International relations and, therefore, the ethics of international relations are inherently institutional matters, as are the ethics of politics more generally. This intransigent fact underlies the common, sometimes implicit view that ethics does not apply to politics. Indeed, two of the four historically dominant schools of ethics in the Western tradition are so focused on individuals and their morality that they have not been successfully brought to bear on broad politics or international relations. These two schools are the tradition of Kantian ethics, which has built on the vision of Immanuel Kant, and virtue ethics, which has classical Greek roots, especially in Aristotle, and medieval church roots. Kantian theory has dominated much of recent discourse. Virtue theory lost its hold on Western philosophical writings on morality about two centuries ago, and its school is now scattered and often idiosyncratic. The other two schools are utilitarianism and libertarianism (and related rights theories). Utilitarianism can in principle fit the whole range of human interaction, although its advocates through much of the twentieth century have focused on individual, virtually face-to-face morality. Libertarianism is a specifically political theory that is primarily focused on property relations and personal liberty. It typically entails a thin, rudimentary theory of minimal government.

Much of modern moral theory is divided between roughly consequentialist and deontological theories. Both have been invoked in so-called applied ethics in the evaluation of policies, as have other theories such as virtue and communitarian moral theories. Kantian and certain other moral theories are

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1 Presented to a seminar at the Carnegie Council on Ethics and International Affairs, New York, May 10, 1994. I am grateful to participants in that seminar for discussion, and to Douglas Lackey for a superb written commentary.


4 Communitarian views have especially been applied to environmental issues. Environmental problems are clearly collective rather than individual in both their origin and the concern with them. Unfortunately, they also commonly transcend any community that a communitarian could love.
generally called deontological—a term that comes from a neologism meaning the science of duty. The term was, oddly, invented by the arch-utilitarian Jeremy Bentham to apply to utilitarian duties, but it has come to exclude utilitarianism and virtually to stand for the residual class of all nonutilitarian theory. Deontological theories typically focus on actions, which are judged right or wrong independently of outcomes. Utilitarianism is called consequentialist because it focuses on outcomes, from which actions are only derivatively justified. The two categories are messier than they might seem at first. Some theories blur the distinction by falling into both categories. John Rawls's theory of justice is consequentialist in its concern with general outcomes and with institutions that can cause relevant outcomes, although it is generally seen as deontological and Kantian in its derivation.

On their surfaces, deontological and consequentialist theories seem dramatically different in structure. In particular, deontological theories, especially in Kantian variants, seem not to apply to policies that are about consequences, while consequentialist theories are naturally suited—indeed, even limited—to such policies. Although the superficial appearances are not conclusive, they indicate problems in the application of deontological theories to international relations. The way in which utilitarianism can be brought to bear in international relations is through institutional structures designed for the purpose. Kantian theory must similarly be given an institutional interpretation, as in Rawls's theory of domestic distributive justice. Kant's own interest in institutions in his writings on jurisprudence is not closely related to his moral theory, and later Kantian moral theorists have generally neglected his jurisprudence. (In its functional variants, as in some views of Aristotle's ethics, virtue theory is grounded in institutional roles. For example, the virtues of civic leadership are what produce good life in the city.) International policies are typically stated consequentially or with reference to states of affairs and desired changes in them. Oddly, Kant wrote in this vein on international politics in Perpetual Peace. But in this discussion, his approach was not to apply his Kantian moral theory but rather to make social-science claims about the likelihood of peace between different kinds of states. He supposed that liberal democratic states would not make war against each other. Hence, the spread of liberal democracy should bring peace. This thesis grounds an enormous literature that is, however, not generally concerned with Kant's moral theory.

Although as a utilitarian I am an outsider to the Kantian enterprise, I wish to pursue the problem of Kantian international ethics because debate between major schools of thought is typically very instructive. Each school benefits from serious encounters with others. Often, two schools seem almost complementary in that one does one thing well and the other does another, quite different thing well. But the major schools in ethics are generally not complementary in the constructive sense of working together to get everything right at once. In international affairs, there has been strong resistance to the intrusion of any ethical reasoning and, strangely, there has been relatively little systematic moral reasoning. Most of the writing appears to address specific issues rather than the general character of the problem. I will discuss the forms that Kantian reasoning might take—from rationalist actor theory to Kantian proceduralism to ad hoc Kantianism—and the relation of Kant's dictum that ought implies can to the institutional nature of much of international affairs. Then I will relate these discussions to three quite different general policy issues: nuclear deterrence, intervention, and international redistribution.

Kantian International Relations

There are three ways in which Kantian moral theory could be brought to bear on the actions or policies of states. First, we might apply the theory directly to states as if they had the attributes of Kant's rational beings. Second, we might apply it only to the actions of relevant individuals with policy and action roles in the state and then infer the morality of a state's action from the morality of the individual's actions. This latter move would combine standard Kantian personal morality with a proceduralist inference to state morality. We may call it Kantian proceduralism. Third, we might apply Kantian moral theory to any individual involved in international policy formation or implementation. We may call this ad hoc Kantianism. Under it, I might be a Kantian even though almost no one else is.

States as Rationalist Actors

Kant's moral theory is rationalist in the sense that it is derived from a priori principles that anyone should be able to follow. Its central tenet is the categori-
individual imperative: One should act only from principles that one could will to apply to all persons. Much of theory in international relations has been built on the assumption that states are rational actors analogous to rational individuals. One might suppose that a Kantian account of international ethics would therefore infer its principles from a state-level variant of the categorical imperative. There are two objections to this move—descriptive and normative.

First, descriptively, states are not rationalist actors in any literal sense and they cannot count as such for a Kantian theory of international relations. Various officials of a particular state must typically reach different conclusions about what is rationally required in the sense of a categorical imperative for action. This is, of course, a problem for any theory, rational or moral, of how states should behave. But it cuts to the very foundations and coherence of a rationalist account based on the presumption of deductive rationality on the part of the state.

Second, normatively, deducing principles from the assumption that states are a Kantian kingdom of ends to be treated with overriding respect could produce perverse results. For example, the state-level concern with survival of the individual state might trump concern with the survival and welfare of citizens. This would be absurd. Kantian concern with individual autonomy might make compelling sense for persons, but it makes no sense for states. For example, that the number of states has varied enormously as a result of absorption and splitting is not inherently a matter of moral concern. If the peoples of Europe were to choose to obliterate France, Italy, Germany, and others in order to produce a United States of Europe, that would not be an immoral action merely because it disposed of states.

The more plausible way for a Kantian ethics of international relations to go would be to build from individuals. Yet it would be implausible to instruct individuals to act as though there were no states or other institutions. Indeed, individuals' actions would have to be fitted into the institutional structure of the international relations of their time. This is an uncomfortable move for a Kantian because it introduces a massive, contingent complication into a priori theory. Just how great a complication it would entail may be suggested below.

Kantian Proceduralism

Libertarianism is the model of a proceduralist political theory. As in Robert Nozick's account, the theory applies exclusively to individual actions, which do or do not violate rights. Any institution or practice that emerges or arises from individual actions that fit libertarian morality is itself moral so long as it does not violate any individual rights. A Kantian might argue similarly. For example, Alan Donagan supposes that a state or institution is justified only to the extent it is produced by individual-level actions that are morally right. Hence, the institution is merely emergent from such actions. There is no additional institutional-level principle of justification to apply directly to its justification. Rawls, another major Kantian of our time, has, on the contrary, attempted to give a Kantian institutional account of justice.

In a utilitarian theory of politics, there is similarly only a single moral principle at work; however, there may be inherently different epistemological constraints for institutions and individuals that justify the creation of institutions, which are not a priori merely emergent from individually moral actions. Indeed, institutions might be designed to take into account the likelihood that many relevant individual actions may not be moral. Hence, an institution might be better at reaching moral results than the mere aggregate of its individuals would be.

A Kantian or libertarian must be uncomfortable with any actual state or significant institution, because no such institution is likely to have come into existence or developed into its present form merely through right actions by relevant individuals. This discomfort is one that must be shared with deontological libertarian theorists, who also can only justify institutions emergently, not directly. The most unsatisfactory part of Nozick's theory is his account of rectification of institutions and distributions that result from violations of rights.

But suppose rectification is not a problem because there have been no violations of rights. Libertarians commonly make the exceedingly sanguine assumption that the universal exercise and honoring of rights will produce a generally beneficial outcome. This is a grand sociological assumption that may or may not be true. If the exercise of, say, property rights had generally detrimental effects on human welfare, many libertarians would be loath to insist on holding to them. Although it is not stated in such terms, their view is essentially functional. Like virtue theorists, they suppose that their rights will contribute to human flourishing.

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7 Robert Nozick, Anarchy, the State, and Utopia (New York: Basic Books, 1974).
8 John Rawls, A Theory of Justice (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971). Rawls attempts instead to deduce institutional-level principles that would permit the Kantian justification or criticism of a state. This is inherently a consequentialist move, although it need not be utilitarian. Of course, his theory is exclusively about justice within a state or society, not the morality of state actions toward other states or toward individuals not in the state itself.
Plausibly, the reason libertarians give relatively little attention to the actual form of the state is not merely that the state is emergent from libertarian actions but, more importantly, that its form will be largely accidental. That form will turn on the accidents of preferences and the order in which people interact. Similar accidents will afflict Kantian proceduralism, which is inherently inconsistent with a vision of states and individuals as rationalist actors capable of deducing right action from first principles.

A libertarian theory of international relations would presumably be no different from a libertarian theory of politics generally. It would merely include the grand emergence of a whole international system. The odds that such a system would actually be grounded entirely in rights-respecting actions seem vanishingly small. A libertarian international order is virtually inconceivable. Similarly, a Kantian proceduralist theory of international relations is inconceivable. It is not worthy of extended discussion.

Ad hoc Kantianism

In lieu of a systematic application of Kantian ethics, we generally can expect that some people follow what they think to be Kantian principles (or what we might think to be such principles) at least some of the time while others do so much less of the time, if at all. An individual Kantian would act from Kantian principles through ad hoc derivation of them in particular contexts. In daily life, such ad hoc Kantianism is eminently plausible. Indeed, there must be many people whose moral stance is essentially Kantian even though most people seemingly have other stances.

In international affairs, however, ad hoc Kantianism is a more complex stance. Suppose I do what Kantian moral theory seems to direct only to find that my action induces a perverse reaction from the leaders of some state, a reaction that radically undercuts my action and leads to far worse problems than those I initially addressed. For example, I tell the truth about some political group in Neverland that is working for democracy and personal autonomy—a Kantian ideal—and the sudden knowledge of that truth induces the leaders of Neverland to destroy that group and any reasonable hope for democracy and autonomy for Neverland’s current generation.

Truth-telling has long been a bugbear of Kantian debate because Kant once claimed one must always, under all circumstances, tell the truth, even if it should cause enormous harm. Many Kantians, however, think Kant was wrong about the absolute duty to tell the truth. Some of them are not even sure that any duty can be deduced from his overriding categorical imperative. In Kant’s example of the host who is asked by an assassin whether his intended victim is in his home, the intuitive objection to Kant’s duty to tell the assassin the truth is that it would cause enormous harm or would lead to violation of the victim’s right.

But in the case of Neverland, following a putative inference from the principle of autonomy leads to a violation of autonomy itself. This seems like a conceptual flaw and not merely a conflict of (perhaps wrong) intuitions. Here the question is: What is the force of duties for the individual in a world in which many violate those duties and in which institutions—such as states—with staggering powers for harm violate them most of all? Does a Kantian have a duty to work to secure institutions that will support Kantian ideals? Presumably, yes. But what duties does the ad hoc Kantian have in her immediate dealings with anti-Kantian institutions, institutions that often bulldoze autonomy with impunity? This is the central question that all ad hoc Kantians must face in international affairs for the foreseeable future.

Ought, Can, and Institutions

One of Kant’s most often cited dicta is that ought implies can (it is a philosopher’s double entendre, at least in English, that ought implies Kant). This dictum gives entrée to consequentialist concern in his moral world. Actions are not literally right or wrong completely independently of their consequences if they fail to be right because they cannot be taken. A purely consequentialist ought implies can is naturally built into utilitarianism. A utilitarian is not bound to do the impossible, but merely to do the best she can. For example, it might seem to be good if starvation in the Sahel were ended tonight. But you cannot end it tonight. Hence, you cannot be in the wrong merely because you do not end starvation in the Sahel tonight.

In either its Kantian or its utilitarian form, the dictum that ought implies can virtually requires institutional arrangements if there are to be any serious international duties. There are many international actions, including Kantian beneficence, and outcomes that are impossible for individuals but possible for institutions. Of course, the Kantian must first justify the existence of institutions at all. As argued above, this may be a very difficult task. In any case, it is a task that has not been extensively undertaken by Kantian theorists. Whether the Kantian individual should do something may turn on whether there are institutions that can be relied on as essentially extensions of the individual. This consideration

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suggests that a Kantian morality in international relations must deal with roles, not merely with rationalist individuals. It must be institutionally articulated. And, at least in the decision making of actual individuals, its application must be contingent on what institutions exist.

There is a partial exception to the claim for institutions in cases of problems that one nation, such as the United States, or a small coalition of nations could resolve without intermediary institutional structures. For example, the United States might be able to resolve a crisis of hunger in an isolated case. Ad hoc Kantian, utilitarian, or other arguments might be brought to bear on such a case even for motivating leaders of states that are not rationalist actors. Even then, however, the general resolution of any important class of international problems would typically require ongoing institutional structures that transcended momentary exertions by particular states.

Deterrence
The policy issue that dominated international politics through more than forty years from the end of World War II until the end of the Soviet empire was nuclear deterrence. This was conceptually consequentialist. It was not about actions but about outcomes. The desired outcome was peace; the threatened outcome was devastating retaliation. At the moment of retaliation in this system, it would have been too late to deter, and it therefore seemed profoundly immoral to destroy cities full of children merely for the sake of the theory of deterrence. In its early years the system of deterrence was founded on actors who seemingly believed strongly enough in the purpose to do what was required to secure it. In its later years it was increasingly founded on systems that individual actors could not block. In the early years there was fear that someone might take unauthorized action that would cause holocaust. In the later years there were such strong systemic barriers to unauthorized action that massive redundancy had to be built in to overcome these barriers if the relevant moment came.

It is perverse and incoherent even to speak of the specific actions within a system of deterrence as independently justified on Kantian grounds. Therefore, not surprisingly, there is a massive Kantian literature criticizing deterrence as immoral. In that literature, there are excessively optimistic efforts to show that unilateral disarmament would lead to no great harm, but the Kantian judgment of the rightness or wrongness of the policy of deterrence does not depend on the validity of such efforts (which were generally put forth by philosophers and moralists with little grounding in relevant matters). Yet the fundamental issue must be not whether the particular actions of people who push buttons to launch weapons are moral but whether the creation of a system of deterrence is moral. This latter question must be addressed at the institutional, not the individual, level.13

Intervention
Hobbesian, contractarian, and human-rights political theories do not yield an independent justification or moral status for the state or government. Rather, they can only yield highly contingent justifications of the state that depend on what the state does for its members. Utilitarianism, similarly, cannot directly imply any principle of intervention or nonintervention, although it might follow from epistemological capacities of states that they should generally be left to oversee the lives of their citizens. Such an argument would be essentially institutional and social scientific and, to carry, it would have to stand against institutional arguments in favor of international arrangements for intervention in certain cases. And, even at its strongest, it would be contingent.

What must a Kantian theory say of the state and its putative sovereignty? One might suppose that state sovereignty is a natural implication of a Kantian rationalist-actor theory of the state. However, when it is invoked in international relations, as, especially, in debates in the United Nations, national sovereignty is used to justify noninterference with state actions without any claim that those actions are actually rationally determined. Rather, the claim seems more nearly the analog of Mill’s claim that any individual presumpively knows better what would fulfill her desires than anyone else does. Hence, government should not tell me what to do for my own sake. Similarly, governments should not tell other governments what to do. This is not a defense that a Kantian can allow. Bald preferences are not sufficient grounding for Kantian morality. And certainly the bald preferences of a nation’s leaders have no a priori standing in Kantian morality.

Westerners, with their pervasive sense of individualism, are apt to see a fallacy of composition in the implicit vision of national sovereignty in practice. A representative of the government of a state says the state wants or would benefit

13 See, for example, several contributions to the special issue of Ethics 95 (April 1985), on “Ethics and Nuclear Deterrence.”
from or has a right to decide on x. The Westerner supposes this could only mean that the people of the state want or would benefit from or have the right to decide on x. But this derivation is commonly wrong. The very reason the leaders of the state appeal to the right or whatever of the state is that it is not difficult to see how that right enables the government to harm its people. Idi Amin and Pol Pot could rail against intervention in defense of their tyranny over and mass murder of their fellow citizens. The mullahs could assert the rightness of their bringing all Iranians under a harsh variant of Islamic law and authoritarian politics. The list is long. In some cases, such as those of Pol Pot and the mullahs, the leaders might claim that what they are doing is in the interest, or for the good, of some relevant part of the people. There remains the question of whether the good of those people trumps the good or even the lives of various other people in the relevant nation.

Moreover, of course, intervention might be justified on international, not domestic, grounds. For example, many people think the United States, some coalition of nations, or the United Nations should intervene to stop North Korea from becoming a nuclear power that could threaten East Asia. Here one might suppose that Kantians and utilitarians could agree that intervention would be good in principle. (A Kantian might readily suppose that such threats do not have a place in the kingdom of ends that application of the Kantian theory is to establish.) But the Kantian might have difficulty assigning the duty to intervene to anyone in particular, because none of the available “anyones” are rational beings who could, through rationalist inference, deduce their duty. The utilitarian might also have difficulty assigning the duty of intervention, but the difficulty would be social-scientific difficulty in determining effects of various assignments, not moral or conceptual difficulty.

Note a final peculiarity. There is nothing for the Kantian that distinguishes intervention for international reasons from intervention for domestic reasons unless the state per se can be seen as a rationalist actor, in which case it might seem wrong to intervene even against a murderous Idi Amin. The latter conclusion seems, again, incoherent with the Kantian program. For the Kantian proceduralist, however, although there is nothing to distinguish the two forms of intervention, it is hard to see where to start an analysis if the world is not the emergent result of individually Kantian actions. Of course, throughout all known history it has not been. For ad hoc Kantianism, the program must be a very near analog of the utilitarian program: Do what most enhances autonomy, domestically within other nations and internationally between nations. The utilitarian merely does what most enhances welfare. Against this conclusion, one might argue against the maximization of aggregate autonomy in the name of individual autonomy.\(^{14}\)

**International Redistribution**

During the heyday of virtue theory, the chief virtue was charity. The ultimate demand of that virtue was to achieve equality of condition, with all enjoying the same level of food and shelter. This might have been achieved if all had had the will of St. Francis to share what they had with the poor. Charity lost its central claim on us when its contrary vice, avarice, suddenly turned good in the burgeoning commercial societies of England and the Netherlands. Avarice clearly led to production that benefited many. This odd fact gutted the supposed logic of the pairwise virtues and vices. At about the same time, the state began to have enough reach, seemingly, to take up the burdens of charity more consistently than the amorphous many could do.\(^{15}\) Now, a couple of centuries later, many European states and Japan have finally achieved the virtual elimination of domestic poverty. The more glaring problem today is the international distribution of wealth. There is a virtually incomprehensible gulf between the poverty and suffering of Kenyans and the wealth and splendor of Swedes and others.

The problems of destitution and suffering in large parts of the world are not merely matters of a failure of will by the rich countries. Even with good will, there would be no good theories of how to serve the cause of benefiting the peoples of the Sahel, Bangladesh, and central Africa. An illustration of this point is the history of U.S. programs to end poverty. At least some of the requisite will was there during the presidency of Lyndon Johnson and even thereafter. And there may have been some success in the programs that were adopted. But the end result of all the programs is an arguably larger and more difficult problem today than we faced in the sixties. There are raging disputes about the effectiveness of many of the programs, as well as, of course, criticisms of the limited will to carry them out.

The poverty in much of the Third World cannot be well addressed with anything short of massive institutional efforts. The literature on how demanding moral theories are seems to start from depictions of nothing more than the relative wealth of the residents of the wealthy nations and the poverty of those of the

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14 Nozick argues against what he calls the utilitarianism of rights, which is the urge to minimize rights violations, even at the cost of intentional rights violations. Nozick, *Anarchy, the State, and Utopia* (New York: Basic Books, 1974), 30.

15 Virtue theory had already come under attack from the quasi-institutionalist theories of Machiavelli and Hobbes and Protestant claims against human goodness.
poor nations. Seemingly, anything approaching fairness or benevolence or even some versions of justice would entail shifting substantial resources from the wealthy to the poor. But this conclusion follows only to the extent that it is possible to make relevant improvements in the conditions of the poor by shifting resources. You as an individual, driven by an apparently very demanding moral theory, may think you have a large obligation. But you cannot easily explain how you could effectively carry out actions that would fulfill your obligation. You might even conclude that, if ought implies can, there is little or nothing that you ought to do because there is little or nothing you can do that would have positive effect.

You could give large sums to Oxfam or some related charitable organization to let it handle the institutional obstacles to your benefiting people in an impoverished community. But even then, you are likely to wonder whether Oxfam's efforts make the overall problem, including the future problem, worse. Contributing life-sustaining resources may simply make for far more lives led on the destitute and miserable margin. If a charitable organization or the United Nations or even a wealthy nation could create the structures to make an impoverished society economically productive, that would seem to be a beneficial action. Merely supplying food in a context in which further supplies of food will be perpetually necessary and in which the food may actually exacerbate the future scale of the problem is not so clearly a beneficial action.

Most people must be made part of productive societies, not part of a pool for charity. The leading moral theories that have anything to say about beneficence toward the destitute surely agree on this claim. For example, a Kantian might want benevolent actions to produce autonomy among the beneficiaries. A utilitarian would generally conclude straightforwardly that making people productive is a better security to further well-being than mere charity. The utilitarian conclusion depends, of course, on a social-scientific claim that might be wrong. The claim seems well supported by the evidence of whole societies that have ceased to be impoverished after they became productive while other impoverished societies have continued to languish in frequent or chronic dependency. The utilitarian who thinks the claim is sociologically right has an easy moral inference to make.

All of the argument above is independent of the problem that charitable organizations often use their resources in perverse ways. It has been a constant complaint against the Catholic church through much of its history that the funds it collects to do good are too heavily invested in the perquisites and pleasures of church fathers and too little in the benefit of the poor. The former United Fund, now the United Way, has suffered similar criticisms. Many American academicians are convinced that Oxfam is an honorable and trustworthy organization that converts almost all its collected funds into benefits on the ground in Africa and elsewhere. (Most of those who think this seem not to have any real data about the issue and are distressed to hear of the documented abuses of many other charities.) Even such an organization, however, can only deliver food in ways that are woefully inefficient in comparison to food grown on the spot in viable communities.

To raise a nation out of poverty means increasing its productivity well beyond the level of subsistence agriculture, in which upwards of eighty percent of populations in many nations were historically, and still are, immured. But that means moving a large fraction of the rural population into other forms of production. And it means increasing agricultural production with inputs other than human labor, especially with chemical inputs that typically have such harmful external effects as the pollution of lakes and streams.

Closing Remarks
The program of Kantian international morality is essentially nascent. It faces severe problems in addition to the obvious difficulties that any analysis of international relations faces. Two of the ways to go seem incoherent. There cannot be a rationalist state actor model of international relations that is consistent with Kantian rationalist personal actors. And there cannot be any hope of creating an international order that fits Kantian proceduralism. While such a model might make sense as an ideal, it cannot underlie actual policy-making. The third option, ad hoc Kantianism, appears to be the only plausible stance for Kantian moral theory in international affairs until the theory is developed further. The articulation of that option in the context of massively un-Kantian institutions and individuals is the central task of a genuinely Kantian ethics of international affairs. The articulation presumably must include an account of how to treat institutions as extensions of personal capacity for action, extensions that enable one to have a greater duty than one might otherwise have. This is a very general claim that applies to any theory, Kantian or other.