

Political Philosophy as Practical Philosophy: a response to “political realism”*

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1. What is the normative orientation of political philosophy?

From where should political philosophy take its normative orientation? According to self-described “political realists”, political philosophy is not oriented by ordinary moral reasoning about values and obligations, but must take its normative orientation from an interpretive understanding of the practice of politics itself.¹ This doesn’t mean that moral considerations have no place in political philosophy – only that if they do, they must be shown to be supported by or compatible with sources of normativity derived from the practice of politics. The realist answer is typically contrasted with the view that political philosophy’s normative orientation has (in the words of two recent opponents of realism) ‘its ineliminable roots in morality’.² In recent years, an increasingly complex debate has unfolded around these two positions, with much of the current focus on whether political realism ultimately collapses back into the position it seeks to reject.³

I want to try something a little different in this paper. I want to raise two doubts about the realist insistence on taking normative orientation from an interpretive account of the practice of politics. But I wish to do so from a perspective that *agrees* with realism that political philosophy’s normative orientation does not lie ‘in some non-political moral system or set of values’.⁴ So my two doubts are friendly doubts, in the sense that

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¹ Following Matt Sleat and Enzo Rossi, “Realism in normative political theory”, *Philosophy Compass* 9/10 (2014), 689-701, at p.690.

² Jonathan Leader Maynard and Alex Worsnip, “Is there a distinctively political normativity?”, *Ethics* 128 (2018), 756-787 at p.787.

³ For examples of versions of this objection who see it as no bad thing, see David Miller, “In what sense must political philosophy be political?”, *Social Philosophy and Politics* 33 (2016), 155-174, and Maynard and Worsnip, “Is there a distinctively political normativity?”

Something like this objection could also be pressed as a *failing* of political realism – see, for example, Lorna Finlayson, *The Political is Political* (London, Rowman and Littlefield, 2015) ch.5, for an argument that realism is in key respects just another version of what it opposes.

⁴ As Matt Sleat and Ed Hall put it in “Ethics, morality, and the case for realist political theory”, *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy* 20 (2017), 276-290 at p.283.

neither doubt points towards the account of normative orientation realists set themselves against. Rather, my two doubts point to a third possibility: political philosophy takes its normative orientation from the form of judgement and knowledge that characterises it (a form it shares with moral philosophy). I will not be able to get anywhere close to properly vindicating this claim about political philosophy's normative orientation. But I hope I can do enough to bring it into view, and thus open up a possibility that appears to be overlooked in the current debate.

My two doubts address, respectively, a standard realist assumption concerning the practice of politics, and a standard realist assumption concerning the perspective the political philosopher takes on that practice. With respect to the former, I worry that realists characterise the practice of politics too narrowly to do justice to the compelling idea that *the personal is political*. And with respect to the latter, I worry that realists take an overly theoretical perspective, ignoring the significance of practical judgement, so that the realist political philosopher thinks *of* participants in a practice in such a way that cannot be to think *as* such a participant.

Neither of these doubts, I should add, need apply only to political realism. One could certainly argue that much non-realist political philosophy (and much moral philosophy too!) fails to do justice to how the personal is political. One could also argue that much non-realist political philosophy (and again, much moral philosophy) ignores or downplays the significance of practical judgement. Nevertheless, it strikes me that my two doubts involve different sets of issues when raised concerning realist or non-realist positions.

One might, for example, say that political philosophy is “overly theoretical” when it makes use of problematic idealisations – that is, falsifications for the purposes of theoretical clarity or precision – about the world and about reflection. If that is what we want to say, we need an argument attacking claims about the appropriateness of idealisation: for example, attacking claims that moral and political theory is fundamentally analogous to scientific theorising and so can deploy idealisations in the

same way. I certainly think an argument attacking claims of this sort should be made,⁵ but it is not the argument I am going to make against political realism. As we shall see, it is an assumption about the appropriate form of judgement, rather than claims about the appropriateness of idealisation, that burdens much realism with an overly theoretical perspective.

The same point applies to the possibility that non-realist positions fail to do justice to the ways in which the personal is political. Consider a prominent strand of feminist reaction to much modern liberal political philosophy: that while modern liberal conceptions of justice may well be capable of *accommodating* how the personal is political (for example by including, in response to feminist critique, the family within the basic structure to which principles of justice apply), they are often incapable of *generating* that critique in the first place.⁶ The cause of that incapacity is held to be various idealisations about social arrangements, agency, rationality, and history within the target accounts of justice. To make that case, one requires an argument showing what is problematic about such idealisations. Again, my doubt that realism can do justice to the idea that the personal is political concerns a different point. The difficulty I find with realism here is a classificatory one rather than a problem of idealisation: even if realists do not idealise away the complexities of social arrangements, agency, rationality and history (and I make no claim either way on that score), they operate with a definition of political activity that leaves too many of these complexities as non-, or not-really-, political.

Taken together, my two doubts also have a particular implication for political realism. Once we take up the perspective of practical judgement, normative orientation cannot be located in accurate perception of the features of politics, because *practical* perception of a field of obstacles and opportunities must itself be oriented by the constellation of standards one lives by. I realise this is an obscure thought, and to spell it out I am going to say a lot about the particular distinction between practical and

⁵ For a first attempt see my “Idealization, justice, and the form of practical reason”, *Social Philosophy and Policy* 33 (2016), 372-392.

⁶ Following Lisa Schwartzman, *Challenging Liberalism: Feminism as Political Critique* (University Park, Penn State University Press, 2006), pp.95-109. See also Susan Moller Okin, *Justice, Gender, and the Family* (New York, Basic Books, 1989), and Charles Mills, “Ideal theory as ideology”, *Hypatia* 20 (2005), 165-184.

theoretical judgement this thought invokes. For now, I hope it is enough to say: *if* normative orientation cannot be located in features of politics, the realist idea of a distinctively political source or sources of normativity is called into question. In this way, my two doubts should prove troubling for realists in a way that simply doesn't apply to non-realist positions.

So, setting aside other issues my two doubts might raise about the myriad non-realist approaches in political philosophy, I begin (§2) by introducing my first doubt: that realists give too narrow an account of the practice of politics. To bring this doubt into view, I draw on the work of one of the central figures of modern African philosophy, Paulin Hountondji, who trained in France as a Husserl scholar but abandoned his work on Husserl upon returning to Africa. Hountondji describes this decision as *political*, yet it falls outside realist accounts of political decision-making. I suggest we have good reason to agree with Hountondji's description, and thus to doubt the realist account of politics.

I then move to my second doubt: that realists overlook the importance of practical judgement. In order to raise this doubt, I need first to explain the difference between practical and theoretical judgement and knowledge. Drawing from both Kant and Aristotle, I do so (§3) in terms of the differing existential relation between judgement and object in each form of judgement and knowledge. I then argue (§4) that, if our philosophical perspective is to be one "within" political activity (as realists like to say), judgements that express this perspective must be practical in form. Developing this line of thought (§5) casts doubt on the core realist claim that political philosophy takes its normative orientation from an interpretive understanding of the practice of politics. Once the form of our thinking shifts from theoretical to practical, and thus our grasp of a practice from observational interpretation to a non-observational understanding, we see that practical perception of the circumstances of politics is shaped by normative standards, so cannot be the source of normativity for those standards.

Finally, I suggest (§6) that my two doubts about political realism point to the possibility that political philosophy takes its normative orientation from the form of practical judgement and knowledge. I do not claim that my two doubts about political realism

are sufficient to vindicate the claim that political philosophy should be oriented in this way, only that they help bring this possibility into view.

2. *First doubt: the personal is the political*

Political realists construe the practice of politics in varied ways, depending on which aspects of the practice they take to provide distinctively political sources of normativity. Nevertheless, there seem to be three elements common to many realist accounts. The first is that politics is defined, as an anthropological universal, in the following way. It is the activity of reaching, under conditions of disagreement, collectively binding decisions that preserve both the legitimacy of the procedure by which they are made and of the coercive enforcement of conformity to their results; and of the attainment and exercise of the power to shape those decisions.⁷ Secondly, realists hold that nothing in this anthropological universal settles how the practice of politics unfolds: political philosophy must begin from a culturally and historically (and politically!) textured understanding of the practice.⁸ Finally, realists assume that the practice of politics, at both the parochial and universal levels, is something grasped through interpretive observation. I mean by this that realists insist that the practice of politics is something *given to* political philosophy, something that must be observed and understood if the political philosopher is to offer any prescriptions.⁹

My first doubt concerns the narrowness of this two-level account of the practice of politics. At the historically and culturally contingent level, the realist political philosopher works with an observational interpretation of what we can call the *modes of legitimation* operative in that particular context: the constellations of normative (not

⁷ See, for example, Mark Philp, “What is to be done?”, *European Journal of Political Theory* 9 (2010), 468-484 at p.471, p.475; Hall, “How to do realist political theory and why you might want to”, *European Journal of Political Theory* 16 (2017), 283-303, at p.294; Bernard Williams, *In the Beginning was the Deed* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2007), p.12-13; Raymond Geuss, *Politics and the Imagination* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 2009), p.6; Matt Sleat, “What is a political value?”, *Social Philosophy and Policy* 33 (2016), 252-272 at p.255-258.

⁸ For example Philp, “What is to be done?”, p.477; Hall, “How to do...” p.288; Williams, *In the Beginning was the Deed* p.25-26; Geuss, *Politics and the Imagination*, p.33; Sleat, “What is a political value?” p.262.

⁹ Thus Sleat, “What is a political value”, p.253: ‘there are certain facts about the actual nature of politics that any political philosophy must take as given.’ For more references, see §3 below.

necessarily *ethical*) concepts into which patterns of action must be cast if they are to be seen by others as examples of going on in the right, or at least an acceptable, way. I expect realists will agree that modes of legitimation do not merely supervene on a given practice, for what counts as a *move within the practice* is dependent on its being cast within the practice's modes.¹⁰ Accordingly, alterations to those modes are a sort of move within the practice, one that alters the practice itself. But if we accept this, the realist understanding of the practice of politics looks implausibly narrow.

An example might help bring this doubt into view. Consider the Beninois philosopher Paulin Hountondji, who trained in France as a Husserl scholar before becoming one of the most influential figures in post-independence African philosophy. Reflecting on his change of philosophical direction upon his return to Africa, Hountondji writes:

One thing is certain for me, a political decision of sorts: the locus on my philosophical work should in no way exclude Africa. On the contrary, Africa must constitute its centre, its point of departure, and, where possible, its primary beneficiary. Reluctantly, I had to abandon my research on Husserl. The time was not right. Too many conditions still had to be met for Africa to be able to listen, without feeling of self-repudiation or distraction, to a discourse on Husserl, or on any other such author or doctrine anointed by the Western philosophical tradition.¹¹

There is a lot going on here. But to take just Hountondji's opening phrase, his decision is obviously outside the practice of politics understood as the exercise of authority through collectively binding decisions. It isn't a political decision, as realists define the practice of politics.¹² I would like now to suggest that Hountondji's decision is, nevertheless, a political one.

If I understand him, Hountondji's remark concerns what philosophy is. For Hountondji, philosophy is an activity rather than a body of knowledge, and it is an activity *that*

¹⁰ For further discussion of modes of legitimation, see my "Human rights: sometimes one thought too many?", *Jurisprudence* 7 (2016), 111-126.

¹¹ Paulin Hountondji, *The Struggle for Meaning* (Ohio University Press, 2002), p.74. Compare Hountondji, *African Philosophy: Myth and Reality* (London, Hutchinson, 1983), p.33, p.46.

¹² To give just one example, Williams, *In the Beginning was the Deed*, p.13: 'a political decision [...] does not in itself announce that the other party was morally wrong, or, indeed, wrong at all. What it immediately announces is that *they have lost*.'

engages an audience. As an activity, philosophy is universal, something everyone, including of course Africans, can do. But as a mode of engagement, much of the Western philosophical tradition, despite speaking to what is universal, has been what Hountondji describes as ‘a closed Western circle of interlocution’.¹³ One might then ask what would it be for the Western philosophical tradition to address an audience that includes Africans. But that is not quite Hountondji’s question. He is asking what would it be for *Africans to be able to engage with* that tradition: address is not second-personal (a diatribe or lecture), but first-person-plural (something more like a conversation).

I would like to suggest that Hountondji’s understanding of philosophy is correct. There must be limits to the extent that the activity of philosophy is understood as a conversation. As John Pocock once observed, in a genuine conversation no one person is in control of what is said, whereas philosophical activity must at times have the form of a monologue in order to clearly determine the objects and terms of reflection.¹⁴ But the question of whom that monologue is addressed to remains, and when the answer is “anyone”, Hountondji’s question immediately arises as to what would constitute a first-person-plural mode of engagement. At least, it must arise if one thinks of philosophy in the only way I know how to: as reflexive, an activity carried out under a standing obligation, as John McDowell likes to say, to hold oneself open to reflective questioning. That obligation could only be discharged via a first-person-plural mode, involving an audience of engaged questioners.

But is Hountondji’s representation of the Western tradition of philosophy as a ‘closed Western circle of interlocution’ correct? There is a long-standing debate over whether the prejudices expressed by the key figures of the Western tradition can be sharply separated from their philosophy, or whether racism (and sexism, etc.) is embedded in the very structure of e.g. Kant’s or Hume’s or Husserl’s (etc.) philosophical positions. If I understand him, Hountondji’s point is separate from that debate, both sides of which concern the Western tradition alone. Hountondji, by contrast, is making a point about

¹³ I am quoting from “Constructing the universal: a trans-cultural challenge”, an unpublished paper Hountondji gave at the University of Ghana, Legon, 25/03/2015.

¹⁴ J. G. A. Pocock, “Philosophical ideas as historical events”, in M. Richter, ed. *Political Theory and Political Education* (Princeton, Princeton University Press, 1980), pp.139-158 at p.145-6.

what it would be to *engage with* the views of the Western tradition from outside of it – a point, again, that I would like to suggest is correct.

Hountondji does not deny that the Western tradition speaks of what is universal, and insofar as Kant or Hume or Husserl do so their philosophical standpoints are open to all. At the same time, he reminds us that ‘none of these authors suspected that they could someday be read by the Negroes of Africa or the Papuans of New Guinea’¹⁵ If I understand Hountondji, he is reminding us of the following. Modern Africans or Pacific Islanders must be aware that the Western tradition was not addressed to, but rather imposed on, their ancestors. This is to be aware that their own engagement with the Western tradition is a legacy of the monumentally gross and still persisting injustice characteristic of Western colonial expansion. So it must be a live question, for any African or Pacific Islander or any other peoples colonised by Western powers, of how one engages with a tradition the openness of which is bound up in a complex history of gross injustice.

Because philosophy is a universal activity anyone can engage, with sufficient attention to context, with the ideas found in any tradition of philosophy. (Although, as Kwasi Wiredu once remarked, ‘considerable maturity is required in the African’ to disentangle Kant’s and Hume’s genuine insights from what they say about Africa).¹⁶ The problem Hountondji sees is this: if one engages with Western philosophical thought *as though* it were addressed universally, one is adopting the position of someone that tradition addresses – and this *cannot be an African position*, for Africans were not addressed by the tradition but rather had it imposed upon them. The solution must be to determine a mode of engagement with the Western tradition that is first-person-plural: a mode of engagement both among African philosophers themselves and between African and non-African philosophers.¹⁷

If I understand Hountondji, such a first-person-plural mode of engagement is equally an element of African philosophy and African public life. In African philosophy, the

¹⁵ Hountondji, “Constructing the universal” (see n13 above).

¹⁶ I owe this reference to Hountondji. See Kwasi Wiredu, *Philosophy and an African Culture* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1980), p.49fn13.

¹⁷ Compare Hountondji, *Myth and Reality*, p.53.

development of a genuinely first-person-plural mode of engagement between, but without being restricted to, Africans is needed to remove the problematic persistence of colonial ideas about Africa, African thought, and how it must be oriented towards the West.¹⁸ Hountondji sees a genuinely first-person-plural mode of engagement as also necessary to confront the disorders of post-independence public life in African societies, not least (but not solely) because the same tropes about Africa figure in the modes of legitimation operative in African public life. It is thus impossible to understand the conditions under which Hountondji could return to Husserl scholarship without understanding the conditions in which public life in African states could maintain a discourse that neither excludes, nor is solely oriented towards, the West: to ‘get Africans talking to each other’ without restricting the conversation to Africa alone. Nor can one understand the conditions for that aspect of public life without understanding the conditions in which Africans are ‘able to listen, without feeling of self-repudiation or distraction, to a discourse on Husserl’. What may at first seem like two problems are in fact two dimensions of the same problem.

I have been building up to the following point. One cannot think of a practice without thinking of the modes of legitimation that shape that practice. Now think of politics in the realists’ narrow terms. In thinking of the practice, one must think of how individual subjects deploy and navigate the indeterminate permissions of the various modes concerning both who should speak on matters requiring a collective decision, and what the terms of that discourse should be. This is to think of how these modes reflect and are reflected in the exceptionally complex interconnecting webs of interpersonal patterns of action that constitute social life in that particular time and place.

It is not that we have here the same concerns mirrored in multiple distinct practices. What we have are patterns of action that are, simultaneously, moves in multiple practices. A decision where to sit on a bus, or who to kiss in public, which job to apply for, which language to speak in, who to make friends with, how one modulates one’s voice, how one brings up a child, or what one’s academic programme of research will be – these are all contributions, either supportive or subversive, to the modes of

¹⁸ The point is especially clear in Hountondji’s sustained critique of the idea of African philosophy as the quasi-anthropological presentation of traditional constellations of belief ‘built up essentially for a European public’. *Myth and Reality*, p.45, see also p.52.

legitimation operative in public life. Hountondji's choice to abandon Husserl scholarship is 'a political decision of sorts' in that *it is a sort of political decision*: a move within the practice of politics in post-colonial Africa.

To reinforce the point, consider one of the other examples I just gave in passing. Think of what Margaret Thatcher's decision to lower the pitch of her voice illuminates about the prevailing ideas of what it is to be a woman, to be of a certain class, and what it is to be a leader and to have authority (and what it is to be electable) in British society at the time. Now think of the myriad ways, in all the myriad contexts of one's life, in which a person in any walk of life might challenge or reinforce these ideas of how authority and leadership and masculinity/femininity and/or class are connected/opposed. It would be misleading to think of these myriad behaviours and decisions as at one remove from political activity, as if they merely had knock-on effects on properly or centrally "political" concepts like *authority*. These myriad behaviours and decisions all shape what one might think it is to be a woman, to speak with authority, to exhibit leadership. I say "behaviours and decisions" because these shapings may be unintentional, or even counter to the intentions of the subject had he or she held what she does, says, and thinks up to scrutiny. When that is so, we have something that is questionably a political decision only in the sense that it is questionably a *decision*. That does not undermine the point that these myriad behaviours and decisions are all ways of altering or reinforcing or calling into question modes of legitimation a politician like Thatcher is using (in this particular example, perhaps reluctantly using) – and so are moves within political practice.

Hountondji's decision to abandon Husserl scholarship is political in the same way. Altering his programme of research is an intentional shaping, however small, of one of the central elements of the modes of legitimation operative in post-independence African societies: what it is to think as, and be, an African. Accordingly, I can see no way to hold on to any narrow understanding of politics in terms of the reaching and enforcing of collectively binding decisions. Of course political philosophy should try to say something about collectively binding decision-making. But whatever one wants to say about that, one will have to say it in a way that properly takes into account how the modes of legitimation operative in public life are shaped through, and thus operative in, the myriad and kaleidoscopic patterns of interaction between individuals. To

account for this must be to give up on any narrow understanding of the practice of politics: political decisions are found everywhere, in every nook and cranny of life.¹⁹

3. *The realist perspective related to two forms of judgement and knowledge*

If my argument holds up so far, we have reason to think realists give too narrow an account of the practice the political philosopher is to reflect upon. I now aim to show that realists make an assumption about the political philosopher's perspective that we also have reason to doubt. In raising this second doubt, I make an assumption of my own: that realists share Bernard Williams's hostility to "moralism". On the clearest definition Williams provides, moralism is a 'deformation' of reasoning that 'tends to leave the commentator entirely outside the person [who is the object of commentary], preaching at him.'²⁰ Accordingly, political philosophy must be done in a way that avoids this "outside" perspective. My worry, to put it roughly, is that as long as realists assume an overly theoretical perspective, they can only think *of* participants in political practice rather than think *as* a participant – which must be to think of the practice from outside, from sideways on.

The realist perspective involves a distinctive kind of judgement: judgements about political values must demonstrate fit with the particular local manifestation of political practice one is determining the value for. As Matt Sleat puts it:

It is vital to stress that there are many questions in play here, all of which are rightly thought of as matters of political judgement: what are the preconditions of any particular value? Do they hold in our present society? If not, just how out of reach are they for us? The latter question may be particularly difficult to answer given that it requires a further judgement about how much the future will look like the present.²¹

If I understand him, Sleat is imagining the philosopher's philosophising to be reflection on whether a purported value fits with a given set of conditions. Even a *prospective*

¹⁹ Mark Philp may be an exception, given his claim that 'our judgements about politics and its ends [...] are themselves intrinsically political.' "Realism without illusions", *Political Theory* 40 (2012), 629-649, at p.646. It is unclear to me how the 'political' virtues he enumerates are supposed to relate to philosophy.

²⁰ Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, p.219 n16.

²¹ Sleat, "What is a political value?", p.262.

judgement seems to be a case of fitting to conditions: the question of how ‘out of reach’ a value may now be is answered by imagining whether that value will be a good fit with expected conditions.

Other realists speak in very similar terms. Ed Hall insists that ‘our normative political arguments should begin with the acceptance of various factual considerations about how our world is’.²² William Galston asserts that ‘[d]escription precedes prescription. Political realism must begin with and rest on an adequate description of political life’.²³ Mark Philp describes political judgement as ‘the agent’s receptivity to facts’; that one must respond to the relevant features of politics ‘for their own sake’.²⁴ Raymond Geuss depicts political judgement as a combination of *prediction* and *grading*.²⁵ In all of these judgements, the object of judgement is *given to* the judging subject. The political philosopher takes a given value and a given set of conditions and assesses the degree of fit. Or takes a given set of conditions and finds the values/courses of action that fit with it. Or makes a prediction, such as to accurately represent the likelihood of an event’s occurrence – a likelihood that is not produced by the prediction itself. Or grades an act or option, such as to accurately represent where a given thing lies on a given scale of evaluation.

Note that judgements of this sort have a distinctive form, characterised by the existential relation that holds between object and judgement. The object of judgement is something *given to* the judging subject. In keeping with an ancient tradition associated with both Aristotle and Kant, we can call this form of judgement *theoretical* rather than *practical*. In Kant’s formulation, knowledge relates ‘to its object in one of two ways, either merely *determining* the object and its concept (which must be given from elsewhere), or also *making* the object *actual*. The former is *theoretical* and the latter *practical* cognition of reason.’²⁶ Now, philosophers have used the labels “theoretical” and “practical” in all

²² Hall, “How to do...” p.294.

²³ Galston, “Anger, humiliation, and political theory”, in Matt Sleat (ed.) *Politics Recovered* (Columbia University Press, 2018), pp.93-113 at p.110.

²⁴ Philp, “Realism without illusions”, p.634.

²⁵ Geuss, *Politics and the Imagination*, p.11.

²⁶ Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* trans. P. Guyer and A. Wood (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999), Bix-x; see also *The Critique of Practical Reason* 5:46. Aristotle is, I believe, also in this tradition. Practical judgement ends in action (*Met* 993b); the starting point of action is the acting subject herself (*NE* 1113a); and practical, in contrast to

sorts of other ways too, which I set aside here. As I use the distinction, it is in the Aristotelian/Kantian tradition: we distinguish two forms of judgement, and thus knowledge, by the existential relation between object and judgement that each exhibits. In *theoretical* judgement, the actuality of what is known does not depend upon that knowledge, but is rather given to the judging subject. In *practical* judgement, the actuality of what is known depends upon that knowledge: the object of judgement is not given to the judging subject, but is rather produced by the subject's judgement. The existential relation in practical judgement picks out how, in the central or non-defective case, action depends upon thought.

This wants more explaining. A helpful, if technical, way to put it is to say that practical judgement has a *self-conscious efficacy*: a judgement could not be such as to produce its object unless its object is understood by the judging subject as the subject's own will in operation. "Self-conscious" should be heard here in the technical sense that the object of thought is, in a crucial aspect, the thinker of that very thought: the thinker's own will, the very capacity that the judgement is an exercise of.²⁷ Although this formulation is technical, the basic idea is I hope straightforward.

Distinguishing theoretical from practical judgement and knowledge in this way leads us to a second distinction, by revealing an ambiguity in how we might speak of a practice. On a familiar view, a practice is something understood in a fundamentally anthropological, observational way. One grasps a practice through interpretive observation of participants' behaviour and attitudes, use of concepts, and self-understandings. This, as we have seen, is the understanding of a practice realists assume.

Here is second way of understanding a practice: in terms of a particular reason-giving concept or principle. For example, to understand the practice of promising is to

theoretical, reason concerns what is variable – that which would not exist if it weren't for the acting subject herself (*NE* 1112a, 1140a). So Aristotle, too, acknowledges the self-conscious efficacy of practical judgement.

²⁷ Following Stephen Engstrom, *The Form of Practical Knowledge* (Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 2009). Compare Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* trans. J. Timmermann (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2012), 4:412: 'the will is nothing other than practical reason'.

understand what the concept of a promise gives one reason to do.²⁸ Any individuated case of promise-keeping instances the practice of promising insofar as the ground on which the promise-maker acts is the concept of promising. As Michael Thompson puts it:

Where agents keep promises from fidelity, their actions have different sources only in the sense that they have made different promises. Apart from that, they act not just on similar or parallel grounds, but on the same ultimate ground and not just on principles with the same content, but *on the same principle*.²⁹

These two understandings of “a practice” can be two ways of knowing the same thing (e.g. what promising is). The difference between them is this: one understanding requires interpretive observation, whereas the other is grasped non-observationally. A subject understands “promising” non-observationally when she understands the concept of a promise as something to *act for the sake of*. This is to understand “promising” in terms of an elementary aspect of practical thought – one way an action depends on a thought, namely action oriented by a standard of reason. It is, in other words, *practical* knowledge of the practice of promising.

This idea of practical knowledge of (in our example) promising connects to a further aspect of the Aristotelian/Kantian tradition. You might be tempted to say, of the distinction between practical and theoretical judgement just drawn, that the practical side is restricted to knowledge of *what one is doing*. Yet both Aristotle and Kant also place knowledge of *how we should live* on the practical side of the distinction.³⁰ In the context of modern moral and political philosophy, this is an unusual claim. If I understand it, it amounts to the following. A judgement constituting practical knowledge expresses what should be done (e.g. a standard of morality or justice) and through that expression is such as to cause the manifestation of that standard in the judging subject’s activity. (I say “is such as to” to allow for defective cases where the manifestation fails). To know that *bribery is dishonest and corrupt*, and thus to know something of *honesty* and *justice*, is to know that I myself must be honest and just, and

²⁸ Following Adrian Moore, “Maxims and thick ethical concepts”, *Ratio* 19 (2006), 129-146; and Michael Thompson, *Life and Action* (Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 2008), Part III.

²⁹ Thompson, *Life and Action*, p.210.

³⁰ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* A633/B661; Aristotle, *NE* 1140b.

this knowledge is such as to cause – for example – my rejecting, and refusing to offer, any bribes.

This, too, wants more explaining. The claim will be obscure if we assume that the abstract principle *bribery is dishonest and corrupt* explains or describes the wrong-making feature(s) of a given act or outcome: we are then likely to think of practical judgement as the follow-through on theoretical judgements about how to live.³¹ To say, with the Aristotelian/Kantian tradition, that knowledge of how to live is practical knowledge is to understand abstract principles of morality and justice as prescriptive and prospective, rather than descriptive or explanatory. In this way, the principle *bribery is dishonest and corrupt* is such as to shape one's action: to so judge is to shape how one is to live. We can understand practical judgement as operating in chains that increasingly concretise what should be done, moving from abstract standards to particular manifestations of those standards in action. At no point in the chain is there a move from theoretical to practical judgement: even at the most abstract level, the object of judgement is still a shaping of the judging subject's own life. My judgement that bribery is dishonest and corrupt is certainly abstracted from any particular scenario. It is not, however, abstracted from *all* contexts of action: because the judgement is such as to shape how I, the judging subject, lives, the relevant context is my own ongoing activity.

This is a very controversial position. We can begin to see some reason to accept it by bringing the two ways of speaking about action implicit in what I've just said to bear on the commonly accepted claim that standards of morality and justice are action-guiding. We can speak of discrete, completable actions: "buying butter", "fetching my camera", and so on. We can also speak of *ongoing and open-ended activity* – as, for example, I just did in speaking of the activity of living. One way to bring this difference out is to note how "acting justly" or "acting honestly" are not like the examples of discrete actions just given. In e.g. buying butter, my end comes to completion – in the future, if I buy butter again, I have set myself a new end. By contrast, in acting justly it is not the case that I have set myself a new end each time. Rather, every time I act justly, I act for *the sake of justice* – my end is the same. "Acting justly" picks out an end that

³¹ See Maïke Albertzart, *Moral Principles* (London, Bloomsbury, 2014), p.94-95.

never comes to completion in a discrete action, but rather an end that is *time-general*: that may be manifest in an indefinitely specified number of possible actions.³² Justice, honesty, and so on are standards that orient the ongoing and open-ended activity of life. Although distinct, these two types of end are typically nested within the chains of judgement that constitute practical reasoning, for action rarely if ever is such as to manifest a single standard alone. For example, in *buying butter* I know that I must also *act justly*, and so I pass over TrumpButter, should such an abomination exist, in favour of a more ethical brand.

If principles of how we should live are, *contra* the Aristotelian/Kantian tradition, theoretical principles, action-guidance depends on a set of act-descriptions being already to hand to be evaluated in theoretical judgement. This must be to think solely of action in discrete, completable terms. For once we think, instead, of *ongoing* and *open-ended* activity extending into an unpredictable future, we are thinking of action that cannot be adequately captured by specific descriptions – as ongoing and open-ended, it is something that must be worked out through the judgements that bring it into existence. Because both discrete and time-general ends are nested in judgements about what should be done, action-guidance must address ongoing, open-ended activity, where there is no particular act to hand to be judged. And so it appears – doesn't it? – that if principles of justice and morality are to be action-guiding, they cannot ultimately be explanatory and descriptive. They must, rather, be prescriptive and prospective in form: *practical*, rather than theoretical, principles. This will, I hope, suffice for present purposes to motivate the idea that knowledge of how we should live is practical knowledge.³³

4. Second doubt: our perspective must be practical, rather than theoretical

I can now properly introduce my second doubt. I doubt that the realist political philosopher's perspective, characterised as it is by judgements that are theoretical in form, can be the perspective of a participant in political activity. To argue the point, I

³² Compare Sebastian Rödl, "The form of the will", in Sergio Tenenbaum ed. *Desire, Practical Reason, and the Good* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2000), pp.138-160.

³³ Defenders of the claim that principles of morality and justice are theoretical in form will no doubt have a lot to say in response. See, for example, Sean McKeever and Mike Ridge, *Principled Ethics* (Oxford, Clarendon, 2006).

shall enlist Bernard Williams as an unlikely ally. Within any practice the question is not how much the future will look like the present, but *of what it would be to extend the practice into the future*. Williams once called this a ‘Hegelian problem’, and remarked – with a turn of phrase I’m sure realists will appreciate – that ‘the Hegelian problem is the right problem to at least this extent: it asks how a concretely experienced form of life can be extended, rather than considering how a universal program is to be applied.’³⁴ Williams takes the ‘Hegelian problem’ to arise when thinking from within a practice. This is a problem, I now want to suggest, of *practical* rather than theoretical judgement.

To think of the extension of a practice into an open-ended and to some extent unpredictable future is to think of action in the ongoing and open-ended, rather than discrete and completable, sense. Here, we can see that any time-general standard must exhibit a particular kind of generality: the possibilities for instantiating the standard in one’s action are not exhausted by the totality of historically concrete patterns of action that have instantiated the standard.³⁵ This distinctive generality must be true of all standards that are standards to live by. No such standard could guide ongoing and open-ended activity, as it plays out across an indefinite number of possibilities for interaction with an indefinite number of other agents, if it were not possible to find new ways of going on in the same way. The possibility of finding new ways of going on in the same way, in turn, depends on the standard in question being such that the possible manifestations of this end are not exhausted by its historical manifestations.

A judgement that is such as to extend a practice into the future has as its object what it would be to go on in the right way: something that is yet to be done, that *should* be done. Such a judgement is at once prescriptive and prospective, its object the instantiation in action of standards that have the form of time-general ends. Precisely because these standards are time-general, the possibility of finding new ways of going on in the same way obtains in any such judgement. The object of judgement cannot be the evaluation of an act-description given to the judging subject. Rather, the object of judgement has no reality independent of judgements that are such as to extend the

³⁴ Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, p.104.

³⁵ Following Thompson, *Life and Action* Part III; and Rödl, “The form of the will”.

practice. Williams's 'Hegelian problem' is thus a problem of practical, rather than rather than theoretical, judgement and knowledge.

My hunch is that this point becomes clearer when one thinks of cases where the question of what it would be to extend a practice is especially challenging. Accordingly, consider cases where the effects of colonisation place considerable pressure on this question. For example, the pre-contact ethical concepts of the Māori of Aotearoa New Zealand have been placed under considerable pressure by both the deliberate attempts at the destruction of Māori cultural forms through British, and later Dominion, colonisation, and by the strains Māori engagement with Western science puts on the genealogical animism in which all pre-contact Māori ethical concepts were embedded. Nevertheless, Māori continue to hold onto their pre-contact ethical concepts such as *mana* and *tapu*. For that to be possible, at least two things must be true of the Māori ethical outlook. New ways of going on in the same way had to be found, so concepts like *mana* must be time-general ends: the possibilities for manifesting *mana* in action are not exhausted by the totality of ways in which *mana* has historically been manifested. What is more, the extension of these concepts took place under conditions where it cannot always have been clear to post-contact Māori what it would mean to act for the sake of *mana* or *tapu*. So these standards must have passed reflective scrutiny as standards to live by *despite it being unclear what it could mean to act for their sake*.³⁶

It is not my aim to try to fully spell out this second, difficult possibility within practical thought.³⁷ What I want to highlight is that the question of what it would be to continue to live by *mana* has no answer independent of the judgements Māori made and continue to make concerning how one lives by *mana* – judgements that, in virtue of the generality of the standard they express, always hold out the possibility of new ways of going on in the same way. This isn't a special kind of judgement that only comes into play when a practice is subject to disorienting pressure such as the Māori have faced. It is an illustration of a general feature of judgements that extend a practice. What it would be to extend a practice into the future – what it would be to continue to live by a particular

³⁶ See, for example, Sir Hugh Kawharu's excellent introduction to Kawharu ed. *Conflict and Compromise* (Auckland, Reed, 2003) for an account of the 'crisis of purpose' many Māori have faced.

³⁷ See, for a magisterial account, Jonathan Lear, *Radical Hope* (Cambridge MA, Harvard University Press, 2006).

action-guiding standard or constellation of standards – is not something that can be given independently of the attempt at extension. Here, the existential relation between object and judgement is that of practical judgement: the existence of the object one has knowledge of depends upon that knowledge.

I may seem to have forgotten about the political realists. But I am finally in a position to clearly state my second doubt. Think again of, for example, Sleat’s account of political judgement, where even a prospective judgement is a case of fitting value to conditions. As I hope the example of the Māori helps make clear, the judgement “Mana is a concept to live by” is not a matter of showing that the standard fits with existing or expected conditions, for it is possible to make that judgement even when one is unclear what it would be to live with mana in the conditions one faces.

This isn’t just an objection to Sleat’s realism. As we’ve seen, realists appear to uniformly assume that the correct perspective on the practice of politics is expressed in judgements that are theoretical in form. Yet the form of judgement appropriate to answering Williams’s “Hegelian problem”, I hope it is now clear, has the existential relation between object and judgement exhibited by practical rather than theoretical judgement. If we are to think from within the practice, we are thinking of judgements that are such to shape ongoing and open-ended activity – that are such as to produce their object. It therefore seems that the realist political philosopher is thinking merely *of* subjects participating in a practice, in a way that cannot be to think *as* such a subject. Doesn’t that leave the realist political philosopher exactly where no realist political philosopher should be – outside the practice?

I wonder if some realists assume that the political philosopher’s perspective is expressed in theoretical judgements under the influence of Williams’s tendency to use examples contrasting practical standards from different historical eras: the impossibility of anyone now living as a medieval Samurai, or of ordering civic life in Revolutionary France by the civic virtues of Republican Rome.³⁸ It seems to make sense to say “The Samurai code doesn’t fit in the modern world.”³⁹

³⁸Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, p.161; Williams, *Making Sense of Humanity* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1995), p.139.

³⁹ Matt Sleat, “What is a political value?”, seems an especially clear example.

I take a different lesson from these cases, which seem chosen precisely because, unlike the example I gave of the Māori, there is no continuous tradition of manifesting the standards that constitute the practice. The problem isn't that the would-be 21st century "Samurai" has selected a *prima facie* value that doesn't actually fit. The problem is that the would-be 21st century "Samurai" is not in the business of answering Williams's practical, "Hegelian problem" at all: there is nothing in this case that could intelligibly count as a practice to extend.⁴⁰

Put just like that, it might sound as though I am really in agreement with realists that political philosophy has to start with the practices that are currently live in a particular context. But as the form of our thought has shifted, here, from theoretical to practical, so the relevant understanding of a practice has shifted, from the observational sense to an elementary aspect of practical thought. We are not thinking of a practice as something grasped by observation, but as an ongoing and open-ended pattern of activity that manifests a constellation of standards one has adopted as standards to live by. This is to grasp the practice non-observationally, in terms of one way in which action depends upon thought: that these particular standards are what one *acts for the sake of*.

5. Practical judgement and normative orientation

Hang on, you might say: why is any of this incompatible with realists' insistence on the priority of political practice? Practical judgement would be unintelligible without prior theoretical judgements about how the world actually is, so – in Galston's formulation – *description precedes prescription*. Even something as mundane as my judgement "I should buy butter on the way home" cannot be such as to produce its object if I don't know the relevant facts about geography, social conventions, and institutions. Similarly, any judgement a subject might make about what it would be to extend a political practice into the future requires the subject to know something of their political traditions. This is true even in Hountondji's choice of scholarly enterprise. So, you might object, practical judgements depend on prior theoretical judgements, and because

⁴⁰ Compare Williams, *Shame and Necessity* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2008), p.7: 'It is not a question of *reviving* anything. What is dead is dead, and in many important respects we would not want to revive it even if we could know what that would mean.'

these theoretical judgements about the world are *prior*, they are where political philosophy takes its normative orientation from, through interpretive understanding of political practice.

Actually, I think things are a bit more complicated, and here my second doubt extends to the core realist claim that normative orientation is provided by an interpretive account of the practice of politics. The object of practical judgement is always interaction with the world: the judging subject needs an accurate perception not only of the world in general, but of those particulars with which she must interact if her judgement is indeed to produce its object. For example, a surgeon, making the practical judgement “NN’s tumour should be removed” had better be aware of NN’s fatal allergy to certain forms of anesthetic, just as a political actor had better be aware of the salient aspects of her situation. But is this sort of judgement *prior*? I do not think so. The judgement “NN has a fatal allergy” concerns an *obstacle* to the surgeon’s end. It is not a judgement that solely concerns how things are with NN. To see this, imagine how the judgement looks if the surgeon instead decides “NN should be murdered” – the obstacle has now disappeared.

What we have, here, is what Aristotle calls *practical* perception. Anton Ford makes the point in his typically brilliant way as follows:

On the one hand, of course, “*This is an obstacle*” is like “*This is a rock*”, in that both can be true or false: both are responsible to “the facts, reality.” On the other hand, though, if what I perceive is a rock, it is not a rock because of me. What I perceive, in perceiving a rock, is part of a reality that does not depend on my will. By contrast, if what I perceive is an obstacle, it is only an obstacle because of what I am doing – say, walking home. [...] If I weren’t going anywhere, or if I were going someplace else, the rock wouldn’t be in my path, and it wouldn’t be an obstacle: it would only be a rock. What I perceive, in perceiving an obstacle, is such that it *would not be there to be perceived* apart from my being up to something. So if my

thought, “*This* is an obstacle” is responsible to the world, still, the world it is responsible to is, in a certain sense, a world of my creation.⁴¹

The existential relation between the object of the judgement and the judgement itself, here, is that intrinsic to *practical* judgement. In this way, one can agree with realists that the contingent features of local contexts of political activity cannot be ignored, without insisting that description precedes prescription. Any judgement about what it would be to go on in the right way must, if it is not to be defective in virtue of its practical form, involve the practical perception Ford draws our attention to. But because one’s *practical* perception of the world is shaped by one’s conception of the ends to be manifest in action, judgements about how to go on in the right way cannot be fundamentally oriented by the extent of fit between ends and world. The circumstances of politics are relevant not because of their theoretical priority but in virtue of subjects’ practical ends.

Once we see that the circumstances of politics are relevant in virtue of subjects’ practical ends, the notion that those circumstances can ground or constitute a source of normativity is called into question. Practical judgement, I have already remarked, operates in chains of increasing concretisation encompassing both abstract standards and their particular manifestations in action. Because the most concrete end of any such chain is interaction with the world, the process of increasing concretisation must involve accurate perception of the circumstances in which one is to act. These circumstances are perceived, in practical judgement, as a field of *obstacles* or *enabling features*. Accordingly, the normative orientation of our thought cannot be found in these considerations, for obstacles and enablers only exist as such in virtue of the time-general ends that we judge are standards to live by. Normative orientation must instead be found further back along the chain of practical judgement, in the conditions a judgement must meet if it is to express a time-general standard to live by.

5. Political philosophy as practical philosophy

⁴¹ Anton Ford, “On What is in Front of Your Nose”, *Philosophical Topics* 44 (2016), 141-161 at p.154.

My second doubt thus leads us away from the realist insistence on distinctively political sources of normativity. But it need not lead us towards the claim that normative orientation lies in “non-political” ethical theory. Rather, our shift in perspective to that of practical judgement opens up a third possibility.

Take, for example, the realists’ emphasis on collectively binding decisions. We can say something like the following. Whatever the rules of recognition might be by which some authoritative primary rule is known to be valid, and whatever the modes of legitimation might be by which that validity is known to be legitimate, these rules and modes will have to be communicable to a plurality of subjects. We could then ask: what are the subjectively necessary possibility conditions of a rule or mode being communicable? Such a rule or mode would, minimally, have to be *followable in thought* by those it is addressed to. And as these rules and modes shape the institutional structures through which the activity of life unfolds, these rules or modes are also rules and modes to live by. So they must not only be followable in thought but also *actionable in principle*.⁴²

Now think of straightforwardly ethical standards: one should act for the sake of *respect* and *honesty* and *beneficence*, etc. It strikes me that a basic feature of ethical standards is that they are first-person-plural: to judge *honesty is a standard to live by* is to judge I must live honestly and – it is all the same thought – others must live honestly too. We can again ask: what are the subjectively necessary possibility conditions of such a standard being manifest in the activity of a plurality of subjects? The answer again must be: no practical judgement could possibly be action-guiding for a plurality of subjects if that judgement is not followable in thought and actionable in principle by those subjects.

It should now strike us that, however we divide “How should we live?” into “political” and “ethical” registers, the answers will be governed by the same constraint – a constraint derived from the form of practical judgement. In this way, judgements about how to live in either the ethical or political registers take their normative orientation

⁴² Following Onora O’Neill, *Towards Justice and Virtue* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996).

from the same place, from the practical form of such judgements. I hope this is not a novel point: Onora O'Neill has been reminding us of it for decades.

Practical principles can be followable in thought without everyone following them, and actionable in principle without anyone acting on them. The constraint here advanced is a modal one. Yet the constraint recognises that ethical reasoning must be about what we can say to those who might not share our starting assumptions about how to live, whoever "we" are. Realists sometimes say that politics is about how we are to live given that we disagree about how we are to live – in this respect, ethics is no different to politics.

To sum up this admittedly programmatic suggestion: we need not draw a sharp distinction between "the political" and "the ethical", giving priority to the former, if we are to avoid grounding political philosophy in a 'non-political moral system or set of values.'⁴³ As long as we understand standards of justice and morality to be practical in form, expressed by judgements that are themselves practical in form, we can see both enquiries as equally constrained and oriented by the form of thought they exhibit.

The alternative I am advancing therefore gives priority to neither moral nor political philosophy. If practical judgements about how we should go on are not public in the very minimal sense of being *capable* of being shared, the very possibility of collective decision-making could not obtain. But this need for publicity is not just a need of what realists might portray as distinctively "political" judgement. It is among the subjectively necessary possibility conditions of *any* first-person-plural practical judgement: of any judgement expressing a standard that I, and others, must manifest in action. And isn't it the case that every ethical standard has this first-person-plural dimension? I hope my two doubts now appear to be two sides of the same coin. My second doubt is really just a more abstract expression of my first doubt: that the personal is the political.

Realists might reply that a recursive appeal to the form of practical judgement does not contradict the realist insistence on distinctively political sources of normativity. As I

⁴³ Sleat and Hall, "Ethics, morality, and the case for realist political theory", p.283.

earlier enlisted Williams as an ally, it seems appropriate to make the point by drawing on his position. If I understand Williams, the question of how to live is always a practical question, but it can be asked in more than one way. It can be an agent's question, asked in the first-person singular.⁴⁴ An agent can also ask it with respect to the various bounded domains she belongs to. When she asks this with respect to the political community (or communities) to which she belongs, a distinctively political source of normativity can be identified by recursive appeal to what the question "How should we live?" presupposes about that domain. Thus Williams repeatedly remarks that the political question of how we should live must begin with an account of legitimate order, because solving the question of legitimate order 'is the condition of solving, indeed posing, any other political question.'⁴⁵ Judgements about how the "we" of one's political community should live must, accordingly, be oriented by the modes and practices that express the historically and culturally contingent answer that community has given to the question of legitimate order.

Yet this imagined reply depends upon singling out and unjustifiably elevating only one of several conditions for social life. The Hobbesian note Williams typically sounds when making the point helpfully illuminates the problem, for one could also sound a convincingly Hobbesian note about our imperfect duties to reject neglect and indifference. Here is O'Neill in fine form:

[N]o vulnerable agent can coherently accept that indifference and neglect should be universalized, for if they were nobody could rely on others' help; joint projects would tend to fail; vulnerable characters would be undermined; capacities and capabilities that need assistance and nurturing would not emerge; personal relationships would wither; education and cultural life would decline.⁴⁶

It is worth noting that this passage is Hobbesian only in its sense of doom. Rather than attempting, with Hobbes, to read ethical conclusions off an empirical understanding of

⁴⁴ See *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, esp. p.18-19; p.68-69. Williams explains further: 'This is not to forget "What shall we do?" That is first-personal too: the basic question is who the speaker is taking as the plural first person – a speaker who, it is essential to remember, is once more an *I*.' p.206n16. By the later political essays, Williams instead insists that "What should we do" 'must on every occasion be a political question', such that 'not much can be said about it in general at the philosophical level.' *In the Beginning was the Deed*, p.72-3.

⁴⁵ Williams, *In the Beginning was the Deed* p.62, see also p.4.

⁴⁶ O'Neill, *Towards Justice and Virtue*, p.194.

human nature, O’Neil is recursively identifying a constraint on practical judgement derived from the subjectively necessary possibility conditions for shareable action-guiding standards. Here, once again, the personal is political.

I do not wish to suggest that Williams’s concern with legitimacy doesn’t matter: of course political philosophy should try to say something about that in historically and culturally informed ways. On the alternative I am advancing, the locally effective modes of legitimation in this or that historically and culturally contingent context form part of the field of obstacles and opportunities perceived in non-defective practical judgement. That field becomes more precisely delineated as practical judgement about how to live moves along the chains of increasing concretisation that are such as to extend the practice of living justly and well into an open-ended future. Part of that concretisation must involve asking which, and then how, time-general standards are to be institutionalised in various ways. But to repeat, the source of normativity cannot lie in perception of aspects of the circumstances in which one is to institutionalise these standards. That perception is itself oriented by judgements, about which standards we should live by, lying further back along the chain of practical reasoning. The source of normativity must instead lie in the conditions time-general standards must meet if they are to be capable of being standards a manifold of subjects can live by. Following O’Neill, I have gestured to two such conditions: such standards must be followable in thought and actionable in principle by all within that manifold.

Having thus brought the possibility of orienting political (and moral) philosophy by the form of practical judgement and knowledge into view, I would have to broaden the discussion well beyond an engagement with political realism to carry it further. On the one hand, the claim that knowledge of how we should live is practical knowledge stands in need of a lot more justification than I have given it. I cannot do so here: I’d need at least a series of papers,⁴⁷ or perhaps a book,⁴⁸ or perhaps a series of books.⁴⁹ On the other hand there is the fact that, while the Aristotelian/Kantian tradition works with a

⁴⁷ Which are in progress: see my “Idealization, justice, and the form of practical reasoning”, and my “How should *we* live?”, currently unpublished.

⁴⁸ See, very helpfully, Engstrom, *The Form of Practical Knowledge*.

⁴⁹ See, very helpfully, O’Neill, *Constructions of Reason* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1989); *Towards Justice and Virtue*; and *Constructing Authorities* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2015).

shared practical/theoretical distinction and a shared understanding that knowledge of how to live is practical in form, in other respects there are deep disagreements within that tradition. Perhaps most significantly, Aristotelians are far more likely to emphasise the teleological elements of practical judgement and knowledge than are Kantians, and that will significantly shape how their respective recursive appeals to the form of practical judgement are developed.⁵⁰ My aim has only been to bring into view the possibility these divergent accounts all develop: I cannot here suggest how such disagreements might be resolved.

So pretty much everything remains to be said. What I hope I *have* managed to say is that we should have two doubts about political realism, as many of its proponents construe it: we should doubt both the narrow account it gives of political activity *and* the overly theoretical perspective it takes on that activity. What is more, these two doubts at least open up the possibility that, to do political philosophy “from within” as realists want, one need not insist that normative orientation lies in interpretive observation of political practice. One can instead locate the source of normativity within practical thought itself. And who better to help us with that inquiry than the two foremost philosophers of practical thought, Aristotle and Kant?⁵¹

⁵⁰ For example, contrast O’Neill’s sustained hostility to teleological accounts of practical judgement in *Towards Justice and Virtue* with Rosalind Hursthouse, “After Hume’s justice”, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 91 (1991), 229-245.

⁵¹ This conclusion may seem particularly wrong-headed to those realists who uncritically accept Williams’s objections to Aristotle and Kant (*Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy* ch.3 and 4). Those objections rest on foundationalist interpretations of either thinker that cannot, in my view, survive the powerful non-foundationalist readings offered by, respectively, John McDowell and Onora O’Neill. See, for example, McDowell, *Mind, Value, and Reality*, (Cambridge MA., Harvard University Press, 2001) ch.9; O’Neill, *Constructing Authorities*, ch.1.