

Dr. Christoph Humrich
Peace Research Institute Frankfurt
Baseler Strasse 27-31
60329 Frankfurt/Main
Germany
humrich@hsfk.de

Security, Dialogic Ethics and the Problems of Reasonableness, Responsibility and Self-Referentiality

Abstract

Dialogic ethics receive increasing attention as an approach to global ethics. The particular strength of any dialogic ethics lies in their post-metaphysical, immanent and practical foundation on the normative powers of dialogue. However, it seems that for this very reason, dialogic ethics is badly suited for any kind of normative theorizing or practical advice in regard to security issues. On the one hand, questions of security emerge where dialogue - while very often still desirable - stops being a *reasonable* option. On the other hand, reframing problems of security as problems of dialogue might be dangerously naïve or outright cynical: At least in international politics we can think of many situations in which dialogue is not a morally *responsible* choice anymore. Does that mean that the question of security constitutes the limit of dialogic ethics? Is it just a fair-weather approach for consolidated liberal democratic societies (the context for which it has been developed)? Does it not become *self-referential* when we need a dialogue to determine how conditions for dialogue should be created? Could it conceive of security questions theoretically and include the dialogue averse realm of security issues in its normative-practical portfolio?

While dialogic ethicists have thought about these questions and did not refrain from making practical suggestions in concrete cases either (e.g. Habermas), they therefore also were target of much criticism. But as an approach to global ethics, dialogic cosmopolitanism ultimately remains unconvincing without sound answers to security questions.

The proposed paper assesses the problems and prospects of dialogic ethics in the field of security. The paper deals with the theoretical challenges posed by security questions as well as with the practical answers dialogic ethics could offer to moral problems in the field of security. I first briefly introduce dialogic ethics, their applications to the international realm and the accompanying academic debates. I then sketch how dialogic ethics could conceive of security as a moral problem. Following this, I show how in the field of security the three particular problems already hinted at above arise for dialogic ethics: the problems of reasonableness, responsibility and self-referentiality. Dialogic ethicists like Apel, Habermas and Linklater have provided ideal-typical ways to cope with these problems, which we could term philosophical, reconstructive and political respectively. I conclude by arguing that the reconstructive way is the most convincing solution and indicating what follows from it practically.

I am pleased to send the paper upon request.