

ETHICS IN INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL ECONOMY: NO QUESTION ABOUT IT

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ABSTRACT

‘Conventional’ models of how the field of international political economy should engage with ethics have proposed or assumed the normative primacy of ethical principles and often sought to add reliable empirical-economic analysis so that political perspectives on economic systems, institutions, and practices can result. James Brassett and Christopher Holmes (2010) have criticized such approaches for overlooking the potentially ‘violent’ character of ethics as ‘a constitutive discourse like any other’. The present article defends the conventional method against Brassett and Holmes’s critique. Focusing especially on Thomas Pogge’s ethics of world poverty as Brassett and Holmes’s main conventionalist target, the article argues that: (i) Brassett and Holmes’s understanding of ‘ethics’ is seriously inadequate; (ii) Pogge’s ‘negative duty not to harm’ principle should be maintained against Brassett and Holmes’s troublingly ‘political’ account and facile ‘relativist’ critique of Pogge’s ethics; (iii) Brassett and Holmes, while conceivably critical of Pogge’s global-level reformist solution as superficially ‘neo-liberal’, cannot see that their own, arguably valuable proposal of radical local forms of ‘resistance’ can coherently complete Pogge’s poverty ethics and thus confirms, rather than undermines, the conventional method. Ultimately, Brassett and Holmes’s post-structural attempt risks being ‘violent’ itself for implying a renewed international moral skepticism.

KEYWORDS

Ethics, IPE, Thomas Pogge, violence, global poverty

1. INTRODUCTION

Even more than the 1970s ‘international interdependence’ era did, the post-1990 one of financial and trade-politicized ‘globalization’ has made it virtually inescapable for international political economy (IPE) scholars to address questions of global poverty, inequality, and justice, although attempts at relating ‘ethics’ and IPE have still been sporadic (Beitz [1979] 1999; Higgott [1993] 2007; Higgott and Watson 2007; Brassett and Holmes 2010; Brassett 2014). The ‘conventional’ model of how IPE should tackle ethics entails, first, that normative theorizing

about global-economic relations primarily draws on ethics as rigorous moral-philosophical reflection, and second, that an analytical distance is to be maintained between normative standards and additional empirical-economic analysis; a third step would be to combine the results - precise ethical principles and reliable empirical evidence - into practical-political views on economic systems, institutions, and practices. Such is the approach proposed, or at least assumed, by renowned political theorists such as John Rawls ([1971] 1999, 1999), Charles Beitz ([1979] 1999), Thomas Pogge ([2002] 2008), Simon Caney (2005), and Matthias Risse (2005a, 2005b).

However, the conventional political-philosophical approach has come under attack. Most comprehensively in their 2010 *Review of International Political Economy* article 'International political economy and the question of ethics', James Brassett and Christopher Holmes question, from a broadly post-structural perspective, the conventional view of ethics 'as a "supplement" to IPE;...as somehow outside IPE, helpful for IPE, a *potential doctor for critical IPE*, since this view 'leaves unquestioned the content and potential violence(s) that ethics can enact' (2010: 427, emphasis in original; cf. Brassett 2009, 2014; Holmes 2013: 276). This inquiry, as the authors acknowledge, is indebted to Kimberly Hutchings's 1999 book *International Political Theory* (Hutchings 1999: especially 92-93, 117-118, 18). As Brassett and Holmes see it, then, we should not assume ethics to be 'inherently good' and thus basically different from 'power politics' (2010: 426). Rather, '[e]thics is a constitutive power similar to any other discourse' that, while offering welcome opportunities for reflection, can 'also perform a violence' by implying marginalization or circumscription of 'anything...left "outside" or "othered"' and perhaps even '[of] the "subject" of the discourse itself' (Brassett and Holmes 2010: 427, 427, 432). Brassett and Holmes are particularly critical of Thomas Pogge, whose famous economic ethics of world poverty, they think, constitutes a form of violence by constructing 'the poor' as helpless, agency-empty victims (cf. Brassett 2014: 79) and actually reaffirms, rather than undermines, the contemporary 'neo-liberal' world order through its superficial proposals for global institutional reform. Thus, Brassett and Holmes typify 'ethics' and Pogge's version thereof as follows:

[Each discourse of ethics] risks reifying a set of particularly neo-liberal conceptions of the individual, property and the market, albeit couched in the language of ethics...When, for instance, Thomas Pogge [[2002] (2008): 211] invokes ethical obligations [not to harm] in order to reform globalisation, his central suggestion of a Global Resources Dividend (GRD) to ameliorate the 'ordinary centrifugal [tendencies]' of the global market place, arguably reifies and instantiates just as much neo-liberal theory as it challenges. Such suggestions automatically construct 'the market', and specifically its existence at the global level, which is

to accept a specific set of power relations and knowledge claims as a condition of thinking ethically (Braslett and Holmes 2010: 428).

Considering the deeply critical nature of Braslett and Holmes's stance on ethics and their subsequent proposal of a 'pragmatist research agenda' supposedly alternatively built on notions such as 'possibility', 'violence', and 'resistance' (Braslett and Holmes 2010: 441-447), it is remarkable that theorists who purport to discuss global issues of basic moral importance have left this top-journal published challenge virtually unanswered (but see Frost 1996: 66-70). In the case of Pogge, for whom contemporary global issues are utterly serious, it is particularly unfortunate that Braslett and Holmes's treatment of Pogge's account as a potentially exclusionary discourse like any other has not yet been addressed. For Pogge, we, the rich citizens and governments of developed Western countries 'violate the human rights of billions of poor people by collaborating in the imposition of a supranational institutional scheme that foreseeably produces massive and reasonably avoidable human rights deficits' (2011: 33). Thus, Pogge insists, theorists of justice and their readers should acknowledge that they may be involved in 'a large crime against humanity', one that is 'by far the greatest contributor to the current global human rights deficit' (2011: 18-19). Indeed, 'Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin were vastly more evil than our political leaders, but...they never came anywhere near causing 18 million deaths per year' (Pogge 2005: 33). The present article, then, attempts to help fill the lacuna stated by engaging critically with Braslett and Holmes's account, particularly their critique of Pogge.

I shall defend the conventional position by arguing that Braslett and Holmes's critique fails: their account is fundamentally wrong and can be conventionally accommodated insofar as it is clarifying and possibly right on less basic levels. A threefold argument will be developed - one giving special attention to Pogge's ethics of world poverty as Braslett and Holmes's key target - which will show that Braslett and Holmes misconstrue ethics as such and Pogge's poverty ethics in particular. First, the conventional view of ethics *per se* and its relevance to IPE should be maintained against Braslett and Holmes's unduly crude and confused view of 'ethics' as potentially 'violent'. Second, Pogge's 'negative duty not to harm' principle of normative ethics should be maintained as a key standard for assessing the current world order against Braslett and Holmes's troublingly 'political' account and (implicitly and uncritically) 'relativist' critique of Pogge's ethics. Third, Braslett and Holmes conceivably criticize Pogge's global-level reformist solution as superficial and affirmative of the 'neo-liberal' world order, but they - cannot but - overlook that their own, arguably valuable proposal of more radical local forms of 'resistance' can coherently complete Pogge's economic ethics of world poverty (which can avoid 'neo-liberal' dangers thereby) and thus confirms, rather than undermines, the conventional approach. The article concludes that Braslett and

Holmes's post-structural attempt risks being 'violent' itself for implying a renewed skepticism about the role of moral considerations in world politics.

2. HOW (NOT) TO UNDERSTAND 'ETHICS'

My first argument is that the conventional conception of 'ethics' and its IPE relevance should be upheld against Brassett and Holmes's unduly crude and confused view of 'ethics' as possibly 'violent'. I will suggest that, basically, the problem is that Brassett and Holmes (2010: especially 437) - like their predecessor Hutchings (1999) and presumably mainly for valuing 'power' most of all - overlook, if not refuse to confront, the very question of how to define 'ethics'. Instead, Brassett and Holmes (2010: 425, 427, 432, 433, 437, 443, 448) adopt, without serious argument, a 'critical and post-structural' perspective and simply apply that to IPE, so that 'ethics' automatically turns into a political discourse of potential violence like any other. But ethics, exceptional as its subject matter - 'morality' and 'moral' issues - is, should not be seen as a constitutive, potentially violent discourse like any other and certainly not more or less equally so.

First, Brassett and Holmes's claim that conventional philosophers interested in global political-economic issues treat ethics as a 'supplement' to IPE (quoted in the introduction), as an 'add-on' to IPE, or even as 'the solution' to IPE issues (Brassett and Holmes 2010: 432, 433) is unfounded and wrong. Political philosophers see ethics as truly fundamental, whereby the very extension of moral thinking to the global economy as the area of concern implies that 'we may either have to rethink our moral values generally or at least become clearer about what is fundamental to our beliefs' (Dower 1998: 5).¹ Actually, ethics is a sub-discipline of philosophy that, at least initially, maintains the normally overriding, or supremely authoritative, nature of moral considerations (about good, permissible, bad, evil, etc.) against other (e.g., self-interested, religious, legal, power-political) ones (Stroud 1998; Beauchamp [1982] 1991: 16-17; Beitz [1979] 1999: 4-7, 179, 181; Amstutz [1999] 2018: 7-11), and that reflects on 'justice' as based on some impartial weighing of all interests involved (Beitz [1979] 1999: 58). Brassett and Holmes completely overlook such features of 'ethics' and also the international-philosophical agenda as initiated by Charles Beitz ([1979] 1999: 4-7, 179, 181): the task is to find basic moral principles that guide political choice and constitute the empirical-academic study of international relations, IPE included. Subsequently, Brassett and Holmes (2010) ignore that conventionalists, rightly, do not treat eth-

¹ As Nigel Dower (1998: 5) explains, it is also misleading to characterize international ethics simply as 'applied ethics' - as if it entailed little more than an uncritical application of 'a well formed pre-set body of moral beliefs' (say, a Kantian, utilitarian, liberal, or communitarian one) to international politics (against Hutchings 1999: 28-54).

ics as identical to forms of (global) governance, states, or practical measures such as fair/free trade, debt relief, or carbon trading. Insofar as ethics would support ('top-down' or 'bottom-up') institutions or measures, it will always do so conditionally and critically. And while ethics, conventionally understood, assumes a critical distance between 'ought' and 'is' (Amstutz [1999] 2018: 13), Brassett and Holmes (2010: 426-427, 432, 438, 440; cf. Hutchings 1999: 5) wrongly suggest that it embraces 'positivism' and thus refuses to question status quos and only wishes to convince policy makers (cf. Brown 2002: 1-18). Indeed, whereas 'ethics' is 'unlike other areas of inquiry' (Sterba 2013: 1, cf. 2) for being 'primarily concerned with providing the general outlines of a normative theory to help us in answering problems about what is right or ought to be done' (Frankena [1963] 1973: 5), we should recognize that particular 'answers' may not be taken as fundamental (although the next section argues that Pogge's 'negative duty' should be accepted as such), but that does not alter ethics' very basicness.

Second, related to their misconception that ethics must always 'accept an artificial [or any] divide between ethics and power' (Brassett and Holmes 2010: 428), or between 'freedom' and 'power' (2010: 434), Brassett and Holmes tend to limit 'ethics' to 'liberal ethics', and overlook that ethics, while surely emphasizing 'obligation' or 'duty' (Brassett and Holmes 2010; see Zimmerman 2013),² does not deny, or oppose, 'power' as such - if only because power might be used to have obligations fulfilled. Apart from ignoring the very nature of 'ethics', then, the authors tend to confuse ethics with, or narrow that down to, 'liberal ethics' - claiming, as we saw in the introduction, that '[each discourse of ethics] risks reifying a set of particularly neo-liberal conceptions of the individual, property and the market' - or to 'cosmopolitan ethics' (Brassett 2009: 420-421, 2010).³ But for conventional philosophers to emphasize international ethics is 'merely' to oppose moral skepticism as grounded in realist power politics, and to defend the possibility of human choice (Beitz [1979] 1999: 11-66) and indeed the capacity of power to support good as well as bad choices globally. Remarkably, by overlooking that ethics is supposed to *critically evaluate* power, Brassett and Holmes (2010; cf. Hutchings 1999: 41-42) themselves come close to Hans Morgenthau's skeptical view that 'the political realist [who thinks in terms of interest defined as power] maintains the autonomy of the political sphere, as the economist, the lawyer, and the moralist maintain theirs[, and thus] cannot but subordinate these other standards to the po-

² Although '[t]he concept of duty or obligation is fundamental to ethics' (Zimmerman 2013: 1483), Brassett and Holmes tend to belittle the 'discourse of obligation' (2010: 433, cf. 427-428, 433-441).

³ Later we shall see that (i) Brassett and Holmes understandably feel that Pogge's theory could troublingly reify certain 'neo-liberal' features of the world economy, but also that (ii) Pogge's theory, if suitably reconstructed, may well avoid this.

litical one' (Morgenthau [1948] 1959: 11-12). As ethicist Marshall Cohen debunks this view:

[M]orality has no discrete sphere of its own...parallel to, but separate from, the main areas of human activity. It is not only appropriate, but characteristic and necessary, to apply its standards to economic, legal, and political phenomena...Often, too, moral standards will have to prevail over...[economic, legal, and political] standards. As we cannot accept the extreme realist view that moral concepts and judgments do not apply in the political realm, so we must also reject the less extreme...view that these judgments must always be subordinated to political ones. For this requires that the decisive considerations always be considerations of power, and even its most celebrated proponents like Morgenthau cannot [convincingly] adhere to that deplorable doctrine (Cohen 1984: 310-311).

Third, even if we accept, for the sake of argument, Brassett and Holmes's claim that 'ethics' is a discourse that can be 'violent' like any other discourse, we should insist that all forms of violence need not be equally so and that ethics, if practiced properly, will be the least violent of all discourses due to its fundamental nature and (academic) capacity for internal critique. Thus, both 'ethics' and 'power politics' being potentially violent discourses (cf. Brassett and Holmes 2010: 426) would not really mean much if indeed the latter is far more dangerously violent than the former. Whereas 'power politics' could lead, and arguably has led, to deadly violence, 'ethics' searches for principles that have critical moral bite and are self-enforcing. Indeed, there is no reason to believe that it is somehow problematic if ethics *per se* 'marginalizes' people with immoral convictions or actions, such as terrorists, fundamentalists, and oppressors. Brassett and Holmes's view of the 'violence' of discourses is so general and broad that it cannot meaningfully distinguish analytically between 'ethics' and, say, 'terrorism' or 'tyranny' (cf. Walzer 2004: 12-13, 130-131). Given the regularly overriding nature of moral considerations and the ethical assumption of the possibility of choice, ethics arguably excludes only those who *choose* to exclude themselves. As Pogge may insist, the billion people who suffer the severe consequences of an unjust world order will not be justly recognized, let alone supported, if we make the issue of how we 'construct' or 'circumscribe' their identities 'violently' our main concern.

In sum, Brassett and Holmes's understanding of 'ethics' suffers from a remarkably dogmatic use of post-structural thought, which may result from their inclination to equate 'ethics' with 'the use of ethics' (Brassett and Holmes 2010: 427, 445), the latter of which is non-basic and potentially (very) violent indeed. Having argued why Brassett and Holmes's treatment of ethics fails generally, I now aim to show that this verdict also holds in the case of Pogge's ethics.

3. IN DEFENSE OF POGGE'S NEGATIVE DUTY NOT TO HARM

My second argument is that Pogge's negative duty not to harm should be upheld as a key normative standard for assessing our world order against Brassett and Holmes's troublingly 'political' account of Pogge's ethics and their (implicitly and uncritically) 'relativist' critique thereof. Thus, we should retain the negative duty principle besides the standard view of ethics.

As Pogge defines them, 'negative duties' are 'duties not to harm that impose specific minimal constraints (more minimal in the case of human rights) on conduct that worsens the situation of others' ([2002] 2008: 15). Now admittedly, already at this point Brassett and Holmes have ground to be suspicious of Pogge's eventual global-reformist position. To some extent at least, Pogge bases his negative duty on the aim to 'keep my argument widely acceptable' (2010: 28, cf. 28-29), and he insists that his GRD reform proposal should be guided by 'modesty' so as to achieve essential support (Pogge [2002] 2008: 211; cf. Brassett and Holmes 2010: 439). Surely this makes it conceivable that Brassett and Holmes think that Pogge 'invokes ethical obligations [not to harm] *in order to reform globalisation*' and argues that 'basic negative duties "not to harm" *can be used to justify global re-distribution*' (2010: 428, 438, emphases added). Yet Brassett and Holmes's reading of Pogge's negative duty position too quickly turns that into a neo-liberal 'political' discourse, since global reform is not, or need not be, Pogge's *primary* goal. Firstly, from Pogge's negative duty-based perspective, we are not *forced* to draw his reformist conclusions and affirm neo-liberalism. As the next section aims to show more fully, Brassett and Holmes wrongly suggest (in the passage quoted in the introduction) that Pogge's GRD is identical to, or inescapable from, his negative duty. Second, what matters now is whether Pogge's negative duty can be defended on non-instrumental, independent-*ethical* grounds. And - unfortunately neglected by Brassett and Holmes - Pogge himself does attempt to do this.

Pogge's ethical argument for negative duties, then, acknowledges that libertarians at least rightly hold that someone being in need does not generate a real 'positive' duty to assist (Pogge [2002] 2008: 15). But libertarianism along with other views in Western philosophy does defend the negative duty that no harm may be done to other people. As John Rawls, quoted by Pogge (2011: 15, cf. 14-17) puts it, 'when the distinction is clear, negative duties have more weight than positive ones' ([1971] 1999: 98). Pogge himself argues that, other things equal:

[Positive d]uties to assist are strongest toward the near and dear and weakest toward foreigners in distant lands. But [negative] duties not to harm do not fade in this way...If the unfairness of the global order we impose causes poverty to persist in the poor countries, then our moral responsibility for the associated deaths and deprivations is not diminished by diversity of nationality and geographical or cultural distance (Pogge 2004: 279).

Corinna Mieth (2008: 23-24) insists that Pogge does rely on positive duties rather than libertarianism, and actually rightly so: we should be concerned about severe poverty *per se* as an emergency situation in need of transformation of the status-quo and redistributive actions. Now indeed, Mieth valuably argues that global poverty is morally problematic as such and thus a matter of positive duties, too (cf. also Linklater 2006). Nevertheless, while she thereby shows that emphasizing negative duties may be insufficient for covering poverty entirely, the - boundary-unaffected - negative duty still seems to capture the alleged responsibility of Western governments and citizens to help diminish poverty most compellingly, even if not completely.

Yet how universally valid is this negative duty, outside Western philosophy? Noting the ‘classically liberal foundations’ (2010: 439) of Pogge’s duty, Brassett and Holmes are critical:

[T]he attribution of power to reason is clear; all that is seemingly required is the obliging force of the better argument and global justice can be achieved. Basic critical questions such as ‘whose reason?’ or, ‘for what purpose?’ might suffice here, but the point is already apparent: Pogge intends to change the minds of ‘us’ citizens of affluent states, so that h/w we can help ‘them’, the wretched and poor. The use of such dichotomies is problematic because ethics can only be understood and addressed in terms of a divide between strong and responsible subject/citizen and a weak and helpless subject/potential recipient. This is a form of ethical violence that places ‘the poor’ at one step remove from the political spaces in which they might shape and realise their own conceptions of justice...In terms of breaking the divide between the ‘ought’ of reason and the ‘is’ of inequality at least one task might be to include the voices of the people we claim to speak for? (Brassett and Holmes 2010: 440, cf. Brassett 2014: 76).

However, at least as an objection to the universality of negative duties, Brassett and Holmes’s line of reasoning is flawed. First, Pogge includes an *ethical* argument to clarify our moral obligations; while that *should* mean that he aims to persuade his readers (Brassett and Holmes included), most typically by the ‘power’ of reason, he nowhere claims that negative duty arguments will suffice for global justice. Second, while the ‘for what purpose?’ may be answered by ‘the rights and interests of the poor’, the ‘whose reason?’ hardly seems relevant here, because the point of negative duties to refrain from harming is that they are accepted by many philosophical and religious traditions, also outside the West, and thus qualify as a ‘fundamental value’ (Bok [1995] 2002; cf. Linklater 2006). As Carmen Pavel boldly states: ‘a moral premise that everyone shares [is] the negative duty not to harm’ (2015: 450). And as Andrew Linklater adds, ‘the existence of an international society of states which includes liberal and non-liberal states reveals that diverse communities can agree on a global...harm principle’ (2006: 333).

Third, Pogge does not just postulate ‘a divide between strong and responsible subject/citizen and a weak and helpless subject/potential recipient’; key to his neg-

ative duty argument is that the former *have harmed* the latter and that *therefore* the former carry responsibility (to ‘correct’ the injustice), not because the latter simply need ‘help’ as Brassett and Holmes misunderstand it. Now Pogge (e.g. [2002] 2008; 2011: 5, 15) often speaks of harm in terms of ‘human rights’, of which Brassett and Holmes seem critical. Yet they nowhere offer any serious counter-argument; they do not explain why ‘human rights’ or, say, ‘global distributive justice’ (let alone ‘no harm’) *per se* could entail a serious ‘violence’ towards the global poor or any victims of globalization.

Fourth, Brassett and Holmes’s critique of Pogge ironically implies a basic ethical position of their own, but one philosophically suspect (cf. Beauchamp [1982] 1991: 40) and left undefended by the authors: an (anti-liberal) relativist ethics that is implausible at worst and accommodative by Pogge’s negative duty at best. They criticize Pogge’s ‘ethical violence’ against the poor’s ‘own conceptions of justice’, but fail to explain: what these conceptions of justice entail; what, if anything, will make these conceptions basically different from Pogge’s; why such conceptions (if they exist) should simply be tolerated (as intra-societal conflicts might concern disagreements about ethical notions similar to the problem of relativism as occurring in international ethics); that those conceptions may be indeed be recognized as the poor’s rather than as upheld by the powerful in society as to cause harm to the vulnerable - who may not be able to realize their justice conceptions for *that* reason; or that those conceptions may actually be qualified as ‘moral’ rather than, say, ‘egoistic’ (cf. Beitz [1979] 1999: 18-19). Let me elaborate this further.

What Brassett and Holmes ignore is that: (i) ethics is focused on what ‘should’ be the case, not on cultural diversity and other ‘facts’; (ii) significant global consensus exists about basic principles regarding beneficence and justice; (iii) accepting cultural relativism makes it very hard, if not impossible, to condemn obviously wrong practices such as torture, forced expulsion, systematic violation of (basic) human rights, and religious persecution (Amstutz [1999] 2018: 13-14); (iv) it would be ‘perverse’ for us to leave an unjust world order, one that may concretely harm poor people, intact, since, while we believe that doing harm is wrong, we also assume that, alas, the ‘non-liberal’ global poor do not really care so much about harm avoidance (cf. Pogge 1994: 218-219). Indeed, a position such as the authors’ one could effectively incapacitate ethical attention to ‘real’ transnational issues such as poverty and exploitation (cf. Higgott [1993] 2007: 166). Again, it is anything but clear that the ‘ethical violence’ they foresee could be ‘problematic’. If Pogge’s ethical negative duty argument marginalized those whose behavior is globally harmful, it would have good effects rather than bad ones. Moreover, this argument of Pogge’s could have the effect of creating space for the poor to implement ‘their own conceptions of justice’ (to be allowed insofar as these are ‘harm-free’) and, indeed, to meaningfully raise their own voices and have them heard - as ‘agents of justice’ (Deveaux 2015, who may even have a just cause for war against

the global rich; Lippert-Rasmussen 2017). Finally, ‘voices’ already raised suggest that if there is anything people in the South want from people in the North, it is that they stop doing global harm. Consider, for example, this theological statement from a 1995 regional conference within the World Alliance of Reformed Churches (WARC) held in Kitwe, Zambia, which condemns the global order for unjustly redefining people’s very identities:

Today, the global market economy has been sacralised and elevated to an imperial throne. It has changed places with the human beings who created it. By redefining what it means to be human, it has become the creator of human beings. Thereby it usurps the sovereignty of God, claiming a freedom that belongs to God alone. For us as Christians, this raises the question of idolatry and of loyalty to God or Mammon...It is our painful conclusion that the African reality of poverty caused by an unjust economic world order has gone beyond an ethical problem and become a theological one...The gospel to the poor is at stake in the very mechanism of the global economy today (WARC 1995, quoted in Duchrow and Hinkelammert 2004: 206).

This African consultation ultimately compares global economic injustice to Nazism in Germany and apartheid in South Africa (Duchrow and Hinkelammert 2004: 206). What matters here is not whether the charge is empirically correct or its boldly-worded discourse is suitable, but that this non-Western example confirms the universal validity of the negative duty not to harm principle.

Fifth, not only does virtually ‘everyone’ (Pavel, quoted above) accept a negative duty not to harm, but Brassett and Holmes themselves, without truly acknowledging it, do appeal to such a duty in their critique of violent discourses and the current neo-liberal economic order, even if they prefer the term ‘violence’ instead. As they write: ‘we use violence instead of harm *merely* to shy away from the close association of the latter term with notions of “intentionality” and “action”’ (Brassett and Holmes 2010: 448 n. 1, emphasis added). Their own position, then, is not free from the ‘classical liberalism’ they criticize, although this seems incoherent with their relativism as described above. Brassett and Holmes might respond that their (explicit) critique of violent discourses matters more than their (implicit but potentially violent or harmful) relativism, but then their very criticism of Pogge’s no-harm ethics would seem to be a non-starter.

In sum, Pogge’s negative duty not to harm offers a strong normative-ethical foundation for world order assessment. Brassett and Holmes’s critique of Pogge wholly fails in this regard.

4. A POGGE-COHERENT POLITICAL-ECONOMIC CRITIQUE

My third argument is that, at the levels of economic analysis and political implications, Brassett and Holmes credibly criticize Pogge’s global-level reformist solu-

tion as superficial and affirmative of the neo-liberal world order, but they - cannot but - overlook that their own, certainly important proposal of more radical local forms of 'resistance' can coherently complete Pogge's economic ethics of world poverty and thus validates, rather than discredits, the conventional approach. I will not be concerned with how correct Pogge's globalist explanation of world poverty is, but with its implications regarding how global causes are to be addressed. His inquiry is sufficiently plausible and accepted to justify this task (cf. Lippert-Rasmussen 2017: 448).⁴ Thus, my point will be that, while Pogge himself draws reformist conclusions from his 'negative duty not to harm' principle together with his empirical-explanatory globalism, one is not forced to follow Pogge's solution but could just as well, if not better, draw non-reformist, more radical conclusions from - and this is what Brassett and Holmes misjudge - his analysis.

Pogge's diagnosis of the global causes of world poverty, to summarize, includes the following steps. First, professional economists tend too comfortably accept the 'purely domestic poverty thesis' (PDPT) that country-specific factors (climate, environment, resources, history, culture, institutions, policy, leadership) are completely responsible for the great international variations in poverty development (Pogge 2004: 263-267; 2005: 29-30; [2002] 2008: 16-18; cf. Risse 2005b: 367). Second, the PDPT is empirically false due to the protectionist practices of the rich countries, the free-competition disabling regulations and poor-people disadvantaging practices of the World Trade Organization, International Monetary Fund, and World Bank, and four international privileges the West confers upon anybody able to somehow gain and exercise coercive control over a country: the privilege to sell the natural resources of the country, to borrow in its name, to sign treaties on behalf of it, and to import weapons for consolidating one's power - the 'success stories' of the Asian 'tigers' (Hong Kong, Taiwan, Singapore, South Korea) and China notwithstanding (Pogge [2002] 2008; 2004: 264-278; 2005: 47-50; 2013: 89-94). Third, current globalization features billions of people lacking sufficient access to basic goods, many more people dying from poverty-related causes than the total number of deaths resulting from government violence in the entire twentieth century, and a dramatic increase of global economic inequality (Pogge 2013: 74-88).

Although Pogge's global poverty analysis as linked to his negative duty ethics implies that change should come from those who have caused nothing less than 'the largest...crime against humanity ever committed' (Pogge 2005: 33), he provides a fairly optimistic case for global-institutional reform (Pogge [2002] 2008: 26-32, 152-261). Pogge (2004: 280; 2013: 95) submits that only fairly small changes in the global order and thus at most minor decreases in the incomes of the rich are

⁴ Elsewhere I offer a qualified defense of Pogge's global economic analysis (Kamminga 2019, forthcoming).

required. For the purpose of analysis, I will focus on the GRD as ‘his central suggestion’ (Brassett and Holmes 2010: 428). Thus, use of global resources should be taxed through a GRD, and the money raised employed to make access to basic provisions possible for the poor. To make the GRD work, ‘modesty’ and ‘gradualism’ are required, Pogge ([2002] 2008: 211; cf. 2014: 86) argues. One may doubt whether Pogge’s reformism genuinely matches his radical diagnosis of the global condition, however. Pogge ([2002] 2008: 211) merely speculates that a modest GRD within the context of a fair and open market system will yield sufficiently positive cumulative effects. Overall, one may suspect that the GRD should be ‘modest’ for reasons of strategic feasibility (Pogge [2002] 2008: 211) rather than global injustice eradication. Indeed, Pogge appears skeptical about the preparedness of the rich to create a truly just global order - which Brassett and Holmes (2010) also seem to be, although they suggest a different solution: local radicalism instead of global reformism.

With at least some justification, then, Brassett and Holmes criticize Pogge’s GRD as a legitimization of global neo-liberalism and so as a possible form of ‘violence’:

Pogge’s GRD arguably reifies and instantiates just as much neo-liberal theory as it challenges. It ultimately accepts the neo-liberal version of the global market place, as a basically benign instrument that occasionally needs correction. However, by his own argument, the current global market place is the product of (at least) a shared violent history,...and an institutional order is systematically dominated by the large powers. At best, the GRD proposal is piecemeal. At worst its strategic logic works to tranquilise the fundamental critiques that drove its creation (Brassett and Holmes 2010: 439-440).

As Brassett explains elsewhere, Pogge’s GRD resembles the Tobin Tax: ‘For all that the Tobin Tax seeks to rein in global finance..., the proposal works within - and actively affirms - monetarist assumptions of capital-account convertibility, mobile capital and cash-based approaches to ethical objectives’ (2014: 82; cf. Brassett and Holmes 2010: 443; Brassett 2010). In addition, the authors criticize, understandably again, Pogge’s reliance on ‘states’ as key actors:

While one might conceive of ‘the global’ as a universal space, the whole globe perhaps, it is remarkable how prominent states remain in the equation. Pogge [[2002] (2008: 205)] speaks of powerful western states, weak and/or corrupt developing states, [yet assumes] ‘a worldwide states system based on internationally recognized territorial domains, interconnected through a global network of market trade and diplomacy.’ The constitutive violence of this ontology is to leave unchecked the sovereign demarcation of political space and political subjectivity (Brassett and Holmes 2010: 440-441).

To restate, Brassett and Holmes’s critique of Pogge is that, although he argues that the global order has harmed the global poor - something our authors do not

aim to dispute -, he ends up ‘endors[ing] global capitalism with minor institutional amendments’ and so ‘risk[s] failing to critique the excessive practices of global capitalism’ and even ‘risk[s] entrenching them by contributing to the ideological legitimacy of global governance’ (Brassett 2014: 74). Now while Pogge nowhere rejects capitalism *per se*, it is surely the case that his GRD proposal, ‘modest’ and ‘feasible’ as that is, does not (even intend to) affect existing power relationships within the global capitalist economy. He focuses on rectification as second-best solution ‘after the fact’ (cf. Reich 2014: 91-93; Pogge 2014: 80) based on existing power relationships. Therefore, Brassett and Holmes’s claim that the ‘strategic’ GRD is ‘piecemeal at best’ and violently ‘tranquilizing at worst’ is a valid one. At *this* - non-basic - level, then, their criticism of Pogge is quite plausible.

Subsequently, Brassett and Holmes stress the need for bottom-up individual initiatives, small-scale communities and networks rather than top-down international institutional reform:

[A] ‘power to’...can include the everyday actions of individuals that challenge particular configurations of power relations...So the farmer who exits the trade relation in favour [of] individual or collective subsistence farming, or the individual who only buys locally produced coffee, or grows their own, each explore a new mode of being not produced by the existing set of relations. Similarly, we might address resistance to climate change by switching our attention away from the global solutions that automatically privilege the actors and mechanisms that operate at the global level and towards actors who articulate resistance to norms of commercial society in a creative and productive way. Examples of such work from political economists already exists, including Polanyi’s...analysis of Robert Owen’s counter-industrial revolution politics, E.F. Schumacher’s *Small is Beautiful*...and Juliet Schor’s...research on ‘downshifters’, who partially reject the norms and incentives of commercial worklife in favour of ‘slower’ forms of existence less reliant on consumption and waste. By focusing on these creative acts of resistance, we can avoid grinding to a halt as we begin to appreciate the limitations of macro-structural solutions (Brassett and Holmes 2010: 447, emphasis in original).

Here Brassett and Holmes soundly defend the need for a turn towards non-global but local initiatives from the poor themselves. However, what they overlook is that this ‘power to’ solution may actually cohere with Pogge’s no-harm ethics and complement - in the ‘piecemeal at best’ case - or substitute for - in the ‘tranquilizing at worst’ case - Pogge’s GRD if the rich sadly albeit wrongly lack the motivation to truly and fully meet their moral obligations (which, of course, are not offset by inadequate motivations) but let much of their guilt endure. Indeed, there is no reason to suggest that the poor taking control of their own situation in order to eliminate global injustice (in their own way) instead of waiting for the rich to overcome their motivation deficit would not fit in with Pogge’s core perspective (cf. also Deveaux 2015). Thus, Brassett and Holmes are blind to the very possibility that a follower of Pogge, or even Pogge himself, comes to endorse their bottom-up proposal from the perspective of Pogge’s global poverty analysis in com-

bination with his negative duty ethics if the opportunistic wish to be - merely - 'strategic' were dropped.

When Brassett elsewhere suggests a 'context where responsibility might entail the possibility of "not acting"', he plausibly does not presuppose the notion of 'global governance [as] often tasked with "solving the world's problems"', if only because it is 'an ongoing irony [in] global ethics that so many, often radical, political theorists get drawn into the celebration of what are essentially large bureaucracies' (2014: 70, 72, 75). Yet, while Brassett and Holmes's non-global-governance path is surely utopian and perhaps *too* radical, what matters is that it could match Pogge's radical diagnosis of the world economy and their own basic support of that, and is in this sense supportive of the very conventional ethics-in-IPE approach they think they oppose.

5. CONCLUSION

Against Brassett and Holmes, who never consider the specific nature of ethics but simplistically equate that to all other kinds of discourse through a straightforward application of post-structural thought, I have argued that their critique of the conventional method of linking ethics and IPE fails. It is not Pogge's basic-ethical, negative duty not to harm that constitutes 'violence' against the poor, even if the empirical 'neo-liberal' world economy possibly works as such. While credibly attacking Pogge's reform proposals, Brassett and Holmes corroborate the conventional approach as followed by Pogge and other philosophers, as their small-scale localism can be merged into Pogge's ethical framework. The reason why Brassett and Holmes must overlook this is their assuming a single, undivided conventionalist 'discourse of ethics', whereas this 'discourse' actually identifies various sorts or levels that, ethically, are not equally fundamental.

Overall, Brassett and Holmes's critique at best confirms the conventional approach and at worst is 'violent' itself for implying a 'realist-relativist' skeptical IPE program about the role of moral considerations in world politics - one that highlights 'possibility', 'violence', and 'resistance' but marginalizes typical-ethical notions such as 'morality', 'duty/obligation', 'rights', and 'justice' (Brassett and Holmes 2010: 441-447). As Beitz ([1979] 1999: 17-27) explains, both cultural relativism - which Brassett and Holmes as (kind of) poststructuralists appear to uphold - and political realism are key sources, albeit implausible ones, of international moral skepticism, since both deny the appropriateness of moral judgment in international relations and thus oppose international ethics. Mervyn Frost has even argued that poststructuralists 'may, themselves, justifiably be called super realist', for '[a]lthough they reject the realist commitment to the *state*, they remain firmly committed to the realist canon that the primary focus in all social analysis must be on *power*' (1996: 68, emphases in original; cf. Boucher 1998: 376). Seen as such,

Brassett and Holmes risk advancing an implausible rekindled skeptical argument about international ethics. Thus, the contribution of ethics to IPE should remain the search for moral principles to guide political action and to empirically study global politics.

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