

Vocations of Realistic Political Theory

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Most political theorists agree that the key task of political theory is providing guidance to collective human action. The main question they discuss is ‘In what capacity and to what extent can political theory be politically informative and guide human actions within the political domain so that our individual and collective actions generate better outcomes?’ The revived divide between moralistic and realistic approaches to political theory in the last decade, we suggest, can most meaningfully be characterized on the basis of their disparate answers to the above question.

Moralism (in the Rawlsian tradition, for example) encompasses theoretical positions premised on the assumption that it is, in principle, possible to fashion ourselves, as human agents, and the world we live in, through a model of what ideally ‘ought’ to be the case. Realism, as popularized by Bernard Williams and Raymond Geuss, in contrast, starts with the recognition that any attempt to provide guidance to human beings must take them as historically located agents in their historically contingent circumstances. This entails recognizing that the desires, beliefs, values, motivations and interests people hold as well as the institutional structures through which they must act to realize these vary historically. Any realist theoretical construct aiming to guide human actions must reflect and respond to this dynamism and to the resulting historical variation. The first step towards this is acknowledging the stark truth that there are no grand recipes for guiding human actions within the political domain. All there is to rely on is historical individuals creating historical reality/(ies) through their actions in very different cultural and historical contexts.

There are a number of possible theoretical positions that employ a variety of vocabularies from a variety of intellectual traditions that are compatible with this rather broad construal of realism. We invite for this workshop, papers that focus on possible vocations of realist political theory having accepted the claim that it is not possible for political theory to promote grand recipes for guiding human actions. By aiming to offer consideration of a variety of realist perspectives, the panel hopes to contribute towards achieving a heightened awareness of the significance of political realism beyond but never independent of the realm of political action, in political theory. It also intends to encourage representatives of political realism to engage in scholarly dialogue with representatives of other theoretical inclinations regarding vocations of political theory.

Contributions may address the following themes:

- The critical purchase of realist political theory
 - Realism’s relationship to other critical techniques, methods and methodologies (i.e. conceptual analysis, genealogy, *Ideologiekritik* and so on)
- Constructive/Positive aspects of realistic political theory
- Realism and history
 - Historical evolution of political realism and historical evaluation of its vocations
 - Is a historical background necessary/useful/possible for a realistic political theory? If so, which periods are relevant in this respect?
- The structure/form of a realistic political theory – what does a realist political theory look like?
 - Which structural aspects should a realist political theory include?

- Should it tell us what is the case politically now?
- Or what ought to be the case ideally?
- Or what is to be done politically here and now?
- The philosophical substance of realist political theory
 - A theory of political judgement
 - Prudential political theory
 - A theory of modus vivendi/status quo
 - A theory of human nature
- The transformation of the role and function of political theory in a realist key
- A theory of substantive universal values, applied to particular political contexts
- Perils of realism
 - Relativism
 - Machiavellianism
 - Disregard for the rule of law and equity
 - Trivialization of ethics

Submission Guidelines

We welcome submissions from a range of relevant fields, including, but not limited to, philosophy, political science, international relations, sociology, legal and political theory and so on. To submit a paper for the workshop please send a max. 500-word abstract to realisticvocations@gmail.com by 15th of May, 2017. Notification of acceptance will be given within a week after the deadline.

Papers for the workshop (no longer than 4000 words) will be pre-circulated. Full drafts will be due for circulation to workshop participants by 28th of August, 2017.

All workshop participants must register for MANCEPT 2017. Registration will open in May and is subject to a registration fee. The cost of registration is £230 for academics and £135 for graduate students/retirees. A number of bursaries will be available to graduate students. The deadline to apply for a bursary is 16th of June 2017. For more information please visit <http://www.mancept.com/mancept-workshops/mancept-workshops-2017/>