

MAKING SENSE OF POLITICAL NORMATIVITY

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POLITICAL LIFE, like the rest of life, makes demands on us. There are certain things we ought to do and certain evaluations we ought to make when it comes to politics. Some of this normative action is of the prudential variety, some of it is epistemic, and much of it is blandly instrumental. But it seems like a good chunk of it—the chunk that political philosophy cares about—is moral.¹ It is morally wrong, for example, for a government to oppress its citizens. And we have moral reasons to pursue political projects that will make society more just. When political philosophers theorize about justice, legitimacy, democracy, freedom, equality, and so on, the goal is to figure out what morality says about these issues. Or so the standard story goes. Call this *political moralism*.²

Political realists find this story problematic. They critique the primacy of the moral in political theory.³ The traditional way to do this is to highlight the

1 However, see the recent interest in the field of political epistemology, as exemplified in, e.g., Hannon and de Ridder, eds., *The Routledge Handbook of Political Epistemology*.

2 The term ‘political moralism’ comes from Bernard Williams. He uses it to refer to views that, according to him, “make the moral prior to the political” (“Realism and Moralism in Political Theory,” 2). Since Williams, there has been some debate about how to understand moralism. In their well-known 2018 paper, Jonathan Leader Maynard and Alex Worsnip characterize the view as holding that “what gives political theory its normativity is . . . morality” (“Is There a Distinctively Political Normativity?” 765). In other words, it denies the existence of a distinctly political domain of normativity. More recently, however, Leader Maynard has offered a less ambitious definition of moralism, according to which “moral reasoning is a necessary, though not sufficient, task of political theory” (“What Is Political Moralism?” 14). Leader Maynard still denies that there is a distinctly political domain of normativity; the purpose of the weaker definition is to allow for other kinds of nonmoral (e.g., prudential) reasons to play a role in politics. Because this article is about whether a distinctly political domain of normativity exists, I follow the earlier usage of the term ‘moralism’. As I clarify in section 5 below, I am open to the weaker version of moralism.

3 Williams describes this as the “refusal of a mere moral normativity” (“Realism and Moralism,” 10). The literature related to political realism’s revival is vast and growing. Williams’s posthumously published collection *In the Beginning Was the Deed*, particularly its first essay, is a crucial touchstone. For a more radical realism, the work of Raymond Geuss is influential. See especially Geuss, *Philosophy and Real Politics*. A useful critical overview can be found in

importance of instrumental or prudential concerns.⁴ Another way is to add to morality's list of competitors by claiming that there is a distinct *political* domain of normativity.⁵ Suitably distinguished from the former, the latter strategy has not been particularly popular—indeed, many realists have distanced themselves from it.⁶ This is in part because it is not immediately clear what it means to say that there is a distinctively political normativity, nor what it would take to vindicate such a claim. Thus, realists might be better advised to go with the other options just mentioned or to otherwise try to articulate their concerns within a picture that still gives pride of place to morality.

Instead of these more concessive courses, this article argues that there is a readily available route to the idea of a distinctly political kind of normativity. An important early stop on this route is the thought that a picture of normativity that admits of different normative domains is an effective way to make sense of normative conflicts—that is, situations where normativity pulls us in different directions. This suggests a strategy for individuating domains of normativity: showing that the existence of distinct domains is what best explains some particular normative conflict. More specifically for our purposes, if there are conflicts for which a distinctly *political* domain figures in the best explanation, then we have good evidence that there is such a domain. Showing that there are such conflicts, then, is at the heart of the argument. This naturally leads to other questions about the nature of the political domain. I have plenty to say about this as well. But I want to stress that even if one is not convinced by that account, one can and, I believe, should still accept that the question that the debate turns on is whether a political domain, however it is cashed out, is needed to make sense of the normative landscape. In other words, the substantive account of the political domain of normativity that emerges is one contribution of this article. Another, no less important contribution is laying out the strategy for getting there.

The article is organized as follows. In section 1, I introduce the idea of normative domains and how they help us make sense of normative conflicts. In

Rossi and Sleat, "Realism in Normative Political Theory." More recent collections of note include Sleat, ed., *Politics Recovered*; and Sagar and Sabl, eds., *Realism in Political Theory*.

- 4 See, for example, realism in international relations. For a contemporary effort to cash out the idea of the political's distinctive normativity in terms of the instrumental and the epistemic, see Burelli and Destri, "The Sources of Political Normativity." See also Rossi, "What Can Epistemic Normativity Tell Us About Politics?"
- 5 See the numerous citations in Leader Maynard and Worsnip, "Is There a Distinctively Political Normativity?" 757n3, to which we can add Jubb, "On What a Distinctively Political Normativity Is"; and Burelli, "Political Normativity and the Functional Autonomy of Politics." See also the recent special collection on political normativity in *Topoi* (2024).
- 6 Sleat, "Realism and Political Normativity."

section 2, I make the initial case that there is a familiar tension in politics and political philosophy for which political normativity can serve as a good explanation. Section 3 bolsters this case by interpreting the domain of political normativity in terms of the value of a political order making sense to its subjects as authoritative (which I will abbreviate, following Bernard Williams, as 'MS'). With the basics of the theory on the table, I then turn to its clarification and defense against moralism. Section 4 responds to the moralist objection that MS, if it is valuable, is only morally valuable. In section 5, I address another moralist objection, that political normativity is either not normative at all or normative only in the weak and uninteresting sense that etiquette is normative. Section 6 concludes.

1. DOMAINS OF NORMATIVITY

Normativity speaks in many voices. As Derek Baker writes,

What ought I to do? A lot of things, and frankly, too many things. Too many things, because there are too many oughts. Morally I ought to give to charity, prudentially I ought to invest. Epistemic reasons may demand that I begin to doubt my friend's innocence, while loyalty forbids it.⁷

He gives other examples: the director Zack Snyder has reasons of self-interest to sign on to projects like *Batman v Superman*, though he has aesthetic reasons not to; Gyges had prudential reasons to kill the king, but moral reasons to refrain.⁸ We can come up with more: Paul Gauguin's *Two Tahitian Women* is aesthetically valuable yet morally fraught, given the artist's personal history and that history's connection to the content of the painting.⁹

7 Baker, "Skepticism About Ought *Simpliciter*," 230 (emphasis removed). For more on the epistemic conflicting with the moral, see Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 126.

8 Baker, "Skepticism About Ought *Simpliciter*," 234.

9 In an essay about political realism, Matt Sleat also gives the example of aesthetic and moral concerns pulling in different directions when judging a piece of art. Sleat, "Politics Recovered," 6. The example of Gauguin has provided good fodder for those interested in this phenomenon (although it is worth noting that Williams raises Gauguin's case to make an entirely different point about moral luck). Gauguin deserted his wife and children to live in French Polynesia, where he engaged in numerous abusive relationships with young women. These problematic escapades produced notable works, including *Two Tahitian Women*. The artist Michelle Hartney's "performance/hang and run/call to action" *Separate the Art from the Artist* is one example of artists themselves grappling with Gauguin and others (Picasso and Balthus, in Hartney's case) and the issues that they raise. For more on the relationship between the aesthetic and moral (and an early statement of the idea of encroachment), see Eaton, "Integrating the Aesthetic and the Moral." For an excellent

In describing these situations in this way, we make use of the idea of normative *kinds* or *domains*, which I define here, following Errol Lord, as systems of evaluations, recommendations, and demands.¹⁰ The idea of normative domains is relatively uncontroversial, even if there is debate about how exactly to understand them or what ought to count as one.¹¹ The domains invoked above—the moral, the prudential, the epistemic, and the aesthetic—are among the paradigmatic domains. And the distinction invoked when claiming that political normativity is a distinct kind of normativity is the same distinction invoked when theorists talk about there being moral normativity, prudential normativity, epistemic normativity, and aesthetic normativity.¹²

In addition to illustrating the notion of the domains, the above examples also point to why domains are so useful: they allow us to make sense of the variety of normativity, in particular the ways in which we are so often pulled in different directions. This is not to say that the pulls have equal force; in many cases, it may be that one of the domains wins the day, and sometimes this will be obvious.¹³ But even in such cases, domains allow us to account for the remainders, to register the fact that when we hang the Gauguin painting on account of its aesthetic value, we do so at some cost, even if it is the case

treatment of the issue outside of the philosophical literature, which sees things differently from Hartney, see Nelson, “Art Song,” esp. 21–23.

- 10 See Lord, “Choosing the Right Companion,” sec. 2.1. We should not take the term ‘system’ too seriously here, as domains can be relatively disorganized.
- 11 For similar lists, see Lord, “Choosing the Right Companion,” sec. 2.1; Leader Maynard and Worsnip, “Is There a Distinctively Political Normativity?” 756; and Baker, “Skepticism About Ought *Simpliciter*,” 230–52. There is some controversy here, particularly around the prudential and its relationship to the moral. Indeed, one group of people for whom talk of domains would likely be rather bizarre is Ancient Greek philosophers. Julia Annas, for example, argues that Ancient Greek ethical theory does not give a role to distinctively prudential reasoning (“Prudence and Morality in Ancient and Modern Ethics”). In the modern context, Alex Worsnip has recently argued that there are no prudential reasons (“Eliminating Prudential Reasons”). For a famous argument as to why we should not collapse prudential reasons into morality, see Wolf, “Moral Saints.” For a recent discussion of Wolf’s argument, see Lord, “Impartiality, Eudaimonic Encroachment, and the Boundaries of Morality.” For a recent monograph on prudential normativity, see Fletcher, *Dear Prudence*.
- 12 Indeed, this is explicitly how Leader Maynard and Worsnip frame their paper “A Distinctively Political Normativity?”
- 13 Baker, though, argues against this thought, which would involve an overriding or all-things-considered ought (the *ought simpliciter*, as he calls it). Nothing in my argument hangs on this question. All I am pointing to is the existence and usefulness of domains, which is presupposed by the argument about the ought simpliciter. For discussion, see Musso, *The Historical and Contemporary Significance of Anscombe and Foot’s Metaethical Thought*, esp. ch. 4; Tiffany, “Deflationary Normative Pluralism”; and Copp, “The Ring of Gyges.”

that hanging it is indeed what we should do, all things considered.¹⁴ Without domains, our normative thought and talk would be flattened and would fail to do justice to normativity's richness.

With this in mind, debates about domains or kinds of normativity can be usefully understood as debates about how best to explain the evaluations that are apt or the reasons that we have. That is, we can read cases like the above as inferences to the best explanation wherein the explanandum is a normative conflict, and the explanans is the existence of distinct normative domains. Understood this way, these situations of conflict are good evidence of there being different domains of normativity. To take one of the cases from above, the distinction between the aesthetic and the prudential best explains the conflictual normative situation Zack Snyder is in when he is asked to direct *Batman v Superman*.

The idea that distinct domains are explanatorily powerful is not novel. It has proven useful in discussions of supererogation, for example. To briefly explain: most of us think that while it might be morally best to put oneself at great risk to save another, it is not required. Actions like these, which go beyond the call of duty, are said to be supererogatory. Supererogation raises a puzzle for moral theory: if one action is better than another, why is the better action not simply what morality demands? That is, if it really is morally better to run into the burning building to save someone's life, why is this not simply what we ought to do? A leading contemporary candidate for a solution to this puzzle is to introduce a nonmoral domain of normativity: while morality does indeed demand the further action, that action is not all-things-considered obligatory because there are normative considerations of another kind that weigh against it. As Daniel Muñoz puts it, "heroic sacrifices are optional, even though they are morally better, because we have mighty non-moral reasons not to harm ourselves."¹⁵ In other words, the initial analysis of the situation appears paradoxical because it makes use of only a single domain. The introduction of a nonmoral normative domain avoids the puzzle and best explains the data.¹⁶ This is akin to

14 As Lord puts it, we want "to be able to register a certain sort of complaint," even when the overall right thing is done ("Impartiality, Eudaimonic Encroachment, and the Boundaries of Morality," 121). The notion of domains helps us to do this.

15 Muñoz, "Three Paradoxes of Supererogation," 702.

16 Muñoz summarizes: "We need two dimensions to make sense of supererogation" ("Three Paradoxes of Supererogation," 702). As Muñoz points out, this does involve a slight revision in the concept of supererogation; going beyond the call of duty is not actually better overall, it turns out. But importantly, it holds onto the strong intuition that it is morally best. Another thing worth noting is that the term 'dimensions' is ambiguous in a way. Indeed, Muñoz is happy to grant that there are other ways of construing the distinction than relying on the idea of a distinctive normativity. But these other ways rely on

our analysis of the other cases involving Snyder, Gauguin, and so on. One need not agree with these analyses in every case; the point is to illustrate that for a nontrivial array of normative situations, we cannot make sense of them from only the moral domain. Indeed, no single domain can do all of the explanatory work by itself in such cases.

This idea of distinct normative domains, as well as the notion that they are explanatorily useful, is very important for what follows. Our strategy moving forward is to identify cases like the above in political contexts, where the existence of a distinctly political domain is the best explanation of the situation. Our analyses of such cases are structurally analogous to the nonpolitical examples given in this section.

2. NORMATIVE CONFLICTS IN POLITICS

To see the sorts of political cases I am interested in, consider the following examples.¹⁷

Immoral Democracy: A democracy passes, with wide support, a law instituting a system of taxation that is deeply inconsistent with whatever the true theory of distributive justice is.

Moral Autocracy: Disregarding the wishes of the people, who much prefer an unjust tax code, an autocrat institutes the tax code most consistent with the true theory of distributive justice.

How should we think about these cases? On the one hand, Immoral Democracy merits our moral disapproval. The law is unjust, and the people who support it are morally wrong in doing so. On the other hand, something has gone right. (We can remain vague for now about what that is.) The law has a certain kind of normative standing that it would not have if it were instituted in the face of wide opposition. It deserves a certain kind of respect, or some sort of positive evaluation. There are, then, conflicting judgments here. It is important that in pointing this out, we set aside the question of the relative weights of these judgments, as well as the question of what the correct all-things-considered judgment is. The point here is simply to notice the conflict. Similarly,

collapsing the distinction between morality and prudence, a distinction that I think we have good reasons to maintain.

¹⁷ Like the examples from section 1 above, these are toy models in that they omit many details that we would expect in the real world. Their purpose is to help us distinguish different normative considerations; given this purpose, their schematic nature is warranted at this stage of the argument.

Moral Autocracy yields competing evaluations. Despite the fact that the morally superior law has won the day, something has gone wrong here. At the very least, there is a troubling distance between the people and the political power they are being made to comply with. Again, setting aside the question of the all-things-considered evaluation, there is a normative conflict here.

These thoughts need sharpening, and we will get to that in a moment. For now, note that such cases bear an important resemblance to those considered in section 1 above. Take, for example, a simple case of supererogation. Suppose that I have a fair amount of disposable income, and consider two options regarding how I could dispose of it: give it to those worse off than me or spend it on various personal pursuits and pleasures such as travel, art, restaurants, gifts for loved ones, and so on. Morality tells me that the first option is best. The second option, or at least certain versions of it, might be morally permissible, but it is morally inferior to the first. On the picture we have worked up so far, the best way to analyze this is by holding that my reasons to choose the first option are moral, and my reasons to choose the second are not. Whatever the all-things-considered verdict might be, figuring it out involves weighing these different kinds of reasons.

Compare this with the situation from our two political cases in which the governments decide on new tax codes. Tax code *A* is most just, but everybody prefers tax code *B*. Which code ought the government implement? They have moral reasons to implement tax code *A*. But they also have reasons—of some kind—to implement tax code *B*, given that this is what the people prefer. Again, whatever the all-things-considered verdict might be, figuring it out involves weighing these reasons.

A natural way to cash out the supererogation case is to say that we have moral reasons to do what morality demands and reasons of another kind—prudential, or perhaps eudaimonic—to pursue our personal projects.¹⁸ Similarly, I argue, a natural way to cash out the political case is to say that we have moral reasons to pursue political projects that morality demands and reasons of another kind—which I call *political*—to pursue political projects that align with our own values and commitments. My argument is that in both cases, there is a normative conflict that morality alone cannot explain. And in both cases, a nonmoral normative domain can be invoked to fill in the explanatory gap. Again, it may or may not be the case that at the end of the day, what we really ought to do, all things considered, is what morality demands. This (controversial) idea is beside the point.¹⁹ The point is that there are two domains of

18 Lord, "Impartiality, Eudaimonic Encroachment, and the Boundaries of Morality."

19 See note 13 above.

normativity—two systems of evaluations, recommendations, and demands—that exert themselves in such situations. Whatever the all-things-considered verdict might be, figuring it out involves considering these different domains.

The core argumentative strategy for establishing the existence of a distinct political domain of normativity is now up and running. Describing this strategy is itself one contribution of this article. In what follows, I am concerned with the other contribution: pursuing that strategy to its end. I have sketched the initial argument for doing so in this section, but more work needs to be done. Two tasks in particular loom large. For one, we must give some idea of what the political domain is, ideally in a way that resembles the way in which we have a grasp on what the paradigmatic domains are and in a way that adds plausibility to the explanation of these cases. Second, we must show that alternative explanations that do not invoke a nonmoral domain are inadequate. I address these tasks in sections 3 and 4, respectively.²⁰

3. POLITICAL VALUE

First, let us say more about what this distinctly political domain of normativity is all about. Note that this is a distinct question from the question of what politics as a domain of human activity is all about. Many realist approaches to political normativity try to define politics as an activity in terms of some distinguishing characteristics and then to build up a theory of the kind of normativity exclusive to that domain.²¹ This strategy faces certain difficulties, however. For one, it is not easy to define politics in a succinct and uncontroversial way. More importantly for our purposes, reflection on the paradigmatic normative domains reveals that they are not solely contained within particular spheres of human activity. The epistemic, for example, is at the heart of the activity of inquiry, but it also plays a role in many other areas of human life. Similarly, the aesthetic domain is at the heart of artistic activity, but it guides our lives in other ways as well. This suggests that we should not start from a characteriza-

20 Once we have the idea of the distinct political domain, other questions arise, especially having to do with that domain's significance. I address this issue in section 5 below.

21 For example, one may understand politics as the domain of activity concerned with enforcing conduct amidst moral disagreement or the domain concerned with ensuring social order. For discussion, see Leader Maynard and Worsnip, "Is There a Distinctively Political Normativity?" 767–73, 781–85. To take another example, in his investigation of the nature of political value, Sleat argues that political values must be consistent with the nature of political practice ("What Is a Political Value?"). He seems, then, to be thinking of the political as a domain of human *activity* that other values can be appropriate or inappropriate for, not a domain of *normativity* in the sense that the moral, the aesthetic, and so on are domains of normativity.

tion of political activity from which we try to theorize the kind of normativity exclusive to that domain. In working up a theory of political normativity, then, I avoid definitional claims about what politics is as a domain of activity.²²

Instead, a helpful alternative suggestion for proceeding comes from Lord, who points out that we can profitably understand many domains of normativity in terms of their central organizing values.²³ For example, beauty and truth play this role in the domains of the aesthetic and the epistemic, respectively.²⁴ Articulating such a value for the political domain would go a long way toward filling out the argument that such a domain exists and is distinct from morality.²⁵

It also helps to have a rough characterization of the moral domain in hand or, at the very least, to avoid any controversial commitments about it.²⁶ If it turns out, for example, that the distinctness of the political rests on a contentiously narrow conception of the moral, this would make the resulting view much less interesting. Indeed, as Leader Maynard points out, this has sometimes happened in the realism-moralism debate.²⁷ We want to avoid stacking the deck in the realist's favor in this way. Using the idea of a central organizing value, then,

22 This has the happy consequences of avoiding certain difficulties inherent in views that employ the activity-based strategy. Leader Maynard and Worsnip, for example, criticize views that foreground disagreement and the priority of legitimacy ("Is There a Distinctively Political Normativity?" 767–73, 781–85). Eva Erman and Nicklas Möller characterize an entire family of realist views as holding that political reasons are just those reasons that are operative in politics (where politics is understood as a domain of activity rather than as a domain of normativity) ("The Role of Moral Norms in Political Theory"). As they point out, such views have been roundly criticized.

23 Lord, "Choosing the Right Companion." There is more to say about the idea of a central organizing value. For Lord, normative domains are often (but not always) *constitutively* organized around such values, which means that there is some attitude that is constitutively tied to the value, as belief is tied to truth (this is to say that belief has an essential connection to truth; in this case, belief's standard of correctness is tied to truth). A full account of political value might include a discussion of these issues, but I leave such details out here. For now, my ambition is simply to get an idea of political normativity off the ground. For a helpful related discussion regarding the moral's relationship to the epistemic, see Julia Driver on intellectual and ethical virtues in Driver, "The Conflation of Moral and Epistemic Virtue," as cited in Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice*, 126.

24 The aesthetic case, as Lord notes, is a bit complicated, as there are significant debates about beauty's relationship to the aesthetic ("Choosing the Right Companion," sec. 5.2). Nothing for either of our purposes hangs on these debates, though.

25 That said, we might be compelled by the argument for a distinctively political normativity laid out in sections 1 and 2 and yet disagree on the political's organizing value.

26 I thank a referee at this journal for pushing me to address this issue.

27 Leader Maynard, "What Is Political Moralism?" 14–16. As a referee also points out, this is not surprising, given political realism's connection to Williams, whose well-known conception of morality is too restrictive for many theorists.

we can posit *giving due regard to others* as having this role for the moral domain. This particular locution is derived from Lord, but the underlying idea is not idiosyncratic.²⁸ Leader Maynard, for example, argues that *other-regardingness* is the conceptual core of the moral domain.²⁹ This notion has the advantage of being both intuitively plausible and capacious enough to include many different ways of cashing out exactly what it means to give due regard to others.³⁰ It includes, for example, consequentialist views that center on aggregate utility or well-being; on such views, regarding others properly involves considering them as contributors to this aggregate.³¹ Contrast this with, say, the Kantian notion of regarding others as ends in themselves. Such views can all be understood as moral in that they are essentially interested in the importance of giving due regard to others.³²

Returning to the political, then, what can play the requisite role? The cases from the previous section—Immoral Democracy and Unjust Autocracy—as well as existing work in political realism give us some good starting points. Drawing on the work of Williams in particular, I suggest that we understand the value that competes with morality in such cases to be the value of a political order that is aligned with its participants, particularly with their desires, needs, aspirations, and so on. But we can specify this further. As Williams emphasizes, it is a basic and universal fact about human societies that they continually ask and attempt to answer questions about why power in their society is arranged as it is.³³ This practice points to a crucial goal of politics: to achieve a situation in

28 Lord, "Choosing the Right Companion," sec. 5.3.

29 Leader Maynard, "What Is Political Moralism?" 15.

30 Leader Maynard, "What Is Political Moralism?" 14–16.

31 Opponents of consequentialism of course deny that this counts as giving people due regard—indeed, one of the most famous objections to consequentialism is precisely that in subordinating individuals to the aggregate, it does not give them due regard—but we can understand this as a debate about what it means to give due regard to others, not about whether morality is about giving due regard to others. For consequentialists, as I understand them, there is no notion of giving due regard to others outside of considering them as vessels of value in a sea of aggregate value. Some consequentialists may want to add that we can and should also take up another, more personal point of view of others, as Peter Railton famously argues ("Alienation, Consequentialism, and the Demands of Morality"). Again, though, such two-level or "sophisticated" views are just more examples of how to think about giving due regard to others. I thank a referee at this journal for encouraging me to think through these issues more.

32 The capaciousness of this notion of giving due regard raises the suspicion that it must include whatever values are at the heart of political normativity. This is an important concern; I say something about it momentarily and address it more fully in section 4 below.

33 Williams, "Realism and Moralism." This is a point also at the heart of Thomas Piketty's *Capital and Ideology*, specifically as it relates to inequality. See also Greene, "Legitimacy

which people—as many as possible and to as great a degree as possible—see the various forms of power under which they live as making genuine claims on them. Williams refers to this as the order *making sense* (MS, as I will follow him in abbreviating) to its subjects as authoritative.³⁴ It is this notion, I argue, that we should understand as at the heart of the political domain of normativity, playing the role that beauty, truth, and giving due regard to others play for the domains of the aesthetic, the epistemic, and the moral, respectively.

It may initially appear that MS is a moral idea, especially if we understand morality as being about giving due regard to others. I more fully address this concern in the next section. For now, though, two points are worth making. The first is that MS is not at its core an other-regarding notion—that is, its value is not reducible to the value of people being treated or considered in a certain way.³⁵ Its value just is what I have said above: that of being able to make sense of one's political order in a particular way—namely, in that one can affirm it as being genuinely authoritative.³⁶ My claim is that such a situation is good—and good in a significant way—independently of any relational or other-regarding considerations, just as beauty and truth are. Put another way, the value at the

Without Liberalism,” 315; and Greene, “Is Political Legitimacy Worth Promoting?” 88.

- 34 Williams, “Realism and Moralism,” 10–11. The *as authoritative* part is crucial. Lots of power structures can make sense, but not all make sense *as* the sort of structure that makes a claim worthy of heeding.
- 35 It does, however, have implications for how to treat others. But this does not make it moral, as I explain in section 4 below.
- 36 A full theory of political normativity would say more about the question of what kinds of orders tend to MS and why they do so. Space prohibits developing such a theory here, but a few initial thoughts are worth giving. For one, the answers given to questions about MS vary depending on particular historical circumstances. Second, as I indicate below, democracies tend to be a reliable vehicle for MS, though this is not a conceptual truth. Third, following Williams, we might think that one consistent truism is that might does not make right—i.e., political orders that justify themselves only in terms of raw power tend not to make sense as authoritative. Fourth, power must solve what Williams calls the “first” political question, which is “the securing of order, protection, safety, trust, and the conditions of cooperation” (Williams, “Realism and Moralism,” 3). This is not sufficient, though: a state, for example, may answer this question in a way that does not MS to its subjects. One possible suggestion to generalize this notion is that political orders in general make sense when they solve the problems their subjects take themselves to have. Javier Rodríguez-Alcázar, for example, argues that politics should be understood as a kind of collective instrumental rationality that aims at achieving the goals of the people, whatever those goals may be (“Beyond Realism and Moralism”). Similarly, Vitor Sommariva proposes that political normativity is closely related to the solving of political problems (“A Constructivist Account of Political Normativity”). I am friendly to both these ideas, though I understand the connection between achieving goals (or solving problems) and MS as contingent (though robust) rather than analytic.

heart of political normativity is the value of being part of a political order that one can affirm, not the value of people being given due regard.³⁷

Second, we should resist the temptation to understand MS's value solely in terms of its apparent instrumental connection to the moral goods of peace and stability. On the one hand, it is true that societies that do poorly with regard to MS tend not to last very long or must undergo significant transformation.³⁸ And it is true that governments might have instrumental moral reasons, grounded in the moral demand to avoid violence, to achieve MS. But the demands of MS can diverge from the demands of peace and stability. Indeed, the fact that people are willing to unsettle their own political orders when they do not make sense is evidence that they value MS not merely in virtue of its connection to peace and stability. So long as we take such actions seriously, we take seriously the value of MS for its own sake.³⁹

With that said, then, we can highlight the significant explanatory power of MS. Most immediately, it has explanatory power in the particular way that interests us for this argument—namely, it explains the kind of normative conflict that we considered in the previous section through the two main examples. Furthermore, MS is a familiar notion that figures into a great deal of political philosophy, especially in the liberal tradition. It is related not only to influential discussions of democracy, but also to important discussions of the significance of consent, legitimacy, and self-determination, to name a few.⁴⁰ And as I have

37 This is compatible with thinking that in some cases, part of what it is to give due regard to others is to subject them to a political order that makes sense to them (or at least to not subject them to a political order that does not make sense to them). I discuss this more near the end of section 4 below.

38 As Piketty documents exhaustively in *Capital and Ideology*.

39 Interestingly, this distances my view from one way of thinking about political realism as being based on the priority of order and stability over other ends. For example, Erman and Möller have recently characterized realism in this way (“The Role of Moral Norms in Political Theory,” 3). In this sense, I am friendly to Samuel Bagg’s enjoinder to disconnect the realist project from the priority of legitimacy (“Realism Against Legitimacy,” 29–60). I am grateful to a referee at this journal for suggesting that I address the issues raised in these two paragraphs.

40 For the significance of consent, see the entire social contract tradition. For a well-known example connecting MS to legitimacy, recall Michael Walzer’s claim that “a state is legitimate or not depending upon the ‘fit’ of government and community, that is, the degree to which the government actually represents the political life of its people” (“The Moral Standing of States,” 214). Or see public reason accounts of legitimacy (in, e.g., Quong, “Public Reason”), according to which political principles must be justified to those subject to them. (We return to public reason below.) Finally, for an example connecting MS to self-determination, see David Miller, who argues that the intrinsic value of self-determination is “the value of belonging to a group that can act so as to make a difference to the world

mentioned, it has sociological significance: people and societies throughout history have tried to achieve it. While this latter point does not immediately vindicate MS as a reputable notion from the point of view of normative theory, it does lend it some legitimacy.⁴¹ It also partly explains its interest to political realists, who are characteristically interested in bringing political theory closer to the real world of politics.

In any case, the idea of making sense in this way is not merely sociological. It figures into a plausible reading of the cases from the previous section. For example, when we assess a democracy that has run afoul of justice (as in Immoral Democracy), a good way to understand the recognizably positive aspect of the situation is in terms of MS. The law's democratic credentials suggest (though may not guarantee) that it reflects the values and commitments of the society's members; it suggests, in other words, that the use of power in this way, for these ends, makes sense to the society's members, given who they take themselves to be and the problems they take themselves to have.⁴² Likewise, when considering the situation from the point of view of the citizens, we can put some more meat on the bones of the thought that they have reasons to want the government to pass tax code *B* (the one that they prefer) instead of tax code *A* (the just option). Those reasons are *political* reasons, grounded in the value of achieving MS, the situation wherein the power under which they live makes sense to them as authoritative. The enactment of tax code *A* would take them further from MS, even if it would take them closer to morality.⁴³

We have now, therefore, an idea of a political domain of normativity, organized around the central value of MS and motivated by its explanatory power in political conflicts. There are some difficult and important questions to be raised

in accordance with the formed will of its members" (*Is Self-Determination a Dangerous Illusion?* 36).

- 41 It is worth recalling John Stuart Mill's famous point that good evidence for something being valuable is that people do in fact value it (Mill, *Utilitarianism*, 35). This is also related to a background methodological commitment of mine (and Williams's) of pursuing philosophy as a humanistic rather than scientific discipline: the primary goal is to understand ourselves and our activities. See Williams, "Philosophy as a Humanistic Discipline."
- 42 A referee points out that in more realistic versions of this case, we may have reason to doubt that such a society really does achieve MS. If a government taxes its citizens in ways that, for example, privilege certain groups over others, it seems unlikely that they are ruling in a way that makes sense to its subjects as authoritative. The first point to reiterate is just that I stipulate for the sake of argument that MS is indeed achieved, so as to illustrate the distinction I am drawing. But I am also not sure that this is so far from some realistic cases. Many unjust tax codes are widely supported, or at least seem to be so.
- 43 Again, I make no claims about what they should want all things considered; I am arguing only that they have political reasons to want tax code *B* and moral reasons to want tax code *A*.

about this picture, and they occupy the remaining substantive sections of this article. Before turning to them, though, I want to motivate this idea further by pointing to two areas in which the idea of political normativity, understood in terms of *MS*, has helpful theoretical potential. The point here is not to settle any debates in these areas—this would be far too ambitious in the current context. My goal is modest: I mean only to illustrate the promise of political normativity for helping with some problems that have characteristically beset long-running debates.

The first area is democratic theory. *MS* gives us a way of understanding what is good about democracy, and it does so in a way that has important advantages over the traditional ways in which democratic theory has tried to do so. Such views are usually divided into two categories.⁴⁴ On the one hand, instrumentalists ground democracy's value in its tendency to deliver morally good results.⁴⁵ They may consider cases where democracy acts wrongly—cases like Immoral Democracy—to be unfortunate exceptions to this general rule, but they must concede that in those instances, democracy is not in fact good. Many theorists, though, prefer a commitment to democracy that is not so contingent, that is not held hostage to the results turning out in democracy's favor.⁴⁶ So they opt for an intrinsic value account, according to which democracy is itself part of what justice demands.⁴⁷ These theorists, though, find it difficult to explain why democracy is intrinsically good when it is so easily compatible with injustice.⁴⁸ Democracies, after all, can (and do) elect racists and fascists.

The political domain, as I am sketching it, understands democracy's value in connection to its ability to achieve *MS*. Citizens of a well-functioning democracy have a plausible story to tell each other about why they should accept how things have turned out (that is, about why their political order *MS*): it is what they have chosen, together, even if not everybody agrees. Or, if they are not moved by considerations regarding their own agency and political participation,

44 For a good introduction, see Christiano and Bajaj, "Democracy."

45 See, for example, Arneson, "Democracy Is Not Intrinsically Just." There are different ways to cash this out, but all are united by the thought that democracy's value is to be found in its outcomes, particularly in comparison to alternatives.

46 Many also want to avoid saying that, as Valentini puts it, "a society governed by a wise sovereign, or a small enlightened elite, is fully just, even if it implements an equitable distribution of resources" ("Justice, Disagreement, and Democracy," 181). In other words, they want to avoid being committed to even the possibility of a just autocracy, at least in practice.

47 Various theorists have argued, for example, that democracy is the only form of government compatible with human freedom or human equality. See Christiano and Bajaj, "Democracy," especially secs. 2.2 and 3.2.

48 Valentini, "Justice, Disagreement, and Democracy," 180–82.

they may point to the fact that, as Samuel Bagg argues, democratic institutions are reliable if limited bulwarks against state capture by self-interested elites.⁴⁹ In either case, these kinds of commitments to democracy are more robust than other instrumentalist arguments that rely on contingent outcomes, yet more realistic and more plausible than intrinsic value theories that try to accommodate democracy within morality and thus have difficulty with the fact that democracies can and do make immoral decisions.⁵⁰

Furthermore, unlike intrinsic value theories, this view also explains the fact that one of the core goods that democracy delivers can also be delivered in non-democratic contexts. This is just to say that nondemocratic political arrangements can and do sometimes make sense to their subjects and that something valuable is achieved in such cases. But we can allow for this fact while seeing why democracy is still a more reliable route, even if it is not the only route to achieving that value.

The second area of interest is legitimacy, particularly the liberal idea of legitimacy. One of the most influential theories of liberal legitimacy ties it closely to the ideas of public reason and public justification, the basic thought of which is that political power is legitimate only when exercised according to reasons that its subjects can accept.⁵¹ This is seen by its proponents as the best solution to the fundamental question of how to reconcile coercive political power with the freedom and equality of persons. Only by giving reasons that are acceptable to subjects themselves can rulers coerce them in ways consistent with their freedom and equality.

Public reason liberalism is thus based on an ideal that looks very similar to MS—what David Enoch calls “justification-to.”⁵² Enoch raises a number of problems for this notion. One is closely analogous to the problem that we have already discussed, faced by intrinsic value theorists of democracy. This is the problem arising from the fact that people can be mistaken in their beliefs. Just as democracies can pursue unjust projects, people can find abhorrent regimes acceptable to them (or, conversely, they can fail to find just regimes acceptable).

49 Bagg, “The Power of the Multitude,” *The Dispersion of Power*.

50 As a referee points out, the argument thus far still leaves available a view on which MS’s value is both intrinsic and moral but also *prima facie* (in W.D. Ross’s sense). Such a view partly captures the intrinsic value of democracy while also explaining the existence of immoral democracies, without needing a nonmoral domain of normativity. I address such a view in the next section.

51 For the Rawlsian formulation of this idea, which has some important qualifications, see Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, 217. See also Quong, “Public Reason.”

52 As Enoch puts it, “for a state (for instance) to be legitimate, its authority must be justifiable to each of those subject to it” (“Against Public Reason,” 115).

This means that public reason theory needs to introduce significant idealization, which it does with the idea of the “reasonable.”⁵³ But Enoch argues that this idealization is ad hoc—if it is important to give reasons to reasonable people that they can accept, then it is important to give reasons to *everyone* that they can accept, including the unreasonable.⁵⁴ In other words, the idea of the reasonable seems rigged up just to escape the counterexamples where people accept injustice.⁵⁵

This nicely throws into relief a general problem that political philosophy faces when trying to fit concerns related to MS entirely into the moral domain: it can do so only in ad hoc ways because of the persistent threat of conflict between what morality demands and what makes sense as authoritative to people. Enoch thinks that the solution is to downgrade the importance of justification-to (or MS) and to consider it just as one moral desideratum among others.⁵⁶ In the next section, I argue that this solution fails. On my view, political liberalism is right to emphasize justification-to, but Enoch is also right that it does so in an unconvincing way. My diagnosis is that this stems from political liberalism’s failure to properly distinguish the moral and the political, not from its being too concerned with justification-to.

Before coming to that, though, consider another of Enoch’s criticisms. He claims that the importance that public reason theorists place on justification-to stems from a fundamental confusion.⁵⁷ The confusion is this: when a ruler coerces a subject, the reasons they do so are just the things they would cite if they were to give an honest explanation of their actions. Their reasons are not the fact that they believe those things. On this, Enoch gives the following argument:

Let’s imagine a possible world in which you are mistaken about autonomy, thinking that it’s not of value, even though it is. Do you still want—in the actual world—to impose autonomy-based directives on people in that hypothetical world? A positive answer seems obvious. But in that world, you don’t believe in the value of autonomy. Still, in that world autonomy is of value. So what we can learn from the fact that when you think (in the actual world) about that possible world you still want to impose autonomy-based directives is that your reason for imposing

53 Again, this is analogous to how defenders of the intrinsic value of democracy need to idealize what counts as democracy.

54 Especially since, as Enoch points out, many people are unreasonable in the technical public-reason sense, including him (“Against Public Reason,” 121–22).

55 Enoch, “Against Public Reason,” 117–30.

56 Enoch, “Against Public Reason,” 138.

57 Enoch, “Against Public Reason,” 130–34.

them is *that autonomy is of value* (which is true there too), not *that you believe that it is of value* (because on that world, you don't).⁵⁸

Enoch's target is the connection that public reason theorists draw between justification-to and equality, but this is not my concern here.⁵⁹ I want to point out another issue raised by this example, one that illustrates the importance of political normativity and its place in our political thought.

The problem with Enoch's argument is that the answer that he claims is obvious is far from so. From the perspective of morality, we can see his point; if we think autonomy-based directives are what morality calls for, we will want them imposed in both worlds. But there is another important sense in which it would be very strange to want your alternate-world self to impose autonomy-based directives: your alternate-world self does not value autonomy and thus does not believe that autonomy-based directives should be imposed. For them to do so, then, would bring them further away from their ideal of what a society should be like. *This would be a bad thing for them*, in precisely the way that the notion of MS and the domain of political normativity explain: it creates a situation wherein they cannot make sense of their political order as authoritative. Morally, then, we may want our alternate-world self to do as Enoch says, but *politically* we recognize that the resulting political order would be defective in an important way and that our alternate-world self would be alienated from it.⁶⁰

To summarize this section, I have argued that we should understand the political domain of normativity as being organized around the central value of a political order making sense to its subjects as authoritative (MS). Following my proposed strategy, the main motivation for this view is its explanatory power regarding conflicts like the ones found in Immoral Democracy and Moral

58 Enoch, "Against Public Reason," 131.

59 The thought is that when a ruler coerces a subject for reasons that the subject cannot accept, the ruler is placing himself above the subject in a certain kind of way, thus not treating the subject as an equal. Enoch thinks that this is not so; because the reason has nothing to do with the ruler himself, no issue of equality is raised. The success or not of this argument is orthogonal to my concerns here.

60 A feature of the example that might make it hard to see this is that it focuses on the point of view of the ruler rather than the subject. From the perspective of the subject, the point is even more vivid. As a companion example, Enoch points out that it would be silly to think that your belief in the moon's gravity explains the tides rather than simply thinking that the moon's gravity explains the tides. Again, as he puts it, the reason is just not about you. While he considers this case to be analogous to the political cases, we can easily see why it is not—it is entirely unrelated to concerns about power making sense to its subjects. No concerns about political normativity are in the picture. Thus, we can accept his analysis of the moon and the tides without accepting his analysis of the justification of political power. See Enoch, "Against Public Reason," 131–32.

Autocracy. I have also given two examples of how political philosophy tries to accommodate something like MS but runs into problems when doing so. I have argued that the idea of a distinctly political normativity has the potential to avoid these problems. In the case of democratic theory, it can navigate between intrinsic and instrumental views of democracy's value. In the case of public reason, it can capture concerns about justification-to without being ad hoc. To reiterate an earlier point, these two examples are just sketches of arguments. They do not settle the debate about the value of democracy, nor do they amount to knockdown considerations against public reason liberalism, an important and longstanding research program with a voluminous literature. What they are meant to do is demonstrate the theoretical promise that the idea of political normativity, understood as being centered around the notion of MS, has. More work needs to be done to take the next steps in this direction.⁶¹

4. THE DISTINCTIVE NORMATIVITY OF MAKING SENSE

It is time now to address two problems that have lurked in the background since I first introduced the general strategy in section 1. The crux of that strategy is that (1) the existence of distinct normative domains helps explain normative conflicts, and (2) the political domain helps explain a familiar class of conflicts in politics between MS and morality. The first issue is why MS is not a notion that can be handled from within the domain of the moral. Why can morality not capture all of the relevant normative action? The second problem comes from a different angle. It grants that MS is a political notion but asks why it is normative at all. We might accept that it exists and that it conflicts with morality, but does it ever matter? Does it ever win? What kind of authority does it have? I take on the first of these issues here and the second in the following section.

Regarding the first problem, the discussion in the previous two sections already puts pressure on the idea that MS is a moral notion. For one, we have seen that there is a mismatch between what political normativity cares about and what morality cares about. The cases of conflict in section 2, as well as their structural similarity to familiar nonpolitical normative conflicts, bring this out. And in section 3, we filled out this picture by clarifying the central organizing value of the political domain and distinguishing it from the central moral notion of giving due regard to others. We have also seen that MS so understood helps make sense of tensions raised by moralist theories of democracy and liberal legitimacy that try to incorporate something similar to MS.

61 I appreciate the suggestions of a referee at this journal that I clarify the scope of my claims in the section.

We can now press the case further. In doing so, we can also more fully address a seemingly viable alternative picture to the one I have painted, according to which the conflicts I highlight are *intradomain* conflicts rather than *inter-domain* conflicts.⁶² This view may be a natural one for those attracted to the thought that judgments of moral value are *prima facie* rather than all things considered.⁶³ On such a view, morality itself often pulls us in different directions as it involves a variety of different values and requirements. So why not think that MS is one such demand? While one response is to simply deny that this is the right way to think about morality, it is important to address the concern more directly in order to avoid the objection that my argument relies on a particular conception of the moral domain endorsed just in virtue of its amenability to my conclusions.

In addition to the issues I have already raised, then, the main problem with this moralist position is that it cannot fully capture the sense in which MS is valuable without delivering implausible verdicts about morality. The best way to see this is to examine our cases from section 2.⁶⁴

Consider first Moral Autocracy, in which the government imposes a morally good measure over the opposition of its people. While there may be disagreement about what the correct, all-things-considered judgment is regarding whether the government ought to do this, I take it that (1) many will feel that they ought not, and (2) even those who think that they ought will feel that there is still a loss to be accounted for and a corresponding complaint to be registered on behalf of the people. But the moralist proposal on the table has a great deal of difficulty explaining this. This is often not apparent in real-world cases

62 In other words, such a view accepts that there are conflicts but holds that they are conflicts between moral values; MS is a moral value that competes with others in politics. As we have seen, this appears to be Enoch's view with regard to what he calls justification-to. See also Leader Maynard and Worsnip, "Is There a Distinctively Political Normativity?" 767.

63 This is helpfully pointed out by a referee, using the example of W. D. Ross's theory. See Ross, *The Right and the Good*. When I use the term '*prima facie*', I use it in Ross's sense, although many now understand him to have been pointing to a notion better captured under the concept of *pro tanto*.

64 There is also the worry that if we understand MS as one moral value among many, it will lose too easily in these competitions with other values. This is analogous to the problem mentioned earlier with instrumental defenses of democracy, that they make the democratic commitment too contingent. In that case, the issue is that reasons for valuing democracy are too frequently overridden by the moral benefits of nondemocratic systems. Here we might analogously worry that if MS is understood purely as a moral value, it is hard to see why we should care about it when it conflicts with other moral concerns, like moving toward a just society. As I point out, Enoch is happy to say that we want autonomy-based directives imposed in a society where people do not value autonomy. From the moralist perspective, why should he not be?

because as a matter of political reality, such autocratic actions tend to involve morally dubious methods.⁶⁵ Further, actual situations of enlightened rulers like this are few and far between; the moral lines are rarely so starkly drawn. To make the point more vivid, then, it helps both to set aside the question of coercive methods and to ratchet up the moral distance between the measure being imposed and what makes sense to the people it is imposed on. While this takes us afield of real-world scenarios, it helps to clarify the underlying normative issues. Imagine, for example, laws demanding basic equality and nondiscrimination being imposed on a society full of racial supremacists. What *moral* complaint can these people have, even if just *prima facie*? In what sense are they not being given due regard? Or to return to Enoch's example, imagine that measures with immensely autonomy-boosting effects are being imposed on people who do not value autonomy. Again, it is hard to see why there is anything to worry about in such cases, if considered from solely the moral perspective. And yet it does seem like there is something to worry about.⁶⁶ On my view, political normativity is what explains this.

Immoral Democracy illustrates the same point. To see this, it is again helpful to raise the stakes and consider cases where a government does something especially abhorrent with the full support of the people. As with the other case, the proposed moralist assessment here is that one moral value is traded off for another; the situation is good in one way (in the achievement of *MS*), bad in another (in the immorality of the government's actions), and the senses of both good and bad are moral. Perhaps the value of *MS* is very weak and is outweighed; in any case, it is understood as morally valuable. This approach fails, though, because it is implausible that it is at all morally good to have an *MS* relationship to an extremely unjust political order. In fact, as we ratchet up the injustice, the *MS* relationship itself becomes morally *worse*. It is especially morally troubling when people approve of injustice—that is, when abhorrent regimes not just exist but also make sense to their subjects as authoritative.⁶⁷ From the purely moral perspective, then, it is very difficult to hang on to the thought that there is anything good about such situations, let alone something good about the *MS* relationship in particular. Morality seems to lose out here across the board.

65 My view has no trouble granting this. Indeed, what my argument shows is that it tends to be these methods that do the moral work, not, crucially, considerations about *MS* itself. I am grateful to a referee at this journal for pointing this out and giving me an opportunity to clarify my view in this regard.

66 It is worth repeating: we are setting aside here the question of the all-things-considered judgment.

67 Fabian Wendt makes a similar point about the value of widely accepted laws ("Compromise and the Value of Widely Accepted Laws," 56–58).

Note that this does not rely on any unduly narrow conception of the kind of normative domain that morality is: due regard, on any plausible view of that demand, is not given in such cases. From the point of view of morality, people with abhorrent moral views are not owed, even in a weak or *prima facie* sense, a political order that enforces those views. At the very least, the burden is on moralists to defend a substantive view of morality according to which they are owed this. And yet there is some kind of positive evaluation, however weak, that seems apt here.⁶⁸ Again, political normativity can fill this explanatory gap.

The upshot in both cases, then, is that it is difficult for moralists—even those with a pluralist picture of the moral—to accommodate the value of MS while staying within the bounds of a plausible morality.⁶⁹ As a final attempt, though, consider a more sophisticated moralist view of MS, according to which the moral value of MS is conditional on some minimal moral criteria being met. Outside of these conditions, the view would hold, there is nothing normative at all about MS. Furthermore, the defender of this view could also hold that MS is nonetheless noninstrumentally valuable. This would accommodate the fact that MS can diverge from other moral concerns (such as distributive justice), that it is nevertheless to be pursued for its own sake, and, crucially, that its value is moral. Brutally repressive theocracies, for example, might make sense to their subjects as authoritative, but this is not in any way valuable. Minimally decent hierarchical societies, though, provided they do things like provide for the basic human rights of their citizens, might achieve MS in the normative sense despite being far from justice.⁷⁰

Let us grant that this represents the most plausible way for moralism to accommodate the importance of MS without admitting a distinct domain of

68 A moralist might insist that this positive evaluation is moral, but again, they face the uphill battle of explaining these extreme cases in a plausible way, i.e., in a way that is not ad hoc and fits with our other considered moral judgments. It is worth recalling here that my overall argument is an inference to the best explanation. So we can press the question to the moralist: Is morality really the *best* explanation here (especially when there is a ready-made alternative in the form of political normativity)?

69 This point seems to be accepted by many theorists. It is one reason why moral principles that have something like MS built into them also build in limits designed to rule out such cases. That is, they build in limits to prevent very morally bad situations from meeting the principles' criteria. We have already seen this in the cases of intrinsic value theories of democracy and public reason theories of legitimacy. The same is true for theorists who attribute intrinsic moral value to self-determination, wide acceptance of laws, or nonliberal legitimacy. For example, Amanda Greene defends legitimacy as having moral value independently of justice ("Legitimacy Without Liberalism," "Is Political Legitimacy Worth Promoting?"). For her, this value is noninstrumental but conditional. I address views like this in the next paragraph.

70 On decent hierarchical societies, see Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*, 71–85.

normativity. One immediate worry is that such a view is still ad hoc in the same way that Enoch argues public reason's use of the reasonable is ad hoc. In other words, how can we set a principled threshold of morality at which MS switches from being morally invaluable to morally valuable, in a way that is consistent with why we care about MS at all? Because realists understand the situation as one in which MS competes with morality, they avoid this question.

More deeply, a realist has the advantage of being able to hang on to a commitment to the value of MS that is independent of morality. This more sophisticated moralist still gives up the claim that in the unjust democracy, for example, there is something good *in the very democraticness of the situation itself*—namely, MS—not merely MS as combined with some other minimal moral criteria. The moralist says that what is valuable here is MS *in conjunction with* some minimal moral criteria (if it obtains). They then give up the thought that MS itself is *pro tanto* good—that, all else being equal, it is always in some sense better for a political order to make sense than for it to not.⁷¹ From the moral perspective, that question hinges on whether the moral criteria are met. If they are not met, then it is worse if the political order makes sense.

The reason this is a problem is that, as I stress throughout, the *pro tanto* goodness of MS *itself* is an important feature of our political thought. It underlies our intuitions about cases like Immoral Democracy and Moral Autocracy, plays a central role in political theory, and influences our political activity. There is something commendable about democratic outcomes even when those outcomes are morally bad, and there is something bad about unpopular rule even when that rule is morally good. Reasonable people can argue about how strong or weak this something is, but the point is that it is there nonetheless. In short, there is an important, nonmoral way that politics can go well even when it goes morally wrong. The moral perspective alone cannot accommodate this thought. My suggestion for saving it is to introduce the distinctly political perspective.⁷²

Before concluding this section, there is a related issue to address. Even if we buy the argument just given that the political domain best explains the value of MS and its conflicts with morality, there still seems to be a suspiciously tight relationship between morality and political normativity. What is morally right seems to have something to do with what makes sense to people as authoritative, and what makes sense to people seems to have something to do with what

71 This is precisely the thought that motivates the first moralist view that I address in this section but that I argue fails to comport with a plausible conception of morality.

72 It helps to keep in mind throughout this argument that the sense of good being used is the broad and general sense, unless otherwise specified. It is the same way we use the word when we say that a work of art is aesthetically good but morally bad.

is morally right. But this is no threat to the distinctness of political normativity. It is just an instance of the more general fact that domains can interact in various ways while remaining distinct. This is uncontroversial but important to make explicit. Consider two sorts of interaction. One sort is *extensional overlap*: the same action can be required by two different kinds of normativity (say, by both prudence and morality, to take a happy example), the same object can have different kinds of value (e.g., moral and aesthetic), and so on. A second, more substantive sort of interaction is *encroachment*. This is the phenomenon wherein reasons or requirements from one domain of normativity make a difference to reasons or requirements in a different domain of normativity.⁷³ For example, according to *eudaimonic encroachment*, reasons and requirements relating to our own well-being can make a difference to our moral reasons and requirements without themselves being moral.⁷⁴ The mechanics of and the debates surrounding encroachment are outside the scope of this article, though they are worth exploring in the future as they relate to political normativity. The point for now is that it is a viable example of how two domains can interact in a fairly strong way while remaining distinct. Of particular interest to us, then, is that the interaction of the moral and political is not necessarily evidence that there is no distinction between the two, nor that political considerations reduce to moral considerations. It is a mistake to automatically infer identity from interaction or to think that cross-domain relevance implies reduction.⁷⁵

Thus, it is consistent with the view on offer that morality plays an important role in political theory and in politics itself. This can happen in a subjective and an objective sense. Regarding the latter, objective moral facts might inform political normativity in the same ways that we just mentioned—in terms of encroachment, for example. Regarding the former, what makes sense to people—and thus what counts as politically normative—is plausibly informed by their moral views. Justifications for power are usually not acceptable to people if they strike them as grossly immoral. But this is true whether or not the moral views in question are correct. In any case, we can remain neutral on the question of whether these kinds of relationships actually obtain; the point

73 Perhaps the most well-known kind of encroachment is *pragmatic encroachment* in epistemology. This is the view that pragmatic facts can make a difference to whether one has reason to form a certain belief. Importantly, they do so without themselves being reasons for belief (i.e., epistemic reasons). For discussion, see Ichikawa and Steup, “The Analysis of Knowledge,” sec. 12. See also note 9 above.

74 Lord, “Impartiality, Eudaimonic Encroachment, and the Boundaries of Morality.” This is analogous to pragmatic encroachment in epistemology.

75 For a similar point, see also Jubb, “What a Distinctively Political Normativity Is,” 365.

is that even if they do, they do not threaten the distinctiveness of the domains.⁷⁶ Recall once again the analogy with moral-prudential conflicts: what is conducive to our own well-being is bound up with what we think is moral, given that most of us care about morality. Still, morality is not prudence.

Such interactions can work in the opposite direction as well. That is, political considerations can make a difference to moral considerations without themselves being moral. This opens conceptual space for the possibility that giving due regard to others could involve building political orders that make sense to them as authoritative, without it being the case that MS itself is a moral value. Analogies involving other normative domains are again helpful here. It may be that I owe it to my children to expose them to Miles Davis records or Jane Austen novels, but this does not mean that the value of those works is moral rather than aesthetic. A more plausible view is that their aesthetic value makes a difference to what counts as my giving due regard to my children. Similarly, the fact that MS facts can make a difference to morality does not necessarily mean that such facts are themselves moral. Moralists, then, must do more than point out the existence of these sorts of interactions.⁷⁷

5. THE SIGNIFICANCE OF POLITICAL NORMATIVITY

To recap, the previous section considered lingering worries that MS is a moral notion. In the end, the upshot is that MS is best understood as a nonmoral notion. It cannot be adequately accommodated within the moral domain. Let us now turn to a different sort of objection. Here, a moralist may grant that there is some nonmoral evaluative standard based around MS but deny that this standard is worth paying attention to. This brings us back to section 1 and to the way we have set up the issue of domains. I define them, following Lord, as systems of evaluations, recommendations, and demands. But as he points out, this means that domains come rather cheaply.⁷⁸ Practices like etiquette and grammar and games like chess all have associated systems of evaluations,

76 Some realists seem to dispute this, leading to pessimism about the relevance of the claim of a distinctive political normativity. See, for example, Sleat, "Realism and Political Normativity," 8.

77 In this sense, the kind of political realism associated with the view of political normativity on offer here is what Matt Sleat and Enzo Rossi refer to as the weaker rather than stronger version ("Realism in Normative Political Theory," 690). The stronger version seeks to excise morality from political philosophy altogether; the weaker version allows it to play a role. I follow many realists, such as Edward Hall (*Value, Conflict, and Order*, 13, 185n42), in seeing little value in the stronger version.

78 Lord, "Choosing the Right Companion," sec. 2.1.

recommendations, and demands. It seems clear, then, that not all domains are equally worthy of our attention; certain domains seem especially important. For example, etiquette and chess matter less than morality. The moralist, then, can concede the existence of a political domain of normativity but argue that it is more like etiquette than morality. It is insignificant.

An immediate problem with this view is that it is in tension with the historical and sociological significance of MS that we already noted in section 3. Indeed, it is in tension with numerous considerations that we have raised in building the argument for political normativity. For example, political normativity is necessary for our understanding of certain kinds of political conflicts, and it affects how we think about the value of democracy and public reason. Similar considerations cannot be raised regarding etiquette or the rules of chess. It is also easy to explain why political normativity has this kind of significance: it speaks to a central aspect of human experience. This makes it significant in just the same way that the paradigmatic domains are significant, even if we quibble about their relative significance: they concern what is true, what is beautiful, what gives due regard to others, what makes our lives go well, and so on. These are all matters of great importance, certainly more so than questions about which chess move to make or whether I have set the table correctly. Building political orders that make sense as authoritative to their inhabitants is more than just a game.

There is a more specific way to think about significance, though, that a moralist might have in mind when objecting that the political is insignificant. This is the idea that certain domains are *authoritative*, in that their dictates are inescapable by any rational agent.⁷⁹ It is widely held that the epistemic is authoritative in this way, and a longstanding ambition in moral philosophy is to show that the same is true of morality.⁸⁰ For many, the notion of authority marks a fundamental distinction—on the one hand, we have domains like the rules of chess, and on the other hand, we have domains like morality that are genuinely action guiding, that *really* tell us what to do.⁸¹ If a defender of political normativity

79 Lord, "Choosing the Right Companion."

80 This is related to the thought that certain domains are overriding, i.e., that whenever there is competition, they win. These notions are not necessarily the same, though. One could hold that both the moral and the epistemic are authoritative without having a view about whether one overrides the other in cases of conflict. On this view, there may simply be genuine practical dilemmas.

81 Baker, "Skepticism About Ought *Simpliciter*," 234; "The Varieties of Normativity," 577–80.

wants to claim significance, they must show that the political is like morality in this way. If it is not, then it is not worth caring about.⁸²

A straightforward way to rebut such an objection is to give examples where political reasons ultimately determine what we ought to do. Such examples are bound to be controversial, given that they involve first-order, all-things-considered judgments about what to do when moral and political reasons conflict. Notably, I avoid relying on such judgments; the argument needs to deal only with the underlying structure of the cases at issue. The idea is to show that they involve conflicts that cannot be explained from within a single domain of normativity. The present objection is about whether the political might win out in some such cases.

It seems fair to say that they might, though there is room for disagreement. To illustrate, consider the issue of climate justice. Most environmentalists, philosophers, and activists agree that climate justice places considerable moral demands on well-off societies. For example, such societies should take significant action to curtail greenhouse gas emissions. There are many potential policies that could help comply with such demands: widespread carbon taxes, aggressive measures to phase out combustion engine vehicles, restrictions on high-emission agricultural practices, even limiting air travel, to name just a few examples. Grant for the sake of argument what seems to be the case: these measures do not garner much popular political support in the United States, at least if electoral results are anything to go by. Perhaps there might be certain policies that are slightly more popular, but these alone are less than what is morally required. To this extent, then, the politics that climate justice demands do not make sense as authoritative to a great many people, at least at the time of writing. Would the government be wrong to pursue them anyway at this

82. Some theorists, such as Stephen Finlay, even reserve the term 'normativity' exclusively for phenomena in the latter category, preferring terms like 'norm-relativity' for the former ("Recent Work on Normativity," 331–33). Others distinguish between weak or formal normativity, on the one hand, and authoritative normativity, on the other. I follow Lord ("Choosing the Right Companion," sec. 2.1) and Baker ("The Varieties of Normativity," 568–69) in considering all of this to count as normativity, but I agree with Finlay, Leader Maynard and Worsnip ("Is There a Distinctively Political Normativity?" 778–79), and just about everyone else that some normativity is more important than other normativity. This is what matters in the present context, not the terminology. Those philosophers who endorse this sharp divide here understand the claim of a distinctively political normativity differently from those who are content to call etiquette a domain of normativity. For the former group, a defender of the political needs to show that political demands tell us what to do. For the latter, there simply needs to be some recognizable system of recommendations, evaluations, and demands. This bar is much lower, arguably to the point of triviality. Simply establishing the political in this sense is a pyrrhic victory for realists, especially in the eyes of moralists.

time? Plausibly, yes. But even the fact that this is an open question suggests that morality is not alone in the practical calculus. Distinctly political considerations demand attention as well.

Whether this particular example succeeds, there is a larger point in the background that is crucial to bring to the fore: it is not the case that a defender of a political domain of normativity must uncontroversially show that it wins out in practical deliberation. The demand that we show this rests on an overly simplistic view of authority. There is important space between the poles of domains that “really” tell us what to do and domains that are only formally or weakly normative.

There are two reasons to think this: first, it is not the case that authority entails total dominance over all of our practical and doxastic attitudes.⁸³ All that it entails is that it always matters in some sense, i.e., that rationality takes it into account. Domains can fully determine some weighted verdict, but they can also matter to determining the weighted verdict without being the only considerations in play.⁸⁴ They can exert rational pressure without winning out. Indeed, the examples of ordinary normative conflict given in section 1 exhibit this point. The second reason is that authority can obtain with regard to some practical and doxastic attitudes but not others. For example, morality might fully determine what we ought to intend to do but not what we believe. These two points together are what allow us to properly articulate and account for the complexity of normativity’s relationship to our various practical and doxastic attitudes. They allow us to say, for example, that the aesthetic domain fully determines what aesthetic judgment I should make in a particular case, but it lacks this kind of authority for what I ought to intend to do. Aesthetic considerations, though, might factor into the overall weighted verdict regarding what I ought to intend to do.⁸⁵ This refined view of authority complicates the simple dichotomy between domains that “really” tell us what to do and those that do not.

This matters for the present discussion because adherence to this dichotomy has allowed claims of a distinctively political normativity to be too quickly dismissed.⁸⁶ Leader Maynard and Worsnip, for example, frequently imply that unless political reasons “really” tell us what to do, political normativity is not really normative at all.⁸⁷ But this puts things in a misleading way, conflating the

83 On these points, I am indebted to Errol Lord.

84 See Lord’s distinction between *verdictive authority* and *contributory authority* (“Choosing the Right Companion,” 8–9).

85 Lord, “Choosing the Right Companion,” 8. To take another example, morality might fully determine what we ought to intend to do but not what we ought to believe.

86 For discussion, see Hernandez, “Why Isn’t There a Distinctively Political Normativity?”

87 See, for example, Leader Maynard and Worsnip, “A Distinctively Political Normativity?” 780, 781–85.

general idea of authority with a more specific kind of it—namely, full authority over the practical. As we have seen, though, authority is a more complex notion. There is more space than moralists let on for a domain like the political to be significant for our practical lives. It can be more significant than etiquette without fully determining the weighted verdicts of the practical.⁸⁸

Giving a full theory of the authority of the political domain is beyond the scope of this article. My goal is only to establish that there is such a domain. The point of raising the issue of authority is to stave off the moralist objection that even if there is a political domain, it is not worth paying attention to. Not only is this objection implausible on its face, but it also rests on the assumption that in order to be worth paying attention to, a domain must have an implausibly strong kind of authority. Insofar as they help themselves to this assumption, moralists stack the deck against political normativity. Even without a full theory of the political's authority in hand, it is important to level the playing field.⁸⁹

6. CONCLUSION

It is time to take stock. In sections 1 and 2, we motivated the idea of political normativity by arguing that it helps to explain a persistent kind of normative conflict in politics. In section 3, we filled out the idea of political normativity in terms of a central organizing value—namely, MS, the value of a political order making sense to its subjects as authoritative—in such a way as to vindicate the motivation. In section 4, we gave some rejoinders to the moralist objection that we can accommodate MS and its importance wholly from within the moral. And in section 5, we rebutted the worry that MS is only formally or weakly normative.

Regarding the question of political normativity, then, this article's contributions are twofold. On the one hand, I outline a general approach to distinguishing domains of normativity, consisting in the identification of normative conflicts that are best explained by the existence of distinct domains. This approach has been fruitful in other areas of ethical theory and can be applied to the question of political normativity. The second contribution of the article is to pursue this strategy in the case of the political. As I mentioned at the outset, the two contributions are separable. In other words, one can adopt my suggested methodology and come to different conclusions about the substantive

88 We might also find significance outside of the practical, once we consider other attitudes. Perhaps, for example, the political domain fully determines whether it is apt to be alienated from one's political order when it does not make sense.

89 Again, see Hernandez, "Why Isn't There a Distinctively Political Normativity?"

conception of the political domain (though they would have to engage with the arguments for that conception that I give here).⁹⁰

The development of this methodology also serves to push back against a kind of realist worry about the approach I take here. Robert Jubb, in response to Leader Maynard and Worsnip's paper criticizing the idea of a distinctive political normativity, argues that the method of using "abstract general arguments" and "attempt[ing] to demonstrate, in analytically rigorous terms, that moralism makes conceptual mistakes" is unlikely to be fruitful.⁹¹ On his view, the problem has to do with the lack of prospects for agreement on the terms of the argument. There is no shared sense of what counts as a distinctive political normativity, nor what could count as evidence for or against it.⁹² This results in theorists talking past each other and failing to make progress. Jubb's suggestion is that we change tack, taking up "a more discursive, allusive method," focused, for example, more on particular contexts.⁹³ So even though my argument is friendly to the realist project, some realists may chafe against the sort of tools I bring to bear.⁹⁴

I take seriously this concern, but I believe that this article moves forward on precisely the questions that Jubb is pessimistic about. I try to provide a clear idea both of what a distinctively political domain of normativity might look like and how one might argue for and against it. I draw on a relatively uncontroversial notion of normative domains to conceive of the political as a nonmoral domain, analogous to the epistemic, aesthetic, and so on, with a central organizing value. And I work up a theory regarding what counts as evidence for or against it: in short, whether it has explanatory power when it comes to ethical conflict. While this in part involves schematic cases that someone with Jubb's pessimism might object to, it is now open to all of us to develop richer and more realistic cases within the methodology that I propose. One way to think of this is that we need a bit of abstract, conceptual work in certain areas of the realist project, and more contextual and concrete work in others, and that we need those areas to inform each other. I lean toward the former in this article, but this is not incompatible with such an overall picture, and I see no reason

90 In theory, one can also agree with my conception of political normativity without adopting my methodology.

91 Jubb, "On What a Distinctively Political Normativity Is," 363, 361.

92 Jubb, "On What a Distinctively Political Normativity Is," 366. Sleat makes a similar point as well ("Realism and Political Normativity," 8).

93 Jubb, "On What a Distinctively Political Normativity Is," 367.

94 I thank a referee at this journal for suggesting that I reflect on Jubb's concern here. It is also worth keeping in mind that realism is a big tent. See Sleat, "Realism and Political Normativity," sec. 3.

to think that that picture is incoherent or unattractive. Indeed, it seems to me quite in the spirit of Williams's work, which fits neatly into neither a purely analytic and abstract approach nor a purely historicized and concrete approach, and has subsequently been productively engaged with by theorists on either side. My point here, then, is simply that such conversation can be dialectically constructive, and it is not clear to me that the appropriate move at this juncture is for both sides to go their separate ways. The optimistic conclusion is that more engagement will continue to be fruitful.

With that being said, we can now conclude with a brief summary. In this article, I have argued that there is a distinct, nonmoral, political value in the achievement of political power that makes sense to its subjects as authoritative. This value is at the center of the political domain of normativity. Independently of that claim, I have also tried to contribute to the political normativity debate by clarifying what it is about. It is about, I have suggested, whether a distinctly political domain is necessary to make sense of the normative richness of politics. I have shown how political normativity understood in terms of *MS* fits this bill: it explains a persistent kind of conflict in political theory and practice, between what morality demands and what makes sense to people as an authoritative order of power. This has potential implications for a number of debates in political philosophy, some of which I explored in section 3. While I leave open the question of exactly how the demands of politics weigh up against morality, the point for now is just that they are distinct demands. When it comes to politics, we have reasons not only to build the most just society but to build a society that is ours, that makes sense to us, given who we take ourselves to be and what problems we take ourselves to have. If the central claim here is correct, then there is a distinct kind of value in this creative project.⁹⁵

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