

The Autonomy of the Political

by

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ABSTRACT

This thesis examines and critically assesses five arguments for the autonomy of the political. The arguments I examine are those of Niccolò Machiavelli, Jean Bodin, Thomas Hobbes, Carl Schmitt, and John Rawls. After presenting what I believe to be the most plausible reconstructions of these arguments for the autonomy of the political, I conclude that none of these arguments succeed in their task. The arguments of Machiavelli, Hobbes, Bodin, and Schmitt each fail to establish an autonomous political account of justification or political legitimacy. Rawls' argument, on the other hand, succeeds in establishing a plausible and distinctively political standard of justification, but fails to establish that the political is autonomous. I conclude that there is an inescapable conflict between the thesis that the autonomy of the political and the idea that the state's actions could be acceptably justified or that the state could be legitimate.

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