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Ethics in International Relations: Expanding the Contributions of Latin American Scholars

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The field of ethical issues in international relations has generally been understood to include such topics as just war, humanitarian intervention and the responsibility to protect, global justice, economic sanctions, global governance, and more recently, issues concerning migration and the environment. Within this field, there have been discussions of considerable importance on a wide array of questions: is there a right to intervene in situations of internal conflict? Are there occasions when there is a moral duty to do so? Are there forms of warfare that are inherently morally impermissible? How do we weigh security interests and humanitarian concerns when they come into conflict? In foreign policy and global governance, are economic measures, such as sanctions, always permissible? Or should they be subject to the same restrictions as warfare? Are there any ethical limitations on what may be done by institutions of global governance, such as the United Nations Security Council?

While there has been extensive discussion about these and similar questions within the academic domain of ethics in international relations, the conversation has been limited in certain ways. The participants have predominantly been from Western Europe, the United States, Canada, and Australia. Contributions from scholars in Africa, Asia, the Arab world, and Latin America are quite limited. The lack of diversity is problematic on several levels. The lack of global representation means that the intellectual discourse is profoundly inequitable and exclusionary. But additionally, the content of the field itself is not as robust as it might be.

Consider the question: Does the use of drones in warfare violate the principles of just war? It is an important and timely question. But within the academic field,

those who address this question will almost exclusively come from countries that use, or may use, drones; and none will be from Pakistan, Afghanistan, or other countries against which drones have been used. In large measure, this holds true for the other topics of ethics in international relations as well. For example, those writing on the topic of economic sanctions will typically be from the countries that impose sanctions; and none will be from Cuba, Nicaragua, Iran, North Korea, or the other countries that have had sanctions imposed upon them.

There is a certain structural distortion here: we typically hear the ethical arguments and perspectives of scholars from the countries that use these measures; and we hear very little from those in the countries against which they are used.

In making such a broad statement, I want to add a number of caveats. First, there are certainly many commentaries and publications on the topics of warfare, intervention, and so forth, written by intellectuals, journalists, bloggers, and others in the countries impacted by these experiences. However, I am referring specifically to the academic field of ethics in international relations.

Second, I am not suggesting that all American or Canadian or French scholars have the same position. Clearly that is not the case. There is considerable diversity, and debate, among scholars in this field on any given issue. Nor is it the case that these scholars necessarily reflect or agree with the policies of their governments. Certainly many do not. However, the range of views among Latin American scholars is likely to be rather different than the range of views among U.S. scholars, in ways that reflect the differences in national and regional perspectives and experiences. This project

allows us to explore some of the ways these differences may be manifested.

Finally, I do not mean to suggest that there is a single “Latin American” point of view. Certainly there is likely to be as much diversity among Latin American scholars on issues of ethics in international relations as there is on any other topic of discussion or debate.

With all these caveats in mind, this collection is intended to be a small exercise toward the end of enriching the dialogue within the field by inviting contributions from Latin American scholars on issues of particular relevance to them. This collection consists of four articles. The first, “Tropas Salvadoreñas en Irak: Implicaciones éticas según Kant,” by a team of researchers at the Universidad Centroamericana in Managua, Nicaragua, addresses an arrangement between the Salvadoran and U.S. governments in which Salvadoran soldiers were sent to fight in Iraq, under the command of the U.S. government. Thousands of Salvadoran soldiers were sent and were often placed in the most dangerous areas of the fighting. Hundreds of them died in this conflict. The authors consider the implications of this, within the framework of Kantian ethics.

The second, “Ciudadanía universal y libre movilidad: Comentarios sobre una utopía ecuatoriana,” by Ahmed Correa, responds to the ethical debate over open borders within the literature on migration. Much of the discussion responds to the reluctance of host countries to accept migrants and the resistance to open borders. However, Ecuador is quite extraordinary in that it has an explicit constitutional commitment to universal citizenship. The author explores the implementation of this commitment, as well as the contradictions and ambivalence that characterize it.

The third, “U.S. Economic Sanctions on Cuba: An International Ethics Perspective,” is an article by Cuban scholar Raúl Rodríguez on the ethical aspects of the sanctions imposed on Cuba by the United States. He draws on both utilitarian and rights-based frameworks in looking at the humanitarian impact of the sanctions.

The fourth article, “Responsibility to Protect as a Norm under Construction: The Divergent Views from the South,” by Raúl Salgado Espinoza, looks at how the notion of the “responsibility to protect” was formulated, and why it has been met with such a mixed reception in Latin America.

This collection is intended to provide a venue for these scholars to consider topics of interest to them within the field of ethics in international relations. But it is also intended to be a first step toward providing greater intellectual depth to the field through greater inclusion and diversity. ■

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