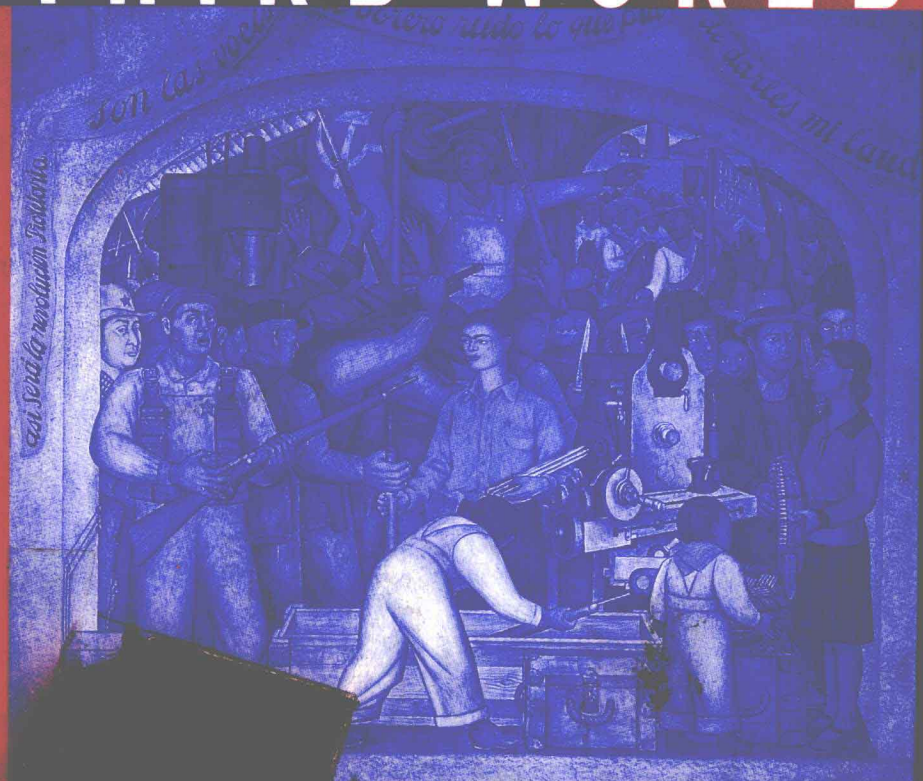


ETHICS, AMERICAN FOREIGN POLICY, AND THE THIRD WORLD



DAVID J. CINGRANELLI

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Ethics, American Foreign Policy, and the Third World

**To my parents, Louis and Josephine Cingranelli,
whose love and encouragement over the years
have been a constant source of inspiration for me.**

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Preface

When Jimmy Carter was elected president of the United States in 1976, he announced that human rights would be “the soul of our foreign policy.” The ensuing debate over the proper role of human rights considerations sparked my interest in the relationship between moral values and foreign policy. I wondered whether such a bold statement of purpose would have any effect on U.S. behavior toward other nations, especially developing ones where human rights were fragile and U.S. influence great. Even if the new policy rhetoric brought changes in this behavior, I wondered whether the changes would produce effects different from those spawned by past policies.

In 1981 I began working on a series of projects with students and colleagues on various aspects of human rights, including one project on the relationship between the human rights practices of developing countries in Latin America and U.S. foreign policy toward those countries. A paper based on that research, co-authored with Thomas E. Pasquarello, was published in 1985.¹ It demonstrated that America’s leaders had considered the human rights practices of governments in Latin America when making some, but not all, kinds of foreign aid decisions. That research convinced me to write this book. My earlier work had focused solely on Latin America and examined only foreign aid allocations, neglecting other instruments of foreign policy such as trade, military intervention, and the exercise of influence over the lending policies of international financial institutions. It presented a picture of the allocation of foreign aid in 1981 and 1982, but gave little evidence of how either aid allocations or human rights conditions were changing as a result of the newly stated policy goal. Finally, its focus on human rights and foreign aid precluded attention to the other foreign policy goals of the United States and how they might have affected foreign aid policies.

¹David L. Cingranelli and Thomas E. Pasquarello, “Human Rights Practices and the Distribution of American Foreign Aid to Latin American Countries,” *American Journal of Political Science* 25, No. 3 (August 1985): 539–563.

I decided to address a broader set of questions by examining U.S. policies toward a more representative group of developing countries and by incorporating more information about the historical development of U.S. foreign policy toward the Third World. As the project progressed, I gradually came to the conclusion that the moral and ethical dimensions of foreign policy-making were crucial and that foreign policy behavior flowed naturally from some basic ethical and moral choices.

Philosophers have offered several standards by which particular acts can be judged as moral or immoral. These standards, derived from rational arguments concerning what kinds of things are "good" and why, are usually reducible to maxims. At one end of the moral continuum are ethical egoists, who argue that asking "what is good?" is the same as asking "what is in my long-term self-interest?" The basic premise of this school of thought is that there is nothing inherently immoral about the pursuit of individual or national self-interest. The most important question in the context of foreign policy, however, is how much responsibility the leader of one nation should have to protect the welfare of the peoples of other nations. Should the United States, for example, in its attempt to advance its own economic and military interests, be concerned about any negative impacts on developing countries?

Implicitly or explicitly, utilitarianism is the moral standard U.S. policymakers most commonly use to justify all public policies, including foreign policy. Even within the field of political philosophy, utilitarianism operates as a standard against which all other political philosophies must be judged.² The utilitarian maxim is "Act so as to bring about the greatest good possible, not just for you, but for all actors." In other words, choose the act with the best total consequences. According to this standard, policymakers act immorally if they do not think through the full range of consequences a policy will have on others, if they expect the total consequences of the action chosen to be worse than if some other course of action is pursued, or if they know that the announced policy will not really be implemented or has a very small chance of being successful even if implemented. Utilitarians emphasize the idea that acts are not morally good in and of themselves. Rather, the moral good or evil of an act depends entirely on its consequences for others to whom the person acting should be held responsible. In the context of international relations, utilitarians recognize that the same act—for example, breaking a treaty—may have good or bad consequences in different situations.³ Therefore,

²Will Kymlicka, *Contemporary Political Philosophy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 9.

³See William K. Frankena, *Ethics* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1973), for an extended discussion of utilitarianism.

whether it would be right or wrong to break a particular treaty would depend on the particular circumstances. For this reason, those who prefer absolute rules sometimes refer to utilitarianism derisively as “situational ethics.”

Another approach to deciding what is right and what is wrong is to choose a process for deciding on the best moral principles and then to abide by the results of that process. One reason why democracy is so valuable is that it provides a process for choosing among alternatives even when the advocates of different positions are unwilling to compromise. Many people accept a truly democratic process as fair and legitimate and are, therefore, willing to abide by the results whether or not they like them. For this reason, some have argued that democracy or, to use the more general term, self-determination is the most fundamental value in the sphere of politics. When a nation resolves to abide by decisions reached in the United Nations, it essentially places faith in a process that is felt to transcend any particular moral principles. But no process is ever entirely neutral. The most important decisions in the United Nations, for example, are decided by the United Nations Security Council, where any one of the five permanent members (China, France, the Russian Federation, the United Kingdom, and the United States) may cast a binding negative vote. Most matters of less importance are decided by the General Assembly, where the one-nation/one-vote rule gives small and large countries equal weight.

In an attempt to construct a process that would be impartial, some philosophers have proposed that the best principles would be the ones approved by a hypothetical “ideal observer.” Briefly, an ideal observer would be one who (1) is impartial or unbiased, (2) has full knowledge of the pertinent facts of the situation, and (3) can empathize fully with every person involved in the situation. According to this view, knowing that the ideal observer approves X is the same as knowing that X is right.⁴

John Rawls has developed a theory of justice using a variation of the “ideal observer” criterion. Recognizing that it was difficult for anyone judging among several alternative ethical and moral principles to be unbiased, he suggested that the observer could don a “veil of ignorance” to achieve impartiality.⁵ The veil of ignorance would enable a person to choose principles for making decisions about the distribution of scarce valued things in ignorance of the place in society the person would have. Under such circumstances, he contends, everyone would agree on two principles for dividing scarce valued things among competing interests.

⁴John Hospers, *An Introduction to Philosophical Analysis* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1967), p. 570.

⁵John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1971), p. 12.

Rawls's first principle of justice is that "each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive total system of basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all."⁶ His second principle is that any social inequalities are to be "to the greatest expected benefit of the least advantaged" and subject to "conditions of fair opportunity."

Charles Beitz has extended Rawls's principles, stressing their redistributive implications, to develop less familiar, more radical principles for international social justice. Regarding the distribution of resources among nations, he predicts that, operating under the veil of ignorance and not knowing the resource endowments of their own societies, "the parties would agree on a resource redistribution principle that would give each society a fair chance to develop just political institutions and an economy capable of satisfying its members' basic needs."⁷ Rawls and Beitz, as well as others who have attempted to find a compromise position between the values of liberty and equality, have staked out what may be called the "liberal equality" position.

Still another moral position is that of the neo-Marxists, who favor absolute equality, even at the expense of liberty. They appeal to a more radical theory of justice in which the existence of private property is considered intrinsically unjust. The unequal distribution of property, political power, and well-being among individuals and among nations of the world is, therefore, doubly unjust. As a first and modest step in the right direction, neo-Marxists believe U.S. foreign policy should be designed to support a radical redistribution of wealth and power from the more advantaged nations to the less advantaged.

The major purpose of this book is to locate U.S.-Third World relations within this rich debate over standards for moral conduct and to provide a historical perspective. As I see it, the main controversy can be reduced to different conceptions of (1) what "good" should be maximized and (2) to whom national leaders should be held morally responsible. Part I describes four moral positions that represent the four logical combinations of answers to these two questions. Each moral position incorporates a view of the nature of humankind and a related empirical theory from which a set of propositions are derived explaining the nature of international relations. From that theoretical explanation, we can infer the set of goals that actually motivate U.S. foreign policy toward the Third World, as well as the moral and ethical values that should guide it.

Standard treatments of American foreign policy and international

⁶Ibid., p. 302.

⁷Charles R. Beitz, *Political Theory and International Relations* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1979), p. 141.

relations often ignore or give only brief attention to moral principles, North-South relations, and historical developments prior to World War II. Therefore, the discussion of the moral dimensions of U.S. foreign policy toward the Third World in Part I is followed, in Parts II and III, by a historical overview of significant developments in U.S.-Third World relations. This overview, which begins with the early years of the American republic, is necessary because moral choices take on meaning only in the context of real-life situations that force decisions to be made. Only an understanding of the particular situations that led to interventions or to major new policy initiatives allows us to consider the kinds of values that often conflict and the kinds of tradeoffs that must be made among them. A historical overview also enables us to see in concrete terms the kinds of real policies that flow from the application of alternative sets of moral principles. It also helps make sense of the extensive anti-Americanism we often find among Third World peoples today. Part IV focuses on present and future policies, which are of immediate interest. However, an awareness of the past public statements of U.S. leaders, and of policy actions and their consequences, is essential if we are to understand present developments and to predict the future.

Consideration of the values and objectives that motivate U.S. foreign policy toward the Third World is especially important at this juncture in history. The plight of the Third World, and the response of the United States to it, expose the kinds of tradeoffs U.S. leaders have been willing to make between values generally associated with the pursuit of national self-interest and those associated with altruism and humanitarianism. American value tradeoffs are particularly significant and far-reaching because, since World War II, the United States has been the acknowledged leader of the industrialized democracies and the leading contributor to most important international lending organizations including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. U.S. foreign policy toward developing countries, therefore, has had—and will continue to have—a profound effect on the character of North-South relations and on the welfare of people living in less developed countries.

America's relations with Third World countries are also becoming increasingly important to the welfare of U.S. citizens. More than ever before, the United States is vulnerable to threats emanating from Third World regimes or from people living in Third World countries. The Atlantic and Pacific oceans once provided the United States some security from external threats, but they will not protect us from environmental degradation perpetrated by other nations, from the export of dangerous drugs to our shores, from the effects of externally supported terrorism, or from militant Third World leaders. Few Third World states have nuclear

weapons, but many that are unfriendly to the United States have developed frightening chemical and biological weapons. American leaders must decide how the United States should respond to these potential threats.

Finally, in the name of anti-communism, since World War II the United States has conducted morally reprehensible foreign policies toward some Third World countries. It has developed close relationships with repressive, but anti-communist, dictators in the Third World, including three generations of Somozas in Nicaragua, Ferdinand Marcos in the Philippines, and Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, the former shah of Iran. American leaders have also attempted to undermine some pro-communist regimes in the Third World, in some cases even financing the assassination of Third World leaders. Many ostensibly successful U.S. policies have had terrible consequences for the poor and powerless in Third World societies. Chile, in the aftermath of the assassination of Salvador Allende, is a case in point.

Of course, it is difficult to write about the future of any aspect of international relations when the world is changing so quickly. With the historic transformations taking place in the former Soviet Union and in Eastern Europe, U.S. leaders will have the opportunity to reassess past policies and modify them in response to a new, less threatening climate in East-West relations. Failure to do so will call into question the rationale of anti-communism that was used to justify nearly a half century of U.S. intervention in Third World politics. Chapter 11 discusses three possible scenarios for U.S. foreign policy toward the Third World in the twenty-first century. The United States' response in 1991 to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and to subsequent provocative acts by Saddam Hussein's regime gives us some concrete evidence about the direction U.S. foreign policy toward the Third World will likely take in the aftermath of the Cold War.

In the small contemporary body of literature dealing specifically with ethics and U.S. foreign policy toward the Third World, both neo-Marxists and neoconservatives have been disproportionately represented. Both sides have focused on the moral and practical failures of U.S. foreign policy toward the Third World. However, they have ignored progressive elements in that policy or have treated them with derision. In this book I have tried to stake out a more balanced approach.

DAVID LOUIS CINGRANELLI

Ethics, American Foreign Policy, and the Third World

Contents

Preface	vii
PART I Morality and Foreign Policy: Contending Views	1
CHAPTER 1 A Typology of Moral Positions	3
The Typology	5
Applications	11
A Progressive Trend	16
Cycles of Political Party Control	21
The Third World	24
Plan of This Book	26
CHAPTER 2 The Contemporary Debate	30
Nationalism	30
Exceptionalism	35
Progressivism	38
Radical Progressivism	43
Summary	50
CHAPTER 3 The Marxists	53
The Empirical Argument	53
A Mainstream Response	60
Proper Ends and Means of American Foreign Policy	64
Summary	65

CHAPTER 4	Knowing Motives; Reconciling Means and Ends	69
	Knowing the Motives of Others	69
	Means and Ends	74
	Summary	82
PART II	Early History: 1776–1945	85
CHAPTER 5	Territorial Expansionism: 1777–1900	87
	Wars against Weaker Neighbors	89
	Manifest Destiny	92
	The Monroe Doctrine	93
	Economic Expansionism	95
	The African Slave Trade	96
	The Spanish-American War	97
	The Goals: 1776–1900	100
CHAPTER 6	Dominance (and Democracy) in the Western Hemisphere	103
	Theodore Roosevelt and Big Stick Diplomacy: 1901–1909	104
	Taft and Dollar Diplomacy: 1909–1913	108
	The Idealism of Woodrow Wilson: 1913–1921	109
	Repudiation of Interventionism: 1921–1945	113
	The Goals: 1900–1945	116
PART III	Establishing the Progressive Agenda: 1946–1980	123
CHAPTER 7	Promoting Economic Development to Stop Communism	125
	Truman	126
	Eisenhower	135
	The Ends Justify the Means	142
	The Goals: 1946–1960	144

CHAPTER 8	Fostering Social Justice	150
	Kennedy	151
	Johnson	158
	Nixon	161
	Expanded Use of Covert Methods	166
	The Goals: 1961–1976	169
CHAPTER 9	Advancing Human Rights	172
	Human Rights	173
	Economic Relations	177
	Less Covert Action	178
	Responses to Action-Forcing Events	179
	The Goals: 1977–1981	185
PART IV	Reagan, Bush, and the Future, 1981–	189
CHAPTER 10	A Shortened Progressive Agenda	191
	The Reagan Doctrine	192
	Third World Economic Development	193
	Human Rights	198
	Promoting Democracy	201
	Responses to Action-Forcing Events	206
	The Goals: 1981–	214
CHAPTER 11	The Past, Perestroika, and the Future	217
	Past Patterns	217
	Standards of Evaluation	222
	Future Trends	230
	Timeline of American Military Interventions in the Third World and Stated U.S. Policy Priorities, 1898–1992	236
	Index	239

PART I

**Morality and
Foreign Policy:
Contending Views**