
Some Approaches to an Ethics for Disaster ¹

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ABSTRACT: We have witnessed, and in some instance from afar, disasters of all sorts that span the globe from the Caribbean, South and North America, Asia, to Australia and other affected regions of the world. Some of these destabilizing and at times fatal events have resulted in lives lost, forced migration, and a restructuring of the physical, social and economic architecture of the affected parts of the globe. Further, the disasters as massive restructuring of the physical and psychological status quo are at times human made and at others, natural.

¹ I am grateful to the editors of the journal and to the anonymous readers of an earlier version of this article. I have tried to incorporate their comments and queries in this final version of the work. Their contribution to the work is immeasurable but as I continue to struggle with these issues and themes, my hope is to respond eventually to all of their concerns. In this effort, I have elaborated on some of the issues raised here in this paper and have included some of the passages here in a few of the chapters of my forthcoming book titled *Global Development Ethics*, London, UK: Rowman and Littlefield, (Summer 2019). The reader of the book will thus recognize some of the ideas and texts of this article as they are repeated in the Introduction and Chapter Six of the book. The argument here however remains an independent argument despite the similarities and shared resources with the book.

My paper offers reflections on the construction of an ethics for conditions of disaster. I shall argue that fellow human beings, who through no fault of their own suffer the wrath of (socio-political or physical) nature, should be relieved. A humane world will work to redress the nefarious conditions of persons whose lives are altered by such disasters. My efforts to carve out the motivations to alleviate specific chronic and acute need is also in short, an effort to articulate constituents of a global ethics that presumes that pervasive nefarious conditions will persist and will have to be contended with morally.

I. Disaster Ethics

WE HAVE WITNESSED even if from afar disasters of all sorts that span the globe from the Caribbean, South and North America, Asia, Australia and other parts of the world. In September 2018, to name but two of such instances, Japan grappled with an earthquake that produced landslides, deaths and challenges to the political machinery of the country. My home state of North Carolina was contending, as I revised this work, with the aftermaths of Hurricane Florence. Some of these destabilizing and at times fatal events have resulted to be sure in lives lost, but they have also triggered forced migration and a restructuring of the physical, social and economic architecture of these parts of the globe. Further these disasters, that are by definition a massive restructuring of the status quo, are sometimes human made and at others so far as we know, strictly natural.

I thus revisit this article as my home state of North Carolina continued to contend with the effects of hurricane Florence and then Michael. The advent of the hurricane has culled up a series of reactions and anecdotes about resilience, governmental responsibility, and common vulnerabilities. My dental hygienist recalls how during hurricane Hugo, one of the predecessors of Florence in the State some thirty years ago, descended on Charlotte, N.C.. She and her flat mates were without power for a few days when by contrast, others in the general area, were without electricity for months. She recounts how she and her friends resorted to primitive basic skills to endure the few days without the necessities we have come to take for granted. By her account, and it is easy to forget how recent our modern comforts are, although the level of modern comforts differs depending on what parts of the country or state one lives, suffice it to remember also that the comfort is more recent for some than for others. Regardless of where one is, it is evident that disasters reveal the vulnerability we share in common with other humans in a mainly unpredictable world. Our scientific advances manage to minimize psychologically the unpredictability of our world. They thereby contribute to the shield, in truth or by illusion, our common vulnerability as humans.²

² See Robert E. Goodin's *Protecting the Vulnerable*, (Chicago: University of Chicago, 1985) for a fuller account of the extent of our perception of our common vulnerability and its associated responsibilities.

The anecdote of my hygienist and the pummeling of the hurricane Florence also bring to mind the approaches we might embark on in order to consider a moral response to disasters and their aftermath. I think it relevant to preface the exploration of an ethics for disaster with a reminder that in this work I consider disaster ethics to be a series of reflections that focus on the role of ethics when contending with conditions of disaster. I contrast this delineation with an attempt not executed here to present a ready formed ethics for disasters. Also for my purposes, I emphasize environmental disasters writ large, i.e. conditions of disasters that persist and that are environmental in a larger sense than that of being strictly related to the physical environment. So conditions of poverty, chronic illnesses and many other events or conditions that affect human viability but that are unforeseen, unconnected, or for the most part unmediated by identifiable causal connections with a human agency, would also meet my expectations of the environmental and thus subsumed in my definition of disaster.

That is, I leave out the financial and political disasters that would have the same effect as the environmental ones because they, more readily than the former, point to human or institutional agency and as a result, the challenge to ethics from such cases is less daunting theoretically than in the former cases alluded to. So it will be less important for me here to consider, whether factually or theoretically, the extent of the culpability of a person or institution in the demise or disruption of the lives of groups or states. When such disasters do occur however, we might do well to distinguish the two forms of culpability (mediated or unmediated) if for no other reason than to establish the range of our responsibility in alleviating the impact of such conditions.

The intuition that I support in this essay suggests that environmental disasters in my sense, compel us to consider the problem of chronic need and the response to it. I hold thus that a humane world will work to redress the nefarious conditions that alter the lives of persons or, in the least, will move to aid the persons so affected. It may indeed be the case that in fact and in many instances, aid to persons in particular instances of disasters is more feasible. That it is perhaps more expediently preferable, than redressing the permanent conditions that repeatedly and invariably affect them in their quotidian lives. This tendency to cater to the instance of disaster by charitable aid is no doubt true especially if it is foreseeable that responding to the pervasive nefarious conditions will tax the benevolence and good will of others, who would otherwise be disposed to aid in short-term or acute cases. It nevertheless seems to me despite this tendency to placate donor or relief fatigue that at some point, we shall need to contend with the very conditions that yield needs and as a result, the work of disaster ethics is well cut out for it.

II. Preparing a disaster ethics

On January the 12th of 2010, the country of Haïti was rocked to its core in the capital Port-au-Prince and its immediately surrounding areas. The Southern minister Pat Robertson, saw in the catastrophe the exercise of God's wrath on the

people because of their history.³ The irrationality of Robertson's faith notwithstanding, there was visibly and actually a compulsion to respond to the vulnerabilities of persons. We may disagree as to whether the compulsion where it exists is religious, moral or legal. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights offers an arsenal of support for claiming duties for persons, based on their universal rights to be unmolested and, to personal social and physical safety.⁴ Those rights may have explained the global outpouring of pledged and actual aids in the immediate aftermath of the quake.⁵

We move then beyond blame⁶ and character⁷ to acknowledge that the Dominican Republic that despite its persistent negrophobia recognized its responsibility to aid.⁸ In cases of need or crisis, and generally when there is not any immediate risk to themselves, neighbors do not necessarily peer through their windows to watch and wait for governmental agents to respond to the predicament of the neighbors. When risk is minimal and neighbors are in need, we share our support or help without the expectation of governmental intervention. For the most part, and on an international scale, the support of the neighboring nation exemplifies the social compact understanding of civilians and good neighbors. Subsequent to the neighborly Dominican support, various organizations, civil and statal, individual and collective, helped restore some aspects of normalcy in the country.⁹

³ https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=pat+robertson+Haïti

⁴ David Mayers, "Humanity in 1948: The Genocide Convention and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights", *Diplomacy & Statecraft*, 26:446-472, 2015, <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/09592296.2015.1067522>

⁵ http://daraint.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/Haïti-Crisis-Report_HRI-2010.pdf

⁶ Naomi Zack's version of what I dub a political ethics of disaster would want to consider whether the political leaders shirked their contractual obligation to such an extent as to make the country perennially prone to the effects of disasters large and small. She favors a social contract ethics that would lay blame squarely on the shoulders of the political leaders for mismanaging the structural disaster preparation and response of the country. She articulates her view in her forthcoming *Reviving the Social Compact: Inclusive Citizenship in an Age of Extreme Politics*. Rowman and Littlefield, 2018. See especially her chapter 6.

⁷ Pat Robertson as I have suggested in the above is the contemporary embodiment of this type of criticism.

⁸ Zack refers to this reaction as one of social compact where members of a civil society, in this instance the civil society consisted of the whole island, in the absence of governmental ability, responsibility, or presence resorts to the pre-governmental stage. She would construe that compact to be Lockean rather than Hobbesian. Her Chapter 6 explains this process of relegating responsibility.

⁹ Even when a case can be made about a right to relief (as David Mayers's article might suggest), the deployment of the associated duty requires in the practice some governmental and civil infrastructures. In the absence of such internal mechanisms, international partners or relief organizations (i.e. INGOs and donors) can use, whether justified or not, that fact to withhold the disbursement and undermine the

But bureaucratic hurdles, a failed development plan, a failed ethics, and financial manipulations have contributed to an ostensibly unsystematic disaster response. The nature of that response has in turn reinforced a level of vulnerability for the citizens of the country that is antithetical to social sustainability, or even to some aspects of a return to normalcy.

III. What should be done in case of Disaster?

The government of Haiti *per force* committed itself to a reactive posture to future cases of both, natural and human-made, disasters. It left itself open to accusations of a failed state. Although the rumor of a deteriorating civil society was unsubstantiated, the belief that the polity and civil society disintegrated, lest we descend into a Hobbesian state of nature, was thought to justify the inevitable foreign intervention.¹⁰

Political ethics as a form of public or institutional, and not individual, morality for cases of disaster thus engenders a justification for restoring in large, the constituents of an established polity. When the viability of individuals in a polity is threatened we resort, according to this form of ethics of disaster, to the political realm or to the various interpretation of the hypothetical contract thought to hold with the governing bodies and institutions of the political society in question. The ethics involved might take a libertarian form where the argument would be to reject intervention except in the most minimal restorative form that the intervention will enable individuals to recapture their individual autonomy to determine in their own way, the polity they would deem fit for their particular circumstances. The libertarian approach to disaster or disaster relief even as it adopts the negative approach of eliminating impediments to individual viability, does not however support the restoration of autonomy for those outside of the specific polity in question.¹¹ Cross-polity relief is not permissible under the libertarian view except in the form of willing charity. There are no moral mandates, from their perspective, to interfere with the other. With this restriction on the libertarian view, we notice the problem that a cross-border claim of responsibility would pose to a libertarian disaster ethics. It would not see itself concerned by such transnational responsibilities, at least not as moral obligations.

sovereignty and/or the autonomy that a state might assume it has earned to respond to manage and respond in its own way to the conditions of concern.

¹⁰ Paul Voice's "What Do Liberal Democratic States owe the Victims of Disasters? A Rawlsian Account", *Journal of Applied Philosophy*, Vol. 33, No. 4, November 2016: 396-410, doi: 10.1111/japp.12119, renders an attractive alternative account to the social contractarian form of political ethics to which I refer in the earlier note and in this section.

¹¹ Jan Narveson represents well a version of this libertarian point of view. See for example his 'Welfare and wealth, poverty and justice in today's world', *The Journal of Ethics* 8, 4 (2004), pp. 305-348.

Peter Singer, who represents the utilitarian view¹², does distinguish between aid to citizens and non-citizens but employs a utilitarian calculus of harm and benefit that is vague enough to devolve into an aleatory responsibility that resembles charity more than a moral responsibility¹³. Singer proposes that one aids extra-statal citizens if on average, the benefits of the aid to the recipient outweighs the harm that the aid provider would incur for her efforts. The determination of the harm and benefit remains from this calculus a subjective one. So even if a moral responsibility can be articulated, the force of the obligation because subjective, remains halfhearted.

Paul Voice's¹⁴ attempt, by contrast, to develop a Rawlsian account for such cross-border responsibility improves on both, the libertarian silence and Singer's utilitarian offer. Although he too proposes a utilitarian interpretation of that sort of responsibility, his own argument for a cross-border responsibility moves in the right direction in that it assigns the responsibility to the political structure and its leaders. His political analysis is buttressed by a cosmopolitan morality that is nevertheless restrictive. Because it departs from a Rawlsian base, the cosmopolitan morality that motivates his approach rightly targets the restoration of individuals' dignity and their capacity to exercise their rights.¹⁵ Voice's approach understandably also presumes consistent with the Rawlsian model, a conception of a well-ordered society that in the end limits the benefits he believes are gained with the cosmopolitan attribute.¹⁶ Not all societies in need of aid are well-ordered, and not all well-ordered societies are so in the same way. More importantly, who (and how does one) determine objectively, that (and when) a society is well-ordered? Should societies that do not meet the 'well-ordered criterion' be thereby exempt from the benefits of the cosmopolitan responsibility he favors? The short answer to this last seems to be yes. Rawls and, by extension, Voice promote in my view a restrained cosmopolitanism.¹⁷

The protests thus by groups such as "Doctors without Borders," "World Food Program," or of countries like Brazil and France, that their aid and access to Haïti in the immediate aftermath of the earthquake were delayed by the US military on the ground that the society was not well-ordered enough, are well founded. These organizations' insistent protests favor an inclusive cosmopolitan morality that also

¹² See Voice op. cit., p. 406-8.

¹³ See Peter Singer's "Famine, affluence, and morality", *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, Vol. 1, No. 3, (1972): 229-243.

¹⁴ See Voice's article, op. cit. in note 8.

¹⁵ Voice, op. cit., p. 401.

¹⁶ See John Rawls's *The Law of Peoples* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999) where Rawls extends his theory of justice to the international realm. The global ethics that he develops for aid in the international community limits the exercise to other liberal democratic polities thereby curtailing the cosmopolitan aspirations of the Rawlsian view.

¹⁷ I shall offer later in the last section of this work an alternative interpretation of Rawls that I think more consistent with his views and more relevant to the conditions of disaster I am concerned with. Voice, in my view, makes Rawls more restrictive than he needs to be.

reveal the fundamental problem of the vacuum left by the governmental apparatus and its reluctance to be disaster ready. At a different, but as important a level as the absence of governmental involvement, one recognizes the dogged issue of money and aid in countries that dwell in chronic need. Despite Haïti's presence and early participation in many of the international milestones that have shaped our modern era, ranging from the formation of the League of Nations and the dialogues concerning international responsibilities in the form of foreign and development aids, the country's actions have been uninspiring. Haïti has not been able to translate its place in the development of the modern era into one of leadership and autonomy of its own fiscal affairs as for example, the country of India has so adroitly done in its recent negotiations with the World Bank.¹⁸

This retreat from international leadership, in fairness is not completely *sui generis* for many of its colleagues then and now conspired in different ways to erase its international place in, and significance to, the international community. The combination of international kleptocracy and internal non-chalance has showed itself in its contemporary political practice, and ultimately in its mismanaging of the crisis of the earthquake. With the billions raised, and even more pledged, only a small fraction were in fact distributed for the relief efforts. Even with that distribution, the state and other local civic non-governmental organizations (NGOs) were excluded from the decision-making or management of the funds. The reticence to include the local public and civil organizations however cannot be the result of a "fear of corruption." The exclusion of the local public and civic sector, if fear of corruption motivated such reticence, did not however apply to the participating U.S. organizations that operated in the country. They benefitted from what would be attributed, at best, as "disaster profiteering." Haïti controlled as little of the purse as it did the determination of which of the projects it needed would be undertaken. The operation of relief exemplified the problem of the 1% of Aid fund. In this particular situation, the *Haïti Crisis Reports* has found that of every US aid dollar, 33% of it went to the US military and 1% to the government of Haïti. Autonomy of projects is rendered thus minimal, if existent at all.¹⁹

Despite the crisis, it is reasonable to have expected that the major players involved even when they have isolated and excluded the local stakeholders, would have devised a coordinated path to development post-crisis. It is a disgrace that the major international players appointed to direct the potential reconstruction of the city post-earthquake achieved only a minimum of that goal. The participants in the project of reconstruction and management of aid adopted a corporate model for managing the crisis.

If the formula of 1% obtains in this context as well, it yielded an industrial park, a hotel, or some funds gingerly allocated to some local entrepreneurs and organizations. Furthermore, one might think that the approach however timid follows

¹⁸ See Jason Kirk and Vikash Yadav, "From Swagger to Self-Advocacy: India's Postgraduate "Transition" in the World Bank", *India Review*, vol. 14, no. 4, 2015, pp. 377-398, <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14736489.2015.1092739>

¹⁹ http://daraint.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/12/Haïti-Crisis-Report_HRI-2010.pdf, p. 163

a systematic model that could in prospective similar cases be rehearsed over time. The approach would follow presumably the sort of 'acronym' model that many islands and sites of development have successfully or not, adopted.

IV. Development as Ethical alternative to Aid: The Acronym Models

The acronym models are economic development models that some have argued are imposed on countries of need without respect for the latter's respective discriminating peculiarities. Eric Clark for example has argued that the acronym model of island development is bankrupt because it lacks particularity, democratic involvement and a respect for the integrity of persons and cultures living within the boundaries of the island.²⁰ In the acronym model, development trumps sustainability. MIRAB, as the first of three models of island development that Clark rejects, favors **m**igration **r**emittances, **a**id and **b**ureaucracy, hence the acronym MIRAB. Although it represents a transitional stage out of which and into which countries may fall, MIRAB describes an approach to income development strategies for developing countries. This model describes communities found at the lower rung of the development ladder. At the upper rungs of the strategies of development, we find the other models such as: the PROFIT and SITE models.

PROFIT represents a model of economic development that focuses on **p**eople, **r**esource management, **o**verseas engagement, **f**inance and **t**ransportation. It endeavors to train some members of the local population but invites outside investment to exploit the local resources of the island. The SITE model on the other hand refers to **s**mall **i**sland **t**ourist **e**conomies. Its focus blatantly is to turn the island into a commodity, a tourist destination *simpliciter*.

I agree with Clark that all three of these models of development seek rents in general. They either extract compensation from abroad (from expatriates or offshore finances) or by inviting a cultivation of the territory for rent. They are also actual procedures that underscore the fact that island cultures are independent of economic development projects and have managed to survive despite the thrust toward an economic development. So, far from being an objective and normative standard or model of development, these acronym models when implemented as normative models commit a parallel to the naturalistic fallacy that G.E. Moore warned us against.

In other words, the fact that many islands have adopted these approaches to survival in a global capitalist environment does not imply that these models should be adopted as ideals or norms for other or all island countries that wish to actively participate with integrity in the global environment. In addition to these theoretical objections practically, in the various instances where these models are adopted, the territories have proved deficient in the promotion of other values, like democracy for example. In other instances, the factories financed by offshore groups have proved

²⁰ Clark, E., "Financialization, sustainability and the right to the island: A critique of acronym models of island development", *Journal of Marine and Island Cultures* (2013), <http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.imic.2013.10.001>

repressive, thus violating human or labor rights. They also sometimes forcefully remove locals, thereby dislocating the fabric of local communities. In yet other instances, the environment where these models operate suffers degradation or pollution with long-term ramifications that supersede the momentary financial attraction of the development option.

In short, the brief assessment of the models of development I have considered take for granted that the development of a country is done strickly in terms of capitalization. Aid, if we think it a moral response to economic or political disasters, comes here in the form of development, of economic development. This form of an ethics of disaster constitutes a return to a pecuniary interpretation of our relationship with each other and with the governing institutions of our world, however broadly or narrowly construed. Nature, persons, culture are commodified to make way for the market. Surely development cannot be imposed from ideal models or from the prevalent vision of the outside observer. If development is to be of value and as a placeholder for aid, its value does not reside in the profit or the capital that it yields. Rather, development's value consists in cultivating, nurturing and promoting a common space that the people for whom development is deemed necessary create and establish for themselves, lest we resort to old fashion imperialism. The development that is specific to a particular community cannot be articulated nor imposed from outside of the community and without the latter's involvement and participation. Development is no more singular than personal identity. To reduce the country's development to tourism or sweatshops developments (human power), or the export of T-shirts or bananas and the like, is to negate the various other factors that help anchor or identify a community or group of people.

In the particular context of Haïti in the aftermath of the earthquake, development, as aid or antidote to prospective disaster, would entail a challenge of the traditional ways of doing disaster relief. It would mean shifting the spatial arrangements of the distribution of funds and expertise. It would mean shifting the geography of the 1% formula, and a shift in the presumption of expertise. It also would mean rejecting the language of evangelism that undercuts the traditional existent communal knowledge, to promote instead an adaptation of local ways to the exigencies of the contemporary. It would mean shifting the focus from what international NGOs (INGOs) decide the country and its people need, to having the people and the local NGOs and institutions determine for themselves what they need. Since they are committing to live there (wherever that is), they are likely to want to sustain it in a manner that is consistent with their continued viability. This shift in the approach to considering a disaster ethics does not naturally flow from the language of positive rights that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) denote.

As a set of positive rights, myriad of institutional hurdles hamper the constituents of the UDHR and undermine its effectiveness. We may admit that people have a "right to reasonable working hours..." but such a right would depend on the availability of work. Whose task is it then to develop such industries? Or yet again, we may agree that everyone is "entitled to an international order of politics" consistent with the fulfillment of his/her/their human rights but who is to build such

an order? Or who is to institute the tribunal, to adjudicate when such rights are violated? The recent backlash against a cosmopolitan environment in the form of increasingly nationalist and xenophobic governments that masquerade as populism reminds us of the fragility of the UDHR and of the continuous challenges that other documents like the Genocide Convention, continue to face.

Even with the help of positive rights or laws, disaster ethics given the proposal suggested thus far, entails a preparation. We prepare for disaster in accordance to the rights that we assume every individual to possess in our contemporary, or post-World War II, moment. However helpful those rights, disaster ethics consists in both a practical and a theoretical/moral preparation for disaster. UDHR couples with development ideals to suggest that a worthwhile antidote to both natural and human-made disaster is development. At the heart of the effort to reach the goal of development is the belief that development transforms the space within which people live or will live. Ethical development is in fact the realization of a spatial environment that sustains the viability of all of its members. It involves the translation of knowledge into actions that ultimately enlists the participation of, and incorporates the knowledge that, the people as a community have accumulated over time. It involves the critical use of the practical and traditional knowledge that have sustained, up to this point, the people for whom development is a goal, as well as the normative criteria or principle that would prescribe actions vis-à-vis them going forward.

V. Ethics and the Associated Responsibility

From the challenges suggested in the preceding section, I propose a reconsideration of the disaster in Haïti and the responsibility that it entails. If there are failures in the administration of aid during, and in the aftermath of the crisis, my point is not to identify blameworthy agents and institutions. Rather, I suggest that in the context of the deployment of aid, these failures are structurally embedded in the conception of aid as a form of positive responsibility, as a self-assigned responsibility. In the following segments of the work, I shall present the moral underpinnings, the justification, for the moral right to aid. I shall thus propose an alternative argument to the positive right or the charitable arguments that have hitherto been marshalled to justify aid. I contend that the positive right to aid absolves the aid provider of the nefarious effects of the aid by shielding them from accusations of ineffectiveness and in effect, shielding them from blame for want of respectable institutional structures to facilitate the proper diffusion of aid in the country of operation. So even when the right to aid is justified morally, we ask whether the goals of its implementation should be a restoration of the *status quo* (making the current and common state of affairs livable/viable) or that of reverting to a *status quo ante* disaster (as it pertains to the population of concern). In what follows, I aim to show that the disaster response that took place in the aftermath of the earthquake in Haïti bandaged the conditions of the people and consisted of a rapid, but temporary, response to the circumstances.

In the face of such practical problems, the challenge for disaster ethics is twofold. It aims first to determine the morality of disaster relief. As we have

understood the relief from the above narrative, I am inclined to believe that the positive appeal of the right to relief, if we follow the UDHR, implies simply the duty of its provision. We must thus provide relief. As we have also noticed, the provision does not necessarily achieve the end intended, namely the restoration of the autonomy and self-determination of the population in question. Therefore, the moral justification of the right to relief in the case of disaster is thus linked secondly, to a practical challenge, a specific outcome. I consider the first challenge and return to the second last.

The consideration of what I would classify as a disaster ethics begins with an observation of the works of two luminaries in the field of moral theory. I think here of the works of John Rawls and Alan Gewirth respectively. Rawls determines in the second chapter of his *A Theory Of Justice*, that the construction of a just society begins with the equality of all participants and with institutions that benefits the least advantaged in the society. The institutions he envisages for that society would be constrained by two foundational principles: a) that institutional positions in that society be open to all, and b) that policies that help govern the structures of that society will engage individual ingenuity and improve the lot of the least advantage.²¹ This last principle generally referred to as the *Maximin* principle, helps Rawls further distinguish between obligations and natural duties.

Moral obligations for him result from conditional and volitional acts. The conditional acts may be ones of benefitting from particular conditions and the volitional ones may result from tacit or expressed undertakings e.g. agreements, promises, etc.. These obligations generally owed to the specific individuals with whom one partakes in these conditions are in the main contractual and they are contrasted with the natural duties. Natural duties are protective of, or promoting of, the individual's individuality. They consist of positive and negative duties that "hold between persons irrespective of their institutional relationships."²² The duty not to harm and the duty of mutual aid are two of the natural duties where it should be clear that the former is negative and latter, positive. Again, these duties hold between persons in general. Rawls asserts furthermore that one of the aims of the "law of nations is to assure the recognition of these duties in the conduct of states."²³

With this last claim, Rawls becomes of interest in this exercise on disaster ethics. His approach can apply to three levels of concern. He helps one decide whether 1) to protect the interest of another, 2) to come to her aid or 3) whether one is positively obligated to respond to her plight. Whereas in the interpretation offered here of Rawls, the two first options are direct/acute and may not require long-standing commitment, the latter one is chronic so long as the relationship that triggered the conditions persist. My hope is to offer, here and in the remaining parts of this work, an interpretation of both ethics and disaster that would justify supporting the third option in Rawls's theory.

²¹ Rawls, John, *A Theory Of Justice*, Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1981

²² Rawls, John, op. cit., p. 115

²³ Rawls, Ibidem

Rawls for the moment appears more attractive than someone who like him has proposed a moral theory that would justify aid or more specifically mutual aid. The alternative theory to Rawls's is that of Alan Gewirth. Gewirth like Rawls aims to establish the foundation of a moral theory that would strengthen moral rights. From Gewirth's position, the starting point of any moral theory is agency. The agent who is rational and self-interested will not deny, at the risk of contradiction, that the conditions for his actions will obtain for any other agents similarly situated or motivated. The motivation of the agent is such that he acts. Whether the agent considers the possibility of action or the act itself, the prospective agent exhibits that he values his freedom to act. He is likewise motivated to act because he perceives that the act will help him achieve a goal he values. His action thus has a purpose and as such, he is a purposive agent.

Gewirth demonstrates that these two attributes of a) individual autonomy and b) purposiveness, will be recognized by the rational agent as necessary goods for his agency. Likewise, these attributes will be necessary for any other prospective agent. The rational agent will furthermore acknowledge that the necessity of these attributes, freedom and purposiveness, as goods, will also help establish them as rights. The purposive rational agent who wills to avoid inconsistency and self-contradiction, will therefore accept that these are also the rights of any other rational agent. The principle that helps the translation from individual rights to generic rights of agency is the "principle of generic consistency" (PGC). Moving from individual agency to mutual aid, Gewirth argues that the PGC requires that an agent not only refrain from interfering with his recipients' freedom and well-being, but also that he assist them in securing these necessary goods when they cannot do so by their own efforts, and when the agent can provide such assistance, at no comparable cost to himself. By 'comparable cost' is meant that he is not required to risk his own life or other basic goods in order to save another person's life or other basic goods, and similarly with the other components of the necessary goods of action.²⁴

The prospective agent has as negative duty, the protection or non-interference of these rights, and as positive duty, the promotion of these rights so long as she does not undermine her life or other basic goods. We have then in this formulation a justification of the duty of mutual aid. It remains, even in this humane and most rational of position presented by Gewirth, a singularly individualistic project. Gewirth explains these positive duties in terms of his recognition that morality obtains only in interpersonal actions, actions between persons. Persons who are prospective agents, and for whatever reasons are unable to enjoy their necessary goods should be helped, because these goods are rights of theirs. We have as a result,

²⁴ Gewirth, Alan, *Reason and Morality*, Chicago, IL: The University of Chicago Press, 1981, p. 218. The PGC is an abbreviation of the principle of generic consistency on which Gewirth rests the imperative that, when adhered to, accounts for the determination of moral actions. It is the test of consistency that acknowledges the logical consistency that the rational agent submits to himself in his determination that the necessary goods for him are rights that at the risk of contradiction, he will admit that other prospective agents have the same rights.

and in both of the cases of Gewirth and Rawls, a solution for disaster but one that pertains more directly to acute cases and would only tangentially address the more chronic conditions of contemporary circumstances of disaster.

Given both thinkers' perspectives, we are indeed justified in responding to cases of disaster. In instances of acute or chronic conditions, we are permitted or directed to restore the conditions of freedom and well-being (Gewirth) for prospective agents. Or we might do, as Rawls suggests (which amounts to the same thing), uphold the principle of fairness. The principle in turn would obligate me (an agent), to come to the succor of individuals with whom I share a particular condition, conditions from which I have benefitted. The principle of obligation is strengthened by both, the positive and negative natural duties that prescribe refrain from harming others or aiding them in cases of need.

Although Rawls's call is to infuse the law of nations with such principles²⁵, the call remains rhetorical in the face of current contemporary conditions where the claim of aid seems more appropriately, to be a call for collective responsibility. A call for aid however continues to appear more pressing and relevant when heeded from, and assigned to, fellow nationals or fellow liberal democrats. So the determination of how widely to construe the common condition shared by both beneficiary, and victims or disadvantaged, remains a vexing one. If we cannot establish the perimeters of common condition, disaster response is best answered morally as a case of individual or political benevolence or charity and as a consequence, the chronicity of the needs that ensue from such conditions would remain a fact of nature, and one for which morality offers no solutions.

Short of the pervasive conditions of chronic need, we have explored the possibility of justifiable aid. It has been one that is however tapered by the caution of self-preservation. A complete disaster ethics requires that we do the best that we can to relieve those afflicted, from their predicament. Gewirth's call for rights points in the right direction but the practical result would remain one of political benevolence or good will. The dire circumstances of individuals who are attempting to recover from the throes of disaster cannot rely on goodwill or benevolence alone, whether they be individual or political. Charity, goodwill, and benevolence can serve as motivators of an ethics for disaster when the perspectives offered by the social contractarian, the development model, Gewirth, Rawls and the various instantiations thereof, do not respond satisfactorily to the demands of disaster, or at least not well enough to the demands that recent cases of disasters have forced the world to consider.

It is in light of this challenge to individual or political ethics that I am considering this essay into the constitution of an ethics for disaster. I believe that there are some elements to be borrowed from the theories mentioned above. More specifically, I find the appeal to conditions and the benefits accrued from participation in such conditions a positive one. I also find the inherent respect for persons, their equality, very attractive and promising. I shall try thus to expand on these fruitful contributions.

²⁵ We gathered that already from Voice's article, op. cit. above. See note 18.

I shall now explore the second challenge. It consists in determining the teleological, practical aim of moral intervention in instances of disaster. Should the aim be stability -an emergency intervention- to stop the dangers or effects of disaster, should it be a restoration, i.e. a return to *a status quo ante*, or should it be something else entirely? A first look, it would appear that one of the first two goals would be what should, at a minimum, be expected from external benefactors. The basis for this minimum is justified, one might argue, on the grounds of the respect for the principle of sovereignty although one might override the principle of sovereignty by formal or informal invitation. Alternatively, one might also override sovereignty in instances of disaster, but admit that the intervention is to be limited, and to a minimum. It may consist of a restoration of the condition that preceded the cause for intervention. The case of Haïti, I argue, offers ground to articulate a larger conception of moral responsibility than that suggested by either the stability or restorative criterion.

VI. Fatal Aids

To be sure, many goodhearted individuals and organizations pitched in to help the immediate victims of the catastrophe. Jonathan M. Katz reported recently on the many ways that good will, politics, business and the presidential candidates of the 2016 elections in the U.S.A. intersected to provide in the end what would be considered a stability response to the earthquake and post-earthquake Haïti.²⁶ The stability response in this instance is a call to provide help, and even in some cases, employment opportunities, to some sectors of the population there. That response may have combined the rejected acronym approaches mentioned in the development models alluded to earlier. But as Katz reminds his readers, the help is managed and predetermined not from Haïti's own assessment of its priorities but instead, the help is directed from the perspective of the aid organizations' sense of their own priorities.

There is something else going on here. Something that I believe calls for a sense of collective responsibility different from the individual and political responsibilities that have proved too restrictive to marshal a fitting ethics for disaster. From the perspective of a donor organization, not much could be asked for or perhaps more accurately, not much could be expected. The grantor dictates its priorities even in instances of disaster. Admittedly the 'grantor privilege' posture and the stability response that accompany it are reasonable approaches to disaster, but I propose that more should be done and this, on two counts. In the specific case of Haïti, the circumstances are complicated by a) the introduction of Cholera in the midst of earthquake and security relief and b) by a global donor organization, the United Nations Organizations (U.N.).

²⁶ Jonathan M. Katz, "The Clintons Did Not Screw Up Haiti [*sic*] Alone. You Helped", http://www.slate.com/articles/news_and_politics/politics/2016/09/the_truth_about_the_clintons_and_Haïti.html?wpsrc=sh_all_dt_fb_top.

U.N. Nepalese peacekeepers during their rotation for a different mission started in 2004 purposed to provide security and stability to the country, introduced the disease of Cholera to the country shortly after their arrival in the autumn of that year (2010). The U.N. initially refused to shoulder the blame for the epidemic but having created this new 'wrinkle' in our understanding of disaster, it has now formulated a strategy that epitomizes the stability approach to disaster.²⁷ Reluctantly, the U.N. acknowledged its responsibility in triggering the Cholera crisis in the aftermath of the earthquake.

Renaud Piarroux, an epidemiologist and professor at Aix-Marseille University and who was designated by the Haïtian government to investigate the matter in 2010, has reported on the stonewalling of the U.N. organization before the acknowledgment of responsibility. As the tug-of-war of blame and responsibility went on, cholera became unnecessarily an acceptable part of the daily living of Haïtians. Now as part of the fabric of life in the country, the health prescription became one of management of the spread of the disease and a fatalist acceptance that a small, only a small, percentage of those affected will perish. The country should now live with the new reality.

So the recent acknowledgment of responsibility changes the response plan to disaster because it now involves the U.N. and not only the responsibility of the Haïtian government and its civil society. Yet the U.N.'s plan has not embraced the full range of the response required for the added health crisis it created. Piarroux alternatively suggests that the U.N. plan should target the areas most affected by the disease by providing the population there with education about the disease and access to clean drinking water. The new plan should also, according to Piarroux, increase the number of health care providers and strengthen their ability to detect, control, and respond to cholera alerts. This example of the stability approach to disaster is reasonable because, to some extent, it is considered to be as minimally intrusive as possible. It supplements in the best of circumstances, the indigenous community's abilities and preserves the integrity of the nation state within which the plan is implemented.

Piarroux insists however that the U.N. should shoulder more responsibility than what is proposed through its "stability response." In fact, he thinks that the U.N. should fully assess its responsibility, be transparent about what truly happened in the case of the cholera in Haïti and not only tend to the damage done but also take steps to "prevent such disasters in the future."²⁸ Piarroux's position is calling for a full acknowledgment of moral responsibility at the same time that the U.N. is contesting class actions lawsuits levelled against it.²⁹ The latter's claim of immunity notwithstanding, the corporate (collective) responsibility that it has thus far assumed seeks to manage, stabilize the condition under consideration but from Piarroux's

²⁷ Renaud Piarroux, "The U.N.'s Responsibility in Haïti's Cholera Crisis", <http://www.nytimes.com/2016/09/08/opinion/the-uns-responsibility-Haïtis-cholera-crisis.html?emc=eta1>

²⁸ Piarroux, *op. cit.*, p. 3

²⁹ Camila Domonoske, "U.N. Admits Role in Haïti Cholera Outbreak That Has Killed Thousands", <http://www.npr.org/sections/thetwoway/2016/08/18/490468640>

perspective should go a bit further. Piarroux calls for providing tools to ‘prevent such disasters in the future’. Along the same line of this approach to a collective responsibility, consider the local paper *Le Nouvelliste* that reported that the minister of public health, Dr. Delsoin, is initiating a vaccination campaign that would initially inoculate one million inhabitants.³⁰ Dr. Delsoin’s stubbornly stabilizing approach to the disasters, whether natural or human-made, contrasts with the corporate and international collective responsibility approach of Piarroux. It does not strike at the heart of the conditions but only at the symptoms.

Dr. Piarroux’s menu of actions that results from the U.N.’s acknowledged responsibility moves us away from the stability approach but does not go far enough. His own approach, laudable though it is, attempts what I would call a *status quo ante* approach to disaster ethics and responses. His call for preventing disasters of the sort from occurring in the future would protect the population from such scourges in the future to be sure. It does nothing however to protect the population from other sorts of disasters. The proof is that in September/October of 2016, hurricane “Matthew” corroborated my skepticism of the general approaches that have been attempted in Haïti since the earthquake. We can list some of them again: the ready succor of the Dominican Republic, a needed rapid response, the flood of individual and organizational support with their own respective defects ranging from sexual abuse, molestation, hegemonic hubris, and in short, projects although helpful but that are only limited to the priorities set by the grantor agencies. Even when culpable of exacerbating the conditions in the aftermath of disaster, the responsibility assumed are limited to the stabilizing effect approach or to the return to a *status quo ante* the disaster.

Haïti is in need of more. The claim here is not intended to perpetuate the notion that as a ‘poor’, ‘developing’ country, it is again begging for relief. I am not sure that a nation in the 21st century should assume alone the shame that is associated with charity in a capitalist environment. Charity is a sign of structural poverty whether they be local or global. When these pockets of poverty are global, charity at that level too, as I have argued, is unacceptable. It undeniable now that I am arguing for a cosmopolitan ethics in the face of the shortcomings of traditional ethics applied to disaster. I maintain that in the global environment, the presumed isolation of communities from each other is a myth. The perpetuation of that myth have prevented us from recognizing that there are rooms for collective and sororal or cosmopolitan responsibilities³¹. These responsibilities in turn do not require begging but refer instead to our recognition of rights, the moral rights of all members of the planet whether they live in the “wealthy North” or “corrupt South.”

³⁰ Alphonse Roberson, “Les vaccins contre le choléra sont là, la campagne commence début novembre”

<http://lenouvelliste.com/lenouvelliste/article/164785/Les>

³¹ Bonnie Honig has argued for such an option in her *Democracy and The Foreigner*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001. See especially her Chapter 3.

To be sure, and as Arnold Antonin has documented in both, his video documentary of the aftermath of the earthquake, and his biopic of Albert Mangonès, the leadership of the country even with all of the international impediments, has failed the citizenry and certainly has failed both, the patrimony and matrimony of the country.³² The environment, the history and many of the cultural jewels of the community have been neglected for want of a vigilant and dialogical political leadership. The interlocutors that Antonin has convened for the two documentaries mentioned above agree that the country has suffered from both political and urban neglect. Civil society has persevered but the anarchic construction reflected in the proliferation of “bidonvilles” (or shantytowns) in the capital and other urban centers signals the political neglect. The political leaders have historically failed to formulate or adopt a plan, and see it to fruition. Instead, their political postures have too often made power and money rather than sound public policy, goods in themselves. They have assiduously pursued the former as worthy goals.

This pervasive attitude in turn has permeated the populace and public policy making flora, fauna, the environment and even the citizenry, commodities. I think that this degradation in their public discourse has by now become a permanent state of affairs, where the living for most is day-to-day, precarious and long term sensible planning is scarce, if existent at all. That state of affairs has placed the populace in a permanent condition of disaster. Haïti historically has looked into the abyss and has rejected nihilistic thinking and solutions. Perhaps, and this is my motivation for this article, a disaster ethics armed with a clear conception of collective and cosmopolitan responsibility will constitute the beginning of a contemporary project. It would be a project to unmask inhumane conditions. A project that would much like the work that has revealed the complicity of the U.N. in the disastrous import of cholera to the country, unveil the common bonds that fuel our responsibility to each other and to the various communities that support our humanity. Such a project would also unmask various other sources of responsibility that would not amount to charitable good will but rather to the recognition and restoration of the collective rights of communities, nations and their people.

VII. Conclusion

This past year and a half of combined human and natural environmental disasters makes us recognize what they share in common with social, political and economic disasters. Disasters realize our sense of vulnerability. They exemplify the vulnerability of persons in society whether that vulnerability is to a) exploitative powers within a political environment, b) the actual use of that power, c) to natural occurrences or d) human-made conditions of scarcity. They also at once reveal the plurality of moral agency.

The governor of North Carolina as a representative of a corporate entity has shown one approach to prescriptive actions in cases of disaster. He has broadcast available information to caution the citizenry and assumed a prospective

³² See also Arnold Antonin, *Albert Mangonès: L'espace public*, DVD(video), Haïti: Unité audiovisuelle du Centre Pétion Bolivar, [2004]

responsibility to help the affected restore their viability. To the extent that he is morally and not strictly politically motivated, the content and constituents of his political ethics would be fleshed out in the manner that Zack, Voice or Rawls would approve of. The governor's responsibility would be a collective responsibility and not simply an individual one for he would be responsible, as a governor, to help the citizenry restore their viability. In his professed gesture, we also recognize why the libertarian option is inappropriate at best or worst, morally reprehensible. One, unless the purpose is to display complete contempt or cruelty, does not tell a drowning person to fend for herself or to exercise their unimpeded full individuality as they drown. We also understand why the utilitarian option might be unattractive. It devolves into the charity that the libertarian substitutes for moral obligation or responsibility.

The self-sufficiency that the libertarian favors underscores our interdependence. He embarks on a project that seeks to replace the interdependency consistent with our human existence with an advocacy of autonomy. Whether the autonomy is of single individuals or of corporate entities like states, the libertarian overlooks the structures within which the exercise of that autonomy is meaningful. The libertarian would see ethics as development, a good path to statal autonomy. Alan Gewirth by contrast is more instructive in this march toward autonomy. His call for a recognition of purposive agency and the moral rights that it engenders, is testament to the recognition of socio-political structures that would promote and nurture inequalities.

These past weeks and years, we have faced the reality of hurricane and natural disasters of various sorts. The responses planned to counter such circumstances have alluded to a collective responsibility. In some instances, they have pointed to a collective responsibility beyond borders. They are responses that do not deny individual triumph or ingenuity but also acknowledge that in order for the many afflicted to exhibit their individuality, the self-sufficiency, which would be at the core of such an individuality, that goal implicates political, corporate or collective agents that traditional ethics seldom explore.

Rather than consider an alternative conception of morality, the commentators on an ethics for disaster that I have alluded to above adopt a political ethics to respond to conditions of disaster. The Rawlsian approach that extends the political response to engender work with outside communities concerns itself mainly in those cases, with restoring the equality it presumes internal to a well-ordered society to other, well-ordered, societies. What if the communities afflicted are not as well-ordered as we are, or well-ordered in the manner we conceive of 'well-orderedness'?

This last question strikes at the core of our concerns here, namely our responsibility to strangers, or to communities outside of our own boundaries, if such boundaries can ever be reasonably drawn. This thus is the true concern of an ethics for disaster would. It is a concern that asks that we accept our interdependence rather than submit to the taxonomy of power that inevitably entices us to reinforce walls and invites hierarchies that in turn, influence our perceptions of needs and desert. In such circumstances of needs, and when our goal is to render viable the human environment,

we may do well to not take 'needs' and 'desert' for granted, and to try instead to uncover the tools we use to perpetuate the hierarchies of power and privilege.

I propose thus that the prospect for an ethics of disaster is to unmask the hierarchies of powers and encourage succor beyond our arguably ill-defined communities. Consider a preview of such an approach, in Duane Cady's assessment of moral thinking. He asserts that in order to establish a viable human environment, I should add whether before or after a disaster, one practices an "open-ended process involving ongoing interactions within and among individuals and groups, where disparate value frameworks, practices, and explanations stand in continuing review of one another."³³

Cady favors a pluralism to motivate our moral thinking. In itself, the posture is not without precedent but in Cady, it articulates a peculiar innovation. Versions of pluralism saw a first approximation explicitly offered by some Utilitarians. The latter's interest in moral responsibility moved moral thinking away from individual ratiocination and toward the consideration and inclusion of the plight of others. Cady however, thinks that we should rethink our approach to morality and I agree with him. Moral reasoning (or morality) too is structured. It is structured by language to initiate a way of seeing that harbors the peculiarity of guiding "reflection on judgment, choice, and decision."³⁴ The purpose thus of morality is to solidify "the fit between what we value and what we do"³⁵ even as the fit is constantly tested by the challenge that life experiences pose to our values. Morality, for him, exposes what specific cultures promote and what they silence, what standards of actions ought to be adopted and under what condition.

Given these recognitions, he believes that we tend to approach ethical theories from two perspectives. The first is to identify moral theories that enable normative talks of the sort: is this act moral? With the second, we consider the way ethical theories reflect the values we hold when we determine the meaning of moral act, or accept it as a moral act. Cady's effort in a short version of the history of ethics, is to show that values embed ethical theories and thought, and not the other around. Our language harbors values that in turn frame our thoughts. Values originate from culture but transcend their origination. Cady thus rejects absolutism and relativism. He favors instead a pluralism whose legitimacy is positively tested by its relevance to human community.

As circumstances like disasters challenge our values, they can create dissonance. These "episodes of dissonance" initiate moral crises that cause the operating traditional framework of ethics to expand and accommodate new experiences until it can no longer do so.³⁶ To avoid crises, as these episodes of dissonance increase, a new paradigm should emerge to mediate between the values in collision, and to benefit the parties involved.³⁷ For Cady our behaviors, physical

³³ Cady, Duane, *Moral Vision*, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Pub., 2005, p. 102

³⁴ Cady, *Moral Vision*, p. 6

³⁵ Cady, *Ibidem*, p. 10

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 92

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p.102

or linguistic, assert the values we hold. Chronic need rather than being simply descriptive of a particular condition is in addition a metaphor on a par with available metaphors like: neo-liberal institutions, democratic governance, etc.. They are terms that reveal our adherence to the values of individualism, forms of equality, but also certain structures of power.

Languages die, so do nations and nation-states despite the increasing arguments for their proliferations (e.g., the two-state solutions whether in Lybia, Israel/Palestine, Sudan). My hope is that we shall not have to wish for the death of nation-states for example as a metaphor, to compel us to acknowledge the institutions we need in order to shoulder the collective responsibility that follows from our common conditions despite our uncritical adherence to separatist metaphors. The two operative metaphors that encourage us to contemplate a collective responsibility are a) disasters (as deviation from a prospective trajectory) and b) chronic need (as permanent condition of vulnerability). They represent crises and they guide this current exploration. I have tried to engage this analysis to call for a new moral vision (with apologies to Cady) that heightens our collective responsibility and unmask the frameworks that create chronic need and artificial vulnerabilities.

That disasters will occur is perhaps inevitable. I have tried to highlight here that in cases of disasters, especially as they visit our fellow human beings here and abroad, it would be a tragedy not to have done what one could to eliminate the structural conditions that create the vulnerabilities of our fellow human beings. The ethics of disaster, to the extent that it has any purchase going forward would support our consideration of a collective responsibility that would eliminate the precarious conditions we at times create for our fellow human beings, through our language and socio-political apparatus.

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