

Introduction to contemporary political theory / Colin Patrick Farrelly

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Abstrak

Political theory is thus a normative discipline, it is primarily concerned with how things ought to be as opposed to how things actually are. Of course this does not mean that theorists should not take seriously the realities of the current social and political arrangements. This is essential as one cannot determine what we should be aspiring towards if one does not know where we currently are and thus what the pros and cons of the current arrangement are. But political theorists do not engage in the descriptive or explanatory project that the political scientist engages in. The political scientist tackles questions like How is the American political system different from that of other countries?, or Who actually wields political power in America? Whereas the political theorist will ask Who should wield political power in society and what ideals, principles and institutional arrangements best secure the diverse demands of justice? A diverse range of political arrangements can be, and have been, defended by reference to values such as justice, freedom, equality and democracy. The job of the political theorist is to bring some precision to these vague and contested concepts so that one can provide convincing arguments for the particular social arrangements they believe we should be aspiring towards. Ideas are powerful things, they exert great influence on the real world and help determine the fate of the lives of billions of people. So the political theorist has a very important role to play, one that has an influence on the real world of politics.

This textbook focuses exclusively on debates in contemporary political theory. Focus primarily on the central theories and debates of the past thirty years.