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THE DIALECTIC OF MIGHT AND RIGHT

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the degree of MASTER OF ARTS IN POLITICS at Massey
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MARCEL JON ZENTVELD-WALE

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Abstract

The question of 'might versus right', as to whether might makes right or is subject to it, is one of the overarching questions of Western moral and political thought from the ancient Greeks to today. This is an exploration of that question, the debate between the proponents of might ('Realists'), the proponents of right ('Idealists'), and the opponents of both ('Relativists'). It is particularly concerned with the sources of this debate, in the founding figures of these schools of thought and the foundational thought of the tradition as a whole. This debate forms a dialectic that spans much of the history of Western ancient and modern moral and political philosophy, crossing over to a number of related fields. This study is therefore concerned with both the traditional spheres of moral and political philosophy (the theory of nature and the theory of law) and certain related fields (theology, mythology and metaphysics). It provides an overview of this dialectic, its sources, and the relationship between its theoretical and practical aspects.

the DIALECTIC of
MIGHT and RIGHT

Power and Justice in Realism, Idealism and Relativism

Marcel Jon Zentveld-Wale

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M. Z. W.

WAGNER

Excuse me sir!—the pleasure's surely vast
To contemplate the spirit of the past!
To read the thoughts of ancient learned men,
And see how wondrous far the world has moved since then!

FAUST

Ay, far indeed! Up to the very skies!
My friend, the past, all that behind us lies,
Is as a book, with seven seals made fast;
And what you call the spirit of the age
Is but the critic's spirit, in whose page
The age itself is darkly glassed.

—Goethe, *Faust*

O

I N T R O D U C T I O N A MODEL OF MIGHT AND RIGHT

Now the two masters, *theory and practise*, you cannot serve.

—Charles Peirce

This is a study of might and right, power and justice. It is an overview of certain overarching discourses of might and right in Western moral and political thought; a genealogy of might and right, which identifies dominant trends in thinking about power and justice and explores their origin and evolution from a critical perspective. It examines the relationship between power and justice within the major “ethical-political”¹ discourses of the West: the antithesis of power and justice in the traditional discourse, its synthesis in the alternative. This is a study of that dialectic and, more specifically, of its genesis. Its first task is taxonomical: to outline the familial relations between discourses of power and justice. The second is genealogical: to trace their points of “emergence” (*entstehung*) and lines of “descent” (*herkunft*).² The third is critical: to explore the links between theory and ideology.

The scope of the study is very broad. It uses the “telescope” (to apply Proust’s metaphor) rather than the “microscope”.³ This is reflected in both the length of the intellectual history surveyed and the range of topic-areas considered. The core sources are drawn from the ancient, medieval, renaissance and modern periods, in a history spanning from before the ‘birth’ of moral and political philosophy in Socrates to its ‘death’ in Nietzsche.⁴ Because it is a search for the genesis of certain ideas and ways of thinking, these core sources are restricted largely to certain founding figures of the schools of thought in question. In addition, a number of precursors to the

¹ The term “ethical-political” is from Bernstein, *The New Constellation: The Ethical-Political Horizons of Modernity and Post-Modernity*, 1991: 9

² Foucault, ‘Nietzsche, Genealogy, History’, 2004: 75–7

³ Proust, *Remembrance of Things Past, Volume Two* [1932: 1118]

⁴ Rengger, *Political Theory, Modernity and Postmodernity: Beyond Enlightenment and Critique*, 1995: 138–9

core sources, going back to even earlier times, are also surveyed, as are various secondary sources, interpretations of the core and precursor texts, many of which date to present times. The topic-areas considered include not only the traditional fields of moral and political philosophy (nature and law) but also a number of related fields (religion, myth and metaphysics).

The role of this introduction is to provide an overview of the basic concepts and categories of these discourses of might and right, and an outline of the dialectic that exists between them, the sources of which are the subject of the chapters that follow. This means beginning at the end, since the definitions and distinctions developed here at the outset are the outcome of a process, which the remainder of the study attempts to record. This is not unusual, according to Ophir: “In a philosophic treatise (perhaps in any scientific treatise), the reader always starts from the place where the writer has concluded.”⁵ Throughout this introduction, and in the chapters that follow, it will be necessary to quote extensively from both primary and secondary sources. The method is like that attributed by Proust to Schopenhauer, who, he says, “never advances an opinion without immediately supporting it with several quotations”.⁶ Such methods are necessary in cases such as these, where the opinions that are advanced concern the opinions of others.

This introduction proceeds as follows: It begins by considering the overall shape of the debate between the major discourses of might and right. This shape is at once biangular and triangular, which is the shape of the dialectic. The debate is divided, first, between two overarching ways of thinking, which form the two phases of the dialectic model, controversy and conciliation. This first phase is divided between two opposing views (thesis and antithesis). The second is united against the first, but also, in some way, unites them (synthesis). It goes on to distinguish between the two major modes of thought, which are designated ‘traditional’ and ‘alternative’. The first is theoretical, defined as the rational pursuit of truth, and an associated elevation of theory over practise. The second is antitheoretical, defined as the refutation of truth through reason, and corresponding subjection of theory to practise. It then defines ‘politics’ and

⁵ Ophir, *The Order of Evils: Toward an Ontology of Morals* 0.101:

To propose a definition is to invite a recursive move to prior definitions, regressing to the point where definition is no longer possible. From that point, one can begin over again, progressively moving toward description and clarification, gradually extricating one meaning from the other. When I begin over again I know where I want to go – that is to the last definition in the series, the opening definition. But the last definition, which is the first definition, presupposes the entire process of description and all the claims it involves.

⁶ Proust, *On Reading* [1971: 51–2]

‘ethics’, in terms of power and justice, and considers the traditional and alternative modes of ethical-political thought. These form the two phases of the dialectic of might and right, thesis/antithesis and synthesis. Finally, it examines the major schools within these ways of thinking. The traditional, theoretical ethical-political discourse is divided between the Grand Theories of ethics and politics, Realism and Idealism. This corresponds to the division between ethics and politics itself, with Realism representing a political or power worldview, Idealism an ethical or moral worldview. It also corresponds to the basic ideological positions, conservatism and radicalism, respectively. The alternative, antitheoretical ethical-political discourse, Relativism, is opposed to the traditional, but at the same time subsumes the major schools by incorporating the political and moral worldviews. Together, Realism, Idealism and Relativism form the thesis, antithesis and synthesis of the dialectic of might and right.

0.1 Triad, Dyad and Dialectic

The debate between modes of ethical-political thought, as described here, is an example of the conflict between two- and three-term relationships in Western intellectual discourse, as described by Henri Lefebvre in a section entitled ‘Triads and Dyads’.⁷ Many of the Western intellectual traditions are polarised between two opposing schools of thought. In many cases a tradition is defined by the dichotomy formed by the competing schools, and the schools defined in opposition to each other. (Perhaps the strongest example of this, and the dyad at the heart of the present study, is the central division in metaphysics and in moral and political philosophy, namely the realism/idealism dichotomy.) Alongside the traditional dichotomy, however, there emerges a pre-existing, but previously unacknowledged, alternate way of thinking, which is at the same time the antithesis and synthesis of the traditional schools. (Here it will be argued that a standpoint of moral and political relativism fulfills this role in regard to the realist/idealist dichotomy, and completes the Lefebvreian triad in ethics and politics.) The new triad challenges the totality of the traditional dyad, and the supremacy of either side. The traditional debate may eventually be subsumed within a broader framework, as part and parcel of a larger whole.⁸

⁷ Lefebvre, ‘Triads and Dyads’, 2003: 50

⁸ *ibid*: 50:

Thought that is reflective, that philosophises, has long put the accent on dyads.... But a triadic structure long present within the Western *logos* has emerged since Hegel.... Is there ever a two-

This triadic structure, thesis-antithesis-synthesis, is that of the dialectic. This is a mode of discussion, employed by the Socratic philosophers, through which understanding (both in the sense of ‘agreement’ and ‘knowledge’) is supposed to be reached. The discussion begins in controversy with two antithetical positions. It ends in consensus where the two positions are reconciled.⁹ It is also the manner in which, according to Hegel, Marx and others, human history advances. In particular, the ‘Master-Slave Dialectic’, the “antagonistic struggle...between *herrschaft* (mastery) and *knechtchaft* (servitude)”,¹⁰ is thought to be the driving-force behind the march of history.¹¹ For Hegel, the Master-Slave Dialectic is the driving force behind the formation of the social and political order. This “struggle”, he says, “is the phenomenon from which men’s social life emerged and it is the beginning of states.”¹² For Marx it is also the driver of social and political transformation. The basic idea is that societies become divided between two opposing groups, a reactionary ruling order and a revolutionary underclass. The revolutionary movement grows until the ruling order is overthrown, and society is transformed. History is thought to progress through a number of such stages, the number and type of which have been variously conceived. The dialectic model is applied here in both these forms, as a model for both theory and practise. It is applied, in a broadly Socratic sense, to the ‘conversation of mankind’ in ethics and politics, to describe the way that traditional, dyadic modes of ethical-political thought are overcome through triadic synthesis. It is also applied, in a vaguely Hegelian or Marxian way, to society, to describe the struggle between reactionary and revolutionary movements.

0.2 Traditional and Alternative

Two broad modes of thought are identified and examined here. These are designated ‘traditional’ and ‘alternative’. This distinction is related, but not identical, to the distinction

term relationship, except in representation? There are always Three. There is always the Other. But the relationship between two entities (duality, opposition, contrariety, dyad) vanishes as it takes shape, turning into image and reflection, a mirror effect, a rivalry that is derisive to the primacy of either one. Hence...their arrival at the logical compromise of mutual representation.

⁹ Bluhm, *Theories of the Political System*, 1971: 79–81; Reeve, Editor’s Introduction to Plato, *Republic* (2004: xvi–ii)

¹⁰ Flew and Priest, *A Dictionary of Philosophy*

¹¹ “...the relation of master to slave...engenders a dialectic which will be the driving spring of human history.” (Hassner, ‘Georg W. F. Hegel’, 1987: 735)

¹² Hegel, *Encyclopedia of Philosophic Sciences* [1959: 352]

between modernism and postmodernism, which is the subject of much debate in philosophy and social science, as well as in art and art-criticism.¹³ While there are a number of similarities between these ways of distinguishing, there are also a number of differences. Modernism-postmodernism implies a historical (or pseudo-historical) distinction between intellectual traditions. Traditional-alternative has no such implications, and is used to highlight the continuity of both so-called ‘modernist’ and ‘postmodernist’ ways of thinking in pre-modern as in modern times. The terms ‘traditional’ and ‘alternative’ are used to highlight the predominance of the former for most of Western intellectual history (i.e. the period from Socrates to Nietzsche), though the latter predominated in the period before the former gained supremacy (i.e. among the pre-Socratics), and today enjoys increased popularity under the banner of ‘postmodernism’ (i.e. since Nietzsche). ‘Traditional’ is therefore meant in the sense of ‘mainstream’, rather than in the chronological sense of ‘early’. This is not a clear-cut distinction. Certain schools of thought blur the boundary between the two ways of thinking. One such way of thinking, which stands somewhere between traditional and alternative modes of thought, is Critical Theory, which stands somewhere between traditional and alternative modes of thought. Critical Theory will not be examined directly in the present study, though elements of it influence its methodology and terminology. Indeed, in many ways, the present study, as a ‘theory about theory’, may itself be considered exercise in Critical Theory. The use of ‘traditional’ and ‘alternative’ as opposed to ‘modern’ and ‘postmodern’ also allows the present study to skirt the so-called ‘Modernity Debate’, often traced to Kant’s essay ‘What is Enlightenment?’¹⁴ This debate is concerned with what defines ‘modernism’ as such, and what distinguishes it from pre-modern and postmodern ways of thinking. Where the basis of the distinction between modernism and postmodernism is the subject of on-going debate, its substitution for traditional and alternative makes it possible to distinguish these on my own terms, so to speak. The basis of that distinction, as between modernism and postmodernism according to some commentators but not others,¹⁵ is their respective epistemological standpoints.

¹³ Flew and Priest, *A Dictionary of Philosophy*

¹⁴ Foucault, ‘What is Enlightenment?’, 2004: 41

¹⁵ See Rengger, *Political Theory, Modernity and Postmodernity: Beyond Enlightenment and Critique*, 1995: 68, 84, 166–7

The traditional mode of thought is theoretical. Theory or reasoned inquiry (*logos*)¹⁶ is the pursuit of truth (*alethe*) through reason (also *logos*), the end of which is knowledge (*episteme*, the subject of epistemology). To speak the truth is, as Aristotle says, to “say of what is, that it is, and of what is not, that it is not”,¹⁷ just as “to know”, as Plato points out is “to know something” and that ‘something’ must be “something *that is*”.¹⁸ “What is [*to on*]” (‘*on*’, ‘being’, being the root of the English ‘ontology’, the “science that investigates being as being [*on e on*]”¹⁹) refers to existent entities, the totality of which is reality.²⁰ For every claim to truth, there is some object, physical or mental, the existence or non-existence of which renders the claim true or untrue,²¹ and this object is the proper “object of knowledge”.²² That is, claims are true if they correspond to, or cohere with, whatever the objects of knowledge happen to be. Appearances are taken to be a reflection of reality, though not necessarily an accurate reflection: Appearances can be deceiving. Theory is ontological, in that it elevates ontology over phenomenology, and “ontology leads to realism” of various kinds,²³ the specific type of which depending on the nature of the theory’s ontological postulates.²⁴ Knowledge is absolute because it is rooted in an absolute reality. Absolutism is the defining feature of the traditional, theoretical mode of thinking. For the absolutist, in any controversy, where two or more opposing points of view are represented, only one may be true and the others must necessarily be false (*pseudos*); an account is either true or it is false. Thomas Hobbes, for example, argues that “through speech, human beings are capable of discovering general truths, and of uttering absurdities.”²⁵

¹⁶ The intended meaning is closer to the Greek ‘*logos*’ than the English ‘theory’. *Logos* refers generally to the “use of language in the service of reasoning”, and reason in the service of truth, as opposed to “the use of language in the service of imagination, story-telling and fiction” (Flood, *Political Myth: A Theoretical Introduction*, 1996: 6).

¹⁷ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1011b25–8 [1984:1597]

¹⁸ Plato, *Republic* 476–7:

SOCRATES: ...Tell us this: does someone who knows know something or nothing?...

GLAUCON: I will answer that he knows something.

SOCRATES: Something that is or something that is not?

GLAUCON: That is. How could something that is not be known?

SOCRATES: We are adequately assured of this, then, and would remain so, no matter how many ways we examined it: what completely is, is completely an object of knowledge; and what in no way is, is not an object of knowledge at all?

GLAUCON: Most adequately.

¹⁹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* Γ1003a20–5

²⁰ Putman, *Reason, Truth and History*, 1981: 49

²¹ Merricks, *Truth and Ontology*, 2007: xiii

²² Plato, *Republic* 477

²³ Hewson and Sinclair, *Approaches to Global Governance Theory*, 1999: ix

²⁴ Gunnell, *The Orders of Discourse: Philosophy, Social Science, and Politics*, 1998: 121

²⁵ Kavka, *Hobbesian Moral and Political Theory*, 1986: 30; Hobbes, *Leviathan* V

The opposite, alternative mode of thought is anti-theoretical. Antitheory (*antilogos*) is the attempt to refute supposed truths through reason, “to make use of the paraphernalia of science itself”, as Nietzsche says, “to point out the limits and the relativity of knowledge generally, and thus to deny the claim...to universal validity and universal aims”.²⁶ The rejection of truth is founded on a denial of the entity to which the statement purporting to be true pertains, or of reality as a whole.²⁷ According to Gorgias’ *On the Non-existent*, for example, “nothing exists; then that if it exists it is unknowable”.²⁸ Appearances are independent of reality, in this view, in stemming from a variety of angles or viewpoints, and reality is itself constituted by the various conceptions people have of it: Perception is reality.²⁹ This is illustrated in Protagoras’ *Antilogiae*, in the section ‘On Being’³⁰: “Man is the measure of all things: of the things that are, that they are, and of the things that are not, that they are not.”³¹ Anti-theory is thus counter-ontological in elevating phenomenology over ontology,³² and opposition to ontology gives rise to anti-realism. Without ontological foundation knowledge is relative, in that it stems from appearance and not from reality. Relativism is the hallmark of this alternative, anti-theoretical way of thinking. For the relativist, controversy implies that no one point of view is absolutely true, but that opposing views are equally true,³³ and, for them, there are always at least two, and potentially infinite, sides to any argument. Protagoras, according to Diogenes Laertius, “was the first to maintain that there are always two *logoi* in opposition” (the principle known as *Dissoi Logoi*, or ‘Double

²⁶ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy* 18

²⁷ Without “things in themselves” there can be no “facts-in-themselves”. (Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* 556) “For Nietzsche there is no order in the world for things to correspond to; there is nothing... to which statements can stand in the required relationship in order to be true.” (Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher*, 1965: 75)

²⁸ in Guthrie, *The Sophists*, 1971: 196

²⁹ “There are no facts, only interpretations.” (Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* 374); “If the real is defined as consisting in the pictures of the world that people invent and accept then there are as many realities about something as are created....” (Nimmo and Combs, quoted in Flood, *Political Myth*, 1996: 46)

³⁰ Untersteiner, *The Sophists*, 1954: 10

³¹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1062b13:

The saying of Protagoras is...that man is the measure of all things, meaning simply that that which seems to each man also assuredly is. If this is so, it follows that the same thing both is and is not, and is bad and good, and that the contents of all other opposite statements are true, because often a particular thing appears beautiful to some and the contrary of beautiful to others, and that which appears too each man is the measure.

³² Jacquette, *Ontology*, 2002: 101; “Phenomenology...might instead be the method by which to confront the question of the meaning of human life.” (Sheehan, ‘Heidegger – Dasein’, 199)

³³ Relativism “denies the possibility of absolute truth by insisting that nothing could be true without relativistic qualification”, and so “allows...conflicting judgements to be...equally true.” (Woodruff, ‘Protagoras and Gorgias: Rhetoric and Relativism’, 1999: 300)

Arguments’),³⁴ and according to Nietzsche “we cannot dismiss the possibility that the world contains *infinite interpretations*.”³⁵

The debate between traditional and alternative modes of thought stems from opposite conceptions of the causal relationship between theory (*logos*) and practise (*praxis*). The traditional way of thinking is “*logocentric*”, to use Derrida’s terminology, in placing theory ahead of practise.³⁶ The belief that theory can uncover general and necessary truths assumes that theory is prior to practise. That is, it assumes that theorising takes place from a position outside of practise, an Archimedean Point, and that theory, in transcending practise, can inform and transform practise.³⁷ Because practises are a product of local conditions, the ascendance of theory over practise is a necessary precondition to the attainment of universal over local truths, and so of absolutism. The alternative mode of thought might be called ‘*praxiocentric*’ in prioritising practise over theory. The antitheorist opponents of theory reject the “myth of an Archimedean point, rational foundations”,³⁸ considering theory to be subject to practise, rooted in the practical purposes of, and applicable only to, certain people at certain places and times.³⁹ The impossibility of transcending local practises makes the attainment of universal truths likewise impossible, and is the starting point for much of relativist thinking.⁴⁰

0.3 Ethics and Politics

The present inquiry is concerned with traditional and alternative modes of *ethical-political* thought. The “hyphenated expression ‘ethical-political’”, introduced by Bernstein and

³⁴ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers* L.IX.51

³⁵ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* 481

³⁶ Habermas, ‘Levelling the Genre Distinction between Philosophy and Literature’, 2006: 19; Rorty, ‘Habermas, Derrida and the Functions of Philosophy’, 2006: 48–9

³⁷ Fairfield, *The Ways of Power: Hermeneutics, Ethics and Social Criticism*, 2002: 35–7

³⁸ Fairfield, *The Ways of Power: Hermeneutics, Ethics and Social Criticism*, 2002: 36–7

³⁹ “All interpretation, all evaluation, is made from a definite perspective: that of the preservation of the individual, a community, a race, a state, a church, a faith, a culture.” (Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* 259)

⁴⁰ Flew and Priest, *A Dictionary of Philosophy*:

The relativist recognises, first, the importance of the social environment in determining the content of beliefs about what is and ought to be the case; and, second, the possible diversity of such environments.

adopted by Rengger and others,⁴¹ is used to highlight the inherent interconnectedness of ethics and politics:

Although we can distinguish ethics from politics they are inseparable. For we cannot understand ethics without thinking through our political commitments and responsibilities. And there is no understanding of politics that does not bring us back to ethics. Ethics and politics as disciplines concerned with *praxis* are aspects of a unified practical philosophy.⁴²

At the same time, it highlights the “tension between...ethics and politics”,⁴³ a tension that is central to the present study, as will become clear. First of all, a definition of ‘politics’, and ‘ethics’, is in order.

“A definition of ‘politics’ is a good starting point for this discussion”, as William Bluhm says, in a section entitled ‘*What We Mean by “Politics”*—’,

but it is not an unambiguous place to begin. For one of the chief means of distinguishing political theories is by referring to the conception of the ‘political’ which they embody. Are there any...constants which cut across all the various conceptions of politics?⁴⁴

Narrowly defined, ‘politics’ refers to public affairs – the activities of rulers, revolutionaries, councils, committees, advocates, analysts, and so on. In a broader sense, politics is about questions of governance generally. It is therefore “possible to speak of ‘private politics’ as well, politics in the university, the business corporation, the labor union, the church, even in the streetcorner gang”.⁴⁵ The overriding question in all of this is that put to Alice by Humpty Dumpty, the concern, in the original nursery rhyme, of “all the king’s horses and all the king’s men”: “The question is..., who is the master. That is all.”⁴⁶ Simply put, politics is about *power*. Thinkers are divided, however, as to what this power consists of, and whether there is even a

⁴¹ Bernstein, *The New Constellation: The Ethical-Political Horizons of Modernity and Post-Modernity*, 1991: 9; Rengger, *Political Theory, Modernity and Postmodernity: Beyond Enlightenment and Critique*, 1995: 44

⁴² Bernstein, *The New Constellation: The Ethical-Political Horizons of Modernity and Post-Modernity*, 1991: 9–10

⁴³ *ibid*: 9

⁴⁴ Bluhm, *Theories of the Political System*, 1971: 9

⁴⁵ *ibid*: 9–10

⁴⁶ Lewis Carroll, *Alice through the Looking Glass*. The actual Humpty Dumpty was a kind of cannon, the implication being that ‘power grows out of the barrel of a gun’.

coherent concept to which the word corresponds, it being, as Lukes says, an “essentially contested concept”.⁴⁷

Ethics or morals (the two “may be used interchangeably in most contexts”) are codes of right conduct,⁴⁸ which set out what we should and should not do, what is right and what is wrong.⁴⁹ As with politics, there are various kinds of ethics, corresponding to the various spheres of human activity with which they are concerned. There are personal ethics, professional ethics, business ethics, political ethics, and so on; though insofar as each of these spheres is political, all ethics is political ethics. In the narrower sense, political ethics are codes of good governance, of how public authority ought to be held and exercised. In the broader sense, these are codes of how we ought to govern, and be governed, generally. The overriding question in all this is that of Plato’s *Republic*, of what the good life and good polity consists in. In short, ethics is about justice (*dike*, *dikaiosyne*).⁵⁰ The question of what this consists in, and whether there is “a defining property of...justice, in virtue of which the word applies”, remains an open one.⁵¹

Conceptions of power and justice exist on a spectrum ranging from the purely-physical at one extreme to the purely-moral at the other. Conceptions of power range from legitimate authority, or power as “*right*”,⁵² at the moral end of the spectrum, to physical force and violence (*bia*), “strength”,⁵³ or *might*, at the physical end.⁵⁴ Conceptions of justice range from “practical justice” or enforcement at the physical end of the spectrum,⁵⁵ to moral justice, or *right*, at the moral end. Might and right are unconditional power and justice, in that each exists independently of the other, whereas power as legitimacy is conditional on justice (power *from* justice), and justice as enforcement is conditional on power (justice *from* power). Power as might takes only physical factors into account; it is completely amoral. It is therefore consistent with a pure politics, divorced from morality, power politics or *real politick*, and a political or “‘power’

⁴⁷ Lukes, *Power: A Radical View*, 1974: 31

⁴⁸ Wiggins, *Ethics*, 2006: 9

⁴⁹ Smith, *Violence, Politics and Morality: Ethical and Political Issues in War and Peace*, 1996: 1–2

⁵⁰ This is closer to the Greek ‘*dike/dikaiosyne*’ than the English ‘justice’, which is, as Reeve says, “Often broader than our notion of justice and more nearly equivalent to ethical rightness in general. Its opposite, *adaikia*, then has the sense of general wrongdoing.” Editor’s Glossary for Plato, *Republic* [2004: 328]

⁵¹ Schmitz, *Elements of Justice*, 2006: 3–4; See also Smith, *Violence, Politics and Morality: Ethical and Political Issues in War and Peace*, 1996: 2–3

⁵² Hindess, *Discourses of Power: From Hobbes to Foucault*, 1996: 1

⁵³ *ibid*: 29

⁵⁴ “At the other end of the spectrum of power we have something that could be called ‘mightiness’ as a source of violence.” (Boulding, ‘Peace, Justice and the Faces of Power’, 1994: 47)

⁵⁵ Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*, 1955: 15

worldview”.⁵⁶ Justice as right is concerned only with moral considerations, ignoring the physical. It is consistent with a pure morality, divorced from power and politics in the ‘negative’ sense, and a moral worldview. If politics and ethics are about power and justice, then might and right are politics and ethics *par excellence*, and at the heart of the “tension between...ethics and politics”,⁵⁷ and the “conflict of principles, the physical and the moral”.⁵⁸

0.3.1 Ethics and Politics:

Traditional and Alternative

Traditional moral and political thought is theoretical. Ethical theory is “the philosophical study of morals or morality”, the search for moral truth.⁵⁹ Political theory is the theoretical study of politics, the search for political truth.⁶⁰ This is carried out in the belief that there are absolute truths, not only of the natural world, but also of the social world, which transcend cultural and personal differences, “unwritten principles which may be said to be universally recognised”,⁶¹ “universally valid conditions and norms”.⁶² Like all universal truths, the truths of ethico-political theory are rooted in a conception of reality and its principal components.⁶³ Ontological questions, as Taylor says, “concern what you recognise as factors you will invoke to account for social life” and for “the moral stand or policy one adopts”.⁶⁴ Alternative moral and political thought is anti-theoretical, and attempts to refute the supposed truths of human moral and political life. It denies that there are absolute moral or political truths, beyond the local truths of certain societies,⁶⁵ or

⁵⁶ *Oxford Dictionary of Politics*

⁵⁷ Bernstein, *The New Constellation: The Ethical-Political Horizons of Modernity and Post-Modernity*, 1991: 9

⁵⁸ Greene, *Maira: Fate, Good and Evil*, 1968: 6

⁵⁹ Wiggins, *Ethics*, 2006: 9

⁶⁰ Badiou, *Metapolitics* 2005: 10:

Political theory is the programme which, holding politics...as an objective datum, or even invariant, of universal experience, accords philosophy the task of thinking it. Overall, philosophy’s task would be to generate an analysis of the political and...to submit this analysis to ethical norms.

⁶¹ Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 1368

⁶² Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*, 1955: 6, 17

[I]n the tradition of Western Philosophy...such objective concepts and principles exist.... Rational mastery of nature and society presupposes knowledge of the truth and truth...is universal and necessary....

⁶³ Merricks, *Truth and Ontology*, 2007: xiii

⁶⁴ Taylor, cited in Rengger, *Political Theory, Modernity and Postmodernity: Beyond Enlightenment and Critique*, 1995: 108–9

⁶⁵ Norris, *Truth and the Ethics of Criticism*, 1994: 5

the private confessions of particular people.⁶⁶ Because they are specific to certain people, places and times, such ‘truths’ cannot be universally applied.⁶⁷ This is based on a rejection of certain aspects of social reality, or of that reality in its entirety. The social world is seen to be less about ontology than about phenomenology, less about how things really are than about how they appear to the people or person in question, in light of their particular needs and wants, “the matrix of human purposes ordered to human interests and ultimately to human survival – that is, a world.”⁶⁸ Without ontological foundation, there can be no single account of social life, and no objective moral or political stance.

Just as the debate between traditional and alternative modes thought corresponds to opposite accounts of the relationship between *logos* and *praxis*, the debate between ethico-political theory and anti-theory corresponds to opposite conceptions of the relationship between ethico-political theory, on the one hand, and social and political practise, on the other. In traditional thinking, ethico-political theory is presented as “the disinterested search for...knowledge of political and social reality...[and] for the principles of the good state and good society”, as this means that it remains uncorrupted by personal or partisan interests. Theories give rise, in the traditional formulation, to different kinds of ideology, or “rationalization for current or future political and social arrangements”, the specific type of which depends on the theory on which it is said to be based.⁶⁹ In this view, as Rengger says, “philosophy and the city can be easily reconciled, in that the one (philosophy) can prescribe to and for the other (the city)”.⁷⁰ Alternative ethico-political thought reverses the traditional formulation of the relationship between moral and political theory and practise. The opponents of traditional ethical-political theory consider that theory to be a product of practise.⁷¹ Here the

On this account ‘local knowledge’ is the most we can hope for, since theoretical truth-claims amount to nothing more than the expression of in-place consensus beliefs on the part of some existing cultural enterprise....

⁶⁶ “It has gradually become clear to me what every great philosophy has hitherto been: a confession on the part of the author and a kind of involuntary memoir....” (Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* 6)

⁶⁷ Fairfield, *The Ways of Power: Hermeneutics, Ethics and Social Criticism*, 2002: 36–7:

There is no unified set of values or form of life prescribable to all individuals and human types. Instead, there are numerous conceptions...which are determined by their respective points of origin.

⁶⁸ Sheehan, ‘Heidegger – Dasein’, 2007: 199

⁶⁹ Hacker, *Political Theory, Ideology, Science*, 1961: 5

⁷⁰ Rengger, *Political Theory, Modernity and Postmodernity: Beyond Enlightenment and Critique*, 1995: 138

⁷¹ “Theories...are proposed with normative applications in mind.” Kavka, *Hobbesian Moral and Political Philosophy*, 1986: 31; Norris, *Truth and the Ethics of Criticism*, 1994: 7:

supposedly “disinterested search” for moral and political truth is itself a “rationalization for current or future political and social arrangements”.⁷² This is in accordance with the ideological interests and political practises of certain individuals and groups, and against those of their ideological opponents, which are represented by their own, opposing, theoretical tradition; differences in social theory arise from different modes of social life.⁷³ It therefore presents “a distorted description or explanation of political and social reality”.⁷⁴ On this account, “philosophy is dead and all we are left with is struggle for, and in, the city”.⁷⁵

0.4 Realism, Idealism and Relativism

As the search for the truth of human moral and political life, ethical-political theory is divided between as to whether that truth is primarily moral or political. This is because any claim to moral and political truth, any account of ethics and politics that claims a position of “epistemic sovereignty”, must be principally either one or the other, “either a critique of power in the name of legitimacy or an acceptance that might makes right”.⁷⁶ The contention corresponds to competing conceptions of social reality as regards the respective ontological status of power and justice, these being the defining features of politics and ethics respectively. These opposing ethico-political truth-claims are enshrined in the Grand Theories of politics and ethics, political realism/moral cynicism, *Realism*, and moral realism/political idealism, *Idealism*. As the denial of moral and political truth, ethico-political anti-theory denies that human political life is principally moral or political. This is because any claim against moral and political truth, any stand against

[S]cientific theories and truth claims always take rise within some given (culture-specific) history of human endeavor, or as the upshot of practises...which likewise belong to their own time and place.

⁷² Hacker, *Political Theory, Ideology, Science*, 1961: 5

⁷³ Theory arises from “intentions or ends, which, or course, have their being in the ‘life-world’ or pre-theoretical horizon of pre-theoretical activity”, but so do “rival or contradictory ends”. (Kavka, *Hobbesian Moral and Political Philosophy*, 1986: 31)

⁷⁴ Hacker, *Political Theory, Ideology, Science*, 1961: 5; “The methods of truth were not invented from motives of truth, but from...wanting to be superior. How is truth proved? By...utility..., by advantages...: a sign that truth is not involved at all—“ (Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* 455)

⁷⁵ Rengger, *Political Theory, Modernity and Postmodernity: Beyond Enlightenment and Critique*, 1995: 138–9; Fairfield, *The Ways of Power: Hermeneutics, Ethics and Social Criticism*, 2002: 146:

Neither can moral theory prescribe a particular way of life or conception of the good. The classical conception of ethics as a systematic answer to the question “How should one live?” was an overly ambitious view of what moral philosophy could achieve. Questions of the good cannot be resolved philosophically – so much may be conceded to the antitheorists.

⁷⁶ Rousse, ‘Power/Knowledge’, 1994: 105

claims to “epistemic sovereignty” in the field of ethics and politics, can be neither one nor the other. This represents a rejection of the belief in a ‘social reality’, and, in particular, the idea that either power or justice occupies such a reality, or that either enjoys a position of ontological priority or superiority over the other. This alternative ethico-political tendency is enshrined in moral and political anti-realism, or *Relativism*.

‘Political realism’, as the name indicates, ascribes ontological priority to power, making justice dependent on pre-existing power-relations, hence ‘moral cynicism’. For the Realist, power is “the driving force in all political life”,⁷⁷ and “determines all normative categories”, being “anterior to...justice and morality”.⁷⁸ Realism is the “orthodoxy” in traditional “political approaches.... It claims an intellectual heritage going back to Thucydides, Machiavelli, [and] Hobbes....”⁷⁹ Thucydides’ *History of the Peloponnesian War* is the starting-point for the Western Realist tradition. Hobbes “himself translated Thucydides’ *History*”, finding in it “a confirmation of his own philosophy”,⁸⁰ and while he “does not refer to Machiavelli, the revolution effected by Hobbes was decisively prepared for by Machiavelli”. Hobbes, in turn, is “a teacher of Spinoza”, though Spinoza distanced himself from Hobbes in much the same way as Hobbes did from Machiavelli.⁸¹ Indeed, Hobbes is a teacher of most, if not all, subsequent Western Realist thinkers to date.⁸² The Realist understands power as Might “– that is, physical force, for moral force”, as Clausewitz says, “has no existence” in and of itself, and apart from the physical.⁸³ That is, as Thucydides says, “So far as right and wrong are concerned, they think that there is no difference between the two.”⁸⁴ Machiavelli, for example, elevates “politics above ordinary morality”,⁸⁵ while Hobbes “legitimizes the rule of might over right”.⁸⁶ Justice is defined by the Realist in purely cynical terms, as “nothing more than the will of the stronger party” or “ruling element”,⁸⁷ and is thought to be, as Johnson says, “devoid of true moral content”.⁸⁸ This is what Levi Strauss calls the Realist’s “new use of the word ‘ought’”, according to which one ‘ought’ to

⁷⁷ *Oxford Dictionary of Politics*

⁷⁸ Clark, ‘Traditions of Thought and Classical Theories of International Relations’, 1996: 4–5

⁷⁹ *Oxford Dictionary of Politics*

⁸⁰ Johnson, 1993: ix–xi

⁸¹ Strauss, ‘Niccolo Machiavelli’, 1987: 298–300

⁸² Johnson, *Thucydides, Hobbes, and the Interpretation of Realism*, 1993: x

⁸³ Clausewitz, *On War* 1.2

⁸⁴ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* V.97

⁸⁵ Williams, Wright and Evans, *A Reader in International Relations and Political Theory*, 1993: 70

⁸⁶ Johnson, *Thucydides, Hobbes, and the Interpretation of Realism*, 1993: 77

⁸⁷ Plato, *Republic* 338, 343

⁸⁸ Johnson, *Thucydides, Hobbes, and the Interpretation of Realism*, 1993: 84–5

do what is expedient irrespective of what is right.⁸⁹ For instance, evil deeds, according to Machiavelli, “may be well committed (if one may use the word ‘well’ of that which is evil) when...they are necessary for establishing one’s power...”⁹⁰ In political society, power, and the moral authority that it is said to accompany it, is thought to reside ultimately in the sovereign state (defined, as by Weber, as the sole coercive power within a certain territory);⁹¹ outside it, that power stems from the body of man.⁹²

Moral realism, in contrast, as its name suggests, ascribes ontological priority to justice,⁹³ making power dependent on pre-existing moral ideals, hence ‘political idealism’. The political idealist “sets...morality before practical justice”, law and order,⁹⁴ and holds that politics is “shaped by the pursuit of...an ideal of the good.... It is convenient to counterpose realist thinking to idealism”,⁹⁵ as the traditional opponent of Realist orthodoxy. Idealism traces its history to such figures as Plato, Aquinas and Locke. Platonic idealism is the starting-point for Western Idealism generally. Plato influenced Aquinas, the central founding figure of Christian idealism, principally through his student Aristotle, whose works Aquinas translated and wrote commentaries on. Locke was influenced by the Platonic and Aristotelian/Thomistic tradition though he clashed with them on a number of fronts and often sought to distance himself from them. Locke in turn was influential in German idealism, inspiring Kant and Hegel.⁹⁶ The Idealist, in contrast to the Realist, understands justice as right. Power is defined by the Idealist in moral terms, as legitimacy or rightful rule, as by Locke in his *Second Treatise of Government*: “Political power I take to be a *right* of making laws...and only for the public good.”⁹⁷ This involves what Hindess describes as a “slippage between the idea of power as a *capacity*...and that of power as a *right*”.⁹⁸ Aquinas, as

⁸⁹ Strauss, ‘Niccolo Machiavelli’, 1987: 300–2

⁹⁰ Machiavelli, *The Prince* VIII

⁹¹ Weber, *Theory of Economic and Social Organisation*, 1964: 154

⁹² Hobbes, *Leviathan* VI:

For these words of *good* and *evil*,...are ever used with relation to the person that useth them: there being nothing simply and absolutely so; nor any rule of good and evil, to be taken from the nature of the objects themselves; but from the person of man, where there is no commonwealth; or, in a commonwealth, from the person that representeth it....

⁹³ “...justice is self-subsisting....” Strauss, ‘Plato’, 1987: 51

⁹⁴ Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*, 1955: 15

⁹⁵ *Oxford Dictionary of Politics*

⁹⁶ Schopenhauer, ‘Sketch of a History of the Doctrine of the Ideal and the Real’ [1914: 5]; Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*, 1955: 19

⁹⁷ Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* 1.3

⁹⁸ Hindess, *Discourses of Power from Hobbes to Foucault*, 1996: 51

Finnis points out, holds that “social theory can describe from the moral ‘point of view’”.⁹⁹ “*Ius* or right” Locke argues, “is what distinguishes the legitimate authority or *potestas* of a king over his subjects from the mere *potentia* or power of a pirate to command his victims.”¹⁰⁰ In political society, justice, and the legitimate political authority that goes with it, is thought to reside in society; outside it, justice stems from the mind of man, and its rational and moral faculty, reason and conscience.

Moral and political anti-realism, as its name suggests, denies that power or justice forms part of an absolute reality.¹⁰¹ Relativists believe that power and justice is phenomenal rather than ontological. For the Relativist, “none of these...has any reality of its own, but what appears to people to be so is true at the time when it appears and for as long as it appears”.¹⁰² In addition, the Relativist denies that either power or justice is necessarily prior to the other, but believes that they are interdependent, that “ethical ideals are interwoven with...regulations of domination.”¹⁰³ Relativist ideas can be traced to the Sophists,¹⁰⁴ Protagoras, Gorgias and Callicles,¹⁰⁵ and to Nietzsche.¹⁰⁶ Protagoras and Gorgias were contemporary, and together are the starting-point for Western Relativism. Callicles is a student of Gorgias in Plato’s dialogue by that name, which is the only source we have of him. Nietzsche was influenced by the Sophists generally, and Protagoras especially. Callicles’ account in the *Gorgias* in many ways anticipates Nietzsche, so that Babich calls Callicles “Nietzsche’s ancestor”.¹⁰⁷ For the Relativist, there is no definitive definition of power or justice, no “universal or impartial principles” of might and right; instead “there are numerous conceptions...which are determined by their respective points of origin”.¹⁰⁸ Relativism thus rejects the conventional conceptions of power and justice defended by either of

⁹⁹ Finnis, *Aquinas: Moral Political and Legal Theory*, 1998: 47

¹⁰⁰ Ayers, *Locke: Epistemology and Ontology*, 1991: 191

¹⁰¹ Fairfield, *The Ways of Power: Hermeneutics, Ethics and Social Criticism*, 2002: 36–7:

The categories of political morality are ruses to be seen through and exposed...rather than...inspected for their logical credentials. The [Relativist] critique of...morality and power must be understood in light of...opposition to the foundationalist and universalist premises of [traditional] ethics and politics.

¹⁰² Plato, *Theaetetus* 172

¹⁰³ A view attributed to “writers who have drawn on Nietzsche”. Taylor, *Sources of the Self*: xi

¹⁰⁴ “Perhaps the most characteristic feature of the sophistic world-view was its skepticism about absolute and transcendental truths.” (Bluhm, *Theories of the Political System*, 1971: 29)

¹⁰⁵ Robinson, ‘Protagoras, Antiphon and Callicles’, 1999: 245–6; Woodruff, ‘Rhetoric and Relativism: Protagoras and Gorgias’, 1999: 300

¹⁰⁶ “...Nietzsche’s philosophy: There is no truth,...no objective reality,...no genuine distinctions between right and wrong...” (Flew and Priest, *A Dictionary of Philosophy*)

¹⁰⁷ Babich, *Habermas, Nietzsche and Critical Theory*, 2004: 18

¹⁰⁸ Fairfield, *The Ways of Power: Hermeneutics, Ethics and Social Criticism*, 2002: 36–7

the major theoretical traditions, denying that there is any absolute measure of power, embodied in the body of man or body politic, or any absolute standard of justice, embodied in the individual or social conscience (though there may be a “will to power” and “desire to be just”).¹⁰⁹ Some have gone so far as to deny that there is such a thing as a sovereign power or society,¹¹⁰ or even a human subject.¹¹¹ For Nietzsche, for instance, both the self and society are a “social structure of drives and affects” without a “centre”.¹¹²

0.4.1 Realism, Idealism and Relativism: Conservatism and Radicalism

The Grand Theories of ethics and politics, Realism and Idealism, correspond to the sides of the ideological divide, conservatism and radicalism: “The controversy between conservatives and reformers, still pending, finds its counterpart, in the history of philosophy, in the quarrel between realists and idealists.”¹¹³ “The ‘power’ world-view offers the would-be social scientist immunity from moral evaluation.”¹¹⁴ If power is the source of all justice, if there is no “moral force...save as expressed in the state and the law”,¹¹⁵ then that law is necessarily just and challenges to it necessarily unjust, there being no higher law upon which to justify such challenges. Realism is therefore consistent with conservative ideology in legitimating the established order and condemning rebellion. The moral worldview, on the other hand, can be “understood as providing the foundation for a moral critique of political power”.¹¹⁶ If justice is self-subsisting, and the source of power, if the world “has...a moral” and not “merely a physical...significance”,¹¹⁷ then revolution can be justified on “an appeal from the law of the

¹⁰⁹ Nietzsche, *Assorted Opinions and Maxims* 33

¹¹⁰ Fairfield, *The Ways of Power: Hermeneutics, Ethics and Social Criticism*, 2002: 16:

That power resides largely within an identifiable and centralized agency, that the popular will is itself uncorrupted (indeed, on some accounts, incorruptible), and that its overriding concern lies with securing a condition of optimal civility are premises implicit to many a political argument.

They are also, in Nietzsche’s view, evidently false.

¹¹¹ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* 3.12

¹¹² Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* 12

¹¹³ Proudhon, *A History of Political Economy, or, The Philosophy of Misery* [2008: 26]

¹¹⁴ *Oxford Dictionary of Politics*

¹¹⁵ Clausewitz, *On War* 1.2

¹¹⁶ Hindess, *Discourses of Power from Hobbes to Foucault*, 1996: 82–3

¹¹⁷ Schopenhauer, *On Ethics* [1914: 195]

land...to a higher law”.¹¹⁸ Idealism therefore has obvious radical implications in legitimating challenges to the prevailing political system in the name of justice, and in condemning the established order.¹¹⁹ The latter provides for “a critique of power in the name of legitimacy”, the former entails an “acceptance that power makes right”¹²⁰: “Thus two powers are contending for the government of the world, and cursing each other with the fervour of two hostile religions:...tradition; and...utopia.”¹²¹ The Relativist alternative to the Grand Theories has no discernable ideological position and is a-political, even anti-political, in its practical implications.¹²² The rejection of absolute truths or universal norms “allows no ground” from which to praise or blame political programs present or planned, existing or imagined.¹²³ From here, there is no moral motivation for obeying the law of the land, nor any such motivation for political resistance; there is only self-interest and personal taste: ethics and politics are reduced to ascetics.¹²⁴ In the absence of ethical-political truth “there can be no sense that value A is better/preferable to B”, and no reason for favouring one ideology over another, “except, perhaps, on purely ascetic grounds”.¹²⁵

Here, as elsewhere, the controversy centres on the relationship between *logos* and *praxis* that is supposed. The proponents and opponents of the Grand Theories of ethics and politics correspond to opposite accounts of the relationship between those theories and their practical or ideological implications. As before, ‘in theory’ theory is prior to practise, ideas are set before ideology; ‘outside’ theory the relationship is reversed.¹²⁶ In the traditional formulation, people and parties are conservative or radical in their beliefs and practises because they are convinced by the theories to which their chosen ideological position corresponds, because they believe it

¹¹⁸ Strauss, ‘Niccolo Machiavelli’, 1987: 297

¹¹⁹ This is why “a moral conviction of rightness” is, as Barker says, “both a requirement and a distinguishing characteristic of...rebels”. (*Legitimizing Identities: The Self-Presentation of Rulers and Subjects*, 2001: 100–1)

¹²⁰ Rousseau, ‘Power/Knowledge’, 1994: 105

¹²¹ Proudhon, *A History of Political Economy, or, The Philosophy of Misery* [2008: 26–7]

¹²² “One cannot indulge a concern for politics, especially global politics...without losing one’s soul.” (Babich, *Habermas, Nietzsche and Critical Theory*, 2004: 23)

¹²³ Flew and Priest, *A Dictionary of Philosophy*

¹²⁴ Babich, *Habermas, Nietzsche and Critical Theory*, 2004: 23; “...it is under all circumstances a matter of taste – and no more.”; “It is at bottom a question of ascetics...” Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* 184; *The Will to Power* 353

¹²⁵ Renner, *Political Theory, Modernity and Postmodernity: Beyond Enlightenment and Critique*, 1995: 96–7

¹²⁶ Fairfield, *The Ways of Power: Hermeneutics, Ethics, and Social Criticism*, 2002: 146–7:

Subverting these dichotomies entails a rejection of the traditional subordination of practise to theory and a recognition of the primacy of practise.... Rather than subordinating practise (conceived since Plato as defective, contingent...) to theory (conceived since Plato as unconditioned, pristine...), the practise-imminent view takes the domain of practise as its starting-point.

provides a more realistic description of social phenomena and prescription for a more ideal society. Conservatives support the ‘powers that be’ because they accept the Realist view that might makes right. Revolutionaries oppose the status-quo because they adopt the Idealist position, which subjects *might* to *right*.¹²⁷ In this view, a person is a realist or idealist first, reactionary or radical second, and the conflict between major ideologies reduces to the intellectual debate between the Grand Theories. The assumption is that a person or group’s political opinions are uncorrupted by their position in society. In the alternative formulation, individuals and groups are conservative or radical in thought and action because it promotes the interests of the social strata with which they identify, because it idealises, or seeks to realise, a social schema consistent with the political agenda of the strata in question.¹²⁸ Conservatives support the powers that be because they belong to the ruling strata or because they have been won-over by those that do. Radicals oppose the status-quo because they belong to a lower class or caste, or because they have been converted to its cause. The assumption here is that personal and public opinion is necessarily corrupted by the position within society one occupies, or by the propagandistic efforts of rulers or rebels.

In this latter, alternative ethico-political tradition the debate between Grand theories appears as an extension of the master-slave dialectic, in that it emerges from the struggle between rulers and the ruled. This corresponds to Nietzsche’s distinction between ‘master’ and ‘slave’ moralities, named after the Hegelian categories¹²⁹:

In a tour of the many finer and coarser moralities which have ruled or still rule on earth I found certain traits regularly recurring together and bound up in one another until at length two basic types were revealed and a basic distinction emerged. There is *master morality* and *slave morality*.... The moral-value distinctions have arisen either among a ruling order...or among the ruled....¹³⁰

¹²⁷ Proudhon, *A History of Political Economy, or, The Philosophy of Misery* [2008: 27]

¹²⁸ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* 345, 455:

Every man desires that no doctrine or valuation of things should come into favour but that through which he himself prospers. ... The advantages that one anticipated from truth were advantages resulting from belief in it.... One likewise disputed the ‘truth’ only when one promised oneself advantages from one’s victory—e.g., freedom from the ruling powers. The methods of truth were not invented from motives of truth, but from...wanting to be superior.

¹²⁹ “Although he would not, of course, accept Hegel’s metaphysics of History, he yet echoes Hegel....” (Heller, *The Importance of Nietzsche*, 1988: 66)

¹³⁰ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* 260

These are, he hastens to add, ideal types rather than natural kinds, and, in most cases,

attempts at mediation between the two are apparent” as are “confusion and mutual misunderstanding between them, indeed sometimes their harsh juxtaposition – even within the same man, within *one* soul.¹³¹

A person is not a master or slave ‘according to nature’, according to Nietzsche, but according to circumstances, and “the order of rank in which the innermost drives of his nature stand in relation to one another”.¹³² “Master morality” (which is not a ‘morality’ in the strict sense of the word, but its antithesis) is the ‘morality’ of the rulers, of the “powerful, high-stationed and high-minded”.¹³³ It equates goodness with power,¹³⁴ in an attempt to *idealise* prevailing physical and political *realities*, and so works to legitimate the powers that be, in the ideological interests of the rulers. “Slave morality”, morality proper, is the morality of the subjected, “the abused, oppressed, [and] unfree”.¹³⁵ It equates goodness with weakness and evil with strength,¹³⁶ in an attempt to *realise* moral *ideals*, to subvert the ruling order through moral criticism, in accordance with the ideological interests of the underclass: the “slave revolt in morality”.¹³⁷ The Grand Theories of ethics and politics, Realism and Idealism, correspond to this “basic distinction” between moral types. Realism, which subjects moral justice to political power and is conservative in its practical implications, looks much like the morality of the masters. Idealism, which subordinates the might to right in theory and practise, resembles the morality of the slaves.

¹³¹ *ibid*; Fairfield, *The Ways of Power: Hermeneutics, Ethics and Social Criticism*, 2002: 36–7:

Universal and impartial principles...give way to categories of ‘noble’ and ‘base’...categories that constitute critical perspectives for social phenomena. ... There is no unified set of values or form of life prescribable to all individuals and human types. Instead, there are numerous conceptions of the good...which are determined by their respective points of origin – master morality prevailing among the powerful and slave morality among the powerless.

¹³² Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* 6

¹³³ Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals* 1.2

¹³⁴ *ibid*

¹³⁵ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* 260; *The Genealogy of Morals* 1.2

¹³⁶ “All good people are weak: they are good because they are not strong enough to be evil.” (Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* 355); “...because within the slaves’ way of thinking the good man has in any event to be a harmless man....” (*Beyond Good and Evil* 260); Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals* 1.11:

Picture, on the other hand, ‘the enemy’, as the man of resentment conceives him...: he has conceived ‘the evil enemy’, ‘*the Evil One*’, and this indeed is his basic conception from which he then evolves, as a corresponding and opposing figure, a ‘good one’ – himself!

¹³⁷ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* 260; *On the Genealogy of Morals* 1.2, 10; “The basic tendency of the weak...of all ages is...to weaken and pull down the stronger: chief means, the moral judgement.” (*The Will to Power* 345)

0.4.2 Realism, Idealism and Relativism: Triad, Dyad and Dialectic

Realism and Idealism form the traditional dyad in ethical-political thought. The theoretical tradition in ethics and politics is defined, in large part, by the conflict between the Grand Theories, and the theories are each defined in contrast to the other, as textbooks and dictionaries of political philosophy almost invariably testify. The basic distinction in introductions to classical political and international relations theory is that between political realism and idealism, and definitions of each in political dictionaries and glossaries inevitably contain an inverse reference to the other.¹³⁸ The debate is as old as the traditions themselves, going back to the birth of philosophy itself in Ancient Greece, beginning with the attack by Socratic philosophy, especially Platonic idealism, against the realist branch of the Sophists,¹³⁹ exemplified by Thrasymachus, and, by implication, Thucydides' realism. It is the basis of the debate between Socrates and Thrasymachus in Plato's *Republic*, regarding the nature of justice.¹⁴⁰ In Lefebvre's words, moral and political "thought that is reflective, that philosophises has long put the accent on dyads".¹⁴¹

The addition of Relativism completes the Lefebvreian triad in ethics and politics. This "triadic structure, long since present in the Western logos", in this case since the Sophists, "has emerged since Hegel" (the 'discoverer' of the Master-Slave Dialectic), for instance in Nietzsche (who is, in his own way, a student of Hegel). The anti-theoretical alternative to ethico-political theory stands opposed to Realism and Idealism in denying their claims to absolute truth and universal applicability, and so is antithetical to them both. At the same time, it considers Realism and Idealism to be "equal in terms of truth", and equally appropriate for the ways of life they represent, and so is also their *synthesis*. For the Relativist, "on both sides, right and wrong are equal, and...the rivalry, narrowness, and intolerance of opinions have been the sole cause of the misunderstanding".¹⁴² In Relativism, Realism and Idealism are reduced to "image and reflection,

¹³⁸ *Oxford Dictionary of Politics*

¹³⁹ See Guthrie's section 'The Realists', in his *The Sophists*, 1971: 84–99

¹⁴⁰ Plato, *Republic* 337–354

¹⁴¹ Lefebvre, 'Triads and Dyads', 2003: 50

¹⁴² Proudhon, *A History of Political Economy, or, The Philosophy of Misery* [2008: 25]

a mirror effect, a rivalry that is derisory to the primacy of either one. Hence...their arrival at the logical compromise of mutual representation”,¹⁴³ as master and slave morality.¹⁴⁴

0.5 A Model of Might and Right

These, then, are the general concepts and categories of the discourses of might and right, and an outline of the dialectic that exists between them. To summarise: Two basic modes of thought in general, and of ethical and political thought in particular, are identified: ‘traditional’ and ‘alternative’. The traditional mode of thought is defined by its subordination of appearance to truth, and practise to theory; the alternative is defined by its elevation of perception over reality, and practise over theory. The first is often divided along a central fissure, formed by the division between the dominant schools of the tradition in question. The second is united against the first, but also incorporates and combines elements of each of its major schools. In traditional moral and political thought that central fissure was said to be that between politics and morals, between political and moral realism, Realism and Idealism. These provide a defence of each of the major modes of socio-political practise, representing each of the basic ideological standpoints, conservatism and radicalism. In alternative moral and political thought, the traditional standpoints are reduced to one in the same, and to their ideological positions, as master and slave ‘moralities’. And this is the dialectic of might and right, corresponding to the Lefebvreian, intellectual dialectic, between philosophy and the “Other”, and something of the Hegelian/Marxian dialectic, in the struggle between masters and slaves, and master and slave morality.

What follows is an exploration of this dialectic as it plays out within various fields of ethical-political inquiry, broadly conceived. These form the sources of that dialectic as a whole, and of the concepts and categories at its heart, principal among which are conceptions of power and justice. This involves the application of the model developed here in the introduction to each of these fields, the sources of the dialectic, in each of the chapters that follow. As a result, each chapter follows a similar pattern to this introduction, and to each of the other chapters, since each takes the shape of the dialectic and each is part of the wider dialectic, which is the subject of the study as a whole. It proceeds in two parts. The first is devoted to the ‘usual suspects’ of ethical-

¹⁴³ Lefebvre, ‘Triads and Dyads’, 2003: 50

¹⁴⁴ Babich, *Habermas, Nietzsche and Critical Theory*, 2004: 14–5; Fairfield, *The Ways of Power: Hermeneutics, Ethics and Social Criticism*, 2002: 37

political inquiry, nature and law, the subjects of chapters one and two, respectively. The second is devoted to less 'usual' but equally important areas of ethical-political analysis, religion, myth and metaphysics, the topics of the third, fourth and final chapters. These latter subject-areas either prefigure, or in some other way feed-into, the former, and so, as a search for the sources of these ways of thinking, are essential to the present study; even more so because they are so-often overlooked in contemporary approaches to the study of ethics and politics.

In proceeding as it does, the present study will attempt to achieve the aims set out at the outset, namely to provide a taxonomy, genealogy and critical analysis of the overarching discourses of power and justice in Western ethical-political discourse. The first is concerned with bringing together the various subject-fields, intellectual-historical epochs, schools of thought, and individual thinkers within a coherent whole, and ascribing to them an overarching pattern. The second is concerned with identifying the points of emergence and lines of evolution of these discourses, in and across these various areas, eras, theories and thinkers. The third is concerned with exploring the links between moral and political inquiry and social and political practise, between theory and ideology, in each of the modes of moral and political thought, in each of the topic-areas considered.

PART ONE

I

POWER and JUSTICE
in NATURE and LAW

If “ethics and politics are aspects of a unified practical philosophy”, as Bernstein says, then it is in nature (*physis*) and convention (*nomos*) that they are united. Nowhere is the unity of ethics and politics more apparent than in nature, as Bernstein himself asserts: “The essential link between ethos and polis is nomos.”¹ But the unity of ethics and politics is also evident in *physis*, and in the relationship between *physis* and *nomos*, as Rengger responds. As he points out, what links ethics and politics is “not simply *nomos*”, but rather “the *question of nomos and/or physis*”.² Nature and convention each mean many things. “The many meanings of ‘natural’ in this context embrace a characterisation of human nature” and also of natural law, “rules of conduct determined by reflection on human nature”.³ Convention can mean ‘law’ (in the sense of ‘conventions’ (*nomoi*)), but also ‘artifice’ (in the sense of ‘conventional’ or ‘nominal’). Confusingly, a distinction is also made between natural law (*nomos of physis*) and conventional law (*nomos* in both senses).

The different meanings of nature and convention give rise to different meanings of the “*question of nomos and/or physis*”. It can be a question of “nature versus nurture”,⁴ where “‘nature’ connotes what comes as an inborn characteristic, while ‘convention’ connotes that which is suggested by custom and practise”. It can also be a question of natural versus positive law, as to which laws are god-given and which are man-made.⁵ The former is the starting-point for the first chapter, the latter, that of the second. From here, these chapters explore the traditional and alternative approaches to nature and law, and their respective conceptions of the relationship of natural and legal theories to social practise and political ideology. These chapters then discuss the role of the question of might or right in naturalistic and legalistic debate, in terms of its centrality to the fundamental questions of nature and law. They go on to consider the answers provided by Realists, Idealists and Relativists to these fundamental questions, and the ideological implications of their respective positions. Finally, they apply the dialectic model, as outlined in the introduction, to the debate between Realism, Idealism and Relativism in nature and law.

¹ Bernstein, *The New Constellation: The Ethical-Political Horizons of Modernity and Post-Modernity*, 1991: 9

² Rengger, *Political Theory, Modernity and Postmodernity: Beyond Enlightenment and Critique*, 1995: 107, 134–5

³ *Oxford Dictionary of Politics*

⁴ Heywood, *Political Theory*, 1999: 18–21

⁵ *Oxford Dictionary of Politics*

1

C H A P T E R O N E THE NATURE OF MIGHT AND RIGHT

1.1 “Nature versus Nurture”

Of the questions concerning human nature, the nature/nurture debate is the most pertinent and persistent.¹ The question of nature or nurture is *the* question of human nature, the question of its role and limits, and, by extension, its relevance to the study of ethics and politics.² Are the core human characteristics innate or learned? Are human beings as human beings ‘born’ or ‘made’?³ This question underlies the more-specific questions of human nature. If the answer is the former, then the question arises as to what this ‘nature’ consists in.⁴ If the answer is the latter, then this question is moot, or at least needs radical revision. These questions, the answers supplied by the schools of thought in question, and their implications, are the basis of the present chapter. The question of human nature also underlies the question of natural law, “rules of conduct determined by reflection on human nature”.⁵ If there is a definite human nature, then natural laws may prevail; if there is no such nature, then there can be no such laws. These questions will be considered in the next chapter.

The question of nature and nurture is closely related to the question of ontology and phenomenology that underpin the distinction between modes of ethical-political thought. The nature/convention dichotomy corresponds to that of reality/appearance.⁶ Nature, or the natural world, is often equated, or at least closely-linked, with ‘reality’, the real world.⁷ That which exists by nature exists in and of itself; it does not depend on anything else for its existence (except,

¹ Heywood, *Political Theory*, 2002: 18

² Rengger, *Political Theory, Modernity and Postmodernity: Beyond Enlightenment and Critique*, 1995: 131

³ Heywood, *Political Theory*, 2002: 18

⁴ “What is the unchanging core of human nature...?” (Sabine, *A History of Political Theory*, 1957: 38)

⁵ *Oxford Dictionary of Politics*

⁶ Caizzi, ‘Protagoras and Antiphon: Sophistic Debates on Justice’, 1999: 318

⁷ Keyt, ‘Plato on Justice’, 2006: 343

perhaps, for the supernatural and the metaphysical, the role of which is considered in later chapters). It is a-cultural and a-historical, the same for all people at all times. Similarly, human nature consists of those qualities that are attributable to all members of the species, with some exceptions; to humanity at large.⁸ The conventional, in contrast, is of the apparent or phenomenal world. In convention, we find “the analogue of fleeting appearance”.⁹ What exists by convention depends for its existence on human beliefs and practises, and, being “mortal and of mortal birth”,¹⁰ has its place in time and space, history and culture. Human qualities that exist by convention do so as a result of conditioning and socialisation, and, as a result, are applicable only to certain people, places and times.

1.2 Naturalism versus Conventionalism

Traditional ethico-political thought is naturalistic, in setting out from nature, as in Aristotle’s *Politics*: “We shall, I think, in this as in other subjects, get the best view of the matter if we look at the natural growth of things from the beginning.”¹¹ This is consistent with the ontological underpinnings of traditional philosophy and social science, and the resulting universalism. Naturalistic political approaches “embrace universalism; they hold that human beings share a common or universal character”.¹² Because of the universality of nature, “appeals to nature or to the nature of things...rule out extreme relativism”.¹³ Accordingly, ethical-political theorists have based their accounts of moral and political life in society and the state on accounts of human nature, and of life in the ‘state of nature’. This assumes that there is a universal human nature, which provides an ontological foundation for moral and political advocacy.¹⁴ As Macpherson points out, “Every political theory which sets out to justify or advocate a particular system of government...must rest on an explicit or implicit theory of human nature.”¹⁵ While

⁸ Kavka, *Hobbesian Moral and Political Theory*, 1986: 31

⁹ Sabine, *A History of Political Theory*, 1957: 38

¹⁰ Plato, *Laws* 899

¹¹ Aristotle, *Politics* 1.2

¹² Heywood, *Political Theory*, 1999: 19

¹³ Woodruff, ‘Rhetoric and Relativism: Protagoras and Gorgias’, 1999: 304

¹⁴ Taylor, cited in Rengger, *Political Theory, Modernity and Postmodernity: Beyond Enlightenment and Critique*, 1995: 108–9

¹⁵ Macpherson, Editors Introduction to Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, 1980: x

traditional moral and political thought is united in its naturalism, it is divided as to what that nature consists in.¹⁶

The alternative ethico-political discourse is conventionalistic, in starting-out from convention, and in rejecting the naturalism of traditional moral and political philosophy. This is consistent with its phenomenological or counter-ontological underpinnings. “Others”, as Rengger says, “and most importantly sophists like Protagoras and Gorgias, challenged naturalism *per se*”,¹⁷ as did Nietzsche, who, as Rosen says, “believed that the Greek *Physis* is not accessible to us”.¹⁸ In this alternative picture, “*nomos* – convention... – is all there is”, there being “no fixed deployment of ‘nature’ or the ‘natural’”.¹⁹ At the same time, many of these critics of traditional naturalism, including Nietzsche and the Sophists, are naturalists of a sort.²⁰ Gorgias, for example, says that “Whatever we see has a nature”,²¹ and Nietzsche describes his “task” as an attempt to “translate human beings back into nature”, and to “become master over the many vain and overly-enthusiastic interpretations and connotations that have so far been scrawled and painted over that eternal basic text of *homo natura*”.²² While convention is seen as all-pervading,

there is a recognition that ‘conventionalism’ takes place against the background of, and in light of, pre-theoretical settings – ...lifeworlds – which...set the parameters for the possibilities of conventionalism.²³

In contrast to the traditional conception of nature, as fixed and universal, the alternative conception of nature is one of change and relativity. Human nature is seen as indeterminate, as by Nietzsche who defines ‘man’ as “the animal whose nature has not yet been fixed”.²⁴ Instead of postulating a universally-shared human nature, Relativist thinking tends to distinguish between

¹⁶ Sabine, *A History of Political Theory*, 1957: 38:

The question remained, however, as to what form this permanent element in human life should take. What really is the unchanging core of human nature which all men have in common, whatever may be the veneer of ‘second nature’ which habit and custom have laid over the surface? What are the permanent principles of human relationship what remain after due allowance has been made for all the curious forms in which conventionality has clothed it? Many solutions were offered, depending on what was conceived to be natural.

¹⁷ Rengger, *Political Theory, Modernity and Postmodernity: Beyond Enlightenment and Critique*, 1995: 135–6

¹⁸ Rosen, *Hermeneutics as Politics*, 1987: 126

¹⁹ Rengger, *Political Theory, Modernity and Postmodernity: Beyond Enlightenment and Critique*, 1995: 144–5

²⁰ Bluhm, *Theories of the Political System*, 1971: 29

²¹ Woodruff, ‘Rhetoric and Relativism: Protagoras and Gorgias’, 1999: 304

²² Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* 230

²³ Rengger, *Political Theory, Modernity and Postmodernity: Beyond Enlightenment and Critique*, 1995: 144–5

²⁴ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* 62

different natures. The most common distinction is that between “masters” and “slaves”, “ascending and descending life”,²⁵ which is found in the arguments of Gorgias,²⁶ his student Callicles,²⁷ and especially in the writings of Nietzsche.²⁸

Again, this conflict, between traditional and alternative approaches (in this case, traditional and alternative approaches to nature), corresponds to opposite conceptions of the relationship between theory and practise. The proponents and opponents of traditional naturalism proffer opposite conceptions of the relationship between theories of nature and the practises they espouse. In the traditional discourse, the conventional causal relationship between theory, on the one hand, and ideology and action, on the other, is thought to prevail. In the alternative discourse, the direction of causality is reversed, and the opposite relationship is proposed. In the traditional conception, theory of nature, which sets out the basic premises of ethical and political theory as a whole, remains unaffected by prevailing social conditions and the political preferences of its authors and adherents. Naturalistic propositions, in this view, are set out with a view to their validity, and not to their ideological implications; the value of such propositions is supposed to be a truth-value, not an ideology-value. The observations and recommendations that flow from naturalistic theorising are supposed to be incidental to the theories rather than intentional. In the alternative picture, “all theory, including the theory of nature, is a construction”, constructed with a view to its ideological and practical extensions.²⁹ In this view, theoretical naturalisms arise from “intentions or ends, which...have their being in the “‘life-world’ or pre-theoretical horizon of theoretical activity”.³⁰ These ‘lifeworlds’, as Rengger and Rosen say, “provide the *conditions*, within which both ontological theories and particular acts of advocacy can be articulated”.³¹ If “theories of human nature are proposed with normative implications in mind”³² then these theories, and the moral and political standpoint they advocate, cannot be trusted: “What, for example, is the meaning of the ‘will to truth’ in the case of...the naturalists?—Critique of ‘objectivity’.”³³

²⁵ Fairfield, *The Ways of Power: Hermeneutics, Ethics and Social Criticism*, 2002: 36–7

²⁶ Untersteiner, *The Sophists*, 1952: 144

²⁷ Plato, *Gorgias* 483–4

²⁸ Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals* I.2; *Beyond Good and Evil* 260

²⁹ Rosen, *Hermeneutics as Politics*, 1987: 126; Rengger, *Political Theory, Modernity and Postmodernity: Beyond Enlightenment and Critique*, 1995: 141

³⁰ Rosen, *Hermeneutics as Politics*, 1987: 137

³¹ Rengger, *Political Theory, Modernity and Postmodernity: Beyond Enlightenment and Critique*, 1995: 131, 145

³² Kavka, *Hobbesian Moral and Political Theory*, 31

³³ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* 455

1.3 Nature, Might and Right

Might and right are central to questions of human nature in ethics and politics. The debate as to the nature of human beings is, in many ways, a question of might versus right. This corresponds to the basic distinction in ‘nature-theory’, between a ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ conception of human nature. The distinction is a moral one. A positive conception of human nature is the view that human beings are moral and social animals, who can therefore coexist in relative peace and harmony prior to, or outside of, political society. In this view, right reigns, both in the nature of individuals, in terms of their natural disposition, and in the state of nature, in the natural relations between individuals, whereas might is unnatural. A negative conception holds that human beings are naturally amoral and antisocial, ruled by physical drives, and exist, in the absence of society and the state, in a natural state of violent conflict. In this view, might reigns in the both the personal and interpersonal aspects of nature, whereas right exists, not by nature, but by convention. It is a question of “*Homo Potens*”³⁴ versus ‘*Homo Moralis*’. This debate consists in a number of sub-debates, well known to students of ethics and politics. They are: “Intellect versus Instinct”, “Cooperation versus Competition”,³⁵ and ‘Sustenance versus Security’.

1.3.1 Nature, Power and Justice:

“Intellect versus Instinct”

This is the question as to whether human nature is governed by raw animal drives or by the higher functions. That is, as to whether human nature centres in the body (or ‘stomach’) or mind (‘head’), whether the psychological is subservient to the physiological, or visa versa: Do the needs and desires of the body win out over the intellect and conscience, or does reason and moral judgment rule over peoples’ physical nature? Also: Is the *modus operandi* of human interaction in nature primarily physical or moral? The implication is that if the body, and physical force, naturally takes precedence over the mind, and moral conscience, then power as *might* will be

³⁴ Poggi, *Forms of Power*, 2001: 1

³⁵ Heywood, *Political Theory*, 2002: 20–5

prior to justice as *right*, whereas if mind and morality takes precedence over body and strength then *right* will be prior to *might*.

1.3.2 Nature, Power and Justice:

“Competition versus Cooperation”

This is the question of “whether human beings are essentially self-seeking and egoistical, or naturally sociable and cooperative”.³⁶ In other words, of whether human beings are solitary predators, ‘lions’, or pacific herd-animals, ‘lambs’, and so whether the normal tone of human relations is antagonistic or friendly, whether war or peace is the natural state of intra-species interaction; *Lord of the Flies* or *The Swiss Family Robinson*?: “Is nature kindly or cruel? Does she sanction the brotherhood of man or struggle for survival?”³⁷ Restated, this question is as set out by Schopenhauer in his *On Ethics*: “The question has been mooted as to what two men who had each grown up quite alone in the wilderness and who met each other for the first time would do.” Some, he says, argue that “they would meet each other lovingly”, others, “inimically”.³⁸ This too is central to the debate as to the primacy of power and justice, and so of politics and ethics, in nature. Insofar as power is central to warfare, and justice to peace, the question of competition versus cooperation in nature is a question of the primacy of power or justice respectively.

1.3.3 Nature, Power and Justice:

Security versus Sustenance

This is the question as to the primacy of extrinsic versus intrinsic needs. That is, as to whether the principal problem faced by early man was one of protecting against external threats, security, or providing for intrinsic needs, sustenance. Put another way, it is the question of whether the ‘human condition’ is one of insecurity or insufficiency, whether, in the state of nature, the threat of attack outweighs the threat of starvation or exposure. It is also a question as to the original impetus for leaving that state for civilization (traditionally seen as a response to the fundamental problems of human life in the state of nature) and principle function of political

³⁶ *ibid*: 24–5

³⁷ Greene, *Maira: Fate, Good and Evil*, 1968: 223

³⁸ Schopenhauer, *On Ethics*, 1914: 227

society. If the threat of attack predominates the principal reason for civilisation will be security, and the primary function of political society will be a military one. But if the need for food and shelter is paramount, then the original impetus for civilisation will be sustenance, and the primary function of society and the state will be its economic function.

1.4 Realism, Idealism and Relativism on Nature

These opposite conceptions of *physis* are enshrined in the Grand Theories of ethics and politics, Realism and Idealism. Each of the theories is based on an opposing conception of human nature, and this controversy (the so-called ‘State of Nature Debate’) is at the centre of the conflict between them. This has been so even from the earliest articulations of this conflict. The reason for the difference between Thrasymachus’ and Socrates’ accounts of justice in the Republic, for example, as Caizzi points out, is the “conception of human nature that is presupposed”.³⁹ As elsewhere, the debate centres on the relationship between power and justice, the question of might versus right. Here again that question is as to whether human nature is essentially amoral or immoral, the debate between a ‘negative’ and ‘positive’ conception of human nature, and the related questions of ‘instinct versus intellect’, ‘competition versus cooperation’ and ‘security versus sustenance’.

Realism embodies a ‘negative’ or amoral conception of human nature. It holds that power is natural, in that the drive for power is seen as an instinct of human nature, and the conflict of power a decisive feature of relations between individuals in the state of nature. In this view, the natural order is a physical and a political order. At the same time, it holds that justice is conventional, in that reason and morality are thought not to be part of our essential nature or a natural feature of human interaction. As Johnson says in his *Interpretation of Realism*:

In man’s natural condition...notions of right and wrong have no place. Nothing can be unjust, justice and injustice being qualities that apply to men in society, not in solitude. Force and fraud are cardinal virtues, because the only *modus operandi* is survival.⁴⁰

³⁹ Caizzi, ‘Protagoras and Antiphon: Sophistic Debates on Justice’, 1999: 316

⁴⁰ Johnson, *Thucydides, Hobbes and the Interpretation of Realism*, 1993: 9

This arises from the Realist portrayal of human beings as inherently instinctual, conflictual and security-oriented.

For the Realist, human beings are primarily instinctual, governed by physiological drives, including the drive to dominate others. Human nature, in this view, centres on the ‘stomach’; that is, on the desire for food and sex, and so for prestige and power. In this view, as Johnson says, “man’s nature derives from the purely physical”.⁴¹ As Glaucon argues in his continuation of Thrasymachus’ line of argument in Plato’s *Republic*, the “desire to do better [*pleonektein*]...is what every natural being naturally pursues as good [*kalos*]”.⁴² *Pleonektein* is “connected to *pleonexia*”, acquisitiveness, “—wanting to get and have more and more”.⁴³ The thing that people want most of all, according to him, is power over others, their possessions, bodies, lives and fortunes; that is, “all the things that would make a person like a god among men”.⁴⁴ Thucydides describes human nature as “desirous for gain and insubordinate to the idea of justice”,⁴⁵ and calls the desire “to rule over others...an instinct of human nature”.⁴⁶ “Hope and Desire”, he says, especially the desire for power and the hope of attaining it, “are everywhere; Desire leads, Hope attends”.⁴⁷ Hobbes puts “forward for a general inclination of all mankind, a perpetual and restless desire for power after power that ceaseth only in death.” “Men” he says, “naturally love Liberty, and Dominion over others”.⁴⁸ Mental faculties, he argues, according to Heywood, are subordinate to the physiological, existing to serve the needs of the body:

Thomas Hobbes...believed in the power of human reason, but only as a means to an end. In his view, human beings are driven by non-rational appetites and desires, the strongest of which is the desire to exercise power over others.⁴⁹

The Realist holds that human beings are naturally hostile, and that human relations are naturally conflictual. Thucydides, as Cazzi points out, holds that “violence nestles in each of

⁴¹ *ibid*: 78

⁴² Plato, *Republic* 359

⁴³ Reeve, Editor’s Glossary for Plato, *Republic* [2004: 327]

⁴⁴ Plato, *Republic* 359

⁴⁵ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* III.84

⁴⁶ *ibid* I.76

⁴⁷ *ibid* III.45.5–6

⁴⁸ Hobbes, *Leviathan* XVII

⁴⁹ Heywood, *Political Theory*, 1999: 22

us”.⁵⁰ In this view, human beings are like lions or lone wolves: solitary creatures, jealous, territorial and prone to anger and aggression. Hence Hobbes’ famous dictum: “*Homo hominus lupus* [Man is a wolf to man].”⁵¹ This he contrasts with the Socratic depiction of man as a social animal, like “Bees” and “Ants”.⁵² This predatory nature leads, naturally, to conflict. For the Realist, war is natural, and the state of nature is a state of war.⁵³ Thucydides likens this natural conflict to the horrors of civil war. In the Corcyraean *stasis*, he says, in which the most terrible atrocities were committed (“fathers killed sons; men were dragged from the temples or butchered on the very alters”; etc, etc.⁵⁴), “human nature, always ready to offend even when laws exist, showed itself proudly in its true colours, as something incapable of controlling passion, and insubordinate to the idea of justice....”⁵⁵ Hobbes describes the natural state of conflict as a war “of every man, against every man”,⁵⁶ and likens relations between individuals in the state of nature to relations between states in the international arena, who, he says, stand in relation to one another “in the state and posture of Gladiators; having their weapons pointing, and their eyes fixed on one another..., which is a posture of War”.⁵⁷ This is compounded by the natural drive for wealth, sex and power, which leads, according to the Realist, to competition and conflict. As Hobbes argues, wanting things leads to wanting the same thing, which leads to competition for that thing, and ultimately to struggle, and finally conflict: “...therefore if any two men desire the same thing, which nevertheless they cannot both enjoy, they become enemies....”⁵⁸ Even more so in the case of the desire for power, in which conflict is inherent, since one person’s power is another’s weakness. “Competition of...power”, as Hobbes says, “inclineth to contention, enmity and war.”⁵⁹ Or, as Thucydides says of the Corcyraean *stasis*,

Love of power, operating through greed and through personal ambition, was the cause of these evils.... In their struggle for ascendancy nothing was barred; terrible indeed were the actions to

⁵⁰ Caizzi, ‘Protagoras and Antiphon: Sophistic Debates on Justice’, 1999: 322-3

⁵¹ Hobbes, *De Cive*

⁵² Hobbes, *Leviathan XIII*

⁵³ *ibid*

⁵⁴ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War III.81*

⁵⁵ *ibid III.85*

⁵⁶ Hobbes, *Leviathan XIII*

⁵⁷ *ibid*

⁵⁸ *ibid*

⁵⁹ *ibid*

which they committed themselves.... Here they were deterred neither by the claims of justice nor by the interests of the city....⁶⁰

Because human beings and human relations are seen as naturally conflictual, the Realist considers the need for security the first and foremost human need, and the principal threat to human life as that posed by other human beings. For Hobbes, the “worst” part of man’s unfortunate natural condition, as he sees it, is “the constant feare of violent death” arising from his “inability to secure himself”.⁶¹ As such, security is seen as the earliest and most pervasive human need.⁶² For the Realist, protection is prior to provision, in that the attainment of food and shelter is thought to be impossible until control over resources and territory is established. Until then, Hobbes says, “if one plant, sow, build, or possesse a convenient Seat, others may be expected to come prepared with forces united, to dispossesse, and deprive him”.⁶³ In this view, military life precedes commercial life. In Thucydides’ ‘Archeology’, the first Greeks are said to have lived

without commerce...., destitute of capital, never planting their land, for they could not tell when an invader might not come and take it all away, and when he did come they had no walls to stop him.⁶⁴

Or as Hobbes famously writes: “In such a condition, there is no place for industry; because the fruit thereof is uncertain...and the life of man, solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short.”⁶⁵ At the same time, security concerns are themselves seen as a source of conflict by Realists. The steps that people take to secure themselves, they argue, are likely to be taken by others as signs of aggression, or may actually entail acts of aggression, as in the case of a ‘pre-emptive strike’; for “there is”, as Hobbes says, “no way for any man secure himself, so reasonable, as Anticipation”.⁶⁶

Idealists, on the other hand, advance a ‘positive’ conception of nature. They hold that justice is natural, in that human nature, and human interaction in the state of nature, is seen as inherently rational and moral. In this view, the natural order is a rational and moral order. They

⁶⁰ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* III.82

⁶¹ Hobbes, *Leviathan* XIII

⁶² Johnson, *Thucydides, Hobbes and the Interpretation of Realism*, 1993: 9

⁶³ Hobbes, *Leviathan* XIII

⁶⁴ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* I.2–6

⁶⁵ Hobbes, *Leviathan* XIII

⁶⁶ *Ibid* XIII

also hold that power is conventional, in that the pursuit and exercise of power is not a natural human drive, or a natural feature of human interaction. This arises from the Idealist conception of human nature as inherently rational, cooperative and sustenance-oriented.

For the Idealist, humans are primarily intellectual beings, governed by mental and moral faculties, reason and conscience. Idealism holds that the mind rules over the body; it sets “freedom of *thought*...before freedom of *action*”.⁶⁷ In this view, “man’s existence centres in his head, i.e. in Thought”, and especially in “what men think to be...right and good”.⁶⁸ As Plato argues, “the form (*idea*) of justice” is “of nature” (“that which is just by nature [*to physei dikaion*]”), whereas physical or practical justice (law and order, crime and punishment), only inhabits nature (is “in nature”).⁶⁹ This is in direct contrast to Realist physicalism. For Plato, as Cazzi points out, Thrasymachus’ “theory was contradictory because it attributed ontological and axiological priority to [physical] nature rather than intelligence.... Its principle flaw was its elevation of body above mind.”⁷⁰ According to Aquinas, human nature is essentially rational, and reason teaches human beings to be moral:

And so whatever is contrary to the order of reason is contrary to the nature of human beings as such; and what is reasonable is in accordance with human nature as such....So human virtue...is in accordance with human nature just in so far as it is in accordance with reason; and vice is contrary to human nature just in so far as it is contrary to the order of reasonableness.⁷¹

In his view, physical drives are governed by reason. “What nature inclines one to is to be pursued”, he says, “not indiscriminately but reasonably”, and evil is “not natural”.⁷² This is, as Finnis points out, in direct contrast to Hobbes’ subordination of reason to instinct.⁷³ Locke adopts a conception of nature as *ius naturalis*, a view that Ayes calls “ethical naturalism”.⁷⁴ In line with this, he holds that human beings are inherently rational and moral creatures.⁷⁵ Like Aquinas,

⁶⁷ Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*, 1955: 5

⁶⁸ *ibid*: 5

⁶⁹ Keyt, ‘Plato on Justice’, 2006: 343; Plato, *Republic* § 501, 597; Strauss, ‘Plato’, 1987: 52

⁷⁰ Cazzi, ‘Protagoras and Antiphon: Sophistic Debates on Justice’, 1999: 327

⁷¹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I–II.71.2

⁷² Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I.48.1; Finnis, *Aquinas: Moral, Political, and Legal Theory*, 1998: 93, 104

⁷³ Finnis, *Aquinas: Moral, Political, and Legal Theory*, 1998: 104

⁷⁴ Ayes, *Locke: Epistemology and Ontology*, 1991: 197, 338

⁷⁵ Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* II.6

Locke argues that the state of nature “is not a state of license” as Hobbes has it, but of “reason”, and this, he says,

teaches all mankind, who will but consult it, that...no one ought to harm another in his life, health, liberty or possessions...being furnished with like faculties, sharing all in one community of nature....⁷⁶

For the Idealist, human beings are naturally cooperative and human interaction is naturally peaceful. Human beings are depicted as birds, bees and lambs: social animals, socially- and hence morally-minded, naturally belonging to a herd, hive or flock, and so naturally possessing the moral attributes required of members of a community. Plato, for example, likens human beings to “birds” and human groups to “flocks” in the *Laws*.⁷⁷ In this view, human beings’ inherent rational and moral faculties teach them to respect the person and property their fellows, and to do them no harm “unless”, as Locke says, “it be to do justice on an offender”.⁷⁸ In this view, if two people encountered one another in Schopenhauer’s hypothetical ‘First Meeting’, they would, as Plato says, “be delighted with one another and full of goodwill”.⁷⁹ Aquinas argues that, “because all human beings share in the nature of the species”, and because that nature is a moral one, “every human being is naturally a friend to every other human being...”.⁸⁰ The propensity for violence and conflict, in this view, is unnatural and unwanted, the result of some defect or disease: “no one is evil intentionally”;⁸¹ “evil...is unnatural”.⁸² The state of nature is not equated with the state of war; instead, the two states are strictly differentiated, as by Locke in the section entitled ‘On the State of War’. There is, he says with Hobbes clearly in his sights, a

plain difference between the state of nature and the state of war, which however some men have confounded, are as far distant, as a state of peace, good will, mutual assistance and preservation, and a state of enmity, malice, violence and mutual destruction, are one from another.⁸³

⁷⁶ *ibid*

⁷⁷ Plato, *Laws* 680-1

⁷⁸ Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, II.6

⁷⁹ Plato, *Laws* 679; Schopenhauer, *On Ethics* [1914: 227]

⁸⁰ Finnis, *Aquinas: Moral, Political, and Legal Theory*, 1998: 111

⁸¹ Plato, *Laws* 860; Saunders, ‘Plato’s Later Political Thought’, 1992: 472

⁸² Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I–II q. 41 a. 3c; Finnis, *Aquinas: Moral, Political, and Legal Theory*, 1998: 93

⁸³ Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* 19

Because human life is seen, by the Idealist, as naturally peaceful and cooperative, threats to security in nature are thought to be negligible. In this view, the primary human need is for food and shelter, and the principal threat to human life, the threat of starvation and exposure. For Plato, the basic requirements of human life are “food”, “shelter”, “clothing, and things of that sort”, and “the first and greatest of our needs is to provide food in order to sustain life”.⁸⁴ For the Idealist, provision is prior to protection, since, for one person to pose a threat to another, the one must be fed, clothed and armed, and the other must possess something worth attacking for. Military life begins, in this view, only after basic economic needs have been met, as an extension of economic activity. According to Plato, the community begins as a collective of producers, and it is only later that they establish defences, and engage in other military activities.⁸⁵ Consequently, he holds that soldiers are a late addition to the *polis*, arising after every productive role has been fulfilled, and a flourishing commercial society has been established. At that point, he says, “The city must be further enlarged...and not just a little, but by the size of a whole army. It will do battle with the invaders in defence of the city’s wealth, and of all other things we just described.”⁸⁶ Similarly, Locke argues that commercial life (in the form of private property, trade, and even the use of coined money) is prior to political life and the state:

Men, at first, for the most part contented themselves with what unassisted nature offered to their necessities: and though afterwards, in some parts of the world, (where the increase of people and stock, with the *use of money*, had made land scarce, and so of some value) the several *communities* settled the bounds of their distinct territories, and by laws within themselves regulated the properties of the properties of the private men of their society, and so, *by compact* and agreement, settled the property which labour and industry began....⁸⁷

At the same time, the primacy of material needs helps to further promote peace and harmony by bringing human beings together and forcing them to cooperate: “Because we each have many needs, and because one of us calls on another out of one need, and on a third out of a different need, we gather together...as partners and helpers.”⁸⁸

⁸⁴ Plato, *Republic* 369

⁸⁵ Plato, *Laws* 680-1

⁸⁶ Plato, *Republic* 373-4

⁸⁷ Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* 45–51

⁸⁸ Plato, *Republic* 369

For the antitheorist opponents of the Grand Theories, neither of these conceptions of *physis* applies absolutely but both apply in relative terms. Moral and political antitheory is based on a rejection of the traditional concept of nature altogether, and a compromise between the opposing traditional views. This compromise is also based on the relationship between power and justice, Might versus Right. Here, however, it is not a question of whether human nature is moral or non-moral, ‘positive’ or ‘negative’, but of which sort of nature gives rise to what kind of disposition, instinctual or intellectual, conflictual or cooperative, security or sustenance-oriented.

Relativists advance neither a ‘negative’ nor ‘positive’ account of human nature, but maintain that both apply to in a more limited sense. For them, neither power nor justice is natural in the traditional sense, of attributable to humanity as a whole. But they maintain that both are ‘natural’ in the alternative sense, of attributable to “a certain kind of life” or “species of man”.⁸⁹ In this view, the natural order is neither a political nor a moral order, but is at the same time both political and moral. According to Gorgias, for instance, *physis* must be understood in terms of the antithesis between *dike* and *bia*; between goodness and grace, on the one hand, and force and violence, on the other.⁹⁰ These correspond to the basic distinction in the Relativist typology of morals. “The antithesis involved by ‘physis’ according to Gorgias,” as Untersteiner points out, “he implicitly defines as a contrast between two opposing dikai”, or moral types, one associated with *bia*, another with *dike* proper.⁹¹ This contrast is made explicit by Nietzsche in his distinction between master and slave moralities. Power in the physical sense is said to be ‘natural’ to the masters, who are powerful and therefore immoral,⁹² just as justice, in the moral sense, is said to be ‘natural’ to the slaves, who are weak and therefore moral.⁹³ In this view, the masters are physiologically-motivated, conflictual and security-oriented, while the weak, or slaves, are psychologically-motivated, cooperative and sustenance-oriented.

For the Relativist, human beings are essentially neither instinctual nor intellectual. Whether a given human’s nature centres in the body or mind depends, in this view, on the specific ‘nature’ of the human in question, according to their relative position within the lifeworld. The strong are presented as physical beings, instinctual and power-seeking. The weak are portrayed as moral creatures, intellectual and moralistic. In Callicles’ depiction of *physis* in

⁸⁹ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals*, preface 2

⁹⁰ Gorgias, *Palamedes* § 1; Untersteiner, *The Sophists*, 1952: 144

⁹¹ Untersteiner, *The Sophists*, 1952: 144

⁹² Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals* I.2

⁹³ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* 260; *The Genealogy of Morals* I.11

Plato's *Gorgias*, the masters, are powerful and power-seeking. They are the "stronger", those who, he says, may properly call themselves 'men', who are "ambitious" and "capable of getting the upper hand" or "gaining an advantage over others" by force or sheer "might". The "slaves", on the other hand, Callicles argues, are intellectual beings, intellectually and moralistically superior, capable of outwitting the masters and subjecting them to moral codes through "charms and spells and...repetition of the dogma that men ought to be equal and that equality is fine and right". The former rule "according to *physis*", in physical terms, though sheer "might". The latter rule according to "*nomos*" in the form of *ethimos* and *ethikos*, by what they call "right".⁹⁴ Nietzsche tells an analogous story in his *Genealogy of Morals* and *Beyond Good and Evil*.⁹⁵ Accordingly, instinct and appetite, and especially the "instinct of power, the instinct for rank" he sees as a symptom of strength, or "sign of a *high rank*", while to rationalise and moralise is seen as an act of weakness.⁹⁶

By the same token, the Relativist holds that human beings are competitive or cooperative, human relations conflictual or peaceful, depending on their specific nature, arising from their place in the lifeworld. The "masters" are naturally competitive and warlike, and fight amongst themselves for mastery, over one another and over the "slaves", who are naturally peaceful and cooperative, and cooperate amongst themselves for their mutual provision and protection from the masters.⁹⁷ Both Callicles and Nietzsche depict the masters as "lions". Callicles likens the moral indoctrination of the masters to "taming lions",⁹⁸ while Nietzsche makes numerous references to the masters as "lions", "blond beasts" (not Germans, as Danto points out, but lions once again),⁹⁹ and "beasts of prey".¹⁰⁰ The slaves, on the other hand, are not represented in this way by Callicles (though his reference to "oxen" is suggestive),¹⁰¹ but are depicted by Nietzsche

⁹⁴ Plato, *Gorgias* 483–4

⁹⁵ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* 260; *The Genealogy of Morals* I.2

⁹⁶ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* 263; Fairfield, *The Ways of Power: Hermeneutics, Ethics and Social Criticism*, 2002: 21–2

⁹⁷ "Unable to stand alone, the weak form a herd.... The values they prize are likewise collectivist in nature...." (Fairfield, *The Ways of Power: Hermeneutics, Ethics and Social Criticism*, 2002: 28–9)

⁹⁸ Plato, *Gorgias* 484

⁹⁹ Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher*, 1965:169–70

¹⁰⁰ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* 287; *Thus Spake Zarathustra* LVI; *Beyond Good and Evil* I.11:

One cannot fail to see at the core of all these noble races the animal of prey, the splendid blond beast prowling about avidly in search of spoil and victory...: the Roman, Arabian, Germanic, Japanese nobility, the Homeric heroes, the Scandinavian Vikings....

¹⁰¹ Plato, *Gorgias* 484

as “lambs” and “camels”, “herd animals” and “beasts of burden”.¹⁰² The former are “the independent”,¹⁰³ the latter “dependents of every degree”.¹⁰⁴

Because the Relativist sees human beings as essentially neither conflictual nor cooperative, but predatory or peaceable depending on their specific nature and ‘place on the food-chain’, the principal human need is thought to likewise depend on the nature of the human being in question. Because the masters are naturally violent, their lives conflictual, they live in constant danger of attack, risking war with their fellow masters and ‘revolt’ by the slaves. According to Nietzsche, the lives of the ‘leaders of the pack’ in any species are fraught with danger. Speaks Zarathustra:

An attempt and risk seemed all commanding unto me; and whenever it commandeth, the living thing risketh itself thereby.

...

It is the surrender of the greatest to run risk and danger, and play dice for death.”¹⁰⁵

The masters lead a Spartan lifestyle, in both the sense of ‘militaristic’ and ‘minimalistic’. Theirs is a warrior ethos, associated with a military caste, which values power over prosperity, and so is largely unconcerned with economic affairs. Because the slaves are naturally cooperative, their lives peaceful, security concerns are minimal, and the only real threat to survival is from insufficiency. They are motivated by the drive for food, shelter and so forth, both to sustain life, but also for a greater material ‘quality of life’. The slaves enjoy a settled, commercial existence. Theirs is a producer ethos, which values peace and prosperity over rank and power. These opposite *ethes* correspond to Jacobs’ distinction between “commercial” and “guardian” “moral syndromes”. The commercial moral syndrome includes shunning force and loving profit, while the guardian moral syndrome involves shunning trading and seeking honour and glory.¹⁰⁶

¹⁰² Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* 116; *The Genealogy of Morals* I.2; *Thus Spake Zarathustra* Prologue, I

¹⁰³ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* 287

¹⁰⁴ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* 260

¹⁰⁵ Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra* XXXIV

¹⁰⁶ Jacobs, *Systems of Survival: A Dialogue on the Moral Foundations of Commerce and Politics*, 1992: 45–6; Poggi, *Forms of Power*, 2001: 138–9

1.4.1 Realism, Idealism and Relativism on Nature: Conservatism and Radicalism

The opposing naturalisms of the Grand Theories are consistent with their opposing ideologies. The irrational naturalism of Realism is consistent with its conservative ideological implications: “Conservative theorists were among the first to acknowledge the power of the non-rational.”¹⁰⁷ The links between the two are as outlined in Popper’s *Conjectures and Refutations*:

Disbelief in the power of human reason...is almost invariably linked with a distrust of man...[and] a doctrine of human depravity, and it tends to lead to the demand for the establishment of powerful traditions and the entrenchment of a powerful authority which would save man from his folly and his wickedness.¹⁰⁸

Conversely, the rational naturalism of Idealism is consistent with its radical political tendencies: “Rationalism implies that human beings possess the capacity to fashion their own lives and their own world....In addition, rationalism often underpins radical or revolutionary political doctrines.”¹⁰⁹ The Grand theorists’ views on nature also underpin their conceptions of law, which have additional ideological implications. These are explored in the next chapter.

The conventionalism of the Relativist alternative to the Grand Theories is consistent with its a-political or anti-political implications. If there is no single, universal human nature, then there can be no one way of life for all, and consequently no generally-applicable ideological standpoint. Instead, the prescriptions that flow from considerations of nature are thought to apply, if they apply at all, only to the way of life to which they correspond, because they are conducive to that way of life: “The ideas of the herd should rule in the herd—but should not reach out beyond it: the leaders of the herd require a fundamentally different valuation for their own actions....”¹¹⁰ The view that human beings are inherently instinctual is correct and appropriate for the masters in any given life-world: true because the masters are naturally instinctual; appropriate because the view that all human beings are inherently irrational works to reinforce their mastery. The view that individuals are naturally rational is right and good for the slaves, who are

¹⁰⁷ Heywood, *Political Theory*, 2002: 22

¹⁰⁸ Popper, *Conjectures and Refutations*, 1965: 6

¹⁰⁹ Heywood, *Political Theory*, pp. 20–1

¹¹⁰ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* 287

themselves ‘naturally’ rational, and because the belief that all people are so aids in their efforts to subvert the rulers. Each “deems ‘natural’ and unconditional its moral values, forgetting that its particular values were invented as strategic measures deployed in the struggle for hegemony.”¹¹¹ The Relativists’ account of nature is similarly connected with their account of law, which is likewise considered in the next chapter.

According to their proponents, the opposing naturalisms of the Grand Theories arise independently, and give rise to their opposing ideological implications. Theories of human nature are supposed to be arrived at objectively, because they are the more convincing to those that adopt them; not because they coincide with the interests of one group or another, a coincidence which is supposed to be incidental to the views people hold. This keeps the theories pristine, since it means that they are uncorrupted by the practical and ideological concerns with which they ‘happen’ to accord. In this view, conservatives are conservative because they are pessimistic (they would say ‘realistic’) about human nature, while radicals are radical because they are optimistic (their enemies would call this ‘idealistic’, meant in the negative sense) regarding human nature. For their opponents, the opposing naturalisms of the Grand Theories arise from opposing ways of life, and are themselves ideological in their intent. Just as every theory is thought to be no more than “the private confessions of its author”,¹¹² every theory of nature is considered an apology for “a certain kind of life”;¹¹³ its ‘representation’, in both senses of the word, as both ‘depiction’ and ‘defence’. This means that the theories are not pristine, but necessarily corrupted by the practical and ideological concerns of those that advocate them. In this view, conservatives advance a pessimistic view of human nature because they are conservative, because they belong to, or identify with, an established order, in order to preserve that order, and discourage rebellion or revolt. Likewise, radicals are thought to advance an optimistic account of human nature because it has radical implications, because they themselves are radical, because they belong to, or identify with, a revolutionary underclass.

¹¹¹ Fairfield, *The Ways of Power: Hermeneutics, Ethics and Social Criticism*, 2002: 29

¹¹² Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* 6

¹¹³ *ibid*, preface 2

1.4.2 Realism, Idealism and Relativism on Nature:

Triad, Dyad and Dialectic

The opposing naturalisms of the Grand Theories form the traditional dyad in the theory of nature, divided between a ‘negative’ or ‘pessimistic’ account of nature, according to which human beings are naturally instinctual, conflictual and security-oriented, and a ‘positive’ or ‘optimistic’ account, in which human beings are naturally rational, cooperative and sustenance-oriented. The two positions are diametrically opposed, and irreconcilable in their pure forms, as claims to absolute truth regarding a universal human nature. At the same time, each is defined in contrast to the other, in that there could not be a ‘positive’ conception of nature without an opposing, ‘negative’ conception. The conventionalism of the opponents of the Grand Theories’ naturalisms is the Third, the “Other”, which completes Lefebvre’s triad in naturalistic discourse. It is the *antithesis* of the traditional dyad, in denying that there is any universal human nature, ‘negative’ (instinctual, conflictual and insecure) or ‘positive’ (rational, cooperative and insufficient). It is also its *synthesis*, in that both ‘positive’ and ‘negative’ views apply, in a more limited fashion, to different natures, which are themselves in competition with one another, for survival and superiority, from which the views themselves spring. This dialectic thus plays out in both theory and practise, in the political struggle between the reactionary masters and revolutionary slaves, and between their respective moralities, master and slave morality.

1.5 The Nature of Might and Right

This is the nature of might and right, the dialectic of might and right in nature, and the first chapter. In summary: The distinction between nature and convention corresponds to the distinction between truth and appearance. The traditional way of thinking is naturalistic, and elevates the theory of nature over social practise and political ideology, in line with its ontological and epistemological standpoint. The alternative mode of thought is conventionalistic, and subordinates nature-theory to social and political practise, in line with its (anti-)epistemological and ontological position. The question of might and right is central to the fundamental questions of human nature and the state of nature: ‘Intellect versus Instinct’, ‘Competition versus Cooperation’, and ‘Security versus Sustenance’. Realists maintain that

power is natural and justice conventional. They present a negative conception of human nature, portraying human beings as inherently instinctual, competitive and security-oriented. Idealists hold that justice is natural and power is conventional. They present a positive conception of human nature, portraying humans as inherently intellectual, cooperation and sustenance-oriented. Relativists deny that either power or justice is natural, but that each is 'natural' to a particular form of life. They hold that power is thought to be natural to the masters, who conform to the Realist conception of human nature; justice is seen as natural to the slaves, who conform to the Idealist conception. The opposing naturalisms of the Grand Theories are consistent with their opposing ideological standpoints. The conventionalism of Relativism is consistent with its counter-ideological position. In the former, the respective theories of nature take precedence over their respective ideologies, conservatism and radicalism. In the latter, the ideologies take precedence over the theories, which are reduced to master and slave morality. As before, Realism and Idealism form the first phase in the dialectic, thesis and antithesis; Relativism, the second, their synthesis. This is the dialectic of might and right in nature. It is the lynchpin of the dialectic of might and right as a whole, and of its study here. It underlies the dialectic of might and right in law, the subject of chapter two, which, along with nature, comprises the traditional sphere of ethical-political analysis, and the first part of the present study. Underlying it are a number of related fields, in which that dialectic also plays out, including theology, mythology and metaphysics, which together comprise the second part.

2

C H A P T E R T W O THE LAWS OF MIGHT AND RIGHT

2.1 Natural versus Positive Law

The legal naturalism/positivism debate is “one of the thorniest...in political theory. Philosophers have long been taxed by questions related to the nature of law”. The question of natural versus positive law is the fundamental question of law, of “its origins and purpose”: Is law rooted in the natural order, or is it merely conventional? Are there laws given by God or crafted by nature, or are all laws the work of particular men and women, in certain communities?¹¹⁴ This is linked to the question of nature versus convention with which the previous chapter opened. Natural laws are “laws derived from...human nature”,¹¹⁵ so that legal naturalism is a product of naturalism broadly, while legal positivism is a product of conventionalism. The question of natural versus positive law also underlies the more specific questions of law, in much the same way as the question of nature versus nurture underlies the specific questions of human nature. If natural laws prevail, the question arises as to their content. If they do not, then it is not a question of which laws are natural, but of what kind of ‘nature’ pertains to which set of laws. These questions are the basis of the present chapter, as are the answers offered by the traditions of thought, and their practical applications.

Like the question of nature versus convention from which it derives, the question of natural versus positive law is closely linked to questions of ontology versus phenomenology, truth versus appearance. Natural laws are of the natural world, with which the real world is often equated. Like the basic laws of reality, the natural laws are supposed to be eternal and immutable. They are laws to which all people and polities are, or ought to be, bound, as in Cicero’s famous

¹¹⁴ Heywood, *Political Theory*, 1999: 156–7

¹¹⁵ *Oxford Dictionary of Politics*; and “were man’s nature is different, so would be his duties”, that is, his obligations under natural law. (O’Conner, *Aquinas and Natural Law*, 1967: 18)

formulation: “There will not be one law for Athens and another for Rome, but one law for all.”¹¹⁶ Positive laws are conventional, in which “we find the analogy of fleeting appearance”,¹¹⁷ and so are likewise “fleeting”, being constantly made and remade, subject to chance, change and contingency. They are the legal and moral codes of particular people, according to their specific circumstances. In short, natural laws are god-given, positive laws are man-made.

2.2 Legal Naturalism versus Positivism

Traditional moral and political thought is also naturalistic in the legal sense.¹¹⁸ It maintains that there exist natural laws, to which positive laws, the dictates of society and the state, owe their existence and validity. This belief in unchanging, universally applicable laws of nature is a consequence of belief in an unchanging, universal human nature, reflection on which is the basis of such laws.¹¹⁹ This is, again, in accordance with the ontological commitments of traditional intellectual approaches. Just as appearances are seen as a picture of reality, but not necessarily an accurate one, positive law is thought to be a product of natural law, but not an exact replica as some commentators have mistaken it for.¹²⁰ Natural law theorists, as Finnis points out, hold that positive law “derives...from natural law”, but “is not a mere emanation from or copy of natural law”.¹²¹ Positive laws may diverge from the natural and, in doing so, become unstable and corrupt, their ontological and axiological base eroded. The effect is something like that described by Aristotle, in his distinction between normal and deviated constitutions, and his discussion of constitutional change. Normal constitutions are in accordance with nature, and are stable and virtuous. Deviated constitutions diverge from nature, and are unstable and vicious.¹²² While traditional ethico-political thought is united in its commitment to natural laws, it is divided

¹¹⁶ Cicero, *On the Republic* III.XXII.3

¹¹⁷ Sabine, *A History of Political Theory*, 1957: 38

¹¹⁸ “...the principles of natural law...are traced out not only in moral philosophy or ethics..., but also in political philosophy and jurisprudence....” (Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights*, 1980: 23)

¹¹⁹ *Oxford Dictionary of Politics*

¹²⁰ Kelsen, *General Theory of Law and State*, 1961: 416:

The natural-law teachers contend, in a version which has remained a stereotype from the church fathers down to Kant, that positive law...is essentially a mere emanation of natural law; the making of statutes or of decisions does not freely create, it merely reproduces the true law which is already somehow in existence....

“Positive law is treated as a mere ‘copy’ of natural law. But all this is travesty....” (Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights*, 1980: 28)

¹²¹ Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights*, 1980: 27–8

¹²² Aristotle, *Politics* III.6

as to the content of those laws. That natural laws exist in some form is generally accepted among moral and political theorists, but there is little agreement as to their tenets.

Alternative moral and political thought is positivistic with regard to law. For the opponents of ethico-political theory, laws and morals do not derive from nature, but from the state and society: “Their contention, by contrast, is that the *polis*...is the source of morality and law.”¹²³ In this view, all laws are particular to certain people, at certain places and times, the content of which is determined entirely by the specific circumstances of the people in question, given their place in time and space. This rejection of universal moral and legal standards arises from the denial of a universal human nature. Without “the concept ‘nature’”, as Nietzsche says in *The Will to Power*, the ‘law of nature’ is lost.¹²⁴ So, he says, “Let us beware of saying there are laws of nature. There are only necessities: there is nobody who commands, nobody who obeys, nobody who transgresses.”¹²⁵ If “the Greek *physis* is inaccessible to us”, “if *nomos* – convention – is all there is”,¹²⁶ then there can be no laws of nature, only nominal or conventional, positive laws. This is consistent with the counter-ontological, phenomenological standpoint of alternative ethical and political thought. Just as it holds that appearance is everything, that there is no reality underlying appearances, it holds that there are only positive laws, with no natural law underpinning positive law. The enduringness and appropriateness of positive law does not depend, in this view, on its coincidence with natural law, but on how well it serves the purposes of the people for whom it was created.

As before, the controversy stems from opposite accounts of the relationship between theory and practise. In this case, the question is of the relationship between the theory of (natural) law and practise of (positive) law. In the traditional picture, naturalistic theorising (“reflection on human nature”), which, again, takes place from an objective standpoint or ‘Archimedean Point’,¹²⁷ uncovers natural laws, which, because of their objective origin, are genuine (at least in their intent). This means that the natural laws revealed by philosophy can provide a yardstick against which positive laws (existing or proposed) may be judged. In this view, natural laws are “penetrated through...reason”, and a “‘just’ society” is “one in which human laws conform as far

¹²³ Rengger, *Political Theory, Modernity and Postmodernity: Beyond Enlightenment and Critique*, 1995: 135–6

¹²⁴ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* 136

¹²⁵ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* 109

¹²⁶ Rengger, *Political Theory, Modernity and Postmodernity: Beyond Enlightenment and Critique*, 1995: 141, 144–5; Rosen, *Hermeneutics as Politics*, 1987: 126

¹²⁷ Fairfield, *The Ways of Power: Hermeneutics, Ethics and Social Criticism*, 2002: 35–7

as possible to this transcendental wisdom”.¹²⁸ In the alternative view, the theory of nature takes places from within the community, and is itself a social “construction”, so that “our belief in the ‘lawfulness’ of nature is held to involve a projection into the world of...purely conventional features of our social existence.”¹²⁹ If nature-theory is a product of a particular society or social strata, then the ‘natural’ laws it gives rise to are not neutral, but biased, corrupted by the interests of the group in question. This would mean that the ‘natural laws’ posited by philosophers are not a basis on which to evaluate positive laws, but are themselves symptomatic of certain forms of life.¹³⁰

2.3 Law, Might and Right

As with nature, *might* and *right* are central to questions of law. The question as to the nature of law is, in many ways, a question of *might* versus *right*. This arises from the two-fold nature of law. Law can be understood in ‘legalistic’ or ‘moralistic’ terms; as either a dictate or edict, and “different from moral law”, or “understood as a right...corresponding to moral [law]”.¹³¹ (This corresponds to the dualism inherent in the Greek *nomos*, which encompasses both legal codes in the narrower sense and customary and moral codes.) From a legalistic standpoint the laws are legal codes, the legitimacy of which is incidental. By this definition, what matters about law is the power to compel by physical means. In the latter, the laws are moral codes, the enforcement of which is incidental. By this definition, what matters is the moral convictions people hold. Further evidence for this can also be cited: *Nomos* includes edict, the dictates of the state (*polis*), on the one hand, and custom (*ethimos*) and morality (*ethikos*), the dictates of society, on the other. The former is a “social control backed up by means of enforcement; it therefore defines what *can* and what *cannot* be done.” The latter “is concerned with ethical questions and the difference between ‘right’ and ‘wrong’; it thus prescribes what *should* and *should not* be done.”¹³² These two forms of law often come into conflict, a conflict which is yet another manifestation of

¹²⁸ Heywood, *Political Theory*, 1999: 157

¹²⁹ Rengger, *Political Theory, Modernity and Postmodernity: Beyond Enlightenment and Critique*, 1995: 141; Rosen, *Hermeneutics as Politics*, 1987: 126

¹³⁰ Fairfield, *The Ways of Power: Hermeneutics, Ethics and Social Criticism*, 2002: 20–1

¹³¹ Kelsen, ‘Foundation of the Natural Law Doctrine’, 1991: 84

¹³² Heywood, *Political Theory*, 1999: 156

the “tension between ethics and politics”, the struggle between *might* and *right*.¹³³ “Whether reason of state should take precedence over moral rules has been an issue from the time of ancient Greece to our own day.”¹³⁴ The question of legalism versus moralism plays out in a number of sub-questions, including the question of ‘state versus society’ and that of ‘edict versus custom’.

2.3.1 Law, Might and Right: State versus Society

The question of state versus society is the question of whether politics precedes or antecedes social life: Does the establishment of a sovereign political body take place before or after the establishment of cultural and commercial society? Does the state exist by nature and society by convention, or is society natural and the state conventional? This question stems, in large part, from the questions of human nature considered in the previous chapter: If human nature is essentially conflictual, such that protection is first and foremost among human needs, the state would likely arise first, either instituted as a security arrangement or imposed through conquest. By the same token, if human beings are naturally conflictual, social life could not arise in the absence of the state, which would be necessary to enforce peace between them before social life could begin. But if human nature is essentially cooperative, such that provision is the primary human need, then society would probably arise first, through economic cooperation, and could begin without the need for enforcement. The sovereign state is supreme political authority, which manifests itself as physical force and violence. Society is supreme moral authority, an authority that manifests itself as customary norms and values. Since the state and society are the embodiment of physical power and moral justice in communal life, the question of state versus society is a question of *might* versus *right*.

¹³³ Kelsen, ‘Foundation of the Natural Law Doctrine’, 1991: 85:

We frequently encounter norm conflicts, especially between norms belonging to a given...legal order and norms belonging to a certain moral order. [e.g.] When a norm of a moral order commands never to kill a person, but a legal norm commands us to kill people in war or in execution of capital punishment....

¹³⁴ Vasquez, *Classics of International Relations*, 1990: 1

2.3.2 Law, Might and Right: Edict versus Custom

This is the question of the relationship between political and moral law: Does enforcement of law occur spontaneously, later giving rise to moral and customary codes? Or do morals and customs grow up organically, eventually spawning legal codes? Is the law of nature a physical or moral law? “Does law [edict]...give effect to a set of higher moral principles, or is there a clear distinction between law and morality?”¹³⁵ This stems largely from the question of state versus society, outlined in the previous section. If the state exists by nature and is prior to society, then edict, the dictates of the state, will have the character of natural law, while custom, the dictates of society, will be conventional and secondary to edict. If society is naturally prior to the state, then the natural law will be a customary law and prior to enforced laws, which will constitute the conventional law. Insofar as enforced law rests on force, and *ethimos* (custom) on *ethikos* (morality), the question of edict versus custom is, once again, a question of *might* versus *right*.¹³⁶

2.4 Realism, Idealism and Relativism on Law

Like the opposite accounts of *physis* in the previous chapter, these competing conceptions of *nomos* are embodied in the Grand Theories of ethics and politics, political realism/moral cynicism (Realism) and moral realism/political idealism (Idealism). Each endorses an opposing conception of natural law, consistent with their respective conceptions of human nature, a conflict that is central to the debate between them. Here too that debate reduces to a question of might or right. As in the preceding sections, that question here is whether the natural law is a political or moral law, the debate between ‘legalism’ and ‘moralism’, and the related questions of ‘state versus society’ and ‘edict versus custom’.

¹³⁵ Heywood, *Political Theory*, 1999: 156. Heywood defines ‘law’ in a more restricted sense, to include only what is here called ‘edict’ and excluding custom and morality.

¹³⁶ Keyt, ‘Plato on Justice’, 2006: 342–3:

[T]he doctrine that the just is the lawful carries in its train the unsavory doctrine that might makes right. To connect the two all that is needed is the plausible assumption that a *polis*’s laws are in the hands of the stronger. If (1) the just in a *polis* is what is lawful in it and if (2) those who make and enforces the *polis*’s laws – the *polis*’s rulers – are those who monopolize the coercive force in the *polis*, then...(3) what is just and what is won by force are the same.

Realists advance a 'legalistic' conception of law. They hold that law rests entirely on the power of enforcement, and justice consists in obedience to authority. Here the 'law of nature' is synonymous with the 'law of the jungle' or 'law of tooth and fang', according to which might makes right. In this view, the natural law coincides with the natural rule of the strong over the weak. For instance, Thucydides' Athenians maintain that "It is a general and necessary law of nature to rule whenever one can", and that "it has ever been an established rule that the weaker man is kept down by the stronger":

This is not a law we made ourselves, nor were we the first to act upon it when it was made. We found it already in existence, and we shall leave it to exist for ever among those who come after us.¹³⁷

This arises from the Realist conception of human nature as inherently non-rational and non-moral. "Hobbes", as Berns says, "elaborated a code of...natural law", which,

following Machiavelli's 'realism',...separated...natural law from the idea of the perfection of man. He attempted to deduce the natural law from what is most powerful in most men most of the time: not reason, but passion.¹³⁸

Hobbes himself, though he calls the dictates of moral justice "Immutable and Eternall...Lawes of Nature", holds that these do not apply "in the condition of meer nature, (which is a condition of War,)" where "private Appetite is the measure of Good, and Evill", but "only where there is Security"¹³⁹:

For the Lawes of Nature (as Justice, [etc.])...without the terrour of some Power, to cause them to be observed, are contrary to our natural passions, that carry us to Partiality, Pride, Revenge and the like. And covenants, without the Sword, are but Words, and of no strength to secure a man at all. Therefore notwithstanding the Lawes of Nature..., if there be no Power erected, or not great enough for our security; every man will, and may lawfully rely on his own strength and art, for caution against all other men.¹⁴⁰

¹³⁷ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* V.105

¹³⁸ Berns, 'Thomas Hobbes', 1987: 396-7

¹³⁹ Hobbes *Leviathan* XV

¹⁴⁰ Hobbes *Leviathan* XVII

Or as Machiavelli puts it: “...it is impossible to have good laws where good arms are lacking....”¹⁴¹:

For all the arts that have been introduced into society for the common benefit of mankind, and all the ordinances that have been established to make them live in fear of God and in obedience to human laws, would be vain and insignificant if they were not supported and defended by military force; this force, when properly led and applied, will maintain those ordinances and keep up their authority, though they perhaps may not be perfect or flawless. But the best ordinances in the world will be despised and trampled under foot when they are not supported, as they ought to be, by a military power; they are like a magnificent, roofless palace which, though full of jewels and costly furniture, must soon moulder into ruin since it has nothing but its splendor and riches to defend it from the ravages of weather.¹⁴²

This arises from their belief that the state and its legal codes are prior to society and its moral codes.

For the Realist, sovereignty precedes society, and military life is prior to civilian life. In this view, political and military organisation is a necessary precondition for economic and social organisation. This is linked to the Realist conception of human nature and the state of nature, according to which human beings are naturally violent and the state of nature is a state of war. According to Thucydides’ ‘Archeology’, the Greeks had no “settled population”, “social unity” or “collective action” before the establishment of fortified cities (*poleis*), during which time ordinary people were forced to carry weapons in their own defence,

for at one time, since houses were unprotected and communications unsafe, this was a general custom throughout the whole of Hellas and it was the normal thing to carry arms on all occasions, as it is now amongst the barbarians [*barbaroi*].¹⁴³

In a similar vein, Hobbes argues that there can be “no Culture” and “no Society” before such time as there is established a “*Sovereign Power*” or “common power to keep them all in awe”, which is instead

¹⁴¹ Machiavelli, *The Prince* XII

¹⁴² Machiavelli, *The Art of War* preface

¹⁴³ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* I.2–3, 6. Translation slightly modified: “Rex Warner regularly translates the Greek ‘*barbaroi*’ by ‘foreigners’” (Finley (ed.), 1972: 37, n. 7) since this was a generic term for non-Greeks, as only Greeks were thought to be ‘civilised’.

a time of Warre, where every man is Enemy to every man; the same is consequent to the time, wherein men live without security, than what their own strength, and their own invention shall furnish them withall.¹⁴⁴

That is, until the multitude gives up its right to self-defence to one “*Man, or Assembly of Men*”, either voluntarily (“by *Institution*”) or by force (“by *Acquisition*”).¹⁴⁵

This done, the Multitude so united in one Person, is called a COMMON-WEALTH, in latine CIVITAS. This is the generation of that great LEVIATHAN, or rather...of that Mortall God, to which wee owe under the Immortal God, our peace and defence. For by this Authoritie...he hath the use of so much Power and Strength conferred on him, that by terror thereof, he is inabled to performe the wills of them all, to Peace at home, and mutuall ayd against their enemies abroad.¹⁴⁶

Because society is thought to be subsequent to, and dependent on, the state, customs and morals, the dictates of society, are thought to depend on edict, the dictates of the state. For the Realist, the only kind of law worthy of the name is “the word of him that...hath command over others”.¹⁴⁷ For the Realist, as Johnson says, “force and fear” are “the surest bases for law...in a world of...conflicting individuals”.¹⁴⁸ This “force and fear” is the prerogative of the sovereign state, which, in the words of Hobbes, has “so much power as to keep them [the citizens] in awe”. In this view, *ethimos* and *ethikos* are a product of edict, and an expression of the ruling power. As Thrasymachus says in the *Republic*:

Each type of rule makes laws that are advantageous for itself.... And by so legislating, each declares that what is just for its subjects is what is advantageous for itself—the ruler—and it punishes anyone who deviates from this as lawless and unjust.¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁴ Hobbes *Leviathan* XV, XVII

¹⁴⁵ Hobbes *Leviathan* XVII–XIX

¹⁴⁶ Hobbes *Leviathan* XVII

¹⁴⁷ Hobbes *Leviathan* XV

¹⁴⁸ Johnson, *Thucydides, Hobbes, and the Interpretation of Realism*, 1993: 77

¹⁴⁹ Plato, *Republic* 338-9, 344-5; Reeve, Editor’s Introduction to Plato, *Republic* [2004: xiii]:

Thrasymachus...argues that those who are stronger in any society – the rulers – control education and socialisation through legislation and enforcement.... Hence they make laws and adopt [social] conventions...that...determine a subject’s conception of justice.... By being trained to follow or obey them, therefore, a subject is unwittingly adopting...a code of values and behaviour....

Strauss, ‘Plato’, 1987: 37–8:

This is much like the view of Hobbes, who, as Jonson says, “defines *justice* as nothing more than man-made laws.”¹⁵⁰

Idealists advance a ‘moralistic’ conception of law. They hold that law rests on its rational and moral credentials, that “just laws are the ordinances of right reason” and the power to make and enforce laws is a “*right*”. Here the ‘law of nature’ is a moral law or rule of reason, coinciding with the rule of right over might. Of the “many...titles to rule and be ruled, in cities large and small”, the “greatest”, according to the Athenian of Plato’s *Laws*, is the rule of reason and justice over ignorance and injustice; greater, for instance, than the rule of the strong over the weak:

Indeed it is this title...that I at least would hardly assert is against nature, but rather according to nature: the natural rule exercised by the law over willing subjects, without violence.¹⁵¹

Similarly, “Aquinas teaches: Just is what is in accordance with the rule of reason, and the first rule of reason is natural law.”¹⁵² He defines ‘law’ as “an ordination of reason for the common good promulgated by one who is in charge of the community”.¹⁵³ “This rational command”, as Sigmund says,

is not a mere act of the will. When the Roman law says ‘the will of the prince has the force of law’, it is understood that this will ‘must be guided by reason.... Otherwise the will of the prince would be iniquity rather than law’.¹⁵⁴

This means that unjust laws, those contrary to the dictates of reason and the common good, are not ‘laws’, in the proper sense of the word, but “rather corruptions of law [*non lex sed legis corruptio*]”, just as tyranny, rule against the common good, is not properly ‘government’, he argues, but its corruption.¹⁵⁵ Locke, as Hindess points out, agrees that moral codes, formed by

If the just is identical with the legal, the source of justice is the will of the legislator. The legislator in each city is the regime—the man or body of men that rules the city: the tyrant, the common people, the men of excellence, and so on.

¹⁵⁰ Johnson, *Thucydides, Hobbes, and the Interpretation of Realism*, 1993: 78

¹⁵¹ Plato, *Laws* 690

¹⁵² Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I–II, 95, 2; Kelsen, ‘Foundation of the Natural Law Doctrine’, 1991: 83

¹⁵³ Aquinas, *Summa Theologica* I–II, 90, 4

¹⁵⁴ Sigmund, ‘Aquinas: Law and Politics’, 1993: 222–3

¹⁵⁵ Finnis, *Aquinas*, 1998: 47

“secret and tacite consent”¹⁵⁶, “have the character of laws”. Such laws, according to Locke, he continues, do not depend on “the blessing or the authorization of...rulers”, though the “laws laid down by government” depend for their legitimacy and continued existence on their coincidence with moral laws.¹⁵⁷ This goes along with Idealism’s subjection of state and edict to society and custom.

For the Idealist, society and social life is prior to political life and the state. Politics and war is dependent, in this view, on economics and society. This is consistent with the Idealist account of nature, which sees human beings as inherently nonviolent, the state of nature as one of peaceful cooperation, and the principal human need as the need for sustenance. This means that human beings are naturally willing, able and, indeed, compelled to gather and work together, and will naturally do so, “like birds forming one flock”. This occurs through the joining-together of larger and larger communal groups, from the family and tribe through to the city- and nation-state. Human beings, according to Plato, are first found “in single households or clans.... After this, larger numbers come together in bigger communities, making cities”. Only then, he says, do they set about “erecting defensive walls of stone around themselves”.¹⁵⁸ Likewise, in the *Republic*, the first, “healthy” city is a city of producers without soldiers, “it knows...no coercion or government, no war”, which first appear in the second, “purified city”, “the city of the armed camp”.¹⁵⁹ Aquinas, following Plato via Aristotle, argues that ‘man’ is a “social and political animal [*politikon zoon*]”,¹⁶⁰ naturally a member of society. The “first society to which he belongs...is the family”, which gives way to larger groups, the last of which is civil society.¹⁶¹ Likewise, Locke says that either “*a family by degrees grew up into a commonwealth*” or “several families, whom chance, neighbourhood, or business brought together”, came to be united “into society”.¹⁶² This is in stark contrast to the view of Hobbes, which explicitly rules out this kind of amalgamation of human groups as a basis for society and the state, which he says arises not “from the conjunction of a few men or families”, nor even from that of “a great Multitude”.¹⁶³

¹⁵⁶ Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* §10

¹⁵⁷ Hindess, *Discourses of Power: From Hobbes to Foucault*, 1996: 60–1

¹⁵⁸ Plato, *Laws* 680-1

¹⁵⁹ Strauss, ‘Plato’, 1987: 42–3

¹⁶⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, 76, 5; Aristotle, *Politics* 1.2; Fortin, ‘St. Thomas Aquinas’, 1987: 248; “Aquinas correctly broadens the translation of *politikon zoon* to argue that “man is by nature a political and social animal.” [*The Governance of Rulers* I] (Sigmund, ‘Law and Politics’, 1983: 218)

¹⁶¹ Aquinas, *Commentary on the Politics*, I, Lect. 1, n. 39; Fortin, ‘St. Thomas Aquinas’, 1987: 248

¹⁶² Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* § 110

¹⁶³ Hobbes, *Leviathan* XVII

Because society is seen as prior to, and the source of, the state, the Idealist holds that custom and morality, the dictates of society, take precedence over edict, the dictates of the state. Legality, in this view, is entirely dependent of morality. Enforced law, it holds, is based on, and exists to ‘shore up’, customary and moral laws, in those rare cases where it falls short. For Plato, the “unwritten laws” of custom are the foundations on which the ‘written’ laws of the state stand, and when the laws “go perversely awry” from their customary and moral foundation they collapse, bringing the state down with them.¹⁶⁴ He holds that without customary and moral codes, “no system of law will be effective”, but once these are established, “legislation...is a routine manner”.¹⁶⁵ Physical punishment, according to him, exists to treat the “disease” of moral deficiency, which he holds is an abnormal and unwanted condition: “no one is evil voluntarily”.¹⁶⁶ For Locke, the natural law is a moral law, which, like that of Aquinas, is consistent with Christian moral principles, in this case the principles ‘do unto others that which you would have done unto you’ and ‘he who lives by the sword shall die by the sword’.

For antitheorist opponents of the Grand Theories, neither conception of *nomos* applies in absolute terms, but both apply given relativistic qualification. Ethico-political antitheory, as we have seen, rejects the notion of natural law altogether, along with the traditional concept of nature. Once again, it offers a compromise between the opposing traditions, based on a mutual recognition of the power and moral worldviews, in that certain forms of law apply to certain people. The question, then, is not what sort of law, ‘legalistic’ or ‘moralistic’, applies to all people, but what kinds of people apply which sort of law.

For the Relativist, the law of nature is neither a physical nor a moral law, because there is no such law, because there is no ‘nature’ in the traditional sense. For the Relativist, there is no universally-applicable natural law, but different laws for different natures. Natural law is seen as neither ‘legalistic’ nor ‘moralistic’, but one or the other depending on the nature in question, which is, as always, determined by its place in the ‘lifeworld’. Each type of law is natural for the way of life it represents; “baseness is as much in conformity with nature as is nobility”.¹⁶⁷ Edict, with its emphasis on authority and enforcement, is seen as the ‘natural law’ of the masters. For the strong, as Callicles says, “it is right that the better man should prevail over the worse, the

¹⁶⁴ Plato, *Laws* 793

¹⁶⁵ Reeve, Editors Introduction to Plato, *Republic*, 2004: xix

¹⁶⁶ Plato, *Laws* 860; Saunders, ‘Plato’s Later Political Thought’, 1992: 472-3

¹⁶⁷ Rosen, *Hermeneutics as Politics*, 1987: 133

stronger over the weaker”, and “right consists in the superior ruling over the inferior and having the upper hand”.¹⁶⁸ Morality, with its emphasis on moral justice and legitimacy, is seen as the law of the slaves. The weak, Callicles argues, maintain that the “attempt to gain an advantage over the majority is...wrong and base” and call this “criminal”.¹⁶⁹ Neither the state nor society, edict nor custom, necessarily takes precedence, in this view, but each is said to arise among a “certain form of life”. The state and edict are attributed to the masters, society and custom to the slaves.

For the Relativist, whether the state precedes society or society the state in ‘nature’ depends, again, on the ‘nature’ in question. Political and military life begins amongst the masters, while social and economic life originates amongst the slaves. This derives from their opposite ‘natures’. Because the masters are warlike and self-aggrandising, it is they who first organise themselves politically and militarily, establishing and maintaining control over territories, and exercising authority over their populations. They are depicted, as before, as “herdsmen”, or “leaders of the herd”.¹⁷⁰ They are said to form a warrior “caste”, which seeks hierarchy or “order of rank”,¹⁷¹ which is the basis of the military-political order. Because the slaves are peaceful and acquisitive, they are the first to engage in economic activity, to work together and trade with one another, and enact customary and moral codes to facilitate economic life, and communal life generally. The slaves are depicted, once again, as “herds” and “herd animals”, with their “herd-mentality” and “herd-animal morality”.¹⁷² They constitute “a mass like grains of sand”,¹⁷³ which is the basis of the social order. They seek “equality” because, being “inferior” in strength, as Callicles says, “they are content to be on an equal footing”.¹⁷⁴

For the Relativist, the masters are also the first to enact and enforce edicts, as an expression of their mastery, and the slaves also are the first to developed shared customs and morals, as a means to overcome the masters. According to Callicles, the “natural law”, which is natural only to the strong (with whom he identifies) as his later comments indicate, is that first dictated by the strong over the weak:

¹⁶⁸ Plato, *Gorgias* 484

¹⁶⁹ *ibid*

¹⁷⁰ Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra* Prologue

¹⁷⁰ Nietzsche, *Human all-too-Human* 45

¹⁷¹ Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals* I.4; *Human-All-Too-Human* 45

¹⁷² Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals* I.2; *Thus Spake Zarathustra* Prologue

¹⁷³ Nietzsche, *Human all-too-Human* 45; *The Gay Science* 116

¹⁷⁴ Plato, *Gorgias* 483

Pindar seems to me to express the same thought as mine in the poem in which eh speaks of ‘Law, the kind of all, men and gods alike’, and goes on to say that this law ‘carries things off with a high hand, making might to be right.’¹⁷⁵

Morals, in contrast, although he calls them “conventions”, are natural to the weak, who are their original architects:

Conventions, on the other hand, are made, in my opinion, by the weaklings who form the majority of mankind. They establish them and apportion praise of blame with an eye to themselves and their own interests, in an endeavour to frighten those who are stronger....¹⁷⁶

Similarly, the strong and independent man of Nietzsche’s *Thus Spake Zarathustra* is called “lawmaker” and “lawgiver”: “him who writeth new laws on new tablets”, who says “I will be master over peoples!”¹⁷⁷ On the other hand, it is the slaves among whom the moral categories ‘good’ and ‘evil’ arise, according to Nietzsche.¹⁷⁸ Hence ‘morality’ proper, he says, is “herd-animal morality”, arising among the herd.¹⁷⁹

2.4.1 Realism, Idealism and Relativism on Law:

Conservatism and Radicalism

Like their conceptions of nature, the Grand Theories’ conceptions of law are consistent with their respective ideological standpoints. These arise out of their opposing views on human nature and the state of nature. As elsewhere, Realist theory is consistent with conservative ideology, Idealism with radicalism.

The Realists’ legalistic law of nature coincides with its conservative ideology. Because society and custom is seen as entirely dependent on sovereign and edict, because morality is thought to have “no existence, save as are expressed in the state and law”,¹⁸⁰ the ruled are thought entirely subject to the rulers. In this view, the people have no recourse against the state, since any

¹⁷⁵ *ibid* 484

¹⁷⁶ *ibid* 483

¹⁷⁷ Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra* LVI

¹⁷⁸ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* 260; *The Genealogy of Morals* I.2; *Human-All-too-Human* 45

¹⁷⁹ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* 202

¹⁸⁰ Clausewitz, *On War* 1.2

attempt on the part of the people to change the mode of government, any “moral critique of political power”, would be self-undermining, since there is no ‘morality’ or even a ‘people’ where there is no authority. For Machiavelli, there is no difference between legitimate and tyrannical government, since all rule, all law, is based ultimately on force. Machiavelli’s “view of legitimate rule is commonly summed-up in the phrase, ‘might equals right’”, as Spiekerman says in his *Shakespeare’s Political Realism*, a view he likens to that of Shakespeare’s *Richard III*: “Well you deserve. They well deserve to have | That know the strong’st and surest way to get”¹⁸¹ For Hobbes, the sovereign is absolute and the people completely under its sway. The power of the “*Leviathan*” is godlike and God-given, hence its depiction as “the *Mortall God*, to which wee owe under the Immortal God, our peace and defense”. The power of the sovereign is without limit, above all laws, and having “the use of so much Power and Strength...that by terror thereof, he is enabled to performe the wills of them all”.¹⁸² In this view, moreover, even if the people were capable of overthrowing the ruler, they would be back in the ‘state of nature’, and the “war of all against all”, compared with which any rule, no matter how tyrannical, is better than none.

The Idealists’ moralistic natural law corresponds to its radical ideology. Because the state and its dictates are thought to depend on society and its dictates, because political power is understood as a “*right*”, and thought conditional on its legitimacy, the rulers are thought to be subject to the ruled and the ‘rule of law’. For the Idealist, the rulers are the servants of the people, bound by the laws, and any attempt on the part of the rulers to subjugate society, or enact arbitrary or tyrannical laws, would be self-defeating (like ‘biting the hand that feeds’). Plato, in direct contrast to Machiavelli, distinguishes sharply between tyrannical and legitimate rule on moral grounds, the one being unjust and the other just. For him, the normal, natural form of government is good government, rule in the interest of the people, while rule against the common good he sees as an unnatural and abnormal, a symptom of a diseased or decayed city.¹⁸³ Against Thrasymachus’ claim that rulers govern in their own interest and are in the strict sense infallible, the Platonic Socrates responds that the rulers in the strict sense (i.e. as rulers) govern in the interest of their subjects.¹⁸⁴ The “Guardians” of Plato’s “Kalipolis [=good city]”, for instance, are likened to good “guard-dogs”, who serve and protect the populace, never turning on and ‘biting’

¹⁸¹ Spiekerman, *Shakespeare’s Political Realism*, 2001: 24; Shakespeare, *Richard III*, iii.200–1

¹⁸² Hobbes, *Leviathan* XVII

¹⁸³ Plato, *Republic* 543–4

¹⁸⁴ “Thrasymachus, no one in any position to rule, to the extent that he is a ruler, considers or enjoins what is advantageous for himself, but what is advantageous for his subject....” (ibid 432)

it.¹⁸⁵ Its rulers, the philosopher kings (a sub-group of the Guardians) are moral philosophers – those capable of grasping, and therefore ruling in accordance with, the “form” (*idea*) of justice (*dike*), which is equivalent to the good, or goodness itself.¹⁸⁶ While Socrates maintains that Kalipolis is a city only “in speech”, its revolutionary implications are strong enough to convince Glaucon that they should immediately set about constructing it. Aquinas adopts Aristotle’s notion of a “commonwealth [*res publica*]...in which the multitude rules for the common benefit”, and “Aristotle’s definition of a citizen as one who rules and is ruled in turn”.¹⁸⁷ He goes even further, in advocating “action against tyrants even to the extent of tyrannicide”.¹⁸⁸ Given Aquinas’ views on law and government “it is easy to understand why Lord Acton described Aquinas as ‘the First Whig’ or believer in the limitation of governmental power”.¹⁸⁹ Locke was an actual Whig, whose most famous work, the Two Treatises, came to form “a defense of the Whig Revolution”, in attempting to provide “a theoretical justification for resistance to the sovereign”.¹⁹⁰ All this is in stark contrast to the view of Hobbes, who, as Strauss says,

considered Socrates and his successors to be anarchists in that they permitted an appeal from the law of land, the positive law, to a higher law, the natural law.... According to Hobbes, on the other hand, the higher law, the natural law, commands so to speak one and only one thing: unqualified obedience to the sovereign power.¹⁹¹

The legal positivism of the Relativist alternative to the Grand Theories is consistent with its non-ideological or counter-ideological standpoint. If there are no laws of laws of nature, if all laws are positive, arising among certain people at certain times and places, then there is no one ideology that is true, right and good for all people, at all places and times. Each set of ‘natural laws’ is natural only to a “certain species of man”, as a means to its survival and success relative to other forms of human life, and not to humanity as a whole. Each set of laws arises, in this view, from “intentions or ends, which, or course, have their being in the ‘life-world’”, and

¹⁸⁵ *ibid* 375–6

¹⁸⁶ *ibid* 479–80

¹⁸⁷ Sigmund, ‘Aquinas: Law and Politics’, 1993: 220–1

¹⁸⁸ *ibid*

¹⁸⁹ *ibid*

¹⁹⁰ Macpherson, Editor’s Introduction to Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* [1980: ix]

¹⁹¹ Strauss, ‘Niccolo Machiavelli’, 1987: 297

opposing laws arise from “rival or contradictory ends”.¹⁹² Its message, if there is a message, is that each person should honour and respect the law that is right for them, “not as a law of God..., not as a human law”, but as an “earthly virtue”.¹⁹³ In this view, it is natural, and, indeed, appropriate, for the strong to adopt the morality of the masters, and the weak that of the slaves, since it accords with their respective modes of survival, according to their relative positions in the lifeworld.¹⁹⁴ In this view, “it is absolutely not desirable that all men should act in the same way” or be subject to “universal rule”.¹⁹⁵

Again, this opposition between the Grand Theories of ethics and politics, on the one hand, and moral and political antitheory, on the other, centres on opposite accounts of the relationship between theory and practise. The Grand Theorists assume that their respective theories of law arise independently of the prevailing legal system, and wider social and political environment, in which they find themselves. The appeal to natural laws, laws for all peoples, places and times, implies that theory can transcend the moral, legal and political conditions of the day. By the same token, the Grand Theories’ must assume that their theories of law are articulated with a view to their truth, and the actual nature of law, and not to their ideological applications; otherwise they would be propaganda rather than theory. Whether a theory is conservative or radical is supposed, by its proponents, to be incidental, rather than intentional (though one side often accuses the other of deliberately misrepresenting the facts to promote their ideological position). Relativists, in contrast, maintain that the Grand Theorists’ theories of law are a product of their respective times and places, with their specific legal, political and moral codes. The denial that natural laws prevail entails the denial that a legal theory can transcend its place in time and space. In this view, the theory of law is not an attempt at truth, but a “will to truth”, as Nietzsche calls it. This is the attempt, by a certain way of life, to represent as ‘truthful’, ‘natural’ and ‘lawful’ the conditions of its own survival and success, relative to other ways of life.¹⁹⁶ For the Relativist, the opposing theories of law put forward by Realists and Idealists are advanced with a view to their ideological applications. The former is advanced by representatives of the ruling orders, to reinforce their rule, the latter by representatives of the lower orders, to subvert it.

¹⁹² Rengger, *Political Theory, Modernity and Postmodernity: Beyond Enlightenment and Critique*, 1995: 144; Rosen, *Hermeneutics as Politics*, 1987: 133

¹⁹³ Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra V*

¹⁹⁴ Fairfield, *The Ways of Power: Hermeneutics, Ethics and Social Criticism*, 2002: 36–7

¹⁹⁵ Nietzsche, *Human-All-Too-Human 25*

¹⁹⁶ Fairfield, *The Ways of Power: Hermeneutics, Ethics and Social Criticism*, 2002: 29

2.4.2 Realism, Idealism and Relativism on Law:

Triad, Dyad and Dialectic

The opposite legal conceptions of natural law proffered by Realism and Idealism form the traditional dyad in the theory of law, and correspond to their opposing conceptions of human nature and the traditional dyad in nature-theory. It is divided between a 'legalistic' and 'moralistic' account of law, a division that stems from opposite answers to the question of might or right. The former elevates state and edict over society, custom and morality, which is another manifestation of the elevation of might over right. The latter subordinates state to society, edict to custom and morality, which is another manifestation of the subordination of might to right. As with their opposing naturalisms, Realist and Idealist legal theories are diametrically opposed and irreconcilable in their pure forms, as claims to absolute truth, in the form of universal natural laws. Again, each is the equal-opposite of the other, and each is defined in terms of the other. The legal positivism of Relativist opponents of Realism and Idealism is, again, both the antithesis and synthesis of the Grand Theories, transforming the philosophical dyad into the philosophy/Other triad. On the one hand, it denies that either conception of natural law is *the* natural law, since it denies that there is any such law, in line with its denial of a universal human nature. On the other, it maintains that each conception forms a kind of natural law, the law of a particular 'nature', according to which it rules over other 'natures', the first according with the rule of the masters, the second, with the revolt of the slaves. Again, this is a dialectic in both theory and practise, corresponding to both the Lefebvorean dialectic and master-slave dialectic.

2.5 The Laws of Might and Right

These are the laws of might and right, and this the dialectic of might and right in law, and the second chapter. To summarise: The natural law/positive law dichotomy arises from the distinction between nature and convention, considered in the previous chapter, and like it, corresponds to the distinction between perception and reality. Traditional moral and political thought is naturalistic with respect to law, positing universal laws of nature, in line with its commitment to a universal human nature, and its ontological and epistemological standpoint.

Alternative ethical-political thought is positivistic with regard to law, which is consistent with its conventionalism, and rejection of traditional ontology and epistemology. The fundamental questions concerning the nature of law identified here (state versus society, edict versus custom), may be reduced to one – the question of might versus right. For the Realist, the natural law coincides with the rule of might over right. In this view, the state and its dictates are logically and ontologically prior to society and its dictates, existing ‘by nature’, as it were. This is consistent with its conservative implications. For the Idealist, the law of nature coincides with the subjection of might to right. In this view, society and custom are prior to state and edict. This is consistent with its radical implications. For the Relativist, there is no natural law, applicable to all societies, or even social strata, in accordance with its non- or counter-ideological standpoint, but different laws for different natures. The law ‘natural’ to the masters is that consistent with their continued rule, in line with the Realist conception of natural law, and is another manifestation of the morality of the masters. The ‘natural law’ of the slaves is that consistent with the “slave revolt in morality”, in line with the Idealist conception, and is another manifestation of slave morality. Once again, Realism and Idealism form the traditional dyad in moral and political thought, and the first stage of the dialectic of might and right in law, while Relativism plays the role of the “Other”, making “Three”, and the second stage of that dialectic. This completes the present exploration of that dialectic within the normal subject areas of moral and political thought, nature and law, and the first part.

PART TWO

II

POWER and JUSTICE
in RELIGION, MYTH
and METAPHYSICS

While ethical-political theory (and antitheory) is normally limited largely to questions of *physis* and *nomos*, these being the “essential link[s] between ethos and polis”,¹ it is in no way closed or self-contained. Instead, as Bluhm points out,

every political theory is formed within the framework of a broader system of philosophy, from which it derives basic axioms and assumptions. We must give special attention to the metaphysical...bases of a political theory in order to understand it adequately. The answer a writer gives to the question ‘What is ultimately real...?’ [is] crucial for the kind of political theory he writes.²

This question is central to the questions of nature and law already explored, questions that are at the heart of ethics and politics, and the “tension between...ethics and politics”.³ But the bases of ethical-political theory are not only philosophical, but also ‘pre-philosophical’. There is, as Rosen says, “a ‘pre-philosophical’ understanding of nature upon which philosophical understanding rests”;⁴ or as Strauss puts it:

Classical philosophy originally acquired the fundamental concepts of political philosophy by starting out from political phenomena as they present themselves to ‘the natural consciousness’, which is a pre-philosophical consciousness.⁵

The ‘pre-philosophical’ ways of thinking are those that predate and precede reasoned inquiry, including religious and mythic traditions. While often overlooked by contemporary thinkers, these pre-philosophical bases of ethical-political thought remain essential to it, and are especially important for those who are interested in the origins and evolution of its “fundamental concepts”:

Without an awareness of the historical development and evolution of ideas about ‘nature’ – in all its varied senses – ...naturalistic arguments...can be easily pulled apart by those...who are aware

¹ Bernstein, *The New Constellation: The Ethical-Political Horizons of Modernity and Post-Modernity*, 1991: 9; Rengger, *Political Theory, Modernity and Postmodernity: Beyond Enlightenment and Critique*, 1995: 107, 134–5

² Bluhm, *Theories of the Political System*, 1971: 13

³ Bernstein, *The New Constellation: The Ethical-Political Horizons of Modernity and Post-Modernity*, 1991: 9

⁴ Rosen, *Hermeneutics as Politics*, 1987: 137

⁵ Strauss, *What is Political Philosophy?*, 1959: 75

of this history and of the aprioras and discontinuities within it, that contemporary naturalisms have often ignored.⁶

The fundamental questions of nature and law have counterparts in these first-philosophical and pre-philosophical precursors to moral and political thought. The latter include the question of the existence or non-existence of God, understood as the defender of truth, and creator and upholder of the natural order, and the question of a myth, understood as imagination, fiction and fable, and “antimyth”,⁷ understood as reason, truth and science. The former includes the question of being, form and reality, versus becoming, flux and appearance. These correspond to the question of nature versus convention, which was the basis of the first part, and to the wider question of ontology and phenomenology, developed in the introduction. They are also the starting-points of the third, fourth and final chapters, respectively. These take a similar form to the first two chapters, and the introduction, though their content is very different. They go on to explore traditional and alternative approaches to religion, myth and metaphysics, respectively, and the relationship between theory and practice, in each of these subject-areas. They then consider the place of might and right in the fundamental questions of these topic areas. From here, they explore Realist, Idealist and Relativist views on religion, myth and metaphysics, respectively, in relation to these fundamental questions, and their respective ideological implications. They each conclude with the application of the dialectic model, as developed in the introduction and subsequent chapters, to their respective debates.

⁶ Rengger, *Political Theory, Modernity and Postmodernity: Beyond Enlightenment and Critique*, 1995: 131–2

⁷ Adams, *The Philosophy of the Literary Symbolic*, 1983: 329

3

C H A P T E R T H R E E THE THEOLOGY OF MIGHT AND RIGHT

3.1 Theory and Theology

Theology is the study (*logos*) of God (*Theos*). The sources of Western theology are its major religions. Two of these are of particular importance to the present study, and form the basis of this and the next chapter. These are the religions that were dominant at the time of the founding of the major schools of moral and political thought. The first of these is the Greco-Roman, polytheistic tradition, which was dominant during the Classical period, the sources of which are Greek and Roman poetry. The second is the Judeo-Christian, monotheistic tradition, which predominated during the Medieval, Renaissance and Modern periods, the principal source of which is the Bible:

The Western conception philosophical conception of God has emerged from a range of ideas from a variety of different cultures and historical epochs. Some of these ideas fit together well, others less so, and an understanding of these different elements enables us to understand some of the tensions in the philosophical concept of God. ... Ancient Greek mythology and philosophy has been particularly influential in shaping the Western concept of God. ... At the same time as owing much to the classical Greek world, the Western concept of God is also dependent on the biblical tradition.¹

In Judeo-Christian religion the word ‘God’ refers to the One God. In Greco-Roman religion ‘God’ is often used to refer to the gods as a collective, the Pantheon, or sometimes to Zeus as head of the Pantheon. Theology has important implications for philosophy in general, and for moral and political philosophy specifically. A person’s theological, metaphysical and moral and political standpoints are intrinsically intertwined.

¹ Clack and Clack, *The Philosophy of Religion*, 2008: 10–1

The existence (or non-existence) of God has important implications for questions of epistemology and ontology, which underlie the questions of theory in general. The religions in question have linked the concept of God with concepts of truth and knowledge, the pursuit of which is theory. In both Judeo-Christian and Greco-Roman religion truth and knowledge are assigned to God. The Judeo-Christian God, as Kee says, “is, above all, a God of truth”,² defined in the Bible as, among other things, “omniscient”,³ “only-wise”⁴ and “truthful”.⁵ Christ claims to be “the way, *the truth*, and the life”.⁶ He says to Pontius Pilate: “For this I was born and for this I have come into the world to bear witness to the truth.”⁷ In contrast, God’s nemesis Satan is called the “Father of Lies”.⁸ In Greek religion, *Alethe* (Truth) and *Sophia* (Knowledge), feminine in form, are goddesses, reflecting the Greek tendency to deify abstract concepts. The universe and its contents are also attributed to God by the major Western religions. The first section of the Bible tells how God ‘created the heavens and the Earth’, along with its various contents (plants, animals, etc) from the ‘formless void’.⁹ Elsewhere, God is equated with existence itself, as everywhere and in everything.¹⁰ Various Greek gods are said to form the components of the cosmos in Greek myth (earth=Gaia, sky=Uranus, sun=Helios, etc), such that theogony and cosmogony are one, as in Hesiod’s *Theogony*. In either case, existence in general is often thought to depend, in some important way, on the existence of God. This relationship, between the existence of God and existence in general, Habermas calls “ontotheological”.¹¹ At the same time, philosophers have used religion to defend truth and knowledge, while the opponents of philosophy have rejected this. Descartes, for instance, who is seen by many as the godfather of modern philosophy, based his final defence of truth and knowledge on the existence of God, and the assertion that “the Good Lord would not deceive us”.¹² Nietzsche, in contrast, maintains that

² Kee, Editors Index in *The Cambridge Annotated Study Bible*, 1993: 283

³ Psalms 139.1–18; Proverbs 5.21

⁴ Romans 16.27

⁵ Titus 1.2

⁶ John 14.5–6; Hebrews 10.19–22

⁷ John 18.37

⁸ “He was a murderer in the beginning and does not stand in the truth, because there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks according to his own nature, for he is a liar and the father of lies.” (John 8.44–7)

⁹ Genesis 1

¹⁰ Jeremiah 23.23–4

¹¹ Adams, *Habermas and Theology*, 2006: 110

¹² Descartes, *Meditations on First Philosophy* IV

faith is opposed to truth, and to the “methods of research”.¹³ For him, God is not the truth, but a lie, and “honesty” and “academic integrity” demands that we deny God.¹⁴

God is also central to questions of human nature and natural law, which underlie the questions of ethical and political theory. Nature is sometimes said to be a god (as in the case of the Greek Gaia), or The God (as in certain aspects of Judeo-Christian religion); sometimes the work of gods (Zeus and the Olympians in Greek myth) or God (as in Genesis). Human nature is often seen as reflecting the nature of God. In Genesis, “God created humankind in his image; in the image of God he created them”.¹⁵ Somewhat differently, the Prometheus legends have the Titan stealing certain powers of the gods and bestowing them on human beings, making humans akin to the gods:

Since then, man has had a share in the portion of the gods, in the first place because of his divine kinship he alone among living creatures believed in gods, and set to work to erect alters and images of them.¹⁶

God is also often understood as the executor and enforcer of the natural law, which is often equated with, or thought to derive from, the divine law. The law of nature may therefore be understood as “what God intended for man, and what is required of man” by God.¹⁷ In the Bible, ‘Law’ is identified with “the Pentateuch containing the Mosaic Codes”.¹⁸ In Hesiod, Lawfulness (*Eunomia*) and Justice (*Dike*) are daughters of Zeus who “oversee the actions of mortal people”.¹⁹ This is reflected in philosophy and, inversely, in opposition to philosophy. Habermas’ writes of “Nature in God”,²⁰ Spinoza, of “God from Nature [*Deus ex Natura*]”.²¹ Natural law, according to Kant, “leads ineluctably to religion, through which it extends itself to the idea of a powerful

¹³ “What one always wanted was faith—and *not* truth. Faith is created by means antithetical to the methods of research—: they even exclude the latter.” (Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* 455)

¹⁴ Nietzsche, *The Antichrist* 12; *The Gay Science* 51; *The Will to Power* 404

¹⁵ *Genesis* 1.27

¹⁶ Plato, *Protagoras* 322

¹⁷ *Oxford Dictionary of Politics*; “Natural law partakes of a share of eternal law. For it is the natural law where the eternal law...reveals itself. The authority of natural law is...the authority of God.” (Finnis, ‘Natural Law and the Ethics of Discourse’, 2008: 106)

¹⁸ Kee, Editors Index in *The Cambridge Annotated Study Bible*, 1993: 282; “The *lex naturae* is...known through the ten commandments in scripture.” (Habermas, quoted in Adams, *Habermas and Theology*, 2006: 110; *Exodus* 20.1–17)

¹⁹ Hesiod, *Theogony* 901–3

²⁰ Adams, *Habermas and Theology*, 2006: 117

²¹ Strauss, ‘Niccolo Machiavelli’, 1987: 311

moral lawgiver outside mankind.”²² “Who else other than God”, asks St Augustine, “has written the natural law into the hearts of men?”²³ Or as St Aquinas puts it: “Natural law is nothing else but the participation of rational creatures in the eternal law.”²⁴ Here faith is seen as complementary to reason. The opponents of philosophy, on the other hand, deny that belief in God can be a basis for an understanding of nature, or the nature of things. According to Nietzsche, for instance, ‘natural science’ demands the “de-deification of nature”.²⁵

3.2 Theism versus Atheism

Traditional ethico-political thought is theistic at its outset. Belief in God is common to virtually all, if not all, early moral and political theorists (though their conceptions of God differ, sometimes radically), and their various beliefs about God form an important part of their respective theories. This is in line with the epistemological and naturalistic implications of belief in God, as outlined above. This is consistent with the aims of theory as the search for truth, and with the naturalistic starting-point of traditional moral and political thought. Thucydides refers to the Greek gods throughout his *History*, and discusses competing conceptions of the gods in the ‘Melian Dialogue’.²⁶ Likewise, the Platonic Socrates “never fails to invoke the gods”, as Clay says.²⁷ Aquinas was a priest who was later canonised, whose major work, *Summa Theologia*, is, as its name suggests, principally a theological treatise. Aquinas, as Jordan points out, “was by vocation, training, and self-understanding an ordained teacher of an inherited theology”.²⁸ Machiavelli, often thought to have little to say on the topic of religion, in fact wrote much on it, though often outside his major works, and especially in his poems and plays.²⁹ Hobbes also “wrote copiously on the philosophy of religion”, as Hepburn points out,³⁰ and, as Taylor says, “a certain kind of theism is absolutely necessary to make his theory work”.³¹ A “certain kind of

²² Kant, *Religion Within the Limits of Reason Alone* VI.6

²³ Augustine, *De Serm* II.9.32

²⁴ *ibid* I–II.101.2

²⁵ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* 109

²⁶ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* V.105

²⁷ Clay, ‘Plato *Philomythos*’, 2007: 213

²⁸ Jordan, ‘Aquinas: Theology and Philosophy’, 1993: 232

²⁹ see Viroli, ‘Machiavelli’, 1998

³⁰ Hepburn, ‘Hobbes on the Knowledge of God’, 1972: 85

³¹ Taylor, in Brown (ed.), *Hobbes Studies*, 1965: 50. Others, however, have played down the role of theology in Hobbes’ theory: “...it is not of the least importance to Hobbes...to regard God as the author of the laws of nature.”

theism” is also central to the moral and political philosophy of Locke, who bases his moral theory and theory of human nature on “the supposed intentions of the Creator”.³²

Alternative ethico-political thought is atheistic or agnostic. Moral and political antitheorists deny that God exists or, at the very least, deny that human beings can achieve knowledge of God. This denial is central to a number of their criticisms of traditional thought. First and foremost, it goes against the epistemological and naturalistic implications of belief in God. It is therefore consistent with antitheory’s rejection of truth and knowledge, and of nature traditionally conceived. The Sophists Gorgias and Protagoras are famously agnostic. Themistius calls “irreverent and far from...piety...Protagoras from Abdera and Gorgias of Leontini and...other naked heads who proclaim themselves wise among the Greeks.”³³ Protagoras, for instance, says that, “concerning the gods, I am not in a position to know whether or not they exist, or what they look like, for many things prevent my knowing.”³⁴ Nietzsche is outright atheistic. He lists “No God” as a “supposition” in *The Will to Power*,³⁵ while in *The Gay Science* he famously declares the death of God,³⁶ which is linked, as by Rengger, to the ‘death’ of philosophy. “To announce the death of God”, he says, is to “confront and affirm the fact that the human world is not inherently valuable or meaningful”.³⁷ Or, as Danto says, “if God is identified with truth”, and God is Dead, “then truth must be dead. Is this not another way of stating that there is no truth, no objective order, *nothing* which we must acknowledge as higher than ourselves, as fixed, eternal, unchanging?”³⁸

This debate between traditional and alternative approaches to religion stem, again, from the opposite conceptions of the relationship between *logos* and *praxis*; in this case, between theology and religion, between the theory of religion and religious (and hence social and political) practise. In the traditional formulation, religious doctrines are thought to be divinely inspired, and honestly interpreted. In the Greco-Roman tradition, the poets and prose-writers,

(McNeilly, *The Anatomy of Leviathan*, 1968: 211) But it certainly seems, as Johnson says, that, without God, “Hobbes’ ‘morality’ seems to be missing something.” (Johnson, *Thucydides, Hobbes and the Interpretation of Realism*, 1993: 78)

³² Macpherson, Editor’s Introduction to Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, 1980: xiii; Macpherson, *Democratic Theory: Essays in Retrieval*, 1973: 229

³³ Themistius, *Orations* 161–2

³⁴ In Guthrie, *The Sophists*, 1971: 234

³⁵ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* 595

³⁶ “God is Dead; but given the way of men, there may still be caves for thousands of years in which his shadow will be shown. And we—we still have to vanquish his shadow, too.” (Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* 102)

³⁷ Rengger, *Political Theory, Modernity and Postmodernity: Beyond Enlightenment and Critique*, 1995: 90, 138

³⁸ Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher*, 1965: 191–2

authors of the writings in which the religion was contained, were thought (and thought themselves) to have been inspired by the muses.³⁹ In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the prophets, on whose words its doctrines were said to have been largely based, were inspired by God or his agents (the most common of which is the Angel of the Lord).⁴⁰ Meanwhile, the priests and scholars who interpreted the writings, and put them into practise, are assumed to have done so without thought for themselves, their specific interests, or their particular moral and political sentiments. This ensures that the doctrines correspond, as closely as possible, to a ‘true’ religion, which reflects the actual will of God, and not simply that of religious practitioners, politicians or moralists. In the alternative formulation, religious doctrines are recorded, and interpreted, with a view to their practical implications. The religions, it holds, do not in any way reflect the nature of God, but the nature of those who espouse them. Religions exist either as a necessary fiction, serving the needs of certain groups of people at certain times in their history, or as a deliberate act of deception on the part of one group in an attempt to gain leverage over another. Thus, for Nietzsche, the fundamental question of religion is “not whether a religion is true, but who benefits from it.”⁴¹

3.3 God, Might and Right

The question of might versus right is central to the fundamental questions of the nature of God in the Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian theological traditions. The word ‘God’ suggests, above all, supreme power and supreme justice. This can be seen, for instance, from the terms ‘godlike’ and ‘godly’. ‘Godlike’ denotes great strength, stature or status, in largely amoral terms. ‘Godly’ denotes purely moral or spiritual qualities, goodness and grace, in contrast to ‘godless’, meaning evil or immoral. In the Bible, God is both the ultimate physical/political and moral force in the universe, the source of all power and all justice in the world. Kant, for instance, said that God must be understood as “all-mighty” and “all-good and just at the same time”.⁴² In Greco-Roman poetry, the Greek pantheon, under the divine kingship of Zeus/Jupiter, is the source of all that is, and is good, in the world. Zeus himself, as head of the pantheon, is supreme political and

³⁹ Hesiod *Theogony* 1, Homer *Iliad* 1; Homer, *Odyssey* 1

⁴⁰ Exodus 3.2; 1 Kings 19.5–8; 2 Kings 19.35; Matthew 1.20; Luke 1.11

⁴¹ Levy, Editor’s Introduction to Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra* [1956: 43]

⁴² Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, VI; Finnis, ‘Natural Law and the Ethics of Discourse’, 2003: 149

moral authority in heaven and on earth. This is the “twofold character” or “dual role of Zeus” (in the words of Guthrie and Greene respectively),⁴³ which, along with lord of Olympus, makes him “both arbiter of justice and weather god”.⁴⁴ This double-nature is also inherent in the relations of lesser deities to Zeus.⁴⁵ However the notion of an infinitely powerful God is inconsistent with the notion of a perfectly just God, given the existence of suffering and wrongdoing in the world. This is the ‘Problem of Evil’, and is perhaps the central problem in theology, which gives rise to ‘theodicy’, the “defence of God in the face of the problem of evil”.⁴⁶ The problem runs as follows: An infinitely powerful God must also be the source of the evils in the world, and so cannot be entirely good, while a perfectly good God cannot be the cause of evil, and so cannot be all-powerful. The problem is famously articulated in St Aquinas’ *Summa Theologiae*: “If one of two contraries be infinite, the other would be altogether destroyed”, and “the name of God means that He is infinite goodness”. But if God were to exist in this way, “there would be no evil discoverable; but there is evil in the world”.⁴⁷ An analogous point is made by Greene regarding the Greek gods: If we suppose that the gods are the “source of all things” then this makes them the “source of evil as well as good”. So, given the existence of evil in the world, the gods cannot be simultaneously all-powerful and all-good, and we are left to wonder if they are “imperfectly good” or “good but not omnipotent”.⁴⁸ This gives rise to two competing theological perspectives. One stresses the omnipotence or infinitude of God, the other emphasises God’s grace or goodness. The former explains the existence of evil by making God morally imperfect, the latter, by making God limited in power. This plays out in a number of sub-debates, between an older orthodoxy and a newer way of thinking, between a doctrine of particular wills and one of general wills, and between political and liberation theology.

⁴³ Guthrie, ‘The Religion and Mythology of the Greeks’, 1975: 856; Greene, *Moiras: Fate, Good and Evil in Greek Thought*, 1968: 11–2

⁴⁴ Greene, *Moiras: Fate, Good and Evil in Greek Thought*, 1968: 11–2

⁴⁵ Hesiod, *Theogony* 901–3

⁴⁶ Clack and Clack, *The Philosophy of Religion*, 2008: 10–1

⁴⁷ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I.2.3

⁴⁸ Greene, *Moiras: Fate, Good and Evil*, 1968: 3–5

3.3.1 God, Might and Right: Orthodoxy versus Revision

This is the question of whether the older, Epic and Old-Testament religious tradition should take precedence over the newer, Classical and New-Testament tradition. The former conception of God, which elevates the power of God above God's goodness, is predominant in the traditional orthodoxy of both Judeo-Christian and Greco-Roman religions. The latter conception, in which divine might is subordinate to divine right, predominates within the more-recent theological tradition, in Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian religions.

In Epic poetry, the gods are all-powerful but imperfect. "The gods of Homer", having unlimited power over natural events and the course of history, must, as Greene points out, "assume the blame for catastrophes and periods of depression".⁴⁹ It is Zeus in whom the combined power of the gods, and ultimate control over the lives of men, resides:

How greatly he surpasses all the gods, and in might is the strongest.⁵⁰

That is how far I surpass in power both gods and mortals!⁵¹

This power is in no way constrained by moral considerations. In the Epics, as Lefkowitz says, "only Zeus has enduring power", and he uses it for both good and evil.⁵² In Hesiod, Zeus is the father of the Fates, "who give mortal people what people have, *for good and for evil*".⁵³ In the *Theogony*, Might (*Kratos*) and Violence (*Bia*) are said to have "no house apart from Zeus, nor any dwelling nor path except that wherein God leads them, but they dwell always with Zeus the loud-thunderer."⁵⁴ Likewise, in the Old Testament, God is all-powerful but amoral. All things are his will and work. This makes him the source of ill, as well of as good. He brings rain, but also floods and droughts, he feeds and heals, but also starves and sickens. He is the Lord of Hosts, or "armies",⁵⁵ who determines the outcome of battles and so sets the course of history, for good and

⁴⁹ Greene, *Moirai: Fate, Good and Evil*, 1968: 12

⁵⁰ Hesiod, *Theogony* 48–9

⁵¹ Homer, *Illiad* 8.27

⁵² *Greek Gods, Human Lives*, 2003: 28–9

⁵³ Hesiod, *Theogony* 215–6

⁵⁴ Hesiod, *Theogony* 385–8

⁵⁵ 1 Samuel 1.3, 11; 4.4; 2 Samuel 4.2; Eissfeld, 'The Hebrew Kingdom', 1975: 565

bad. Here the justice of God stems from his power, from his being above question, as in Job: “If it is a contest of strength, he is the strong one. If it is a matter of justice, who can summon him?”⁵⁶

In later Greek and Roman religious thought, the gods are more often presented as morally perfect but limited in power. This view is often traced to Xenophanes, who, as Lefkowitz says, “attacked the epic poets for saying that the gods behaved in ways that...would be considered immoral”⁵⁷: “Homer and Hesiod have ascribed to the Gods all the disgraces and shame that mortals have – stealing, adultery, and cheating each other.”⁵⁸ Somewhat differently, the Roman tradition often represents good and evil in opposing deities. In Virgil’s *Aeneid*, for example, Jupiter represents good (fate), and his wife Juno takes up the role of representative of evil (counter-fate). Virgil’s Jupiter also denies that he possesses power over Fate as Zeus does in Homer and Hesiod, asking, “What god possesses such power?” In the New Testament, God is all-loving but limited. All goodness in the world stems from him, and none of the bad. Jesus and his followers portray God as merciful, in contrast to the vengeful Old-Testament God. Jesus himself, in accordance with this conception, is reported to have fed the hungry, aided the poor, healed the sick, and to have blessed the “poor in spirit”, “the meek”, “the righteous” and “those who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness”, “the merciful” and “the peacemakers”.⁵⁹ The evils of the world are no longer linked to God, but instead are attributed to a counter-figure, an Evil One. Satan, who in the Old Testament served at God’s side as *advocatus diaboli* (as in Job),⁶⁰ takes on, in the New, his more-familiar role as God’s nemesis and the source of evil in the face of God’s goodness.⁶¹ Christ, as the embodiment of God’s goodness, is also attributed an evil adversary, the Antichrist.⁶²

⁵⁶ Job 9.19-20

⁵⁷ *Greek Gods, Human Lives*, 2003: 29

⁵⁸ Xenophanes, fragment 11

⁵⁹ Matthew 5

⁶⁰ Job 1.6–12

⁶¹ Matthew 4.1–11; John 8.44, 13.2; Hebrews 2.14; Revelation 2.10, 12.9, 20.2, 10; etc.; Kee, Editor’s Notes, Glossary in *The Cambridge Annotated Study Bible*, 1993: 265, 428

⁶² 2 Thessalonians 2; Revelation 13, 17, 20

3.3.2 God, Might and Right:

Particular versus General Will

This is the question as to whether God acts according to “particular wills [*volontés particulières*]”, in an arbitrary or *ad hoc* fashion, or “general wills [*volontés générales*]”, in accordance with general laws.⁶³ This is closely related to another question, as to whether the primary religious texts should be understood directly, as revealed religion, or in light of reason, especially moral reason. The former view is consistent with a literal reading of the religious texts, the latter with a reasoned interpretation. The believers in *volontés particulières* “rely not on philosophy or reason but on the authority of Scripture”, whereas belief in *volontés générales* is attributed to the “philosophers”.⁶⁴ *Volontés particulières* and revealed religion is consistent with an infinitely-powerful, but imperfectly-just God, as it implies that God directly produces all effects, good and bad. This coincides with the older Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian religious tradition. *Volontés générales* and reasoned religion is consistent with a morally-perfect but limited God, since it entails that God indirectly produces effects according to general laws, which ensure their general goodness, but allows for instances of evil outside God’s control. This coincides with the newer Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian religious tradition. Again, the division centres on the question of *might* versus *right*. Those who support the former view do so primarily because they cannot accept that God would be so powerless as to act only through general laws: “What contempt I have for those philosophers who...make him the author of nothing more than a certain general order, from which the rest develops as it may!”⁶⁵ Those who favour the latter view do so because they cannot accept that God would be so unjust as to cause directly the evils of the world:

If rain falls on certain lands, and if the sun roasts others...if a child comes into the world with a malformed and useless head...this is not at all because God wanted to produce those effects by

⁶³ This is basis of a famous French theological debate, on which this section is largely based. This is summarised in Riley’s Introduction to Bousseut’s *Politics Drawn from the Very Words of Holy Scripture* [1990: xxi–xxxvi].

⁶⁴ Bousseut, *Funeral Oration of Marie-Thérèse d’Autriche*, in *Œuvres*, 248–9; Malebranche, *Traité de la Nature et de la Grâce*, 61–2; Riley, Editor’s Introduction to Bousseut, *Politics Drawn from the Very Words of Holy Scripture* [1990: xxi–xxii]

⁶⁵ Bousseut, *Funeral Oration of Marie-Thérèse d’Autriche*, in *Œuvres*, 248–9

volontés particulières; it is because he has established [general] laws..., whose effects are necessary consequences.⁶⁶

3.3.3 God, Might and Right:

Political versus Liberation Theology

This is the question as to whether a theological standpoint has conservative implications, in reinforcing the status-quo, or radical implications, in sponsoring change. This is raised in Forrester's *Theology and Politics*. Political theologies, he says,

affirm and give an odour of sanctity to the values implicit in the existing order. The king is majestic and must be obeyed because he participates in deity, or because he has the highest place in the earthly hierarchy, which corresponds to the heavenly hierarchy. ... Such ways of construing the world are, of course, highly conservative in their implications. To challenge the authorities is impious as well as seditious.⁶⁷

Such a standpoint is consistent with the earlier conception of an all-powerful, but morally imperfect God, as presented by Baker, in his 'Farewell Sermon':

All things are the will and work of god, including the laws of men, and all the actions of the evildoers in the world, and to resist the laws, or wicked, or powerful is to work against god.⁶⁸

If God produces all effects, good and evil, then "both good and evil kings rule by God's will" and "evil rulers are just as legitimate as good ones".⁶⁹ This is consistent with the older orthodoxy in Greco-Roman and Judeo-Christian religion. Homer, as Dowden says, "would agree with Hesiod that 'kings are from Zeus'".⁷⁰ It is Zeus who "anoints" the princes and bestows "glory" on the

⁶⁶ Malebranche, *Traité de la Nature et de la Grâce*, 32

⁶⁷ Forrester, *Theology and Politics*, 1988: 2–3

⁶⁸ Baker, *Farewell Sermon* 1–2; An analogous view is presented by Hoffman: "Let every soul...be subject to higher powers, for there is no power but of God; therefore...if you believe a God, you must be Obedient, for the powers that be are ordained by God..." (Hoffman, *Some considerations of present use wherein is shewn that the strong ought to bear with the weak, and the weak not clamour against or censure the strong, in which the true notion of the strong and weak is stated*, 2)

⁶⁹ Speikerman, *Shakespeare's Political Realism*, 2001: 6–7

⁷⁰ Dowden, *Zeus*, 2006: 72; Hesiod *Theogony* 94–6

“scepter-holding kings” of the *Iliad*.⁷¹ It is he, too, who is ultimately responsible for the injustices perpetrated by the kings, as seen from Agamemnon’s apology to Achilles: “...I am not responsible, but Zeus and Fate...”⁷² Likewise, in the Old Testament, God is “Lord of Hosts” or “Armies”.⁷³ He “anoints” the judges and “chooses” the kings that rule over His people, and even their abuses are ascribed to Him: “And ye shall cry out on that day because of your king which ye shall have chosen you; and the Lord will not hear you on that day.”⁷⁴ Liberation theology, on the other hand, as Forrester says, is a kind of “negative political theology”. It “is not concerned with conferring an aura of sanctity on politics’ but rather “with questioning and demystifying the political sphere”. This, he says, is the theology of the radical “left”.⁷⁵ If God is responsible only for the good in the world, then unjust rulers go against God, and may be replaced. This is consistent with the newer religious traditions. In tragic poetry earthly powers are often set at odds with divine justice, where resistance to human authority is justified through appeal to the moral authority of the gods. As Antigone in Sophocles says:

That order did not come from God, Justice, that dwells with the gods below, knows no such law. I do not think your edicts strong enough to overrule the...laws of God and heaven, you being only a man. ... Guilty of their transgression before God I cannot be, for any man on earth.⁷⁶

In the New Testament, Christ is highly critical of the ruling powers of his own time, by which he is eventually put to death. The threat he presented to the Roman authorities is indicated by Pilate’s inscription on the cross, designating the charge against him: “King of the Jews”.⁷⁷ As a result, Christ has become a figurehead for resistance. It is in light of this that Forrester speaks of the “‘subversive memory’ of Christ, which challenges all established order and complacency”.⁷⁸ In Revelation, the corrupt earthly kingdoms are represented by the Beast, and are opposed to God and the forces of good. Thus “the New Testament suggests that...Christians were capable of denouncing an emperor as the Beast of Revelation 13”.⁷⁹

⁷¹ Homer, *Illiad* 1.279

⁷² *ibid* 19.86–9

⁷³ 1 Samuel 1.3, 11; 4.4; 2 Samuel 4.2; Eissfeld, ‘The Hebrew Kingdom’, 1975: 565

⁷⁴ 1 Samuel 8.11-18

⁷⁵ Forrester, *Theology and Politics*, 1988: 58-9

⁷⁶ Sophocles, *Antigone* 450-455

⁷⁷ Matthew 27.37; Mark 15.26; Luke 23.38; John 19.19; Forrester, *Theology and Politics*, 1988: 107

⁷⁸ Forrester, *Theology and Politics*, 1988: 19

⁷⁹ Forrester, *Theology and Politics*, 1988: 19

3.4 Realist, Idealist and Relativist Theology

These opposite theological positions are each advanced by proponents of one or other of the Grand Theories of ethics and politics, Realism and Idealism, and underlie their opposite views on power and justice. The Realist portrays God as all-powerful, but imperfect, identifying with the traditional orthodoxy in Greco-Roman and/or Judeo-Christian religious teachings. The Idealist, in contrast, paints a picture of an infinitely perfect but limited God, in line with later revisions of these teachings.

In Realist theology, as elsewhere, power takes precedence over justice. The Realist conception of God is of an almighty but largely amoral being or collective, which causes all effects through particular wills. This view, attributed to the “men of science...who maintain that the height of justice is to succeed by force” (i.e. Realists), is attacked by Plato in the *Laws*.⁸⁰ In response to the Melians’ moral appeal to the gods, Thucydides’ Athenians maintain that their “aims and actions are perfectly consistent with the beliefs men hold about the gods”:

So far as the favour of the gods is concerned, we think we have as much right to that as you have. ... And therefore, so far as the gods are concerned, we see no good reason why we should fear to be at a disadvantage.⁸¹

Somewhat differently, Machiavelli rejects the Christian conception of a moral god, in favour of the power-centric Greco-Roman gods of Epic poetry, and, to a lesser extent, the Old Testament conception of God as a “tyrant”.⁸² “Machiavelli’s God”, as Viroli points out, “has little resemblance to the Christian God who sent his own son to die for humanity. He is the God of captains, princes, lawgivers....”⁸³ The clearest articulation of this view, however, is to be found in Hobbes’ *Questions Concerning Liberty, Necessity and Chance*. According to Hobbes, all events and actions are dictated by God, including the ills of the world and the acts of evil men:

⁸⁰ Plato, *Laws* 890

⁸¹ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* V.105

⁸² Strauss, ‘Niccolo Machiavelli’, 1987: 311-2

⁸³ Viroli, *Machiavelli*, 1998: 23

The will of God makes the necessity of all things....[H]ealth, sickness, ease, torments, life and death, are...dispensed by him; and he putteth an end to them then when they end, and a beginning when they begin, according to his eternal purpose, which cannot be resisted.⁸⁴

In his view, God's justice stems from His power, and since this power is unlimited, all things are justified as the work of God, and "we should not question God's ways, especially since irresistible power naturally justifies all actions".⁸⁵ Hobbes' conception of God (and that of Realists in general) is aptly summarised by Johnson in his *Interpretation of Realism*:

God's justice is...subsumed under His power. For God, there is no eternal and universal right and wrong. God determines good and evil by what He wills; His will is not determined by what is good and evil. ... He is not bound by justice; He creates it by virtue of His power. Everything He wills is good and just, because He wills it. What seems evil to us must be good to God, and it fits somehow into His eternal plan.⁸⁶

In Idealist theology, in contrast, justice takes precedence over power. The Idealist God is conceived of as morally perfect but limited in power, the source of good but not evil. As Plato says: "Since the gods are good they are not...the cause of everything.... Of the good things, they alone are the cause, but we must find some other cause for the bad ones, not the gods." In line with this, Plato rejects the Homeric conception of the gods and of Zeus in particular:

Then we won't accept from Homer—or from anyone else—the foolish mistake he makes about the gods when he says: 'There are two urns at the threshold of Zeus, one filled with good fates, the other with bad ones'.... Nor will we tolerate the saying that 'Zeus is the dispenser of both good and bad to mortals' [⁸⁷].⁸⁸

"Plato's replacement" theology, as Dowden points out, "would stress how gods are responsible for all that is good in the world but for none of the evil".⁸⁹ Accordingly, Plato's Zeus lacks the

⁸⁴ Hobbes, *The Questions Concerning Liberty, Necessity and Chance*: Preface, 213

⁸⁵ Johnson, *Thucydides, Hobbes and the Interpretation of Realism*, 1993: 80; Hobbes, *The Questions Concerning Liberty, Necessity and Chance*: 115–6

⁸⁶ Johnson, *Thucydides, Hobbes and the Interpretation of Realism*, 1993: 80–1; Hobbes, *The Questions Concerning Liberty, Necessity and Chance*: 146, 192

⁸⁷ Homer, *Iliad* 24.527–32

⁸⁸ Plato, *Republic* 379; Saunders, 'Plato's Later Political Thought', 1992: 479

⁸⁹ Dowden, *The Uses of Greek Mythology*, 1992: 48

infinite power of his father, Cronos.⁹⁰ Aquinas, in line with the Christian tradition, shows a marked preference for the New over the Old Testament, distinguishing between “the Law of the Old Testament, and the Gospel of the New”, calling the “Gospel” “true” and the “Law” merely “symbolic”. In answer to the question of the origin of evil, he argues that “God is the highest good”, but that His goodness is still unfolding, making it not-yet-infinite.⁹¹ Locke’s First Treatise of Government “provided”, as Sim and Walker say, a “vigorous, closely-argued refutation of Filmer’s doctrine of divine right”. For Filmer, “Kings are held to be above the law” and “rebellion in any form can never be countenanced”⁹²: “As kingly power is by the law of God, so it hath no inferior law to limit it.”⁹³

Moral and political antitheory denies that either conception of God applies, since it holds that there is no God, or, at least, no way of knowing anything about God. It therefore rejects both of the traditional conceptions of God, but as always provides a compromise between them, in maintaining that different religions are equally applicable to different ways of life. The question, once again, is not which conception of God is applicable to all people, but of which people apply what conception.

In Relativist theology neither power nor justice predominates. For Relativists there is no absolute conception of God, either as supreme power or supreme justice. Instead, they believe conceptions of God to be relative. This means that different, and even divergent, beliefs about God are equally true, and equally appropriate for different kinds of people. As usual, this tends to follow the basic distinction between human types outlined previously: There is a God of the masters and a god of the slaves, a distinction made explicit by Nietzsche. In the case of Greco-Roman religion, he identifies the religion of the masters with Homeric poetry, and the religion of the slaves with Plato.⁹⁴ Likewise, in the case of Judeo-Christian religion, he argues that the older tradition represents a religion of the strong, the later a religion of the weak. He calls the “older parts of the Old Testament” “an affirmative...religion, the product of a ruling class”, but calls Christianity “a woman’s religion”.⁹⁵

⁹⁰ Plato, *Statesman* 268–74

⁹¹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I.2.3

⁹² Sim and Walker, *The Discourse of Sovereignty, Hobbes to Fielding: The State of Nature and the Nature of the State*, 2003: 72–3

⁹³ Filmer, *Patriarcha* [1949: 35]

⁹⁴ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* 137, 141–3

⁹⁵ *ibid* 145, cf. 139

3.4.1 Realist, Idealist and Relativist Theology: Conservatism and Radicalism

Here, as elsewhere, the views of the Grand Theorists have opposite ideological implications. The Realist conception of God is conservative in its implications, while the Idealist conception has radical implications. Realist theology is a political theology, in legitimising the prevailing order; Idealist theology is a liberation theology, in legitimating challenges to that order. As was shown above, the view that God is almighty but amoral serves to justify the powers that be, whereas the view that God is moral but limited opens the ruling powers up to moral critique. This is further demonstrated from the writings of the founders of the Grand Theories. Thucydides employs the former conception of the Greek gods to justify his conception of natural law, which justifies the rule of the strong over the weak, even in the face of justice: “Our opinion of the gods and our knowledge of men lead us to conclude that it is a general and necessary law of nature to rule wherever one can.”⁹⁶ Machiavelli rejects the Christian conception of God as inimical to the power of the state and authority of the prince.⁹⁷ Hobbes, meanwhile, makes a telling analogy between the “Immortall God” and “that Mortall God” the Leviathan state.⁹⁸ The Socratics, on the other hand, employ the latter conception of God, which clearly presented a challenge to the authorities of their time. “Socrates is a doer of evil...and he does not believe in the gods of the state but has other new divinities of his own”, his accusers say, and, as Forrester points out, Socrates “was indeed one who undercut the old civic religion and political theology in an irreversible way”.⁹⁹ Socrates replies: “Men of Athens, I honour and love you. But I shall obey God rather than you....” In doing so, Forrester continues,

he implied in no uncertain fashion that the polis was not holy and beyond scrutiny. As Fustel de Coulanges argues,^[100] he ‘founded a new religion, which was the opposite of the city religion. He was justly accused of not adoring the gods whom the state adored’.¹⁰¹

⁹⁶ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* V.105

⁹⁷ Strauss, ‘Niccolo Machiavelli’, in Strauss and Cropsey (eds.), *History of Political Philosophy*, 1987: 311–2

⁹⁸ Hobbes, *Leviathan* XVII

⁹⁹ Forrester, *Theology and Politics*, 1988: 8

¹⁰⁰ de Coulanges, *The Ancient City*, 1956: 356

¹⁰¹ Forrester, *Theology and Politics*, 1988: 9

For Aquinas too the will of the sovereign is not equivalent to the will of God, but only insofar as the will of the sovereign is bound by rational and moral laws. The divine law described by Aquinas, as Elshtain says, is one that “binds earthly authorities and powers, and authority is stripped from kings turned tyrants”.¹⁰² Likewise, Locke’s conception of a moral God underlies his limited and legitimate conception of government, providing, as Macpherson says, “the foundation for his moral critique of political power”.¹⁰³

The agnosticism and atheism of the alternative schools has no discernable ideological implications, but is, as always, non- or counter-ideological. If there is no ‘true’ religion, if religions apply only to the ways of life they represent, then religion loses the claim to universality necessary to an ideological doctrine. Instead, the alternate way of thinking seeks to expose the ways of life underlying such doctrines. It attempts to show that all religions are nothing but ideology; that is, nothing more than the wills to power of different ways of life. “For the strong” as Nietzsche says, “religion is one more means of overcoming resistance so as to be able to rule”.¹⁰⁴ For the weak, he says, religion is a way to attain power over the strong:

How does one gain authority when one does not have physical power in one’s hands (no army, no weapons of any kind—)? How, in fact, does one gain authority over those who possess physical strength and authority?¹⁰⁵

“On the other hand”, he argues, the religion of the weak “is *poison*” to the rulers: “[T]o implant the teaching of sinfulness and damnation into the...soul” of the powerful “is nothing other than to poison it....”¹⁰⁶

As elsewhere, the proponents and opponents of the Grand Theories present opposite accounts of the relationship between those theories and their respective ideologies. The proponents assume that their theologies are distinct from their ideological applications, and not simply ideology disguised as theology. The appeal to a ‘true’ or universal religion implies that theology can transcend earthly conditions and norms, and can remake those conditions and norms in their own image, which is the supposed image of God. Whether a religion preaches obedience

¹⁰² Elshtain, *Sovereignty: God, State and Self*, 2008: 15

¹⁰³ Macpherson, Editor’s Introduction to Locke, *Second Treatise of Government*, 1980: x

¹⁰⁴ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* 62

¹⁰⁵ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* 140; “That is why the French Revolution is the daughter and continuation of Christianity—....” (184)

¹⁰⁶ Nietzsche, *Assorted Opinions and Maxims* 224

or resistance is supposed to depend on whether their God is a conservative or a radical, so to speak, and not on the ideological disposition of its leadership or membership. Their opponents, in contrast, deny that the opposing theologies of the Grand Theories are distinct from their ideological standpoints. Instead, the opposing theologies are identified with the ideological interests of opposing groups, as yet another weapon in the “struggle for, and in, the city”.¹⁰⁷ For the Relativist, the ‘political theology’ of the Realist is arises amongst the rulers, to reinforce their rule, and the ‘liberation theology’ of the Idealist, amongst the slaves, to aid in their revolt against the rulers.

3.4.2 Realist, Idealist and Relativist Theology:

Triad, Dyad and Dialectic

Realism and Idealism’s opposing theologies comprise the traditional dyad in Western theo-political discourse, corresponding to the basic theological division, between an all-powerful and all-moral God. As elsewhere, these opposing points of view represent opposing answers to the question of might or right. The first posits an almighty but amoral God, who acts according to particular wills, which forms a political theology, and is a further manifestation of the elevation of politics over morality, might over right. The second posits a moral but limited God, who acts according to general laws, which forms a liberation theology, and is a manifestation of the subordination of politics to ethics. Realism and Idealism’s opposing theologies are equal-opposites and irreconcilable insofar as each claims to represent the one, true religion. The atheism or agnosticism of the Relativist is clearly opposed to each of these theologies, and yet offers a compromise between them, and so is, as ever, both the antithesis and synthesis of the Grand-Theories. It denies the existence of God, and so the truth of any religion, as it rejects truth as a whole. At the same time, it maintains that the competing conceptions of God are appropriate to competing ways of life, and so holds that each represents a ‘true’ religion to the extent that each is ‘true’ to a certain group of people, the to the masters, the second a to the slaves. This is

¹⁰⁷ Rengger, *Political Theory, Modernity and Postmodernity: Beyond Enlightenment and Critique*, 1995: 138–9; Fairfield, *The Ways of Power: Hermeneutics, Ethics and Social Criticism*, 2002: 146:

Neither can moral theory prescribe a particular way of life or conception of the good. The classical conception of ethics as a systematic answer to the question “How should one live?” was an overly ambitious view of what moral philosophy could achieve. Questions of the good cannot be resolved philosophically – so much may be conceded to the antitheorists.

the dialectic of might and right in religion, corresponding, as ever, to the Lefebvorean dialectic in theory, and the master/slave dialectic in practise.

3.5 The Theology of Might and Right

This is the theology of might and right, and brings to a close this third chapter. In sum: Theory and theology are intertwined, as are their opposites. Early ethical-political theory is theistic, in that it fosters a belief in God based on religious texts, and defends a conception of what it takes to be the ‘true’ religion, in line with its commitment to absolute truth, an ultimate reality and a universal nature. Moral and political antitheory is atheistic or agnostic, in line with its rejection of truth, reality and nature. The question of might and right pervades the fundamental debates in political-theology, between an older and newer theo-political tradition, doctrines of *volontés particulières* and *volontés générales*, and positive and negative political ideologies. Realism and Idealism represent each side of this debate; Relativism holds that these questions are moot, and yet offers something of a compromise between them. In the former, the opposing theologies are the source of the conflict between conservative and radical religious movements. In the latter, the conflict between masters and slaves is the source of the debate between political and liberation theologies. These are the antagonists in the dialectic of might and right in religion, and this the end of the third chapter, and the first third of the second and final part.

4

C H A P T E R F O U R THE MYTHOLOGY OF MIGHT AND RIGHT

4.1 “Myth and Antimyth”

Mythology is the study of myth (from the Greek *mythos*). The word ‘myth’ has various meanings, or as Powell puts it, “myth is like the sea-god Proteus in Greek myth, who could take on many shapes and yet remain the same god”.¹ Two common conceptions of myth are of interest here. The first is of myth as a traditional narrative, widely believed by certain peoples at certain times and places.² The second is of myth as “an untrue story”,³ or “widely disseminated falsehood”.⁴ “In everyday usage a myth is taken to be an untrue account of events, or simply a collective belief which is or was given the status of truth by a group of people.”⁵ This is illustrated by the relationship of *mythos* to *logos*, where *mythos* connotes “the use of language in the service of imagination, story-telling and fiction, as opposed to *logos*, connoting the use of language in the service of reasoning”,⁶ what Adams calls “antimyth”.⁷

A particular kind of myth is of interest here, myths of human origins and development. These are stories that designate the place of humanity in the world and predict the path its future will take. Two major mythic traditions will be examined, corresponding to the theological traditions previously explored and contained in the same literature – a Greco-Roman, poetic tradition and a Judeo-Christian, Biblical tradition. As in the previous chapter, these traditions feed directly into Western ethico-political thought. Like religion, myth plays an important, though often ignored, role in the foundational thought of the major ethico-political schools, both

¹ Powell, *A Short Introduction to Classical Myth*, 2002: 1

² Von Hendy, *The Modern Construction of Myth*, 2002: 278

³ Flood, *Political Myth: A Theoretical Introduction*, 1996: 6

⁴ Von Hendy, *The Modern Construction of Myth*, 2002: 278

⁵ Powell, *A Short Introduction to Classical Myth*, 2002: 1

⁶ Flood, *Political Myth: A Theoretical Introduction*, 1996: 6

⁷ Adams, *The Philosophy of the Literary Symbolic*, 1983: 329

traditional and alternative. “Not even Thucydides”, as Dowden says, “seems to know the difference between myth and history”, and “not even he challenges the basic historicity of myth”.⁸ This is seen, he argues, by his invoking the traditional myth of the foundation of Greece (which overlaps with Judeo-Christian myth):

Before the Trojan War Hellas [Greece] clearly did nothing jointly: in my opinion, it did not yet have this name as a whole: before Hellen [‘Greek’] son of Deukalion [=Noah] this name did not exist at all....⁹

It is also evident, Dowden continues, from his treatment of Homer. “Thucydides’ Homer”, he says, “is rather a documentary writer too”¹⁰: “There is no reason to be distrustful...one must accept that this expedition [the Trojan War] was the greatest hitherto....”¹¹ Plato, as Powell points out, “was famous for his *mythoi*”,¹² and Clay calls him a “philosophical devotee of myth (*philomythos* as *philosophos*)”.¹³ Plato invokes a number of the traditional stories of the poets in his dialogues, including the ‘Myth of the Metals’ (creation myth) and ‘Myth of Er’ (account of the afterlife), in the *Republic*.¹⁴ Even Protagoras, as recorded by Plato, invokes Greek myth in his discussion with Socrates in the *Protagoras*, namely the Prometheus legend “describing how Prometheus and Epimetheus meted out different faculties to the creatures of the world”.¹⁵ Aquinas, being a Christian monk and theologian, naturally refers to a variety of Judeo-Christian myths. Like Thucydides, Machiavelli blends myth and history, presenting a number of mythic figures as historic personages, including Moses, Cyrus, Romulus and Theseus, passing “over in silence”, as Palmer says, “the miraculous or mythical elements in the ancient reports of Cyrus, and Romulus’s being weaned by a she-wolf, and Theseus’s slaying of the Minotaur.”¹⁶ Hobbes refers to a number of the traditional stories, including the story of The Fall and that of Abraham

⁸ Dowden, *The Uses of Greek Mythology*, 1992: 46–7

⁹ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* I.3

¹⁰ Dowden, *The Uses of Greek Mythology*, 1992: 47

¹¹ Thucydides, *History* 1.10.3, from Dowden, *The Uses of Greek Mythology*, 1992: 47

¹² Powell, *A Short Introduction to Classical Myth*, 2002: 11

¹³ Clay, ‘Plato *Philomythos*’, 2007: 211

¹⁴ Plato, *Republic* 414–5, 614–21. Other examples include his account of the final judgement of the soul after death in the *Gorgias* (523), and the myth of the heralds in the *Statesman* (271).

¹⁵ Plato, *Protagoras* 321–3; Powell, *A Short Introduction to Classical Myth*, 2002: 8

¹⁶ Palmer, *Masters and Slaves*, 2001: 81–2

and Isaac as though they were historic fact.¹⁷ Locke also references myths of *Genesis*, such as the story of Cain and Able, and, like Plato, according to Bluhm, “communicated in the metaphor and allegory of a political myth”.¹⁸ Nietzsche deals with Greek myth at length in his *The Birth of Tragedy*, where he makes extensive use of the categories ‘Apollian’ and ‘Dionysian’, named for the Greek gods Apollo and Dionysus. However, while both traditional and alternative thinkers make use of myth, their treatment of myth is radically different. This centres on the twofold definition of myth, as a “traditional story”, on the one hand, and a “widely-disseminated falsehood”, on the other.¹⁹

Myths of human origins and development underlie philosophic conceptions of human nature, contributing to what Rosen calls the “‘pre-philosophical’ understanding of nature upon which philosophical understanding rests”.²⁰ Questions as to the original human condition were discussed and debated in myth long before the advent of philosophy, and philosophic conceptions of human nature echo, and even reference, their mythical predecessors. Even the very notion of an original condition, of an extra-historical natural state, has its origins in myth, as Barthes points out in an oft-cited passage:

What the world supplies to myth is an historical reality, defined, even if this goes back quite a while, by the way in which men have produced or used it; and what myth gives in return is a *natural* image of this reality.... A conjuring trick has taken place; it has turned reality inside out, it has emptied it of history and has filled it with nature.²¹

An understanding of such myths is therefore necessary for an understanding of the origins of ideas about human nature:

Without an awareness of the historical development and evolution of ideas about ‘nature’ – in all its varied senses – ...naturalistic arguments...can be easily pulled apart by those...who are aware

¹⁷ Hobbes, *Leviathan* XII; *De Homine* 56; *The Questions Concerning Liberty, Necessity and Chance* 102–3; Johnson, *Thucydides, Hobbes and the Interpretation of Realism*, 1993: 83–4

¹⁸ Bluhm, *Theories of the Political System*, 1971: 330

¹⁹ Von Hendy, *The Modern Construction of Myth*, 2002: 278

²⁰ Quoted in Rengger, *Political Theory, Modernity and Postmodernity: Beyond Enlightenment and Critique*, 1995: 140–1

²¹ Barthes, *Mythologies*, 1983: 142–3; Doniger, *The Implied Spider: Politics and Theology in Myth*, 1998: 101

of this history and of the aprioras and discontinuities within it, that contemporary naturalisms have often ignored.²²

Since questions of human nature are central to questions of ethics and politics, such myths also underlie moral and political thought.

4.2 Traditional and Alternative Approaches to Myth

Traditional ethico-political thinkers employ the latter definition of myth in distinguishing between *mythos* and *logos*, not the former, employing traditional narratives supposedly in the service of truth but referring to these as *logoi*. Thucydides, despite his largely unquestioned acceptance of Homer, considers the evidence for his own account as

better...than that of the poets, who exaggerate the importance of their themes, or of the prose chroniclers, who are less interested in telling the truth than in catching the attention of their public, whose authorities cannot be checked, and whose subject-matter, owing to the passages of time, is mostly lost in the unreliable streams of myth.²³

“Plato” too, as Powell says, “distinguished *mythos* from *logos*, the one having a greater claim to the truth than the other”²⁴: “[*Mythos*] as a general rule, is false [*pseudos*]”.²⁵ Yet Plato, Powell continues, “was famous for his *mythoi*, which he seems to have viewed as vehicles complementary to *logos* in the expression of truth.”²⁶ In the *Gorgias*, for instance, the Platonic Socrates offers a ‘traditional tale’ in which he “invokes gods and the other world” but denies that this is a *mythos*, claiming it instead as a *logos*: “Listen now to a fine *logos*, which you will regard as a *mythos*, I imagine, but I as an actual *logos*. What I am about to tell you I mean to offer as the truth [*alethe*].”²⁷ For Plato then, the distinction between myth and inquiry is epistemic, not stylistic. The implication is that there is a ‘true’ account, which can be attained through language, regardless of its form. This is reinforced by Aristotle, who says that “the writings of Herodotus

²² Rengger, *Political Theory, Modernity and Postmodernity: Beyond Enlightenment and Critique*, 1995: 131–2

²³ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* I.21

²⁴ Powell, *A Short Introduction to Classical Myth*, 2002: 11

²⁵ Plato, *Republic* 377; Dowden, *The Uses of Greek Mythology*, 1992: 47–8

²⁶ Powell, *A Short Introduction to Classical Myth*, 2002: 11

²⁷ Plato, *Gorgias* 523; Powell, *A Short Introduction to Classical Myth*, 2002: 11–2

could be put into verse and yet would still be a kind of history, whether written in meter or not.”²⁸ Later ethico-political theorists echo this, including Hobbes, who argues that through language “humans are capable of discovering general truths and...of uttering absurdities.”²⁹ For traditional thinkers, while myth is relative to certain peoples, places and times, inquiry can reveal general and necessary truths. This is consistent, then, with the epistemological claims of the theoretical mode of thought.

Alternative ethico-political thinkers, on the other hand, distinguish between *mythos* and *logos* on the basis of its form, whether narrative or analytic, rather than in terms of its truth or untruth. Protagoras, in Plato’s dialogue by that name, offers to present his arguments *either* as a *mythos* or a *logos*: “...shall I...put my demonstration in the form of a *mythos*, or of a *logos*?” When told to proceed as he pleases, he presents a traditional tale invoking gods and the like, which he calls a *mythos*: “I fancy the more agreeable way is for me to tell you a *mythos*.”³⁰ Later, however, he presents an analytic account, which he calls a *logos*: “On this point...I shall give you a *logos* instead of a *mythos*.”³¹ Here the distinction between myth and inquiry is purely stylistic, and not epistemological. The implication is that myth is as true as inquiry, that inquiry is no better than myth from an epistemological point of view, man being “the measure of all things”. The idea that inquiry is no truer than myth is made explicit by Nietzsche. When we enquire into the nature of things, he says, “we act once more as we have always acted: mythologically”.³² For him, as Von Hendy points out, “both the past and the physical world, the objects of history and science, are matters of mythopoetic perspective”.³³ For him, truth itself is a myth,

a mobile army of metaphors, metonyms and anthropomorphisms...which have been enhanced...poetically and rhetorically, and which after long use seem firm, canonical and obligatory to people: truths are illusions the illusory nature of which has been forgotten; metaphors which are worn out and lack sensuous power, coins which have lost their pictures and now function only as metal.³⁴

²⁸ Aristotle, *Poetics* 1451

²⁹ Kavka, *Hobbesian Moral and Political Theory*, 1986: 30

³⁰ Plato, *Protagoras* 320

³¹ Plato, *Protagoras* 324

³² Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* 21

³³ Von Hendy, *The Modern Construction of Myth*, 2002: 75

³⁴ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*

For the opponents of traditional thought, *logoi* and *mythoi* alike pertain only to certain people, places and times, according to their particular beliefs and values, which are a product of their place in time and space. This is consistent, then, with the negative epistemological position adopted by alternative, anti-theoretical thinkers.

The tension between *logos* and *mythos*, between those who employ myths as theories and those who reduce theory to myth, is yet another example of the conflict between *logos* and *praxis*. This is because *mythos* is a product of *praxis*, of the customs, habits and traditions of certain peoples, places and times. So the conflict of “myth and antimyth”³⁵ is another manifestation of the conflict of theory and practise, which is at the heart of the conflict of theory and antitheory. The traditional subjection of myth to theory is consistent, then, with its subject of theory to practise. The alternative subjection of theory to myth is consistent with its subjection of theory to practise.

4.3 Myth, Might and Right

Questions of might and right are central to myths of human progress in both Judeo-Christian and Greco-Roman mythical traditions. The tension between power in the physical/political sense, on the one hand, and justice in rational/moral terms, on the other, is one of the most common themes in myth. “Here”, as Greene says, “is a conflict of principles, the physical and the moral, which is of the essence of tragedy”,³⁶ and the defining feature of tragedy, we learn from Aristotle, is “*mythos*”.³⁷ While this “conflict of principles” is a virtually universal feature of myths of human origins and progress, such myths differ as to the relationship between power and justice they portray. Some ascribe priority to power over justice, others subordinate power to justice. There are myths of might and myths of right. As elsewhere, this debate plays out in a number of sub-debates. In this case, this is between myths of descent and ascent (Detienne, Powell),³⁸ between older and newer mythical trends, and between “ideological” and “utopian” myths (Manheim, Sorel, Von Hendy).³⁹

³⁵ Adams, *The Philosophy of the Literary Symbolic*, 1983: 329

³⁶ Greene, *Moirai: Fate, Good and Evil*, 1968: 6

³⁷ Aristotle, *Poetics* 1450

³⁸ Detienne, *Between Beasts and Gods*, 1981: 215-28; Powell, *Classical Myth*, 2009: 110-4

³⁹ Manheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, 1929: 173-6; Sorel, *Reflections on Violence*, 1950: 48, 57-8; Von Hendy, *The Modern Construction of Myth*, 2002: 282-5

4.3.1 Myth, Might and Right: Ascent versus Descent

Myths of human history may be divided into two basic narratives. The first is a story of moral and social degeneration, from a past age of peace and probity to a present age of war and wrong, and to a future still worse. The second is a story of man's moral and social improvement, from savagery to civilisation, brutality to morality, and of a better life to come. Powell summarises these contrasting mythical traditions:

Ancient myth usually depicts early human beings as having lived in a paradise that is now lost, a biblical Eden. The Greeks (and Mesopotamians) also told stories of a better time in the remote past..., but as Aeschylus tells it, nothing of the kind was true. Early human beings were rude, witless and savage.⁴⁰

The two sides of this “twofold tradition” in “mythical discourse”, as Marcel Detienne says in his *Between Beasts and Gods*, “represent inverse orientations” of human development, with “two symmetrical starting-points” (“juxtaposed antithetical symmetries”, as Von Hendy calls them). The first begins “at the ‘top’”, with God, from which man descends toward the level of the beasts. The second begins “at the ‘bottom’”, among the beasts, from which man ascends toward God.⁴¹

4.3.2 Myth, Might and Right: Old versus New

As with theologies of might and right, myths of might constitute the older orthodoxy, myths of right a revisionist movement, in both the Judeo-Christian and Greco-Roman mythical traditions. Again, the former are embodied in the Old and New Testament respectively, the latter, in Epic and Tragic Greek poetry respectively. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, the myth of descent may be identified with the story of the Fall, while the myth of ascent is contained in the

⁴⁰ Powell, *Classical Myth*, 2009: 113; see also Greene, *Moira: Fate, Good and Evil*, 1968: 5–6; Vernant, ‘The Myth of Prometheus’, 1981: 43–56

⁴¹ Detienne, *Between Beasts and Gods*, 1981: 215–28; Powell, *Classical Myth*, 2009: 110–4; Von Hendy, *The Modern Construction of Myth*, 2002: 282–5

Messianic stories. The Book of Genesis tells of the decline of man from an Age of Innocence in Eden, to “knowledge of good and evil”, expulsion and moral degeneration. Life in Eden was a life entirely without evil, without even knowledge of evil. Upon eating of the forbidden fruit, of the “tree of knowledge of good and evil”, man becomes aware, and capable, of evil. Cain kills Able, signifying the elevation of violence over virtue. Humanity descends into iniquity: “The wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was evil continually.”⁴² The Gospels, in contrast, teach the perfectibility of man through Christ, who is the embodiment and example of human moral perfection, moral perfection in human skin. In Christ, humanity is redeemed from its past evils, saved from sin, forgiven.⁴³ The Revelation of St John projects this upward trend into the future, telling of a coming end to evil, embodied in the foretold destruction of Satan and the coming of God’s Kingdom, the creation of paradise on earth. Right will reign, the mighty will fall, and all the kingdoms of the world. The “home of God” will be “among mortals”:

He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes. Death will be no more; mourning and crying and pain will be no more, for the first things have passed away.⁴⁴

In Greco-Roman mythology, the former is told in the myth of the metals, the latter, in the Prometheus legends. The Epic poets describe the decline of man from a Golden Age of peace, justice and respect to the present Iron Age of “unending warfare” and “hatred”, and of an age still worse to come:

Trusting in force, they will raid and plunder each other’s dominions. The faithful will win no regard, nor even the just or the honest; only the cynical doer of evil will win the world’s admiration, he who thinks might makes right, whose heart is empty of scruple.⁴⁵

“Might, as Lefkowitz says, “will make right”; force, violence and wrongdoing will rule the world;⁴⁶ “there will be no respite from evil”.⁴⁷ The Tragic poets and their inheritors increasingly

⁴² *Genesis* 1, 3, 6, 17

⁴³ 1 *John* 11–4; *Matthew* 5-6, 10–1; *Romans* 1–5

⁴⁴ *Revelation* 19–22

⁴⁵ Hesiod, *Works and Days* 110–90, 180–90

came to tell a different story, of the progression of humanity, from barbarism to civilisation, brutality to morality. Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound* has the Titan bestowing on humanity the intellectual powers that distinguish it from the animals, while Protagoras' adaption of the Prometheus legend makes "justice [*dike*] and respect [*aidos*]" the centerpiece of Prometheus' gifts.⁴⁸ This trend is summarised in Moschion's myth:

There was once a time when the life of men resembled that of the beasts. ... Law was of small account, and violence shared the throne of Zeus. But when time...wrought a change in mortal life...men turned their lives from savage ways to civilised.⁴⁹

4.3.3 Myth, Might and Right:

Ideological and Utopian Myth

Like the competing religious doctrines of the previous section, these competing mythical discourses have opposite implications for social and political practise. The first, which looks back to an idyllic past and forward to a terrible future, suggests a need to conserve the prevailing social and political order, and resist social and political change, and its belief that human beings are inherently evil, and given to force and violence, highlights the need for authority, and enforcement of justice, and is therefore conservative in its implications. The second, which looks forward to a better future, and back to a ugly past, suggests a need to transcend the prevailing order, and promote social change, and its belief that humanity is essentially good, given to justice and capable of moral progress, allows for the possibility that peace can prevail without power, that power is an impediment to justice, and so is progressive in its implications. This corresponds to a distinction that Von Hendy makes, drawing on the thought of Sorel and Mannheim, between "ideological" and "utopian" myths. These correspond, he says, to the two overarching modes of "social behaviour", namely "the conservative and radical or the static and dynamic". Ideological myth "represents conservative stasis", the "stasis of the status quo", and works to idealise prevailing political realities. In its utopian form, however, myth "takes on a revolutionary function", and works to realise moral ideals. In short, "ideologues...preserve the status quo, but

⁴⁶ Lefkowitz, *Greek Gods, Human Lives*, 2003: 26–8

⁴⁷ Hesiod, *Works and Days* 200–1

⁴⁸ Aeschylus, *Prometheus Bound* 450–500; Plato, *Protagoras* 322–3.

⁴⁹ Moschion, fragment 6

utopians struggle to transform it”. These two types of myth, he says, are in “dialectical motion” with one another.⁵⁰ The two sides of this dialectic form part of the wider dialectic of might and right, as embodied in the theories of Realism and Idealism, in the writings of their major historical figures. They feed directly into the theories’ competing conceptions of human nature, as essentially wicked, vicious and violent, in the former, and as essentially good, peaceful and propitious, in the latter.

4.4 Realist, Idealist and Relativist Mythology

Like the theological standpoints to which they correspond, these opposite mythological positions are each adopted by one or the other of the Grand Theories, and underlie their respective conceptions of human nature. Realist mythology traces the decline of humanity, in accordance with the early orthodoxy in each of the major Western mythical traditions. Idealist mythology traces an upward trajectory of human development, in line with later versions of the myths, in each of the traditions.

In line with its theological perspective, Realism represents the older mythic tradition, embodied in Homeric poetry and the Old Testament. The story of ‘descent’ or ‘The Fall’ of humanity is present in the work of Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes, and a number of their inheritors, and feeds into their negative conception of human nature. In Thucydides, “knowledge of men” is listed alongside “opinion of the gods”, belying its mythical origins, namely in Epic poetry, to which he makes numerous references.⁵¹ This forms part of the rationale for his belief that “cities and individuals alike, all are by nature disposed to do wrong”, naturally “insubordinate to the idea of justice”, and instinctively seek to “rule over others”, principally through force, violence and intimidation.⁵² It is also behind his rejection of the idea of human progress, inherent in his belief that the Peloponnesian War would be a ‘war for all time’, and the Corcyraen *stasis* the civil equivalent. These events, he says, “(human nature being what it is) will, at some time or other and in much the same ways, be repeated in the future.”⁵³ Machiavelli again

⁵⁰ Von Hendy, *The Modern Construction of Myth*, 2002: 278-303; Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, 1936: 173-6

⁵¹ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* V.105

⁵² *ibid* I.76; III.45, 84; V.105

⁵³ *ibid* I.22; I.1; III.82:

rejects New-Testament thought, invoking his usual blend of Classical and Old-Testament thinking to portray human beings as inherently corrupt, and incapable of moral improvement. This is evident in his adaption of the story of The Fall in his poem *Of Ambition*:

Hardly had God made the stars, the heaven, the light, the elements, and man...and from Paradise had banished Adam with his wife for their tasting of the apple, when...a hidden power which sustains itself in the heavens,...to man's nature by no means friendly to deprive us of the peace and to set us at war, to take away from us all quiet and good, sent two Furies to dwell on the earth.⁵⁴

Hobbes similarly draws heavily on Old-Testament scripture to support his view that the wicked form “the greater part of mankind”, and that human beings are naturally inclined to “contention, enmity and war”.⁵⁵ Spinoza, echoing Machiavelli and Hobbes, says that “there will be vices as long as there are human beings”, a view that, according to Strauss, represents a “wholesale rejection of belief in the Messianic Age”.⁵⁶

Idealism, in line with its theological standpoint, represents the newer mythical tradition of Classical poetry and the New Testament. Myths of ascent and redemption permeate the writings of Plato, Aquinas and Locke, and account, in part, for their positive conception of human nature. Plato inverts Hesiod's Myth of the Metals to allow for a return to the Golden Age, in his own version of utopia, Kalipolis. He also rejects the Epic conception of man as essentially flawed, advancing an alternative myth, which teaches that men are always good and denies the existence of evil.⁵⁷ Aristotle follows Plato, in saying that “in all things, men do only what they think right”, and “no one is evil intentionally”. Human beings, he argues, are moral by definition, such that anyone who is incapable of morality is not strictly human.⁵⁸ Blending Aristotelian and Christian moral thinking, St Aquinas argues that moral virtue is instilled in men by God, and is known through faith and reason, and that evil exists only by accident, or mistake, or as a kind of spiritual

In the various cities these revolutions were the cause of many calamities – as happens and always will happen while human nature is what it is, though there may be different degrees of savagery, and, as different circumstances arise, the general rules will admit of some variety.

Likewise the *History* itself was meant for all times: “My work is not a piece of writing designed to meet the taste of an immediate public, but was done to last for ever.” (I.22)

⁵⁴ Machiavelli, *Of Ambition*

⁵⁵ Hobbes, *Leviathan* XIII

⁵⁶ Strauss, ‘Niccolo Machiavelli’, 1987: 299

⁵⁷ Plato, *Republic* 491

⁵⁸ Aristotle, *Politics* I.2

defect: “Evil...is not natural”.⁵⁹ Hence Aquinas’ famous dictum, “grace does not destroy nature, but perfects it”.⁶⁰ For him, all nature moves toward perfection, a belief which stems from his belief in a morally-perfect but still-unfolding God:

It is not fitting that the supreme goodness of God should produce things without growing them toward perfection.... It belongs to the divine goodness, as it brought things into existence, so to lead them to their end.⁶¹

Locke invokes similar thinking, arguing that human beings are innately moral, and will naturally act to uphold moral laws, again in accordance with New Testament teachings.⁶² Locke’s ‘*ius naturalis*’ and moral law of nature stems from an “*ius creationis*” and divine moral law, as Ayers points out.⁶³ For Locke, the “law of nature” and “rule...of reason” is the “measure God has set to the actions of men”, which teaches them to be just. Therefore, he continues, anyone

who having renounced reason, the common rule and measure God hath given to mankind, hath, by the unjust violence and slaughter he hath committed upon one, declared war against all mankind, and therefore may be destroyed as a *lion* or *tyger*, one of those wild savage beasts, with whom men can have no society and security: and upon this is grounded that great law of nature, *Whoso sheddeth man’s blood, by man shall his blood be shed*.⁶⁴

In contrast, the antitheorist opponents of the Grand Theories deny the supremacy of either mythological standpoint, and either of the paths of human development they chart. Instead, it plots a middle road between them, denying that either one represents the path of humanity as a whole, but allowing that each may prevail with respect to a certain form of life. For them, the question is of what form of life is associated with which mythological standpoint.

In Relativism, neither mythic tradition takes precedence; instead, both are represented. Protagoras’ myth presents human nature as at the same time both conflictual and cooperative, and suggests a non-linear line of development. Human beings, the story goes, “lived at first in scattered groups”, lacking technical wisdom (*sophia*), social skills and martial ability (“the art of

⁵⁹ Finnis, *Aquinas: Moral, Political and Legal Theory*, 1998 93

⁶⁰ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae*, I, 1, 8

⁶¹ *ibid* I, 103, 1

⁶² Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* 4–5

⁶³ Ayers, *Locke: Epistemology and Ontology*, 1991: 197

⁶⁴ Locke, *Second Treatise of Government* 4–8, 11

politics”, “justice [*dike*] and respect [*aidos*]”, and “the art of war”).⁶⁵ This is said to be due to the oversight of Epimetheus, who had distributed to the animals their various attributes but had left out human beings, leaving them “unclothed, unshod, unhoused and unarmed”.⁶⁶ So Prometheus stole from the gods fire and technology and bestowed them on human beings, thus providing them with the means to sustain themselves. Still lacking the ability to defend themselves, however, they “sought to save themselves by coming together and founding fortified cities, but when they gathered in communities they injured one another for want of political skill”. So Zeus, “fearing the total destruction of our race”, bestowed on them the “art of politics”, *aidos* (respect) and *dike*, thus allowing them to live together in peace, and thereby preventing their destruction.⁶⁷ The twists and turns of Protagoras’ myth suggest that early human moral and political development was not a straight line, either ‘upward’ or ‘downward’, but a wavering one. Elsewhere, the mythological dualism espoused by the Relativist is directly linked to the struggle between masters and slaves. Callicles’ story in the *Gorgias*, which describes the early development of man, reads much like a myth. In it, he presents both sides of the traditional mythic accounts, ascent and descent, but inverts the values attached to each, presenting his account from the point of view of the strong-man immoralist, so that ‘ascent’ is seen in negative terms, ‘descent’ in positive. This accounts, in part, perhaps, for Gorgias’ two-fold account of *physis*, with its two *dikai*, *bia* and *dike* proper, as described by Untersteiner.⁶⁸ It is almost identical to Nietzsche’s narrative in the *Genealogy of Morals*, which “also has a mythic quality”.⁶⁹ In the beginning, they argue, the strong rule, and the weak are ruled, by force. Over time, however, the slaves subject the masters to moral codes, according to Callicles “by repetition of the dogma that men ought to be equal, and equality is fine and right”,⁷⁰ what Nietzsche calls “the slave revolt in morality”.⁷¹ This is equivalent to the ‘ascent’ tradition, but phrased in negative terms. “But if there arises a man sufficiently endowed by nature”, Callicles says,

⁶⁵ Plato, *Protagoras* 321–2

⁶⁶ *ibid* 321

⁶⁷ *ibid* 321–2

⁶⁸ Untersteiner, *The Sophists*, 1954: 144

⁶⁹ Bergmann, ‘Nietzsche’s Critique of Morality’, 1988: 29

⁷⁰ Plato, *Gorgias* 483–4

⁷¹ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* 260

he will shake off and break through and escape from all these trammels; he will tread underfoot our texts and spells and incantations and unnatural laws, and by an act of revolt reveal himself our master instead of our slave....⁷²

Here we have the opposite of the “slave revolt in morality”, the master’s revolt against morality. This looks very much like the moral decline described in the ‘descent’ tradition, but phrased, conversely, in positive terms.

4.4.1 Realist, Idealist and Relativist Mythology:

Conservatism and Radicalism

The opposing ideological positions of the Grand Theories are also inherent in the mythic traditions they represent. The older tradition of Descent or The Fall, represented by the founders of the Realist school, the older orthodoxy in ethics and politics, has conservative implications. Conversely, the newer tradition of Ascent or Redemption, represented in the founding thought of the newer, Idealist school, has radical implications. As has already been discussed, the former, which holds that the future will be worse than the past, suggesting the need to preserve the prevailing order, is an ‘ideological myth’, which represents the “stasis of the status quo”, whereas the latter, which holds that the future will be better than the past, implying that the prevailing order can be improved upon, is a ‘utopian myth’, representing revolutionary progress. As has also been discussed, the respective mythic traditions represented in the Grand Theories feed into their respective conceptions of human nature, and, by extension, their conceptions of law, which are the mainstays of their respective ideological positions.

By the same token, the non-ideological or counter-ideological standpoint adopted by moral and political antitheory is consistent with its mythology. In denying the supremacy of either the older Descent/Fall or newer Ascent/Redemption traditions Relativism deprives the traditions of their claim to universality, and so deprives them of their ideological power, either conservative or radical. Moreover, in maintaining that the Grand Theories themselves amount to nothing more than myths, that the Grand Theorists did not only incorporate the mythic traditions but are actually continuations of them, antitheorists deprive the theories of their claim to greater

⁷² Plato, *Gorgias* 484

truth, and their claim to rule over practise. Finally, in incorporating both sides of the mythical tradition, the Relativist attempts to designate both sides as expressions of opposing ways of life, the first as a mythology of the strong, the second as a mythology of the weak.

Again, the question of the relationship between theory and ideology is central to the division between the Grand Theories of ethics and politics, on the one hand, and moral and political antitheory, on the other. The opposing mythologies posited by Realism and Idealism are supposed, by their proponents, to be *logoi* first and *mythoi* second. While their accounts take the form of traditional stories, their lessons are supposed to be a product of reasoned inquiry, and not of the imagination, as in poetry and fiction. This makes them more than mere myths, and applicable not only to the peoples in which the traditions arise, but generally, as truth. This means that their ideological implications, whether conservative or radical, are the outcome of the theoretical process, and not mere myths, invented to serve whatever ideology they espouse. For their opponents, in contrast, the Grand Theories are *mythoi* through and through. In this view, when the theories take the form of the myth, they show themselves as they actually are. This makes not only the mythic aspects of the theories, but the theories themselves, no more than stories, and applicable only to the peoples, places in times in which they appear. The myths themselves are thought to have been dreamed-up with a view to their ideological implications, the opposite traditions corresponding to opposite modes of social existence.

4.4.2 Realist, Idealist and Relativist Mythology:

Triad, Dyad and Dialectic

The distinction between traditional and alternative approaches to political mythology corresponds to the dialectic described by Adams, “the dialectic of myth and antimyth”, a dialectic that “does not provide for Hegelian synthesis, but for the constantly renewed conflict of Heraclitus”.⁷³ Meanwhile, the major division in the mythic traditions, between older and newer traditions, and myths of ascent and descent, corresponds to the dialectic described by Mannheim, arising from the conflict between ideological and utopian myths. This, in turn, corresponds to the master-slave dialectic, in the struggle between those who seek to “preserve the status quo” and

⁷³ Adams, *The Philosophy of the Literary Symbolic*, 1983: 329; Heraclitus said that “all things come to pass through conflict” and “in accordance with conflict”, and that “war is the father of all and the king of all”. (fragments LXXV, LXXXII, LXXXIII)

those who “struggle to transform it”.⁷⁴ The opposing myths sponsored by Realism and Idealism form, as elsewhere, the first stage of the dialectic of might and right in myth (thesis-antithesis), representing each side of the mythological and ideological divide. The dual mythical tradition espoused by Relativism again forms the second stage of that dialectic (synthesis), incorporating both sides of the mythological divide and the ideological divide, which it reduces to master and slave morality. This is the dialectic of might and right in myth, and related dialectics.

4.5 The Mythology of Might and Right

Here, then, is the mythology of might and right, the dialectic of might and right in myth, and the fourth chapter. To summarise: The traditional mode of thought distinguishes sharply between theory and myth, “the one having a greater claim to truth than the other”.⁷⁵ In this view, theory, unlike myth, can transcend practise. The alternative way of thinking maintains that theory and myth are one, as there is no truth on which to distinguish such claims. In this view, theory, like myth, is a product of local conditions, and the practises of particular people. Central to the fundamental questions of mythology is the question of might versus right. These include the question of ascent versus descent, old versus new mythical traditions and ideological and utopian myths. Realism and Idealism represent each of these mythic traditions, each in accordance with their respective ideological positions: Realism represents the older myths of descent, and is an ideological myth, in accordance with its conservative ideology; Idealism represents the newer, ascent tradition, and is an utopian myth, in line with its radical ideology. Relativism denies the supremacy of either side, but incorporates elements of both sides. It maintains that the earlier, descent tradition represents a myth of the masters, and that the later, ascent tradition a myth of the slaves. In the traditional view, the conflict between their opposing mytho-naturalistic standpoints is a source of the struggle between conservative and radical ideologies. In the alternative view, the mythic traditions grow out of the ideologies, and the opposing modes of social existence they represent. The mythological conflict of the Grand Theories, and their compromise in moral and political antitheory, form the dialectic of might and right in myth, corresponding to the Lefebvreian, intellectual dialectic, and also to the conflict between mastery and slavery that

⁷⁴ Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, 1936: 173-6; Von Hendy, *The Modern Construction of Myth*, 2002: 278-303

⁷⁵ Powell, *A Short Introduction to Classical Myth*, 2002: 11

underpins the master-slave dialectic. This brings to a close the fourth chapter, and the second third of this second part, comprising the pre-philosophical bases of this dialectic of might and right. It brings us at last to the first-philosophical bases of that dialectic, and the fifth and final chapter.

5

C H A P T E R F I V E THE METAPHYSICS OF MIGHT AND RIGHT

5.1 Theory and Reality

Metaphysics is the study of reality or being (*ontos*). Reality is the sum of existent entities or ‘beings’ (*onta*),¹ and the reality posited by given a metaphysical theory depends upon the nature of its ontological postulates. The theory of reality is central to theory generally. This is due largely to the interconnectedness of metaphysics, ontology and epistemology. Theory may be understood as the search for truth, and knowledge is comprehension of the truth. Truth is about reality, about what really is or the way things really are: “And so we might say that truth depends on the world.”² As has been said, for every truth there is some entity, physical or mental, that makes it true,³ the type of which is related to the epistemological standpoint one adopts.⁴ The entities that make up reality (whatever form they/it might take) are the source of truth and the objects of knowledge. As Plato says, “what completely is, is completely an object of knowledge; and what in no way is, is not an object of knowledge at all.”⁵ What ‘completely is’ is what exists in and of itself: unconditional things or ‘things-in-themselves’. Such things are “definite” and “determinate”, so that there can be “stable definitions” of them, and so truth and knowledge.⁶ In contrast to this “‘true world’ of ‘being’” is the “‘apparent world’ of change, becoming, creation and destruction, struggle and suffering, and birth and death.”⁷ “Perceptible things and characteristics are always in flux”, so there can be no “stable definitions of them to serve as

¹ Putman, *Reason, Truth and History*, 1981: 49

² Merricks, *Truth and Ontology*, 2007: xiii

³ *ibid*

⁴ Gunnell, *The Orders of Discourse: Philosophy, Social Science, and Politics*, 1998: 121

⁵ Plato, *Republic* 476–7

⁶ Reeve, Editor’s Introduction to Plato, *Republic* [2004: xv]

⁷ Schacht, *Nietzsche*, 1983: 158

correct answers to...questions”.⁸ This means that appearances cannot, in themselves, be the source of truth and knowledge, but only insofar as they represent actualities.

As well as being central to theory in general, the theory of reality is also central to the theory of politics and ethics more-specifically. Metaphysics provides the “basic axioms and assumptions” for political theory, and the kind of metaphysics a theorist adopts determines, in many respects, “the kind of political theory he writes”.⁹ For one, the theory of reality is central to the theory of nature, which is at the heart of ethical-political theory, as discussed in the first chapter. As was discussed previously, nature is closely related to reality, and convention to appearance. The natural is seen as either one in the same as, or a subtype of, the real, while the conventional is considered as part or parcel of the apparent.¹⁰ Likewise the laws of nature may be understood as the same as, or derived from, the laws of reality. For another, the theory of reality has important interconnections with theology, which has its own implications for nature-theory, and so for ethics and politics, as discussed in chapter three. God and reality are similarly intertwined. As was also mentioned earlier, being may derive from God, as the Creator of things, or may be equated with God (pantheism). At the same time, God may also be seen as a special kind of being, and as an archetype of being as a whole: the “‘being’ *par excellence*, and even ‘being itself’”.¹¹ Similarly, the metaphysical world is sometimes equated with the supernatural world, as by Danto when he says that the metaphysical world may be variously understood as “the noumenal world, the kingdom of heaven, Nirvana, Brahma, the universe of pure forms, or what you will”.¹²

5.2 Being versus Becoming

Traditional moral and political thought is metaphysical, as it is rooted in a conception of reality and its component parts. “Philosophers”, as Schacht says, “have long exhibited a strong attachment to this notion and distinction” and “what may be called the ‘being-hypothesis’ pervades much of the history of philosophy, from the Greeks to recent times”.¹³ This is, of course,

⁸ Reeve, Editor’s Introduction to Plato, *Republic* [2004: xv]

⁹ Bluhm, *Theories of the Political System*, 1971: 13

¹⁰ Sabine, *A History of Political Theory*, 1957: 38

¹¹ Schacht, *Nietzsche*, 1983: 158

¹² Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher*, 1965: 75

¹³ Schacht, *Nietzsche*, 1983: 156–7

consistent with the epistemological and ontological standpoint of ethical-political theory. Just as appearances are understood as a reflection of reality, but not necessarily an accurate one, the apparent world of becoming is taken to be a reflection of the real world of being, but an imperfect one, being a product of human experience and so subject to human error. This is certainly the case as regards the thinkers considered directly here. Thucydides does not discuss the nature of reality as such, but a certain metaphysical standpoint pervades his entire *History*, and is central to his political views. Plato wrote at length on the subject of metaphysics, and developed an original theory of reality known as the ‘Theory of Forms’, which underpins his moral and political philosophy. Like Thucydides, Machiavelli does not discuss metaphysics as such, but bases his political theory on a certain conception of reality. Aquinas, as Finnis explains, “was keen to show the relationship between his ethics of natural law and his general theory of metaphysics and the world-order. He wished to point out the analogies running through the whole order of being.”¹⁴ Hobbes was also keen to point out such analogies, basing his moral and political philosophy on a metaphysics rooted in Galilean physics, having met and been thoroughly influenced by Galileo himself. Locke developed his own metaphysical theory, which underpinned his own moral and political views. Again, various kinds of reality are posited: “Different philosophers have conceived of the trans-phenomenal world realm or order of ‘being’ in different ways”, though “all such variations on the ‘being-hypothesis’ involve the same general sort of philosophical move.”¹⁵ These differences centre largely on the kind of ontological entities of which the realities in question are said to be comprised.

Alternative ethico-political thought is anti-metaphysical, in that it denies the existence of a ‘real world’ or ‘things-in-themselves’. Just as appearance is everything, and perception is reality, in this view, for the antitheorist there are only perceptible things, and the apparent world. The Sophists, as Woodruff says, “eschew speculation outside the human sphere” or ‘lifeworld’.¹⁶ Their reaction to “metaphysical speculation was”, as Bluhm says, “a renunciation of the questions about ultimate reality altogether”, a “denial of the validity of metaphysical enquiry” altogether. Sophists therefore “confined their attention to the world of phenomena....”¹⁷ Likewise, for Nietzsche too, there is only

¹⁴ Finnis, *Nature Law and Natural Rights*, 1980: 35

¹⁵ Schacht, *Nietzsche*, 1983: 156–7

¹⁶ Woodruff, ‘Protagoras and Gorgias: Rhetoric and Relativism’, 1999: 306

¹⁷ Bluhm, *Theories of the Political System*, 1971: 31

'this world', the world of human experience and action, and which is supposed by adherents of the metaphysical view to be *merely* apparent and *merely* phenomenal in relation to the 'other world' of 'true being'.¹⁸

Since perceptible things are always in flux, the world itself, to the extent that it 'exists' at all, exists in a constant state of flux, "always *becoming*, never *being*".¹⁹ Nothing is fixed; "everything flows".²⁰ This is the 'Theory of Flux', traced to Heraclitus,²¹ and adopted by the sophists, according to Plato,²² and by Nietzsche.²³ This is in line with the negative ontological and epistemological position of the alternative mode of thought, and also with its atheism, as Nietzsche points out: "...we godless and antimetaphysical ones...take *our* fire from a torch which a belief a thousand years old has kindled, that belief of Christ's which was also Plato's belief, that God is truth, that truth is divine...."²⁴ In a world of flux, Nietzsche argues, there can be no 'things-in-themselves' ("Continual transition forbids us to speak of 'individuals.'"²⁵) and no truth without relativistic qualification ("Everything has become: there are no eternal facts, just as there are no absolute truths."²⁶) As Woodruff says, "if 'is' drops out of the picture, so must truth and knowledge".²⁷

Again, these opposing modes of thought are associated with opposite conceptions of the relationship between theory and practise; in this case, between the speculative philosophy of reality, and the practical philosophy of ethics and politics. Traditional moral and political thought assumes that metaphysical theories are developed objectively, abstracted from prevailing social and political conditions, and without thought for their ideological implications. That is, metaphysical inquiry is supposed to be a neutral description of reality at large, which gives rise to

¹⁸ Schacht, *Nietzsche*, 1983: 157

¹⁹ Reeve, Editor's Introduction to Plato, *Republic* [2004: xv]

²⁰ Heraclitus, fragment LI

²¹ "Graspings: wholes and not wholes, convergent divergent, consonant dissonant, all things one and from one all things." Heraclitus, fragment CXXIV

²² *Theaetetus* 152–5; Reeve, Editor's Introduction to Plato, *Republic* [2004: xv]:

In the *Theaetetus*, he argues that Protagoras' claim that 'man is the measure of all things' presupposes that the world is in flux; in the *Cratylus*, he suggests that the theory of flux may itself be the result of projecting Protagorean relativism onto the world.

²³ "Nietzsche sees himself as an heir of Heraclitus: reality is becoming, and becoming is interpreted as struggle: *polemos pater panton*." (Tongeren, 'Nietzsche and Ethics', 2006: 397)

²⁴ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* 344

²⁵ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* 520

²⁶ Nietzsche, *Human-all-too-Human* 2

²⁷ Woodruff, 'Protagoras and Gorgias: Rhetoric and Relativism', 1999: 302–3

a certain conception of social and political reality, which in turn has certain implications for the way that social and political life ought to be. The ideological implications of a given metaphysical theory are supposed to be incidental to it, not intentional. This means that the conception of reality that is advanced, and the practical recommendations that flow from it, while not necessarily correct are at least well-intended and not deliberately deceptive, in that the former has not been skewed to fit in with the latter. For the opposite, alternative mode of thought, on the other hand, the metaphysical standpoint a theorist adopts is taken up with a view to its moral and political implications. In this view, theorists do not develop a conception of reality in isolation, on which their conception of social and political reality is based, giving rise to a certain, unbiased ideological position. Instead, it is thought that they adopt a theory of reality from within a given social and political environment, in order to shape that environment. A theorist will therefore endorse a metaphysical theory that coincides with their own views as to how political and social life ought to be, according to their place in the lifeworld, in order to reinforce their own, self-serving ideological standpoint. As Nietzsche says,

To explain how a philosopher's most remote metaphysical assertions have actually been arrived at, it is always well (and wise) to ask oneself first: what morality does it (does *he*—) aim at? I accordingly do not believe a 'drive to knowledge' to be the father of philosophy but that another drive, here as elsewhere, only employed knowledge (and false knowledge!) as a tool.²⁸

5.3 Metaphysics, Might and Right

The question of might versus right also arises out of metaphysical debate. The “conflict of principles, the physical and the moral” is central, not only to questions of human nature and the nature of God, but also to the related question of the nature of reality. Does the ‘real world’ have, as Schopenhauer says, a “moral” or “merely a physical significance”?²⁹ The implication is that, if that world has only a physical significance, then power in the physical sense, might, will likewise be real, and justice in the non-physical sense, right, will be merely apparent; whereas, if that world has a moral significance, then right will be real and might merely apparent. As ever, a

²⁸ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* 6

²⁹ Schopenhauer, *On Ethics* [1914: 195]

number of sub-questions feed into this. There is the question of the “the Real and the Ideal”,³⁰ as to the relation between subject and object, and the related question of ‘Empiricism versus Rationalism’, as to whether, by extension, the world should be understood empirically or rationally.

5.3.1 Metaphysics, Might and Right:

“The Real and the Ideal”

The question of “the Real and the Ideal” is perhaps the central debate among metaphysicians, the history of which is the subject of Schopenhauer’s *A Sketch of a History of the Doctrine of the Ideal and the Real*:

...the question as to what in our knowledge is objective, and what is subjective; in other words, what might be ascribed by us to other things, and what we must ascribe to ourselves...the relation between ideas...and the external world....³¹

This is the basis of the debate between metaphysical realism and metaphysical idealism. The former holds that reality and its components exist externally, and independent of the mental. It posits a “mind-independent world” of ‘mind-independent’, physical objects,³² in line with the ‘common-sense’ or “folk theory” understanding of reality,³³ and with that of the physical sciences. It is the “description of the world...as that of common-sense objects”, the world of everyday things.³⁴ The latter has it that reality exists, at least in part, internally, and dependent on mental. It holds, as Marcuse says, that “man’s existence centres in his head, i.e. in Thought, inspired by which he builds up the world of reality”.³⁵ It posits a “mind-dependent world” of ‘mind-dependent’ or mental objects,³⁶ in line with certain spiritual teachings, and certain forms of psychology. The political and ethical implications of this, in terms of the relationship between might and right, are clear. If the ‘real’ is equated with the physical, then the world has “merely a

³⁰ Schopenhauer, *A Sketch of the History of the Doctrine of the Ideal and the Real* [1914: 1]

³¹ *ibid*

³² Hirst, ‘Realism’, 1967: 77

³³ Devitt, *Realism and Truth*, 1984: 61

³⁴ *ibid*: 13-5, 47

³⁵ Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*, 1955: 5

³⁶ Hirst, ‘Realism’, 1967: 77

physical significance”,³⁷ whereas if the real is equated with the mental, if the ideal is real, then, because the moral derives from ‘the mental’ or ‘ideal’, the world has “a moral...significance”.³⁸ This also has important implications for questions of human nature, which are at the heart of ethical-political discourse. In particular, the question of ‘the real versus the ideal’ has ramifications for the question of “intellect versus instinct”, considered in our first chapter. The view that the world exists in purely physical terms, independent of the mental, is consistent with a conception of human nature in which man’s physical nature predominates over the rational. In contrast, the belief that the world is a rational construction, and dependent on the mental, is in line with a rational conception of human nature, in which the mind rules over the body.

5.3.2 Metaphysics, Might and Right: Empiricism versus Rationalism

The question of empiricism versus rationalism is the question of the proper relationship between metaphysics and epistemology, as to whether the world should be understood empirically or rationally. This is the basis of the distinction between a more-strictly scientific approach, which deals with facts revealed through observation, and a philosophic approach in the narrower sense, which deals with ideas revealed through abstract thought. This opposition arises from the questions just discussed. If ‘what is’ is ‘what exists externally’, then “saying of what is, that it is” is a statement of fact, based on observation. But if ‘what is’ is “what exists which exists in a form concordant with reason”,³⁹ then to “say...what is” is to say what is rational, based on abstract thought. This debate is central to Western philosophy as a whole, representing, according to Marcuse, “not merely a clash of different philosophical schools, but a struggle for philosophy as such.”⁴⁰

³⁷ Schopenhauer, *On Ethics* [1914: 195]

³⁸ *ibid*

³⁹ Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*, 1955: 11

⁴⁰ *ibid*: 16

5.4 Realism, Idealism and Relativism on Metaphysics

Like the opposing theories of nature, law, religion and myth, considered in the preceding chapters, these theories of reality form the metaphysical component of the Grand Theories of ethics and politics. The conflicting conceptions of the metaphysical world, and of the relationship between mind and reality, are central to the conflict between politics and morality. Central to this, as always, is the conflict between power and justice, might and right. Again, this question is to whether reality is essentially physical, and therefore political, or rational, and therefore moral. As before, this question plays out in the sub-questions, “the Real and the Ideal” and ‘Empiricism versus Rationalism’.

Realists adopt a purely physical conception of reality, according to which “the world has merely a physical and no moral significance”.⁴¹ Realism equates the metaphysical world with the physical world, and the apparent with the ideal, reducing metaphysics to physics, as it were. The implication is that physical power, might, is real, and moral justice, right, merely apparent. This arises from its incorporation of realist metaphysics, and its adoption of an empirical model.

Political realism is consistent with metaphysical realism, from which it derives a number of its key precepts. It holds that the reality exists outside us, independent of the mental, as a totality of mind-independent, physical objects, and that we are directly aware of such external objects. It also holds that power and politics, understood in physical terms (as force, violence, etc.), exist in and of themselves, and that their laws, like physical laws, are universal and timeless. Power is likened to force in physics, and provides the basis for a ‘science’ of politics along the same lines as the physical sciences, based on the testimony of the senses: “The ‘power’ worldview offers the would-be social scientist...the possibility of emulating the explanatory achievements of the physicist.”⁴² At the same time, Realism holds that justice and ethics, in the moral sense, since they are not to be found in the physical world, or ascertained through observation, do not exist in any meaningful way, and therefore are not proper objects of inquiry. The only kind of justice that is real, in this view, is physical justice, law and order, from which the appearance of moral justice is thought to emanate. This belief is summarised by Clausewitz, who says that “moral force has no existence save as expressed in the state and the law”, in

⁴¹ Schopenhauer, *On Ethics* [1914: 195]

⁴² Johnson, *Thucydides, Hobbes, and the Interpretation of Realism*, 1993: 78

contrast to “physical force”, which is thought to exist in and of itself.⁴³ Hobbes’ theory, for instance, is based, according to Bluhm, on “a set of universal principles of order...conceived as analogous to the laws of physical motion, and abstracted from the empirical motions of the material world, which Hobbes thought to be the only reality.”⁴⁴ For him, “there is nothing in the world but matter in motion”, and thought is merely the interplay of physical drives, “appetites and aversions, such as hunger”, and the “experience of the effects of various [physical] objects on individuals. Man’s senses are activated when they are moved by outward objects....”⁴⁵ This corresponds to the Realist conception of human nature, according to which “man’s nature derives from the purely physical”.⁴⁶ Thucydides, for example, “adopted without qualification the...theory of a human nature which, like physical nature, is subject to determinant law and which can be known through observation....”⁴⁷ This accounts for the Realist preference for an inductive or empirical, ‘scientific’ model, which in politics involves the study of current and historical political and military events. Realists, and especially Thucydides and Machiavelli, make extensive use of such a model. Thucydides’ only known work is his *History of the Peloponnesian War*, and he is often considered one of the inventors of the scientific method of historical analysis.⁴⁸ His researches, he says, are based on his own observations, the reports of others of what they saw or heard, or reconstructions of what likely took place,⁴⁹ in contrast to the hypothetical examples of Plato. Machiavelli bases his political doctrines almost entirely on the testimony of history, and especially the history of Rome.

Idealists take a moral view of reality, according to which the world has “a moral” and not “merely a physical significance”. They equate the metaphysical world with the ideal world, the apparent with the perceived. The implication is that moral justice, or justice as right, is real (hence ‘moral realism’), and physical power, power as might, is only apparent. Idealism equates the metaphysical world with the ideal world, and the apparent with the perceived; it “denies to the given the dignity of the real”.⁵⁰ “‘Real’ comes to mean not everything that actually exists (this

⁴³ Clausewitz, *On War* 1.2

⁴⁴ Bluhm, *Theories of the Political System*, 1971: 13

⁴⁵ Johnson, *Thucydides, Hobbes, and the Interpretation of Realism*, 1993: 78

⁴⁶ *ibid*

⁴⁷ Bluhm, *Theories of the Political System*, 1971: 31–2

⁴⁸ Finley, Editors Introduction to Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* [1972: 9–11]

⁴⁹ Thucydides, *History of the Peloponnesian War* I.20–2

⁵⁰ Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*, 1955: 5

should rather be called appearance), but that which exists in a form concordant with reason.”⁵¹
This arises from the adoption of idealist metaphysics and a deductive method of research.

Like political realism, political idealism is consistent with its metaphysical counterpart, metaphysical idealism, “the doctrine that the external world must be understood through consciousness”,⁵² from which it derives certain central tenets. It holds that ‘reality’ exists within us, in thought and reason, as a totality of mental objects (ideas, qualities, categories, etc.). It holds that ethics and justice, understood in rational and moral terms, are unconditional, that their laws are eternal and immutable.⁵³ This provides the basis for a philosophy of morals, rooted in abstract reason. Ancient and modern Idealists alike “opposed the empiricist claim that knowledge of the world could only be gained by experience. On the contrary”, they claim that “experience could only be made sense of by drawing on the categories of thought”. As such, they hold that “moral experience” must be understood “in relation to an ideal of the good...such as equality or justice....”⁵⁴ Plato, for instance, argues that “Ideas or Forms are the only truly real things that there are, and the only things that can be known. For they are permanent and unchanging....”⁵⁵ There is therefore a form or idea of justice, knowable through reason, which is equivalent to ethical rightness in general: “the good”, “the idea of the good”, etc, etc. Justice, he holds, “is self-subsisting” Ideas, he continues, “escape the eyes of the body. Ideas are ‘visible’ only to the eye of the mind, and the mind as mind perceives nothing but ideas.”⁵⁶ The observed object, in contrast, according to Plato, is a projection of the forms, like the shadows on the cave-wall in his Allegory of the Cave.⁵⁷ For him, the senses are “inaccurate witnesses”; “true existence is revealed only in thought.”⁵⁸ Aquinas, the godfather of Christian metaphysical-idealism, equates the real with the

⁵¹ *ibid*: 11

⁵² *Oxford Dictionary of Politics*

⁵³ “Unless man possesses concepts and principles that denote universally valid conditions and norms, his thought cannot claim to govern reality....” (Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*, 1955: 11)

⁵⁴ *Oxford Dictionary of Politics*

⁵⁵ Bluhm, *Theories of the Political System*, 1971: 76

⁵⁶ Strauss, ‘Plato’, 1987: 51

⁵⁷ Plato, *Republic* 514–20

⁵⁸ Plato, *Phaedo* 76:

And thought is best when mind is gathered into herself and none of these things trouble her—neither sounds, nor sights, nor pain, nor pleasure—when she takes leave of the body and has as little as possible to do with it, when she has no bodily sense or desire, but is aspiring after true being.

Bluhm, *Theories of the Political System*, 1971: 76:

Plato’s belief, for example, that reality is found in a world of abstract and ideal essences, which is also the standard of good, led him to construct a best political order which had an intellectual

ideal, 'what is' with 'what ought to be'. "Goodness and being", he says, "are really the same. ... Hence it cannot be that evil signifies being or any form of nature."⁵⁹ In Aquinas' metaphysical theory, as Kelsen points out, "Existence and norm converge."⁶⁰ This is because reality, he holds, proceeds according to the divine reason, in which human reason is thought to partake. For this reason to be acceptable, however, it must be in accordance with God's word, as revealed in the New Testament: "Are the reasoning and the traditions of men always to be rejected?" asks Paul. "No", answers Aquinas, only when reasoning is "matter-bound" and "proceeds according to them and not according to Christ". Consequently, he maintains, as Finnis says, that the "moral science or ethics (*philosophia moralis*) is prior to" the physical and political sciences.⁶¹ Like Plato, Locke holds that the mind perceives only ideas or objects of thought, rather than external realities or physical objects: "whatsoever the Mind perceives in itself...that I call an *Idea*";⁶² that is, "the Object of the Understanding when a man thinks".⁶³ Unlike Plato, however, but like Aquinas, he denies the existence of innate ideas, "moral" or "speculative",⁶⁴ although he holds that "some speculative principles...are self-evident".⁶⁵ The rest, including moral principles, are knowable only through reason: "...reason alone can determine what is truly good."⁶⁶ Accordingly, he holds that "universal knowledge is concerned with abstract ideas rather than eternal archetypes".⁶⁷ "The power of thought is not", he thinks, "a 'natural' property of matter", of physical bodies or the physical body. Instead, thought, he thinks, is "superadded" by God to a "system of matter suitably disposed". Such 'superadditions' come to form "what Locke calls 'excellencies' or 'perfections'". It is the 'perfection' of thought that, for him, provides the potential for moral perfection, and which underlies his "moral Law of Nature".⁶⁸

The opposite of the Grand Theories, moral and political antitheory, holds that neither conception of reality holds, in and of itself, and without relativistic qualification. The antitheorist's rejection of an ultimate social reality is based on the rejection of reality *per se*. For

existence only and no counterpart in empirical reality. Plato's metaphysics also accounts for his use of a...deductive rather than an inductive method of analysis.

⁵⁹ Aquinas, *Summa Theologiae* I, 48, 1

⁶⁰ Kelsen, 'Foundation of the Natural Law Doctrine', 1991: 104

⁶¹ Finnis, *Aquinas: Moral, Political and Legal Theory*, 1998: 47

⁶² Locke, *An Essay on Human Understanding* II.viii.8

⁶³ *ibid* I.i.8; Chappell, 'Locke's Theory of Ideas', 1994: 26-7

⁶⁴ Locke, *An Essay on Human Understanding* I.iii.1-2

⁶⁵ *ibid* I iii.4; Schneewind, 'Locke's Moral Philosophy', 1994: 200

⁶⁶ Locke, *An Early Draft of Locke's Essay* [1971: 257]

⁶⁷ Ayers, *Locke: Epistemology and Ontology*, 1991: 191

⁶⁸ Ayers, *Locke: Epistemology and Ontology*, 1991: 169-70

them, the world has neither a moral nor a physical significance, in any cosmic sense. Instead, the world is physically or morally significant to certain kinds of people, or ways of life. This too centres on the relationship between might and right. Here neither metaphysical realism nor idealism applies, and the world is to be understood neither empirically nor rationally. Instead, the conception of reality a person employs is thought, as always, to be symptomatic of a certain way of life.

For the Relativist, there is no metaphysical world, no state of being, beyond the apparent world of becoming. Moral and political relativism is therefore consistent with metaphysical relativism, or nihilism, according to which nothing exists, in and of itself. Gorgias, for example, famously argued that “Nothing exists; then that if it exists it is unknowable; then that if it is knowable it cannot be communicated.”⁶⁹ Nietzsche, though he admits the possibility of a metaphysical world, denies that we can have access to it,⁷⁰ whether through observation or abstraction. For him, faith in reason and philosophy more narrowly, like the faith in God from which, he says, it derives, is misplaced:

The presupposition that things are, at bottom, ordered so that human reason may be justified—is an ingenuous presupposition and a piece of naïveté, the after-effect of belief in God’s veracity—God understood as the creator of things.⁷¹

But so too, he thinks, is the belief in the ‘testimony of the senses’. For while “our senses do not lie”, according to him, “what we make of their testimony”, our interpretation, does, because it is filtered “through the lens of life”, and so reflects, once again, one’s place in the ‘lifeworld’.⁷² Ultimately, he argues, “it is a metaphysical faith upon which our faith in science rests”,⁷³ and “physics too is only an interpretation of the world...and not an explanation of the world”.⁷⁴ His

⁶⁹ in Guthrie, *The Sophists*, 1971: 196

⁷⁰ Nietzsche, *Human-All-Too-Human* 9:

It is true that there might be a metaphysical world: the absolute possibility of this is hardly to be disputed... . But one can do very little with this bare possibility... . For concerning the metaphysical world nothing could be said except that it would be a different world, but an inaccessible and incomprehensible one. Even should the existence of such a world be proven, this would still be the most irrelevant knowledge of all.

⁷¹ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* 471

⁷² Nietzsche, *The Genealogy of Morals* 3.1; “We behold everything through the human head, and cannot cut off this head...” (Nietzsche, *Human-all-too-Human* 9)

⁷³ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* 344

⁷⁴ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* 14

rejection of realist metaphysics is summed up in a section of *The Gay Science* entitled ‘To the Realists’: “There is no ‘reality’ for us – not for you either, my sober friends.”⁷⁵ Because the world is formless, according to Nietzsche, it is also lawless (“No laws hold. It is we alone who invented the...law....”), and the belief in form and laws, like all beliefs, are no more than myths: “When we project and mix this symbol world into things as though they existed ‘in itself’ we act once more as we have always acted: *mythologically*.”⁷⁶ Hence the laws of reason, which give rise to moral laws, and the laws of physics, which give rise to the principles of power politics, do not hold, according to the Relativist.

5.4.1 Realism, Idealism and Relativism on Metaphysics: Conservatism and Radicalism

The respective metaphysical theories adopted by the Grand Theorists also accord with their respective ideological positions. Metaphysical realism, like political realism, is consistent with conservative ideology. The Realist belief that reality exists independent of mind, and has only a physical and not a moral character, entails that the laws of reality are not subject to the laws of reason or moral laws. Metaphysical realism thus grants the political realist “immunity from moral evaluation and theoretical speculation”.⁷⁷ At the same time, the preference for an empirical/historical model suggests that the future will be much the same as the past. This entails an acceptance of the status quo and a rejection of the utopian aspirations of revolutionary movements. Metaphysical idealism, on the other hand, like its political counterpart, coincides with radical ideology. The view of the Idealist, that reality is mind-dependent and has a rational and moral character, entails that the world outside us is not fixed or given, but subject to rational change and moral progress:

Man is a thinking being. His reason enables him to recognise his own potentialities and those of his world. He is thus not at the mercy of the facts that surround him, but capable of subjecting them to

⁷⁵ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* 57

⁷⁶ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* 21

⁷⁷ Johnson, *Thucydides, Hobbes, and the Interpretation of Realism*, 1993: 78

a higher standard, that of reason. Consequently the ‘unreasonable’ reality has to be altered until it comes into conformity with reason.⁷⁸

The political conclusions of this are, as drawn by Hegel, that “nothing should be recognised in a constitution except what has to be recognised according to reason’s right”.⁷⁹ Meanwhile, the preference for an abstract/deductive mode of analysis allows the Idealist to develop a hypothetical model of an ideal society and state, a model of what could and should be, rather than of what is or has come before. This is in line with the utopianism that is part and parcel of revolutionary movements. Hence, Proudhon’s statement, that “the controversy between conservatives and reformers” corresponds to “the quarrel between realists and idealists”,⁸⁰ is as true of metaphysical realism and idealism as of their counterparts in political theory.

The opposition of Relativists to metaphysics is consistent with their non-ideological or counter-ideological standpoint. Relativism’s rejection of both metaphysical realism and idealism is consistent with its refusal to endorse either conservatism or radicalism. Moreover, and more importantly, if there is no reality to speak of, physical or ideal, then there is no ontological foundation on which to base moral or political advocacy, conservative or radical, and consequently no set of social or political practises appropriate for all peoples, places and times. Instead, as elsewhere, the ideologies that flow from opposing conceptions of reality, are supposed to apply only to the ways of life they represent. As ever, the Relativist maintains, as Nietzsche does, that “ideas of the herd should rule in the herd” but that “the leaders of the herd require a fundamentally different valuation for their own actions...”⁸¹ Metaphysical realism and the application of the scientific method to the study of ethics and politics is appropriate for the masters, insofar as it reinforces their mastery. Metaphysical idealism and the use of a deductive method of analysis is appropriate for the slaves, insofar as it aids in their revolt against the masters.

As ever, the conflict between the Grand Theories and their antitheoretical opponents derive from opposite conceptions of theory-practise relations. From the point of view of the theories themselves, the opposing metaphysical theories give rise to opposite ideological

⁷⁸ “Thought ought to govern reality. What men think to be true, right and good ought to be realised.” (Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*, 1955: 6); Schopenhauer, ‘On Ethics’ [1914: 196]

⁷⁹ Quoted in Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution*, 1955: 6

⁸⁰ Proudhon, *A History of Political Economy, or, The Philosophy of Misery* [2008: 26]

⁸¹ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* 287

standpoints, but are themselves independent of their ideological implications. In the alternative view, opposing metaphysical theories spring from opposing ways of life, and their respective moral syndromes. Nietzsche, for instance, asserts that “the moral (or immoral) intentions in every philosophy have always constituted the real germ of life out of which the entire plant has grown”.⁸² In this view, rulers endorse metaphysical realism and empiricism because it coincides with their conservative ideology, while revolutionaries endorse idealist metaphysics and rationalism because it coincides with their radical ideology.

5.4.2 Realism, Idealism and Relativism on Metaphysics: Triad, Dyad and Dialectic

As elsewhere, the opposing metaphysical theories advocated by the Grand Theories, metaphysical realism and idealism, form the traditional dyad in the Western philosophic tradition. Each is the inverse of the other, its equal-opposite, its nemesis. As with their political counterparts, realism and idealism are each defined in contrast to each other, as dictionaries and glossaries of philosophy indicate, and the tradition itself is defined largely by the division between them. The division between them is as old as philosophy itself, beginning, as in the case of political realism and idealism, with the debate between Socrates and his followers and followers of the realist branch of the sophists. The realist-idealist divide in metaphysics is the Lefebvreian dyad *par excellence*. But, as he says, “there are always Three, there is always the Other”, and here again the antitheoretical alternative to Realism and Idealism seems to fulfill this role. The anti-metaphysics of Relativism, metaphysical nihilism, reduces the Grand Theories to two sides of the same coin, master and slave morality. It holds, as ever, that “on both sides, right and wrong are equal, and...the rivalry, narrowness, and intolerance of opinions have been the sole cause of the misunderstanding”.⁸³ It is, once again, then, their antithesis but also their synthesis.

⁸² Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil* 6

⁸³ Proudhon, *A History of Political Economy, or, The Philosophy of Misery* [2008: 25]

5.5 The Metaphysics of Might and Right

This is the dialectic of might and right in metaphysics, the final source of that dialectic considered here. Traditional moral and political thought is metaphysical, in rooting its practical philosophy in first-philosophy. Alternative ethico-political thought is antimetaphysical, in rejecting questions of an ultimate reality altogether. Once again, the question of the relationship between power and justice is central to a number of the fundamental debates of metaphysics, between metaphysical realism and idealism, and between empiricism and rationalism. Realism and Idealism take their respective sides of this debate: Political realism embraces metaphysical realism, and an inductive method of analysis; political idealism embraces its metaphysical counterpart, and a deductive method. Relativism rejects both sides of this debate. It denies that either the real or the ideal forms an ultimate reality, or that reality can be known, either empirically or rationally. The former hold that their respective theories of reality are another basis of their conservative and radical ideologies; the latter maintains that these are yet another manifestation of master and slave moralities. Metaphysical realism, idealism and nihilism form the thesis, antithesis and synthesis of the dialectic of might and right in metaphysics. This is the metaphysics of might and right, and the fifth and final chapter, bringing to a close this second of two parts.



C O N C L U S I O N
THE DIALECTIC OF MIGHT AND RIGHT

Ares will come into conflict with Ares, Dike with Dike.

—Aeschylus, *Choepori*

Having explored the sources of this Dialectic of Might and Right, fields in which the dialectic plays out, the sketch laid out in the introduction has been filled-in somewhat. That is, the definitions and distinctions outlined, in the abstract, at the outset, having been applied to the various subject-areas, now have some substance to them. We have arrived at “the last definition in the series, the opening definition”.¹ Having started at the end, we have arrived back at the beginning. The purpose of this conclusion is to expand on those definitions and distinctions, on the basis of the preceding chapters, and offer a fuller picture of the dialectic of might and right, which incorporates the elements of those chapters. It will also provide a summary of the findings, in terms of the aims set out in the introduction, namely to provide a taxonomy, genealogy and critical account of the major discourses of power and justice. Two overarching conflicts are at the heart of this study, and of the dialectic it sets out to describe, and these will form the basis of these final sections in summing up the present study.

The first of these is the conflict of truth and appearance. Truth is the way things actually are in reality. Appearance is the way things seem or are perceived to be. This conflict has correlates in the various fields explored in the previous chapters, nature, law, religion, myth and metaphysics. It corresponds to the question of nature and convention, natural and positive law, God as truth and God as lie, antimyth and myth, and metaphysics and anti-metaphysics. This conflict is also the basis of the distinction between modes of thought. The defenders of truth are the theorists, who constitute the traditional mode of thought. The traditional, theoretical mode of

¹ Ophir, *The Order of Evils: Toward an Ontology of Morals*, 2005, § 0.101

thought is characterised by its commitment to truth, and subordination of practise to theory. Theory itself is the pursuit of truth through reason. In line with its commitment to truth and reality, traditional moral and political thought is naturalistic, theistic, anti-mythical and metaphysical. The opponents of truth, and defenders of appearance, are the antitheorists, who comprise the alternative way of thinking. Antitheory (*antilogos*) is itself the refutation of truth through reason. In line with its rejection of truth and reality, ethical-political antitheory is conventionalistic, atheistic, mythical and anti-metaphysical.

The second of these conflicts is the conflict of the physical and the moral. This is the basis of the question of might or right, and the “tension between...ethics and politics”. This conflict also has its correlates in each of the subject-fields covered by the previous chapters. It corresponds to the debate between negative and positive conceptions of human nature, legalistic and moralistic conception of law, a conception of God as ultimate power or supreme goodness, myths of descent and ascent, and metaphysical realism and idealism. This conflict is also the basis of the debate between political realism, moral realism and moral and political antirealism. Political realism advances a negative conception of human nature, a legalistic conception of law, a political conception of God, a myth of descent and realist metaphysics. Moral realism embraces a positive conception of nature, legal moralism, a moral God, a myth of ascent and metaphysical idealism. The two sides of these debates correspond to the two basic ideological tendencies, conservatism and radicalism. Moral and political antirealism rejects both sides of each of these debates. It denies that either conception of nature, law, religion, myth and law prevails, as it denies that there is such a thing as human nature, natural law, God, non-fiction, or reality. As such, it lacks the ideological implications of either side. At the same time, it brings the two sides of the debate together, allowing them to stand side by side, as master and slave morality.

These conflicts form a dialectic, which is designated the dialectic of might and right, after the concepts at its core. The first phase of this dialectic comprises the traditional mode of moral and political thought, ethical-political theory. This traditional discourse is ‘dyadic’, divided between political and moral worldviews, embodies in the Grand Theories of ethics and politics, Realism and Idealism. This arises, once again, from the “tension between...ethics and politics” and the “conflict of principles, the physical and the moral”. The second phase of the dialectic of might and right comprises the alternative mode of moral and political thought, ethical-political antitheory. The addition of the alternative discourse transforms the Realist-Idealist dyad into a

triad: Realism-Idealism-Relativism. In many ways, Relativism, while antithetical to both Realism and Idealism, to the traditional mode of moral and political thought as a whole, is also their synthesis, in that it presents them as two sides of the same coin, in the rubric of master and slave morality. This is the dialectic of might and right. Like the conflicts themselves, this dialectic plays out in each of the subject-fields surveyed, the topics of the preceding chapters. There is the dialectic of might and right in nature, in law, in religion, in myth, and in metaphysics.

This corresponds to a number of other dialectics, identified by various thinkers. It corresponds closely to the Lefebvreian intellectual-dialectic, which holds that traditional, ‘philosophical’ modes of thought form dyads, which, in the presence of an alternative, an “Other”, are reduced to “image and reflection, a mirror effect, a rivalry that is derisory to the primacy of either one. Hence...their arrival at the logical compromise of mutual representation.”² It also corresponds to certain aspects of the Hegelian/Marxian historical-dialectic, the ‘Master-Slave Dialectic’,³ and especially its central premise, that history and society is characterised by the conflict between conservative ruling classes and revolutionary underclasses.⁴ The opposite ideologies (conservative and radical) inherent in the Grand Theories represent the two sides of this conflict, as do the opposite forms of life (“ascending and descending”) and the moral-syndromes associated with these (“master and slave morality”).⁵ Certain facets of this dialectic correspond to others. This is particularly evident in case of the dialectic of might and right in myth, which corresponds to Adams’ “dialectic of myth and antimyth”,⁶ and Mannheim’s distinction between ideological and utopian myths, which, Von Hendy says, are “in dialectical motion” with one another.⁷

As regards the objectives of the present study, the hope is that these have been reached. The taxonomical, genealogical and critical aspects of the study should now be clear. The taxonomy is the familial relationship between discourses of might and right it describes (the bipartite/tripartite division between broad modes, and major schools, of ancient and modern moral and political thought), and the shape or pattern ascribed to them (that of the dialectic). The genealogy is its account of the points-of-origin of these discourses (the subject-fields in which

² Lefebvre, ‘Triads and Dyads’, 2003: 50

³ Flew and Priest, *A Dictionary of Philosophy*

⁴ “All hitherto history is the history of class conflict.” Marx, *The Manifesto of the Communist Party*

⁵ Fairfield, *The Ways of Power: Hermeneutics, Ethics and Social Criticism*, 2002: 36–7

⁶ Adams, *The Philosophy of the Literary Symbolic*, 1983: 329

⁷ Von Hendy, *The Modern Construction of Myth*, 2002: 278-303; Mannheim, *Ideology and Utopia*, 1936: 173-6

they emerge, which form the topics of the chapters – nature, law, religion, myth and metaphysics), and their lines-of-development (from pre-philosophy (religion and myth), to first-philosophy (metaphysics), to practical philosophy (ethics and politics proper, nature and law); and through ancient, medieval, renaissance and early-modern intellectual epochs). The critical aspect is its discussion of the relationship between theories of ethics and politics and social practise and political ideology, in both the modes of moral and political thought identified, in each of the topic-areas considered. The hope is that it has accomplished its task, but judgment belongs, as always, to the reader.

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