**Moral Agency 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, moral agents must possess the quality of intentionality, meaning they must intend for their actions to occur. A hurricane cannot be held morally accountable even it causes destruction because it does not intend its action. Inosafar as morality values the guiding of action, it must assign some value to the intentions 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 intentional – to act in accordance with a single rule – agents cannot be moral agents. Gerson 2 explains that even though nations have deliberative bodies and enact policy, they do not have intentionality,

Having said this, I still think that the argument that seeks to include nations within the class of moral agents on the basis of intentionality is a weak one. Here is why. There is an ambiguity in the term “intentionality” that this argument exploits. In the sense in which nations have intentionality, the attribution of moral agency does not follow. In the sense of intentionality according to which moral agency does follow, this argument does not show that nations have that. Intentionality in the first sense can characterize any goal-directed behavior and can also be applied to any behavior that is understandable in the light of that goal. For example, it is perfectly reasonable to say that a squirrel is gathering nuts for the purpose of eating throughout the winter, or that the rattle of the snake’s tail shows that it intends to strike, or that the field mouse is trying to get into the house in the autumn in order to keep warm, or that the chess-playing robot is trying to pin down my knight. But the sense of intentionality that applies to such goal-directed behavior by agents obviously does not indicate *moral* agency. Intentionality in the second sense, the sense according to which its applicability *does* imply moral agency, is something else. In this sense, intentionality refers first and foremost to the self-awareness of the presence of the purpose and the self-awareness of the mental states leading to its realization. That is, of course, precisely why we refrain from claiming that someone is responsible for her actions when she is *unaware* of what she is doing, especially when she could not have been aware. The acknowledgement of self-awareness is necessary for the attribution of moral agency. I would in fact argue that all and only nondefective human beings have this ability to be self-aware. But that is not my point here. There *may* be agents other than human beings that are moral agents. My present point is that a *group* of human beings, such as the group that comprise a nation, cannot be self-aware in this way and therefore cannot be a moral agent.

Thus, while individual members of a nation’s deliberative body can possess self-awareness about their own and their group’s actions, the group itself cannot. Just because all members of the group are self-aware about what they are doing does not mean that the group is self-aware. Gerson 3 continues,

As a member of the group, I can deliberate about whether my nation should declare war, and I can decide for or against that proposition. But whatever I (and my colleagues) each decide to do, there is not *another* decision that arises from another intentional act of deliberation by the nation. True, there is another action. I mean that, say, the declaration of war is an action over and above my voting for or against it. But that declaration of war is not a declaration by a self-aware agent, the nation.

Gerson 4 continues,

Another way to look at this point is to consider that in cases of genuine self-awareness, the subject who has the intentional object, say, a purpose must be identical with the subject who is aware of having that intentional object. But when the nation has a purpose, as expressed, say, in a resolution of a governing body, it is not the nation that is self-aware but the persons who comprise it. And that self-awareness is not of each individual’s own purpose, since one’s own purposes may be in conflict with those of the nation. Even if they are not in conflict, that is, even if there is 100 percent support for a motion, the awareness of the nation’s purpose as expressed in the motion occurs in the individual persons and not in the nation. Unless you can put purpose and self-awareness of purpose in the identical subject, you cannot have a moral agent. And in the case of group action, you can never have the identical subject that both has the purpose and is self-aware of having it. Knowing that my nation has declared war is different from the act of declaring war and occurs in a different subject. Indeed, the nation or the nonmoral agent that declares war *cannot* know that it declares war anymore than the chess-playing robot can know that it won (Rovane 1994; Rovane 1998).

So, while the individuals within the group can be aware of their own decisions, a nation cannot be self-aware and thus is not a moral agent. Gerson 5 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.

The affirmative framework is flawed because it assumes that evidence about moral obligation of individuals apply to nations. Gerson explains,

The principle insight gleaned from Aristotle in this regard is that **much if not all of the discussion of international relations today rests on a serious mistake. The mistake is to suppose that nations are moral agents. If one supposes this, then whatever theory of morality one wishes to defend, one will assume that the theory applies to nations. Thus, if one, say, defends a version of utilitarianism or some sort of deontological theory, one will then go on to claim its applicability to nations, treating them as if they were moral agents.**

AT: This is a bad moral system

Gerson’s argument is not a moral system at all, is ontological in nature. His argument is that NO moral theory makes sense unless we understand what a moral agent is. Gerson writes,

This seems to me a very bad argument, indeed. **Unless it can be established that nations are moral agents over and above the moral agents that comprise them, the very idea of a normative basis for international relations is unintelligible.** It bears emphasizing that **the accusation of unintelligibility should not be watered down into a rejection of one particular moral theory in favor of another. The point I am making is not, say, utilitarianism is wrong whereas some deontological theory is right.** Nor am I making the point that that the correct moral theory at the international level is different from the correct one at the individual level. **The problem** I see **is more radical than that of sorting out the pros and cons of moral theories. The problem is that *no* moral theory makes any sense unless we can understand what a moral agent is. If nations are not moral agents, then the application of moral theory to international relations hardly makes more sense than it does as applied to the jungle.**

AT: This allows/permits genocide.

Individuals can still be morally obligated to ameliorate genocide and other human rights violations – the moral prohibition simply can’t be placed upon nations as an agent. Gerson writes,

Another way of framing the objection is to insist that justice and human rights are transnational concepts and that the members of nations ought to promote these internationally through the instrumentality of their own nations. **Nothing that I have already said contradicts the notion that of moral theories that include a concept of human rights, one might maintain that persons in nations other than their own have had their rights violated. And nothing precludes the notion that the moral theory requires its adherents take steps to ameliorate their condition. But I what I have said is true, then there is no logical connection between what is required of an individual person to do and what that person’s nation should do**.

AT: Nations are just the people who comprise them.

Nations are agents distinct from the individuals who comprise them. Gerson writes,

First, let me say what part of this line of thinking I agree with. I agree that a nation, in doing the above, is some sort of agent distinct from the moral agents who are the persons who make up the deliberative or legislative body. I have no wish to contest the existence of group dynamics or collective action or agency. I agree that a nation is an agent when it votes in an international assembly. After all, **since a nation can, for example, declare war when some members of the legislative body are opposed to such a declaration, we can hardly maintain that there is no difference between the agency of the legislative and that of the individuals who comprise it. Similarly, I have no ontological scruples about holding that, say, Germany (*not* Germans) can defeat Italy (*not* Italians) in football.**

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)