

# International Politics

## International Ethics

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Hilary Term

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# Framing Questions

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- What is Ethics?
- What are the main philosophical debates in International Ethics?
- Elaborate on idealistic versus relativistic narratives of international Ethics
- Evaluate Rawlsian interpretations of social and international justice
- Define thin and thick global ethics?
- What are theoretical challenges to the principles of international ethics?



# Early debates on ethics

- Plato's Republic: Thrasymachus to Socrates: Justice is the name of actions that the powerful require the rest of us to perform for their benefits!
- Thus happiness is to act unjustly and succeeding! Plato, through Socrates refutes this
- Glaucon and Adeimantus refute the intrinsic value in practicing justice: one can gain much more by fooling people into believing that one is just when one isn't
- This is the main questions of local and global ethics: what is good?
- Ethics is the philosophical study of morality. What are good and bad ends to pursue in life and what is the right or wrong in the conduct of life
- what principles OUGHT TO guide the policies of states, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), corporations and individuals in their relations with everybody else



# What is morality

- Two notions of morality: 1. morality as an existing institution of a particular society, i.e. society's conventional morality. 2. A universal ideal grounded in reason
- Anthropology and Sociology Versus Ethics
- An example on the conventional morality of slaveholding or interracial marriages
  - I. Interracial romance and marriage in the USA
  - II. Huckleberry Finn's epiphany and the untrustworthiness of other races
- Hence only a notion of morality regarding the standards of right whose authority in practical thought is determined by reason rather than custom could be subject to ethical studies



# Telos Versus Deon

- Telos (end or purpose) Versus Deon (duty)

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- Teleological: Standards of right and wrong have authority in practical thought in virtue of the ends or interests served by the conduct that these standards guide
- Deontological: Standards of right and wrong have authority in practical thought *independently* of the ends or interests served by the conduct that these standards guide
- Being duty bound to perform or avoid certain actions versus being well-advised in view of certain ends and interests



# Philosophers of Ethics

- Aristotle's doctrine of mean; Intellectual virtue and moral virtue: Eudaimonia
- Machiavelli's teleological ethics
- J. S. Mill: All actions must be evaluated to see how much overall pleasure they produce; intellectual as well as physical pleasures
- W. D. Ross: Humans have the ability to recognize what is a moral duty: intuitionism
- Seyla Benhabib: Kant's Universalism is good but the intrinsic imperialist ethics in it must be substituted with an ethics of care with feminist characteristics
- Kant: Duty Ethics: Human reason is capable of uncovering universal duties



# The Categorical Imperative

- Act only on that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it shall become a universal law
- to act morally one must recognize every individual's equal moral standing, people are ends not means!
- Ex. Slavery, keeping promises, passing red light ...
- War would be a violation because citizens and non-citizens are reduced to achieve states' ends
- lawfulness is the condition of a moral action. This is called "Formalism in Ethics"

# Challenges to deontological ethics

- Are some rules always right for everyone to follow – because they are right in themselves? polygamy? telling the truth ?

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- **Consequentialism** judges actions based on the desirability of their outcomes, teleological reasoning
- **Utilitarianism** judges actions by their expected outcomes in terms of ‘the greatest good of the greatest number’
- **Egoism:** The highest good for each person is his happiness
- **Hedonism:** well-being is pleasure and absence of pain
- **Existentialism:** no universal standards of ethics; each individual is the final authority on questions about the sort of person to be and decide what types of value to guide our lives
- **Theological Voluntarism:** No matter what God commands it is the right thing to do

# Idealism Vs Relativism

- Can ethics be decoupled from politics?

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- Idealism refers to how strongly we feel about the pursuit of humanitarian goals, such as believing that everyone should be concerned with the welfare of other people
- The belief that world affairs can and should be ordered to place a priority on maximizing everyone's well-being
- Relativism refers to the belief that the only way we can decide what's ethical and what's not is to rely on our experiences and internal moral compass
- Rejecting the idea of universal moral rules that exist outside of individual experience subscribe to a relativistic approach to problems—they don't believe there are any legitimate moral absolutes that are capable of helping us figure out the best course of action in a given dilemma



# Analytical Political Philosophy

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- Some scholars define a branch of political philosophy as analytical (or anglophone) as opposed to continental philosophy (speculative)
- Conceptual and language clarity versus commitment to abstract and even metaphysical reasoning. pop culture versus “*jeux de mots*”
- Analytical philosophy’s second objective therefore is to employ methods of scientific enquiry to disclose true nature of the world

# Historical Development of International Ethics

- Analytical versus continental philosophical approaches: abstract decontextualized approach versus a deeply contextualized one. Anglophile versus Hegelian philosophy
- Universal moral values versus viewing ethics as a result of the nature of relationships among people
- Western world started to reflect upon international ethical questions and rights of “citizens” and humanity around the world in three main historical junctures:
  - 1. Following the French Revolution founded upon Enlightenment ideals: UNIVERSAL declaration of the right of men and the Citizens
  - 2. development of European overseas empires and colonialism and subjugation of other nations on the ground of inferiority, whiteness, mulatto etc. (phenotype)
  - 3. Development of nationalist aspirations



# Development of Ethics in IR

- Up to 1980s Ethics was largely ignored in IR for being unscientific
- Incompatible with the logic of the Cold War
- 1980s rise of critical theory and poststructuralism: Criticizing “objectivism”, we can never be objective, ethics can never be neutral
- After 1991 liberal politics moved towards normativism, international “ought tos”: good governance, human security ...
- Rise in the interest in ethics of globalism
- All this resulted in the multiplications of International Organizations and Institutions based on cosmopolitan ethics



# Duties of justice

- **Positive** duties are moral duties to act, including duties to create a just social order, and helping those who suffer unnecessarily
- Positive duties underlie the idea of the **Responsibility to protect**
- **Negative** duties are duties to stop doing something (usually to avoid unnecessarily harming others)
- Rawls idea of 'natural duties': mutual aid, to offer assistance in times of need, and the negative duty not to harm or inflict unnecessary suffering
- Andrew Linklater argues that cosmopolitan duties to do no harm generally fall into three categories.
  - **First, bilateral relationships:** what 'we' do to 'them' and vice versa
  - **Second, third-party relationships:** what they do to each other
  - **Third, global relationships:** what we all do to each other
- **Cosmopolitans** emphasize extensive positive and negative duties



# Cosmopolitanism

- One single human community with some rules that apply to all. These rules are right because in principle could be agreed on by everyone

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- Everyone's interest should be judged from a disinterested position. Impartiality requires that affiliations like national identity must be assessed from the position of the good of the whole
- Such impartiality leads to the idea that the political institutions of the planet should guarantee global equality of rights and goods
- Moral cosmopolitanism (individual responsibilities) Vs. Institutional cosmopolitanism (rules that govern societies)



# Rawls Laws of Peoples

- Rawls: “the veil of ignorance” and the “original position” leading to social contract Peoples are free and independent, and their freedom and independence are to be respected by other peoples
- Rawls’s “ideal theory”: 1: all citizen should enjoy, as a matter of right basic principles of liberty and 2: economic distribution should be in a way that least advantaged social positions can expect to fare as well as possible, regardless of how well others do (difference principle)
- Social justice is to balance, as exactly and as plausibly as possible legitimate self-concern and proper respect for the just claims of others
  - Peoples are to observe treaties and undertakings.
  - Peoples are to observe a duty of non-intervention.
  - Peoples have the right of self-defense but no right to instigate war for reasons other than self-defense.
  - Peoples are to honor human rights.
  - Peoples are to observe certain specified restrictions in the conduct of war.
  - Peoples have a duty to assist other peoples living under unfavorable conditions that prevent their having a just or decent political and social regime (Mutual Aid).



# Exercise in veil of ignorance

- Butcher
- Lawyer
- Taxi Driver
- President
- King/Queen
- Foreign Minister
- University lecturer
- Hotel receptionist



# Criticism to Rawls

- Only participating individuals in the original position deliberations can hope to have their rights discussed and secured, how about disabled people or mentally impaired ones?
- Disabled people might need more resources than able-bodied ones to enjoy comparable levels of well-being (Dworkin 2000, Nussbaum 2006, Sen 1981, Arneson 1999, Cohen 1989, Temkin 2020 and Andersen 1999)
- This group also criticises Rawls for ignoring the degree to which individuals take responsibility for their own prospects, the difference between a lazy and a industrious person for example
- Sufficiency (everyone receiving enough for a decent life) or priority (giving priority to those least advantaged) should not require commitment to equality
- It is unclear how non-citizens should be accorded any rights?
- What about non-human beings? Animals for instance or other environmental concerns?
- Isn't this argument too individualistic? Lots of social behaviour and functions are not that individualistic. The argument that every human community is different as has its own rules and values
- There is also a feminist critique of Rawls on gender basis. The argument primarily centered around the fact that most of gender discrimination takes place inside the family unit that all liberals including Rawls shield from public deliberation
- Accusations of foundationalism defined as effort to provide rational foundations for traditional ethical expectations.
- This latter objection is associated with postmodernists and post-structuralists what are thought to refute foundations of enlightenment
- Libertarians also accuse Rawls of being inconsistent in not recognising the right to engage in gainful activities. Coerced redistribution is unjust (Nozick 1974, Lomasky 1986)



# Principles of Global Ethics

- There is a global community and all humans are members just in virtue of being human
- The community's laws are the universal standards of morality
- But there is no evidence of such a universal community, whereas local communities have several evidences for existing, language, boundaries, oral and written histories...
- How about global elements of truth and justice? Honesty, keeping promise, not stealing, marriage, forced labour, non-aggression, respect...
- But still one needs to provide a reason why these acts in themselves have intrinsic value
- Teleologically why ends are best achieved through certain values ex. Honesty
- Deontologically: must prove the existence of certain universal values and justify their place in human life



# Questions of International Ethics

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- IE addresses the nature of duties across community boundaries and how members of political communities—mostly nation-states—ought to treat 'outsiders' and 'strangers'
- whether outsiders ought to be treated according to the same principles as insiders—ought they be treated as moral equals?
- How this can be done in a world characterized by two conditions: the existence of international anarchy, and moral pluralism



# Global Poverty

- Fundamental question here is: whose responsibility is to respond to global poverty
- All individuals' positive duty? Global distributive system (egalitarianism)? or arguing for minimal responsibility of states (sufficientarianism)?
- Global egalitarians: such as Charles Beitz, Darrel Moellendorf, Thomas Pogge argue for global egalitarianism that go far beyond poverty relief or charity
- Thomas Pogge: Powerful states have a negative duty to cease violating human rights by imposing an unjust international trading and financial order on the world's poor. There is enough wealth to end global poverty quickly and sharply
- Pogge emphasizes the causal relation of the wealth of the rich and poverty of the poor. Rich countries are responsible for 18 million deaths in poor countries each year
- Peter Singer: impartial and universalist conception of morality requires that those who can help ought to, regardless of any causal relationship with poverty. If it is on our power to prevent something bad from happening without thereby sacrificing anything of comparable moral importance we ought morally to do it (1985)
- These approaches seem to primarily rely on individual's responsibility, is this sufficient? how about states' responsibility?



# Fundamental questions of International Ethics

- Should humans be regarded as one single moral community with some rules that apply to all(**cosmopolitanism**)?
- Or as a collection of separate communities, each with their own standards and no common morality (**realism**)?
- Or as a collection of separate communities with some minimally shared standards (**pluralism**)?
- Pluralism: anarchy does not preclude states from agreeing to a minimal core of standards for coexistence
- **Thick** cosmopolitanism: global egalitarianism the emphasize duties across the borders including global distributive justice through radically transformed global order, versus
- **Thin** (statist) cosmopolitanism advocating minimal duties to harm, aid in the case of emergency and minimal human rights standards in which national borders have significant ethical status, priority of compatriots over others. Yet basic moral minimums

# Anti-cosmopolitanism

- we have only very limited (mostly negative) duties outside of our own community
- national boundaries provide central ethical constraints, and that morality is ‘local’ to particular cultures, times and places
- Those of a **realist** bent claim that international anarchy and sovereignty mean that the only viable ethics are self-interest and survival
- Morgenthau: “the appeal to moral principles in the international sphere has no concrete universal meaning... that could provide rational guidance for political action... it will be nothing but the reflection of the moral preoccupations of a particular nation” (1952)
- Marxism: Ethics are product of social relations; Universal values represent values of dominant class; social ethics can only come through social change



# Global Religious Ethics

- German Philosopher Hans Kung observed that all religions contain principles of peace and harmony among people
- In 1993 parliament of the World's Religions convened in Chicago
- Declaration Toward a Global Ethic was signed which proposed the following principles:
  - Humaneness
  - Golden Rule of reciprocity : Treating others as you want to be treated
  - Commitment to a Culture of Non-violence and Respect for Life
  - Commitment to a Culture of Solidarity and a Just Economic Order
  - Commitment to a Culture of Tolerance and a Life of Truthfulness
  - Commitment to a Culture of Equal Rights and Partnership Between Men and Women

# Debate Questions

- To what extent do you think diplomats or international journalists are bound by deontological rules of ethics?
- What do you think is the relation between international law and international ethics?
- How could (if at all) targeted assassinations by drones be explained by international ethics?
- Do responsibility to protect fall within thin or thick cosmopolitan international ethics? Why?
- How useful is it to conceptualise international relations in terms of the “original position” and the “veil of ignorance”?
- What role have the great powers played in the global poverty and how much of the responsibility could be attributed to local actors?