

## **What can we hope for from analytic political philosophy? Not sure.**

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*Abstract.* I present a difficulty with evaluating analytic political philosophy based on a lack of data to compare achievements there with. For example, if a paradox was (or were) given to members of an elite university college for a day, how many solutions would they come up with?

The question of how outsiders would view the area of research known as analytic political philosophy is sometimes raised (e.g. Reiff 2018). There is the perception that it is not “analytic enough.” I personally don’t wish to force upon the area a really dry style which is only accessible to a few, as is associated with this philosophical tradition. But when hoping for something from analytic political philosophy, I operate with “gaps” in my data, which prevents me from being able to determine what it is reasonable to expect.

To illustrate the problem, consider the appearance of Laura Valentini’s paradox of ideal theory, which consists of these propositions:

- (a) Any sound theory of justice is action guiding.
- (b) Any sound theory of justice is ideal.
- (c) Any ideal theory fails to be action guiding.

Solutions must argue for giving up one of these propositions, it seems. Quite a lot of people in this small research area have degrees from the University of Oxford. So imagine that undergraduates at an Oxford college are given this paradox to work on for a day, with background information about how Valentini is interpreting “ideal.” How many solutions do they come up with? Which solutions? What is the distribution of solution-devisers? Do solutions

come from mostly one person: paradox Jim, say? How many of them are willing to present solutions accessibly, rather than just say such things as “Sound theory – ideal – ideal – false assumptions,” leaving you to work out the rest? Without this kind of information, I would find it difficult to assess analytic political philosophy. “Why is that solution not in the literature by now?”: is that a reasonable criticism or not? I don’t know. (Of course some things I should assume are below the range of acceptability. I am not especially keen on the Oxford experiment by the way! Or switching the location to Cambridge, etc. I am just saying, as they say. Apologies if I sound as if I am disrespecting people who work on Valentini’s paradox.)

## **Appendix**

I think on Joel Smith’s television channel today, Professor Jeanette Edwards is in an arena and a spider is explaining to her that someone with very rudimentary games programming skills could still make software which is not bad with literary imitation suggestions. (I haven’t, by the way.)

## **References**

- Reiff, M.R. 2018. Twenty-one statements about political philosophy: an introduction and commentary on the state of the profession. *Teaching Philosophy* 41: 65-115.
- Valentini, L. 2009. On the Apparent Paradox of Ideal Theory. *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 17 (3): 332-355.