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The Political Ethics of International Relations

The two major developments in the literature on international relations during the past ten years have been widely different and yet, as we shall see, they are not unrelated. One is the growth of a "scientific" theory of conflictual cooperation. It applies game theory to the study of the conditions and possibilities of cooperation under anarchy. The most characteristic contribution to this literature was the October 1985 issue of *World Politics,* which tries to show how game theory could be used to bridge the gap that has developed between the study of diplomatic-strategic behavior and that of the international political economy.

The other major development is the appearance, especially in the United States and in Britain, of a new literature about the ethical aspects of international relations and particularly of foreign policy. These works are both analytical and prescriptive. They are analytical insofar as they concern themselves not only, like so many writings on international affairs, with the facts of power and the description of interests but also with the moral choices faced by decision makers or by citizens when they have to engage in transactions among different societies or deal with those domestic issues that affect foreigners. These works also concern them-

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selves with the moral consequences that decisions entail even when the decision maker is unaware of the moral nature of his choices. Principally, however, this new literature is prescriptive; this is probably its most daring aspect. It asks the following question: given the nature of international politics, given the constraints that operate on any foreign policy, what are, on the one hand, the moral *restraints* that actors (states, international or regional organizations, transnational actors such as multinational corporations, and so on) should observe and, on the other hand, what are the moral *objectives* that they ought to give themselves?

This new body of work rests on three assumptions. The first assumption is that all politics is a goal-oriented activity (indeed, one of the weaknesses of many of the attempts at turning the study of international relations into a science is that they concentrate on means instead of starting with goals, or else they consider the actors' goals as given or fixed, which is a serious mistake). One major difference between, say, international politics and sports is that the goals of foreign policy are multiple; they are selected by the state and they consist of both material objectives and "milieu" targets that embody a conception of the good, a notion of right and wrong. The second assumption is that international relations is a domain of moral choice. It is not the realm of pure necessity, nor is it a field in which the moral code is different from the code that exists in personal life, in the life of groups, or in domestic politics. The limits within which this moral code operates may be much more stringent, and the possibilities of moral action may be more limited, but the code itself is not radically different. Although the substance of morality does not vary with the sphere of action, it remains true that the world is characterized by a great diversity of moral codes actually observable in different cultures or societies, and it is also true that there are many competing moral systems or theories, that is, there are serious disagreements about what constitutes a moral imperative, about how we define

the criteria of morality and rank our values. The third assumption is that this diversity does not vitiate or preclude efforts at moral reasoning in any field of applied ethics.

The new literature on ethics and international affairs has many authors; some are philosophers (see for instance the 1985 issue of the journal *Ethics* on nuclear issues). Indeed, philosophers seem to have had a field day trying to cope with the formidable problems raised by nuclear weapons, often at an extremely high level of abstraction. But much of the new literature comes from political theorists, such as Michael Walzer or Charles Beitz, and political scientists, such as Joseph Nye and Robert W. Tucker. I will now turn to some remarks about the antecedents of this literature; I will then ask myself why it has developed now; I will briefly review the major contributions so far and finally make a few more personal remarks.

The Antecedents of the New Literature

The new literature has august antecedents. The philosophies of international relations that have dominated the intellectual history of the field always had an ethical dimension. In succession, the field has been marked by the Christian philosophy of just war, the liberal conception that emerged when the modern state system appeared, and the Marxist approach to world affairs. The Christian doctrine of just war was based on the model or assumption of a worldwide Christian community under natural law, with the Church playing the role of authority and official interpreter of that law. The doctrine entailed an attempt not at banning the use of force but at imposing limits on it. In other words, it recognized, or implied, the inevitability of evil but tried both to contain it and to harness evil impulses to the common good. Hence the complex system of restraints on the ends and means of force, a remarkable mix of absolute prescriptions (such as those concerning the ends toward which force could legitimately be used, or the

principle of the immunity of noncombatants) and of calculations of consequences.

The liberal conception had deep Christian roots. One of its major branches, that which affirmed the existence of natural rights and whose greatest founding fathers were Locke and Grotius, had its own origins in the traditional Christian conception of natural law. Both the natural-rights branch and the utilitarian one were (and still are, insofar as liberalism is alive today) oriented toward the future. Liberalism advocated and predicted a society of self-determined, self-governing nations that would settle their conflicts without war, nations in which the powers of the state would be sharply curtailed by the free transnational activities of individuals (such as travel and trade). It thus offers a vision of both an interstate society and a transnational society. The Kantian variant of liberalism contains a strong emphasis on the state: it stresses the need for certain proper, that is, constitutional, institutions, and the league for peace that Kant envisaged rested on agreements among states. Anglo-Saxon liberalism put less of an emphasis on the state and much more on the role of individuals, who would reduce the state to a collection of public services controlled by domestic and world public opinion. Clearly, there was a definite conception of the political good in these visions.

Finally, the Marxist philosophy of history predicted the final abolition of class conflicts and of states; the end of alienation would be at the same time the end of social struggles and the end of state quarrels. Although the stages of human history that precede this nirvana offer nothing but false moralities, that is, ideologies in which the conceptions of the good merely disguise the interests of the powerful, the final vision is, once again, clearly a moral one.

All these conceptions express dissatisfaction with the moral implications of what has sometimes been called, since Rousseau, the "state of war," that is, the state of permanent tension and recurrent violent conflict among the temporal units into which the world is divided. Now, this state of war is itself both a latent,

and often manifest, reality in the so-called Westphalian system of international relations and an intellectual tradition of its own. I am referring to what is probably the most distinguished school of thought in the history of international relations, realism (the best recent study of it is that of Michael Smith, *Realist Thought from Weber to Kissinger* (Louisiana University Press, 1987).

Realists, who assert and describe the permanence and inevitability of violent conflict in an anarchical milieu deprived of common central power and almost devoid of common values, have always been bothered by the ethical issue. Some realists have simply denied that ethics has much to do with international affairs. For Machiavelli, indeed, all politics, domestic as well as international, is a state of war, and the Christian morality that is often observed in private life is irrelevant to and destructive of the political universe. For Max Weber all politics, again, entails violence, but the structure of international affairs, which rules out a monopoly on the legitimate use of force, condemns the world to inexpiable clashes of values and power. The statesman, whose primary responsibility is to his own nation, cannot morally transcend its borders. Other realists have, in effect, smuggled a certain brand of ethics into their stark and bloody universe. It is the ethics of moderation or of the least evil, and one can analyze the superficially cool but deeply passionate work of Thucydides, the writings of Hans Morgenthau, and those of George Kennan, the most articulate critic of the legalistic and moralistic approaches in international relations, as pleas for an enlightened or moderate conception of the national interest that would certainly not eliminate but would at least mitigate conflict and allow for a modicum of comity among states.

As the density of relations and of processes among states and across states increased in the last two centuries, ethical considerations became important in the actions of states, particularly in two kinds of cases that brought about profound changes of behavior, regimes, and maps. On the one hand, we find the sudden, recurrent

appearance of revolutionary actors who try to reshape international relations according to certain principles: France during the French Revolution, Russia after the October Revolution, and Nazi Germany. All these actors went way beyond the traditional kinds of possession goals, onto attempts at recasting the milieu in their own image. On the other hand, after the major wars that marked the breakdown of an international system, ambitious peace settlements have tried to create conditions for stability that very clearly derived from a combination of political and moral principles. I am referring to the Congress of Vienna and its reassertion of monarchic legitimacy and, of course, also to the Wilsonian settlements of 1919, as well as to the failed attempt at building a new world order in 1945.

And yet we encounter a paradox. Despite these intellectual traditions and this massive intrusion of political-ethical considerations at important moments in modern international affairs, the ethical dimension seemed to disappear in the scholarly literature of international relations. Why? A first cause appears to be the general tendency toward "value-free" research and theory. In the social sciences, research and theory were conceived as a reflection on or an explanation of what *is,* in reaction against the mixing of the *is* and the *ought* that had prevailed before. In other words, social science has wanted to conquer its independence from all aspects of philosophy. This ambition did not appear until late in the nineteenth century; it is interesting in this respect to compare Tocqueville and Weber. The latter is the real father of the value-free conception, whereas Tocqueville, in his analyses of democracy in America, France, and England, in his writings on revolutions, and in his analytic history of the development of the French state, never tried to dissociate the *is* from the *ought,* his analytical concepts from his value preferences. To be sure, the Weberian conception never conquered everything and everyone: as one of Weber's most brilliant disciples, Raymond Aron, pointed out, scientific analysis in sociology and political science is almost inevitably

followed by, or almost inevitably leads to, an ethical-political evaluation. The grip of the scientific ideal, however, appears to be most tenacious in the study of international relations. Harsh criticisms, including those of Raymond Aron, have not dispelled the dream of a science of international relations built on the models of the natural sciences and of modern economics—a science consisting of formal models in which the preferences of the actors are treated as givens and in which attempts are made at quantifying the multiple imponderables of international affairs.

A second cause for the disappearance of the ethical dimension in the literature is the deep mark of the realist intellectual tradition. It was a double impact. On the one hand, realists seemed to be arguing that there was no room for ethical considerations in a Hobbesian universe; such considerations make sense only within a well-ordered state. This conception has been most recently restated by Felix Oppenheim, who argues, in his article "National Interest, Rationality, and Morality," that foreign policy is nothing but the quest for the most effective means to reach unavoidable or necessary goals; it is a domain not of moral principles but of rational choice.[1] On the other hand, realist works also try to show that international affairs could be seriously damaged and made more violent or irrational by the introduction of ethical considerations. This is what George Kennan pointed out; E. H. Carr had previously stated that ethical notions in foreign policy were likely to be either a hypocritical disguise or a sign of ethical confusion.

As a result, ethical considerations have for a long time been relegated almost exclusively to the literature of international law. Here they appear inevitable, since international law is about how states *ought* to behave, and the key issues in the theory of international law—the foundations of obligation, the nature of sovereignty—all raise questions about the nature and direction of international relations. The answers reproduce the traditional philosophies: positivism (the international-law translation of realism),

natural law, liberalism, and Marxism. But international relations theory has reacted against international law, which it has tried to describe, deconstruct, or demythologize as a mere tool of states and their interests.

Confronting a New International System

Why has a new literature on ethics and international relations developed in the last ten years? As usual, we have to look for an answer in the evolution of international relations themselves. The density of those relations has increased even more than it had in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. We now live in the first truly global international system and it is characterized by two highly important phenomena. The first is the nuclear revolution. The invention of nuclear weapons has created formidable new dimensions of insecurity and, as one statesman after another has proclaimed, highlighted the bankruptcy of the traditional approach to security as a zero-sum game. The second phenomenon is economic interdependence in an increasingly integrated world economy. This has meant both that domestic politics, and particularly domestic public policies in economic and social matters, are at the mercy of outside forces and that domestic needs and demands can often be met only by international cooperation. The nuclear revolution and economic interdependence amount to a huge change in the significance of sovereignty. Sovereignty now does not mean authority abroad (including the authority to accept voluntary limitations); it means only the authority to cope with a host of external penetrations, obstacles, and constraints.

These new phenomena put an enormous emphasis on the problem of change. Letting things happen, behaving as states have traditionally behaved, following the customary logic of conflict and competition among a hugely increased and diversified crowd of actors could easily be catastrophic, and yet the political logic is almost inevitably driven by the quest for short-term gains. One

key innovation, the result of the multiple crises of the twentieth century, has been the attempt by states to achieve, at home and abroad, deliberate, planned change—the welfare state at home, agreements among superpowers on rules of the game, the establishment of international regimes, efforts at regional integration, the turn to international organizations, and so on. Now, planned change necessarily involves values, because planned change reintroduces the dimension of "ought-ness" in international affairs.

There are also purely intellectual reasons for the development of the new literature. One notices a certain dissatisfaction with the "value-free" conception of social science. One could almost argue that the more international relationists, to use Hedley Bull's expression, try to square the circle by turning the study of international affairs into science, the more other scholars realize the philosophical limitation of the attempt. After all, in dealing with human affairs the scholar's role is not exhausted by the familiar dialectic of explanation and interpretation. Explanation means trying to identify the causal connections that led to an event; interpretation is an attempt at exploring the meaning of the event or phenomenon. When one is through with explanation and interpretation, there remain an extra dimension and task: evaluation, or judgment, which goes beyond the quest for the historical significance or meaning of the event or phenomenon and implies a moral position. Let us take the example of the Cuban missile crisis. It is easy to see how, after one has tried to explain the surprising Soviet move and the American reaction, and after one has interpreted the place of this crisis in Soviet and American foreign policy and its significance for the international system, one is still left with the need to take a moral stand on the risks and choices that characterized the diplomacy and strategy of the two antagonists, and on the solution they reached.

There has also been considerable dissatisfaction with realism. Quite a number of years ago Arnold Wolfers showed how unconvincing arguments about necessity were in the realm of national security: there are, in fact, always choices, and the idea that survival and national security are beyond moral judgment, or can be envisaged apart from moral judgment, is both shortsighted and dangerous. Insofar as morality, driven out of the main door, is smuggled in through the rear window in the works of some realists, one is left in a very uncomfortable position. Max Weber's conception of international relations as a clash of national assertions and cultures and his conception of the duties of the statesman resulted in a view according to which a German statesman could have no other political and moral horizon than the unmitigated pursuit of the German national interest. This position was arbitrary (since in the Weberian universe there seems to be no reason why one national set of goals ought to be judged morally superior to another), and yet it was presented as an absolute. As for Hans Morgenthau's conception of the national interest, it did not make sufficiently clear the fact that the definition of this interest is derived not only from geopolitical considerations but also from values, most of which originate in domestic beliefs and intellectual traditions (this is as true for the way in which survival is defined as for the selection of goals other than survival and security). As I explained thirty years ago in *Contemporary Theory in International Relations* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1960), Morgenthau's assumption that a correctly defined national interest would be ipso facto moral and lead to an international politics of moderation strikes me as very time-bound; it assumes a universe of statesmen who do not have to take the passions of nationalism too much into account.

Finally, there was a reason intrinsic to political philosophy for the emergence of political ethics in international relations. Political philosophy has traditionally been about the good state. Indeed, the current critique of liberalism, which accuses it of "bracketing" the search for the good and concerning itself only with the definition of rights, forgets that behind this emphasis on rights there is

a conception of a good state, which happens to be the state that grants such rights and allows for a free competition among divergent views of the good. Traditional political philosophy did not go much beyond the state, not only because the state was correctly seen as the highest focus of human allegiance but also because it was conceptualized as a largely self-sufficient, sovereign unit. But as the international system became more and more obviously a major constraint on states—indeed, one particularly influential theory of international relations, that of Kenneth Waltz, presents the international system as the determinant of state behavior in a universe of anarchy—as this system began to develop a host of institutions of its own, traditional ethical-political concerns could not but be transported from the level of the state to the level of the international system itself.

Thus we find an interesting convergence of two very different strands. On the one hand, there is the explicitly ethical reasoning of works such as those of Beitz, Nye, or myself, which examine the possibilities and limits of ethical behavior in foreign policy. On the other hand, there is the question that underlies the apparently purely "scientific" research of such writers as Robert Keohane and the other students of international regimes, or the research of Robert Axelrod and the other enthusiasts of game theory. This question is whether, in a world in which self-help can easily be counterproductive or disastrous, cooperation that is mutually and genuinely beneficial to states can emerge in the midst of anarchy and on the basis of calculations of interests. Even if some of its champions deny it, the literature on the emergence of cooperation is not value-neutral; both this literature and the works on game theory seek a way out of conflict within the constraints of the Westphalian system. Indeed, even the vocabulary is not neutral, insofar as game theory relies on a somewhat simpleminded dialectic of cooperation versus defection! The explicit ethical strand asks, in a variety of ways, for moral progress in international affairs; the scientific literature tries to prove that such progress is possible under certain conditions.

Philosophical Debate and Political Achievements

It is impossible in a brief account to do justice to the many contributions that the new literature has already made. I would like to comment first on what could be called the philosophical debate within the literature, and then on the political achievements with which it can be credited.

Philosophically, this literature has rediscovered some of the most fundamental and intractable questions of moral philosophy. Three appear as particularly vexing. First, practically every moral theory or system rests on assumptions of universality, on the belief that moral reasoning can persuade individuals of different societies and beliefs, or that the moral intuitions of human beings are not fundamentally irreconcilable or intransitive. And yet, as I indicated before, there is an undeniable diversity of moral conceptions and standards. To what extent is the advocacy of a single moral code a form of hubris or of hypocrisy, the attempt to impose one particular philosophy on others? Conversely, does the recognition of diversity entail a resignation to moral cacophony and conflict? Thus the issue of relativism versus universality is one which has to be faced, even if it cannot easily be resolved.

Second, there is the tension, so familiar to moral philosophers, between two approaches to morality: the deontological approach, which relies on imperatives and commands and which is best exemplified by Kant, versus the various moral approaches that emphasize the need to take consequences and context into account (utilitarianism is only one of these approaches). It is hard to imagine a statesman who does not seek to evaluate consequences and whose decisions are made without reference to the context, but there is of course a constant danger of diluting or ditching principles and slipping into mere opportunism when consequences (which are in any case hard to foresee) and context become the dominant considerations.

Third, there is the question, raised, for instance, by Charles Beitz in his influential book *Political Theory and International Relations*

(Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979), whether morality and self-interest are basically incompatible. Is a moral act one that is purely disinterested? In this case the argument for an ethics of foreign policy becomes pretty hard to sustain. To be sure, there is a danger of assuming all too easily that self-interest and morality necessarily coincide, or that morality is simply another name for an enlightened self-interest; clearly, there are cases in which morality and even a broad conception of self-interest will be in conflict, but how far can one go in demanding altruism or self-abnegation of states and their representatives?

I turn now to the intellectual contributions of the ethical literature to our understanding of international politics. They appear in three realms. First, the new literature has intellectually sharpened some of the underlying dilemmas of contemporary international relations. In the realm of force, it has made us look more closely at the effects of different strategies and it has raised important questions of trade-offs. For instance, insofar as deterrence is concerned, we have asked ourselves about the ethical significance of a peace preserved by a threat of indiscriminate destruction. On the other hand, if pulling away from such a threat (either by moving toward more accurate and discriminating nuclear weapons, as Albert Wohlstetter or Fred Iklé would want us to, or by moving toward nuclear disarmament) would actually weaken deterrence or make the world safe for conventional war, does this represent moral progress? Philosophers and political theorists have raised ethical questions about the reliance of statesmen and citizens on the expectation that deterrence would remain solid forever and that crises could always be managed. At this stage the ethical literature is torn between two currents. There is a literature of total condemnation of the nuclear universe, deterrence and all, a condemnation that is often (although not always) based on absolute principles but that may well be not only unrealistic but potentially dangerous. Another strand tries, often in rather tortured ways, to vindicate deterrence, not merely as a fact of life

but as a morally acceptable position, and even to find "centimeters" of possible moral use of nuclear arms, which is of course not without enormous risks of its own.

To the conundrum of deterrence must be added the conundrum of nonproliferation. The ethical goal of limiting the spread of nuclear weapons, especially in areas where the conditions that have kept deterrence reasonably stable between the superpowers may not be reproduced, raises a conflict between the value of international security and the value of national sovereignty. Then there are all the moral problems of intervention, a domain that remains insufficiently explored in the new literature. In a world where nonintervention is practically impossible, in which intervention takes many forms other than military assistance and violent intrusion, are there possible guidelines? I am referring to guidelines concerning the nature and seriousness of the threat necessary to justify military intervention; or guidelines concerning the capacity to affect positively the political, economic, and social life of another society, for instance through economic or humanitarian intervention, without violating this society's autonomy; or guidelines concerning covert operations—a subject that Gregory Treverton's recent book has very sharply put into focus (*Covert Action: The Limits of Intervention in the Postwar World.* New York: Basic Books, 1987). Even if such guidelines are possible, what would be their meaning and effects in a universe of self-help?

In the realm of human rights and distributive justice there are, again, many conflicts and trade-offs highlighted by the ethical literature. There is the conflict between self-determination, or sovereignty, and justice. National sovereignty can be a formidable obstacle to attempts at achieving justice across borders or at instituting effective international or regional human-rights regimes; sovereignty is also a colossal obstacle to attempts at what might be called international centralization or centralized decision making for the solution of problems that are way beyond the means of any one state. Furthermore, there are conflicts between the different

dimensions of human rights and of justice (justice for the state versus justice for individuals in a state, equality of opportunity versus equality of outcomes, trade-offs between equity and efficiency, and so on). There are also conflicts between widely different philosophical conceptions of our responsibility to others who happen to live outside our borders.

Secondly, the new works have important implications for the theory of international relations. By underlining the poverty of traditional realism and of what is sometimes called neorealism, they offer major corrections to such theories. The new ethical writings also confirm that there are many different ways of "reading" the nature of international relations. The "scientific" literature is dominated by the old realist reading or by the structural reading of Kenneth Waltz's neorealism. In other words, it is dominated by the "anarchy" formulation. There are several alternatives that the new literature has brought forward. One is the conception of the international milieu as an international society—partly conflictual, partly collaborative because of common interests, institutions, and norms. This could be called a neoliberal reading of international affairs and is to some extent derived from the remarkable treatment by Hedley Bull in his book *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1977), which was itself grounded in a Grotian interpretation of international affairs. It offers a "statist" conception of international morality, insofar as it looks at the international order as above all a society of states, but it is a statist conception that, instead of stressing anarchy and conflict, stresses the social and cultural underpinnings of interstate relations. There exists also a far more radical alternative to the realist approach, the idea of an emergent world (and not just international or interstate) society or world community. This appears in two very different versions: that of Charles Beitz, who takes as his point of departure the writings on interdependence and the erosion of sovereignty, and that of the whole literature on dependency, which of course entails a much gloomier

reading of interdependence but, again, differs drastically from the "horizontal" approach of anarchy.

Another correction is provided by the importance that much of the ethical literature grants to what Kenneth Waltz, in his famous earlier book *Man, the State, and War,* had called the second image, that is, the domestic political and economic regime, a factor quite often neglected by realists—and by Waltz himself in his *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, 1979). With respect both to war and to human rights, the new literature emphasizes that moral progress seems to be linked to the development of democracy. Finally, the new literature corrects international relations theory insofar as these works stress both urgency and discontinuity; they tend to show that merely trusting historical forces will not provide sufficient moral opportunities to prevent disasters. In other words, they state, and sometimes scream, that the international system is not self-regulating; that in the realm of force, deterrence, left to itself, may well self-destruct; that even if it lasts between the superpowers, it still leaves room for the chaos and violence of limited wars and intervention; that it has no answer to the problems of nuclear proliferation; that in the realm of economic interdependence, the long-term mutuality of interests in a world of rabidly uneven economic and social conditions still leaves room for highly disruptive state temptations to engage in short-term zero-sum games; and that the spread of disorder may come not only from the deliberate manipulation of interdependence but from the unforeseen effects of domestic political decisions. The ethical literature tells us that the processes of change on which the world has relied are today often far too dangerous, insofar as they entail the use of force, and are probably irrelevant, given the transformations of power and of the international system.

The great merit of this literature is to show the need for new approaches, for what Mr. Gorbachev now calls "new thinking"; indeed, the fundamental question that it asks is whether the tradi-

tional realist model is compatible any longer with the realization of essential human values. Obviously this model embodies some such values, such as self-determination, but at what cost? While the ethical writers are aware of the limits of moral opportunity and action in international affairs, they tend to reject the view that self-interest is the only possible morality of states, especially as self-interest is itself a dependent variable defined in the light of external circumstances, internal structures, and values and ideologies.

The third major political achievement of the new literature lies in its approach to the future. Much contemporary literature in international relations asks what is politically likely and desirable. But its answers are unconvincing. First, this literature is unsatisfactory because of the very indeterminacy of international affairs. Some broad trends are certainly predictable, but what are not predictable are crises, actual policy choices, and how these interact with trends. Hence the endless multiplication of often equally plausible scenarios among which it is quite impossible to choose. Second, as a result, much of this literature smuggles in preferences and is thus doubly deficient, analytically and ethically, because these preferences are rarely made explicit. The new ethical writings move from indeterminacy to freedom. They point out that the future is indeed open. These works' contribution to futurology is important, both because they shed the pretense of scientific forecasting, and because they inject into reflections on the future the indispensable element of intentionality; this allows for the fruitful cooperation of political scientists and philosophers trying to answer the question: under what political conditions could certain values become effective policies?

All this being said, the new literature has, of course, weaknesses of its own. The philosophical foundations of the writers' preferences and arguments are not always made sufficiently clear, as Hedley Bull pointed out years ago in his review of Michael Walzer's *Just and Unjust Wars.* Moreover, there may well be an overconcentration of talent and ingenuity in the realm of the superpowers' nuclear conflict. The thorny issues of nuclear ethics are certainly the most terrifying, but they are not the only ones in this world, and I personally wish that less energy would be spent on what I would call the two theologies of nuclear strategy, the theology of strategic studies and the more ethical theology. More attention ought to be paid to the formidably complex problems of human rights and, above all, justice in a world of considerable misery, population explosion, unregulated migrations, environmental disorders, and so forth. In a sense, it is the very abstractness of the nuclear issue that seems to excite the authors; writing intelligently about the other issues requires a much broader range of empirical knowledge and experience.

Extending the Debate

I would like to end these remarks with some more personal suggestions. I hope to develop them at far greater length in a book that Michael Smith and I plan to write. I believe that those of us who are interested in the ethical dimensions of foreign policy must begin by recognizing that in today's world the states are simply not ready to commit hara-kiri; that statehood still represents a good; and that statehood is the object of the aspirations and hopes of individuals in most of the world (observe the Palestinians). In other words, sovereignty, however much it may be leaking, is not merely a reality but a value. Therefore, ethics cannot hope to establish the nirvana of a world government in the short run; it can aim only at moralizing state behavior, on the one hand, and, on the other, at enlarging in a variety of ways what could be called the cosmopolitan sphere of international affairs, both through interstate institutions and regimes and through the establishment of a transnational society.

While the opportunities for moral action are clearly limited, a margin for action exists. Here, as in many other realms of human

endeavor, necessity is the mother of morality. The fear of violent death and the fear of economic collapse are the international-relations equivalent of that famous threat of hanging which so powerfully concentrates the mind. Both these fears give rise to imperatives that can also be seen as a result of learning—learning the two very different lessons of 1914 (that is, the danger of an unstoppable war mechanism) and of 1939 (the dangers of appeasement), and learning the lessons of the Great Depression. These imperatives are reenforced by the transformations of power, the sharp limits on the usefulness of force, and the restraints that operate on economic power in an interdependent realm—transformations I have tried to analyze at some length in previous books.

There are, of course, preconditions to moral action. The first is moral awareness: awareness of the fact that morality is an integral part of public policy, an element that is present even when it is not consciously included in the calculations of statesmen. We are aware of this in our private life and in our domestic political life, at least in democracies. We are much less aware of it in foreign-policy making, partly because of the absence of a world community, partly because of the grip of the realist tradition. Yet our decisions always have moral effects on others, and even decisions that we think are based on considerations of prudence and expediency turn out to be grounded in an underlying conception of the good. It is this implicit theory of the good that determines our explicit definition of the prudent.

Thus there is a need for a moral vision in the statesman and the citizen. Morality is not reducible to cost-benefit analyses (in most issues, evaluating what is a cost and what is a benefit is highly subjective and indeed dependent on one's values); nor does it mean accommodating all claims (one has to listen to them, of course, but a final judgment is still necessary on which claims are right and which are wrong; political strategy may require prudence in dealing with the claims that are wrong, but a moral strategy

requires such judgment). In other words, the statesman and the citizen need to begin with a moral conception, that is, with certain principles to be applied while taking into account their consequences, since political ethics needs to be an ethics both of ends and of consequences.

Not only is moral awareness needed; political awareness is indispensable as well. Next to cynicism, the greatest threat to morality is disembodied idealism. Indeed, the difficulty of ethical action in international relations results from the fact that moral concern has to be both prior to an event or given situation (that is, one must already know what one wants) and entirely immersed in it, since there can be no purely mechanical application of principles. Thus, the ethical practitioner desperately needs a correct analysis of situations. Both law and morality provide rules for certain categories of situations; but we need to be able to say, when we take up a case, in what category it belongs. When, as so often happens, the answer is ambiguous, we need to go deeper and analyze the dynamics of the conflict—which is exactly what the American bishops did in their famous letter on nuclear weapons. In other words, the first duty of an ethicist is to be an expert, just as the first duty of an international relationist is to be morally aware.

The strategy I have recommended before and continue to believe in is a transformist strategy—one that aims at building a satisfactory world order while defending the interests of one's state. No statesman can neglect such a defense, but these interests are less and less likely to be safeguarded by self-help alone or by reliance on preordained harmony. In moral terms, the problem we face is that of the rights of others beyond our borders: not merely the moral rights of other states, which have been enshrined in international law for a long time, but the rights of other human beings, either as members of other communities or simply as human beings. Since it is difficult for a statesman to be a pure cosmopolitan, he has, if he is morally aware, a choice among three moral strategies. One is moral warfare (we are good, other states

have moral rights only insofar as they share our values, international relations is a clash between good and evil). This is an unacceptable position, because it makes an agreement on values a precondition for the recognition of rights; it violates the moral duty of impartiality. Moreover, the political consequences are unacceptable: endless political-military warfare and a selective treatment of misery or human rights. A second approach is incrementalism. This is unsatisfactory, because it does not go to the roots of the moral blemishes that proliferate in international affairs and because it still relies essentially on the dynamics of self-help, whose occasional good results are too easily reversible. The third strategy is what I call transformism. Essentially, it aims at reforming the present world order so as to introduce as much interstate and transnational society into the framework of anarchy as is possible. Such a strategy requires certain kinds of leaders and certain kinds of citizens. The leaders should not be narrow tribalists, or heroes, or ideological crusaders; they need to be compassionate, open, and capable of making informed decisions. The citizens must be able and willing to pressure, to prod, to censure their government, and also to act independently across borders.

This whole approach aims both at avoiding the worst and at pushing as far as possible in a more cosmopolitan direction. It recognizes the fact that moral fulfillment is still linked to the national community and that peace and justice are often, although certainly not always, best achieved within it. But there is nothing morally sacred about a national community: it is good only if it is based on certain moral-political principles of legitimacy, and even when the national community is morally admirable, it stops being so if it becomes exclusive and inflates its own worth. It is admirable when it is the concrete embodiment of universal moral rules, but certainly not in other cases.

How all these abstract notions are turned into concrete suggestions is, of course, another story. The philosophical foundation of this approach is another story as well, although it is easy to see that Kant, however diluted and modified, is not very far behind.

Be this as it may, it is necessary to salute the new literature with all its battles, its own sound and fury, and its flaws as a major contribution both to moral philosophy and to our understanding of politics. The fact that this literature, until now, is largely Anglo-Saxon is, of course, a source of worry, both because of the silence of other countries and because of the dangers of innocent, or not so innocent, parochialism. What is now being achieved, however, is a leap of philosophical concern from the horizon of the state to the still hazy one of the world as a whole. It is also a new way of amending, completing, and enriching realism, one that aims at reconciling those two forces whose battle enlivened the field of international politics some forty years ago, realism and idealism. Reflecting upon Hans Morgenthau's remarkable work, I wrote recently that we are all realists now. But it is a realism that encompasses not only—in its analytical dimensions—all the reasons for, and forms of, cooperation in a world that is still anarchic but also a prescriptive dimension that tries to transcend gradually the most perilous and morally unacceptable flaws of an anarchic milieu.

NOTE

1. Felix Oppenheim, "National Interest, Rationality, and Morality," *Political Theory* 15 (August 1987).