Csornay Annamária

The Liberal Political Realism of Bernard Williams

I.

Bernard Williams's "Realism and Moralism in Political Theory" published in the *In the Beginning Was the Deed* is one of the founding texts of contemporary political realism.[1] Despite the great influence of and interest in Williams's work, it seems that little attention has been paid to the philosophical underpinnings of his approach.[2] The present study aims at unfolding the underlying view of morality in Williams's concept, in particular his rejection of moralism in political theory. The application of such a view is the basis of Williams's distinct account of legitimacy and a different grounding of liberalism than the dominant liberal ones. Through these points, the goal of the current study is to clarify the ethical foundations, and correspondingly, to identify the strengths and challenges of Williams's liberal political realism.

Generally, all forms of political realism, including the one put forward by Williams, aim at a realistic approach of the political. This perspective has a longstanding history: the primary idea is that, instead of following Plato in his pursuit of normatively defining the just state in the *Republic* – setting the path for many utopian thinkers –, the focus should be on investigating what is established in reality, and develop ideas on what is to be done accordingly. This is the general attitude behind realist approaches. Williams's realism is not first and foremost concerned with this tension between the ideal and non-ideal theory, rather its focus is on freeing political philosophy from moralism.[3]

Williams's rejection of moralism is based on his earlier concerns within moral philosophy. Williams devoted many of his works to showing that systems of morality, such as the Kantian or the Utilitarian ones, are very problematic. In the text *Morality, the Peculiar Institution*, one of the most important critical works in contemporary moral philosophy, Williams shows that "philosophical mistakes are woven into morality",[4] and these misconceptions are rooted in the over-rational approach of past philosophers. He argues that ethical life is not about being able to follow abstract (and therefore universally applicable) principles, rationally constructed by moral philosophers. Once this is clear, Williams's problem with political moralism becomes evident: "politics

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1 For an overview of the premises of contemporary realism see *Politika egy tökéletlen világban; A politikai realizmus elméleti előfeltevéseiről* (Szűcs 2014).
2 A profound exception is Edward Hall's *Realism and Liberalism in the Political Thought of Bernard Williams* (Hall 2013).
3 Rossi and Sleat 2014, 699–700.
4 Williams 2006, 196.

cannot be applied ethics because ethics cannot be applied ethics".[5] In *Realism and Moralism in Political Theory*, his aim is to renounce the application of such systems of morality in political theory. Williams claims that rationality does not have authority in political theory, just as it does not have authority in the case of moral philosophy. More specifically, the problem with political moralism is that it "misrepresent[s] the nature of the relationship between moral considerations and political practice, and consequently offer[s] a set of normative prescriptions that do not properly apply to the subject matter with which they claim to be concerned".[6]

Williams's main opponent is Rawlsian liberalism, which is a paradigmatic example of political moralism. Following Williams, other realists have also found a target in Rawls's work, labelling it and other dominant theories constructed in a similar fashion "high liberalism",[7] "liberal utopianism",[8] and "liberal moralism".[9] It is important to draw attention to the fact that realism's objection is not to liberalism itself, but to the moralist foundations thereof. Also, "political realism is not just a corrective of high liberalism but another type of liberalism [realist liberalism]",[10] which means that realist liberalism is well-separable from mainstream liberalism. As opposed to dominant theories, the realist approach "denote[s] a philosophical disposition – an instinct or an inclination"[11] which can be associated with the following challenge formulated among liberals in the 19th century: "how to achieve liberal, enlightened goals in a world that does not follow liberal, enlightened rules".[12] Realists believe that instead of creating rational-moral grounding for liberalism, its foundation should rely on political practice, which means that liberalism should be seen as something based on its history in the real world. Affirming this, Williams recommends liberalism not because of its normative superiority, but on the grounds of it being successful in practice, as there is a "worldwide success of the demand for it".[13] This point is to be explained in detail later.

The fact that Williams rejects moralism does not mean that he gives up ethical considerations altogether. That is why his realism can be clearly distinguished from the common (and somewhat misguided) understanding of realism, which can be associated with international relations realism, power politics, self-interest, *Realpolitik*,

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5 Hall and Sleat 2016, 8.

6 Hall 2013, 10.

7 North 2010, 381.

8 Galston 2010, 408.

9 Horton 2010, 431; Sleat 2014, 317.

10 North 2010, 384.

11 Bew 2014, 50.

12 Bew 2014, 42. Bew uses a different terminology, which should not be misleading: the original *Realpolitik* shows similarities with liberal realism, the latter *Realpolitik* – and this usage became dominant – corresponds to the idea of might is right.

13 Williams 2005, 15.

Machiavellianism, manipulation, ruthlessness and calculating behaviour. Realism in this sense conveys the idea that might makes right. Contrary to this interpretation of realism, Williams claims that "might does not imply right, that power itself does not justify".[14] The firm rejection of understanding realism as *might is right* is based on the view that successful domination is not the same as political solution, rather it suggests the use of unmediated coercion and brute force. In other words, violence is not a political means. This principle became an axiom for contemporary realist writers, as Matt Sleat states, it is not acceptable to reduce "politics to violence by making the *de jure* right to rule equivalent to the *de facto* ability to do so".[15] It is apparent that the rejection of might makes right serves the goal of showing that realism denies the idea that anything goes and the view that there are no criteria for evaluation in politics. Even though there is no clear understanding of might is right behind its dismissal,[16] this is the general attitude of contemporary realism.

Williams's political realism finds the assigned role of morality problematic both in might is right and moralism. His anti-moralist but not anti-moral attitude governs the text of *Realism and Moralism in Political Theory*. In line with this, the main challenge of Williams's realism is to find a way to show that politics and the exercise of power are not exclusively determined by applying moral rules, and at the same time to prove that politics is not only a matter of successfully coercing people to accept the ruling power. Politics – according to realist writers – is somewhere between the two. To understand this concept precisely, we should turn to the text itself.

II.

Realism and Moralism in Political Theory was a lecture given during the late 1980s and 1990s by Williams, published after the philosopher's death in 2003 in a book that collects other lectures and essays of his edited by Geoffrey Hawthorn. These texts were to serve as the bases for a book on politics Williams had been working on until the

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14 Williams 2005, 5.

15 Sleat 2014, 315.

16 I believe that the mistake realists make lies in their superficial reading of might is right. Might can actually imply right, however this can never be unrestricted. In other words, might makes right does not mean that power can do whatever it wants. Therefore, the idea that anything goes cannot be true, because there are always limitations on what can be done. These constraints do not come from moral prescriptions as moralists believe, but rather they are natural boundaries, such as the ends of human capabilities and circumstantial restrictions. For instance, what can be done is limited by the actual moral expectations that people have; those who hold power have to act in accordance with these expectations to a certain extent, or they will lose their power. Consequently, the realist rejection of might is right is unnecessary, for it relies on a false reading that it excludes any moral or other boundaries in politics.

end of his life but never finished.[17] For the lack of a comprehensive book, Williams's ideas on political matters are scattered, and the texts in their current forms are rather fragmentary. This makes it challenging to reconstruct Williams's view. Moreover, since Williams rejects systematising and theorizing, it would be a misplaced goal to formulate a theory of realism based on Williams's writings.[18] Therefore, the current aim is not to reproduce Williams's realist theory, but to accurately understand his foundational ideas, which determine contemporary realism.

The starting point for Williams is the critique of political moralism. He claims that theories of political moralism subordinate politics to some moral conception, which means that the task of politics is seen as either to implement the vision of a moral ideal or to comply with it. Williams explains how Rawls's neo-Kantian theory is an example of political moralism. The basic argument is that Rawlsian theory is defined by the following structure: the moral restricts what politics legitimately can do. This is true both for *A Theory of Justice* and the latter *Political Liberalism*. In these two works, Rawls appoints justice (a moral virtue) as the goal of a well-ordered society. It does not make a difference from the realist perspective that in *Political Liberalism* Rawls constructs a political conception of justice instead of a moral one based on a thin theory of good.[19] The political conception of justice is still founded on a moral conception, because it relies on the reasonableness (the moral-rational capacity) of people. Reasonable citizens want to agree on a framework that is acceptable to all (regardless of their particular comprehensive doctrines).[20] This framework, based on the political conception of justice, is the object of their overlapping moral consensus. As Williams quotes Rawls "the stability of a democratic pluralistic society is, or should be, sustained by the moral psychology of citizens living within an overlapping consensus".[21]

Accordingly, the condition of legitimacy is based on a predetermined moral requirement: a political arrangement has to be just in order to be legitimate. The consensus on the basic principles regarding the political conception of justice is justified, because it is an outcome of an appropriate process, the exercise of the rational faculty. The legitimate use of power has to be congruent with the principles agreed upon. As Rawls states: "Our exercise of political power is fully proper only when it is exercised in accordance with a constitution the essentials of which all citizens as free and equal may reasonably be expected to endorse in the light of principles and ideals

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17 Hall 2013, 11–12.
18 Hall 2013, 21.
19 Rawls 1999, 355–58.
20 For further elaboration see John Horton's *Rawls, Public Reason and the Limits of Liberal Justification* (Horton 2003).
21 Williams 2005, 2. Stability for Rawls means stability for the right reasons.

acceptable to their common human reason."[22] The Rawlsian theory can be evaluated in the following way from the realist position:

> This seems to turn politics into a realm of implausibly harmonious moral and political consensus and exclude much of the disagreement and conflict that seems to characterise politics, including fundamental disagreements about constitutional essentials, conceptions of justice and even the nature and limits of politics itself.[23]

In contrast to the view of Rawls and political moralism, Williams sees – relying on Hobbes – politics as a tool to avoid *summum malum* and not as a tool to achieve *summum bonum*.[24] Accordingly, the first question of politics, that is, the primary task of politics is "the securing of order, protection, safety, trust, and the conditions of cooperation".[25] Williams points out that these have to be re-secured from time to time, which implies that there are no enduring solutions in politics (as opposed to the idea embodied in the commitment to finding the single best solution). The concept of legitimacy is inseparable from what the role of politics is viewed to be.[26] In order to be legitimate, it is necessary for a state to solve the first question, but Williams points out that it is not a sufficient achievement.[27] For Hobbes, it was a satisfactory criterion that if power provides a better state than a condition without power, then it is legitimate. Power has to be able to protect its subjects.[28] However, Hobbes's requirement is problematic in at least two respects. First, one might argue that it is difficult to tell whether an existing state with a rule is better than a state without one. Secondly, the specific problem of Williams is that the requirement of order can be met too easily, which allows for oppressive regimes to pass as legitimate. Therefore, the Hobbesian approach is unable to distinguish between political rule and effective domination, which should be the primary aim when one determines the standards of legitimacy according to Williams. This goal becomes apparent when Williams posits that the solution to the problem of order cannot become the problem itself, for instance in the form of terror and violence. As Galston states, "[T]he core challenge of politics is to overcome anarchy without embracing tyranny."[29]

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22 Rawls 1993, 137.
23 Sleat 2014, 322.
24 Hall 2013, 17. As Hobbes writes: "The passions that incline men to peace, are fear of death; desire of such things as are necessary to commodious living." (Hobbes 1998, 86)
25 Williams 2005, 3.
26 For a comprehensive explanation of contemporary realist legitimacy, see Sigwart 2013.
27 Williams 2005, 3.
28 Hobbes 1998, 115.
29 Galston 2010, 391.

Respectively, it can be said that Williams's liberal realist legitimacy places itself between the two extreme positions. It does not accept the Rawlsian solution, because it gives moral criteria for legitimacy instead of political ones, and it does not accept the Hobbesian solution because it disregards political morality by giving an insufficient definition of legitimacy. None of them understands the nature of the relationship between morality and politics, therefore, neither have the right means to determine legitimacy. Williams believes that when doing political theory, the aim should be to give "greater autonomy to distinctively political thought".[30] A genuine political philosophy adheres to the idea that politics is an autonomous field with specific rules and notions of its own (that cannot be derived from ethics). Since the demands of politics (and political values) are distinctive, the definition of legitimacy has to be correspondingly political.

Williams's solution subscribes to the autonomy of the sphere of politics: he introduces the idea of Basic Legitimation Demand, meeting which is a genuine political requirement. An appropriate answer to the Basic Legitimation Demand is the acceptable solution to the first question, which means that "the state has to offer a justification of its power to each subject".[31] This implies that the state must be able to offer a justification to the most disadvantaged group of people within its borders and protect them as well.[32] In light of this explanation, the question arises: is the criteria of Basic Legitimation Demand a moral requirement? Williams argues that even if the Basic Legitimation Demand is a moral principle, it is not prior to politics. It is a political demand, it exists to enable one to distinguish between political solution and "successful domination".[33] In this respect, the Basic Legitimation Demand "is a claim that is inherent in there being such a thing as politics".[34]

Yet a critic of Williams, Charles Larmore has attempted to show that there is a circularity in Williams's concept. The realist account of legitimacy is based on the idea that moral principles external to the sphere of politics cannot serve as conditions of legitimacy, because legitimacy is a political principle. Therefore, legitimacy has to be based on political criteria. Some interpretations claim that political criteria are equal to power justifying itself. Thus, in order to avoid the self-legitimation, criteria have to come from outside of politics. However, this was already rejected in the first step. Consequently, Larmore claims that Williams's realist approach enters a paradoxical state. There are two possible directions to move in according to Larmore. Realism has

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30 Williams 2005, 3.
31 Williams 2005, 4.
32 Williams 2005, 4–5.
33 Williams 2005, 5.
34 Williams 2005, 5.

to either accept self-justification or it has to rely on external moral requirements. He thinks that the latter would be the appropriate foundation of legitimacy.

> [I]t is not so much the BLD as rather the justification of state power, whatever it may be, in which satisfying the BLD is taken to consist, that must express a 'morality prior to politics' […]. […] [Legitimacy is] when people accept a state as legitimate, and when a state claims legitimacy for itself, they are holding that the state's exercise of coercive power really is justified, […] whatever its quality, the attempt to justify the state's exercise of coercive power has to base itself on principles assumed to have a validity antecedent to, because purportedly justifying, the authority claimed for the state.[35]

Although critics readily accuse Williams of both anti-morality and moralism, these accusations are based on a confusion. To answer the first charge: critiques arbitrarily limit political legitimation to the self-justification of power. This shows the misunderstanding of Williams's concept. Williams argues: "The situation of one lot of people terrorizing another lot of people is not per se a political situation: it is, rather, the situation which the existence of the political is in the first place supposed to alleviate (replace)."[36] That is why the Basic Legitimation Demand calls for the Critical Theory Principle. According to this, an acceptance of a regime made by itself through coercion is not legitimate.[37] This shows that Williams did not try to "legitimate the political order without reference to moral values".[38] The answer to the second allegation is this: the Basic Legitimation Demand can include moral considerations, nevertheless, these are not external, abstract and universal ideas, but concrete and local ones. Those moral expectations are the part of politics that people actually hold. Since people's needs change, there cannot be a fixed set of moral criteria of legitimacy.

Legitimacy, understood by Williams, requires that it has a "roughly equal acceptability (acceptability to each subject)".[39] Acceptability means that the legitimation offered *makes sense* as such, "MS [makes sense] as an example of authoritative order, […] it MS to us as a legitimation". [40] This strongly depends on people's beliefs about morality, politics, economics and so on, which are rendered by historical experiences, cultural circumstances and current conditions, that is, by particular factors. Everyone has different conceptions about what it takes for a state to be legitimate, about what

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35 Larmore 2013, 16–18.

36 Williams 2005, 5.

37 Williams 2005, 6.

38 Sleat 2014, 317.

39 Williams 2005, 7. The problem with this criterion is that it is underdetermined (Szűcs 2016, 53).

40 Williams 2005, 11. This notion of legitimacy rests on Max Weber's, according to him „the basis of every system of authority, and correspondingly of every kind of willingness to obey, is a belief, a belief by virtue of which persons exercising authority are lent prestige" (Weber 1964, 382).

makes sense to them as legitimation, and these are contingent to a certain extent. "The beliefs that lie at the base of forms of legitimation are often as confused, potentially contradictory, incomplete, and pliable as anything else, and they can in principle be manipulated, although in most cases not ad libitum."[41] Since beliefs are diverse, there can be many different reasons why people think a regime is legitimate. Williams's argument that the state must establish and maintain order is only a general criterion which reflects on fundamental expectations of human beings toward a regime. The concrete demands vary and they go beyond the establishment of order; there are additional requests that the state must satisfy in order to be accepted. Naturally, there are differences between people's political expectations within a single society and there are differences between different societies' political cultures as well. Therefore, there is no single criterion of legitimacy within one society, just as there is no single criterion of legitimacy globally either.

The final consideration in connection with liberal realist legitimacy is that power always has a limited legitimation. Sleat argues as follows: "At least in part every political order will be partially imposed by coercive force because it cannot be fully or sufficiently legitimated to all those who are subject to it",[42] which is a situation prohibited by moralist theories. Ideas about legitimacy are not unchanging, and sometimes politics itself has an impact on the way people think about political concepts. As Sleat puts it, "there is no way in which legitimacy can float completely free from the power relations in which it is engaged".[43] Therefore, legitimacy is not black-and-white: it should be evaluated in terms of degrees. According to Bernard Williams: "We can accept that the considerations that support LEG are scalar, and the binary cut LEG/ILLEG is artificial and needed only for certain purposes."[44] Politics uses many forms of force, but it is hard to distinguish the acts that automatically make a regime illegitimate from those that are momentary misconducts. An illegitimate action does not make an illegitimate state. Thus, it can be concluded that the accurate distinction between successful domination and political rule is difficult.

From the concept of legitimacy, the question arises: "How do we get to liberalism?"[45] Since this has an important effect on the criteria of legitimacy in a Western context, Williams describes the succession of liberalism in the following way: liberals expand the standards of who counts as disadvantaged, of the expectations of state, and of what counts as a threat.[46] The consequence of this is that only the liberal solution meets

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41 Geuss 2008, 36.
42 Sleat 2014, 329.
43 Sleat 2014, 330.
44 Sleat 2014, 10.
45 Williams 2005, 7.
46 Williams 2005, 7.

the Basic Legitimation Demand "now and around here".[47] To show this concept in simple terms, Williams created the following formula: "Legitimacy + Modernity = Liberalism".[48] This means that what counted as a legitimate state in the past does not necessarily count as one today. "'MS' is a category of historical understanding",[49] when applying it to a past state it is used as an evaluative concept, but using it to judge one's own state in the present must be a normative one.[50] This means that in the Western context, the liberal answer makes sense to people.

This is a fundamentally different approach to liberalism than the dominant ones. Williams links his view to Judith Shklar's idea of liberalism of fear, "the original and only defensible meaning of liberalism",[51] according to which liberalism is understood as a conception whose main goal is to protect the less empowered from violence. This suggests a break with the dogmatic supersaturated liberalisms.[52] Williams also emphasises the importance of democratic settlement and participation in connection with liberalism. His goal is to offer an account of liberalism based on a new foundation. Thus, realist liberalism is not grounded on the "liberal conception of the man",[53] it is not based on respect for moral agency or moral contractualism. Instead, according to Williams, liberalism is justified, because it is successful and there is a global demand for it. Williams gives an example of how liberal ideas become prevailing. There are contemporary societies that are non-liberal, and as liberal ideas spread citizens of such states may accept them. Then, the Basic Legitimation Demand will arise, due to which the state eventually has to become more liberal. This is how liberalism advances.

III.

The following concerns arise. First of all, we can ask how the claim that order is the first question of politics can be reconciled with the idea that there cannot be a single principle that politics is supposed to actualise. It can be argued that safety, which is guaranteed by stability, is a universal need for human beings. This does not mean that order is always the primary concern of politics: there may be cases where other needs can override it, it only means that generally, self-preservation is thought to be a fundamental interest of all kinds of people. For instance, it is certainly possible that in

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47 Williams 2005, 8.
48 Williams 2005, 9.
49 Williams 2005, 11.
50 Williams 2005, 11.
51 Shklar 1989, 21.
52 A fellow realist, John Gray also argues against rationalist-moralist understanding of liberalism in Gray 2000.
53 Gray 1986, x.

a particular situation, to do justice is more important than protecting order. Moreover, what order means to people is very diverse, it is a notion that can be filled with various concrete expectations.

A similar argument can be made regarding legitimacy. The Basic Legitimation Demand does not assume that there is only one right answer to it. However, it does require a state to give one in order to be legitimate. It is a requirement that can be globally applied, which is not blind to the particularities of different societies. The condition that an answer has to make sense shows this precisely. The difficulty of making a theory sensitive to the particularities of different societies is a general challenge. Since theorising inherently consists of generalising, it can conflict with pluralism. Williams's approach can be instructive in solving such problems.

In order to understand the applicability of Williams's concept, its relation to normativity has to be made clear. It seems that underlying his approach is the idea of the inseparability of descriptive and normative notions.[54] This can be explained in the following way: it is problematic to say something about what *ought* to be without saying something about what *is* (or more precisely, how one interprets what is). This is true the other way around as well. What is (or at least its interpretation) depends on what ought to be. This is fundamentally different from the way moralism relates to normativity. No matter how precisely moralist writers can describe reality, when they create what the ideal should be or prescribe principles, that is, when they formulate normative content, they are detached from reality. This detachment is the cause of abstractness and what the realist call *a priori* reasoning. Williams has a different approach to normativity. He is not so much interested in finding the most realistic prescriptions. For him, the origin of normativity is not the philosopher, but rather the people. This means that people's expectations and actions (for instance organising their political living respectively) are the source of normativity.

Two considerations follow from the interpretation I have given above, and from Williams's text itself. These are connected to questions that are not particularly new in political philosophy; nevertheless, they remain troubling in this context.

Firstly, since people shape the lives of their communities, how can it be guaranteed that they will not change it for the worse? The success of liberalism is contingent, and it is not clear what could secure it. The moralist answers are unsatisfactory, because they misjudge human nature. The realist answers are also unsatisfactory in a sense, because they accept that sometimes things do get worse. Although the realist position might be disappointing to some, it is instructive for philosophy. Realists think that philosophy

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54 Some writers think this would be a fruitless distinction, for instance Geuss writes that "I do not distinguish sharply between a descriptive theory and a 'pure normative theory' (the former purportedly giving just the facts; the latter moral principles, imperatives, or ideal norms), because it is useless." (Geuss 2008, 16)

alone cannot solve such a problem, since it does not have sufficient authority. They believe that it is first and foremost the task of political practice to safeguard liberalism, and even then, liberalism still cannot be guaranteed.

Secondly, it is problematic to apply Williams's account of legitimacy. According to Williams, one can only make sense of the things the way one interprets them. Therefore, one cannot completely understand how or why a legitimation makes sense to others. This results in the problem of not having a theoretical or practical directive towards other political arrangements. Thus, the question of how one can successfully distinguish between legitimate rule and successful domination seems insoluble by Williams's tools. This is congruent with the realist attitude that politics is not about black-and-white matters.

IV.

In spite of these issues, Williams's liberal realism offers a compelling view of politics, as opposed to mainstream political philosophies. Williams's rejection of political moralism is grounded in the fact that moralism is based on a mistaken view of how human morality and rationality work. Williams thinks that theory can only have a limited effect on political practice. His scepticism is the reason why he rejects the political constructivism of Rawls. People have all kinds of motivation, many of which are not reasonable. As Horton puts it: "Those reasons often will include some measure of self-interest, but may also include more general prudential considerations and whatever moral principles and other values can be effectively mobilized in support of a particular political settlement."[55] Realists think that there is a primary concern of human beings that precedes and brings about their need for justice. As Strauss expounds the Hobbesian concept: "the desire for self-preservation is the root of all justice and morality".[56] There is another reason why justice cannot be the central aim of a society: it is a misunderstanding of the nature of political life that a single criterion can and should determine it. There are various expectations that the state has to meet, and different situations require different principles (or no principles at all) to govern their solutions. Thus, we can conclude that the underlying idea of realism, as Williams suggests, is that liberals overvalue rationality. Human reason does have a role – it is not true that conflicts can never be rationally resolved – but not every situation has a particularly

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55 Horton 2010, 440.
56 Strauss 1965, 13.

rational answer; there is no common currency according to which the gains and losses can be calculated in politics.[57]

Williams created a concept that disallows the primacy of rationality, and as it has been shown, a number of considerations follow from this rejection. The denial of the optimistic reliance on rational-moral capabilities of humans does not collapse into a mere acceptance of power and the use of brute force. Morality cannot be excluded from politics and political evaluation, but it has a different relationship to political practice as opposed to the way moralist see it. This is especially clear within the concept Williams gives regarding legitimacy. The Rawlsian legitimacy exhibits the moralist view, according to which moral principles are authoritative in defining political concepts such as legitimacy. Williams, on the other hand, thinks that distinctively political principles have to determine legitimacy. However, these do not lack moral consideration. Order is a political value, the Critical Theory Principle does have moral dimensions, and what makes sense to people as legitimation depends partly on moral expectations. In Williams's account, the role of morality is understood within the sphere of autonomous politics and not extrinsically. Autonomy means that politics is not subjected to morality.

By making it clear that rationality has a limited authority and by placing morality in its right position in relation to politics, Williams defined the realist understanding of the nature of politics and human beings. Within this framework, he set the foundations of a liberal system, which draws on the successful history thereof in the world. In general, Williams's liberal political realism recognises that politics is a complex sphere, which urges liberal thinkers to dismiss the idea of pure reason and change their expectations of philosophy, respectively.

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57 Williams 1981, 77.

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