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Ethics as a Means to Power

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Abstract:
This essay seeks to reconsider the place of ethics within the framework of political realism through an engagement of the politico-theological ideas of Max Stirner. Instead of considering ethics as part of the contexts of action in which prudent political decision-making takes place, Stirner's critique of traditional religious frameworks as inadequate in addressing existential questions lays the groundwork for his conceptualization of politics as an arena for the pursuit of metaphysical meaning. Subsequently, Stirner contends that the absence of objective ethical foundations compels individuals to imbue political concepts with quasi-religious significance, thereby transforming them into sources of metaphysical security. By extension, even though this essay agrees with the realist premise that political decision is never principally based on ethics, the self-induced illusion of ethical realism creates an ever-emerging political force that decision-makers cannot simply navigate with prudence, but must contend with substantively. Yet this very same force allows political mobilization on the basis of framing any political issue as an ethical issue.

Keywords: Political Realism, Ethics, Max Stirner, Political Theology, Soft Power, Power Dynamics, International Relations, Ideological Mobilization

In January 2024, the state of South Africa initiated legal proceedings against the state of Israel at the International Court of Justice in The Hague, citing concerns over Israel's actions in the Gaza Strip amid the ongoing Israel-Hamas conflict. While the specifics of the case are not central to this discourse, the focus here pivots towards the demonstrations outside the courtroom. Protesters, hailing not only from the Netherlands but from various Western countries, congregated to amplify their voices. What renders this protest noteworthy is the absence of a unifying organizational structure among its participants; rather, their convergence stemmed from a shared sense of justice, which they sought to manifest in the political arena by lending support to the South African cause. Such fervor impelled individuals to traverse continents in order to partake in this collective outcry.

Over recent decades, the Western world has borne witness to a plethora of analogous demonstrations, including but not limited to Women's Marches, Black Lives Matter rallies, Climate Strikes, Yellow Vests demonstrations, and assorted nationalist gatherings. While political mobilizations of this nature are not novel, this essay posits that they are poised to assume a heightened prominence. Furthermore, it contends that such mobilizations constitute a distinct form of influence that has thus far eluded comprehensive scrutiny. Ultimately, this essay submits that a deeper comprehension of this form of influence can be gleaned through an examination of the political realism espoused by 19th-century philosopher Max Stirner.

The terrain of political realism is vast and intricate; thus, a thorough exploration thereof risks veering off course from the central thesis of this essay. Accordingly, our inquiry here revolves around the intersection of ethics and politics. Specifically, this essay endeavors to establish the capacity of ethics to wield power within the paradigm of political realism. In pursuit of this objective, the essay commences with a concise survey of the role ethics assumes within political realism. The aim is not to furnish an exhaustive analysis of political realism and its many subtleties, but rather to distill from its certain overarching principles that

will serve as a backdrop for the ensuing argumentation. Given that the argument advanced herein echoes the insights of 19th-century political realist Max Stirner, the subsequent section will furnish a succinct overview of his rationale. Subsequently, the third section will extrapolate the implications of Stirner's discourse on political realism and extend it to contemporary political thought.

1. - Ethics in Political Realism

Political realism, as a philosophical doctrine, is predominantly defined by its negations rather than affirmative propositions. It positions itself in opposition to the optimistic visions of political idealism, critiquing notions of collaboration, collective security, and the attainment of a conflict-free political order. At its core, political realism underscores the primacy of power, self-interest, and pragmatic pursuits in shaping political decisions. It posits that actors within the political sphere prioritize their own interests and endeavor to augment their power and security vis-à-vis others. Bruce Bueno de Mesquita succinctly encapsulates this premise by asserting that "political survival is at the heart of all politics"[1].

Realism acknowledges the inherent presence of conflict and competition among political actors, highlighting the imperative of strategic calculations and foresight in guiding political conduct. While its origins trace back to antiquity, with Thucydides, Hobbes, and Machiavelli often credited as early proponents, a resurgence of interest in realist principles emerged in the aftermath of World War I, amidst mounting disillusionment with prevailing idealistic paradigms. During this epoch, Edward H. Carr aptly synthesized the realist stance on the ethical dimensions of politics, asserting:

1 Bueno de Mesquita B. & Smith A., 2011: 255

> The three essential tenets implicit in Machiavelli's doctrine are the foundation-stones of the realist philosophy. In the first place, history is a sequence of cause and effect, whose course can be analysed and understood by intellectual effort, but not (as the utopians believe) directed by "imagination". Secondly, theory does not (as the utopians assume) create practice, but practice theory. In Machiavelli's words, "good counsels, whencesoever they come, are born of the wisdom of the prince, and not the wisdom of the prince from good counsels". Thirdly, politics are not (as the utopians pretend) a function of ethics, but ethics of politics. Men "are kept honest by constraint". Machiavelli recognised the importance of morality, but thought that there could be no effective morality where there was no effective authority. Morality is the product of power.[2]

The intent of this discourse is not an exhaustive delineation of political realism's philosophical underpinnings, nor an exhaustive appraisal of its merits. Rather, the focus lies on elucidating the role of ethics within this framework. While political realism resists facile definition and principally counters political idealism, the crux of our inquiry here pertains to its distinct emphasis on delineating ethics from political pursuits. Whereas idealism aspires to employ politics as a conduit for realizing ethical ideals in societal structures, realism contends that political decisions must be adjudicated based on their intrinsic merits and the imperatives of power and survival, rather than being subservient to ethical imperatives.

While political realists are not outright dismissive of the pertinence of ethical convictions in politics, there is an evolution in their stance compared to earlier exponents such as Thucydides, Machiavelli, Hobbes, Pufendorf, Bodinus, or Clausewitz. Twentieth-century realists are more receptive to acknowledging the influence of ethical ideals on political

2 Carr E., 1946: 63-64

behavior. They recognize, as Raymond Guess contends, that "ideals and aspirations influence their behaviour and hence are politically relevant, only to the extent to which they do actually influence behaviour in some way".[3] Realists concede that while political decisions may not be predicated on ethical convictions, the prevalence of such convictions among individuals in society necessitates their consideration by political decision-makers. These ethical convictions, akin to various external factors, become integral components of the "contexts of action".[4]

However, it is crucial to note that the 20th-century resurgence of political realism primarily concerns itself with the dynamics of power among states in the realm of international relations, a distinction less explicitly made by earlier realists. Aligned with Machiavellian principles, contemporary realists endeavor to systematize and scientifically expound upon political dynamics, with international politics proving more suitable to this approach due to its relatively finite number of actors and ascertainable power dynamics. Moreover, realists contend that international politics precludes the establishment of enforceable universal laws, a fundamental distinction underscored by Waltz, who posits that "At the level of the state, an adequate political system permits individuals to behave ethically; a comparably adequate system is not attainable internationally".[5] Reinhold Niebuhr compounds this by arguing that: "All nations, unlike some individuals, lack the capacity to prefer a noble death to a morally ambiguous survival."[6] Nevertheless, even within domestic politics, where the relationship between law and ethics is more intertwined, realists assert that power remains paramount, as the ethical possibilities of a society are circumscribed by the physical power wielded by the state. The dichotomy between domestic and international politics, though emphasized by contemporary realism, does not significantly bear on the argument advanced in this essay.

3 Guess R., 2008: 9
4 Guess R., 2008: 11
5 Waltz K., 2001: 164
6 Niebuhr R., 2008: 39

Therefore, we adhere to Morgenthau's thesis that "Both domestic and international politics are a struggle for power, modified only by the different conditions under which this struggle takes place in the domestic and in the international spheres". [7] Lebow concurs, asserting that "Thucydides and Morgenthau understand politics as a struggle for power and unilateral advantage. The differences between domestic politics and international relations are of degree, not of kind".[8]

The crux of the matter lies in the realist relegation of ethics to the realm of personal conviction, which, in turn, overlooks the significant impact of ethical convictions on political decision-making beyond their mere contextual influence. Niebuhr contends, for instance, that "as individuals, men believe they ought to love and serve each other and establish justice between each other. As racial, economic and national groups they take for themselves, whatever their power can command".[9] Morgenthau similarly argues:

> Realism maintains that universal moral principles cannot be applied to the actions of states in their abstract universal formulation, but that they must be filtered through the concrete circumstances of time and place. The individual may say for himself: "Fiat justitia, pereat mundus (Let justice be done, even if the world perish)," but the state has no right to say so in the name of those who are in its care. Both individual and state must judge political action by universal moral principles, such as that of liberty. Yet while the individual has a moral right to sacrifice himself in defense of such a moral principle, the state has no right to let its moral disapprobation of the infringement of liberty get in the way of successful political action, itself inspired by the moral principle of national survival. There can be no political morality

7 Morgenthau H., 1997: 17
8 Lebow R., 2013: 64
9 Niebuhr R., 2013: 9

> without prudence; that is, without consideration of the political consequences of seemingly moral action.[10]

While realists may suffer from an ill-deserved reputation for cold-heartedness, many harbor strong personal moral convictions. Thinkers like Carr, Morgenthau, and Niebuhr view politics not as a realm solely governed by myopic and psychopathic power pursuits, but rather as a domain fraught with tragic dilemmas. Despite their moral and religious convictions, they have arrived at the sobering realization that the attainment of idealism is elusive within the exigencies of political reality.[11] In this vein, ethics assumes a gentler role, exerting a nuanced influence on political conduct and demarcating soft boundaries therein. Notably, for figures like Waltz and Mearsheimer, the scientific approach to politics, construed as a balance of power, is often motivated by a desire to foster peace in international relations, rather than indulging in utopian reveries.[12] Morgenthau, akin to Machiavelli before him, perceives it as the moral duty of the state to safeguard its citizens, irrespective of the ethical universalism it confronts.[13]

While realists do not discount the significance of morality entirely, they stress that decision-makers must prioritize their survival and security in a milieu where power dynamics invariably eclipse ethical considerations. Moreover, any ethical considerations pertinent to a particular political decision must be filtered through the pragmatic exigencies of the situation at hand. Even fervent political idealists, such as Saul Alinsky, have grappled with this reality, as he acknowledges that "The basic requirement for the understanding of the politics of change is to recognize the world as it is. We must work with it on its terms if we are to change it to the kind of world we would like it to be. We must first see the world as it is and not as we would like it to be. We must see the world as all

10 Morgenthau H., 1997: 12

11 Carr E., 1946: 93-94; Morgenthau H. 1945: 10; Niebuhr R., 1949: 6-7

12 Waltz K., 2001: 113; Mearsheimer J., 2018: 1

13 Morgenthau H. 1945: 274

political realists have". [14] Kenneth Waltz offers a succinct illustration of how power constrains the realm of ethics in politics:

> To most people there is nothing immoral about a game of cards, but there is definitely something immoral about cheating at cards. In cards, the code of morals is established by custom and enforced by the fact that anyone who cares to stop playing may do so. In international politics there are some rules of law to guide states both in peace and in war, but if it is found that some states break them, the others cannot simply quit playing the game... The leaders of the state may have to choose between behaving immorally in international politics in order to preserve the state, on the one hand, and, on the other, abandoning their moral obligation to ensure their state's survival in order to follow preferred ways of acting in international politics. The conclusion? Moral behavior is one thing in a system that provides predictable amounts and types of security; another thing where such security is lacking.[15]

The subsequent sections of this essay aim to demonstrate that ethics, far from being subordinate to political power, can indeed serve as a means to power. Inspired by the politico-theological insights of Max Stirner, ethics emerges as a potent political force, whose efficacy augments alongside heightened political consciousness and engagement.

2. - Stirner's Political Theology

In comprehending Stirner's distinctive perspective on political realism, an exploration of his stance on political theology is imperative. Historically, Stirner has been

14 Alinsky S., 1971: 25
15 Waltz K., 2001: 207

positioned either as the final Hegelian, [16] the first main adversary of a young Marx,[17] or the precursor to Nietzsche.[18] Recent scholarship has elevated Stirner as an original thinker, particularly within the realm of (post-)anarchism,[19] and, to a lesser degree, as an early exponent of psychology [20] or existentialism. [21] When interpreting Stirner's oeuvre through the lens of political realism, it necessitates an assimilation of his contributions to these latter two domains, especially political psychology. Stirner discerned a particular psychological phenomenon of paramount relevance to political realism, yet hitherto underexplored.

Stirner lived during an era when many contemporary political ideologies were nascent. Amidst the Young Hegelians, with whom he associated, there prevailed a fervent repudiation of religious authority. Nevertheless, Stirner discerned that "Atheists keep up their scoffing at the higher being, which was also honoured under the name of the 'highest' or *être suprême*, and trample in the dust one 'proof of his existence' after another, without noticing that they themselves, out of need for a higher being, only annihilate the old to make room for a new."[22] Stirner's allusion to the 'need for a higher being' points to a psychological condition endemic to his contemporaries, which he theorizes as a profound existential disquiet, concerning one's purpose, historical and worldly significance, interpersonal connections, and moral conduct—what I term 'metaphysical insecurity'—needing resolution against an ethical framework grounded in metaphysical underpinnings.

However, Stirner identifies a quandary: the more humanity delves into the physical realm, the more apparent it becomes

16 De Ridder W., 2008; McLellan D., 1969; Stepelevich L., 1985; 2020

17 Hook S., 1962; Dematteis P., 1976; Berlin I., 1959

18 Lévy A., 2006; Steiner R., 1960; Glassford J., 1999

19 Arvon H., 1998; Woodcock G., 1962; Koch A., 1997; Newman S., 2001

20 Jansen H., 2009; Jenkins J., 2009; Buber M., 2002

21 Carroll J., 1974; Paterson R., 1971; Camus A., 1984; Read H., 1949; 2015

22 Stirner M., *1995*: 38-39

that objective answers to these existential queries remain elusive. Stirner asserts, "a man is 'called' to nothing, and has no 'calling', no 'destiny', as little as a plant or a beast has a 'calling'." [23] Despite the cogency of this assertion, Stirner observes the reluctance of many to embrace this premise. Consequently, he astutely observes a tendency to seek solace and direction in modern political ideologies as a surrogate for religion, thus elevating certain political constructs—such as equality, freedom, fatherland, or humanity—into quasi-religious ideals divorced from their utilitarian essence, serving as ethical imperatives to be pursued for their intrinsic value.

Fundamentally, Stirner furnishes a distinctive and foundational psychological lens into what is now recognized as political theology. Specifically, Stirner discerns a libidinal impetus towards ethical convictions, which, devoid of ontological substance, emerge as extensions of one's psychological predispositions. As articulated by Stirner:

> Sacred things exist only for the egoist who does not acknowledge himself, the *involuntary egoist*, for him who is always looking after his own and yet does not count himself as the highest being, who serves only himself and at the same time always thinks he is serving a higher being, who knows nothing higher than himself and yet is infatuated about something higher; in short, for the egoist who would like not to be an egoist, and abases himself (combats his egoism), but at the same time abases himself only for the sake of 'being exalted', and therefore of gratifying his egoism. Because he would like to cease to be an egoist, he looks about in heaven and earth for higher beings to serve and sacrifice himself to; but, however much he shakes and disciplines himself, in the end he does all for his own sake, and the disreputable egoism will not come off him.[24]

23 Stirner M., 1995: 288
24 Stirner M., 1995: 37

Although Stirner attributes the deification of political concepts to psychological egoism, he contends that such deification eludes conscious recognition. If one consciously and deliberately chooses which concepts are worthy of worship, than one can just as easily reject them, which renders one's adherence to them meaningless. Instead, these deified concepts must be perceived as an objective *summum bonum*, a supreme good. Consequently, to attain 'metaphysical security,' these deified concepts must transcend human grasp and possess a semblence of being ontologically real. Furthermore, modern political deities, besides being ultimate objectives, forfeit their erstwhile utilitarian essence. Hence, it becomes imperative not only for politics to be oriented towards the pursuit of these ethical ends but also for adherents to renunciate their own sense of self and perceive themselves as instrumental in their attainment, thus assuming the role of heroes. In Jungian discourse, the death of the dragon alone is insufficient; one must actively participate in its slaying.[25]

3. - Stirner's Political Realism

Though rarely discussed in analyses of Stirner's work, except in Marx's original commentary on the work,[26] Stirner's rejection of ethical realism inherently aligns him with political realism, as he explicitly states: "In consideration of right the question is always asked: 'What or who gives me the right to it?' Answer: God, love, reason, nature, humanity, etc. No, only your might, your power gives you the right".[27] Stirner's path

25 Nietzsche F., 1978; Jung C., 1988; 2009; Campbell J., 2008; Peterson J., 1999

26 Marx was the first to comment on Stirner's work and one of the few to acknowledge him as a political realist. However, he erroneously argues that Stirner has contributed nothing new to the realist view since "Machiavelli, Hobbes, Spinoza, Bodinus, and others of modern times, not to mention earlier ones" (Marx K. & Engels F., 1998: 340). In this essay, I am arguing precisely that Stirner presents an original view that is worth further consideration.

27 Stirner M., 1995: 168

to political realism diverges from that of many other realists. In the Stirnerian view, since there is no ethics on any objective sense, it cannot possibly guide our political acts and decision-making. We've established that Stirner's psychological analysis views belief in ethics as a satisfying illusion driven by a libidinal desire for a structured, metaphysical understanding of the world. He discerns a tension between the desire for ethical realism and the world's inability to provide it. Consequently, Stirner identifies in the libidinal pursuit of ethics a means to power. This section aims to explore how Stirner's insights contribute to the contemporary paradigm of political realism.

Previously, we've noted that realists generally view ethics as part of the 'contexts of action,' where it influences decisions indirectly due to the ethical convictions of affected parties. Many realists hold personal ethical convictions but see politics as a tragic sphere where such convictions cannot be realized. From the Stirnerian perspective, political engagement is more than utilitarian; it's a search for meaning. This blurs the lines between ethics and politics, making politics a practical implementation of ethical convictions. Waltz's comparison between international politics and a card game effectively illustrates the utilitarian perspective of the realists, but Stirner sees modern politics as a personal commitment to a deified ethical *telos*. Unlike a game of cards, politics involves fundamental ethical and metaphysical beliefs, and a search for meaning and self-understanding.

Here, I am not implying that political realism overlooks the irrational forces underpinning politics. As Burnham astutely notes, "the Machiavellian analysis... shows that the masses simply do not think scientifically about political and social aims... Beliefs, ideals, do sometimes influence the political actions of the masses; these are not, however, scientific beliefs and ideals, but myths or derivations". [28] The crux of my argument, however, lies in recognizing that unlike a game of cards, politics involves the very essence of one's identity, one's sense of self and search for meaning. Stirner's concept

28 Burnham J., 1943: 194

of political theology extends beyond mere irrational desires projected onto politics; it delves into individuals' most profound ethical and metaphysical convictions and their perception of self.

Given that ethics lacks ontological reality, despite its perceived significance, attempts to pursue it through politics create a potent yet erratic politico-theological force. Importantly, due to the absence of ethical realism, ethical convictions remain fluid, subject to change over time as they stem from irrational desires. As a result, Stirner's politico-theological force emerges as a capricious and aimless entity, disrupting the rational realm of political decision-making akin to a wildfire sweeping through a forest. This force proves unpredictable and resistant to negotiation, lacking discernible leaders akin to a wildfire's absence of control. While political leaders may be involved, they function merely as representatives of deified concepts rather than as charismatic figures leading a movement. Unlike a wildfire, however, political decision-makers *must* confront this force in a substantive manner, navigating its complexities while enacting policies often unrelated to ethics. Nonetheless, decision-makers also *can* make use of this force for their own purposes.

In the contemporary landscape, characterized simultaneously by unprecedented access to information, a recession of national borders, and an erosion of traditional religious frameworks, Stirner's insights into the human condition gain renewed relevance. Secularism has dismantled the once-convenient religious answers to existential questions, leaving individuals to navigate the complexities of existence with newfound autonomy and skepticism. This cultural shift has redirected the search for meaning from the religious to the political sphere. Consequently, the boundaries between domestic and international politics blur, as individuals increasingly identify with global issues transcending geographical confines. Realists, adhering to the classical dichotomy between ethics and politics, confront a paradigm shift wherein the distinction between the two spheres becomes increasingly porous. The 21st-century political

landscape is characterized by the ascendancy of ethical imperatives that are indifferent to national borders. Decision-makers grapple with the ramifications of this ethical conflagration, navigating a terrain where political engagement is imbued with moral significance and ethical considerations pervade every facet of governance. The traditional realist framework, predicated on rational decision-making and power accumulation, struggles to accommodate the evolving dynamics of contemporary politics, where ethical imperatives reign supreme. When politics is considered as practical implementation of irrational ethical convictions, rather than a sphere of rational decision-making for the accumulation of power, then politics is rendered to a contest between good and evil. The ethically driven political force is neither rational, nor can be placated easily.

For example, in his seminal work *The Concept of the Political*, Carl Schmitt delves into the essence of politics by defining it as the fundamental distinction between friend and enemy. Contrary to conventional views that treat politics as a distinct domain, Schmitt considers it as a degree of intensity, asserting that any discernible difference can potentially transform into the demarcation between friend and foe. Notably, Schmitt posits that "the political enemy need not be morally evil or aesthetically ugly; he need not appear as an economic competitor, and it may even be advantageous to engage with him in business transactions".[29] However, the Stirnerian politico-theological lens offers a contrasting perspective. From Stirner's viewpoint, the categorization of an enemy inevitably assumes a moral dimension. If, as Schmitt claims, "the friend and enemy concepts are to be understood in their concrete and existential sense, not as metaphors or symbols",[30] it demands substantial engagement from all that are involved in the dichotomy. Stirner argues that in modern politics, the enemy inherently becomes morally evil as political engagements intersect with the quest for existential meaning.[31] While Schmitt's analysis aligns with conventional

29 Schmitt C., 2007: 27
30 Schmitt C., 2007: 27
31 Stirner M., 1995: 165

notions of political realism, Stirner's perspective reframes the friend-enemy dichotomy within the context of moral absolutism in contemporary political discourse. From the Stirnerian perspective, the *political* enemy thus eventually becomes a *moral* enemy.

Amidst this milieu, the libidinal desire to infuse politics with ethical significance emerges as a potent force shaping political discourse and mobilizing collective action that political decision-makers *can* tap into for an almost inexhaustible source of political energy. Stirner's observations regarding the malleability of ethical beliefs find resonance in contemporary political phenomena, where issues are reframed within an ethical context to galvanize public support and mobilize resources. The concept of 'climate justice' exemplifies this phenomenon, wherein the imperative to combat climate change is recast as a moral duty rather than as something utilitarian, invoking notions of justice and intergenerational equity. The ethical appeal of such causes transcends traditional political divides, mobilizing diverse coalitions and fostering global solidarity in pursuit of shared moral objectives.

However, this fusion of ethics and politics poses inherent challenges, as decision-makers grapple with the complexities of reconciling ethical imperatives with pragmatic governance. Political issues can be reframed effortlessly as moral quandaries, with ethical appeals justifying contradictory actions such as equality legitimizing inequality or liberty sanctioning oppression. Since ethics lacks an ontologically 'real' foundation, an effective political force can be mobilized as long as its *political* purpose is formulated *ethically*, exemplified by the adaptation of ideas like 'race consciousness' to serve as rallying points for opposing political affiliations. For the better part of a century, we've considered the idea of 'race consciousness,' as purported by the Nazis, [32] as reprehensible, yet nowadays one can find

32 Examples of passages that address the Nazi view of race consciousness can be found in Hitler A., 2018: 326; Hitler A., 2006: 197; Rosenberg A., 1978: 62.

supposed progressives[33] that argue that "there is merit in the proposition that race neutrality is at least an overblown norm; race consciousness may not be the overarching evil it often seems to be" [34] The exact same adaptation of the Marxist idea of 'class consciousness' serves as the same *summum bonum* for political affiliations that consider each other as direct opponents. Consequently, the libidinal desire for ethics identified by Stirner emerges as a potent means to wield political power. Stirner's insights into the malleability of ethical beliefs shed light on the fluid nature of contemporary politics, where ideological allegiances shift and ethical imperatives evolve in response to changing circumstances.

Expanding on these themes, it becomes evident that the convergence of existential yearning and political pragmatism creates a potent brew of ideological fervor and strategic maneuvering. Decision-makers must navigate this complex terrain with nuance and foresight, recognizing the symbiotic relationship between ethics and power. While ethics may lack ontological grounding, its instrumental value in shaping political discourse and mobilizing public sentiment cannot be overstated. As such, political actors must tread carefully, mindful of the ethical undercurrents that animate the political landscape and the potential ramifications of harnessing them for strategic ends. In a world where information flows freely and boundaries blur, the intersection of ethics and politics becomes an ever-evolving battleground where ideals clash and power dynamics play out in intricate and often unpredictable ways.

To enhance analytical precision of this discourse, it is instructive to juxtapose the framework proposed here, which expands upon political realism, with Joseph Nye's concept of 'soft power'. Soft power, as delineated by Nye, extends Carr's division between military power, economic power and power over opinion. Nye defines soft power as "the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or

33 Similar cases for race consciousness can be found in DiAngelo R., 2021: 48; Delgado R. & Stefancic J., 2001: 22.

34 Flagg B., 1998: 132

payments".[35] Fundamentally, it denotes a nation's capacity to influence others through non-coercive methods, such as culture, diplomacy, and values, harnessing attractiveness and persuasion to shape the preferences and behaviors of actors in the international arena. Soft power is often wielded through cultural exports, international aid, and diplomatic endeavors, with the objective of attracting and persuading others based on the appeal of a nation's ideas, culture, and policies, thereby shaping their preferences and behaviors. Nye emphasizes that "soft power is not a form of idealism or liberalism. It is simply a form of power, one way of getting desired outcomes".[36]

However, despite the conceptual proximity between Nye's soft power and the framework proposed in this essay, Nye's concept remains firmly entrenched within the confines of traditional political realism. Even when transcending the focus on states in international politics, Nye's concept primarily revolves around influencing the 'contexts of action' within which decision-makers operate, thereby indirectly shaping their decisions. Conversely, the notion presented here underscores a pervasive libidinal impulse to imbue politics with ethical dimensions, transcending traditional power dynamics. Moreover, engagement with this paradigm of ethics-as-politics is not discretionary; its significance escalates concomitantly with the rise of political awareness and participation.

Crucially, the pursuit of ethics-as-politics represents an inherently individual endeavor, in stark contrast to the essentially collective nature of soft power. Realists like Niebuhr, who are cognizant of the individual's role within power dynamics, acknowledge in a similar vain to Stirner the impossibility "of drawing a sharp line between the will-to-live and the will-to-power."[37] The structural realism of Bueno de Mesquita and Smith even radicalizes such realist individualism further when they argue against the likes of Niebuhr that "anyone who thinks leaders *do what they ought*

35 Nye J., 2004: x
36 Nye J., 2011: 82
37 Niebuhr R., 2013: 42

to do—that is, do what is best for their nation of subjects—ought to become an academic rather than enter political life. In politics, coming to power is never about doing the right thing. It is always about doing what is expedient". [38] However, Stirner's analysis of political theology unveils a distinct facet, elucidating a libidinal urge to submit oneself to a *summum bonum*, albeit in an individualistic manner. While this may culminate in collective action among like-minded individuals, such as witnessed in protests, it stems from individual convictions rather than collective directives.

4. - Conclusion

Despite the intricacies inherent in political realism, this essay endeavors to explore a distinct political phenomenon most visibly embodied in protests and gatherings motivated by perceived 'just' causes, drawing participants from across the globe. Through the lens of proto-psychologist Max Stirner's insights, we can elucidate this phenomenon as a departure from viewing politics merely as utilitarian and instead recognizing its fundamental role in the quest for meaning. Stirner discerns a psychological pattern wherein individuals seek to comprehend the world as a metaphysical entity to grapple with existential questions. However, a dilemma arises when this quest for ethical realism confronts the stark absence of such principles in the world, leading individuals to project their libidinal desire for ethics onto their surroundings, thereby interpreting it as ethical realism. Consequently, in the absence of traditional religious frameworks, politics assumes the role of a tangible endeavor to manifest these ethical convictions in reality.

Stirner's assertion that politics cannot be guided by ethics in the absence of ethical realism firmly situates him within the realm of political realism. However, what distinguishes Stirner from other realists is his recognition of the yearning for ethical realism and its translation into a dynamic political force pursuing an ever-evolving *telos*. This politico-

38 Bueno de Mesquita B. & Smith A., 2011: 37

theological force transcends being merely a contextual backdrop for political decision-making, emerging as a potent competitor to traditional political institutions. In an era marked by heightened political engagement fueled by modern communication technologies and increasingly porous national borders, such politico-theological forces are poised to proliferate rather than diminish. Therefore, for a comprehensive and scientifically grounded understanding of politics, the realist framework must encompass an analysis of these forces, acknowledging that while might may indeed make right, faith, to a certain extent, also shapes might.

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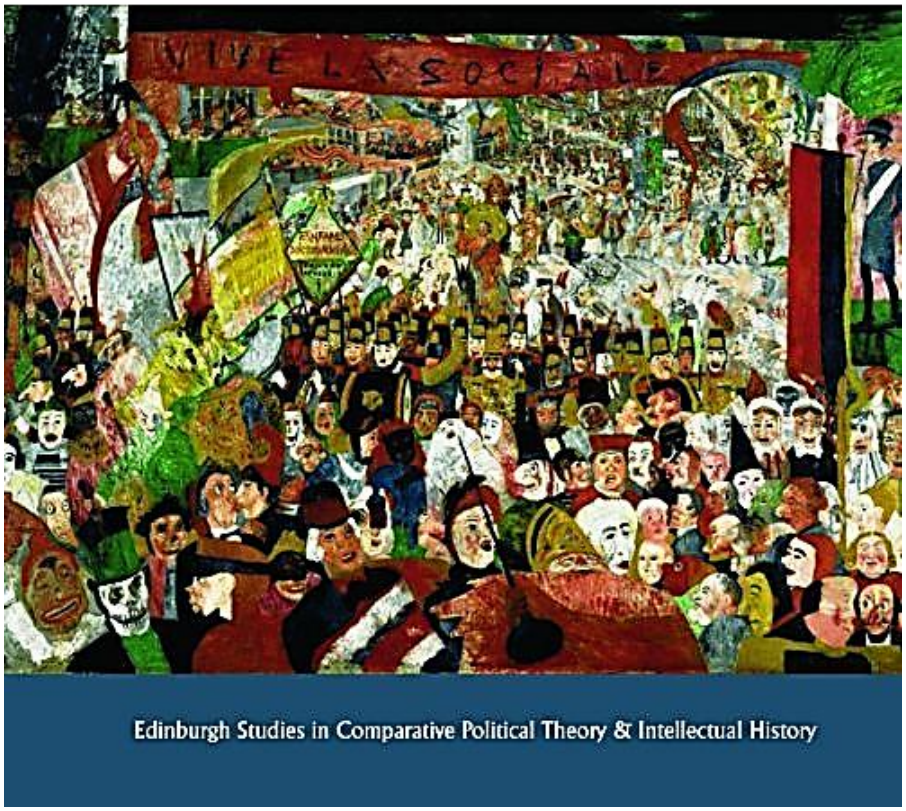
THEOPOLITICAL FIGURES

Scripture, Prophecy, Oath, Charisma, Hospitality

Montserrat Herrero