Let us not fail to notice, however, that there is a difference between arguments from and those to first principles. For Plato, too, was right in raising this question and asking, as he used to do, ‘Are we on the way from or to the first principles?’ There is a difference, as there is in a race-course between the course from the judges to the turning-point and the way back. For, while we must begin with what is evident, things are evident in two ways—some to us, some without qualification.

Aristotle, *Nicomaean Ethics*, 1095a30-1095b3

§1: Introduction

Famously, John Rawls holds that the task of political philosophy is to provide a theory of justice.¹ Since, on his view, the theory of justice occupies the entire space of political philosophy, justice is not to be understood as a narrow value contrasted with other political values such as democracy, equality, freedom and opportunity.² Although he does limit the scope of his theory to matters of justice concerning the basic structure of society, Rawlsian justice is capacious, encompassing all the claims that the members of a political community have on one another to order the basic institutions of their society in a way that

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² Within Rawls’ system, the concrete values mentioned here—democracy, freedom, equality and opportunity—are all protected by Rawls’ two principles of justice. The first principle concerns the claims arising from democracy and freedom, and the first part of the second principle addresses the claims arising fair equality of opportunity. Both principles, and indeed the theory as a whole, are concerned with securing conditions of equality. TOJ, 52-57.
is fair. Insofar as political values give rise to such claims, they necessarily fall under the
purview of the theory of justice.

Rawls claims that the theory of justice can be thought of as dividing into two parts
that he calls respectively “ideal theory” and “nonideal theory.” Ideal theory presents the
principles that characterize the basic structure of a just society. This conception of a just
society is meant to serve as a “realistic utopia” setting the long-range goal of political hope
and aspiration. Realistic because the theory, if successful, must articulate principles that are
compatible with the basic facts of human psychology, social science, and the material
conditions of our social world. Utopian because the society so conceived must be—unlike
our society and the other societies with which we are familiar—a just society.

Nonideal theory, by contrast, “asks how this long-term goal might be achieved, or
worked towards…It looks for courses of action that are morally permissible and politically
possible as well as likely to be effective.” If ideal theory discusses the long-range goal,
nonideal theory discusses the means that can effectively and justly be taken in pursuit of it in

3 As capacious as it is, note that there are many ways in which a society can be better or worse that
do not speak to its justice (see, e.g. TOJ 9). In his later work, the conception of fairness in question is
limited also to what he calls a political conception of justice.
4 G. A. Cohen has recently opposed this capacious understanding of justice. I do not engage his
critique in this essay, although I acknowledge that it as an important one that must be addressed by
anyone who wishes to defend this expansive view of justice. G. A. Cohen, Rescuing Justice and Equality,
5 TOJ, 216. I discuss the idea of realistic utopia at greater length in, “Constructivism, Strict
Compliance, and Realistic Utopia”. See also John Simmons , “Ideal and Nonideal Theory” in
Philosophy & Public Affairs, Vol. 38, no. 1, 5-37; and Zofia Stemplowska and Adam Swift, “Rawls on
Ideal and Nonideal Theory” in A Companion to Rawls, edited by Jon Mandle and David A. Reidy, John
Wiley and Sons (Chichester: 2014).
6 John Rawls, Justice as Fairness: A Restatement, Belknap Press (Cambridge: 2001), 4-5 (hereafter JAF),
LOP) See also the discussion of “end state” conceptions of ideal theory in Laura Valentini, “Ideal vs.
7 LOP, 11-13.
8 LOP, 14.
9 LOP, 89.
the short and middle range. Since nonideal theory is to strategically navigate towards the goal of a just society in this fashion, it must allow us to identify the injustices that are obstacles to forward movement. Having identified them, it must diagnose the underlying causes of these political pathologies, with a view to proposing morally permissible and effective remedies. It must investigate the strategies of opposition, and resistance, and the policies and programs that would be effective in moving us towards conditions of justice.

Rawls holds that these two parts of the theory of justice are not on a par, but rather are ordered by a relation of conceptual dependence: ideal theory is prior to nonideal theory, and equivalently, nonideal theory is posterior to ideal theory. By providing the end towards which nonideal theory is oriented, Rawls claims, ideal theory provides a necessary basis for a systematic and deep understanding of the problems of nonideal theory. Rawls thus writes, “the nature and aims of a perfectly just society is the fundamental part of the theory of justice.” I will call this claim of asymmetric theory dependence “the priority claim”.

Taken together, these ideas about political philosophy express one interpretation of the widely shared idea that political philosophy is practical. On this interpretation, political philosophy is practical insofar as its project is to articulate a realistic conception of a just society that serves as a suitable object of practical hope and political action, and to outline feasible and just steps towards achieving this goal, working out from our currently unjust condition. The practicality of political philosophy thus consists in the fact that it makes explicit and defends a practical good that serves as an end towards which our political action

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10 TOJ, 8, 216-217. Providing a theory of justice that encompasses both ideal and nonideal theory in their entirety is a herculean, and perhaps impossible, task. This should not surprise us, since the theory of justice is a way of characterizing the entire enterprise of political philosophy.

11 I take this general metaphor of pathology from Elizabeth Anderson, The Imperative of Integration, Princeton University Press (Princeton: 2010). (Hereafter, Imperative.)

12 Some relevant texts expressing the priority claim include, TOJ 7-8 and LOP 90-91.

13 TOJ, 8.
can be directed. Furthermore, it seeks to identify and diagnose the root causes of the injustice of our society in such a way that concrete and pragmatic action can be taken to overcome them. Following Rawls’ lead, I call this “the realistic utopia conception” of the practicality of political philosophy.

This conception has recently come under heavy fire. There are radical pluralists who reject the notion of a just society as a unitary end, and so reject the project of ideal theory wholesale.14 But there are others who are happy to juxtapose the injustice of our society with the ideal of a genuinely just society; in the struggle against injustice, they view it as important that our hopes and aspirations should reach towards a just society. What they reject is not the legitimacy of employing an ideal of a just society as part of a theory of justice, but only the claim that ideal theory is prior to nonideal theory. This is the route taken by philosophers such as Charles Mills and Elizabeth Anderson who accept as legitimate the aspiration to provide an account of a just society while rejecting the priority of ideal theory.15

In §2 I present several strands of argument these critics advance for rejecting the priority claim. Their basic thought is something like this. Political philosophy properly begins with our sense of the injustice of our society, and, if successful, it equips us to address this injustice well. Given that it begins in our experience of injustice, its proper starting place is nonideal rather than ideal theory. Such an investigation must begin with the social theorizing necessary to arrive at an accurate appreciation of whatever institutional props, structural features, and cognitive and motivational biases, play a role in causing the relevant injustices.

14 By “radical pluralism”, I have in mind the line of criticism issuing from Isaiah Berlin and running through John Gray, Stuart Hampshire, Amartya Sen, Bernard Williams, and others, according to which justice is composed of disparate and antagonistic elements that cannot be combined in a single account of a just society. On this radically pluralist view, justice is a grab bag and so does not have the sort of unity that could constitute it as an end for practice. I reply to the radically pluralist challenge in “Justice as an End”.
15 See Imperative, 3-7 and 89-111; Charles Mills, “Ideal Theory as Ideology” in Hypatia, Vol. 20, No. 3, 165-184, specifically 168.
With a keen empirical understanding of oppression in hand, we can then construct ideals of justice that function as effective remedies. If, as practice demands, we are to stay in touch with reality, we must work outwards from the injustice of the real to an understanding of the justice of the ideal.

By contrast, if we adhere to the priority claim, we prioritize the experience of privileged individuals who do not experience of the injustice of our society. Furthermore, we are forced to begin our investigation without a real understanding of the issues we confront. To do so is to run the hazard of uncritically employing normative concepts that nonideal theorizing might call into question. Thus Anderson and Mills reverse Rawls’ priority claim, arguing that ideal theory should be viewed as conceptually dependent on nonideal theory. Ideal theory is, on their conception, the handmaiden rather than the queen of political philosophy.

These authors signal their allegiance to the reverse priority claim by re-appropriating and granting new significance to the terms ideal and nonideal theory. Instead of treating them as names of two parts of one theory of justice, they use “ideal theory” to refer to a theory of justice like Rawls’, accepting the priority claim, and “nonideal theory” to name a theory like theirs, that affirms the reverse priority claim. On the basis of their critique they thus offer us what is intended as a new and different way of doing political philosophy centered in our experience of injustice and proposed remedies to it. Although I will follow Rawls’ usage of these terms in this paper for the sake of consistency of terminology, my main concern is to understand the confrontation they set up between Rawls’ view and their own. For “nonideal theory”, in the critics’ sense, would appear to be one of the main alternatives to the realistic utopian approach. This confrontation of methods promises to be of the utmost importance for how we are to practice and conceive of political philosophy.
§2: *A Genetic Interpretation of the Priority Claim*

When discussing the priority of ideal theory over nonideal theory, Rawls employs temporal language. For example, he says that ideal theory is to be addressed *before* nonideal theory, which he tells us is to be worked out *after* ideal theory.\(^{16}\) Similarly, he expresses the priority claim by saying that nonideal theory presupposes that the results of ideal theory are *already on hand* and that *until* ideal theory has been completed at least in outline, it lacks a goal.\(^{17}\)

These temporal glosses suggest that Rawls views the priority claim as a thesis about the proper genesis of the different parts of the theory of justice. As political philosophers, we have two tasks to complete corresponding to the two parts of the theory of justice. The priority claim addresses the following question: if we wish our theory of justice to be justified and rationally constructed, which of these two parts should we start with? The priority claim answers this question by asserting that questions of ideal theory are the proper starting point for the development of a theory of justice. We are to begin by investigating questions about the justice of a just society. Only later are we to turn to questions about the identification and explanation of, and response to, the pressing injustices that confront us in our “ordinary political life”.

Indeed, when taken at face value, Rawls’ remarks suggest something even stronger. If nonideal theory presupposes that the conclusions of ideal theory “are already on hand”, then it looks like we must not only *begin* with ideal theory before turning to nonideal theory, but that we must *finish* ideal theory—“at least in outline”—before we can so much as make a

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\(^{16}\) *TOJ*, 216.

\(^{17}\) *LOP*, 89-90.
start on nonideal theory. This would seem to imply that we cannot be justified in identifying something as an injustice without employing some worked out conception of justice as a standard. Also, having identified something as unjust, it would seem to imply that we cannot know whether some alteration would constitute an improvement without having the end presented by ideal theory in view.\textsuperscript{18} If a philosopher wishes to proceed in a rational and justified manner, Rawls’ remarks suggest, she must arrive at a complete outline of an account of a just society before she can start to theorize about injustice.

Critics argue persuasively that this genetic claim about method is wrongheaded. Elizabeth Anderson writes,

This [method] misunderstands how normative thinking works. Unreflective habits guide most of our activity. We are not jarred into critical thinking about our conduct until we confront a problem that stops us from carrying on unreflectively. We recognize the existence of a problem before we have any idea of what would be best or most just.\textsuperscript{19}

It is not a desire to reflect with satisfaction on the justice of the institutions that surround us that draws us in to political philosophy, but rather our perception of the failures of justice that we experience in our society. We are driven to formulate a theory of justice precisely because of our keen perception of injustice.\textsuperscript{20} These perceptions and the identifications of injustice they presuppose thus necessarily antedate our theories of justice. Our normative theorizing about justice naturally and rightly \textit{begins} with the identification of injustice, and next proceeds to reasoning about the responses to this injustice. The priority claim, by contrast, rests on a general picture of normative thinking as necessarily beginning from

\textsuperscript{18} John Simmons seems to assert this when defending the priority claim. See Simmons, “Ideal and Nonideal Theory”, 34.

\textsuperscript{19} Imperative, 3.

\textsuperscript{20} This was noted with great gusto in John Herman Rashdall, “The Wrong and the Bad” in \textit{The Journal of Philosophy} Vol. 51, No. 24, 1954, 764-765.
satisfied reflection on the successes of justice. It thus rests on a false picture of where normative theorizing begins. The natural path in normative thinking starts from the nonideal and works up to the ideal.

Charles Mills pursues a similar argument with a different emphasis. Mills agrees with Anderson that political philosophy begins in our ordinary political experience, but he points out that different groups have different experiences. In particular, the experience of political subjects who are victims of systematic oppression differs from political subjects who are not. For the former, the injustice of the present political order is the unavoidable and undeniable starting point of political reflection. For the latter, more privileged, group, the present order is more ambiguous, being experienced as substantially if imperfectly just. The priority claim, in effect, privileges the experience of the privileged. 21 It makes the experience of the privileged of substantial justice the legitimate starting point for inquiry, and relegates the experience of the oppressed to second-class epistemic status. Because of the depressing demographic facts about philosophy—an embarrassing outlier in the humanities—it is no surprise that the priority claim would assume the status of an obvious and unquestioned truth. But this fact hardly speaks in its favor.

So while Anderson argues that the priority claim embodies a mistake about how all normative thinking works, Mills suggests that the priority claim is no mistake. It accurately captures the experience of white male upper-to-middle class normative thinking, and functions to discount the experience of other disadvantaged groups. However, this disagreement aside, Mills agrees with Anderson that the priority claim is wrongheaded. For, if our concern in political philosophy is to address the pressing and appalling injustices that confront us in our ordinary experience, it makes good sense to take very seriously at the

outset the experience of those who are actually confronted by the relevant injustices. And Mills certainly agrees with Anderson about the possibility of the direct identification of injustice, which is apparent in the experience of the oppressed.

Elizabeth Anderson also objects to the idea that comparative judgments about relative injustice and its amelioration presuppose a worked out ideal theory. She points out that we can often settle a just claim on our conduct now in response to nonideal conditions, without having completed our ideal theory even in outline. Often, we can know what is better without yet knowing what would be best.22 In passages with a similar spirit, from which she draws, Amartya Sen points out that we can know that many things are unjust, and that reforms ameliorating or removing them are improvements, without having settled on the details of a perfectly just society.23 Sen’s persuasive examples of obvious and egregious injustices include the subjugation of women, human trafficking, and mass starvation in the midst of plenty. We don’t need a worked out ideal theory to know that these evils are unjust, and that we should address them if we can. For example, we need not have determined the maximally just tax rate to know that sex trafficking is wrong and things would be better (less unjust) if we put a stop to it.

Furthermore, Mills and Anderson both argue that ideal theory itself is hampered by the priority claim. Mills points out that merely launching into reasoning about justice without having first theorized about injustice leaves us in a bad position to critically assess and intelligently operationalize the normative concepts that are handed to us by our public culture. Some of these normative concepts are ideological constructions that nonideal theorizing will lead us to abandon when we recognize their role in sustaining oppression. Others, although perhaps fine if properly operationalized, are subject to ideological

22 Anderson, Imperative, 3.
distortions revealed by nonideal theory. Finally, some important concepts that can help us construct ideals of justice are not likely to show up on our radar without nonideal analysis. In a similar vein, Anderson argues that launching into ideal theory before engaging in analysis of oppression will lead us to employ crude and “lumpy concepts” like racial discrimination that a nonideal analysis like hers decompose into a network of finer notions. Such lumpy concepts encourage misguided ideals, for example, the ideal of colorblindness.

I find these arguments all persuasive. I also wholeheartedly favor the disciplinary shift that Mills and Anderson urge towards a concern with the pressing and urgent matters of injustice in our society, including racial injustice. However, I must admit that I find the very obviousness of some of the points made by Anderson and Mills worrying. Could it possibly be that Rawls and those who have followed him were making such crass, and, in some cases, bizarre errors? To be sure, Mills has an experiential story intended to explain the mistake, but it strikes me as surprising nonetheless.

§3: Reflective Equilibrium as Genetic Epistemology

Things become still more troubling once we realize that Rawls does indeed have a genetic epistemological story to tell that the critics do not mention. This genetic story is not the priority claim, but rather the theory of reflective equilibrium—Rawls’ famous dynamic epistemology of normative thinking. In this section I explore this aspect of Rawls’ thinking, highlighting several of its features that are relevant in this context, before relating it in §4 to the priority claim.

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24 Charles Mills, “Ideal Theory as Ideology”, 176-177.
25 Imperative, 4-6.
Reflective equilibrium is a method to arrive at justified views about justice, culminating ultimately in a theory of justice. As Rawls presents it, this theory is an account of one of our moral powers, which Rawls calls “the sense of justice”. The sense of justice is an intellectual and practical capacity, issuing in judgment and action about justice. Our theorizing begins by assuming that the capacity is up and running in us, that by reaching our adult years we have acquired a sense of justice, and so have the ability to make the relevant judgments about justice. We begin our analysis by isolating some provisionally fixed starting points, our pre-theoretical “considered judgments” about justice. These are judgments that strike us as sound exercises of the capacity. They are thoughts about justice that seem to us correct if any of our thoughts about justice are.

Such judgments are pre-theoretical in the sense that they do not draw on a theory of justice. Nonetheless, they are rational in that the subject of these judgments will usually have some awareness of the supporting reasons for the judgment. Furthermore, although pre-theoretical, they occur at all levels of generality. To be pre-theoretical is thus not to be a judgment about a described case. Considered judgments are thus not only or primarily “intuitions” in the usual sense of that term. They range from judgments about particular

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26 TOJ, 46. Here and throughout I follow Thomas Scanlon’s “deliberative” interpretation of reflective equilibrium. The only place I differ from Scanlon is that I do not view the claim that the theory of justice provides an account of our sense of justice as in tension with (or a distraction from) the deliberative interpretation on which the purpose of reflective equilibrium is to arrive at correct views about justice. See Thomas Scanlon, “Rawls on Justification” in The Cambridge Companion to Rawls, ed. Samuel Freeman (CUP: 2002), 139-167,
27 TOJ, 46; JAF, 29.
28 Ibid.
29 TOJ, 47-48.
30 Rawls describes considered judgments this way: “Some judgments we view as fixed points: ones we never expect to withdraw, as when Lincoln says: ‘If slavery is not wrong, nothing is wrong.” See JAF, 29.
31 TOJ, 48.
situations, to those about standing institutions, all the way up to abstract thoughts about, for example, what fails to counts as a reason for holding an institution to be fair. At the start of our reflections such judgments are necessarily episodic and piecemeal. The goal is to ascend through a process of reflection to a unified and self-conscious representation of justice that relates these different judgments, showing the relations of dependence that hold between them.

The crucial mediating factors, relating different levels of considered judgment, are the principles of justice. The more and less general considered judgments relate in different ways to the principles. The principles of justice are grounded in our highest-level considered judgments. Rawls own attempt to ground principles of justice involve his use of several devices of representation, including the original position and the veil of ignorance, intended to assemble our most general considered judgments in such a way that we can extract from them a general statement of their consequences. The principles in turn function to explain our lower level considered judgments. These judgments along with their supporting reasons are derived from the principles in conjunction with suitable empirical assumptions.\(^{33}\) The goal of the method is thus to account for the sense of justice by revealing the dependence of some our judgments about justice on other judgments about justice, as mediated by principles and other theoretical constructions.

This process does not leave our judgments untouched. By formulating principles that explain our lower-level judgments, it enriches our understanding of these judgments, by gathering them together into groups and showing their common dependence on general principles, and ultimately, on the considered judgments that underwrite these principles. This can, of course, affect how we make the judgments, and also how we conceive and formulate

\(^{33}\) *TOJ*, 46.
the reasons we offer for them. Also, by formulating general principles reflective equilibrium extends our judgment into areas where we may not have been prone to make judgments of justice.\textsuperscript{34} Perhaps most importantly, it also helps us to settle matters where our judgments were uncertain and conflicted.\textsuperscript{35}

Of course, as Rawls famously emphasizes, there’s no guarantee that our considered judgments will all fit together.\textsuperscript{36} When, for example, there are conflicts between the principles and lower-level considered judgments, we face a choice. We must either abandon the lower level judgment or revise the principle.\textsuperscript{37} Since the principle is supported by higher level considered judgments, we have to see whether that high level judgment might be embodied in a revised principle consistent with the lower level judgment. But if it can’t, we’ll have no choice but to decide which considered judgment we ought to give up. We will tend to be justified in abandoning a considered judgment when we can provide a convincing account of the source of our error in making the judgment, and also say what was right about it, for example, by saying what nearby true thought we were conflating the mistaken judgment with.\textsuperscript{38} By working back and forth from principles to judgment, we seek a reflective equilibrium between our considered judgments at all levels, as mediated by principles that reveal the structures of explanation and dependence that hold between them.\textsuperscript{39}

Now if we want to know what Rawls’ views about the proper starting points of investigation are, it is clear: they are our considered judgments about justice. So to see

\textsuperscript{34} See \textit{TOJ}, 319 for a discussion of the Difference Principle as extending our judgment into “questions that commonsense finds unfamiliar and leaves undecided”.

\textsuperscript{35} For the settling of internal conflict and uncertainty, see \textit{JAF}, 30.

\textsuperscript{36} \textit{TOJ}, 48; \textit{JAF}, 30.

\textsuperscript{37} \textit{TOJ}, 48.

\textsuperscript{38} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{39} \textit{JAF}, 30-31.
whether he disagrees with the critics about the starting points for an investigation of justice, we need only consider what considered judgments he works with. For example, are they all judgments about just arrangements and institutions? Or are many of them judgments about injustice, arising from our historical and personal experience of the deficiencies of our political community?

It is a striking fact that most of the considered judgments that Rawls mentions concern paradigm *injustices*, for example, that slavery, or caste systems, or the apportionment of social goods on the basis of race, or religious persecution, are *wrong*.40 Or again and most famously, that the loss of one *cannot* be made good by the gain of another, i.e. is unjust, or that inequality of the starting places in our society cannot be justified by appeal to desert, and so are disturbing and prima-facie unjust.41 Indeed, even many of the more general considered judgments Rawls works with concern failures of justification. For example, the veil of ignorance largely functions to codify the set of considerations that fail to justify an inequality when offered by those more privileged citizens to the less privileged citizens on the bottom end of the inequality. In other words, some of the considered judgments at the basis of his theory concern forms of reasoning are patently crummy rationalizations from the point of view of justice.42

So Rawls’ own starting points appear to be the identification of various injustices as provisionally fixed points, black stars in the firmament of our political thought. Furthermore, Rawls treats these considered judgments as initially credible points to which the construction of our theory is answerable. He would thus seem to agree with the critics that someone with a mature sense of justice is in a position to judge many things to be unjust in a piecemeal

40 *TOJ*, 19.
41 *TOJ*, 3 and 7.
42 *TOJ*, 18-19.
fashion, without yet having arrived at any very theoretical judgments about justice. There is no reason to think that Rawls would deny that many of these judgments are comparative in form. Indeed, if our sense of justice is sound enough to issue in the firm judgment that slavery is evil, then presumably it is also able to issue in the firm judgment that emancipation is better, i.e. more just. Rawls’ whole theory is thus predicated on the possibility of our making pre-theoretical judgments of the sort the critics argue the priority claim commits him to denying. They are among the starting points of his investigation.

What is going on?

§4: The Priority Claim as a Thesis about the Output of Reflective Equilibrium

What invited such criticism was Rawls’ temporal language. But some caution is warranted in this regard, since asymmetric dependence relations of diverse kinds are naturally expressed through temporal language, even when temporal ordering is clearly not what is at issue. (Think only of how naturally we speak of “prior and posterior”, “before and after”, when discussing the order of theorems or premises of a proof.) Perhaps then, charity demands that we find some other way to understand Rawls’ remarks.

A clue comes from the fact that as Rawls describes the priority relation, it holds between ideal and nonideal theory. But, of course, these two theoretical components are not the starting points of investigation. They are not the piecemeal and fragmented considered judgments that serve as the inputs to reflective equilibrium, but rather the developed portions of an articulated theory of justice that is the output of reflective equilibrium. Thus, the priority claim seems not so much to apply to the starting points of investigation as to its finished products.
Indeed, when he first articulates the priority claim in *A Theory of Justice*, although using his characteristically incautious temporal language, Rawls nonetheless draws our attention to the systematic character of the priority relation.

The reason for beginning with ideal theory is that it provides, I believe, the only basis for a systematic grasp of these more pressing problems [of nonideal theory]. … At least, I shall assume that a deeper understanding can be gained in no other way, and that the nature and aims of a perfectly just society is the fundamental part of the theory of justice.⁴³

Ideal theory is prior to nonideal theory not because it is necessary to have any grasp whatsoever of the problems dealt with by nonideal theory, but because it provides a basis for a systematic grasp of these problems. Furthermore, this systematic approach allows us to gain a deep understanding of these problems that Rawls alleges a piecemeal approach cannot deliver. It is because he thinks that ideal theory is necessary to provide a systematic and deep understanding of nonideal theory that Rawls asserts that it is the fundamental part of the theory of justice.

It is compatible with the spirit and the letter of this passage that the problems of nonideal theory can be addressed without appeal to ideal theory. All this passage tells us is that if we do so, we will have a less systematic grasp of the topics, and will forego the advantages of the deep understanding that relating the questions to ideal theory would afford. This passage thus suggests what Rawls surely must think—who would deny it?—that one can tackle questions in all kinds of order in the course of one’s thinking as a professional philosopher, or engaged political thinker.

Indeed, this passage is compatible with a variety of methodological prescriptions about the fruitful order of ones inquiries. For example, it is compatible with thinking that

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⁴³ *TOJ*, 9.
one should always be thinking about ideal theory in tandem with nonideal theory, moving back and forth between the two over the course of ones thinking; or that one ought to do some serious thinking about questions nonideal theory before one launches into reasoning about ideal theory in order to avoid employing lumpy or badly operationalized concepts. All the priority claim asserts is that when it comes time to achieve a systematic and deep understanding of nonideal theory, then one must do so by relating it to ideal theory as its basis. Until one has made this connection, ones reflections about the questions of nonideal theory will have an unsystematic character, and lack the depth that might be achieved by relating them to systematic views about justice.

Of course, the breezy temporal language Rawls employs certainly does not invite such alternative methodological prescriptions, but rather obscures the compatibility of the priority claim with them. Although I wish he had been more judicious in his use of language, there are at least intelligible reasons for speaking this way in context. A Theory of Justice is a highly systematic work of political philosophy. Here Rawls displays the worked out course of his reasoning about justice in an ordered form. It is a natural thought that in the systematic presentation of a body of knowledge, the order of presentation ought to follow the relations of dependence that hold between the different parts of the theory. The order of presentation in the finished product, we might say, ought to follow the order of explanation. In this way, we draw attention to the systematic character of the knowledge, and emphasize the depth of explanation that the ordered whole enables us to provide. But this is, at best, a heuristic point. It would be a mistake to fetishize a claim about the tidy presentation of a finished product with a methodological prescription about how we are best to meander our way towards a theory of justice from the fragmented starting place of our piecemeal and episodic considered judgments.
Of course, this understanding of the priority claim raises our central question: why does Rawls think that ideal theory provides the only basis for a systematic and deep understanding of the problems addressed by nonideal theory?

§5: Reflective Equilibrium, Constructivism, and Realistic Utopia

To answer this question, we need to get more of Rawls’ thinking about ideal and nonideal theory into view. To start with, we need to see how reflective equilibrium is related first to constructivism and then to realistic utopia.

The central idea of Rawls’ constructivism is to establish a suitable connection between conceptions of the moral person and society and the first principles of justice.44 The “suitable connection” is one of dependence: the principles are to be justified as the most reasonable norms for subjects so conceived. This justification proceeds by means of a procedure of construction that assembles features of these conceptions in such a way that principles of justice may be defended in terms of them.

For these purposes, Rawls employs a series of what he calls “model-conceptions”. 45 One of these model-conceptions is the account of the moral person, understood as the possessor of two moral powers: the sense of justice, and the capacity to form and pursue a conception of the good. 46 The second is the well-ordered society. This is a model-conception of society as a system of social cooperation conducted on fair terms between free and equal citizens. The third model-conception is that of the original position. It plays a mediating role, helping us to construct from the other model conceptions the fundamental principles of

44 “Kantian Constructivism”, 304.
45 “Kantian Constructivism”, 307.
46 “Kantian Constructivism”, 312-313. See also JAF, 18-19.
justice. It does this by asking what principles representatives of moral persons living in a well-ordered society would choose. Famously, Rawls constrains this choice through the veil of ignorance, and some other constraints, so that the principles selected will embody relations of reciprocity between free equals.\textsuperscript{47} The original position thus allows us to defend principles of justice as the most reasonable norms for agents conceived of as moral persons, related to one another as free equals in a system of social cooperation.\textsuperscript{48}

How does Rawls’ constructivism relate to the method of reflective equilibrium? We have seen that the principles of justice play a mediating role in the process of reflective equilibrium. They function to make explicit the dependence of considered judgments at lower levels of generality on considered judgments at higher levels. As we’ve seen, these higher-level considered judgments concern a variety of things, including very general thoughts about paradigm injustices, and also judgments about what reasons fail to justify an inequality to those on its bottom end. These judgments also include thoughts about what reasons are at least relevant materials for such a justification, and as well various claims about the subject matter of justice.

Putting these points together, constructivism is the view that such general considered judgments can plausibly be construed as thoughts, more or less oblique, about the proper relation of citizens to one another as free equals in a system of social cooperation. For example, Rawls invites us to view our judgments about what reasons are irrelevant to invoke when defending an inequality to those on its bottom end as partial descriptions of the relations of reciprocity that hold between free equals.\textsuperscript{49} The fact that this gender hierarchy benefits those (like me) who occupy the position “man” is utterly impotent when offered as

\textsuperscript{47} “Kantian Constructivism”, 310; \textit{PL}, 16-17; for an explicit statement that the original position models the relation between citizens see also \textit{LOP}, 30 n.32.

\textsuperscript{48} \textit{JAF}, 16.

\textsuperscript{49} \textit{PL}, 24.
a justification of the hierarchy to my free equal who occupies the position “woman”. Or, to take another sort of example, (my belief) that there is no salvation outside of the Catholic Church is utterly impotent to justify a lesser religious liberty for my Protestant free equals.

Rawls’ thought is that judgments like these each say something about our normative conception of the standing we have to one another as moral persons and fellow citizens. And there are, of course, many considered judgments that more directly characterize the conception of the citizen and society, as when we judge that justice concerns the public claims we have on one another to order our shared institutions, or that these institutions constitute an ongoing system of cooperation that ought to advance the good of each.

To defend principles of justice in terms of these general considered judgments, Rawls assembles them into the relevant model-conceptions. For example, the veil of ignorance assembles our considered judgments about reasons that the better off cannot offer the worse off to justify the inequality between them. The set-up of the original position assembles some judgments about what sorts of considerations are germane to the justification of our institutions by making them the basis for the representatives reasoning on behalf of her citizen. And so on. Rawls then employs these model-conceptions to compare different proposed principles of justice specifying the fair terms of cooperation. Constructivism is thus Rawls’ attempt to assemble our most general considered judgments about justice into several devices of representation modeling the relations of free and equal citizens in order to mount arguments from these general judgments in support of principles of justice.

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50 JAF, 30.
The defense of principles is, however, only the first phase of Rawls theory of justice. After specifying the principles, Rawls proceeds to discuss their institutional realization. Rawls holds that the main principles of justice govern social institutions, and the bulk of our thought about justice concerns claims we have on one another to order our social institutions in ways that are fair. He thus thinks the theory of justice will be incomplete until it has drawn on social science to examine what institutional arrangements might feasibly and workably satisfy the principles of justice. How such institutions cohere with our considered judgments is an important test of a theory of justice. This is the subject he pursues in “Part II” of *A Theory of Justice*, where he specifies a set of institutions that would realize the two principles.

With the help of the feasible institutional realization, we can link reflective equilibrium to the idea of realistic utopia. To do so, we must bring into view another aspect of the sense of justice. So far we have focused on the fact that the sense of justice is an intellectual power by focusing on the way in which reflective equilibrium forges connections between judgments about justice at different levels of generality. However, the sense of justice is also a practical power. Rawls describes the sense of justice as a part of practical reason, and the conception of the citizen and society that are supposed to organize our higher-level considered judgments as “conceptions of practical reason”. So let us now bring

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51 I discuss this threefold division of *A Theory of Justice* in greater detail in, “Constructivism, Strict Compliance, and Realistic Utopia”.
52 *TOJ*, 171.
53 These institutions include constitutional democracy, and either market socialism or an egalitarian regime of private ownership of the means of production (property owning democracy).
54 *PL*, 107-108. Rawls affirms Kant’s division between practical and theoretical cognition: practical cognition produces objects through their representation, while theoretical cognition represents objects given from elsewhere. His example of such an object is “a just constitutional regime taken as the aim of political endeavor”. See *PL*, 90 and 96.
this practical aspect of the sense of justice in view by considering the connection of judgments of justice not with one another, but with action.

This practical character of the sense of justice is manifested in the special place we grant judgments about justice in our practical thought. In the famous words of the opening section of *A Theory of Justice*,

Justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought. A theory however elegant and economical must be rejected or revised if it is untrue; likewise laws and institutions and institutions no matter how efficient and well-arranged must be reformed or abolished if they are unjust...The only thing that permits us to acquiesce in an erroneous theory is the lack of a better one; analogously, an injustice is tolerable only when it is necessary to avoid an even greater injustice. Being first virtues of human activities, truth and justice are uncompromising.  

Heady stuff. True, Rawls immediately adds, with characteristic exaggerated humility, that it is “no doubt expressed too strongly”. But for our purposes the important claim is that judgments about justice have an immediate practical significance. While the injustice of an institution may not settle it straightaway that it must be reformed, it allows only special kinds of exemptions. Absent such exemptions, judgments about injustice have practical consequences.

If the institutions of our society are unjust, then absent some special exemption we must reform them. Presumably we must continue to do so until we have achieved a feasible and workable institutional structure that realizes the principles of justice. For this reason, the institutionally realized principles serve ultimately to specify an end that “we must achieve if

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55 *TOJ*, 3-4.
56 *TOJ*, 3. I’m not so sure it’s too strongly expressed.
we can”.\textsuperscript{57} Viewed as an exercise of practical reason, the theory of justice thus culminates in a representation of a good to be pursued in our political strivings.\textsuperscript{58}

Let us review the course of development up to this point. The theory of justice begins in our episodic and unconnected considered judgments. From there we seek, with the help of mediating principles, to bring to self-consciousness the relations of dependence that hold between the different levels of our thinking about justice. Rawls argues that this general level of our thinking can be organized in terms of the idea of the citizen and society. The principles of justice are defended as the most reasonable public principles for citizens so conceived. Having arrived at such a conception of a just society, Rawls progresses from principles to their feasible and workable institutional realization. In light of the practical role of judgments of justice, this serves as an end for our political practice. This end is the “realistic utopia” that the theory of justice tries to articulate in the effort to bring our considerations about justice into a self-consciousness and systematic practical representation.

§6: The Case for the Priority Claim

It is common ground between Rawls and his critics that nonideal theory concerns the pressing and urgent matters that confront us in our ordinary political life in an unjust society. Nonideal theory, on any conception, involves the identification of injustice, and the proposal of effective, politically possible, and morally permissible remedies to these injustices. It is also common ground that nonideal theory is an indispensable component of

\textsuperscript{57} TOJ, 246.
\textsuperscript{58} There will doubtless be multiple routes forward. Rawls pitching things at a high level of abstraction identified two families of institutions that might realize justice as fairness: liberal socialism and property owning democracy, and settled on the latter as the more feasible of the just alternatives in the United States.
the theory of justice, raising its own distinct theoretical questions not addressed by ideal theory. Finally, Rawls and his critics share the belief that nonideal theory must draw extensively on empirical research of all kinds to diagnose the underlying political pathologies that confront us and propose effective remedies.  

However, Rawls appears to differ from his critics in holding that we can only achieve a systematic and deep understanding of the relevant issues dealt with by nonideal theory by bringing them in relation to ideal theory. We are now ready to consider this argument in detail. For this purpose, I will focus on five aspects of the dependence of nonideal theory on ideal theory: identification, explanation, comparison, practical reasoning, and moral permissibility. 

As we have seen, Rawls agrees with his critics that it is possible to identify injustice without recourse to worked out views about justice. However, to identify injustice in a systematic fashion, we need ideal theory. For, to identify injustice in a systematic fashion, we need to go beyond our piecemeal judgments about injustice, and group different classes of injustices together by relating them to the general normative requirements that they violate. Such systematic classification of injustice thus depends on the principles of justice developed in ideal theory. The principles bring further system to our judgments insofar as they allow us to extend our judgments into ignored or uncertain areas where we are conflicted and unsure in our judgments. 

Since our considered judgments of injustice often come along with an awareness of the grounds on which we make the judgment, we can often explain the injustice of various phenomena without recourse to ideal theory. However, ideal theory functions to deepen and systematize these explanations. It does so by deriving the relevant judgments along with the

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59 For the extensive and essential role of social science in nonideal theorizing see LOP, 90.
supporting reasons from principles of justice. These, in turn, are grounded in our general judgments about the relations of reciprocity between free equals. The arguments in favor of the principle that the identified injustice violates renders legible the explanatory connection between the principle and the more general thoughts about the relations between citizens. Ideal theory thus serves to deepen our explanations of injustice by showing how the unjust feature is incompatible with the relation of free equals in a democratic society. Such explanations also, of course, bring to light the common grounds underlying the judgments of injustice of a variety of kinds, unifying and connecting the explanation for various lower-level judgments about injustice.

The third dimension of justificatory dependence concerns the function of nonideal theory to equip us to make comparative judgments concerning the grievousness of different injustices. While it is a mistake to assume that knowledge of how to response to injustice is exhausted by the ability to make such comparative judgments, they do have a substantial role to play in nonideal theorizing. 60 This is so because progress towards justice is often a matter of replacing one unjust feature of society with another that is less unjust. Nonideal theorizing is thus thick with comparative judgments about justice. Although such comparison can sometimes be made on the basis of our untutored judgments, a systematic approach to such comparative judgments must draw on ideal theory. 61

By providing principles of justice and their institutional realization, ideal theory contain a great deal of thinking specifying dimensions along which various failures can occur. While not delivering an algorithm for comparative judgments, it specifies numerous relevant features. If we wish to be systematic in our comparison, awareness of the numerous

60 See John Simmons, “Ideal and Nonideal Theory”, 21-23.
relevant dimensions of justice is important. Furthermore, the principles of justice specify the reasonable claims citizens have on one another to order their institutions. Often, different sorts of values stand on each side of a claim. In a just society, these claims are ordered and handled in some way that the principles of justice make clear. (To explain how such claims are ordered is a central task of ideal theory.) Ideal theory will thus contain some important information about how justice requires us to handle situations where more than one value is in play. Such evaluations, giving precedence to some claims over others, can guide us when making comparative judgments about the grievousness of situations where the choice is between two different injustices.\(^\text{62}\) For example, if a just society would not diminish rights of democratic participation to improve economic opportunity, then this indicates to us that lacking the right to vote is more unjust than having a lower rate of opportunity for upward economic mobility. (Note that acknowledging the reasons for this weighting adds depth to the explanation to comparative judgments about injustice in the way I sketched above.) Of course, this weighting might hold only for a range of cases. But even this is interesting and relevant information necessary for a systematic approach to such comparisons.

Of course, since they are practical judgments, the whole purpose of the identification, explanation, and comparison of injustice is political action overcoming these practical evils. No doubt, we can reason in a piecemeal and ad hoc fashion about what responses are called for by various injustices, sometimes successfully. However, by specifying the long-range goal of our political hope and action, ideal theory orients such practical reasoning and allows it achieve a systematic and ambitious character. It does this in several ways. It reminds us that there is a range of injustices, many of them inter-related, and

\(^\text{62}\) Rawls makes this point about the priority of liberty in justice as fairness. See \textit{TOfJ}, 246.
all of which must ultimately be addressed.\textsuperscript{63} It also allows us to make more sophisticated practical judgments of a long-range character. For example, it allows us to reason ambitiously about how we must transform political conditions before various more ambitious reforms become possible.\textsuperscript{64} It also allows us to situate our comparative judgments of injustice in their context, by recognizing that short term gains to justice are not always worth long term costs. This is the fourth dimension of the dependence of nonideal on ideal theory.

The fifth dimension of the dependence of nonideal on ideal theory involves the moral permissibility of various responses to injustice. There are two separate issues here. Since nonideal theory looks for politically feasible and morally permissible changes to institutional structures that will move us towards a just society, nonideal theory must have something to say about what institutional changes are morally permissible. The second issue is the moral permissibility of employing various strategies for effecting such institutional change. Nonideal theory includes the account of different means by which citizens can attempt to introduce more just institutions in their society, ranging from ordinary participatory politics, to boycotts and orderly protests, through civil disobedience, and all the way up to militant resistance and revolution. This will involve an account of the nature and rationale of these various strategies, a specification of the conditions under which they are each legitimately taken, and requirements on how they must be conducted in order to retain legitimacy as principled methods in the pursuit of justice.

\textsuperscript{63} For a nice expression of this point, see John Simmons, “Ideal and Nonideal Theory”, 31-32.

\textsuperscript{64} Pablo Gilabert calls such duties to transform social conditions, in order to make further changes downstream possible, “dynamic duties”. His is the most sophisticated discussion of this important phenomenon. See Pablo Gilabert, “The Feasibility of Basic Socioeconomic Human Rights: A Conceptual Exploration” in \textit{The Philosophical Quarterly}, Vol. 59 No. 237, 659-682.
We can see the relevance of ideal theory to a systematic approach to these tasks in numerous ways. Rawls' discussion of civil disobedience provides a nice example. In order to theorize civil disobedience as a strategy of resistance in a deep and systematic way, we must draw on democratic theory. For example, to provide a theory of the conditions under which civil disobedience is morally permissible, we must first understand the status of the rule of law in a democratic society, and the reasons for obedience to even unjust laws when produced through a genuinely democratic process. Furthermore, we must grasp an idea of democracy deeper than, say, voting in periodic elections, in order to see how civil disobedience could be a profoundly democratic act even while it contravenes democratic legislation. The key, Rawls argues, is to recognize civil disobedience as a principled and public call to waken the conscience (sense of justice) of one's fellow citizens. Once again, we see here the need to relate the idea of modes of resistance to a conception of the citizen and her relation to her democratic equals that ideal theory provides.

It seems clear as well that systematic views about what institutional policies are morally permissible responses to injustice will depend partially on claims about the nature and aims of a just society. This has to do with the idea of moral costs, and follows from the previously specified dimensions. For example, suppose an effective way of responding to an injustice involves introducing an institutional arrangement that would otherwise violate a principle of justice. This is a moral cost, and it is certainly relevant to judge the moral permissibility of the policy proposal. For example, if an equally effective way of addressing
the problem exists that does not introduce the relevant injustice, the policy may be impermissible. But as should already be clear from the previous dimensions of dependence, the systematic specification of moral costs will depend on the identification, explanation, and comparison of various injustices, as well as the general point about practical reasoning, which all depend on ideal theory for their systematic character.

In sum, the basic Rawlsian argument for the priority claim is that only ideal theory is capable of relating our particular judgments about injustice to their grounds in our general considered judgments and the principles they support. In doing so, it ultimately orients our thinking about injustice in the here and now to a conception of the relation of free and equal citizens. By taking this conception to its limits and specifying its feasible institutional realization, ideal theory orients our practical reason to the end of a just society as the object of our political hope and action. This work of sharpening and deepening our practical intelligence by taking reflection on justice to its limit is arguably indispensable for a systematic and deep approach to the pressing and urgent matters with which nonideal theory contends.

§7: The Contest between “Ideal Theory” and “Nonideal Theory” Revisited

It might seem that I have been offering a polemical defense of Rawls’ method of “ideal theory” and urging the rejection of the method of “nonideal theory” that his critics offer as an alternative. But this impression would be wrong. Instead of taking sides in a collision of opposing methods, I have been arguing the debate might be better likened to ships passing in the night.

67 For political philosophy’s role in orientation us to a conception of the citizen and the end of a just society, see J-4F, 3.
Consider. Mills and Anderson argue that we should begin from our experience of injustice. They argue that such experience presupposes that we can identify such injustices in a rough way, and make comparative judgments about their amelioration, without having worked out views about a just society. They argue that it would be misguided to begin with a satisfied reflection on justice, and that leaping directly into such a project runs the risk of employing deficient normative concepts that we inherit from our (flawed) public culture. They urge the importance of empirical research for theorizing the systems of oppression that characterize our society. But Rawls can agree with all these claims. Some of them are even points he insists on as the basis of his theory.

Furthermore, Mills and Anderson are both willing to work with ideals of justice. They are not particularists who deny that our general judgments can serve as the basis for our lower level judgments, or radical pluralists who think that a unitary ideal of a just society is impossible. Anderson and Mills agree that it is important to orient our thinking to the relation of free and equal citizens interacting on terms of democratic equality. But then it is unclear whether the method they employ in fact involves rejecting the priority claim in practice when properly interpreted not as a genetic epistemic point, but rather as a point about the systematic relation of parts of the theory of justice. Since this is not a claim that concerns the hygienic order of presentation, we cannot judge by attending to the order in which they discuss topics. Nor can we attend to their methodological remarks, since they do not draw all of the relevant distinctions. Even if they did, we would have to inquire whether these remarks diverge from their method as practiced.

To see the sort of methodological issues involved, let me focus briefly on Anderson’s book *The Imperative of Integration*. After the methodological remarks that I presented in §2, Anderson introduces Charles Tilly’s relational theory of group inequality as an empirical
framework useful for investigating the injustice of racial inequality in the United States.\(^{68}\) Anderson employs this theory on the basis of its empirical credentials, which receive confirmation from her wide-ranging synthesis of social scientific findings in Chapters 2 and 3.\(^{69}\) However, in locating the causes of group inequality in the relations between groups, the theory is attractive to her for another reason. This is because Anderson holds that relations between citizens, rather than distributions of goods, are the direct object of evaluation for the purposes of justice. On Anderson’s view, presented in the context of her famous critiques of the ideal theory of luck egalitarianism, equality is fundamentally a relation between citizens rather than a distribution of goods.\(^{70}\) Such distributions, including distributions that track group membership, are unjust if they embody, cause, or are caused by hierarchical relations of subordination, degradation, or domination. This is, on the face of it, an ambitious position in ideal theory, and is pursued by Anderson in this apparent spirit when she defends it against luck egalitarian alternatives that provide direct criteria for tracking the justice of distributions. So Tilly’s theory is especially transparent to evaluation by the lights of Anderson’s general views about justice.

Now, it is true that Anderson remarks in this context that she is not providing a detailed ideal theory, since her book is a work in nonideal theory, and it will be enough for her purposes if she can identify injustices and discuss satisfying alternatives. This is fair. However, it is undeniable that her work is structured from the outset by her systematic and general views about justice. She doesn’t discuss them here only because she and others—she cites Rawls’ Kantian constructivism lectures, for example—have discussed them at length

\(^{68}\) Imperative, 7-16.  
\(^{69}\) Imperative, 23-66.  
elsewhere. And the satisfyingly systematic character that her nonideal investigation takes
appear to owe its systematic character precisely to this organizing principle.

The point I am making receives more direct confirmation when *The Imperative of
Integration* reaches its crescendo in Chapter Five, which is titled, “Democratic Ideals and
Segregation”. Anderson begins the chapter with this pair of sentences: “Throughout this
book, I have been alluding to an ideal of democracy as a basis for evaluating racial
segregation. This ideal needs deeper articulation.” Thus Anderson thus represents this ideal as
something she has been drawing on in an implicit way throughout in her discussion of the
injustice of racial inequality, and she argues that a deeper articulation of the ideal is necessary
in order to achieve a profound understanding of the injustice of racial segregation in the
United States. In the chapter, she presents a number of ideal theoretic claims about
democracy: that it is to be understood not only as a mode of government, but also a
membership organization and a culture; that it has an epistemic dimension as a mode of
collective of inquiry; and that it is a system through which citizens hold each other
accountable. Underlying all these features, Anderson argues, is a conception of democracy
as a society of equals. In this context she argues that the civil, social, and political liberties
stand or fall in a free republic. Her discussion even culminates in a series of six principles
through which she articulates a conception of democratic equality.

This general ideal theoretic set of claims, bolstering and more deeply articulating her
relational egalitarian position, allows her to provide a deep and systematic explanation of the
profound injustice of residential racial segregation in the United States. She is able to
combine her painstaking empirical synthesis with her ideal theoretic claims to argue that

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71 *Imperative*, 89.
72 *Imperative*, 89-102.
73 *Imperative*, 102-105.
74 *Imperative*, 106-108.
segregation and resulting racial inequality distorts the democratic mode of government, spoils its democratic culture, disables its epistemic function, and undermines it as a system of accountability. It thus appears that Anderson’s own practice supports the priority claim on its best interpretation, despite her protestations to the contrary. Because these protestations are based partly on a genetic epistemic construal of this claim that is different from its best interpretation, they are not dispositive in any case.

The moral, as I see it, is that “nonideal theory” presented by the critics is not best understood as a different method at odds with “ideal theory”, at least when the latter is defined in terms of the most satisfying interpretation of the priority claim. The practice of the critics is not really based on an interpretation of the practicality of political philosophy different from that offered by the defenders of realistic utopianism. All of this is not to say that Anderson and Mills do not have other methodological proposals to make that are at odds with the details of Rawls’ method. For example, both Anderson and Mills reject the use of strict compliance for ideal theory, and I have joined their cause elsewhere.\textsuperscript{75} Mills proposes a different use of the veil of ignorance to capture the claims of corrective justice owed to historically oppressed groups.\textsuperscript{76} Anderson has made proposal about progressive historical learning and the testing of ideals of justice, along Deweyan lines.\textsuperscript{77} These are all important proposals deserving further discussion. Should someone wish to say on this basis that Anderson and Mills do, after all, present new and different methods, I have no quarrel with her.

\textsuperscript{75} Imperative, 3-4; “Ideal Theory as Ideology”, 166-170. For some different arguments in support of the same conclusion see my, “Constructivism, Strict Compliance, and Realistic Utopia”.
\textsuperscript{76} See Mills’ proposal of “the domination contract” in his contribution to Charles Mills and Carol Pateman, \textit{The Contract and Domination} (Polity: 2007).
\textsuperscript{77} Imperative, 6-7.
Finally, it is important to stress that I accept their general critique of the disciplinary focus of academic political philosophy in the analytic tradition. For example, I agree with Mills that the strange lack of interest in the pressing and urgent questions of nonideal theory, and especially matters of racial injustice, is to be explained by the whiteness of our discipline. I join him in the call to renew our discipline by turning its attention to the places away from which the privilege of its practitioners have steered it. I agree as well with Anderson that we do not have enough good models combining empirical research with normative theorizing in nonideal theory. *The Imperative of Integration* is, I think, the best contemporary model we have.

I also agree that our reflection in political philosophy begins from our fragmented and piecemeal reactions to the injustice that confronts us. I have argued that in order to achieve a systematic and deep understanding of these nonideal matters, we must ascend to ideals of justice. But we must remember that the whole point of this ascent is to return to the existing injustice from which we began with a sharpened practical intelligence. It is true that political philosophy begins and ends in the keen perception of injustice and the desire for a more just world. But my argument has been that the beginning and the ending are different in character, and in consequence, as Aristotle tells us Plato used to say, we must distinguish between the way to and the way from first principles.