

Dilemmas of Sovereignty: Law, Politics and Moral Reasoning in Hugo Grotius

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The paper:

Hugo Grotius's account of sovereign power in *De iure belli ac pacis* (first edition 1625) occupies a contested place in recent histories of sovereignty. This paper argues that Grotius's legal arguments do not do their work alone. They function within a broader horizon of what he calls "morals," a field of reasoning that has debts to scholastic moral theology and Aristotelian moral science. Grotius's conception of sovereignty represents a modulation between law and "morals," which allowed him both to separate his scientific jurisprudence from the science of politics and to make a parallel distinction between sovereignty and administration. The context of "morals," however, is not narrowly political but inter-political, generating a potential tension between domestic aspirations to sovereignty and the international order. Grotius's "moral" handling of the issues is resonant for modern dilemmas of sovereignty between popular democracy and functional conceptions of international executive rule.