

## Laura Valentini wins a Philip Leverhulme Prize for her research



*Dr Laura Valentini has been awarded a Philip Leverhulme Prize in Politics and International Relations. **The Philip Leverhulme Prizes** recognise the achievement of ‘outstanding’ and ‘exceptionally promising’ researchers whose work has ‘attracted international recognition’, making up to thirty awards of £100,000 a year across a range of academic disciplines. Laura tells us more about her research and how the award will enable her to embark on new projects.*

I’m a political theorist and my work focuses on domestic and international justice and the methodology of normative theorizing. A substantial part of my past research has concentrated on the distinction between duties of justice and duties of humanitarian assistance, and how this applies to real-world cases, such as natural-disaster relief, global poverty, and microfinance. This line of work takes the lead from the observation that morally decent people ought to do something to relieve the suffering of others—at least when they can do so without too much sacrifice. But when does this personal moral duty become a matter of enforceable political morality? When do the needy have a claim to our resources as a matter of justice? And what would it take for us to fulfil our moral duties towards them? I’ve addressed these questions in several of my articles, as well as a book, ***Justice in a Globalized World: A Normative Framework***.

Another of my research interests is the methodology of political theory, and specifically the role of facts and social practices in the justification of normative principles. Political theorists, especially in the analytic tradition, tend to invoke idealized, counterfactual assumptions in developing their principles. For instance, John Rawls famously suggests that the correct principles of justice for our society are those that would be selected by hypothetical choosers unaware of their specific identities, talents, abilities, and social positions. Similarly, political theorists often think about justice assuming ‘full compliance’. They ask: ‘What ought I to do, assuming that everyone else will do their duty?’ There has been growing concern that these kinds of idealizations might be misleading, if our aim is to develop principles for real people and non-ideal societies. My work on the methodology of political theory explores the extent to which this anxiety about idealization is justified, both by clarifying distinct “sources” of anxiety that are often mixed together, and by distinguishing between helpful and unhelpful idealisations.



I feel privileged and honoured to have been awarded a Philip Leverhulme Prize. With the help of the Prize, I'll be able to devote some concentrated research time to two projects. The first concerns the moral status of legal and informal social norms. It begins with the observation that many people subscribe to the slogan 'When in Rome, do as the Romans do'. That is, they believe that we ought to act in conformity with the norms—be they legally codified or informal—prevalent in the social environments we inhabit. I plan to investigate whether living by this slogan is morally—as opposed to merely prudentially—defensible.

The second project builds on, and extends, my existing work on the methodology of political theory, by attempting to defend an approach that brings political theory closer to the methodology of theory-building and theory-testing in the empirical social sciences, while recognizing the disanalogies between normative and positive theories.

*Dr Laura Valentini is Associate Professor of Political Science at the LSE Department of Government.*

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