desirable result.

Now consider a negative example. Suppose a sixty years old man wants to become a famous piano player. Is it realistically possible? No. How do I know it? No amount of exercise neither physical nor intellectual would be sufficient to turn him into a great piano player, due to the rigidity of his bones and to the lack of musical study. There is nothing that, if done, would lead him from the actual world to one in which he is a great piano player. There is just no way to overcome these constraints. Note, however, that such a world is both conceivable and compatible. Tomorrow one might invent some kind of drug which would make bones more malleable, specifically to create the desired effect. However, this is no counter argument: such farfetched examples are precisely the ones that a realistic notion of possibility is designed to rule out. This drug would in fact constitute a causal way to reach the world where he is a famous piano player, but we should ponder whether the creation of this drug itself is a trackable state of affairs.

Trackability is recursive: we could ask if the action by which X is brought about, is trackable. This question could prompt a '*regressus ad infinitum*'. However, given that the intent of political realism is pragmatic, we can be content with the 'dogmatic horn' of the 'Münchhausen trilemma' (Albert 2014, 16). In other words, if we are in doubt whether Y is realistically possible, we should just follow up the regression until a point, which we no longer doubt.

Reconsider the example about losing weight. As I said, it is trackable, for example, by going to the gym. Is going to the gym trackable? Clearly yes, since by going outside

and walking there I would in fact get at the gym. If I am still not convinced, I could try to delve deeper into the causal chain. I could ask if I can go outside and walk, or even if I could want to do it, as Estlund considered in a related paper (Estlund 2014).

However, digging too deeply into the causal chain is generally not worth doing, as such 'hyperbolic doubts' are rarely politically interesting¹². A more skeptical or more theoretically oriented individual might want to do it nonetheless. This is fine, he would just stop later on the causal chain, given that each person would eventually reach a point that he can accept without regressing *ad infinitum*.

Therefore, in order for a state of affairs to be trackable, each step along the way must itself be trackable. When there is a single gap in the causal chain, the goal as a whole is not trackable. Thus, unless the intermediate steps are each slightly better than where we currently are, it is not worth moving towards the final goal until we figure out the whole path. This is not only because each step has presumably some cost attached to it, but also because, given that the path is broken at some point, we may actually be moving farther away from our goal, if it is reachable in another way. This goal may still be possible but throughout a completely different causal chain from the one we are about to start. If the gym is closed, it is counter productive to go there; especially if the swimming pool, in the opposite part of town is open. This conception of trackability also makes sense of the concern that if we can't reach our goal, the 'second-best' case scenario, might not necessarily be the one closest to the ideal (Goodin 1995; Lipsey and Lancaster 1956).

A metaphor, attributed to Lincoln, helps to clarify this view. If our moral compass is pointing north, this does not mean that we should head north, unless we know our path. In fact it might be that north of us, before our desired destination, there is some impassible swamp or mountain. This does not necessarily mean that there is no way to reach our destination, but perhaps the only way to do it is by circling the barrier going east or west. Indeed, if we are surrounded by the obstacle it could make sense even to

¹² With the notable exception of the ability to will (Estlund 2011), which however I cannot consider here as it would require too much attention.

go south (assuming there is an exit there) in order to go north. The destination of our moral compass, thus, it is not trackable unless we know how to reach it from where we are now. An analogous metaphor is proposed in the literature by Ingrid Robeyns:

ideal theory guides us by telling us where the endpoint of the journey lies: it does not necessarily tell us anything about the route to take to get to the lighthouse. In some seas it is dangerous, indeed impossible, to just sail straight into the direction of a lighthouse. One needs a precise map of the channels in between the sandbanks – and these channels can make the sailor first head into a very different direction before getting onto the track which is direct from an aerial view. If sandbanks move over time, a lighthouse that was once reachable may even no longer be within reach – or at least not until the sandbanks have shifted again. (Robeyns 2008, 4–5)

This is a very important point for a realistic political theory. John Dunn remarks that ‘political theory has no choice but to try to tell us how to act, given that this is indeed where we are now’ (Dunn 1990, 196).

To be sure, trackability imposes a serious epistemic requirement on the political thinker: it is much harder to show that something is possible in this sense, compared to how easy it is to know if something is just conceivable or compatible with the world. However, this may not necessarily be a bad thing, as it weeds out these political options, which we do not really know how to bring about.

Actually, precisely because of these epistemic difficulties, trackability can be a very useful and sensible way to think about politics. Consider a practical and debated case: the ideal of the United States of Europe. Even if I share this ideal, I still have to ask myself: is it realistically possible? Perhaps: I do not know. However, when I do not know the answer, trackability provides a useful criterion to look for it. I have to enquire what the current state of the European Union is, what the desired state of affairs is, and how to move from here to there. What causal chain is there to move from today’s EU to a genuinely political union? Would the politicians of the nation states be willing to concede more power? Would the citizens? Can we re-structure the situation so that they will? How could they be persuaded and mobilized? What institutional mechanism ought to be put in place to avoid opting out?

According to this view, what is trackable is relative to actors. What causal chains are available depend on the actors, on the position they occupy and the resources they command. Some could be able to realize things that are impossible for others. This does not seem an implausible conclusion, granted that we account for the fact that an actor can plan to acquire the position and the resources of another actor. Intuitively, there is no course of action for me to directly change the Italian constitution now. However, I could elaborate an (implausible) plan to found a new party, win the election with a big enough majority and change the constitution. This would make it possible, if very unlikely, for me to change the constitution. However, maybe another actor is French and thus it won't be possible for him to change the constitution at all. Thus, I must consider each actor, treating other actors as fixed objects who might respond by opposing or accepting (or being influenced/manipulated) by our actor. Do so for each actor to know which one has a chance to succeed.

This fits well with the emphasis political realism puts on the perspective of political actors. This realistic notion of possibility emphasizes also the practical dimension of needing a plan of action in order to lead to the specific result. Unguided action in politics runs the risk of producing no result, or unwanted results. Either we stand by idly contemplating our ideal or we move frantically but without really knowing which way to go, we end up in an altogether different place. Thus, political realism emphasizes the importance of having a political project, a plan to move effectively through the causal chain. Realism cautions us against desirable states of affairs, which we have no clue how to realize, it requires from us that we be sober and prudent, that we try to come up with at least some vague idea of the causal chain involved in the actualization of the desirable state.

Now recall the previous examples. First: is an earth with all the grass turned blue a trackable state of affairs? This is a question of physics and biology: what credible causal chain is there, which, if initiated, would turn the grass blue? Second: is a world without war trackable? This is a question of international relations: what causal chain is there which, if initiated, would bring us to a world of 'perpetual peace' (Kant 2008a)? Third: is an institutional framework without coercion a trackable one for modern societies? This

is a question for the social sciences: what chain is there which, if initiated, would bring about a coercion-less society? If the answer to any such question is 'none' or 'unknown', we should be skeptic about such result being realistically possible, even though they are certainly conceivable and compatible with the world. In fact, these desirable states of affairs would be of no practical value, as we would not know how to act in order to support them.

The Rawlsian world of strict compliance to be possible should be considered trackable if we were to know what actions or institutional mechanisms would make such world actual. This is why the world of strict compliance can be rejected as unrealistic, because Rawls does not tell us how to reach it from here¹³. While some people may be compliant most of the time, it is certainly misleading to assume that all people ever will. There is no envisageable causal chain that would lead us to a world where everybody is a strict compliant. Therefore such a world is ruled out by the conception of ought-implies-can based on trackability.

Now consider another philosophically interesting example, which has been discussed in regards to 'ought implies can' by Estlund (Estlund 2011): the Carens Market (Carens 1981). According to this admittedly utopian theory, distributive equality is compatible with both efficiency and individual freedom, as long as there is a behavioral requirement on citizens to maximize pre-tax income. Suppose we conceive equality as equality of income, and that we institute a taxation whereby everyone gets exactly the same salary from his or her work. What we get is – maybe – an equal system, but one that does not offer incentives to increase productivity and would fall prey to the leveling down objection. However, suppose people are willing to maximize their pretax income, even though they know that after taxation everybody would get the same wage (i.e. they are willing to work as hard as if there were no taxes): in this case, Carens concludes, the system would grant equality, freedom and efficiency.

¹³ To be fair, Rawls does have an argument in 'Theory of Justice' (Rawls 2009) about how we came to develop the sense of justice. He says that it is a feature of our moral psychology and that it is reinforced in a well-ordered society from the unconditional love kids receive from their parents. However, this only proves a well-ordered society is self-reinforcing. It does not explain how we can transition from a non well-ordered society to a well-ordered society.

Carens's market, however, clearly imposes an unbearably heavy constraint on individuals. 'Maximization' means that they literally ought to dedicate every single moment of their time to work, and invest all the money they have on it, without gaining anything extra from it. While Carens recognize this as a utopian situation that will fail if we were presently to implement it, he still believes that no logical inconsistency or physical incompatibility exist between equality, efficiency and freedom. Therefore, men would only need to develop the appropriate moral motivation to maximize pretax income in order for Carens Market to be practical. Estlund agrees with him that this is a sound reasoning. Then, he draws the general conclusion that constraints based on what we are willing to do and on human nature fails to be 'requirement blocking' i.e. fails to disprove that we ought to do something. However, this argument is incomplete from the point of view of political realism. It needs not only be shown that a state of affairs where everybody is spontaneously willing to maximize pretax income is conceivable or compatible with human nature and the world. What it is important for political realism is how we can track this world, how can we move there from our world. I believe no answer to this question is available, not unless we decide to give up the 'freedom' requirement and just carve our way there with public coercion. The very name 'utopia' suggests that they are nowhere to be found (ου τοπος, literally 'no place'), so the very attempt to 'get there' is paradoxical and runs the historical risk of needing intolerable amounts of enforcement.

Every debate about possibility between a realist and an idealist, if carried out long enough, would always at some point lead us to what I call the 'slavery objection'. Consider, for example, the following remark: 'What does he make of genuine instances of social and political progress, such as the abolition of slavery, the civil rights movement, the democratization of Europe and North America? [...] What is especially striking about these examples of progress [...] is that these activists aimed for something beyond what they could even see as possible through history' (Jensen 2009, 180). An idealist could enounce any farfetched desirable state of affairs like full compliance, naïve anarchism, radical pacifism or Carens Market and then say: look, you may think that these are utopian state of affairs but, whatever you may say, the same could have been

said about the abolition of slavery before it was actually accomplished. Therefore, you really should have at least some doubts that, however implausible my idea may seem to you, it might also be realized someday.

This is a crucial objection, and one towards which realism may seem to lack a satisfying answer.

The second argument I gave could provide an answer to such idealistic objection, by pointing out that the burden of proof should rather lie on idealists. It is they, who should prove why desiderata, which are wildly different from how things have been in the past, are possible. However, this response is unsatisfactory, as the slavery objection seems to shift the burden of proof back on realists. Given that in the past something deemed impossible could actually be realized, then it does not fall upon political idealists to argue how their utopias are possible. Pogge (Pogge 2008, 215), among others, claims that it falls on the defenders of the status quo the burden to prove that there are no feasible alternative to the undesirable current condition.

I claim that the third argument I gave, the one about trackability, can answer this worry effectively: it allows realism to turn the slavery objection against the idealist. One could argue - and I believe one would be right in doing so - that it was not because someone, or even most people, started thinking that the abolition of slavery was possible, that it was actually realized. As Dunn observes: 'even a (miraculously and unfallaciously derived) convergence of normative judgment within the theory of value could only have a definite political implications if this extended also to some clear understanding of the appropriate modalities for its historical implementation' (Dunn 1990, 195). The critical factor was not some dubious breakthrough in ethics or public morality, but the elaboration of a political project. Actually, it took a political actor, Lincoln, with a plausible causal understanding about how to modify and bend existing political constraints in order to make them fit his vision. The abolition of slavery was not possible because it was conceivable; rather, it was possible in a realistic sense because someone elaborated a political project, which would take him from a world with slavery to a world without slavery. When Bismarck asserted that 'politics is the art of the possible', he did not mean that it is a field where everything one can think of is possible.

Rather, he meant that politics is a place where it falls on the politician to make things possible, by planning casually satisfactory projects of action.

The issue of slavery, in fact, is a good example to show how political realism and moralism practically differ, if we analyse the oppositions of Abraham Lincoln and the moralistic attitude of the abolitionists. Contrary to what some believe, Lincoln has never been an abolitionist, notwithstanding his burning hate of slavery. This naturally prompts the following question: 'if he hated slavery so much, why did Lincoln not become an abolitionist?' (Fehrenbacher 1987, 107–108). Although he hated to see slaves hunted down and taken back to their owners, he never advocated the violation of the Fugitive Slave Law, on the ground that it was morally wrong. For this reason he counted himself among 'the great body of the Northern people [who] do crucify their feelings, in order to maintain their loyalty to the constitution and the Union', that granted slavers their rights (Lincoln 1953, 320).

Moreover, he dissented with the moralistic conviction of abolitionists that slaveholders were inherently evil. In a public speech, he declared that 'they are just what we would be in their situation. If slavery did not now exist amongst them, they would not introduce it. If it did now exist amongst us, we should not instantly give it up'. (Lincoln 1953, 255). This belief put him on quite a different course of action than abolitionists. These were openly criticizing and violating the law and the constitution by illegally freeing slaves. Before the outbreak of the civil war, Lincoln had never challenged the rights granted to the slavers. Although he found them repugnant on moral ground, he saw them as legitimate and grounded on the constitution. He even ran in 1860 for election promising to leave slavery intact in the states where it already existed, 'Rather than agitate for its speedy removal, Lincoln thought a more prudent plan would be to keep slavery from spreading so that it would eventually die' ("Lincoln and Abolitionism | The Gilder Lehrman Institute of American History" 2012).

Only once elected president and confronted by the secession of the southern states, he saw the opportunity to tackle the issue. Even then, he was in disagreement with the abolitionists. These, in fact, were in favour of granting the immoral states the right to secede and only after the firing on Fort Sumter they were convinced that actions need

to be taken. Lincoln was also much more prudent in his actions than abolitionists would have liked. He delayed divesting rebels of their slaves until sufficient popular support could be mustered and he allowed emancipation only within his constitutional powers of commander in chief.

So great was the distance between abolitionists and Lincoln, that they labelled him the 'slave hound of Illinois' (Wilson et al. 1998, 704), insofar as he advocated respect for the law, prudence in action and the influence of circumstances on behaviour. Ironically, it was the prudent plan of action of the slave hound of Illinois that brought about the end of slavery, not the shining convictions of the abolitionists.

While under this view 'being realistic and demanding the impossible' (Rossi 2015) are, strictly speaking, incompatible attitudes, realism cannot be reduced to a conservatory status quo bias. Realists cannot demand the impossible, but they can demand even radical change, assuming they know what to change and how to do it.

2.3 On what there must be

Political realism tends to emphasize the role of necessities, whose existence effectively constrains actors on the political scene. They 'unavoidably characterize the political condition [...] theory cannot affect or modify them, it can only – and is required to – register them' (Pasquali 2012, 64). I am going to establish what necessities are, and I will enquire on what grounds some things are deemed to be necessary.

Necessity is a modal property that means that something cannot be different from what it is. It can be attributed to things as well as to other properties. Necessities thus are either states of affairs, which cannot not be, or properties that some state of affairs cannot not have. For example: a mug is necessarily concave. They are the negative correlates of the previously discussed notion of possibility: X is necessary if non-X is not possible, e.g. it is not possible for a mug not to be concave. For the same reason, X is possible if it is not necessary that non-X.

If the conception of possibility presented above is convincing, we could mirror it to frame an equally convincing conception of necessity. If a state of affairs is possible only if there is a causal chain to move from here to there, then a necessary state of affairs would be one whereby there is no causal chain to move away from it. Similarly, an impossible state of affairs would be one that presents no causal chain to reach it.

But can an argument be given to explain why there are necessary and impossible states of affairs? I believe it can. If reality is truly independent from what we believe and desire, and adjustable only by acting when beliefs and desires prompt us to it (as I argued in Chapter 1), we just need to assume that we are not omnipotent in order for it to follow that there are parts of reality which we may not be able to change. If we do not have the power to do everything, there are bound to be things we cannot do.

Possibilities, as we have seen, are limited given that we are not capable to cause any change we might conceive. While we can believe and desire anything, what we can practically achieve is limited. Necessities arise from our imperfect ability to affect the world.

But why is there such limitation? No general answer will suffice. The reasons are usually too variable to be accounted for, because they depend on the context. The more general logic underlying it is a 'non-omnipotence condition': the fact that we are not able to accomplish anything we might desire, and to cause anything we might conceive.

This condition follows from the metaphysical realism described in the previous chapter. If there is a reality in which I live that is not entirely dependent on my desires and beliefs than this is bound to constrain me in some way. It may limit me much, or little, but it will do so nonetheless.

It follows from this non-omnipotence condition that there are things we can do, things that we can only do in a certain way and things that are beyond what we will ever be able to do, depending on the causal chains available. First, it is plainly obvious that among the things I can conceive there are some, which I can do. I can – and as a matter of fact I do – write my doctoral thesis. No one could question that. The causal chain required to move from a world in which I am not writing a doctoral thesis, to one where

I am writing it, is clear¹⁴. That there are things one can only do in a certain way is also a plausible idea (at least 'here and now'). These are things whose realization is brought about only by a single causal chain. For example, there may be a single path to a lost valley (Geuss 2014), thus, in order to leave it, one is forced to go through it. Imagine that there are two last passengers on a falling plane and there is only one parachute. If one wants to survive, he must take it for himself. If both of them wants to survive above all else, they will have to fight for that last parachute. One may dislike the idea, but unless that dislike outweighs his will to live, he would need to do the unpleasant thing. Third, there are also things I may not be able to do full stop, for which no causal chain is given. For example, I may not be able to win a chess game by sacrificing the king, I may not become a famous pianist at 60 years old, I may not reach the moon by jumping very high, I may not live in a society where everybody earns more than the mathematical average. All these cases are – for a variety of reasons – beyond what one can do, and are thus necessities.

These assumptions seem all plausible enough, and in line with what we expect. This point will indeed be sufficient for the aim of this chapter. I do not need to prove that necessities are everywhere, what I am bound to argue is that there are necessities. In the next chapter we will discuss two of them that have significant effects on the political realm.

2.4 The Transformative Power of Necessity

Realism is often 'interpreted and dismissed by hostile liberals as solely engaged in a descriptive enterprise [...] Realists are, on this account, guilty of getting their ises and oughts mixed up' (Sleat 2013, 5).

Estlund, for instance, is very critical of what he calls 'complacent realism' (Estlund 2014, 123): the kind of attitude that considers even small deviations from what is actually the case to be unrealistic. Rousseau famously remarked: '«Propose what can be

¹⁴ The causal chain to muster the will to do so albeit much less so.

done», they never stop repeating to me. It is as if I were told, «Propose doing what is done»' (Rousseau 1979, 34). Estlund agrees and argues that, strictly speaking, the only truly realistic theory is one which states that what ought to be done is exactly what one is doing. In general, it is commonly conceded that 'the point of a theory of justice is precisely to give us a conceptual framework from within which to criticize existing agents who do not conform with it' (Valentini 2009, 340). As a consequence, every philosophical theory, as long as it can be used to criticize reality and advocate change is utopian to a degree. Therefore, political realism either collapses into mere political descriptions or falls victim to the same charge it raises against moralism. Since both these mutually exclusive options are unsatisfactory, political realism as a theoretical approach seems dubious, being either useless or self-refuting.

This seems to me the reverse of what Laura Valentini called the paradox of ideal theory: the 'situation where their ideal theories are unable to guide action and yet, at the same time, are indispensable in guiding action' (Valentini 2009, 333). In our paradox of non-ideal theory we either have theories that accurately describe actions or theories capable of criticizing actions.

The claim I tried to defend is that political realism can avoid this lethal accusation, by referring to distinctive criteria of necessity and possibility. Only the kind of change for which a plausible causal chain is provided, is allowed under a realistic 'ought implies can' principle. This kind of change is non-utopian. On the contrary, utopias support states of affairs for which no causal chain exists (impossibilities), or purport to avert undesirable states of affairs to which all causal chains lead (necessities).

How does the emphasis on necessity combine with a non-complacent conception of possibility? I want to claim that political realism is not an exclusively negative response to political idealism. It is not merely complacent but actively critical and transforming.

Consider Machiavelli (Machiavelli 2013) appeal for a united Italy or Hobbes's (Hobbes 2009) attempt to justify the modern state. Their imperative is not 'look at reality and do what is being done', it is rather 'learn from reality to do what you can'. Political realism cautions us against discounting the world as it is, but it does not inevitably claim that we

must abandon ourselves to its necessities. Rather, I think its claim is to carefully study its forces in order to manipulate them into obtaining the result you want. Reality provides both friction against our desires, and the means to overcome some friction.

While a necessity is something we can't change, an obstacle we can't climb or demolish, realism does not necessarily claim that it cannot be avoided. Political realism can be transformative, and so can its notion of necessity. In fact, by pointing out undesirable feature of reality, which will always be there, instead of focusing our effort on the elimination of it, we redirect our attention to mitigate its effects. This is still a change in the world, which is aimed at making it better. Albeit it does not aim at the elimination of something which cannot be eliminated, but by containing and mitigating its negative effects. Some have claimed that for these reasons political realism is even normatively more valuable than idealism. In the field of international relations Carr proposes such an argument when he maintains that, while political idealism actually contributed to spreading conflict in its futile attempts to moralize international politics, political realism was more apt to devise alternative strategies to contain war, while accepting its persistence (Carr 1939). As Annette Baier puts it, this kind of normative idealism 'is at best morally irrelevant, at worst morally destructive'(Baier 1985, 225). In the field of normative theory, the same argument is proposed against the attempt to 'displace politics' and its forces. This is not just a claim that we should embrace the ever-present potential conflict in the field of politics, but that we should look to mitigate and manage its dark presence, without wasting resources on strategies to completely overcome it. In short, utopias actually make realities even worse, because they channel our efforts into dead ends, while disregarding those possibilities of improvement, which fall short of absolute perfection. Rawls, while falling victim to some degree of idealism, shared this sensible intuition and had an effective way of express it: 'a distortion of vision with a consequent misdirection of efforts' (Rawls 1974, 21).

Necessities in this characterization, do prove to have a double normative effects, one negative and one positive: they give us reasons not to try to dismantle them, and they give us reasons to look around for sideways. While we accept war as a necessary institution in international relation (Bull 2012), by understanding its logic and function

we can still concentrate resources on making it less likely or less damaging. The contrary attempt to make war obsolete runs the risk of being at best a waste of valuable time and effort, and at worst a 'war to end all wars'. While accepting the inclination towards conflict in pluralistic societies, we may focus on strategies to defuse it, control it or reduce it to nonviolent means. The contrary drive to eliminate conflict, will harshly clash against the world's reality and either fail silently or ignite the conflict. As Shklar puts it when criticizing utopias: 'disaster does not, in fact, always follow radical enterprises, but they do stimulate conflict' (Shklar 1994, 176).

In the next chapter, I will argue that conflict and cooperation are indeed the two chief transformative necessities of realistic politics.

3 CONFLICT AND ORDER

3.1 Introduction

In the last chapter I tackle the issue of framing possibility and necessity within the metaphysical view of political realism. However, this discussion was very abstract. I will now try to show that this methodological issue has nevertheless remarkable substantive consequences for political realism.

In this chapter, I will discuss the specific elements, which political realism takes to be necessary and unchanging features of politics. The claim I will defend is that politics is understood as created by the tense interplay between two necessities. These are the inevitability of conflict and the need for order. Moreover, I claim also that the awareness of this is the defining feature of a realistic political theory.

To show how this is the case, I draw on Jeremy Waldron's account of the 'circumstances of politics' (Waldron 1999, 101). He argues that 'disagreement' and 'coordination' are what defines politics. I will argue here that these elements can be shown to be political necessities, following the conceptualization drawn in the previous chapter.

I claim that any theory that does not account for either of these necessities of politics, fails to be genuinely political and it is thus an unrealistic theory of politics. It is unrealistic, precisely because it fails to recognize what politics is about. On this interpretation, we can understand more clearly what realists mean with their accusation of 'displacing politics' (Honig 1993). A political theory displaces politics when it fails to account for either of these elements. This critique often targets theories that are deemed politically idealistic, insofar as they fail to recognize that conflict is an inevitable reality of politics. Rawls is the usual suspect of this charge, because he fails to give a philosophical account of what he calls 'unreasonable pluralism'. However, theories may also displace politics if they fall on the other hand of the spectrum and deny that some kind of order is an unavoidable need, without which politics would not arise. These

theories, which I will label unrealistic realism, can be thought to encompass the tradition of political agonism, which focuses excessively on the dimension of conflict and loose sight of the need for order. A genuinely realistic political theory is one that recognizes that the goal of politics is to make conflict and order compatible, to make it the case that we enjoy order notwithstanding conflict.

In order to prove this claim, I argue as follows.

In the first part, I reconstruct Waldron's illuminating intuition, explaining its merits and highlighting where it falls short. This preliminary part should lay the basis for recasting the distinction in a more realistic way.

In the second part, I focus on the first circumstance of politics, disagreement. I claim that the situation is more severe than Waldron recognized, because it is not just disagreement on good faith that is unavoidable, but conflict. Here I provide first a conceptual analysis of what counts as conflict, highlighting two elements that mark its emergence: contrasting wills among agents (due to different interests, values, or identities), and the intention to realize one's will against the will of others. Subsequently, and contrary to Waldron, I try to give an argument for why this would be the case. Following the conceptualization of political necessities I laid down in the previous chapter, I claim that conflicts are inevitable insofar as there is no causal chain, which leads to a world without conflicts. Both elements, the presence of contrasting wills and the tendency to impose one's will cannot be consistently eliminated. Thus, a political theory that denies this fact is unrealistic.

In the third part, I try to ground what Waldron defines as the need for 'cooperation or coordination'. This, I argue, is more realistically understood as a need for order, following Williams's idea of the 'basic legitimation demand' (Williams 2005, 4). The argument is that humans are social animals, not because they care about each other's well-beings, but because they need each other in order to survive and live decent lives. Thus, just like the need for food is a fact of biology, whether or not people want food, so the need for order is a fact of politics, whether or not people want order. Following my argument about necessities, I claim that the need for order is inevitable insofar as

no world is causally reachable, where there is no order and we do not risk our lives. This necessity is different and weaker than the previous one, because the two conditions need to hold conjunctively. There indeed are causal chains that lead to worlds where there is no order but we risk our lives. Thus, it only holds hypothetically: if we do not want to risk our lives, then there is no world where we can avoid our need for order.

In the fourth part I conclude, by claiming that this realistic reconceptualization of the circumstances of politics allows us to define as realistic these political theories that appropriately acknowledge that politics by the intercross between the inevitable recurrence of conflicts and the necessary need for order. Unrealistic theories can be criticized, not recognizing these two necessities of politics, are not genuinely *political* theories. They fail to recognize the conditions that mark the emergence of politics. They either underestimate or morally constrain conflicts as permanent facts of politics, or they do not admit the fact that conflicts would be meaningless unless there was an underlying and ubiquitous need for order.

3.2 The Circumstances of Politics

In his book *Law and Disagreement*, Jeremy Waldron introduces the concept of 'Circumstances of politics' in order to explain the great '*achievement*' of legislation, which allows for 'concerted, co-operative, co-ordinated, or collective action in the circumstances of modern life' (Waldron 1999, 101).

According to Waldron, political philosophy has had at least two importantly different aims: '(i) theorizing about justice (and rights and the common goods etc.), and (ii) theorizing about politics [...] reflecting on the purposes for which, and the procedures by which, communities settle on a single set of institutions even in the face of disagreement about so much that we rightly regard as so important' (Waldron 1999, 3). Since Rawls wrote that 'justice is the first virtue of social institutions' (Rawls 2009, 3), political philosophy has been excessively focused on theorizing about justice. While both of these aims are interesting enquiries, it is a mistake to consider theorizing about

politics as a mere application of theorizing about justice, as it is done when one considers non-ideal theory as a mere application of ideal theory to practical cases. On the contrary, Waldron insists that the '*distinct agenda*' (Waldron 1999, 3) of political philosophy lies in theorizing about politics.

How is theorizing about justice different from theorizing about politics? Waldron believes that the difference lies in the circumstances of politics, which makes politics both possible and necessary. Rawls said that justice as a virtue and a practice is both possible and necessary, because we live in a condition of moderate scarcity of resources and human beings are only capable of limited altruism. Thus theorizing about justice is only appropriate insofar as these 'circumstances of justice' apply (Rawls 2009, 126–130). If they do not arise conjunctly justice would be unnecessary.

Similarly, Waldron argues:

'the felt need among the members of a certain group for a common framework or decision or course of action on some matter, even in the face of disagreement about what that framework, decision, or action should be, are the circumstances of politics [...] Disagreement would not matter if there did not need to be a concerted course of action; and the need for a common course of action would not give rise to politics as we know it if there was not at least the potential for disagreement about what the concerted course of action should be' (Waldron 1999, 102–103).

Thus, in order to theorize about politics, these circumstances of politics have to be the case. In addition, in order to do so correctly, one must not moralize or abstract away these circumstances of politics.

The first of these circumstances is disagreement on good faith. We happen to live together with many other people who do not happen to share our same interests, values or identities. Each of them would presumably try to resist our worldview as much as we would be willing to resist theirs. Each would, on good faith, think that he is right, and we are wrong. This is what Rawls called the fact of permanent disagreement: 'a diversity of conflicting and irreconcilable comprehensive doctrines [is] not a mere historical condition that may soon pass away; it is a permanent feature of the public culture of democracy' (Rawls 1989, 246). According to Rawls, due to our epistemic deficiency, the

so-called burdens of judgment, we are unable to establish which view happens to be true. Waldron pushes this point further by arguing that even if there were objective truth on matters of justice, it would not matter for politics as it would be just as dubious as all the false views surrounding it. Moral objectivity itself would be irrelevant (Waldron 1999, 164). Moreover, Waldron points out that Rawls deceive himself if he thinks that disagreement can be safely contained away from matters of justice. Disagreement, on his view is much more extensive. He thinks that 'Rawls of course does not deny that people disagree about what justice requires. But he doesn't say much about this disagreement in his own discussion' (Waldron 1999, 151). Moralizing, ignoring or abstracting away disagreement might be permissible in theorizing about justice, but it completely derails theorizing about politics. Philosophers who, 'by some philosophical subterfuge, try to wish the facts of plurality and disagreement away' (Waldron 1999, 99) are seriously mistaken.

The second circumstance of politics is coordination. Waldron vaguely states that 'in a variety of ways and for a variety of reasons, large numbers of us believe we should act, or organize things, together. [...] In fact, when it actually takes place, action-in-concert is something of an achievement in human life' (Waldron 1999, 101–102). He appeals to the very common and powerful intuition that many things people want to enjoy can only be achieved by acting in coordination with other people, following rules and establishing institutions. However, 'action in concert is not easy, particularly once people have a sense of themselves as individuals and of the ways in which acting with others might conflict with smaller scale projects of their own' (Waldron 1999, 102). This view is akin to those of contract theorists who considered society to be an artificial achievement, stabilized by human action and thought, instead of a spontaneous natural order. In fact it closely remembers Hobbes's state of nature (Gauthier 2000) or Rousseau's 'stag hunt' (Skyrms 2001). Believing that social coordination is both desirable and difficult, Waldron consider it to be a crucial circumstance of politics. Without this need to leave together in a stable way, the fact of permanent disagreement would not constitute a problem at all.

Thus, Waldron concludes that political philosophers should spend more time theorizing about politics instead of thinking about justice. However, in order to do so successfully, one needs to acknowledge the circumstances of politics and keep clearly in focus what politics is about. The circumstances of politics do not make the circumstances of justice redundant. Rather, they constrain them. The circumstances of justice require first that we address the circumstances of politics. Williams call the establishment of a cooperative order in the face of potential conflict the ‘first political question’ (Williams 2005, 3). Its satisfaction is a requirement for raising issues of justice, because without it these would not even arise. Politics on this view does not make justice irrelevant, but it makes it conditional.

However, I believe that Waldron’s intuition, while illuminating, is unsatisfactory for two reasons. First, it is not realistic in his account of the circumstances of politics and may thus fell to the same critiques he raises against Rawls. He accuses Rawls of providing a controlled version of disagreement, by restricting it to disagreement about the good. However, he himself commits the same fallacy insofar as he is interested only in disagreement ‘on good faith’. By limiting the first circumstance of politics to situations in which we honestly disagree about the truth of the matter is deeply unsatisfactory. It leaves out both disagreement about interests¹⁵ and all cases in which we are more intent on having it our ways than in being right. Against Waldron, it seems to me that disagreement on good faith leads to an excessively moralized version of politics, one that leaves unaccounted many issues which actually happens to be heavily contested in our society.

Secondly, Waldron presents his idea in a way that, while intuitively appealing, lacks a clear and valid way to support it. Only a few pages are spent trying to flesh out why politics is the way it is and why the circumstances of politics do apply. He provides only

¹⁵ He admits this, and it is actually functional to his general argument, which favors majoritarianism as a decision procedure. Otherwise, if the original disagreement wasn’t on good faith but a reflection of interests, the minority would have no good reason to accept the interests of the majority. On the contrary, Waldron argues, that if the disagreement is on good faith, majoritarianism is justified towards minorities because it respects their opinion by counting them equally.

a quick account of his promising intuition and does not grant to it the attention it deserves.

Despite not being developed as much as it deserves, I believe that Waldron's intuition captures the two fundamental dimensions of politics in a way that is both synthetic and illuminating. Thus, I will try to amend the idea of the circumstances of politics by recasting the distinction in a more realistic light and providing a more detailed argument for why it holds true.

3.3 From Disagreement to Conflict

The aim of this part is to try to provide a more realistic reconceptualization of the first circumstance of politics, as introduced by Waldron. The problems with his view, I have argued, are that the notion of disagreement is too moralized and not convincingly debated. Thus, here I propose first that an appropriately defined notion of conflict is a more realistic substitute for disagreement on good faith, insofar as it encompasses also cases of disagreement on bad faith, contrasts of interests, and unreasonable worldviews. Secondly, I refer back to my argument about political necessities, to show that conflict is an inevitable feature of political life, and political theory who ignores this cannot count as genuinely political.

I start by defining conflict as the situation characterized by (1) two or more actors (institutions, individuals or groups) having incompatible wills (due to interests, values, identities...), and (2) at least one of them prefers imposing his will 'against the resistance of the other party' (Weber 1978, 38).

Second, I show how adopting such a definition allows to distinguish conflict from similar concepts commonly employed in political philosophy, like pluralism, disagreement, violent struggle, and war. Pluralism for example, restricts (1) to values and does not imply (2). Rawls's 'reasonable pluralism', for example, assumes (2) away insofar as his justification is aimed at reasonable individuals, while *modus vivendi's* 'radical pluralism' often implicitly accepts it, although without clarifying it.

Disagreement does not fit (2) because people are supposed to share a will to find the truth on the matter. Violent struggles are a specific form of conflict because they restrict their means to violence. Similarly, war restricts (1) to institutional actors and to organized violence.

Third, I tackle a few interesting features of conflict that are clarified through this definition. First, not all conflicts are political. Second: the use of violence is contingent, although always potential. Third: conflicts are content-neutral. They cannot be resolved by proving the enemy wrong. Fourth: conflicts may arise unilaterally. Only one actor needs to exhibit the will to prevail, in order for the other to be in a situation of conflict.

Fourth, I claim that conflicts are permanent features of politics by showing that there is no causal chain available to move to a world where (1) and (2) do not happen to be the case. Contrasts of wills (1) are broadly recognized in the literature, both in political philosophy and in social and political sciences. The will to prevail (2) is not as unanimously acknowledged, but due to the unilateral emergence of conflict, we only need it to be possible, for conflicts to be inevitable. We should then be skeptic about theories which disregard, moralize, or assume away conflict.

Fifth, I consider how the theoretical account I outlined is supported by the literature of political realism.

Defining Conflict

Surprisingly, a clear definition of conflict seems to be lacking in political theory. A survey of the literature shows that, while this concept frequently comes up when issues like struggle, violence, pluralism, disagreement and war are discussed, it is rarely defined and explicitly addressed. I claim that conflict is a defining feature of politics, in the sense that Waldron outlined in his circumstances of politics.

The definition combines two elements present in the literature. First, the widespread intuition in political and social sciences that conflict expresses some kind of incompatibility: 'Conflict not only relates to physical interaction; but also to any form of disagreement about ends to be pursued' (Bealey 1999, 79); 'A conflict exists when two

people wish to carry out acts which are mutually inconsistent' (Nicholson 1992, 11). Second, the Weberian insight that we have conflict 'insofar as an action is oriented intentionally to carrying out the actor's own will against the resistance of the other party' (Weber 1978, 38).

I define thus conflict as a situation characterized by (1) two or more actors (be they institutions, individuals or groups) that have diverse wills (due to their interests, values, identities...) and (2) at least one of them intends to carry out his will¹⁶ against the resistance of others.

Conflict and its Fellow Concepts

Adopting such a definition allows one to distinguish conflict from other concepts among which it is sometimes confused: pluralism, disagreement, violent struggle, and war. Let's see how conflict is different and why this definition captures a crucial element of politics.

Although in some literature they figure as synonymous, conflict is not the same as pluralism. While we observe that - empirically - cases of pluralism seem to end in conflict, this is not always the case. Indeed our observation may be influenced by a selection bias, as we often just notice pluralism, when it is about to turn into conflict. Such observations are still not enough to warrant the conceptual collapse of pluralism with the notion of conflict, as two significant theoretical differences remains. First, pluralism restricts the sources of conflict to worldviews. Conflict, on the contrary, is in my view indifferent about the roots of the contrast of wills. Contrary to pluralism, the notion of conflict also captures cases where only the direct material interests are irreconcilable, not their worldviews. Secondly, and more importantly, pluralism only captures the first element of conflict, the contrast of will, but it needs not entail the second one: the will to prevail. Rawls, for example, numbers among the fact of politics 'reasonable pluralism' (Rawls 1993, 24), which is the kind of pluralism experienced by

¹⁶ I do not refer to any philosophically qualified accounts of 'the Will', which I realize is controversial. I use the concept in its common-sensical understanding of whatever the subject wants.

reasonable individuals. Given that the most important feature of reasonable citizens is the 'willingness to propose and honour fair terms of cooperation' (Boettcher 2004, 604), it seems that by definition they would not try to prevail on one another. Reasonable pluralism on this account just is pluralism without conflict. Challenging Rawls, some political philosophers employ a more radical conception of pluralism (Gray 2002). This is closer to the definition of conflict I have given, but it is still unsatisfactory as it is mainly derived negatively from Rawls's position. Radical pluralism is pluralism among unreasonable individuals. While the will to prevail is definitively part of unreasonable individuals, my definition spells out more precisely what feature of unreasonableness results in conflict. Any conflict of interests within the same value system could serve as an example of conflict not reducible to pluralism. The conflict between firms and unions, for instance, may prove to be such an example, when they try to impose on one another an agreement advantageous to the material interests of their respective side.

Conflict, as a political concept, also eludes the notion of disagreement, to which it is sometimes reduced. A disagreement might involve diverse wills, but disagreeing actors are not trying to prevail on one another, they are instead trying to figure out what the truth of the matter is. In a situation of disagreement 'it is true beliefs that are of interests for the contenders: beliefs, that is, that capture the relevant facts to judge, to know what to think about something and what to do with regards to it' (Besussi 2012, 265–266). As Waldron conceives it disagreement is 'on good faith', by people who have different, but sincere, views about what ought to be done. He essentially refers back to Rawls, who justifies the fact of pluralism on the burdens of judgment: 'it is not to be expected that conscientious persons with full powers of reason, even after free discussion, will arrive at the same conclusion'(Rawls 1993, 57). However, this notion of pluralism, as we have noticed before, is focused solely on reasonable pluralism. Those who disagree care more about which of the contrasting wills truly ought to prevail, than to impose their own. A conflict, on the contrary, is hardly swayed by the force of reasons alone. Although that might happen, more often arguments are ineffective. Consider the concept of class struggle (Marx and Mandel 1992); this is a classic example of conflict

not reducible to disagreement, as each side wants to prevail on the other, and is not going to be swayed by arguments.

Conflict is sometimes conceived as violent struggle (Mouffe 2005; Schmitt, Strong, and Strauss 2007) but this notion, I believe, is too restrictive. While it is true, that violent conflicts are the most destructive kind of conflicts, they are not the only ones. There are different reasons why conflicts may not turn violent. In some instances, the actor's will to prevail might not be fiery enough to incline them to the use of violence. In other cases, violence might simply be too costly for them, as they could be at a disadvantage against the other party or they could both be subjected to another arbitrating power. Both actors may also hold moral beliefs, which classify violence as non-permissible means to conflict. Conflict could thus take many forms, even non-violent ones. An institutional conflict, for example, is a kind of conflict, which is non-violent, and yet one that can threaten the order upon which a society is built. In case of conflict, the agent who strives to prevail need not only act through violence. However, as long as one of the contenders wills to prevail, a contrast would still be a case of conflict even when there is no violence. As the will to prevail is still the focal point, conflicts always carry the risk of potentially turning violent, as soon as the variables that keep them peaceful change. If conflict is kept non-violent by an arbitrating institution, for example, it may become violent as soon as that institution is weakened. If a conflict is not violent because it is only the weakest party that wills to prevail, a change in the balance of power might prompt a turn to violence.

On a similar note, conflict is also different from war - 'deadly quarrels' (Richardson 1960) - although it sometimes is used in this sense. Traditionally¹⁷, war counts as a very specific kind of conflict: one that restricts our definition to a specific kind of actor (sovereign institutions) and modus operandi (organized violence). Reducing the concept of conflict to war, would thus extremely impoverish it.

As I have tried to show, this more general and neutral definition of conflict distinguishes two dimensions along which other similar concepts could be classified,

¹⁷ Current efforts to

thus it allows to better grasp political reality. It is indifferent about who the agents are (individuals, groups, institutions...), about why their points of view are incompatible (interests, values, identities), and about what modes of action they engage in. What matters is only that they hold incompatible positions and that one of them is willing to carry out his will at the expenses of others. Conflict seems intuitively different from pluralism, disagreement, violent struggles and wars and by using this definition we can see exactly how they differ.

Conflict and Realism

Political realism characteristically stresses the role of conflict and its inevitability. It may lay dormant, but there is always a potential for disorder springing from natural human dispositions. This is what Stuart Hampshire evocatively calls the Heracleitean picture, where 'every soul is always the scene of conflicting tendencies and of divided aims and ambivalences, and correspondingly, our political enmities in the city or state will never come to an end while we have diverse life stories and diverse imaginations' (Hampshire 2001, 5).

The persistence of conflict is the oldest theme in political realism and it is a very common issue since the classics. Starting from Thucydides (Reeve 1999), the tendency of human beings to conflict is identified as one of the key elements on the political sphere. Moreover, this recognition is presented as something that is persistent, that we won't be able to root out even if we want to. For this reason, he claims that his 'History of the Peloponnesian War' is an 'everlasting possession' (Thucydides 1954). Machiavelli, to consider another example, notoriously claims that every city contains a conflict between the aristocrats and the people: '*they do not consider that in every republic are two diverse humors, that of the people and that of the great*' (Machiavelli 2009, 16). Hobbes too stresses the importance of conflict in human affairs, and he goes as far as saying that 'during the time men live without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called Warre' (Hobbes 2009, 88).

In fact, it has been suggested that the inevitability of war is the simplest, most general, thought which unmistakably identifies one as a political realist (Herz 1951). In

my view, it is not war, but conflict more generally, whose inevitability marks one as a political realist. All realists in fact do seem to agree that conflict is an inescapable and un-disposable feature of our human world. They may give different reasons for why this is actually the case: based in human nature, in the form of our political institutions, or in the structure of social interaction, as Kenneth Waltz famously distinguished (Waltz 2001). They may also derive different implications from the inevitability of conflict, but they all agree that conflict is always going to be present whatever we believe and whatever we desire.

It is a fact, that politics always confronts us with the real danger of conflict because political actors are real individuals with different interests, beliefs and powers and not purely abstract ideas or propositions that can be reconciled through rational dialogue according to some neutral standard of truth or to a moral ideal of reciprocity. It has been said on this regard that *'those writing from diverse positions – republican, liberal, and communitarian – converge in their assumption that success lies in the elimination from a regime of dissonance, resistance, conflict, or struggle'* (Honig 1993, 3). Although their intents differ, idealists seem to agree that the elimination of conflict is possible. Realists, on the other hand, firmly believe that history has made abundantly clear that it is not. Politics for them consists in managing recurrent conflicts. The goal is its continuous containment, not elimination. Bealey, for instance, reminds us that *'Political science is much concerned with conflict: indeed, without conflict it would not exist because politics would not be necessary'* (Bealey 1999, 79). To eliminate conflict, would be to eliminate politics. This is why, according to realism, moralism aims to eliminate politics by means of morality. As Galston puts it: *'high liberalism represents a desire to evade, displace, or escape from politics'* (Galston 2010, 386). This does not mean that realism becomes a sterile celebration of conflict, completely detached - and even opposed to – its declared intention to emphasize the role of facts and reality in informing political guidance, as it has been suggested (Baderin 2013). On the contrary, it is from the very idea of conflict that we derive practical guidance. As Honig, an advocate of agonism, writes: *'to affirm the perpetuity of the contest is not to celebrate a world without points of stabilisation; it is to affirm the reality of perpetual contest, even within an ordered*

setting, and to identify the affirmative dimension of contestation' (Honig 1993). Realism does not degenerate into 'complacent realism'(Estlund 2014, 115), with respect to conflict. Quite the contrary, realists often recommend that we put in place procedures that contain unavoidable conflicts. In this respect, realism is not merely a critical stance but to some degree a transformative one, since it is linked to the need for order. The inevitability of conflict does not imply that we actively pursue it, only that we prepare for it and are willing to accept it when we cannot avoid it.

Features of Conflict

This definition allows us to distinguish several interesting features of conflicting situations.

First, not all conflicts are political¹⁸. Indeed, not all values or interests make a claim on public coercion, not all conflicting agents choose to try to enforce their will through the state's apparatus. While doing so might be a viable strategy for trying to impose our will on others, without using violence ourselves, one might pursue other ways to do it. Trade unions, for example, may turn to politics to ask for new labour laws but often decide to organize a strike to make businesses conform to their will. A religious institution may lobby for laws against abortion, or it might try to persuade actual doctors to use their right of conscientious objection. It is important to remark this point, because it is sometimes uncritically assumed that conflicts are only dangerous if they turn to politics. However, political realists emphatically stress that all conflicts may potentially turn violent if left politically unchecked, and thus all conflicts are dangerous in virtue of their involving 'a real possibility' of violence (Schmitt, Strong, and Strauss 2007, 33).

According to the definition I have given, the use of violence is only an accidental property of conflict. One that – it is true – is always potentially there, but one that does not encompass the whole realm of this concept. Conflict theory of sociology necessarily links conflict and violence: '*Above all else, there is conflict because violent coercion is*

¹⁸ I am using 'political' in Weber sense, whereby: 'what "politics" means for us is to strive for a share of power or to influence the distribution of power, whether between states or between the groups of people contained within a state (Weber 2013, 33).

always a potential resource, and it is zero-sum sort' (Collins 1975, 59), I believe that non-violent conflicts would exist even if physical violence was completely out of the question. It could be observed (Nicholson 1992, 239–240) that while violence is usually considered bad, conflict need not be referred to as negative. Weber himself emphasizes that conflict opens up new possibilities and can thus be considered beneficial. Economic competitions and courts of justice are two examples of positive conflicts, which one could cite. However, these are very specific kinds of conflicts and they are only good insofar as they follow precise rules, which are laid down and enforced by the public authority, which prevents their potential escalation towards violence. If I were to use corruptions, blackmails or threats in either of these, one would not keep considering them good. They are good insofar as they can be contained in such a way. Indeed economics defines rather rigidly under what conditions we have good perfect competition and laws establish clearly what conducts fall outside the legalized conflict of the courts of law.

Another important feature of my definition of conflict is its content-neutrality. It does not really matter why a conflict emerges, according to which opposing values, interests or identities. We cannot resolve the conflict by referring to truth or rightness, because the actors care more about imposing their will than about questioning it to see if they are really justified in doing so. As Hampshire recalls 'Machiavelli and Hobbes famously insisted that political conflicts are not finally and reliably resolved on a rational level by adversary argument, because they normally also bring with them a struggle for power in the state or in the society, which often overwhelms rational procedures' (Hampshire 2001, 66). It is thus a crucial mistake, political realists claim, to overstate the importance of reasons in conflict resolution. Indeed, one might go as far as saying that all considerations of content misinterpret the nature of conflict, because conflict is not about the fact of the matter, but about clashes among wills. Somewhat similarly, Schmitt defines his famous 'friend-enemy' opposition as being irreducible to other distinctions, like good or bad, right or wrong. Once we enter a relation of conflict, we know –by definition - that the will to prevail is weighted more than the will to truth. One cannot resolve a conflict by proving his enemy wrong. If it truly is a conflict, and not a matter of

pluralism or disagreement, others would not be swayed by considerations of content. As Nozick puts it there are two different possible dispositions: either both parties judge 'wrong decision worse than conflict with those on the other side' or at least one of them believes that 'conflict is better than losing the issue' (Nozick 1974, 98).

Another important feature of this definition is that it clarify why conflict can be unilaterally triggered. While the opposition of wills requires two or more actors to have different opinions, only one of them needs to exhibit the will to prevail in order for a situation of conflict to arise. You may get caught in a situation of conflict even without exhibiting the will to prevail yourself. You may prefer to resolve the contrast by debating the matter to find out who is actually right or by bargaining a mutually agreeable solution. However, in order for content-related reasons to be effective, the other party needs to have the same disposition to find the truth or to seek an agreement. Whether or not you want to be in a situation of conflict is irrelevant, if someone else wants to impose his view on you. Insisting that 'the most effective way to deal with human conflicts is to reason them out (Dennes 1946, 344) is a very dangerous attitude in politics, as it fundamentally misinterprets the nature of conflict. Both the intentions of the other party and their ability to unilaterally trigger a conflict are not assessed correctly in such situations.

The inevitability of conflict

If our definition is sensible, we can argue that conflict is inevitable by showing that the elements from which it arises are. Using the methodology defended in the chapter on political necessities, I will try to show that there is no way to move to a state where the two conflict inducing conditions do not arise. I argue that there seem to be, at the present time, no causal chain that leads to a world where there are no contrasting interests, values or identities among actors, nor to a world where no actor exhibit a desire to assert his will against the resistance of others.

Let us start with the first feature of our definition: the contrast of wills. There is in the literature extensive evidence for it. Just in the field of political philosophy, the discussion of pluralism and disagreement presents ample consensus on the fact that

values diverge dramatically inside any society. Also a brief survey of the literature in social and political sciences tells us that the interplay between contrasting interests is also widespread and bound to raise conflicts. History, finally, tells us that both values and interests were subjected to a lot of variability among societies, both geographically and diachronically.

To assert that this state of affairs is necessary, however, we need to consider whether there is a way to move away from such a condition. Rawls himself, when he discusses the fact of pluralism, mentions that such contrasts of wills are 'a permanent feature, which cannot be eliminated without recourse to an intolerable amount of force' (Rawls 1993). His argument is moral: only the impermissible means of an undesirable amount of force might end disagreement. I want to push the argument further and claim that even dramatic amounts of force would not actually enforce a single value system, but only the appearance of it. Locke's observation (Locke 2011) that it is pointless to impose a religion, because faith cannot be enforced, could be extended to prove this point. First, it is not possible to consciously choose to believe something or to like something (Elster 1985), whatever the incentive system in place. Moreover, even if it were possible, since pure matters of conscience escape surveillance, repression can only intervene on our actions, not on our wants or beliefs, which remain beyond what can be observed by the state. Thus the differences in interests, values and identities, which generate the contrast of will, cannot be eliminated by coercion and its threat. One can surely modify how people express their wills, by banning actions associated to them from the public sphere and employing constant surveillance. The contrast of will, however, would still be present, if only unexpressed. Thus, once the 'intolerable amount of force' is relaxed, contrasts of wills are going to reemerge again, since they were never truly eliminated but only locked away.

It is true that there are psychological mechanisms that operate at the level of conscience, like adaptive preference forming or psychological conditioning. Even if extreme coercion were to generate widespread adaptive preferences, this would hardly be the case for all the citizens. Another way in which one might try to dispose of dissonant ideas is through high social pressure, which is arguably how communities did

(Tönnies, Ferdinand 2001). However, here too is hard to see how it could be universally successful in rooting out all kinds of deviances, as opposed to just hiding them from sight. Insofar, as the elimination of contrasts of will needs to be universal, we can safely conclude that currently no causal path leads to a world where this is true.

Now we need to discuss the second element, the will to prevail, in light of our discussion about necessities. If only the first element can be shown to be inevitable, then we would only prove the inevitability of pluralism or disagreement, rather than conflict. In fact, we need both element (1) and (2) conjunctly to attest the inevitability of conflict. Having argued for the unilaterality of conflict, however, the argument need not be very demanding. It does not require all actors to try to impose on one another, but only some, in order for conflict to emerge. Thus, one needs to show that there are no causal paths, which lead to a world where none tries to force his will on others.

This willingness to impose one's will is recognized but not as ubiquitously acknowledged in the literature. Indeed liberal authors usually downplay this element, by emphasizing moral progress and the potential for reform and education in the nature of men, which are thought to be workable path towards a world without people willing to impose on one another. Authors like Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Nietzsche, Marx and many other realists on the contrary emphasize this unchangeable dimension of human nature. The emphasis on the acquisition of power in realist literature comes precisely from admitting that our dealings with others always conceal a potential for prevarication. This negative anthropology is not assumed to be universal, only present in some, even few, of the relevant actors. Given the unilateralism of conflict, prudence is enough to induce preparations against conflict. Rational anticipation of the aggressiveness of others leads to strategic aggression from ourselves. As Hobbes puts it: 'that men are evil by nature, follows not from this principle; for though the wicked were fewer than the righteous, yet because we cannot distinguish them, there is a necessity of suspecting, heeding, anticipating, subjugating, self-defending, ever incident to the most honest, and fairest condition'd' (Hobbes 1991, 5). Once limited in such a way, it seems that what we argued for the contrast of will applies here too. We need a causal path to reach a world where nobody ever is inclined to try to assert his

will against the resistance of others. However, given that there seem to be no way to dispose completely of this tendency, it seems implausible to deny that there will always be someone trying to enforce his will against the resistance of others.

Thus, if we accept that (1) and (2) can never be completely eliminated, we must conclude that conflicts cannot be 'displaced' (Honig 1993) either. This does not mean that they cannot be controlled or contained, only that their existence is bound to persist. And politics along with them.

This is why 'no attempt to remove conflict will be successful and no political solution implying the removal of conflict is to be deemed reasonable from a realistic perspective' (Pasquali 2012, 66)

3.4 From Cooperation to Order

The Need for Order

The second circumstance of politics, according to Waldron, is our need for cooperation. Here I argue that a more realistic take on this second element is both possible and desirable. While Waldron focuses on the fact that we have to act conjunctly in order to reach many of the things we might want, it is not just our goals or ideals which require social coordination, but the more essential problem of our own survival. Thus a second fundamental feature of politics is, according to realists, the need for order. Confronted with the inevitable emergence of conflict, realists stress the need for a minimum of order, to develop a stable frame of cooperation. Politics is precisely devoted to the containment of dangerous conflicts, which recurrently afflict human relations.

The need for order is a fundamental feature of politics for realists, as all political problems are related to issues of order. One might be puzzled about treating order as a fact of politics. Isn't a need something that depends on the individual will? Not necessarily. The need for food, for example, is something that every human being has

whatever he believes or desires. One might not want to feed, but he would still need to. Denying such need, by refusing to feed, leads ultimately to a tangible risk of death.

Similarly, realists argue, men need a peaceful and cooperative order. Man is a social animal. Not in the moral sense that he cares about his fellow human beings, but rather in the materialistic sense that he depends on them for his very survival. Without cooperating with others, one would struggle to provide oneself even with the most basic needs. In 'reasonably favourable conditions' (Rawls 2009, 178), many valuable things in life would only be available once a successfully cooperative order is established, but the situation would not be so dire as to impinge survival. Realists are more radical in their assumptions. As Hobbes most evocatively puts it:

'in such condition there is no place for industry, because the fruit thereof is uncertain, and consequently, not culture of the earth, no navigation, nor the use of commodities that may be imported by sea, no commodious building, no instruments of moving and removing such things as require much force, no knowledge of the face of the earth, no account of time, no arts, no letters, no society, and which is worst of all, continual fear and danger of violent death, and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short' (Hobbes 2009, 89).

Thus, the need for order is a fact for men, as it relates to their objective incapacity to survive without their need to act in accord. Denying such need leads ultimately to a tangible risk of death.

In this sense it is important to distinguish 'cooperation' from simple 'coordination' (Rawls 2001, 6). Usually we talk about cooperation when actors willingly comply with a common course of action, whether out of respect, sense of justice or because they believe it is in their personal interest. Coordination, on the contrary, is a more general: it does not matter why we comply with a common course of action, as long as we do. It might also be because we fear to be excluded by the group, because we are threatened by sanctions if we defect, or because we are forced to do so. For this reason, moralists consider cooperation the only desirable state, and look upon coordination negatively, as an immoral surrogate of cooperation. Contrary to this, political realists tend to consider coordination preferable to not being capable to act in a common course of action. While cooperation is in many ways better than coordination, sometimes we must

secure the less ambitious state of coordination first. Moreover, in other cases it is not worth it to risk losing an already secured state of coordination in the vain hope of reaching the most ambitious coordination. When I discuss the need for order, I have in mind primarily this conception of coordination rather than the more idealized notion of cooperation.

The Need for Order as a real and necessary feature

The need for order is a necessary element of politics, but in a different way than conflict is. Framing the issue with my previous conceptualization of necessity will be helpful in clarifying why the need for order is necessary, and in what sense this necessity is different from that of conflict. The existence of plausible causal chains to reach a certain state is the criterion for its possibility.

My previous example of the need for food will again prove a useful analogy. There are many causal chains that allow us to stop feeding, but all of those also lead to our death¹⁹. There are no chains that allow us both to stop feeding and to survive. Thus, in a weaker, hypothetical sense, food is necessary for as long as we also care about our survival.

Similarly, is there a causal chain by which we can escape our need for an orderly and stable cooperation? As long as we want to survive, the answer is negative. Indeed there are many ways to avoid the need for order, but those, so realists argue, all end up threatening the survival of actors. We need order, because we need coordinated action with others to survive safely. There is no causal chain that allows us to both disregard the need for order, and survive. Thus, if we take our will to survive as fixed, there are no ways in which we can avoid seeking order.

Of course an anarchist might contest that this is truly the case and fancy himself in a society without the illegitimate political obligation. However, the dream of the anarchist still revolves around a kind of cooperative order, albeit a non-political one. The anarchist imagines a natural, perhaps moral, cooperation among individuals without the mingling

¹⁹ In this example, medically assisted nutrition counts as a way of feeding.

of institutional powers. Perhaps some kind of direct democracy without interference (Wolff 1970). What the anarchist rejects, usually, is that the emergence of conflict is a lethal challenge to purely moral cooperative orders. On the opposing line argue political realists: once actors are willing to impose their view on others spontaneous cooperation breaks down and makes it so that the need for order has to be expressed under different forms than those conceived by the anarchist.

However, there is a clear difference between the necessity of conflict and the necessity for order, one which mirrors the ambiguity that is also present in the etymology of the word. In Greek and Latin 'necessity' means both 'inevitability' and 'need'. The conflict is inevitable: there are no causal chains to dispose of conflict. Order is an hypothetical necessity. It is inevitable given that we want our survival to be the case. Thus, inevitability and need are conceptually related in the notion of necessity.

Conflict and order reflect these double meaning of necessity. However, their force is different. Order is subordinated to the necessity of conflict, as it is precisely its recurrent, inevitable resurgence that threatens our lives and prompts us to seek some agreeable order. It is a weaker, practical necessity as opposed to the true metaphysical necessity of conflict. Nevertheless, it holds some power once one accepts the minimal assumption of the will to survive.

The Need for Order and Realism

Many realists, like Williams, Geuss and Gray all recognize the need for order, as a reaction to the inevitability of conflict. Hobbes emphasized this point the most, although other realists shared it. Machiavelli thought that some degree of political conflict was beneficial to the state, as it served to temper the strength of the political community, which in turns allowed for its freedom. In the discourses he says: 'to me it appears that those who damn the tumults between the nobles and the plebs [...] consider the noise and the cries that that would arise in such tumults more than the good effects that they engendered'(Machiavelli 2009, 16). If no internal or external danger is present, a society grow complacent and increasingly unable to face conflict when it will inevitably arise again. Machiavelli evocatively describes such process: *'if heaven were so kind that it did*

not have to make war, from that would arise the idleness to make it either effeminate or divided; these two things together, or each by itself, would be the cause of its ruin' (Machiavelli 2009, 23). Even Machiavelli, however, praised only a limited degree of conflict regulated by the institutional constraints of a political order. He argues in *Florentine Histories* that conflicts can prove useful, as in Rome, but can also be very damaging for a society, as in Florence:

'the animosities that first arose between the nobles and the people of Rome were determined by debate; those of Florence, by the sword. A feud in Rome was settled by a law; a dispute in Florence by the death and banishments of many of its citizens. [...] This diversity of effects was necessarily owing to the widely different views entertained by the two cities. The people of Rome were willing to share with the nobility the honors of the state, but the people of Florence fought for the supreme control of the government, to the utter exclusion of the nobles. And as the desire of the roman people was more reasonable, the nobility the more readily complied with them' (Machiavelli 1845, 129).

Hobbes is even more radical, as he puts the highest possible emphasis on the need for order. He directly endorses survival as the highest human goal (the '*primum bonum*'), and derive its laws of nature from it. He effectively links individual survival to social coordination in a straightforward way. Hobbes's philosophy is an attempt to deduce both rights and political obligation from the fact that a political order is necessary for survival. Williams and Geuss refer to him to highlight this concern for order as a fundamental question of a politically realist philosophy.

Williams considers this the 'basic legitimation demand', which needs to be satisfied first in order to raise all other issues like liberty, justice, equality etc. He suggests that political questions presuppose a stable cooperative order within the society. He argues: 'I identify the "first" political question in Hobbesian terms as the securing of order, protection, safety, trust, and the conditions of cooperation. It is "first" because solving it is the condition of solving, indeed posing, any others' (Williams 2005, 3). He claims that 'first virtue of social institutions' (Rawls 2009, 3) is not justice, but legitimacy. The fundamental need for security and cooperation is how he characterize the 'basic legitimation demand' (Williams 2005, 13), which according to him can be satisfied in

different ways in different contexts and historical time. Liberalism is then considered as the best real answer to the basic legitimation demand at the present time.

Another realist like Geuss considers the problem of 'intolerable disorder' as a necessary concern for the political world as well. Contrary to Hobbes, however, both Williams and Geuss do not want to build a political system upon this assumption. Political realism, they both believe, rejects highly abstracted systematic approaches. Indeed, such a universalization cannot be effectively applied. We cannot deduce from self-preservation alone principles that might successfully be applied in the same way to all historical contexts. Thus, they both relativize the historical importance of the concept of survival. Geuss concedes that there is an undeniable ubiquity of the will to survive in human history but, he argues, it is too general a fact to tell us anything specifically interesting about politics. On the contrary: 'understanding politics means seeing that such [universal empirical truths] have clear meaning at all only relative to their specific context, and this context is one of historically structured forms of action' (Geuss 2008, 14). Williams on the other hand believes that the importance of survival is becoming somewhat trivial: our historical development has shown us that we can and do expect more than mere survival from political institutions. It is still the basic legitimation demand and it is thus necessary for legitimacy but, arguably, not sufficient any more. In this historical context, liberalism has in fact shown that political institutions can do more than just providing survival.

3.5 A Taxonomy of Political Theories

Up until now, I tried to improve on Waldron's conception of the circumstances of politics. By moving from disagreement to conflict, and from cooperation to order, I hope to have provided a more accurate account of politics, one that does not fall prey of moralizing assumptions. Moreover, by employing the methodological analysis I developed in the previous chapter, I attempted to show that these circumstances prove to be permanent features of the world, in the sense that there is no course of action to pursue if one wanted to dispose of them.

I now want to conclude by showing that we can use the previous discussion to show that theories, which underestimate, abstract away or moralize conflict or order, drastically misinterpret politics. Thus, they cannot be ‘good’ theories of politics. They might be good theories of justice, as Waldron says, or good moral theories but not good political theories. At best, one can consider them partial theories of politics, insofar as a fundamental part of politics will be missing.

I propose to use the realistic revision of the circumstances of politics I provided, in order to analytically distinguish political realism from other political theories, which are unrealistic for different reasons. This is useful in order to understand and categorize where a theory falls short and how to make it more realistic, if one so desires. Here is what we get:

DIMENSIONS OF THE POLITICAL	<u>Acknowledge the Need for Order</u>	<u>Disregard the Need for Order</u>
<u>Acknowledge Conflict</u>	Political Realism (Weber, Gray, Williams)	Unrealistic Realism (Schmitt, Mouffe, Geuss)
<u>Disregard Conflict</u>	Political Idealism (Rawls, Estlund)	Non-political Idealism (Communitarianism, Anarchism)

Most political thinkers, even those who would not generally be classified as realists, are aware that conflict and the need for order are important elements. However, this is not enough to count as political realists: they need to emphasize their necessary status. It is not enough that state that conflicts do arise, but that they are bound to recur. Also the need for order

First and for most, there is the cluster of theories which recognize the unavoidable human need for a political order but underestimate the radical impact of conflict. Realists usually criticize political idealism, high-liberalism, moralism, or ethics-first political philosophy for the fault of subscribing to a moralized version of conflict (like disagreement or reasonable pluralism). Rawls is the main culprit of this charge, not

because he was the most radical in carrying out the crime, but because he was the most successful.

Rawls thinks that the emergence of a stable cooperative order among contrasting theories of the good is indeed the main problem of political philosophy in a democratic society. He explicitly declares that 'its practical role arise[s] from divisive political conflict and the need to settle the problem of order' (Rawls 2001, 1). While in his introduction to Political Liberalism he raises the issue regarding the wars of religion and Weimar's republic, he does not address it in his philosophical discussion as his focus stays instead on reasonable pluralism.

Rawls starts with the idea that pluralism is a fact of politics. In 'Justice as fairness' he asserts: 'a democratic society is not and cannot be a community, where by a community I mean a body of persons united in affirming the same comprehensive, or partially comprehensive, doctrine' (Rawls 2001, 3). Given our cognitive limitations regarding political problems, i.e. the 'burdens of judgment' (Rawls 2001, 36), no common idea of the good can be unquestionably established and thus pluralism is the result of the natural operations of human reason.

However, Rawls thinks that this does not affect our capacity to reach a settlement about a shared conception of the right. Galston recognizes that Rawls's direction is a fruitful one, however he believes that it is not coherently pursued along his argument: 'Rawls is partly right: under conditions of pluralism, agreement on living well is not to be expected. But shifting focus from the good to the right doesn't help: agreement on justice is not to be expected either' (Galston 2010, 391).

Rawls is indeed not too distant from realism in this moderate scepticism, when he argues that the burdens of judgments weight on our epistemic ability to reach rational consensus over the good. He then goes on to claim, however, that a similar consensus can nonetheless be reached over what is right.

Yet this critique from Galston is not quite correct. In fact, Rawls does not refer to pluralism but to reasonable pluralism, as a basis for shared conception of the right. An agreement on justice is to be expected of reasonable individuals. However, political

realism sees this very restriction to reasonable individuals as an unrealistic *caveat*, which excludes a large portion of actual conflict. The ‘facts’ of moralism appear to be normatively twisted from the start.

Religious pluralism, for example, is sometimes unreasonable and purely based on one’s faith. When this is the case, it is not admitted under this caveat. However, such religious disagreement is a simple fact of the world. A fact, moreover which requires our attention here and now. If a political theory excludes religious pluralism, then it confines itself to the kind of pluralism, which is most uninteresting: that which is not radical enough to ignite conflicts.

If a political theory does not worry about unreasonable pluralism, it is bound to be ineffective. In fact, reasonable pluralism assumes away the possibility of conflict, since the status quo is already moralized. Conflicts sprang when among opposite points of view, an actor wishes to impose his own. Clearly, Rawlsian reasonable individual would never do that, given that they are willing to propose and abide to fair terms of cooperation. No real conflicts are admitted in Rawls’s system. However, conflicts do arise in the real world, where unreasonableness often affects even democratic citizens.

Given Rawls’s fact of oppression (Rawls 2001, 84), the use of enforcement is deemed the wrong solution to pluralism. Gray suggests that it might be the only one, when he considers the apt example of religious freedom in Singapore (Gray 2002, 112). While deep religious disagreement endangered political stability, a solution was found in the restriction of religious freedom. The solution admitted freedom of cult while enforcing a ban on proselytising; this reduced the amount of interaction between conflicting religious systems and as such reduced the risk of a violent conflict. This solution was not ideal, but it did preserve the maximum amount of religious freedom compatible with political stability.

This is an unreasonable (in the Rawlsian sense, but presumably not in the ordinary one) solution because it is a restriction by public force of one of our most basic freedoms – freedom of speech. However, it was a necessary one, given that the harsh reality of

religious pluralism threatened to plunge the whole society into chaos, a deeper evil that moralism tends to underestimate.

Indeed Rawls seems to accept something like this when he claims that unreasonable citizens ought to be at best ignored, if they are no threat to the stability of the well-ordered society and at worst repressed, if they were to become dangerous. He expresses the hope that unreasonable doctrines are going to be eroded by the free competition among worldviews that a democratic society allows. This empirical claim unfortunately is not heavily supported by observation. Nonetheless, what is worrying about Rawls remarks on dealing with unreasonable people is how little he discusses the point. While a lot of space is devoted to justifying his political philosophy in front of democratic citizens, who already share the idea that society is a fair system of cooperation among free and equals citizens, not nearly as much is dedicated to addressing people aren't reasonable on this respect.

One might add that Rawls also idealizes the second element of realistic politics, the need for order, thus putting it into a different type in the taxonomy. He does in fact mitigate the assumption of scarcity. Scarcity for him is 'moderate scarcity' (Rawls 2001, 84), thus rendering the need for order less vital. It is different from the situation imagined in Hobbes's state of nature, where survival was at risk for perpetual lack of food and basic resources, which bred conflict for survival.

More importantly, however, Rawls distinguishes cooperation from simple coordination:

(a) 'social cooperation is guided by publicly recognized rules and procedures which those cooperating accept as appropriate to regulate their conduct', (b) 'the idea of cooperation includes the idea of fair terms of cooperation: these are terms each participant may reasonably accept, and sometimes should accept, provided that everyone else likewise accepts them', (c) 'the idea of cooperation also includes the idea of each participant's rational advantage, or good' (Rawls 2001, 6).

Thus, the need for order is morally qualified. Not any order is satisfactory, but only the order expressed as a fair system of cooperation among free and equal citizens. This

however contrasts with what realists want to say, i.e. that first we need a kind of order of whatever kind, and only later we can worry about his fairness, freedom or equality.

Thus, realists do not accept any of these ambitious qualifications of the idea of cooperation. It is true that 'resolution of conflict by principles that no one can reasonably reject is itself, according to Rawls, a reasonable way to resolve conflict because it achieves legitimacy and stability in the face of unavoidable practical conflict' (Chang 2009, 134). However, this restricts the targets of justification in order to obtain a more qualified notion of order. As long as we risk conflict, any kind of coordination seems preferable. Cooperation may be ideally more valuable, but coordination is certainly more vital. Given the likelihood of conflict in our political reality, the best is enemy of the good. It seems only wise to seek cooperation, if we already achieve coordination before and doing so does not compromise it. Otherwise, shunning coordination as something morally insufficient may sparkle conflict, instead of dampening it.

In short, Rawls reject the realistic view of order as a 'mere modus vivendi', where there is a precarious enforcement of a common framework by tentative compromises over different ideas of the good. Galston aptly comments on this point:

'the very phrase "a mere modus vivendi" suggests a certain distance from the political; experience (including at the present time) suggests that those who enjoy such a thing are already lucky.' The fortunate ones should not imagine that their communities have solved the task of political stabilization once and for all; disorder is a perennial possibility, and it is important to reverse the breakdown of trust and social cooperation before the situation degenerates into wider conflict' (Galston 2010, 398).

Notwithstanding this moralizing twist on the notion of order, it is still sensible to admit that Rawls is only unrealistic in his assumptions about conflict. In fact, while he says that not any order is sufficient, but only a qualified notion of order, he is also deeply aware of the importance of such issue. He recognizes that it is an artificial phenomenon, which has to be intentionally maintained by our thoughts and actions. He even go as far as saying that to defend the well-ordered society from a serious threat of unreasonable individuals trying to subvert it, we are allowed to fight them back. Thus, I believe we

could classify Rawls as satisfying the criteria of a realistic conception of the need for order. If anything, he is too optimistic due to an insufficiently realistic conception of conflict.

On the opposite side of the spectrum one can find agonistic theories of politics that focus excessively on the inevitability of conflict and lose sight that this is only relevant if we presuppose that a kind of order is necessary. These theories often pass under the label of realism, since they are allies in their critique of political liberalism.

Authors like Chantal Mouffe and Bonnie Honig, drawing from Karl Schmitt, emphasize the irreducible dimension of conflict and harshly criticize political idealism for dealing only with a sweetened picture of pluralism and disagreement. The price of liberal consensus, according to them, is the exclusion of what are viewed as unreasonable doctrines. Through the filter of reasonableness, politics is insulated from value pluralism. As Mouffe puts it, 'Rawls and Habermas want to ground adherence to liberal democracy on a type of rational agreement that would preclude the possibility of contestation. This is why they need to relegate pluralism to a non-public domain in order to insulate politics from its consequences' (Mouffe 2009, 92).

However, if I was successful in my previous discussion of the circumstances of politics, it would be clear that this kind of argument is not overly realistic. Indeed, ignoring the crucial dimension of order is a critical mistake for these theories, insofar as the object of politics is not focused accurately. The most famous exponent of this tradition, Mouffe, for example, declared that 'while we desire an end to conflict, if we want people to be free we must always allow for the possibility that conflict may appear and to provide an arena where differences can be confronted' ("Hearts, Minds and Radical Democracy | Red Pepper" 2015). Contrary to this liberal insulation, agonists claim that all view need to have access to the political arena. Once publicly expressed, it's up to democratic discussion to find an always temporary compromise (or winner) among conflicting views. This does not mean that there are no limits on public confrontation, but that these limits ought to be recognized as political, and thus open to contestation.

It is true that Mouffe defines 'politics' as the ensemble of practices, discourses and institutions which seek to establish a certain order and organize human coexistence in conditions that are always potentially conflictual' (Mouffe 2009, 101). Thus, it would seem that she recognizes both order and conflict, the realistic circumstances of politics. However, the need for order in her theory is left completely indeterminate. She clearly favors democracy and its *ethos* which transforms antagonists from enemies to be destroyed into adversaries, 'whose ideas we combat but whose right to defend those ideas we do not put into question' (Mouffe 2009, 102) and recognize that this need some common ground. While this common ground is identified in the 'ethico-political principles of liberal democracy: liberty and equality' (Mouffe 2009, 102), no argument is given why this ought to be the case. She in fact is convinced that these limits are not permanent points, that they are contestable, and that they are political. However, this means that the need for a common order is not just debatable, but a matter of preference for which no 'rational or moral' arguments can be given. As I tried to show in my previous discussion of the need for order, however, a rational and prudential, if not moral, argument can be given. And it is just unrealistic to try to build a political order without providing any reasons for why this is a good idea.

Opposite to political realism, denying both the political dimensions of conflict and of order, we find non-political idealism. Theories that fall into this category can be so defined, insofar as they misinterpret what politics is about. Rarely political theories completely miss both of these realistic circumstances of politics, but there are indeed theories that underestimate them, or moralize them away. If we are to believe their critics, one such example could be found in Communitarian theories. As Elizabeth Frazer remarks: 'Communitarians, that is, overlook precisely the politics of 'community'— to such an extent, we argued, that communitarianism barely looks like a political theory at all' (Frazer 1999, 2).

While debating Rawls' circumstances of justice, Sandel recognizes that these presuppose that 'Society is seen as a cooperative venture for mutual advantage, which means that it is typically marked by a conflict as well as an identity of interests - an identity of interests is that all stand to gain from mutual co-operation, a conflict in that,

given their divergent interests and ends, people differ over how the fruits of their cooperation are to be distributed' (Sandel 1998, 28). However, contrary to these he proposes a conception of the 'circumstances of benevolence' (Sandel 1998, 35), a more ideal situation in which the circumstances of justice do not apply because men are capable of unlimited altruism or there is no scarcity of resources. This account not only opposes the circumstances of justice, but also those of politics. Indeed, there would not emerge a need for order, since human survival would not be a stake, thus conflicts would not be problematic, insofar as people would not be strictly dependent on one another. Curiously, however, liberals have responded to the moralized view of communitarians by raising the same critiques, which have now been raised by realists against them. Gutmann, for example, observes: 'Nor does it make theoretical sense to assume away the conflicts among competing ends [...] that give rise to the characteristic liberal concern for rights. In so doing, the critics avoid discussing how morally to resolve our conflicts and therefore fail to provide us with a political theory relevant to our world' (Gutmann 1985, 319–320).

What communitarians have in mind with their ideal is 'a community whose primary bond is a shared understanding both of the good for man and the good of that community' (MacIntyre 2013, 290). Discordant worldviews on this account can only happen through interferences from outside the community. To recall a group of metaphors used by communitarians, a community views members who disagree with its shared values in the same way a family view a son who misbehaved: it blames it on him not knowing who his true friends are and being misled by bad companies. This view assumes an underlying unity in the society, which only external influences are able to muddle. Honig puts forward a similar point when she observes that: 'Sandel assumes that any lack of closure in the identity of the subject comes from a multiplicity that is exterior from an environmental, plural constitutedness that, if sorted out in the right setting, in a better environment, can be uncovered to disclose an underlying and authentic and enabling unity' (Honig 1993, 184). Not only, all contrasts come from outside the community, but it is also the case that they can be easily and naturally reabsorbed by the community. In fact, Sandel 'implicitly assumes that the multiple ends

and identity formations of the intrasubjective conception are susceptible to harmonization and ordering in the right setting' (Honig 1993, 180).

Thus, communitarianism downplays conflict as well as the need of order, insofar as conflicts are harmonizable accidents generated by external influences and order is not really a need at all because it spontaneously emerges from within the community without any effort.

Last, but most importantly, come theories which are politically realistic. According to our table these falls in the intersection of the two realistic circumstances of politics. Political reality is thus according to realists characterized by two features, namely the inevitable fact of conflict and the unavoidable need for order. As it is put in social conflict theories, 'the basic insight is that human beings are sociable but conflict-prone animals' (Collins 1975, 58). These elements come up from many authors in political realism, but among the classics Hobbes is the one who draws the most attention to them. Thus, we might say that political realism draws substantially from Hobbes, the '*quintessential realist*' (Runciman 2012, 58). Williams himself gave an illuminating summary of why such Hobbesian questions are important focal points of political realism:

'It is a human universal that some people coerce or try to coerce others [i.e. conflict], and nearly a universal that people live under an order in which some of the coercion is intelligible and acceptable [i.e. need for order], and it can be an illuminating question (one that is certainly evaluative, but not normative) to ask how far, and in what respects, a given society of the past is an example of the human capacity for intelligible order, or of the human tendency to unmediated coercion' (Williams 2005, 10).

In short, realists tackle directly the problem of political realism: to 'overcome anarchy without embracing tyranny' (Galston 2010, 391). Geuss agrees with Williams that realism takes his modern roots in Hobbes and the problem to secure cooperation notwithstanding conflicting agents. In this regards he says:

'what I wish to call "the realist approach to political philosophy" develops this basically Hobbesian insight. It is centered on the study of historically instantiated forms of collective human action with special attention to the variety of ways in which people can structure and organise their action so

as to limit and control forms of disorder that they might find excessive or intolerable for other reasons' (Geuss 2008, 22)²⁰.

²⁰ These Hobbesian roots are relevant because they reveal something important about realism, even though contemporary realists shun the question of political reality, as a question a moralist would be tempted to ask: too abstract, or even abstruse, to be given a satisfactory answer. Williams is convinced that 'trying to give a definition of the political [...] would certainly be fruitless' (Williams 2005, 12) and Geuss agrees that one does not need 'an antecedent ontological specification of a distinct domain called "politics"' (Geuss 2008, 23) like the one Hobbes himself is trying to give.

4 RATIONALITY AND NORMATIVITY

4.1 Introduction

In the previous three chapters, I have offered an account of Political realism.

In the first chapter, I started from some preliminary consideration of what features a realistic political theory should have and I tried to describe what metaphysical view of reality they implied. I defended a view called 'effectual realism', whereby something counts as real iff it is causally effective. I finally noted that this view is a kind of metaphysical realism, insofar as there is an external reality that is knowable and independent from our beliefs and desires.

In the second chapter, I argued that effectual realism leads political realism to a causal conception of possibility and necessity. I argued that a realistic notion of possibility could not be reduced to logical coherence or compatibility with the world and the nature of men. For something to be possible there must be a causal chain that leads from our actual world to the possible one. This in turns, lead me to a realistic notion of necessity. For a state of affairs to be necessary or inevitable, all possible causal chains lead from our state to said state. By converse, for a state of affair to be impossible, there must be no causal chain that leads to said causal state.

In the third chapter, I identified two pivotal necessities in the political sphere, conflict and order. I argued that conflicts emerge among actors holding contrasting views, when one of them intend to force his view against the resistance of others. I also claim that the recurrent emergence of conflict seems inevitable insofar as there is no causal chain to permanently avoid the emergence of contrasting views and of the will to prevail. I also claimed that some kind of cooperative order is inevitable, insofar as we want to survive. Politics arise by the interplay of these two necessities. A political theory is realistic, I concluded, if it acknowledges that politics is about preserving a framework of cooperation among recurrent conflicting tendencies.

To summarize, I defended the following scheme:

1. Realism → Reality
2. Reality → Possibility and Necessity
3. Political Necessity → Conflict and Order

So far, however, I have not touched directly on the question that drives my research: how does political realism provide normative guidance? However, the previous methodological work shall prove crucial to answer the question in this final chapter.

The claim I shall put forward is that the normativity of political realism is grounded on the willingness to realize one's desires. Political realism's normative injunctions are hypothetical imperatives grounded on the preference to realize one's preferences, which I defined as meta-preference.

This meta-preference, I shall argue, translates into a realistic notion of rationality, whereby one chooses not among end-states but among courses of action. A course of action is the combination of the desired end-state, the best available means to it, its probability of success, and its likely consequences. If one wants to realize his preferences, one needs to be realistically rational, and thus to deliberate in such a way.

The meta-preference and the realistic notion of rationality, allows us to draw the following normative conclusions, which would be valid for people willing to realize their own preferences.

Political realism is based on a normative claim, as it functions as an injunction to pay attention to the real world [cit.]. In the language of common sense, a political realist is someone who invite us to 'be realistic!'. This translates philosophically into the injunction that 'you ought to acknowledge reality'. This is why I argued in the first chapter that political realism requires a metaphysical kind of 'effectual realism', needing to assume the existence of a causally effective reality, which is knowable and independent from our beliefs and desires. Otherwise, the injunction to recognize reality would be incoherent.

However, this first level is so general that does not tell us anything. Depending on what is meant by reality, very different injunctions can be derived. This concept of

realistic normativity is as much uncontroversial as it is empty, unless the meaning of reality is specified.

I suggest that the empty notion of reality is understood more substantially by linking it to necessity. When realists claim that one ought to pay attention to the real world, what is usually meant is that one ought to acknowledge the necessities of reality. As I argued in chapter 2, if metaphysical effective realism is true, and we are not omnipotent, then there are parts of reality which falls outside our causal ability to change them. These, I called necessities. The previous injunction 'you ought to acknowledge reality' is to be understood, I argue, as a claim to acknowledge that there are parts of reality, which we cannot control. Thus, whatever we might desire, it makes no sense to wish them away. Political realism claims that we would do well in recognizing political necessities for what they are: hard constrains.

However, what these necessities actually are is yet to be determined. A step further is taken by focusing more closely on the realm of the political. Political realism is obviously interested in the political field and thus aims at pinpointing exactly these kinds of necessities that pertains to the political realm.

More precisely, political realism identifies, as I argued in the third chapter, two main necessities of politics. These two important and unavoidable elements of politics are conflict and the need for order. The commonsensical injunction of realism ('be realistic') is now clarified in its true political implication. First, you have to accept that disagreement, pluralism and conflict cannot be expunged neatly from politics, but only partially controlled and managed. Second, you must recognize that there is an inescapable need for order, which has to be satisfied as long as we are interested in our own survival. Therefore, when realists argue that you ought to be realistic, they mean, or so I claim, that you have to acknowledge the fact that conflicts are inevitable and that some system of order is required.

Thus, this following sequence of normative consequences hold true:

0. If you want to realize your preferences, then you ought to:
 1. Evaluate courses of action instead of states of affairs

2. Pay attention to reality
3. Individuate its possibilities and necessities
4. In politics, consider specifically the inevitability of conflict and the need for order

If this is correct, then there is reason to believe that political realism is a genuinely normative theory of politics, and not merely a kind of descriptive complacency as some critics would have it (Estlund 2014, 115).

I shall follow the following argumentative structure.

First, I tackle the issue of the source of normativity. This I claim to be the idea of a meta-preference, i.e. the preference towards the realization of one's preferences. This is a conditional clause that grounds the hypothetical imperatives put through by political realists.

Secondly, I claim that this way to conceptualize the meta-preference involved, leads to a particular conception of rationality, in whose view deliberation is about courses of action rather than end-states.

Thirdly, I explain the features of this conception, by claiming that it focuses on a political calculus, whereby one does not only consider the value of the final states of affairs, but also their means, their consequences and their likelihood.

Fourth, I enquire the question of whether or not this view is different from a simple view of instrumental rationality. I claim that it is clearly distinct from the pure Humean conception, because, contrary to it, it allows to discard some preferences as irrational.

Fifth, one could use this model of political calculus to criticize some specific forms of irrationality. I will discuss the case of fanatic, saint, naïve, ineffective, wishful, self-deceptive and acratia actors, and explain why they are wrong according to political realism's view of rationality.

In the sixth part, I briefly discuss how this view can contribute to the debate among ideal and non-ideal theorists. Idealistic theories are conceived without reference to the means to implement them, their likelihood of success, and their unintended consequences. This renders them, in the view of political realism, dangerous tools to guide action.

Finally, I show how this view of rationality and the meta-preference it involves are well fit for realism. I conclude by showing that it can be used to transform the descriptive claims of the first three chapters into hypothetical imperatives: that you ought to pay attention to reality, pinpoint its necessary features, and be aware specifically of the two necessities of conflict and order.

4.2 A Meta-preference

The fundamental questions of this work, what realists claim we should do, and what is the source of this normativity, have yet to be answered. Here I shall address the problem of the source of the normativity for political realism. Once this is done, it will be clear what the substantive claims of political realists are, by referring back to the previous chapters.

Since both opponents and endorsers often consider political theory to be merely descriptive, I shall start from what is considered an uncontroversial assumption in this interpretation: a subjective theory of the good. As I have argued in chapter 1, political realists, often put their emphasis on motivation and stress the fact that there are no reasons for actions that apply externally to everyone in the same way. Thus, they tend to be sceptic towards the existence of universal goods that are independent from individuals' subjective attitudes. Thus, it makes sense to consider realism, at least at first glance, as an approach whereby values are determined by preferences and desires. However, when this account combines with metaphysical realism, surprisingly objective normative constraints may be derived.

The claim, which I am going to defend here, is that wanting to realize one's desires, commits one to a normative political realism, that is, a political realism that provides reasons for action, whenever the following hypothetical condition is satisfied:

0. If you want to realize your preferences

This meta-preference can simply mean that whatever you happen to desire, you must also be motivated to pursue through your actions.

In one sense it is easy to see how preferences refer to actions rather than objects.

For instance, it makes no sense to say that I like mountains as object, yet I am not inclined to be in any causal relations with them: I do not want to be near them, watch them, go on holiday on them, skiing etc. Thus, properly it is not the object that I like, but the action that relates to it. I do not like mountains *per se*, I like going on holidays on mountains.

Thus, saying that I like strawberries, implies that there is something I would like to do with strawberries. Presumably eat them. But I might also dislike their taste and appreciate their beautiful form. In this case I still like strawberries although in a different sense from the one common sense implies. However, the point is I do not like strawberries simply, but some action related to it. Thus it generally seems that, I like something if there is some causal relationship I would like to entertain with that object.

If this is true, it makes sense to interpret desires and preferences as referring not to object or states of affairs, but to actions (even implicitly) related to those. Although often they are implicit. Everything else being equal, when I say I like strawberries it means that prefer eating them to not eating them.

Political preference seems similar. I like peace or justice if I would like to live in a peaceful world or a just society. More generally preferring an ideal means wanting to live in a world that approximates it.

Even abstract preferences seem to work in the same way. Preferring truth means having the preference for being told the truth, or for living under state of affairs where truth is out.

The reason why we do not always notice this is that when the preference is shared by many, the action is usually elided. Thus, I like pasta obviously mean I like to eat it (although it is conceivable that it might mean that I just like to look at it, cook it or throw it to pigeons, instead). However, when an unfamiliar preference is introduced one ought to specify the action. I like light has such an unclear reference, and it must be specified to be understandable at all. Context often helps here. 'I like trains' is interpreted rather differently if I am a businessman on a train, or a kid in a toy shop.

Thus, the claim that one wants to realize one's own preference should not seem particularly strange. If you desire walking in the park you must also be willing to sometimes take a walk in said park. This is not an extraordinary claim. Indeed, one can consider this to be implied by the very idea of preference. Disregarding eventual costs of acting in such a way, a preference for something must imply an inclination to do it. Of course, eventual costs could directly affect the choice of whether or not to do it, even though I maintain an inclination for it. If the park has an expensive entry fee, I might not be willing to take a walk there anymore, even if I would still enjoy said walk.

Clearly, if the realization of one's goal counts against some other goal that outweighs the first, it is reasonable to wish it not realized. However, whenever this is not the case then you are assumed to want it realized. Otherwise, it would not make sense to count it as a preference at all. The concept of preference refers to something you desire to see implemented. Everything else being equal, you have a preference for X iff you would rather live in a world where X is the case than in one where X is not the case. To have this meta-preference, then, is just what it means to have a preference.

In this view, the meta-preference in conjunction with reality can act as a filter on preferences. If reality tells us that some preference cannot be realized, then our meta-preference put forward a second order claim to abandon or reformulate our first order preference into realizable terms. While reality sets the available means, the meta-preference require me that I ought not to pursue goals for which no means are available and thus filters out those ends I might have for which no means are available.

Suppose I want everybody to earn more than the average income. Given the definition of 'average', this particular preference is logically impossible to realize. Thus, the meta-preference, under this interpretation, would give me a decisive reason to abandon it. This case seems quite plausible. However, other examples might be more controversial.

Does the impossibility of reaching the grapes count as a reason for the fox to abandon her preference (Aesop 1998; Elster 1985)? If there is really no way for the fox to get the grapes, the intuition of the previous example should carry the same force here. Of

course, this case is more dubious from an epistemic point of view, as there is no way to ascertain that there is really no way for the fox to get the grapes with any degree of certainty. The fox might be discounting some obvious means to get to the grapes and, if she suspects this, she might have reasons to hold on to her preference and keep searching. However, if by assumption we grant that getting the grapes is not just difficult but truly impossible for the fox, she should yield to her meta-preference and abandon her preference for the grapes.

Realism can be ultimately grounded on this meta-preference. If you are willing to realize your preference than you ought to be a realist. Moreover, if you are a realist, you ought to be willing to realize your own preferences. And you need to exclude from your preference ranking those preferences that are unrealizable. There is thus a double implication between the meta-preference and political realism.

This, however, looks like a moral imperative and does not seem in line with political realism's scepticism towards universal commands. Can realism claim that the will to realize one's preference is required to outweigh said preferences? Political realism does not necessarily need to do so. The meta-preference is a hypothetical assumption to draw normative conclusions that are only valid for those who share it. However, it also states that this meta-preference is extremely important for politics: if you do not have it, you would be ill fitted as a political actor. As I argued in chapter one politics, for political realists, is about getting things done.

To answer this question, let us consider as an example a lone priest in the state of Carolina of the 19th century. This priest happens to share the peculiar (for the time) disposition that white and black people ought to be treated as equal. Let us imagine, furthermore, that such a preference would be completely unrealizable in that context. Does the filtering effect of the meta-preference imply that the priest ought to give up this ideal? Are realists committed to claim that he should? If we state by assumption that this ideal is completely impossible, than it would seem to follow that according to the meta-preference it ought to be abandon.

However, such an assumption is quite unrealistic in its own way. What is more likely to be the case is that the complete, or even substantial, realization of that ideal was impossible. In this context, realists tend to claim that it is a mistake to look to implement complete equality. Realists would like to claim that it would be more rational, given this ideal, to strive to raise the awareness on the problem, or to mitigate the damaging effects of racial segregation, than to campaign for a fully-fledged racial equality.

If we fail at implementing it, there is no value in holding the right view. The ideal of racial equality is not important as such, but only as something, which we want to implement in the world. We would like to live in a world that approximates our ideal of racial equality. Indeed, we would rather live in a world where there is racial equality but we are against it, than in one where there is no racial equality and we would desire it. This means that the meta-preference suggests that the rational course of action for the priest is the one, which moves his actual world the closest to his ideal. Consequently, the priest ought to consider which means there are at his disposal to realize his ideal, how effective they are likely to be, and what other consequences they might have. The meta-preference requires to factor each ideal state in a political calculus, and thus to reformulate the original preference in terms of courses of actions.

Let us now sum up the argument from meta-preference thus far. Preferring something means that we want it to be the case. If I want something to be the case, I must want to realize it. Then since that something is whatever I want, I must want to realize whatever I want. Thus, I must adopt the way of thinking that allows me realize whatever I want the most.

We are then left with the following claims:

1. I want A
2. I want A to be the case
3. I want to realize A
4. I want to realize X (whatever A I want)
5. I ought to calculate how to realize X

If I approve of racial equality, I must want racial equality to be the case. If I want racial equality to be the case, I must want to realize racial equality. Then, since this argument can be replicated for any other preference I have, I must want to realize whatever I want. Thus, I must calculate what I realize whatever I want the most.

If we want to realize our preferences, we are committed to the view that we ought to ponder our available means attentively in order to select which one is the best in order to move the actual world closer to our desired one. This reveals the rationality of realists, who are interested in the political calculus that transforms preferences for states of affairs in preferences for courses of action. Now I am going to specify this last claim.

4.3 A Realistic perspective on practical rationality

The following analysis does not want to be a fully-fledged philosophical theory of practical reason. Neither do I intend to take a stance in the long-issued debate between substantive and instrumental interpretation of rationality.

While the former generally identifies rationality with the substantive recognition of certain legitimate ends for everyone's action, the latter conceives of rationality as an instrumental calculus of the best means for whatever (pre-rationally) chosen end. This last account of rationality is the one used by game-theoretic approaches in political science, for instance, but political philosophers, starting from Hobbes and Hume, have defended it as well. Historically, advocates of political realism have been seen as supporters of this instrumental version of rationality (Herzog 2008). Nevertheless, my aim in this chapter is to flesh out a plausible notion of rationality in line with the insights of political realism that separates itself from pure instrumental rationality.

The focus of this realistic conception of rationality is not on end-states, but on courses of action. Choices, and the evaluation of preferences which leads to them, has to take courses of action as their natural object, and ponder the whole means-ends-consequences chain.

Imagine I am considering whether I prefer to be a professor of philosophy or an astronaut. The question is fallaciously abstract and idealistic, as I am considering being a professor of philosophy or an astronaut as ideal end-states. Comparing end-states is meaningless, as their value cannot be properly assessed, if one does not factor in along with the value of the end also the cost or value of the necessary means and of the other consequences of that causal course of action. In the example above, I might in isolation consider being an astronaut more satisfying and enjoyable than being a professor. However, if I am to choose between the course of action that has the best chance of allowing me to become an astronaut, and the course of action that has the best chance of allowing me to become a professor, other considerations become relevant.

First, the course of action draw emphasis on the best available means one needs to deal with in order to reach his end-state. Although I might love to float in space, I might hate learning astrophysics (assuming this is the best available way to attempt to become an astronaut). In this case, the means can impose a significant burden on the end-state, and it is open to question if the costs are outweighed by the goal. The means, however, might as well be positive, and thus contribute to the value of the end state. For example if studying philosophy is something I genuinely enjoy doing, this would add value to the end-state of being a professor of philosophy.

Second, the most effective means available are still not guaranteed to land a success. Thus, selecting a course of action involves discounting the value of the end state by the probability of reaching it through the best means available to you. Becoming an astronaut might be inherently more difficult than becoming a professor, and thus choosing a course of action must reflect these different 'expected utilities'. Moreover, it might be more difficult to backtrack on a course of action. If I were already a PhD student in philosophy, it would be more costly for me to become an astronaut than it would be if I had just graduated at college. Thus if for whatever reason some end-state is less likely to be successful, one should rationally discount its expected utility by the likelihood of realizing it. Even if I strongly long for floating on a space station, if I fail I risk not becoming neither an astronaut nor a professor of philosophy, given that the two courses of actions are mutually exclusive.

Finally, that course of action might be also likely to produce other foreseeable consequences, which can add or subtract to its value. For example, a likely consequence of being an astronaut might be spending a lot of time away from your girlfriend, which is something one could have promised not to do. Another, less likely but presumably more discomfoting consequence, is that of dying from some accident. Even if the chance of a lethal accident in space were not particularly high, living on a space station is still more dangerous than going to most classroom. Consequences need clearly not only be negative. One might for example get childishly excited considering the extremely remote consequence of making first contact with some alien lifeform. This would add value to the course of action, although a marginal one given its low probability. Thus, the value of the course of action might need to be not only reduced or increased by the consequences, but also discounted by their likelihood of happening.

I think the reader can easily discern for himself or herself how the silly examples I employed in this discussion of rationality can be substituted with more serious and controversial ones taken from the political domain. Should I negotiate with a terrorist organization in order to free its hostages? Should I be willing to buyout other politician's votes in order to get slavery abolished? Should I make a temporary pact with Mafia in order to win an election, if only by winning it I have a chance to fight it effectively? Should I plan false-flag terrorist attacks against my own country, in order to alienate popular support from a party that plans to turn it into a communist dictatorship? Should I terrorize the people of Romagna, in order to prevent political decaying and civil war? All these questions, I claim, have no clear-cut answers. For a realist political thinker means are not always justified by ends, consequences do not always justify means, and principles do not categorically bar the use of means. Each element needs to be balanced against each other, in the particular context. Choosing a course of action is different from choosing an end-state, from allowing principle to have categorical authority on means, and from purely consequential calculations.

4.4 Political calculus

From the previous example, we might extract the following scheme:

$$\text{Appropriate course of action} = \text{best available means}^{21} + \text{end-state} * P + \text{consequences} * P$$

The value of a course of action is equal to the addition of the best means available to reach the end-state, times the probability of success, and of the consequences times their respective probability.

Rationality needs to contemplate courses of action and not just static states of affairs. There are three elements to consider beyond the value of the final state of affairs: available means, consequences, and likelihood. Whenever we just ponder states of affairs, we fail to be rational in the realistic sense I outlined because we fail to draw the necessary links between our end-states and these four elements.

First, the best available means to what you desire might make you reconsider your inclination. A realistic view of practical rationality should reflect the importance of the available means to judge appropriately if an end-state is worth getting to. I might desire to have 15 euros to go to the cinema. However, if the best means available to me to get these 15 euros is to work a month in a salt mine, I might reconsider my preference. Alternatively, I might prefer to live in a fully equal communist society, but I could not bring myself to do the dramatic deeds required to start a revolution (assuming a revolution would be the only means to it). In all these cases, even if I prefer the end-state, I do not look as favourably on the course of action. I might prefer the state in which salaries in higher education amounts to three times as much (especially given how low they are in Italy). However, I might not look favourably upon the available means to reach this state: either raise taxes or reallocate the public funds from other social expenses. Even if I would like that someone were to deploy these unpleasant reforms, I may not be willing to do so myself. Maybe some moral principle of mine holds me responsible for my actions, or I merely fear what others would think of me. This leads us to the next point.

²¹ For 'best available means' I do not intent the most effective means, but the means that offer the best tradeoffs between costs and effectiveness. A necessary means to something is by definition the best available means to it (as it is the only one)

Second, the consequences of a desired state of affairs need to be carefully considered. Suppose I spent days wandering in the Sahara desert without water. As soon as I reach a village, I saw a rusty public fountain with the faintest water stream, and a swimming pool of the brightest blue. My first desire is to jump in the swimming pool and immediately and completely quench my thirst. I would most definitively prefer the end-state in which I am swimming with my belly full of water to the one in which I am slowly quenching my thirst on the weakest of fountains. However, being a realist means that I ought to carefully consider the consequences of my actions. I know for a fact that, after a long period of serious dehydration, drinking a lot of water has dangerous, perhaps lethal, consequences. Thus, this end-state cannot be appropriately evaluated in isolation from their consequences. Even if I clearly prefer the swimming pool to the fountain, I have to add up the disvalue of a likely death. As long as I would also (reasonably) will to survive, I might end up preferring the safer, if less satisfying, course of action. To consider a political example, I could desire to remove a cruel dictator, and yet said dictator may be the only thing keeping together a country on the verge of a tribal civil war. I have to consider this and ponder whether I am willing to risk this negative consequence.

Third, the likelihood of realizing a goal is extremely important in judging what to do. My best available means are not necessarily effective means. I might be willing to live in a world of radical ecology, where none eats meat, nor drive, and is extremely conservative with water and electricity. However, if my best available means are to do so myself, I am entertaining costly means, and have an extremely low probability to get the given states, as not enough others would be moved from my example to do so themselves. Thus, if I want to bring about a more ecologically sustainable world, my acting as if I already were in such a world cannot realistically be enough to realize my preference, even though I could be an example to others by doing so. I might be willing to do so nonetheless, perhaps because I like to consider myself as an example for others more than I dislike the inconveniences that come with doing so. To be sure, this view does not prevent me from having a deontological perspective on the right kind of behavior we need to uphold for the sake of the planet. Nevertheless, realists cannot

consider such a behavior as *right* and effective if what one cares about is making the world better and not just being a model for others.

4.5 More than instrumental rationality?

This realistic view of rationality shares some similarities with Humean instrumental rationality but it is ultimately different, as the goals are not just taken as fixed, but enter the calculation. Clearly, these views are similar, as they do not make assumptions on the value of ends, which is in both cases purely subjective. Both accounts are, in fact, subjectivist about value. However, by being applied to the course of actions and not strictly on end-state, this realistic view of rationality provides a more nuanced understanding of the relationship between end-states, means and consequences. A political actor cannot conceive the value of ends as given, but rather he has to adjudicate it depending on the cost of the best means available and their consequences.

Let us take a traditional advocate of instrumental rationality for a comparison: David Hume. Hume famously said that “Tis not contrary to reason to prefer the destruction of the whole world to the scratching of my finger’ (Hume 2007, 128). Hume’s remark is built on the following assumptions: (1) that there are two end-states, the destruction of the world and the scratching of a finger; (2) that they are mutually exclusive²²; and (3) that it is rational to prefer the second to the first. What can be said about this from a realistic conception of rationality?

First, one needs to grant the assumption that some course of action that leads to the destruction for the world is available. Else, the conception of rationality I outlined above would imply that, if no course of action is available, the probability of realizing the end-

²² I am interpreting here Hume’s remark under the assumption that the destruction of the world is the only and thus best available mean to avoid the pain of scratching my finger. It could be more radically interpreted as to mean that it is just one way to avoid the pain, that I happen to prefer to others (more reasonable) like avoiding to get the finger scratched in the first place, or healing it later. I that these, if available, are less costly way to realize one’s preference. Although, I can see that if one wants to be radical, he could entertain the possibility that some kind of idiosyncratic fatalism and fear of medicines would make such easy solutions to the problem of the scratching of a finger worse than the destruction of the world.

state is 0, and thus the expected value of said state would be 0 as well. Realistically, not many people would have such an option, but to accept Hume's challenge we need to concede this. Hence, along with the value, which it is by assumption assigned to destruction of the world, one needs to consider the value and effectiveness of the best available means and its consequences. One could perhaps still choose this course of action even when he considers the brutal means and the dramatic consequences involved. If one simply lacks empathy for others, he might still worryingly consider that his own death figures among the negative consequences. This inevitable consequence of destroying the world might force him to reconsider the value of the course of action he judged preferable. Again, if one has some sudden bleakness of desires, due to depression or loss of hope in humanity, he might be forced to reconsider by factoring in exactly what he needs to be doing in the best available course of action that would result in the destruction of the world. Perhaps, he truly would prefer that the world were destroyed, but he would never accept being the one who causally bring about such destruction.

Consider now what this realistic view of practical rationality would have to say about the scratching of a finger. Here, Hume's example is built up to assume that there is no avoiding the scratching of a finger, unless we straight up destroy the world. This would mean, that the only, and thus the best available, course of action to avoid the mild pain to my finger is to cause the whole world to cease to exist. The question now is the following: does removing the mild pain to my finger outweigh the costs of causing the destruction of the world? In addition, again, what is my opinion about the consequences of destroying the world? Am I willing to destroy all the people I care about? And if there is none I care about, because I feel no empathy, am I willing to destroy myself? Is the dissatisfaction with the scratching of a finger so great that it outweigh every other pleasurable experience I might have?

It is true that 'at present we have no adequate theory of the substantive rationality of goals and desires, to put to rest to Hume's statement' (Nozick 1994, 139–140). This realistic view of rationality, however, does allow some goals to be revised in light of the best means available and its consequences. Even if it could never completely dismiss the

rationality of Humean psychopaths, it does a lot more to contain them and render them less likely. By making a requirement of practical rationality that one considers also the likelihood of the end-state, the cost of the means, and the expected consequences, one should be more wary of his desires. If preferring the destruction of the world to the scratching of a finger violates any of these rational requirements, it could indeed be said that this preference is indeed 'contrary to reason'. Surely, some men will 'just want to watch the world burn'. Fewer men, however, would do the burning themselves, and even fewer would be willing to burn along with it.

Contrary to Hume, one recent accounts of instrumental rationality imposes some requirements on ends. The famous Von Neumann-Morgenstern utility theorem requires us to have complete, transitive and continuous preferences. As Nozick notes:

'one tiny step beyond Hume, not something he need resist, I think, are the constraints on how preferences hang together [...] Contemporary decision theory takes this one step beyond Hume: although it does not say that any individual preference is irrational, it does say that a group of them together can be' (Nozick 1994, 140).

The realistic theory I outlined here is actually similar, insofar as it simply requires decisions to be consistent with a set of goal and well informed in the causal connections of reality, which is necessary to realize these preferences. Thus, there is a sense in which a preference is contrary to reason, but this does not depend on some universal truth of moral philosophy, rather it depends on the set of goals I have at the present. For example, I might like cyanide's flavour, and thus count it among my preferences. For as long as I hold my desire to survive more dearly, however, I would decline eating cyanide. In this sense, my preference for eating cyanide can be deemed irrational. In this situation, Hume would say that both the two incompatible preferences, which I hold simultaneously, are rational. This reasoning can also be extended to a conflict between the preference and the meta-preference. I might hold the preference to satisfy my preferences and the preference for a society in which everybody earns more than the average. As the second contradicts the first it is to be abandoned.

This realistic conception of practical reason, by focusing on choice among courses of action, emphasizes three points: the cost of the best available means, their

consequences and their likelihood to reach our desired end-state. You do not maximize ends whatever the means, as the fanatics do. You do not forbid some means, whatever their end, as moralists do. You do not allow any means, in order to have good consequences. All of these considerations take place at the same time. When we deliberate, we balance them against one another. This view filters away preferences which are unrealizable, or that have no effects on the world, or that are an end in itself, or that one would be utopian if one would hope to realize.

The political calculus of means-ends and consequences is what determines the shift from preferences among final states of affairs to preferences among courses of action. Preferences among mere end-states, detached from means and consequences, are irrelevant if what matters to us is the realization of these states of affairs in the world in which we live. If we want to realize successfully what we want, we ought to reframe our choice to target courses of actions that are available to us instead of mere end-states.

Pure instrumental rationality and the realistic rationality I outlined are distinct. Being instrumentally rational means finding out the best means to our ends.

Instrumental rationality calls for goals, which are conceived abstractly from reality. Reality comes in only later to filter the possible goals among the many one could come up without reference to the world.

First, I conceive a list of all the possible states of affairs that are valuable to me, with an endless supply of fascinating but unrealizable goals: from eating strawberries on Mars, to watching a western movie in the Mariana Trench, to teaching cats about theories of justice etc. Then I figure out which of these goals are feasible, and I end up with a more mundane list of things I want: earning a good salary, leaving in a warm and sunny country, going out with my girlfriend etc. Then again, from this list, I select which of the claims makes the strongest claim on my limited resources, and thus I order them from the ones I care the most the ones I care very little about, thus deciding what to do.

However, this is clearly an unrealistic conception of rationality. Realistic rationality, as a matter of fact, is deeply rooted on the contingent reality one happens to live into. It is the real world that reveals what means are available, and this in turns allows me to

focus on what I might want among the already restricted domain of my ends. Thus, preferences are always muddled with contingency: they are selected from what is possible here and now, rather than from an abstract domain of all conceivable states of affairs.

One does not waste time and resources to deliberate about what lays beyond his capacity to do. I do not have to deliberate whether I want to smoke a cigar on Saturn. Given that I lack the means, the question of whether it is desirable lacks urgency. Of course, I could raise the question and find out whether or not I would care about such bizarre preference. However, this is not a worry that would arise naturally. Even more clearly, a roman centurion does not ponder whether he would like to visit the Old-Faithful, and then regret that he cannot. The question just does not arise for him. A moralistic philosopher might perhaps provide an argument that he would if he could. Maybe from the admiration that romans proved towards nature, and their thirst to expand, one could deduce that they would have wanted to visit the Old-Faithful, if they knew about it and could somehow reach it. However, these conditionals are so distant to the context of the agent that it makes whatever conclusion we derive from them extremely dubious.

Contrary to such idealistic extremes, a realistic notion of rationality tells us what ends are appropriate for any human beings. The realistic conception of rationality I presented balances means and goals, and allows one to say that some ends are to be rejected, in light of the means they require to be realized or in light of the undesired consequences they produce. While instrumental rationality produces means for given ends, the realistic conception produces courses of action, of which both means, ends and consequences are necessary cogs.

While pure instrumental rationality is abstract, a realistic conception of rationality is muddier. Here, the ideal end-states only counts as desirable in connection to the means they require, the likelihood of being implemented and the consequences they carry. This is why, I believe, the view I presented is more in line with political realism's distaste for abstraction.

4.6 Irrational agents

Political realism can use these criteria to criticize several actions as irrational. In this section, I consider different types of agents whom realists deem irrational, because of the view of rationality that characterizes political realism, as I claim. Those are the saint, the fanatic, the naïve, the ineffective, the wishful, the self-deceptive and the akratic agents. These flaws are by no means mutually exclusive. For example, a saint might also be naïve, while a fanatic might be also wishful. However, I believe that each of these failures is distinctive.

These irrational behaviours can be represented in three types of irrationality. Firstly, there are actors that counts as irrational because they reject the calculus among means, ends and consequences (fanatic, saint and naïve). Secondly, there are those who do undertake the political calculus, but do so mistakenly (the ineffective, the wishful and the self-deceptive). Third, there are the most irrational ones, who do entertain the calculus correctly, but then end up doing something else than what they deliberated (the akratic actors).

These kinds of failures are most relevant in the political arena, and here the critiques of realism are most persuasive. However, realists can still condemn these behaviours as irrational even when they appear in other areas of human lives. For this reason, for each irrational actor I discuss, I will propose examples applicable to both the political sphere and other areas, even though my main attention rests within the first one.

I call *fanatic* a political actor who is not willing to entertain the political calculus but takes his end-state to justify whatever means or consequences. This person is not rational insofar as he is willing to sacrifice anything for a goal. Whereas the moralist actor excludes in principle a certain set of available means, which are deemed immoral, the fanatic actor is so committed to his goal that any means become available and beyond judgment. According to this view, one could not label someone as fanatic, if he were to ponder the course of action to undertake only to find out that some abhorrent means are actually outweighed by his goal. This is because, according to realists, the

crucial element to be considered rational is to enter the political calculus of means, ends and consequences. Realists do not criticize the particular goals chosen by the fanatic actor, nor the extreme means they employ. Rather, they condemn the fanatic's refusal to reconsider his goal with respect to the means that such a goal requires to be realized and their consequences.

Weber consider an example of fanatic actor.

Finally, there is the duty to tell the truth. For an absolutist ethic, this duty is paramount. Some people have inferred from this, therefore, that what was needed was the publication of all documents, especially those that incriminated our own nation. And what followed from this unilateral publication was a confession of guilt, itself one-sided, unconditional and heedless of its consequences.(Weber 2013, 83)

In this case, the goal of not telling lies is deemed worthy, whatever means (the publication of the state's secrets) and whatever the consequences (damage to the nation).

A proper political calculus requires an actor to balance means, probability of success and consequences along with the goal. Therefore, unreflective fanatics are to be criticized as irrational as they are from the very beginning bound to allow extremely abhorrent means for the slightest possibility to realize their goal.

A *saint* is irrational because he focuses too much, on whether means are permissible independently from ends or consequences. The saint is a deontological actor. If he allows principles to block means categorically, he does not appropriately enter the balancing. Consider Machiavelli's remark about Christian ethics. According to his moral doctrine, a good Christian would refuse to employ violence for whatever means. He would rather 'turn the other cheek' to their offender. However, politics requires the occasional use of violence. If one is always against violence, one would be a bad politician. This does not mean that one can use violence lightly, whenever one so pleases. On the contrary, an 'economy of violence' is often encouraged in Machiavelli's thought, because employing it has some costs and one can ruin himself by doing it too often. As he often remarks, one needs not always to do 'evil', but be prepared to do so when the situation requires it. True Christians would never consider the benefits of

being evil, and would avoid doing so whatever the costs. Thus, Christians might make good men, but poor politicians. Weber gave a good description of such a person:

‘you must be a saint in all respects or at least want to be one; you must live like Jesus, the apostles, St. Francis, and their like, and then this ethic will make sense and be the expression of true dignity. But not otherwise. For if, following this unworldly ethic of love, you ought to "resist not him that is evil with violence" - the politician must abide by the opposite commandment: "You shall use force to resist evil, for otherwise you will be responsible for its running amok"' (Weber 2013, 82)

Another paradigmatic case of saint is the Kantian who refuses to tell lies under whatever circumstances. Even when he is faced by a murderer inquiring the whereabouts of his children, he thinks he ought to answer truthfully.

If such Christians and Kantians were realistically rational, they would be willing to at least consider the consequences and goals, under circumstances that require the use of violence or lies, and to check if these are worthy of infringing the categorical rule. It might still be the case that they end up deciding against it, if the benefits are not deemed good enough to outweigh the costs. However, they would have done so with a realistically acceptable reason. Otherwise, realists could not consider them rational, as they can give up extremely positive consequences in exchange for a minimal violation of principle. Whenever certain means are excluded in principle without entering in the political calculus of ends, means and consequences, we have the specific irrational agent I called saint.

An actor is *naïve* if in the political calculus he does not give the appropriate weight to the probability of success. In an abstract choice between two states of affairs, one might fail to give the appropriate weight to the probability of success. A state might for example be slightly better, but significantly less likely to be realized. By considering courses of action, on the contrary, we are led to balance one against the other. Sometimes, taking a risk for a significant better end-state might be worth it, if the expected utility is greater. Other times, it is just more sensible to focus on more assured if less spectacular improvements. For example, one might find better the situation in which no government can wield nuclear weapons, to that were two powers have the monopoly

of atomic weapons. However, the two end-states needs to be compared with the respective likelihood of being brought about. Let us assume a situation in which two countries have the monopoly of nuclear weapons. It will be extremely hard to persuade them both to dismantle their arsenal, insofar as each of them would benefit immensely by defecting from such an agreement. On the contrary, a more likely strategy to contain the damage nuclear weapons could cause would be to persuade the two countries to find an agreement as to limit their own arsenals and to police other minor powers that could try. Even if the first state might be sensibly deemed more valuable on its own, it must be given less weight in deciding what course of action to undertake for its meagre probability of success. Discovering the true perfect society is not very important in politics. Nor is it designing its flawless blueprint. According to realism, what matters is pushing our society ever so slightly closer to the one we desire. On this account, the probability of success is not an accidental feature, but a crucial factor in deciding what course of action to undertake. Not paying attention to it miss an important part of the political calculus and can lead to realistically irrational decisions.

Saint, fanatic and naïve actors fall within the first class of irrationality, as all these actors fail to enter the political calculus of means, ends and consequences. They are distinct, however, in the reasons they employ for refusing the calculus and the specific areas they choose. For a fanatic actor the end-state they yearn for justifies whatever consequences and means. No means is too dreadful, and no consequence is abhorrent enough to dissuade a fanatic. A saint, on the contrary, is entirely focused on means, as it allows principles to categorically dictate what means are impermissible, whatever goal or consequence might happen to follow. A naïve actor on the other hand is one that does not consider the likelihood of the end-state, which is a crucial part of the calculus.

An *ineffective* actor is an actor whose knowledge of reality and necessity is insufficient to allow him to choose effectively among viable courses of action. This kind of actor is rational in the sense that he does consider the means and the consequences, but he is just wrong about them. External reality is objective, according to realists, and thus one who is mistaken about it is objectively wrong. In Williams's famous example, he considers the following situation: 'the agent believes that this stuff is gin, when it is

in fact petrol. He wants a gin and tonic. Has he reason, or a reason, to mix this stuff with tonic and drink it?' (Williams 1981, 102). Due to an epistemically incorrect assessment of reality, the actor takes a course of action that does not lead to his goal, and suffers other negative consequences. Let us consider another example. A political actor wishes to turn a cruel dictatorship into a democracy and rightly considers the course of action. He concludes that a military intervention is the best available means to reach his goal, that it is likely to reach his goal, and that no negative consequence is to be expected. In particular, he expects this war not be particularly hard nor deadly, as the dictator's army is weak and the population would rejoice and support the liberating army. However, both these factual assumptions happens to be wrong and the military intervention ends up being long, deadly, and incapable of instituting a durable democracy. Thus, he undertook a course of action that he would not have entertained if he had been better informed about the world. From a merely formal point of view, an ineffective actor is rational as he honestly engages in the realistic calculus of means-ends-consequences, but he reasons correctly from erroneous data. Hence, in order to judge him properly, we need to shift our attention to the reason why his data are incorrect. Can we regard him as blameworthy for ignoring certain facts? If the facts were potentially available to him, realists cannot but judge him irrational, as he could and should have known reality better. Clearly, it is problematic from an epistemic point of view to determine in what cases the facts were potentially available in any circumstances. However, the inevitability of conflict and the need for order, which I discussed in the previous chapter, are the most important features of political reality that one ought to acknowledge. As they are knowable for realists, if a political actor is mistaken about them is always at fault.

Wishful actors are instead agents who fall prey of wishful thinking. Just as ineffective actors are mistaken about the world in which they live, wishful actors refuse, consciously or unconsciously, to recognize it for what it is. As I argued in chapter one, reality is effective, independently from one's beliefs or wants. It is thus a self-defeating mistake to allow our ideals to distort our beliefs about the world. If we do this, we misrepresent means and consequences, thus failing the rationality test I outlined. Even

more than ineffective actors, wishful actors are to be blamed as irrational, because not only should they have known reality, but also they refused to know it. In Aesop's example of the fox and the grapes, a wishful-thinking fox would simply refuse to acknowledge the fact that there are no ways for her to get the grapes (suppose this is true). She would never enjoy living in a world so cruel that allows tasty grapes to escape her reach. Consequently, she is willing to believe falsely that there must be some way to reach the grapes. As she pointlessly insists to look for means that just are not there, she misses on the food she could actually reach and ends up starving.

A more serious example of this kind of irrationality is given by a variation on the classic theme of 'dirty hands' (Walzer 1973). When a politician refuses to torture a terrorist in order to obtain information that would prevent an attack and save thousands of lives, in Walzer's eyes he is refusing to use dreadful and immoral means that would violate his moral principles. However, let us suppose that in this case such a politician is not being 'saint', but wishful. He does not consider that torture is never allowed, even when the lives of thousands are at stake, but he is convinced that 'there must be a better way' to prevent the attack. He would indeed torture him in order to save these many lives, if he were to believe that this was the only way to accomplish that, but he is naïvely persuaded that reality must be offering a cleaner way that would allow him to prevent the attack without compromising his moral purity. However, in this case there actually is no other way to acquire the vital information, short of using torture. The politician is not an ineffective actor, either, because she does not simply erroneously consider the facts and judge mistakenly that there are other ways. She wants to believe that there are others, indeed better ways, to do it. It is this very desire that distorts his beliefs. The best means available in this example are very costly and thus the politician is wishfully trying to convince herself that there are surely better ways to obtain the same result without paying so high a cost. Being wishful means rejecting accurate beliefs in favour of beliefs that would fit better with our desires. According to political realists this is a mistake, because it affects our deliberation in ways that would frustrate the attempt to realize one's preferences.

Wishful and self-deceptive actors follow within the second class of irrationality, insofar as they both entertain the political calculus and both are mistaken in the data they use. In the first case the actor makes a computational mistake, in the second one he deludes himself in some of the data. A difference between the two actors is perhaps to be found in the degree of resilience of their fallacy. Ineffective actors would promptly acknowledge and correct their mistakes once pointed out. They might offer some resistance out of pride, perhaps, but ultimately their desire to realize their goal would override other considerations. On the contrary, wishful actors might not be so inclined to amend their mistaken beliefs, insofar as they offer psychological comfort to them. If however, they truly want to realize their goal and they prize it more than their psychological comfort, they should revise their irrational position. If they do not they are irrational in the realistic sense, because they fail to realize their own preferences.

These two types are very similar from an external perspective. So similar, in fact, that it becomes difficult to distinguish among the two in empirical cases. Clearly, a mistake in good faith is logically distinct from a case of self-delusion, because in the first case one commits to a wrong assessment of the evidence in good faith, whereas in the other there is a deep inclination towards being mistaken, either for short term psychological comfort, or to postpone the pain of disenchantment. However, the difference from the two attitudes would not be noticeable to the external observer.

An actor is self-deceptive if he does not truly have preference for 'X', but the expressive preference for 'displaying preference X'. For example, I might want others to think of me as one of these dandy intellectuals who like Dadaism. In this case, I am not interested into realizing this preference for Dadaism (going to expositions, reading books, watching documentaries, buying artworks etc.) as much as professing it. Indeed, I would not in this case display a preference for Dadaism as such, but a preference for expressing a preference for Dadaism. On the other hand, I may say I am all for a free market society with a minimal state. However, I am not really thinking that neither I, nor the majority of people would be really better off in such a situation. I just enjoy when others think of me as the radical sort, because I like to stand out among others who hold blandly reasonable views. I do not really prefer living under a minimal state, but I do

have a preference for indulging myself in discussing such an ideal society, while thinking that I am one of the few who understands how things ideally ought to be, even if these thoughts do not make the current situation slightly better.

A self-deceptive actor is not a deceptive actor. Political realists would have no problem with the second. Indeed, some of them, like Machiavelli, recommend deception if this is used consciously in order to reach some other good. However, self-deception is different. One deceives oneself when one believes he does not really prefer *what he prefers*, but something else. I might believe I enjoy studying, while all I want is just to appear like one who enjoys studying. If this is true, then I am having false beliefs about my preferences. This is problematic, in my view, because it leads one to perform the political calculus with false preferences. This would lead to pick a course of action, which is not in line with one's preference, or maybe even fail to carry through with it. If I think I enjoy studying, I might choose to go to university. However, if this is a case of self-deception, I might end up failing to put up with the studying and never graduate, or I simply find myself during something, which I do not enjoy, whereas I might have done something else instead.

This case would then be similar to the previous one. Like a wishful actor has false beliefs about the facts of the world, because he wants them to be different from what they are, so does the self-deceptive actor have false beliefs about his own preferences, because he wants them to be different from what they are. Of course, there is nothing wrong with having such 'second-order desires (Frankfurt 1988, 21). The problem is when they distort our own beliefs about what we want. In this way, they alter the political calculus and lead us to courses of actions, which do not help us to realize our desires.

It remains open to question whether from an external perspective one can distinguish a saint from a self-deceptive actor. In Sartre's vivid and famous description of the problem of dirty hands, it is unclear whether Hugo is a saint or a self-deceptive actor:

'You cling so tightly to your purity, my lad! How terrified you are of sullyng your hands. Well, go ahead then, stay pure! What good will it do, and why even bother coming here among us? Purity is a concept of fakirs

and friars. But you, the intellectuals, the bourgeois anarchists, you invoke purity as your rationalization for doing nothing. Do nothing, don't move, wrap your arms tight around your body, put on your gloves. As for myself, my hands are dirty. I have plunged my arms up to the elbows in excrement and blood. And what else should one do? Do you suppose that it is possible to govern innocently?' (Shepard 1965).

Saints and self-deceptive actors are clearly logically distinct, as the first one sincerely refuses to employ means that are categorically excluded by some principles; the other prefers being one who knows what would be best to being one who does something good. However, it is very difficult from an external perspective to distinguish among the two. One would in fact observe the same behaviour from these actors, albeit for different reasons: they claim to hold the moral high ground and then refuse to act for anything short of perfection. Both these kinds of actors are similar under another respect, however: they both express a lack of motivation to entertain a certain course of action and a lack of personal responsibility towards the goal one professes to have. While the self-deceptive actor does not truly have the goal he professes to have, the saint does not take seriously his goals, as he allows potentially even small violations of principles to invalidate very important goals.

Ineffective, wishful, and self-deceptive actors are all similar cases insofar as they all miscalculate the most favourable course of action. They do so for different reasons and on different parts of it, but they all do so nonetheless. While ineffective actors fail to account correctly for some of the evidence, and thus miscalculates means, likelihood and consequences of the end-state, wishful actors are misled by their own desires and assess the world wrongly. Self-deceptive actors, finally, have their desires deceive them about their own desires. In all of these cases, the political calculus is distorted and the actor fails to realize his own preferences.

The final case of irrationality is the *akratic* actor. In Hume's view of instrumental irrationality there is nothing necessarily wrong with akrasy. He even goes as far as saying that: 'Tis as little contrary to reason to prefer even my own acknowledged lesser good to my greater, and have a more ardent affection for the former than for the latter' (Hume 2007, 128). Realists, on the contrary, may consider akratic actors irrational, because

they are not willing to undertake the course of action that he considers the best for him. As Ovid puts it: '*video meliora proboque, deteriora sequor*' (Ovid 1972, 59): I see and approve of the better, but I follow the worst. This is a much-debated issue in moral philosophy, and I only want to consider here briefly how it can be disentangled by focusing on courses of actions rather than end-states. This realistic conception of rationality might help to explain why some agents seem akratic but are actually quite rational, if insincere. It is entirely possible and plausible that one looks positively on some end-state, and yet refuses to undertake the course of action that leads to it. Realists explain this with the fact that he forgets to consider the costs of the necessary means of doing it. It might be the case that the costs for him outweigh the benefits of the end-states. Thus, he would be realistically rational in avoiding this course of action, as long as he does the calculation and carefully considers his preferences. In the example, Medea is either irrational, because she did not entertain the cost of the means of her revenge, or she is rational but insincere. In this second case, she would have entertained the political calculation only to find out that her revenge was more valuable to her than the lives of her children. This is indeed how Hobbes interpreted Ovid's sentence: 'that saying, as pretty as it is, is not true; for though Medea sees many reasons to forebear killing her children, yet the last dictate of her judgment was, that the present revenge on her husband outweighed them all, and thereupon the wicked action *necessarily* followed' (Hobbes and Bramhall 1999, 34).

Another example of an akratic actor in a political setting is a politician who knows that some reform would be ideal for the majority of the people. However, this does not mean that he is willing to be the one implementing said reform, because he might not want to pay the related costs. Perhaps the reform is unpopular in his constituency, and thus it might cost him his re-election. He is only akratic, and thus realistically irrational, if he truly cares more about the common good than about his re-election, and yet refuse to implement the reform. If the politician holds the reversed preference ranking, he is not an irrationally akratic actor, but rather a more common insincere, but rational, one. Even though from an external point of view it is very difficult to distinguish among the

two, realists would tend to suspect that rational insincerity is a better explanation than irrational akrasy.

True irrational akrasy is for political realists the most incomprehensible kind of irrationality. Because if one does take the time and effort to undertake the political calculus correctly, thus selecting the best course of action according to his own preferences, it makes no sense not to follow through with it.

To sum up, the political calculus among courses of actions lead with a plurality of different types of behaviour, which political realism criticize as irrational:

REJECT POLITICAL CALCULUS		
Fanatic	Saint	Naïve
Fails to consider the cost of means and consequences	Fails to consider the benefits of end-states and consequences whose means are forbidden	Fails to consider likelihood of success
MISTAKEN POLITICAL CALCULUS		
Ineffective	Wishful	Self-deceptive
Fails to acquire available knowledge of means and consequences	Knowledge of means and consequences, distorted by preferences	Knowledge of his own preferences, distorted by other preferences
IRRELEVANT POLITICAL CALCULUS		
Akratic		
Fails to carry through the political calculus		

4.7 Realistic Rationality and Ideal Theory

My notion of realistic rationality allows to capture the ideas behind the vast array of critiques against ideal theories. The methodological debate about ideal and non-ideal theories has become extremely rich but also confused insofar as the opposition between ideal and non-ideal theories is understood in different ways depending on the authors. There is not a single, uncontroversial way to delineate the relation between ideal and

non-ideal, and frame the debate around this. If we start from a generic and commonsensical definition of ideal theory, however, we could see how it can be linked directly to what we discussed above. In particular, the realistic view of rationality, with its emphasis on choices among courses of actions is particularly useful in emphasizing some problems with ideal theorizing.

'Ideal theory' is a term of art, invented by Rawls, to designate theories of justice that provides 'the nature and aims of a perfectly just society' (Rawls 2009, 8). Roughly speaking ideal theory refers to 'utopian or idealistic theory' (Valentini 2012, 654), and aims 'to work out the principles of justice that should govern an ideal society' (Robeyns 2008, 3). From a realistic perspective, the problem with this kind of ideal theories is that they describe the good society as an ideal end-state, and ignore the considerations, whose importance is revealed by a rationality that deals with courses of actions. Such theories thus result detached from pertinent concerns about the costs and efficacy of the best available means to reach the ideal end-state they advocate and the consequences they are likely to have. Although ideal theorizing can be a useful and legitimate enterprise in its own way, as it allows honing our judgment of a given end-state, according to political realism it is flawed. In fact, even if we were to get an uncontroversial account of what the best society looks like, this alone would not be sufficient to claim that we ought to have it. Our realistic model of rationality recommends that we focus on courses of actions rather than on static state of affairs, and this applies also to ideal theories that describe ideal societies as ideal end-states. To claim that it is rational to reform our society according to some ideal plan, it is essential to consider what the best available means are, how likely are they to succeed, and what other consequences shall derive from them.

A 'realistic utopia' (not in Rawls's sense) would be instead an arrangement of society, which presents a credible course of action to implement it. This would imply figuring out what are the best available means to get to the ideal end-state, and control that these means are not excessively expensive and reasonably likely to result in the desired outcome. Moreover, eventual consequences that could come up need to be accounted for. An entirely unrealistic utopia is, under this view, an institutional favour, which (a)

has no way to be realized, (b) requires excessively costly means, (c) carries costly consequences, (d) is unlikely to be realized. In short, the same critiques, which we have addressed against desirable end-states, can be proposed against ideal societies. Let us see more precisely these different kind of shortcomings.

(a) If there are no means to reach what is proposed as ideal society, then it is clear that the expected value of our society is zero. From a realist perspective, it does not matter how much we value this end-state because the value we should expect to get from trying to realize it is zero. While trying to implement an unrealizable arrangement we pay the cost of the means and incur in probable negative consequences, without gaining from our goal in return. Consider for example the Rawlsian theory of justice. As I have argued in the previous chapter, Rawls argues that such an arrangement would be self-reinforcing, because the education of children²³ would make them reasonable, and thus willing to consent and comply with the requirements of his ideal well-ordered society. However, he does not tell us how one can get from a non-ideal society to well-ordered one. There is no causal chain to get there, no means that we can take, no course of action likely to produce the result. At best, his theory is incomplete. In order for the ideal to be of normative relevance for people outside the self-reinforcing well-ordered society, realists deem it needs to be amended to include an account of the means to get there, and of the consequences, which will result.

Contrary to political realism, Estlund reject this point (Estlund 2014) He thinks that ideals never worsen the current situation, even when they are completely unrealistic. For example, if I believe that we should all donate to charity, this is clearly an unrealizable ideal. However, even if the ideal that all be generous is not realized, from the fact that a handful of people adopt it and donate to charity, the world would get better. However, I believe that while this might be true in theory it misses the point, and is deficient in practice. It misses the point, because the critique is that political idealists

²³ The congruence theory and the moral psychology of individuals account for the stability of the theory of justice in Rawls's 1971 work. Here I am interested only in the education part of Rawls's discourse. If we consider this case, Rawls happens to have the same problem Rousseau had in his Social Contract when he had to account for natural individuals' being able to behave like proper citizens that prioritize the General Will to their individual interests.

do not enter the political calculus. This of course would not always penalize them, but in some cases, it might frustrate their preferences and actually worsen the situation. Moreover, assuming many others would follow them, they might channel their resources into projects that turn out to be dead end instead of other more modest but beneficial nonetheless.

(b) Other theories fail to be realistic when the desirable end-state they design can only be realized through extremely costly means. Suppose I am sincerely convinced that the best design for a society is a perfectly egalitarian one. However, suppose the apparent best means to get there is through a forceful suppression of the social institution of family, as it is the only way to fully obtain equality of opportunity. Nonetheless, it seems hard to imagine that such a regime would immediately gain unanimous support by all the people. Although the end-state might be desirable (let us grant this), the costly means, which one has to employ to bring it about, need to be considered when deliberating whether or not one ought to support the end-state. It might still be the case that one ends up thinking that many generations of perfect equality of opportunity do outweigh the termination of a traditionally valuable social institution. However, this needs to be explicitly addressed; otherwise, the theory would be incomplete and incapable of grounding its normative conclusion.

(c) A third way in which theories are unrealistic emerges when they do not account for the costs of consequences. For example, I may persuasively argue that the best and most valuable arrangement is one in which people are under a system of absolute equality of income. Let us assume that there is an easy and effective way to implement such a regime, so that we do not encounter problems (a), (b) or (c) here. If we think that equality is the most important virtue of a political regime, and that this arrangement is the one that maximize it, then we could conclude that this is rational for us to bring it about. In addition, we would be right in these considerations. However, this argument would be incomplete, as another point is left unaccounted for. We have not yet considered in this example the relevant consequences, which might follow the implementation of such a regime. For example, it is often argued that equality of income would reduce incentives to be productive and efficient. Consequences, as well as means,

have costs, and thus costs might be enough to outweigh the benefits we expect from a given end-state.

(d) The best available means may be extremely unreliable to get the desired result, even if they are not excessively costly. Thus, resources might be more productively employed in some other way, which is more likely to produce a result. For example, I may consider that the best available means to successfully lead to well-ordered society is writing a treaty on how people ought to behave in order to raise education and awareness about the injustice of current arrangements. The idea that preaching and being an example for others is a good way to influence them is often criticised by realists as futile intellectualism and naiveté of political idealists. However, this course of action seems to realists to have a limited impact on the world, and thus it proves ineffective as a means to the realization of such well-ordered society.

The parallel between ideal theories and the end-states discussed before should now be clear. This realistic view of rationality is not only relevant to the deliberation of actors, but it directly affects what a political theory should be like in order for its recommendation to be persuasively normative. It directly invalidates the normative claims of theories, which deal only with ideal end-states without considering the actual course of action towards them.

4.8 A model fit for realism

Like all other conceptions of rationality, the one I presented above is a normative model. It does not necessarily picture the way we do in fact reason, but it provides an ideal model of what good reasoning might look like. Thus, one might quite sensibly ask why one ought to be rational at all.

The normative power of instrumental rationality is often easily accepted (although not by everyone, for a critical discussion, see Korsgaard 1997). As Rousseau said: 'he who wills the end wills the means also' (Rousseau 2002, 21). If you want to pursue your goals, you are plausibly going to have at least some reasons to pursue their means. This

reason might not be a decisive reason, as other concerns may prevail, but it is one reason nonetheless. Intrinsic to our having preferences, is the fact that we want to realize them. Thus, assuming that desiring something is having a reason to get it, we also have a reason to want the means that allows us to realize the end. Consistently defying instrumental rationality is damaging for the actor, insofar as he would be sabotaging its preferences, whatever they are. Thus, as long as he has preferences, he has reasons for heeding rationality as well.

In the view of rationality suggested above, I suggested that one is rationally required to consider courses of action instead of static states of affairs, thus considering also the likelihood of success and costs of the best means available to him, and the costs of the eventual consequences caused into being.

Why should one adopt such model of rationality? Our willingness to have our goals realized, as opposed merely to contemplate them, leads one to adopt this notion of rationality as the best model for effective choice. If one is just interested in figuring out the best way of life, he might not be willing to adopt such model. However, he needs to be aware and prepared to fail repeatedly whenever he contemplates practical action. If, on the contrary, one wants to make our actual way of living better, then he needs to consider what the best available means and the likely consequences of his action would be. The best, as common sense suggests²⁴, is enemy of the good. The best end-state may not be a 'good' state from a realist perspective, given that it might be unrealizable, or it might entail costly means or consequences, or might require sensible amounts of resources in exchange for a negligible probability of success.

This model of rationality would justify why realists insist that we ought to pay attention to reality and its necessities.

Given that the available means and the consequences are decisively important when choosing a course of action, one has to focus on reality. The world around us indirectly influences our choices, by selecting a set of means from which we can pick, and

²⁴ 'Le mieux est l'ennemi du bien'(Voltaire 1825, 74), says Voltaire, quoting an italian saying.

establishing what consequences would casually follow. This is why political realists urge us to be attentive towards reality. We ought to make the effort to know what the actual circumstances are like, if we want to make an informed choice. Especially important for this is knowing which state of affairs are necessary, since all available paths lead to them, and those which are impossible, as no course of action would take us to them. Political realism recommends that we be particularly attentive to the necessities of order and conflict, insofar as these are of fundamental importance in politics.

The value of a course of action is influenced by reality and necessity as much as by preferences. Willing something means willing it realized. If you will something realized, you ought to be rational in the sense discussed. If you are rational in this sense, you need to consider carefully the real world and its necessities, which are especially important since they completely cancel out the value of end-states *per se*. If your goal requires that conflict be non-existent (like communitarianism), than that goal however wonderful, is cancelled out. If your goal requires that order be sacrificed, than it might be the case that by sacrificing order you invalidate the goal itself.

This view of rationality fits realism particularly well, I believe, as it can accommodate a few points that political realism is often willing to make.

First, it can explain why necessities are very important in framing the question of what one ought to do. Unrealizable states of affairs are inert preferences. For example, I might want to visit Alpha Centauri, but this state of affairs is unrealizable and cannot motivate me to do anything at all. Indeed, given that there is no calculation that leads to me visiting Alpha Centauri at all, I might as well assume don't have this preference. It would remain inert for as long as a new course of action emerges that might lead to my preference being satisfied. A particular goal is completely nullified if there are no means to reach it, as its probability and expected value become 0. Just the same, if all courses of actions lead to a certain state of affairs, the expected value of avoiding it is nullified.

Consider the goal of eradicating conflict that we debated in the last chapter. If there is no way to suppress consistently the spontaneous re-emergence of conflicts, then one needs to reconsider the goal of eliminating conflicts once and for all. If political ideals

require political order, these ideals lose their value if they require or end up undermining the political order on which they depend. In order for a preference to be rational in the realistic notion of rationality, some course of action has to lead to its satisfaction. In the absence of such a requirement, the preference itself is inert. It cannot be realized, but it also cannot motivate one to do anything at all to bring it closer to its realization, as there are no courses of actions to be chosen. Moreover, resources and endeavours spent on such a preference are wasted at the cost of other preferences, which, while less desirable, may be attainable nonetheless and thus would actually move the world closer to our desiderata.

Second, this interpretation explains the emphasis on the context typical of political realism, which I have debated in the first chapter. Both means and consequences are extremely variable throughout history. Since their assessment is essential to choose between courses of action, it is a foolish endeavour trying to discuss the merit of specific end-states without reference to the specific context. Moreover, in order to appropriately evaluate means to a given state, it is paramount to consider where one is at the moment. It makes no sense to evaluate from a 'view from nowhere' (Nagel 1989), because the means, consequences and probability of success, which are essential to judge appropriately, are context-dependent.

Third, some goals are so important that do justify their means. As Machiavelli famously pointed out: 'it is very suitable that when the deed accuses him, the effect accuses him' (Machiavelli 2009, 29). This view of rationality allows for Machiavelli's idea, which has become a tantamount of realism, that even repugnant means are permissible if the expected effect and consequences are far greater. However, Machiavelli adds that: 'when the effect is good, as was that of Romulus, it will always excuse the deed; for he who is violent to spoil, not he who is violent to mend should be reproved' (Machiavelli 2009, 29). This means that it is not true that the end justifies the means, as sometimes his claim is too easily popularized. A more accurate interpretation would be that some ends justify some means. In particular, the effect of conserving the state and the '*salus populi*' allows violent means to be employed. However, you are not allowed to use violence for the opposite effect, for example, to destroy the political order. The view of

rationality I presented as a candidate for a realistic political theory clarifies this point. The best available means, even morally repugnant ones, are permissible in choosing a course of action whose end-state and consequences are good enough to outweigh them. However, sometimes the end-state just does not outweigh the morally repugnant means. Thus, not any end excuses its means. Not any ruthless means is authorised. Machiavelli would not approve of me to start a civil war in my country in order to become rich by selling weapons, for example. It is the goal of state building, of establishing a political order, excuses violence as an instrumentally effective mean, because it outweighs it.

If a political actor wants to be said rational from a realistic point of view, he must: (1) be willing to give normative priority to the meta-preference of realizing his preferences with respect to any other individual preference; (2) entertain in the calculation of ends, means and consequences, while balancing his ends against likelihood of success, means and consequences; (3) be attentive towards reality, and the possibility and necessity it hides, among which most importantly conflict and order. If one does this, he is rational in this sense. If one also concludes the calculation in a valid and sound way (thus attributing the right weight to the right circumstances, ex. conflict and order), then he is substantively rational from a realist perspective.

Thus, we are lead to this final normative chain:

1. If you want to realize your preferences, then:
2. Evaluate courses of action instead of states of affairs
3. Pay attention to reality
4. Individuate its necessities
5. In politics, consider specifically the inevitability of conflict and the need for order

If it is true that we want to realize our preferences, then we ought to accept a realistic notion of rationality, whereby we evaluate among courses of actions pondering also the necessary means, the likelihood of success and the unintended consequences of our ideal goal. Only by adopting such a view of what it is rational to do, we can hope to be consistently successful in realizing what we desire. Thus, this is what realism claims we ought to do.

In order to conduct this political calculus correctly, we ought to pay attention to reality. Only an accurate picture of the world around us would fill in the causal knowledge to guide us in our deliberation. Which means we can take, and how likely they are to succeed is dictated by the real world, in which we live. In addition, what consequences there are is determined by reality. There are the facts of the matter, which holds a paramount weight in deliberating what it is rational to do.

Certain features of reality, are of particular relevance in the political calculus. Some states of affairs are necessary, because no causal chain allows avoiding them (e.g. people's need to feed). Symmetrically, there are states of affairs that no causal chain allows to reach (e.g. a society where everybody earns more than the average income). These are called impossible. Political realism is keen on emphasizing necessary and impossible states of affairs, because they have the most impact in the realistic rationality outlined above. If there are no means to a given end, then this is not as valuable because we should expect not to realize it. Symmetrically, if realizing some goal requires us to violate some necessary element, then we should discount its expected value as well.

Finally, we ought to consider particularly two elements in the political arena: the inevitability of conflict and of the need to survive. There is no causal chain that allows us to evade the recurrence emergence of conflict in the political sphere, as there is no way to root out dissent permanently. Nor we can hope to root out our human inclination to impose our will against others. More weakly, there is no way to emancipate human kind from the need to establish some kind of political coordination, as long as we want to live safely. Political realism strongly remark these two defining feature of politics, as the circumstances of politics which make politics both possible and necessary. If a theory ignores them, it is no genuine theory of politics as it misunderstands its object. Moreover, any theory that supposes to do away with them is bound to offer poor guidance in this world.

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