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The Religious Dimension of the Liberal Case for Humanitarian Intervention

Abstract. Political theorizing about armed humanitarian intervention has been dominated by liberalism. Contemporary liberal political theorists broadly agree about the right, if not the duty, of intervention in at least grave cases of human rights violation. This essay argues that the liberal case for humanitarian intervention, despite its secular outlook, features a religious dimension: it tacitly relies on a particular Christian understanding of politics. The argument of this essay is twofold. First, the liberal argument for humanitarian intervention is "actively Christian": it implicitly assumes that political leaders perform normative "Christian prudence" instead of "secular prudence" - more specifically, "higher prudence" rather than "lower prudence". Second, the liberal interventionist ideal is "Roman": it entails a further secularized continuation of the "Roman" tradition as opposed to the "Protestant" one within Christian intellectual thought. The religious dimension of the liberal case for humanitarian intervention may be aptly characterized as "progressivistically Roman".

Keywords: Liberalism; humanitarian intervention; religion; war ethics; international political theory

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INTRODUCTION

As with fighting global poverty, inequality, and climate change, political theorizing about humanitarian intervention – military interference by an outside power for the primary purpose of protecting civilians of a particular state – has been dominated by a secular liberalism. At the core of the humanitarian intervention debate lies the tension between the principle of state sovereignty and the evolving norms concerning individual human rights. Until the 1970s, liberal political theory usually defended the view that states are like individual persons in having rights of autonomy, and therefore are entitled to sovereignty and non-intervention. However, contemporary liberal theorists, while they disagree about whether principles of global distributive justice are called for, are in broad agreement about the right, if not the duty, of intervention in at least grave cases of human rights violation (Walzer 2004c, cf. 2006; Rawls 1999; Beitz 1999; Téson 2003) - provided intervention achieves the best possible human rights outcome (cf. Heinze 2009). Today, the liberal standard assumption is that states should secure basic human rights, and that their sovereignty is at most of instrumental, certainly not of intrinsic, value[1].

[1] A qualification seems in order. While liberalism is grounded in the demand for a substantial domain of personal freedom that the state (or any other political institution) ought not to violate except to protect others from harm, various liberalisms have come into existence. One important distinction often made is between "Anglo-American" and "Continental" liberalism. The latter position, with Austrian economist Friedrich von Hayek as a key figure, insists on economic freedom. The state should facilitate economic activity, but should not intervene in the free market to promote some desired outcome or "distributive justice", as that would involve improper interference with personal freedom and, as a centrally planned activity, cannot but fail. Anglo-American liberalism, of which John Rawls is a leading theorist, rejects such "libertarianism", arguing that (economic) freedom may have to be limited somewhat for the purpose of equality. Political intervention may be called for to "correct" the operations of the free market in order to create more just outcomes, notably for worse-off members of society (Brown 2007: 151-155, cf. 165). Thus, the secular liberal case for humanitarian intervention (which broadly unites "communitarian" or "pluralist" liberals and "cosmopolitanist" liberals notwithstanding their disagreement about the scope - national or global - of distributive justice)

In this essay, I argue that the liberal case for humanitarian intervention, despite its secular (non-religious) outlook, features a religious dimension: it tacitly relies on a particular Christian understanding of politics. At first glance, liberals may seem to have good reasons for denying the relevance of religion for their case. Thus, first, it seems clear that humanitarian intervention is a "fundamentally liberal enterprise" rooted in Enlightenment and modernity (Bass 2008: 7-8). Second, experts such as Martha Finnemore (2003) and Gary Bass (2008), while they disagree about whether nineteenth-century humanitarian intervention is to be understood in terms of either pan-Christian loyalties (Finnemore) or non-Christianized humanitarianism (Bass), agree that the scope of contemporary humanitarian intervention includes non-Western and non-Christian populations, too. The international norm now is that all humans, whatever their worldviews or further characteristics, possess inalienable human rights that should be protected. This is most visibly the case after the end of the Cold War, as the interventions in Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia-Herzegovina, Liberia, and Macedonia demonstrate. Third, arguments such as Brian Lepard's (2002) that the revered texts of world religions (including Christianity, Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, Confucianism, and Islam) all advocate human rights and humanitarian intervention seem more pragmatic than substantive, and may be criticized for employing selective reading (underlining "pro-rights" passages, while ignoring or downplaying "anti-rights" passages), as humanitarian intervention is never directly addressed in

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to be examined in this essay originates from the Anglo-American liberal tradition, which has come to prevail in international political theory. It may still be noted that not all Anglo-American philosophers somehow sympathetic to liberalism would endorse the progressive, left-wing outlook of the Anglo-American variant. To mention but one example: conservative thinker Michael Oakeshott (whose thought is religious rather than rationalist) would presumably, more or less like Hayek, have defended a "skeptical liberalism" of limits on power and ambitions, low expectations, and order maintenance instead of a liberalism of justice and human rights promotion (Canovan 1998).

these texts. And yet, my claim is that the liberal political-theoretical defense of humanitarian intervention depends on - and so cannot work without - certain beliefs or value systems regarding what is ultimate (unconditioned, uncaused, pre-political) and thus is not religion-free at all[2]. Such an outcome may shed new light on both the modern humanitarian intervention debate and liberal political theory. Even leading liberals such as John Rawls and Jürgen Habermas, who have come to give significant room for religion in their political thought, have persisted in keeping their theoretical attitudes secular in the sense of religion-independent. However, at least with humanitarian intervention, liberalism may be truly religion-reliant, or at any rate much more so than liberal political theorists recognize[3].

The independent strength of the liberal analysis of (international) political issues lies in its "technical" capacity to supply justification, clarity, and precision to the use of moral concepts such as rights, obligations or duties, and justice (cf. Kamminga 2007). Yet, as regards humanitarian intervention as I aim to show, from the point at which we must move from abstract ethics into

[2] For this understanding of religion compare Philpott (2002: 68).

[3] Rawls's political philosophy was driven by a deeply religious temperament (Nagel 2009). And as a political, not comprehensive, liberal theorist, Rawls allowed religious arguments in the public sphere. Yet he maintained that, under pluralistic conditions, realistic justifications of laws and policies require that religious arguments be complemented, sooner or later, by non-religious, neutrally secular reasons (Rawls 1999: 144, 152). Habermas, an atheist who signals the impact of Judaism and Christianity on modern ideals of freedom and justice (and a European philosopher who has attempted to bridge critical theory and Anglo-American liberalism), criticizes Rawls for saddling up religious communities with the hard task of translating their religion-based moral beliefs into a secular moral vocabulary suitable for modern pluralism, which puts them in an unequal position compared to non-theists who are able to employ a native secular language. Yet he remains a dedicated secular theorist who is vigilant about non-translated religious arguments in the public domain, particularly at the level of formal governance, and merely tries to redress the imbalance by requiring that non-religious citizens cooperate with religious citizens in the task of translation towards a "post-metaphysical" vocabulary (Habermas 2006; cf. Hannan 2009). At its core, the *theory* of "secular liberalism", also when addressing the issue of humanitarian intervention (cf. Kreide 2009 for both Rawls and Habermas), embraces morality and appeals to ethics, but avoids religion in its political reasoning (cf. Stout 2004).

political ethics - which includes moral reflection on authority[4], leadership responsibility, and military obligation (cf. Gaskarth 2011), and analysis of moral-political ideals - the religious input is not to be overlooked. I offer a twofold argument. First, the liberal argument for humanitarian intervention is "actively Christian": it implicitly assumes that political leaders perform normative "Christian prudence" instead of "secular prudence" – more specifically, "higher prudence" rather than "lower prudence". Second, the liberal interventionist ideal is "Roman": it entails a further secularized continuation of the "Roman" tradition as opposed to the "Protestant" one within Christian intellectual thought. Taken together, these arguments suggest that the religious dimension of the liberal case for humanitarian intervention is to be characterized as "progressivistically Roman".

THE "ACTIVELY CHRISTIAN" CHARACTER OF THE LIBERAL INTERVENTION ARGUMENT

Liberal political theorists believe that any state or political community rightly willing to undertake a humanitarian intervention should be prepared to risk the lives of its soldiers (Archibugi 2004: 11-12). "Soldiers are destined for dangerous places, and they should know that (if they don't, they should be told)," writes Michael Walzer (2004c: 73; cf. Tan 2006: 107-108). For liberals, a basic distinction between readiness to sacrifice oneself for national self-defense and willingness to die for the basic rights of "strangers" does not exist: "soldiers [should] risk their lives, first for their compatriots and then for the innocent members of other countries" (Walzer 2004b: 45). Liberals, then, have strongly criticized the intervention means applied in Somalia, Bosnia, and Kosovo, particularly the increasing reliance on air strikes, as these means suggest that Western

[4] In the conclusion, I shall comment explicitly on the role of authority in humanitarian intervention within the context of just war thought.

governments value the lives of their soldiers and those of the civilians they purported to rescue differently. Thus, Walzer (2004a: 17) condemns "what NATO did in the Kosovo war, where its leaders declared in advance that they would not send ground forces into battle, whatever happened inside Kosovo once the air war began". Without political leaders' willingness to put soldiers at risk in faraway places when their own country is not under attack and when national interests, narrowly understood, are not at stake, humanitarian intervention, although justified, will often be impossible. It is the purpose of this section to show that this position of liberal theorists makes sense only if its reliance on Christian prudence, notably higher prudence, is acknowledged.

Liberals themselves have realized that their stance needs further defense. Even when "external" justifications in terms of justice and necessity exist, the more "internal" question that remains is how leaders could justify to their soldiers that they will be sent abroad on humanitarian missions. Thus, Walzer (2004c: 74) answers that "all states have an interest in global stability and even global humanity", and that if one remains insensitive, one "will soon have to pay the political price of turmoil and lawlessness nearer home". Fernando Téson (2003: 126-127) offers the "important qualification" that the government must send voluntary soldiers before resorting to conscription, because, as contract draftees, "[v]oluntary soldiers have validly consented to fight in cases where the legitimate government believes there is (a morally) sufficient reason (apart from consent) to fight". James Pattison (2010: 110) argues that it is only regular, volunteer soldiers that can be justifiably used for humanitarian intervention: "the soldier-state contract is not limited to defense of a state's vital interests. A soldier can expect when signing up that they will take part in humanitarian and peace operations, given the frequency of such operations" (cf. also Tan 2006: 108).

However, such arguments seem to overstretch the liberal position. Note first that the issue that needs addressing is what motivational rationale should bring state leaders to exercise a right to humanitarian intervention by employing military forces. In wars of self-defense or strong political interests related to international order, this motivation is more or less self-evident: self-protection. However, (authentic) humanitarian interventions have other-regarding, altruistic motives: the defense of human rights elsewhere. Whereas in the first set of cases a state takes on enormous financial, cultural, and bodily dangers to defend its own interests (directly or indirectly), in humanitarian interventions it assumes such risks in order to help others (Miller 2000: 16; Achterhuis 1999: 55). Thus, as Richard Miller (2000: 16) writes, "[t]he politics of self-defense and the politics of rescue appear to derive from different wellsprings of action", as "[i]t is much more difficult for a political leader to ask citizens to risk their lives to address other countries' needs than it is to rally troops for a national emergency". Peaceful citizens of democratic countries, even when moved by compassion and shocked by atrocities, are reluctant to wage war for others (*ibi*: 16-17).

Trying, then, to bridge the motivational gap by appealing to indirect self-defense, which is what Walzer does, is unconvincing. As Miller argues, this argument is too abstract and empirically unstable to provide sufficient basis for countries with interventional power to assume risks for the sake of rescue in peripheral regions, that is, the world's most vulnerable regions, in which countries cannot rely on a strong ally or immediate neighbor (*ibi.*: 17-19)[5].

[5] Thus, more concretely, "indirect self-defense" offers no real incentive for the United States or other NATO member states to undertake other-regarding, military risky interventions in African countries torn by humanitarian disaster and in lack of protection, as it is hard to imagine how conflict in countries such as Somalia or Rwanda could ever create serious danger to America or Europe. Consequently, Walzer's "division of labor" proposal, grounded in a notion of special regional responsibility, also falls short. Writing in 1994, he suggested the following: the European Community, or its member states, should have intervened in Bosnia;

Clearly, attempting to render this argument more positively as one of indirect self-benefit (more future welfare for ourselves because of the world having become a safer and more just place) does not really help to eliminate this serious problem. In its reliance on promise, or hope, "indirect self-benefit" remains too vague a basis for asking individuals to risk their lives for humanitarian causes (cf. *ibi.*: 21-24)[6]. Thus, Walzer's argument might support

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the Organization of African Unity should have intervened in Rwanda; and the United States (with Central American and Caribbean states) should have intervened in Haiti (Walzer 2004c: 79). Problematic for this position is that even within a region human rights violations in one area need not necessarily endanger or affect the interests of another (note that Walzer, who combines liberalism with communitarianism and stresses "thick" national identities, does not appear able, and is presumably not even willing, to demonstrate the existence of strong regional identities, not even of a European identity). But moreover, it remains the case that some regions and their populations - again, Africa comes to mind - are left at serious risk thereby when facing a humanitarian crisis. Their only hope for rescue is contingent on contiguous states, which may (and often will) be military or politically weak and lack adequate resources for intervention (Miller 2000: 18; Rieff 1999: 8). Further, Walzer acknowledges that his position makes it hard to tell who was responsible for stopping the killing in southern Sudan or East Timor. He argues that, in cases of unclear responsibility, the United States should pursue military initiatives or, if possible, should stimulate other states to take action (Walzer 2004c: 79-80). However, it is by no means clear what long-term national interests should make the United States act in one of these ways (Miller 2000: 18; cf. Kamminga 2002: 87-88).

[6] Note that the argument of indirect self-defense or benefit cannot be improved by pointing out that humanitarian intervention may help the intervening power to attain or strengthen a condition of hegemony. Now it cannot be excluded that the interventions in Bosnia and Kosovo have resulted in an enhancement, however marginally, of the hegemony of the United States (cf. Reiff 1999: 10). Yet such an argumentation strategy would fail for at least two reasons. First, it is questionable whether humanitarian intervention in vulnerable, marginalized (rather "insignificant") regions would indeed promote (Western or American) imperial dominance, and even if it did, whether the gain in this respect would be such that it could justify the cost of putting the lives of soldiers at risk. Again, particular world regions would face the prospect of being left without outside help when experiencing a humanitarian disaster. Second, more fundamentally, the very logic of hegemony seems incompatible with (genuine) humanitarian interventions. If a state aims at hegemony for itself – a goal that seems devoid of moral considerations and may easily have immoral consequences – then it is hard to see why it would ever intervene militarily in conflict-ridden regions for primarily altruistic reasons. Indeed, one would then rather foresee that state to employ moral rhetoric as a cover-up for its interest in promoting its hegemony (for a pro-humanitarian intervention argument that even leftists should not worry too much about the danger of American "humanitarian imperialism", see Van der Linden 2006). Thus, it would be illogical, if not inappropriate, for a liberal political theorist to try to save the indirect self-defense or benefit argument in this way.

NATO's current war against Islamic fundamentalism and terrorism in Afghanistan, but it does not apply to humanitarian intervention.

Next, the "voluntary contractor" (set of) argument(s), while not wholly implausible, is inconclusive. First, this argument largely, and ironically, excludes humanitarian intervention by countries that happen to have no voluntary soldiers available. Second, more important, this argument is juridical rather than (political-)ethical. It does not offer adequate moral guidance to the political leader for whom the use of military means for protection of humanitarian values will be much less absolute than its use for protection of national security. The "body bags argument" weighs heavily in humanitarian interventions, much more so than when protecting one's own territory. And it does not sufficiently guide the military person, giving no satisfactory reason why to expect him or her to exchange a patriotic, concrete, and bounded motivation for a more universalistic, principally endless and distant, psychologically (even) more straining, one. Pointing to the voluntariness of contract signing does not show that the vital identification is conceptually and emotionally not only possible on the nation-state level, but also on the level of a "world political community". The liberal case does not do full justice to the following "humanitarian paradox": Western soldiers will encounter fighters who, fueled by ideology, nationalism, ethnicity, tribalism, or religious fundamentalism, are willing to go into the extreme, while they themselves can hardly see the conflicts in which they come to find themselves as worth dying for (Christ Klep, cited in Achterhuis 1999: 55).

If indeed such arguments fail, it would seem that liberals must acknowledge that military persons have no moral obligation to participate in humanitarian intervention, but have a supererogatory duty at most: participation is praiseworthy or heroic, but not obliged (cf. Baer 2011). Note

that, as James Fishkin (1982: 70) states, “[w]e cannot [by some ethical theory] be morally *required* to be heroes…[S]uch a conclusion is an indication that something has gone wrong” (emphasis in original). Insofar as a strategic necessity exists for employing ground troops, or at least not to exclude this option, the problem is that military persons may refuse to risk their lives for humanitarian, thus non-traditional, policy goals (Kamminga 2002: 88-90). On this basis, leaders’ basic attitude would be that military personnel “may accept [humanitarian] deployments in the name of the ideals of international community, but only to a certain (and rather low) threshold of pain” (Cook 2003: 151). Since, then, the (internal) question about the duty to ultimate assistance lacks a satisfactory liberal answer, it makes sense to see if the liberal case for humanitarian intervention actually relies on some outside factor.

What liberal political theorists neglect, and seem unable to comprehend in their own terms, is that their argument for humanitarian intervention entails a case for a (far-reaching) form of *policy*, not merely for some (well-articulated) principle of justice. But, as James Gustafson (1996) has argued, “policy” should assume the position of moral responsibility and so cannot be solely determined by ethical principles. Moral discourse about policy is distinct insofar as it needs to accept “the standpoint of persons who have institutional roles that require them to formulate policy within the limitations and possibilities of resources accessible to them” (*ibi*.: 53). Thus, to reflect adequately on political leaders’ decision-making concerning sending soldiers to faraway places for humanitarian goals entails that considerations typical of responsible leadership are addressed as well. In order to do this - to take up the problem of “translating” ethical principles into a morally sound intervention policy - one must bring in the political-ethical concept of *prudence*, properly understood as “practical wisdom”, or the character-based capacity (of leaders) to deliberate

and act in a non-ideological, other-regarding, and self-controlled way, with due regard for the friction of circumstances or "particulars" (Coll 1999; cf. Kamminga 2007: 434-437; Jackson 2004). Ironically, one major problem of secular liberalism, which tends to reduce the practical-political to the abstract-moral and is rather silent about the conditions of leadership (cf. Brown 2002: 184-185, particularly in the context of humanitarian intervention)[7], is that it by itself lacks the resources to oppose the "prudence" of "secular realists", such as Thucydides, Machiavelli, and Hobbes, who treat politics and morality as basically divorced and prudence as the skill of distinguishing those actions that best serve one's self-interest. For all its moral force, and despite its political pretensions, by itself liberal theory is not obviously incompatible with an amoral political prudence that is narrowly instrumental and tends to equate prudence with "caution, stealth, and the successful quest for survival… of the self or a particular political community" by all necessary means (Coll 1999: 76-77)[8]. However, a more original, religious prudence tradition – one that insists

[7] Admittedly, as a just war theorist, Michael Walzer (notably 2006: 287-327) has discussed the question of (political) responsibility quite extensively. However, while it can be debated whether his reflections on this issue show sufficient awareness of the moral character of the leadership domain, what matters most here is that they fail to shed light on the specific responsibility that leaders face when considering sending soldiers abroad for humanitarian purposes and are of no help to liberal political theory in this regard.

[8] For a classic analysis of Hobbesian (and Machiavellian) amoral prudentialism in international relations, or "international skepticism", see Beitz (1999: 13-66). Machiavelli regarded every political action directed at the power of the state as legitimate, even if it necessitates the use of immoral means. "[I]t is necessary to a prince, if he wants to maintain himself, to learn to be able not to be good", and "he is often under a necessity, to maintain his state, of acting against faith, against charity, against humanity, against religion" (Machiavelli 1998: 61, 70; cf. Coll 1999: 90, Achterhuis, 1999). As David Boucher (1998: 141, cf. 126, 136) comments, Machiavelli "is concerned only with the common good of the ruler's own state, and not with that of those states he conquers and subjects", and attaches more weight to the power and glory of the ruler's own state than to balance of power and order with other states. Indeed, with the Renaissancist Machiavelli there was a first attempt to break radically with the Christian conception of prudence, particularly its "higher" version (see the text below), as Machiavelli's "post-Christian" prudence idea entailed: "deprivation" of prudence of its intrinsic orientation towards ultimate ends, in favor of a total directedness towards proximate concerns; secular patriotism; subordination of religion and ethics to politics; justification of immoral essential acts

on the final authority of the "ought" over the "is" in politics (*ibi.*: 75) – has the capacity to condemn secular prudence. In the wake of Thomas Aquinas, it could point out that such "prudence" is "false" for being rooted in "the sin of covetousness" (*ibi.*: 77, cf. Pieper 1965: 20-21). Most important here is that this tradition can explain why liberalism, if that is to have real political significance, is reliant on "normative prudence", notably in a version that may accept exceptional risk-taking for humanitarian purposes. I now elaborate this.

As Alberto Coll (1999) has explained, typical of "normative prudence", which has deep roots in the Christian tradition, is its emphasis on the possibility of linking "morality" and "politics" by "seeking to bridge the treacherous gap between the necessities and inner logic of a fallen political world and the transcendent vision of the gospel" (*ibi.*: 78, 85, cf. also Carr 2001: 94-95). Christian thinkers have tried to lessen the tension between Jesus's "radical gospel", with its "uncompromising" transcendental reference point, and the general tenor of political decision-making, which tends to take the "necessities" and "parameters" of this world for granted, by distinguishing two legitimate forms of Christian prudence. First, there is "lower prudence", evident in the Old Testament, the Pauline letters, Augustine, and Reinhold Niebuhr. Lower prudence "is cautious…, defensive, focused on survival and respect…,…conservative and realistic[;] values…stability because it understands the fragility of order and the evils spawned by social chaos[;] recognizes the place of sin and self-interest[; and] is open to compromise" (Cochran 1983: 195). Second, there is "higher prudence", which comes closest to the understanding of prudence in Aristotle, the Gospels, and Aquinas - with a

(cf. Korvela 2006).

Christian scope more cosmopolitan than the Aristotelian one[9]. Higher prudence:

> is active, caring more for justice than survival and for love than respect[;] takes risks in the interest of realizing higher values[; and] follows the prophets in contending that the only genuine peace and stability are those founded on God's law; that is, on justice and mercy (*ibi.*: 195-196).

While higher prudence "appreciates lower prudence" for its valuing of order against revolt and suspicion of ideology, it ardently aims to challenge injustice and oppression, exposing their ugliness, even if such an attack runs the risk of promoting a violent backlash; it is a "virtue infused with grace" (*ibi.*: 196).

It seems, then, that secular liberalism, if indeed it insists on its case for humanitarian intervention and so has to bridge the gap between justice, or human rights, as a principle and intervention as a practical-political activity, needs to assume normative, Christian prudence - higher prudence in particular. To begin with, liberal political theorists must acknowledge that, as Christian prudence insists, at the core of political-ethical decision making, especially when considering the use of "living material", is "a degree of existential agony and darkness perhaps indicative of man's finiteness and of his need for a transcendent grace" (Coll 1999: 97) that, as Niebuhr puts it, may "complete what even the highest human striving must leave incomplete", since "faith in God's forgiveness" is what ultimately "makes possible the risk of action" (quoted in *ibidem*). The secular liberal defense of humanitarian intervention ultimately appeals to the capacity of state leaders, who have to make "the

[9] As Coll (1999: 78-79) remarks, whereas Aristotle stressed "the ends of a well-ordered city-state" as the standard for prudence, Aquinas believed one should broaden prudence to include the common good of "a much wider transnational human community".

godlike consequentialist calculation" (Wheeler 2000: 51), to deal adequately with agony and consciences burdened with awkwardness.

Next, concerning the higher-lower prudence distinction, with the liberal plea for (altruistic) humanitarian intervention we are clearly dealing with higher prudence, rather than lower prudence, in a cosmopolitan application (cf. Kamminga 2008)[10]. In the liberal case for intervention, global justice is the ultimate norm, which, if it is to have real practical meaning, presupposes that leaders will take radical action and significant risk for justice, if necessary at some cost of lower prudence values such as stability and self-interest. State leaders are asked to "make the agonizing decision that saving the lives of civilians beyond their own borders requires risking the lives of those who serve in the armed forces" (Wheeler 2000: 51). Indeed, liberal political theory implicitly requires that leaders follow the dictates of higher prudence by putting the lives of particular human beings - insofar as available, of course - at risk for saving the lives of complete strangers. It ultimately relies on a New Testament-like motivational rationale that it is not enough for the "steward" cautiously to protect the gifts of God (here, say, human dignity or justice at home); he or she must administer them so that they increase (human dignity not just at home but also abroad) – always a risky affair – with due regard to the lower prudence demand that the gifts entrusted are not squandered or invested in foolish and fruitless enterprises (Cochran 1983: 197-199). As liberalism must avoid the counterintuitive conclusion that leaders should be ready to treat soldiers "as if they are morally required to be heroes or saints" by demonstrating their willingness to give their lives for (total) strangers, it is bound to accept a religious context in which such universal solidarity seems

[10] Cochran (1983: 198) himself applies higher prudence to the domestic issue of income support programs – which should be compassionate rather than abuse-free or efficient – and the transnational issue of cutting arms spending – which a nation should take the risk of before its opponent does.

self-evident, while beyond the grasp of the liberal "contract" argument. Thus, liberals implicitly appeal to those religious traditions, such as Catholic social teaching, that make us, and our soldiers, see humanity as a genuine global community of solidarity, sister- and brotherhood, and interdependence (Himes 1994: 94-96, 105). They need to disagree with Miller's arguably lower prudence view that, as Rwandans, Bosnians, Somalis, Liberians, Haitians, and Kosovars have their own cultural, historical, religious, and ethnic particularities, appeals to a global "we" falsely bid nations to deny those specifics as a basis for risking great dangers to themselves (Miller 2000: 24). The secular liberal case presumes that people of far-off lands are not just abstract problems but concrete sisters and brothers, whose dignity should be preserved at times, even by accepting vital risks on our part. Thus, the plausibility of the liberal requirement that soldiers risk their lives for rescuing (total) strangers depends on its willingness to propagate this religious, "thick" understanding of global community, in which strangers become fellow community members with which conceptual and emotional identification *is* possible – not fully, of course, but at least to the extent that more risk-taking by political leaders seems warranted.

THE "ROMAN-NESS" OF THE LIBERAL INTERVENTIONIST IDEAL

Having defended the "actively Christian" quality of the liberal intervention argument, I now turn to a defense of this essay's second argument, one distinguishable from yet (as will become clearer below when we touch upon the concept of prudence again) closely related to the first one. Thus, I argue that the interventionist ideal embedded in the liberal case entails a secularized version, a subsequent one actually, of a more basic religious tradition within a divided Western Christianity: the "Roman" tradition as opposed to the "Protestant"

one, distinguished and extensively reconstructed by (environmental and) "theological economist" Robert Nelson (1991)[11].

Although liberal theorists themselves are not very explicit in this regard, their case for humanitarian intervention would hardly make sense if it did not assume some "ideal of makeability", that is, an optimistic belief that some kind of intervention practice that eliminates, or at least significantly reduces, human suffering could be designed. In this sense, liberal interventionism follows in the footsteps of the Western welfare state and development assistance, but more ambitiously so (cf. Achterhuis 1999: 45-50). The welfare state attempts to eliminate poverty within the context of domestic society. However, humanitarian intervention, like development assistance, means extending the faith in "makeability" to the whole Earth, including the complicated contexts of international relations and unfamiliar societies, but with the typical feature that "saving strangers" (cf. Wheeler 2000) is regarded (principally) possible by employing military force. In order to be able to demonstrate the "Roman-ness" of the liberal interventionist ideal, I must first turn to Nelson's understanding of the Roman and Protestant traditions and his defense of the "Roman-ness" of the welfare state.

[11] As we shall see, whereas both traditions have Greek philosophical beginnings, these have subsequently been absorbed and embodied in Christian traditions. The labels "Roman" and "Protestant" remind of the theological heritage of the two traditions. The medieval Roman Church sustained the theology of the "Roman" tradition for several centuries. The Reformation, led by the "protestors" against the established, Roman Church, offered the most typical statement of the theology of the "Protestant" tradition. The labels chosen, Nelson stresses, achieve a consistency with respect to the main tenets of theological belief, even if not always describing well what the actual institutional churches of these names have believed in each historical period. Also, for Nelson, none of the thinkers he discusses (see the text below for major examples) exhibits all the beliefs of "his" tradition at all times (Nelson 1991: 17, 22-23, 30). Indeed, whereas some dispute has arisen about whether Nelson has placed all the figures in the right traditions (Stackhouse 1993: 377; Gordon 1993: 755-756), his approach clearly suggests that he would be quite willing (and able) to make revisions if proven mistaken (Stackhouse 1993: 377).

The Roman tradition rests on the conviction that there exist rationally grounded laws of nature and that mankind is ethically bound and practically motivated to follow these laws. The all-pervading idea of a cosmic-and-ethical system of natural law is central to Thomism, as in the Aristotelian and Stoic philosophies, and as again in the liberal philosophy of the eighteenth-century Enlightenment. Aristotle is the first and Aquinas (who reconstructed Aristotle's thought in conformity with Christian theology) the second great representative of this tradition of Western thought that achieved another high point in the Enlightenment with thinkers such as John Locke, Adam Smith, and Jeremy Bentham, and that has come to exert a dominant influence in Keynesian economics and twentieth-century welfarism. The Roman tradition believes that human reason and action may lead to progress, universal justice, and human equality. Whereas individual self-interest is rational and just, also a social obligation exists to help the poor. The role of government (politics) is to help create the good life. This tradition, then, is this-worldly, commonsensical, empirical, pragmatic, cosmopolitan, and utilitarian (Nelson 1991: 28-33). It typically defends political prudence (cf. Donald McCloskey in *ibi.*: xiii), although its tendency towards "higher prudence" (a concept explained in the former section) may be tempered by the extent to which its attitude is moderate and pragmat*ist*. However, a deep understanding of the Roman tradition can only be acquired if the outlook of its antipole - the Protestant tradition - is taken into account as well.

From Plato ("the first Protestant") onwards, the Protestant tradition is deeply skeptical about human reason, which is seen as the source of illusion, not of human improvement. Men cannot master their fate, as they are frequently weak and deluded. Indeed, by its very misplaced confidence, humanity often worsens its suffering and misfortunes. The story of history is

one not of advance but of retrogression: man's decline from harmony, contentment, and well-being to maladies such as war, selfishness, and jealousy. Human action and the use of human reason will not move mankind toward realization of the ultimate goal, as people lack this capacity within themselves. Hope for humanity's progress must be found instead in an autonomous force outside human influences, such as divine intervention or an impersonal law of history. Progress requires a basic transformation in the quality of human existence: the making of a whole new man. It is impossible to perfect mankind's current state, because men have become too corrupted and sinful to offer a satisfactory foundation of gradual improvement. Alienated from their true reason and nature, men have fallen into a trap in which they must hope for divine or other outside mercy and so wait for revelation. For Augustine, Luther, but also Karl Marx and Sigmund Freud, alienation is the core element of the human condition. The Protestant tradition sees the task of government as one of coercively controlling sin and unruly natures, not one of eliminating poverty or creating justice. It is other-worldly, anti-cosmopolitan, communalist, pessimistic, and negative about interventionism and its consequences (*ibi.*: 49-59). Insofar as it values political prudence at all and does not practically leave politics at the mercy of secular realists (Luther, Karl Barth), it will defend lower "prudence" (Niebuhr; explained in the former section) at most[12].

[12] Nelson himself does not (explicitly) include Karl Barth and Reinhold Niebuhr, and so overlooks the (divergent) contributions of these two highly influential Protestant thinkers. A typical Protestant, Barth insisted that political and social evils are the necessary product of man's sinful nature and that human effort to eradicate them is futile (Carr 2001: 94). As Carr notes, whereas a view such as Barth's, like that of Luther's, is basically different from that of the realist who makes morality a function of politics, in the field of politics it tends to become indistinguishable from secular realism (and its distorted view of prudence) (*ibidem*). Niebuhr defended an Augustine-inspired political ethics, strongly emphasizing the overall presence of sin in both situations of injustice and attempts to pursue justice. While Niebuhr upheld a certain Roman reason-based, pragmatic optimism about the human political obligation to work actively for justice and progressive social causes (cf. Berg 2007), his basic outlook was pessimistically Protestant, especially in international politics - hence his lower prudence.

Nelson himself argues – quite compellingly, considering his well-organized and well-researched work (Barkley 1992; Stackhouse 1993; cf. Gordon 1993) – that the modern age has channeled the exchange between the two basic, Roman and Protestant, ways of thinking into new, secular forms, but also that the optimistic Roman tradition has been the most influential in shaping economic thought and practice. Post-Enlightenment history witnesses a widespread belief - whether or not confessed aloud - that economic progress will eventually solve both the practical and spiritual problems of mankind. For many modern people, the possibility to eradicate evil from the world is no longer reserved to a divine power; it is mainly a matter of eliminating economic scarcity. The credo of contemporary "economic theology", then, is that if all important human material needs can and will be satisfied, the most important cause of war and other forms of human hostility will belong to the past. It is modern economics (with its practitioners as the high priests of the economic religion) which will establish "heaven on Earth". Thus, the twentieth-century welfare state can be regarded as the most important modern embodiment of this Roman faith (Nelson 1991).

I now offer a four-step defense of the argument that the "secular" liberal intervention ideal has religious roots in the Roman tradition. First, Nelson's "double tradition" perspective is arguably relevant to International Relations and its very debate about humanitarian intervention (not just to economics) - with the ideal of *non*-intervention as unambiguously rooted in Protestant Christianity (Philpott 2000) and the contradicting liberal interventionist ideal as at least likely (at this early stage of my argument) grounded in Roman Christianity. Daniel Philpott has shown that the modern system of sovereign states, with its revolutionary norm of non-intervention, has deep religious roots, namely in the Protestant Reformation: "no Reformation, no Westphalia"

(*ibi.*: 206, 240). He states that the Protestant need for security and protection against the enforcement efforts of the Holy Roman Emperor – which opposed sovereignty of states – encouraged them to give the temporal power in the hands of state rulers. While none of the early Reformers explicitly took up the concept of sovereignty (French philosopher Jean Bodin was the first to do so systematically, in 1576), by offering a theological justification for local political and ecclesiastical autonomy they laid the foundations for the theoretical development and political manifestation of modern sovereignty (Carlson and Owens 2003: 16)[13]. Thus, Philpott's argument explains the presence of the communalist and anti-interventionist features of the Protestant tradition in the international sphere. And whereas Protestantism is narrowly linked to the Westphalian system of sovereign states, the opposing, Roman tradition is broadly incompatible with the modern state and is more European (cf., e.g., Belloc 1931: 41-58), even cosmopolitan (cf. also Nelson 1991: 56). All this suggests a first reason for thinking that liberal interventionism springs from the boundary-transcending Roman tradition.

Second, as an heir of the Enlightenment, and in the wake of the Western welfare state, liberal interventionism clearly exhibits core Roman features and its optimistic outlook. In fact, its very belief in the (principal) possibility of saving strangers entails a cosmopolitan extension of the makeability faith, and so is more Roman still. As the global domain is much more complex than the

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[13] To briefly summarize Philpott's argument: in separating the kingdom of the spirit and the kingdom of the social world – united under medieval Roman Catholicism – Reformation political theology essentially prescribed sovereignty; in subsequently facing armed threat from the emperor, the reformers found even more reason to give full sovereignty to the princes whose armies could protect them; and the polities that had experienced a Reformation crisis and were strongly influenced by (proto-)Reformation intellectual ideas and movements came to have an interest in a system of sovereign states (Germany, the Netherlands, Sweden, France, England, Denmark, Transylvania) and helped to bring about Westphalia, whereas in every polity that fought against a sovereign states system (Spain, Italy, Poland) the Reformation acquired few converts.

domestic one, and also lacks a centralized government, it is not surprising that in this case the Roman influence has been mainly ideal rather than practical, unlike in the case of the welfare state. Liberals would find little reason to consider and defend humanitarian intervention if that were a common and successful international response to severe human rights violations. However, this is surely not the case. The last two decades alone have seen humanitarian crises in Somalia, Rwanda, East Timor, Bosnia, Kosovo, Liberia, Haiti, and the Darfur region of Sudan. Many people feel anger about the failure of the United States and its European allies to stop the genocide in Rwanda, and their unduly long delay when doing so in Bosnia. However, the West only sometimes rallies to stop the evil, as it did in Kosovo. Yet liberals believe that their defense of humanitarian intervention - a characteristic appeal to human reason - may change this situation for the better and make their ideal more followed in practice.

Third, the proposals that liberals have recently offered for institutionalizing their interventionist moral ideal further elucidate the typically Roman nature of liberal interventionism. In order to avoid the problem of not finding secular powers inclined to make their soldiers available for rescuing the lives of foreigners, various liberals want the international community to create a permanent, democratically accountable (smaller or larger) global rescue army (Archibugi 2004; Pattison 2008). The United Nations lacks an air force or navy, but the international community should have an army of its own. Remarkably, this progressivist liberal proposal culminates into the wish to move up to a post-Westphalian, post-sovereign, “neomedievalist” world political order (cf. Pogge 1994, Linklater 1998, Caney 2005). Here one may think of European Union-like global system, in which the holding of sovereignty is split between nations and supranational bodies that determine when interventions are called

for: “somewhat of a return to a feature of the pre-Westphalian system, in which the authority over a people was divided between the local rulers and the ‘universal’ Church” (Etzioni 2009: 174). Such proposals to “reunite” the “(quasi-)ecclesiastical” and the “secular” authorities, albeit in a modern way, are as Roman as can be.

Fourth, the ideal of makeability that underlies the liberal case for humanitarian intervention, like any makeability ideal, is directly at odds with the pessimistic element in Protestant anti-interventionism, which, again, suggests its Roman-ness. Protestants will typically reject the liberal belief in the task of politics to help improve human conditions not merely at home but even abroad. They will presumably find liberal interventionism haughty, or at least naïve, as it ignores that the ultimate cause of grave humanitarian suffering is an inherent evil beyond the scope of politics. The Protestant tradition, then, would rather insist on its own ability to clarify the modest practice of humanitarian intervention. It may want to stress that outside powers will not intervene out of respect for the non-intervention norm. More to the point, the Protestant tradition may want to emphasize that outside powers will be pessimistically hesitant to intervene in strange social environments (also because the domestic welfare state has met disillusion recently for having led to alienation and apathy), and will not want to risk the lives of its soldiers for uncertain humanitarian rescue operations. And even if the Protestant skeptical attitude towards liberals who think that the makeability ideal can be applied outside the domestic sphere - by warfare even - would not have the significant practical force it seems to have, Protestants would insist that this is the way in which outside powers should behave. The Protestant view may find confirmation in the dubious, if not bad, consequences of the 1999 Kosovo intervention (cf. Achterhuis 1999). Moreover, even if a Roman, neomedieval global polity were

needed for carrying out humanitarian interventions whenever called for, Protestants will warn for the risk that such a system of crisscrossing loyalties will end up more violent than the present sovereign states system (cf. Bull 2002: 246, 275). Put differently, they will warn for the dangers of a global, "second counter-Reformation". However, indeed, to think that such caution is misplaced is typical of the optimistic Roman tradition.

CONCLUSION

As the concept of high prudence has Roman roots yet is not pragmat*ist*, the arguments advanced above, taken together, suggest that the liberal political theory of humanitarian intervention must assume a religious dimension that may well be called "progressivistically Roman". Liberal advocates of humanitarian intervention policy should study religion in order to understand their own position and the rootedness of their presumed secular outlook in religious worldviews. How can we explain that liberals themselves do not seem aware of this? This, I would suggest, has to do with one major shift that secular liberalism (along, though, with contemporary Catholic and Protestant social teaching) has pursued within the Western religious tradition: a departure from the traditional emphasis on authority (whose responsibility it is to decide) (Johnson 2003). Thus, secular just war thought features the prioritization of just cause among the moral criteria to be satisfied for resort to armed force (see notably Walzer 2004a, 2004b, 2004c, 2006), including humanitarian intervention, thereby reducing the requirement of sovereign authority to (at best) a secondary, supporting role (such authority is to act in response to the establishment of just cause). By contrast, both the Roman Aquinas and the Protestant Luther clearly gave priority to the political-ethical requirement of sovereign authority as instituted by God to carry out the responsibilities of

ensuring a peaceful (global) order. It is the sovereign, in deciding whether to resort to armed force (as *the* one who is in a position to judge whether a just cause exists or not in a given case), who must make sure to satisfy the other moral requirements of *jus ad bellum* (Johnson 2003).

Yet, if today we demand that states take their sovereignty to entail the responsibility to protect their populations, we somewhat return to the views of Aquinas and Luther, which both emphasized the sovereign's responsibility to serve the common good of the political community over which the person in authority is sovereign. Indeed, it is from a political-ethical perspective largely rooted in (neo)medieval and early modern beliefs that leaders such as former Yugoslavian president Milosevic or former Libyan president Gadaffi appear not proper sovereigns but tyrants, who should enjoy no protection.

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