A ROLE FOR IDEAL THEORY
IN LIGHT OF
THE THEORY OF SECOND BEST

by

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A thesis submitted to the Department of Philosophy
In conformity with the requirements for
the degree of Masters of Arts

Queen’s University
Kingston, Ontario, Canada
(October, 2015)

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Abstract

Political theorists, in increasing frequency, have focused on the application of theories of justice to concrete social issues and policy prescriptions. This so called “policy turn” has made it ever more important to reflect upon the goal of political theory. At the heart of this debate is a concern for action-guidance and a dissatisfaction with what political philosophy has offered in terms of practical relevance. The ideal guidance approach to ideal theory, best exemplified by John Rawls, holds a complementary relation between ideal and non-ideal theory, in which the former provides the goal for the latter to approximate. This approach to ideal theory, however, has been challenged by the Theory of the Second Best which undermines the assumption that simply approximating an ideal will result in the second best available option. Despite this challenge from the TOSB it will be the project of this paper to defend a more indirect role for ideal theory in political theorizing.

My thesis is organized as follows. Chapter 2 will introduce the concept of ideal theory and fact sensitivity and provide a brief overview of how philosophers have attempted to define these concepts. I will argue that it is important to distinguish the ideal guidance approach from more epistemological approaches to theorizing about justice. In chapter 3, I will examine a unique challenge to the ideal guidance approach to ideal theory, the Theory of Second Best (TOSB). In chapter 4, I will discuss how comparative approaches to justice attempt to construct a theory of justice in light of the TOSB by rejecting the use of ideal theory for real world reform. Finally, in chapter 5, I will mount a moderate defense for the use of ideal theory in normative political theorizing.
Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude and thanks to my supervisor, Will Kymlicka, for all his encouragement and insightful comments that made the completion of this project possible.

I would also like to extend my thanks to my fellow graduate students in the philosophy department for the stimulating conversations and to my parents who have supported me, always.
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Chapter 1

Introduction

Political theorists, in increasing frequency, have focused on the application of theories of justice to concrete social issues and policy prescriptions. This so called “policy turn” has made it ever more important to reflect upon the goal of political theory. Methodological issues regarding ideal and non-ideal theory have come to the forefront of contemporary debate. At the heart of this debate is a concern for action-guidance and a dissatisfaction with what political philosophy has offered in terms of practical relevance. In the Idea of Justice Amartya Sen assesses two ways to theorize about justice that centre on this very issue, what he calls the “transcendental” and “comparative approach”. The transcendental approach (or what is often called ideal theory) aims at “identifying perfectly just societal arrangements” while the comparative approach (or non-ideal theory) simply attempts to provide a ranking of feasible alternative states of affairs.

At first glance these two approaches to theorizing about justice seem to pursue different goals. Ideal theory seems to be a mode of theorizing intended to clarify what the ideal of justice is, regardless of its real world application. In contrast the comparative approach, which seeks to rank feasible states of affairs, appears to be better suited for practical guidance and real world reform. However, this is to ignore an approach to ideal theory that seems to reconcile these two methods, namely what David Wiens’ calls the ideal guidance approach.\(^1\)

\(^1\) Wiens (2015a)
The ideal guidance approach to ideal theory, perhaps best exemplified by John Rawls, holds a complementary relation between ideal and non-ideal theory. Rather than ideal theory simply serving to elucidate the concept of justice it also determines the set of principles that can serve as an appropriate normative criterion for the evaluation of our current societal arrangements. Ideal theory, the argument goes, is needed in order to determine in what way present circumstances are non-ideal. Understood this way, ideal theory is in fact action guiding despite claims otherwise since it provides a set of criteria or a benchmark which we should reference when choosing amongst feasible alternative states of affairs.

Although at first appearing to dissolve the conflict between ideal and non-ideal theory, the ideal guidance approach is challenged by the Theory of Second Best (TOSB). The TOSB—put forward by economists Richard Lipsey and Kevin Lancaster—shows that a principle that is descriptively close to a desired ideal does not mean that it is in fact the best feasible alternative available. Although it may end up being the case that the best policy available is the one that most resembles our desired ideal, the TOSB claims we are unjustified in assuming that this is the case.

The TOSB presents a serious challenge to the claim that ideal guidance is action guiding, leading some theorists to adopt a comparative approach to justice which eschews ideal theory all together. Amartya Sen and David Wiens argue that ideal theory is not necessary to determine a partial ordering of feasible alternative states of affairs. Despite this, Amartya Sen admits that “there might well be some less obvious connection, some relationship between the transcendental and the comparative that could make the transcendental approach the right way of proceeding to comparative assessments.
It is the project of this thesis to attempt to provide this less obvious connection. In particular I will argue that despite the challenges of the TOSB there remains a more indirect role for ideal theory in political theorizing.

My thesis is organized as follows. Chapter 2 will introduce the concept of ideal theory and fact sensitivity and provide a brief overview of how philosophers have attempted to define these concepts. I will argue that it is important to distinguish the ideal guidance approach from more epistemological approaches to theorizing about justice. In chapter 3, I will examine a unique challenge to the ideal guidance approach to ideal theory, the Theory of Second Best (TOSB). In chapter 4, I will discuss how comparative approaches to justice attempt to construct a theory of justice in light of the TOSB by rejecting the use of ideal theory for real world reform. Finally, in chapter 5, I will mount a moderate defense for the use of ideal theory in normative political theorizing.

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2 Sen (2009), 96
Chapter 2
The Ideal Theory Debate

2.1 Introduction

Over the past few decades, the debate among political philosophers on the meta-theoretical issue of how it is we ought to go about doing political philosophy has intensified. This has been marked by a renewed focus on the concepts of ideal and non-ideal theory. Although (as we will see below) the exact definition of ideal and non-ideal theory is contested, the debate itself can be said to deal with certain fundamental questions such as: What is the function of a principle of justice? To what extent should human nature along with social facts and costs, constrain our theory of justice? Or conversely, to what extent should principles of justice be justified independent of these constraints? It is the project of this chapter to provide a brief overview of how political philosophers have attempted to categorize and answer these questions.

The treatment of the debate will include: (2.2) an overview of the main characterizations of the ideal theory debate. (2.3) A description of one of the most widely used metrics to describe the ideal/non-ideal distinction (fact-sensitivity) and the dangers faced on either end of the fact-sensitivity spectrum. (2.4) An argument for the inclusion of action-guidance in order to fully capture the ideal/non-ideal distinction, especially in regards to Rawlsian moderate idealism. (2.5) Finally, a brief summary of the theoretical insights that will inform the ensuing chapters. The main lessons from this chapter will be twofold: (1) we need to characterize the ideal and non-ideal debate as more than a distinction between fact-sensitive and fact-insensitive theories; and (2) failing to do so overlooks the distinct character of Rawlsian moderate idealism.
2.2 Ideal by What Metric?

As stated above, there is a lack of agreement among political theorists as to what makes a theory of justice ideal.\(^3\) There has been an impressive amount of scholarly work dedicated to simply reining in the debate by attempting to map out the various uses of the non-ideal and ideal labels. For example, Laura Valentini in a recent article identifies three distinct sets of issues that get wrapped up in the ideal vs. non-ideal theory debate; (1) compliance, (2) feasibility and (3) the goal or purpose of the theory. It is worth pausing for a moment to fully flesh out these three different categorizations.

**The Compliance Metric:** Perhaps one of the earliest understandings of the ideal/non-ideal debate originates in John Rawls’ *A Theory of Justice*. For Rawls, ideal theory was applicable to situations in which “[e]veryone is presumed to act justly and to do his part in upholding just institutions.”\(^4\) This is what Rawls calls “strict compliance theory” or full compliance, in which citizens are presumed to automatically support and comply with the theorized institutions.\(^5\) Non-ideal theory, on the other hand is applicable to circumstances of “partial compliance” in which support and compliance with institutions is not merely taken for granted. Understood in this way the debate regarding ideal and non-ideal theory is a debate about what obligations we have as citizens in situations of full compliance and what obligations we may have in situations of partial compliance.

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\(^3\) Valentini (2009), Swift (2008), Hamlin and Stemplowska (2010).

\(^4\) Rawls (1999), 8

\(^5\) This strict compliance assumption is at least assumed initially, some institutions despite being conceived under ideal conditions may strain commitment. C.f. John Simmons (2010)
**The Feasibility Metric:** A further and broader understanding of the ideal/non-ideal debate is characterized as a disagreement regarding whether or not considerations of feasibility are relevant to our normative political theorizing. That is to say, whether or not feasibility should constrain what we take to be a just state of affairs. Although what counts as a feasible state of affairs is itself a matter of debate Anca Gheaus provides us with a broad definition, namely a state of affairs “that we know we could achieve”. As we will see below, critics often warn that too much attention paid to feasibility will unduly limit the horizon of possible social change instilling a status quo bias into our normative theorizing. Conversely, by abstracting too far away from considerations of feasibility one runs the risk of rendering their theory of justice practically inert.

**The Goal of the Theory:** The final understanding of the debate that Valentini points to is a debate as to whether we need an ideal goal or standard in order to make progress in the pursuit of justice. Understood in this way ideal theories are theories concerned with ‘end-state’ accounts of justice, that identify “an ideal of social perfection” we should work towards whereas transitional theories or non-ideal theories focus on “transitional improvements” without having to determine a perfect ideal. Amartya Sen is perhaps the most well-known advocate for transitional theories of justice in which the identification of an ideal of social perfection is neither necessary nor sufficient in order to remedy

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6 See Wiens (2015b)
7 Gheaus (2013), 450
8 This is simply another reformulation of the well-known practical irrelevance and adaptive preference. See, Farrelly (2007), 846
9 Valentini (2009), 654
injustice. In a now famous example Sen states that knowing Mount Everest is the tallest mountain in the world is neither necessary nor sufficient to compare the peak heights of Mount Kilimanjaro and Mount McKinley.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to make a strong argument for the primacy of any of the three categorizations outlined above. For the sake of this project however, I will adopt one of the most widely used metrics to understand the ideal/non-ideal divide that closely resembles the feasibility metric outlined above; namely fact-sensitivity. Borrowing from Colin Farrell, I will argue that it is helpful to understand the ideal/non-ideal distinction as a debate over the role of facts in developing principles of justice.

2.3 Fact-Sensitivity Spectrum

In many ways fact sensitivity shares much in common with the feasibility metric outlined above. The term fact sensitivity originates from G.A. Cohen in his 2008 book Rescuing Justice and Equality, in which he differentiates between two types of theories. Fact-sensitive theories which are “grounded in the facts of human nature and of the human situation”\textsuperscript{10} and fact insensitive theories which “abstract away from existing practices, and attempt to define justice ‘in its pure’ form […] uncontaminated by facts.”\textsuperscript{11}

In Ideal Theory: A Refutation, Colin Farrell proposes that this distinction between fact-sensitive and fact-insensitive principles that Cohen has identified is a good candidate to characterize the ideal and non-ideal distinction. Rather than understanding the distinction as categorical, however, Farrell proposes that we ought to place a given

\textsuperscript{10} Cohen, (2008), 229
\textsuperscript{11} Valentini (2009), 335
principle of justice along a fact-sensitivity spectrum (Figure 1). The fact-sensitivity spectrum is meant to capture and help organize a wide range of political theories, with their varying emphasis and consideration of facts.

![Diagram of Fact Sensitivity Spectrum](image)

*Figure 1. Fact Sensitivity Spectrum (Farrelly, 2007).*

The spectrum achieves this by charting normative political theories in between two poles; non-Ideal theories on the one end and extreme ideal theories on the other. The two poles are meant to capture the fact-sensitive and fact-insensitive distinction outlined by Cohen, with the former stressing the importance of taking facts – psychological or social – into account when determining principles of justice, while the latter emphasize the need to abstract from, or idealize the factually existent status quo. Both ends of the spectrum have often been associated with certain dangers. Extreme Ideal theory is often criticized.

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12Farrelly (2007)
as an impotent theory of justice due to its abstract nature and idealized assumptions.

While on the non-ideal end, there is a danger of what Farrelly labels adaptive preference formation’ - where the current social context is assumed to be static rather than dynamic, thus fostering a status quo bias.  

David Miller succinctly describes these dangers in the following way:

If the theory abstracts too far from prevailing circumstances, it is liable to become a merely speculative exercise, of no practical use in guiding either our public policy or the individual decisions we make as citizens. If the theory assumes too much by way of empirical constraints, on the other hand, it may become excessively conservative, in the sense of being too closely tied to contingent aspects of a particular society or group of societies, and therefore no longer able to function as a critical tool for social change.

According to Miller then, both methods of normative political theorizing bring along specific difficulties to the table. In addition to these two “extreme” positions, Farrelly charts a third position between the two extremes, what he calls “moderate idealism.” Moderate ideal theorists – such as John Rawls and Ronald Dworkin - differentiate themselves from the extreme ideal camp insofar as they are “not completely blind to non-ideal considerations” holding a minor role for facts when justifying principles of justice. Rawls, for example, takes into account facts regarding moderate scarcity and a conception of human nature that includes limited altruism. Whereas Dworkin, understands that the choices we make are never so “pure” as to make choice and endowment sensitive distributions directly applicable to a non-ideal world.

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13 Farrelly (2007), 846
14 Miller (2007), 18-19
15 Farrelly (2007), 846
16 Ibid
17 By occupying a middle position between the two extremes, one might assume that the moderate idealists are better equipped to overcome the pitfalls faced by those theories that find themselves on either end of the
Understanding the ideal theory debate as an issue regarding fact-sensitivity is useful due to its broad and scalar nature. However, focusing on the degree of fact sensitivity obscures another difference between the plotted normative theories in Farrelly’s spectrum above. In the next section I will examine how purported action guidance is an important feature of normative political theories and should be included in any characterization of the ideal/non-ideal debate.

2.4 Action Guidance and Rawlsian Moderate Idealism

In On the Apparent Paradox of Ideal Theory, Valentini cautions against using a single spectrum to describe the ideal/non-ideal divide, as it leaves out important differences between various theories of justice. Rather than conceiving of the ideal and non-ideal debate as simply differing in degree of fact-sensitivity, Valentini argues that theories also differ regarding their purported function. Most fact-sensitive theories are “premised on the idea that principles of justice should perform a certain function, namely that of governing the exercise of political power” whereas fact-insensitive theories have “no such functional connotation”.\(^{18}\) As Valentini states “[highly abstract theories] do not consider a capacity for guidance as a necessary condition for the validity of a conception of justice [...]”\(^{19}\) Adam Swift similarly argues that this disagreement over action guidance can be characterized as a disagreement between practical theories of justice and spectrum. Farrelly argues that such an assumption is misguided. Farrelly argues that Rawls’ idealization of compliance and scarcity of resources, subjects his theory to the same practical irrelevance charge as the extreme idealists. This has to do with what Farrelly calls a cost-blind approach to rights that Rawls adopts in which he does not consider the financial cost associated with upholding and implementing basic rights.\(^{18}\) Valentini (2009), 335
\(^{19}\) Ibid
epistemological theories of justice.\textsuperscript{20} The former hold that the goal of political philosophy is to guide action, whereas the latter, similar to other areas of philosophy, simply aim at truths. In the case of political philosophy, truths \textquotedblleft about which states of affairs, or which actions in which circumstances, are just\textquotedblright.\textsuperscript{21}

Armed with this new distinction, we are now in a position to determine whether what separates the three camps of plotted normative theories in figure 1 is simply the degree of fact-sensitivity or is there also a difference in purported function. Analyzing the three plotted camps in terms of action guidance alters our evaluation of their plotted positions. Extreme idealists such as G.A. Cohen can now be seen as distinct from the other plotted theories insofar as Cohen does not view action guidance as the primary aim of political philosophy. Although Cohen acknowledges that political philosophy often does have an impact on political practice, its significance is not tied up in its impact on practice. Rather the main question political philosophy ought to try to answer is \textquotedblleft not what we should do but what we should think, even when what we should think makes no practical difference.\textquotedblright\textsuperscript{22}

Moderate ideal theorists such as Rawls on the other hand, share more in common with the non-ideal theorist insofar as they view political philosophy as action guiding. However, whereas non-ideal theorists such as Sen simply rely on comparative assessments to guide action, the action guidance of Rawlsian idealism is located in its dual structure which incorporates both ideal and non-ideal theory. Consider the distinct function of ideal and non-ideal theory under the Rawlsian framework. Ideal theory, for

\textsuperscript{20} Swift (2008), 366
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid
\textsuperscript{22} Cohen (2008), 243
Rawls, is meant to determine a set of ideal principles that can serve as appropriate normative criteria for the evaluation of the basic structure of well-ordered society under reasonably favorable conditions. Whether or not ideal conditions exists depends on whether (1) there is full or partial compliance with the demands of justice and (2) the existence or absence of favorable conditions. However, non-ideal theory (and this is obscured by solely focusing on fact-sensitivity) plays an important role in that it informs us as to what we ought to do in less than ideal circumstances. Rawls has this to say about the distinction in general:

The first or ideal part assumes strict compliance and works out the principles that characterize a well-ordered society under favorable circumstances. It develops the conception of a perfectly just basic structure and the corresponding duties and obligations of persons under the fixed constraints of human life. My main concern is with this part of the theory. Non-ideal theory, the second part, is worked out after an ideal conception of justice has been chosen; only then do the parties ask which principles to adopt under less happy conditions.23

Although it is clear that primacy is afforded to ideal theory (both in Rawls’ focus but also in the order of theorizing) non-ideal theory also factors into our theorizing about justice. Rather than conceiving these two types of theorizing as opposed, Rawls views the relationship as complementary stating that non-ideal theory “presupposes that ideal theory is already on hand. For until the ideal is identified, at least in outline—and that is all we should expect – non-ideal theory lacks an objective, an aim, by reference to which its queries can be answered”.24 This complementary relationship is what David Wiens’ calls the ideal guidance approach to ideal theory.

23 Rawls (1999), 245
24 Rawls (2001), 90
Simply put, ideal guidance achieves action guidance through an interaction between both ideal and non-ideal theory. The relationship between the two, described above, is one of lexical ordering, with ideal theory as taking place prior to non-ideal theory. In order to determine whether the present circumstances are non-ideal, ideal theory needs to provide the criteria or benchmark for normative assessment. The non-ideal principles as such are meant to discharge a “natural duty to remove any injustice, beginning with the most grievous as identified by the extent of the deviation from perfect justice”. It is worth noting that this non-ideal “natural duty to remove any injustice beginning with the most grievous” can at times be so strong as to override our ideal principles:

It suffices to observe that when we come to non-ideal theory, the lexical ordering of the two principles, and the valuations that this ordering implies, suggests priority rules which seem to be reasonable enough in many cases. By various examples I have tried to illustrate how these rules can be used and to indicate their plausibility. Thus the ranking of the principles of justice in ideal theory reflects back and guides the application of these principles to non-ideal situations. It identifies which limitations need to be dealt with first. In the more extreme and tangled instances of non-ideal theory this priority of rules will no doubt fail; and indeed, we may be able to find no satisfactory answer at all.

It is clear from this passage that although ideal principles are meant to serve as a moral target, our practical prescriptions whilst under non-ideal condition, may end up differing drastically if circumstances are extreme enough.

2.5 Summary

25 Rawls (1999), 216
26 Rawls (1999), 267
Summarizing the main conflict between the ideal and non-ideal theorists, one can see that it partially resides in a disagreement regarding the degree to which facts ought to constrain our theory of justice. However, by focusing solely on fact-sensitivity we ignore how the fact-insensitive theories are being utilized. As we saw, moderate ideal theorists such as Rawls differentiate themselves from extreme idealists such as Cohen by including a modest set of idealized assumptions but also in the purported action guidance of the ideal/non-ideal theoretical framework. It is important to acknowledge the distinct nature of moderate Rawlsian Idealism insofar as charges of practical irrelevance lose their edge due to Rawls ability to fall back on non-ideal theory. However, although theories that rely on ideal theory to guide non-ideal action overcome certain difficulties, they face their own new challenges. It will be a project of the next chapter to explore these challenges.
Chapter 3
The Challenge from the Theory of Second Best

3.1 Introduction
In the previous section we saw that there were competing characterizations of the ideal/non-ideal theory debate and that fact-sensitivity as the sole metric fails to capture all the relevant features of this distinction. In particular, it was argued that the fact sensitivity spectrum fails to account for certain theories of justice that incorporate a complementary relation between ideal and non-ideal theory, with the former acting as a “moral target” or guide for the latter. The inclusion and proper characterization of ideal guidance theories into the ideal theory debate is important insofar as it dulls the practical irrelevance charge often raised against ideal theories. By viewing an ideal principle as something we ought to approximate, or as a benchmark we should use to evaluate feasible alternatives, the direct applicability of ideal theory to non-ideal circumstances becomes less worrying. However, the ideal guidance approach faces its own challenges.

It is the project of this next section to examine a challenge specific to the “ideal guidance” approach to justice, namely the Theory of Second Best (TOSB). I will begin by outlining the theory, drawing from both the original source as well as philosopher’s treatments of the issue (3.2). I will then examine the implications that the Theory of Second Best has for normative political philosophy (3.3) and (3.4).

3.2 The Theory of Second Best
Although the ideal guidance approach is able to overcome certain feasibility worries outlined in the previous chapter, it faces a new challenge from what is called the
Theory of Second Best (TOSB). The TOSB was put forward by two economists, Richard Lipsey and Kevin Lancaster, in their 1956 article The General Theory of Second Best.

They describe the general theory in the following way:

It is well known that the attainment of a Paretian optimum requires the simultaneous fulfillment of all the optimum conditions. The general theorem for the second best optimum states that if there is introduced into a general equilibrium system a constraint which prevents the attainment of one of the Paretian conditions, the other Paretian conditions, although still attainable, are, in general, no longer desirable. [...] From this theorem it follows the important negative corollary that there is no a priori way to judge as between various situations in which some of the Paretian optimum conditions are fulfilled while others are not. Specifically, it is not true that a situation in which more, but not all, of the optimum conditions are fulfilled is necessarily, or is even likely to be, superior to a situation in which fewer are fulfilled. It follows, therefore, that in a situation in which there exist many constraints which prevent the fulfillment of the Paretian optimum conditions, the removal of any one constraint may affect welfare or efficiency either by raising it, by lowering it, or by leaving it unchanged.\(^ {27}\)

The general ideal is this: We can have a theoretical model that describes an economic system (or any system for that matter) that functions perfectly, but if we are unable to reproduce the axioms of said theory in the real world (or if we can’t set the preconditions necessary to get that theorem to work) then partially fulfilling those conditions may not produce the second best result. In order to produce the next best option you may have to go into an entirely different and unexpected direction.

For example, economists may agree that efficiency is best achieved when all sectors of the economy are fully competitive. If however, one of the factors that contribute to a competitive market place are frustrated – e.g. through imperfect information or the introduction of a monopoly – then it is not necessarily true that the

\(^ {27}\) Lipsey and Lancaster (1956), 11-12
second best policy will be an approximation of the ideal policy in a fully competitive market place.

Ultimately, the weight of the TOSB challenge comes from the idea that a given ideal represents an interdependence of values or features. If the achievement of certain features that make up an ideal is the goal, then it is easy to make the assumption that movement toward this ideal within each individual feature will always create positive utility. However, this is only the case if each feature of the ideal is completely independent from one another. More often than not the different elements of the ideal coexist with one another making their value contingent on the other features and their simultaneous realization.28 Consider Robert Goodin’s example:

Your ideal car, let us suppose, would be a new silver Rolls. But suppose the dealer tells you none is available. The point of the general theory of second best is this: it simply does not necessarily follow that a car that satisfied two out of your ideal car’s three crucial characteristics is necessarily second best. You may prefer a one-year-old black Mercedes (a car unlike your ideal car in every respect) over a new silver Ford (which resembles your ideal car in two out of three respects).29

Thus, when the desirability of a given feature in the ideal world of X is contingent upon the realization of other conditions, the frustration of one of these other features may make feature X undesirable. Stated simply, the various elements that constitute an ideal are not the type of goods that a greater possession of each individually, necessarily means one is approximating the ideal. In the next section I will explore what this anti-approximation warning from the TOSB means for political normative theorizing.

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28 Thus as Sen (2006) states Ideal theories of justice cannot “address questions about advancing justice [...] short of proposing a radical jump to a perfectly just world” (pp. 218)
29 Goodin (1995), 53
3.3 Implications for Normative Political Philosophy

What does the TOSB mean for normative political philosophy? Although the TOSB originates from within the field of economics it is clear that the TOSB has important implications for normative political theorizing.\textsuperscript{30} In the same way that we cannot assume that the approximation of an economic ideal is necessarily the second-best strategy in non-ideal circumstances, we similarly cannot assume that this is the case for a political ideal.

This then poses a serious problem for the ideal guidance approach outlined in the previous chapter. Intuitively we may say that in order to achieve the best society we can within non-ideal constraints, we should create a society that instantiates as many attributes of the ideal society as possible and to as great an extent as possible. However, the TOSB appears to show that this intuition is misguided. Due to the interdependence of values we cannot assume that the best thing to do is to create a society that instantiates more rather than less of the attributes of an ideal society. The different elements of the ideal principle must be taken into consideration together. As Goodin states “this follows from interdependencies among our ideals, politically, in just the same way it would follow from interaction effects among commodities that we are consuming, economically.”\textsuperscript{31} Thus, since the various features of a political ideal depend on one

\textsuperscript{30} See Bruce Coram (1996) for an interesting discussion of the effect of the TOSB on voting schemes.
\textsuperscript{31} Goodin (1995), 54
another in the same way they do in an economic ideal, the unavailability of one feature can render the full achievement of the other features undesirable.

Some theorists, however, have taken the lessons of the TOSB for normative theorizing to mean that we ought to simply devote more time and focus for non-ideal theorizing in order to correct a blind spot, which the TOSB illuminates. Consider what Goodin says about its implications:

Thus, the general theory of second best has important implications for how we go about our moral and political philosophy. In the light of that theory it becomes crucial, in setting out moral and especially political principles, to devote at least as much attention to second-best schemes for their implementation—and to the socio-psycho-economic constraints that might force us to fall back upon them --- as we devote to questions of what would be the abstractly ideal political arrangements.\(^\text{32}\)

This equal division of labor argument has been reiterated by others theorists stating that ideal and non-ideal theory should not be seen as rival approaches to political theory.\(^\text{33}\) However, simply stating that the TOSB shows us that we need to spend as much time working on problems in non-ideal theory as we do in ideal theory, does not fully reckon with the challenge of the TOSB. The implication taken by those who view the TOSB as a call for a renewed focus on non-ideal theory is similar to Amartya Sen’s claim in the Idea of Justice that ideal theory is neither necessary nor sufficient for remedying real world injustice.\(^\text{34}\) The TOSB, outlined above, seems to have been interpreted to say the same thing. That is to say, it may not be sufficient to rely solely on ideal principles in order to evaluate or guide our action but they are nonetheless helpful and/or an essential

\(^{32}\) Ibid, 55
\(^{33}\) See Stempowlska (2008), Jubb (2012) and Rothstein (forthcoming)
\(^{34}\) Sen (2009), 102
component of the equation. As David Wiens points out, “a travel guide for Argentina or Zambia can prove useful despite being neither necessary nor sufficient for having an enjoyable travel experience”\(^3\). Thus we need a further argument to show that political ideals are actually “misleading or uninformative” when specifying the real world policies we should aim at\(^3\). Wiens believes that the TOSB provides such an argument. In order to understand how this is the case we need to pause for a moment and take a look at what Wiens considers to be a commonly used model for doing political philosophy.

3.4 Basic Values and the TOSB

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Figure 2- Charting David Wiens’ Model for Political Philosophy

In order to understand why the TOSB demonstrates that ideal principles are completely “uninformative” for our real world policy reform we need to look at how Wiens understands the practice of political philosophy. Wiens views political philosophers such as John Rawls and Ronald Dworkin as engaged in a type of normative theorizing that involves three levels of analysis which the above chart

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\(^3\) Wiens (2015a), 5

\(^3\) Ibid
maps out. Following Hamlin and Stempowlaska (2010) and Robert Goodin (1995) before them, Wiens views the most fundamental level of analysis as the specification of basic moral and social values such as liberty, equality, and community. These basic values, according to Wiens, underpin our more concrete political principles. This seems uncontroversial. Ultimately we evaluate states of affairs based on how well they do or do not realize certain basic values that we care about. In evaluating a particular state of affairs we may say it fails to promote equality, that it restricts freedom, or that it fails to foster community. However, since the “practical implications of our commitment to these values are often vague”, we rely on ideal political principles to “codify these vague implications” by enumerating the general scheme of rights and duties that our basic values demand in that particular state of affairs.

Importantly for Wiens, philosophers formulate these normative principles in an ideal context in an effort to avoid overtly complicating the moral analysis. These political principles are then said to represent an “ideal balance of certain basic values”.

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37 Hamlin and Stempowlaska (2010)
38 Goodin (1995)
39 It is beyond the scope of this paper to provide a full defense of Wiens’ interpretation of political theory methodology (although it does seem like a plausible interpretation). However, one potential issue worth mentioning is whether our taxonomy of political concepts can be neatly divided into the three categories Wiens uses. For example, it is unclear where certain thick concepts such as citizenship or stability fit into his proposed model as they are not quite ideal principles nor do they seem basic in the same way that the thinner concepts of equality and liberty are. Furthermore, the model seems to leave out even deeper values such as personal responsibility and equal respect (Dworkin 2011).

40 Wiens (2015a), 5
41 Ibid, 6
Having determined the ideal political principles that represent an ideal balance of our basic values, Wiens argues that philosophers then move to an application of ideal principles in the non-ideal world (see table 1, Row 3). As stated in chapter 2, we run into difficulties when attempting to directly apply ideal principles to non-ideal circumstances, as their practical relevance is called into question. However, as we saw, most philosophers concede that ideal principles fail to map directly on to non-ideal circumstances, but rather are better understood as moral targets which we should attempt to approximate or as a benchmark that we should use to evaluate a range of feasible alternatives.

However, the TOSB problematizes this move for the ideal guidance theorist in the following way. Assume a given ideal principle $P$. Assume that a state of affairs $S$ best approximates the ideal principle of $P$. The TOSB tell us that $a$ priori we do not know that $S$ is in fact the second-best strategy since all ideal conditions present in ideal $P$ are not found in the real world. This doesn’t mean that it is impossible for the second best strategy to be $S$, but rather that we have no reason to assume $S$ is the second best strategy simply in virtue of its resemblance to $P$. As Wiens states:

> We can’t simply infer from the fact that ideal principles would best realize our fundamental values if implemented in favorable circumstances that they would also advance realization of our fundamental values were they implemented in actual circumstances.\(^\text{42}\)

What we need is a way to justify our assumption that $S$ is the second-best strategy. Equipped with Wiens’ model for normative political theorizing outlined above, we can attempt to provide such a justification. To justify the expectation that $S$ is the second-best

\(^{42}\) Wiens (2014), 7
strategy, we need to determine that $S$ best realizes our basic moral and social values more so than any other feasible alternative. To do so one would need to engage in a comparative assessment between all feasible states of affairs and evaluate them based on the extent to which they realize our basic values. However, as Wiens points out, once we engage in this comparative analysis, ideal political principles are rendered uninformative for our real world reform.

If the action guiding goal of political theorizing is to identify and implement morally progressive real world reform (reform that best realizes our desired basic moral values) then we already accomplish that goal by simply evaluating feasible states of affairs indexed to our basic values. If we demonstrate that a particular state of affairs (that may or may not be the approximation of an ideal) does in fact best realize our basic values through a comparative assessment of alternative feasible arrangements, we essentially have bypassed the ideal theory stage of the methodology outlined above (table 1). Thus, for Wiens, the TOSB shows us that ideal theory can be rejected completely in our analysis, as it is uninformative for real world reform. This reduces Wiens’ original chart down to two stages of analysis; (1) basic values, and (2) real world reform that best realizes our basic values (Table 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Basic Values</th>
<th>Equality</th>
<th>Liberty</th>
<th>Efficiency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Real world Reform that Best Realizes Basic Values</td>
<td>A Particular Tax and Transfer Scheme</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 3 – Wiens’ Revised Model for Political Philosophy

By rejecting ideal principles one might make the assumption that political philosophy no longer has a role to play in normative political theorizing. If ideal
principles have been shown to be uninformative to real world policy reform, does the task of creating morally progressive reform become the sole domain of social science? Although social science has an important role to play Wiens argues that the specification and interpretation of basic values “assures abstract political philosophy of an important role in normative theorizing.” Adam Swift makes a similar claim in response to Amartya Sen’s rejection of ideal principles stating that Sen’s argument “is not an argument for abandoning fundamental philosophical work” and that the comparative approach Sen adopts requires “careful thinking about the relative value of the different values that have to be traded off against each other”. For both Wiens and Swift then, political philosophy has an important role to play at the level of basic values insofar as we need to have a better understanding of what these values are, which ones are salient for certain situations, and the comparative weight of each value.

3.5 Summary

Although the ideal guidance approach to ideal theory overcame practical application issues raised in the previous chapter, the complementary relationship built into the approach faces its own challenges. In particular it was shown that the Theory of the Second Best presents a serious challenge to the claim that ideal guidance is action guiding by demonstrating that we are unjustified in assuming an approximation of an ideal in non-ideal circumstances is the second-best strategy (i.e. the strategy that best realizes our basic values). This prompted some theorists such as David Wiens to reject

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43 Wiens (2015a), 25
44 Swift (2008), 373
ideal principles completely although maintaining the specification and interpretation of basic values as “fundamental philosophical work”\textsuperscript{45}. Having outlined the major challenges non-ideal theorists raise for ideal theory it will be the project of the next chapter to explore in greater depth what a non-ideal theory of justice - that is to say a theory of justice without ideal principles - would look like. In particular I will examine the “comparative approach” to justice through the work of Amartya Sen, and David Wiens.

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid
Chapter 4

Constructing a Theory of Justice in Light of TOSB

4.1 Introduction

In the previous section we saw that the TOSB presents a formidable challenge for the ideal guidance approach to ideal theory, by contesting the action guiding relationship between ideal and non-ideal theory. If ideal principles are unable to justifiably offer any practical guidance for real-world reform that more basic values cannot themselves provide, then it seems that the role ideal principles play in normative political theorizing is at best uninformative and at worst misleading. This has lead theorists such as David Wiens to reject the use of ideal principles from our political theorizing, relying instead on our more basic values to assess and evaluate feasible states of affairs. It is the project of this next chapter to examine, in greater detail, what such political theorizing would look like. In particular I will examine multiple accounts of what is called the comparative approach to justice. I will begin by examining perhaps one of the most well-known accounts of the comparative approach put forward by Amartya Sen (4.2) as well as the subsequent criticism’s his approach has faced (4.3). I will then turn to the work of David Wiens to examine how his account of comparative justice has overcome some of the difficulties found in Sen’s account (4.4).

4.2 Amartya Sen’s Comparative Approach to Justice

In *The Idea of Justice*, Amartya Sen provides a critique of ideal theory that arguably underpins much of the more recent criticism against ideal theory. Sen famously
argues that ideal theory (or transcendental institutionalism as he calls it) is neither necessary nor sufficient for ameliorating current injustice.

Ideal theory is not sufficient for two reasons. First, ideal principles are unable to effectively compare and rank feasible states of affairs. This is a criticism against ideal guidance (or what Sen calls the distance-comparison approach) similar to what was discussed in the previous chapter. The ideal guidance account holds that we can compare feasible states of affairs in reference to an ideal principle or ideal societal arrangement and then rank them based on their relative distance from that ideal. However, because a state of affairs can fall short of the ideal principle along multiple dimensions, the comparison will become difficult and ambiguous. Sen frames the problem in the following way:

The difficulty lies in the fact that there are different features involved in identifying distance, related, among other distinctions, to different fields of departure, varying dimensionalities of transgressions, and diverse ways of weighing separate infractions. The identification of transcendence does not yield any means of addressing these problems to arrive at a relational ranking of departures from transcendence.

Simply put, there may be two feasible states of affairs that might resemble our ideal principle to the same degree but along different dimensions, making it unclear which state of affairs is superior. For example, it is unclear how we should rank a world where there is freedom of speech but limited freedom of movement, against a world where there is freedom of movement but limited freedom of speech. What is needed is some form of

46 Sen (2009), 16
47 Sen (2009), 98-99
48 It is clear that Rawls theory is ill equipped to adjudicate claims between each distinct basic liberty but it is unclear why Sen thinks that Rawls is unable to adjudicate competing claims between socioeconomic gains on one hand and the violation of liberties on the other. It seems as though the lexical ordering of the two principles makes such a comparison relatively straightforward.
criteria to adjudicate such trade-offs, but Sen states that such valuations “helpful as they would be, lie beyond the specific exercise of the identification of transcendence and are indeed the basic ingredient of a ‘comparative’ rather than a ‘transcendental’ approach to justice”. 49

Secondly, ideal theory is not sufficient for ameliorating injustice insofar as “descriptive closeness is not necessarily a guide to valuational proximity”.50 As Sen states, a person who prefers red wine to white wine might still choose white wine over a mixture of the two, even though the latter is closer to red in a descriptive sense.51 This idea that the descriptive closeness to an ideal matters less than the realization of the basic values that underlie it, clearly captures the lessons of the TOSB outlined in the last chapter, but in less explicit terms.

Sen goes on to argue that ideal theory is not only insufficient but also not necessary to make comparative judgments. Sen illustrates this through the analogy of determining the relative height of two mountains. Sen states that the knowledge that Everest is the tallest mountain in the world, “is neither needed, nor particularly helpful, in comparing the heights of, say, Kilimanjaro and Mount McKinley.”52 Similarly, when ranking two feasible alternatives, one can evaluate which is better without appealing to what is best.

In place of the use of ideal principles, Sen adopts a ‘comparative approach’ to justice (non-ideal theory). The comparative approach differs from ideal theory insofar as it does not attempt to identify a perfectly just principle or societal arrangement that we

\[^{49}\text{Sen (2009), 99}\]
\[^{50}\text{Sen (2009), 16}\]
\[^{51}\text{Sen (2009), 16}\]
\[^{52}\text{Sen (2009), 102}\]
ought to approximate or use to evaluate our own state of affairs. Rather, the comparative approach simply focuses on judgments regarding immediate and feasible states of affairs that can be described as “more” or “less” just, without considering what perfect justice might look like. This focus on remedying immediate injustice through pair-wise comparisons has led some to call Sen’s approach an “incremental” or “piecemeal” approach to justice.53

It should be noted that under the ideal guidance approach, comparative judgments are still an important aspect of normative political theorizing. Action of any kind requires some sort of comparative evaluation between feasible states of affairs. This comparison, however, under the ideal guidance approach is conducted in reference to an ideal state of affairs. The force of Sen’s argument is not that comparative judgments ought to be used for our real world reform, as this is uncontroversial. Rather the force of Sen’s thesis is that these comparative evaluations can be made without any appeal to an ideal standard. It will be the project of the next section to examine two challenges to this thesis.

4.3 Critique of Sen’s Comparative Approach

Sen’s work and in particular his argument regarding transcendental and comparative approaches to justice has been highly influential but has also faced criticism from those who seek to defend ideal theory. It will be the project of this section to outline two particular complaints ideal theorists make. Namely that a comparative approach still requires abstract normative theorizing to evaluate ‘hard cases’ and that ideal theory is

53 Kamm (2011),
needed to determine how we can best accomplish our long-term justice goals. I will begin with the former.

4.3a Higher Abstraction Needed for ‘Hard Cases’

Debra Satz agrees with Sen that a theory of perfect justice is not needed in order to condemn extreme poverty and malnutrition as unjust, but argues that this says more about the simplicity of the chosen cases than it does about the role of ideal principles in political theorizing. According to Satz, ideal theory still has a role to play since “many cases of actual injustice […] are much more complicated” and it is our “perplexity in the face of opposing claims for reform here and now that leads us to seek a more systematic, abstract, and coherent theory of justice.”

Satz uses the example of how primary and secondary schooling should be distributed:

Some people argue that it should be distributed on the basis of merit; others on the basis of equality of opportunity; and still others so that every child is guaranteed a threshold level of educational competency. In making and assessing these arguments about schooling, ordinary people and policy makers considering what we should do inevitably make reference to what they take to be compelling ideals of fairness. In arguing about these different ideals, they may be led to seek common ground on a more abstract level with less concrete assumptions.

Similarly Adam Swift argues that we may have to choose between adopting policies that result in children being cared for properly but also increase gender inequality, and policies that enhance gender equality while neglecting children.

According to Adam Swift then we may not need transcendental theory as Sen defines it

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54 Satz (2011), 560
55 Ibid, 561-562
56 Swift (2008),
in order to tell us which consideration is more important, but some form of abstract theorizing, that closely resembles ideal theory might be necessary.\textsuperscript{57}

4.3b Piecemeal change and Path Dependence

Frances Kamm argues that the piecemeal or incremental approach to justice that Sen utilizes, in which we reject theorizing about perfect justice and focus on the amelioration of clear real world injustice, faces problems that Sen does not account for. In particular, the amelioration of one particular injustice in society may compound or create a further injustice in another segment.\textsuperscript{58} That is to say, without a blueprint for an ideal society it is unclear how we are to “attend to the impact of some change on all the factors that are relevant to justice.”\textsuperscript{59}

It is unclear how problematic this criticism is for Sen. It seems plausible that in ranking feasible alternative states of affairs we can build into that ranking a consideration for the foreseen effects it will have on other areas of society, which will thus affect its overall ranking. However, a related but stronger concern regarding the piecemeal approach has to do with the long-term effects the amelioration of current injustice can have.

The criticism stems from defenders of ideal theory who view a conception of perfect justice as a long-term goal that not only will help us evaluate our current state of affairs but will guide us by constraining our responses to current injustice. That is to say, a picture of an ideally just society may tell us that “one needs to sacrifice justice in one

\textsuperscript{57} Swift (2008), 375
\textsuperscript{58} Kamm (2011), 85
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid, 86
dimension here and now, in the hope of gaining more justice in another dimension [...] in the long term”. The lesson here is simply that in order to reach a more fully just society we may have to take two steps back in order to go three steps forward. Without a long term end-state conception of justice, it seems difficult for the comparative theorist to make these strategic trade-offs. One cluster of concerns for comparative theorists in this regard (especially for designing institutions) are issues of path-dependency.

Path-dependence, broadly understood, is the study of how institutional design and the choices we make in politics can generate increasing returns that make opting out of the institution or diverging from the original choice costly. Large set-up costs, learning effects, and adaptive expectations can make retooling or defecting too costly, thus locking a government into a specific path. Consider Margaret Levi’s description:

> Path dependence has to mean, if it is to mean anything, that once a country or region has started down a track, the costs of reversal are very high. There will be other choice points, but the entrenchments of certain institutional arrangements obstruct an easy reversal of the initial choice. Perhaps the better metaphor is a tree, rather than a path. From the same trunk, there are many different branches and smaller branches. Although it is possible to turn around or to clamber from one to the other-and essential if the chosen branch dies-the branch on which a climber begins is the one she tends to follow.

Thus without a proper blueprint for an ideal society we may lock ourselves into a path that ameliorates injustice in the short term but less so overall in the long run. As Simmons notes, “where ‘comparative gains’ or targeted attacks in fact set back the cause

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60 Robeyns (2008), 351
61 This general point is made by Ingrid Robeyns(2008), Simmons(2010), Satz(2011)
62 Piersen (2000)
63 Piersen (2000), 254
64 Levi (1997), 28
of overall social justice, it is hard to see why anyone who is committed to that cause would regard this as nonetheless a positive development.\(^{65}\)

Having outlined two specific challenges raised by defenders of ideal theory to Sen’s comparative approach I will spend the remainder of this chapter examining a modified comparative approach put forward by David Wiens. After outlining his approach I will evaluate how well Wiens’s modified theory deals with the objections raised above.

**4.4 Institutional Failure Analysis**

Wiens calls his comparative approach *Institutional Failure Analysis* which highlights its focus on ameliorating *current* social failure, as opposed to theorizing about perfect justice. Wiens takes there to be three main phases of the failure analysis design process: (1) identifying a failure, (2) the diagnosis of the failure, and (3) designing to overcome failure.

**4.4a Identifying Failure**

Wiens argues that we can identify failure by focusing on the initial state of affairs that generates our dissatisfaction, as well as the *feasible* alternatives that may help to reduce it. The alternative state of affairs that we use for our comparative analysis can come in two types; those that are actual alternatives already realized in our present world and counterfactual cases that are possible but currently unrealized. It is clear that the latter will require careful and judicious selection as it is easy for the process to result in

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\(^{65}\) Simmons (2010), 24
either unrealistic alternatives or conservative alternatives that suffer from a status quo bias.\textsuperscript{66}

Wiens uses the case of health care provision in the United States as a way to demonstrate the identification procedure. If we are dissatisfied with the health care provision in the United States we might take for our set of contrast cases Canada, Cuba, Mexico, Nigeria, Russia, Sweden, and Tanzania. Wiens states that the process is initiated by a “rough intuitive ordering of these cases according to the relative justice of their health care provision schemes”.\textsuperscript{67} After this rough first cut ordering, further orderings are offered which reflect basic considerations when it comes to judging a particular health care apparatus. Some of these morally salient considerations may include the regime’s performance along health benchmarks, the efficiency of the regime, and scope of access.\textsuperscript{68}

Equipped with a first cut ordering, a process of justifying an authoritative ordering begins, which involves reflecting “upon the moral values we endorse and our reasons for endorsing them, as well as identifying the principles that best express those values”.\textsuperscript{69} For Wiens this moral justification involves impartial reasons i.e. reasons that won’t appeal to an individual’s particular interests or circumstances. According to Wiens this debate will “lead us to some shared judgments, although we are unlikely to arrive at complete consensus” but that is enough to make the tentative and incremental judgments Wiens has in mind.\textsuperscript{70}

\textsuperscript{66} See Wiens (2015b)
\textsuperscript{67} Wiens (2012), 56
\textsuperscript{68} Wiens (2012), 57
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid
reflection and debate about which failures take priority. The determination of a priority list will appeal to the moral considerations generated by the earlier discussion as well as “the effects of various intervention possibilities”.71

Although disagreements might emerge regarding Wiens characterization of the process in which we carry out our identification of social failure the main point for Wiens and his argument is that one doesn’t need to have ideal principles or a picture of an ideal society in order to identify social failures.72

4.4b Diagnosing Failure

After identifying a social failure, the next stage of the Institutional Failure Analysis process is providing a diagnosis. This diagnostic phase includes both normative and empirical analyses that for Wiens, are rarely separable. The moral analysis involves reflecting on how current conditions undermine values we find important “while at the same time re-evaluating the standards by which we assess social conditions.”73 The empirical analysis on the other hand is focused on explaining the outcome. It involves “identifying the salient components” of the causal process and “specifying their interrelationships.”74 This means taking into account the impact a proposed intervention may have on other areas of society. Wiens states that in order to successfully carry out such causal diagnosis, philosophers need to “critically engage with the relevant social scientific research”.75 However, such interaction according to Wiens, must be of a specific type. First, according to Wiens, it must be active, meaning one must not take the

71 Ibid, 58
72 Ibid, 59
73 Ibid, 60
74 Ibid, 62
75 Wiens (2012), 63
quality of the study for granted and determine whether or not “poorly specified statistical models or unsustainable formal models” have led to biased results. Second a case has to be made to show that the social scientific data is directly relevant to the specific institutional design question and not simply presumed to be relevant due to it addressing the same broad topic. Lastly, one must avoid relying on correlations identified by social scientists. This is particularly problematic if the correlation is used to justify a particular intervention as it might simply target a symptom rather than the underlying cause.

4.4c Designing to Overcome Failure

The last step is to engage in the design task. The design task, according to Wiens is two fold. First, our normative design aim should be to prescribe institutions “that will bring about social conditions that comport with the moral values we can endorse on the basis of impartial reasons”. Secondly, our causal analysis design aim is “to prescribe feasible institutional solutions that can intervene effectively at important places in the causal process to improve the outcome.” The process Wiens has in mind is a “fluid, experimental process” that is subject to revision in light of potential weaknesses and negative interactions. But Wiens cautions that a “fully worked out ideal” is not likely. According to Wiens “Our vision is too limited, our knowledge too local. Each proposal is tentative and experimental, aiming at piecemeal, incremental progress.”

76 Ibid
77 Ibid
78 Ibid
79 Ibid
80 Ibid, 65
81 Ibid, 66
Having outlined Wiens Institutional Failure Analysis comparative approach it is clear that there is little use for ideal principles in his framework. According to Wiens all we need to know in order to make comparative judgments regarding what is more or less just is “(1) which possible solutions are feasible; (2) which of the feasible solutions are morally acceptable; and (3) which of the feasible, morally acceptable solutions are likely to effectively intervene at the appropriate place in the causal process generating the failure.” Crucially for Wiens, none of these three conditions requires a reference to ideal principles of justice.

4.5 Assessing David Wiens’ Institutional Failure Analysis (IFA)

We are now in a position to assess how David Wiens’ IFA comparative approach fares against the criticisms raised above. Recall that Sen’s comparative approach was criticized for its inability to adjudicate ‘hard cases’ in which it is not clear what alternative state of affairs promotes ‘more’ justice. Swift and Satz argued that higher abstract theorizing was needed in order to make trade-offs and to determine our priorities amongst competing claims. Wiens appears to fare better at accommodating this criticism in so far as Wiens makes it clear that such abstract moral theorizing remains, it is simply lower level ideal principles that must go. Returning to Satz’ example of debating how to distribute primary and secondary schooling Wiens can in fact appeal to more abstract ideals in order to make the case for a particular policy. In making and assessing arguments about schooling we can appeal to the way in which these policy proposals

82 Ibid
exemplify or fall short of values we would endorse upon reflection such as equality of
opportunity.

By explicitly retaining the utilization and interpretation of basic moral values as
fundamental philosophical work Wiens -at least at first brush\textsuperscript{83}- provides a potential
avenue from which to address the concerns that a comparative approach to justice lacks,
the evaluative and critical features necessary to promote morally progressive reform and
adjudicate cases where the injustice is not overdetermined.

Next I will examine how the IFA fares in light of the charge that a comparative
approach is ill-suited to accommodate issues of path-dependence. Wiens answers the
charge by building into his comparative approach an eye towards path-dependencies. As
Wiens states:

Thus, the last phase of the design process is to evaluate our
design hypotheses for potential weaknesses and potentially
negative path dependencies. Will the proposal generate morally
perverse consequences? Will the institution be exploited by
enterprising opportunists? Will it close off important possibilities
for improvement in the future? Should we find weaknesses, we
return to the drawing board to shore them up. […] The aim is to
establish institutions that can foster and coordinate interactions
in a way that, when aggregated, lead to morally improved social
conditions that keep open possibilities for future improvement,
as well as mitigate or contain the negative consequences of
socially destructive interactions.\textsuperscript{84}

By making path-dependence a consideration in ranking feasible states of affairs,
Wiens’ comparative approach can presumably avoid \textit{unnecessary} negative path-
dependencies as they will be ranked lower amongst other feasible alternatives.

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{83} In the next chapter I will examine the extent to which ‘basic values’ can play the role Wiens thinks they
can without the aid of lower level ideal theory.
  \item \textsuperscript{84} \textit{Ibid}, 65
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
4.6 Summary

Amartya Sen’s criticism of ideal theory in favour of a comparative approach to justice has been widely influential but has encountered some of its own challenges. Other philosophers who have adopted the comparative approach towards theorizing about justice have attempted to amend the broad comparative framework Sen laid out in an effort to neutralize some of these criticisms. In this chapter we saw how Wiens inclusion of abstract basic values as well as his eye towards long-term institutional design helped the comparative approach avoid certain obstacles. In particular Wiens approach has been shown to at least fare better to critiques regarding ‘hard cases’ and negative path-depencencies. It will be the project of the next chapter to mount a more basic defense for the role of ideal principles in normative theorizing that is applicable to both Sen’s comparative approach as well as Wiens modified version.
Chapter 5

A Role for Ideal Principles in Light of the TOSB

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter we saw how David Wien’s Institutional Failure Analysis (IFA) overcame certain difficulties associated with Sen’s comparative approach to justice. Despite the IFA’s ability to avoid these challenges I will put forward a further challenge to the IFA in defence of ideal theory. The defence will be limited in nature, insofar as the role envisioned for ideal theory will not be as central to the task of real world reform that was held in the ideal guidance approach. As Sen states in the introduction of The Idea of Justice, “there might well be some less obvious connection, some relationship between the transcendental and the comparative that could make the transcendental approach the right way of proceeding to comparative assessments [emphasis added]”.85 It is the project of this chapter to attempt to provide this “less obvious connection”. I will begin by outlining the structural differences between what I call linear and non-linear application of ideal theory (5.2, 5.3) and then examine how the need to solve simultaneous equation problems and identify value requires the use of ideal principles (5.4, 5.5).

5.2 A Motivational Role

Rather than defend the ideal guidance conception of ideal theory, many theorists have attempted to defend ideal principles in virtue of further features that may make them

85 Sen (2009), 96
useful for alleviating real world injustice. One of these features is the motivational role ideal principles may play in ameliorating real world injustice. Pablo Gilabert argues that “ambitious political pictures can inspire political action, setting long-term agendas for dramatic improvements of social life”. 86 Important political ideals such as liberalism and socialism can be seen as highly demanding and can be argued that they may never fully come to fruition. However, as Pablo Gilabert notes these idealized political concepts “have inspired the political action and experimentation of generations, and enabled some extraordinarily important historical achievements” listing the bill of rights, the creation of the welfare state and the spread of democracy as some of these accomplishments. 87

It’s important to see why this approach to ideal theory does not run into the problem of the TOSB in the same way that the ideal guidance approach does. Rather than ideal principles directly influencing real world reform, they do so only indirectly, by increasing our motivational capacities. 88 Ideal principles may foster political ambition and inspire individuals to reach their “social potential” and may also signal a commitment to a particular set of values which is in itself valuable beyond any contribution to a particular second best strategy. Thus although ideal principles are not simply mapped on to existing states of affairs, they nonetheless help us carry out our reform. This type of non-linear application of ideal theory is the kind of role I have in mind for ideal principles. In the next section I will further examine the difference between a linear and non-linear application of ideal principles.

86 Gilabert (2012), 8
87 Ibid,
88 Gilabert also includes in his discussion here the possibility of ideal principles as a powerful bargaining tool for the oppressed
5.3 Linear vs. Non-Linear Application of Ideal Principles

Recall that David Wiens has argued that political philosophy can be described as operating across three levels of analysis: (1) basic values, (2) Ideal principles, (3) and real world reform. This form of political theorizing conceives of the three levels as existing in a linear process in which basic values are codified into ideal principles and then ideal principles are, to the best of our ability, applied to our real world reform. Conceived in this way the directionality of the process looks something like the table below (table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Basic Values</th>
<th>Equality</th>
<th>Liberty</th>
<th>Efficiency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Normative Principles with assumed empirical constraints (ideal theory)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>The Difference Principle</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Real world application of ideal principles (morally progressive reform)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>A Particular Tax and Transfer Scheme</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 4 Linear Application of Ideal Theory

However, as demonstrated in chapter 3 this type of methodology runs into problems due to the TOSB which renders the second level – ideal principles- uninformative to our real world reform. In response to this problem, Wiens advocates the rejection of ideal principles while maintaining basic values as an evaluative tool for ranking alternative feasible states of affairs. By retaining basic values for the purpose of developing *morally progressive* policy, Wiens ensures that abstract political philosophy...
has a role to play in real world reform insofar as we need to interpret these basic values and identify which values are relevant for our institutional design. As Adam Swift states, the identification of, and interpretation of these basic values, is “fundamental philosophical work.”

However, it is my contention that this task of interpreting and identifying basic values that Wiens wants to hold on to is in fact aided by ideal theory. I will argue that we have good reason to think this is the case below. However, it is worth pausing for a moment to examine what this indirect non-linear application would look like. Rather than the directionality of the process moving linearly across the three categories we can think of the first two categories – basic values and ideal principles- as existing in a special, mutually supporting relationship. Basic values support and define our ideal principles insofar as ideal principles can be seen as a codification of the ideal balance of our basic values. At the same time ideal principles – understood as the ideal balance of our basic values – helps us better interpret and identify which values are relevant to a particular practice, as will be shown below. The directionality of the process is then better understood non-linearly as an application of basic values which are themselves interpreted through ideal principles (figure 5).

89 Wiens, (2015a), 25
90 Swift (2008), 373
It’s important to note that the non-linear application of ideal principles outlined above is entirely consistent with the picture David Wiens wants to defend. Ideal principles are no longer seen as a blue print which ought to be implemented, even in approximation. Rather, in accordance with Wiens view, it is the basic values that serve as the primary evaluative tool for ranking the set of feasible states of affairs. Ideal principles simply help us clarify the implications and structure, of these basic values.

### 5.4 Simultaneous Equation Problems and Identifying Value

Having sketched a general outline of what a non-linear application of ideal principles would look like, I will now examine how ideal principles may better help us understand and apply our basic values. I will argue that ideal theory provides the appropriate level of abstraction to engage in a discussion of value. By abstracting away from certain disagreements over facts, disagreements over value are brought into starker relief aiding our analysis of them. As Rawls states “the work of abstraction then, is not gratuitous: not abstraction for abstraction’s sake. Rather, it is a way of continuing public discussion when shared understandings of lesser

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**Table:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1. Basic Values</th>
<th>Equality</th>
<th>Liberty</th>
<th>Efficiency</th>
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<td>2. Normative Principles with assumed empirical constraints (ideal theory)</td>
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<td>3. Real world application of ideal principles (morally progressive reform)</td>
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**Figure 5** Non-linear Application of Ideal Theory

It’s important to note that the non-linear application of ideal principles outlined above is entirely consistent with the picture David Wiens wants to defend. Ideal principles are no longer seen as a blue print which ought to be implemented, even in approximation. Rather, in accordance with Wiens view, it is the basic values that serve as the primary evaluative tool for ranking the set of feasible states of affairs. Ideal principles simply help us clarify the implications and structure, of these basic values.
generality have broken down”. Rawls forewarns that “we should be prepared to find that the deeper the conflict, the higher the level of abstraction to which we must ascend to get a clear and uncluttered view of the roots of the conflict”. I will begin with Ronald Dworkin’s discussion of the simultaneous equation problem.

5.4a Dworkin’s Simultaneous Equation Problem

One way in which ideal principles may help us better interpret and apply our basic values to real world reform is solving what Ronald Dworkin calls the *simultaneous equation problem*. Dworkin discusses the simultaneous equation problem in reference to a government’s attempt to balance both the equality and liberty based interests of its members. Dworkin states that “no government is legitimate unless it subscribes to two reigning principles. First, it must show equal concern for the fate of every person over whom it claims dominion. Second, it must respect fully the responsibility and right of each person to decide for himself how to make something valuable of his life.” Crucially for Dworkin we must “do this in a way that compromises neither principle but rather find attractive conceptions of each that fully satisfy both.”

This process of finding an attractive interpretation of each value that seems right in itself while also providing mutual support for one another is what Dworkin calls the “unity of value” thesis, or the “big thing” that the hedgehog knows in Archilochus’s

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91 Rawls (1993), 45
92 Ibid
93 Dworkin (2011), 4
94 Ibid, 2
95 Ibid, 3
comparison of the fox and the hedgehog.\textsuperscript{96} For Dworkin, we have a responsibility to make our convictions cohere with one another which in turn ‘thickens’ these abstract and porous values.\textsuperscript{97}

Take the supposed conflict between liberty and equality. Dworkin denies that this conflict exists in the distribution of resources. For Dworkin, in order to respect the fundamental principles of equal concern and personal responsibility we must attempt to interpret each value so that they dovetail with one another. Dworkin takes liberty to be any freedom that government would do \textit{wrong} to constrain, thus differentiating it from a more general freedom “which is simply your ability to do anything you might want to do without government constraint”.\textsuperscript{98} By interpreting liberty in this way, Dworkin states that there is no longer a conflict with equality since the two conceptions are thoroughly integrated.

We can see this integration when we examine the popular view that taxation violates liberty. On Dworkin’s account this is a false conflict insofar as what government extracts through taxes is \textit{justified} on moral grounds by appealing to the principle of equal concern for every person.\textsuperscript{99} Since we reasonably interpret liberty as any action that the government is \textit{unjustified} in constraining rather than pure license to do whatever you want, there is no conflict, at least in regard to how the values of equality and liberty fit into redistributive acts of the government. For Dworkin, “you cannot determine what

\textsuperscript{96} \textit{Ibid}, 1
\textsuperscript{97} \textit{Ibid}, 109
\textsuperscript{98} \textit{Ibid}, 4
\textsuperscript{99} \textit{Ibid}
liberty requires without also deciding what distribution of property and opportunity shows equal concern for all."^{100}

5.4b All Things Considered View vs. Individual Value

Another helpful way to understand the importance of simultaneous equation is to examine how some theorists differentiate between the analysis of a single value and what is called an ‘all things considered’ view. I will draw from the luck egalitarian debate to demonstrate this distinction. Luck Egalitarians take justice to be the neutralization of any negative effect produced through undeserved misfortune on a distribution of goods.\textsuperscript{101} However, Luck Egalitarians are often criticized for being too harsh on victims of option luck. Consider the example of the uninsured driver.

**Uninsured Driver:** An uninsured driver negligently makes an illegal turn that causes an accident with another car. Witnesses call the police and report who is at fault. This information is then transferred to the emergency medical technicians who then decide to save the prudent driver and leave the negligent uninsured driver to die by the side of the road.\textsuperscript{102}

Since Luck Egalitarians view brute luck (unchosen misfortune) as a greater injustice than option luck (misfortune due to a gamble) it seems to be a consequence of their view that the uninsured driver, who made a gamble driving uninsured must be ignored in preference of the prudent driver involved in the accident. Luck egalitarians tend to respond to such cases by conceding that Justice on its own may demand leaving the uninsured driver by the side of the road.\textsuperscript{103} However, they get around this harshness

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\textsuperscript{100} Ibid
\textsuperscript{101} I use goods here as a place holder for any equalisandum one would prefer e.g. resources, capabilities or welfare.
\textsuperscript{102} Anderson (1999), 295
\textsuperscript{103} This coheres with G.A. Cohen’s (2008) statement that “justice can be mean and spiteful”.

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objection by appealing to some other separate value – such as community, compassion, or charity to aid - which will help mitigate the harsh treatment of victims of bad option luck.\textsuperscript{104} From the point of view of justice the medical technicians made the right choice, but in terms of an all things considered view which determines what social state of affairs\textsuperscript{105} we want to bring about in light of all competing values, we ought not leave the victim of bad option luck at the side of the road.

In sum, the worry here for Wiens is that the interpretation of basic values - what Wiens views as basic philosophical work – without an all things considered view, without understanding how the values liberty, equality, and community ‘hang together’, we may be left with evaluative tools that are equally unfit for the project of real world reform. Political values, interpreted without reference to the larger political morality that they are embedded in tend to result in an interpretation that is unrecognizable for real world reform. That is to say we end up with a notion of liberty “that amounts to mere license”\textsuperscript{106} or a conception of justice that is “mean and spiteful”.\textsuperscript{107}

5.4c Rawlsian Reflective Equilibrium

A less controversial example of this drive for placing our values in equipoise is the Rawlsian notion of reflective equilibrium which seeks to obtain integrity amongst our abstract and concrete convictions about justice.\textsuperscript{108}

In searching for the most favored description of this situation we work from both ends. We begin by describing it so that it

\textsuperscript{104} In fact Temkin (2003, p.63) argues that “any reasonable egalitarian will be a pluralist” \\
\textsuperscript{105} Cohen (2008), 227 \\
\textsuperscript{106} Dworkin (2011). \\
\textsuperscript{107} Cohen (2008), 318 \\
\textsuperscript{108} Rawls (1993), 7
represents generally shared and preferably weak conditions. We then see if these conditions are strong enough to yield a significant set of principles. If not, we look for further premises equally reasonable. But if so, and these principles match our considered convictions of justice, then so far well and good. But presumably there will be discrepancies. In this case we have a choice. We can either modify the account of the initial situation or we can revise our existing judgments, for even the judgments we take provisionally as fixed points are liable to revision. By going back and forth, sometimes altering the conditions of the contractual circumstances, at others withdrawing our judgments and conforming them to principle, I assume that eventually we shall find a description of the initial situation that both expresses reasonable conditions and yields principles which match our considered judgments duly pruned and adjusted. This state of affairs I refer to as reflective equilibrium.\textsuperscript{109}

Rawls differs\textsuperscript{110} from Dworkin regarding where this “pruning” stage occurs. That is to say Rawls “did not aim to interpret each value in the light of others so that each supported rather than challenged the others”.\textsuperscript{111} Rather for Rawls the mutual adjustment regarding conflicting values is made \textit{after} the interpretive process by introducing a lexical priority. Thus values may still be said to clash but the lexical ordering provides us with a mechanism to adjudicate such conflicts. Simply put Rawls saw the \textit{ordering} of values as the means through which we can achieve coherence amongst our political values whereas Dworkin wants to achieve this coherence by pruning the values themselves.

5.4d The Identification of Value

Not only will ideal theory help us interpret basic values by situating the value in a larger framework of political morality, but it will also help us identify and argue for the

\textsuperscript{109} Rawls (1991), 18
\textsuperscript{110} Dworkin’s view also differs regarding the range of values we ought to pose in equilibrium, advocating a wider scope than Rawls’ deliberately political one.
\textsuperscript{111} Dworkin (2011), 263
inclusion of a particular value in the evaluation of a certain practice. For example the value of efficiency (Pareto efficiency) was for a long time viewed as an entirely technical and value free notion distinct from issues of fairness or distributive justice. However, the case can be made that part of the lasting influence of John Rawls’ *A Theory of Justice* was to show that a principle of efficiency was in fact, part and parcel of a principle of justice. Ideal theory facilitates this exercise insofar as it provides us with the framework to better see its interplay with other values in higher relief. By demonstrating that liberty, equality, and efficiency cohere with one another as well as our considered judgments it at the very least gives us more confidence in the importance that particular normative consideration may play for the evaluation of a given set of practices (i.e. the organization of the economy). Thus as Dworkin states, “values may become newly attractive when presented in [an] integrated way.”

5.5 Striving for Coherence

The above discussion has focused on how a proper interpretation of basic values involves observing how each conception of value coheres within the larger political morality. Ideal theory, by removing certain issues that may over complicate the analysis, allows us to better clarify the structure of each value and the possible implications it may have for both our interpretation of each value and real world reform. However, underlying this account is a further argument about the role coherence plays in providing justification for a theory of justice.

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112 Heath (2001), 222
113 Dworkin (2011), 110
Justificatory coherence is a common criterion for a political theory although it is not accepted by all. Political theories tend to strive for “a more systematic and unified moral theory whose structure and purpose would be comparable in some ways to linguistic or logical theory.” 114 Such a theory would, it is argued, “serve to order our thoughts and reduce disagreements and bring divergent convictions more in line”. 115

In fact this is what Rawls sought to accomplish through reflective equilibrium stating that “we have to believe each part of a mutually supportive system of principles in order to suppose that together they are sound”. 116 Similarly Dworkin views a coherence theory of truth as the best we can hope for as a way of justifying our moral and political convictions. Dworkin supports this claim by examining how our value judgments differ from judgments about the physical world. When we make a judgment about the physical world, say that there is a black pen on your desk, the bare existence of the pen’s particles make the judgment true. However the truth of a particular value judgment – say that the invasion of Iraq was wrong- is different. Since there are no moral particles that would make a value judgment “barely true” in the same way as the pen, we must rely on another concept of justification. 117

This is where coherence has a role to play. For Dworkin, value judgments can be true only in virtue of the “case” that is made for them. Making a case for a particular moral judgment involves appealing to further value judgments to support the original judgment. 118 These further value judgments cannot be barely true either and require

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114 Lassman (2011), 162
115 Ibid
116 Dworkin (2011), 263
117 Ibid, 114
118 Ibid, 116
further justification. Thus “the truth of any true moral judgment consists in the truth of an indefinite number of other moral judgments.”

It might be clear to the reader that this chain of moral reasoning cannot come to an end at some fundamental principle since that principle would also have to be barely true for there to be an end to the regress. Thus Dworkin states, the argument ends when “it meets itself” by which he means when coherence is adequately demonstrated. Coherence is demonstrated when the particular judgment is “situated within a large interconnected and interdependent system of principles and ideas” from which you could “defend any part of that network only by citing some other part.” Thus, the act of defending your judgment regarding the immorality of the Iraq war may involve “appealing to principle about negligence in personal matters, trustworthiness as a virtue, and caginess as a vice, and then to further principles purportedly justifying each of these convictions […]”

What lessons does this draw for our discussion of Wiens’ attempt to retain fundamental philosophical work while eschewing ideal principles? The account of moral reasoning outlined above supports the claim that the basic philosophical work Wiens has in mind necessarily involves drawing from an embedded series of judgments regarding other values, from which we could in turn draw on further values. Ideal theory provides the grounds from which to “make the case”, as it were, for a particular interpretation of a value and its inclusion. By demonstrating that our other judgments about value cohere

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119 Ibid, 117
120 Ibid, 119
121 Ibid, 121
with this particular interpretation of value we can be more confident in that particular interpretation as well as its position within the limited social space of institutions.\textsuperscript{122}

### 5.5b Rejecting Coherence

As stated above, despite being a rather widely accepted criterion for political theory, not everyone accepts the role coherence plays in justification. Following Weber, one may argue that holding coherence in such a high regard is to be blind to the pervasiveness of disagreement, especially in the political domain. Rather than seeking grounds for agreement, the argument goes, we should focus more on clarifying the nature and implication of the values to which we are committed, which may in fact serve to highlight rather than reduce our disagreements.\textsuperscript{123}

However, at the very least, providing coherence seems to at least give us more confidence that the inclusion and interpretation of a particular value within our framework tends to give us the right answer over a range of cases. Furthermore, it is unclear to what extent Dworkin’s account is opposed to Weber’s, insofar as Dworkin admits that the interpretive project of “knitting our values together” seems impossible to wholly succeed.\textsuperscript{124} For Dworkin his claim is more moderate. The method of moral reasoning outlined above does not guarantee moral truth, but rather once we find that our

\textsuperscript{122} Rawls (1993), 57
\textsuperscript{123} Lassman (2011), 163
\textsuperscript{124} Dworkin (2011), 121
arguments are adequate after demonstrating coherence we have simply “earned the right
to live by them.”

5.5 Conclusion

It has been the task of this chapter to provide a more moderate defense for the
inclusion of ideal theory in normative political theorizing. Rather than defending the
traditional ideal guidance account of ideal theory, it has been argued that ideal theory has
a more indirect role to play. In particular, ideal theory presents us with a helpful way to
“make the case” for a particular interpretation of a value as well as its inclusion in the
evaluation of a particular institution. If ideal theory does in fact play this role, if it does
help us interpret and understand our basic values, then it also impacts the implementation
of real world policy, if only indirectly.

It is important to note that this indirect application of ideal theory is entirely
consistent with a comparative approach like Wiens’ Institutional Failure Analysis. Basic
values are still the primary tools to evaluate our current state of affairs as well as the
range of feasible alternatives. However, since ideal theory has a constitutive role to play
in determining what these values are, the link between ideal theory and real world reform
is restored. In the next chapter I will provide an overview of the argument made so far, as
well as identify certain limitations.

125 Ibid, 39
Chapter 6

Conclusion

6.1 Conclusion

I have considered how the role of ideal theory in normative political theorizing is affected by the challenge of the Theory of Second Best (TOSB). I began by distinguishing the ideal guidance approach to ideal theory from other fact-insensitive theories of justice and how this shapes our understanding of the various critiques of ideal theory. I have suggested that by adopting the ideal guidance approach, ideal theorists overcome some of the criticisms they face, in particular, irrelevancy charges. Despite circumventing this challenge I argued that the TOSB presents a strong challenge to the ideal guidance theorist. The TOSB renders ideal principles uninformative for our implementation of real world reform insofar as we are unjustified in assuming that the policy that best approximates our ideal will in fact be the best policy. In order to justify that assumption we must show that the policy best reflects our basic values that underlie the aspirational ideal. However, as Wiens’ points out, by engaging in this process of justification we render ideal theory redundant to the process of developing morally progressive policy. If we demonstrate that a particular state of affairs does in fact best realize our basic values through a comparative assessment of alternative feasible arrangements, we no longer require ideal principles as a benchmark.

In light of the challenge of TOSB I have defended a more moderate role for ideal theory in normative political theorizing. In particular I argue that ideal theory has a role
to play in clarifying the structure of the basic values Wiens wants to use to evaluate real world reform. I argued that we have good reason to think that the task of placing our values in equipoise is crucial for our understanding of those basic values as well as for identifying what values are thought of as attractive. Furthermore, ideal theory is the appropriate avenue to carry out this task since the disagreements over value are brought into starker relief.

I would like to conclude this chapter with a caveat regarding the argument made above. Although the above defense of ideal theory is moderate in nature, much more still needs to be said about how we ought to go about doing ideal theory. In particular, more needs to be said about what kind of idealizations should be considered “good” idealizations. The answer to this question is not widely agreed upon.\textsuperscript{126} In fact it has been argued that certain idealizations can be seen as not only unhelpful for real world reform but actually pernicious for how we think about justice.\textsuperscript{127} As Ingrid Roebyn’s suggest we need to study “cases of flawed idealizations” in order to understand what makes an idealization good or bad.\textsuperscript{128} Despite the fact that the above defense of ideal theory can already be considered moderate in nature it is nonetheless imperative that we attempt to conduct the task of ideal theory with an eye towards deliberate idealization rather than abstraction for abstraction’s sake.\textsuperscript{129} It is quite possible that such indiscriminate abstraction has not only led to the more recent attacks on ideal theory but also led to the complete rejection of ideal theory. In an effort to avoid the overwrought framework of an

\textsuperscript{126} Robeyns (2008), Valentini (2009), Stemplowska (2008)
\textsuperscript{127} Mills (2009)
\textsuperscript{128} Robeyns (2008), 362
\textsuperscript{129} Rawls (1993), 45
unduly abstract theory of justice theorists may end up rejecting too much. It has been the
project of this paper to argue that a less obvious connection, between ideal theory and our
non-ideal comparative judgments, remains and we ought not to reject ideal theory
completely from the task of political theorizing.
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