

A simple-minded solution to Laura Valentini's ideal theory paradox

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Abstract. This paper offers a solution to Laura Valentini's paradox of ideal theory. A reason for idealizing assumptions is because otherwise the theory would be too complicated to be action guiding.

"It is a risk, this seed to sow,

But I'm assuming this they do not know."

I return to Laura Valentini's paradox of ideal theory and its three components:

- (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.

"Surely one proposition must go." But which? Valentini clarifies the sense of "ideal theory":

First, a theory may be 'ideal' in a non-technical sense, insofar as it proposes an ideal of a fully just world towards which we should aim. Intuitively, it would seem that, unless a theory is ideal in this way, it cannot qualify as a normative theory of justice. Second, and more interestingly, a theory can be ideal in the technical sense of being designed under idealised, i.e., false, assumptions. (2009: 337-338)

But why have these false assumptions? An answer is that they are simplifications and simplifications are required because otherwise the theory would be too complicated and if it is too complicated, it is not useful in guiding action. "It has all these

qualifications and exceptions to mentally process which do not usually arise, slowing down applying it.” So appreciating a reason for idealization leads to a rejection of (c).

Reference

Valentini, L. 2009. On the Apparent Paradox of Ideal Theory. *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 17 (3): 332-355.