



Ethics in International Politics: Irrelevant or Indispensable? Revisiting a Persisting Debate¹

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Abstract: This article revisits an old debate which still persists in the study as well practice of international politics: the view that ethics and even norms are irrelevant as well as damaging in foreign policy decision-making; and the opposite view which regards ethics and norms indispensable and unavoidable in international political theory and praxis. First the views of classical realism are presented followed with the views of modern realism, with emphasis on their main arguments for discarding ethics. Then the counter-arguments are presented in considerable detail, the aim being to show that they are more convincing than the views of the realists. The article concludes with a succinct depiction of normative international relations or international ethics which has burgeoned as a field from the 1990s onwards.

Keywords: Anarchy, Security, National Interest, Amoralism, Ethics, Norms, Values, International Law.

1. INTRODUCTION

The difference between 'is' and 'ought' has a long history in international politics. 'Ought', in the sense of ethical and normative criteria in international affairs, is in place since time immemorial,² in theory as well as in practice, either in order to evaluate international behavior with the yardstick of moral values and norms or in order to do away with ethics as irrelevant to international politics.

The wider 'is-ought' dichotomy harks back to the debate between David Hume and Immanuel Kant, or more accurately, to Kant's elaborate repudiation of Hume's empiricism. Hume accepted only the 'is' based either on logical necessity or on empirical fact (experiment, experience), and he discarded the 'ought' as not controlled by reason and a product of passion, sophistry or confusion.³ Kant was strongly opposed to this approach. For Kant there could be utterances that were meaningful though not logically necessary or based on experience. This was the case with 'ought', namely moral action cum reason as a matter of choosing principles that reflect the demands of duty. And in this context he came up with the famous 'categorical imperative': one ought to act as if one's act could become a universal law of human action, an act that facilitates a harmony of purpose among rational human beings who should be treated as an end and never as a means to one's ends.⁴

In international affairs, the 'is', based on the experience of world anarchy, had more adherents from antiquity until the late 18th century, be they scholars, diplomats or statesmen. Characteristic examples include in antiquity the Greek historian Thucydides, the Indian politician and philosopher Kautilya (known also as **Chanakya** or **Vishnugupta**) and the Chinese general and military strategist Sun Tzu; in the Renaissance Niccolò Machiavelli, Thomas Hobbes and Baruch Spinoza, in the Enlightenment

¹ This article is based on the first chapter of a book by the author to be published at the end of 2019. It is entitled Just War and Humanitarian Intervention: A History in the International Ethics of War.

² T. Nardin, Ethical Traditions in International Affairs, in T. Nardin and D.R. Mapel eds, Traditions of International Ethics, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1992, p.1.

³ C. Brown, International Relations Theory: New Normative Approaches, New York, USA: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1992, p.29.

⁴ Ibid., pp.29-30; T. Donaldson, Kant's Global Rationalism, in Nardin and Mapel eds, Traditions of International Ethics, pp.136-39.

Jean-Jacques Rousseau and in the 19th century, Carl von Clausewitz and other exponents of *Realpolitik* (power politics). Within this school of thought, conflict and war ('a state of war') is an everyday occurrence at the inter-state level and international society is by definition conflict-prone and anarchic. This interstate setting does not allow the pursuit of behaviour based on international norms and even less so on ethics.

The alternative viewpoint, the pursuit of international state behaviour on the basis of norms and ethics, and by doing so transforming the existing dismal international environment, was voiced in antiquity by a small number of Greek and Roman Stoic philosophers, such as Zeno, Chrysippus, Cicero, Seneca and Emperor Marcus Aurelius; and in the Middle Ages by Thomas Aquinas. In the Renaissance similar views surfaced in the utterances of humanists, such as Desiderius Erasmus and Jean Bodin, and in particular in the works of the founders of international law, Francisco Vitoria, Domingo de Soto, Francisco Suarez, Alberico Gentili and Hugo Grotius; followed during the Enlightenment by Samuel von Pufendorf, Christian Wolff, Emer de Vattel, Immanuel Kant and Nicolas de Condorcet; and in the 19th century by Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill and an array of international lawyers. These enlightened thinkers posited that norms and morals were relevant to the international behaviour of states and would ultimately dominate the scene, drastically limiting the use of armed violence in international relations.

Initially in the inter-war period, as International Relations (IR) became a distinct scientific discipline (from 1919 onwards), idealism, with its emphasis on international law, international institutions and ethics dominated the scene. But as idealism's main point of reference, the League of Nations was found wanting in its task of securing peace and security on the basis of norms and League pronouncements, realism entered the scene as the predominant paradigm in IR from the late 1930s onward. From the 1940s until the early 1970s the subject of international ethics and norms did not abandon the scene altogether, but it was on the defensive with realism carrying the day from the early Cold War until the advent of détente in the mid-1970s that led to the Helsinki Accord of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE). The abode of the normative approach prior to the mid-1970s was international law, including the international law of human rights.

2. REALISM: ETHICS DISCARDED FROM INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

2.1. Classical Realism

The tradition of classical realism from Thucydides to the 19th century regarded justice and morality inapplicable in international politics and more likely to run counter to the interests of states. International politics are to be distinguished from internal politics, residing in a realm of their own in 'a moral vacuum'.⁵

The most extreme position on the matter was taken by Machiavelli, who totally discarded morality from international politics. For him the overriding goal of a state was survival and securing the national interests, which could not be fettered by considerations of Christian ethics. Such ethics, such as love thy neighbor, the pursuit of peace and so on, if followed in foreign policy were the mark of irresponsibility and were bound to lead to detrimental behaviour which will put the security and welfare of the citizens in jeopardy. Such morality could only be used as a device to deceive naïve leaders in other states, and he favoured hypocrisy, lies, fraud, betrayal and treachery and generally immoral behaviour, along the dictum that it was necessary to do evil for the sake of good (the end justifies the means).⁶ International politics is a distinct area of political activity from internal politics; at the international realm lies are not lies and crimes are not crimes. Internally the opposite was the case: civic virtue, the 'prince' had to behave morally towards the citizens to gain their devotion.⁷ The main reasons for this amoral approach at the international level is to be able to thrive in a chaotic

⁵ M. Hoffman, Normative International Theory, in A.J.R. Groom and Margot Light eds, Contemporary International Relations: A Guide to Theory, London, UK: Pinter, 1994, p.28.

⁶ J.V. Femia, The Machiavellian Legacy: Essays in Italian Political Thought, Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 1998, pp.41, 45, 48, 50, 53; R.W. Grant, Hypocrisy and Integrity: Machiavelli, Rousseau, and the Ethics of Politics, Chicago, USA: The University of Chicago Press, 1997, pp.18-22, 24, 27.

⁷ G. Faraklas, Machiavel: Le pouvoir du prince, Paris: Presses Universitaire de Paris, 1997.

word, another reason is Machiavelli's very bleak depiction of human nature, and hence also his well-known aphorism that it is better to be feared than loved.⁸

Spinoza is next in line, after Machiavelli, and only slightly less extreme. For him the only moral duty of a state internationally is survival, and in this context 'might is right'; a state has the right to expand and occupy other territories to the extent that its power allows it. And a state is under no moral or legal obligation to abide by treaties it had previously signed.⁹

Next comes Hobbes, who despite his claim of human aggression and *homo homini lupus* (man is wolf to man), was not as extreme as the other two thinkers. The reason he posits for repudiating ethics and norms is the anarchy and 'state of nature' reigning in the international system. Any moral, just or conciliatory initiative on the part of a state towards another state is bound to be taken advantage of, hence the inevitability of an aggressive posture in a world of *bellum omnium contra omnes* (the war of all against all). Under the circumstances, offensive wars are permitted and necessary, as a last resort for resolving conflicts. Morality and justice or the quest for peace could have been attained only if there was an overriding government, something unattainable.¹⁰

Thucydides also did not endorse morality and justice, but he was far more nuanced than all the other classical realists that lived centuries after him. For Thucydides justice and morality have no place at the international plane especially between unequal powers and the stronger party always prevails. This is the message of the famous Melian dialogue, which is regarded as one of the most potent expressions of 'realist amorality'.¹¹ As stated by the Athenian generals to the Melian leaders: 'the standard of justice depends on the equality of power to compel ... the strong do what they have the power to do and the weak accept what they have to accept'.¹² In other words the wise decision for the weak is to accept the *dictat* of the more powerful ('to behave with deference to one's superiors' as the Athenian generals put it to the Melians) and not appeal to ethics and justice. This is presented as a fact of international life, a sad fact. But Thucydides by no means approves of the Athenian stance and on several occasions refers positively to utterances by Pericles and others who invoke morality and justice in international matters. Thucydides's realism is 'almost a tragic one',¹³ with the states obliged, due to the prevailing international circumstances as well as internal pressures, not to abide by moral principles, even though for country the mark of a higher culture is to be a moral community. And the Athenians with their imperialism and haughtiness towards the other Greek states regressed into barbarism and ultimately this was the reason that they lost the war with the Spartans.¹⁴

⁸ B. Croce, *Politics and Morals* (translated by S.J. Castiglione), London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd, 1946, pp.44-47; J.A. Vasquez, *Classics of International Relations*, Upper Saddle River, USA: Prentice Hall, 1996, pp.1, 15-19; F. Parkinson, *The Philosophy of International Relations*, Beverly Hills: Sage, 1977, pp.30-2; Femia, *The Machiavellian Legacy*, pp.39-56; S. Forde, *Classical Realism*, in Nardin and Mapel eds, *Traditions of International Ethics*, pp.64-9; Grant, *Hypocrisy and Integrity*, pp.18-30; J. Donnelly, *Realism and International Relations*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000, pp.9, 24-25, 44; R. Jackson and G. S Sørensen, *Introduction to International Relations: Theories and Approaches*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007, 3rd edition), pp.63-5; P.R. Viotti and M.V. Kauppi, *International Relations Theory: Realism, Pluralism, Globalism* (New York: Macmillan, 1993), pp.39-40.

⁹ Parkinson, *The Philosophy of International Relations*, pp.37-40. Forde, 'Classical Realism', p.77.

¹⁰ D.R. Mapel, 'The Contractarian Tradition and International Ethics', Nardin and Mapel eds, *Traditions of International Ethics*, pp.186-9. C.R. Beitz, *Political Theory and International Relations*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979, pp.28-32, 36, 50; Donnelly, *Realism and International Relations*, pp.14-15. Forde, 'Classical Realism', pp.75-6; Vasquez, *Classics of International Relations*, pp.219-21; Jackson and Sørensen, *Introduction to International Relations*, pp.65-7; Parkinson, *The Philosophy of International Relations*, pp.37-40. Viotti and Kauppi, *International Relations Theory*, pp.40-1.

¹¹ Donnelly, *Realism and International Relations*, p.167.

¹² Thucydides, 'The Melian Dialogue', in Vasquez, *Classics of International Relations*, p.10.

¹³ Forde, 'Classical Realism', p.73; S. Forde, 'Power and Morality in Thucydides', in L.S. Gustafson ed., *Thucydides' Theory of International Relations*, Baton Rouge, USA: Louisiana State University Press, 2000, pp.151-57, 160, 166-67. See also R.N. Lebow, *The Tragic Vision of Politics: Ethics, Interests and Orders*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp.126-28.

¹⁴ Forde, 'Classical Realism', pp.69-75. Donnelly, *Realism and International Relations*, pp.3, 23-24, 167-70, 179-85; Jackson and Sørensen, *Introduction to International Relations*, pp.62-3; Viotti and Kauppi, *International Relations Theory*, pp.37-9; Vasquez, *Classics of International Relations*, p.1; Lebow, *The Tragic*

2.2. Modern Realism

From the 1930s until today, a substantial body of IR literature doubts the possibility of the existence of ethics and moral principles¹⁵ in foreign policy.¹⁶ Predictably this is a core tenet in the works of major realist thinkers in the 1930s and 1940s, such as Reinhold Niebuhr, Edward Hallett Carr, Georg Schwarzenberger, Hans Morgenthau and George Kennan, followed during the Cold War by Henry Kissinger, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Kenneth Thompson, Colin Gray, and other ‘cold warriors’, as well as by neorealists such as Kenneth Waltz, Robert Gilpin, John Mearsheimer and others. It has been suggested that the issue of morality in foreign policy is probably the question where the ‘greatest gulf’ exists between the realist and liberal theories of IR.¹⁷

The overall modern realist approach is, at the very least, one of ‘international moral skepticism’.¹⁸ However, as was the case with Machiavelli, it does not deny the importance of ethics internally within states and societies, but denies its salience at the inter-state level. It regards preoccupation with morality and standards of ethics in international affairs and the conduct of foreign policy irrelevant, misleading or when alluded to by decision-makers, hypocritical and an *ex post facto* rationalization for domestic or international audiences. According to this line of reasoning international politics ‘occupies an autonomous realm of power politics exempt from moral judgment and immune to moral restraint’.¹⁹ As the Italian political philosopher, Benedetto Croce, had put it, echoing Machiavelli: ‘in the interest of the State one must, if necessary, break a promise or commit murder ... one can do evil in order to attain good’.²⁰ In its absolute rendition this approach amounts to the predominance of power politics, ‘might is right’ along Spinoza²¹ or perhaps to a manifestation of social Darwinism.²²

The main rationale of realism for not taking morality on board is that the primary aim of foreign policy, its *raison d’être*, is the *raison d’état* of each state; national security and the promotion of vital national interests can be achieved more effectively outside the purview of moral considerations. States and governments, whose main goal is security and self-preservation in what is an unpredictable and threatening anarchical world society, do not have the option or luxury to act on the basis of ethics or restrictive norms.

Put differently, there is no higher morality, there are no ‘controlling universal rules in relations between states’²³ in view of the ‘features of an anarchical world’:²⁴ ‘my country right or wrong’, self-help is the name of the game. As Hobbes had argued one cannot act on the basis of morality internationally for one would endanger one’s own survival for the other side is highly unlikely to act

Vision of Politics, pp.122-30; D. Boucher, *Political Theories of International Relations: From Thucydides to the Present*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998, pp.67, 74-6.

¹⁵ The terms ethics and morality are by and large coterminous. I will follow Terry Nardin’s who uses ‘ethics’ to refer to a wide range of considerations affecting choice and action and ‘morals’ for the more limited rules of conduct. See Nardin, *Ethical Traditions in International Affairs*, p.3.

¹⁶ Beitz, *Political Theory and International Relations*, pp.13-14; M. Cohen, *Moral Skepticism and International Relations*, in C.R. Beitz, M. Cohen, T. Scanlon and A.J. Simmons eds, *International Ethics*, Princeton, USA: Princeton University Press, 1985, pp.3-50; D. Little, ‘Morality and National Security’, in K.M. Jensen and E.P. Faulkner eds, *Morality and Foreign Policy: Realpolitik Revisited*, Washington, D.C., USA: United States Institute of Peace, 1991, pp.1-19.

¹⁷ J.H. Rosenthal, *Rethinking the Moral Dimensions of Foreign Policy*, in C.W. Kegley ed., *Controversies in International Relations Theory: Realism and the Neoliberal Challenge*, New York, USA: St. Martin’s Press, 1995, p.317.

¹⁸ Beitz, C.R., *Bounded Morality: Justice and the State in World Politics*, *International Organization*, 33(3) (1979), pp.406-7; Beitz, *Political Theory and International Relations*, p.13; M. Frost, *Ethics in International Relations: A Constitutive Theory*, Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996, p.13.

¹⁹ Cohen, *Moral Skepticism and International Relations*, p.11.

²⁰ Croce, *Politics and Morals*, p.8. For a mistaken quote from Croce see Cohen, *Moral Skepticism and International Relations*, p.3. And Cohen erroneously claims that Croce is ‘a self-professed discipline of Machiavelli’. In fact Croce was highly critical of Machiavelli’s lack of morality and was a strong advocate of morality in internal as well as international politics. See Croce, *Politics and Morals*, pp.8-9, 21, 44-8, 131-5.

²¹ Parkinson, *The Philosophy of International Relations*, pp.37-40. Forde, ‘Classical Realism’, p.77.

²² For an excellent presentation of social Darwinism see Rogers, J.A., *Darwinism and Social Darwinism*, *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 33(2) (1972).

²³ Beitz, *Political Theory and International Relations*, p.3.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p.13.

on the same grounds and observe the same restraint.²⁵ And as Spinoza had asserted, if a government follows moral criteria in its behaviour it will not secure a country's survival and self-interest and thus will violate the tacit contract between people and government.²⁶

At this juncture it is worth referring to the main thrust of key figures of the modern realist paradigm regarding the irrelevance of morality in international politics.

According to E.H. Carr, 'supposedly absolute and universal principles [are] not principles at all, but the unconscious reflexions of national policy based on particular interpretations of national interest at a particular time'.²⁷

Hans Morgenthau, the father of modern realism, argues that any desire for an alternative to power politics, any attempt aimed at a more principled and ethical international politics is 'at best, utopian',²⁸ for universal moral principles cannot be applied to the foreign policy of states, which is based 'upon considerations of the national interest'.²⁹ Morgenthau claims that that international morality is largely a thing of the past and that 'the state has no rights to let its moral disapprobation ... get in the way of successful political action, itself inspired by the moral principle of national survival'.³⁰ As he also put it: 'the very essence of politics' is 'man's aspiration for power over other men', which 'implies the denial of what is the very core of Judo-Christian morality – respect for man as an end in himself. The power relation is the very denial of that respect; for it seeks to use man as means to the end of another man. This denial is particularly flagrant in foreign policy; for the civilizing influences of law, morality, and mores are less effective here than they are on the domestic political scene'.³¹

According to Georg Schwarzenberger, although 'rulers and statesmen are well aware of the existence of rules of international morality', the necessities of power rarely allows them to act on these rules. International morality, like international law, 'is both subservient to power politics and ... flourishes best where it does not interfere with the international struggle for power'.³² And one of his conclusions regarding morality is that 'the main function of morality in the international society does not consist in the control of one's own behavior, but in the use of morality as a keen and powerful weapon against potential and actual adversaries'.³³ Moreover 'international morality fulfills the functions of an ideology in that it masks the interests of power politics ... cloaking, in deference to public opinion, policies of national self-interest and self-preservation'.³⁴

The American geostrategist, Nicholas Spykman went even further: 'In international society all forms of coercion are permissible, including wars of destruction. This means that the struggle for power is identical with the struggle for survival, and the improvement of the relevant power position becomes the primary objective of the internal and the external policy of states. All else is secondary'.³⁵

For US diplomat George Kennan, the conduct of states is not 'fit' for 'moral judgment'.³⁶ There is no reason to believe that morality can serve 'as a general criterion for the determination of the behavior of states and above all as a criterion for measuring and comparing the behavior of different states ... Here other criteria, sadder, more limited, more practical, must be allowed to prevail'.³⁷ The 'primary obligation' of any government 'is to the interests of the national society it represents' and as a result

²⁵ See above reference 10.

²⁶ See above reference 9.

²⁷ E.H. Carr, *The Twenty Years' Crisis 1919-1939*, London, UK: Macmillan, 1946 [1939], p.87.

²⁸ In Cohen, *Moral Skepticism and International Relations*, p.12.

²⁹ Quoted in Donnelly, *Realism and International Relations*, p.187.

³⁰ H. Morgenthau, *Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace*, New York, USA: Alfred A. Knopf, 1954 [1948], p.10.

³¹ H. Morgenthau, *Politics in the Twentieth Century*, Abridged Edition, Chicago, USA: The University of Chicago Press, 1971, p.11.

³² In Donnelly, *Realism and International Relations*, p.28.

³³ G. Schwarzenberger, *Power Politics: An Introduction to the Study of International Relations and Post-War Planning*, London, UK: Jonathan Cape, 1942, p.165.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, pp.165, 168.

³⁵ Quoted in Donnelly, *Realism and International Relations*, p.162.

³⁶ In Cohen, 'Moral Skepticism and International Relations', p.3.

³⁷ Quoted in Little, 'Morality and National Security', p.3.

of this obligation ‘the same moral concepts are no longer relevant to it’.³⁸ There is an overriding concern for survival; hence national interest is a matter of ‘unavoidable necessit[y]’ and therefore ‘subject to classification neither as “good” or “bad”’.³⁹

At this point and having presented exclusively the views of British and American scholars and diplomats from the late 1930s until the 1950s, an injunction is worth making as regards the other side of the Iron Curtain. At a momentous meeting at the Kremlin held on 10 February 1948, where the Bulgarian leader Georgi Dimitrov was reprimanded for being unrealistic, Stalin had the following to say: ‘You should not be afraid of any “categorical imperative” regarding moral responsibility. We are not bound by any “categorical imperatives”. The key is the balance of forces. If you are strong, then strike a blow. If not, do not enter the fray. We agree to fight not when the adversary wants us to, but when it is in our interests to do so’.⁴⁰

Returning to the mainstream, for the father of neorealism (or structural realism), Kenneth Waltz, ‘states in anarchy cannot afford to be moral. The possibility of moral behavior rests upon the existence of an effective government that can deter and punish illegal actions’.⁴¹

According to the neorealist scholar, Robert Gilpin, ‘power and security are [not] the sole or even the most important objectives of mankind; as a species we prize beauty, truth, and goodness. Realism does not deny the importance of these and other values ... What the realist seeks to stress is that all these noble goals will be lost unless one makes provision for one’s security in the power struggle among social groups’.⁴²

The essential position of realist scholars is that the pursuit of power is the main vehicle of foreign policy which cannot be governed by ethics and norms. In the real world of international politics each state tries to enhance its power and to do so without restrictions based on considerations of universal principles.⁴³

The underlining rationale of the realist argument is that there are ‘*ethical* arguments for an “amoral” foreign policy’,⁴⁴ and realists ‘adopt the substantive moral position that “our” interests ought to count more than the interests of others (which “ordinary” morality enjoins us to consider as equal to our own)’.⁴⁵ As Jack Donnelly points out, such thinking goes back to the 19th century idea of the state as an ethical entity, as advocated by Meinecke, Ranke and Treitschke, and I would add the father of this curious idea, none other than Hegel.⁴⁶ And as Donnelly correctly asserts: ‘Such as categorical ethical distinction between “us” and “them” certainly is morally contentious. It is, however, deeply rooted in the structure of an international political system of sovereign states. Realists thus have a plausible case for holding that the national interest is an important – although not necessarily decisive – ground for judging international political action in a world of sovereign states’.⁴⁷

There are several other arguments for rejecting ethics in international politics. At a more theoretical level it is argued that propositions based on ethics or normative theory are neither true nor false, because there are no ethical or normative facts to reckon with; they cannot be falsified or verified as is the case with other IR theories. Such approaches cannot provide guidance for foreign policy-making; they function mainly as *post hoc* rationalization, as a tool of policy to suit a variety of purposes and most of all to secure advantages.⁴⁸

³⁸ Quoted in Donnelly, *Realism and International Relations*, p.163.

³⁹ Quoted in *ibid.*, p.164.

⁴⁰ *The Diary of Georgi Dimitrov 1933-1949*, Introduced and edited by Ivo Banac, New Haven, USA: Yale University Press, 2003, pp.442-43.

⁴¹ From a 1983 paper by Art and Waltz, quoted in *ibid.*, pp.162-3.

⁴² R.G. Gilpin, *The Richness of the Tradition of Political Realism*, in R.O. Keohane ed., *Neorealism and its Critics*, New York, USA: Columbia University Press, 1986, p.305.

⁴³ Frost, *Ethics in International Relations*, p.42.

⁴⁴ Donnelly, *Realism and International Relations*, p.164.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.* p.164.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p.164.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 165.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp.42-3.

A more practical argument is that ethics and norms may require costs that run counter to national interests, and thus are highly unlikely to be followed by governments, which are not prone to sacrifice national interests for the sake of some high moral principle. Moreover honesty, which is one of the virtues of good behaviour, is in short supply as governments are justified to use duplicity and even treachery (as seen in antiquity with Kautilya's advice to Emperor Chandragupta Maurya, in his book *Arthashastra*,⁴⁹ and centuries later with Machiavelli's similar advice to the Prince) if it serves the self-interest of the state as they perceive it.⁵⁰

Another major argument against the relevance and use of so-called universal morals and norms is the multiplicity of existing ethical codes, what is known as 'cultural relativism'. In a diverse world of sovereign states and diverse social orders there is no possibility of arriving at universally agreed ethics applicable to international politics.⁵¹ As early as the 1950s none other than Kennan had warned his compatriots that we should not 'assume that our moral values ... necessarily have validity for people everywhere' and we should not set 'ourselves up as the judges over the morality of others'.⁵²

Cultural relativism is based on the premise that morality is different depending on the people and culture involved; morality is culture-bound not universal, as argued by political philosophers, such as Charles Taylor, Michael Sandel and Alasdair MacIntyre, and in particular by cultural anthropologists, who have documented the disparities existing among different cultures, about what is regarded as good and acceptable, and even what amounts to a rational goal-seeking behaviour.⁵³ Samuel Huntington's famous 'clash of civilizations' also follows this logic (though with far more dangerous consequences if perceived as implying a hierarchy), namely the claim of insurmountable fissures between different cultures or 'civilizations' as he chose to call them.⁵⁴

It has been argued that when the requirements of states are in conflict there are no rational grounds for regarding one social morality superior to another and under the circumstances the best one can hope for is to arrive at a least common denominator of morality or norms, which does not amount to very much.⁵⁵ Moreover given the existing stark differences in beliefs and values, any attempt to generalize and apply one type of morality, which is after all 'a historically-bound construction',⁵⁶ in this case Western ethics, largely derived from Christian morality, natural law and Enlightenment values, smacks of yet another form of neo-imperialism or neocolonialism.⁵⁷

Even if this is not the case, and if the 'good intentions' can be proven in a specific initiative, they may lead to mistakes: ethics in foreign policy can lead well-intentioned moral crusades to disastrous consequences.⁵⁸ To remember a well-known Middle Ages aphorism, the 'road to Hell', often leveled in particular by critics of 'humanitarian intervention':⁵⁹ that 'the road to hell is paved with good intentions', in the sense that good intentions, when acted upon, may have unintended negative consequences.

⁴⁹ T.A. Coulombis and J.H. Wolfe, *Introduction to International Relations: Power and Justice*, Englewood Cliffs, USA: Prentice-Hall, 1978, pp.138-9; A. Watson, *The Evolution of International Society*, London, UK: Routledge, 1992, pp.78-83.

⁵⁰ Frost, *Ethics in International Relations*, p.43.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p.42.

⁵² Quoted in Donnelly, *Realism and International Relations*, p.166.

⁵³ Beitz, *Political Theory and International Relations*, p.17.

⁵⁴ S. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations?*, in S. Huntington et.al., *The Clash of Civilizations? The Debate*, New York, USA: Foreign Affairs, 1996; S. Huntington, *If not Civilization, What?*, in S. Huntington et.al., *The Clash of Civilizations?*

⁵⁵ Beitz, *Political Theory and International Relations*, p.17.

⁵⁶ J. Donnelly, *The Social Construction of International Human Rights*, in R. Falk, H. Elver and L. Hajjar eds, *Human Rights: Critical Concepts in Political Science*, London, UK: Routledge, 2008.

⁵⁷ R.A. Wilson, *Human Rights, Culture and Context: An Introduction*, in R.A. Wilson ed., *Human Rights, Culture and Context*, London, UK: Pluto Press, 1997, pp.1-2, 4-5; L.S. Bell, A.J. Nathan and I. Peleg, *Introduction: Culture and Human Rights*, in L.S. Bell, A.J. Nathan and I. Peleg eds, *Negotiating Culture and Human Rights*, New York, USA: Columbia University Press, 2001, p.5.

⁵⁸ J.S. Nye, Jr, *Nuclear Ethics*, New York, USA: The Free Press, 1986, p.7.

⁵⁹ Chesterman, S., 'Leading from Behind': The Responsibility to Protect, the Obama Doctrine, and Humanitarian Intervention in Libya, *Ethics & International Affairs* 2011, p.6.

In any event the other side is bound to resent the intrusion in question as a however disguised form of blatant cultural imperialism. This applies especially with regard to the foreign policy of several Western states which take the protection of human rights abroad seriously, only to be seen as diehard neo-imperialists who have having discovered yet another devious device to intrude into the affairs of African, Asian or Muslim states, even though they have different moral codes. There has even been talk of the ‘human rights conspiracy’ of the West so as to destabilize Asian or Muslim states that do not comply with the wishes of the West.⁶⁰

Furthermore, an excessive moralistic attitude can lead to mistaken policy choices in foreign policy.⁶¹ Overzealousness on moral, ideological or emotional grounds may obscure the salient features of a situation⁶² and lead to ineffective and self-defeating policies internationally (as had been pointed out by Machiavelli).⁶³ To sermon and point a figure is unlikely to provide the basis for a rational foreign policy aimed at enhancing and securing national interest. Needless to say, those who accuse others, trying to place themselves on a moral high ground mar relations between the states concerned and could even lead to more abuses of human rights and democratic principles on the basis of *raison d'état* or for reasons of national pride.

Lastly, as Thucydides had argued, realism as a basis of foreign policy behaviour can prove less extreme and gentler than moralism. Ideological or moral campaigns tend to be more cruel and devastating than politics based on cool-headed calculations based on national interest.⁶⁴

3. THE LIBERAL RIPOSTE: ETHICS AND NORMS ESSENTIAL FEATURES OF INTERNATIONAL POLITICS

The original arguments for the existence of ethics and norms in international politics have their roots in the Renaissance and Enlightenment founders of international law and towards the end of the 18th century and early 19th century in the cosmopolitanism of Immanuel Kant, Jeremy Bentham and other liberal thinkers. For Kant as well as Bentham ethics have a place in international politics as do norms, namely international law, and with time they will be taken seriously by states and as a result the existing international anarchy and the deplorable ‘war of all against all’ will give way to an acceptable international order and to a lasting peace.⁶⁵

Interwar idealism was well known for its strong advocacy for international law as well as international morality.⁶⁶ The main volume that expressed this Interwar spirit is *Morale Internationale* by Nicolas Politis, which combined international law with international morality and tried to introduce social morality into international politics. A characteristic example of Politis’s overall attempt is his view on humanitarian intervention. As he put it:⁶⁷

Every people has the right to organise itself as it wants ... without other countries being in the position to oppose or to intervene in what are internal affairs.... But ... such a right will merit due respect on the principle that it makes reasonable use of it. If, on the contrary, it gives ground to abuses of power ... and, in general, if the prescriptions of *international morality and*

⁶⁰ Tesón, F.R., International Human Rights and Cultural Relativism, Virginia Journal of International Law, 25(4) (1985), p.896.

⁶¹ Beitz, Political Theory and International Relations, p.21.

⁶² To remember Talleyrand’s advice to young French diplomats: ‘above all, not too much zeal’.

⁶³ Beitz, Political Theory and International Relations, pp.20-2.

⁶⁴ Forde, Classical Realism, p.73.

⁶⁵ For Kant see Chapter 6 and the following: Doyle, M.W., Liberalism and World Politics, American Political Science Review, 80 (4) (1986), p.1157; T. Donaldson, Kant’s Global Rationalism, in Nardin and Mapel eds, Traditions of International Ethics, pp.136-9, pp.142-9; Hoffman, Normative International Theory, p.29; Brown, International Relations Theory, pp.28-41. For Bentham see A. Ellis, Utilitarianism and International Ethics, in Nardin and Mapel eds, pp.164-65; Brown, International Relations Theory, p.43; Conway, S., Bentham on Peace and War, Utilitas, 1(1) (1989), pp.88-98; M.W. Janis, Jeremy Bentham and the Fashioning of ‘International Law’, in B. Parekh ed., Jeremy Bentham: Critical Assessments, Volume III, Law and Politics, London, UK: Routledge, 1993, pp.404-17; Parkinson, The Philosophy of International Relations, pp.95-7.

⁶⁶ M. Kumar, Theoretical Aspects of International Politics, Delhi: Shiva Lal Agarwala & Company, 1978, pp.34, 51.

⁶⁷ N. Politis, La morale internationale, Paris, France: Bibliothèque Brentano’s, 1944), p.144. My translation from the French.

of international law are downtrodden, other countries are entitled to intervene; they could put into play the rules of international responsibility. [emphasis added]

Later, from the late 1960s and 1970s onwards, the criticism of realism and its skepticism regarding ethics and norms has come from several quarters in the study of IR, from liberalism and liberal institutionalism (Robert Keohane, Joseph Nye), world society pluralism (John Burton), the English realist school (Martin Wight, Hedley Bull, R.J. Vincent), the world order approach (Richard Falk, Saul Mendlovitz), as well as from various strands of constructivism and post-positivism (reflectivism), and in particular from normative international relations or international ethics (Michael Walzer, Charles Beitz, Terry Nardin, Mervyn Frost, Jack Donnelly, Allen Buchanan and others).

Interestingly even Carr, the uncompromising critic of inter-war idealism (which he dubbed ‘utopianism’) was aware of ‘the limitations of realism’ (as he put it) and made the following pertinent point in *The Twenty Years’ Crisis 1919-1939*, in the very book where idealism is put to task: ‘it is utopian to ignore the element of power, it is an unreal kind of realism which ignores the elements of morality in any world order’;⁶⁸ ‘Consistent realism excludes four things which appear to be essential ingredients of all effective political thinking: a finite goal, an emotional appeal, a right of moral judgment and a ground for action’;⁶⁹

Now let us try to pinpoint some of the reasons why normative and moral principles are far from irrelevant in international politics and foreign policy behaviour.

To begin with, actors in international relations and scholars of IR are regularly called upon to face normative questions, to pass judgments and to arrive at crucial decisions with a clear ethical dimension, which go beyond narrow self-interest and in some instances even against it.⁷⁰ As Mervyn Frost has vividly put it:⁷¹

We ... are all regularly called upon to seek answers to the following questions: Where different nations claim the right of self-determination in the same territory, whose claim should we support? What should we do about famine in other states? ... How should we treat people (possibly tens of thousands) who arrive in our country as political or economic refugees? Where a government engages in genocide against a minority in its territory what ought we do about it? What may we legitimately do against a state which infringes another state’s rights? May we use force of arms to stop human rights abuses in other states?’

All these problems are normative and ethical, and cannot be presented as nothing more than mere facets of narrow self-interest or variants of national interests; they involve judgments and decisions about what ought to be done which cannot be dealt simply with ‘is’, by simply alluding to the way things are in the world as claimed by textbook realism.⁷² We are called upon, as decision-makers, intergovernmental organizations, IR scholars, international jurists or activists, ‘to decide what, given the specific situation, would be the right thing to do ... The moral problem is to chose the ends to be pursued and to decide upon what means might legitimately be used in pursuit of those ends’.⁷³ Indeed ethics exist ‘at all levels of politics including international politics’;⁷⁴ and ‘no science, at least no social science, can exist without a normative aspect’.⁷⁵

Secondly, it may be that ‘if something is impossible, we have no moral obligation to do it’.⁷⁶ And if international politics ‘were the domain of absolute necessity, then there would be no room for morality’.⁷⁷ However, as Joseph Nye points out, in international politics ‘absolute necessity is extremely rare. Even in situations of acute insecurity there are often choices with profound moral

⁶⁸ Carr, *The Twenty Years’ Crisis 1919-1939*, p.235.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p.89.

⁷⁰ Frost, *Ethics in International Relations*, p.11.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp.1-2.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p.2.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, p.11.

⁷⁴ Kumar, *Theoretical Aspects of International Politics*, p.51.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p.51.

⁷⁶ Nye, *Nuclear Ethics*, p.7.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p.7.

implications ... One cannot legitimately banish ethics simply by asserting that international politics is a “state of war” or that we are engaged in a “cold war” with an amoral adversary’.⁷⁸

Thirdly, with few exceptions such as, for instance, Nazi Germany or the Stalinist Soviet Union, states and governments are bound by legal obligations (international law) in their relations with each other. One reason for this is that the basic norms of international society, the principles of international law are generally accepted,⁷⁹ such as independence, sovereignty, non use of military force, non-intervention, territorial integrity, inviolability of frontiers, the peaceful settlements of disputes and so on, and they have been adopted precisely because they serve the vital interests of the already established states (above all their survival and perpetuity) and of future independent states. Hence most states are reluctant to act in ways that show disrespect for these salutary principles or in a manner that may enhance anarchy and insecurity in the society of states of which they are a part. The preservation of international society is to their benefit and is a function of their behaviour. As put by the realist scholar of the British school, Martin Wight, ‘morality is the fruit of security, but lasting security as between many Powers depends on their observing a certain common standard of morality’.⁸⁰ When a state, and not least a superpower acts in an unprincipled and immoral manner, akin to ‘a rogue power’ or ‘rogue superpower’, than the very foundations of world society are undermined.

Fourthly, states have rights as well as duties and abiding by them is a reality and not mere fiction. Indeed most ‘mature states’ prefer to attain, if they possibly can, the moral high ground and act as a positive example internationally. Even from the realist perspective, the moral and legal authority of a state, its reputation as peaceful, constructive and principled (including an active role in peacekeeping, mediation, good offices and so on) pays; it is an asset and an important aspect of power, an attribute of ‘soft power’ to remember Joseph Nye’s contribution.⁸¹ Moral power enhances a state’s clout internationally, as seen in the foreign policy of the Nordic states or in the foreign policy of India under Jawaharlal Nehru, South Africa under Nelson Mandela or Tanzania under Julius Nyerere. In this sense one can speak in terms on ‘enlightened self interest’,⁸² or of a more sophisticated form of realism or of ‘liberal’ or ‘utopian’ realism.⁸³

Fifthly, there is the human rights discourse to reckon with, which is founded on the standards set by a number of pace-setting normative documents on human rights in the UN, the CSCE/OSCE and the Council of Europe. This has led, especially from the 1970s onwards (starting with President Jimmy Carter’s human rights foreign policy), to foreign policy by a number of states and governments based on human rights, namely to further develop norms and mechanisms for the protection of human rights and to condemn violations of human rights, and lack of rule of law and of democratic principles, even though some non-Western societies may see this as a device for unwarranted interference. The Western states or to be more accurate several Western states, most of the time do not see themselves as acting in a haughty intrusive manner especially if their governments happen to be led at the time by liberals and cosmopolitans and not by hard-nosed realists.⁸⁴

Six, there is the Kantian postulate: that democratic states are more likely to be more peaceful and principled than authoritarian regimes, what is known today in IR theory as ‘democratic peace’.⁸⁵ To

⁷⁸ Ibid., pp.7-8,

⁷⁹ Frost, *Ethics in International Relations*, p.109.

⁸⁰ M. Wight, *Power Politics*, London, UK: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1946, p.67.

⁸¹ J.S. Nye Jr., *Soft Power: The Means to Success in World Politics*, New York, USA: Public Affairs, 2004.

⁸² Beitz, *Political Theory and International Relations*, p.56; Nye, *Nuclear Ethics*, p.7.

⁸³ Booth, K., ‘Security in Anarchy: Utopian Realism in Theory and Practice’, *International Affairs*, 67(3) (1991).

⁸⁴ P.R. Baehr, *The Role of Human Rights in Foreign Policy*, New York, USA: St. Martin’s Press, 1994; R. Müllerson, *Human Rights Diplomacy*, London, UK: Routledge, 1997; D.P. Forsythe ed., *Human Rights and Comparative Foreign Policy*, Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2000.

⁸⁵ For the ‘democratic peace’ theory see in particular M.W. Doyle, *Liberalism and World Politics Revisited*, in C.W. Kegley ed., *Controversies in International Relations Theory: Realism and the Neoliberal Challenge*, New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1995, pp.83-106; M.E. Brown, et. al eds, *Debating the Democratic Peace*, Cambridge, Mass., USA: The MIT Press, 1996, pp.58-81; B. Russett, *Grasping the Democratic Peace*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993; B. Russett and J. Oneal, *Triangulating Peace: Democracy, Interdependence and International Organizations*, New York, USA: Norton Series in World Politics, 2011.

remember an apt comment by General George Marshall, governments that systematically ignore the rights of their own people are less likely to respect the rights of other nations and people and are more likely to pursue their goals with the use of violence.⁸⁶ Bringing about more democracy and respect for human rights across the world is a recipe for greater peace and security and less anarchy and violence in international relations. Moreover it is for several decades an accepted norm that democratic institutions within a state are preferable to non-democratic ones, hence non-democratic states are on the defensive, and are called upon to justify why they are not democratic. This also applies with regard to human rights, and irrespective of the cultural relativism thesis, states that do not abide with the respect and protection of human rights are again on the defensive, and are called upon to change their conduct or at the very least present a valid excuse for the violations in question.⁸⁷

Seven, there are several difficult cases, such as whether or not to become involved or intervene militarily in cases of genocide or other man-made humanitarian disasters (war crimes, crimes against humanity or ethnic cleansing); or what to do in instances of unilateral self-determination (secession) especially if the people concerned have suffered systematic and mass abuses of human rights (what is known in the relevant literature as 'remedial' cases and a corresponding 'remedial right' to secede⁸⁸)? In both the humanitarian and secessionist cases, existing international law (*lex lata*) does not suffice and thus international ethics (the quest for convincing moral criteria) come into play, to act as guidelines for crucial decisions on the part of other states, the UN and other intergovernmental organizations, initiatives which may save lives, establish justice or a lasting peace settlement in a protracted violent conflict.

Eight, states and governments, like individuals, are rarely so cynical as to regard themselves on the wrong, as inhuman, beastly and barbarian, even if they are clearly monstrous, as in the case of Hitler's Germany or Stalin's Soviet Union. With few exceptions they are convinced of their good intentions and righteousness. If governments sometimes act in an extreme and violent manner they see this as inevitable and blame their adversaries, external or internal, for having started the dispute and having provoked them. When a state, be it Russia, China or Turkey trample upon a numerical minority or oppress a region in their midst (Chechnya, Xinjiang and Tibet, or the Kurds respectively) and violate basic human rights or minority rights (the latter established mainly from 1990 onwards), they do so because they believe that they have no other choice if they want to avoid a major blow to their country, such as dismemberment, the shrinking of its territory or a vital deterioration of its power and status. These three states appear threatening to their neighbours because they themselves feel vulnerable and threatened (and also feel that they are treated unjustly and disrespectfully), and come to evoke a number of conspiracy theories, however absurd they may be, as seen with the 'Sèvres syndrome' (or 'Sèvres phobia') in the case of Turkey.⁸⁹ Another case in point is Israel vis-à-vis the Palestinians which in recent decades has routinely violated an array of international law principles in the name of survival (misguided though it is). All these policies can also be seen as a variant of 'the end justifying the means' that is of higher values (such as survival seen as the ultimate value) inevitably overriding other values in exceptional circumstances.

Nine, even if some governments or specific leaders may not regard norms and ethics essential in the foreign policy they pursue, they have to reckon with the attitude of their home publics or of their allies which may call for initiatives in cases of massacres and other abhorrent acts in other countries. In such instances governments (leaders, the governing party) may want to avoid a public (or international) outcry of being seen as callous and indifferent to appalling human suffering. Thus at the

⁸⁶ In Müllerson, Human Rights Diplomacy, p.21.

⁸⁷ Frost, Ethics in International Relations, p.111.

⁸⁸ Buchanan, A., Theories of Secession, Philosophy & Public Affairs, 26(1) (1997), pp.31-61. See also L.C. Buchheit, Secession: The Legitimacy of Self-Determination, New Haven, USA: Yale University Press, 1978; Brilmayer, L., Secession and Self-Determination: A Territorial Interpretation, Yale Journal of International Law, 16 (1991); Heraclides, A., Secession, Self-Determination and Non-Intervention: In Quest of a Normative Symbiosis, Journal of International Affairs, 45(2) (1992).

⁸⁹ See Jung, D., The Sèvres Syndrome: Turkish Foreign Policy and its Historical Legacies, American Diplomacy (August 2003); Guida, M. The Sèvres Syndrome and 'Komplo' Theories in the Islamist and Secular Press, Turkish Studies, 9(1) (2008), pp.37-52; H. Yılmaz, 'Two Pillars of Nationalist Euroscepticism in Turkey: The Tanzimat and Sèvres Syndromes', in I. Karlsson and A. Strom Melin eds, Turkey, Sweden and the European Union, Stockholm, Sweden: Swedish Institute for European Policy Studies, 2006, pp.29-40.

end of the day they may act in a principled and moral manner to placate their critics or gain greater popularity at home or abroad (for instance coming to the support of the 'Muslim' Kosovars was appreciated by Muslim states, which previously felt that the West was indifferent because it was a Muslim plight and not a Christian one).

As for the cultural relativism thesis it is controversial and need not be stretched too far. The different values in different cultures may call for prudence and avoiding a blind imposition of 'our moral standards on other cultures'.⁹⁰ But this 'does not excuse us from making moral choices about our own actions'.⁹¹ And in this respect 'some degree of altruism or consideration of others can often be included in the motives for foreign policy'.⁹² More generally, cultural relativism, sometimes dubbed by its critics as the 'anthropological heresy', 'has not fared well as a philosophical doctrine', not least because 'contrary to appearances, [it] bears little resemblance to tolerance'.⁹³ And it has been pointed out that 'virtually no person can live with cultural relativism's severe consequences because consistent cultural relativism demands jettisoning more than naïve relativists imagine'.⁹⁴

It has also been argued by Western as well as non-Western thinkers that differences in moral principles and values are not all that great and unbridgeable among different ethical traditions, as claimed by cultural relativists and Huntington. Even as regards the Western tradition of human rights by comparison to the Islamic, Confucian, South East Asian or African traditions, one can find several points of convergence such as human dignity, self-respect, freedom from oppression, the urge for justice, equality and political participation, the rejection of individual or group violence, respect for human life, the ban on genocide and other hideous crimes against humanity, and so on.⁹⁵ Others scholars have gone further, claiming that in fact human rights, in particular fundamental human rights, have attained a universal status (as claimed by cosmopolitans, such as Jürgen Habermas, John Rawls or Amartya Sen^{96,97}) and are not culturally bound as they were in previous epochs. Moreover the 'Asian values' or 'Islamic values' objections is suspect, mainly a strategy by oppressive regimes to stifle dissent at home. And if instead of culturally-bound values we speak in terms of 'universal human needs' (Abraham Maslow, John Burton and others), common 'human nature' (Hadley Cantril) or the quest for 'self-realization' or 'self-actualization' by human beings (as seen in the humanistic psychology of Carl Rogers, Erich Fromm, Eric Erikson, Karen Horney, Melanie Klein and others) then there is ample room to arrive at communalities across cultures. Another unifying path comes from the natural law approach, according to which there are a number of self-evident principles common to all human groupings. According to natural law scholar John Finnis they are the following: life, knowledge, play, aesthetic experience, sociability, practical reasonableness and religion. True all these they may take different forms of expression but they are common to all societies.⁹⁸

Another possible argument against the lack of morality internationally, put forward by Benedetto Croce, is that it is 'illogical' and against 'human conscience' to claim 'that it is sometimes necessary to do evil in order to attain good' and that 'private ethics' are different from the state of play internationally, where presumably in the interests of the state ('for the sacred protection, for the

⁹⁰ Nye, *Nuclear Ethics*, p.9.

⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p.9.

⁹² *Ibid.*, p.8.

⁹³ Donaldson, *Kant's Global Rationalism*, p.143.

⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p.143.

⁹⁵ Donnelly, J., *Human Rights and Human Dignity: An Analytic Critique of Non-Western Conceptions of Human Rights*, *American Political Science Review*, 76(2) (1982), pp.306-15; Dundes Renteln, A., *Relativism and the Search for Human Rights*, *American Anthropologist*, 90 (1988), pp.56-72; An-Na'im, A., *Religious Minorities under Islamic Law and the Limits of Cultural Relativism*, *Human Rights Quarterly*, 9 (1987), pp.3-5; Onuma Y., *Toward an Intercivilizational Approach to Human Rights*, in Falk, Elver and Hajjar eds, *Human Rights*, vol.1; C. Taylor, *A World Consensus on Human Rights*, in Falk, Elver and Hajjar eds, *Human Rights*, vol.1, p.142. A. Sen, *Human Rights and Asian Values*, in Falk, Elver and Hajjar eds, *Human Rights*, vol.1, pp.386-9; Bell, Nathan and Peleg, Introduction.

⁹⁶ Sen, *Human Rights and Asian Values*, pp.386-89, p.400 note 6.

⁹⁷ Bell, Nathan and Peleg, Introduction, p.5; Wilson, *Human Rights, Culture and Context*, p.9; Tesón, *International Human Rights and Cultural Relativism*; P.R. Baehr, *Human Rights: Universality in Practice*, Basingstoke, UK: Macmillan, 1999.

⁹⁸ J. Finnis, *Natural Law and Natural Rights*, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 1980.

development, or for the rebirth of the fatherland⁹⁹) a government must, if necessary, act immorally. There cannot be one set of ethics in the private sphere and another internationally, ‘as though evil and good are merchandise to be exchanged’.¹⁰⁰ And Croce concludes his 1946 book on politics and morals, with a chapter on ‘international justice’ that includes the following prescription:¹⁰¹

mankind does not renounce its longing and its demand for a more just, more gentle and more civilized world ... for a more human world, in which all rights will be protected; in which every good deed will find help and encouragement; in which hardships and sorrows will gradually diminish ...; in which war will be abolished ... the war which continues the barbaric custom of bloodshed, massacres, cruelties and torments ... Nor does mankind renounce its insistence and its hopes that the States will ... elevat[e] themselves to “ethical States” or “States of culture”.

To conclude, it is simply impossible to explain many aspects of international politics ‘without becoming involved in some kind of normative theory’.¹⁰² States ‘must pursue moral values’,¹⁰³ and as Mahatma Gandhi had pointed out, ‘the interest of one nation can be adjusted with the larger interest of mankind’.¹⁰⁴ More practically, it pays for states or governments to be principled and moral in their behaviour and to be seen as such. And there is ample evidence to indicate that states do take norms and ethics seriously and that these norms do carry considerable weight.¹⁰⁵ If a state is unprincipled, callous and aggressive towards its neighbours or within the country against its own citizens or against specific ethnic or religious communities it is highly unlikely that it will get away with it in the long run. The other side is bound to react accordingly and the spiral of conflict will continue indefinitely as seen with several inter-state conflict dyads or in ethnic or separatist conflicts, especially if issues of identity are also involved, which is often the case in protracted conflicts, especially if the stereotype of the ‘negative Other’ is vital for the in group’s self-definition and sense of self-worth.¹⁰⁶

Having, hopefully, established that ethics and norms are far from irrelevant in international politics, to the contrary that they are indispensable in many instances, I will conclude with a brief presentation of normative international relations or international ethics, a field of IR which has made its mark from the second part of the 1990s onward.

4. CONCLUSION: NORMATIVE INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS OR INTERNATIONAL ETHICS

To begin it is worth remembering that there are by and large two ethical traditions: ‘virtue ethics’ and ‘consequentialism’.¹⁰⁷ According to virtue ethics or ‘ethics of virtue’, the qualities of the one who acts is what matters, that is mainly the motives or intentions involved and whether they are moral or not, a concept which go back to Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and the Stoics, and today has been associated in particular with Immanuel Kant and his disciples (modern representatives of this approach include Paul Ricœur, Alasdair MacIntyre and Amartya Sen). According to consequentialism or ‘the ethics of consequences’, the emphasis is on the consequences of acts, as the basis for any moral judgment about the rightness or wrongness of a specific behavior. This approach has been the purview of utilitarian philosophers, such as Jeremy Bentham, James Mill, John Stuart Mill and Henry Sidgwick. Virtue ethics and consequentialism and their juxtaposition are very relevant in the heated debates

⁹⁹ Croce, *Politics and Morals*, p.9.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.8-9.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p.132.

¹⁰² Frost, *Ethics in International Relations*, p.13.

¹⁰³ Kumar, *Theoretical Aspects of International Politics*, p.52.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p.52.

¹⁰⁵ D.V. Jones, *Code of Peace: Ethics and Security in the World of the Warlord States*, Chicago, USA: Chicago University Press, 1991; Kegley Jr, C.W., *The New Global Order: The Power of Principle in a Pluralistic World*, *Ethics & International Affairs*, 6 (1992), pp.21-40; G. Goertz and P.F. Diehl, *International Norms and Power Politics*, in F.W. Wayman and P.F. Diehl eds, *Reconstructing Realpolitik*, (Ann Arbor, USA: The University of Michigan Press, 1994, pp.101-22.

¹⁰⁶ See Heraclides, A., ‘What Will Become of us Without Barbarians?’ *The Enduring Greek-Turkish Rivalry as An Identity-based Conflict*, *Southeast European and Black Sea Studies*, 12 (1) (2012).

¹⁰⁷ Brown, *International Relations Theory*, pp.41-2; Donaldson, *Kant’s Global Rationalism*, pp.136-39; Nye, *Nuclear Ethics*, pp.16-17.

within normative international relations or international ethics, including just war, humanitarian intervention and assistance to secessionist movements.

Normative international relations or international ethics is a sub-field of IR that by definition regards morality and norms of considerable importance and highly relevant to the theory and practice of international politics. Normative international relations or international ethics is also arguably a school of thought within the post-positivist or reflectivist approach.¹⁰⁸ In the 1980s it was not a recognizable sub-field of IR,¹⁰⁹ despite the publication in 1977 of Michael Walzer's *Just and Unjust Wars*, and the debate it generated. This sub-field made its entry by the 1990s, although some of its adherents lamented that it was not a central concern but was to be found only in the 'fringes of the discipline', together with post-modernism, feminism and ecological approaches.¹¹⁰ However, this can hardly be said thereafter, that is from the second part of the 1990s onwards. Normative and ethical approaches have reached centre stage in IR. In lieu of an example, the scholarly volumes dedicated to one of the most controversial topics of this field, humanitarian intervention, are almost a hundred and fifty within IR and international law, not to mention countless academic articles and chapters in edited books.

It is generally accepted that there are two main strands in this field. One is 'cosmopolitanism', 'cosmopolitan morality' whose origins are to be found in Immanuel Kant and Jeremy Bentham according to most commentators,¹¹¹ and I would add Nicolas de Condorcet. The other is 'communitarianism', the 'morality of states' approach which has its origins in Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Johann Gottfried Herder, Georg Hegel and arguably John Stuart Mill (mainly due to his preoccupation with nation and nationalism).¹¹²

According to Chris Brown:¹¹³

The cosmopolitan/communitarian divide relates directly to the most central question of any normative international relations theory, namely the moral value to be credited to particularistic political collectivities as against humanity as a whole or the claims of individual human beings. Communitarian thought either denies that there is an opposition here, or is prepared explicitly to assign central value to the community; cosmopolitan thought refuses this central status to the community, placing the ultimate source of moral value elsewhere.

The cosmopolitan approach, which has its roots in the Stoic philosophers, the Renaissance and the Enlightenment, focuses on the reasoning of the human individual as an autonomous moral agent and claims that there is a universal set of self-evident moral truths accessible to all people via human reason. The ultimate source of moral values is the individual as part of wider humanity. The point of reference is the individual and humankind as a whole and not the state, nation or community.¹¹⁴

The communitarian approach is culture-bound, arguing that the source of human values is inherent in the community and it is only through membership in a political community, a nation or a state that people can find meaning and secure rights and obligations. According to arch-communitarian Hegel, only through the state can individuals realize their freedom and potentials.¹¹⁵

Today the scientific field of international ethics or normative international political theory covers a wide spectrum, which includes the autonomy and sovereignty of states, peace, the ethics of war and of armed violence, just war, nuclear ethics, self-determination and secession, human rights, minorities, cultural rights, multiculturalism, intervention, including humanitarian intervention, refugees, distributive justice, the North-South gap, environmental degradation and others. To this field of norms

¹⁰⁸ See for this view not shared by others, S. Smith, Reflectivist and Constructivist Approaches to International Theory, in J. Baylis and S. Smith eds, *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations*, Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press, 2001, 2nd edition, pp.229-31.

¹⁰⁹ Frost, *Ethics in International Relations*, p.ix.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp.5, 7.

¹¹¹ Beitz, *Bounded Morality*, pp.406, 408-9; Donaldson, *Kant's Global Rationalism*, pp.136-50; Brown, *International Relations Theory*, pp.28-43; Hoffman, *Normative International Theory*, p.2.

¹¹² Brown, *International Relations Theory*, pp.57-75.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p.12.

¹¹⁴ Hoffman, *Normative International Theory*, p.29.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, pp.29-30.

and ethics one should also add a whole discipline, international law, whose whole approach is by definition normative.

Thus drawing on a threesome distinction by Martin Wight, the Machiavellian, the Grotian and the Kantian traditions in international thought,¹¹⁶ one could add a third variant to normative international relations, the ‘Grotian tradition’ or ‘internationalism’,¹¹⁷ starting with Grotius and the other founding fathers of international law, with its inherent ethical foundations.

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¹¹⁶ M. Wight, *International Theory: The Three Traditions*, edited by G. Wight and B. Porter, New York, USA: Holmes and Meier, 1994.

¹¹⁷ According to Jack Donnelly’s rendition of the Grotian tradition, see J. Donnelly, *State Sovereignty and International Intervention: The Case of Human Rights*, in G.M. Lyons and M. Mastanduno eds, *Beyond Westphalia: State Sovereignty and International Intervention*, Baltimore, USA: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995, pp.120-21.