

BACHELOR'S THESIS EXAMINER REPORT
PPE – Bachelor's in Politics, Philosophy and Economics
Faculty of Social Sciences, Charles University

Thesis title:	The Injustice of the Current Global Economic Order in the Light of Thomas Pogge's Argument from Negative Duties
Student's name:	Constantin Zeithammer
Referee's name:	Jakub Tesař

Criteria	Definition	Maximum	Points
Major Criteria			
	Contribution and argument (quality of research and analysis, originality)	50	42
	Research question (definition of objectives, plausibility of hypotheses)	15	12
	Theoretical framework (methods relevant to the research question)	15	10
Total		80	64
Minor Criteria			
	Sources, literature	10	9
	Presentation (language, style, cohesion)	5	4
	Manuscript form (structure, logical coherence, layout, tables, figures)	5	5
Total		20	18
TOTAL		100	82

Reviewer's commentary according to the above criteria:

The thesis seeks to evaluate and possibly revise Pogge's argument of negative duties of affluent countries/consumers of the Global North. The author introduces the core approach and two critical perspectives well; he then evaluates the concept in light of the case study, which focuses on agricultural subsidies and differences between countries of Global North (OECD) and Global South (some other countries). He shows that it is difficult to attribute the responsibility for doing harm to Global Economic Order because there is a clear difference between countries in both categories. He nevertheless agrees with Pogge that inequality can be remedied within the parameters of the current system (as some countries already managed to do). The thesis is well sources, the argument is strong, and the author comes to the conclusions which answer the research question.

Regarding some areas for improvement, I can list several main points that may be contested in the thesis. First, the thesis builds on the contradiction between the consequence of the Global Economic Order and what results from the policies of individual countries. The main weakness I see is that GEO is never defined in the thesis. For the most part, it is represented by the actions and rules of WTO, but those rules are established by members of this organisation, i.e., individual states. Therefore, it is not clear

the difference between what states and WTO (reflecting the interest of states) want. It would require some elaboration on the agency of institutions of the GEO and how those organisations act independently of their member states. Second, the thesis seeks to analyse how specific actions impact the negative duties of “affluent countries”. But the analysis then focuses on inequality or differences between developed and developing countries. None of which does equal the prevalence of poverty (and undernourishment). The classical counterargument could be the “rising tide lifts all boats” argument, which claims that a flourishing economy and trade lift people out of poverty even though the inequality may worsen. The authors analyse how different groups of countries use subsidies. Still, except for a brief paragraph at the beginning of the thesis, the impact on people living below the poverty line is unclear. The third argument relates to the revision of Pogge’s approach. The author concludes that because we cannot collectively attribute responsibility to Global North (GEO) countries, we should redefine it in terms of collective responsibility. I wonder, with respect to my first point, how it changes the concept. And last but not least, I wonder what the normative consequences of this move are. Suppose we claim that it is impossible to find a causal relationship between individual actions and the harm done. In that case, we relieve the individuals from responsibility even though there are options (like responsible consumer choices) that allow individuals to not participate in the normal market relations and would minimise the harm, fulfilling the negative duties proposed by Pogge and others.

Some points regarding the method. I appreciate the effort to connect the theoretical argument with some empirical evidence. But the methodological section is relatively brief, without many sources. It does not clarify some essential choices of the chosen design (why we focus on these countries and not others, what is the timespan of our analysis, and how focusing on subsidies helps answer the research question). The analysis uses data from different periods, does not reflect the possible impact of Covid years, and does not reflect on the evolution of OECD membership (there were 24 countries in the 1980s, but now the organisation comprises 38 countries – how does it impact the described trends?). It is also not always clear what the statistical data reveal (How relevant is the increase in payments based on non-commodity criteria such as set-aside land if the amount is 4.16 billion compared to 94 billion in market price support. An increase in a category of about 5% of the other probably does not counterweight the decline in the latter. Similarly, what is the relevance of relative shares of subsidies when absolute amounts differ so widely? Isn’t the higher relative share of Norway far less important than relatively lower but in absolute numbers higher amount of subsidies by the United States or China?). As already mentioned, I missed some basic definitions of central concepts used in the thesis (affluent countries, global economic order). The thesis presents well Pogge’s argument and the two critics, but there is also an enormous literature relevant to the topic, which is not directly reflected in the thesis (development as freedom, positive vs negative peace etc.)

As regards formal criteria, the thesis is well structured and flows well. However, many arguments are repetitive; the thesis could be substantially shortened without impacting the content. There are also many language issues throughout the thesis (e.g., argument “from” negative duties, where I think the proposition is wrong). There are also some problematic claims in the thesis (e.g., “the people of the richest 10 per cent of the world, are equally spread among world’s regions” (page 21)).

Overall, the thesis tackles a relevant and timely topic, and the author handled it well. It features original ideas, and the author connected various streams of his academic discipline. I have no hesitation in recommending the thesis for defence.

Proposed grade: B

Suggested questions for the defence are:

- How does the change in number of OECD countries (and acceptance of countries like Chile or Mexico) throughout the years changes your analysis?
- How would you argue against the assumption that individuals have options how to not participate in dominant trade and market structures though certain consumer choices? Would that not meet the criteria of negative duty?

I recommend the thesis for final defence.

Referee Signature

Overall grading scheme at FSV UK:

TOTAL POINTS	GRADE	Quality standard
91 – 100	A	= outstanding (high honor)
81 – 90	B	= superior (honor)
71 – 80	C	= good
61 – 70	D	= satisfactory
51 – 60	E	= low pass at a margin of failure
0 – 50	F	= failing. The thesis is not recommended for defence.