**Title**: The Shpolitics Objection to Realist Legitimacy

**Abstract:**

Political Realists argue that political philosophy should give greater autonomy to the political over the moral realm. Particularly, they reject what Bernard Williams labelled as political moralism, that is the reduction of political philosophy to a branch of ethics. According to them, our normative theories of legitimacy ought to start from within the political realm rather than appealing to moral values that are supposed to possess antecedent authority over politics (Geuss 2008; Newey 2010; Philp 2007; Rossi 2012; Sleat 2016b, Waldron 2013; Williams 2005).

Although many attempts to reject political moralism seem to collapse into non-ideal or practice-dependence takes, I argue that there are two peculiar ways in which we may interpret the such claim as ultimately free-standing.

The first consists in claiming that political moralism, by virtue of resorting to pre-political moral values, is unfit to respond to ineradicable moral disagreement. In fact, individuals who disagree on the relevance of the moral values over which our theoretical endeavor is ultimately based have no reason to comply with the requirements of legitimacy we derive (Meta-Ethical Worry).

A second way is to argue that, by virtue of resorting to pre-political moral values in grounding the requirements of legitimacy, moralist theories fail to be political theories at all, insofar as they omit or misconstrue the constitutive features of the political realm (Epistemological Worry, Sleat 2016a).

Political Realism responds to these worries in a rather straightforward fashion, that is by deriving the normative contents of our theorising from an understanding of the constitutive features of politics. Essentially, by maintaining our fidelity to the phenomenon of politics we derive normative requirements of legitimacy that are supposedly non-arbitrary.

Three obstacles, I argue, separate political realism from success: (a) there is a concern over the possibility of reaching a common understanding on what are the constitutive features of politics; (b) realists are in need to show that a common understanding of the constitutive features of politics would not be too thin a basis to derive requirements of legitimacy; third, even granting (a) and (b), there is a concern over why should we should engage with politics in the first place.

The third obstacle, also known as the Shmagency question (Enoch 2006), is, I argue, rather fatal to political realism. Its force stems from the fact that if the normativity of realist accounts of legitimacy is conditional upon our willingness to engage with politics, then, realists are in need to provide us with reasons to do so. But such reasons cannot be extracted from the constitutive features of politics themselves.

There are, I argue, three possible way out of the shmagency (shpolitics) question: the first consists in resorting to pre-political moral values in order to provide us with reasons to engage with the enterprise of politics; the second is to show that politics is somewhat inescapable, such that we cannot but engage with it; the third is to give up on full-blown normativity;

While the first strategy would make political realism collapse into moralism, and the inescapability thesis, although plausible for other kinds of enterprises, does not seem to hold for political realism, the third way out could prove promising.

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