

'Why do we punish?' is a question that scholars tackled from a variety of angles. Philosophers have addressed it from a justificatory perspective, debating what (if anything) justifies punishment. Social scientists, on the other hand, tackled the question from an explanatory perspective, investigating what causes human beings to adopt such a practice.

Although some scholars have lamented how unreceptive philosophers can be towards the work of social scientists, they failed to compellingly spell out the terms in which empirical insights could claim any relevance for philosophers.

So far, such a failure has been far from surprising. After all, there is a common-sensical point justifying philosophers' lack of interest in the empirics of the issue: the space of causes and the space of reasons are apparently insulated from one another and any attempt to make inferences from the former to the latter is at best misleading and at worst fallacious.

However, several authors recently mounted formidable attacks to this piece of philosophical common sense, showing that causes can bear upon the space of normative reasons in a variety of ways. This change of perspective turns the gap between empirical and normative discourse about punishment into an uncharted territory for productive dialogue. A dialogue that is important to have, given the high social and human costs that punishment imposes on modern societies and their members.

The general goal of this project is to fill this gap by examining how the best explanations of why we punish bear upon the normative status of the practice of punishment, thereby offering an empirically informed evaluation of our discourses and practices as far as legal punishment is concerned.

To pursue this goal, this project resorts to a reconstructive approach to the practice of punishment, investigating if it can be grounded in universal necessities related to the human condition and reconstructing the needs and pressures that might have led to its currently dominant configuration in many western countries.

The expected outputs of this project consists in three articles and a book proposal, in which the following conclusion is likely to result supported: that some form of legal punishment constitutes a practical necessity for complex and modern societies, but that the current configuration of our punitive practices is not.