

The John U. Nef Committee on Social Thought presents a Nef Lecture

“Normativity and Reality: Reflections on Plato’s Paradox”

Rainer Forst

Professor of Political Theory and Philosophy
Goethe-Universität Frankfurt am Main

Thursday, March 21st, 4:30–6:00 p.m. CST
Foster 505

In his *Politeia*, Plato founded the science of politics and left it with a paradox. According to it, the real truth about the just political order is politically uncommunicable and unrealizable, given the realities of political life. But what is the reality political science has the task of understanding? Is it a reality of antagonistic power struggles based on individual and collective interests, leaving no room for an independent account of political normativity, especially of justice? From a "realist" perspective of ideology critique, let us assume that social and political power is generated in the discursive space of justifications and that the exercise of power depends on the capacity to rule that space. This means that social and political reality is a reality of justifications, and, importantly, the question of what a "real" justification is becomes the central political question. Will this help us to escape the cave?

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Rainer Forst is Professor of Political Theory and Philosophy and Director of the Research Center “Normative Orders” at Goethe University Frankfurt. His research focuses on questions of justice, democracy, and tolerance, as well as critical theory and practical reason in the Kantian tradition. In 2012, he was awarded the Gottfried Wilhelm Leibniz Prize of the German Research Foundation. He is a Member of the Berlin-Brandenburg Academy of Sciences and Humanities and a Corresponding Fellow of the British Academy.

He held numerous visiting professorships and fellowships in the US, for example, at the New School for Social Research, Dartmouth College, Rice University, the University of Michigan, and NYU. In 2021, he was a Fellow at the Thomas Mann House in Los Angeles. He is also a Visiting Research Professor at the Wissenschaftszentrum Berlin. His work has received great international attention; for example, in recent years, five collections of critical essays on his work in English with replies by him have appeared.

Important publications (in English): *Contexts of Justice* (Univ. of California Press, 2002), *Toleration in Conflict* (Cambridge UP, 2013), *The Right to Justification* (Columbia UP, 2012), *Justification and Critique* (Polity, 2013), *Normativity and Power* (Oxford UP 2017), *The Noumenal Republic* (forthcoming with Polity Press).

For accessibility assistance, please contact souvik@uchicago.edu.

Souvik De
Department Administrator
The John U. Nef Committee on Social Thought
Social Sciences Division, University of Chicago
1130 East 59th Street | Chicago, IL. 60637
souvik@uchicago.edu | 773.702.8427