



Taking People as They Could Be

A Defence of Ideal Political Theory

Dimitris Efthimiou

Ph.D. thesis defence on 3 February 2012

Abstract

The object of this thesis is to defend ideal political theory from a series of objections that question its theoretical and practical soundness. My preliminary thesis is that ideal political theory is theoretically as well as practically sufficient in terms of providing us with valid normative prescriptions. The first three chapters explore the nature of ideal political theory and provide a qualified defence of its theoretical force whereas the last three chapters are somewhat more practical and focus on whether and how ideal theory can inform political action. In chapter 1 I provide a critical overview of the most recent debates on the nature of ideal theory and show how these are related to meta-ethics. The aim of chapter 2 is to provide a preliminary defence of the necessity and sufficiency of ideal theory for normatively ranking alternative states of affairs as well as for helping us to decide what to practically do. The aim of chapter 3 is to defend the claim that mere incongruence between a theory and the nonideal circumstances of its application does not constitute an argument against its theoretical and practical soundness. In chapter 4 I argue that a fixation on political feasibility, from the part of contextualist political theorists, comes at the price of theoretical incoherence as well as suboptimal and arbitrary suggestions concerning political reforms. In chapter 5 I engage with the real-world problem of climate change and show how ideal political theory can practically serve as a guide for political action in nonideal circumstances. Finally, in chapter 6, I show in what ways the complex reality of partisan party politics and political pluralism is compatible with ideal political theory.



Jury: Peter Wagner (Univ. Barcelona) (Supervisor), , Dimitris Efthimiou (candidate), Andrew Mason (Univ. Southampton), Glen Newey (Univ. Libre de Bruxelles), Martin Van Gelderen (EUI) (in absentia)

Bio: Dimitris is principally interested in normative political theory and has a particular interest in its feasibility conditions and application. Other research interests include: environmental justice, the relationship between equality and legitimacy as well as the relationship between distributive justice and solidarity. Dimitris also holds an MPhil in Social and Political Sciences from Cambridge University and a first class BA in Sociology from Goldsmiths College. He has also spent time as a visiting scholar in Politics at Oxford University. Dimitris has been teaching at University College London since 2008.