How do we begin to think about the world?

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THE QUESTION
THINKING AND LANGUAGE

How we think about the world matters in very important ways. It impacts on what we do from day to day, for a start. For example, if, as a student, you have a poor opinion of a particular lecturer at your university or college – if you have decided that he or she is boring or difficult to follow – you will be less likely to attend the lecture, unless of course you think there are strong conventions in place to compel you to go. If you think of the world as a dangerous place, this may impact on how you travel to the lecture: you may avoid public transport, for example, and decide to walk, because of the possibility of a terrorist attack. Such an attack may be statistically very unlikely, but the way you picture the world will affect how you interpret such 'evidence' and how you behave. Other students may see travelling on the bus or the train as a way of making a political statement, a way of 'defying' those who want to prevent life going on as usual.

This chapter explores the notion that how we think about the world affects how we live in it. It is of course not just a matter of how we live in it on our own, but how

we live in it with others. You encounter lots of people in your life from the moment you wake up to the moment you go to bed. Some of them may be close to you and you may even love them. Some you don't know so well, but may see regularly like students and lecturers. Some you've never met but have heard or read about, like people all over the globe who appear in the news. And, of course, there may be some people you just do not like, find 'weird', or plain annoying. Either way, we don't live in the world on our own and somehow need to find ways of accommodating each other.

Living in the world with other people is the realm of politics and ethics. Broadly speaking ethics is about how we should live with other people in the world and politics is about what kinds of living and ways of thinking about who we are are made possible. So, for example, should someone whom you regard as 'weird' be treated any differently to someone you love? Furthermore, what counts as 'weird'? What does that tell us about 'normal'? Are people whose lives are different to ours, perhaps because they live in a different country to us or practice a different religion, 'weird'? Ethics and politics looks at both how we should regard and accommodate each other and what kinds of things make it possible to, for example, treat each other with respect and those which don't. That I might view you as 'weird' or even 'inhuman' (politics) may very much dictate how I then treat you (ethics). When we examine more closely how we think about the world, it turns out that ethics and politics are inseparable.

The significance of being treated as 'human' and the problem of who gets to count as such is explored in **Chapter 27**.

Is thinking about the world something that just happens in our heads? Perhaps, but our thinking about the world must in some way be public, or accessible to others. We formulate and communicate ideas and thoughts by means of language. Language is public. It consists of shared rules and vocabularies, for example. Language seems a strong candidate for giving us access to how we think about the world and, as such, the relationship of language to the world is a central theme of this chapter.

The thoughts we have about the world reveal a number of things: the types of things that we believe are in the world, the kinds of people that we think we live amongst, what we think is important, what we think is possible, and even how we believe we should think about the world. These thoughts are all attempts to make sense of the world and our place in it. So, the questions that we are going to look at here are:

These broad questions are examined in the context of thinking about danger in Section 3 of **Chapter 24**.

1 How do we begin to think about the world and make sense of it?
2 Does the world exist independently of any thoughts we might have about it?
3 Is the way we think about the world simply a representation of what it is?

This may seem a bit abstract, but let's look more closely now at the effects that our thinking has in the world.

Some people regard thinking and language as something that is separate from the world. They see the world as carrying on independently of what we think. According to this way of thinking, we produce various representations of the world, but the world continues regardless of our thoughts about it. However, as I mentioned above, what we are going to explore in this chapter is how what we think about the world actually impacts on the world: it changes the world and our relations with the people in it. We also examine how, if we ignore the impact our ways of thinking have on the world, we can find ourselves complicit in what happens in ways we might not wish to be. In other words, this chapter suggests that if we don't sometimes pause to think about how we

think about the world we might find ourselves accepting and endorsing practices we might find immoral, wrong or unjust.

ILLUSTRATIVE EXAMPLE
THINKING ABOUT TORTURE: THE TICKING BOMB SCENARIO

We will begin by looking at an example of thinking. The form of thinking we will examine is the one most often used to think about torture. It is called 'the ticking bomb scenario'. Although we will be engaging with *thinking* about torture here, it is important to be clear that this does not necessarily mean we are engaging with the practices of torture and their justification or otherwise. In fact, as we shall see, sometimes our thinking about torture avoids engaging with it in important ways.

Torture obviously affects people's bodies and lives; it causes great physical suffering and pain and has profoundly negative emotional and psychological effects. Elaine Scarry, in her book *The Body in Pain* (1985), goes as far as to say that torture in a sense destroys, or in her words 'unmakes', the world: it destroys ideas of the world and our place in it that have been painstakingly put together. Some governments have condoned torture and created official policies around its use. The particular way of thinking about torture that I want to examine – the ticking bomb scenario – has been an important part of recent debates. Examining the use of the ticking bomb scenario to think about torture, and the practical implications of that way of thinking, provides an example of how ways of thinking about the world have very real effects.

An absolute prohibition against torture is embodied in a convention to which many states have agreed, the United Nations Convention Against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment. In the Convention Against Torture (CAT) (1984), torture is prohibited because it violates 'the inherent dignity of the human person' (Preamble). Torture is defined as:

> any act by which severe pain or suffering, whether physical or mental, is intentionally inflicted on a person for such purposes as obtaining from him or a third person information or a confession, punishing him for an act he or a third person has committed or is suspected of having committed, or intimidating or coercing him or a third person, or for any reason based on discrimination of any kind, when such pain or suffering is inflicted by or at the instigation of or with the consent or acquiescence of a public official or other person acting in an official capacity. It does not include pain or suffering arising only from, inherent in or incidental to lawful sanctions.

(Article 1)

The Convention continues: 'No exceptional circumstances whatsoever, whether a state of war or a threat of war, internal political instability or any other public emergency, may be invoked as a justification of torture' (Article 2, section 2). The Convention Against Torture, therefore, prohibits any circumstances being used as a justification for torture. However, the argument has been made that there are circumstances when

torture can be justified. This argument often begins with the positing of a particular scenario. Here is how the scenario goes:

Imagine this: There is a time-bomb planted in the centre of a large city somewhere in the United States or a European capital, in Washington, Paris, London, or Berlin, for example. It is armed, ticking and counting its way down towards detonation. You have the person who planted it in custody. He won't talk. Hundreds, if not thousands, will die if the information on the whereabouts of the bomb is not revealed. Should you torture the person that you are holding in custody in order to find out where the bomb is and stop it from exploding?

This hypothetical situation is called the ticking bomb scenario. The scenario is often used as a starting point in thinking about whether torture can ever be justifiable. It is used to test the limits of the absolute prohibition against torture: the idea that we shouldn't use torture under any circumstances. The ticking bomb scenario challenges this prohibition by asking whether it can be displaced or disregarded in exceptional circumstances, even though the Convention Against Torture prohibits this explicitly as we have seen. Often, the answer that the scenario leads to is that it can. Let us examine how allowing an exception to the prohibition of torture comes about through the thinking that lies behind the scenario.

How does a hypothetical scenario like the ticking bomb function to justify torture in practice? It does so by providing *only* the kind of information we need to conclude that we might be justified in torturing the person we have in custody.

Using this hypothetical scenario gives us certainty about a number of things:

- We are certain that the person we have in custody is the person who planted the bomb and not someone who is lying about having planted it or an innocent person.
- We are certain that we know that the bomb has been planted in a large city and that it will kill lots of people rather than just one or two.
- We are certain that the bomb will go off, that is to say, we are confident that it won't just fizzle, splutter and fail to detonate.
- We are certain that if we torture the person in custody he or she will tell us the true location of the bomb and not lie.
- We are certain that it is possible to torture the person for the short period of time that the bomb is ticking and not a moment longer (weeks, months, years) in order to extract the information on the location of the bomb.
- We are also very confident that when we do torture that person, our torture methods won't kill him or her before he or she tells us where the bomb is planted.
- We assume then, that we (or our agents) are trained, effective torturers with a practical knowledge of torture techniques. We are certain that our torture methods work; torture will make the person in custody tell us where the bomb is and therefore, allow us to find it, disarm it, and save many valuable lives.
- We also know that saving lives is an appropriate justification.

The scenario is neat and tidy. It has been constructed very carefully to eliminate many difficult issues. This isn't deliberate deception particularly. Rather it is a function

A scenario can mean an imagined or hypothetical sequence of events; the word also refers to the outline of the plot of a play or film.

When we buy into a scenario, we no longer have to worry about things that the scenario already tells us are one way rather than another – we put them to one side.

BOX 2.1 TORTURE AFTER 9/11

The debate about possible justifications for the use of torture came to the fore, especially in the United States, after 11 September 2001 when the US president George W. Bush declared and pursued a 'war on terror'. During this 'war' the United States has detained people in prisons outside its own territory including Abu Ghraib prison in Iraq, the US airbase in Bagram, Afghanistan and most (in)famously the US naval base in Guantánamo Bay, Cuba.

FIGURE 2.1
Iraqi Graffiti mural depicting prisoner abuse on wall in Sadr City, Baghdad. Photo: Ali Jasim/Reuters

FIGURE 2.2
Guantánamo Bay: A detainee is escorted for interrogation in 2002. Photo: Andres Leighton/AP

It was not until May 2004 that accounts and images of US military personnel torturing detainees in Abu Ghraib prison, Iraq, burst into public view although there had been secret US military investigations into allegations of torture, and reports of its use from organisations such as the International Committee of the Red Cross.

In particular, the Bush administration's use of Guantánamo as the central prison for 'unlawful enemy combatants' became subject to global condemnation because of its violation of the Geneva Conventions and the use of torture 'lite'; so-called 'harsh interrogation techniques'. Such was the negative symbolism of Guantánamo that two days after his inauguration President Obama signed executive orders to close the detention camp, stopping the Bush administration's use of the military commissions system for prosecuting detainees and ending the Central Intelligence Agency's secret interrogation programme. However, in March 2011 President Obama permitted military trials to resume, albeit with revamped procedures, and has all but admitted his failure to close the camp wherein 172 'high risk' detainees remain.

Unfortunately, allegations and the evidence for the use of torture extend further than the prisons with the use of extraordinary rendition or 'torture by proxy'. This policy is one where 'hundreds of people have been unlawfully transferred by the USA and its allies to countries such as Syria, Jordan and Egypt . . . [where] they risk enforced disappearance, torture and other ill-treatment' (Amnesty International 2007: 9). Evidence of the extent of the practice controversially entered the public domain through posts of secret and confidential American diplomatic cables on the website Wikileaks in November 2010.

of the hypothetical scenario. It deliberately eliminates specific aspects of a situation in order to focus solely on the core issue: whether the prohibition against torture is absolute. By abstracting the core issue in this way, the idea is that we can 'test' the limits of the prohibition.

The scenario works by providing compelling reasons for torture being justified under certain circumstances. However, it is a scenario set up in such a way that we *already* know that torturing the detainee is justifiable. Since the scenario tells us that saving lives is good and torture saves lives, it must be the case that torture can be justifiable. The scenario is a purely theoretical construct and deliberately so. In order to construct a hypothetical scenario such as this, one must believe that theory (thinking about the world) and practice (doing things in the world) can be separated. A separation is made and assumed to be possible.

When we read the ticking bomb scenario more closely, we notice that it does two other things, as well as separating theory and practice.

First, the scenario suggests that we need to employ our rationality and come to conclusions based on either certainty or, at a minimum, reasonable belief. There are certain things we need to know before we can make a decision and we need to balance them up rationally. Often what we are balancing are competing values. In the case of the ticking bomb it is the value of the strict prohibition of torture *versus* the value of saving a significant number of lives. As we have seen, the scenario suggests that abstraction is helpful. The ticking bomb scenario is deliberately and consciously designed to reduce the problem of torture to only two competing values and to compel us to choose which value is more significant. It is, necessarily, a simplification. But, in the view of those using this scenario, simplification can help us determine more accurately what we should do.

Second, although the scenario suggests that all human life has value – not only the lives that are at risk from the bomb's explosion, but also that of the person we have in custody – it is clear that 'we' are not the person who planted the bomb, nor are 'we' associated with them. The scenario is not constructed from the point of view of the person who is in custody. There is no mention of what justifications he or she may have, or what reasons there may be, for planting the bomb. Of course, this does not mean that there are any justifications, but the scenario does not explore whether there are any reasons for planting the bomb or not. For example, the ticking bomb scenario is not one where a person plants a bomb that threatens hundreds of lives in order to prevent others from taking hundreds of other, different, lives. The scenario is completely silent about the purported bomber's motivations other than the desire to kill people with the explosion of the device. This means that 'we' are the potential (albeit righteously reluctant yet well trained) torturers in the scenario. Furthermore, 'we', as potential torturers, feel more akin to those whose lives are at risk from the bomb than to the person we have in custody. Whoever he or she is, it seems that they are not 'us'. Whoever 'we' are, we are not in Kabul, Addis Ababa, or Shanghai, for example as the scenario, interestingly, always imagines that the bomb is planted in an advanced industrialised country.

As an abstraction then, the ticking bomb scenario shows much more than might be supposed at first glance about the way of thinking about the world that it involves. When we look at what the scenario leaves out, what it does not allow us to consider explicitly, we find that it ignores the question of how far our feelings and responsibilities

You will often find that people simply assume that saving lives is a good thing. But we don't always act to save everyone's lives. In fact, we routinely endanger some people's lives, and not always in order to save others. Soldiers and enemy civilians are only the most obvious cases here; arguably, the global economy also relies on putting some lives at immediate risk.

Rationality came to be seen as incredibly important in the period called the Enlightenment, but it was also a quality attributed to men in particular. See **Chapters 5 and 6**.

FIGURE 2.3
'I found out what makes him tick. . .'
Artist: Mike Baldwin. CartoonStock
ref.: mba0459. www.CartoonStock.com

A scenario could be said to be similar to a theoretical explanation, in that theories tend to leave things out, and to be abstract.

may stretch: should or do they include others who are not part of what 'we' think of as 'us'? Perhaps our obligations are limited to those who belong with us in a particular community or perhaps they stretch beyond nationality and extend to the whole of humanity.

In practice, things are more complicated than the abstract scenario. The situation may not be one of choosing between the value of one life (the person in custody) and that of many others (the potential victims of the bomb). We cannot always be sure that we have the right person in custody. We are often uncertain. This implies that we may have to torture others as well, since they might equally know where the bomb is planted. We are more likely to be dealing with several (or even hundreds of) possible 'knowers' that would need to be tortured to reveal the location of the bomb *versus* hundreds of lives to save. Indeed, it is precisely the kind of logic employed in the ticking bomb scenario that leads to large numbers of people being detained in the 'war on terror': they may be 'knowers'. In practice, the logic of the ticking bomb scenario provides a justification for detaining people in great numbers. If so, the neatness of the scenario begins to break down, and with it its strict separation of theory and practice. The scenario no longer refers to an exception that applies to only one life (the bomber's) but begins to implicate many others.

The prohibition of torture, as set out in the Convention Against Torture (United Nations 1984), does not treat torture as an act that is perpetrated on only one individual either. The Convention Against Torture's references to 'a public official or other person acting in an official capacity' (Article 1) as perpetrators of torture make it clear that the Convention is concerned with prohibiting the institutionalisation and widespread political use of torture by states. The Convention Against Torture and the abundant evidence of torture being used globally show that, in practice, torture implicates many, many lives. In global politics then, what is at stake in the practices of torture is not a question of the justifiability of an isolated incidence of the action of one person

(the torturer) on only one other (the person in custody). It is, more accurately, the actions of many ('us') on many ('them').

Our short study of the ticking bomb scenario has served as a way of introducing questions about a way of thinking about the world: one that employs an abstract rationality and separates thinking about the world, or theorising, from the world itself, or practice, and one that ducks the question of whether our obligations are limited to people who share the same community with us or whether they extend to the whole of humanity. We have seen that this way of looking at the world can provide a justification for actions that in practice can lead to the torturing of many people, not just one.

GENERAL RESPONSES
THINKING ABOUT ETHICS: TWO RESPONSES

The ticking bomb scenario implies that the decisions that we have to make about whether or not to use torture should be thought of as *moral* decisions. They are decisions about what we *ought* to do or what we *should* do. Very often, moral decisions are seen to be the result of applying some kind of rule governing our treatment of others and understanding exactly how the rule should apply. For example, the ticking bomb scenario rationally examined the limits of applying the rule 'torture is an absolute moral prohibition' and found that the rule was not absolute after all. We noted at the start of the chapter that, roughly speaking, *ethics* is about how we should live with other people in the world. Thinking about ethics means broadly thinking about moral rules and how they govern the ways in which we treat each other. Often such rules are phrased in terms of moral duties, moral obligations and/or moral responsibilities. When we come to explore how people have thought about the question of ethics in global politics, straight away we encounter discussions about the rules that should govern our duties and obligations and how far they should stretch: whether our duties and obligations should extend only to those within the political community or state in which we find ourselves, or whether they should extend to the whole of humanity. This question of how far our moral obligations extend is traditionally captured by the debate between cosmopolitans and communitarians. We have already encountered hidden aspects of this debate in our exploration of the ticking bomb scenario when it was noted that whoever the bomber is the bomber isn't one of 'us'. If the bomber's nationality seems to make a moral difference, or indeed none, to your conclusions about the ticking bomb scenario then the cosmopolitan–communitarian debate is deeply relevant. This is because the debate thinks through the moral implications of whether 'we' are best understood as members of the whole of humanity (cosmopolitanism) or as members of specific political communities (communitarianism).

Charles Beitz and Michael Walzer, from the cosmopolitan and communitarian traditions respectively, have sustained answers to how far our ethical obligations extend in global politics. I will look at the work of each thinker in turn. In order to begin to understand and unravel the implications of each set of answers, I will focus on the pictures or representations they use. I will say more about what we mean by pictures or representations in the next section, but for the time being it is sufficient to note that

The work of different thinkers is often grouped into different schools of thought, perspectives or approaches. While sometimes useful, 'boxing' people like this risks oversimplifying complicated questions.

thinking about the pictures they use is helpful in highlighting the way in which each answer is their attempt to provide an accurate and true representation of the realities of global politics.

- First, a focus on *pictures of reason* will serve to reveal traditional, differing, views on what an academic study of global politics is supposed to focus on as most relevant to ethics and how we should think about it.
- Second, *pictures of the subject* tell us what or who, supposedly, 'we' are and more particularly, what it is about 'us' as moral subjects that provides us with moral value or character. This is vitally important because such pictures not only tell us who or what has the highest moral value in global politics, but the moral subject towards which we are primarily ethically responsible in practice.
- Third, *pictures of ethico-political space* tell us where the possibility of ethical action in global politics is believed to take place. They seek to depict what the 'world' of global political reality is 'really' like and its hostility, or otherwise, to the accommodation of ethics in practice.

Communitarianism: Michael Walzer

For other views of what the state, or what is sometimes called the nation-state, is as a form of political community, and how it is held together, see **Chapters 11, 12 and 13**.

In the work of Michael Walzer we find a communitarian set of answers to questions of ethics in global politics. Communitarians focus on the state as a moral subject in global politics. As Walzer's picture of ethico-political space will reveal, the moral value of the state lies in its political community.

To understand the moral significance of the community we first need to examine Walzer's *picture of the subject*. According to Walzer, being human is about being complex: creating meaning and culture which 'we' both reflect and are reflected in (Walzer 1994: 85). Human beings have equal moral value because they are all culture- and meaning-producing creatures. Each subject participates in their own community. Globally, there is a vast plurality of differing social and cultural meanings because whilst 'we' all produce meanings and culture, 'we' do not all produce the same ones. Is it possible to talk of a common humanity since there will be differing opinions about what 'humanity' might mean? Yes, says Walzer, although 'our common humanity will never make us members of a single universal tribe. What members of the human race have in common is particularism (that is, attachment to particular groups over humanity as a whole): we participate, all of us, in thick cultures that are our own' (Walzer 1994: 83).

Of course, what counts as human and what doesn't is historically and culturally changeable. See **Chapters 5, 21 and 27**.

For Walzer being human is about creating meanings and therefore different cultures; unsurprisingly his *picture of reason* is a picture of shared understandings, which are radically particularistic. In contrast to the cosmopolitan thinker, Beitz, whose view we examine below, for Walzer reason is not separate from its social, historical and cultural contexts. What is rational depends on what those of us who share the same understandings mean by it. Applying this to ethics, Walzer's position is one that emphasises that standards of rightness and wrongness, justice and injustice, etc., depend on particular socio-cultural practices.

Having prepared the ground, we can now better appreciate Walzer's *picture of ethico-political space*. In the final analysis, he produces an international ethics that centres on

states as the moral subjects (Walzer 1977). States, he argues, have moral value because they contain a political community. The community is the expression of a common life that its members have produced, sustained and participated in as meaning-producing human beings. A state, for Walzer, consists of a political community and its government (Walzer 1985 [1980]: 220, 235). The political community has rights to territorial integrity and sovereignty and these rights belong to the state through the consent of its members. Through consent, members form a metaphorical 'contract' with the state that it should protect the common life which they have shaped over a long period of time.

The state's claim to territorial integrity and political sovereignty is discussed in **Chapter 11**.

For Walzer, upholding the state rights of territorial integrity and sovereignty should form the basis of an international morality. However, only legitimate states' rights should be respected. He says that states are only legitimate if there is a fit between the government and community such that the former represents the peoples' political life in accordance with their own traditions and specific way of life. The problem, of course, is how can we judge fit when 'our' opinions about being governed according to 'our' traditions will be so different from others? For example, 'we' might think that only democratic forms of governance provide a fit and hence, provide legitimacy to governments. Well aware of this, Walzer says that in the majority of instances states should presume that other states are legitimate, and should not intervene in their affairs. Nevertheless, there may be very rare occasions when the principle of non-intervention can be overridden. For Walzer, these would be when the absence of fit is radically apparent, as in the case of either a struggle for national liberation, a civil war, or the massacre, enslavement or expulsion of a mass of people.

Changing attitudes to intervention are the subject of **Chapter 25**.

What does this add up to? It adds up to an approach to international ethics which says that, for the most part, we should leave states alone to live the historical and culturally specific lives they have created for themselves. We can't expect to understand other ways of living from our own specific perspectives and so not only do we have no right to intervene but we lack the capacity to understand the situation objectively. In short nationality and citizenship, as forms of belonging to political community, make a moral difference because they mark a difference in interpretations and understandings of the world.

Cosmopolitanism: Charles Beitz

The second answer to ethics in global politics is a cosmopolitan one, found in the work of Charles Beitz. In contrast to Walzer, Beitz considers individuals who are rational, free and equal to be the moral subject of global politics.

Chapter 13 examines ways of conceptualising the political community by looking at a number of novels. One of the characters is a committed cosmopolitan.

Beitz applies John Rawls' theory of justice to international politics (Beitz 1999 [1979]; Rawls 1971). He seeks to find out which principles of justice would be chosen to create a perfectly just world order (an 'ideal theory'). But how would such a principle, where 'social and economic inequalities are to be arranged . . . to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged', be chosen? To think about this, Beitz uses a hypothetical scenario called the global original position. He sees using this scenario as a purely theoretical exercise of moral reasoning – like the ticking bomb scenario – and one that is impartial. It requires that we suspend any bias and put to one side being a particular self with particular interests: according to his *picture of reason*, this is possible. In the

BOX 2.2 JOHN RAWLS

John Rawls (1921–2002) is widely regarded as the late twentieth-century's greatest liberal political philosopher. His major intellectual preoccupation was to defend the notion that civil and political rights are inviolable and that such rights were the first duty of a liberal state. His most important book, *A Theory of Justice*, was first published in 1971. In it he explores the contours of a just society with the argument that 'Each person possesses an inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of society as a whole cannot override. Therefore, in a just society the rights secured by justice are not subject to political bargaining or to the calculus of social interests.'

FIGURE 2.4 John Rawls. Photo: Jane Reed, University of Harvard

scenario, state representatives would not know their nationality or whether their state had large natural resources, but they would know that resources are unevenly distributed globally and each state needs adequate resources for there to be a successful and just global society. Consequently, Beitz argues, the parties would rationally choose a global principle that redistributed natural resources justly, because no state representative would want to find that they had few or no natural resources.

For Beitz's cosmopolitan ethics to work, he needs to argue that principles of justice can apply to the non-ideal environment of global politics. Why? It all has to do with Rawls. Rawls thinks his principles can only be applied to domestic societies as 'cooperative ventures for mutual advantage' (Rawls 1971: 4). Beitz disagrees and argues that international politics is sufficiently similar to domestic politics to count as a cooperative scheme, even though international institutions and practices may not be genuinely cooperative. Beitz's point is that there is enough transnational activity – trade, international investment, aid and communications – to mean that burdens and/or benefits are produced which need to be justly distributed. Beitz offers us a *picture of ethico-political space*, then, that emphasises the similarity between domestic and international politics. Because of their similarity the principles of justice discovered by ideal theory and the hypothetical scenario apply.

But who are 'we' according to Beitz? For whom are global burdens and benefits to be redistributed in the name of justice? Beitz's answer is the individual: persons who have rights and interests. Beitz rejects the view that non-person based interests are appropriate or relevant from the moral point of view. According to his *picture of the subject* it is persons, rather than states, nations or communities who should benefit. This is the badge of a cosmopolitan position. Furthermore, Beitz believes that persons have a natural duty to create and sustain just institutions. In other words, the principles of justice (which ideal theory locates using the hypothetical scenario of the global original position) can become part of the non-ideal world because it is a natural duty of moral subjects to secure justice *and* because the international context is sufficiently like the domestic to make acting on such a duty appropriate and realistic.

The problem of the distribution of benefits across the globe is certainly a major issue in global politics today. See **Chapter 19**.

For the cosmopolitan then, international ethics is understood from an impartial perspective that any human being can take simply because they are a rational human being. Unlike Walzer, Beitz is arguing that we can understand other cultures and make moral judgements without worrying about mistranslation or misunderstanding. For Beitz, the important thing is to base our moral judgements and therefore, our international ethics on ideal principles of justice. As such, what morally matters the most is not our nationality nor our citizenship but rather, our humanity.

We summarise Walzer and Beitz's different pictures in Figure 2.5.

	Walzer (Communitarian)	Beitz (Cosmopolitan)
Reason	Reason cannot overcome interests, biases and socio-cultural meanings	Reason transcends our interests and biases
The subject	The state or the political community is the moral subject	The individual (as a member of humanity) is the moral subject
Ethico-political space	Ethics takes place within states; those outside are not our primary moral concern	Ethical responsibility extends to every person regardless of where they live

FIGURE 2.5
Table summary of Walzer and Beitz

BROADER ISSUES
THINKING ABOUT THINKING

Surveying the way two thinkers in global politics approach ethics gave us two sets of *pictures* of reason, the subject and ethico-political space. *Importantly, both approaches share the impulse to picture.* Regardless of the content of the pictures, each approach believes that theirs is an accurate and true representation of the *reality* of reason, the subject and ethico-political space.

Attempts to describe global political reality are forms of representation, or what I have called pictures. The assumption is that the truth or falsity of a picture or representation depends on how accurately it corresponds with reality. This depends on postulating what we call a *word–object relation*. The meaning of a word depends on it naming or accurately representing the corresponding object that exists independently in reality. So, for example, 'political community' refers to a common way of life; and so on. In this way of thinking, all the things referred to exist outside language and act as the foundation of the world. They exist in a reality that is independent of any thoughts or words we might have about it. Our words simply refer to the foundation or essence of such things as political community and principles of justice. This is what picturing

assumes. It is called a correspondence theory of truth. When a picture accurately portrays reality, or when our words name the correct 'thing' or object, then the picture is true. The picture is false if it is inaccurate.

But what happens if you begin to wonder about the whole endeavour of picturing and the pictures themselves? What happens if we shift our attention towards pictures as the problem rather than the answer to ethics? If we did make such a shift we would be involved in something different: another approach. This different approach questions whether pictures can fully capture reality at all. In other words, it questions how and where we draw the lines around what we think reality is and what impact these lines have on people's lives and the ways in which they are able and unable to live them with each other.

Pictures, framing and language games

Before we return to looking at torture and ticking time bombs as an example of how pictures impact on people's lives and our treatment of each other, we first need to ask why pictures might be problematic. The philosopher Ludwig Wittgenstein argued that when we provide answers they tend to be of the kind 'This is how things are.' However, as Wittgenstein says:

> one thinks that one is tracing the outline of the thing's nature over and over again, and one is merely tracing round the frame through which we look at it. A *picture* held us captive. And we could not get outside it, for it lay in our language and language seemed to repeat it to us inexorably.
>
> (Wittgenstein 1958: §§114–15)

Wittgenstein implies that pictures are part of the practice of language that he calls language games. Rather than picturing reality as though reality were outside our language, pictures constitute or create reality. This does not mean that there is no

BOX 2.3 LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN

Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889–1951) is one of the most influential philosophers of the twentieth century. His major intellectual preoccupation was with the relationship between language and the world and how our misunderstandings of it lead to philosophical problems. In his lifetime he published only one work, the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1922) perhaps most famous for its phrase 'Whereof one cannot speak one must remain silent.' His later philosophy was posthumously published as *Philosophical Investigations* (1958). His influence remains important outside philosophy, including in thinking about global politics.

FIGURE 2.6
Ludwig Wittgenstein. von Wright and Wittgenstein Archives, University of Helsinki

external reality. But it does mean that we are wholly dependent upon language to make sense of and understand the world we live in. And if this is so, then language tells us *what* to think about the world or what we call reality. The importance of this cannot be overstated. It means that how we think about the world is regulated by our language games or practices. In turn, if our thoughts are regulated by language, it means that our thoughts are practices: ways of being in the world. This is why pictures, as snapshots of what we think about things and people in the world, affect the world we live in. For example, naming a person who plants a ticking bomb a 'terrorist' or a 'freedom fighter' matters beyond the choice of mere vocabulary. Using the term 'freedom fighter' seems to suggest that the person may have a justifiable reason for their actions, whereas 'terrorist' does not. Another way of putting this important point would be to say that our language games constitute the limits of possibility: they tell us what it is possible to do and how it is possible to exist and act in the world.

In summary, thinking about language games emphasises how language makes a difference to how we live and act in the world with others. Pictures tell us what we think 'reality' is and therefore regulate how we act and live in it. Elaborating this further we can say that pictures are practices of telling us what shall count as 'true', 'false', 'humanity', 'political community': any 'thing' (object) or any 'body' (subject). Therefore, the pictures that relate to ethics are a set of practices that tell us what ethics is. Making pictures the problem rather than the answer makes the job of asking how we think about the world and ethics in global politics very different. Thinking about the world becomes a questioning of how thinking or picturing regulates the ways in which we act and the impact this has on people's lives.

Let's now return to thinking about torture and the ticking bomb scenario in order to illustrate the shift towards an approach that sees pictures of reason, the subject and ethico-political space as the problem, not the answer.

Pictures of reason, the subject and ethico-political space

The ticking bomb scenario is the practice of a specific kind of picture of reason: a particular idea of what we think 'thinking about' the world requires. In this case, we will see that Charles Beitz and the United States administration of George W. Bush deployed the same picture of reason as that underlying the ticking bomb scenario. There is a good chance that you are familiar with this picture. It is often associated with liberalism.

The ticking bomb scenario operates with a picture of reason as abstraction. It operates in three steps. *Step one* presents us with a dilemma; whether the value of the life of the bomber can be overridden in order to save other lives. However, this dilemma is not generated by the scenario. It is what the scenario *is* about and why it has been constructed. Having constructed it for this purpose, *step two* requires imagining or thinking hypothetically of anything that might be an exception to an absolute prohibition against torture. Obviously, the candidate for an exception is a ticking bomb. The scenario is asking us whether we think that a ticking bomb really is an exception. Once we've decided that, then *step three* in this picture of reason is to find 'real world' cases or practices where the justifications for torture appear. The shape of this picture of reason is one where there is a clear separation between theory and practice. How we are to act

in the world is first determined by theory as the exercise of reason in the abstract. The next issue is then to apply theory to the world. These steps are also how Beitz generates his principles of justice. He identifies the issue, provides a hypothetical scenario (the global original position) and from that deduces global principles of justice that should be applied to the world.

How can we engage with this picture of reason differently? One way is to trace the effects of this picture rather than engage with its 'truth' or 'falsity'. There are many effects, but we can highlight an important one here. Separating theory and practice means just that: separating them. This then raises the obvious problem of how the two can be reunited, if at all, as the practice of theory. But more importantly, we might want to think about whether theory and practice can be separated in the first place. One way we could do this would be by asking what kind of people are included in this picture of reason. The scenario is not interested in, nor does it include, actual cases of torture: who was tortured, how, why and by whom. The only people that are in the picture are people using abstracted reasoning. They don't have feelings of guilt, humiliation, fear, enjoyment, or confusion nor do they feel pain or scream for example. The scenario also does not include any politics; why the 'bomber' might have planted the bomb, why he planted it where he did, who has captured him, who has labelled him as a 'terrorist' and why, etc. The scenario is deliberately designed to strip away all this information and ask us to make decisions in the absence of the much messier, complicated fabric of global politics.

This section has been arguing that pictures are practices even if, as in this case, they are conceived as purely theoretical. Examining the ticking bomb scenario's picture of reason as the problem involves exploring the possibility that, through its separation of theory and practice, it may be a practice that sanitises torture through its lack of reference to any specific people or political context. Arguably, this has the effect of making torture seem more rational, more palatable and less objectionable. If so, the creation of a scenario that allows for the possibility that torture *is* justified may well be implicated in the actual practice of torture. This would mean that the strict separation of theory and practice that the scenario depends on for making torture justifiable might not be possible in the first place.

So those talking about torture in this way are in some sense responsible for the actual torture that takes place: their talk has made that torture possible.

An example of this would be the Final Report of the Independent Panel To Review [US] Department of Defense Detention Operations, which was published in August 2004 as a response to accounts of the torture of prisoners in Abu Ghraib prison, Iraq, by US military personnel in late 2003. The Report was commissioned by the then US secretary of defense, Donald Rumsfeld, to provide independent advice on the abuse of detainees. The Report stated that 'For the US, most cases for permitting harsh treatment of detainees on moral grounds begin with variants of the "ticking time bomb" scenario' (Schlesinger *et al.* 2004: Appendix H, 2). Why does this matter? The point is that the Report clearly accepted that the ticking bomb scenario *justifies* torture and that this was the position shared by the Bush administration. Therefore, the picture of reason that underlies the ticking bomb scenario was part of a set of shared practices employed by the administration. Given this, for the US and the Report, the issue then became how 'harsh treatment' can be used, by whom and under which circumstances, but no longer *whether* it should be used. Indeed, what consequently emerged was a distinction between torture 'lite' and torture – the former being a justified form which is,

FIGURE 2.7
Samrong Military
Hospital, Cambodia.
Photo: Olivier Pin-Fat

purportedly, moderate and restrained (Wolfendale 2009). Bearing this in mind, we must ask whether the ticking bomb scenario is complicit in the use of torture because the use or practice of its picture of reason makes torture possible. Moreover, once thinking along these lines is made permissible it makes possible any further distinctions we might want to make about 'lite' forms of it and current debates on whether waterboarding, for example, is a form of torture or not. This is a very long way away from the original position of the CAT which says that there are no circumstances under which torture may be justified. I suggest it's the abstract thinking of the 'ticking bomb' scenario which leads us to these practices so horribly quickly.

Pictures of reason are also related to pictures of the subject. In the bomb scenario, it is clear that subjects are meant to come to their decisions rationally and this is what matters most. Our alternative approach would ask what kind of subject this is: what does it include and exclude? It is fascinating that the ticking bomb scenario does not mention pain, as pain is, perhaps, what we most associate torture with. The subjects in the scenario (the torturer and the tortured) are pictured as disembodied. That is to say, that they are viewed as people with reason but with no body that can feel pain. Nor are they pictured as having emotions. Not only does the bomber in the scenario not scream, he does not cry, he has no relationships of love and he holds no beliefs in his heart rather than his head. It is very difficult to explore how far our bodies and emotions matter in global politics and ethics, but the point is, we can ask whether this picture of the subject that excludes them seems to miss something important about being human. In so far as this picture of the subject is a practice, it has the effect of excluding emotions and embodiment from consideration. This is, furthermore, a political act since it is telling us what matters most about being human. So, for example, if the tortured bomber begins begging for the torture to stop should we listen to him? Or should we only listen if he

When we talk about other forms of violence – war for example – we also tend to talk as if there were no actual bodies involved. See **Chapters 1 and 22**.

is presenting us with rational reasons to stop? Is compassion, for example, irrelevant to global politics and ethics?

Apart from this picture of the subject as disembodied, without emotions and without emotional ties to others, the subject is neither social nor political. Again this is a picture most associated with liberalism and is also shared by Beitz. In the ticking bomb scenario the bomber and the potential torturer do not belong to any specified society or culture, have no specified citizenship, no specified notions of belonging or identity, and no political reasons for acting. In section 3, we traced how this is a picture of the subject that Beitz employs and we saw Walzer's objections to it. However, instead of asking which thinker has the 'true' picture, what we need to do using our alternative approach is trace the effects of the practice of each picture. As we have seen in the ticking bomb scenario, the picture of the subject is employed in a way that contributes to the separation of theory and practice by abstracting people from the context within which they are living and acting. Consequently, the ticking bomb scenario does not ask whether there might be any justifications for the bomber planting the bomb.

This leads us nicely into thinking about the relationship between pictures of reason and the subject and the picture of ethico-political space. *Where* does ethics or politics take place? Ironically, the pictures of reason and the subject in the ticking bomb scenario do not explicitly suggest a particular place because of their commitment to the absence of a specific society and a disembodied subject. Place lies in the background as a hidden assumption. However, it is clear from the practice of these pictures that the scenario is supposed to apply to the United States or a state much like it. The clues are in the setting up of the scenario. The bomb is planted in Washington, Paris or London for example. There are two things to notice about this. One, the potential victims of the bomb will be people living in the US or an advanced industrialised state. Two, therefore, the potential torturers will be the US or a liberal democratic, advanced industrialised state. This is the ethico-political space within which the ticking bomb scenario is set. We could see this as a problem and we could ask what happens to the scenario if it is set elsewhere. What if, for example, a ticking bomb is planted somewhere in Afghanistan and the bomber is a US soldier being held by the Taliban? Does this make a difference to how we would come to a decision about the justifiability of torture? And, if you feel that it does, why does it? Would you want to make a distinction between the Taliban practising torture 'lite' and torture? Regardless of your answers, in the ticking bomb scenario we have a picture of ethico-political space as one occupied by states; more specifically, liberal democratic states.

We might want to ask whether it is only liberal democratic states that can justifiably use torture. Moreover, we can go further by asking whether the spaces within which ethics and politics take place in global politics must be territorial spaces like states, nations or political communities. *Perhaps ethics is all around us and is unavoidable.* We live in a world of pictures, where what we think about the world matters. If, as this chapter has suggested, pictures are the problem, then ethico-political space, and the need and occasion to think about the problem of picturing, is everywhere: it is in the state, at home, in the lecture theatre, in this textbook, in abstract thoughts and hypothetical scenarios. If we fail to be aware of how we think about the world and its effects, we may find ourselves blindly complicit in a variety of practices, like torture. It should make us pause to think about how we think about the world.

CONCLUSION

This chapter has traced how and why what we think about the world matters. It began by posing questions about how the way we think about the world impacts on our treatment of others. In order to highlight how thinking affects the world, the chapter examined the abstracted way of thinking deployed by the ticking bomb scenario. The chapter showed that thinking about thinking very quickly led us to questions of ethics in global politics. Not only was the ethics of torture implicated but also the much broader question of whether our moral obligations extend primarily to 'us' as fellow citizens or 'us' as the whole of humanity. This apparent choice between an international ethic based on communities or on humanity was identified as the cosmopolitan–communitarian debate; a debate which provides well-established answers to what pictures of reason, the subject and ethico-political space consist of. Finally, the chapter examined a different approach: a way of thinking that sees pictures as the problem, not the answer, a way of thinking that can be seen as an ethico-political endeavour in itself. In the final analysis, the chapter is a plea for us, whoever 'we' may be, to be mindful of how we live in the world and our ethico-political relations with others.

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United Nations, Committee Against Torture, part of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights, http://www2.ohchr.org/english/bodies/cat/
    This Committee is responsible for monitoring the prevention of torture.

Wikileaks, wikileaks.org
    This site includes collections of leaked official documents, for example The Guantanamo Files, Iraq War Logs and Afghanistan War Logs.

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