

TAKING HUMAN RIGHTS SERIOUSLY

Perhaps the central question of contemporary international political theory is how to adjudicate the tension between state sovereignty and human rights. One attractive way to negotiate this conflict is to posit that all and only legitimate states are morally entitled to sovereign rights, where a state counts as legitimate just in case it satisfactorily protects human rights. No one believes that a state must maintain a perfect record on human rights to be legitimate; presumably states need only achieve a threshold level of competence. If we take human rights as seriously as I believe we should, however, then it is hard to see what principled objection we could have to a humanitarian intervention that would avert a single human rights violation. In this paper, I defend this stark view by, among other things, arguing that it (surprisingly) leaves enough room for state sovereignty.

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