

What is Legitimate to Study? In Pursuit of the ‘normative’ in Normative theory

Keywords:

Methods in political theory, legitimacy, normative theory, political philosophy, historicism, realism, university funding, genealogy, Nietzsche.

Abstract

When both academic critique and funding criteria essentially say to political theory, ‘what is the point?’, anxiety creeps into the heart of every normative theorist and agonising self-reflection ensues; the study of the political without advisory comment and application may not seem a legitimate use of public finances, where demands to ‘make better use’ of research (in a UK context at least) reveal a common tendency towards impact (Council E. a., 2017). Thus, our response appears urgent: not just for the standing of the subject, but for its very survival, for the continuation of PhD funding relies upon the quality of the reply.

The problem is, the replies do not merely conflict, they rest upon fundamentally opposed views of what the subject actually is – effectively, whether or not it should be in pursuit of actual impact. With the premise of an impact agenda therefore set up, in this paper I intend to deliver three objections to a consequential ‘impact theory’, and seek to resolve those objections with an altered methodological approach. I hope this gives us a normative theory that can be seen as ‘legitimate’ in terms of being able to explicitly rise to the challenge of ‘why it should be funded by the taxpayer’, and ‘legitimate’ in the sense that it still retains its philosophical identity; that social prescription does not come at the cost of, what I believe, should be key elements of theorising – conceptual analysis and deep reflection.

Introduction

In Part 1 – ‘Funding, Impact, Legitimacy, and the Current State of Theory’ - I start with a little story as a set-up, from which I spend the rest of the paper unpacking, but the main point here is to present the fact that *legitimacy* measured as *impact* is firmly on the agenda with university funding. After this, I explain why such funding demands ought to be brought into the debates within the *academy* between philosophy, history, normative theory and realism. Next, I give a brief analysis of how normative theory is currently adaptable in an impact agenda, moving from this to see, at first glance, how it stands up to the two main ways I believe research councils are measuring impact.

Following on from this, part 2 – ‘Objection, Objection, Objection!’ - details three concerns to a more explicitly normative, normative theory. The *objection of philosophy* deals with a political theory that is not thought of predominantly as a ‘prescriptive’ pursuit, due to the concerns over the wielding of a resultant moral expertise and other related issues. Going into the *objection of history*, I connect this to a critique of normative principles and presupposition, yet show that such concerns leave us in a problematic position in regard to effective evaluation of ‘real life’ events and actors, and the power to deem certain actions desirable or not. I then offer the last of the doubts over a normative theory for impact; my own: an objection of *method*. This however, I think, leads me into an answer to not just the methodological complaint, but the other two objections also. In Part 3 – ‘A Method for Legitimacy’ - I propose a subtle change to how we approach normative theory. This offering, I believe, avoids concerns over *moral expertise* and deals with *historicisation* of normative principles, yet engages in *conceptual analysis* more readily than the current method of presuppositions does, at the same time as being able to be socially *prescriptive* for impact and transformation. Perhaps a little late, I present how such a way of doing normative theory would look in practice, by examining how the work done in Jeremy Waldron’s ‘Homelessness and the Issue of Freedom’ could be performed with this altered approach.

I end on a brief ‘Epilogue’, in which I consider *storytelling* as one framework for this new normative method.

Part 1 – Funding, Impact, Legitimacy, and the Current State of Theory

1.1 The Tower of philosophy: connecting funding to impact

Let us start then, with the aforementioned story. On the top floor of a high-rise building, a group of people talk. The room they converse in is large, spacious, and full of interesting items, from ancient, creaking bookshelves lined with old cracked, leather bound tomes, to bottles of wine that appear oddly new in comparison to the furniture around (apparently though, the wine itself has soured). There are many people here, dressed in togas and scholarly robes. Some look up through the glass domed roof to the skies above, asking ethereal questions to, who is now, no-one in particular: the categorical spectre of a murdered god. Others focus more on each other, conversing animatedly. If one could overhear these exchanges, they would catch talk of justice, morality, and the normative.

A few have been floating around closer to the windows - the ones that are not stained - only dipping into abstract discussions as they occasionally wander away from the glass panes. They soon seek them out again though, to gaze onto the world below with the knowledge each conversation gives them, rather than spending more time on arguing over that knowledge; or at least accepting that is a task related to the window-gazing, but to be pursued in between those moments one looks beyond. A particularly extroverted window-gazer even goes so far as to open one and pop their head out, seeing clearly the patterns that go on down there, a wider picture gifted from up here. She observes one person, for example (seemingly small because of the distance), apparently lost, unable to find the right path. The gazer knows where they should go of course, she can see the layout of the streets from this almost bird's eye view. An impulse causes her to cry out, creating an immediate silence in the room. 'Shh!' one of the conversants says, 'the Zarathustra will see us!' The window gazer glances back out, looking for the figure of history, half expecting a little red bead to appear on her chest.

Instead, the lift across the room pings: somebody has made the journey to the top of this tower to bring a message, and by doing so, has shattered the mythical illusion that the architecture of this room attempts. The stone wall covered in ivory carvings suddenly reveals its plastic truth as one section of it opens like a gaping mouth. The window-gazer glances over as a man and a woman in grey suits enter from the incongruously unveiled elevator, hand a cream folder to the closest conversant, then step back into the lift and abruptly go to leave. They have many more

floors to visit, or so they say as they efficiently step out, and must be on their way. As the lift door is hidden by the folly wall, the conversant left holding the folder opens it and reads aloud. 'It looks like it's about updates on *impact* and *funding criteria* that we need to be clued up on' he says, then putting on a tone of voice which suggests he is quoting directly rather than summarising, he continues: '*We can provide business, public services and civil society organisations with access to world-leading academic researchers who can help you think in new and challenging ways*'.

There are some nods here from a few.

'We have awarded funding (through Impact Acceleration Accounts) to 24 universities to work in partnership with non-academic organisations to make better use of social science'.

Some begin to shuffle, a little unnerved about where this narrative is going. The speaker pushes on regardless, growing unease lending him oratory power and speed.

'We support world leading research that makes a difference to lives'.

'We invest heavily in world class resources to provide an infrastructure which can help tackle some of our most pressing issues' (Council E. a., 2017).

'Collaborating partners can be private sector companies, public sector bodies or voluntary organisations' (Council E. &., 2016).

'That's ok' one of the fellows interjects abruptly, before everyone begins to get overly concerned. She explains her calm: 'although admittedly there are often overlaps with what we do, these are requirements of the social sciences and most of us work in political *philosophy*'.

The reader looks up, a nod of relief, but it is swiftly replaced by more consternation as he turns the page and narrates on.

'Why is impact assessed - Arts and humanities research offers a variety of direct and indirect social and economic benefits. Our Business Processes and Analysis Team co-ordinates the collection of evidence and impact to address key questions posed by the Department for Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy, demonstrating the value of arts and humanities research; why it should be funded by the taxpayer; and what 'added value' the Arts and Humanities Research Council as an organisation delivers'.

Some muttering begins to soundtrack the continued narration, but the pace the reporting has gathered prevents any further interruptions.

‘Collaborative Doctoral Awards provide funding for doctoral studentship projects proposed by a university based academic, to work in collaboration with an organisation outside of higher education’ (Council A. a., Collaborative Doctoral Awards, 2015).

‘How we collect impact - We take a portfolio approach to developing the evidence base. A mix of quantitative and qualitative information is important to make a convincing and robust case for the impact and value of AHRC-funded research. An increasing emphasis on accountability and efficiency makes this approach more relevant than ever. Quantitative evidence, for example, is needed to provide ‘hard’ evidence of outputs of funding, whilst case studies are recognised as the most effective approach to demonstrating impact’

‘Development of AHRC Impact Webpages – As we continue to develop our impact portfolio and evidence collection methods we will further develop this webpage. This page will contain links to a large number of impact case studies categorised and searchable via a range of parameters, including place, sector and discipline. We will also aim to provide information that will assist Arts and Humanities researchers to develop their impact story. This will include describing how impact is defined by Research Councils, giving guidance on how to incorporate pathways to impact within research proposals, capture of evidence of impact, and how to better articulate the impact generated from arts and humanities research’ (Council A. a., Impact, 2015).

There is a collective sigh, a sign that all present have had enough information and now seek to give their reaction to it. The question of what is legitimate to study, from the perspective of the bodies that are mostly responsible for enabling it, is ever more so summed up in a simple equation: utility, or *impact* = legitimacy. In this case then, there is a demand for a political philosophy capable of such impact, from the hand that feeds. This is problematic, for the responses in this tower room will not be unanimous. The window-gazers are likely to react first, already half-prepared, even eager for this kind of theorising, despite the Zarathustra lying in wait for the kill; the conversants perhaps more hesitantly, unable or unwilling to unlock themselves from their debates for fear of what it would mean, whilst the sky-gazers have barely noticed. Meanwhile, the hand still holds the corn.

1.2 Connecting funding and *impact legitimacy* to current debates

So, there is an increasing and emerging impact agenda within university funding, in both EHRC and AHRC criteria, thus straddling political theory, history of political thought and political philosophy (and all the grey bits in between). This paper does not dispute that some projects may well continue to receive funding which make no claims to impact, such as conversations which we have solely within the academy for conversation's sake, but I do believe that an impact agenda as a *justification* for 'taxpayer's' money is on the rise, and therefore I seek to consider normative theory's reaction to funding bodies that are increasingly making it clear that a '*legitimate*' subject to study, work and do research on, within a higher institution, is one that demonstrates 'the value of arts and humanities research' to that presumed 'taxpayer'.

It is also true though, that what might be thought of as 'legitimate' by a research council may not be for the practitioners of the subject, perhaps having no interest in developing 'their impact story', or, harbouring concerns over where this leads. This 'impact' demand then, is to seriously consider the 'nature' of our chosen discipline and whether it can be reconciled with this particular framing of 'legitimacy'. Thus, it is not just timely to discuss this in a practical sense of actually getting research grants and PhD places, but as a philosophical moment, for I think such a situation offers something almost new in regards to our self-reflective musings. This is not a reflection had at luxury, but one done out of necessity, or at least with an added scrutiny which brings a sharp focus to an age-old *academic* debate regarding the purpose of political theorising. Within this circumstance of finance, numbers and department survival, a little dose of our own realism infiltrates this question of the 'nature' of political philosophy. This will inevitably create tensions that jeopardise future PhD projects in the field, and therefore the subject as a whole.

Henceforth, in my view, directly confronting the challenges of funding criteria needs to be talked about alongside academic debates, more than I think it currently is, because it not only deals with the practical matter of subject survival, legitimacy and reflection over 'use' within the discipline, but these demands and the environment they create also bring up old issues and impasses in the arguments we have with historicism and realism: historical critiques of normative foundations undermine the idea of a normative theory that produces the 'right thing to do', which is surely where our 'impact' would lie.

Therefore, if normative theorists and political philosophers as a whole fall short of or ignore these impact demands there is an argument that we turn out to be utterly disconnected and

irrelevant to the society we comment upon; so then, to a certain extent, it is worth at least considering if we also fail to deal with our own anxieties regarding impact, as well as the aforementioned critiques. This is why I have thrown the funding criteria into the melting pot already swirling around regarding normative theory and its transformative claims: essentially, the narrative of ‘impact’ from beyond the academy, opens up unresolved battlegrounds within it. Without a series of responses, normative theory will be found wanting and without an answer in a practical, *and* academic, sense, leaving it nowhere to go. What then, is the present case for a more normative, normative theory?

1.3 If the cap fits...: normative theory as it currently is within an impact agenda

In that debate over whether or not normative theory *ought* to be more impact based, is also intertwined the question of whether or not it even has the *capacity* to be, which presumably, is a question of immediate interest for the research councils. Before we worry ourselves with the ‘should’ issue, let us first make sure the second demand is even possible. Is normative theory adaptable to such an agenda?

Political philosophy is, to my mind, reflection on how we live collectively, which requires us to also conceptually analyse the terms which we rely upon to engage in this. This pursuit only becomes normative when such reflection is ‘*pursued* in light of’ what we ‘should do’ (Lane, 2011, p. 133) (emphasis added), but it ought not discard the conceptual analysis which was part of our philosophical musings in the first place – this is what keeps normative theory a form of political philosophy¹.

This is a simple, not necessarily fixed distinction, but it helps us to hone in on what the *purpose* and *effect* of this intervening modal verb is exactly. There are two aspects to it, which simultaneously co-depend and strain on each other. First, ‘should’ tells us this is an activity in which we will be conversing mostly in the abstract, because we are talking about what ought to be done yet is not, and second, that there is an action-guiding aspect hovering around what we discuss. For some, this action-guiding may well be the heart and soul of the activity, whilst for others it is perhaps something in the shadows, nothing more than a framing device for the abstraction. As an initial thought, we may think this at once offers a political philosophy well-suited to the impact agenda and by the same merit, potentially rendered useless. ‘Well-suited’, when we consider that funding bodies are explicitly stating to institutions and taxpayers outside

¹ This claim is essential to this paper and will be explored later

of academia that arts and humanities research tell an ‘impact story’, or that academics in general can ‘help you think in new and challenging ways’. If an impact discourse demands that of normative theorists, then the fit can seem a good one. Put simply, the abstractions in which theorists engage in to find some insight in how we should live, promise the ‘new and challenging’, whilst the normative component easily translates into the ‘help you’.

‘Rendered useless’ though, because ultimately, if we are to produce ‘new ways of thinking’ through abstracted principles, then fundamentally there is a disconnect with the world around us: if our abstraction is too abstract, we run the risk of appearing completely detached. I think it is currently fair to say that the impact agenda asks for a more explicitly normative element from our philosophical work than perhaps we as theorists are used to, what with talk of pairing up with ‘non-academic partners’ and collaborators. Thus, that which takes an ‘is’ and frames it with an ‘ought to’ in this impact discourse environment, has a lot more emphasis placed on the ‘ought’ within it, requiring a sort of ‘impact theory’, if you like. Hence, the strain makes itself apparent: does this extra emphasis on the action-guiding demand come at the expense of less abstract reflection, pulling us irrevocably closer to a realist pursuit of ‘modus vivendi arrangements’? (Stears, 2011, p. 178) Are our window-gazers straying too far from the conversations?

Not exactly. John Rawls re-invigorated political philosophy, of course, by energising the normative impulse through starting from the abstract space known as the ‘veil of ignorance’, in order to ‘nullify the effects of specific contingencies which put men at odds’ (Rawls, 1991, p. 136). Thus, the implication of all this is that certain contingencies and personal involvements can disrupt two human possibilities: our ability to think of a ‘just’ (Rawls, 1991, p. 136) moral value and our capacity to agree upon its justness (not ignoring the fact that the definition of the former relies somewhat upon the achievement of the latter). The reasoning is that departing from contingencies not only clears our path of these obstacles, but also means that any agreement we subsequently would reach could be trusted more, over a simpler utilitarian calculus.

So, when one starts one’s normative pursuit in abstraction, they are freed up to pursue perfectibility of a concept or value, which in fact makes normative theory adaptable to an ‘impact theory’, rather than irrelevant to it. This is because within this activity, it is not that real-life events are ignored, they are ignored in the prior construction of the principle so that we may reach an ‘ideal’ which should be of use to identifying concerns with a specific issue or event. It is this trait that actually ensures normative theory is at once *morally suited* to action-

guiding and *capable* of it: there is a space where we can imagine the right thing to do, as a pressure upon the reality. When the regularity of the 'is' has clouded our moral reasoning, normative theory reconnects us with the 'should', in both the abstract, 'new ways of thinking' sense, and action-guiding 'help you' sense. From this perspective, pursuing 'the right thing to do' thus appears to conform to an idealised, yet practical politics.

1.4 ...wear it: normative theory and the potential for action guiding and co-production

The window-gazers in the introductory indulgence above were already keeping an eye on what was happening beyond their ivory tower then, pondering how the conversations over the ideal within it, energised a normative approach to the outside world. We might consider Jeremy Waldron's 'Political Political Theory' a good reflection of this. In this ground-breaking collection of theoretical works, he urges us to consider a more outwardly looking normative theory: 'political theorists lose nothing when we insist that our particular concerns and the values and principles that we particularly emphasize are concerns in the first instance about elections, parties, legislatures, courts, states, regimes, and agencies' (Waldron, *Political Political Theory*, 2016, p. 19). Our moral discussions and their normative force, should thus be considered directly related to our society's actual laws and institutions. This presumably falls in line with new criteria which effectively decide whether or not our projects are legitimate candidates for funding, in terms of them making a 'difference to lives' (though as we shall see, Waldron himself seemingly has a more nuanced position than simply advocating a normative theory with a fully 'prescriptive', 'blueprint for society' (Waldron, *What Plato Would Allow*, 1995, pp. 161, 164)).

So far so good, but how will claims like this be measured by our research councils? As far as I can gauge, the major funding bodies are doing this in two ways. Firstly, the extent to which non-academic organisations have 'access' to us, where we are cast as 'world leading researchers' whose moral musings have weight, or add weight to the institution we are part of. In this, we either have effect as an individual through our work being read and absorbed in a non-academic sphere, or what we produce contributes to the official company-line of the university, who are listened to as a research institution. Effectively we are the Aristotle's to the Alexander's or philosophers in a think tank, where what we say is engaged with the places where politics 'goes on'. Here, there is a presumption that our voices have the potential to be heard by society in general, almost as much as by someone in a political position: 'In these

cases, it would be fair to say, its principal educative impact is in the forming or refining of political sensibilities and political judgement, rather than the transmission of a definite set of findings' (Dunn, 1996, p. 13). Secondly, our impact is measured in actual 'collaboration' or *co-production* with 'non-academic partners'. With this, our work is tied into a particular organisation, where it therefore must be of use to be considered worthy of 'partnership'. It should, on some level, produce 'results', whatever they are predefined as, directly relevant to our 'collaborators'. It is not only focussed on a specific problem, but a specific organisation already involved with the issue in some way.

In both methods of appraisal, an explicitly *normative* theory seems to be necessary, and the foundation of a 'Political Political Theory' is the first step to this, where the abstract principles we discuss at length within academia, *are* relevant to specific events or institutions outside of the ivory tower. In this framing, ideologies and principles founded within a 'veil of ignorance' do matter, because they act to expose actions, laws or policies which contradict our moral compasses; thus, why we should 'insist' that our philosophical pursuits are 'in the first instance' 'concerns' with actual events and institutions. Therefore, justice as a metaphysical discussion *is* applicable to debates over contract law, for instance, or to specifically cite an example which this paper is concerned with, *freedom* in the abstract sense *is* useful in putting a moral pressure on real, trending legislation regarding public space and the homeless². So, our urge to gaze out of the ivory tower window in fact comes from our engagement with abstract principles, rather than our abstractions being in conflict with that.

Under such a perspective, political philosophy can be ready for this impact shift, if we move closer towards a more transformative normative theory. As 'world leading researchers' one would expect nothing less from us than *action guiding* theoretical work of use to those institutions or organisations outside academia, and on occasion even collaborative, *co-production*. However, this preparedness and its premise is disputed. What then, would be the objections to this understanding of the subject, where do they come from, and what state do they leave political philosophy in within an academy already anxious about the normative in normative theory, put under the gaze of an impact discourse?

² This is a direct reference to Jeremy Waldron's 'Homelessness and the Issue of Freedom', which I will talk of in detail later.

Part 2 - Objection, Objection, Objection!

2.1 An objection of philosophy

The understanding of normative theory as an abstract pursuit with an action-guiding element seems easy enough, but the balance we strike between the two is a more complicated, and aggravated, matter: ‘The *purpose* of our theorizing is – ironically to be sure, but not regrettably – never actually intended to guide action’ (Lamb, 2016, p. 18). This is our first response to a more explicitly normative, normative theory, grounded in the idea that political theory is determined by content, not expertise, thus whether in a lecture hall or pub conversationists are ‘in some sense engaging in the same essential *activity*’.

These different visions of political philosopher as scientist on the one hand, and activist on the other, are each attempts to explain the role of a *professional* practitioner, figures that are likely to be employed by – or have been employed by, or are preparing to be employed by – a university or equivalent institution. Although discussions of the nature of the subject are often framed in this way, in being so they arguably miss something very important about the nature of political philosophy, not as an area of specialised academic enquiry, but rather as a human activity’ (Lamb, 2016, p. 4).

This being the case, ‘It is ‘simply’ the lack of deadline for decisions, and consequent luxury of time, that defines the political theorist and *not* her expertise on the subject matter about which she writes’ (Lamb, 2016, p. 5). This is not to deny that the academic culture within which discussions take place is not different or distinct – they involve a ‘high level of philosophical abstraction’ and are ‘expressed in more demotic terminology’, for example. What this does suggest, is that when we transfer the normative element in these debates beyond the academy into moral instruction we should be very wary of the premise that we are ‘world leading researchers’, for, however light a touch we may apply, we still imply a moral authority which is misplaced. We are not in fact giving expert advice, but reproducing a certain way of doing normative discussion. Essentially, reproducing a particular culture of ‘having conversations about the same issues’ (Lamb, 2016, p. 4) (The irony here in regard to realist critique – which I will come to later - I am sure is not lost). This therefore cannot have the weight of moral expertise, and so cannot be asked to justify itself in the manner that an impact discourse seemingly, and increasingly, demands. Or, if we seek not to simply impose and reproduce our academic traditions of debate, and moderate this in order to have the conversation in the same language with our ‘non-academic partners’, then to put it crudely, what is the point in us being there? What do we bring to the table? What are we co-producing?

This point seems particularly pertinent when considered alongside Ian Hampsher-Monk's claim that in our current times 'political argument takes place within an unspecialised, demotic linguistic field' and so is mostly 'conducted through rhetoric' (Hampsher-Monk, 2011, pp. 112, 113). Normative theory, by its own standards, cannot engage in rhetoric at the expense of truth claims (which are of course under a historical gaze not truths but 'local prejudices'), and so becomes too isolated and removed to actually employ the normative task. Thus, effectively it cannot work as a form of political comment which seeks to be advisory beyond academic debate. The philosopher begins to realise the ivory tower is also her prison that she has been locked within. This leaves any defence over its merit and worth restricted solely to the same moral discussions within the academy. We may conclude that such a form of internal valuation is bankrupt, particularly when it is a subject which regularly looks on political action, yet struggles to *take* action.

It is worth mentioning though that this does not mean our academic is devoid of any expertise at all, just that it is only recognisable internally, within a university institution:

The expert on political philosophy is a scholar and her knowledge is necessarily located in and defined by a domain, the discipline in which she has epistemic competence. She is the person who has studied, for example, the writing of Thomas Hobbes or John Rawls intensively and to an advanced level, who perhaps teaches their theories to students, who might write essays that advance our understanding of, and appreciation for, them, and who has received the professional recognition that comes with university association through such statuses as employment, affiliation, or the conferral of a doctorate in that field (Lamb, 2016, p. 6)

This 'institutional' expertise (Lamb, 2016, p. 7) with which a supervisor is recognised as having over a PhD student for example, can be wielded, because it is within an academic 'domain'. The former is likely to have a better knowledge of Rawls, from which the latter can gain. But, this 'advanced level' of normative knowledge, does not translate into a moral expertise outside of the academy. A call for external 'impact' to justify the use of taxpayer's money in such a way is therefore anathema to this view of political philosophy or theory.

This tension between philosophy as an activity and the normative, action-guiding pursuit that Lamb pulls at, relies upon favouring one side of a distinction made in normative theory by Jeremy Waldron in 'What would Plato allow'. Here, Waldron gives us a framing of political philosophy into two endeavours: 'evaluative' and 'prescriptive' (Waldron, What Plato Would Allow, 1995, p. 161). This article therefore in some ways offers the building blocks to the objections an over-enthusiastic window-gazer, looking for funding, may face when talking about the 'impact' of their theorising. This is because even though Waldron has more recently

called for a ‘Political, Political Theory’, within this older piece (published in 1995), he tackles the issue with *presuming* a philosophical work is action-guiding. Here Waldron argues that we should not make the mistake of assuming political philosophy is just normative theory, or even that all normative theory is some kind of ‘wishlist’ designed and discussed ‘for immediate implementation’ (Waldron, *What Plato Would Allow*, 1995, pp. 162, 159). Waldron insists that often, ‘what looks like nothing more thoughtful than the presentation of a normative blueprint – a utopia, an ideal society, a new dispensation – can often be a cover for much deeper speculation in philosophy’ (Waldron, *What Plato Would Allow*, 1995, p. 164). This is because, despite what we might feel and acknowledging the world beyond as our ‘first concern’, theorists are not writing policy proposals or describing perfect societies for political leaders, but exploring the consequences and implications of a normative concept in an academic, philosophical arena; hence, a ‘*speculation*’.

Waldron uses Nozick to highlight the issue with presuming that action-guiding is meant to guide policy-makers and political actors rather than have force in a philosophical debate, but even cites Hobbes and Rousseau as good examples, having hardly been political advisors either, other ambitions they may have had aside. A strong argument can therefore be developed, proposing that normative theory done within the academy is a culture of discussion had predominantly in an ‘evaluative’ mode: with an abstract principle as the starting point, because any event it is applied to effectively works as an example, to first and foremost strengthen an academic argument. Incidentally, this begins to sound like an invitation to read normative theory in the manner of Skinner, asserting that we investigate who the interlocutors were and what the reason for the piece was: ‘whenever it is claimed that the point of historical study of such [perennial] questions is that we may learn directly from the *answers*, it will be found that what *counts* as an answer will usually look, in a different culture or period, so different in itself that it can hardly be in the least useful even to go on thinking of the relevant question as being the ‘same’ (Skinner, 1969, p. 52). However, Waldron’s argument very much relies on a political philosophy aware of itself, or to be more accurate, political philosophers aware of the idea that they do write within the same field or conversation as other theorists. Thus, many questions they ask *are* in fact similar, if not the ‘same’, because they are framed within a culture of a philosophical arena, more so than being defined by the particular time period.

Indeed, Waldron delivers this concept whilst claiming to ‘disassociate’ from such a historicist approach (Waldron, *What Plato Would Allow*, 1995): ‘In this age of exquisite hermeneutic sensitivity, *we* may be anxious to avoid the anachronism of reading the traditional texts in the

light of our own concerns. But the authors whose works we are handling with this sensitivity had no such scruples themselves, and I think it is fair to say that our sensitivity to their context seriously distorts our understanding of their philosophical intentions' (Waldron, *What Plato Would Allow*, 1995, p. 146). In effect, Waldron cites Hobbes attacks on Aristotle (amongst others), to show that there was an awareness of and belief in a 'dialogue across the ages' (Waldron, *What Plato Would Allow*, 1995, p. 146) amongst philosophers of the time, even if that is doubted today. Just how disassociated he is from the historical critique, is a matter for debate: we may think, for instance, that this claim involves an engagement in exactly the historical method he criticises, for coming to such a position does not just involve a close reading of text. But passing over this point, the conclusion is assuredly not in fashion for most historicists: that these text's authors felt they were part of a recognised pursuit and theorists were not just writing responses to their living interlocutors and current events, but were also aware that they were contributing to some vague sense of a canon and a subject that went beyond mere immediate circumstance, a subject which therefore connects us to them directly through similar questions and problems – in short, political philosophy. Thus, if they were taking past works into account when they wrote and replying to long-deceased interlocutors from an ancient civilisation, they could also perceive of forthcoming generations and the position of their own work within any future canons: 'the idea that he [Hobbes] would have insisted indignantly that we confine his work to its 'context' strikes me as absurd' (Waldron, *What Plato Would Allow*, 1995, p. 147). Hobbes, Rousseau and even Hegel, Waldron claims, 'wrote in response to books that were written centuries ago; and it is impossible to read such works as *Leviathan*, for example, without getting the impression that the authors also intended their works to survive the historical vicissitudes that elicited them' (Waldron, *What Plato Would Allow*, 1995, p. 147). If this is the case, then the context of the English civil war despite being of interest and perhaps even a motivator for Hobbes, is also relegated to a reference point for the deeper philosophical discussion over sovereign authority which Hobbes understands will occur again beyond his own time. Under this view, it is therefore not wrong to read Hobbes as if he were part of the same 'conversation' as our own, for that is what Hobbes himself was doing not only in regard to Aristotle, but also in anticipating us, as fellow theorists with a need to consider the same problem. Hence, the implication is that some works are written primarily in this literary and academic world of abstraction in response to other theorists gone, present and to come, rather than being first and foremost for our localised political realms of policy, governance and events. Should we accept this as the case, we must remember this 'academic world' is a place to discuss, theorise and propose *ideas* in a shared academic culture, not

necessarily to offer concrete and absolute prescription to the events it may deliberate over as part of this ‘conversation’. When framed in such a way, we see their works as experiments and forms of evaluation over and above action-guiding for a specific problem: it may be part of it, but the commitment to the activity of philosophising strains against this. It is from this position that Waldron can say that normative theorists are not necessarily or always being prescriptive to wider society and politics when they do normative theory, for like Hobbes, they are conscious of the academic ‘dialogue’ in which they pen their ideas, and their own place as theorists within this culture.

This of course is not to say that such attempts to go beyond this world of ‘conversation’ could not and did not ever happen, or that the actual realm of governance was ignored: ‘it would be wrong for me to suggest that there is no place for a philosophically informed and rigorous contribution to the civic discussion of legal and constitutional reform’ (Waldron, *What Plato Would Allow*, 1995, p. 147). Likewise, as Waldron concedes, it is not impossible for the reverse to happen: that the political realm provide the philosophical world with material – here he obviously mentions the *Federalist Papers* as an example (Waldron, *What Plato Would Allow*, 1995, p. 147). These caveats seem particularly important seeing as ‘Political Political Theory’ calls upon theorists to attempt a ‘much closer connection between political theory and law’, and asserts that ‘we certainly do need a sophisticated philosophical understanding of the layers of value that are implicated in the assessment of political institutions’ (Waldron, *Political Political Theory*, 2016, p. 12). We should be generous with this caveat, for we must remember that over 20 years separate the Plato paper from this book.

The underlying point then, is only that we should not suppose that a work of political philosophy or normative theory is some kind of political manifesto, even when it may on the surface appear so apparently engaged with an actual place of contingencies and context, like *Anarchy, State and Utopia*, or *Leviathan*. Therefore, for instance, when Nozick suggests we abandon tax as a method of wealth redistribution, it is perhaps wrong to *presume* that this is anything more than a theoretical exploration within an academic discussion, or more specifically, a response to Rawls with an awareness that one is also contributing to the subject and academic culture of political philosophy: ‘Robert Nozick is a professional scholar, tenured at a great American university at the end of the twentieth century, in circumstances where he is free to write or teach anything he pleases, without political repercussions’ (Waldron, *What Plato Would Allow*, 1995, p. 145). Such a point is well made, and rings across many confused

interpretations trying to consolidate Nietzsche the Zarathustra with Nietzsche the awkward polite man, or Rousseau the principled theorist with Rousseau the absent father.

Thus, political philosophy is not just normative, and normative theory can and indeed ought to involve something other than moral medicine in its philosophical exploration: ‘we should not be so sure that we have had (from the thirties through the early sixties) all the *conceptual analysis* that we need, and that we now perfectly well understand the concepts of politics’ (Waldron, *What Plato Would Allow*, 1995, p. 167) (emphasis added). The argument is that we must remember that ‘evaluative is not the same as prescriptive’, and when writing predominantly within an academic debate, the former cannot and should not become the latter at the expense of the ‘evaluative’. Ergo, if ‘discerning the reason inherent in what already exists is not the same as setting out, in imagination, a plan for social construction’ (Waldron, *What Plato Would Allow*, 1995, p. 161), let us not make normative theory only about one thing – prescribing and guiding action – for it also, in this ethical guidance, gives us opportunities to reflect on concepts used, and as Lamb does, the implications of being moral guidance. A ‘normative blueprint’ then, presumably, should not brush aside its commitment to philosophical analysis at the gain of instruction, for it is this ‘deeper speculation’ that maintains the philosophy within the normative.

The ‘evaluative’ and ‘prescriptive’ forms are distinctions worth considering then, even if we do not believe they are necessarily mutually exclusive endeavours, as Lamb I think suggests. We may decide to push at this, reversing the concern, by pointing out that Waldron’s critique of the historian can be turned against his own analysis: the idea that someone like Nozick can write something so politically grounded, and not expect it to contribute to ideologies behind political governance if not policy itself, is equally ‘absurd’ as the thought that Hobbes could write about sovereignty in *Leviathan* and be ‘indignant’ if it were ever to be considered beyond the historical moment of the English civil war. Writing in the philosophical arena, surely involves the idea that what is produced and argued there, has some kind of relationship with those who practice politics, even as a philosophical experiment, for the purpose of such experiments is to offer clarifications and show how a particular way of thinking may alter our moral commitments in various contexts: to repeat, ‘In these cases, it would be fair to say, its principal educative impact is in the forming or refining of political sensibilities and political judgement, rather than the transmission of a definite set of findings’ (Dunn, 1996, p. 13).

Furthermore, even *if* the historical moment of Hobbes was a conversation first, political instruction second, then the historical moment of political philosophy in more recent times is

the challenge of ‘impact’ beyond this philosophical ‘dialogue’, through the question of its effect on actual politics, and so we now surely write well-aware of this. Again, Waldron himself seems to accept this with the claim that philosophical thinking is not separate from ‘civic discourse’, and that the *activity* of philosophy is something which can be done in a bar between friends as much as it is within the academy, and so, one would assume, within parliament assembly also: ‘Both citizens and theorists argue about politics, economy, rights, and justice: we do it in our seminars and journals; they do it in town halls and on the streets; and many of us wear both hats’ (Waldron, *What Plato Would Allow*, 1995, p. 147). Hence, ground-breaking ways of thinking pursued within the academy would surely be of interest to the professional politician and governance, if, through the rhetoric, they still be in some small way in the business of the application of these ‘new’ outlooks.

Nevertheless, a tension persists between our evaluative and prescriptive tendencies, and the *objection of philosophy* that Lamb more directly makes to an ‘impact theory’, does raise an uncomfortable issue with the consequential establishment of a scholarly moral expertise, and whether or not such establishment is to misconstrue the nature of philosophy. This will need to be resolved if this paper is to make a successful argument for a normative, normative theory. With Lamb, we have an explicit and understandable worry over moral authority, but in many ways, Waldron’s analysis of normative theory has simply made us more actively aware on the ‘space between thought and action’, when considering the question ‘what should I do?’, in relation to the actual act of ‘what shall I do’ (Williams, *Ethics and the Limits of Philosophy*, 1985, p. 18): in essence, an analysis that says normative theory should not be thought of as action-guiding at the expense of reflection, and even, conceptual analysis, considering that ‘we have not had enough’ of it.

This is an important warning, for if we are to consider what we may lose theorising within an ‘impact’ agenda, we should also question the presumption that we are actually going to achieve ‘impact’. For instance, even if a co-producing political philosopher was able to overcome these hurdles and work with a non-academic organisation, does the concept of impact remain severely limited in regard to reach? Whilst the paradigm of impact is heavily skewed to co-production, theoretical work which seeks to have impact - either because of a funding agenda or because of a belief in a transformative normative theory – as I have mentioned, may have to become narrower, focussing on the issues their collaborative ‘non-academic partners’ are interested in. Despite the claim that our moral theorising is applicable to and a concern with actual problems in our societies, in regard to co-production, there are not many collaborators

like charities, policy makers, think tanks or institutions outside of the academic culture of western political philosophy asking broad questions like ‘what is justice?’, let alone to the same ‘high levels of abstraction’ that the academic arena does. Therefore, our problem resurfaces: if our concerns are to be with ‘in the first instance about elections, parties, legislatures, courts, states, regimes, and agencies’, as I agree they should be, and we want to in some way maintain a space for theory as a transformative act, then it is necessary to recognise that subsequently, conceptual questioning of the meta-topics like justice and what view of the world the ‘right thing to do’ rests upon, is in danger of getting buried beneath presupposition, in the clamour to be transformative. This in fact, is exactly the point raised by a *historical* gaze onto normative theory: having seen the issues from our objection of philosophy then, let us now turn to an objection from history to a funding-friendly, impact-based, *normative*, normative theory.

2.2 The objection of history

It is actually in another Waldron article that we can begin, to help us examine the *historical* objection. In his thought provoking paper ‘Homelessness and the Issue of Freedom’, he engages negative liberty within an appeal to ‘abstract liberal principles’ (Waldron, Homelessness and the Issue of Freedom, 1991, p. 295), to frame homelessness for a philosophical *discussion*, yet at the same time it is normative in the sense that it is a *moral* gaze on a problem, which cannot hide a desire to shame ‘people into *action* and concern’ (Waldron, Homelessness and the Issue of Freedom, 1991, p. 323) (emphasis added)³. By pointing out that the freedom of the homeless in many places is impinged upon to the extent that one cannot even pursue ‘primal human tasks’ like urinating, eating or sleeping (Waldron, Homelessness and the Issue of Freedom, 1991, p. 301), without the threat of (and in many cases actual) interference and prohibition, it would be a particularly hard or polemic reader who was not moved in some way: when one examples this lack of negative liberty in such actions, affirmation of the concept is almost inevitable. This seems then, a perfect instance of how the academy’s discussion of normative theory – in this case liberal principles of negative freedom - can *apply* to and be relevant for an actual event – the problem of homelessness. This is an especially powerful message when Waldron highlights how many of these activities simply

³ I would say that I do not think this is a contradiction with the earlier article on evaluate and prescriptive theory, or a significant change in attitude on Waldron’s part. His analysis was concerned primarily with presumptions over normative theory, it does not prevent subsequent pieces of work engaging in the prescriptive aspect.

have to be fulfilled before any subsequent action to get out of a homeless state, or even before we can make basic plans for the most rudimentary survival strategies – try looking for a shelter when one has not slept for two days. Essentially, they are ‘urgent’ functions that he says are not ‘actions that a person can *wait* to perform’ (Waldron, *Homelessness and the Issue of Freedom*, 1991, p. 321) if one is to significantly increase one’s chance of staying alive whilst on the streets: thus, they are not only survival strategies in themselves, but pursuits which enable more attempts at staying alive. One must be able to perform them regardless of whether we praise or blame the homeless for their situation: even if we believe they are responsible for their circumstances, then we still have to allow them the chance to work themselves out of it, without making it actively more difficult. Objections borne from experiential or empirical observations, such as highlighting the active presence of a local aid program or how obstructive a specific homeless hangout is, still struggle to deal with the basic *principle* we have been asked to view homelessness from⁴: ‘even if their being homeless cannot be laid at anyone’s door or attributed to anything over and above their own choices or the impersonal workings of the market, my point remains. Their homelessness *consists* in unfreedom’ (Waldron, *Homelessness and the Issue of Freedom*, 1991, p. 306). The origin point then is the perfectibility of negative freedom, and it is a persuasive case when it is so strongly reinforced in the context of an actual event where negative freedom seems so completely absent, the reality distant from the origin; a reality which of course, appears so dire and desperate to us. Negative liberty, used to gaze on such a context, quite literally becomes a case of life or death. This type of normative theorising therefore appears to hold a strong element of the ‘prescriptive’ (Waldron, *What Plato Would Allow*, 1995, p. 161): telling us what is wrong, not just in the context of a philosophical debate, but as a society, through reaffirming a theoretical concept. This is an article which would, I assume, please the impact agenda.

The historical objection here then, would be a Nietzschean paraphrasing of ‘under what conditions did man invent the value judgements good and evil? *And what value do they themselves have?*’ (Nietzsche F. , 1994, p. 5). Armed with this historical framing, the historicist is able to take what would seem the most rudimentary, agreed-upon and universal concepts, switch out the ‘good and evil’ for whichever moral standard he or she wishes to evaluate – in this case negative liberty - and trace a particular historical lineage, exposing the contingency of such beliefs. This raises doubt over the perfectibility of any normative *value* the viewer

⁴ In a second article, homelessness and community, this seems to be Waldron’s main aim: to deal with, on liberal terms, the ‘cosmetic communitarian’ (Waldron, *Homelessness and Community*, 2000, p. 406) responses to homelessness which effectively interweave a homeless blame within their communitarian ethics.

applies to the event, such as Waldron's 'abstract liberal principles' and its gaze onto homelessness.

Now, naturally, one may balk at the audacity of such a questioning, when we consider the obvious awfulness that homelessness generally involves in reality, but this only serves to emphasise the point a Nietzschean framing makes, in many ways, strengthening the need for it: the masking of the normative 'presupposition' into one of many '*canons* of reasons' (King, 2009, p. 306). Simply put, any moral argument which provokes accusations of audacity and disbelief when questioned, is exactly the kind of thing we do need to keep a historical eye upon.

It is of course not only this genealogical approach to moral principles which dogs the steps of normative theory: '*History of political philosophy* serves effectively to temper the parochialism of analytical theory, where complacency can so easily blind us to the controversial nature of our presuppositions' (Haddock, 2011, p. 69) (emphasis added). Furthermore, grounded on a historicist view of the abstract search for perfectible principles, realist critiques are perhaps the most hostile to action-guiding on the premise of a moral right or wrong: 'such commitments seem to warrant a realism like that of Guess: on what grounds are we to seek 'justice' or 'progress', if our moral beliefs are solely the products of our local environment and historical setting?' (Stears, 2011, p. 187). A normative theory which reacts to funding discourse by applying moral principles found through lengthy and abstracted discussions within the academy, to beyond this 'philosophical arena', is one that inevitably collapses in on itself when it is recognised as a specific culture, because of the impossibility this historical framing places over apparently moral intentions. Normative theorists are well-aware of this assault: 'It is precisely this point that is taken up by philosophers like Guess who wish to make the further claim that the attempt to construct an abstract political philosophy must fail, because it can only be the local prejudices of a particularly society' (Kelly, 2011, p. 20).

Ironically, this historicist accusation at reproduction echoes concerns raised by Lamb, which spurred a departure to an 'evaluative' normative theory in the face of impact demands. This presumably, helps insulate political philosophy from accusations of invoking a dangerous moral authority, which invariably result from a view of normative theory as that which simply veils its own 'local prejudices' within a claim to 'nullify' contingencies. In short, it is a sidestepping to avoid normative theory as the granter of moral expertise, or an extroverted elitism, if you like. This however, in my view, is not a wholly convincing response or desirable reaction to take, where equally, an introverted elitism of sorts can be so readily thrown at the ivory tower that results from this retreat to academia: 'the *ressentiment* of those beings who,

being denied the proper response of *action*, compensate for it only with *imaginary* revenge’ (Nietzsche F. , On The Genealogy of Morality, 2006, p. 400) (emphasis added). In the context of our funding demands, this is perhaps even more problematic, creating issues around the continued survival of a subject if we as practitioners of it, are explicit in our rejection of impact (I will return to this).

Admittedly though, we are also exposed under a historical scrutiny when we take the opposite approach of prescribing quite happily, when our moral principles are explained as being historically formed and contingent. If we are even a little bit engaged with the window-gazing, ‘prescriptive’ aspect of normative theory then, what ‘particular society’ are we reproducing ‘local prejudices’ from, other than the academic society of western political philosophy? Surely, if nothing else Nietzsche was arguing that the Kantian, metaphysical dialogue between philosophers was a partisan culture all of its own, unable to see past its constructed morality; a morality dependant on and borne from Socratic debate. Thus, the historicist’s claim that theoretical abstraction is in fact not a neutral practice or *process* but a partisan place or *framework*, with its own cultural bias, means that the ‘particular society’ we are regurgitating is normative theory: it has a specific historical construction, which in its abstraction, can sometimes struggle to properly consider contingencies which *create* certain types of moral claims. Here for example, we can see how corrective justice potentially gets abstracted away in a ‘veil of ignorance’, and when inequalities may be racially caused, this is extremely problematic. Failure to recognise such injustices for what they were can lead to accusations of ‘white theory’⁵. Therefore, this claim not only seemingly condemns normative theory’s attempts to achieve its own criteria of nullifying contingencies, but also makes it potentially bias against or dismissive of moral claims that do not come from the abstract.

In this gaze onto such political philosophising, history subsequently cannot help but supplant it as the political commentator, for the ‘claim to discern what lies at the basis of reality’ is both a philosophical and historical exercise (Hampsher-Monk, 2011, p. 106), and should historians undermine the philosopher’s gaze on reality, all that is left is the historian’s (until science ascends and puts all our actions down to chemical reactions, maybe). This puts realism in a strong position in terms of future academic research. Essentially, realism’s attack on normative theory relies upon what the historical gaze exposes: that the historical is how we should be looking at events around us. If political philosophy tries to gaze *onto* an event with its

⁵ This is a point raised in an excellent lecture by Charles Mills (Mills, 2012) <https://podcasts.ox.ac.uk/liberalising-illiberal-liberalism>

normative darling, then history, having subverted normative theory by ‘unmasking’ (Hoy, 2008, p. 276) the historicity of its ‘presuppositions’, attempts to replace political philosophy as that which tried to get at ‘the basis of reality’ by gazing *within* the event: seeing its own localised position perhaps most distinctly so with its genealogical sweetheart. Realism is thus given the route to undercut normative theory. The ‘nitty gritty’ actualities of institutions become the only thing worth looking at, for there is nothing else outside of this other than similarly localised ‘nitty gritties’. Nietzsche’s genealogy of morality hence does not engage in the metaphysical or abstract to undermine a grouping of moralised beliefs, but instead finds an opposing set within history. The task of searching for what is ‘just’ in a place removed of contingency is replaced by ‘virtues’ (Nietzsche F. , Thus Spoke Zarathustra, 1969, p. 56) found deep within such contingency, the actual problems our society encounters, or in our history. The applicability of an idealised principle to a practical politics is rejected either as elitist, useless, unachievable, or even racially prejudiced, and all that matters is the force of the argument.

Let us not make a straw-man of theorists though. The Straussian days of truth, or ‘independently acquired knowledge’ (Strauss, 1988, pp. 76-77), are long passed. In its place we have ‘vindicatory genealogy’ (Hoy, 2008, p. 276): the recognition that something historically contingent can still have value attributed to it through philosophical analysis. Historicists must accept this notion of a vindicatory genealogy (and therefore the philosopher’s use of it as a riposte), for otherwise they could not believe their own ‘empirical content’ (Bevir, What is Genealogy?, 2008, p. 274) and value their own historical method. If what defines a genealogy at its base is the original premise of the historical contingency of all things, then genealogy itself is open to this denaturalizing process. Happily, by acknowledging the idea of a vindicatory genealogy, the historian has ‘no reason’ to ‘not believe both that radical historicism arose contingently, perhaps even accidentally, and that it is true’ (Bevir, What is Genealogy?, 2008, p. 275). The same however, can be said of the normative principle in play: the historical and genealogical critique is thus pushed back a little further, for historians seem forced to accept a reinterpreted universal or ‘truth’ made ‘by means of a comparison with the alternatives on offer’ (Bevir, The Logic of History of Ideas, 1999, p. 126). Once contingency has been asserted, there still needs to be a decision over whether something is worth keeping or not, which necessitates a working criterion. Surely, we would desire a criterion which accepted historical contingency but did not completely discard making a case for moral

grounding because of that contingency, over one which simply reduced everything to ‘accidents’ (Foucault, Nietzsche, Genealogy, History, 1984, p. 81) of history?

From one perspective, this issue of evaluation that history produces is not a problem at all: ‘The fear that a normative theory based on history will be contingent or lack definitive justification is essentially a fear of pursuing a project that may be extinguished when it outlives its usefulness’ (Sabl, 2011, p. 176). So, there is no need to worry if we cannot judge something ahistorically: if a concept is no longer of use, that is its own judgement. As a result, we need not be concerned that we do not transcend the historical or localised when we evaluate: when something becomes history, that is all the evaluation we need.

For the normative window-gazer, this no doubt raises more problems than it solves: we become ensnared by the ‘use’ of something, its utility, which leads us to an extreme consequentialism: if left unchecked by some other standard this can have fairly dangerous results. Sometimes, loss of a belief or principle is to be mourned, and induce a feeling of things getting worse, otherwise we constantly live in the naïve bliss of things always getting better. Forces of change and agency are thus disarmed. Similarly, we may then wonder exactly *how* something outlives its usefulness: ‘when’ seems to be doing a lot of work here. If a belief present today is being assessed for its value, and in that process is exposed as being historically contingent, the fact that it is still in use now automatically qualifies it for ‘usefulness’, for the institution, individual or group who make a case for it by utilising it. In other words, the existence of something can always have a strong case made for its ‘usefulness’, because it exists. How does it come to not exist then, for surely sometimes a concept has to be questioned by somebody, challenged in thought, before it falls to disuse? It cannot always be simple loss of habit which ends it. With such a manner of measuring worth, nothing ever really stops, or literally every moment in history is reduced to fate, fortune, or the retrospective. Nietzsche and Foucault did much in taking on the formidable dialectic aimed at ‘dissolving the singular event into an ideal continuity’ (Foucault, Nietzsche, Genealogy, History, 1984, p. 88), but we would also do well to remember they were not replacing one totalising ‘truth’ of history with another: ‘That the historian’s claim is effectively a philosophical one (i.e. a claim about the universally parochial conditions of philosophical speech) is, of course, ironic, and is surely damagingly so when formulated in a language particular enough to be identified as itself a claim within a parochial philosophical position’ (Hampsher-Monk, 2011, p. 109)

Likewise, how do we know whether a concept, practice or belief is still useful or if simple habit is actually working in the reverse and maintaining it? Is there a distinguishable difference? If

we want to challenge a habit we would indeed think there was a difference, but then how would we effectively judge between one set of historical norms and another knowing both are ultimately built on nothing but contingency, if that be all that is open to us? How can we critique something if it is still in use? There must therefore, however small, be room for valuation and judgement where we can recognise that we create evaluating principles from ‘a particular society’ but are not imprisoned there. If anything is to change at all, there has to be some external position of a modest degree that one can conceive of if not always utilise, emergent from one’s own historicity, in order damn a belief, concept or practice, and consign it to the past. A tower to reach for, but not start from; a thought space to explore. Yet if this type of *almost* ‘liberated’ thought to ‘reach for’ is only found in historical comparison, in the captivity ‘freeing’ genealogy, then can the philosopher not argue that we are not being freed at all, merely substituting a set of historical values for others, which have their own restraints? Indeed, in such a process, we should therefore ask ‘whether contingency simply and necessarily equates to freedom’ (Lane, 2011, p. 141). Thus again, the question of how practices and beliefs become genuinely distasteful and get discarded arises.

Essentially, if it is the case that we are simply regurgitating localised truths and repackaging them as tools for comparison, then normative theorists can contend that there is nothing wrong about their reproductions (reproducing localised claims is after all inevitable for everyone under a historical gaze), if they simply addendum these comparisons with recognised contingency. Likewise, a claim can be made that this acknowledgement would do nothing to worsen the quality of arguments the practice produces: when one writes about negative freedom and homelessness for instance, one need not necessarily believe to have settled the debate over negative freedom once and for all, to create something worthwhile. What we end up with then, is a *presupposed*, abstracted principle, but one that has been footnoted with acknowledged-contingency, to apply to a ‘real-life’ problem as an adaption to a discourse of impact.

‘Division of labour’ here is key: political philosophers are all too ready to engage in further ‘evaluative’ discussions that have resulted from a historical framing of *presupposed* principles, which were applied in a ‘prescriptive’ manner. Yet, this separation of duties or pursuits, in my opinion, has a problematic implication: that it is an inevitable outcome of a ‘contingent’ normative theory, that such conceptual analysis of principles be separate from the moment of prescription or ‘blueprint’. This would therefore likely mean that in an ‘impact’ environment, funding councils would be increasingly insistent on and interested in the latter ‘blueprint’, and less concerned over the presumption from which it is built. Of course, often in academia, our

work is selective: sometimes between ourselves, as we accept others will do the conceptual analysis bit whilst we do the application (and vice versa), and sometimes between our own self as we write a methods piece one time and a substantive one the other, otherwise, when exactly would the normative get done? Certainly, not in the confines of a paper or article. This seemingly squares off the problem we have, between a Waldron who talks of what normative theorists may be doing versus what we presume they are doing, with a Waldron who talks of engaging theory with institutions and actual law, or who writes a piece on homelessness with a presupposed principle of negative freedom. However, this ‘division of labour’ seems a little clumsy to me, even dangerous, but also perhaps even un-necessary, when we realise there is a way to combine these labours of history, philosophy and action guiding, or narrative, reflection and prescription. This relies on scrutinising one last contingency of normative theory that has not been widely recognised and considering what we can build from that, which comes when we take another look through the historical perspective: yet not by gazing at the normative principle, but the normative *method*.

2.3 Prologue to a resolution: an objection of method

It seems a little banal to re-emphasise, by way of introducing this section, that when a moral value or normative principle is so effectively historicised, like Nietzsche’s vision of morality, the obvious response of a normative theorist is to then subsequently build up a riposte as to why the principle still has value. I feel that repeating this point is important though, for what we realise is this brings the argument away from a historical framing and back onto the political philosopher’s home turf.

What we find in this impasse between historicism and philosophy, and realism and normative theory, is that we are not even speaking to each other. This is a real danger, for if an impact agenda adds urgency to the formation of a ‘legitimate’ and relevant, transformative normative theory, then we must realise that historical and realist criticisms are of paramount importance in doing this effectively - with scrutiny. As a consequence of not doing this, we are currently engaged in a toing and froing regarding the historicisation and subsequent vindication of normative morals, and in this battleground we have, in the main, overlooked something: ‘adopting a historical perspective on the *method* our subject employs may well prove invaluable’, and so we should give it equal attention (Floyd, 2011, p. 38). Matthew King for example, has argued that the Foucauldian ‘project’ was to ‘rationally criticize particular

rationalities', where the targeted 'rationalities' are 'not anything like *forms* of reasoning' but concepts and ideals which are presented as '*canons* of reasons', such as madness (King, 2009, p. 306). This view for genealogy and of Foucault's work, I think, tends to take us more down the path of unravelling the perfectibility of concepts and principles, rather than focusing on the '*forms* of reasoning' which lead us to our 'canonical' principles, or as we have called them, 'presuppositions'. At the very least, this implies a separation between examination of principle and method. He cites Foucault where the French philosopher appears to be emphasising the former aspect to his work: 'as if it were not possible to write a rational criticism of rationality' (Foucault, *How Much Does it Cost for Reason to Tell the Truth?*, 1996, p. 353). In this framing King gives us, the main target is not rational *processes* then, but a solidified, almost unquestioned perception of values claiming rationality: as I have said, the concepts we arrive at from our use of it. 'Be rational' one might say to someone refusing to acknowledge X, and the inference here is that by following procedures which count as 'being rational', X becomes as canonical as the mind-set or *process* of reasoning which precedes it. Genealogy can have a narrow focus on a specific ideology or moral value with the aim of disconnecting this presumption, in which it remains limited to exposing the history of good and evil, insanity, or liberty, by showing that it is not rational processes that brought us to our concept, but historical accidents or manoeuvres for power. However, in all of these projects is also an eye (which has become lazy) on the *forms* of reasoning, which in my view could be more active: genealogy can be utilised to reflect on both the concept or ideal within its crosshairs, *and* the manner of thinking that promises such ideals, particularly when that means that one must subsequently also reflect on the rationality behind one's own genealogical process, given that in order to be convincing, genealogy itself must be rational in regards to relying on its own evidence.

When we do normative theory with the *principle as the starting point*, within the work we are doing, the principle is in danger of becoming a 'canon of reason' for that work; this is a drawback of using it in this way. The obvious thing to do when faced with such presuppositions, as a genealogist, is to tackle these 'canons', unearthing the layers to undermine the purchase they have on our world today: to be an archaeologist and strip the universal force from the viewer's principles. Yet as we have seen, many theorists accept contingency and acknowledge that they are indeed working with presuppositions when they try to apply normative theory to an actual event or real-life problem.

However, this accepting of contingency that has been performed, a kind of ‘footnoting’ of it that anti-foundationalists do⁶, has still ignored one fact – you cannot simply recognise contingency and then carry on with a method that emerged from a context which did not widely or seriously acknowledge it, for you are then using a method that does not fit with this more flexible interpretation of the universal ideal. Or, at least, it is not erudite to think that one can merely reinterpret the principle without reinterpreting the method which delivers it. Thus, if you are going to ‘footnote’ an abstract principle with contingency, you need to adapt the method so that it better reflects this footnoted principle. My point here is that a way of doing normative theory – *the principle as the starting point* – has become default, and it is a method which places the principle at the point of origin because it relies on, was even formed from, the idea that a universal value found from a non-localised, contingent-free abstract space was achievable, and therefore applicable to any problem exactly as a universal from a privileged point of origin. When we consider that Nietzsche’s question asked us to contemplate the conditions under which a certain morality was created, contained in that was a questioning of the process which produced it. Thus, the implication of Nietzsche’s question means we have to reform normative theory’s default way of pursuing the right thing to do, so that it is not a *method* which has stayed unchanged from a historical context where the universality of the normative *principle* and its position at the start of things, was not under contention (or the contention was generally overlooked or ignored). If so, then that method is no longer suitable, for in our ‘localised’ culture of western political philosophy we *do* exist in a context in which the universal principle is not only contended, but the challenge to it is even accepted by normative theorists themselves. We therefore need to reshape our normative method so that it correlates with the new contingent position the principle is in. This may not actually involve much, perhaps just subtle shifts, but we cannot continue unreflectively in a manner that presupposes the ideal as the starting point and all-applicable universal, when we accept the universal’s more modest position as the ‘best account of the world currently on offer’ (Bevir, *What is Genealogy?*, 2008, p. 269) – especially so, in the context of an ‘impact theory’ and Lamb’s concern over the moral expert, for an expert who cannot definitively give us the ‘correct answer’, is not an expert, but a guide or provocateur. React to this we must, but essentially, when we accept our clarifying principle as being somewhat affected by localised

⁶ ‘Anti-foundationalism requires one to avoid appeals to given truths, but there are other ways of justifying knowledge. Truth can act as a regulative ideal in that our interactions with our environment give us a good reason to take the theories we select with our criteria of comparison as successive approximations to the truth’ (Bevir, *The Logic of History of Ideas*, 1999, p. 126)

prejudice, do we in effect make a methodological error if we carry on using the same method which relied upon the universal, which would make us kind of half-experts? Being the case, we must ask ourselves whether or not we should continue to presuppose our normative value ‘at the beginning *as* the beginning’ when the *purpose* for it being there has now been undermined, but the *demand* for ‘new and challenging thinking’ has intensified.

At the heart of it, I think our methodological default of *normative principle as starting point* is therefore perhaps now the biggest presupposition there is: a presupposition of method, which is equally problematic, for the power of the principle is not just defined by what the principle is – a truth or a prejudice - but its positioning or *role* in relation to our narrative. In other words, using it as a universal and *framing* an event with it in such a way, as an impact theory will inevitably demand, conflicts with a recognition of universal principles as contingent and locally reproduced. Next then, in this third half, will be my attempt to match a way of doing normative theory to this realisation which is suitable: to essentially propose the ‘best method for the best account’, thus making normative theory something which can prescribe for *impact* without giving up on the ‘deeper speculation’ of *conceptual analysis*, for surely to do such a thing would confirm Lamb’s concerns and result in a normative theory founded on a moral *authority*. This means that as well as proposing a solution to the methodological issue I feel is present, I will also need to solve the internal concerns over the distortion of the ‘nature’ of political philosophy when adapted to an environment demanding its direct use, and the historicist/realist concerns over the ‘reproduction’ of presuppositions – or, the ‘objection of philosophy and the ‘objection of history’.

Part 3 - A Method for Legitimacy?

3.1 A proposed *approach* for a method: *narrative starting point*

At this juncture, those who are familiar with Waldron's work on homelessness may make the point that he does recognise the contingency of the principle and its relationship to the normative method of principle as starting point, when he presents a brief case for the relevance of negative freedom in the context of what it *means* for homelessness, before he *frames* their 'predicament' (Waldron, *Homelessness and Community*, 2000, p. 406) with it, and so indeed he is not too 'hasty' with this methodological 'presupposition'. He outlines homelessness the issue, then introduces negative freedom the value. This is a worthy objection to my point, and it is important to remember that Waldron's work serves more as inspiration for this paper for what it achieved as a step forward, and less as target for an imagined failure. Yet, this message of normative pursuit, whether we see it as 'evaluative' or 'prescriptive', gives us the following inception: here is something I feel unsettled by or am opposed to, why is that, and what normative principle does it infringe upon? In this, the principle is still brought in and applied onto the apparent 'problem', even if the problem is outlined first of all. This is what I mean by an origin or *starting point*: not necessarily that we actually stylistically begin with a normative ideal, but that at some point we are asked to frame our issue with it, with a tendency that does not extensively allow the event to impose back on or change the ideal, to even become part of the discussions which form it. We keep the abstract insulated and our principles unaffected, other than to simply remould them to make them more 'practical' (see below). Thus, although stylistically what we have is - problem – principle – evaluation, methodologically we are still getting something like this: 'here is an intellectual ideal, and here is an example of why it is necessary for our political landscape'. Although we may retreat from our window-gazing to disagree over the principles we hold, when we come to utilise them, we apply the principle assuming perfectibility: in essence, regardless of what the principle is, we still gaze *onto* an event, based on a justification that where we gaze from is removed of the 'contingencies which put men at odds'. Waldron's 'abstract liberal principles' are applied in a manner where the context of our behaviour cannot shape the ideal, but the ideal is presupposed to shape our behaviour within a context.

This idea of a 'challenge to the ideal' from the event we apply the ideal to, is important in the perspective of the historical view which tells us that there are no such purified principles, but

a swapping of one set of contingent beliefs for another, for in that mind-set we are merely reproducing arguments from the academy which are just as conditional. The danger is that the normative *method* seems reluctant or incapable to fully explore how an ideal can be challenged through contingency: not just made more practical to fit with a ‘reality’, but actually made more ideal. At least, it is not a method that was formed for such a thing, and so in some sense, it is a bit of a botch job to try and make it so. By having abstraction as our starting point, as a default, because of a methodological process, are we always in danger of overlooking times when the actuality of an event could in fact teach the ideal something, and not just in a ‘realistic’ manner? In essence, is there a chance the reality has conjured something that would aid our idealistic abstractions, instead of hinder them? Even, when we remember the issue regarding racial discrimination and corrective justice, that the contingencies can *form* the moral principle: ‘certain political *actions* do sometimes speak more clearly than certain moral thoughts’ (Floyd, 2011, p. 60) (emphasis added). To consider this, that we may create ideal principles just as well from a context as we do prior to one (and not only workable, realistic ones), we need to examine the unchallenged supremacy of abstraction as the ideal-maker (and therefore the starting point for action guiding work). To do that, we can challenge the worth of ‘relocating’ our mindset to achieve greater clarity, but also examine the extent to which it does actually do this, and whether or not it is thus qualitatively distinct from other forms of theorising.

If the case for abstract theorising is that it distances us from contingencies which ‘puts men at odds’, then there is a fundamental claim within that that it stands apart from simply building a moral framework from experiences. But is this actually the case? Can one really rid oneself of subconscious influences which surely pervade our attempts to abstract? For example, if we devise a thought experiment with a runaway trolley cart to find what the right thing to do is, we know the images and pictures we create in this abstract place rely heavily upon our contingent experiences, even down to how frightened or panicked we may feel about the idea of a runaway trolley cart. What we have done here though, is reduce the contingencies down to a bare minimum: we are not discussing the 6.32am from London St Pancras hurtling towards either a group of nurses or lawyers, but the core of our abstraction still holds a foot in the reality of our experiences. Therefore, if we understand realism as taking a real event or set of experiences and building an idea of normative from that, then an *abstract* political philosophy, viewed in this way, is not different by definition, only by degree. We may choose to put more of the ‘nitty gritty’ into the abstraction in the hope that it actually becomes a useful and relevant practice in action-guiding, or we may reduce those contingencies because we think such

thoughts cloud our idea of 'right'. In the former, we are consciously inviting experiences to adjust our moral view, whilst in the latter we are limiting such influences to subconscious experiences. It is however, a balancing act between the two, not a separate activity, begging the question: could we not ask of realism something a bit more ambitious than 'modus vivendi arrangements' (Stears, 2011, p. 178), whilst tempting ideal theory down from its ivory tower?

In essence, the distance we put between thought and event is greater, but all roads eventually lead back to Rome, and if we think otherwise, we are fooling ourselves. For now, let us say that by not considering this as a possibility, we put the abstracted normative value on a cleansed, moralised pedestal, which of course is the point. But still, this question niggles at me. Currently in normative theorising, I feel, such prejudices perhaps put too much faith in the abstract so that the insistence on the deliberative process forgets to deliberate itself, or neatly places that in another pocket or philosophical moment. When thought of as a truly prior and separate activity which forms the ideal, abstract theorising holds us 'captive' (Owen, 2002, p. 226), so we are unable to identify when a removing of a contingency is not simply deliberating without that which 'puts men at odds', but the application of power itself⁷: essentially, to apply a normative principle as a starting point is to forget that normative theory is not only, to paraphrase into singular, not a 'canon of reasons', but also, is not a canon of *reasoning* either.

When this occurs, does this insistence on the deliberative process become one which shapes and excludes also? This would be the point Foucault would say considering 'illegitimate' forms of resistance⁸. It is a point we should always consider. From this narrative what I think we can learn is that the *process* by which we prescribe normative theory, makes too much of a habit of beginning after the deliberation of the principle, which of course would seem the obvious thing to do when the principle is there to frame a problem, but in fact I believe we can have our cake and eat it concerning this: we can scrutinise and conceptually analyse our chosen ideal *within* our prescription. However, when we footnote our principle with the claim that it is

⁷ Michel Foucault, of course, provides an excellent critique of this: "What is this Reason that we use? What are its historical effects? What are its limits, and what are its dangers? How can we exist as rational beings, fortunately committed to practicing a rationality that is unfortunately crisscrossed by intrinsic dangers?" (Foucault, *Space, Knowledge, and Power*, 1991, p. 249).

⁸ In such a political framing, any notion of a new system with its own set of moral limitations that may accompany a resistance movement must be envisioned post-struggle, for a creation of values beyond that of identity forming is to 'extend our participation in the present system' (Foucault, *Revolutionary Action: "Until Now"*, 1977, p. 230). Hence, violence, cannot be disregarded under the values of the system which the resistance opposes, for that is simply to 'extend' 'participation' within it.

discussed in abstract detail *elsewhere*, we divorce the arguments for applying normative principles from the process of challenging them, as if it is right they be two separate activities. There is a divide between having our conceptual security undermined and having it reinforced, insulating it, which I think leads too easily to casual acceptance of presupposition. Similarly, as I have argued, we completely deny the possibility that the ideal can be made more ideal, from a particular event. This is how our perfectible principle is not ‘challenged’ by the context it frames: in a normative theory where the *principle is the starting point*, to repeat, we do not expect to learn something about the ideal itself from the event we apply it to, other than how it may need to be watered down to fit with reality. But, as I have argued, cannot events in fact mould and improve on our principle in the ideal sense, in ways which we claim abstraction can, for as offered, perhaps there is no distinctive difference in the definition of what we do, only the distance we place between experience and moral reflection?

For sure, this distance may well provide insight more often, because in most cases it is useful to be far from contingencies to theorise ideals. However, I think, this distance can be achieved by building concepts from a narrative, not framing it with them: from walking *through* an event and coming out the other side, or trying to get into our ivory tower, as opposed to looking out of it. This is what we can be aiming for anyway. It of course, requires a certain level of commitment to recognising the historical limits of prior-event abstraction. For that, manipulations of Nietzsche’s question are therefore always present to remind us and dog our normative steps, but equally, we need not chain ourselves to its leash as Guess has done, and stay there. In a sense, even if we believe we cannot empty our heads of contingencies completely in order to find the absolute ‘right’ thing to do, there must be some acceptance that it is possible to ‘relocate’ ourselves to a certain extent, to be ‘better’ at considering a concept than we were before we tried this ‘relocation’, and therefore to be ‘better’ at it than someone else: otherwise we would believe that our perspectives were ‘*equally* local or perspectival, and that no contrast in this respect could conceivably be drawn from *inside* our thought’ (Williams, *Philosophy as a Humanistic Discipline*, 2000, p. 484) (emphasis added), which as Bernard Williams argued, would be a mistake. Therefore, this is the essential middle-ground I am placing my stance within: we may not be able to completely remove ourselves to the outer space of abstraction, totally disconnected from the contingencies down on the ground, but some will make it to the upper atmosphere whilst others only jump – hence, I repeat, the difference is not by definition, but distance. Thus, our ivory tower of abstraction exists as a place to seek, and some might get closer than others. Being closer, denotes a comparative, and a comparative

assessment implies there are measurements which further tell us we are not all rooted into being 'equally local', even if we cannot ascend to godhood. Importantly then, being 'better' does not imply an authority that goes unquestioned, or automatically accepted. An 'expert' that can be refuted, but perhaps should not be ignored.

Under this way of thinking, there is no reason to not try and attempt such idealistic searching, *after* we have begun our moral enquiry from a realist or historical position that is essentially informing us first through a narrative: we begin outside, but search for the window-gazer in the tower, rather than starting alongside her or him and breaking out. This subtle reversal though, is not simply stylistic, but has significant consequences on the *process* of the normative method. Hence, philosophical work where the 'freedom' of the homeless is not *preceded* by presupposed principles which arrive to a place of realities, ready-made for application, assuming we would be satisfied that they have been discussed in theoretical terms at length elsewhere. However, that does not stop one from *following* that story with post-narrative attempts at proposals built upon post-narrative ideal principles. Indeed, it is to be encouraged, otherwise we would simply be recounting something that is happening.

To begin in a realist or historical framing but seek to move beyond it because one has not discarded the potential for an ideal principle that can lead us to a better outcome, is not I think contradictory. Let us for example, consider the following: at some points in our histories of ideas, whether from an individual or a small group, somebody had to have deviated, and to do so, those first few, almost certainly had to have been thinking and judging somewhat loosened of their own historical conditions; and if an idea was 'new', then not harking back to the past either. Even if an idea is not new but reformed, to reform it, one has to some extent break ties with the historical moment that provides the inspiration otherwise it is a simply straight imitation (likewise if we reverse the view: our contemporary prejudices, even if part of a so-called newer perspective, are not simply being copied and pasted if they include a lesson from the past). Surely, the task of genealogy and a significant part of history in general, in helping us realise that what is now was not always so (or opening us to 'the possibility of other pictures or perspectives' (Owen, 2002, p. 221), is to enable us to ponder on the *unimagined*, not simply to imprison us into another historical psyche.

This is a philosophical point, or to be more specific, a question that we answer by gazing back onto history from a philosophical framing. The need for a mode of evaluation returns, but not unchanged. We require something that can be sensitive to history's insights whilst also not rejecting normative theory's desire for an ideal. But can such unity of method be found in the

debate between realism based on historical claims, and ideal theory dependant on abstract principles?

As we have seen, normative theory has been accused by historical contextualists of being out of touch and not of use to the subject it wishes to analyse – politics – because of its attempt to find a space to forge the prior ‘ideal’. It is easy to see how this historical argument adds weight to a non-ideal theorist’s criticism of this value-laden theory: ‘Historical reflection, he argues [Guess], demonstrates that people seek power and crave security’. Thus, ‘Guess’s realism leads him to reject political theorists’ longstanding quest for justice and to embrace in its place the less ambitious, supposedly more realistic end of modus vivendi arrangements’ (Stears, 2011, p. 178) . Yet, for those who ally the historical contextual view with a realist standpoint there is an element of naivety perhaps equal to that of ideal theorists. Put simply, if you think that by looking at the everyday realities of politics and how humans ‘*do* behave’ as opposed to ‘how they *should* behave’ (Floyd, 2011, p. 58) is better because it is geared towards actually being relevant, and therefore based on the idea of having an impact, then is it not as equally optimistic to think that a more realist way of doing theory is actually going to influence politics, as the idea that one can find an ideal? There is also a little optimistic ambition, perhaps even sometimes fantasy, I think, in believing you are doing realism, if your basis for doing it is to improve on ideal theory’s apparent impotence or irrelevance outside of the academy⁹. This is not to completely deny the chances of such an achievement, only to be more self-aware of what criticisms regarding relevance may reveal when turned back on those who throw stones.

In this sense then, it is perhaps better to make a secondary distinction to show the similarity between normative theory and realism, which will help us on taking steps to consolidate the apparent oppositions between them (even further breaking down the distinction between abstract and concrete): ideal theorists can be just as prone to thinking their principles are restricted to an academic discourse as they are vulnerable to believing their ideals are normative in the practical sense, and realism can be motivated by a belief in one’s own impact as much as it can lead to nihilistic conclusions. Those who retain a space however reduced, in both ideal and non-ideal theory, of the potential for an academic debate expanding outside of the academy, would therefore perhaps be better understood as two positions within a wider one: *idealist* theory. Realists may not be producing ideal theories, but they are practising an *idealist*

⁹ Despite this, I hope it is by now apparent to the reader that this paper tackles the issue of relevance and impact in regard to the form normative theory currently takes. How exactly normative theorising gets physically transmitted to beyond the academy is another project all in itself: at least here, I try to make sure it is methodologically prepared for that transition.

form of theory if they pursue the historical realities based on a disdain for the irrelevance of ideal theory. Thus, all that remains in this dispute is a methodological disagreement, not an ideological one. In effect, where to *begin* our philosophical analyses – an ideal abstract space with significant distance to an event, or a ‘realist’ localised one close to it - and it is this which I seek to solve, by offering a *narrative* starting point which can perhaps satisfy this dispute, as well as historical concerns over truth.

This is an approach where the origin and the destination come from each school of thought, bringing them together. One that *begins* with a keen eye on the context and *emerges* from the localised but does not have to *end* there: we may call a search for an ideal normative theory, but really when we rightly cast suspicions over its authority, it is simply a capacity to imagine a difference, alternative or deviation, and that is the only authority it can claim – not ‘unbiased intercourse’ (Strauss, 1988, pp. 76-77) on a ‘quest for universal knowledge’ (Strauss, 1988, p. 11) , but the ability to conceptualise divergences. Is not this skill enhanced by, even found in, historical knowledge, not in the pretended ignorance of it? History might help us to understand similarities, but also realise (if not fully understand) hugely different points of view and practices. To ask oneself those ‘how could they?’ questions we often do at the beginning of our historical journeys, involves an attempt to imagine just that. We may feel that we cannot completely answer that, no matter how far we try to construct ourselves as a subject within a particular historical period, but the *process* of trying to do so is practiced, and in time, improved. So, echoing Williams point, we may not be able to completely empathise, but some are going to be better at it than others through practice. To try and take oneself out of one’s own time into another place, considered alien, is not so far from the powers of imagination it takes to conjure up a place removed of contingencies. In fact, we do this when we read stories – I will return to this. Likewise, abstract thought, no matter how adept one might be at it, cannot take us to a *completely* ahistorical, a-cultural place, for we still recognise ourselves hovering around at the edge of our attempts to think differently in order to realise we are thinking differently, but the attempts to do so inculcate an ability to be ‘better’ at it: to be further away from oneself, and therefore get a good view of our self, our preconceptions and stubbornness.

The point here is that both conceptualising divergences and the capacity to imagine a space for less immediately contingent thought, must come after having trained ourselves in a deep knowledge of localised conditions, and in this way, we do not discount moral principles being formed *from* them. Equating the capability and even emergence of philosophical abstraction within a historical instruction does not deny political philosophy meaning or purpose: in fact,

we could say it makes it more legitimate, for one has not applied an external, isolated perspective onto something, but found the abstraction, or relocation, *after* one has considered the actual event. Indeed, to once again return to Williams, if we did not acknowledge this capacity we would end up at the surely absurd claim that in our reproduction of localized prejudices, all reproductions are '*equally* local or perspectival, and that no contrast in this respect could conceivably be drawn from *inside* our thought' (Williams, *Philosophy as a Humanistic Discipline*, 2000, p. 484) (emphasis added). I repeat this here (somewhat shamefully, for a third time) because it hits another important point. When we acknowledge that we cannot fully escape our contingent positions and reality when we abstract but achieve *distance* from it, we see western political philosophy as more of an *aspect* of a particular society, not necessarily a particular society of its own, or in the least it is not completely disconnected. In this mind-set then, it is not reproducing onto a culture, but within its own culture, for its task is to reflect on the very culture it exists within. It is, to put it clumsily, one of society's self-reflections: a culture, within a culture. It therefore seems philosophy's place should, at least to some extent, be involved in 'impact' with society beyond the academy.

Historical critique of normative theory has done much to help us realise the more ridiculous assertions of objectivity and claims to transcend the historical we have seen in the past, which led to readings of Plato 'as though it had come out in *Mind* last month' (Williams, *Philosophy as a Humanistic Discipline*, 2000, p. 478), but let us not go too far in undermining this simple trait of imagination and relocation that we do share: both historians and abstract philosophers. It is this characteristic which has enabled all human artifice: regardless whether one believes it be for the purpose of power or improvement, and wary of the universal nature of this claim, I still say one cannot eradicate the existence of this feature of human life. If the first hunters can look at footprints and picture a mammoth, pick up a rock and see a spear tip in their minds eye, or suffer a forest fire and perceive of a previously unknown hearth, then ideas can be formed with a significant input of the innovative with the prejudiced also: and innovation, although inspired historically, often can involve something additional, summoned in the imagination. Here, in such a *post-event* abstract space, we can make small and modest claims to preserving the hope, but of course not certainty, that we may both come to understand something beyond our own local culture and context by beginning there, within a narrative, and that therefore such a place exists where the historical perspective is a little less totalising. Thus, in the meantime, we also rescue history from its own universal.

New ideas are essentially how humans change their environments, from scavengers to hunters, nomadic to sedentary and so on: would it be so wrong then, to cite such examples as proof of historically-influenced but not historically-chained, innovative thinking in the history of ideas? In essence, the very first tool had to be an imagined thought first, seen within the cutting edge of a flint-rock, before it became a physical thing. Subsequent designs would then take from history and ever so subtly reshape. This is not to *erase* one's localised environment completely, but to grow something from it and to some extent retain a capacity to imagine beyond it. Our feelings and perspectives in regard to historical events may well be rooted within our specific cultures – the emotions elicited from an ancient sailor as he looked out onto unconquered oceans probably are not directly comparable to the feelings of an astronaut as she gazes into space, or the outlook of a primeval hunter barely recognisable to a poacher – but the capacity¹⁰ to imagine what lay before them is a shared trait, even if what they do imagine is wildly different. For the relevance of this paper, this means the ability to judge and evaluate something from a space of emerging standards that admittedly may only just be being conceived of, built from past echoes or incomplete, but are an attempt at a newer way of thinking all the same. It therefore also implies a possibility, however faint, for thinking beyond one's own conditions. Without this, a flint-knife would never have changed shape, and is there really such a difference between imagining a new shape and why it might cut cleaner or fly faster, and thinking of a 'better' theory¹¹? Hence, we must depart from some of Williams' more extreme claims that one can understand why 'values and their implications' take 'certain forms here rather than others' with 'the help of history' 'only' (Williams, *Philosophy as a Humanistic Discipline*, 2000, p. 489) (emphasis added). Underneath this, is the basic principle that we *can* imagine ourselves in another situation, even as someone else, without fully losing our own identity. The historical then, is not always going to limit us to localised prejudices, but in fact can inspire us to try to think *through* them: to put ourselves in other's shoes, and by doing so, realise how our shoes shape our own feet. This makes logical sense, if we think that localised prejudices are not always determined by the historical, but the geographical. What we understand is that to

¹⁰ Please note, dear reader, I use the word 'capacity': this denotes the possibility or likelihood of a shared process of imagination, not the definite, absolute possession of it. Imagination must exist as perhaps the most common trait amongst us, and so the closest thing to a universal, shared one, but there will always be degrees of capability regarding it, based on education, learning difficulties and environment. Not recognising it is simply to not recognise the reality of mental disabilities, and our continuing lack of knowledge about them. So for now, I will not say absolute possession of the imagining process, but the potential for it is absolute.

¹¹ One may make the point that it was in fact localised conditions which drove the need to change the shape of the knife, but this would be to prove my point: a mix of the localised, with the imaginative, to make something not a complete copy, but equally not a completely ahistorical thing.

get to a divergent position, we need to in fact start from a context or narrative – the dagger is elicited from our mind’s eye through looking at what is local to us right at that moment - the knife - and what is behind us in our history – the flint-rock tool¹². Thus, our imagination, relying upon a mix of current and past, here and somewhere else, needs to have those ingredients before it can hope to perceive something beyond it.

Knowledge of a narrative then, historical, geographical or otherwise, does not limit us to that narrative, but in fact practices our ability to think beyond it when we reflect on the ‘truth’ within it, but equally, encourages us to ponder the potential partiality of our own position when scrutinizing that ‘truth’. Put simply, if we have to adapt to a more prescriptive normative theory, we must gaze *through* events to *reach* our normative ideal, not gaze *onto* them with a presupposition: we do this, by starting with a *narrative*: a ‘technique of enquiry’ (Bevir, *What is Genealogy?*, 2008, p. 275) over a principle.

3.2 The ‘issue’ with homelessness, before the ‘issue’ with freedom – what it *means* to adapt a narrative starting point

With Jeremy Waldron, abstract liberal principles have been used to help us rethink our approaches to homelessness, which involves presupposing a principle to highlight a problem. Whilst normative theory is done mostly in this way, in the environment of ‘impact’, this is likely to persist. So, in Waldron’s appeal to ‘abstract liberal principles’ regarding the homeless, although we see philosophy engaged with a ‘real life’ problem, the paper itself brushes over whether said principles could in fact be a cause of homelessness, because of the current normative method which to a large extent, must presuppose a principle, in order to even begin to attempt an ‘impact theory’. It is not problematic to offer a correcting normative value, but in my view, if we are to do so, we must engage in a deeper conceptual analysis of the value we offer up, *in* the context or problem it is to be argued within and applied to, which requires us to reject a method that involves presupposition of a principle and a ‘division of labour’. Instead then, to give an explicit counter-example, we could read the messages in public space – the legislation and the anti-homeless architecture - to help us rethink not only our approaches to homelessness and the current discourse which informs them, but the abstract principles we may utilise to ‘correct’ those approaches; for perhaps these abstract principles are also part of the

¹² This is an abstract example to show how such a process would work, not a historical claim about daggers.

problem's cause. Waldron posited the blame mostly in communitarian narratives¹³, yet as we increasingly see changes in public space made in the interest of commercial activity and tourism, with community spaces turned to a 'hybrid character' (Nissen, 2008, p. 1131), 'through which people transit, or act as consumers and displayers of their consumption' (Parkinson, 2012, p. 7), we have to wonder whether or not 'liberty *from*; absence of interference' (Berlin, 1958, p. 11) is the new 'issue' causing homeless 'unfreedom' (Waldron, Homelessness and the Issue of Freedom, 1991, p. 306): negative freedom essentially assaulting negative freedom. Put simply, where the prioritisation of certain types of individuals, not the prioritisation of community values, is the new, dominant paradigm driving anti-homeless legislation and architecture. One cannot wonder this if one has placed that very principle as the moral starting point, or 'answer-principle', to resolve anti-homeless approaches, and that is not just a problem specific to that piece of work, but to the whole normative method. Conceptual analysis is immediately in danger of being forgotten, or divorced from the normative pursuit in normative theory.

It should be noted however, that this apparent contextual origin does not claim to do away with prejudices and (ironically, being a genealogical approach) begin from a Straussian beliefs in objective origins or the 'quest for universal knowledge' (Strauss, 1988, p. 11): merely that our *starting* point is not a *moral* framework, but a commitment to a *narrative*, which will subsequently allow us to think with moral prejudice. Regarding this, prejudice in fact emerges as inchoate, in-narrative reflection, before being given full attention afterwards.

What actually happens if we investigate something within our societies in this way? Again, to pursue the chosen example, we can problematize the current approach to homelessness - anti-homeless legislation and hostile architecture - subsequently propose a concept (or concepts) which we think informs and drives it, in order to then problematize said concept. From this problematization, we can then build and offer principles of resolution - 'new and challenging ways of thinking' - which can produce different, more desirable approaches, in the 'impact' world of policy and legislation. This flexibility allows us to even propose an ideal *and* a modified version we think is more relevant to the specific issue, in the same piece of work.

This is a normative theory sensitive to a historical perspective, even encouraging a genealogical approach, but one that can result in action-guiding after we have satisfied conceptual analysis of *both* the 'problem-concept' *and* potential 'answer-principle'; not at the expense of the

¹³ Again, I would like to highlight that the homelessness articles were written in 1991 and 2000, so Waldron's insight is not at fault, only perhaps his foresight was mistaken.

normative suggestion, but in fact because of it. If the task in this act is one of unsettling then, we will not be reinforcing a presupposition when we come to the normative suggestion afterwards, but the *emergence* of a principle is possible. In this, I directly confront what even Nietzsche himself sees as the hardest part of problematization - 'Oh, pulling down is easy; but rebuilding!' (Nietzsche F. , *Fate and History: Thoughts*, 2006, p. 13) - and this is the point, rebuilding *should* be part of problematization, in my view.

This is a challenging task, and if successful, speaks for itself. But, a quick point regarding this: In this approach, one should not expect to find completely new moral concepts. Instead, I merely hope to propose that the purpose of a *narrative starting point* is to enable us as theorists to highlight a problematic presupposition within our political culture (in the homeless example, anti-social behaviour) without needing to *presuppose* another (such as negative freedom and abstract liberal principles). Thus, should we simply arrive at some recognisable form of modified negative freedom or other well-rehearsed philosophical ideal, I would not consider that the approach proposed is pointless. Indeed, quite the opposite, for it will show that the normative principle as starting point is an *unnecessary presupposition* to frame our chosen 'issue', when we can come to the same principle without presuming it. We ask then, not 'what is the issue with freedom when seen in the context of homelessness?', but 'what is the issue with homelessness?'

I have hence tried to argue there is a qualitative difference, I think, between starting from a moral prejudice, and allowing it into your reflection. As the latter is read without explicit framing, the narrative produces the moral discussion, rather than the principle imposing itself upon the narrative. When the normative reflections arrive later on, so to speak, they do so more as 'shows' and not 'tells'. Readers can approach them more cynically, for they already know the story, and are suspicious that somebody now tries to tell them what it means. It is easier to challenge claims made in such a way and makes the story closer to a real 'conversation' (Oakeshott, *The Voice of Poetry in the Conversation of Mankind*, 1962, p. 489) arguably the essence of political theory. There is no potential impasse set up as there is in a normative *framing*, which can sometimes act as a filter for polemical scavengers: 'Typically discussion will focus on the secondary ground that liberals largely share, such as different conceptions or discussions of rights' (Haddock, 2011, p. 68). Thus, non-moral starting points can sometimes provide more inclusive frameworks for their normative discussions. A piece of work like Rawls' 'A Theory of Justice', for example, effectively starts by saying 'if you do not subscribe to the principle of wealth redistribution there is little point in engaging you': other positions

and ideas are, in effect, ‘convicted in advance of irrelevance’ (Oakeshott, *Rationalism in Politics and other essays*, 1967, p. 202), and exactly ‘why these issues should be regarded as pressing is left to one side’ (Haddock, 2011, p. 68). It is in some ways similar with Waldron’s article, for it does not engage in questioning of the ‘principles’ as they are the starting point to the theorising: it presumes their perfectibility, and the reader’s investment in that perfectibility.

Too much of this, I think, could be a problem for normative theory, especially in regard to accusations of a scholarly, moral authority. Of course, my aim is not to completely deny normative theorising performed with starting criteria, navigating actual experiences or ‘real-life’ narratives where said criteria are found absent, only that conceptual analysis is at risk of not being applied to any ‘answer-principle’, which seems odd being that it is analysis of a societal presupposition which often attracts our normative gaze in the first place. What I am ultimately concerned with then, is philosophical reflection of concepts being effectively funnelled into a separate, more abstract project, if we consider ‘division of labour’ as the answer to presuppositions, and a decision between ‘evaluative’ and ‘prescriptive’ to be the reaction to the demands of ‘impact’. This is not just a concern in regard to academic integrity and rigour then, but also one in a more practical sense. In a world where political philosophy has to adapt to funding criteria which increasingly demands impact and utility of individual projects in order to acquire funding, deep examination of our conceptual presuppositions like liberty or freedom, in this kind of funding environment, are unlikely to receive the attention they need if not done alongside or within philosophical work which claims to be directly relevant to a ‘real life’ problem. As philosophers, we should be concerned that this might be even more the case for the next generation of theorists doing PhD’s. Therefore, if we have a method in our arsenal which builds our concepts and resolves our commitments to them *from* a narrative reflective of an existing ‘real world’ issue, rather than impose them onto it, I believe we can arrive at a more critical understanding of both the issue at hand and our normative principles: an understanding which is not insensitive to historical construction, realist commitments and the funding demands which reflect that, yet does not neglect the conceptual analysis required of philosophy and therefore does not make of itself a moral authority. In fact, it insists upon not avoiding this analysis or compartmentalising it into another ‘concepts’ or ‘theories’ paper, but examining it, as we prescribe it. This is important, for although we do not want to lose ourselves to sky-gazing, considering the critical purchase of conceptual analysis and normative theory upon actual policy and legislation, we should remember that a normative theorist is not a civil servant: holding unjust laws or legislation to account is at the heart of

transformative normative work, but so is remembering to reassess our conception of 'unjust', in the same piece of work. Therefore, in my view, carving out a space for a prescriptive style of philosophy, or 'impact theory', is possible, legitimate, and even desirable, as long as it remembers to reflect upon itself: a watchtower of philosophy, with the watchtower of history watching us.

Epilogue

A proposed *form* for the narrative starting point: Tellin' stories - the framing of normative theory as literature and literary comment

'I suppose we'll say that what both poets and prose writers say concerning the most important things about human beings is bad – that many happy men are unjust, and many wretched ones just, and that doing injustice is profitable if one gets away with it, but justice is someone else's good and one's own loss. We'll forbid them to say such things and order them to sing and to tell tales about the opposites of these things'

Book III (Plato, 1991, p. 70)

'I have grown weary of the poets, the old and the new: they all seem to me superficial and shallow sees. They have not thought deeply enough: therefore their feeling – has not plumbed the depths. A little voluptuousness and a little tedium: that is all their best ideas have ever amounted to. All their harp-jangling is to me so much coughing and puffing of phantoms; what have they ever known of the ardour of tones!' (Nietzsche F. , Thus Spoke Zarathustra, 1969, p. 151).

Spoke Zarathustra, 1969, p. 151).

But that I am forbid
To tell the secrets of my prison-house,
I could a tale unfold whose lightest word
Would harrow up thy soul, freeze thy young blood,
Make thy two eyes, like stars, start from their spheres,
Thy knotted and combined locks to part,
And each particular hair to stand an end,
Like quills upon the fretful porpentine.

Hamlet, Act I, scene v (Shakespeare, 1994)

I have critiqued normative theory's default method for starting essentially at the end: the correcting principle is something that should not be presumed, and needs to be *arrived* at, within the overall act of action guiding itself - hence, a *narrative starting point*. Here, then, I will offer one form or style of doing our new narrative starting point. It will hopefully include everything I have argued about gazing back onto a problem, drawing a principle from the issue rather than framing it with it, and conceptual analysis of that normative value at the same time as applying it. Historical realism has taught us to consider the context first, and pull our normative aims from it, so this is the method I propose: *Tellin' Stories: Philosophy as Literature and Literary Comment*.

It is clear, storytelling, although appearing in various different forms, is a reoccurring event in history, and pre-history for that matter. It is the purpose and use of telling stories that I am interested in here: in essence, to argue that only seeing the ‘error’ in the storyteller is the arrogance of the philosopher that should be overcome, so that it can be put to use in a form that the realist may be more accepting of, and our funding councils content with.

Today, we are enmeshed in narrative: whether we are told a story in song and dance, ancestral legends, religious text, table-top roleplaying or TV drama, it is unlikely many of us go a day without having some kind of tale spun to us. We are therefore susceptible to its format, and that’s an issue, when we consider the choice of word; ‘Spun’. The normative theory academy has, I think, overlooked storytelling as a potential method, perhaps because of Platonic associations with guile, trickery and grandiloquence. Yet, I believe that in the days of ‘fake news’ and ‘alternative facts’, and the apparent ineffectiveness of actual facts in the face of such falsehoods, those who, amidst all the warnings not to, bravely step onto the stage of ‘impact’ and take on double-speaking career politicians, misleading media headlines and sky news soundbites must turn to storytelling, for it has power, persuasion and a critical cut to it that exposes. Moral and political truth, framed as it currently is in analytical approaches to normative theory, is failing to tackle the rhetorical, ever-elusive ‘truth’ of modern politics, for the confidence of moral and political truth has been weakened by history even as demands are made upon it by an impact agenda. This is a deadly position for the subject to be in. But, critique and action guiding framed within and from a *storytelling* narrative, I think, has more potential to carry the baton.

Stories reveal things to us, they marvel in such moves, and carve deep into the core of something. For us now, storytelling can be the knife that slices the layers of post-truth, wrapped around each other like an onion, and when that blade unveils the empty nothing at the centre, perhaps we will cry. What we need then, is to couple this flare of storytelling, with a form of storytelling that does not lack authenticity, and dare I say it, a pursuit of ‘truth’. Even perhaps, that we simply need to remember that such storytelling does exist. What kind of storytelling could that be? What would (or does) it look like?

Before we go there, let us briefly focus on what makes stories so compelling. If they do indeed reoccur, from ancient Greek plays to narrative-based computer games, why have cultures across time been so enamoured, one way or another, in stories? This is difficult to precisely pin down. For some, a story is a chance to escape, for others, less about escaping and more imagining. We might wish to get away from a particular event because it wearies us, or live in

a world where something we do not have in our realities is present. The desire to empathise with a character holds no danger of making oneself vulnerable in that empathy, and similarly, experiencing heavy, dangerous emotions like loss and grief can be vicariously lived without the lasting damage that a real experience of such emotions can have. Stories have the power to immerse one in something else: perhaps even, into being *somebody* else with another standpoint, another truth. This immersion of the reader or viewer is far more effective at getting someone to shrug off the layers of their prejudice than patronising argument which just leads to further entrenchment despite ‘the facts’. In its current state, if utilised beyond academia for ‘impact’, I feel that normative theory will rub anyone not involved in ‘the conversation’ up the wrong way and mould them into the opponent with a condescending, analytical mode of speech, irrespective of the indisputability of the ‘truth’ that is shown. This analytical method, with its dry manner, coupled with a kind of ‘I told you so’ reveal, relies on exposing somewhat condescendingly, the ignorance, perhaps even stupidity, of the reader, to them self. To borrow from Daniel Bell: ‘the author of an analytical philosophy essay tends to anticipate objections to her arguments’ then proceeds to ‘show why that critic would be misguided if he in fact argued that’ (Bell, 1993, p. 21). The reader is being lectured as soon as the first page is turned. Storytelling however, brings an audience to an argument through allowing them to escape from self, into another character. This escape from self, invites reflection, almost like a literary comment. Reflection on what things mean, what words mean, even eventual reflection of self before the return. We can in effect transgress our own taboos. Stories are often laced with guilt, and so an underlying concept of right and wrong. Some are involved with reinforcing this, others tearing it down with something new. Stories have consequences, results and moralise ideas. Stories can involve fables, warnings and demands. In a story, characters are antagonists as well as protagonists, and not so easily dismissed. Like in a Socratic dialogue, he ‘continually presses his objections’ (Bell, 1993, p. 21), but in a story, this can be shown through actions and inner-monologues also, so it becomes more immersive: a dialogue does not tell us a speaker’s internal struggle and emotions. Although better than the ‘being spoken at’ which is normative theory currently, we as readers stay as spectators in the conversation. A story *pulls* us into a point of view, which helps us consider our own from a distance; less entrenched. Yet if done well this is not mere propagandist mantra: as characters are imperfect, healthy suspicion often accompanies any concessions we may make. They are not perfectible god-like concepts, but in order to be convincing, they must actually make mistakes and second-guess themselves, and as the mode under which normative theory is delivered, this is less patronising.

A story does not start at the end (even, when the end is used as a literary tool to begin, it becomes the start). A story does not finish once it is told. We think about it afterwards. We ponder on it, the meaning, the purpose, hidden messages. Some stories topple our world views, others merely make us laugh. Those that belong to the former, are forms of philosophy which have a roundabout way of getting us to think and re-examine. In its modern form, we tend to tell stories with something to aim for: a twist, a tense cliff-hanger, an epic finale. Were these things to come at the beginning of our story, we would already consider it half-told. If we are informed that the issue with homelessness is about negative freedom from the very title, then what else do we have to learn other than the argument, which we already know is coming? We miss out on our chance to hear the whole story, first. We want to *comment* on the presumption. Thus, after reading a story, we reflect upon it, but the best ones have many different framings. We look back on a good book for example and understand what happened from several different character's perspectives, and by doing this, we might be able to get to a view with which we are most aligned, through giving the opposing ones full thought: a truth arrived at through at least experiencing the other perspective, and so realising the contingency of our own truth, whilst still holding onto it. Most of the time, I think, this does not involve presupposing one view over another; perhaps we mix a bit more of one *to* another. We are not after all dealing with scientific truths and so cannot completely discount moral views we are opposed to, which is where our 'post-truth' politics wheedles its way in, but, also, this does not mean we cannot criticise something as being built upon a deliberate falsehood: whether that 'falsehood' be an 'alternative fact' that is being used to justify a moral view, or an actual fact being made to fit a perspective that it actually does not support. One can be against 'post truth' with one's own truth, without needing to solidify it into *the* one and only absolute truth. Thus, we pass our truth on to someone else, and they add our version of events into their reflection, perhaps adding spoonful's, perhaps only taking a pinch. My point is, is that this *form* of stories is one example of how the *approach* to normative theory that I have argued for can be realised, if one truly wants a conversation, and not just talking past each other: and that goes for 'us' within the academy, as well as 'them' without.

It is clear then, with this and all of these potential reasons for stories, and all of these possible purposes, that storytelling has a place within philosophy and normative theory. Certain stories over the years have had philosophical content, which should alert us to storytelling as a potential form, or method, for delivering normative theory. From Tolstoy to Orwell stories have been linked to repression and oppression, and from More to Dickens the tale has given us

idealist utopias and gritty realism. Want to understand Hobbes 'state of nature' in a storytelling guise? Watch post-apocalyptic TV series the Walking Dead or pick up that old school copy of Lord of the Flies. Game of Thrones is viewed by millions and gives us the Machiavellian Varys, the categorical Stark, and the Foucauldian 'knowledge is power' Littlefinger.

True enough, if we look too hard we can find meaning in everything, subsequently stripping it from anything, so if looking for theory in computer games and TV entertainment waters down the discipline for you too much, philosophy's own culture alone gives us the connection with 'Tellin' Stories'. We read Socrates as a dialogue yes, but it is also a series of conversations within an overarching narrative, thereby being almost a story. Zarathustra, as Nietzsche's intention to unveil his philosophy, is a story, a piece of *literature*, despite himself¹⁴. Works following it, such as the 'Genealogy of Morals' are merely subsequent reflections, or *literary commentaries* on it, and Rousseau of course, gave us the discourse before the instruction. Beyond our discipline of philosophy, we know stories are penetrated by political and philosophical thinking, but our discipline is also often invaded with story and narrative as a kind of truth telling, or 'a revealing'. *Tellin' stories* therefore has much to remind us regarding the *mores* of normative theory, but I also think, perhaps surprisingly, in its *method* also.

To end this with a concise claim then: 'Tellin' Stories: Philosophy as literature and literary comment' exists because history has taught us that although we cannot say our normative writings are truth, we can, in coming to the normative after a narrative, avoid the predicament of our current method: where we apply normative force from an abstract place prior to the story. Therefore, our normative action guiding may not be truth in itself, but to be seen as *legitimate* in terms of both funding demands and academic criticism, it can at least be attempts that are based on a true story.

¹⁴ Thus Spoke Zarathustra was one of my first forays into philosophy, and I was somewhat disappointed to find that the method of storytelling that delivered his thinking was sparse on the ground when it came to political theory.

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