

KANT AND HUMANITARIAN INTERVENTION

“Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in any other, always at the same time as an end, never merely as a means.” Immanuel Kant, *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, 1785

“No State Shall by Force Interfere with the Constitution or Government of Another State.” Immanuel Kant, *Perpetual Peace*, 1795

Introduction: the issues

I. A critical Kantian perspective

- (A) Standards are not drawn from examples.
- (B) Empirical evidence is relevant to mid-level principles and applications.
- (C) A Kantian legislative perspective.
- (D) The cluster of prescriptions inherent in the idea of humanity as an end in itself.
- (E) Diversity of aims and values must be protected but constrained by principles, and “Who is to judge?”

II. The presumption for humanitarian intervention, relevant practical considerations, and Kant’s apparently inflexible opposition

III. Does a government’s responsibility to its own citizens prohibit intervention primarily for the sake of citizens of other countries?

IV. Does the case for humanitarian intervention depend on illegitimate ideas about the right to punish or forfeiture of the right to govern?

- (A) Intervention based on right to punish?
- (B) Intervention based on the government’s forfeiting the right to rule?

Kant’s radical position: rights presuppose determinate adjudication and enforcement, no one could authoritatively judge that the supreme authority had forfeited; the standards of natural law and rational justice can only be guides to ruling powers, not grounds for others to interfere with them.

Possible replies: challenge the premises; argue that international institutions are (or can be) sufficiently determinate; and/or argue that persistence (or non-forfeit) of rulers’ rights *over their subjects* would not entail that outside interference violates the rulers’ rights.

V. Does forceful intervention in the governance of another state necessarily violate the rights of the citizens of that state?

Doubts about the argument from *Perpetual Peace*, and the attempt to justify sovereign power by appeal to the united will of the people. (Preliminary suspicions that call for a deeper examination of Kant’s theory of state sovereignty.)