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Alternatives to moralism

Political realist essays on power and legitimation

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Publication date

2021

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Citation for published version (APA):

Aytaç, U. (2021). *Alternatives to moralism: Political realist essays on power and legitimation*.

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Alternatives to Moralism

Political Realist Essays on
Power and Legitimation

Uğur Aytaç

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Layout and cover design: Anna Bleeker | persoonlijkproefschrift.nl

Printed by Ipskamp Printing | proefschriften.net

ISBN: 978-94-6421-551-9

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Alternatives to Moralism

Political Realist Essays on Power and Legitimation

ACADEMISCH PROEFSCHRIFT

ter verkrijging van de graad van doctor

aan de Universiteit van Amsterdam

op gezag van de Rector Magnificus

prof. dr. ir. K.I.J. Maex

ten overstaan van een door het College voor Promoties ingestelde commissie,

in het openbaar te verdedigen in de Agnietenkapel

op vrijdag 17 december 2021, te 16.00 uur

door Uğur Aytaç

geboren te Eskişehir

Promotiecommissie

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Faculteit der Maatschappij- en Gedragwetenschappen

Preface

This thesis, entitled *Alternatives to Moralism: Political Realist Essays on Power and Legitimation*, is based on the following collection of articles:

- 1- Aytac, U. (2022). 'Political Realism and Epistemic Constraints', *Social Theory and Practice*, forthcoming.
- 2- Aytac, U. & Rossi, E. 'Ideology Critique without Moralism'.
- 3- Aytac, U. 'Global Political Legitimacy and the Structural Power of Capital: A Radical Realist Account', (under review at the *Journal of Social Philosophy*).
- 4- Aytac, U. (2021). 'On the Limits of the Political: The Problem of Overly Permissive Pluralism in Mouffe's Agonism', *Constellations*, 28(3), 417-431

In the co-authored piece, my co-author and I equally contributed to the development of arguments, conceptualization, and writing of the article.

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Acknowledgements

This thesis would not have been possible without the intellectual and emotional support of my supervisors, colleagues, friends, and family.

I would first like to thank the NWO for financially supporting my research.

The thesis owes its greatest intellectual debt to my supervisors Enzo Rossi and Paul Raekstad. Over the past four years Enzo has been a fountain of horizon-expanding criticism, moral support, and encouragement to find my own voice as a political theorist. My appreciation for his guidance goes far beyond what I can acknowledge here.

The thesis greatly benefited from Paul's insightful and challenging comments. When I needed advice, they were extremely generous with their time. Paul's critical feedback enabled me to reflect on the fundamental problems of political theory and how they relate to my own work.

I wish to express my gratitude to Alan Thomas, Robin Celikates, Annette Freyberg-Inan, Daniel Loick, and Johan Olsthoorn who accepted to serve on the doctoral committee and took the time to read the whole thesis.

I would like to thank a fantastic group of fellow political theorists who took the time to read the whole thesis or portions thereof: Ben Cross, Janosch Prinz, Akshath Jitendranath, Jens van 't Klooster, Adrian Kreutz, Manon Westphal, Lea Klarenbeek, Gordon Arlen, Afsoun Afsahi, and Eric Schliesser. Their questions, comments, and companionship encouraged and formed me as a scholar. Further, I thank Yara Al Salman and Marina Uzunova who shared their brilliant thoughts during our reading groups. I also thank Volkan Çıdam, Faik Kurtulmuş, and Zeynep Pamuk who helped me translate my philosophical interests and questions for the broader public.

I thank my (former and current) colleagues at the Department of Political Science for creating a welcoming, supportive, and stimulating work environment. I especially wish to acknowledge Beste İşleyen, Saskia Bonjour, Marcel Hanegraaff, Gijs Schumacher, Matthijs Rooduijn, Wouter van der Brug, Daphne van der Pas, Mike Medeiros, Marcel Maussen, Armen Hakhverdian, Sarah de Lange, Roderik Rekker, Tom van der Meer, Theresa Kuhn, Wahideh Achbari, Michael Eze, and Eelco Harteveld. Leila Abouyaala, Naziha Irassir, Samira Laazane, Evelyn Oomen, Yomi van der Veen, and Leentje de Vos within the Department and the Amsterdam Institute for Social Science Research were tireless in providing institutional support.

I am particularly grateful to the (former and current) inhabitants of Bro.01. The amazing PhD community in the Challenges group disproved my initial fear that PhD research would be an alienating and isolating journey. In addition to their companionship, I appreciated their engagement with the philosophical aspects of my research. I particularly wish to thank Wouter, Isabella, Anne Louise, Sanne, Hannah, Ebe, Maaïke, Sander, Patrick, Lisanne, Remko, Maria, Sonja, Eda, Haylee, Anne, Valerie, Thomas, Linet, Merve, Judith, Laura, Norah, Sylvia, Christian, Nick, Twan, and Eline. Without Gerrit and Alex, fellow PhD candidates in the Department of Philosophy, it would not have been possible to initiate the Amsterdam Graduate Conference in Political Theory.

I wish to express my gratitude to those whose friendship and solidarity helped me continue through challenging times. Ellis, Natalie, Anıl, Erdal, Çağla, Serkant, Mustafa, Mert, Katal, Sidar, and Gülbike were always there for me.

I am grateful to my parents who selflessly put my education before all else since my early childhood, despite their own hardships. I thank my brother who always supported my ambition to become a scholar.

Hazal. Thank you for your love, support, and determination. Without your strength and compassion, nothing would be the same.

Abstract

Where should we derive political norms from? The methodological debate between moralism and realism in political theory is largely shaped around this meta-normative question. While moralists suggest that political theory is a branch of moral philosophy, realists argue that there are sources of political normativity that are not reducible to moral considerations. However, what these non-moral sources are remains to be clarified. This thesis offers an account of political realism that answers the question of normativity in a pluralist manner. My main contention is that there are *different sources of political normativity* that we need to utilize for *distinct tasks and contexts of legitimation*. I characterize three different types of non-moral political normativity: the inner normativity of politics, epistemic normativity, and linguistic normativity. I propose that we employ these normative sources in three different contexts of legitimation: state power, socio-political order, and imposing limits on the boundaries of the political. First, the inner normativity of politics focuses on state power and identifying the conditions of political legitimacy that are derived from the point and purpose of state institutions. Its task is basically to set out a minimalistic conception of political legitimacy that concentrates on the danger of tyrannical states. Second, epistemic strategies such as the critique of flawed ideological beliefs and empirically informed conceptual innovation are employed to develop a more expansive criticism of the socio-political order: a complex ensemble of institutions including the state, culture, and the economy. These types of evaluations shift the focus from state institutions to the broader power structures that shape and determine the functioning of state power. The scope of social criticism expands in this approach. Third, the Wittgensteinian idea of linguistic normativity is offered to evaluate relatively invisible and informal power relations, namely depoliticizing and excluding certain views from public debate. In the absence of adequate moral and epistemic common ground, I show that linguistic normativity can be useful in criticizing excessive politicization in the political community, e.g., science-denialists' politicization of science.

Keywords: political normativity, realism, moralism, legitimacy, power.