

Political Realism

Political Science

Whether political theory should start from ideals or from conduct.

Ideal theory

- Begins from principles of justice
- Assumes broad compliance
- Sets a standard to aim at
- Criticised as unable to guide action

Non-ideal and realist

- Begins from actual conditions
- Assumes conflict and partial compliance
- Focuses on avoiding the worst outcomes
- Criticised as conceding too much to power

THE DIFFERENCE THAT MATTERS

The practical question is whether a standard we cannot approach still helps us choose between available options.

Educational reference. Most working political theory operates in the non-ideal space between these positions.