



*Stefano Recchia and Jennifer M. Welsh, eds. Just and Unjust Military Intervention: European Thinkers from Vitoria to Mill. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2013.*

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Stefano Recchia and Jennifer Welsh have brought together in this tome a number of authors intending to essentially see what can be learnt from early modern political philosophers about just war and humanitarian intervention. They attempt to have all works in the volume discuss three themes and answer two essential questions. The first theme centers on the issues concerning *jus ad bellum* (the legitimate reasons for going to war). In this, the editors identify the main question of when intervention is permissible.

They say that the work of early modern philosophers broadly are applicable to today's environment, since while the context may have changed, those philosophers still address important issues such as whether the existence of a dictatorial regime is enough to intervene, or whether there must be proof of wrongdoing or genocide in order to do so. While these appear to be very modern issues, and are termed in modern ways, they are questions thinkers have struggled with since the Roman period, as shown in Richard Tuck's article "Grotius, Hobbes, and Pufendorf on Humanitarian Intervention."

Secondly, there is the issue of *jus in bello* (the laws in place once war has begun), summed up by Recchia and Welsh as basically asking what kind of military action or level of force is acceptable in a humanitarian intervention. As many of the articles in the collection point out, there was no concept of regime change in the early modern period where humanitarian interventions were concerned. Largely, the goal was simply to change the behavior of a regime in respect to a certain minority. Different philosophers tied this to whether the consequences of war, especially those unseen, were worth the good done in the intervention.

Finally, the third theme that the editors sought to have addressed was about on whose authority is there determined to be a "rightness" for intervention. While the specificity of the first two questions require the philosophers analyzed to answer these questions relatively directly, the "rightness" factor revolves around the idea of whether there is an objective truth, objective right, or objective authority.

There are two questions that the editors implored the authors to answer, and in this they all succeed. The first is "What is a legitimate basis for intervention?" and the second is "What is the likely impact of intervention and what are the associated risks?" (8).

While issues such as an objective truth and whether the consequences of intervention are worth the lives saved, something the world is currently debating for both Iraq and Libya, are very much applicable to any temporal period, the editors and most of the authors, seek to address the dangers of "presentism." As the editors note, there is a movement that fundamentally advises against trying to place past concepts of justice and right into today's world. While keeping in mind and acknowledging that there is a danger in trying to imprint yesterday's values on today, and vice versa, the

editors point out that there are lessons to be learned and epistemic value in studying past philosophical works, especially influential ones, for their intentions. By studying these, you can tease out broader lessons, and use their logic in solving modern day problems; just because the context was different does not mean that their logic was unsound. That being said, few of the authors tackle this issue directly, instead choosing to outline the arguments and analyze them for what they may or may not mean concerning just war and humanitarian intervention. Regardless, as the editors claim, the two questions asked of the contributors are, essentially, timeless.

There are a number of things to draw attention to in this collection. First, a problem that the editors may face is one of ethnocentrism, as they focus solely on western authors. However, as the international system, with regard to both laws and politics, is based on the Westphalian system (around which the philosophers presented were living in and debated about) and a product of Western European civilization, it is for the most part sound to focus upon western authors. Secondly, an issue which all of the contributors, and the editors, fail to address is that the examples given (save one on the Spanish “intervention” in the new world to “protect” against practices such as human sacrifice and cannibalism), are all performed by England and by English politicians of all stripes, be they monarch or Lord Protector. English intervention in Savoy and the Netherlands are the rare examples of purely humanitarian intervention given during the time period in question. Perhaps some analysis as to why this is the case would be helpful. But this is a small issue and is perhaps best left to a study on its own.

All in all, the book will prove to be an excellent resource for those looking to shore up their epistemological understanding and arguments concerning just war and humanitarian intervention. At the same time, it reminds us all that while sometimes it seems that the only moral option is to intervene, people 500 years ago recognized that to do so could create a situation, either war or something that follows a war, that is an even greater moral and ethical sin. In a world of failed and failing states, where humanitarian intervention seems to be the only “right” option, it is wise to remember that there are many aspects that need to be considered before action is taken.

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