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## Causality and International Redistributive Justice<sup>1</sup>

There are numerous ways to determine some obligation to compensate for the wrongful harming of a person or group of persons. Perhaps the easiest method of making this

fgvto kpcvqp'ku'c'ecwucn'qpg<y j q'ecwugf 'vj g'j cto A'K'vj ku'guuc {.'Rqi i g'au'cti wo gpw'qh'i lobal injustice will be examined, and the question of causation and fault will be expanded upon with the intent to make determinate whether the citizens and governments of rich western nations are at fault for the historical and continued existence of the y qtrf au'absolute poor. I will begin by gzc pfi kpi 'qp'Rqi i g'au'i qcn'cpf 'argument in order to set the grounds of conversation. After this, I will explicate his discussion of synergistic harm prior to offering an analysis of causal notions tgrv kpi 'vq'Rqi i g'au'heory. I will argue that the low democratic credentials in western nations exculpates many or most nny 'kpeqo g'ekkl gpu.'dw'ci tgg'y kj 'Rqi i g'au'cuuguo gpv'qh'ecwucn' responsibility as pertaining to certain groups of the elite who maintain control of western institutions.

### The Argument: Rights and Duties

Pogge is particularly concerned with questions pertaining to the globally absolute poor and the infringement of their negative rights by the governments and citizens of developed pcvkpu'Rqi i g'au'hqewu'qp'c'p'crow spectrum of negative rights is not to suggest that there are no positive duties held by the citizens of developed nations towards the global poor. Rather, Pogge is developing an argument aimed specifically at a certain brand of libertarian who posits that only negative rights are properly called rights.<sup>2</sup> These libertarians would state that nation x

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<sup>1</sup> Rqi i g.'Vj qo cu06Tgeqi pk gf 'cpf 'Xkqrvgf 'd{ 'k'pvtgpcvqpcn'Ncy <'Vj g'J wo cp'Tki j w'qh'vj g'I nqden'Rqqtö" in *Politics as Usual: What Lies Behind the Pro-Poor Rhetoric*. (Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 2010). 26-56.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid., pp. 27-28

possesses a negative right to not be invaded by nation *y*, but nation *y* never has any obligation to offer any sort of aid to nation *x*. To offer aid might be a morally good thing, but it is not morally *obligatory*. While Pogge is arguing for a more expansive set of negative rights, he does not presume that these negative rights are the full extent of rights/obligations. Rather, this is Pogge's attempt to respond to those theorists who would reject even the most basic of international duties. This argument is not, therefore, counter to those who hold that there are a more expansive set of rights/obligations, e.g. Shue or Nussbaum.<sup>3</sup>

Most of these libertarians who argue for negative rights argue in terms of states. If American policies harm foreign nationals, then it is a matter pertaining to state relations. This allows the libertarian or realist to develop a theory which leads to an exculpation of the state's citizens. If anybody is at fault, it is the state, which the libertarian or realist can then argue is an entity

nations do not actively harm the poor, but Pogge distinguishes between two kinds of harm: interactional and institutional. Interactional harm is that which we typically think of, in which one person directly harms another, e.g. *a* punches *b*. Institutional harm might be more controversial as an institution stands *between* the harmed and the harmer, e.g. the harmers are those who support and benefit from the institution of slavery but do not own or work in the slave trade. Libertarians may doubt whether or not we have a positive duty to help those harmed by institutions, e.g. the enslaved, but only a moral skeptic would reject the proposition that one ought to refrain from participating or empowering these institutions. These institutional negative

f wkgu'ctg'yj gthqtg'yj g'uwdlgev'qh'Rqi i gæ'cti wo gp0





Rich nations both support and fund institutions such as the Bretton Woods system. These institutions regularly coerce nations into making structural changes when they are in need of financial rescue. This may or may not be legitimate coercion. Nations voluntarily enter agreements for loan programs. If the coercion is consented to, it seemingly cannot be illegitimate







absolutely poor given the fact that domestic governments cause a preponderance of the harm? Further, most of the harm caused by the international system harms indirectly vis-à-vis domestic governments, e.g. if we accept that the IMF/WB are harming residents of nation x because the domestic government agreed to that harm. Pogge responds to this concern with the tribe example.<sup>14</sup> In the tribe example, two groups of people are independently polluting a river with rather harmless chemicals. These two chemicals combine in the river to create a lethal poison which promptly kills the residents of a third village downstream. When confronted with questions of fault, both tribes upstream argue that they are absolved of all moral culpability. Both argue that their chemical is released into the river independently of the other. The poison happens afterwards. There are two reasons why this might be: either there is a diffusion of guilt among participants based on their degree of fault and/or harm, or one must be fully at fault to be held morally culpable. If we accept this, however, neither party polluting the river bears any responsibility. The result is that nobody is responsible for the harm that both are actively producing. Pogge rejects this and posits that both parties might be fully responsible for the harm. There is, therefore, an increase in fault rather than a diffusion of responsibility. As applied to states, then, even if there are two mutually independent harms done to the people of a state (domestic government harms the people and international institutions harm people), neither is therefore absolved of their responsibility. All parties involved are obligated to stop harming, and until they do, both are fully responsible for the harms done to the impoverished citizens. Pogge further contends that there is an asymmetry of power. The international stage has a strong and direct influence on domestic governments, but domestic governments exert little influence on the

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<sup>14</sup> Ibid., pp. 44-45

international structure. Therefore, the international structure might have an even larger portion of the fault and responsibility.

### Causal Fault: Harm Conduit

The second causal notion that I wish to examine is that of causal fault. In the case of synergistic harm, we found that Pogge argues for all parties to a direct harm being blameworthy for that harm. Vj ku"qvej gf "qp"vj g"kf gc"qh"c"õj cto "eqpf wk.ö"lq0vj g"i qo gule"i qxgtpo gpv' channels any harm that the international system causes, thus taking on the burden of fault. Now y g'y km'gzi nek'vj qug'r ctv'gu'y j lej "ctg'ecwucm{ "cv'hcwml'ht"j cto kpi "vj g'y qtrf øi"

*institutions*

process of wronging. This is shown through a person who is driving and drops a cigarette out of their car window. If the cigarette alights on a pile of leaves and starts a forest fire, then it is the

of the butterfly effect. The threshold of causative fault<sup>20</sup> seems to be either indeterminate or infinite. Either may prove to be insufficient to deliberate on fault or so all-encompassing as to exculpate all possible instigators. Pogge might suggest the key here is the degree of fault or harm that inheres in the actions of the developed citizenry. Insofar as the institutions and governments are founded on democratic legitimacy, all of their acts of fault or harm directly transfer to those who hold democratic powers, i.e. the voters. This relationship is essentially separate from your typical causal interruption.

### Objection 2: Democracy Argument

Vj ku'tgxtv'dt'kpi u'vr "vj g'ugeqpf 'r quikdng'et'kls wg"qh'Rqi i gORqi i gøu'cti wo gpv'ht'y gvgtp" citizens bearing responsibility for their votes which, through a complex causal nexus, cause and perpetuate the existence of global absolute poverty, presupposes democracy. While western governments often pay homage to the *idea* or the ideology of the democracy, the actualization of democracy as relevant to causal fault is an empirical question: do the desires/preferences/etc. of individuals come to bear in policy decisions? Some might point to independent variables as proof against the democratic process, e.g. low voter turnout, low approval ratings (both of individual laws and the legislative bodies generally), etc. These would not necessarily settle the question. More conclusively, I think, is a recent study which measured the actual influence of different groups on policy decisions in the United States.<sup>21</sup> This study came to a rather surprising conclusion for those who believe that ideological or constitutional statements of democracy are gpqwi j "vq'f gvgto kpg'f go qet'c'le'et'gf gp'vc vgtø kpg'f go q # v





Some arguments against this might be to suggest that it is impossible for humans to set aside familial or local relations, so those who argue for an impartial approach to ethics are setting us up for failure.

Second, we may set aside cosmopolitanism and rather concentrate on degree of harm. If the state is indeed a metaphysically significant feature of the international system and morality, then does the degree of harm committed to individuals and groups become a relevant fact? For example, if we take a developed nation with sub-



The question of priority might end in a question of ideal versus realistic. Ideally, we at the very least owe ethical consideration to all rational agents. Realistically, it might be impossible to pay such consideration to people out of sight of our everyday interactions.

The question of global poverty is a serious one in the contemporary age, and seems likely to increase in scope and severity. With the introduction of a world struggling with the effects of climate change, poverty might not only increase in severity due to drought and increases in natural disaster, but available resources will be curtailed. Problems of priority are especially at issue here, as already burdened ecosystems will face the onslaught of a warming planet. The problems of global poverty are largely self-inflicted, whether due to a historical, political or economic process. As Pogge discusses at the end of this chapter, there are sufficient resources to give the world recourse to alleviating global poverty. In my opinion, the argument, it is less an ethical issue than one of admitting moral culpability and righting wrongs. When the cone of causation expands in the next 50 years to all of those factors which contributed to global warming, how will the world respond? This seems to require an expansion of the discussion in our third objection. Will future-Americans, Europeans, Chinese, Indians, etc. be held responsible for repairing the woes that our current generation is inflicting? If we hold that those of us living in the current world are responsible for the wrongs our ancestors committed, it seems likely that we are now committing a similar degree of harm on future generations. If this is true, anybody in the western world currently engaging in acts that contribute a considerable amount to global warming might be culpable for the ensuing chaos bound to follow in a world of restricted resources, and the deaths that are likely to follow.