**The morality of political realism**

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The paper starts from a critique of the concept of “political moralism,” as used by exponents of the realist school of political theory. It argues that the realist critique of political moralism is vulnerable on several points. First, the picture of political moralism emerging from the writings of political realists is highly disputable, as it ascribes a kind of absolute morality to political moralists which they do not necessarily exhibit (a particularly striking example would be Max Weber citing the Sermon on the Mount as a statement of the kind of morality that, in his view, is incompatible with the practice of politics in his famous essay “Politics as a Vocation”). Second, it can be shown that the realists’ concept of the political also contains recognizable, and, it seems, unavoidable, moralistic elements (one influential example would be Bernard Williams’ *Basic Legitimation Demand*, the possibly moralistic character of which he himself tacitly acknowledges; another Raymond Geuss’ admission of a certain – according to him, “anodyne” – form, or reading of morality as a basic influence on political action, without which it cannot be fully understood). Based on these considerations – and contrary to the stated intentions of most realist theorists – the paper will try to interpret political realism as a distinct form of moral philosophy, offering a specific kind of political, or public morality, while taking into account characteristics of the political, as well as the moral life that other approaches often neglect. (Something resembling this view can be found e.g. in Thomas Nagel’s essay, “Ruthlessness in Public Life”, also in Weber’s “Politics as a Vocation”, and, in contemporary literature, in Hans-Jörg Sigwart’s “The Logic of Legitimacy – Ethics in Political Realism”). Thus, political realism would represent, at the very least, a much needed corrective to mainstream liberal political theory, and perhaps even a useful method of studying morality – public, or private – itself.