

International Justice as Equal Regard and
the use of Force

by

Jean Bethke Elshtain

Jean Bethke Elshtain is The Laura Spelman Rockefeller
Professor of Social and Political Ethics, The University of
Chicago, and the author, most recently, of Jane Addams and
the Dream of American Democracy (Basic Books, 2002).

Debates about international justice typically range over the well traversed terrain of distribution and redistribution. From Dame Barbara Ward's Rich Nations, Poor Nations, published in the early 1960s, to calls during the Jubilee Year of 2000 for forgiveness of the Third World debt, justice is thought of in economic terms. A person's economic status, so the argument goes, largely determines his or her life chances. All of us are persons who, through neither fault nor merit of our own, just happen to be born within the boundaries of a wealthy country or an impoverished one. Justice consists in righting the balance between these cases. I am not going to revisit this question, in part because I believe a more exigent matter lies before the international community, namely, helping to bring about the political stability--the minimal civic peace--necessary to attain and to secure fundamental human goods, including a measure of distributive justice.

Absent political stability, every attempt to prop up impoverished countries must fail. Justice demands accountability and there is no political accountability where there is no structure of power and laws. Absent such a structure, the likelihood of what we now routinely call 'humanitarian catastrophes' is magnified many-fold. A

paradigm example of the ills attendant upon political instability is the disaster of so-called 'failed states' in which human beings are prey to the ruthless and the irresponsible. States themselves, whose raison d'etre is maintaining stability and civic peace, may become disturbers of civic peace, hence agents of injustice. What follows is an argument for international justice construed as an equal claim to have coercive force deployed in your behalf if you are a victim of one of the many horrors attendant upon radical political instability. Most often this instability is instigated by ruthless ideologues or presided over by feckless profiteers.¹ An ossified, dictatorial order also qualifies as a violator of minimal civic peace given the instability human beings suffer in situations in which fear reigns supreme. The force to be brought to bear in such cases is lodged within a structure of restraints that I will spell out. Equal regard backed up, if need be, by coercive force, is an ideal of international justice whose time has come.

¹ It should be obvious from my description of the problem that the instability I refer to is not the disturbance to civic peace attendant upon social and political contestation. In such cases, including those involving widespread civil disobedience, a structure of laws and accountability is in place--and it is precisely this structure that becomes a target for protesters to the extent that they believe the law encodes specific injustices. I am referring to law-less situations of

If you are a political theorist, as am I, your starting point is almost invariably the ancient Greeks. Most often political theorists look to how the Athenians understood the life of the citizen in the polis. But what happens if you explore the contrast between the rules that applied to citizens within the polis to the norms and practices that governed dealings with foreigners? As it turns out, justice lies at the heart of the matter. According to Athenian thinking--and it is this thinking that lies at the basis of what became known as realism or realpolitik in international relations--different spheres set the boundaries for norms of right and wrong, the just and the unjust. A sharp internal/external split prevailed. Justice governed relations among citizens within the polis. Force came into play between Athenians and others. What would be counted a wrong against a citizen was not so adjudged if it pertained to an external political entity or a foreigner.

The locus classicus of this rule in its most extreme form is the so-called Melian dialogue familiar to all readers of Thucydides's The Peloponnesian War. When the hapless citizens of the island of Melos refused to give up their seven hundred year old tradition of civic liberty, the

cruelty, arbitrariness, violence, and caprice and these abound at

Athenian generals proclaimed that the strong do what they will and the weak suffer what they must. The Athenians attacked the island, slew the men, young and old, and sold the women and children into slavery.² To be sure, diplomacy and arbitration might be called upon to mediate this norm of force in relations with external others, but the sharp presumptive divide--justice as internal norm, force as external rule--held, with acts of generosity toward the foreigner embodying an exception.

Political and conceptual struggle and debate surrounding the concept of justice since the ancient Greeks largely concerns to whom justice is owed as well as in what justice consists. A dramatic challenge to the severe 'us' (citizens), 'them' (foreigners) rule was embodied in Christian doctrine from its inception. Christianity put pressure on the notion that good or ill treatment should be meted out differently, depending on whether or not a human being was or was not a member of one's particular tribe or polity. Instead, hospitality extended to all without exception. The most famous of the parables of Jesus

present.

² Thucydides, it must be noted, did not lift up the Melian dialogue as a depiction of exemplary behavior on the part of the Athenian generals; indeed, it presaged disaster for Athens. Oddly enough, however, this

illustrating this claim is the story of the Good Samaritan. If a Samaritan, with whom the Jews of Jesus's day had no neighborly contact, could treat a beaten and robbed Jew with tenderness and mercy, was it not possible for a Samaritan to be good and for the normative presumptions to be reversed? Hospitality--caritas--obliged believers, whether the one to whom aid was proffered or from whom aid was received was a family or tribal member or a stranger.

In many ways, this melting down of the neighbor-stranger divide where moral obligation is concerned is counter-intuitive. It is unsurprising that we feel most deeply obligated to family and friends, first and foremost; second, to members of our own culture, clan, or society, with foreigners and strangers coming in a distant third. An injustice meted out against one of our own pains us more keenly than does injustice perpetrated against those far removed from us by language, custom, and belief and separated from us by borders and geographic distance. This is only human and the fact that this 'only human' intuition got solidified into enforced practice, sometimes severely so, should not surprise us. More surprising by far is the early Christian challenge to this intuition.

extreme case of the use of force is often located by contemporary

St. Augustine, in his typically ironic fashion, captured the complexity attendant upon human fellowship in this famous passage from Book XIX, Chapter 7, The City of God:

"The diversity of languages separates man from man. For if two men meet and are forced by some compelling reason not to pass on but to stay in company, then if neither knows the other's language, it is easier for dumb animals, even of different kinds, to associate together than these men, although both are human beings. For when men cannot communicate their thoughts to each other, simply because of difference of language, all similarity of their common human nature is of no avail to unite them in fellowship. So true is this that a man would be more cheerful with his dog for company than with a foreigner."

Mutual unintelligibility to the contrary notwithstanding, however, all human beings without distinction deserve consideration and should not be subjected to arbitrary abuse within Christian theology, whatever the lamentable shortcomings of Christian practice over the centuries. The ancient Greek distinction between justice and force never

realists as a case in point for their perspective.

disappeared, of course. It made a powerful come-back in the writings of Machiavelli and other so-called civic republicans and it was reencoded by the Peace of Augsburg (1555) and, most tellingly, the Treaty of Westphalia (1648). With Westphalia, the norm of justice as pertaining to members of a particular territorial entity was given official sanction in its recognizably modern form, marking the beginning of the international state system. The presumption of state sovereignty held that the state alone was the arbiter of what counted as justice, law, freedom, and everything else within its bounded territory. Efforts at softening sovereign autonomy (associated with Hugo Grotius and the notion of international law) were only partially successful, and were observed most often when hewing to international norms and state self-interest could be reconciled.

At the same time, Christian universalism remained alive not only in theological and moral arguments now advanced within a divided Christendom, but present as well in several traditions of theologically grounded political practice. Where the matter of international justice is concerned, the most important of these is the just or justified war tradition. Many will find this a surprising claim. How can

a method of assessing whether a resort to war is justified, and going on to evaluate the means used to fight a war, bear directly on contemporary debates about international justice? The argument, simply put, is this: the just war tradition is not just about war. It is a theory of comparative justice applied to considerations of war and intervention. Among other things, this means that the post-World War II universalization of human rights deepens and enhances the importance and reach of the just war perspective rather than running counter to it. Just war argument and universal human rights are not only not incompatible, they should, instead, be placed within the same frame. In what, then, does the notion of justice with universal applicability, as imbedded within the just war tradition, consist? To answer this question, a precis of the basics of just war doctrine is required.

Just war argument insists that no unbridgeable conceptual and political divide be opened up between domestic and international politics, precisely the cleavage central to the ancient Greek world and, as well, to realpolitik with its resolute insistence that the rules that govern domestic moral conduct and obligation apply only to the body politic internally and are inapplicable to relations between states

in an international arena construed as a zone of anarchic self-help. Just war politics, by contrast, insists that while it would be utopian to presume that relations between states can be governed by the premises and care apposite in our dealings with family, friends, and fellow-citizens, this does not mean that a war of all against all kicks in once one leaves the hearth, the neighborhood, or the borders of one's country.

On the other end of the scale of possibility, just war thinkers also worry that certain appeals to a more cosmopolitan or internationalist order--whether of a Kantian or utilitarian nature--that make no distinction between the thick moral obligations we owe to those nearest and dearest and the thinner obligations that oblige us where strangers and those far removed from us are concerned, cut so powerfully against ordinary human moral intuitions and are cast so abstractly that they are either unrealizable in principle or unsustainable in practice. The universalism flowing from the obligation of neighbor-regard begins with the concrete, going on to embrace members of one's church community as "brothers and sisters." This expanded ideal obliges those who are members of a particular community in relation to others outside their

community. The obligation is a concrete one compelled by one's profession of faith that works from basic human experience outward, so to speak: this by contrast to the notion of norms that descend from a great height whose rarified atmosphere is inhabited by a few philosophers who have sorted out universal categories supposedly untainted by particular interests or communal experiences.

Just war thinking is best known as a cluster of concrete injunctions: what it is permissible to do; what it is not permissible to do, where the resort to, and the use of, force is concerned. For example, a war must be openly and legally pursued; a war must be a response to a specific instance of unjust aggression or the certain threat of such aggression; a war may be triggered by an obligation to protect the innocent (non-combatants), not members of one's polity, from certain harm; a war should be the last resort: these are the so-called ad bellum criteria.

As a set of strictures about war fighting, just war insists that means must be proportionate to ends--the rule of proportionality--and that a war be waged in such a way as to distinguish combatants from noncombatants--the principle of discrimination and the most important in bello criterion.

Note that one harm that justifies a forceful response, if other criteria such as last resort, are also met, is sparing the innocent from certain harm: the innocent being those in no position to defend themselves. A response to a direct attack is similarly exigent. Acts of aggression, whether against one's own people or against those who cannot defend themselves, are stipulated as cases of injustice that warrant the use of force. This does not mean one must respond with force. It does mean that a justice claim has been triggered and a resort to force is justifiable without being automatic.

Herein lies the rub, the point at which just war and international justice as equal regard make contact. Because the origins of just war thinking lie in Christian theology, a view about human beings as equal in the eyes of God underscores what is at stake when persons are unjustly assaulted, namely, that human beings qua human beings deserve equal moral regard. Equal regard means one possesses an inalienable dignity that is not given by governments and cannot be revoked arbitrarily by governments or other political bodies or actors. It follows that the spectacle of people being harried, deported, slaughtered, tortured, or starved en masse constitutes a

prima facie justice claim. Depending on the circumstances on the ground as well as the relative scales of power--who can bring force effectively to bear--an equal regard claim may trigger a movement toward armed intervention in behalf of the hounded, tortured, murdered, and aggrieved.

There are times when the claims of justice override the reluctance to take up arms. This is a principle sanctified over the centuries in the case of aggrieved states who are the victims of aggression. As a principle applying to all peoples without distinction, however, this claim is by no means universally affirmed. What I am calling for is bound to be controversial, namely, the use of force as a remedy under a justice claim based on equal regard and inviolable human dignity. The upshot is a presumptive case in favor of the use of armed force by a powerful state or alliance of states who have the means to intervene, to interdict, and to punish in behalf of those under assault.

If the claim is universal, some might cavil, ought not an international body respond? Perhaps, but all too often United Nations "peacekeepers"--and they are tagged peacekeepers, not soldiers--are obliged by their rules of engagement (rules of disengagement would be more like it)

to stand by as people are being slaughtered. International bodies have defaulted on the use of coercive force in behalf of justice as equal regard. This makes the insistence that there are grievances and horrors to which 'we' must respond provided 'we' can do so in a manner that avoids, to the extent that this is humanly possible, either deepening the injustice already present or creating new instances of injustice, doubly difficult to sort out. Let's tackle the first difficulty, what it means to make a claim under the equal regard norm, before turning to the second vexation, namely, who can be called upon to use coercive force in behalf of justice.

Defining and defending international justice as the equal right to have force deployed in your behalf means that an aggrieved group is obliged to make the case that theirs is a just cause of substantial gravity. Genocide or ethnic cleansing is the most obvious case in point. But there are others, including many man-made disasters that are now the occasion for 'humanitarian intervention'. Devastating famine is a case in point. As Amartya Sen has demonstrated, famine on a catastrophic scale is most often the coming together of natural factors (many years of drought, for example) with manipulated starvation engineered by cruel

political actors to further their own ends. In such circumstances, it makes far more sense to speak of intervention in a just cause, and to call it justified war, than to obfuscate with the term 'humanitarian relief.' If attack helicopters, armored personnel carriers, automatic weapons, and the like are involved, it is a war of one sort or another. If famine is the casus belli, one interdicts and punishes those responsible for preventing food from reaching starving people.³ Calling these situations 'humanitarian intervention' only clouds the issue. The real problem is a political one and coercive force remains an extension of politics by other means.

Let's unpack further an equal regard claim to the deployment of armed force in one's behalf if one is a victim of systematic injustice in the form of substantial and continuing harm. One further implication of this claim is that a third party may be justified in intervening with force in order to defend those unable to defend themselves, to fight those who are engaged in unjust acts of harming,

³ I would not use U.S. military personnel to respond to authentic natural disasters, like flood relief. International humanitarian relief agencies, including non-military U.S. personnel, NGOs, should be deployed in such instances. In light of the current war on terror, deploying our military to respond to the aftermath of hurricanes and the like will stretch us too thin. Humanitarian relief and coercive force must be kept distinct, in part in order to limit coercive force rather than to bury it under the humanitarian rubric.

and to punish those who have engaged in unjust harm in order to diminish if not destroy their capacity to continue on a path of egregious and limitless violence of the sort embodied in Osama bin-Laden's infamous fatwa calling on all Muslims everywhere to kill all Americans wherever they may be found. Force that observes limits is frequently called upon to fight force without limits.

Because I advance this argument as a form of comparative justice, it is important to note what the equal regard argument does not mean. It does not mean that any one nation or group of nations can or should respond to every instance of violation of the innocent, including that most horrific of all violations--genocide or ethnic cleansing. It is important to note that the just war tradition incorporates a cautionary note. Be as certain as you can, before you intervene in a just cause, that you have a reasonable chance of success. Don't barge in and make a bad situation worse. Considerations such as these take us to the heart of the in bello rules, those restraints on the means deployed even in a just cause. Means must be proportionate to ends. The damage must not be greater than the offenses one aims to halt. Above all, non-combatant

immunity must be protected, even as one recognizes that, in any armed conflict, non-combatants will fall in harm's way.

A prudential warning that intervention in a just cause might exacerbate the harm, or that the only means available in a given situation will themselves create unacceptable injustice--like massive damage to the civilian population of a country or group being harmed by another country or group--must be addressed within the equal regard-just war framework.⁴ In such sad situations, those called upon to intervene are obliged to affirm the equal regard norm even as they spell out explicitly how and why they are unable or unwilling to undertake the risks attendant upon intervention with force. The reasons for standing down must themselves be grounded in the equal regard norm, for example the high probability that more victims would die as a result of armed intervention in their behalf than would likely suffer if such intervention is not mounted.

This approach is better by far than strategies of evasion and denial of the sort visible in the 1994 slaughter by

⁴ Here precision guided weaponry has rolled-back many arguments that modern war and the just war tradition are by definition incompatible. This is surely true of a total war absent restraint. It is not true of a limited war with restraint and fought in order to punish egregious aggression, to interdict terrible violence, to prevent further harm.

Rwandan Hutus of Rwandan Tutsis. Exculpatory strategies at the time included claiming that the full extent of the slaughter was unknown. Or that, as bad as the slaughter was, it wasn't as bad as other cases of genocide, so action that might put American (or other) soldiers in harm's way wasn't warranted. In this and other well-known cases, one is confronted frequently with the spectacle of officials speaking boldly about universal human rights and going on to revert to a narrow doctrine of national self-interest in order to evade the implications of embracing these rights.

A tragic case from the Bosnian war that illustrates both evasion and ineptitude is the fact that safe havens under a United Nations umbrella were declared for beleaguered Bosnian Muslims. People flowed into these safe havens and were there shot to pieces as United Nations Peacekeepers stood by. The United Nations Peacekeepers were impotent under standing rules of engagement. The United States, fearing unfavorable domestic political reaction, temporized, making promise after promise it never kept. Word was sent down that administration spokespersons were to avoid using the word "genocide" because that word triggers an immediate reaction of horror and might create pressure to act.

Samantha Power writes in The New York Review of Books (March 14, 2002): "First, they [administration officials] wanted to avoid engagement in conflicts that posed little threat to American interests, narrowly defined. And second, they hoped to contain the political costs and avoid the moral stigma associated with allowing genocide." By turning the issue into one of international peace-keeping rather than just war-making, ethnic cleansing proceeded apace and its results were ratified with the Dayton Accords. Refusing to name horrors correctly--calling genocide genocide, for example--is a strategy of evasion that becomes more difficult to mount if a clear commitment to international justice as equal regard attains a status akin to that now enjoyed by the right for a state to defend itself.

Suppose one state does intervene in behalf of a victimized state or people? Does this in and of itself mean that the principle of equal regard is being honored in full? Not necessarily. Take, for example, United States intervention in Kosovo under the rubric of NATO authority. The rules of NATO engagement in Kosovo are an example of a failure to abide by a central norm of the just war tradition, namely, that it is better to risk the lives of one's own combatants

than those of enemy non-combatants. With its determination to keep American combatants out of harm's way--to enjoy a zero-casualty war for our soldiers--the Clinton administration embraced a principle I call combatant immunity, not only for our own combatants but indirectly for Serbian soldiers, too, as no attempt was made to interdict the Serbian forces on the ground where the damage to Kosovar civilians continued and even escalated with Nato bombing. The Serbian Army operated with impunity for weeks even as plenty of collateral damage to civilians was going on.

In a hard-hitting piece on "War and Sacrifice in Kosovo," Paul W. Kahn scored the administration's violation of the equal regard norm. His comments are worth quoting at some length:

"If the decision to intervene is morally compelling, it cannot be conditioned on political considerations that assume an asymmetrical valuing of human life. [emphasis mine] This contradiction will be felt more and more as we move into an era that is simultaneously characterized by a global legal and moral order, on the one hand, and the continuing presence of nation-states, on the other. What

are the conditions under which states will be willing to commit their forces to advance international standards, when their own interests are not threatened? Riskless warfare by the state in pursuit of global values may be a perfect expression of this structural contradiction within which we find ourselves. In part, then, our uneasiness about a policy of riskless intervention in Kosovo arises out of an incompatibility between the morality of the ends, which are universal, and the morality of the means, which seem to privilege a particular community. There was talk during the campaign of a crude moral-military calculus in which the life of one NATO combatant was thought to be equivalent to the lives of 20,000 Kosovars. Such talk meant that those who supported the intervention could not know the depth of our commitment to overcoming humanitarian disasters. Is it conditioned upon the absence of risk to our own troops? If so, are such interventions merely moral disasters--like that in Somalia--waiting to happen? If the Serbs had discovered a way to inflict real costs, would there have been an abandonment of the Kosovars?"

The humanitarian intervention doctrine animating the Kosovo war not only built in no barriers to the kind of crude calculus Kahn condemns, it tacitly encouraged a situation

of unequal regard for the following reason. Humanitarian intervention relies on a model of international victimization. Those victimized are represented as in need of relief. We--the more powerful--come to their assistance as an act of pity or, at best, empathy, rather than as a requirement of justice for those perceived as equals. The humanitarian relief model in such circumstances is somewhat analogous to the bureaucratic welfare model of a needy client dependent upon the largesse of a powerful and remote provider. This creates a bizarre situation--one we witnessed frequently in the 1990s--of American soldiers, the best equipped and trained in the world--deployed as high-tech social workers.

By contrast, the equal regard doctrine as an elementary requirement of international justice sets up a citizenship model. We--the more powerful--respond to attacks against persons who cannot defend themselves because they, like us, are human beings, hence equal in regard to us, and because they, like us, are members of nations, states, or would-be states whose primary obligation is to protect the lives of those citizens who inhabit their polities. Thus, all states or would-be states have a stake in building up an international civic culture in which fewer horrors such as

Rwanda or Kosovo take place and in which those that do take place trigger a level of concern that warrants the use of armed force, unless grave and compelling reasons preclude such intervention. We intervene by sending in soldiers who fight under rules of engagement that abide by just war norms, most importantly non-combatant immunity. If we cannot intervene, other means must be resorted to immediately. People should not be slaughtered because powerful nations are dithering, hoping the whole thing will soon be over, and using domestic political considerations as a trump card in refusing to do the right thing.

Samantha Power, again, from her essay, "Genocide and America", writes:

"People victimized by genocide or abandoned by the international community do not make good neighbors, as their thirst for vengeance, their irredentism, and their acceptance of violence as a means of generating change can turn them into future threats. In Bosnia, where the United States and Europe maintained an arms embargo against the Muslims, extremist Islamic fighters and proselytizers eventually turned up to offer support. Some secular Muslim citizens became radicalized by the partnership, and the

failed state of Bosnia became a haven for Islamic terrorists shunned elsewhere in the world. It appears that one of the organizations that infiltrated Bosnia and used it as a training base was Osama bin Laden's al-Qaeda."

I have long argued in my work that moral imperatives are not so many nice-sounding nostrums that we can simply ignore when the chips are down in favor of hard-headed evocations of national interest but, instead, that ethical considerations are a constitutive feature of American national interest. It is in our long term national interest to foster and to sustain an international society of equal regard. An equal regard standard is central to a well functioning international system composed of decent, if not perfect, states. These states may or may not be democratic. Democracy is an ideal for the long term. Stopping brutality and arbitrary violence, including the growth of terrorism and what Michael Ignatieff has dubbed "apocalyptic nihilism", is both a strategic necessity and a moral requirement of the highest priority for the short term. In Ignatieff's words, "...freedom becomes an issue only after order has been established"--this from a February 28, 2002, essay in The New York Review of Books.

The politics of equal regard, hence the right to make a claim for armed intervention rather than simply humanitarian assistance, establishes a framework for the achievement of a decent, stable international order as the necessary prelude to freedom and to international justice. Many states are capable of responding to local situations indigenous to a region, even if that means sending their soldiers into a neighboring country. But if, say, you come from a country whose nationals comprise a minority population within a country at some remove, and they are being destroyed, or threats are made to destroy them, your obligation under the equal regard rule is clear. You are obliged to make a case on the grounds of justice, not humanitarian relief, as you call upon those with the means to intervene. You--this hypothetical country--are also obliged in a circumstance in which, say, the unarmed missionaries of a particular religion are being executed systematically by another state or states. These peaceful missionaries may not be "your" nationals but faithfulness to the alliance of equal regard with universal human rights means obligations are not limited to one's own nationals, or tribe, or co-religionists. In this latter circumstance, you are not the party obliged to make the case, but you are

obliged to respond once the case has been made with whatever means are at your disposal.

Finally, who is the "we" called upon to intervene to protect the innocent from harm, the "we" to whom a country without the means to intervene must make its case? The United Nations cannot be ignored, of course, but nor has it proved to be effective in this regard. Once a measure of order is restored, United Nations Peacekeepers may indeed be the best body to enforce a fragile peace, at least in some situations. But the United Nations habitually temporizes, sends radically mixed signals, and takes so long to gear itself up and put peacekeepers on the ground that its unreliability in this regard needn't be argued at great length. The likeliest 'we' at present with both the means to enforce international justice as an equal regard norm and a strong motive to do so is the United States. The United States is capable of projecting its power as no other state can. The United States is itself premised on a set of universal propositions concerning human dignity and equality. There is no conflict in principle between our national identity and universal claims and commitments. The conflict lies elsewhere--between what we affirm and aspire to, what we can effectively do, and what we can responsibly

do. Here fundamental human moral intuitions will inevitably and invariably come into play. I described these as a powerfully felt human urgency to protect, to care for, and, yes, to seek justice in behalf of, those nearest and dearest to us--our families and friends. Second, we feel these obligations keenly toward our fellow countrymen and women and, third, toward a more universal category of all persons without distinction.

If the case can be made--and it isn't just an exculpatory strategy to avoid acting under the equal regard principle--that those nearest and dearest (categories one and two of family and friends and fellow nationals) will be directly imperiled if one acts, the obligation to act under equal regard may be affirmed even as exigent prudential reasons for why one cannot act in this case are proffered. A reasonable and justifiable departure from the equal regard norm, e.g., a claim that substantial harm will come to one's fellow citizens if one acts, not as a remote possibility but as a high-certain probability, does not apply to the anticipated harm to military men and women attendant upon any commitment to coercive force: it is their job to go into harm's way. It is also their honor to fight as just warriors rather than as terrorists unleashed

like the Athenians at Melos, determined to slay young and old alike or to take them into slavery without exception.

It is extraordinarily difficult to articulate a strong universal justice claim and to assign a particular state and its people a disproportionate burden to enforce that claim. But international justice as coercive force in behalf of equal regard does precisely this. At this critical juncture in human history, the United States is a polity that acknowledges on a foundational level universal premises and is sufficiently powerful to act, or to put pressure on others to act, when and where no other state or states can. The brutal Melian rule is hereby reversed: The strong do what they must in order that the weak not suffer what they too often will.