

Reading Material and Notes on Ethics in International Relations

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International Ethics Defined

International ethics refers to moral principles and standards guiding nations' behaviors and interactions. It underpins international law and treaties, such as the United Nations Charter, aiming to promote peace, security, and cooperation based on mutual respect and the principle of non-interference.

The basic issue that countries face in IR is how to reconcile one's national interests with the values one believes in. Most countries claim their commitment to universal values and try their best to adhere to them. But on many occasions, they find it difficult to guide their actions as per the values they profess.

What is national interest?

It reflects the goals and objectives of a nation in military, cultural and economic sphere. A country's goals and the most effective ways to achieve them are determined by its national interests. The power equations in the international arena are typically seen as a zero-sum game, in which one country's loss is usually seen as another country's gain. As a result, every nation is competing to accumulate more power, including both hard and soft power.

The will to power should be replaced by rationality and responsibility in international relations. Kantian ethics emphasizes morality in international relations. The establishment of multilateral institutions and the Gujral doctrine are examples of countries displaying principles of moral duty. India has always given precedence to its moral duty, as demonstrated by the adoption of Panchsheel.

Some sources of International Ethics

1. **UN Declaration of Human Rights:** Establishes fundamental human rights principles globally.
2. **Geneva Conventions:** Guidelines for humanitarian treatment during war.
3. **Refugee Convention 1951:** Defines the rights of refugees and the obligations of nations to protect them.
4. **Paris Climate Agreement (UNFCCC):** Ensures climate justice via the CBDR (Common but Differentiated Responsibility) principle.
5. **World Trade Organization (WTO):** TRIPS agreement addresses ethical issues in global trade and intellectual property rights.
6. **Global Commons Treaties:**
 - a) **UNCLOS:** Regulates the High Seas.
 - b) **Atmosphere:** Various international agreements.
 - c) **Antarctica:** Antarctic Treaty System
 - d) **Outer Space:** Outer Space Treaty.

Importance of ethics in International Relations

- **Avoiding Ego and Ideological Clashes:** Example: Diplomatic dialogues between the U.S. and China help manage ideological differences and prevent conflicts.
- **Promoting Peace, Respect, and Equality:** The UN Charter promotes peace and equal respect for all nations, aiming for a peaceful world order.
- **Resolving International Conflicts**
 - **Terrorism:** Ethics guide international cooperation in combating terrorism, emphasizing respect for human rights.
 - **Territorial Disputes:** Ethical negotiations can resolve disputes, as seen in the

Reading Material and Notes on Ethics in International Relations

Jatin Gupta

Camp David Accords between Egypt and Israel.

- Refugee Crisis: Ethical considerations lead to cooperative efforts in refugee protection, such as the UNHCR's work.
- **Guiding Environmental Initiatives:** The Paris Agreement on climate change requires global participation to address shared environmental challenges like global warming.
- **Collective Security Measures**
 - **Sanctions:** Economic sanctions on Iran aimed to prevent nuclear proliferation while avoiding military conflict.
 - **Military Action:** NATO's intervention in Kosovo was driven by ethical imperatives to prevent human rights violations.
 - **International Criminal Tribunals:** The International Criminal Court prosecutes war crimes and crimes against humanity.
- **Compassion in Natural Disasters and Refugee Crises:** International aid during the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami demonstrated global solidarity and ethical responsibility.
- **Tackling Human Trafficking:** The UN Protocol to Prevent, Suppress and Punish Trafficking in Persons fosters international cooperation to combat human trafficking, especially of women and children.

Some other examples of application of Ethics in International Relations

- **Berlin Airlift (1961):** During the Berlin Crisis, the Soviet blockade of West Berlin led to a humanitarian crisis. The United States and Britain responded by airlifting supplies, guided by ethical considerations to prevent suffering and uphold human dignity
- **America First Policy (2017):** President Donald Trump's "America First" approach, including high tariffs on foreign allies, faced ethical scrutiny. International leaders labeled it unethical due to its defiance of free trade principles and potential harm to global economic cooperation
- **International Criminal Court (ICC):** The ICC prosecutes individuals for war crimes and crimes against humanity, emphasizing global justice and accountability.
- **Paris Climate Agreement:** Nations commit to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, guided by the ethical principle of protecting the environment for future generations.
- **Humanitarian Aid:** International responses to natural disasters, such as the 2004 Indian Ocean tsunami, demonstrate ethical responsibility and global solidarity
- **Anti-Apartheid Movement:** Global ethical pressure, including sanctions and boycotts, helped end apartheid in South Africa, promoting human rights and equality.

3 Major approaches to ethics in International Relations

- **Realism:** Most common approach in International Politics. It assumes **IR is guided by national self-interest**. According to this approach, **morality is not an important consideration** in a nation's action. In fact, what motivates or guides a nation's actions is its self-interest. E.g *The U.S. invaded Iraq to eliminate perceived threats (weapons of mass destruction) and to maintain regional stability in the Middle East. Russia annexed Crimea to secure its naval base in Sevastopol and maintain influence over Ukraine, countering Western expansion.*
- **Liberalism:** It **emphasizes cooperation, international institutions, and the promotion of global norms and values**. It contrasts with realism by focusing on the potential for peaceful coexistence and mutual benefits among states. E.g *The World*

Reading Material and Notes on Ethics in International Relations

Jatin Gupta

Trade Organization helps manage trade disputes and promotes free trade principles. European Union promotes economic and political cooperation. The UN facilitates international cooperation, peacekeeping, and the promotion of human rights through various agencies and agreements.

- **Constructivism:** It emphasizes the **importance of ideas, beliefs, and identities in shaping international relations**. Unlike realism and liberalism, which focus on material factors like power and institutions, constructivism argues that social constructs and shared understandings significantly influence state behavior and global outcomes. *E.g The concept of "Responsibility to Protect" (R2P) emerged, emphasizing the international community's duty to prevent mass atrocities. The international community's collective identity as promoters of human rights pressured South Africa to change.*

Elements of ethics in IR

- **Human Rights at the Heart of Foreign Policy:** Ethical foreign policies support democratic rights globally, embodying cosmopolitan virtues. **Example:** Canada's advocacy for human rights in its foreign policy initiatives.
- **Commitment to Multilateralism, Prosperity, and Environmentalism:** Seeks global consensus on critical issues like environment, poverty, and inequality. **Example:** The Paris Climate Agreement demonstrates international commitment to environmentalism.
- **Global Justice and Responsibility to Protect:** Acts decisively against global injustices under the "Responsibility to Protect" doctrine. **Example:** NATO's intervention in Libya to protect civilians.
- **Principle of Sacrifice:** Nations should prevent severe harm, like starvation or genocide, if they can do so without sacrificing something of comparable moral significance. **Example:** International humanitarian aid efforts during the Ethiopian famine in the 1980s.
- **Promotion of Peace and Security:** Ethical foreign policies prioritize peaceful conflict resolution and collective security. **Example:** UN peacekeeping missions in conflict zones.
- **Economic Justice and Fair Trade:** Advocates for fair trade practices that promote global economic justice. **Example:** The Fair Trade Movement supports ethical sourcing and fair wages for producers in developing countries.

Ethical challenges/issues in International Relations

- **Neo-Colonialism in International Aid:** Aid can perpetuate dependency rather than addressing root causes of poverty. **Example:** Critics argue that some aid programs in Africa prioritize donor interests over local needs.
- **Selective Attention to Human Rights Violations:** Countries may ignore human rights abuses for political or economic gain. **Example:** China's human rights record is often overlooked due to its economic importance.
- **Neglect of Global Commons Responsibilities:** Developed countries sometimes fail to take adequate responsibility for shared resources like the atmosphere and oceans. **Example:** Limited action on reducing carbon emissions despite climate change agreements.
- **National Interests Over Common Agendas:** Diplomacy often prioritizes national over global interests, hindering collective action. **Example:** The lack of a universally accepted definition of terrorism due to varying national priorities.

Reading Material and Notes on Ethics in International Relations

Jatin Gupta

- **Support to International Terrorism:** Some states are accused of supporting or harboring terrorist groups to advance their own strategic goals. **Example:** Accusations against Pakistan regarding support for militant groups in the region.

Ethics in Contemporary International Aid

Key Principles

1. **Principle of Non-Reciprocity:**
 - True aid should be unconditional, aimed at helping without expecting returns.
 - **Example:** The Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis, and Malaria provides support based on need.
2. **Transparency and Accountability:**
 - Aid must be transparent and accountable to ensure effectiveness and trust.
 - **Example:** The Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the OECD monitors aid flows and promotes best practices.

Concerns Associated with International Aid

1. **Proliferation of Monoculturalism:**
 - Aid can sometimes promote donor cultures at the expense of local traditions.
2. **Self-Interest Driven Aid:**
 - Foreign aid often serves the strategic interests of donor countries.
 - **Example:** Aid tied to political or economic conditions.
3. **National Security Risks:**
 - Foreign investments and aid can pose security threats.
 - **Example:** India banned several Chinese apps and made FDI through government routes mandatory for neighboring countries.
4. **Technology and Profit Motives:**
 - Advanced technologies are often withheld for profit, limiting benefits for aid recipients.
5. **Interference in Electoral Processes:**
 - Allegations of foreign meddling in elections undermine sovereignty.
 - **Example:** Western allegations of Russian interference in elections.
6. **Impact on Sovereignty:**
 - Aid can come with conditions that affect national policy.
 - **Example:** IMF loans to India in 1991 with strict macroeconomic conditions.
 - **Chinese Debt Trap:** Pakistan's heavy reliance on Chinese loans.

Ethical Considerations in Conflicts: Russia and Ukraine

Just War Theory: This theory questions the ethics behind the use and continuation of force, emphasizing that war should be a last resort, have a just cause, and be waged with proportionality. The conflict in Ukraine raises questions about the justification of force and the protection of civilian lives.

According to the Just War Theory, there are six conditions for a just war:

1. **Just Cause:** There must be a moral justification to go to war, not based on greed or elimination of the other party.
2. **Right Intentions:** Entering war should be solely for the just cause, not other hidden motives.
3. **Reasonable Chance of Success:** It is immoral to engage in a war if it is foreseen that a country will lose.
4. **Proportional Benefits to Losses:** The benefits of the war must outweigh the losses. For example, war should not lead to thousands of deaths for a minor cause.
5. **Last Resort:** War should only be considered after all other alternatives have been exhausted, regardless of their cost or inconvenience.
6. **Legitimate Authority:** The war must be declared by an authority that holds legitimate power to do so and can ask its citizens to sacrifice for the just cause.

International Humanitarian Law: The Geneva Conventions emphasize the protection of non-combatants and the prohibition of unnecessary suffering. In the context of the Russia-Ukraine conflict, actions are often assessed based on these conventions to ensure compliance with international humanitarian law.

Examples and Context

1. **Russia's Invasion of Ukraine (2022):**
 - **Just Cause:** Debated internationally, with many questioning the moral justification.
 - **Proportionality:** Concerns over the extensive civilian casualties and destruction.
 - **Legitimacy:** Criticism of Russia's authority to declare such an invasion.
 - **Last Resort:** Many argue diplomatic solutions were not fully exhausted.
2. **Protection of Civilians:**
 - Reports of civilian casualties and infrastructure destruction raise ethical concerns about adherence to the Geneva Conventions.
3. **International Responses:**
 - Sanctions and support to Ukraine by other nations are guided by ethical considerations to uphold international law and support just causes.

Reading Material and Notes on Ethics in International Relations

Jatin Gupta

Refugees and International Morality

Global Responsibility Sharing

- **UNHCR Efforts:** The UNHCR distributes refugee responsibilities among nations, urging adherence to international commitments.
- **Case Study:** The Syrian refugee crisis highlights ethical obligations of nations, particularly in Europe and North America, to provide asylum, despite policies limiting refugee intake.

Ethical Debates on Incoming Refugees

1. **Resource Diversion and Settlement Issues:** Limited resources may be strained by refugee influx.
2. **Hostility from Other Nations:** Neighboring countries may react negatively.
3. **Long-term Political Implications:** Refugees may include political dissidents.
4. **Future Environmental and Poverty Refugees:** A compassionate stance might attract more refugees.

Ethical Concerns

- **Basic Human Rights:** The UN Declaration of Human Rights emphasizes the right to life and humane treatment.
- **Humanitarian Responsibility:** Countries must provide meaningful assistance to prevent refugees from becoming stateless and living in dire conditions.
- **Global Citizenship and Shared Responsibility:** Resistance to accepting refugees raises doubts about global cooperation and economic capability.
- **Lack of Empathy:** Policies of refoulement challenge the democratic values and empathy of host countries, questioning their commitment to the right to live for refugees.

Enhancing Comprehensive National Power through Ethics and Values

- **Human Capital:** Investing in education and health, as seen in Cuba's focus on universal healthcare and literacy, demonstrates how ethical considerations can enhance human capital.
- **Soft Power:** Cultural diplomacy, exemplified by Japan's promotion of its culture through international exchange programs, illustrates soft power's ethical dimension.
- **Social Harmony:** New Zealand's approach to integrating Maori cultural perspectives into its national identity showcases how valuing diversity can promote social harmony.

The Will to Power and International Relations

- **Rationality Over Dominance:** The European Union's integration process exemplifies how cooperation and shared values can temper the will to power, promoting peace and stability.
- **Moral Duty in Leadership:** Nelson Mandela's leadership in South Africa highlights how moral duty can guide nations towards reconciliation and ethical governance.

Reading Material and Notes on Ethics in International Relations

Jatin Gupta

Ethical Challenges in Military Interventions

- Humanitarian Interventions: NATO's intervention in Kosovo in 1999, aimed at preventing ethnic cleansing, showcases the ethical dilemma of violating sovereignty for humanitarian purposes.
- Emotional Intelligence in Diplomacy: The Iran nuclear deal negotiations, facilitated by diplomats' ability to understand and manage emotions, underscore the role of emotional intelligence in achieving peaceful resolutions.

Space Exploration: Ethical Frontiers

- Preserving the Space Environment: The 1967 Outer Space Treaty, emphasizing the peaceful use of outer space and prohibiting celestial bodies' national appropriation, reflects ethical considerations in space exploration.
- Commercialization Concerns: SpaceX's Starlink project, aiming to provide global internet coverage via satellites, raises questions about space traffic management and the long-term sustainability of low Earth orbit.

Conclusion

Ethics in international relations encompasses a broad spectrum of issues, from aid and conflict to the treatment of refugees and space exploration. Each dimension highlights the importance of ethical principles in guiding nations' actions on the global stage. As the world becomes increasingly interconnected, the need for a robust ethical framework in international affairs becomes ever more critical, ensuring that nations can navigate complex challenges with a commitment to justice, peace, and the common good.

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