Moralities and Modes of Inquiry in International Relations

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While cosmopolitanism can be morally justified as a way of investigating international relations due to its universal moral concern, it is not the only approach that is morally defensible. The morality of states approach, which draws on communitarian notions of morality, includes examples of non-universal sources of moral duties. In this approach, individuals can have moral duties to other members of their political community to defend their community, and can also have duties to people in relation to which they have a social role. Drawing on these communitarian notions, it is possible that there exist morally defensible approaches to studying international relations that draw on both notions of universal and non-universal moral obligations.

Some scholars consider that cosmopolitan approaches to studying international relations, predicated on individuals being the ultimate unit of moral concern and having a universal notion of morality (Pogge 2008, 356), are morally defensible while other non-cosmopolitan approaches are not (Beitz 1979b, 417). I argue to the contrary in this

essay—that it is possible that there exist morally defensible approaches to studying international relations that draw on combinations of both cosmopolitan and communitarian notions of moral obligations. I do not construct such an approach in this essay, but argue that one might exist.

In this essay I define an approach to analysing international relations to be *morally defensible* if the agents in the approach (e.g. states or people) are taken to have moral duties to other agents or duties to act with moral regard to other agents. I take this definition of moral defensibility to allow various approaches to be assessed on a moral basis. The question of whether a particular approach to studying international relations is morally defensible then comes down to whether the relationships between the agents in that approach have elements of morality.

Cosmopolitanism

Beitz describes cosmopolitanism as one of three broad approaches to international morality in modern political thought: *international moral scepticism*, the *morality of states*, and *cosmopolitanism* (Beitz 1979b, 406-7). In this essay I focus primarily on cosmopolitanism and the morality of states approaches.

Cosmopolitanism has a long history, with Kant asserting "that all those who *can* impact each other through their actions *ought* to enter into relations of justice for the regulation of their external conduct" (Orend 2000, 414). There are many examples of cosmopolitan positions in the literature, including that people have a universal moral duty to protect others from great harms and risks if this can be done at low cost (Pogge 2001, 14), a moral duty to reduce severe global poverty, and a positive duty to change the global political and economic order to stop the harms it imposes on the globe's poorest people (Pogge 2001, 22). Rawls contends in *The Law of Peoples* that a familiar principle of justice among free and democratic peoples is that "peoples have a duty to assist other peoples living under unfavourable conditions that prevent their having a just or decent political and social regime" (Rawls 1999, 37).

There are many cosmopolitanisms in the literature, not just one. Tan identifies four classifications (Tan 2004, 10-12): institutional cosmopolitanism (how global political institutions should be reshaped) versus moral cosmopolitanism (moral commitments) (Tan 2004, 10; Beitz 1999, 286-287); a claim about justice versus a claim about culture and individual social identity; weak cosmopolitanism (the conditions universally needed for people to lead minimally adequate lives) versus strong cosmopolitanism (that inequalities between people across borders are a concern of justice); and "extreme" cosmopolitanism (all moral commitments must be justified by reference to cosmopolitan principles) versus "moderate" cosmopolitanism (certain special obligations are acceptable) (Tan 2004, 11).

While there are numerous approaches to cosmopolitanism, they all share three elements: that human beings are the ultimate units of concern, that this status is held by all living people equally, and that individuals are the ultimate units of concern for all (Pogge 2008, 356). Cosmopolitanism involves common moral standards across the globe (Beitz 1980, 390) and contends that state and national borders do not constrain or limit justice (Tan 2004, 19-20). Cosmopolitan approaches can be considered morally defensible as they take human beings universally to be the ultimate units of moral concern. In referring to 'cosmopolitanism' in this essay, I am referring to the approaches falling collectively under the cosmopolitan banner.

The morality of states approach

The *morality of states* approach involves states relating to each other in a similar way as individuals relate to each other in domestic society—states are taken to have rights to the integrity of their territory and to political sovereignty in a comparable way to how people have rights to life and to personal liberty. States have a right to non-interference; it is a crime for one state to violate another's rights; and a state is justified in using use force to defend itself and to punish another state that has violated its rights (Beitz 2009, 326). In the morality of states approach, state boundaries fix the limits of distributive obligations (Beitz 1979b, 416).

Walzer exemplifies this approach, contending that the global community is one of nations and not humanity, and that the rights recognised within it have been designed to regulate states' commercial and military transactions and

protect their integrity (Walzer 1980, 226-7). The key moral principle in Walzer's morality of state approach is respect for each state's right to choose its own approach to domestic politics with states being the ultimate units for moral regard (Luban 1980, 393-4). Walzer's scheme is one of pluralism of states and not universal human rights (Luban 1980, 396). States have the space to express their differences in domestic social and political culture in a similar way as citizens in a liberal democratic society share the same set of rights, allowing themselves to live as they see fit (Orend 2000, 414).

The morality of states approach draws on *communitarianism*, which holds that values and moral concerns relate to and are held within a community, as opposed to the universal nature of moral concerns in cosmopolitanism. The core position in communitarianism is that individuals are social—their social environment always shapes them—and that the liberal idea of a person as pre-social is mistaken (Brown 2002, 92). For communitarianism, individuals are historical—they are located at some point in time and space (Rorty 1983: 585-6; Thompson 1992, 19) and they cannot construct a moral standpoint that transcends their environment (Michael Sandel as quoted in Thompson 1992, 19).

There are strong debates in the literature about the relative value of cosmopolitan and communitarian approaches to morality. These debates are likely founded on authors' deeply held values and hence likely unable to be resolved by reference to philosophical or other foundational bases. They also likely reflect the moral tensions within populations between having moral concern for local communities and for people globally. For example, Walzer argues that states are the principal units of focus as they are the means through which people can enforce their political rights (Walzer 1980, 226), while Beitz argues strongly that people and not states are ends—instead, states are "systems of shared practices and institutions within which communities of persons establish and advance their ends" (Beitz 1979, 180).

Below, I argue that people can have non-universal moral obligations (e.g. to family, friends and communities) in addition to universal ones. As a consequence, approaches to studying international relations that draw on both universal and non-universal moral obligations are morally defensible. I do not argue that it is morally defensible for a pluralist approach of the morality of states to set a limit to the universality of human rights (Luban 2008, 396)[1], instead that morally defensible non-cosmopolitan approaches to studying international relations may exist.

Individuals can have moral duties to other members of their political community

Individuals can have moral duties to other members of their political community or communities that may not owe to people globally. This does not imply that there are no universal human rights, but that people may have some non-universal moral duties in addition to their universal ones. Scheffler frames this argument in terms of *special responsibilities* (to family and community) and *general responsibilities* (to others), contending that the two can coexist (Scheffler 1999, 102), a position Kane agrees with (Kane 1999, 114).

Walzer argues strongly that individuals have moral duties to members of their political community or communities in his volume *Just and Unjust Wars* and in the subsequent debate between him on one side and Beitz (1979b, 2009), Doppelt (1980), Wasserstrom (1978) and Luban (1980) on the other. He first argues that the duties extend to other members of the political community that underlies a state—the focus on the state is simply a proxy for the associated political community (Walzer 1980, 210). He then argues that the members of a political community are bound together and that citizens must defend each another and their mode of culture and life (Walzer 1980, 211) as any military or other intervention into the political community violates the rights of individuals by interfering with the integrity of the individuals' political community (Walzer 1980, 211). This is important as political communities are needed for the exercising and enforcement of individual human rights and there is no global political community of humanity (Walzer 1980, 226).

Walzer draws on social contract theory to conceive of his notion of the state and associated political community (Walzer 1980, 211). He considers that life in a community and the pursuit of personal liberty require both "relatively self-enclosed arenas of political development" and "shared history, communal sentiment, accepted conventions" (Walzer 1980, 228). While his focus is on arguing against (almost all) cosmopolitan moralities and military and humanitarian interventions, his ideas provide the basis for a communitarian morality.

Walzer's contention that the enforcement of human rights can only occur within political communities has strength. This implies the existence of a potential communitarian moral duty among members of a political community to defend their community—a moral obligation that extends only to other members of their community. The purpose of defending the community is to ensure that members of the community are able to exercise and enforce their human rights through the ongoing existence of a political community. Failing to defend it could harm oneself and other members of the community.

Another potential communitarian moral duty arises from Walzer's notion that life in a community requires the ongoing existence of shared histories, conventions and cultures. It could be argued that this generates a moral obligation on members of the community to protect and defend such shared aspects as failing to do so may harm fellow community members. While this argument has value, it is not as strong as the argument that a political community should be defended to allow its members to exercise and enforce their human rights.

Individuals can have moral duties to people arising from their social roles

Individuals can have moral duties to people arising from their social roles. Communities comprise, in part, complex webs of relationships, including both social relationships (e.g. family and friendships) and non-social relationships (e.g. economic and political ones). According to Samuel Gorovitz, a person holding a social role bears the associated rights and duties including its moral duties (Beitz 1979b, 420). Extending Gorovitz's argument to non-social roles, it reasonable to contend that the latter may also come equipped with moral obligations. For example, employers and employees may have mutual (although different) obligations to each other while political leaders may have moral obligations to their populations, e.g. to ensure community safety.

In parallel to the web of differentiated moral obligations across a community, people may have elements of a common identity and a loyalty to a particular community and state (e.g. as a consequence of nationalism) (Beitz 1979b, 420). This common identity and sense of loyalty may engender feelings of mutual bonds and moral obligation among members of the community, a sense that is unlikely to extend to people globally (Beitz 1999, 599). Members of a community may also have moral duties to not interfere with the existing web of relationships, as this web may in effect help to support people in their lives and interfering with it may result in harm to others (Beitz 1979b, 420-421).

These are strong arguments that communitarian systems of values are morally defensible. Cosmopolitans have argued against non-universal moralities on the basis that the most essential requirement of any plausible morality is the universal equal moral standing of all people and that different citizenships do not have moral relevance (Beitz 1979b, 417). These rejections of communitarianism, however, are not convincing as they imply rejecting the idea that individuals can have special moral duties to their closest family and friends, which notions of reciprocity and care count against. Beitz himself agrees that one weakness of cosmopolitanism is that it does not take seriously the need for people to develop relationships in order to have full lives (Beitz 1999, 291).

Approaches to Studying International Relations

It may be possible to create approaches to studying international relations that draw on both cosmopolitan and communitarian notions of moral obligations. I do not construct such an approach, but argue that it is possible to hold both types of duties at the same time, a condition needed for such an approach to exist.

Kane and Scheffler argue that it is ethically superior for people to hold both universal and non-universal moral duties than to hold only one type (Kane 1999, 108). As an example, Samuel Gorovitz argues that while food should be distributed so that everyone has a minimally adequate diet as this is essential for exercising human rights, it may be justified to treat family, friends and community preferentially on the basis of loyalty provided this does not occur at the cost of violating others' human rights (Beitz 1979b, 422).

A key element of holding both universal and non-universal moral duties is to determine the appropriate balance between them. It may be challenging to do this but people have an obligation to do so given the complexities of the world (Scheffler 1999, 106; Kane 1999, 114). As an example of this difficult balancing act, Tan argues that

cosmopolitan justice does not preclude patriotism (Tan 2004, 14).

The arguments that people can hold both cosmopolitan and communitarian notions are strong—people are obliged to weigh up universal and non-universal moral duties in coming to views about their own obligations given the competing demands of social and global actors. It is then possible for individuals to hold both universal and non-universal moral obligations at the same time.

Conclusion

Cosmopolitan approaches to investigating international relations are morally defensible as they regard human beings, universally, as the ultimate units of moral concern. Non-cosmopolitan approaches, drawing on both universal and non-universal moral obligations, may also be morally defensible.

Drawing on Walzer's work on communitarianism, I argued that individuals may have non-universal moral duties to other members of their political community to defend their community in order to allow community members to exercise and enforce their human rights. People may also have moral obligations to their community members to defend their shared histories, conventions and cultures. Furthermore, individuals can have non-universal moral duties to others arising from their social roles, and moral obligations to other members of their community arising from a common identity and loyalty to a state.

People can hold both universal and non-universal moral duties at the same time. An approach to studying international relations that draws on both universal and non-universal moral duties would then be morally defensible as the agents in that approach would have moral obligations to each other. I have not outlined such an approach in this essay; however, it is plausible that one exists.

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Endnote

[1] Luban argues this is one implication of the pluralist aspect of the morality of states approach.

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