

Jürgen Sirsch

# Designing Realistic Utopia

Ideal Theory in Practical Political Philosophy



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Jürgen Sirsch

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## Vorwort der Reihen-HerausgeberInnen

Mit diesem Band gibt sich die Schriftenreihe der Sektion Politische Theorie und Ideengeschichte in der DVPW ein neues Layout und ergänzt ihren Titel. Sie dokumentiert damit die Verschmelzung mit der von Hubertus Buchstein und Rainer Schmalz-Bruns herausgegebenen Reihe *Studies in Political Theory*. Der Titel lautet von nun an: *Schriftenreihe der Sektion Politische Theorie und Ideengeschichte in der DVPW. Studies in Political Theory*. Wir danken Hubertus Buchstein und dem im März 2020 viel zu früh verstorbenen Rainer Schmalz-Bruns für ihre Bereitschaft, ihr Bemühen um eine stärkere Internationalisierung der deutschen Politischen Theorie in der Reihe der Sektion aufgehen zu lassen. Mit der Fusion ist die Öffnung der Sektionsreihe für englischsprachige Publikationen verbunden. Wir freuen uns besonders, dass Band 38 – als erster Band der fusionierten Reihe – mit Jürgen Sirchs Dissertation „Designing Realistic Utopia. Ideal Theory in Practical Political Philosophy“ dieses Anliegen verwirklicht.

Oliver Eberl und Frauke Höntzsch



## Preface

The aim of this book is to develop a practically relevant account of ideal theory as part of the ideal guidance approach, which applies ideal theory in order to analyze practical-political problems we face in our societies. While this approach could be considered as mainstream in political philosophy since Rawls, its potential has not yet been fully unlocked. This is mainly because the question of how to construct and how to use ideal institutional designs in practical thinking has not yet been systematically investigated. From the perspective of political philosophy, this is pretty understandable since the question of designing well-functioning institutions requires not only philosophical but also social scientific input.

Hence, this project resulted from three different but related interests: first, normative questions regarding the institutional design of welfare regimes, second, general philosophical questions regarding social justice and, third, methodological aspects of the relationship between the social sciences and political philosophy.

The project also reflects the belief that political philosophers should become more ambitious with respect to providing a critical perspective on society. This does not equate a presumption on the side of political philosophers to be “philosopher kings” who tell society what to do. At the same time, political philosophers should not hide behind procedural questions (as important as these are): Political philosophers have developed relevant and inspiring accounts of justice and how a just society might look like. Developing models of a just society and presenting these to the public provides relevant input for questioning the status quo by showing that societies could be organized differently and offers an aspirational target for political reform.

However, if political philosophy retreats to the side-lines others will fill the void: Often, economists are dominating political discourse with respect to giving expert opinions in matters of social policy. As valuable as economic advice like this may often be, it usually lacks a properly spelled out conception of justice. Additionally, the kinds of idealizations employed by economists are often not well suited for the kind of questions debated in social policy. Therefore, a philosophically informed position that also integrates different empirical perspectives from the social sciences and eco-

*Preface*

nomics is urgently needed. The present book tries to provide a framework for offering such a perspective in the form of an idea how ideal models of society should be constructed and employed for practical thinking.

For this, I discuss and propose a conception of practical political philosophy in the form of the ideal guidance approach that is intended to be useful for the normative discussion of practical questions of social policy. This account builds upon the great work of John Rawls and throughout the book, I try to defend the Rawlsian project against some of its contemporary critics and spell out its implications for the questions described above.

This book is a revised version of my doctoral dissertation, which I completed while teaching political theory and political economy at Johannes Gutenberg-University Mainz. I am very grateful for the support of many individuals who have contributed in many ways to the completion of this project. I want to thank my doctoral supervisors, Ruth Zimmerling and Claudia Landwehr, for providing advice and necessary institutional resources for the completion of my dissertation. Also, I want to thank the editors of the “Schriftenreihe der Sektion Politische Theorie und Ideengeschichte der Deutschen Vereinigung für Politikwissenschaft” – Frauke Höntzsch and Oliver Eberl – for their support. Furthermore, I am grateful for discussions with the participants of the political theory doctoral colloquiums in Mainz and in Bamberg, as well as the participants of the congress of the Political Theory Section of the DVPW in September 2011 in Bremen. Additionally, I want to thank Geoffrey Brennan, Francisco García-Gibson, Bruce Haddock, Johannes Marx, Thomas Plischke, Peri Roberts, Annette Schmitt and Peter Sutch for devoting some of their time to discuss my ideas in various stages of development. Special thanks go to Volker Kunz, who has supported and inspired me very early in my career. The list of acknowledgments would of course not be complete without mentioning and expressing my thankfulness for the constant and unconditional support of Günter and Uta Sirsch. Moreover, the completion of this book would not have been possible without Doris Unger, who has spent many hours discussing the ideas presented in this book, proof-reading and also providing essential emotional support and encouragement.

Wiesbaden, August 2020

Jürgen Sirsch



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