

Morality part 6

Political Ethics

This part begins the last four parts of the series which focus on putting into practice the principles we have discussed thus far. The first part of the synthesis is political ethics. Political ethics centers on the role of governance and world politics. Common ethical situations within political ethics are war and government structure. How are we to behave as a country? What should be our obligations or commitments to other countries and the world? How ought we to be governed?

Immigration

The issues of immigration and emigration are both hot topics for political debate. Should we allow people to freely immigrate from one country into our own? What rights do people of other countries have to immigrate to our country? What is our obligation to provide for these people?

Basic Principles:

Countries have a right to secure their borders. A new wave of thought emerged in the last 10 years to encourage a global governance. This governance would eliminate countries and borders making us one global system. The Church is against this notion of a global governance due to the rights of countries. The borders of a country are not simply boundaries to keep one political entity separate from another. Country boundaries establish cultural, ethnic, and political separation. A person living in a particular country knows his identity, culture, history, and people. This cultural difference allows for the flourishing of people and the beauty of diversity. We should work to maintain the diversity of the world and political boundaries of borders protect this diversity. Therefore every country has a right to protect its citizens, protect its cultural and historic diversity, and have control over the passage of people from outside its borders.

Rights of peoples. One of the topics not normally discussed within the context of immigration is the rights of people. Pope Francis spoke at length of the issues of validating the personhood of immigrants in his encyclical *Fratelli Tutti* (On Brotherly Love). Those who immigrate have serious reasons for seeking immigration. Most come from impoverished countries with low economic development. This means that those who immigrate must leave family, nationality, and familiarity to move to a new location due to necessity. Pope Francis affirms the right of people to immigrate in order to seek their own advancement when not available in their country.

The conflict:

How can a country respect the rights of immigrating peoples while secure its borders and protect its national culture? This question is the center of the debate. On one extreme countries are not morally allowed to close their borders to those immigrants seeking safety or in desperate need of advancement. On the other extreme countries would have complete open borders pose a safety risk to their citizens. Policies regarding attainment of citizenship, freedom to work and live within another country, and systems of border policing must all respect both the rights of the nation and the rights of human beings.

Voting

Basic principles:

Within a governmental structure that gives its citizens the right to vote, the citizens are morally obliged to vote. Various situations can dispense the moral obligation to vote in specific circumstances. If the nature of the law being voted upon is immoral both to vote for and against, then the obligation is dispensed because the only moral option is not voting. If the person is not mentally or physically capable of voting, the obligation is dispensed. Ignorance of the issues, however, does not dispense the obligation to vote. Conversely, the obligation to vote is also tied with the obligation to know the issues of the time and understand the object being voted upon. The unfortunate consequence of freedom to vote and participate in the political system is the necessity of understanding the issues at stake.

Voting in America

The issue of voting is most prominent in America where we bind ourselves to a two-party system. The two-party system necessitates choosing between only two options. Some argue that we have other parties within the United States giving us more than two options for voting. Although this criticism is true, the other parties have rarely made any difference in American politics. Some say choosing another party is throwing away a vote. This criticism is not true. In a situation in which a person cannot morally vote for either of the two major political parties, voting for a minor party is choosing to oblige both the moral obligation to vote and the personal conscience of not choosing the two major parties.

How ought we to vote? The Catholic Church wrote an entire document and produces one each voting year to help Catholics understand the issues at stake and inform their consciences. Ideally we should always vote in such a way as to conform to our consciences. As stated earlier in this series, that implies that our consciences are well-formed. We can never vote for a policy that is immoral. We should never vote for a candidate whose stance is blatantly immoral. Yet, with a two-party system, this may be impossible. When it comes to the moment of voting, like any moral decision, each person must vote based on their conscience and the most important of the political issues presented. I cannot give further advice without speaking on specific issues or candidates.

Governance

Basic principles:

Each country has the right to choose its own form of governance. Not all systems of governance are equal. The role of governance is to allow for the freedom of each individual citizen to flourish and live well. Thus a good government system should respect and promote the basic rights of each citizen, support system that allow and promote human flourishing, protect the citizens, and stabilize the country to allow for collective growth.

Subsidiarity: The principle of subsidiarity states that a government should promote actions to be taken at the smallest level of governance possible. In other words, issues should be handled at the

lowest level possible. Example: Food banks. Food banks can realistically operate at the level of a local community. An individual household is too small for the proper functioning of a food bank but a local community like a town or city county feasibly operate the food bank. These operations including: financing, supplies, policing those who come, and responding to the needs of the community. These operations become hindered or corrupt the further up the chain of command the administration of the food the bank is operated from. Therefore, local communities are the best place to fully operate a food bank.

Taxes: an integral part of a governance system is taxes. Taxes supply the income for those in authority to supply the basic needs of the people including projects that affect the whole county, war, government, and programs. Citizens are morally obliged to pay taxes as part of the country they live in. One exception to the rule: taxes that explicitly fund immoral projects. This exception is tricky and must be understood as a rare exception.

Obedience to government officials: As part of the country and the political system it adheres to, the citizens are morally obliged to respect those in office. Respect does not mean full compliance with the policies of the government especially in a democratic or representative system. Obedience means an adherence to the laws, a willingness to work toward the good of the country, a respect for those in office as elected officials, and to work toward embittering their country through the means given to them.

Summary: government leaders and citizens have an obligation to support their country of residence and work towards to good of all the citizens within that country. This includes using their rights to promote to the common good, work with political systems to promote a just and moral society, understand their role and the issues, and know their obligations for the good of their country. Governments have the moral obligation to promote the flourishing of their citizens as a basic human right. Any government that oppresses or opposes the good of their citizens is acting immorally.

Just War

Basic principles:

The Tragedy of war: war is never the best option. The destruction caused by the mechanics of war leave devastation in its wake and the loss of many lives. The Church teaches that war should be avoided at all cost.

Collateral damage: during times of war, the destruction caused by war machines affects more than the targets soldiers. This is called "collateral damage." A just war, or a moral war, affects only soldiers. Napoleon was the first leader to begin a new form of war called "total war". Napoleon once remarked to a friend who lamented the loss of 30,000 soldier from a war, "you lost 30,00! I lost 30,000 in a day." The change in combat style from soldier on a battlefield to combat within cities change the form of war from combat trained units to targeting citizens, thus total war. Collateral damage is never a moral decision. Targeting citizens or citizen buildings like hospitals is considered a war crime because of the international code of war. Thus a truly just war must be fought between soldiers and not affect the citizens who are not fighting the war.

Causus Belli (the cause of war): The reasons for starting a war are usually the means through which a country justifies its action to engage in a war. Common causes include: the promotion of justice, the spread of democracy, the liberation of people, defense of one's country, and, rarely, religious liberty. How many of these are truly justified? The defense of one's country is always justified. What are the boundaries around defense of a country? Does the threat of war count or does damage need to be done before one can engage in war? All of the other causes of war have options beyond a war. Through international politics, economic aid, and other forms of policies, we have ways to achieve those ends without combat. Thus, as the modern age progresses, the fear of conflict and the devastation it brings is causing nations to become reluctant to start a war.

Summary: does a just war exist? Theologians wrestled with this question for many years. Some argue yes, a just war is possible. For the defense of a country or for the liberation of a severely oppressed people, war is justified. Others argue that the damage caused by war and the devastation upon the person's homeland is so great that war is never justified except in self-defense. The final conclusion is that each situation must be evaluated given the destruction the war would cause weighed against the value from winning the war.

International Obligations

Basic Principle:

Globalization: The issue of international politics is quickly becoming a major issue for every country. With economics and policy intertwined across all the nations of the world, the decision of one country can have vast implications for every other country. With such a globalized world, the major question remains: what is our role in international politics? Can a country be isolated from the world and not participate in international affairs? How do we understand the people of the world?

Economics: the above issue of globalization is deeply rooted in economics. As countries use resources of other countries to fuel their own economy the issues of rights of peoples and the exploitation of countries becomes the moral issues. Can one country exploit another for economic gain? Does the richer country have an obligation to support the economic development of the country they are using for gain? Again, citing from Pope Francis' encyclical *Fratelli Tutti*, we are all brothers and sisters. The less we understand our common humanity, the more we take advantage and exploit others for our own gain. The major problems of the world can be resolved by recognizing the human dignity of each person of the world and working towards a just order. Thus the economic system of exploitation of developing countries is immoral. We cannot treat other human beings as slaves to our economic progress.

Environmentalism: although a hot button issues throughout regions of the world, environmental policy is one of those issues that affect everyone. The prime example is Fukushima. When the earthquake hit and almost destroyed the nuclear reactor, fear of toxic waste affecting water and air quality prevailed in international politics. No longer can we assume the actions of one country are limited to their borders; actions of any country affect all. Thus international political ethics deals with the globe as the home of all humans.

War: although I covered war earlier in this session, the choice of going to war for global peace is different than just war theory. Since all the nations of the world are interconnected, global war is now a bigger issue. When one country goes to war against another, as we have seen in the Russia/Ukraine war, all the surrounding countries and those throughout the world are affected by this war. War now becomes synonymous with a world war. This fear of a total war or world war caused countries to act differently when another country is attacked. United groups of countries like NATO try to limit the chances of war by binding countries into a conglomerate. Do we have a moral obligation to join a fight between two other countries? Would our moral obligation change for economic reasons, political reasons, reasons of safety?

Freedom of peoples: a major trend in political thought is to advance the progress of peoples by instilling a particular set of beliefs or governance. The war in Iraq is a great example of a war fought to bring democracy to another nation. The belief that one political system leads to greater freedom than another or a style of culture will bring greater advancement has led to many of the underlying political decisions. Another example of this idea of “freedom of peoples” is the westernization of the world. Most nations see the west and the cultural ideals of American as the way to live well. Adopting these cultural norms have led to the degradation of their own culture and national identity. Should we force a governmental system on another nation? Can we enforce cultural norms under the guise of promoting freedom and justice?

Policing the world: another major issue in the United States, and sometimes NATO, is the idea of policing the world. Do the larger countries have a moral obligation to end wars, work towards peace, free oppressed people, solve international disputes, or control the workings of the world? We argue in the United States that we keep a large military so that we can protect and defend ourselves but also maintain peace throughout the world. Several of the war we engaged in over the last century we based on the idea of policing or protecting other nations. Is it moral for a country to adopt a policy of protecting the world?

Summary: international politics is becoming increasingly more complicated. Whereas the Middle Ages saw the rise of kings and the politics between kingdoms, the modern era has become globalized meaning that every country’s actions affect the entire world. With everything on a global scale, the morality and ethicality of economics and commerce, war and peace, policy and independence, environment and freedom all become global issues. How are we to act with such a complex and intricate system?