The Ethics of Humanitarian Intervention
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Session 1: State Sovereignty and Self-Determination
Traditionally, the debate on humanitarian intervention has been dominated by authors who defend the sovereignty and self-determination of all, or almost all states around the world. Michael Walzer is probably the most eloquent and insightful defender of this view. In this article, Walzer sets out his reasons for non-intervention. However, more recently a substantial and powerful philosophical challenge has mounted. At its most extreme, authors like Wellman argue that state sovereignty never poses a reason against intervention. This session will contrast these two positions on state sovereignty.

Readings:

12+21 = 33 pages

Session 2: Intervention, For and Against
Setting aside questions of state sovereignty, what are the reasons for or against intervention? In his book, Fernando Teson offers a strongly interventionist argument. According to Teson, it is imperative to protect and promote the freedom and rights of people around the world, if necessary by force. By contrast, J.S. Mill offers a highly skeptical take on intervention. According to Mill such attempts to bring freedom to other peoples are almost always going to fail.

Readings:

24+13 = 37 pages

Session 3: The Ethics and Efficacy of Intervention
Picking up on the prospects of success or failure in intervention, Larry May and Allen Buchanan offer starkly different takes on the ethics of intervention. Buchanan draws an analogy between revolution and intervention, and argues that the practical barriers to intervention can be overcome. May concludes that these practical barriers are the foundation of what he calls “contingent pacifism” – a practical prohibition on intervention and war.
Readings

17 + 33 = 50 pages

Session 4: Policy Applications
This concluding session takes the theoretical debates from previous sessions and applies it to policy. Students will read chapters from the highly influential ICISS report on the Responsibility to Protect (R2P), which argues for increased interventions around the world. Alan Kuperman, by contrast, offers a skeptical argument by drawing an analogy to arguments from moral hazard in economics.

Readings:
- International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, “The Responsibility to Protect” (2001), ch. 2 (pp. 11-18) & ch. 4 (pp. 29-37)

17 + 21 = 38 pages

Total pages:
33+37+50+38=158