

INTERNATIONAL POLITICS AND ETHICS: POSITIVE, NEGATIVE AND RECIPROCAL DUTIES ON GLOBAL POVERTY

Burak BAŞKAN¹

Abstract

Global poverty has been an issue at the centre of ethical debates, because it has devastating effects on human life and it is the main source of various inequalities in society. This paper, which deals with the moral duties of humanity to reduce global poverty, argues that humanity has both positive duties to help the existing poor and negative duties to prevent the emergence of new poor and to find a permanent solution to poverty. The argument that ensures paper's originality is that the poor, who claim positive rights for themselves, are obliged to fulfil their 'reciprocal negative and positive duties' towards the benefactors in return. By defending the opinion that a hierarchy should be determined for the interpersonal distribution of negative and positive duties, the paper also contributes to a fair distribution of duties between both those who request aid and those who aid.

Keywords: Global Poverty, Ethics, Positive Duties, Negative Duties, Reciprocal Duties

JEL Codes: D60, D63, D64, F02, F35, I14, I31, I32

ULUSLARARASI SİYASET VE ETİK: KÜRESEL YOKSULLUK ÜZERİNE OLUMLU, OLUMSUZ VE MÜTEKABİL GÖREVLER

Öz

Küresel yoksulluk, gerek insan yaşamı üzerindeki yıkıcı etkileri gerekse toplumdaki çok çeşitli eşitsizliklerin ana kaynağı olması nedeniyle etik tartışmaların merkezinde yer alan bir konudur. Yoksulluğun azaltılması için insanlığın ahlaki görevlerini konu edinen bu çalışma, insanlığın mevcut yoksullara yardım etmeyi içeren pozitif görevleri ile yeni yoksulların ortaya çıkmasını engelleyecek ve yoksulluğa kalıcı çözümlerin getirilmesine önayak olacak negatif görevleri olduğunu ortaya koymaktadır. Çalışmanın özgünlüğü ise yoksulların pozitif hak taleplerini, hayırseverlere yönelik 'mütekabil pozitif ve negatif görevler' yerine getirmeleri koşuluna bağlamasından kaynaklanmaktadır. Çalışma, negatif ve pozitif görevlerin kişiler arası dağılımında bir hiyerarşi belirlenmesi gerektiği görüşünü savunarak hem yardım talep edenler hem de yardımda bulunanlar arasında adil bir görev dağılımının düzenlenmesine katkı sağlamayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Küresel Yoksulluk, Etik, Pozitif Görevler, Negatif Görevler, Mütekabil Görevler

JEL Kodları: D60, D63, D64, F02, F35, I14, I31, I32

¹ Dr. Öğr. Üyesi, Erzurum Teknik Üniversitesi, İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi, burak.baskan@erzurum.edu.tr, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2885-5911>



INTRODUCTION

Poverty is an important global problem that has affected the life of a non-negligible part of humanity around the world. The 2022 Global Multidimensional Poverty Index revealed that 1.2 billion people (equal to 19.1% of the total population of the world) live in extreme multidimensional poverty across 111 developing countries. 593 million people in those countries (corresponding to the half of the population who live in extreme poverty) are children under 18 years old. Sub-Saharan Africa hosts the largest number of extremely poor people (with nearly 579 million people) and South Asia hosts the second largest number (with nearly 385 million poor people) (UNDP and OPHI, 2022, p. 2). As a consequence of extreme poverty, the number of people affected by extreme hunger has reached 828 million in 2021. 150 million new people were added to the total number as the COVID-19 pandemic emerged. In that year, 2.3 billion people across the world also suffered from food insecurity. Nearly 1.15 billion of them live in Asia; and 795 million live in Africa (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, 2022). Extreme poverty also exacerbated malnutrition-based disorders among children around the world. In 2020, 149.2 million children around the world (corresponds to 22% of children under 5 years old) faced with severe health problems stemming from stunting. 45.4 million children around the world (corresponds to 6.7% of children under 5 years old) were affected by wasting and 38.9 million children globally (corresponds to 5.7% of children under 5 years old) suffered from overweight (WHO, UNICEF and World Bank, 2021). The most dramatic effect of poverty is the high mortality rate among children, whose chances of living a healthy life are directly related to the environment in which they are born and the economic circumstances of their families. In 2020, nearly 5 million children under 5 years old died due to inadequate economic conditions (UNICEF, WHO, World Bank Group and UN Population Division, 2021, p. 12).

The negativity of poverty and hunger is acknowledged by almost the whole world public under the auspices of the United Nations (UN), the most important global organisation in the world. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights adopted by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA, 1948) has determined “the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and of his family, including food, clothing, housing and medical care and necessary social services ...” as the basic right for all human beings. According to the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), ending poverty and ending hunger have been determined as two of the seventeen sustainable development goals of the UN (2022). The rights and duties stemming from the issues of poverty and hunger are taken for granted globally as a consequence of the UN’s regulations and decisions. However, comprehensive theoretical discussions and ethical justifications are important in order to ensure the normative basis of the struggle with global poverty and hunger. Therefore, this paper aims to make an intellectual and ethical contribution to these problematic areas.



The ethical discussions in this paper basically rely on the terms of positive/negative rights as well as positive/negative duties. Positive rights are defined as “the rights one holds to some specific good or service, which some other has a duty to provide” (Fagan, 2003). In conjunction with positive rights, a positive duty refers to the need “to perform some specified action or any action that would bring about a certain specified sort of result” (Narveson, 2001, p. 57). Negative right, on the other hand, means having “the right to be free to do some action or to do no action.” Possessing negative rights ensures being free from the intervention of others. Some examples of negative rights are the right to create a specific conception of the world, the right to express the thoughts freely and the right to decide on the best option for the self (Capone, 2011, p. 749). Accordingly, a negative duty refers to the “duty to refrain from some specified sort of action or from any action that would bring about a certain specified sort of result” (Narveson, 2001, p. 57). The main goal of negative duties is to avoid from harming the others because of a specific active action. Therefore, negative duties are restraining, while positive duties are encouraging.

The current paper problematizes poverty around the world and aims to discuss positive, negative and reciprocal aspects of duties for combating the global poverty problem. Accordingly, it is argued in the paper that we have both positive duties to relieve the existing poor population and negative duties stemming from the negative effects of global order on poverty such as withdrawing our support or denying the benefits available from the order. Moreover, this paper also adds a third dimension to the discussion of global poverty by burdening the poor and the institutions representing them with ‘reciprocal duties. These include the reciprocal negative duties based on not harming the benefactors and the reciprocal positive duties based on making all possible essential efforts to overcome poverty. Hence, the paper defends the indivisible unity of positive and negative duties and makes an objection to the tendency of possible malicious intentions against the benefactors. The claim of the destitute for positive rights depends on the fulfilment of these reciprocal duties. The originality of the paper, therefore, stems from its three-legged position that overcomes the dichotomy of positive duties and negative duties. Finally, this article aims to contribute the fair distribution of the responsibility of fighting against poverty to all humanity by proposing an interpersonal hierarchy of positive and negative duties.

IS IT WRONG TO HELP THE POOR?

The question of whether helping the poor is wrong or not can be an appropriate starting point for ethical discussions on positive rights and duties. One of the most radical standpoints regarding the ethical discussions on poverty belongs to Thomas Robert Malthus (1798/1998, p. 4) who emphasised the negative outcomes of uncontrolled population growth in the long term. He argued that an uncontrolled population increases arithmetically, while subsistence production increases arithmetically. Thusly, population is far



more powerful than the production of subsistence for humanity. From this standpoint, the Malthusian perspective claimed that aiding the destitute is counter-productive; such charitable activities simply cause the survival and reproduction of even more human beings. This might result in presumptive food crises and the world could encounter a worse situation than before (Gomberg, 2002, p. 37). The Malthusian perspective, at this point, makes a moral distinction between letting a human die, which is morally blameless but regrettable, and killing him/her, which is morally unacceptable except in extraordinary cases (Sieger, 2011, p. 277).

The Malthusian standpoint may not accord with reality, because the increase in the world population has been accompanied by significant efficiency benefits in food production, which brought about a 32% decline in the prices of primary nutrients between 1985 and 2000. Furthermore, there are no empirical data to support the argument that reducing severe indigence worsens people's situations and causes more deaths in the future. Conversely, there are remarkable data revealing that birth rates are more likely to drop when indigence is reduced and the economic conditions of women improve. Hence, the minimisation of indigence and the enhancement of the conditions of women might be more beneficial ways of addressing overpopulation (Pogge, 2002, p. 7). More importantly, Singer (1972, p. 240) accepted that high rates of population growth can pose a problem in the future in terms of preventing poverty. However, defending such an argument cannot justify or at least necessitate the position that people should not do anything about those who live in severe poverty at the moment. In other words, he suggested that defending population control in the long term does not hinder someone from helping the poor in the short term.

Liberals have pointed out that rights and duties are often at odds with each other, which they say is a big problem with positive duties. In liberal understanding of justice, rights and duties are justified insofar as they respect individual's rights to freedom and self-ownership. No one can be forced to share their personal property with someone else or to labour so as to be benefited by someone else (Varden, 2011, p. 281). Accordingly, Locke (1690/2003, p. 161) drew the boundaries of state/government action by stating that "The supreme power cannot take from any man part of his property without his own consent: for the preservation of property being the end of government..." As Shue (1996, p. 37-38) highlighted, however, a real distinction between positive and negative rights (or between subsistence rights and security rights) might be illusory; since the state with its institutions such as police forces, criminal courts, penitentiaries, schools, and taxes, has to create a huge system of coercion in order to prevent, detect, and punish the violations of personal security.

For liberals and libertarians, moreover, a salient reason for being oversensitive about property rights and private ownership is their pessimistic belief that people always tend to evade responsibility and



eventually lose their motivation for working. According to Bastiat (1850/1998, p. 6), for instance, human beings naturally tend to escape from toil and since labour is a toil in itself, human beings will choose to plunder whenever plunder is preferable to work. In a similar vein, Malthus (1798/1998, p. 116) argued that human beings cannot be motivated without fearing to fall or hoping to rise in society, and without possessing rewards for hard work or facing punishment for idleness. Most people are motivated to work for their own interests, or probably for the sake of their families, but not for the destitute who might be regarded as ‘undeserving’ or for the government. For liberals and libertarians, hence, ensuring property rights is vital for providing incentives for working hard (Weede, 2008, p. 40). However, considering that there may be a threshold amount that can demotivate each person in proportion to his/her wealth, an ethical standard that determines an amount negligible for a positive duty holder can be set. A \$5 tip, for instance, may be a huge amount for a low-income person, but an insignificant amount for a billionaire. In this situation, a billionaire would not be demotivated by paying a \$5 tip.

As another objection within the liberal tradition to positive rights and duties, Lomasky (1987, p. 94) claimed that the non-interference with the liberties of others is less costly than the provision of something for them. However, there is no guarantee that abstaining from interfering with the liberties and negative rights of others necessitates less effort and toil than making contributions to the provision of needy people’s positive rights. If a person’s life goals necessitate the accumulation of considerable wealth, then realizing those goals without clashish with someone else's negative rights may be more time consuming and may require more work. If we interpret positive rights modestly, then contributing to others' positive rights (for example, donating 10% of our labour or income to provide basic needs for others) might require less burden than the negotiations and labour we must perform to respect the negative rights of others (Lippke, 1995, p. 337). Moreover, people may pay more in order to guarantee their negative rights such as security. For instance, people may prefer housing with high security measures and be willing to pay a significant price for this security. Likewise, some people may accept paying a high price in order to hire a private bodyguard for their personal security.

WHY DO PEOPLE HAVE POSITIVE DUTIES TO HELP THE POOR?

The postulate that people's deaths and/or suffering due to a lack of nutrition, housing, or medical treatment are unacceptable is the starting point for defending positive duties. In order to combat this unacceptable outcome stemming from extreme poverty and hunger, an ethical position can be determined as follows: “If it is in our power to prevent something bad from happening, without thereby sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance, we ought, morally, to do it.” (Singer, 1972, p. 231). Singer, who used the drowning child metaphor to support his ethical position, explained that while passing near a shallow



pond, if a person notices a child drowning in that pond, that person must rescue the child despite some harm to himself/herself, such as wet clothes. In such a situation, according to him, a person has a moral duty to rescue the child since the death of the child is worse than insignificant disadvantages stemming from jumping into the pond such as wet clothes. This metaphor follows the assumption that rescuing a child who is about to drown is the same as tackling indigence and the scarcity and uneven distribution of wealth (Widdows, 2011, p. 153).

On this point, a possible counter argument can be the difference between two instances represented by a drowning child in front of us and a poor child in another part of the world. The action to save a drowning baby does not reflect an individual's responsibility for remote poor people (Cohen, 2005, p. 327). At this point, James (2007, p. 238-239) asserted the concept of "unique dependence" which defines the situations when a needy person relies on us and only us for help. When a child falls into a pond and he/she is about to drown, it means that he/she is uniquely dependent on us, because no one else is able to save him/her. In this situation, our refusal to help him/her will end up with his/her imminent death. For James, this situation is different from that situation of possible recipients of humanitarian aid, since they are not uniquely dependent on us. However, it is possible to find cases in which needy people distant from the benefactor may feel as unique dependence as a child who is about to drown. This is the case especially in the areas of conflict where vulnerable victims are uniquely dependent on the aid of humanitarian agencies (Ruamps, 2022, p. 650). Consideration of responsibility to help on an individualistic basis may cause us to overlook humanity's collective responsibility for severe, deep-rooted problems. Moreover, as Singer (1972, p. 232) underlined, the efforts to disregard the needy people who are distant are not compatible with values such as impartiality, universalizability and fairness.

For some, a different nationality might also matter when helping a person. On this point, Wellman (2005, p. 314) referred to the drowning child metaphor and supposed that an American sees an Australian child drowning in the pond. In this situation, the fact that the rescuer and the person in need are from different countries does not mean that the rescuer does not have a moral duty to help the person in need. This is because every life in the world has the same value. Moreover, the rescuer and the helpless person might both be in different countries. When it is assumed that the pond is on the Mexican side of the border with the US and a child from Mexico falls in the water. Being on the US side does not prevent a person from rescuing that child. Hence, the distance, nationality and location of the needy are ethically irrelevant and the important thing in these different fictional cases is helping a needy at a negligible cost (Wellman, 2005, 315).



It is possible to come across poor people in every country in the world, albeit in varying numbers. 99.8 million undernourished people live in economies with upper-middle incomes. High-income economies have 19 million people who seek to survive under severe food insecurity conditions (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, 2022, p. 143). From here on out, one could argue that it is better to do good things for poor people nearby than for poor people far away. This is because a person can know the bad situations in their own area better and help them for less money (Cohen, 2005, p. 335). However, people have a very effective international media network that can enlighten them about the existing situation of people in other parts of the world, and people have phones and credit cards that enable them to give aid to those who are starving and to charities that can have a mediating role between the benefactors and the needy (Wellman, 2005, p. 317). Especially, social media has emerged as an element that ends the dominance of traditional media, which can act reticent towards the problems of humanity.

Furthermore, the proportion of the population that is below the minimum hunger level as compared with the proportion of the population that is not below that level changes between different continents, regions and countries. The percentage of the population living in extreme multidimensional poverty is 0.1% in Europe and 1% in East Asia and the Pacific, while it is 30.9% in Sub-Saharan Africa, 6.9% in South Asia and 6.8% in Arabic countries. The percentage even varies within the same continent: For example, it is 76.3% in Niger and 74.3% in South Sudan, while it is 30.9% in Sudan (UNDP and OPHI, 2022, p. 33). With reference to the aforementioned data, it is possible to argue that the number of hungry people in relation to the number of potential benefactors varies between regions and states. In the case of Niger, for instance, the maximum proportion of potential benefactors is 25.7%, since the proportion of the extremely poor population is 74.3%. In this situation, a potential benefactor has positive duties for more than one hungry person if it is accepted that benefactors should help only local indigents. On the other hand, in the case of South Africa, for instance, the proportion of potential benefactors is greater than 95%, since the proportion of the hungry population is less than 5%. In this case, the burden of positive duties on potential benefactors is far less than it is in the case of Somalia.

DOES THE GLOBAL ORDER HARM THE POOR?

The rise of global capitalism and the spread of neoliberalism have made it much more unequal around the world (Pflaum, 2015, p. 383). It is argued that the market economy, which has characterised the existing global economic order, is a system in which the inequalities in a society are internalised (Beetham, 1997, p. 88). From this viewpoint, Pogge (2005, p. 55) based his ethical position on the argument that the global organisational system created by people is the main source of the existing severe inequalities and chronic poverty, and added that if this global system had not been designed as it currently is, it could be possible to



prevent inequality and poverty. Such an ethical position locates the struggle with the current global order at the core of the issue and lays the burden of negative duties on the shoulders of organisations and humans in the developed world.

Various policies and practices carried out by the actors of the capitalist world cause the unequal distribution of wealth and create extreme poverty and hunger throughout the globe. The US cotton subsidies might be an appropriate example of how the rest of the world suffers from the policies of developed countries. The size of the subvention to US cotton farmers from the government was \$24 billion, which sharply decreased the global cotton prices and restricted the competitiveness of the developing countries in the cotton sector (Kinnock, 2011). Similarly, the people who have died because of indigence-related matters would have lived, if the WTO Treaty had not been contracted. The governments of wealthy countries adopted protectionist policies that influenced employment, revenues, economic growth and tax incomes and these resulted in an annual loss of nearly \$700 billion in terms of export income in poor countries (Pogge, 2002, p. 18). Furthermore, the loans provided by international financial institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF to developing countries create severe problems in the future because of the obligation to pay them back. The debts of developing countries exacerbate social conditions and diffuse poverty through society (Krishnamurthy, 2015, p. 234). High levels of debt result in countries' loss of their capacity to manage the affairs of their citizens effectively, to provide welfare services for assuring their citizens' basic needs for living, and to utilise their energy and resources for their short-term and long-term policies for furthering the wellbeing of society. While 16 million people in Tanzania were struggling to survive with AIDS in 2000, for instance, the Tanzanian government spent nine times more on debts than it spent on health services (Barry, 2015, p. 109).

As a counterargument to the claim that the global order has a devastating impact on extreme poverty, Risse (2005, p. 9) asserted that the global system is not harmful to the poor and that, on the contrary, humanity has made remarkable progress in terms of prosperity level. He argued that developments in terms of the production of medicines and nourishment were achieved by those countries that established the existing global system (Risse, 2005, p. 14). He concluded that the global order has contributed to the wellbeing of the poor, rather than worsening their situation. However, Risse made the comparison between the past and present situation in those countries with reference to average or aggregate figures, such as GNP per capita. For instance, he used averages such as the increase in life expectancy or he presented the rise in income per capita between 1905 and 1999 from 1.093\$ to 3.100\$ as proof of the development in the developing world. However, average and aggregate data cannot explain the contribution of such an



economic development to the reduction of global poverty at the individual level and it is obvious that the development and burden of capitalism spread to the world unevenly.

The statistical data show that the devastating effects of global inequality and extreme poverty continue to increase and poverty remains one of the world's biggest problems. According to the World Social Report 2020, the gap between countries in terms of absolute income differences has been growing globally since 1990. Even so, the report detected an increase in income inequality in developed countries at the national level in this period (UN DESA, 2020, p. 20). The USA, a prominent developed country, has experienced an increase of 1.2% in income inequality from 2020 to 2021 (Semega and Kollar, 2022, p. 5). The richest 1.1% of the world's population possesses 45.8% of the total wealth in the world. At the bottom of the pyramid, 55% of the world's population shares only 1.3% of the total global wealth (Credit Suisse Research Institute, 2021, p. 17). The 22 richest men in the world have as much wealth as all the women in Africa. If a person began to save \$10,000 every day when the pyramids in Egypt were built, he/she would have reached one-fifth of the average wealth of the world's 5 wealthiest billionaires today (Oxfam, 2020, p. 10). In addition to all these data revealing sharp inequalities around the world, there has been a salient deterioration in terms of undernourishment and hunger in recent years. Following a period of constant rates from 2015 to 2019, undernourishment prevalence increased from 8% to 9.3% in 2020 and to 9.8% in 2021. (FAO, IFAD, UNICEF, WFP and WHO, 2022, p. 10). On the other hand, even if there may emerge a decline in the numbers forming the poorest proportion of the world's population in the future, such a decline will not prevent the people who still suffer from the global order from complaining about it (Pogge, 2005, p. 57). Since the destructiveness of poverty at the individual level is independent of the total number of poor people, a future decline cannot trivialise the situation of the current poor.

Economic inequality is also the main source of many other inequalities such as social and political inequalities around the world and in societies. Thereby, inequalities of income and wealth should not be so great as to convert economic power into political power and harm political freedoms for the least privileged (de Vita, 2007, p. 109). In many cases, not harming others requires more than a passive state of inaction. Compelling the global system into a reformation process will necessitate positive steps that initially take their source from the more basic negative duty of not harming the poor (Hoskins, 2011, p. 199). Therefore, the negative characteristic of duty in this case stems from the intention instead of the action.

WHAT CAN BE DONE TO ELIMINATE HARMS OF THE GLOBAL ORDER?

One of the most significant points in ethical discussions on poverty might be whether people are morally responsible for the activities of institutions that they support or benefit from. Wellman (2005, p.



318) used ‘slave-owning parents’ metaphor to show that people are responsible for the activities of such institutions even though they personally do not harm poor people. He supposed that we are part of a slave-owning family and that we benefit from our parents in many ways such as the provision of a good life or the payment of our university fees. In such a situation, people like us who owe something to their parents cannot claim to be exempt from any ethical criticisms. From this viewpoint, the duties of a person who is burdened with the human rights of other people can be stated as “not to cooperate in the imposition of a coercive institutional order that avoidably leaves human rights unfulfilled without making reasonable efforts to aid its victims and to promote institutional reform” (Pogge, 2002, p. 171).

The case of Henry David Thoreau, who was an influential thinker of the term “civil disobedience”, might be an appropriate example of resistance against the unjust activities of governments. Thoreau (1849/2017, p. 9) distinguished those who served the state conscientiously, and thus often necessarily resisted the state and who were mostly treated as the enemies of the state, from those who served the state not primarily as human beings but as organic machines through their bodies. He praised the free exercise of moral sense and ethical judgement and presented disobedience to the state as a preferable option. Thoreau, like other abolitionists in the US, believed that the main aim of the Mexican War was to expand the practice of slavery to the South and West. He criticized the 1848 peace treaty, which granted the United States 500,000 square miles of new territory. As a result, he refused to pay his deferred tax, since he associated the payment of this tax with supporting the American-Mexican War caused by the American government (Cain, 2000, p. 35).

Under the umbrella of today’s prevailing capitalist world order, the objections of individuals against huge organisations can be seen as ineffective and impractical. Although individual objections mostly do not have a significant effect on the decisions of institutions, it can be argued that collective objections in some cases can force companies to take a step back. From this point forward, there are encouraging examples, such as Apple, one of the world’s leading technology companies. The company was challenged by the boycotts as a reaction to bad working conditions of its workers at Foxconn, one of Apple’s supplier firms in China (Harris, 2012). Following this powerful challenge, the company has undertaken important steps such as reducing the working hours of the workers, solving the exploitation problem of underage workers, and improving the working conditions of women in order to improve the conditions of its workers (Gupta and Randewich, 2013).

Consequently, a significant issue is whether negative duties alone are sufficient in all cases to cope with global poverty or not. Even if people can avoid harming others, they are still obligated to perform some positive duties such as assistance and (if negative rights are violated by others) disincentive duties in order



to prevent others from violating negative rights. For instance, the right to bodily integrity is an important feature of an individual and it may necessitate some assistance duties such as medical treatment or health facilities. In this situation, positive assistive duties can be more important than non-intervention duties (Cruft, 2005, p. 36-37). Moreover, distancing ourselves from the institutions that cause poverty is analogous to refusing to give money for the construction of an unsafe pond. Even though this action could help stop the building of unsafe ponds in the future, it is not enough to fix the safety problem in the ponds that are already there. People can still take some further actions such as forcing the pond administration to employ a lifeguard or preventing the child from running dangerously towards the pond. This is also analogous to forcing the institutions to reform in order to change the existing corrupt global order and help those who are still suffering from severe poverty.

These ‘further actions’ also include the provision of an environment that will give the poor a belief of the possibility of overcoming poverty. Human characteristics such as optimism and hope are increasingly accepted as psychological capital that can act as a buffer against misfortune and is helpful for achieving greater prosperity (Pleeging and Burger, 2020, p. 171). Hope is a significant motivator for individuals to undertake risks and to succeed. Therefore, poor people’s sense of hope provides an opportunity to escape from poverty trap (Duflo, 2012). At this point, hope should be rational. In other words, trustworthy political structures on which poor people’s hope can be actualised needs to be designed; by this way, they will possess a good reason to be hopeful (Blöser, 2022).

OVERCOMING THE DICHOTOMY OF NEGATIVE-POSITIVE DUTIES: TOWARDS A ‘RECIPROCAL DUTIES’ APPROACH

So far, ethical discussions about poverty reduction have primarily focused on the conflicting nature of rights and duties. At this point, there seems to be a need to reconcile those conflicting rights and duties through reciprocity of duties by adopting a duty-based approach instead of a right-based approach. A rights-based approach places all responsibility on the benefactor's shoulders and necessitates an inherently coercive structure. While this situation trivializes ‘volunteering’ in aid, it makes ‘necessity’ as the main determinant of poverty reduction initiatives. On the other hand, O’Neill (1987/2016, p. 37) determined duties and obligations, instead of rights, as the basis for ethical questions in her approach. For her, theories of rights disregard human agency and human is accepted as passive that awaits for others’ respect to his/her rights. Therefore, when a person claims welfare rights or social rights, he/she does not act actually, but expect others to act as a part of their acceptance of obligations. Therefore, obligations outweigh rights, and they are superior to rights. Rights are relative to obligations. Rights have no effect on their own but are effective when they correspond to an obligation. The realization of rights does not arise from the person who holds



them. However, the person who will realize the rights is the person who feels an obligation towards the other (Weil, 1952, p. 3). Hence, as O'Neill (1987/2016, p. 37) underlined, action matters *vis-à-vis* the passivity of solely claiming rights. When action becomes the main determiner in the rights-duties relationship, claiming negative or positive rights necessitate a reciprocal action in return. Thereby, action and reciprocal action can be seen as the manifestation of good will on both sides (namely, the person who demands aid and the person who aids).

Reciprocity in duties (that is, the reciprocal negative and positive duties of recipients) is important for the moral claim of recipients' negative and positive rights. Accordingly, the reciprocal duties of recipients guarantee the duties of benefactors. At this point, it should be noted that 'reciprocal duties' introduced in this paper are different from the 'correlative duties' asserted by Shue (1996), which are based on a right-based understanding and focus on the satisfaction of rights. The reciprocal duties introduced in this paper are purely duty-centred. The fundamental aim in 'reciprocal duties' understanding is to determine reciprocal duties in return to others' duties, not others' rights. Therefore, the causal link in reciprocal duties is established in a different way from Shue's correlative duties.

From this viewpoint, the 'reciprocal negative duty' of the recipient is not to harm the benefactor, that is to say that he/she does not misuse the aid endowed to him/her. At this point, unilateral fund misuse by recipients can be seen in various forms, ranging from large-scale corruption and looting to minor corruption (Cooksey, 2002, p. 46). Poverty aid can be abused by both poor people and national or local governments, which are primarily responsible for poverty. In the first circumstance, the poor may abuse the aid given to them by spending money for nonessential or inappropriate purposes or by wasting material goods such as shelter, food and clothing. In the second circumstance, the institutions representing the poor may spend foreign aid on strengthening their power. For instance, foreign aid on reducing poverty within the Third World countries mostly arrived to the governments, and to the rulers who are responsible for the existing poverty with their policies, rather than the destitute seen on aid campaign posters and aid advertisements. In most cases, the aid was spent according to the political and personal interests of those rulers (Bauer, 1984, p. 49-50). Another form of the misuse of aid is bureaucratic waste, in which aid resources are used for lawful but non-productive or unnecessary purposes. For instance, aid projects may include redundant workforce, equipment, computers, workshops, seminars and study tours with ambiguous practical utility (Cooksey, 2002, p. 47). Therefore, misuse of aid as specified here results in recipients' losing of moral claim for both positive and negative rights.

Furthermore, the recipients of aid also possess reciprocal positive duties to ensure the moral basis for their claim for negative and positive rights. Positive duties of recipients stem from the unappreciative



attitudes, slackness or malicious intentions of the recipients in some cases. From this point forward, aid can cause dependency among recipients towards the benefactor, as can be seen in the example of aid programmes in the mid-1950s that increased the dependency of the Third World countries on the West, rather than decreasing it (Bauer, 1984, p. 49). Individually, long-term and consistent humanitarian aid can lead to dependency on aid (Ruamps, 2022, p. 649). For instance, the case of Sudan's Red Sea State revealed how people especially living in rural areas become dependent on food aid supplied by foreign NGO's and especially by the UN World Food Programme (Assal, 2008, p. 4). Long-term aid can make people lazy and unmotivated, which can lead to a cycle of poverty and aid that never ends. Aid can therefore be claimed as a positive moral right as long as the recipients show goodwill and fulfil their positive duties to benefactors. At the institutional level, the governments and institutions receiving foreign aid have a positive duty to use the aid in the most efficient and effective manner possible and to seek sustainable ways of minimising poverty and hunger in the country. On the other hand, at the individual level, on the other hand, the positive duty of the recipients is to seek all means and opportunities to get out of poverty including active job hunting and working whenever possible.

CONSTRUCTING A HIERARCHY FOR RESPONSIBILITIES AND DUTIES

Reciprocity in duties has been asserted with the aim of constructing a relationship of goodwill between the needy and the benefactor. However, it is also important to construct a similar relationship of goodwill among benefactors themselves. From this viewpoint, a hierarchy of responsibilities and duties has to be determined in order to prevent an unfair distribution of burdens among people. Moreover, such a hierarchy should be applicable for both positive and negative duties.

In terms of positive duties, a first criterion can be determined based on responsibilities. It means that the more responsible a person or an institution is for the emergence of poverty and hunger, the more duties that person or institution should have in terms of positive duties to neutralise the destructive effects of poverty and hunger. Referring back to the drowning child metaphor, Lötter (2015, p. 159) asked the following questions: Who is responsible for taking care of the drowning child? Who is responsible for ensuring the pond's safety? Who is responsible for teaching the child how to be safe when swimming? From this point of view, a person who is passing by a pond by chance should not have the same positive duties as the person whose negligence might cause the child to drown. Positive duties should be determined hierarchically, beginning from the parents responsible for protecting the child from possible dangers and the authorities responsible for ensuring the safety of the pond, to less responsible outer environment. In a similar vein, ex-colonialist states, capital owners who benefit from the uneven wealth distribution of global



capitalism, and corrupt regimes that impoverish people should have comparatively greater positive duties to help the poor.

Another determiner of the hierarchy in terms of positive duties is the fact that the negligible amount for aiding (what Singer (1972) calls “without sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance”) changes from person to person. The wealth of the world's billionaires, or 2153 people, is greater than the total wealth of 4.6 billion people. 6.9 billion people around the world own less than half the wealth of the richest 1% of the world. If only 0.5% of the wealth of the richest 1% of the world is taxed in a 10-year period, 117 million jobs in health, elderly care, education and other sectors can be created and care deficits can be closed (Oxfam, 2020, p. 10). Hence, beginning with the wealthiest people in the world, a hierarchical distribution of positive duties that comprises everyone who can pay a negligible amount from their wealth can make a significant contribution to the minimization of poverty.

A hierarchy is also required in terms of negative rights in order to separate those who cause more harm than others do. Caney (2007, p. 291) specified the possible causes of poverty as an unjust global political and economic order, local actors such as, an oppressive elite or a well-intentioned but incompetent elite, a corrupt government unconcerned with the bad conditions of its people, scanty natural resources, and the mental and/or physical disabilities of individuals. Aside from limited natural resources and individuals' disabilities, other actors are directly responsible for the worsening of global poverty through their actions that cause political, social, and economic harm to others. Based on the hierarchical distribution of negative duties, those who actively cause global poverty must be initially targeted and their harmful actions must be restricted until the negative rights of people are fully guaranteed. The people or institutions that cause more indirect harm should have hierarchically fewer negative duties as compared to those that cause direct harm. In the final analysis, anyone who is able to earn enough to live without poverty by means of the global order will have negative duties at varying rates towards the people impoverished by that order.

CONCLUSION

Global poverty has been a significant problem in terms of its prevalence and severity, of its effects on people's deprivation of fundamental needs such as food, shelter and healthcare, and of its relation to basic ethical debates on the rights and duties of human beings. In today's world, people's loss of life due to extreme poverty and hunger is the problem of all humanity. Although it is accepted in the basic texts and legislation of the UN that poverty and hunger are human rights issues, it is important to set normative foundations for the issue by discussing it theoretically and ethically. The problem of global poverty has been

discussed from various perspectives in this paper in order to make a modest theoretical and ethical contribution to efforts to reduce global poverty.

The main argument of the paper is based on a three-legged position that aims at overcoming the dichotomy of positive and negative duties and proposing ‘reciprocal duties’ as a new dimension to ethical discussions on poverty. First, people have positive duties towards people who live in extreme poverty and are in urgent need of aid. Second, people have a negative duty to withdraw their support from institutions that cause global inequality and poverty, thereby forcing the global economic system to undergo radical structural reformation. Third, the recipients possess reciprocal positive and negative duties towards the benefactors. These duties include responsibilities and duties such as not wasting donations, making every effort to get out of the current state of poverty, and actively seeking employment and can be interpreted as a sign of goodwill towards those who aid. Thus, people's claim for positive rights depends on the fulfilment of their reciprocal positive and negative duties and responsibilities. These reciprocal duties and responsibilities constitute the ethical basis for claims for positive rights.

Finally, a goodwill relationship among benefactors is important for reducing the discouraging effects of aiding on benefactors. Therefore, the paper argues that a hierarchy should be constructed for the interpersonal distribution of positive and negative duties in order to guarantee a fairer cohesion between responsibilities and duties. According to this hierarchy, the more responsible an institution or person is for global poverty and inequality, the more duties that institution or person owes to the poor. Such a hierarchy can also serve as an incentive not to harm the poor, as it places progressive duties on the shoulders of those responsible.

YAZAR BEYANI / AUTHOR STATEMENT

Araştırmacı, çalışmanın tümünü tek başına gerçekleştirmiştir. Araştırmacı, herhangi bir çıkar çatışması bildirmemiştir.

Researcher carried out the study alone. Researcher has not declared any conflict of interest.

REFERENCES

- Assal, M. A. M. (2008). Is it the fault of NGOs alone? Aid and dependency in Eastern Sudan. *Sudan Working Paper*, 5(19), 1-19.
- Barry, C. (2015). Sovereign debt, human rights, and policy conditionality. In R. E. Goodin & J. S. Fishkin (Eds.), *Political theory without borders* (pp. 107–132). Chichester, West Sussex: Wiley Blackwell. doi:10.1002/9781119110132.ch6

- Bastiat, F. (1998). *The law*. (Trans: D. Russell). New York: Foundation for Economic Education. (Original work published 1850).
- Bauer, P. T. (1984). *Reality and rhetoric: Studies in the economics of development*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Beetham, D. (1997). Market economy and democratic polity. *Democratization*, 4(1), 76-93. doi:10.1080/13510349708403503
- Blöser, C. (2022). Global poverty and Kantian hope. *Ethical Theory and Moral Practice*. doi:10.1007/s10677-022-10280-1
- Cain, W. E. (2000). Henry David Thoreau 1817-1862: A Brief Biography. In W. E. Cain (Ed.), *A historical guide to Henry David Thoreau* (pp. 11-60). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Caney, S. (2007). Global poverty and human rights: The case for positive duties. In T. Pogge (Ed.), *Freedom from poverty as a human right: Who owes what to the very poor?* (pp. 275-302). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Capone, (2011). Negative rights. In D. K. Chatterjee (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of global justice* (pp. 749-750). Berlin: Springer Dordrecht. doi:10.1007/978-1-4020-9160-5
- Cohen, A. I. (2005). Famine relief and human virtue. In A. L. Cohen & C. H. Wellman (Eds.), *Contemporary debates in applied ethics* (pp. 326-342). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Cooksey, (2002). Can aid agencies really help combat corruption. *Forum on Crime and Society*, 2(1), 45-56.
- Credit Suisse Research Institute. (2021). *Global wealth report 2021*. Retrieved from <https://www.credit-suisse.com/media/assets/corporate/docs/about-us/research/publications/global-wealth-report-2021-en.pdf>
- Cruft, R. (2005). Human rights and positive duties, ethics and international affairs. *Ethics and International Affairs*, 19(1), 29-37. doi:10.1111/j.1747-7093.2005.tb00487.x
- de Vita, A. (2007). 4. Inequality and poverty in global perspective. In T. Pogge (Ed.), *Freedom from Poverty as a Human Right Who Owes What to the Very Poor?* (pp. 103-132). New York: Oxford University Press.
- Duflo, E. (2012). Human values and the design of the fight against poverty. *Tanner Lectures*. Retrieved from https://economics.mit.edu/sites/default/files/2022-08/2012.05%20TannerLectures_EstherDuflo_draft.pdf
- Fagan, A. (2003). Human rights. *The internet encyclopaedia of philosophy*. Retrieved from <https://iep.utm.edu/hum-rts/>
- Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO], International Fund for Agricultural Development [IFAD], United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund [UNICEF], World Food Programme [WFP] & World Health Organisation [WHO]. (2022). *The state of food security and nutrition in the world 2022. Repurposing food and agricultural policies to make healthy diets more affordable*. Rome, Italy: Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. doi:10.4060/cc0639en



- Gomberg, P. (2002). The fallacy of philanthropy. *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 32(1), 29-66.
- Gupta, P., & Randewich, N. (2013, 25 January). Apple steps up labour audits, finds underage workers. *Reuters*. Retrieved from <https://www.reuters.com/article/uk-apple-audit-idUKBRE90008220130125>
- Harris, P. (2012, 29 January). Apple hit by boycott call over worker abuses in China. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2012/jan/29/apple-faces-boycott-worker-abuses>
- Hoskins, Z. (2011). Correlative obligations. In D. K. Chatterjee (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of global justice* (pp. 198-199). Berlin: Springer Dordrecht. doi:10.1007/978-1-4020-9160-5
- James, S. M. (2007). Good samaritans, good humanitarians. *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, 24(3), 238–254.
- Kinnock, G. (2011, 24 May). America's \$24bn subsidy damages developing world cotton farmers. *The Guardian*. Retrieved from <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/poverty-matters/2011/may/24/american-cotton-subsidies-illegal-obama-must-act>
- Krishnamurthy, M. (2015). International financial institutions. In D. Moellendorf & H. Widdows (Eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Global Ethics* (pp. 230-250). Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
- Lippke, R. L. (1995). The elusive distinction between negative and positive rights. *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 33(3), 335–346. doi:10.1111/j.2041-6962.1995.tb00748.x
- Locke, J. (2003). *Two treatises of government and a letter concerning toleration*. I. Shapiro (Ed.). New Haven Connecticut: Yale University Press. (Original work published 1690).
- Lomasky, L. E. (1987). *Persons, rights, and the moral community*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lötter, H. (2015). Poverty. In D. Moellendorf & H. Widdows (Eds.), *The routledge handbook of global ethics* (pp. 158-169). Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge.
- Malthus, T. R. (1998). *An essay on the principle of population*. London: Electronic Scholarly Publishing Project. (Original work published 1798)
- Narveson, J. (2001). *The libertarian idea*. Hertfordshire: Broadview Press.
- O'Neill, O. (2016). Rights, obligations and world hunger. In *Justice across boundaries: Whose obligations?* (pp. 29-42). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (Original work published 1987)
- Oxfam. (2020). *Time to care: Unpaid and underpaid care work and the global inequality crisis*. Oxford: Oxfam GB.
- Pflaum, M. (2015). The limitations of reductive wealth redistribution strategies for curtailing inequality in the era of global capitalism. *Journal of Economics and Political Economy*, 2(3), 383-399. doi:10.1453/jepe.v2i3.383
- Pleeging, E., & Burger, M. (2020). Hope in economics. In S. C. van den Heuvel (Ed.), *Historical and multidisciplinary perspectives on hope* (pp. 165-178). Cham, Switzerland: Springer.



- Pogge, T. (2002). *World poverty and human rights*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Pogge, T. (2005). Severe poverty as a violation of negative duties. *Ethics & International Affairs*, 19(1), 55-83. doi:10.1111/j.1747-7093.2005.tb00490.x
- Risse, M. (2005). Do we owe the global poor assistance or rectification?. *Ethics & International Affairs*, 19(1), 9-18. doi:10.1111/j.1747-7093.2005.tb00485.x
- Ruamps, C. (2022). Ethics of humanitarian action: On aid-recipients' vulnerability and humanitarian agencies' distinct obligation. *Ethics & Behavior*, 32(8), 647-657. doi:10.1080/10508422.2022.2088536
- Semega, J., & Kollar, M. (2022). Income in the United States: 2021. *U.S. Census Bureau current population reports P60-276*. Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Publishing Office.
- Shue H. (1996). *Basic rights: Subsistence, affluence and U.S. foreign policy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Sieger, L. E. (2011). Duties to the distant needy. In D. K. Chatterjee (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of global justice* (pp. 276-278). Berlin: Springer Dordrecht. doi:10.1007/978-1-4020-9160-5
- Singer, P. (1972). Famine, affluence and morality. *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 1(3), 229-243.
- Thoreau, H. D. (2017). *Civil disobedience*. Los Angeles, CA: Enhanced Media. (Original work published 1849).
- United Nations [UN]. (2022). *The sustainable development goals report 2022*. New York. Retrieved from <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2022/The-Sustainable-Development-Goals-Report-2022.pdf>
- United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs [UN DESA]. (2020). *The world social report 2020: Inequality in a rapidly changing world*. New York: United Nations. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/development/desa/dspd/wp-content/uploads/sites/22/2020/02/World-Social-Report2020-FullReport.pdf>
- United Nations Development Programme [UNDP] & Oxford Poverty and Human Development Initiative [OPHI]. (2022). *2022 global multidimensional poverty index (MPI): Unpacking deprivation bundles to reduce multidimensional poverty*. New York. Retrieved from <https://hdr.undp.org/system/files/documents/hdp-document/2022mpireportenpdf.pdf>
- United Nations General Assembly [UNGA]. (1948, December 10). Universal declaration of Human Rights. *General Assembly Resolution 217A*. Retrieved from <https://www.un.org/sites/un2.un.org/files/2021/03/udhr.pdf>
- United Nations International Children's Emergency Fund [UNICEF], World Health Organisation [WHO], World Bank Group & UN Population Division (2021). *Levels and trends in child mortality: United Nations Inter-Agency Group for Child Mortality Estimation (UN IGME) report 2021*. Retrieved from <https://www.who.int/publications/m/item/levels-and-trends-in-child-mortality-report-2021>
- Varden, H. (2011). Duties, positive and negative. In D. K. Chatterjee (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of global justice* (pp. 281-284). Berlin: Springer Dordrecht. doi:10.1007/978-1-4020-9160-5



- Weede, E. (2008). Human rights, limited government and capitalism. *Cato Journal*, 28(1), 35-52.
- Weil, S. (1952). *The need for roots: Prelude to a declaration of duties towards mankind*. (Trans: A. Wills). London: Routledge.
- Wellman, C. H. (2005). Famine relief: The duties we have to others. In A. L. Cohen & C. H. Wellman (Eds.), *Contemporary Debates in Applied Ethics* (pp. 313-325). Oxford: Blackwell Publishing.
- Widdows, H. (2011). *Global ethics: An introduction*. Durham: Acumen Publishing.
- World Health Organization [WHO], United Nations Children's Fund [UNICEF] & World Bank. (2021). *Levels and trends in child malnutrition: UNICEF / WHO / The World Bank Group joint child malnutrition estimates: Key findings of the 2021 edition*. Geneva, Switzerland: World Health Organization. Retrieved from <https://apps.who.int/iris/handle/10665/341135>