APPLICATION FORM FOR PROSPECTIVE WORKSHOP DIRECTORS

If you wish to apply to direct a workshop at the Joint Sessions in Helsinki, Finland in Spring 2007, please first see the explanatory notes, then complete this form, which will serve as the cover sheet for your workshop proposal. This form should be sent with your workshop proposal to the ECPR Central Services. You can do this by either emailing both documents as an attached file (in word format .doc or rich text format .rtf) to the ECPR Central Services at ecpr@essex.ac.uk. Alternatively, you can print up the information and send it as a fax to the Central Services, fax: +44 1206 872500. The deadline for applications is 15 February 2006.

Title of proposed workshop: Social Justice: Ideal Theory, Non-Ideal Circumstances

Abstract of proposed workshop. Maximum of 250 words (suitable for publication in the academic programme leaflet and on the ECPR web site):

It is a familiar objection that normative political theory has become unhelpfully detached from the real world. The influence on the discipline of Rawls’ A Theory of Justice has, it is alleged, led theorists to focus too much attention to the question of what an ideally just society would look like, while neglecting the implications of their theorising for pressing practical issues of social justice confronted by societies here and now. Some conceive the problem as a hijacking of political theory by philosophy; others defend the value of a philosophical approach but urge theorists to devote greater attention to less fundamental, but more urgent, issues concerning the application of ideal theory to the non-ideal circumstances in which politics actually occurs. This would require political theorists to engage in interdisciplinary work with empirical social scientists – sociologists, political scientists, economists, and experts in social policy.

This workshop welcomes papers that consider how ideal theory may most fruitfully be brought to bear on real-world problems of social justice. Papers may operate at a theoretical level, analysing the variety of things that might be meant by ‘ideal’ and ‘non-ideal’ theorising, and exploring the various ways in which political philosophical work on social justice connects with political action - whether by individuals or by polities as a whole. Or they may proceed more concretely, by exploring a particular policy issue and considering how the various brands of ideal theory on offer address (or fail to address) it. We particularly welcome papers that use case studies to yield clearer understanding of the ideal/non-ideal distinction.

Name of workshop director(s): Dr Ingrid Robeyns (University of Amsterdam)
Dr Adam Swift (Centre for the Study of Social Justice, University of Oxford)

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Please note that the information above is VERY important, as it will be used in all future correspondence and, if the proposal is successful, printed in the academic programme.

The proposal should be typed with 1.5 line spacing on three/four A4 pages using this sheet as the first page, and should cover the points outlined in the guidelines (http://www.essex.ac.uk/ecpr/jointsessions/jsguidelines.htm).

For further information, please contact either:

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ECPR Workshop Proposal (Helsinki 2007)

Social Justice: Ideal Theory, Non-ideal Circumstances

Co-directors
Ingrid Robeyns, Department of Political Sciences, University of Amsterdam, The Netherlands
Adam Swift, Centre for the Study of Social Justice, University of Oxford, UK

Outline of the topic
It is a familiar objection that research on social justice within normative political theory has become unhelpfully detached from the real world. The influence on the discipline of John Rawls’ A Theory of Justice, which is explicitly presented as an exercise in ‘ideal theory’, has, it is alleged, led theorists to focus too much attention on the question of what an ideally just society would look like, while neglecting the implications of their theorising for pressing practical issues of social justice confronted by societies here and now. Some conceive the problem as a hijacking of political theory by philosophy, others defend the value of a philosophical approach but urge theorists to devote greater attention to less fundamental, but more urgent, issues concerning the application of ideal theory to the non-ideal circumstances in which politics actually occurs.

In recent years this problem has increasingly been recognised, and there is widespread awareness that many pressing issues of social justice cannot appropriately be studied when we approach them only through ideal theory. Political theorists themselves are becoming embarrassed by their failure to relate their normative principles to the non-ideal conditions faced by actual political actors, whether those be states or individual citizens. In addition, several emerging problems of social justice clearly demand, for their resolution, an engagement with the empirical and institutional aspects of politics and policies. These include problems related to globalisation, trans-national migration, nationalism, multiculturalism, aging and fertility decline, the changing status of parenthood, the need for a new welfare state, and changing gender roles. Such issues require robust and careful theorising, but they also require political theorists to engage in interdisciplinary work - with sociologists, economists, and experts in social policy – and to incorporate the findings of empirical social science.

The aim of this workshop is to make progress on the pressing issue of how ideal and abstract theorising about social justice can properly inform political action. Political theory needs to develop clear and rigorous ways of formulating theories of the second-best (or third- or fourth-best), and to achieve a more systematic understanding of the various circumstances that constrain the realisation of ideal theories of social justice in the real world. We hope to think through the issue of what distinguishes ideal from non-ideal theorizing, to explore the various factors that make it unhelpful (and perhaps even counterproductive) simply to identify the principles that would regulate an ideally just society, and to illustrate and explore these questions with concrete case studies of social justice issues.

Relation to existing research
Many political theorists and philosophers regard the publication of John Rawls’ A Theory of Justice in 1971 as the revival of analytical normative political theory, in particular of theories of social justice. Rawls identified his own work as being ideal theory, which he defined as theory for a society in which all comply by the principles of
justice. But Rawls’s work has been understood as ideal theory in other ways as well; for example by embedding his work in social contract theory, he brackets certain groups and certain problems, such as questions of justice for the disabled, for children, within the family, and across national borders (Kittay 1999, Sen 1981, Nussbaum 2006). Rawls’ powerful work set the stage for social justice theorizing for the decades to come, for example in the ideal-theoretical work of Robert Nozick (1974), Ronald Dworkin (1981), G. A. Cohen (1995). This literature has been criticised for being constructed upon thought-experiments, unrealistic assumptions, reductive views of human agency, the exclusion of certain groups and a lack of engagement with existing social institutions. While theorists in this tradition have sought to explore the issue of their application to existing societies (Cohen 2000), and have recognised the necessity of accepting second-best policy solutions to real-world problems (Dworkin 2000), and while it has not been clear what precisely made these canonical theories of justice ideal-theoretical, it is often argued that their ideal nature has rendered them of limited use for the study of real world social justice problems. (See, for example, Brighouse (2005), Pierik and Robeyns (2006), Rothstein (2005), Stears (2005)). Meanwhile there is lively debate about the proper way to understand the enterprise of political theory. Some see it as necessarily practical and action-guiding, and for that reason as needing to incorporate real-world constraints (including popular beliefs about social justice) (Miller 2000) while others insist that ultimate principles of justice are independent of all empirical facts (Cohen 2003, Swift 2003a).

Recent years have therefore seen an increasing number of contributions to the social justice literature that develop social justice studies in a non-ideal framework. This is done in a variety of ways. Firstly, some recent work remains broad in scope, but engages more explicitly with empirical data (e.g. de-Shalit and Wolff 2006).

Secondly, it is increasingly common for theorists to engage with existing social and political institutions. Often this translates itself into a study of social justice in one particular domain. For example, Brighouse (2000) and Swift (2003b) have analysed issues of school choice; Okin (1989) and Nussbaum (1999) have addressed issues of gender injustice; Kymlicka (1995) and Barry (2001) have written on social justice related to multicultural questions; Young (2004) has analysed issues of justice related to international outsourcing and globalisation in production; Van Parijs (1995), among many others, has analysed how the welfare state should be reformed in order to be more just.

Finally, some recent research investigates which ideal theories of justice are applicable (or inapplicable) to what kind of problems. For example, Sen’s capability approach to social justice has been used by the highly influential United Nations Human Development Reports, by national governments to assess inequalities and injustices (Robeyns 2006) and as the basis for a non-ideal account of disadvantage (de-Shalit and Wolff 2006), but this does not imply that it is a useful approach for all cases of social justice. Similarly, Rawls’s work on justice may serve as a guide for the design of a constitution for a new state, but may not be very helpful for entirely different questions of social justice (Kittay (1999) and Nussbaum (2006)).

The aim of this workshop is to investigate how ideal theories of justice can best be applied to non-ideal circumstances, by confronting insights from these various strands of research.

References
Both Directors attended the ECPR workshop on ‘Equality of Opportunity’ in Granada in April 2005, which, by bringing together analytical normative political theorists from across Europe, was widely regarded as marking a welcome development for ECPR. The community of such theorists would certainly welcome the opportunity to build on the foundation established in Granada, by extending the informal network begun there to include new scholars.

We are also both embedded in several active networks and institutions of social justice scholars across Europe, in part due to our work experience in several countries (Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands, the UK and the USA). These networks and institutions include the Centre for the Study of Social Justice (of which Adam Swift is the Director); the Human Development and Capability Association (of which Ingrid Robeyns is the information officer); the informal ‘Priority in Practice’ network coordinated by Jonathan Wolff at University College London; and the Equality Exchange network which is hosted in Norway but connects people across Europe and the world (http://mora.rente.nhh.no/projects/EqualityExchange/), of which we are both members. In addition to being able to access all these networks, we have secured permission from the organisers of an international conference on “Social Justice in Practice”, which will be held in Dublin in June 2006 (and at which Robeyns will be a plenary speaker) to use their list of participants when distributing our call for papers.

In addition, we are well-connected with social justice scholars in many countries, whom we will invite to apply for participation in the workshop by themselves or their colleagues or PhD students, including Philippe Van Parijs (University de Louvain, Belgium), Marc Fleurbeay (Université de Pau, France), Ian Carter (University of Pavia, Italy), Bertil Tungodden (Norwegian School of Economics), John Baker (University College Dublin, Ireland), Anne Phillips (LSE, London, UK), Avner de-Shalit (The Hebrew University of Jerusalem, Israel), WulfGaertner
University of Osnabruek, Germany), Lukas Meyer (University of Berne, Switzerland), and Joao Rosas (Macau Inter-University Institute, Portugal). We will make a special effort to identify suitable candidates from Central and Eastern Europe, since these scholars are underrepresented in the already existing (formal and informal) research networks on social justice.

**Types of paper for the workshop**
Since our aim is to foster engagement between philosophical theory and the real world, we are hoping to attract papers with a mix of methodologies. We anticipate papers of various kinds:
1. Philosophical or theoretical papers illuminating the nature of ideal theories of justice, assessing the critiques of ideal theory, and providing taxonomies of non-ideal theories of justice.
2. Applied theoretical papers analysing the usefulness of a particular theory of justice for the study of a social justice issue, or comparing several theories in this respect.
3. Empirical papers analysing a particular social justice problem in a non-ideal setting (e.g. questions of education, gender, disability, global inequality, globalisation, multiculturalism, the family) and reflecting on the relevance and applicability of ideal theory to their clarification and solution.

We will particularly welcome papers that illuminate the application of ideal theory to non-ideal circumstances by means of case studies.

**Funding**
If our workshop is accepted, we will approach funding agencies in several countries in order to raise funds for this workshop, in particular to support PhD students and participants from Central and Eastern Europe. We will also investigate funding resources related to the Centre for the Study of Social Justice at Oxford University.

**Bibliographical notes**
Ingrid Robeyns is a research fellow in political theory at the University of Amsterdam. She has co-edited *The Work and Ideas of Amartya Sen: A Gender Perspective* (Routledge 2005), and is currently co-editing a volume entitled *Justice, Capabilities and Primary Goods*. Her research on justice and equality has been (or is about to be) published in *Analyse und Kritik, Political Studies, Journal of Political Philosophy, Filosofie en Praktijk, Metaphilosophy, Constellations*, among other places.