**Desire NC**

Because nation-states do not have moral obligations in the international realm, I negate. [Resolved: Economic sanctions ought not be used to achieve foreign policy objectives]. “Ought” implies moral obligation, because what is “desirable” can only be determined when couched in some ethical system. There is no such thing as independent desirability, because it begs the question of how we determine what is desirable. So, the affirmative burden is to prove that states have a moral obligation not to use sanctions. Thus, if I prove that nations have no moral obligations, they cannot have this particular moral obligation, and you negate.

I contend that there are no moral prohibitions upon nation-states in the international realm because nations are mot moral agents. Lloyd Gerson[[1]](#footnote-1) explains the nature of moral agency,

**We typically and rightly distinguish nonmoral agents, which are responsible for what they do, although not morally responsible, from moral agents who are morally responsible, except when they are acting merely as nonmoral agents. The errant attack dog that is tried by the military for mauling its handler is, presumably, responsible but not morally responsible for its deed.**

Thus, in order for an agent to be a moral agent, it must act with reason, rather than just according to reason. A hurricane cannot be held morally accountable even it causes destruction because it does not intend its action and does not understand a reason for that action. Insofar as morality values the guiding of action, it must assign some value to the reasons of agents. Only one who is self-aware and capable of doing something purposefully can be held truly accountable for that action. Also, deontology says that we do things according to universal maxims, which assumes we act based on a maxim at all. But, absent the ability to be act with reason – to act in accordance with a single rule – agents cannot be moral agents. Gerson 2 writes,

**To act with reason is to be able to conceptualize an occurent desire and fit that concept into a reasoning process which concludes with an intention or self-injunction to act. For one to act with reason, one must be aware of the *conceptualized* desire and incorporate it into a reasoning process of which one is simultaneously aware. Acting with reason**, moreover, **means being able to have conceptualized desires about one’s own conceptualized desires. By contrast, acting according to reason is nothing more than rule-following motion or behavior. *Any* machine or *any* living thing acts according to reason if it submits input to a rule on behalf of achieving an output.**

Nations cannot act with reason because they do not have second-order desires. Gerson 3 explains,

Another way of making my point is to employ the well-known distinction that originates with the philosopher Harry Frankfurt, the distinction between first- and second-order desires (Frankfurt 1971). As Frankfurt shows, **it is the ability to have desires about one’s own desires that distinguishes persons from nonpersons. That these desires belong to the *same* person is, of course, necessary for the individuation of the person. For example, one can have a desire to take drugs, but also a desire either to have that desire be effective in action or a desire not to have that desire.** In either case, **our willingness to assign responsibility or blame to persons who follow their first-order desires rests upon our assumption that persons can formulate second-order desires in relation to these. In the case of nations, however, even if we assume that they have first-order desires to engage in actions**, first-order desires whose existence is inferred from their behavior, **they cannot have second-order desires. For the putative second-order desires could *only* be those of the individual members of the deliberative body whose decisions resulted in the nation’s initiating an action.** Thus, **one member of the deliberative body might be opposed to the action and the putative desire to engage in it, or else she might herself endorse it. But in either case, that person is not the nation, which itself does not have the requisite equipment for having both first- and second-order desires in the same agent.**

Thus, nations are not moral agents because they cannot have the second-order desires that constitute moral reason. Gerson 4 explains the impact,

**If nations are not moral agents, then it is a** sort of **category mistake to suppose that nations have moral obligations** or rights or duties, or **that they can bear moral guilt or blame. Many people who would concede this claim strictly conceived would maintain that, nevertheless, it is desirable or even inevitable that we adopt the fiction that allows us to make moral judgments about the “citizens” of the community of nations.** I suppose that **this fiction is not entirely insidious, so long as it is agreed that all the claims about moral duties, obligations, rights, and so forth, made in regard to nations are fictions, too.** Thus, for example, to claim that one nation has an obligation to ameliorate the circumstances of another nation (or its members) is to implicate oneself in a fiction. The truth of this assertion is not, so far as I can see, affected by the hypothetical truth of another assertion; namely, that each and every human being has an obligation to ameliorate the circumstances of every other being insofar as possible. It is not affected even if we concede that nations, like other groups, can have interests. If, for example, one acknowledges in oneself an obligation to serve the interests of the Jewish people, it does not follow from this that one’s own nation has an obligation to support Israel. Indeed, more to the point, in my view the latter claim is unintelligible.

Thus, because the resolution claims that there is a moral prohibition upon nations concerning the use of economic sanctions, the resolution is a fiction, and thus not true.

1. Lloyd Gerson. “The Morality of Nations: An Aristotelian Approach.” Published in *Aristotle’s Politics Today*, compiled by Lenn E. Goodman and Robert B. Talisse. Albany: SUNY Press, 2007. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)