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## Introduction

Glen Newey was one of the most interesting and provocative political thinkers of his generation. By the time of his sudden death (at the age of 56), he had made important contributions to a wide range of topics in contemporary political theory, including value pluralism, toleration, liberalism, security, and Thomas Hobbes. Newey was also well-known to a wider public through his role as a regular reviewer and blogger for the *London Review of Books*. In this latter capacity, Newey commented – often with a satirist’s eye for human foible, and a poet’s ear for language – on the political controversies of the day: the marital difficulties of the heir to the British monarchy providing the occasion for one of his more infamous essays, a former British Prime Minister’s brief encounter with a pig another (Newey 2003, 2015a).<sup>1</sup>

Glen Newey’s writings abound with paradoxes. He loved to point out how Plato’s Ideal City, a shrine to wisdom and truth, requires the Guardians to use a lot of drugs and practice deception to sustain it. Newey himself was a brilliant analytical philosopher who poo-pooed philosophy’s pretensions to political understanding. He valued freedom, but advanced withering criticisms of all extant forms of philosophical liberalism. He wrote with great insight about toleration; and yet he believed that the concept of liberal-dem-

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<sup>1</sup> As an editor of the *London Review of Books* later reported: “A subscriber showed up at our office almost speechless with rage when we published the Newey essay [on the monarchy] [...] ‘About as Useful as a String Condom’. Did we realise that his wife read the paper?” (<https://www.lrbstore.co.uk/products/lrb-collections-1-royal-bodies-writing-about-the-windsors-from-the-london-review-of-books>).

ocratic toleration was politically incoherent, and philosophy could offer little guidance in distinguishing the practices that ought to be tolerated from those that ought not. He hated moralism and rejected the idea that moral reasons had any claim to priority over non-moral reasons for action. Yet his own journalistic writings were highly judgmental, savaging the powerful and sympathizing with the weak.

As a political theorist, Glen Newey was a man before his time. His book *After Politics*, published in 2001, provides an early statement of the realist approach to political theory that draws so much attention today. The aim of realists is to break free from the philosophical framework that has dominated the field of political theory since the work of Rawls, Dworkin, and Nozick in the 1970s, a framework that emphasizes the priority of morality to politics, and justice to other political values (such as security, stability, and compromise). Realism, which has always been a theme in the western political tradition – a theme present in the writings of such canonical figures as Machiavelli and Hobbes, Weber and Schmitt – was given fresh impetus in the 2000s with publications on the topic by Raymond Geuss (2008) and Bernard Williams (2005). But it was only in 2010 with the publication of an influential review article that scholars began to take note of realism as a new (or re-newed) approach to political theory (Galston 2010).

There are various ways of conceptualizing political realism. Simply stated, this approach has three elements: one, a focus on the tragic nature of politics, a realm of human activity rarely free of conflict, disagreement, and power; two, a thoroughgoing skepticism of morality's pretensions to resolve – even at a theoretical level – the problems posed by conflict, disagreement, and power; and three, a turn towards political institutions as a means of tempering those problems.<sup>2</sup> These three elements have prompted a lively debate both between realists and moralists and within the realist camp. Many of the key issues raised in these current debates (especially that between realists and moralists) had already been covered by Newey in his *After Politics*, which might plausibly claim to be the urtext of contemporary political realism. For Newey, the Rawlsian revival of political philosophy in the 1970s had achieved nothing so much as a neglect of the real world of politics and an ill-judged aspiration for a post-political order founded on justice (Newey 2001, 2).

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<sup>2</sup>For an alternative conceptualization, see Rossi's contribution to this volume (137-145).

Newey's *After Politics* defends a bracing form of anti-moralist realism. He attacks all attempts to define and defend a neutral or public standard of political justification. And he presses with great vigor the claim that liberal political philosophy seeks the suppression of politics. Newey develops these positions through close, eviscerating readings of leading political thinkers, including Rawls, Habermas, Gray, and Rorty. It would be fair to say, however, that in that work Newey never fully developed his own position. The few critics that discussed the book lamented Newey's reluctance to come clean about his own preferred conception of politics (Chambers 2002; Gunnell 2002; Kelly 2005). Newey was acutely aware of this failing. Over the course of the next nearly two decades, he has steadily, article by article, sought to construct his own distinctive statement of political realism. He died leaving two major completed works unpublished. The essays gathered in this edition of *Biblioteca della libertà* represent the first sustained attempt to assess Glen Newey's work as a political theorist.

Although Newey's name has now become closely tied to political realism, the bulk of his scholarly publications – and his PhD thesis, supervised by John Horton – were on the topic of toleration. Yet even in these early works, it is possible to smell the spirit of skepticism that developed into the fuller realism of his later works, including his misgivings about the effort to find philosophical justifications for our political ideals. Toleration served for him as something of a case study of the way that concepts were deployed – and manipulated – in real-life political battles to serve ideological ends.

The monograph that appeared out of Newey's PhD thesis, *Virtue, Reason, and Toleration* (Newey 1999) explores the paradoxes of the concept of toleration, which, as Newey emphasizes, is widely thought to be both admirable, the mark of good character, but nonetheless addressed towards practices that the tolerator would ideally like to see disappear. This yields the paradox that “being disposed to be motivated by moral disapproval is a necessary condition of acting tolerantly” (*ibidem*, 107). Newey's focus in this first book is on, what he terms, “the possibility conditions of toleration” – conditions which are far less common than we might ordinarily think. One of these possibility-conditions concerns the balance of power between tolerators and the tolerated. In order to be capable of toleration, so Newey argues, the tolerators must have the power to prevent the disapproved of practice. No power; no toleration. Newey went on to explore the role of power in greater detail in a later monograph, *Toleration and Political Conflict* (Newey 2013).

Viewed from the perspective of his later realist writings, perhaps one of the most surprising features of Newey's earliest writings on toleration is the extent to which he relies upon the idea of toleration as a personal virtue. Indeed, Newey's first monograph contains a detailed analytical treatment of Aristotelian virtue (Newey 1999, ch. 4). This dimension of Newey's early work is noticed by the first two contributions in the present volume that get to grips with Newey's theory of toleration. Elisabetta Galeotti and Rainer Forst have long been recognized – like Newey himself – as leading theorists in the field of toleration. In her chapter, Galeotti continues her long-standing debate with Newey concerning the possibility of political toleration, especially liberal political toleration. For Newey, a liberal state could not be tolerant, because the initial expression of moral disapproval – a prerequisite of toleration – was at odds with the liberal state's commitments to neutrality and equal respect. Galeotti, in contrast, seeks to show that a suitably re-worked conception of toleration is quite compatible with liberal ideals.

In his contribution, Rainer Forst also continues his long-standing debate with Newey on toleration. Forst acknowledges that he and Newey are largely in agreement about the conceptual dimensions of toleration, but they disagree quite fundamentally about wider issues of political justification. Forst is one of the leading scholars in the Frankfurt School, and retains a strong commitment to the idea of a critical theory grounded in Reason. Newey could not be more at odds with this approach. “Not unlike Thrasymachus”, as Forst puts it, “[Newey] doubted that there could be any normative factor – of morality, of reason, or what have you – that could elevate us above the power struggles and normative arbitrariness of political life. (Forst, this issue, 42).” Forst, like a number of other contributors to the volume, is clearly uncomfortable with some of the implications of Newey's political realism. Thrasymachus is after all one of the “bad boys” of the western philosophical tradition. For those like Forst who think that a normative political theory can be grounded on some conception of reason, Newey's writings pose an important challenge.<sup>3</sup> This challenge, however, cuts deeper than merely doubting the possibility of a rational grounding for political theory. In some of his later writings, Newey questions whether the very idea of political normativity – the provision of action-guiding prescrip-

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<sup>3</sup> For a further exploration of the disagreement, see Wolthuis (2016).

tions – even makes sense (Newey 2018).<sup>4</sup> I will return to this dimension of Newey’s thought below.

Federica Liveriero also tackles Newey’s theory of toleration but does so by way of a discussion of his critique of John Rawls’s Political Liberalism. Unlike some other realists, Newey was a generous and careful reader of the political theorists that he discussed. He didn’t waste his time battling straw men. Rawls was a frequent target both in *After Politics* (2001) and in a brilliant but barely noticed article that examined Rawls’s various approaches to political toleration (2009b). Liveriero quite rightly perceives that Newey’s principal line of attack on Rawls involves an appeal to, what Newey terms, “the facticity of motivation”, the notion that the motivations of real-life political agents constitute “an empirical and independent check on the force of the justificatory setting laid out by Rawls” (Liveriero, this issue, 51). For Liveriero, this line of attack reflects Newey’s realist rejection of the entire Rawlsian project. Anyone wanting to rescue that project will need to find a response to Newey’s arguments.

In their contributions, Richard Bellamy and Dimitrios Efthymiou discuss an early Newey essay on political lying (Newey 1997). In that essay, Newey saw an irreconcilable tension between democracy and truthfulness (on the part of political leaders). Newey’s account of this tension was premised on the idea that democracy rested upon the consent of the governed – an expression of their collective autonomy. Bellamy complains that such a conception of autonomy is overly demanding and defends instead a conception of democratic equality as the basis for political legitimacy. For Bellamy, the tension between democracy and lies is not as irreconcilable as Newey suggests. Efthymiou responds to Bellamy by defending a modified version of Newey’s thesis. The lies of politicians were a favorite topic of Newey not merely in his philosophical writings but also in his writings as a journalist and blogger. The Blair governments misrepresentations of the facts in the lead-up to the Iraq War – the “Mesopotamian Misadventure”, as he calls it – was a recurrent topic (Newey 2009a).

Kenneth Baynes’s essay tackles another of Newey’s recurrent topics: the clash between secular and religious doctrines. Baynes focuses on debates by

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<sup>4</sup> This issue was central even in Newey’s early work on realism. For the liberal moralists’ response to realism, see Erman, Moller (2015a; 2015b; 2018).

legal and political philosophers, primarily in the United States, who struggle to reconcile the obvious contradiction between the Establishment and Free Exercise clauses of the US constitution – the former requiring governments to ignore religion, the latter requiring them to give it special consideration. Newey himself was skeptical of the ability of philosophers – or normative theory – to reconcile the tensions between religious or ethnic groups. He sometimes liked to suggest that description, an account of the possibilities – such as that undertaken here by Baynes – was the most that could be hoped for in this area.

Newey's skepticism towards normativity is very much in evidence in Newey's own contribution to the present volume, an important essay on political legitimacy which was delivered in Milan in 2016 but is published here for the first time (Newey, this issue, 117-135). Like a number of the essays that Newey wrote in the 2010s, this essay marks a turn towards an even more skeptical thesis concerning political normativity than the one he had defended in *After Politics*.<sup>5</sup> Political realists have always tended to equivocate on the topic of political normativity. They all agree – almost the very precondition for being counted a political realist – that political normativity (i.e. the action-guiding prescriptions that inform any political theory) must be different from (and cannot be reduced to) moral normativity. The justice business established by Rawls in the 1970s is, they all agree, something to avoid. Yet beyond this point, political realists tend to disagree. Some political realists – most notably Bernard Williams (2005) – want to extract a conception of political normativity from distinctively political values. Williams's "basic legitimation demand" represents an attempt to ground political legitimacy on something thinner, less contestable, than justice, human rights, or liberalism. Other realists – "hyper-realists", as they have been called (Miller 2016, 157) – reject the very idea of political normativity on the grounds that politics is nothing but a field of conflict, disagreement, and power. The troubling implication of the hyper-realist view is that nothing very significant separates legitimate political authority from illegitimate political authority, a distinction effaced by the Weberian fact of successful domination. Hyper-realism results, in short, in a form of relativism.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> See especially Newey (2010; 2018).

<sup>6</sup> For a discussion of the relativist implications of political realism in general see Erman, Möller (2018).

On the face of it, Newey (like Raymond Guess [2008]) is a hyper-realist. His essay published here deploys the idea of, what he terms, “a power loop” to cast doubt on the appeal to a counterfactual realm of genuinely free and equal citizens that we might imagine to construct our ideas of justice, fairness, or legitimate political authority. For Newey, power can never be expunged. “Justification cannot be what marks the distinction between politics and non-politics”, he argues, “because political life constantly and predictably calls into question, without definitively deciding, whether submitted justifications are indeed legitimating” (Newey, this issue, 118). Newey defends this hyper-realist claim by way of a scintillating dismantling of Bernard Williams’s theory of legitimacy.

It would be easy to come away from a reading of this essay with the view that Newey’s political realism now occupies a barren, valueless terrain where nothing survives but power, conflict, and disagreement. In such a world, politics itself scarcely seems possible. But Newey quite sensibly shrinks away from such a vista. Elsewhere in his writing, he tells us that Hobbes’s state of nature describes a society without politics (Newey 2013, ch. 2). Newey also constantly reminds us that life without coordinating action with strangers is impossible. And he precedes the passage quoted in the paragraph above with the important qualification: “The aim is not to usurp the dominant liberal paradigm with a pallid version of relativism” (Newey, this issue, 118)”. In a sense that qualification will hover over much of his later writings. In my contribution to the present volume, I argue that Newey ultimately avoids full relativism in favor of a conception of politics involving “freedom as undetermination”, which itself seems to presuppose a cluster of substantial liberal rights.

All the contributors that follow Newey’s essay wrestle, in one way or another, with the challenge posed by the hyper-realist strains of his later writings. Enzo Rossi, who is more favorably disposed to realism than many other contributors, sets Newey’s realism in a broader context. Rossi notes that the realist themes of Newey’s later works can be detected in his earliest work, which supports the claim that Newey was one of the first to get the realist ball rolling. On a more substantive note, Rossi takes Newey to task for his skepticism towards anarchism, which Newey alternatively dismisses as either a form of moralism or not a political position at all (since, on Newey’s view, anarchism cannot fulfill the basic political desideratum of coordinating collective action). Rossi argues that there are resources in Newey’s own work for a position that is less dismissive of alternatives to the Weberian state.

Like Rossi, Bistagnino is also interested in the broader context of Newey's political realism. She highlights Newey's contention that the basic political question is not (as Williams claimed) a demand for legitimation, but a question – *what do we do?* Bistagnino notices that this understanding of the political domain had appeared before both in the writings of Carl Schmitt, Hannah Arendt, and – to cite a more recent example – Hanna Pitkin. Understood in its phenomenological context, a description of the political domain in terms of an open-ended question makes a lot of sense. Although neither Bistagnino nor Newey mention it, a similar open-ended conception of politics informs the perspective of the British conservative political theorist, Michael Oakeshott.<sup>7</sup> In Oakeshott's poetic description of political activity,

men sail a boundless and bottomless sea; there is neither harbour for shelter nor floor for anchorage, neither starting-place nor appointed destination. The enterprise is to keep afloat on an even keel; the sea is both friend and enemy, and the seamanship consists in using the resources of a traditional manner of behaviour in order to make a friend of every hostile occasion (Oakeshott 2010, 234).

The difficulty with all these phenomenological accounts of politics, however, is how to derive any normative position, any critical standpoint, from them. Oakeshott, the conservative, is quite content to reply upon “the resources of a traditional manner of behaviour” to answer Newey's political question about what to do. It is doubtful, however, that Newey himself, not a conservative, would be content to rely upon such resources. Bistagnino complains, quite understandably, that Newey's open-ended question is too open-ended, too underdeveloped, for its own good.

Favara's contribution focuses more specifically on Newey's argument in the Power Loops essay included here. Favara subjects Newey's argument to a close analytical dissection of the sort that Newey himself employed against Williams. She finds implausible his claim that both politics and war are similar, despite their reliance upon force, and calls into question some of his claims about the appropriate relationship between theory and practice. Newey too easily seems to think that clashes of ideology, the life blood of politics

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<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of some similarities between Newey and Oakeshott, see Kelly (2005, 104-105).



as he understands it, are beyond the adjudication of normative theories. Fava's paper chips away at Newey's position here.

Detlef van Daniels interprets Newey's political positions somewhat more sympathetically than most other contributors. Van Daniels recognizes that Newey's analytical critiques of modern liberal theory tend to focus not solely on their internal contradictions, but their remainders, the people, "the free spirits", left-out. This point leads van Daniels to explore one of Newey's pre-occupations: the tension between a theoretical account of human behavior and human free-will. Free spirits tend to act in ways that are theoretically proscribed. This topic forms a central concern for Newey in his *Rogue Theodicy* (Newey [2015b]). This (as yet) unpublished manuscript includes illuminating engagements with Sophocles' *Antigone*, Plato's *Republic*, and the Biblical Book of Job. Evident in this manuscript, as in much of Newey's work, is an effort to find space for a form of wild freedom – a freedom that, as von Daniels notes, perhaps lies beyond good and evil.

Michael Mosher also notes the presence in Newey's later writings of this wild freedom but thinks that the master concept behind Newey's political theory is a conception of security. Newey certainly wrote a great deal on this topic and lamented the fact that political theorists had never given this concept the attention they had given to liberty and equality.<sup>8</sup> Like von Daniels, Mosher suggests that the key to unraveling Newey's thought is to situate him in the context of other figures in the history of political thought. Mosher, for example, sees echoes of Foucault and Kuhn in Newey's account of "power loops". Mosher concludes his piece with a meditation on Newey's unpublished *Rogue Theodicy*. Traditional theodicies, Mosher notes, celebrated freedom. Contemporary political theory, in contrast, provides us with secular theodicies gone 'rogue'. Thus in the Rawlsian tradition, political theorists, if we accept Newey's argument, expunge freedom and politics in the name of justice.

My concluding contribution tries to rescue liberalism from some of the charges that Newey has leveled. I focus in particular on Newey's claim – a claim made by other realists too – that liberals seek to suppress politics in the name of morality. Continuing an argument we had many times in person, I

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<sup>8</sup> Much of what Newey wrote on security remains unpublished, but see Newey (2012; 2013, ch. 5).

try to show that Newey is wrong. My argument – the liberal provenance of which I fully concede Newey would hate – takes three forms. First, I argue that Newey himself, notwithstanding some fluttery-eyed flirtations with relativism, is more of a liberal than he likes to acknowledge. This is evident not merely in his celebration of wild freedom but his commitment to freedom as undetermination, a form of negative liberty. Second, I dispute the claim that liberal theories of justice leave insufficient space for politics. And third, I argue that to the extent that politics is suppressed in modern society, this suppression is more likely to take place at the hands of anti-majoritarian institutions, a feature of any complex society, rather than morality.

Let me conclude by way of noting that the contributions gathered here cover a wide range of topics prompted by Newey's voluminous political writings. There is much more that could have been said. Noone, for example, gets to grips with Newey's reading of Hobbes. Nor does anyone take up in any detail his account of security. At the time of his death, Newey left two unpublished manuscripts, a thirty thousand word essay called *Rogue Theodicy* – which some of the contributors here do discuss – and a book-length manuscript called *Eleutheria: Politics as Transformation* (Newey [2015b]; 2017). Hopefully, these and other unpublished essays will soon see the light of day. When all this material comes out, it will become even clearer that Glen Newey's writings contain the strongest defense of political realism currently available. His voice in the continuing conversation of political theory is already much missed.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> I speak for all the contributors in thanking Federica Liveriero, Chiara Bianco and Adriano Boano for their work in putting this volume together. I would also like to thank Ken Baynes and Enzo Rossi for comments and conversations that helped in writing both this introduction and my own contribution to the present volume.

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