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# The False Promise of Ideal Guidance on the Target View

Jeffrey Carroll

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# THE FALSE PROMISE OF IDEAL GUIDANCE ON THE TARGET VIEW

by

JEFFREY M. CARROLL

Under the Direction of Christie Hartley, PhD and Andrew J. Cohen, PhD

## ABSTRACT

On one understanding of ideal theory, the optimally just social world is specified at the outset to serve as the *target* for nonideal theory to strive to realize subject to the constraints of implementation imposed by a world of nonideal actors. In the spirit of recent work by Gerald Gaus and Keith Hankins, I argue that certain models of the path to the target prove inadequate because they are too simplistic. Figuring out both what the target is and how to get there is a much more difficult task than defenders of the target view suggest. Contra Gaus and Hankins, I believe the problem disagreement poses to ideal targets is uniquely epistemic.

INDEX WORDS: Ideal theory, Nonideal theory, Justice, Rawls, Simmons, Gaus

THE FALSE PROMISE OF IDEAL GUIDANCE ON THE TARGET VIEW

by

JEFFREY M. CARROLL

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Master of Arts

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Georgia State University

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**DEDICATION**

To Mom

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

Recently, there has been increasing attention paid to methodology in political philosophy, specifically the methodology used when theorizing about justice.<sup>1</sup> The focus on methodology has resulted due to a distinction made by John Rawls in *A Theory of Justice* between ideal theory and nonideal theory. Rawls says that ideal theory “assumes strict compliance and works out the principles that characterize a well-ordered society under favorable circumstances.”<sup>2</sup> Nonideal theory concerns “which principles to adopt under less happy conditions.”<sup>3</sup> Though recent attention has been paid to analyzing in what the distinction consists, conceptual analysis of these ideas was not Rawls’s project.<sup>4</sup> Rather, his project was to provide a methodological strategy for how to identify perfect justice and then how to bring it about in the nonideal world.

Rawls’s methodological strategy is one type of a more general methodological approach that holds that ideal theory is responsible for guiding nonideal theory. This general approach has been termed the *Ideal Guidance View*.<sup>5</sup> One type of Ideal Guidance view is *the target view*.<sup>6</sup> On the target view, ideal theory guides nonideal theory by identifying a “target” of perfect or optimal justice and directs nonideal theory towards that target. The target view can be divided

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<sup>1</sup> Eva Erman and Niklas Möller, “Practices and Principles: On the Methodological Turn in Political Theory,” *Philosophy Compass* 10, no. 8 (2015): 533–46.

<sup>2</sup> John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice: Revised Edition* (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 1999), 216.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> For work on how to draw the distinction between ideal and nonideal theory, see Laura Valentini, “Ideal vs. Non-Ideal Theory: A Conceptual Map,” *Philosophy Compass* 7, no. 9 (2012): 654–64; Alan Hamlin and Zofia Stemplowska, “Theory, Ideal Theory and the Theory of Ideals,” *Political Studies Review* 10, no. 1 (2012): 48–62.

<sup>5</sup> David Wiens, “Against Ideal Guidance,” *Journal of Politics* 77, no. 2 (2015): 433–46.

<sup>6</sup> The *benchmark view*, in which ideal theory articulates benchmarks of normative assessment for purposes of comparing alternatives, is the other member of the Ideal Guidance family. For a defense, see Pablo Gilibert, “Comparative Assessments of Justice, Political Feasibility, and Ideal Theory,” *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 15, no. 1 (2011): 39–56.

into two parts. First, the target must be identified. Second, the path from the contemporary world to the target world needs to be outlined.

The path from the existing world to the target world can come in many different forms. The path could be very direct, or it could be rugged. In the literature, a topographical metaphor is often used to model the path from present conditions to the ideal.<sup>7</sup> In the metaphor, optimizing justice is compared to scaling a mountain. First, the summit (i.e. optimal justice) is identified and then the task is to figure out how to reach the summit from one's current location. The two most widely discussed types of mountains are (1) Mount Fuji and (2) Mount Everest. The Mount Fuji landscape assumes that justice has only one local optimum that is also the global optimum of justice. The Mount Everest landscape assumes that justice has a unique global optimum, although it may have many local optima. Following Gaus and Hankins, I believe, though for slightly different reasons that I make explicit in what follows, that both Mount Fuji and Mount Everest are inadequate models of the path from the present to optimal justice.<sup>8</sup> In showing that both fail, there is a need for a more sophisticated, multi-dimensional model. I propose such a model, but argue that it too fails and that an even more complex model is needed. However, I do not see how such a model could be guiding. Thus, on the target view, it seems the only way ideal theory can guide nonideal theory is (a) by making the implausibly and problematically strong normalization assumption that Gaus and Hankins note or (b) by widespread moral innovation.

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<sup>7</sup> The topography language can be seen in: Amartya Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, Reprint edition (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2011) and A. John Simmons, "Ideal and Nonideal Theory," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 38, no. 1 (2010): 5–36.

<sup>8</sup> See Gerald Gaus and Keith Hankins, "Searching for the Ideal: The Fundamental Diversity Dilemma," in *Political Utopias: Contemporary Debates*, ed. Kevin Vallier and Michael Weber (New York: Oxford University Press, forthcoming).

## 1.2 Rawlsian Roots: The Target View

To present the target view, I return to its Rawlsian roots. According to Rawls's formulation of the target view, ideal theory is responsible for identifying a target and non ideal theory is responsible for discovering how to reach the target. But for ideal theory to identify a target requires some account or set of conditions of what ideal theory is such that it can perform this function. Rawls is less than precise about what ideal theory is and how it is able to specify perfect justice. In *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls relies on an "intuitive idea" in drawing the distinction between ideal and nonideal theory.<sup>9</sup> Later, in *The Law of Peoples*, he elaborates on the roles of ideal and nonideal theory. Ideal theory develops "the conception of a perfectly just basic structure and the corresponding duties and obligations of persons under the fixed constraints of human life,"<sup>10</sup> while a derivative nonideal theory addresses "how this long-term goal might be achieved."<sup>11</sup> Still, what is being idealized in identifying perfect justice?

Stemplowska and Swift helpfully suggest that three assumptions delineate Rawlsian ideal theory from nonideal theory. The first is *strict compliance* – "citizens share a conception of justice and are motivated to comply with it."<sup>12</sup> The second is *favorable circumstances* – "the broad social, cultural and economic conditions are such that they could sustain a perfectly just society should people try to have it."<sup>13</sup> The third is *the absence of natural limitations and accidents of human life* such as childhood and severe mental impairment. Rawlsian nonideal theory, then, could be understood as assuming partial (at best) compliance, less than favorable

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<sup>9</sup> Rawls, *A Theory of Justice: Revised Edition*, 216.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> John Rawls, *The Law of Peoples: With "The Idea of Public Reason Revisited"* (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1999), 89.

<sup>12</sup> Zofia Stemplowska and Adam Swift, "Rawls on Ideal and Nonideal Theory," in *A Companion to Rawls*, ed. John Mandle and David A. Reidy (Oxford: Wiley Blackwell, 2013), 113.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.

circumstances, or the presence of natural limitations and accidents of human life.<sup>14</sup>

These three assumptions allow a set – for Rawls a pair – of principles of justice to be identified. Rawls’s two principles of justice, then, structure the design of the ideal institutional scheme. It is this institutional scheme that serves as the target for nonideal theory. Once a target is identified, nonideal theory, using ideal theory as a guide, sets out to reach it. In *The Law of Peoples*, Rawls describes this process in the following way: “nonideal theory presupposes that ideal theory is already in hand. For until the ideal is identified, non-ideal theory lacks an objective, an aim, by reference to which its queries can be answered.”<sup>15</sup>

### 1.3 Plan of the Paper

In Section 2, I consider two topographies of justice: (1) a Mount Fuji landscape and (2) a Mount Everest landscape. I draw the Mount Fuji landscape from the work of Amartya Sen in his *The Idea of Justice*. The Mount Everest landscape comes from an argument made by John Simmons in his article “Ideal and Nonideal Theory.” The analog of the summit of each mountain is the ideal target. I argue that both topographical metaphors fail as models of ideal guidance on the target view. In Section 3, I propose a more complex model as an attempt to salvage the target view. However, I believe even this more complex model fails. As a result of this failing, it is unclear how the target view could provide guidance when a sufficiently complex model is specified. If the target view fails to guide, then the dominant motivation for ideal theory is undercut. Distinct from Gaus and Hankins, I believe the problem facing ideal guidance is primarily epistemic rather than metaphysical.

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<sup>14</sup> Zofia Stemplowska and Adam Swift, “Ideal and Nonideal Theory,” in *Oxford Handbook of Political Philosophy*, ed. David Estlund (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012), 375.

<sup>15</sup> Rawls, *The Law of Peoples*, 90.

## 2 MODELS OF IDEAL GUIDANCE ON THE TARGET VIEW

### 2.1 Perspectives

The first step in figuring out what the target and the path to it are to answer the question: what perspective are we reasoning from?<sup>16</sup> The way I will model possible targets as well as possible paths to the target is in terms of *evaluative perspectives*, or perspectives for short. This concept of a perspective comes from the work of Scott Page. He defines a perspective as “a map from reality to an internal language such that each distinct object, situation, problem, or event gets mapped to a unique world.”<sup>17</sup> Drawing on Page’s work, Ryan Muldoon offers a more precise definition of a perspective as a “mental schema that has two identifiable components: the classification stage where the general ontology is imposed, and the heuristic or judgment stage where choices and evaluations are made.”<sup>18</sup> In the classification stage, one individuates as well as groups the objects and phenomena in the set. In the heuristic or judgment stage, one makes evaluative judgments about the objects in the set. For example, consider the set {vegetables for sale at my grocery store}. In the classification stage, I distinguish between group A, {carrots, green beans, corn, potatoes}, and group B, {beets, turnips}. In the heuristic stage, I make the evaluative judgment that group A is the subset of tasty vegetables and group B is the subset of not tasty vegetables. Note that for any given person, they may have multiple perspectives. If the evaluative standard were nutritious rather than tasty, a different grouping would occur, as would a different evaluative judgment. Moreover, while one perspective may take {carrots, green beans, corn, potatoes} as the tasty vegetables, a different perspective may take {beets, turnips} to

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<sup>16</sup> Ryan Muldoon, *Beyond Tolerance: Re-Imagining Social Contract Theory for a Diverse World* (Manuscript, 2016).

<sup>17</sup> Scott E. Page, *The Difference: How the Power of Diversity Creates Better Groups, Firms, Schools, and Societies* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007), 31.

<sup>18</sup> Muldoon, *Beyond Tolerance: Re-Imagining Social Contract Theory for a Diverse World*.

be the tasty vegetables. Or, for the case of justice, the classification stage might group {property-owning democracy, liberal democratic socialism} together and {welfare state capitalism, socialist command economy, laissez-faire capitalism} together. Then, in the judgment stage, the former group might be deemed the set of just institutional regimes and the latter group the less than just regimes.

Gerald Gaus and Keith Hankins formalize the notion of an evaluative perspective, specifically with respect to assessing the justice of social worlds, in terms of the following five elements:

- (A) A set of evaluative standards or principles of justice;
- (B) An identification of the (justice) relevant features of social worlds;
- (C) A mapping relation from (A) to (B);
- (D) An ordering of the underlying structures which meaningfully relates them in terms of similarity;
- (E) A distance metric.<sup>19</sup>

I will briefly explain how these five elements work together to allow for a cardinal assessment of the institutional schemes of social worlds. An evaluative perspective uses (A), (B) and (C) to construct a justice score for any possible social world. Element (A) specifies the standard of justice and element (B) identifies the features of institutions that determine how just a given society is.<sup>20</sup> Element (C) maps (A) to (B) to determine how just the institutions of any particular social world are. Then, element (D) allows for the comparison of social worlds in terms of how similar and significant the relevant structures are. Finally, (E) makes it possible to compare how

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<sup>19</sup> Gaus and Hankins, “Searching for the Ideal: The Fundamental Diversity Dilemma,” 8–9.

<sup>20</sup> Following Rawls, Gaus and Hankins hold that “a scheme of basic institutions” is “a social world.” Thus, the relevant features are importantly institutional. See John Rawls, *Political Liberalism: Expanded Edition*, 2nd edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 77.



close a possible alternative social world is from the existing social world. In essence, (E) measures how imminently feasible a transition to an alternative social world is.

The way the Gaus-Hankins definition of a perspective works on the target view is that elements (A) – (C) score all the considered social worlds and the world with the highest score is the ideal target. Then, element (D) allows for the assessment and comparison of what social worlds are similarly just to the target. Lastly, element (E) discerns how far other potential social worlds are from the target. Put simply, a perspective first identifies the target, then figures out what institutional schemes are nearly as just as the target, and finally figures out how far the target is from the actual world. To see how this works, consider the perspective of an early-Rawlsian. The evaluative standard – Element (A) – for Rawlsians would be the two principles of justice: roughly, (1) equality in the assignment of basic rights and duties, and (2) inequalities are to the advantage of the least well off. Element (B) would be the features of the basic structure of society, namely “the way in which the major social institutions distribute fundamental rights and duties and determine the division of advantages from social cooperation.”<sup>21</sup> ‘Major institutions’ refer to the “political constitution and the principal economic and social arrangements.”<sup>22</sup> Rawls seems to recognize the need for the mapping function – Element (C). The two principles of justice, he writes, “regulate the choice of a political constitution and the main elements of the economic and social system. The justice of a social scheme depends essentially on how fundamental rights and duties are assigned and on the economic opportunities and social conditions in the various sectors of society.”<sup>23</sup> Thus, the target is the social world in which the basic structure optimally satisfies the two principles of justice. Rawls identifies two target

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<sup>21</sup> Rawls, *A Theory of Justice: Revised Edition*, 6.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 7.

regimes: property-owning democracy and liberal democratic socialism. Then, Element (D) identifies what the relevant features property-owning democracy and liberal socialism share such that other regimes can be compared in terms of these similarities. Finally, Element (E) allows for the assessment of how close other regime types are to the target institutional schemas.

Evaluative perspectives permit the identification of possible targets and paths thereto. The remainder of Section 2 is devoted to the models resulting from two evaluative perspectives. The models draw on existing topographies. These topographical models are the Mount Fuji landscape and the Mount Everest landscape. I take these up in turn. In Section 2.2, I outline how to optimize justice on a Mount Fuji landscape. In Section 2.3, I present *prima facie* evidence that optimizing justice may not be like scaling Mount Fuji. In Section 2.4, I argue against thinking that the target of justice is the summit of a Mount Fuji landscape because the three conditions that allow for smooth optimization create a substantial problem. As a result, the commitment that has famously been given up is the ideal target or ideal end-state. But giving up the target causes a problem of its own, namely, that only a local optimum (and not the global optimum) will be reached. In Section 2.5, I turn to the Mount Everest landscape endorsed by Simmons. In Sections 2.6-2.8, I present sources of disagreement that pose a challenge to a two-dimension topography. In Sections 2.9 and 2.10, I consider possible ways of circumventing the epistemic problem insoluble disagreement poses to ideal guidance. I argue that neither approach is successful

## **2.2 Scaling Mount Fuji**

A perspective yields a Mount Fuji landscape when the only local optimum is the global optimum. That is, there are no local optima distinct from the global optimum. This makes scaling Mount Fuji epistemically easier than scaling other more tumultuous mountains because there is

only one peak, namely the summit, to be identified and ultimately to reach. Thus, in the case of justice, a Mount Fuji landscape is very desirable. Optimizing on a Mount Fuji landscape (i.e. reaching the summit) can be done easily when three conditions are in place:

- (1) A Mount Fuji Landscape (a single-peaked mountain)
- (2) Comparative Assessment (deciding whether a given path is ascending or descending)
- (3) Knowledge of the target end-state (knowing the peak of the mountain)

The Mount Fuji landscape and the comparative methodology both come from the work of Amartya Sen. He writes:

The possibility of having an identifiably perfect alternative does not indicate that it is necessary, or indeed useful, to refer to it in judging the relative merits of two alternatives; for example, we may be willing to accept, with great certainty, that Mount Everest is the tallest mountain in the world, completely unbeatable in terms of stature by any other peak, but that understanding is neither needed, nor particularly helpful, in comparing the peak heights of, say, Mount Kilimanjaro and Mount McKinley. There would be something off in the general belief that a comparison of any two alternatives cannot be sensibly made without a prior identification of a supreme alternative.<sup>24</sup>

Though Sen identifies different mountains in the preceding passage, the topography of justice he is endorsing is known formally as a Mount Fuji landscape.<sup>25</sup> It is expressed in Figure 1 below.

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<sup>24</sup> Sen, *The Idea of Justice*, 101.

<sup>25</sup> The term ‘Mount Fuji’ comes from: Page, *The Difference*.

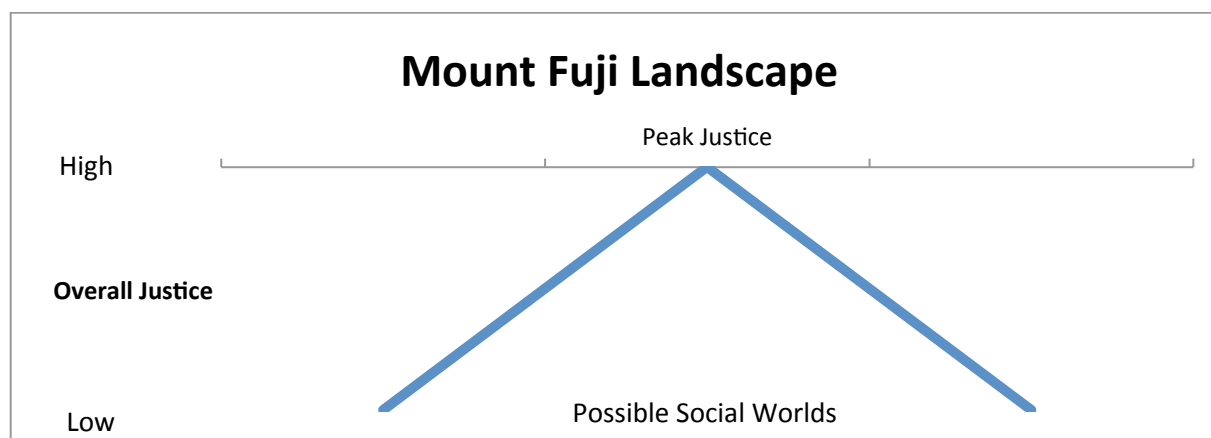


Figure 1 Mount Fuji Landscape

The x-axis expresses possible social worlds. The y-axis expresses the justice score of a social world as determined by elements (A)-(C) of a perspective as defined in Section 1.2. Sen's methodological approach is to identify how just the current social world is and then make comparative assessments until the point on Figure 1 labeled Peak Justice is reached. Comparative assessment (condition 3 above) serves as the means of moving from the existing social world to the social world identified at the point labeled peak justice in Figure 1 by way of pairwise comparison. Suppose the existing social world with the institutional scheme  $x$  has a justice score of 5 and the nearest social world with institutional scheme  $y$  has a score of 6. Clearly, the relevant changes in the institutions of social world  $x$  should be made to transform it into institutional scheme  $y$ . However, when social world  $y$  is compared with a social world that has institutional scheme  $z$ , with a justice score of 4, no changes should be made to institutional scheme  $y$ . Of note is that Sen explicitly rejects that we need to identify Peak Justice, or a target, at the outset. That is, it is unnecessary to identify the highest justice score as an end-state. All that is needed is a Mount Fuji landscape and a cogent means of comparatively assessing alternative social worlds and eventually the result will be Peak Justice. Sen is correct that Peak Justice will eventually be reached on his account; however, a pair of epistemic problems lurks for this type of view. In Section 2.3, I argue that it is statistically unlikely that one will have a

perspective that makes the problem of justice a Mount Fuji. In Section 2.4, I show that unless theorists make the ad hoc move of stipulating that one holds such a perspective, the result may be a local optimum.

### 2.3 The Rarity of the Mount Fuji Landscape

Sens account allows for smooth optimization meaning that once a local optimum is reached, it will be, by definition, also the global optimum. Smooth optimization is desirable because it makes reaching optimal justice a near certainty. The process is simple. Continue making improvements by way of pairwise comparison of possible social worlds until any change makes the justice score of the institutional scheme of the social world worse. Or, conversely, quit making changes to the institutional scheme when no change will make the justice score better. This will, by necessity, lead to the peak if the landscape is really a Mount Fuji. However, Mount Fuji landscapes are very rare. Yet, despite their rarity, they are also always possible. Scott Page calls this result *The Savant Existence Theorem*.

**The Savant Existence Theorem:** *For any problem, there exist many perspectives that create Mount Fuji landscapes.*<sup>26</sup>

But, Page notes that there is a potential issue with The Savant Existence Theorem. Specifically, in allowing any problem to be converted into a Mount Fuji landscape, it opens a Pandora's box of possible perspectives. For example, Page considers a case in which we are trying to identify how many possible perspectives create Mount Fuji landscapes when evaluating only 14 houses

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<sup>26</sup> Ibid., 47.

along a single dimension. For Page's problem there are 8,192 Mount Fuji landscapes and 87,178,291,200 landscapes that are not Mount Fuji (and that thereby do not allow for smooth optimization).<sup>27</sup> Page's insight is that many perspectives can make the optimization problem simple. The not-so-simple part is discovering such a perspective. Savants such as Newton may come along and identify one, but statistically-speaking it is extremely unlikely.

Given that the odds of a Mount Fuji landscape is roughly 1 in 10 million when there are only 14 objects in the set, the odds of a Mount Fuji landscape for justice will be worse by orders of magnitude considering how many different social worlds (i.e. institutional schemes) will be along the x-axis. Defenders of comparative assessment, such as Sen, need to provide some reason to think that a perspective that creates a Mount Fuji landscape with regard to the justice of the institutions of possible social worlds will be identified.

One option would be to have supreme confidence that a justice-savant will come along. I take this first option to be extremely unlikely and not the route that Sen and his supporters would take. The other option would be to defend an extremely strong normalizing assumption that admits only certain perspectives. The normalizing assumption would have to be such that it assumed away much of the disagreement about what are the relevant features of justice and only admits perspectives that are similar and correct about justice. This can be done easily by stipulation. I am inclined to think this is ad hoc. I am unsure if such a stipulation can be defended without being ad hoc, but I am skeptical. Ultimately, I believe that neither is a viable option and doubt that the terrain of justice is actually a Mount Fuji landscape. However, I have certainly not shown that it is not here. I have merely presented some evidence as to why it seems unlikely that optimizing justice is as easy as it is with a Mount Fuji landscape.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 48.

## 2.4 The Challenge to Target-Based Optimization on a Mount Fuji

Besides the low probability of identifying a Mount Fuji landscape, a deeper problem exists for smooth optimization to the target. The problem relates to the three elements of optimization: (1) an ideal target or end-state, (2) comparative assessment, and (3) a Mount Fuji landscape. Specifically, the problem relates to the identification of the Mount Fuji landscape. If the Mount Fuji landscape is to be discovered, then we need some reason to think that is the case. But, as I argued in Section 2.3, we lack such a reason. The alternative is to stipulate or assume that justice is a Mount Fuji landscape. However, this seems to beg the question, given elements (1) and (2). If one stipulates that the summit of Mount Fuji is the ideal target, then, of course, comparative assessment will result in Peak Justice. At that point, comparative assessment simply becomes otiose because the target of Peak Justice is already known. If the point of comparative assessment is to identify or discover peak justice, then saying what the target is at the outset seems to beg the question. Both the discovery and stipulation route seem severely problematic.

In Sen's case, he does not endorse all three elements and rejects (1) an ideal target. He thinks if there is a Mount Fuji landscape and cogent comparative assessment, then the point labeled Peak Justice on Figure 1 will eventually be reached. Once Peak Justice is reached, no further comparative assessments are useful because the institutions of the social world cannot be made any more just. Sen is correct if the topography of justice actually is a Mount Fuji landscape. However, if a Mount Fuji is embedded within a larger mountain range, then Sen's smooth optimization may ultimately yield only a local, and not the global optimum. John Simmons made this point in response to Sen's argument. Simmons writes:

Which of two smaller “peaks” of justice is the higher (or more just) is a judgment that matters conclusively only if they are both on equally feasible paths to the highest peak of perfect justice. And in order to endorse a route to that highest peak, we certainly do need to know which one that highest peak is. Perhaps for a while we can just aim ourselves in the general direction of the Himalayas, adjusting our paths more finely—between Everest and K2, say— only when we arrive in India. But we need to know a great deal about where to find the serious candidates for the highest peak before we can endorse any path to them from here.<sup>28</sup>

Simmons’s challenge is that we lack the epistemic position to be certain that a local optimum is the global optimum. They will be the same if the topography is a Mount Fuji landscape, but as shown in Section 2.3, we have little reason to think that a perspective that generates a Mount Fuji for justice is likely to be stumbled upon. This makes the possibility of getting stuck at a sub-optimal equilibrium exceedingly likely. Simmons rejects the Mount Fuji landscape. Next, I will introduce Simmons’s Mount Everest landscape and explore the way it avoids the problem the Mount Fuji landscape confronts.

## **2.5 Simmons’s Alternative: The Mount Everest Landscape**

Simmons retains two of the three elements used in smooth optimization: (1) an ideal target and (2) comparative assessment. But, he suggests a different topography to avoid the problems that Sen encountered with the single peaked Mount Fuji. The topography of justice Simmons defends is known as the Mount Everest. Rather than smooth optimization as in Sen’s Mount Fuji, Simmons notes the epistemic complexity with optimizing justice and thus

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<sup>28</sup> Simmons, “Ideal and Nonideal Theory,” 35.



appreciates that justice faces a rough optimization problem. The Mount Everest landscape reflects that there may be multiple local optima that are not the global optimum. Figure 2 below represents one possible version of the Mount Everest landscape. Social World 8 represents the global optimum, while Social World 4 and Social World 6 are local optima.

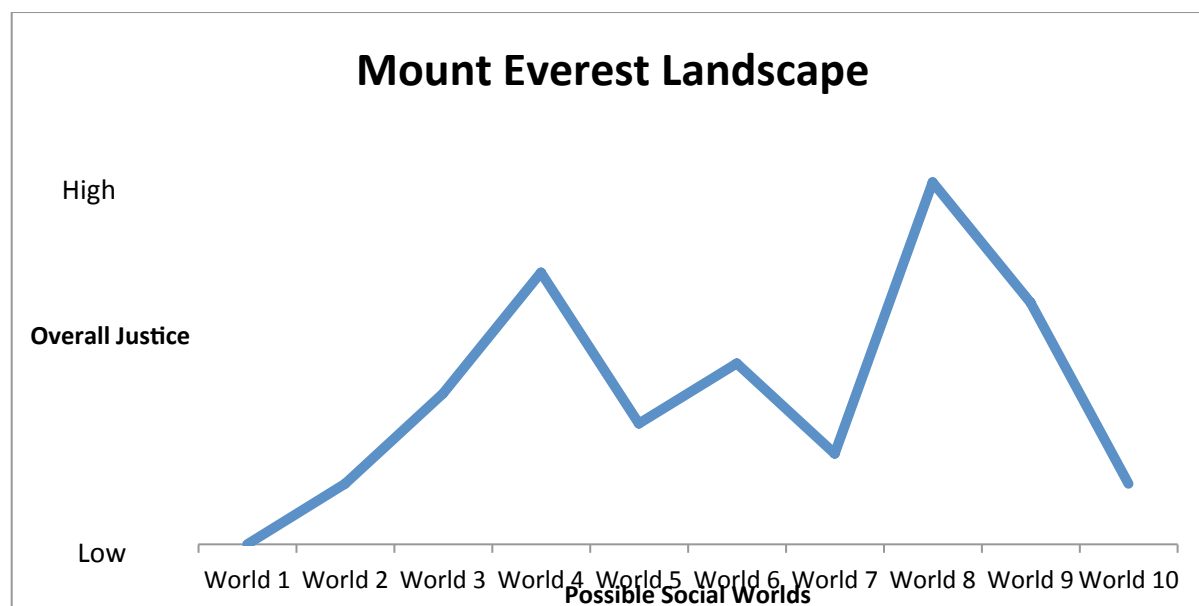


Figure 2 Mount Everest Landscape

The x-axis expresses possible social worlds. The y-axis expresses the justice score of the social world as determined by elements (A)-(C) of a perspective as defined in Section 1.2.

Simmons, unlike Sen, is a proponent of the target view. As such, he writes, “we can hardly claim to know whether we are on the path to the ideal of justice until we can specify in what that ideal consists.”<sup>29</sup> To avoid the problem with Sen’s methodology – reaching a local optimum and thinking it is the global optimum when it actually is not – Simmons argues that theorizing needs to identify the target at the outset. He says “to dive into nonideal theory without an ideal theory in hand is simply to dive blind, to allow irrational free rein to the mere conviction

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 34.

of injustice and to eagerness for change of any sort.”<sup>30</sup> An indiscriminate approach to correcting injustice can have implications that lead to an overall less justice world. Simmons is warning us of this possibility and suggesting that the target view can avoid it.

However, Simmons’s strategy only works if the target as well as the corresponding topography in which the target is embedded can be identified. So far, I have assumed that in both a Mount Fuji and a Mount Everest landscape that disagreement was normalized into a shareable common perspective. By this, I mean that I have assumed that the five conditions Gaus and Hankins use to define an evaluative perspective are shared in determining the target and topography of justice. From this shared perspective, the topography of justice was specified. However, it is unlikely that such a perspective could be shared and there is a problem in assuming that it can be. Gaus and Hankins introduce disagreement at the low level of the distance metric and show how low level disagreement induces disagreement at more fundamental levels. They call this result “diversity contagion.”<sup>31</sup> Ultimately, they conclude, ideal theorizing faces a dilemma: either the perspective is strongly normalized and perhaps only a local optimum gets identified as the target, or diverse perspectives are allowed which makes identifying the global target more likely but then there is no agreement on *which* target should be the guiding one.

Gaus and Hankins challenge Simmons’s version of the target view from the bottom-up; I will critique the target view from the top-down. I aim to show that there will not be agreement on the most fundamental feature of a perspective: the set of evaluative standards or principles of justice. Due to disagreement about the idealizing assumptions used in identifying the evaluative standards and the features constituting the evaluative standards, I am skeptical that any set of

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Gaus and Hankins, “Searching for the Ideal: The Fundamental Diversity Dilemma,” 26.

evaluative standards can be identified. Without a normalized, shared perspective, a common topography will not be determinable because the possible worlds cannot be scored. In Section 3, I attempt to draw out the implications of top-down disagreement. In the remainder of Section 2, I argue for this indeterminacy result on the basis of three sources of insoluble disagreement. There may be disagreement about the *initial assumptions*, the *ideals*, and the *currency* of the ideals. These disagreements need to be settled in order for a shared perspective, capable of dictating the topography of justice, to be identified. To be precise, where I disagree with Simmons is on the *probability*, not the ability, that these disagreements can be dissolved such that some common set of principles of justice is identified.<sup>32</sup>

In Section 2.6, I show how perspectival diversity and disagreement about the initial assumption will lead to a different set of evaluative standards or principles of justice. In Section 2.7, I argue that even if a set of principles of justice can be agreed upon despite disagreement about the initial assumption, there will still be disagreement about the ideals that define it. In Section 2.8, I show that even if we can identify the relevant ideals, there is still disagreement about the currency of those ideals. Sections 2.9 and 2.10 offer possible ways of circumventing the problems posed by deep disagreement. In Section 2.9, I consider Simmons's epistemically optimistic approach to circumventing the problem posed by disagreement. I argue that there is a root tension in Simmons's response that prevents it from being able to adequately address the problem. In Section 2.10, I raise the objection that the disagreement may not actually be deep and intractable disagreement. This argument is non-starter because unless we want to make the exceedingly strong assumption that perspectival disagreement is not possible or make an

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<sup>32</sup> For discussion of the ability versus probability distinction in the context of what justice may demand, see: David Estlund, "Human Nature and the Limits (If Any) of Political Philosophy," *Philosophy and Public Affairs* 39, no. 3 (2011): 207–37; David Estlund, "Utopophobia," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 42, no. 2 (2014): 113–34.

exceedingly normalization assumption for perspectives, then fundamental, perspectival disagreement can exist and can problematize identification of the principles of justice.

## 2.6 Disagreement about the Initial Assumptions

Recall the three initial assumptions of Rawlsian ideal theory that allow ideal theory “to focus on the requirements of perfect justice,” or to identify the target.<sup>33</sup> They were strict compliance, favorable circumstances, and the absence of natural limitations and accidents of human life. Yet, many disagree with the initial assumptions Rawls made in identifying the principles of justice. I will demonstrate how each initial assumption is the subject of disagreement. This perspectival disagreement about the appropriate assumptions seems to prevent a unique set of principles of justice from being identified at the outset.

*Strict compliance* assumes that “(nearly) everyone strictly complies with, and so abides by, the principles of justice.”<sup>34</sup> Though the actual world is nowhere close to having strict compliance, by assuming it for the ideal world, Rawls can inquire into what principles of justice would be binding in a world of perfect justice. With knowledge of what principles would apply in the ideal world, construction of principles for the actual world can begin.

However, the value of the assumption of strict compliance is disputed. David Schmidtz, for instance, opposes assuming strict compliance because theorizing should not provide imaginary answers to questions of justice.<sup>35</sup> It should provide real answers. The way to provide real answers is by acknowledging that the selection of the principles and selection of the level of

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<sup>33</sup> Stemplowska and Swift, “Rawls on Ideal and Nonideal Theory,” 113.

<sup>34</sup> John Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, ed. Erin Kelly (Cambridge, Mass: Belknap Press, 2003), 13.

<sup>35</sup> David Schmidtz, “Nonideal Theory: What It Is and What It Needs to Be,” *Ethics* 121, no. 4 (2011): 772–96.

compliance are not discrete projects. As Schmitz says, “we cannot set aside compliance as something to address later, because our task of choosing a principle we can live with is a task of choosing a compliance problem we can live with.”<sup>36</sup> The point is not that Schmitz is right and Rawlsians are wrong. Rather, the point is that different assumptions about compliance will result in different principles and thus different normative targets. The problem is that it is unclear what compliance assumption should be made for purposes of identifying these principles of justice.

Rawls’s second assumption is *favorable circumstances*, which are the “conditions that ... make a constitutional regime possible.”<sup>37</sup> These conditions include the “historical, economic and social conditions” like “economic means,” “education” and “the many skills needed to run a democratic regime.”<sup>38</sup> Rawls defends this as a necessary assumption for the target because “socioeconomic conditions [should] not preclude the possibility of a just society.”<sup>39</sup>

While most would agree that historical and socioeconomic conditions should not preclude the possibility of a just society, some, such as Charles Mills, would disagree that it can be *assumed* in order to identify the relevant standards in the target. A reason not to assume favorable circumstances is because it may be distorting. According to Mills, the assumption of favorable circumstances, in part, makes theorizing about justice *ideological*, meaning that majority interests and experiences are overrepresented in specifying what justice demands. The problem with ideological theorizing is it fails to be responsive to the interests and experiences of minority parties. By assuming favorable circumstances, historical oppression, for example, is idealized away and the implications of this history on the interests of minority groups ignored. Mills puts it bluntly: “Why should anyone think that abstaining from theorizing about oppression

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<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 778.

<sup>37</sup> Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, 47.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Stemplowska and Swift, “Ideal and Nonideal Theory,” 375.

and its consequences is the best way to bring about an end to oppression?”<sup>40</sup> Though this is stated too strongly as ideal theorists endorsing the target view can theorize about repairing historical oppressions in setting the target, his general point that making the assumption of favorable circumstances has the potential to neglect the interests of underrepresented groups in the construction of the target seems true.<sup>41</sup> More strongly, Mills thinks that ideal theorizing not just potentially, but *probably* leads to the certain interests being neglected. Here, the point is not that Mills is right and Rawls is wrong. It is that identification of the principles of justice requires an assumption to be made about the social circumstances in it. Yet, it is unclear what assumption ought be made.

Rawls’s third assumption is the absence of natural limitations and accidents of human life. This includes childhood, severe impairments and other forms of dependency relationships. Theorists like Eva Kittay and Martha Nussbaum reject this assumption.<sup>42</sup> Whereas Rawls thinks that care-taking relationships “can be postponed to the legislative stage,” Nussbaum stresses that “any theory of justice needs to think about the problem from the beginning.”<sup>43</sup> Rawls’s notion of social cooperation is “based on the idea of reciprocity between rough equals, and has no explicit place for relations of extreme dependency.”<sup>44</sup> By making this assumption, Rawls’s account of the needs of citizens – social primary goods – fails to meet the needs of “real people who are not independent.”<sup>45</sup> The principles of justice depend on whether this idealizing assumption is made or whether dependency relations get addressed at the outset. As it was in the two previous

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<sup>40</sup> Charles W. Mills, “‘Ideal Theory’ as Ideology,” *Hypatia* 20, no. 3 (2005): 171.

<sup>41</sup> Rawls, *Justice as Fairness: A Restatement*, 48, 172–74.

<sup>42</sup> E.g. Eva Feder Kittay, *Love’s Labor: Essays on Women, Equality and Dependency*, 1 edition (New York: Routledge, 1998); Martha C. Nussbaum, “The Future of Feminist Liberalism,” *Proceedings and Addresses of the American Philosophical Association* 74, no. 2 (2000): 47–79.

<sup>43</sup> Nussbaum, “The Future of Feminist Liberalism,” 51.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*

assumptions, the problem is how to decide, in spite of disagreement, what assumption to make.

The moral of this section has been that the principles of justice will vary depending on what assumptions are made by ideal theory in the process of identifying it; however, what assumptions should be made is subject to robust perspectival disagreement. Thus, the prospect of setting the evaluative standards by specifying a set of shared initial assumptions does not seem promising.

## 2.7 Disagreement about the Political Ideals

Another level of disagreement about the principles of justice concerns the political ideals. *Ideals* define what is of normative significance in the specified principles of justice. Examples include freedom, equality, sufficiency, and desert. Sen thought that all reasonable initial assumptions lead to, at minimum, a partially shared set of ideals. He argued that equality is a focus of every theory of justice: the theories just differ on what needs to be equal.<sup>46</sup>

However, Sen seems mistaken. Harry Frankfurt, for instance, argues that the proper focus of economic justice *really* is *sufficiency*, not equality.<sup>47</sup> While Rawlsians and other liberal egalitarians would find some version of economic equality to be what is significant, Frankfurt and other sufficientarians would argue that everyone having enough is really what is morally salient, even if everyone having more is better. The significance of the disagreement becomes vivid when the implications of the ideals on the principles of justice that structure the design of institutions are considered. Compare, for instance, how different political institutions would be designed according to Frankfurt's preferred principles of justice to how the institutions would be

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<sup>46</sup> Amartya Sen, *Inequality Reexamined*, Reprint edition (New York: Harvard University Press, 1992), 3.

<sup>47</sup> Harry Frankfurt, "Equality as a Moral Ideal," *Ethics* 98, no. 1 (1987): 21–43.

designed according to Rawls's principles of justice. Rawls's institutions would reflect the maximin principle to help realize the ideal of equality, while Frankfurt's institutions in which sufficiency is the ideal would not. How this disagreement about the ideals is settled will have far-reaching impacts on what Rawls called the "basic structure" – "the way in which the major social institutions distribute fundamental rights and duties and determine the division of advantages from social cooperation" – of the target.<sup>48</sup> A Rawlsian basic structure will look quite different from a basic structure that takes sufficiency as the ideal of economic justice. Different evaluative standards, and thus different targets, will be operative depending on what ideals are taken as normatively significant. Thus, a hope that agreement on the ideals will circumvent the problem with disagreement about the starting point – i.e. the initial assumptions – is not promising.

## 2.8 Disagreement about the Currency of the Ideals

A further level of disagreement concerns the "currency" of the ideals. Supposing there were agreement on equality as an ideal, still its "currency" is subject to disagreement. That is, even if equality is identified as an ideal that is part of the evaluative standards, we still need to figure out what needs to be equal. There are at least five major positions that make claim to being the currency of equality. Rawls proposes to understand equality in terms of one's share of *social primary goods*, which are "what persons need in their status as free and equal citizens, and as normally and fully cooperating members of society over a complete life."<sup>49</sup> Richard Arneson holds that equality should be concerned with equal opportunity for *welfare*.<sup>50</sup> G.A. Cohen

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<sup>48</sup> Rawls, *A Theory of Justice: Revised Edition*, 6.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, xiii.

<sup>50</sup> Richard Arneson, "Equality and Equal Opportunity for Welfare," *Philosophical Studies* 56, no. 1 (1989): 77–93; Richard Arneson, "Welfare Should Be the Currency of Justice," *Canadian Journal of Philosophy* 30, no. 4 (2000): 497–524.



modifies Arneson's view, which Cohen calls equal *access to advantage*, "where 'advantage' is to be understood to include, but to be wider than welfare."<sup>51</sup> Ronald Dworkin argues that the metric of equality should be *resources*.<sup>52</sup> Finally, Martha Nussbaum and Amartya Sen defend the *capabilities approach*.<sup>53</sup>

The currency of the ideals has implications on the evaluative standards. Disagreement about the currency leads to disagreement about the evaluative standards. If the goal is to design 'equal' institutions, it will matter greatly whether the goal is equal resources or equal capabilities. Evaluative standards with resources as the currency of material equality will be able to meet the demands of equality with a more minimalistic institutional design. Whereas, evaluative standards that take capabilities as the metric will require a more comprehensive basic structure to ensure that equality is achieved. Identifying the principles of justice requires answering what the currency of the relevant ideals that make up the principles of justice are. Disagreement about the proper currency or metric is certainly not limited to equality. Take the ideal of freedom. The principles of justice will vary depending on whether a positive, negative, or republican conception is employed.

Thus far, I have argued that apparently intractable disagreement exists about three fundamental considerations – the initial assumptions, the ideals, and the currency of the ideals – regarding the understanding and identification of the principles of justice. Normalization on a perspective requires either having a way of settling these disagreements about the correct

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<sup>51</sup> G. A. Cohen, *On the Currency of Egalitarian Justice, and Other Essays in Political Philosophy*, ed. Michael Otsuka (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2011), 4.

<sup>52</sup> Ronald Dworkin, *Sovereign Virtue: The Theory and Practice of Equality*, Trade Paperback Edition edition (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2002) Chapter 2 - Equality of Resources."

<sup>53</sup> Martha C. Nussbaum, *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach*, Reprint edition (Belknap Press, 2013); Sen, *Inequality Reexamined*.

evaluative standards or idealizing about way the disagreement. I will consider two possible ways of trying to resolve these disagreements. The first is the route Simmons takes which is to argue that there is widespread *agreement* on the ideal principles of justice and the presence of some disagreement should not damn the entire enterprise. The second option is to apply rational standards for good argumentation to settle disagreements by showing that the disagreement is not intractable, but simply a result of mistaken logic. I argue that neither of these approaches can resolve the problem disagreement poses to identifying the principles of justice.

## 2.9 The Epistemically Optimistic Approach

The first possible resolution is Simmons's epistemically optimistic approach. He claims: "we already know enough about the broad outlines of that ideal (or about essential overlaps between conflicting ideals) and about possible paths to whatever more precise version of the ideal philosophers might convincingly defend that we can proceed to responsibly address particularly grievous injustices now, without waiting for further refinement in ideal theory."<sup>54</sup> He makes explicit that this does not "deny the priority of ideal theory. It is rather to affirm that enough of ideal theory is settled that we can already begin to derive from it the rudiments of nonideal theory."<sup>55</sup> Despite disagreement at the margins, most people can agree to the core features of the target as well as the topography of justice. Suppose race and sex equality are shared ideals that would be part of any target. Even if there is disagreement about precisely what race and sex equality would entail, they offer enough of target and path to it that we ought begin trying to realize them, Simmons would argue.

His optimism about our ability to assess what aspects of the target are sufficiently

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<sup>54</sup> Simmons, "Ideal and Nonideal Theory," 36.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

“settled” is surprising given that the fundamental motivation for the target view is to prevent overzealously eliminating injustices which have implications that make the world less just overall. As Simmons says, it is imperative that “none of us in the end forgets that justice is an integrated goal and that activism in one domain has the potential to affect adversely the achievement of justice in another.”<sup>56</sup> For example, it may be the case that improving racial equality leads to a larger decline in sex equality such that the world is less justice overall. One could imagine an affirmative action policy that mandates an increase in the number of African-Americans hired as executives; and, the way this policy is achieved is by replacing women executives with African-American men. As a result, many wives of the new executives vacate their professional roles to perform the care-taking roles that husbands previously assisted with.

Herein lies the tension with Simmons’s approach. On the one hand, he thinks that most people do endorse general features of the target. Yet, on the other hand, he appreciates that justice is an integrated pursuit and that a particular ideal, when integrated in with the rest of the ideals that constitute the target, may lead to sub-optimal justice. Putting the tension differently, the reason that some disagreement about particular aspects of the target has the potential to undermine the entire target view is because we are not in the epistemic position to know whether guidance from the vague and abstract aspects of the target we do agree with will, all things considered, lead us closer to what justice demands. It may just as likely lead us further away.

So, when Simmons’s says, “the political philosopher’s first job is to refine and argue for an ideal of justice, to say as clearly as possible what goal(s) we must attend to and how we must weigh various factors in our efforts to eventually reach that goal,” he should frame it in terms of

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

an exclusive disjunction.<sup>57</sup> Political philosophers should *either* state as precisely as possible what the target should look like, but in which case there will be many competing targets and rampant disagreement about which is the correct one, *or* specify a target in abstract terms that engenders agreement, but is so opaque that allowing it to guide nonideal theory may actually lead away from what justice demands. Taking the first horn leads to a “solipsistic” approach to theorizing about justice as each philosopher articulates her idiosyncratic target.<sup>58</sup> The problem is that it is indeterminate which precise target should be doing the guiding. Taking the second horn provides a way of identifying a determinate, albeit vague target. The problem with a vague target is that it leaves open the possibility of being lead away from what justice demands, which is precisely what the target view purports to prevent. The result is two untenable attempts at overcoming the disagreement. Thus, the burden is on Simmons and proponents of the target view to show that there is more than a bare possibility of identifying a sufficiently guiding, sufficiently precise target.<sup>59</sup> And, one unavailable route of identifying this “sweet spot” is by appeal to the method of reflective equilibrium as there will be disagreement about what the proper equilibrium point is.

## 2.10 The Deny the Disagreement Approach

A second way of trying to resolve disagreements about the features that define the target would be to invoke rational standards of good argumentation. This would be to say that these three disagreements are mere *surface-level* disagreements and not *intractable* disagreements at all. By “surface-level disagreement,” I mean disagreements in which there is genuine

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> David Schmitz, “Against Solipsism,” in *Oxford Handbook of Distributive Justice*, ed. Serena Olsaretti (New York: Oxford University Press, Forthcoming).

<sup>59</sup> Gaus and Hankins argue that this problem is intractable. See, Gaus and Hankins, “Searching for the Ideal: The Fundamental Diversity Dilemma.”

disagreement between the parties, but only because a logical mistake is being made. If only the mistaken parties reasoned better, then all interlocutors would come to agree on the same initial assumptions, the same ideals, the same currency of the ideals and, thus, the same principles of justice.

This approach would work if these disagreements were solely surface-level. However, the very problem is that disagreement about the initial assumptions, the ideals, and the currency of the ideals often runs deeper than the surface-level. Further argumentation and clarification may lead to some mistaken beliefs being revised, but it will often not settle the disagreement. It is not as if Dworkin and Nussbaum are simply mistaken about what the point of equality is and Arneson is correct. Rather, they fundamentally disagree about what is normatively salient.

In light of the depth of the disagreement, how could a target be identified? One way would be to posit as part of the target whatever feature currently has the strongest argument in its favor. Consider the disagreement between economic egalitarians and sufficientarians. Suppose that the best argument presently is in favor of sufficiency as an ideal. Even if egalitarians disagree, they are simply wrong and the fact that they cannot be convinced otherwise is not a strike against sufficiency. The problem with this route is that it requires a very high credence level in the best existing arguments. It mirrors what John Stuart Mill called “an assumption of infallibility.”<sup>60</sup> Such an assumption is problematic on the target view because the upshot of the target view is that it promises to keep trending towards optimal justice. However, if the posited ideal is ultimately the wrong one and it leads nonideal theory away from justice, then the fundamental motivation for the target view is undercut.

Moreover, this line of reply is a very solipsistic one. David Schmidtz has recently warned

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<sup>60</sup> John Stuart Mill, *On Liberty*, ed. Elizabeth Rapaport (Indianapolis, Ind: Hackett Publishing, 1978), 16.

against solipsistic theorizing about justice. He writes, “we each have our own theories and visions about the nature of justice: perfect justice. But our respective visions of perfect justice are too personal and too idiosyncratic to be a basis for moral life in a social world. It is implausible that true justice is *any* of those idiosyncratic peaks.”<sup>61</sup> There are many aspects of justice that are the subject of deep disagreement and “doubling-down” on one’s own idiosyncratic vision has the potential to lead theorizing away from what justice actually demands.

In Section 2, I argued that neither the Mount Fuji landscape nor the Mount Everest landscape work as models of how to identify and then reach the target of justice. In Section 3, I consider the implications resulting from the failings of these two topographies. I argue that the failings of the Mount Fuji and the Mount Everest indicate the need for a more complex model.

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<sup>61</sup> Schmitz, “Against Solipsism,” 64.

### 3 TOWARDS A MORE SOPHISTICATED MODEL

#### 3.1 Adding Complexity to the Target View

In *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls attempted to settle normative disagreements by constructing a shared point of view from which the principles of justice could be determined. But Rawls, as well as many of theorists that followed, came to appreciate the pervasiveness of disagreement and our limited epistemic position with respect to arbitrating amongst alternatives. I believe the problem posed by disagreement runs much deeper than Rawls anticipated. Section 2 was aimed at demonstrating this. Widespread, deep disagreement about the principles of justice demands a more complex model. Section 3.1 presents and considers such a model.

The way complexity is introduced in the model is by adding a dimension. Rather than normalizing to a single evaluative perspective and, thereby, a 2-dimensional topography as Rawls does, different perspectives will lead to different scorings of social worlds. An example of this is illustrated with Figure 3 below.

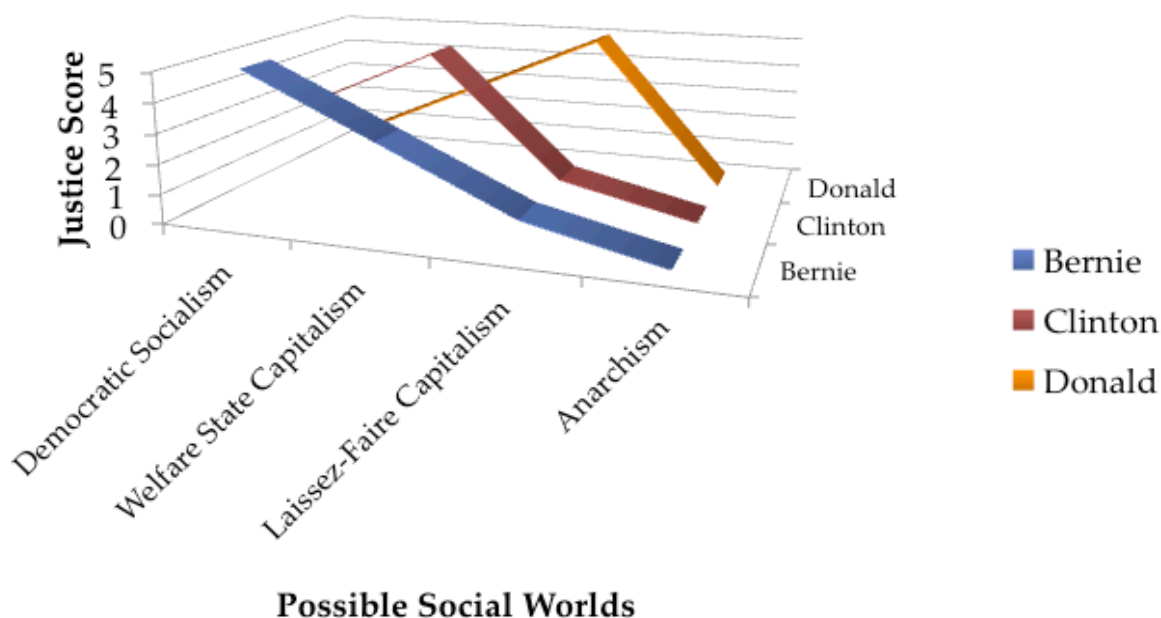


Figure 3: 3-D Model of Social Worlds

The x-axis represents possible institutional schemes of social worlds. The y-axis indicates the justice score of the social world. The z-axis represents possible perspectives. Along the x-axis are the different institutional schemes of four social worlds: anarchism, laissez-faire capitalism, welfare state capitalism, and democratic socialism. On the y-axis, the worlds are scored from 0-5, with 5 being optimally justice. The z-axis marks three hypothetical perspectives: Bernie, Clinton, and Donald.<sup>62</sup>

In this example, Bernie's target is democratic socialism, which he scores as a 5. Clinton's target is welfare state capitalism, which she scores a 5. Finally, Donald's target is laissez-faire capitalism, which he scores a 5. So which is the target? If all agreed that, say, democratic socialism was a 5, then it would clearly be the target. However, there is not. On this model, three potential targets exist. Moreover, Donald scores democratic socialism as a 1, with only anarchism being worse. In fact, all agree that anarchism is a 0. The fact that all agree that anarchism is the worst does not mean that they share the same principles of justice (element A), identify the same justice relevant features of social worlds (element B), and the same mapping function of A to B (element C). Nor does it mean that they agree to the ordering of the underlying structures which meaningfully relates them in terms of similarity (element D) or to the distance metric measuring the feasibility of nearby worlds (element E). In short, different perspectives can lead to the same conclusion, i.e. justice score.

This model is an improvement on the two dimensional topographies of justice, such as the Mount Fuji and the Mount Everest, because it represents disagreement about the target and topography of justice. While it is not as parsimonious as the 2-dimensional topographies for

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<sup>62</sup> The three perspectives happen to coincide with the names of three current political candidates. The simplistic perspectives used here are *not* indicative of the actual political candidates views. Rather, I used these names because they proceed in alphabetical order.



setting a target, it still allows institutional schemes that all agree are unjust to be avoided. The real problem is that even at this level of complexity, it unclear how to identify a target that is capable of guiding nonideal theory in making the actual world optimally just. Put differently, if different people with different perspectives are climbing different mountains, then it does not make sense to say that there is a unique summit to be reached. The topographical metaphor is more misleading than helpful. Now, one may propose some decision rule to attempt to converge on the optimal target given the disagreement. Yet, this just seems to push the problem back. There will be disagreement about the operative decision rule. It seems unlikely that any decision rule would be agreed upon. The deeper problem concerns disagreement about the justice score itself.

Scoring the justice of institutional schemes from 0-5 allows for schemes to be easily compared. However, the justice score represents a complex set of considerations. The model in Figure 3 does not express what the different evaluative standards, relevant features of institutions, or mapping function are that define the justice score of a social world. For example, the disagreement between Rawls's two principles of justice and his relevant features of institutions to a strict utilitarian evaluative standard and the relevant features of institutions that maximize utility fails to be represented in Figure 3. A more complex model than Figure 3 will be required to accommodate this disagreement. However, as the model becomes increasingly complex, it becomes more and more unlikely to be able to identify a guiding target.

### **3.2 The Prospects of Moral Innovation**

One often un-discussed means of circumventing disagreement about the justice of the institutional schemes of social worlds is moral innovation. If my grandfather was writing this

paper, then segregation would have seemed a moral just institution or, at minimum, there would be disagreement about it. In the contemporary, there is near consensus on this institution being unjust. Moral innovators like Martin Luther King, Jr., and Rosa Parks caused this change in our social institutions.

This is a powerful alternative to strong normalization in reaching a more just world. Importantly, moral innovation is at odds with a strong normalization. By normalizing to a shared perspective, diverse, disagreeing perspectives are cut out of the moral calculus. If justice is to be defined in terms of a single perspective, then different perspectives get excluded. The exclusion of disagreeing perspectives from the dominant perspective would have prevented moral innovation and progress at many points in history. If the dominant perspective at the time of segregation required excluding the perspective of King, Jr. and Parks, then moral progress would not have occurred.

Disagreement between perspectives is not antithetical to moral progress, but actually a driving force. Thus, making such an assumption should be avoided. The drawback is that it is unclear how disagreeing perspectives can be squared with the target view. Increasing the complexity of the model of the ideal target and the path to it by including perspectival disagreement makes it less and less clear how an ideal target can guide nonideal theory.

#### 4 CONCLUSION

One of the strongest motivations for ideal theorizing is its claim that it can guide nonideal theory towards an optimal or perfectly just institutional scheme. The most common form of ideal guidance is the target view. On the target view, the ideal institutional scheme is identified at the outset and nonideal theory seeks to approach this institutional scheme as close as it can in light of the limitations imposed by living in a world of nonideal actors. However, ideal theorists often fail to consider or explain how ideal theory actually guides nonideal theory to a more just world. In this paper, I consider different topographies of justice that ideal theory could be guiding nonideal theory through. First, the Mount Fuji landscape fails as a model of ideal guidance because there is not good reason to think that justice is like a Mount Fuji and stipulating that it is begs the question. To avoid begging the question, one can reject one of three conditions. Sen drops the target condition; however, if the target condition is dropped, then it faces the problem posed by John Simmons that what seemed to be a global optimum could actually only be a local optimum. Second, I considered the Mount Everest landscape that is defended by John Simmons. Ultimately, I believe Simmons's model faces a damning problem of its own. Namely, intractable disagreement between diverse perspectives must be normalized in order to evaluate and assess how just different social worlds are. Yet, it seems there is fundamental, insoluble disagreement about the evaluative standards or principles of justice between different perspectives. I consider three ways of dissolving the disagreement but find none of them to work. The result of this failing is the need for a more complex model. I consider such a model; however, I argue that it too requires further complexity. My conclusion is that any sufficiently complex model will be unable to identify a target that is capable of guiding nonideal theory to it. As a result, I think the target view fails as a form of ideal guidance.

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