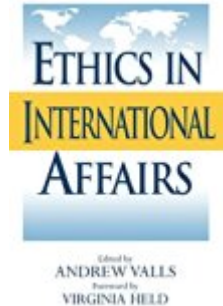


**Andrew Valls, ed..** *Ethics in International Affairs: Theories and Cases*. Foreword by Virginia Held. Lanham, MD and Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2000. xx + 241 pp. \$64.00, cloth, ISBN 978-0-8476-9157-9.



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Doing the Right Thing: Ethics, Morality, and Diplomacy

One of my favorite films is *Judgment at Nuremberg*. Beyond the excellent screenplay and some solid performances, the topic holds great relevance for a diplomatic historian. Very briefly, the film revolves around the trial of German judges who presided during the Nazi regime. It is long after the "big" war crime trials that followed the end of World War II, and the three American judges who are impaneled to decide the case quickly find themselves in the midst of a dilemma. On the one hand, they are pushed by their own sense of moral outrage to punish the former judges who now sit as prisoners; men who sent people to death for violating Nazi "racial purity laws" and signed orders for the sterilization of men and women who were deemed "unclean" or "unpure." On the other, they find themselves pressured by some American officials to "go easy" on the former Nazis. After all, these officials reason, World War II is over. The Cold War is now in full swing and the United States will need the support of all Germans, ex-Nazis or not. Near the film's

conclusion, Spencer Tracy, portraying one of the American judges, proclaims the German judges to be guilty as charged. He then explains his decision:

"There are those in our own country too who today speak of the protection of country, of survival. A decision must be made in the life of every nation at the very moment when the grasp of the enemy is at its throat. Then it seems that the only way to survive is to use the means of the enemy, to rest survival on what is expedient; to look the other way. Well, the answer to that is, 'Survival is what?' A country isn't a rock; it's not an extension of oneself. It's what it stands for; it's what it stands for when standing for something is the most difficult. Before the people of the world let it now be noted that here in our decision this is what we stand for: justice, truth, and the value of a single human being."

The scene is incredibly moving, and I always find myself encouraged and invigorated by Tracy's inspiring words. Yet, the scene is also a dramatic presentation of an issue that continues to intrigue (or baffle, or infuriate) scholars of diplo-

matic history: the role and/or value of ethics and morality in the sphere of international relations.

The place of morality and ethics in international affairs has always been a controversial topic, particularly among historians and political scientists who deal with U.S. diplomacy. The so-called "traditionalists" believe that certain core values imbue America's foreign policy with a patina of selflessness and altruism, and that the nation's goal has always been to make the world a better place by expanding the frontiers of equality, democracy, and justice. "Realist" scholars have had little patience and absolutely no sympathy for such an interpretation. For them, the security of the state and protection of its basic institutions are all important. To talk of "morality" and "legalities" hopelessly confuses matters; it makes little sense to talk about "making the world safe for democracy" in a world that is based on the often ruthless pursuit of power and security. Finally, the multi-faceted "revisionists" sank their teeth into the issue. The result was that many followed the general appraisal of William Appleman Williams, who declared that the "tragedy of American diplomacy" lay in the fact that U.S. policymakers were often forced to compromise their ideals and horribly twist their sense of morality in order to pursue the inexorable demands of the capitalist system and push its expansion overseas.

*Ethics in International Affairs: Theories and Case Studies*, edited by political scientist Andrew Valls (Morehouse College), is one of the latest attempts to deal with this sticky issue. The volume begins with a provocative essay by David A. Welch, who dramatically declares that, "I come therefore not to praise the national interest but to bury it" (p. 11). Welch argues that both the term "national interest" and the general idea that lies behind it are useless. The term itself is hopelessly vague, and its use as a basis of foreign policy decisions can have positively deleterious effects. Instead, Welch argues, let us use "plain language" to describe the "stakes, goals, and values implicated

in any foreign policy choice" (p. 9). Morality, on the other hand, "is a concept with a future" (p. 4). While Welch concedes that morality can also be a slippery term to precisely define, he argues that there is at least some general acceptance of the basic notions of morality and that better attention to the issue and constant reiteration of its importance will help in formulating international standards. In this regard, he cites that growing human rights movement with its "deepening consensus on the minimal standards of treatment governments owe individuals" (p. 6). Therefore, to focus on the "conflict" between morality and the national interest is meaningless. "We should only ever ask, 'What is the right thing to do?'" (p. 4).

The remainder of the book is divided into sections dealing with just war theory, terrorism and political violence, humanitarian interventions, and global justice. Each section begins with a general essay that discusses the various issues and problems involved in the particular topic; this is followed by two case studies. In the section dealing with just war theory, Nicholas Fotion first examines the long history of the theory, explaining the differences between just war theorists, pacifists, and realists. He also carefully differentiates between the justice *of* a war and justice *in* a war. He establishes the criterion for judging whether a war is just, but admits that applying these guidelines is often difficult since "just cause cuts both way" (p. 23).

In the essay that follows, Anthony J. Coates applies these theories to the example of the Persian Gulf War. Although the conflict began with declarations from the United States about the humanitarian purposes of the war--restoring Kuwait as a sovereign nation, toppling a brutal dictatorship in Iraq--the effects of the conflict "betray a willingness to pursue strategic objectives at whatever the cost to the Iraqi people" (p. 46). Though Coates concludes that the Persian Gulf War cannot be classified as a just war, he also admits that the "moral assessment of the war is suitably com-

plex and ambiguous"; the war itself was, "morally speaking, better than some and worse than others" (p. 46). An essay by Frances V. Harbour takes just war theories and applies them to the U.S. use of nonlethal chemical weapons (such as defoliants) in Vietnam. The author argues that simply because these weapons do not *directly* result in human death, they are generally to be considered morally indefensible.

The sections that follow are not without their own intrinsic interest. Andrew Valls opens the section on terrorism and violence by pointing out the double standard that is applied in evaluating state and non-state actors. Political violence by states is permitted, and sometimes even admired, while similar actions by non-state actors are almost always universally condemned. Valls expresses his fervent wish that political violence as a whole could be eradicated, but also concludes that such action by non-state actors *can* satisfy the requirements of just war theory and must therefore be evaluated in the same manner in which we evaluate political violence initiated by states. Following his lead, David A. George looks at the Irish Republican Army and determines that its campaign of terrorism is completely unjustified. Political solutions, he suggests, exist and the IRA's violence is ineffective and often counterproductive. Neve Gordon and George A. Lopez look at the role of terrorism in the seemingly interminable Arab-Israeli conflict. Using Valls's attack on the double-standard used in assessing the use of political violence, the co-authors conclude that both the Israeli government and the non-state Palestinian Liberation Organization engage in tactics that can be classified as terrorism.

So-called "humanitarian interventions" are reviewed in the next section of the book. Simon Caney posits that such interventions can legitimately supersede the nearly inviolable claims of state sovereignty if their "aim is to protect people's fundamental rights" (p. 129). The intervention must also be an effective means of meeting

that objective, cannot have negative impacts elsewhere that outweigh the good, and must be "undertaken by a legitimate body" (p. 130). George Klay Kieh applies the rules of humanitarian interventions to case studies in Somalia, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, and Liberia. His conclusions are pessimistic. While the interventions in the situations in each of these African nations met *some* of the guidelines for justification, none of them fulfilled all of the necessary preconditions and all, to more or lesser extents, ended in failure. Emil Nagengast turns his attention to the German and U.S. roles in post-Cold War Yugoslavia. He praises the German determination to organize a humanitarian intervention into the Yugoslav civil war for placing "humanitarian values above the norm of nonintervention" (p. 164), while U.S. officials refused to get involved in what they perceived as a purely "internal matter."

The volume concludes with an examination of theories of global justice. The essays in this section focus on global distributive justice--the demand by some people and nations that the planet's wealth and resources be more evenly distributed. Peter Jones begins by discussing the differing views taken toward distributive justice. Its supporters argue that both practically and morally strenuous efforts must be made to ignore national boundaries and more equally distribute the world's wealth. In practical terms, they argue, this will make for a more secure and stable world for all. The richest nations and people will hardly be impoverished; indeed, they would likely find themselves enjoying an even better lifestyle. In moral terms, the fantastic discrepancies between the richest and poorest people of the world scream out for redress. Opponents dismiss such arguments as misguided and dangerous sentiments. Distributive justice, if it is to take place at all, needs to be undertaken on the strictly national, not global, level. Despite his obvious sympathy with the moral arguments behind global distributive justice, Jones finds it difficult to believe that

the theory will "be realized in any but very limited and imperfect ways" (p. 183).

Gerard Elfstrom examines the workings of multinational corporations in terms of distributive theories, focusing on the case of foreign aluminum companies operating in Jamaica. He argues that these multinationals have no imperative to invest in unprofitable ventures or to engage in open charity merely to enrich their host nation. However, Elfstrom does state that these companies "have both the expertise and the means to determine which nations and which governments are corrupt or inept." Therefore, they are "obliged to assist governments genuinely working to improve the lots of their citizens and to avoid establishing operations in nations that are corrupt and repressive" (p. 200). Jeffrey Cason details the rise and fall of the New International Economic Order that was promoted by lesser developed nations in the mid-1970s. The NIEO proponents had some leverage in the mid-1970s: the oil crisis seemed to indicate the power of raw material-producing nations and the Cold War meant that Third World nations could play one side against the other. All of that disappeared by the 1990s, and Cason concludes that the "reemergence of an NIEO [is] nearly impossible" (p. 202).

In some ways, reading this book was like rewatching *Judgment at Nuremberg*. Strong statements in support of the necessity for strong and definitive moral undergirdings of foreign policy decisions are reiterated again and again. Wars should not be fought for power and wealth, but only when higher purposes—such as the rights of people to security and freedom—are threatened. Terrorism, whether undertaken by state or non-state actors, is morally reprehensible. There is no need for the world to stand by and witness genocide and brutality; humanitarian interventions can be used in moderation. Global justice means rethinking the distribution of global wealth and resources. And, underlying nearly all of the essays is the strong message that morals and ethics are

not inimical to the "national interest," but are instead the foundation of a nation's interests.

Yet, there are troubling aspects that arise. Even Valls, in his introduction, states that the book "may be said to conclude...on a pessimistic note" (p. xx). Such pessimism, at least in my view, comes from two conclusions. First, there is the very clear indication that despite the high moral rhetoric that flies around many contemporary international issues and events, in the end morality seems to play little role. The Persian Gulf War is revealed as a cynical power play; terrorism continues unabated, and sometimes encouraged (when undertaken by state actors); humanitarian interventions, even when undertaken for the best of reasons, end in miserable failures; and calls for distributive justice are drowned out by laudatory speeches describing the wonders of a free market. Second, even though Valls and many of the other contributors argue that these disturbing instances merely reinforce their declarations that morality and ethics need to play a larger role in international affairs, their carefully constructed "justifications" and "criterion" do not always offer much the hoped for solutions. Whether in laying out what does or does not constitute a just war, a humanitarian intervention, an act of political violence or terrorism, or the proper definition of distributive justice, the selections often seem to become hopelessly tangled and/or extraordinarily vague.

Almost like the "rules for conduct" that many of us remember from our days as students in elementary classrooms, the guidelines established by some of the authors seem, at first glance, simple enough. Coates's declaration that the notion of "just cause" in war "cuts both ways," is a good example of exactly how complicated the seemingly simple notion of what is moral or ethical can become. As I reviewed case after case in the book of examples in which *some* criterion are met in determining whether a war is just, whether terrorism is justified, or whether an intervention is tru-

ly humanitarian, I was consistently struck by the fact that *none* of the examples provide a case in which *all* of the criterion were met. All of this begs the question of whether any such actions could ever be justified. But perhaps that is the ultimate goal: to show that no war, no act of terrorism, no intervention is ever truly justified?

Despite the pessimism with which one may be afflicted upon completing this volume, there is much to offer in the way of hope and insight. The book's approach suggests that moral imperatives can and should play a role in international relations. The contributors are singularly aware that the answers are not simple; that terms such as "just war," "humanitarian intervention," and "distributive justice" need and deserve greater attention and more precise definition. The argument that notions of morality and ethics are at least as tenable as "national interest" in terms of helping to shape a nation's foreign policy is convincing and thoughtful. The idea that merely asking, "What is the right thing to do?", may seem hopelessly idealistic to many. For those who are moved by Tracy's ringing words that a nation must stand for its ideals "when standing for something is the most difficult," the articles in this volume should instigate some serious rethinking about the entire range of issues contained in the study of international relations and, perhaps, even give rise to a cautious but hopeful optimism.

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