

1 Achieving global justice: Why failures matter more than ideals

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The chapters that follow are concerned to specify reforms with the aim of “mak[ing] global institutions work better for the people who need them most.”¹ Much of the work is done close to the ground, concerned with specific structural flaws of particular institutions. But there is a pervading sense that reforming these institutions is not only prudent but morally imperative; that failure to advance the interests of the deprived and oppressed is a failure of *justice*. This sense of injustice has been sharpened by the numerous high profile popular protests launched against key international institutions, from Seattle (1999), Gleneagles (2005), and Toronto (2010) to the various Occupy movements that have emerged in the wake of the 2008 Global Financial Crisis. As if responding to these demands, proposals for ad hoc institutional reforms now line the shelves of bookstores.²

Yet how can we make *systematic* sense of these charges of injustice? Which *general normative principles* might we adopt to guide our efforts to reform global social and political institutions? These are the questions of normative political philosophy. Following John Rawls,³ the predominant methodology among political philosophers for answering these questions is summed up in the mantra “ideal theory precedes nonideal theory.” Roughly, *nonideal theory* specifies how we should respond to injustice amidst unfavorable circumstances, whereas *ideal theory* identifies normative principles that constitute a fully just institutional scheme. According to the conventional wisdom, we can identify morally progressive institutional reforms only if we have a picture of fully

just institutions in view.⁴ Yet many suspect that such a methodology cannot but yield normative guidelines that are too utopian to help guide institutional reform in the “here and now”.

My aim in this chapter is twofold. First, siding with the skeptics, I challenge the view that ideal normative principles offer appropriate guidelines for our efforts to identify morally progressive institutional reform strategies. I shall call this view the "ideal guidance approach." Second, I develop an alternative methodological approach to specifying nonideal normative principles, which I call the "failure analysis approach." I contrast these alternatives using examples from the global justice literature, showing that a failure analytic approach is better suited to the task of specifying morally progressive standards to guide the process of reforming global institutions given their particular flaws.

The ideal guidance approach

Unlike the other chapters in this volume, the central issue here is a rather abstract one, concerning the relationship between ideal normative principles and the normative guidelines we should adopt for identifying morally progressive institutional reform strategies. The central tenet of the ideal guidance approach is that ideal normative principles provide useful guidelines for morally progressive reform efforts. Before evaluating this claim, let us specify what is meant by "ideal normative principles" and "morally progressive reform."

Ideal normative principles specify the broad contours of a fully just society. These principles define the core requirements of our commitment to certain basic moral and social values, such as individual freedom, social equality, or cooperative society. To

do so, they enumerate the general rights and obligations of agents in political society and identify the constitutive features of social and political institutions that fulfill our basic values to the greatest extent possible. There is, of course, some limit to how utopian ideal principles can be; for example, they cannot assume that we have unlimited material resources at our disposal or that individuals are completely virtuous or altruistic. Aside from these broad constraints, theorists generally specify ideal principles assuming circumstances that are more or less favorable for establishing institutions that fulfill our moral and social values as fully as possible.

To illustrate, consider cosmopolitan discussions pertaining to global justice. Cosmopolitans share a commitment to several basic values—in particular, respect for individuals as the units of ultimate moral concern and the moral equality of individuals, regardless of race, gender, nationality, or citizenship. The practical requirements of a commitment to these basic values are indeterminate, but they can be made more determinate by normative principles that specify the constitutive features of a fully just global institutional scheme. Examples include:

- *Global equality of opportunity*: "[P]ersons of different nations should enjoy equal opportunities: no one should face worse opportunities because of their nationality."⁵

- *Global difference principle*: Global "social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are... to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged."⁶

- *Global basic needs satisfaction*: All individuals should "be adequately positioned to enjoy the prospects for a decent life, ... includ[ing] what is necessary

to be enabled to meet [their] basic needs and those of [their] dependents..., and certain protections for basic freedom."⁷

The details of the arguments for these principles do not matter here. What matters is that these principles (1) purport to identify constitutive features of an institutional scheme that best fulfills basic cosmopolitan values, and (2) are specified assuming circumstances that are generally favorable for realizing cosmopolitan values.

Identifying ideal principles is the business of ideal theory.⁸ Nonideal theory aims to identify feasible and morally progressive strategies for responding to injustice amidst nonideal circumstances. The prescribed reforms must be *feasible*, in the sense that we can be reasonably expected to implement them given the (financial, technological, motivational, institutional, etc.) resources we have at our disposal.⁹ They must be *morally progressive*, in the sense that we can reasonably expect the prescribed reforms to advance the realization of our basic moral and social values.

Any nonideal theory must identify *core normative principles*, principles that serve as normative guidelines for our reform efforts. The conventional assumption among political philosophers is that morally progressive reforms should make steady progress toward fulfilling our ideal principles. The underlying reasoning goes as follows. If we aim to implement morally progressive reforms, we require a measure of progress. One might naturally think that such a measure "makes essential reference to the ultimate target, the ideal of perfect justice."¹⁰ Accordingly, political philosophers conventionally understand core nonideal principles as identifying transitional steps from the status quo to the realization of an institutional scheme that satisfies our ideal principles. Put simply, ideal principles should serve as guidelines for nonideal theory. This is the central maxim

of the ideal guidance approach.

One immediate concern arises for the ideal guidance approach as presented, namely, that it fails to consider whether implementing ideal principles is feasible.¹¹ This worry arises because ideal principles are typically specified assuming "ideal" circumstances: general compliance with core principles, low opportunity and transaction costs, few barriers to cooperative collective action, and so on. It is largely uncontroversial that an infeasible institutional ideal does not provide a practical target for reform efforts. But one might reply that ideal principles remain useful guidelines for nonideal theory insofar as we can approximate the ideal even if we cannot fully implement it.

The "general theory of second best"¹² occludes this approximation move. As I show elsewhere,¹³ the theorem implies that if one (or more) of our ideal principles remains unsatisfied as specified, then the set of core principles that best fulfills our basic values does not necessarily include the remaining ideal principles, even if their requirements can still be met. This is because our political principles must account for various interdependencies among our basic values.¹⁴ For example, our valuation of individual freedom (however conceived) likely depends on the extent to which other values are manifest, such as physical security or community. Relatedly, the extent to which individual freedom is manifest might depend on the extent to which we are physically secure or live within a supportive community. When (1) we are committed to realizing more than one basic value, (2) our basic values are interdependent in either of these ways, and (3) these interdependencies are not linear, the theory of second best shows that we cannot straightforwardly estimate how nonideal principles must deviate from ideal principles. Quite simply, ideal principles that cannot be implemented are an

unreliable—and so useless—guide for nonideal theory.

Infeasible ideals provide no guidance for nonideal theory. Can feasible ideals do any better?

The risk of latent failures

I start by noting that our specification of normative guidelines for institutional reform must be *context sensitive*. The extent to which a set of core normative principles fulfills our basic moral and social values is sensitive to the conditions in which the principles are implemented. Since the point of morally progressive institutional reform is to better realize our basic values, the principles we should adopt as guidelines for institutional reform should be those that would realize our basic values to the fullest extent possible were they implemented in our circumstances. For instance, whether we should adopt a global equality of opportunity principle as a normative guideline for global institutional reform depends on the extent to which that principle (together with any other principles we adopt) would realize our cosmopolitan values were we to implement it in our current circumstances.

It is not obvious that ideal principles would do a very good job of realizing our basic values were they implemented in nonideal circumstances. Consider the global difference principle, which requires that global social and economic inequalities be arranged so as to maximize the prospects of the global poor. According to both Rawls and those who (unlike Rawls) extend the difference principle to the global level,¹⁵ the difference principle is part of a package of principles that, taken together, are supposed to best fulfill our commitment to values like impartiality, equality, fairness, and respect for persons. Suppose a fully just global institutional scheme is, in part, constituted by the

global difference principle. Should we adopt this principle as a normative guideline for global institutional reform?

To raise some doubts that we should, consider Figure 1.1. The x -axis represents the distributive share of talented and otherwise advantaged individuals, represented by X_1 ; the y -axis represents the distributive share of individuals with the worst life prospects, represented by X_2 .¹⁶ The 45° line represents all points in the space where the two individuals' shares are strictly equal. Given Rawls's assumption that strict equality is to be preferred unless a departure improves the absolute position of X_2 , the dashed horizontal lines are the moral indifference curves. Let a *contribution curve* represent the set of feasible distributive shares given some assumptions about the differential rewards that would induce talented and otherwise advantaged individuals to contribute to overall social production. Since X_1 is assumed to be better off, a contribution curve lies below the 45° line everywhere except the origin.

[FIGURE 1.1 ABOUT HERE.]

Let the curve OC be the *compliance contribution curve*, the curve that would obtain were Rawls's equal basic liberties principle to obtain. The equal basic liberties principle requires that each person enjoy the most extensive package of basic rights consistent with everyone enjoying the same package of rights.¹⁷ The difference principle requires an institutional scheme that yields the distributive shares represented by the point where OC is tangent to the highest indifference curve; in this case, the point where X_1 receives a and X_2 receives d . This distribution is morally preferred to strict equality—which is realized at O —because it yields a greater absolute share for X_2 . Any point beyond a on the x -axis is deemed unjust.

The difference principle specifies the ratio a/d as the optimal limit on permissible inequality for circumstances where the equal basic liberties principle is fulfilled. But the equal basic liberties principle is not fulfilled at the global level in our world and its fulfillment does not appear forthcoming anytime soon. As several contributions to this volume show, there is gross disparity in the rights people effectively enjoy in different countries and there is staunch resistance to efforts to reduce this disparity among numerous powerful global actors. Failure to satisfy the equal basic liberties principle will likely result in a different contribution curve. This *noncompliance contribution curve* might take the shape of ON (see Figure 1.1), for several reasons. Labor rights disparities allow multinational corporations to take advantage of disparate labor standards to increase their profits; powerful countries are able to extract profitable concessions fairly cheaply from countries where citizens have no effective rights to hold their government accountable¹⁸; unbalanced trade treaties, which encode differential rights and privileges to engage in protective measures, grant competitive advantages to farmers and manufacturers in developed countries. These rights disparities have two potential consequences. First, they diminish the amount of social wealth genuinely available to the worst-off; this reduces their expected prospects, as indicated by the difference between d and e . Second, and relatedly, rights disparities allow the better-off to demand a greater share of the total social product in exchange for their contributions to social production. This is represented by the difference between b and a . At the point at which the noncompliance curve is tangent to the highest indifference curve, X_1 receives b and X_2 receives e . The difference principle permits departures from strict equality up to the point b/e when the equal basic liberties principles is not fulfilled.

From Figure 1.1, we see that the extent to which implementing a global difference principle fulfills our commitment to values like impartiality, equality, and respect for persons depends on important features of the context in which the principle is to be implemented—in this case, whether individuals enjoy roughly equal packages of rights. Whether a global difference principle realizes our basic values to the fullest extent given actual circumstances depends on how the distributive consequences of implementing that principle (together with others) compare to the consequences of implementing some other distributive principle. It seems *prima facie* implausible that, in a world marked by gross rights disparities, the distributive principle that best realizes our basic values would permit increased inequality, as the global difference principle does. This intuition is strengthened once we acknowledge the corrosive political effects of great inequality. Plausibly, the best principle for regulating inequalities when individuals enjoy such disparate packages of rights would locate the limit on inequality somewhere other than b/e —perhaps at the point along the x -axis represented by c .¹⁹ Such a principle decreases X_2 's prospects slightly in exchange for a drastic reduction in inequality. A principle that locates the limit here can be given a reasonable justification: given that individuals do not enjoy similar packages of rights, we must limit permissible inequalities to c/f to prevent the better-off from acquiring the additional advantages that come with great relative wealth.

To be clear, the foregoing does not show that we should reject the global difference principle as a normative guideline for institutional reform. Rather, I have shown that we cannot simply infer from the fact that ideal principles would best realize our basic values if implemented in favorable circumstances that they would also advance

realization of our basic values were they implemented in actual circumstances. The problem here is that our analysis of ideal principles can obscure latent failures.²⁰ When we analyze an ideal institutional scheme, we are analyzing the successful implementation of ideal principles in favorable circumstances. As Figure 1.1 shows, the consequences of implementing an ideal principle with respect to the realization of our basic values depends on certain contextual variables. What we do not see when we analyze an ideal institutional scheme is the consequences that would arise if we were to implement the ideal principles under different background conditions.

The risk is that implementing ideal principles in status quo circumstances would lead to social failures. Here, failure is measured relative to the optimal realization of our basic values within a given set of constraints. A set of core normative principles *fails* if there is an alternative set of principles that can be implemented and that better realizes our basic values given the circumstances. Importantly, to qualify as a failure, a set of principles need not fail along every particular value dimension taken in isolation. There might not be a feasible alternative to a set of ideal principles that does a better job of realizing, say, the value of cooperative society. An alternative set of core principles need not do a better job along each dimension to constitute an improvement over the set of ideal principles; it need only do a better overall job of fulfilling our basic values taken as a package.

What my discussion of the global difference principle shows is that ideal principles might well do a lousy job of realizing our basic values if implemented in nonideal circumstances. Whether ideal principles present useful guidelines for nonideal institutional reform depends on whether they can be successfully implemented given

status quo conditions. Determining whether ideal principles can be successfully implemented given status quo conditions requires undertaking at least the following analyses. In the first place, we must analyze what would happen if we were to undertake a series of reforms that could eventuate in an institutional scheme that satisfies the ideal principles; in particular, we must determine how well the completed reforms satisfy the full package of our moral and social values. We must also sort out the environmental features that constrain the realization of our basic values, which includes assessment of the factors generating extant social failures, as well as the extent to which feasible alternative core principles satisfy our basic values on the whole. Hence, whether we should adopt ideal principles as normative guidelines for institutional reform cannot be settled until we have sorted out which core principles best satisfy our basic values given the status quo circumstances.

My argument can be summarized as follows: (1) We are commissioned to reform an institutional scheme in context C; (2) Ideal principles best realize our moral and social values when implemented in context C* (so I've been assuming); (3) The extent to which a set of core normative principles realizes a set of moral and social values depends on the context in which those principles are implemented; (4) The successful implementation of ideal principles in C* conceals the ways in which their implementation in C might fail to realize our moral and social values; (5) Whether and to what extent ideal principles can realize our moral and social values when implemented in C can only be settled upon completing a comparative assessment of the extent to which different packages of core normative principles would realize our moral and social values if they were implemented in C.

Let us use the phrase "optimizing principles" to refer to the core normative principles that optimally realize our moral and social values given status quo circumstances. If, upon carrying out the aforementioned analyses, we discover that ideal principles diverge from the optimizing principles, then we should adopt the latter as normative guidelines for our institutional reform efforts. If the ideal principles turn out to match the optimizing principles, then we should implement the ideal principles. But notice that, if this is the case, the ideal principles will not serve as guidelines for nonideal theory in virtue of representing the normative ideal. Instead, we adopt ideal principles as practical guidelines only if we expect them to optimally realize our moral and social values under status quo circumstances when compared with alternative sets of core normative principles.

My argument thus suggests that ideal principles are neither necessary nor sufficient for specifying normative guidelines for global institutional reform under status quo circumstances.²¹ They are not sufficient because we cannot responsibly prescribe ideal principles as practical guidelines simply on the basis that they constitute an ideal institutional structure. They are not necessary because our reasoning to nonideal normative principles can proceed entirely from a comparative analysis of the extent to which different packages of principles are expected to realize our basic values in particular nonideal circumstances. My argument also suggests a stronger claim, namely, that ideal principles qua *ideal* principles are not even particularly helpful for our reasoning to nonideal normative principles. This is because, if we wind up recommending ideal principles to guide our reform efforts, the fact that they also happen to constitute a fully just institutional scheme is superfluous in our reasoning.²²

Two final notes before proceeding. First, my argument does not take a stand on whether there are universal normative principles—principles that invariably apply across all circumstances—or whether normative principles must be context-dependent, in the sense that the appropriateness of their application in particular contexts is ultimately explained by appeal to certain contextual variables and not to some more fundamental universal principle.²³ My argument hangs only on the claim that contextual variables determine the extent to which implementing a set of core principles realizes our basic values. Thus, our selection of nonideal normative principles must be sensitive to the relevant features of the circumstances in which those principles are to be implemented. This is consistent with admitting either universal basic values or universal principles whose application is sensitive to contextual variables.²⁴

Second, my argument does not turn on the extent to which ideal principles are specified assuming idealized circumstances; thus, whether ideal theory employs "good" or "bad" idealizations is irrelevant.²⁵ My argument rests on two key premises: first, that ideal principles are specified assuming circumstances that differ in important ways from the circumstances in which we must implement our prescribed reform strategies; and, second, that we cannot assume that the normative principles that optimally realize our basic values in one context will also optimally realize our basic values in another context. These two points imply that our specification of nonideal normative principles cannot infer anything from our finding that ideal principles optimally realize our basic values in circumstances that differ in important respects from the status quo.²⁶

The failure analysis approach

Since ideal principles are not much help when specifying normative guidelines for

institutional reform in nonideal circumstances, where should we turn for guidance? If we aim to specify nonideal normative principles that have critical purchase, that do not simply license the status quo, where should our theorizing start? The preceding discussion suggests that we should start by analyzing the ways in which the institutional status quo falls short with respect to our basic moral and social values. That is, we should start with an analysis of the ways in which current institutions engender *failures*.

Departing from the ideal guidance approach, the failure analysis approach identifies a set of core normative principles that optimally realizes our basic values *given the salient features of the circumstances in which the reform must occur*. These principles are still conceived as enumerating the general rights and obligations of agents in political society and identifying the constitutive features of social and political institutions that best fulfill our basic moral and social values. The difference is the set of circumstances that are taken as constraints on the specification of core normative principles.

On the failure analysis approach, specifying core normative principles is a five step process. The first step identifies social failures. Importantly, failures are not identified by noting the ways in which the status quo falls short of an ideal institutional scheme. Instead, failures are identified by noting the ways in which the status quo falls short with respect to our basic values. The second step undertakes a diagnosis of those features of the status quo that causally generate social failures. The third step identifies alternate institutional schemes that could overcome current failures given our assessment of the factors that currently prevent us from overcoming these failures. The fourth step assesses the extent to which these alternatives can be expected to fulfill our moral and social values given our actual circumstances. The fifth step anticipates the potential

failures that could arise from implementing these alternative institutions, as well as the possibilities for future improvement that we can reasonably expect these alternatives to afford. The principles that constitute the alternative institutional scheme that emerges from this five step analytic program—the institutional scheme that performs best with respect to our basic values given status quo conditions—are the normative principles we prescribe as practical guidelines for institutional reform.²⁷

Geoffrey Robertson’s discussion of the UN in this volume partially illustrates the failure analysis approach.²⁸ The UN’s underperformance with respect to its stated aim of protecting the vulnerable from violence and deprivation are well-documented, with its main political bodies—the Security Council and General Assembly—being the most frequent target of calls for reform. Robertson traces this organizational underperformance to a more obscure failure: the lack of procedural justice in the UN’s employment practices. This failure encouraged “a culture both nepotistic and diplomatic, that undervalues ‘merit’ and true qualifications in employment and promotion decision and looks [instead] to regional groupings, state nominees, and ‘diplomatic’ considerations”.²⁹ The result was systemic corruption and incompetence. In view of these failures, reforms to the UN’s internal justice system were implemented, including the establishment of independent judicial bodies designed to enforce transparent and fair rules in UN employment decisions. Although there remains room for improvement, the outcome of the reforms has been largely positive, resulting in improved service delivery to the poor and oppressed.

To contrast the failure analysis approach more clearly with the ideal guidance approach, let us return to my earlier discussion of cosmopolitan principles of global

justice. A cosmopolitan failure analyst can agree with the ideal guidance cosmopolitan that widespread deprivation of the sort we find in Afghanistan or Somalia constitutes an utter failure with respect to cosmopolitan values. The practical question is how to address these failures. The ideal guidance cosmopolitan's starting point for answering this question is to figure out which normative principles constitute a fully just institutional scheme. In contrast, the cosmopolitan failure analyst starts by analyzing the causal processes that engender the target deprivations.

Although it is beyond the scope of this chapter to present a compelling diagnosis of global deprivations, I sketch some diagnostic considerations that cosmopolitans have routinely neglected to further illustrate how careful diagnostic work frames the failure analyst's specification of core normative principles. Consider the following diagnostic question: Why do some countries witness successful political and economic development (and, so, increase their citizens' chances at a worthwhile life), while others fail miserably (and, so, decrease their citizens' chances at a worthwhile life)? There is still a live debate on this issue, but there is an emerging consensus among social scientists that, broadly speaking, the nature of domestic institutions is an important determinant of development outcomes. Certain public goods such as the rule of law and government accountability constitute positive political development. These goods, as well as secure property rights, physical infrastructure, a healthy and educated labor force, and a stable macroeconomic environment (among others), are also key determinants of economic development.³⁰ Unfortunately, political leaders typically use their political power to enhance development only when there are institutional mechanisms that empower constituents to constrain their leaders to advance their interests.³¹ Hence, development-enhancing

institutions impose opportunity costs on public officials; in particular, political elites must forego opportunities for corruption, inefficient economic transfers, discretionary (i.e., arbitrary) use of coercion, and other forms of private gain.³² Why, then, would a government establish the institutional arrangements needed for successful development given these costs?

One venerable tradition argues that political leaders accept institutional limits on their power as a means to making credible commitments to prospective supporters. Political leaders typically require support from some subset of their constituents to retain political power, be it as a source of revenue, political support, or military assistance to defeat a rival. To secure their support, leaders offer policy concessions to those whose support is necessary for retaining office. Without any mechanism to bind the leader to follow through on his promise, prospective supporters rationally discount his offer. If potential supporters' alternative to cooperating with the leader—placing their money in investments that evade taxation, politically supporting a challenger, engaging in armed rebellion—promises to be more valuable than the discounted value of the leader's offer, then supporters can credibly threaten to withhold their support if the leader fails to keep his promise. Hence, if the required supporters have credible "exit threats," the leader must solve a commitment problem to attract the necessary support. To overcome this problem, the leader implements institutional mechanisms that constrain him to follow through on his promise and, thus, make his offer credible.³³ This dynamic applies to both democracies and dictatorships. When political leaders require cooperation from constituents, they are induced to bargain over policy with prospective supporters. When those supporters can credibly threaten to withhold support, political leaders must give up

some control over future policy decisions in exchange for political support in the present.³⁴ The crucial point here is that countries develop successfully when individuals have sufficient bargaining leverage to compel their leaders to accept institutional limits on their political power as a way to signal a credible commitment to advancing supporters' interests.

In view of this bit of diagnosis, a cosmopolitan failure analyst's core normative principles would be sensitive to the importance of individuals' bargaining leverage vis-a-vis their political leaders. Which principles constitute an institutional scheme that enhances individuals' bargaining leverage? At this point, the answer is not at all clear, as it depends on a great deal of empirical research yet to be done. In any case, a positive institutional prescription is beyond the scope of this chapter. My point here is simply to illustrate how a diagnosis of extant global deprivations might inform our specification of core normative principles for global institutional reform.

None of the foregoing rules out the possibility that a cosmopolitan failure analysis may well endorse cosmopolitan ideal principles in the end. What my argument denies is that we can sensibly adopt cosmopolitan ideal principles as guidelines for institutional reform simply in virtue of the fact that they constitute a fully just global institutional scheme. To support adoption of cosmopolitan ideal principles as guidelines for nonideal theory, cosmopolitans must do more than speculatively suggest some mechanisms by which their institutional ideals could initiate some hypothetical causal process that, given favorable operating circumstances, yields improvements with respect to cosmopolitan values. Simply showing how their institutional ideals might operate under conducive conditions is insufficient to make the case. We must instead show that the prescribed

institutions are likely to interact with the causal processes generating the target failure in ways that enhance our realization of cosmopolitan values. Showing this requires, first, an analysis of the causal processes generating the status quo; second, an investigation of the ways in which the prescribed institutional scheme would interact with extant causal processes; and, third, an assessment of whether this interaction would yield greater realization of our basic values.³⁵

Conclusion

There is a pervading sense — shared among citizens, scholars, and practitioners — that the global institutional status quo is unjust and in need of deep reform. Political philosophers are attempting to come to grips with this sense of injustice in a systematic way. But the prevailing ideal guidance approach to specifying general normative guidelines for global institutional reform is suspect. This is because it adopts ideal principles as normative guidelines without attending to the ways in which implementing those principles in status quo circumstances might fail to realize our basic moral and social values. This does not mean that implementing cosmopolitans' ideal principles is doomed to fail. My point is, instead, that we do not have the slightest idea whether implementing cosmopolitans' ideal principles could effectively fulfill cosmopolitan values given status quo circumstances until we have a careful diagnosis of the causal factors generating global injustices and a comprehensive analysis of institutional remedies that are capable of effectively mitigating global deprivations given status quo circumstances. This is why our efforts to identify feasible and morally progressive strategies for addressing global deprivations should start (as many of the chapters in this

volume do) with an analysis of the target deprivations rather than an analysis of the ideal global institutional structure.

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¹ Kate Brennan, "Introduction," this volume, pp.

² Popular examples include: Paul Collier, *The Bottom Billion: Why The Poorest Countries Are Failing and What Can Be Done About It* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007); Jeffrey D. Sachs, *Commonwealth: Economics for a Crowded Planet* (New York: Penguin, 2008); Joseph E. Stiglitz, *Making Globalization Work* (New York: Norton, 2006).

³ *A Theory of Justice*, second edition (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1999).

⁴ There is debate concerning the best characterization of the ideal/nonideal theory distinction. I leave this issue aside, as nothing I will say hangs on it. For an introductory survey, see Laura Valentini, "Ideal vs. Non-ideal Theory: A Conceptual Map," *Philosophy Compass* 7, no. 9 (2012): 654-664.

⁵ Simon Caney, *Justice Beyond Borders* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 122.

⁶ Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 266, quoted in Charles Beitz, *Political Theory and International Relations*, second edition (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 151.

⁷ Gillian Brock, *Global Justice: A Cosmopolitan Account* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 52.

⁸ A common characterization of ideal theory adds a second component, namely, that of identifying an institutional scheme that satisfies our ideal principles; see, e.g., Pablo Gilabert, *From Global Poverty to Global Equality* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 122ff. Since my argument throughout focuses on the extent to which ideal

principles can serve as practical guidelines for morally progressive reform, I set aside detailed discussion of ideal institutional schemes.

⁹ I develop an analysis of the feasibility concept along these lines in "Political Ideals and the Feasibility Frontier," University of California, San Diego, unpublished manuscript, www.dwiens.com.

¹⁰ A. John Simmons, "Ideal and Nonideal Theory," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 38, no. 1 (2010): 5-36, at 34.

¹¹ Cf. Colin Farrelly, "Justice in Ideal Theory: A Refutation," *Political Studies* 55, no. 4: 844-864.

¹² R.G. Lipsey and Kelvin Lancaster, "The General Theory of Second Best," *The Review of Economic Studies* 24, no. 1 (1956): 11-32.

¹³ David Wiens, "Ideal Theory and the Theory of Second Best," University of California, San Diego, unpublished manuscript, www.dwiens.com.

¹⁴ Cf. Robert E. Goodin, "Political Ideals and Political Practice," *British Journal of Political Science* 25, no. 1 (1995): 37-56.

¹⁵ In addition to Beitz, *Political Theory and International Relations*, see Darrel Moellendorf, *Cosmopolitan Justice* (Boulder, Col.: Westview Press, 2002); and Thomas Pogge, *Realizing Rawls* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1989).

¹⁶ See Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, 66.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 266.

¹⁸ Bruce Bueno de Mesquita and Alastair Smith, "A Political Economy of Aid," *International Organization* 63, no. 2 (2009): 309-340.

¹⁹ The content of such a principle does not matter here, so long as there is a sensible way to give it content. What matters is that the principle locates the limit on permissible inequality somewhere other than *b/e*.

²⁰ Cf. Henry Petroski, *To Engineer is Human: The Role of Failure in Successful Design* (New York: Vintage Books, 1992).

²¹ Cf. Amartya Sen, *The Idea of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2009).

²² My claim pertains to core normative principles, as defined above. I do not claim that abstract moral theory is unhelpful; indeed, abstract moral theory is at least required to sort out the basic moral values that our principles should implement. Cf. Adam Swift, "The Value of Philosophy in Nonideal Circumstances," *Social Theory and Practice* 34, no. 3 (2008): 363-387.

²³ David Miller, "Two Ways to Think About Justice," *Politics, Philosophy and Economics* 1, no. 1 (2002): 5-28.

²⁴ Cf. Caney, *Justice Beyond Borders*, 29.

²⁵ Cf. Laura Valentini, "On The Apparent Paradox of Ideal Theory," *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 17, no. 3 (2009): 332-355.

²⁶ One cannot reply here by saying that we might nonetheless try to approximate ideal principles in nonideal circumstances. If "approximate" implies that the full set of ideal principles is not implemented as specified, then the theory of second best occludes this reply, as noted above.

²⁷ I also discuss these steps in David Wiens, "Prescribing Institutions Without Ideal Theory," *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 20, no. 1 (2012): 45-70. Although my

discussion here preserves the spirit of that earlier work, I now see that my earlier discussion of how to identify failures was more convoluted than it needs to be.

²⁸ Geoffrey Robertson, “Justice for the UN: A quiet revolution,” this volume.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, pp.

³⁰ This theme is repeated across a wide variety of sources. Among others, see Daron Acemoglu, Simon Johnson, and James A. Robinson, “The Colonial Origins of Comparative Development: An Empirical Investigation,” *American Economic Review* 91, no. 5 (2001): 1369–1401; Douglass C. North, *Institutions, Institutional Change and Economic Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990); and Amartya Sen, *Poverty and Famines: An Essay on Entitlement and Deprivation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1981).

³¹ Among others, see Macartan Humphreys and Robert H. Bates, “Political Institutions and Economic Policies: Lessons From Africa,” *British Journal of Political Science* 35 (2005): 403–428; and Charles Tilly, *Coercion, Capital, and European States, AD 990–1992*, revised edition (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1992).

³² Cf. Bruce Bueno de Mesquita et al., *The Logic of Political Survival* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 2003).

³³ Cf. Douglass C. North and Barry Weingast, “Constitutions and Commitment: The Evolution of Institutions Governing Public Choice in Seventeenth-Century England,” *Journal of Economic History* 49, no. 4 (1989): 803–832.

³⁴ In addition to those already cited, see Robert H. Bates and Da-Hsiang Donald Lien, “A Note on Taxation, Development, and Representative Government,” *Politics & Society* 14,

no. 1 (1985): 53–70; and Mancur Olson, “Dictatorship, Democracy, and Development,”
American Political Science Review 87, no. 3 (1993): 567–576.

³⁵ I elaborate this point, with additional examples from the global justice literature, in
David Wiens, "Demands of Justice, Feasible Alternatives, and the Need for Causal
Analysis," *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice* 13 (2013): 325–338.