Demands of Justice, Feasible Alternatives, and the Need for Causal Analysis

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Abstract Many political philosophers hold the *Feasible Alternatives Principle* (FAP): justice demands that we implement some reform of international institutions *P* only if *P* is feasible and *P* improves upon the status quo from the standpoint of justice. The FAP implies that any argument for a moral requirement to implement *P* must incorporate claims whose content pertains to the causal processes that explain the current state of affairs. Yet, philosophers routinely neglect the need to attend to actual causal processes. This undermines their arguments concerning moral requirements to reform international institutions. The upshot is that philosophers' arguments must engage in causal analysis to a greater extent than is typical.

Keywords global justice · international institutions · feasibility · causal mechanisms · methodology

Political philosophers often assert that whether justice demands that we reform international institutions in ways that would benefit the global poor depends on the existence of feasible alternatives to the institutional status quo. This is a simple "ought implies can" point. If there are no feasible alternatives to the status quo, then we can't improve the international system from the standpoint of justice; if we *can't* improve the international system from the standpoint of justice, then it is *not* the case that we *ought* to reform international institutions.

This view has methodological implications that philosophers have thus far neglected. To establish the truth of the claim that we are morally required to implement some institutional prescription *P*, one must argue that *P* is feasible and that *P* improves upon the status quo from the standpoint of justice. Any argument that *P* is feasible must argue that the actual causal processes that affect our ability to realize *P* are not likely to rule out *P*'s implementation. Any argument that *P* improves upon the

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status quo must argue that *P* is likely to intervene in actual causal processes in ways that yield improvements from the standpoint of justice. In brief, any argument for a moral requirement to implement *P* must attend closely to causal explanations for the phenomena we observe.

Recent philosophical work in international justice has become increasingly attentive to debates about causality in complementary social sciences, such as development economics and international relations. This is a welcome situation. Yet political philosophers routinely neglect the need to analyze the causal processes that generate the phenomena we observe.[1] Since actual causal processes impinge on the availability of alternatives to the status quo, this failing discredits arguments concerning the demands of international justice. A compelling argument that we have a duty to implement *P* must attend to actual causal processes to a greater extent than is currently typical.

Several clarifications are in order before I proceed. My claim is not merely that political philosophers ought to attend to, and avoid sloppy reasoning about, the facts. This is obvious. Nor do I claim that philosophers fail to make causal claims. This is false. Finally, I do not claim that philosophers must rely only on true causal explanations as opposed to false ones (although true explanations are obviously desirable). This is too demanding. Analyses of social causal processes are matters of ongoing debate among social scientists; philosophers need not wait until these debates are resolved before they theorize about the requirements of justice. My claim is just this. To show that we morally required to implement *P*, an argument must incorporate premises that pertain to *actual* (as opposed to hypothetical) causal processes. Put differently, any argument for a requirement to implement *P* must incorporate claims with a particular sort of content — claims that are about the actual causal processes that limit the range of feasible alternatives.[2] Simply incorporating such claims already pushes us beyond the methodological status quo.

1 Demands of Justice and Feasible Alternatives

It is plain that what we ought to do is, in general, limited by what we are able to do. This truism is codified by the familiar "ought implies can" principle: if I ought to *Q*, then I must be able to *Q*. This principle carries over to our reflections on the practical demands of global justice, including any duties we might have to reform international institutions.[3] Transposed to this context, the ought implies can principle

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[1] Despite using the more general terms "political philosopher" or "philosopher" throughout, I wish to make clear that my argument targets only philosophical work done under the familiar headings of "international political theory" or "global political theory."

[2] I put the point in terms of the content of the claims that must be incorporated to forestall the worry that I am simply ratcheting up the burden of proof philosophers must bear in showing that *P* is feasible or likely to improve upon the status quo. I do *not* argue here that philosophers must bear a heavier burden of proof than they have heretofore borne (although I think this is true). I argue that arguments regarding the practical demands of global justice must include among their premises claims that are about actual causal processes. Extant arguments typically leave out such claims.

[3] The term "international institutions" denotes the system of organizations, practices, and norms that govern the conduct of international actors, including states, nongovernmental organizations, corporations, and private individuals.

says: if an agent *A* ought to implement some institutional reform *P*, then *A* must be able to implement *P*.

It's not entirely clear what must be true for *A* to be able to implement an institutional reform prescription. Here's a natural proposal. If *A* ought to implement *P*, then *P* must be a feasible alternative to the status quo (cf. Pogge 2005a, 4; Pogge 2008, 25ff). This captures the basic "ought implies can" intuition. But we need to be clear about what "feasible" means before going much further. A detailed discussion of feasibility must be left for another time.[4] But a couple of items are worth noting here.

The basic idea of feasibility refers to constraints on our ability to pursue a proposed course of action. If we do not have the resources or technology required to implement *P*, then *P* is not feasible. But it may be true that, while we do not have the required resources or technology at *t*, we could acquire them at *t* + 1, in which case *P* will be feasible at *t* + 1. Hence, feasibility judgments are indexed to particular times (Gilabert and Lawford-Smith forthcoming). Yet we need not index duties to particular times. Instead, we can draw on Gilabert's notion of a dynamic duty: if *P* is infeasible at *t* but we can we can implement *O* at *t*, and *O* will realize the conditions required to implement *P* at *t* + 1, then we have a *dynamic duty* to implement *P*, which includes implementing *O* at *t* (Gilabert 2008, 19). Put differently, the fact that *P* is infeasible now does not mean that we do not have a duty to *P*. Instead, if we can foreseeably bring about the conditions that would make *P* feasible in the future, then we retain a duty to *P*, which includes a duty to bring about the conditions required to make *P* feasible. We have a duty to implement *P* so long as *P* is *foreseeably* feasible.

An important type of feasibility constraint concerns motivational factors. It seems right to judge *P* infeasible if the relevant actors staunchly refuse to implement *P*. For example, if a sufficient number of legislators resist passing legislation that raises taxes, then we properly deem the legislation infeasible. Or if a sufficient number of countries resist accession to a particular international trade treaty, we rightly judge the treaty's enactment infeasible. But we do not want agents to be able to avoid incurring a duty to reform international institutions simply because they resist being motivated to do so. Taken to the extreme, our duties would then consist entirely in undertaking those institutional reforms that already serve our own interests. This is surely wrong. Yet any feasibility assessment must take (entrenched) motivational resistance seriously.[5] How can our feasibility assessments appropriately account for agents' motivational limitations without letting them off the moral hook simply because they resist being morally motivated?

One thing we should certainly not say is that *P* is feasible only if it could be implemented assuming that all the relevant agents *are (in fact)* motivated to implement *P*. Then the argument that justice demands that we implement *P* simply assumes compliance with the demands of the moral theory that requires *P*. To wit, justice requires that we implement *P* because *P* is a feasible alternative to the status quo; we judge *P* a feasible alternative to the status quo because we assume all the relevant agents are motivated to comply with the demands of the moral theory that requires implementing

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4 I discuss feasibility at length in Wiens 2012.

5 Thanks to an anonymous reviewer for pressing me to make clear that the relevant constraint here is *resistance* to being appropriately motivated, not motivational *incapacity*.

P. This assessment of *P*'s feasibility is surely inappropriate for conditions, like ours, where many agents refuse to comply with the demands of justice.

Another way to proceed is to judge *P* feasible only if the relevant agents *could be* motivated to implement *P*. But how should we judge the possibility of motivating the relevant agents to implement *P*? One way is to idealize the agents: *A* could be motivated to implement *P* if *A* were a suitably described ideal agent — *A* had access to the relevant facts, was sufficiently rational, etc. But this only shows that implementing *P* is feasible for ideal agents and, hence, only required of ideal agents. Judgments about what we ought to do here and now must account for the limitations of actual agents. Another option is to appeal to actual agents' motivational limitations when judging the possibility of motivating them to implement *P*. But this means that implementing *P* will be infeasible whenever an agent, on the basis of transparently bad reasons, stubbornly resists any attempt to motivate her to implement *P*. This leaves us with the implausible claim that an agent is morally required to implement *P* only when doing so aligns with her current motivations.

I propose to proceed as follows: *A* ought to implement *P* only if implementing *P* is feasible assuming *A* is motivated to implement *P* and is willing to bear the morally required costs of implementing *P*. That is, *P* is feasible only if there are no barriers to implementing *P* aside from *A*'s (potential) motivational deficit. This formulation has two advantages. First, it does not let the agent settle the content of her duties by simply resisting compliance with the demands of justice. Second, it accounts for the motivational limitations of others, which are included among the other barriers to implementing *P*. Now, implementing *P* will be infeasible only if *others'* resistance — which lies (partly) beyond *A*'s control — presents a barrier to implementing *P*. *A*'s own resistance to being appropriately motivated has no affect on our judgment regarding the feasibility of implementing *P*.[6]

One might worry that, by focusing on feasibility, I have transmuted the "ought implies can" principles to an "ought implies likely" principle. The latter principle is surely wrong, continues the objection. My duty to implement *P* depends not on my being likely to implement *P*, but on it being *possible* for me to implement *P*. This is right, as far as it goes. In part, the objection is motivated by a worry about agents' motivational limitations unduly restricting the content of our duties. I have already dealt with this concern. Note further that I have been careful to discuss feasibility constraints in negative terms: justice demands that we to implement *P* only if actual conditions are not likely to prevent implementation of *P*. This is akin to saying that we are required to implement *P* only if it is *unlikely* that we *can't* implement *P*, which is quite different from saying that we have a duty to implement *P* only if we are likely to implement *P* or only if *P*'s implementation is likely to be successful.

Finally, the moral requirements we are focused on here concern the institutional arrangements we ought to implement *given our actual conditions*. This restricts our attention to institutional schemes that are possible *given the actual limitations* on our capacity to implement institutional reforms. This is what feasibility judgments do — they restrict our attention to those possibilities that are salient given certain con-

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[6] Some might want to say that *A* could have a duty to motivate others to implement *P*, if doing so is feasible. Such a duty is covered by my appeal to dynamic duties above.

straints on our capacity to carry out prescriptions. Put simply, feasibility judgments pick out the possibilities that are relevant for judging whether agents like us, in our circumstances, *can* implement P.[7] So my focus on feasible alternatives implies a restricted "ought implies can" principle. Given the specific context in which a requirement to reform international institutions is to be satisfied, we appropriately restrict our attention to the institutional schemes that are possible given the ways in which that context constrains our capacity to discharge those duties.

So P must be feasible if I have a duty to implement P. In addition, P must also improve upon the status quo from the standpoint of justice. Perhaps this latter condition is obvious, as it is often assumed when talking about feasible alternatives. To make it clear that these conditions go hand-in-hand, let's summarize them with a single principle. Call this the *Feasible Alternatives Principle*.

FAP: Justice requires that an agent *A* implement a prescription *P* only if
   1. *P* is feasible, assuming *A* is motivated to implement *P* and willingly bears the morally required costs of implementing P,[8] and
   2. *P* improves upon the status quo from the standpoint of justice.

I will call (1) the *feasibility condition* and (2) the *efficacy condition*.

Note that these two conditions are not sufficient for showing that we are morally required to implement *P*. They are only necessary. But arguing that *P* satisfies each of these has noteworthy implications for arguments concerning moral requirements to reform international institutions. I turn to these now.

2 Feasible Alternatives and Causal Analysis

If the FAP is right, then philosophers straightforwardly bear two burdens in establishing that justice requires us to implement some institutional reform. First, they must argue that *P* satisfies the feasibility condition; second, they must argue that *P* satisfies the efficacy condition. Just how conclusive philosophers' claims must be regarding *P*'s feasibility and efficacy is beside my point here. I'm more interested in the *content* of the claims philosophers must incorporate when arguing that *P* is both feasible and effective. I'm satisfied to concede here that philosophers' burden of proof is reasonably light.

For some *P* to be feasible, it must be true that the causal processes that engender the status quo do not prevent us from implementing *P*. Hence, to show that *P* is feasible, one must analyze the actual causal processes that impinge on our capacity to implement *P* and show that these processes are not likely to block *P*'s implementation. Similarly, for some *P* to effectively improve upon the status quo, it must be true that *P* intervenes in or interacts with extant causal processes in ways that generate improvements from the standpoint of justice. Hence, to show that *P* satisfies the efficacy condition, one must analyze the actual causal processes that generate current states

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[7] I defend this view in Wiens 2012.

[8] For convenience, I'll drop this qualification for the remainder of the paper. But it should be read into any subsequent claim regarding *P*'s feasibility, unless explicitly noted otherwise.

of affairs and show that *P* is likely to interact with these causal processes in justice-enhancing ways. In either case, to show that we are morally required to implement *P*, an argument must incorporate analyses of actual causal processes. Philosophers must do *causal analysis* if they are to establish that we are subject to a moral demand to implement their proposed institutional reforms.

What precisely is causal analysis? Let's start by distinguishing causal analysis from other sorts of descriptive information. To fix terms, say that *descriptive information* tells us how the social world *is* and how it came to be that way or how it could come to be some other way, rather than how it *ought to be* or how it ought to come to be some way. This definition admits multifarious types:

– *Data points:* points of fact demonstrable by empirical methods; for example, that 2.6 billion people live on less than $2 per day.
– *Correlation:* the demonstration of a statistical relationship between two or more variables; for example, that democratic governance is statistically associated with higher levels of economic development.
– *Narrative:* a descriptive ordering of events according to some organizational principles (typically time, but also topical relevance or causal salience); for example, a chronology of European diplomatic affairs following the Congress of Vienna.
– *Taxonomy (classification):* a partition of objects (including states of affairs) according to shared characteristics; for example, a classification of countries into regime types.
– *Interpretive:* an account of the (symbolic, cultural, or normative) meaning or significance attributed (or attributable) to particular practices or events; for example, Clifford Geertz's claim that cockfights are "fundamentally a dramatization of [Balinese] status concerns" (Geertz 1973, 437).
– *Causal:* statements regarding a process that generates some empirical regularity or a particular state of affairs.

This list clarifies the ways in which causal information differs from other types of descriptive information. Let's focus on the last item. The definition of *causal information* I have offered counts as causal information a set of (true) causal statements. For example, on this definition, the statement "inclement weather causes a decrease in attendance at outdoor sporting events" counts as causal information. My claim is not that philosophers' arguments must incorporate more causal statements; these abound. To more precisely specify my claim, we need to distinguish causal *information* in general from causal *analysis* in particular. We do *causal analysis* when we identify the salient components of a process that generates an outcome and specify their interrelationships. This latter part includes specifying how the components interact and how changes in one part of the process affect (the operation of) other components.

Put this way, causal analysis is concerned with identifying causal mechanisms. In Elster's words, identifying a (social) *causal mechanism* is a matter of "opening up the black box" and identifying the "cogs and wheels" that connect a cause *C* with its effect *E* (Elster 2007, ch. 2; 1989, p. 3).[9] Less metaphorically, a statement of a causal mechanism provides a detailed account of a connection that enables *C* to reliably generate *E*.

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[9] For a more detailed introduction to causal mechanisms and their role in social explanation, see the essays in Hedström and Swedberg 1998.

Continuing with the earlier example, a causal analysis of attendance at outdoor sporting events identifies the components of the causal link between inclement weather and attendance; for example, that the weather changes some individuals' recreation preferences, or that the weather blocks some travel routes.

In view of the preceding, my main claim is precisely this. To show that we are morally required to implement some proposed institutional reform, an argument must incorporate premises pertaining to (1) the extent to which the causal mechanisms generating the injustice in question permit implementation of the proposed reform, and (2) the extent to which the proposed reform will interact with the causal mechanisms generating the injustice in ways that are likely to be justice-improving. In view of the FAP, failing to incorporate claims pertaining to (1) or (2) vitiates any argument for a moral requirement to implement the proposed reform.

3 The Need for Causal Analysis

Don't political philosophers already undertake causal analyses to show that their proposed reforms meet the feasibility and efficacy conditions? In my view, philosophers routinely neglect to incorporate causal analysis into their arguments concerning international justice and institutional design. Consequently, their arguments are unconvincing.

Demonstrating that these omissions are routine is a difficult task. A decisive argument would require enumerating enough examples to show that they are sufficiently widespread. This is beyond the scope of a short paper and would be tedious in any case. In lieu of a comprehensive literature survey, I present two examples that are both influential and representative of a common type of argument. The first is an example of the ways in which philosophers leave out important claims regarding the extent to which their proposals meet the feasibility condition; the second illustrates how philosophers leave out important claims concerning the extent to which their proposals meet the efficacy condition. My hope is that one will recognize the generality of the lessons I draw from these examples in virtue of the latter's common and familiar features.

3.1 Causal Analysis and the Feasibility Condition

Justice demands that we implement some institutional prescription P only if P's implementation is feasible assuming the relevant agents' willingness to implement P. Any argument that P is feasible must show that extant causal processes are not likely to block P's implementation. Hence, an argument that justice requires us to implement P must incorporate the following three distinct types of claims: (1) claims regarding the causal mechanisms that generate the current state of affairs; (2) claims regarding the causal processes that would be required to implement P; and (3) claims regarding the ways in which the causal processes in (2) would interact with those specified in (1). Most philosophers' neglect the need to incorporate type (1) claims.

Thomas Pogge is among the philosophers who most consistently concerns himself with the feasibility of his proposals; not surprisingly, his work often engages the relevant social scientific literature. So Pogge's influential "Global Resources Dividend" (GRD) proposal serves as a strong example with which to make my case. In Pogge's words, "[t]he GRD proposal is meant to show that there are feasible alternative ways of organizing our global economic order, that the choice among these alternatives makes a substantial difference to how much severe poverty there is worldwide, and that there are weighty moral reasons to make this choice so as to minimize such poverty" (Pogge 2008, 203). Moreover, Pogge acknowledges that our normative assessment of the status quo hangs on the feasibility of alternatives such as the GRD. In his words,

> [W]e are *harming* the global poor if and insofar as we collaborate in imposing an *unjust* global institutional order upon them. And this institutional order is definitely unjust if and insofar as it foreseeably perpetuates large scale human rights deficits that would be reasonably avoidable through feasible institutional modifications. (Pogge 2005b, 5, original emphasis.)[10]

So what does Pogge say to support the claim that the GRD is feasible?

First, the GRD is a "modest proposal" in that it does not propose a demanding reform to the existing structure of entitlements over natural resources; instead, it leaves "each government in control of the natural resources in its territory."[11] This is important if the GRD is to garner "the support necessary to implement it" as a self-sustaining reform. Second, after an initial stage where we must raise large sums of money to raise the global poor above a threshold marking a minimally decent quality of life, the GRD is likely to involve relatively small ongoing transfers from the global rich to the global poor. Third, implementing the GRD would be relatively costless. By exacting a tax of $3 per barrel on extracted oil, the GRD is estimated to raise $90 billion from oil alone. This amounts to a mere 0.14% of global product, which is estimated to be $63 trillion in current US dollars (World Bank 2011). End-users of petroleum products would not pay much either; a $3 per barrel GRD on oil would only raise the price of gasoline by $0.07 per gallon. On Pogge's view, the preceding shows that "[i]t is thus clearly possible — without major changes to our global economic order — to eradicate world hunger within a few years by raising sufficient revenue stream from a limited number of resources and pollutants" (Pogge 2008, 212f).

Let's concede Pogge's conclusion — surely there is *a* possible world at which we can improve the status quo from the standpoint of justice with relatively minor changes. But has Pogge shown that his GRD proposal is *feasible*? In other words, has Pogge shown that implementing the GRD is possible given the actual constraints on our capacity to implement institutional reforms? Not yet. Not until he considers the extent to which extant causal processes permit or prevent implementation of an

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[10] Pogge (2005a, 60) advances four necessary conditions for holding an agent morally responsible for observed human rights deficits: (1) the agent "must *cooperate* in imposing an institutional order" that engenders the deficits; (2) the institutions in question must *foreseeably* engender the deficits; (3) the deficits must "be *reasonably avoidable* in the sense that an alternative design of the relevant institutional order would not produce comparable" deficits; and (4) the "availability of such an alternative design must also be *foreseeable*." Conditions (3) and (4) are the important ones for my purposes here.

[11] The points made in this paragraph are drawn from Pogge 2008, 211ff.

effective GRD. This requires making some claims about the causal mechanisms that engender the status quo.

At a minimum, we must analyze those processes that affect the content of international agreements and the likelihood of successful cooperation. Pogge does acknowledge one roadblock—US and EU resistance to the proposal (Pogge 2008, 217). But he must also consider other potential obstacles. International cooperation theorists tell us that sustainable international cooperation can be induced if states interact repeatedly on a particular issue. International institutions can facilitate cooperation by creating shared expectations for future interactions, reducing transaction and information costs, and facilitating reciprocity as a strategy (Axelrod and Keohane 1985; Keohane 1984). But, as Fearon (1998) argues, successful international cooperation must solve two problems: a bargaining problem, which determines the content of the agreement; and an enforcement problem, which assures compliance with the terms of the agreement. In some cases, the factors that facilitate resolution of one problem can inhibit resolution of the other. To wit, increasing interaction between states generates an expectation that an agreement will be credibly enforced. But, expecting to be bound by the terms of the deal, a state has incentive to hold out in bargaining to secure more favorable terms. So while increasing interactions facilitates enforcement, it can actually inhibit agreement.

These crosscutting effects become exacerbated as the significance of the distributional consequences increase (Koremenos, Lipson, and Snidal 2001). The more there is at stake and the greater the conflict over the potential outcomes, the more difficult it can become to reach a binding agreement. This is especially true when the terms compel states to deviate substantially from what they would have done in the absence of the agreement (Downs, Rocke, and Barsoom 1996). The Doha round of the World Trade Organization negotiations is a case in point; the issue of extant agricultural subsidies (among others) has inhibited agreement in large part because of the significant distributional conflict created by these subsidies.

The GRD has significant distributional consequences for all involved because it would initiate massive transfers (in absolute terms) from resource extracting states and resource end users to the global poor. Moreover, the interests of different countries pull them in starkly competing directions. Rich countries want to spend less on resources and send less money to poor countries; poor countries want to have their resource consumption subsidized. Net exporting countries would worry about the effect of the GRD on demand; net importing countries would resist the inevitable price increases. Even if it is true that the price increase per gallon is small, these add up to significant cost increases at the quantities consumed by industrial firms. These increases would be especially worrisome for countries struggling to increase their level of development. Under Pogge's scheme, these latter countries would likely wind up having their resource consumption subsidized by the GRD. But this only generates further distributional conflict, thereby potentially inhibiting agreement. Note that these barriers to cooperation assume that the end bargaining result would be an effective GRD; they don't yet account for the bargaining difficulties that would inevitably arise due to worries about credible enforcement.

Pogge has two responses to the challenge that states will not agree to the GRD. One claims that the GRD serves states' ultimate interests in security and stability by promoting development and democratization (Pogge 2008, 218f). But this neglects the fact that long term interests often conflict with short term interests, and that short term interests usually win out in international politics. Politicians have short time horizons;

they are predominantly concerned with what will keep them in power in the next time period. Although the GRD serves many long term interests, it conflicts with the short term interest of increasing access to valuable resources at low cost. Moreover, several proposals for global taxation schemes, such as a Currency Transaction (Tobin) Tax or a Carbon Tax, have been floating around for quite some time. Each of these can be shown to serve states' ultimate interests, yet both continue to attract significant resistance at the international level. Pogge's attempt to show that the GRD is feasible must engage with explanations for resistance to these similar proposals. What are the barriers to their implementation at the international level? How, if at all, could the GRD overcome these barriers? These are the sorts of issues that Pogge's proposal must tackle. Until he does, he has not shown that the GRD is feasible. And, given the FAP, until he shows that implementing the GRD (or some other proposal) is likely to be feasible, his argument that the institutional status quo is harming the global poor or that justice requires that we reform the status quo remains unconvincing.

Pogge's second response claims that, even if implementing the GRD is unrealistic, we should continue to insist on the injustice of the institutional status quo (Pogge 2008, 217). Perhaps. (Although, absent foreseeably available feasible alternatives, such insistence appears inconsistent with the FAP, which Pogge endorses.) But this response misses my point. Pogge's argument that the institutional status quo is unjust appeals to the GRD to preempt challenges that point to the unavailability of feasible alternatives (see Pogge 2008, sec. 8.4). I am here arguing that, for this appeal to the GRD to be successful, Pogge's argument *that the GRD presents a feasible alternative* must at a minimum incorporate an analysis of the causal mechanisms that explain successful international cooperation of the sort that would be required to implement the GRD. Further, Pogge's argument must include an analysis of how attempts to implement the GRD can avoid extant roadblocks to the required international cooperation. Pogge has yet to present such analyses, so his argument for the feasibility of the GRD is not convincing. Of course, challenging the feasibility of the GRD does not show that *no* feasible alternatives exist; Pogge himself has offered other proposals that deserve careful consideration.[12] Hence, I do not claim to have shown that we have no duties to reform the institutional status quo. I only claim to have shown that any argument Pogge might provide for the feasibility of any of his prescriptions — which are offered to bolster his argument that the institutional status quo is unjust — must incorporate claims about the causal processes that engender the current states of affairs.

Nor have I aimed to prove that the GRD itself is infeasible. True, the issues I raise pose prima facie challenges to Pogge's claim that it is feasible. But this only illustrates that the GRD proposal cannot obviously overcome some of the salient feasibility obstacles. This is further reason for Pogge to engage the challenges I pose.

3.2 Causal Analysis and the Efficacy Condition

Justice demands that we implement some institutional prescription *P* only if *P* is likely to improve upon the status quo from the standpoint of justice. Any argument that *P* is

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[12]   And, indeed, Pogge charges defenders of the status quo with a burden to prove that there are no feasible alternatives; see Pogge 2008, 215.

likely to improve upon the status quo must show that P is likely to interact with the causal processes generating the status quo in ways that are justice-enhancing. Hence, an argument that we are morally required to implement P must incorporate at least three distinct types of claims: (1) claims regarding the causal mechanisms that generate the current state of affairs; (2) claims regarding the causal mechanisms that could be set in motion by P; and (3) claims regarding the ways in which P would causally interact with extant causal mechanisms. Sometimes philosophers neglect the need to incorporate all three types of claims. Those who do discuss causal mechanisms typically highlight the hypothetical mechanisms that might be set in motion by their proposal, while neglecting to discuss (1) and (3).

Consider, as a representative example, Simon Caney's (2005; 2006) discussion of global institutional design. Caney's is among the most conscientious attempts to attend to causal mechanisms in making an institutional design prescription. Yet, in neglecting to analyze extant causal mechanisms, his argument that his proposal would be justice-enhancing is unconvincing.

Caney argues that there should be a layer of suprastate institutions that have authority to constrain the activity of states in pursuit of cosmopolitan objectives. Among his recommendations are the following (see Caney 2005, 161–162; cf. Caney 2006, sec. 3).

- Democratically-elected global and regional bodies that exercise authority over states (e.g., an elected assembly at the United Nations).
- Democratization of the World Trade Organization.
- Creation of a new global economic institution to coordinate existing economic institutions such as the International Monetary Fund and World Bank and ensure that these organizations adhere to cosmopolitan principles.
- Establishment of a permanent UN volunteer military force to facilitate swift military response to humanitarian crimes within states.
- Expanding the jurisdiction of the International Court of Justice beyond interstate disputes, as well as making its jurisdiction mandatory.

Why should we adopt such an institutional framework? Caney gives numerous reasons, but these can be adequately summarized by his discussion of the four "types of mechanism by which international institutions serve persons' fundamental rights" (Caney 2006, 742ff).

1. The proposed suprastate institutions can help solve collective action problems.
2. The proposed suprastate institutions can enforce compliance with cosmopolitan principles and hold powerful agents accountable.
3. The proposed suprastate institutions can empower weak agents to protect their interests.
4. The proposed suprastate institutions can transform powerful agents' incentives.[13]

Caney's discussion of these mechanisms is diligent; he engages with a wide range of empirical literature. Yet he only partially meets the requirements for showing that we

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[13] Caney also offers a non-instrumental reason for adopting his framework, namely, that individuals have a moral right to "hold accountable — through democratic bodies — the social and economic institutions that exert an impact on what they are able to do" (Caney 2005, 156). This may be a good reason to adopt Caney's institutional proposals, but it is irrelevant for thinking about whether they satisfy the efficacy condition.

ought to implement his institutional framework. At most, Caney has speculated about
the mechanisms by which his proposed framework *could* improve upon the status quo.
But he says too little about the extant causal processes that generate the status quo or
how his proposal would causally interact with these extant processes.

As just one example, take Caney's discussion of the ways in which his proposed
institutions could be useful for solving collective action problems. Assume his claim
is true — the proposed institutions could help solve collective action problems. On
Caney's view, an institutional reform would be justice-enhancing only if it improved
the protection of individuals' fundamental interests in security and avoiding poverty
(Caney 2006, 725). So whether or not his proposed institutions' capacity to solve
collective action problems would effectively improve upon the status quo depends
on whether existing barriers to "protecting persons' fundamental rights" arise from
collective action problems. Caney does not present evidence either way. Moreover,
there are some good reasons to think collective action problems might contribute very
little to the most serious injustices.

Collective action problems arise when multiple agents must work together to real-
ize an outcome that benefits each member of the group, whether or not she contributed
to its realization. Since each member benefits regardless of her level of contribution,
and since contribution is typically costly, each agent has an incentive to "free-ride" on
others' contributions, realizing the benefit without paying the cost. If too many peo-
ple free-ride, then too few people contribute and the agents forfeit the benefit. Even if
each agent would prefer cooperation to no cooperation, the temptation to free-ride is
often strong enough to inhibit cooperation. Alternatively, uncertainty regarding oth-
ers' commitment to contribute could inhibit cooperation if being taken advantage of
by free-riders is costly.[14]

A key feature of collective action problems is that all parties have an interest in
realizing an objective where each benefits. A salient question for Caney, then, is the
extent to which current shortfalls in protecting people's rights are due to states' failure
to realize a common objective that would generate benefits shared by all their con-
stituents. Let's grant that this is true if we look to long term interests — each state
(and its constituents) would benefit in the long run from the peace, stability, and pros-
perity that would result from a world in which people's fundamental rights were effec-
tively protected. Nevertheless, many current shortfalls of justice seem better explained
by states' *conflicting* objectives rather than their failure to secure cooperation in pur-
suit of common objectives. Again, this is due to the magnitude of the distributional
consequences that arise from implementing reforms that would effectively serve the
interests of the global poor. Implementing these reforms will be costly for the rich and
powerful, requiring them to give up money, privilege, and power with which many are
unwilling to part.

We might try to redescribe the current situation as a collective action problem
where a just international system is taken to be a long run common objective, and then
classify conflicting short run objectives as manifestations of free-riding. Described
this way, states resist cooperating in the short term because they wish to experience
the benefits of achieving justice in the long run without paying the cost in the short run.

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[14] See Hardin 1982 and Olson 1971 for general discussions of collective action problems.

But realization of the ultimate goal is too distant to plausibly say that it informs states' bargaining over international cooperative endeavors. Put differently, this misdescribes the strategic problem *as the parties see it*. From states' point of view, they often have conflicting objectives rather than a distant shared objective for which they can't seem to secure sufficient levels of cooperation.

Nothing I have said rules out the fact that interstate collective action problems exist and that some of these causally contribute to current shortfalls in individuals' rights protection. My point is rather that, to show what it purports to establish, Caney's argument that his proposed solutions would likely improve upon the status quo must incorporate a causal analysis of current shortfalls in justice. At the limit, where collective action failures do not explain *any* of the current shortfalls, the fact that Caney's proposed institutions would help solve collective action problems is of no consequence. Institutions that solve collective actions problems would have no effect on the realization of a more just state of affairs. Of course, we are not at that limit, so our analysis of Caney's proposal must be more nuanced. My point is simply that any assessment of a reform's efficacy must analyze the causal processes that generate actual shortfalls from the standpoint of justice and assess the extent to which the reform interacts with those processes in ways that are likely to improve upon the status quo. Caney, like many others, has yet to do this. Given the FAP, any argument that justice requires us to implement his proposed institutional alternative remains unconvincing until he does.

4 Practical Implications

I have argued that any argument to show that we are morally required to reform international institutions must incorporate analyses of extant social causal processes. That political philosophers routinely neglect the need for causal analysis undermines their arguments concerning any such requirement. Previous discussions seeking to motivate more effective interaction between philosophy and the social sciences have located the problems elsewhere — for example, reliance on insufficient data (Wenar 2003) or appeals to the wrong kind of data (Hassoun 2010). To be sure, data problems exist. But effective incorporation of descriptive information does not merely adduce enough of the right kind of data. Ultimately, compelling arguments regarding the demands of international justice rely on *credible explanations of the data*. This requires rigorously analyzing causal mechanisms.

Practically, the preceding discussion suggests that philosophers who are interested in enumerating the demands of international justice must *critically engage* — even if only as collaborators — in the project of explaining the causes of the phenomena with which they are concerned. This is not to say that political philosophers should become full-time social scientists. We divide the labor for a reason — there are gains to be had from specialization. Normative and conceptual considerations have their rightful place and philosophers are well-placed to give them their due. But, as the FAP implies, normatively assessing current states of affairs requires knowing something about their causal antecedents; making effective prescriptions requires understanding the causal logic of the situations we seek to redress. Such insight does not require that

philosophers produce novel explanations, but it does require analytically taking apart causal processes and scrutinizing the role played by each of the moving parts, as well as their interconnections. Doing this with adequate rigor requires critically engaging social science *on its own terms*.[15] To be sure, this makes philosophical work more difficult: philosophers can no longer satisfy themselves with giving the relevant philosophical issues adequate treatment. But difficulty is no objection considering what's at stake — nothing less than the cogency of our assessment of international institutions and our duties to reform them.

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[15] I stress "on its own terms" because philosophers sometimes lapse into meta-level discussions about the limits of social scientific research methods when what is called for is ground-level criticism of an explanation's capacity to account for the relevant data. Risse (2005, 87ff) provides an example of such a lapse.

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