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## The Distinction of Peace

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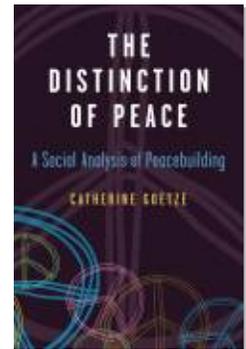
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## CHAPTER 6

# Narratives of Intervention

## *Leadership, Liberalism, and Social Justice*



The discourses of the ideal international civil servant and peace entrepreneur can be interpreted as self-legitimizing strategies by peacebuilders to defend their particular interests as a social class, a profession in the making, and as representatives of international organizations, which need to find and confirm their place in world politics. As the notion of *habitus* implies, these strategies are not necessarily deployed rationally or even consciously; they are subconscious, incorporated *normalities* of behavior and thought.<sup>1</sup> Even though we can sensibly argue that the specific self-interest of peacebuilders to construct their social position is a good reason for such kinds of discourses, we cannot assume that these discourses have an inherent merit, for example, that they are inherently rational or utility-maximizing. There could have been others.

Those discourses that have been chosen, however, have been particularly attractive because they resonate and are effective with an audience that is important for peacebuilding's existence: states, and in particular Western states; NGOs and other international organizations, and in particular humanitarian and human rights NGOs; other liberal elites in overlapping fields; and the Western media, which function as amplifiers of peacebuilding's causes and reasoning. The discourses are part of the symbolic exchange between these various actors of world politics, and accompany the exchange of other types of capital, be it people or

finances, as described in chapter 4 on the overlapping boundaries of the peacebuilding field.

These discourses draw on knowledge and images that are commonly known, and which provide a common language through which the organizationally, politically, and socially different actors can communicate. They reflect the socialization of the peacebuilding field and its adjacent fields by alluding to commonly shared concepts, normative ideas, and worldviews. Peacebuilding uses the vocabulary of political theory (“democracy,” “fairness,” “justice”) to create associations between their work and concepts and images of which most of their interlocutors have some notion. This chapter will explore this vocabulary in order to provide an inventory of the political theory “bits and pieces” that are used in peacebuilding. Three archetypical discourses emerge from this analysis: one on leadership, one on liberal values, and one on social justice. All three discourses set the normative boundaries within which discussions over peace and peacebuilding measures legitimately take place.

In the 2008 and 2012 surveys, peacebuilders were asked several questions regarding their political worldviews.<sup>2</sup> Among them was a question about what reading had influenced their political thinking. A first look at the answers shows that liberal political theory was actually thinly represented. This result is surprising, given the deep interiorization of core liberal values discussed in the preceding chapter, and in light of the frequent claim that peacebuilding aims at building what Roland Paris has called a “liberal peace.”<sup>3</sup> However, as figure 11 shows, the first four most frequently mentioned authors are certainly not typical examples of liberal thought. Although Thomas Hobbes can be considered a “protoliberal” in his skepticism and insistence on individual negative freedom,<sup>4</sup> Plato, Karl Marx, and Niccolò Machiavelli were authors who are loathed by liberals.<sup>5</sup> Yet, the high representation of these three nonliberal thinkers was well balanced by a large range of Enlightenment philosophers and liberal theorists. A strong penchant for dystopian literature (not shown in figure 11) equally emphasizes the peacebuilders’ liberal ideas. The influence of Plato, Hobbes, and Machiavelli clearly exists alongside liberal ideas, not despite them.

The peacebuilders’ answers do show that the common language of peacebuilding is firmly rooted in Western academic traditions of political philosophy. The canon presented in figure 11 is the standard Western, white male reading list of any liberal arts college.<sup>6</sup> The political virtues discussed in most of the literature mentioned reflect largely the preoccupations of this type of Western education: individualism, merit, achieve-

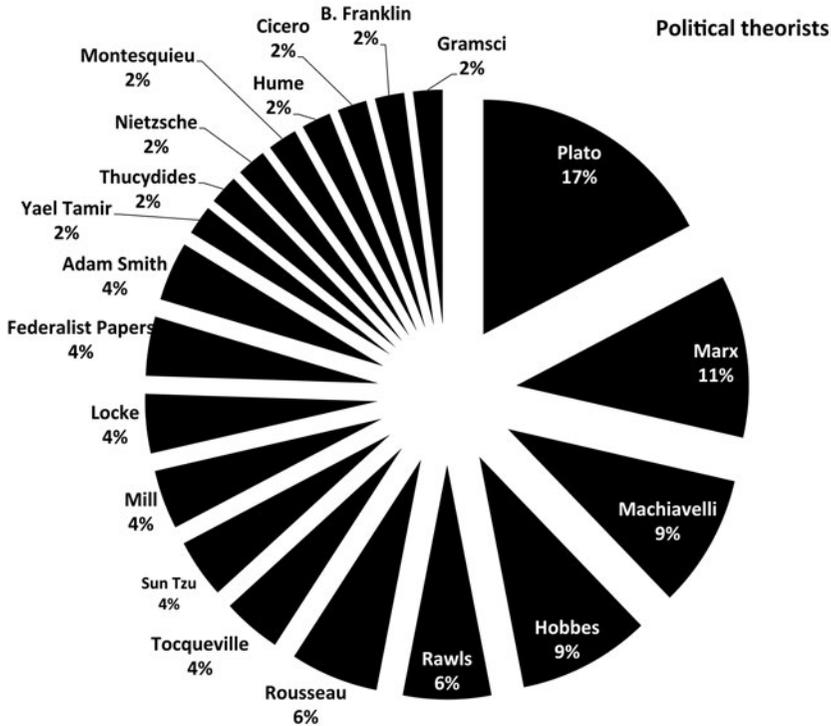


Fig. 11. Political theorists

ment, self-fulfilment (or what Charles Taylor calls “authenticity”<sup>7</sup>), expertise and skills, and the judicious separation of economic utility-maximizing and communitarian ethics of care. Given the educational background of peacebuilders (see chapter 3 and 4), these readings do not present any surprises. However, in terms of discourses of peacebuilding they allow us to map out three strands of thought that demonstrate the breadth (and, by inference, the outer boundaries) of political thought in peacebuilding. The three strands are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they have to be seen as indicating the acceptable realms of discourse within which discussions over matters of peacebuilding, from the question of effectiveness to the question of legitimacy, take place.

The readings reflect three preoccupations of peacebuilding discourses that will be discussed in more detail in this chapter: the theme of leadership and service to the community, with the strong presence of Plato, Hobbes, and Machiavelli; the question of social organization along lib-

eral lines, with frequent reference to John Rawls and other liberal writing, such as *The Federalist Papers*; and the questions of social justice and political engineering within the context of a liberal world. Peacebuilders are no revolutionaries, and adhere strongly to the concepts of private property, market economy, and competition. The strong presence of Marx as reading reference does not represent, therefore, a communist-revolutionary trend among peacebuilders; instead, it shows awareness of the structural inequalities of capitalism and its negative effects, as will be discussed in more detail below.

### *Leadership and Service to the Community*

By answering the question of their preferred reading, respondents demonstrated their idea of what appropriate reading for a peacebuilder would look like. They candidly revealed their image of politics as they think it should be, rather than their personal, intimate reading pleasures. The concept of leadership is a highly important value for peacebuilders. Quite a large number of interviewed peacebuilders accordingly also mentioned biographies and autobiographies of state leaders among the literature that had inspired their political thinking. Memoirs of statesmen and women (at the time of the first wave, Madeleine Albright's memoirs, for instance, had just been published) were widely read.

Despite writing in different periods and under different epistemological premises, Machiavelli, Hobbes, and Plato represent a common strand of thought. All three authors are mainly preoccupied with the question of good leadership in a world of conflicting interests, potential violence, and the impossibility of imposing on a human community certain objective criteria circumscribing good and right decisions. All three postulate a theory of elite government, although with widely differing arguments and different implications. All three argue for the strategic use of force; not for force itself, but as a necessary evil to uphold and order a political community well. And all three distinguish the servant of the political community, its political leader, from the private, moral person that he or she otherwise might be; although again, they do so quite differently. For peacebuilding, all three put forward an important justification for intervention, namely the idea that wise (and consequently, good) leaders will have to override "common sense" or popular feelings in order to preserve fundamental political principles, and first among them, the integrity of the political community itself.

It is worth starting with the discussion of the justifications Machiavelli offers for intervention and top-down ordering politics. Machiavelli has been recognized as an early theoretician of statecraft and diplomacy; more recently, he has been seen as a republican (the pejorative sound of “Machiavellianism” might be due to the very royal despise of exactly these republican ideas in English Reformation).<sup>8</sup> The aim of the utilitarian approach to power in Machiavelli’s writing, particularly in *The Prince*, is the preservation of the state. State reason is, in Machiavelli’s argument, and similar to Hobbes, a rational principle of peace, and, hence, an ethical principle. The best form of a state is a republic, and so the preservation of the state means the preservation of the republic, quite contrary to the title of the work itself. As Maurizio Viroli argues, this title should not mislead us about Machiavelli’s intention, which was to write down principles of government that meant to preserve the *state*, of which the prince would be (merely) its leader.<sup>9</sup> Quentin Skinner points out the importance of Machiavelli as an advocate of a consequentialist ethics of politics in which the possibility that a leader sometimes has to do evil to do well is entirely acceptable. *The Prince* can be read exactly as the title therefore implies, namely as advice to a political *leader* of how to preserve the fortunes of his state in the interest of its citizens.

Machiavelli’s piece of advice that has commonly provoked the most outrage is the one telling a leader to pursue certain policies that he, the leader, thinks are right even if they are most unpopular and are against “common sense.”<sup>10</sup> In the logic of Machiavelli’s consequentialist ethics, the important question to ask is not whether any citizen, or what we would call today a “stakeholder,” should be protected in any particular course of action, but whether the leader’s actions are beneficial to the survival of the government, or rather the leader *per se*. It is the service done to ensure the persistence of the prince that counts, not the price, whether material or moral, that has to be paid for it.<sup>11</sup> Hence, the leader is bound by political logic, and the laws and rules that govern the survival of government, but the leader is not bound by particular interests or specific moral considerations simply for the virtue of these moral considerations.

As Skinner points out, referring to Isaiah Berlin’s reading of *The Prince*, Machiavelli believes that there are different types of morality that have to be weighed against each other in politics: the inner morality of Christian values and the pragmatic morality of state survival.<sup>12</sup> Berlin sharply formulates the juxtaposition Machiavelli undertakes of two types of morality in his writing:

To advocate ideal measures [of Christian morality], suitable only for angels, as previous writers seem to him [Machiavelli] too often to have done, is visionary and irresponsible and leads to ruin [politically]. . . . To choose to lead a Christian life is to condemn oneself to political impotence: to being used and crushed by powerful, ambitious, clever, unscrupulous men; if one wishes to build a glorious community like those of Athens or Rome at their best, then one must abandon Christian education and substitute one better suited to the purpose.<sup>13</sup>

Those respondents who mentioned Machiavelli as an influence on their political thinking wanted to demonstrate their agreement with these basic ideas of political realism. Machiavelli's understanding of politics connects perfectly well with the world of international service. Not only is the system of international politics seen as a field of politics that particularly requires realist leadership; its nature as a system of force and power also requires clear-headed leaders who can see above and beyond day-to-day quarrels and intrigues, and who have the survival of the whole in mind. It is from this perspective that Conor Cruise O'Brien called Dag Hammarskjöld a "Machiavelli of Peace."<sup>14</sup> This interpretation of Machiavelli as advocating leadership as a form of arbitration, and oriented toward the survival and glory of the political community, moves his precepts close to Hobbes's political philosophy.

A common reading of Hobbes's influence on international relations is to equate his conception of the state of nature with the anarchical structure of the interstate system without overarching power that could secure the peaceful coexistence of nations.<sup>15</sup> Since Martin Wight's distinction between the Hobbesian, Lockean, and Marxist theories of international relations, Hobbes has been associated with the realist tradition; yet a growing number of critics argue that neither Hans Morgenthau nor other classical realists saw Hobbes as a theorist of international anarchy.<sup>16</sup> Nevertheless, the association of Hobbes and realism, the conflation of the Hobbesian state of nature with international anarchy, and the argument that strong power is needed to secure survival, are all markers of what could be called the realist conception of international politics.

Citing Hobbes as formative political reading can therefore be interpreted as the respondents' tentative attempt to give the impression that she or he has well understood the anarchical nature of international politics and is perceptively aware that this anarchy is structural, as it is conditioned by the lack of an overarching ruler or "Leviathan." Hobbes's description of the state of nature in which all men, whether by evil or by

good, stumble into chaotic relations, summarized in his famous “*Men live without a common power to keep them all in awe,*” simply seems a very correct observation of the war-prone international system.<sup>17</sup>

Another interpretation of Hobbes places much less emphasis on the association of the state of nature with anarchy, and focuses more on Hobbes’s skepticism about reality. This reading requires a somewhat closer study of Hobbes’s philosophy beyond the *Leviathan*, yet, due to Richard Tuck’s and Skinner’s work on Hobbes, it has become more widely known in the past decades. Hobbes was, like many intellectuals of his time, intrigued by the first astounding results of the optical sciences, and he derived from these and from other, philosophical sources, like Michel de Montaigne’s works, a deep skepticism about men’s capacity to capture and understand one universal truth. His skepticism was, as Tuck points out, less about the existence of truth than about men’s capacity to recognize truth, if it existed, all in the same way as *the* truth; and even if men would all universally recognize truth, this would still be no proof that it was the true truth.<sup>18</sup> Hobbes’s skepticism was epistemological and ontological. Indeed, Hobbes saw the origins of war exactly in the diversity of such central values as good or evil.

Consequently, Hobbes understood language to be the only means by which men can establish if not a common understanding, then at least an authoritative and, by common agreement, shared definition of central values and the laws that should reign over them. The king’s role is to be the arbitrator and authorized author of this definition; the king is, and this is crucial, not considered a person, but an abstract principle, namely that of arbitration.<sup>19</sup> The king is awarded this role for no other reason than his being the sovereign who, by definition of the word “sovereign” itself (again, as institution, not as person), is able to provide protection and guarantee the survival of the citizenry—an early formulation of the social contract between rulers and ruled.

In this reading of Hobbes, an organization like the United Nations, or a nongovernmental organization that brings peace and development, has a particular place in the world as arbitrator of international relations. These organizations are exceptional because they break the logic of anarchy and international survival. Even though they are not sovereign in the classical sense, they are able, in principle, to provide protection from hunger, fear, and death.

The idea that the UN offers a global social contract is a very attractive justification for intervention. The UN, and in a larger sense the so-called international community, proposes the same deal to citizens as does the

Hobbesian sovereign: namely, the protection of the right to survival in exchange for the legitimacy of authoring the rules of the world citizenry. With regard to Hobbes's skepticism, the justification similarly proposes that international multilateral organizations take up a special role in international politics, as institutions that can name and define global politics in a *disinterested* manner by using its own language to arbitrate between conflicting interests. They are not states that are motivated by particular and parochial interests; they are similar to Hobbes's *kings as arbitrators*. Hence, citing Hobbes as most influential political reading, as many of the respondents did, does not represent a contradiction of the conviction that multilateralism and international law are the most apt instruments of international peace, but a corroboration of it.

It is the insistence on leadership on the one hand, and the survival of the political community on the other, that puts Machiavelli in the same category of political thinker as Hobbes and, in certain senses that will be explained more below, Plato. There are certainly deep and important differences between the three, most notably their philosophical reflection about truth that set the skeptics Machiavelli and Hobbes apart from the idealist Plato. Yet all three developed arguments about political leadership that turn around the central idea of virtuous leadership for the preservation of the commonweal; a discourse that resonates well with the international civil servant discourse of Hammarskjöld (see chapter 5).

The argumentative logic of Hammarskjöld's international civil servant and the Machiavellian, Hobbesian, and Platonian ideal of service to the community is the same. The Prince's morality must not lie in being good when it is outright self-destructive to be good; Hobbes's king does not need to be right, good, or wise, but simply the only one who resolves ambiguity; and Plato's philosopher kings might be misled, but, as long as they honestly serve the republic, they are always just.

The peacebuilding narrative is quite similar: neutral international civil servants are doing right and good when they are doing well, as described by the UN Charter and by international law. An overarching idea of the public good (the "republic" in Machiavelli's case, or the UN Charter in Hammarskjöld's case) serves as the key reference for ethical judgments. Whatever serves the right cause is good service, even if this includes unfairness or injustice in particular instances.

Plato in particular developed the argument that it is the purpose of virtue that makes a political act good and just, rather than its actual effect or the way it is executed. Only if the purpose of a political act is reasonable and reached through thorough logical reflection will it be

truly disinterested, and so by definition beneficial to the public good (as opposed to individual interests, which follow whim and sentiment). According to Plato, philosophers are called upon to govern because they have the rare capacity to understand truth, as they have the faculty of objective and reasoned judgment. A philosopher seeks truth with his or her (women, too, could become philosophers) entire soul if she hates untruth; is only interested in ideas, not in material goods; and is brave, generous, autonomous, just, and conciliatory. True philosophers are selected through exigent education in warfare for their bodily strength, but also in algebra, geometrics, analytical geometrics, astronomy, harmonics, and dialectics. These sciences allow them to be enlightened and to guide the “blind” and ignorant.

Plato argued that his was a utopian ideal, as very few men understand the importance of philosophers and are thus willing to grant them ruling status. Furthermore, politics is corrupted by material desires and private property. Both provoke eternal struggles and antagonisms between the rich and the poor. These struggles lead society down the path of decline, where the political community moves from aristocratic government (which is the closest to Plato’s philosopher state), to an oligarchic government, then, through rebellion, to democracy, which is accompanied by increasing laziness and lack of discipline, as the formerly disempowered classes do not have the necessary qualities to rule. The institutional decay of democracy finally allows a populist tribune to take power and to become a tyrant. The tyrant is the exact contrast of the philosopher: cruel, rapacious, passionate, unjust, and a warmonger, full of hatred, and, deep inside, unhappy.

Plato’s philosopher state has been highly influential on the formulation of a large variety of elite political schema and on utopian visions of society, as it has sharpened liberal thought. It has provided for two thousand years the cultural script of political philosophy that discusses a utopian past or future in order to contrast this vision of justice with the present one, where moral decay, institutional dysfunction, and human fallibility lead to constant struggle and violence. Although Plato on the one hand, and Machiavelli and Hobbes on the other, are epistemologically opposed, all three argued for strong leadership as a political solution to diversity, multiplicity, diverging interests, and human conflict. Their key argument was, in all three cases, that just causes of politics will lead wise rulers (whether arbitrating kings, power-conscious princes, or philosopher kings) to take just decisions.

What is striking in this reference to Hobbes, Machiavelli, and Plato

is how little they correspond to the dominant perception of peacebuilding as a liberal enterprise. Of course, Machiavelli and Hobbes were both writing at the beginning of the modern period, and were theoreticians of a sort of proto-Enlightenment. They had already integrated into their political philosophy disenchantment with the world, the notion that God is dead, and the idea of the individual's immanent, worldly, singular, and lonely responsibility for his life and, as political leader, for his real, existing community. This did represent a major break from the Christian political thinking that dominated much of the Middle Ages. But it was not yet liberal thought. Freedom was no category of thought at all for Machiavelli, and it was a minor concern for Hobbes. Individualism, too, is embryonic in Machiavelli's and Hobbes's thought, so that the central category of liberal political thought, namely individual freedom, is underdeveloped and entirely secondary to the much more important and overwhelming question of the survival and existence of the political community, or, in modern expression, the state. In the clearest contradistinction to a modern thinker, Adam Smith, for instance, neither Hobbes nor Machiavelli, nor Plato for that matter, would even have dreamt of making up an argument for men's capacity for self-organization; the entire enterprise of their political philosophy was about the fact that men are naturally, inherently, necessarily incapable of peaceful self-organization. Neither Hobbes nor Machiavelli make an argument about men's natural capacity for reason—on the contrary, they argue for a strong state exactly because men are not reasonable. Plato does argue that politics are best if built on the grounds of reason, but that reason is not inborn to every man on earth; it is a quality that is gained through education, discipline, learning, and the practice of philosophy. It might, thus, require innate intelligence, but it is certainly no universal and intrinsic characteristic of mankind. People's inherent inconsistency, their unreasonable and irrational behavior, their adherence to arbitrary ideas, and so forth—all this actually justifies the need for leadership that is virtuous, wise, and strong.

### *Contract and Intuitive Liberalism*

The image of liberal peacebuilding is better served with the large array of liberal authors who were equally cited by the respondents: Rawls predominantly, but also Alexis de Tocqueville, John Stuart Mill, John Locke, Adam Smith, *The Federalist Papers*, David Hume, and Benjamin Franklin. These philosophers and liberal theorists are mentioned in the good company of

a long row of novelists and essayists who deal with liberal preoccupations: the dystopians H. G. Wells and Aldous Huxley, the libertarian writer Ayn Rand, and the libertarian anarchist Robert Nozick; or, representing again another type of liberalism, the contemporary *New York Times* columnist Thomas L. Friedman. Taken together, readings in classical liberalism represent the third largest category of readings among the 2008 and 2012 surveyees (see figure 11). If dystopians and globalism-favorable literature is counted along with classical liberal political thought, then the category of liberalism even represents the largest (see figure 11).

It is a truism to state that liberalism does not represent a particularly homogenous political ideology. Beyond the common assumption of the individual's freedom, liberal authors will disagree on a wide number of issues, as anyone who compares Rand to Smith will know.<sup>20</sup> Yet the majority of political theory authors mentioned by the respondents are in some form or other adherents of the contract theory of liberalism, the libertarians being a strong outlier here; all authors build their arguments on some kind of undiscussed and "self-evident" assumption that men are endowed at birth with reason and freedom and are born equal; and all these theorists defend in some way a vision of human history as a civilizational process in which full liberal democracy represents, if not a real, existing, perfect political system, then at least a desirable utopia.

Contract theory is very obviously the foundation of liberal institutionalism in international politics. Historians of the "International Relations" discipline point out that its origins lie in the Wilsonian moment of bringing together the world's states in an assembly to create a global institution, the League of Nations.<sup>21</sup> The narrative of liberal institutionalism, particularly around the creation of the League of Nations and the United Nations, is authoritatively laid down as the story of rational men coming together and creating a universal institution for the defense of a universal peace.<sup>22</sup> In American political science more generally, for instance in the works of John Gerard Ruggie, adviser to Secretary-General Annan from 1997 to 2001, the widely accepted narrative of international organizations tells the tale that these arise out of functional and rational arrangements among international actors.<sup>23</sup>

Rawls's *The Law of Peoples* offers a theoretical account of such a "realistic utopia," as he calls his proposition for a global covenant in which societies agree upon a set of fundamental rules for living together in an international system without one overarching ruler.<sup>24</sup> In fact, the absence of an overarching ruler is, in Rawls's theory, not a defect but a purposeful part of the design. Formulating his theory of political liberalism, Rawls

presumes that a well-ordered, decent society, which is based on common principles of governance, and does not need a government or state that will rule by force. Political institutions are not necessarily central government institutions. Rawls's ideal society is one of self-government, in which common institutions play the role of arbitrators rather than of rulers—an ideal he sees perfectly well-reflected in the world of states that lack an overarching ruler.

Domestically, societies—that is, liberal and democratic societies—are held together by common agreement on the procedures of appraising justice. These procedures do not define what justice is, but only how fair adjudication of justice can be achieved in cases of divergent interpretations and opinions. Such procedures can, but do not necessarily have to, be institutionalized; more important, they have to be commonly shared and accepted, and must have grown out of the recognition that everyone is equal. The crucial characteristic of Rawls's original position is that not only are all members of the original position equal when they enter it, they also recognize each other as totally equal while deliberating. They do so not out of humanist ideology, but as a consequence of reasonable consistency of thought. If they could not recognize each other as totally equal, there could be no consistently reasonable agreement. Reason, not humanism, leaves them no other option than to recognize each other as equal.

The image of society underscoring Rawls's just society is one of common people building consensus about fairness from within themselves and for themselves. Government of any kind is then simply a functional accessory to reasonable agreement on the procedures of justice. Government does not incorporate the people's will (which Jean-Jacques Rousseau's republicanism requires, for instance); it is merely a set of institutions that assist a people's democratic self-rule—if people can arrange their lives around principles of fairness without state institutions, then these institutions might even cease to exist. Rawls does not make a strong normative claim for a lean state, as Locke did, for instance. But the ideal underscoring his philosophy of political liberalism and public reason is well modeled on the image of self-government of the early settler communities in America, which were only loosely associated into a state.

Rawls's "original position" in his *Theory of Justice* and the analogous covenant of societies in *The Law of Peoples* are the most contemporary formulations of contract liberalism. By developing an argument about public reason as the basis for political liberalism and as a fundamental principle of fairness, Rawls tried to lift contract theory out of the morass

of natural law. In Rawls's theory, individuals do not have freedom or justice as a birthright. Claims about the fundamental character of mutual respect and freedom arise out of the original position. The individuals in the original position agree upon respect, tolerance, and fairness because these are the only reasonable principles to maintain under the condition of an entirely disinterested person.

Rawls's argument is contrary to both the utilitarian and the communitarian argument. Individuals in his system do not behave as egoistic rationalists in the original position as they have no utility to maximize; but they also have no particular identity to defend, and therefore have no interest in doing so either. Disinterest allows pure reason to reign. A social contract based on respect for procedures of justice is the most reasonable solution to the dilemmas that arise when many individual wills have to cooperate and live together in a collective.

Yet, when transposing his political liberalism to the international sphere, Rawls struggles to make a cosmopolitan claim about a global original position. Instead, he proposes a covenant of societies, presupposing the existence of liberal and democratic societies based on the principles of justice found in the original position.<sup>25</sup> This account resembles in many ways the traditional narrative of international liberal peace, in which foundational principles of the international system such as sovereignty, nonintervention, and respect for borders are reasonable devices to prevent risks for existing societies and offer solutions for conflicts, if ever they arise.<sup>26</sup>

Rawls hence proposes a staggered view of the rules of the international system: these rest on the reasonable dialogue between what he calls "civilized" and "decent" societies, which in turn are governed by procedures of fairness that have been determined via a social contract (original position), which has itself become possible because the veil of ignorance has transformed individuals into disinterested and equally free men. Yet at the base of this argument remains the question of what kind of persons those in the original position are. Rawls shifts the argument of reason away from birthright toward the reasoning *process* once people are in the original position, yet he does not address the original, foundational assumption that people are born as individuals with innate reason and liberty, and with equal status one to each other. This ontological preassumption goes entirely undisputed or, indeed, undiscussed.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the most ardent critique of Rawls's liberalism focuses on the original position and the individuals therein. Formulated from various angles, the main and most common concern

is expressed by the question whether a person who is an absolute individual, and stripped of any identity markers such as age, sex, or color of skin, can reasonably exist. Rawls indeed postulates that individuals in the original position do have a basic knowledge of society and economy and also of human psychology . . . the question then arises how they can have this knowledge, but no knowledge about the social and biological facts that constitute society, economy, and psychology, such as the differences between gender, age, race, and communitarian belonging.<sup>27</sup>

Rawls's response to this criticism was evasive. The primacy of the proposition that totally equal, totally free (in the sense of unbound), and totally reasoning individuals can exist, if not in reality then at least as a "utopian" ideal, is simply never fully discussed. As for the question of how the individuals in the original position could actually deliberate—for instance, which language they would speak, that is, which language could be entirely neutral with respect to the sex, age, and cultural belongingness of the speaker, and hence be entirely nonindividual—Rawls simply evaded the debate by pointing out that his was a "realistic utopia," not a vision of political reality.

This elusiveness is not uncommon for liberal theory; in fact, the presumption of *total* liberty is the crucial definition of liberalism and the key to liberalism's inherent logic of progress and perfectibility. Even if in practical terms, now and here, full individual liberty is inexistent, it is a basic ontological assumption that such a state can be achieved someday, somehow. The ahistorical nature of liberalism's presumptions contrasts strikingly with the utopian ideal of historical progress toward truly liberal societies, from humanity's natural state onwards. The ideas of free will and perfectibility intimately hinge upon each other. As Gerald Gaus, Shane Courtland, and David Schmidtz argue:

That the good life is necessarily a freely chosen one in which a person develops his unique capacities as part of a plan of life is probably the dominant liberal ethic of the past century.<sup>28</sup>

What direction should the good life take if it is not to become a better person, or, at least, to live better and more comfortably? Rousseau and Mill defended the idea of progress more vigorously than present-day liberals, who are cautious about suggesting concrete models of the good life, yet the idea that a good life *exists* still persists in Rawls's "original position."

Fundamentally, human beings are free, equal, and reasoned in lib-

eral theory, no matter whether in reality, history, or real life they are or they are not. Contrary to Hobbes, liberals assume that human beings have, in principle, the capacity for self-government and autonomy exactly because they are born free and equal and endowed with reason. Hobbes's protoliberalism ends precisely when it comes in having faith in people's capacity to live peacefully together despite, or even because of, their differences. Rawls's formulation of *procedures* of public reason and fairness, however, allows for divergences of opinion, belief, and lifestyle, all the while keeping to the basic liberal principles of public justification and fairness.

This restraint is the key to the concept of neutrality. According to Rawls and other liberals, political institutions need to respect freedom, and hence not engage in judgments about the good life. Both the requirements of public reason and overlapping consensus that Rawls formulates as the basis for liberal institutions force political institutions to be neutral with respect to the ways policies are justified. Policies cannot be justified by ranking certain types of lifestyles over others.<sup>29</sup>

Yet this neutrality is based on a tacit presumption that, at its origins, society is structured completely equally for all wo/men. This means that lifestyles, cultures, life chances, ideas of the good life, and personal tastes all have the same chances of expressing themselves in the marketplace of ideas, and no structural, indelible, and durable inequalities exist. This presumption simply ignores what Charles Tilly has called "categorical inequalities," namely structural inequalities that endow actors with different capacities to shape life chances according to preestablished categorical dividing lines in society, such as gender or race. As Carole Pateman and Charles Mills have pointed out in their respective feminist and race-sensitive critiques, Rawls's *Theory of Justice* ironically does not address what can be considered the greatest manifestations of injustice, namely gender and race discrimination.<sup>30</sup>

Similarly, his *The Law of Peoples* is frustratingly silent on politics beyond the state system, whether of the transnational kind or in terms of truly global interconnections. In both respects, whether discussing domestic liberal institutions or international politics, Rawls's theorizing takes the existing order for granted and advocates a basically conservative approach to international politics. The conflation of state and society—despite the term "people"—is a particularly noticeable feature of Rawls's conservative approach to international politics. Rawls defines people or societies according to his theory of justice as the group of peoples in which liberal democratic principles of justice reign. He does contrast

societies with “states,” which he defines in *The Law of People* solely by state institutions’ coercive power of sovereignty; hence he defends here a narrow and typical liberal understanding of the state as a *realpolitik* apparatus of force.<sup>31</sup>

Yet, on the other hand, he describes societies using the same terms in which most international law describes states. According to Rawls, a society exists by

protecting its political independence, its territory, and the security of its citizens; maintaining its political and social institutions and its civic culture; securing its proper self-respect as a people, which rests on its citizen’s awareness of its history and cultural accomplishments.<sup>32</sup>

Societies are states built on popular sovereignty and on the democratic constitution of governmental institutions. In liberal and democratic societies, states *are* liberal and just societies. This representation of states not only presupposes that the society/state is the only legitimate form of political community in international politics; it also implies that it is the most reasonable one. Objections to statism, whether from the point of view of alternative, nonstatist political communities, or because of the factual and historical incongruence of society and state, are not discussed. On the contrary, by reserving the notion of “state” for nonliberal, unjust, and immoral societies, and by claiming that states are by nature expansive—the outlaw states—Rawls likens any other form of political community to tyrannical and aggressively expansionist systems.

Hence, *The Law of Peoples* explicitly introduces a ranking of societies in order of legitimacy and “goodness” according to their degree of liberalism in political life. The core of the international society that he proposes comprises liberal democratic societies, seconded by so-called decent societies that respect some of the fundamental rights of civilized people. At the margin of international society, or even outside of it, there are to be found so-called burdened states (so, states not societies) and “outlaw states.” The rationale behind the confusing hairsplitting Rawls undertakes to tease out his notion of state and society becomes clear in this usage: states are, by definition, illiberal institutions. Classical anti-statism that has not overly marked the *Theory of Justice* finds its way back into Rawls’s liberal theory through the backdoor of his classification of international society.

Yet, what crucially underlies Rawls’s international ranking is the idea that societies can change, and that, indeed, such changes can be induced

by intervention or assistance intended to protect liberal and decent societies from rogue states and “burdened” divergent societies. These societies can be helped by more advanced societies to become civilized. Intervention is not only necessary for security and protection, but it is also possible, because people, societies, and political communities can evolve and progress toward higher levels of civilization. This is a traditional liberal view of civilization and progress that already has been expressed by former liberal thinkers like Rousseau or Mill,<sup>33</sup> both of whose works also feature prominently on the list of peacebuilders’ readings.<sup>34</sup>

In sum, Rawls’s liberalism reflects a number of concerns that previous chapters have already identified as characteristic for peacebuilding. With respect to Rawls’s ontology of the individual, we can find the undisputed idea of the reasonable, equal, and autonomous individual who will first of all strive to live a “good life”; and the implicit idea that it is the individual’s responsibility to forge such a “good life” for themselves. In terms of the social and political imaginary, the concepts of social perfectibility and of the autonomy of political decision making are as central to Rawls’s philosophy as they are to contemporary peacebuilding.

### *Social Justice and Progress*

The concept of progress and civilization is, however, not a solely liberal brainchild. Indeed, it reflects much of the Judeo-Christian ontology of time and history, and in particular reveals the Protestant assumption of the improvement and ultimate perfectibility of a given destiny that moves men (and women) along one single, linear life toward the goal of salvation. Mill particularly expressed this core idea of improvement explicitly when he distinguished “civilized nations” from barbarians who show “a very low grade of social improvement.”<sup>35</sup>

The idea that societies can progress toward better states of justice is also the motivation for many respondents to mention Marx when asked about their political readings. The ideological goggles of the twentieth century have trained observers to see social and political thought as being “divided in two: bourgeois sociology and Marxism,”<sup>36</sup> hence setting up Weber as a theoretician of the former, against Marx as spiritual mastermind of the latter. At first sight, it appears therefore surprising to see Marx as having had such a large influence on peacebuilders who, according to the analysis in chapter 5, should be much more clearly part

of the “bourgeoisie.” Yet it is probably more Marx than Weber whose historical materialism reflects the deep belief in the progress through time of humanity, a common destiny, and an ultimate moment of redemption rewarding humanity’s effort in bettering its fate.

Peacebuilders are no communist revolutionaries. When asked for their priorities, if they had the power to transform the world tomorrow, “abolishing private property” was not on the top of the list.<sup>37</sup> Similarly, communist or revolutionary leaders were almost entirely absent from the list of most admired political personalities. Vladimir Lenin and Che Guevara were mentioned only twice each.<sup>38</sup> Revolutions were also not mentioned as remarkable historical events, whereas the end of communism was voted the most important event in recent history by the majority.<sup>39</sup> Of the various ways one can read Marx, peacebuilders most certainly do not read him as an inspiration for creating a communist society.

In fact, Marx can also be read as a sociologist of modernity and industrialization. When putting forward Marx as inspiring reading, peacebuilders signaled that they thought his work is important to understand the structures of estrangement and exploitation but not that they would want to launch a communist revolution. These concerns overlap well with the cited liberal literature, which is also preoccupied with questions of a fair society, albeit under the assumption that social inequality is not necessarily equivalent to unfairness or the pathologies of modernization. The sensitivity toward the structural foundation of injustice is also reflected in other readings chosen by the interviewees such as Michel Foucault, Pierre Bourdieu, or a range of more generalized critiques of capitalist production forms, and most notably of globalization, such as Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett’s *The Spirit Level* or Paul Krugman’s and Joseph Stiglitz’s writings.<sup>40</sup> These readings most particularly express peacebuilders’ concerns over the origins and dynamics of poverty and the negative effects of capitalism, as they can be also seen in the degradation of our natural environment. “Ecology” and “environmental consciousness” were major concerns of peacebuilders in interviews as well as in the open sections of the surveys.

Given the international agencies’ drive for liberalization and the installation of market mechanisms in postconflict reconstruction settings, one finding is surprising: that many peacebuilders indicated that capitalism-critical or capitalism-skeptical readings were important sources of political inspiration. At least half of the people working in peace-

building missions indicated skepticism about the claim that a liberal market economy is beneficial for society, and suspected that the capitalist production mode was the cause of violent conflict.

Yet this critique of capitalism is entirely consistent with the idea of men's moral fallibility. Plato, Hobbes, Rousseau, and Tocqueville saw the primary causes of the evil men do in private and individual greediness; Marx, Antonio Gramsci, Foucault, and Bourdieu saw the causes of conflict, violence, and exploitation in societies in the constraints on behavior that the capitalist production mode imposes on individuals. The difference between the two schools lies in the analytical framework, although not in the observation of connections between material conditions and social conflict.

More important however, is the fact that in the history of social movements over the past forty years, critique of or skepticism about capitalism have provided an important justificatory discourse for individual commitment to intervention. The structural constraints of capitalism are taken for granted, and so is the corollary power analysis of Gramsci, Foucault, or Bourdieu, which all converge in postulating that these structures are systematic and embodied so that they are beyond an individual's capacity to change. In this case, peacebuilders will argue that their work contributes to bettering people's lives—at least, that tiny bit that is possible within the given structural constraints. Such an interpretation is in line with many statements made in in-depth interviews, where interviewees pointed out that they felt rewarded for their work in peacebuilding missions because they “contribute a little bit” or “at least, they make a little difference.” The argument that they made little contribution is deployed largely in more scholarly discussions of humanitarianism, for instance by the founder of Doctors of the World, the first head of the UN mission in Kosovo, and former French foreign minister Bernard Kouchner, or the Oxford researcher Hugo Slim.<sup>41</sup>

This observation also allows us to perceive a consistency between this literature and the larger corpus of contemporary nonfiction books on specific countries and events. Most of these recount individual stories of salvation or redemption in or after conflicts, such as *Au nom de tous les miens* (For Those I Loved, in English) by Martin Gray or *The Heart Must Break*, by James Mawdsley, both autobiographical tales of overcoming injustice and violence (although it must be pointed out that Gray's book was not only ghostwritten but also contains untruthful parts, particularly about his detention in Treblinka).<sup>42</sup> They praise the individual's fight against the machine, very much replicating the disillusionment of

the post-1968 and post-1989 political culture that led to the idea that capitalism as a system is too powerful to be changed.<sup>43</sup>

The sensibility about the negative effects of capitalism corresponds largely to humanist sensibilities, similar to those that motivated charitable social movements in the nineteenth century, from the abolition of slavery to Florence Nightingale's early humanitarianism. Scholars like Martha Finnemore or Michael Barnett have commonly identified humanism as an ideological precondition for the rise of humanitarian norms. They identify a common history of humanitarianism and the idea of a right or even an obligation to intervene in order to save civilians, and situate this humanist-humanitarian turn in the revolutionary age at the end of the eighteenth and the course of the nineteenth centuries.<sup>44</sup>

Although sharing the intellectual origins celebrating human individualism and reason, humanism developed into its own branch of political philosophy. Most accounts of the history of humanitarians, however, tend to refer to any kind of liberalism as humanism. Barnett, for instance, mentions the conservative liberal Edmund Burke and the utilitarian liberal John Stuart Mill as representing the humanist tradition. A fine analysis of liberal traditions, however, shows up some important differences between libertarian liberalism and humanism. The latter emphasizes individual agency to a much larger extent and deals explicitly and particularly with the paradox that men who are endowed with reason are still also subject to sentiment and emotion. The struggle between sense and sensibility is at the heart of this philosophical reasoning. Of these sentiments, those that are seen to make us particularly human, namely compassion, empathy, and charity, are the philosophers' and literature's objects of interest.

Given the emphasis that historians of intervention put on this tradition, it is surprising how weakly the humanist tradition of political thought is represented on the reading list. The most mentioned philosopher of this tradition is Rousseau, who particularly stressed compassion as an organizing idea of political communities. Yet, other important figures, such as Voltaire, Immanuel Kant, the twentieth-century philosopher John Dewey, or, to mention a non-Western writer, Rabindranath Tagore, and in the literary section Victor Hugo or Stefan Zweig, are largely absent from the reading list. Voltaire and Kant are mentioned once each, the latter with specific reference to his *Perpetual Peace*. Taken out of the context of his general philosophy, this short text has become a classic of the liberal peace tradition.

The great mythical events of this discourse are the Lisbon earthquake,

the abolition of slavery and British abolitionist William Wilberforce; the Crimean War and Florence Nightingale; and Henri Dunant's "souvenir of the battle of Solferino" and the creation of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the Geneva Conventions; or, starting somewhat later, the creation of Oxfam during the Second World War or Médecins sans Frontières in Biafra. These events, however, were not mentioned by the peacebuilders interviewed in response to any question about historical events, nor do the names associated with the humanitarian movement appear in the list of admired personalities.

The identification with the humanist tradition of international political action seems, therefore, weak, and then only associated with a concern for global social justice, which was expressed in a range of other questions: all respondents agreed fully or at least a little with the statement that "worldwide exploitation and economic injustice are the basis of world-wide armed conflict"; similarly, nobody refuted the argument that "wars are the expression of fundamental inequalities in society."<sup>45</sup> The logic of both statements follows the social justice understanding of wars, namely that gross social inequality will provoke conflict.

Unsurprisingly, many respondents emphasized values of solidarity, equality, and equity of distribution of public goods, and advocated state-led social reforms.<sup>46</sup> On the list of things respondents would do if they had the power to change the world tomorrow, measures like land reform ranked high. However, the measure "abolition of private property" ranked extremely low. Furthermore, the list of values also showed an interesting gap between women and men. Women were in general more sensitive to values that reflect a philosophy of care and solidarity, as table 4 shows.

Taken altogether, this allows for the conclusion that significant skepticism exists toward the economic liberal claim that capitalism is beneficial to everyone and everything. Yet the peacebuilders did not draw the conclusion that capitalism should be abolished; simply that its harmful effects need to be moderated. Humanitarian action and individualized contributions to a collective good are legitimate strategies of cushioning the populations hit hard by global capitalism, given the latter's structural irreversibility.

This last type of discourse remains compatible with the former two, particularly with respect to elite politics. Moreover, the common core allows for a common ground to discuss diverging opinions, attitudes toward, and views on practical politics. Notably, the references to professionalism and the collective endeavor of "doing good" provide a fertile ground to build consensus, and may therefore also be considered as a

thick organizational culture. Already in the first mission in the Congo the main line of defense in all memoirs written about this time is that “[w]e saved people and that was what this whole thing was about.”<sup>47</sup> In contemporary peacebuilding, too, the “efficient good-doer” precept binds the missions together: that all that is done is for the benefit of the victims, and whatever is done is done professionally, and through the great individual efforts of every single peacebuilder.

### *Conclusion*

The peacebuilders’ reading lists reveal an important part of the dominant discourses of intervention. Far from being mutually exclusive, the

**Table 4. Female-male differences in political values**

Values	Women—average consent (1 fully agree—5 fully disagree)	Men—average consent (1 fully agree—5 fully disagree)
Combativeness of individuals	4.38	4.19
Community and belonging	3	2.46
Competitiveness	3.3	2.78
Conflict	5.59	5.21
Contention of politics	4.14	3.39
Critical discussion	1.73	1.88
Ecology	1.67	1.78
Equality	1.49	1.75
Equity	1.65	1.77
Fairness	1.38	1.52
Family values	3.57	2.81
Harmony of society	2.22	1.98
Home	3.78	3.08
Identity	3.64	3.07
Individual liberty	1.97	1.93
Individuality	3.59	2.83
Loyalty to the state	3.59	2.96
Merit of individuals	2.62	2.2
Nation and patriotism	4.14	3.31
Plurality of lifestyles	2	1.93
Private property	3.27	2.78
Security	2.08	1.94
Solidarity	1.86	1.89
State sovereignty	3.17	2.75
Tolerance	1.46	1.63

three discourses mentioned above (leadership, liberalism, social justice) converge to form a solid *doxa*—a normatively framed metadiscourse on the rightness of and need for intervention by outsiders to reestablish peace in a society.

Peacebuilding happens based on the solid conviction that a small, well-educated, highly skilled, and “professional” group of people can effectively and legitimately rule a political community if their intentions are to serve the community. The philosopher king, the king as arbitrator, or the reasoned prince are placeholders for the enlightened and disinterested international civil servant. The discourse of being above particular interests, whether they are national interests, as in Hammarskjöld’s time, or the particular interests of warlords in today’s wars, remains a powerful justification for peacebuilding. Rawls’s liberal theory of the law of peoples provides the grammar in which the idea can be expressed that global institutions (international law, organizations, regimes, and so forth) are the fairest agents of justice in the world, as they adjudicate, arbitrate, translate, convert, and distill particularist ideas of justice. Given the structural inequalities and injustice in the world, international agents are also the most appropriate to intervene in order to fight poverty and change the world *un tant soit peu*.

The three discourses are complementary and form one justificatory complex. This does not mean, however, that all peacebuilders would wholeheartedly agree on these three discourses and uniformly reproduce them. As the gender difference in the value ranking above shows, important disagreements will exist over the right order, the right sequencing, and, of course, the right interpretation of these values. Women put solidarity, tolerance, and equality first, and traditional liberal values such as individuality, private property, or competitiveness find themselves relegated to being not so quite important preoccupations; men, on the other hand, display the profile that is commonly depicted as traditionally liberal, with a much greater emphasis on individuality, security, and merit. These findings reflect similar findings on sex differences in work values or general political values; they also reflect other studies’ findings that such sex differences are rather small with respect to value orientation, but significant with respect to considerations about the consequences of actions for others and for the environment.<sup>48</sup> Hence, such differences do indicate that female peacebuilders would situate problems differently from their male colleagues and, consequently, propose different policies and measures, thereby seeming to be more inclined to take the consequences of action into account.

All three discourses, however, provide justifications for the ethics of protection and intervention, as they are expressed in the responsibility to protect doctrine and in concepts of human security that accompany much of the peacebuilding measures. All three presuppose a global community of equal human beings whose actions and lives depend on one another in some way or other. The reading list shows the range of political worldviews and its outer limits. All three discourses converge around fundamental values such as merit, individual freedom, rights (including to private property), autonomy, and justice; all the while they represent a formidable repertoire of antagonistic arguments within this wider frame of assuming a universal, international community. Actors within the field can distinctively position themselves with respect to each other without abandoning this fundamental core. At the same time, the common adherence to this core inscribes the outer limits of the field.

The existence of a global community is, given these considerations, a fact not a debate. The views of the world expressed in the writings discussed above are mainly ahistorical; indeed, historical analyses of the world in general and critical accounts in particular (i.e., neo-Marxist or postcolonial analyses of the world system) are entirely absent from the reading list. The conflicts that have shaped this world, and the struggles that are still ongoing over the definitions of universal values and global community, disappear from sight.