

The Premises and the Context of Global Resources Dividend Argument on Thomas Pogge's Theory

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Abstract. In one of his most famous works, *World Poverty and Human Rights: Responsibilities and Reforms* (WPHR), Thomas Pogge founded a theory which has become a reference point for researchers addressing the topic of global justice. The global resources dividends (GRD) theory has at its core the debate around global justice and, in particular, the debate on how the citizens of rich countries should assume moral responsibility in relation to citizens of other countries, that could be characterized by extreme poverty. Pogge addresses and brings to the forefront of contemporary philosophy the increasingly larger social cleavages, a global community deeply differentiated into two categories of people: citizens of developed countries experiencing an unprecedented abundance and citizens of burdened countries, with people that are fighting hunger, the most severe illnesses and other shortcomings. Due to this context, a rigorous analysis on global moral responsibility and the GRD as a possible alternative is required.

Key words: global justice, moral responsibility, Pogge, Locke.

What is truly innovative in Pogge's theory regarding moral responsibility is how he theoretically constructs and substantiates this principle. Moral responsibility is not the prerogative of the duty concerning humanitarian assistance as John Rawls believed (1999a, 105-120), and is not justified by the fact that rich countries and their citizens are those who hold all the levers required to change the way international order is conceived and the effects it has for the poor. They can be accepted as arguments to justify who bears moral responsibility for global poverty. But this is neither the single, nor the most powerful argument.

I. GLOBAL MORAL RESPONSIBILITY

Thus, Pogge's intuition is that moral responsibility resides in that rich countries and their citizens have worked constantly to persuade poor countries to accept a global order which has had the effect of violating human rights or impeding individuals asking these rights and acquiring specific social benefits. Moreover, it appears that the results of this global order could have been anticipated, which is why Pogge believes that a fundamental moral principle was systematically violated by this situation, namely: do not cause serious harm to innocent people for insignificant advantages: "My arguments do not challenge the morality prevalent in the West. On the contrary, I invoke the very core of this morality: that is wrong to harm innocent people for minor gains." (2008, 32). This approach is the foundation of moral responsibility that the entities listed above should uphold in order to address a serious problem of contemporary society represented by global poverty.

Another moral intuition lies in the idea that the damages that the global order produces to the individuals, members of disadvantaged states, a global order that is

determined by the developed world and for which it is culpable, are extremely serious, in Pogge's view, which is why he is very trenchant when trying to analyse them. The moral responsibility of humans belonging to the developed world can be seen from two perspectives: "we may be failing to fulfil our positive duty to help persons in acute distress; and we may be failing to fulfil our more stringent negative duty not to uphold injustice, not to contribute to or profit from the unjust impoverishment of others." (2008, 33).

The positive duty may seem weak and discretionary. People can choose to support certain humanitarian causes, but they have the freedom to choose whether or not to get involved with helping the poor with whom they have no connection whatsoever, they are free to choose to support or not very expensive campaigns. Violations of a negative duty involve a number of arguments that make Pogge consider that citizens of developed countries have no moral conduct as long as they allow the perpetuation of an institutional system that brings, by its unjust nature, profound disadvantages to others. This argument rests on the idea that the existing institutional system is shared by all countries, being a system built by those who have all advantages and imposed on the burdened individuals.

Kor-Chor Tan identifies a weakness in this point of Pogge's theory. He believes that Pogge, without any justification, assumes that human rights can be violated only by the state and its agencies. Doing so, he does not consider that such damage can be produced by other individuals, members of society, not only in situations where the state and international institutions fail to protect them. Moreover, Tan believes that the institutional design Pogge assumes is wrong because it restricts human rights to individuals who share an institutional order. This concept opens to unfortunate conclusions because it leaves the possibility to conclude that "persons outside our social system are in no position to make human rights-based demands against us; only persons belonging to a common social order belong to a human rights community." (Pogge 2010b, 49).

But Pogge neither endorses, nor intimates that human rights can be reduced to this type of interpretation. He theoretically isolates this issue in order to highlight how human rights are violated in an institutional sense (Pogge 2010a, 192-200). The effects of the international institutional system are likely to produce radical inequality that cannot be attributed to other social factors such as natural disasters, bad luck, natural disabilities or on behalf of other individuals:

[T]he global poor live within a worldwide state system based on internationally recognized territorial domains, interconnected through a global network of market trade and diplomacy. The presence and relevance of shared institutions are shown by how dramatically we affect the circumstances of the global poor through investments, loans, trade, bribes, military aid, sex tourism, culture exports and much else. (Pogge 2008, 205)

Nevertheless, how can the ways in which we relate to the global market, where we have the freedom to acquire and offer for sale any goods or services, influence deep poverty and inequality globally? Why can we be held morally responsible for others' poverty if we have an economic behaviour adapted to our personal needs? These are the kind of

questions that can confront Pogge's theory. But the philosopher accurately identifies a relationship that is not so obvious. Our choices to consume certain types of goods, or some particular types of services determine the prices and thereby, the opportunities and lives of those who produce, and these are factors that influence their survival. And even if Pogge does not advocate the isolation of certain states of the global market, he does not hesitate to argue for greater responsibility and interest in how different global regulations are affecting the poorest.

The negative duty is associated with a moral urgency and, since global poverty can be considered as such, it must be taken seriously. Moral responsibility is held by the governments that allow such an international system that violates fundamental negative duties, but also by citizens because they authorized governments and leaders that they have established and supported and because they are passively partaking in a global order which is deeply unjust:

The citizens and governments of the affluent countries – whether intentionally or not – are imposing a global institutional order that foreseeably and avoidably reproduces severe and widespread poverty. The worst-off are not merely poor and often starving, but are being impoverished and starved under our shared institutional arrangements, which inescapably shape their lives. (2008, 207)

Pogge believes that the global order has a harmful effect on individuals, which is quite obvious. Strong states, members of this order, understand this and deliberately, for the general interests of the respective countries and to preserve their citizens' welfare, perpetuate a disadvantageous situation for poor countries. Moreover, "the social positions of the worse-off and the better-off have emerged from a single historical process that has pervaded by massive, grievously wrong." (2008, 209). The question to be asked at this point is: is there a possibility of establishing an alternative international institutional system?

II. GRD: A POSSIBLE ALTERNATIVE

Pogge has an answer for this kind of question. He believes that there are billions of people who have a profoundly disadvantaged start in life, people who possess all the natural characteristics elementary to succeed in life, to have a good life, to achieve their goals and to lead an active and productive life. However, the current international system restricts their fundamental human rights, and this could be accepted if there was no alternative:

Their misery could be justified only if there were no institutional alternative under which such massive misery could be avoided. If, as the GRD proposal shows there is such an alternative, then we must ascribe this misery to the existing global order and therefore ultimately to ourselves. (2008, 207)

Pogge assumes that the criticism of the international order is not enough and not even the theoretical identification of those responsible would provide sufficient prerequisites for solving poverty and its complementary problems. He dares more and attempts to provide solutions, alternatives that can substantiate further research in order to identify new ways to eradicate poverty which must be accepted as a problem of the international community, a problem for which we are equally responsible. Thus, Pogge offers an innovative view in contemporary political philosophy and proposes a system based on *dividends arising from global resources*, or the *GRD proposal* (1994, 195-224).¹ But what does the GRD model propose?

Thomas Pogge has started developing this idea in 1994 when, in the article *An Egalitarian Law of Peoples*, addressed what Robert Nozick called the Lockean clause:

A process that normally gives rise to a right of permanent transmissible property under a will on something that was not in your possession before, will not have this result, if the position of others who do not have the freedom to use the thing, is worsened by it. [...] A theory of ownership incorporating the Lockean clause will solve correctly the situations where someone appropriates its total reserve of something necessary life. (Nozick 1975, 228-29)

The Lockean clause states that individuals can acquire ownership of certain assets if these are the result of their own work, and if, through their work, individuals do not violate the right of others to do the same and to be able to acquire goods at least as many and as valuable:

Nor was this appropriation of any parcel of land, by improving it, any prejudice to any other man, since there was still enough, and as good left; and more than the yet unprovided could use. [...] God gave the world to men in common; but since he gave it them for their benefit, and the greatest conveniencies of life they were capable to draw from it, it cannot be supposed he meant it should always remain common and uncultivated. He gave it to the use of the industrious and rational, (and labor was to be his title to it;) not to the fancy or covetousness of the quarrelsome and contentious. (Locke 1980, 21-22)

Thus, Pogge is considering a contemporary clause, similar to the Lockean proviso but influenced by Nozick:

Nations (or persons) may appropriate and use resources, but humankind at large still retains a kind of minority stake, which, somewhat like preferred stock, confers no control but a share of the material benefits. In this picture, my proposal can be presented as a global resources dividend, which operates as a modern Lockean provisos. (1994, 200-201)

The modern interpretation of John Locke's proviso, placed within Pogge's theory, aims to demonstrate how the project can operate a global redistribution of resources or benefits from their exploitation. The entitlement of individuals to dividends of global

1] See also Pogge 1998.

resources means that those who have the exclusive right of exploitation do not leave enough and as good for others. The world belongs to everybody and we all have a responsibility for how its resources should be redistributed. Not assuming this responsibility has brought disadvantages to others since their access to benefits is restricted by an international institutional system which does not address this problem. The *modern Lockean proviso* supports equal moral rights over natural resources.

When discussing GRD, Pogge envisaged that states and their representatives do not hold exclusive monopoly on natural resources and share at the global level some of the advantages that their operation entails.

This proposal envisions that states and their governments shall not have full libertarian property rights with respect to the natural resources in their territory, but can be required to share a small part of the value of any resources they decide to use or sale. This payment they must make is called a dividend because it is based on the idea that the global poor own an inalienable stake in all limited natural resources. (Pogge 2008, 202)

Is this model valid? Can we ask states through international regulations to give other people on the planet a share of the available benefits? Is the case for a model of responsibility that transcend state borders justified? And, finally, how can we convince states that are rich in natural resources of the inalienable right of all – including that of potential enemies on the international scene – to the resources they have inherited or were identified within the borders of their states? These are just some of the issues that are immediately arising from the enunciation of such a method.

The method Pogge proposed does not conflict with national control over resources because there is no participation in decisions as to whether or not to use certain resources and on how these should be used. Nevertheless, it entitles individuals from around the planet to some of the economic value of those resources if the national decision is to use them. This idea can be expanded, in Pogge's view, and the resources are not depleted or destroyed through use, but rather eroded as is air and water where pollutants are discharged as a result of the exploitation of certain resources or land used for agriculture, livestock or construction. The principle behind this idea is that the harmful effects of resource exploitation are felt by all individuals, but only some of them receive all the benefits of these activities.

This method could be used in order to support all human beings to meet their basic needs with dignity. By means of such international institutional model people would be able not only to acquire an adequate level of education, medicine, food, etc., but it would also establish a formal framework to enable the pursuit of vital interests of security and the general welfare of society.

Another significant effect of this method is that people may be freed from the dependence implied by living in a poor society. Dependence on government, be it corrupt, authoritarian or otherwise, as well as dependence on international institutions, which anyway fails to show enough consideration for the interests of the members of

such a society, would keep people in a situation that is unfriendly to development. Pogge believes that this method would facilitate individuals' access to education, they would learn to read and write or other professions and, last but not least, they would also be able to successfully adapt to the contemporary environment. Only then could they enjoy real opportunities to participate in the public, social and political life, or they would integrate on the real work market. Thus, the achievement of Human Rights is consistent with the general principle of global justice which attributes moral consideration to all individuals equally, regardless to the boundaries within which they were born.

The proposal is one that can be accepted globally because it does not imply that global resources should be owned by humanity as a whole, and the redistribution of resources and complementary benefits should be made based on an egalitarian principle: "My proposal is far more modest by leaving each government in control of the natural resources in its territory." (2008, 211)

Jiwei Ci doubts that Pogge's moral proposal is so modest as it seems to be in the statement above quoted. The reform thought by Pogge would lead to profound changes in current moral thinking. This would require a fundamental increase of the degree of sensitivity to the real problems of the world. Ci doubts that such a thing could be possible because it requires behavioural changes, and the questioning of the principles that underlie international institutions. Ci manifests scepticism about the moral progress that Pogge assumes when considering the contemporary era as favourable for global justice and the establishment of an institutional order to support it. Ci believes that we cannot talk about moral progress because the abolition of injustice is done through other injustices.

My general point, to say it once again, is this: To the extent that an injustice is shifted elsewhere, there is no moral progress, all sites or means of injustice considered. Only in the absence of such a shift can we speak of the 'net' reduction or removal of the injustice and hence of real moral progress. (2010, 97-98)

In this interpretation, the fact that the transfer of responsibility is solely on the shoulders of citizens of rich countries is an injustice and, as such, no moral progress has been achieved.²

However, it is worth noting that GRD is a method developed for the long term. Poverty is the result of historical developments. The solutions to eradicate it cannot be short-term. Therefore, we have to identify sustainable solutions, but more importantly, this model demonstrates that there are possibilities of finding alternative methodologies and regulations through which the international system could manage to solve many of the current problems of the global community. Humanity has undoubtedly registered a moral progress, and one of the proofs resides in this very academic concern, arising from various fields, regarding global poverty and other similar problems. Research in this area is increasing and contributes to the public debate, the dissemination of information, awareness of global responsibilities and the identification of viable solutions.

2] See a complete answer in Pogge 2010b.

For things to change it is very important to obtain the support of the global community and specialists; moreover researchers from various fields should gain awareness of these problems, and make contributions to the development of a viable alternative systems. Without these premises the leaders of poor countries in many cases deliberately choose to keep citizens uneducated, docile, dependent and exploitable. In such situations, solutions must be direct and they should come from the international community; the target should be beneficiaries and organizations who are involved in solving real sharp social inequalities.

Here is the point where Pogge identifies problems when testing how realistic the system he proposes actually is:

Even if the GRD proposal is practicable, and even if it could be implemented with the good will of all concerned, there remains the problem of generating this good will, especially on the part of the rich and mighty. Without the support of the US and EU, massive global poverty and starvation will certainly not be eradicated in our lifetimes (2008, 216-217).

III. CONCLUSIONS

The moral responsibility belongs to all actors involved in generating and perpetuating the current international system. More precisely, it belongs to the current international institutions, the governments of rich countries and the citizens that promote this reality through active involvement. That is why Pogge proposes the idea of an international cosmopolitanism founded on human rights, that involves an international system of institutions overseeing its implementation.

The innovative part of this system consists in the introduction of three general principles that will form the moral markers to which all international institutions should adhere: it pertains to human beings as such, not to their membership in a certain state, ethnicity, religion etc.; equal treatment, from a moral perspective, of each human being, in regard to the principle of universality and the principle of generality that has global force. From this stems the main idea of moral cosmopolitanism developed by Pogge, summed up in that every human being has a global status, and this is the ultimate unit of moral concerns.

The moral responsibility regarding the hardships of poor states should be globally assumed because these are a result of international settings determined by the developed world, for which it is blameable. This moral blame does not result from the fact that we have a humanitarian duty to help, neither from the fact that we have all the means to eradicate these disadvantages and inequalities. The moral duty results from the negative duty that we have to abide by: not to cause serious damage to innocent people for insignificant gains. The moral duty has its roots in the fact that modern society promotes injustice, contributes to burdening others so that certain interests or gains will not be jeopardized.

This thesis is built on the assumption that the negative consequences of the current international system can be anticipated or even avoided.

All these conclusions and remarks are developed beyond this level, because Pogge does propose a possible solution for how the institutions of the international systems are built and implemented. This consists of rethinking the global institutional setting so that it is based on the principle of dividends from the global resources or GRD. This alternative forwards that states and their representatives do not have a monopoly on natural resources and that they assign to all people, at a global level, dividends from the benefits that are accrued from exploitation of these resources.

This alternative does not endanger national control of the resources and does not involve other states or persons in the decisional process of how these resources are harvested and utilized. The consequence of the GRD principle is that every individual might partially benefit from the advantages resulted from exploitation. This principle would support all individuals to strive for a level of existence adequate to the age we live in, with access to food, shelter, education and medical treatment.

Another consequence would be the obligation to guarantee the dignity and freedom of citizens of poor countries who are dependent on their corrupt governments, employers who exploit them and on other international institutions which show little interest anyway in the general conditions of their living.

Even if the alternative proposed by Pogge can be practised and in the long term would actually generate the positive effects mentioned, the possibility of establishing such a principle depends on the goodwill of stakeholders and, as anticipated by Pogge, this is the most difficult element at stake.

The reform proposed by Thomas Pogge involves a very important principle because it opens new normative possibilities for global institutional arrangements to adapt to the contemporary condition of humanity, which could lead to development for all individuals. The fundamental point of this reform is that compensation requires those who benefit from planetary resources to support those who unintentionally benefit less or not at all.

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