



SPS 3rd term workshop 2016-2017

Methods in Normative Political Theory

Guest speakers: Ian Carter (Università di Pavia), Andrew Mason (University of Warwick), Mark Philp (University of Warwick)

Organised by Rainer Bauböck and Rutger Birnie and the Max Weber Programme

Thursday 11 May 2017 (10.30-16:30 with lunch break)

Friday 12 May 2017 (09:30-17:30 with lunch and coffee breaks)

Seminar room 3, Badia Fiesolana

Please register [online](#)

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Description

Issues of methodology have long been a neglected part of normative political theory, but are now being paid increasing attention. What kinds of questions should we ask in political theory and how should we address these questions? What are the criteria for good normative analysis in political theory? To what extent are diverging substantive conclusions determined by different methods of theorising? In this workshop, we will discuss such questions by focusing on three of the most prominent topics in this field, namely the role of conceptual analysis, the distinction between 'ideal' and 'non-ideal' or 'realist' theory, and the relevance of intellectual history for contemporary normative theory.

In focusing on these topics, we are specifically interested in the links between normative theory and empirical research. What can normative theory contribute to empirical research, for example through rigorous analysis of those concepts which are also the main focus of political scientists? Conversely, what can empirical research tell us about the feasibility constraints which should guide normative theorising? Furthermore, the workshop should also be of interest to law researchers with normative elements in their research and intellectual historians.

Participation requirements

The workshop is open to PhD researchers and postdoctoral fellows from all disciplines. Participants interested in only one or two of the three topics are welcome to attend only those respective session(s). Participants are expected to do the core readings and participate in the discussion for each session they attend. To get 10 credits for the workshop in the SPS PhD programme, researchers must attend both

days of the workshop in full. Additionally, they can either volunteer to introduce one of the readings in class, or write a short paper (2,000 - 4,000 words) that responds to the readings of the workshop or explains how the methodological discussion is relevant to their own research.

Part I: Conceptual analysis (with Ian Carter)

In these first two meetings we shall be discussing the role of conceptual analysis in political theory. In what ways is it possible and/or desirable to provide clear definitions of normative political concepts? How, if at all, do normative concepts differ from non-normative ones? Can normative concepts be analysed independently of the theorist's own ethical or political standpoint? Can disagreements about the proper interpretations of normative political concepts ever be satisfactorily resolved? If so, in what ways? If not, what is the purpose of a political theory that makes use of such concepts?

Each of the two meetings will begin with a brief introduction by the seminar leader (10-15 mins). This could be followed by some individual prepared contributions on some or all of the questions listed below (depending on the number of participants). These individual contributions, taken together, should not last for more than 30 minutes (e.g. 3 contributions of 10 minutes each). The rest of the seminar will be devoted to a general discussion.

Session 1: Descriptive vs Essentially Contestable Concepts (11 May 10:30 – 12:30)

Questions to be addressed:

1. What is an essentially contested concept? Are all political concepts necessarily contested?
2. Does the essential contestability thesis necessarily lead down the road to ethical relativism? What is the point of conceptual analysis if all concepts are essentially contested?
3. Can the concepts of freedom or power be defined descriptively? What is the point of a descriptive concept? Is there a "purely descriptive" point of view?
4. What is the difference between a word and a concept?

Core readings:

- William E. Connolly, *The Terms of Political Discourse*, third edition (Oxford: Blackwell, 1983). Chapter 1: Essentially Contested Concepts in Politics, pp. 10-44.
- Felix E. Oppenheim, *Political Concepts. A Reconstruction* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1981). Chapter 9: Reconstructionism Defended, pp. 177-202.
- Peter Morriss, *Power. A Philosophical Analysis* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1987). Epilogue: Understanding Concepts, pp. 199-206.

Session 2: Value-freeness, Value-neutrality and Value-independence (11 May 14:00-16:00)

Questions to be addressed:

1. Is it possible to clarify and adequately define a normative concept without making any substantive ethical assumptions?
2. Is there a difference between a “value-neutral” concept and a “value-independent” concept?
3. How, if at all, should we distinguish between a “concept” and different “conceptions” of a concept?
4. Is it possible to provide clear definitions of abstract normative concepts in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions, or should we instead look for “paradigmatic cases” and/or seek “family resemblances”?

Core readings:

- Ronald Dworkin, “Hart’s Postscript and the Character of Political Philosophy,” *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies*, 24 (2004). Section 1: Archimedians (pp. 1-5); Section 2: Political Concepts (pp. 5-18).
- Ian Carter, “Value-freeness and Value-neutrality in the Analysis of Political Concepts”, *Oxford Studies in Political Philosophy*, ed. D. Sobel, P. Vallentyne and S. Wall (Oxford: Oxford University Press), Vol. 1, 2015, pp. 279-306.
- Hillel Steiner, “Value Independence” (a selection of excerpts on method from Steiner’s writings on justice, rights and liberty).

Additional readings:

Introductory readings:

- Matthew H. Kramer, “Conceptual Analysis and Distributive Justice”. Forthcoming in S. Olsaretti (ed), *The Oxford Handbook of Distributive Justice*. [A general introductory piece: highly recommended]
- W.B. Gallie, “Essentially contested concepts”, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, 56 (1956), pp. 167-98. [This is the classic article first introducing the idea of essential contestability]

Further readings:

- Dworkin, Ronald (1986). *Law’s Empire* (London: Fontana Press).
- Dworkin, Ronald (2001) “Do liberal values conflict?”, in *The Legacy of Isaiah Berlin*, ed. M. Lilla, R. Dworkin and R. B. Silvers (New York: New York Review of Books), pp. 73–90.
- Dworkin, Ronald (2004). “Hart’s Postscript and the Character of Political Philosophy,” *Oxford Journal of Legal Studies*, 24: 1–37.
- Dworkin, Ronald (2011). *Justice for Hedgehogs* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press), ch. 8.
- Gaus, Gerald F. (2000), *Political Concepts and Political Theories* (Boulder: Westview Press).

- Hart, H. L. A. (1994). *The Concept of Law*, second edition (Oxford: Clarendon Press).
- Mason, Andrew (1993), *Explaining Political Disagreement* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), ch. 2.
- Steiner, Hillel (1994). *An Essay on Rights* (Oxford: Blackwell).

Part II: Ideal and non-ideal theory (with Andrew Mason)

Over the past decade or so ideal theory has attracted a considerable amount of attention. We'll begin by trying to reach a better understanding of its nature and aims before exploring a number of critiques of it that have been developed from different perspectives.

In terms of format, the workshop will consist of two 90 minute sessions. It is anticipated that each session will be divided into two parts; in each part a participant will briefly introduce one or two of the assigned (core) readings, followed by general discussion.

Session 1 (12 May 9:30-10:30)

The first session will begin by exploring the nature of ideal theory, its aims, and the role that it gives to idealisations. It will then explore Amartya Sen's important critique of it and John Simmons' response to that critique.

Questions to be addressed:

1. What is ideal theory? Do we need it and if so, why? Must it come first?
2. What is its relationship to non-ideal theory?
3. Must ideal theory make idealisations? When are they problematic?

Core readings:

- Rawls, J., *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1971/1999), section 2.
- O'Neill, O., *Towards Justice and Virtue* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 38-48.
- Sen, A., 'What Do We Want from a Theory of Justice?', *The Journal of Philosophy* 103 (2006): 215-238

Further readings:

- Farrelly, C., 'Justice in Ideal Theory: A Refutation', *Political Studies*, Vol. 55, 2007, 844-864.
- Hamlin, A. and Z. Stemplowska, 'Theory, Ideal Theory, and the Theory of Ideals,' *Political Studies Review* 10 (2012): 48-62.
- O'Neill, O., *Towards Justice and Virtue. A Constructive Account of Practical Reasoning* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996)
- Robeyns, I., 'Ideal Theory in Theory and Practice,' *Social Theory and Practice* 34 (2008): 341-362;
- Schmidtz, D., 'Nonideal Theory: What It Is and What It Needs to Be', *Ethics* 121 (2011): 772-796

- Simmons, A. J., 'Ideal and Nonideal Theory,' *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 38 (2010): 5-36.
- Stemplowska, Z. 'What's Ideal About Ideal Theory?,' *Social Theory and Practice* 34 (2008): 319-40
- Swift A., and Z. Stemplowska, 'Ideal and Nonideal Theory,' in D. Estlund (ed.), *Oxford Handbook of Political Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012)
- Valentini, L., 'On the Apparent Paradox of Ideal Theory,' *Journal of Political Philosophy*, Vol. 17, 2009, 332-355

Session 2 (12 May 11:00-12:30)

This session will explore two radical critiques of ideal theory that lie at opposite extremes: firstly, the realist critique, in particular, the charge that ideal theory is misconceived because it ignores 'the circumstances of politics', and secondly, the charge that it fails to identify ultimate principles of justice because these (unlike ideal theory) are unconstrained by facts about human nature and what is feasible.

Questions to be addressed:

1. What do realists think is wrong with ideal theory?
2. Is a realist approach to political theory simply a form of non-ideal theory?
3. What sort of feasibility constraint, if any, should political theorists work with when they are defending normative principles?

Core readings:

- Sleat, M., 'Realism, Liberalism and Non-ideal Theory Or, Are there Two Ways to do Realistic Political Theory?,' *Political Studies*, Vol. 64, 2016, 27-41
- Mason, A., 'Justice, Feasibility, and Ideal Theory: A Pluralist Approach', *Social Philosophy and Policy*, Vol. 33, 2016, 32-54

Further reading:

- Cohen, G. A., *Rescuing Justice and Equality* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2008), Ch. 6
- Estlund, D., 'Utopophobia', *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol. 42, 2014, 113-134
- Galston, W., 'Realism in Political Theory,' *European Journal of Political Theory* 9 (2010): 385-411
- Gheaus, A., 'The Feasibility Constraint on the Concept of Justice', *The Philosophical Quarterly* 63 (2013): 445-464
- Hall, E., 'Political Realism and Fact-Sensitivity,' *Res Publica* 19 (2013): 173-181
- Miller, D., 'Political Philosophy for Earthlings', in his *Justice for Earthlings. Essays in Political Philosophy*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013)
- Rossi, E. and M. Sleat, 'Realism in Normative Political Theory,' *Philosophy Compass* 9, no. 10 (2014).
- Sleat, M., *Liberal Realism: A Realist Theory of Liberal Politics* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), esp. Ch. 2

- Williams, B., *In the Beginning Was the Deed* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005)

Part III: History and political theory (with Mark Philps)

In these two sessions we will discuss historical approaches to the understanding of political thought, and intellectual history more generally. Are historians doing something fundamentally different to political theorist in the way they treat classical texts? Should historical readings of texts set constraints on the way that modern political theorists use and discuss classical authors? Has the Cambridge school effectively cut modern political theorists off from the canon of past thinkers? What other units of analysis might we use – words, concepts, discourses, paradigms, languages??

Session 1: The View from Cambridge (12 May 14:00-15:30)

Questions to be addressed:

Are there perennial problems in the history of political thought? How important are authorial intentions to understanding the meaning of a text? How do we determine the appropriate context against which to read a text? Does past thinking have relevance to political thinking today? Does what X meant to do by saying Y constrain how we interpret the meaning and significance of Y? Are the targets of contextualist historians of political thought guilty of the crimes they are accused of? What can be said in defence of the ahistorical study of dead political theorists? Do the 'contextualists' practise what they preach?

Core readings:

- Q. Skinner, *Visions of Politics Volume 1: On Method*, 2002, chapters 4-6.
- M. Philp, 'Politics and History' in Leopold and Stears, *Political Theory: Methods and Approaches* (2008)

Further readings:

- M. Bevir, 'Are There Perennial Problems in Political Theory?', *Political Studies*, 42
- (1994), pp. 662-75 (for a more detailed version, see M. Bevir, *The Logic of the History of Ideas*, 1999).
- D. Boucher, *Texts in Context: Revisionist Methods for Studying the History of Ideas*,
- 1985.
- K. Palonen, *Quentin Skinner: History, Politics, Rhetoric*, 2003, chapters 2-3.
- J. G. A. Pocock, *Politics, Language and Time*, 1972, especially 'Languages and Their Implications: The Transformation of the Study of Political Thought.'
- J. G. A. Pocock, *Virtue, Commerce and History*, 1985, chapter 1.
- Q. Skinner, 'The Rise of, Challenge to, and Prospects for, a Collingwoodian Approach to the History of Political Thought', D. Castiglione and I. Hampsher-Monk (eds), *The History of Political Thought in National Context*, 2001.
- R. Tuck, 'The Contribution of History' in Goodin and Pettit (eds), *Companion to Contemporary Philosophy*, 1993.

- J. Tully (ed), *Meaning and Context: Quentin Skinner and His Critics*, 1988.
- D. Wootton, 'The Hard Look Back', *Times Literary Supplement*, 14 March 2003.
- D. Runciman. 'History of Political Thought: The State of the Discipline', *British Journal of Political and International Relations*, volume 3 no. 1 (2001) pp.84-104.

Session 2: Conceptual History (12 May 16:00-17:30)

In this session we will discuss Koselleck's approach to concepts, and go on to consider other ways of thinking about how to do the history of political ideas, and their relationships with political change.

Questions to be addressed:

Should the history of political thought be written as a history of concepts? How does the method of *Begriffsgeschichte* compare to that advocated by the 'Cambridge school' of intellectual history? What is/are the relationship/s between words and concepts? Does conceptual history help us understand why meanings and usages change? What other ways do we have for thinking about units of analysis in political thought – words, statements, discourses, languages? And what do we want this approach to do: to account for intellectual and conceptual change and development – or to give us a history and analysis of our present?

Core readings:

- R. Koselleck, 'Begriffsgeschichte and Social History' in his *Futures Past*, 1985.
- Joanna Innes and Mark Philp, *Re-Imagining Democracy in the Age of Revolutions* (2015) Intro, chap 7.

Further readings:

- T. Ball, J. Farr and Hanson (eds), *Political Innovation and Conceptual Change*, 1989.
- Peter de Bolla, *The architecture of Concepts* (2013)
(see: <https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/peter-de-bollas-human-rights-edifice/>)
- M. Freeden, *Ideologies and Political Theory*, 1996, chapter 2.
- M. Freeden, 'Ideologies and Conceptual History', *Journal of Political Ideologies*, 2(1997), pp. 3-11.
- H. G. Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, part 2, pp. 235-74.
- Hampsher-Monk, K. Tilmans and F. van Free (eds), *History of Concepts: Comparative Perspectives*, 1998. (Especially 'Introduction' and chapter 6.)
- R. Koselleck, *The Practice of Conceptual History*, 2002.
- J. G. A. Pocock, 'The concept of a language' in A. Pagden, *The Languages of Political Theory in Early Modern Europe* (1987)
- M. Richter, *The History of Political and Social Concepts: A Critical Introduction*, 1995.
- M. Richter, 'A German Version of the Linguistic Turn', D. Castiglione and I.
- Hampsher-Monk (eds), *The History of Political Thought in National Context*, 2001.
- P. Ricouer, *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 1981.