

Introduction to Symposium on Gerald Gaus' *The Tyranny of the Ideal*

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The Tyranny of the Ideal is a powerful challenge to the dominant approach to political philosophy. Gaus argues that the pursuit of a political ideal is fundamentally problematic. Indeed, once we understand the structure of the problem that ideal theorizing in political philosophy has, we find that our ability to identify a political ideal is deeply constrained. Homogenous societies have an extremely constrained “vision” of alternative social worlds. Diverse societies may be able to see more, but at the cost of disagreement over what it is we should be looking for. Indeed, even if we can find an ideal we can agree on, we now face what Gaus calls The Choice: “...we must choose between relatively certain (perhaps large) local improvements in justice and pursuit of a considerably less certain ideal.” (p. 142) It is in The Choice where Gaus identifies the *tyranny* of ideal theory. Commitment to an (theoretical, possibly mistaken) ideal can cause us to make our world *less just* while we chase our vision of justice.

By combining careful use of formal models with a rich philosophical framework, Gaus demonstrates how ideal theorists have glossed over the core challenges posed by social complexity on the one hand and human diversity on the other. By starting from the understanding that social systems are complex systems, Gaus offers a reorientation of political philosophy. Rather than focus on identifying the ideal, with a notion of a well-ordered society in which all share a conception of justice, Gaus presents us with a framework for better debating different visions of the ideal. This reorientation is necessary: in diverse, complex systems, there isn't going to be a realizable ideal. Instead of ignoring these fundamental constraints, Gaus encourages us to choose to leverage diversity to help us navigate social complexity.

In this version of the Open Society, the aim is to allow for as wide a scope of different perspectives to hold each other accountable to a public morality while allowing for different republican communities to develop their visions of the ideal. As Gaus makes clear, this is not a vision of a society in which everyone shares common values and lives in perfect harmony with each other. Instead, it is a potentially frustrating world of disagreement, debate and discovery. A commitment to the Open Society is a commitment to not always getting your way, just like everyone else.

This issue is devoted to exploring and challenging the ideas contained within *The Tyranny of the Ideal*. The lead essay, by Scott Page, engages with the formal challenge of identifying and attaining just social worlds in a complex environment, and the ways in which diversity can contribute to this endeavor. Next, David Wiens challenges Gaus' use of the landscape metaphor, and suggests that this metaphor has led to a larger issue in understanding the relationship between ideal and non-ideal theories. The third essay, by Fred D'Agostino situates Gaus' work in a broader discussion of how we should go about engaging in political philosophy. This leads us to our final contributors. Kevin Vallier presents a puzzle with how we might reconcile *Tyrrany of the Ideal* with Gaus' previous book, *The Order of Public Reason*, given that his earlier book relies on public justification as an equilibrium concept, whereas his latest book argues that we must be able to break free of equilibria and move to new ones. Blain Neufeld and Lori Watson offer a robust defense of Rawlsian approaches, and particularly the conception of a well-ordered society, against Gaus' arguments. The issue concludes with a reply from Gaus.