

Impact case study (REF3b)

Institution: The University of Oxford
Unit of Assessment: UOA33
Title of case study: The contribution of theology to the public discourse on the ethics of killing
<p>1. Summary of the impact (indicative maximum 100 words)</p> <p>Nigel Biggar's recent research has developed novel Christian ethical analyses of a range of overlapping issues of public concern regarding the ethics of killing – specifically physician-assisted suicide and war. Articles written for the press have been frequently quoted by journalists and politicians; a wide audience has been reached through participation in radio debates and lectures to members of the public. Collaboration with public policy bodies and colloquia involving senior civil servants and other opinion-formers have provided further platforms in which advice is sought and given.</p>
<p>2. Underpinning research (indicative maximum 500 words)</p> <p>Nigel Biggar is the Regius Professor of Moral and Pastoral Theology, and Director of the McDonald Centre for Theology, Ethics, and Public Life, at the University of Oxford. He is also a member of the Royal College of Physicians' Committee on Ethical Issues in Medicine. Part of his recent research has sought to establish a legitimate place for religious ethics in the public deliberation of liberal societies, which should aspire to be responsibly plural rather than speciously neutral.</p> <p>On the basis of this principal contention, Biggar has proceeded to develop detailed Christian ethical analyses of a range of practical issues bearing on public policy and law. Among these are two kinds of killing: euthanasia & physician-assisted suicide (PAS), and war.</p> <p>Biggar's major publication on euthanasia & PAS (<i>Aiming to Kill: The Ethics of Suicide and Euthanasia</i>) appeared in 2004, but he has since continued to develop his thinking and to disseminate it publicly. His argument is an unusual combination of liberal and conservative elements. Against ethical conservatives he concedes that some forms of human life are probably not worth living; but against ethical liberals he argues that the fostering of humanist social norms militates against making voluntary euthanasia or PAS legal.</p> <p>Biggar's research on war has developed over the past decade: in several book-chapters (an elucidation of the Church of England's views in <i>Gerechter Krieg – Ja oder Nein?</i> [2003], a contribution to <i>Ethics and Weapons of Mass Destruction</i> [2004], a study on the reception of just war doctrine in British churches in <i>The Price of Peace</i> [2007], an essay on theology and atrocity in <i>The Religious in Responses to Mass Atrocity</i> [2009], and an account of the authority of Christian just war reasoning in <i>The Just War Tradition: The Practice of Authority and Authority in Practice</i> [2013]); in a pair of articles on the New Testament and violence (in the peer-reviewed <i>Studies in Christian Ethics</i> [2009, 2010]); and in another pair of articles on the Iraq war (in <i>International Affairs</i>, a leading journal of international relations [January and May 2011]). Biggar's work on this topic culminated in the publication in September 2013 of a 300-page monograph by OUP under the title <i>In Defence of War</i>. Even prior to publication the manuscript of this book was the subject of two conferences in the US (University of Notre Dame, September 2009: http://kroc.nd.edu/events/upcoming/2009/09/24/570); University of Virginia, April 2012: http://artsandsciences.virginia.edu/religiousstudies/people/ctm9d.html).</p> <p>As the provocative title of his monograph implies, Biggar's position on the ethics of warfare is unfashionable. Against pacifisms religious, secular, and virtual, against legal positivism and liberal individualism, and recovering the early Christian just war tradition running from Augustine to Grotius, he argues that peace is not simple, that not-war stands in need of justification quite as much as war, that just war is basically a punitive response to grave injustice, that its paradigm is not self-defence but humanitarian intervention, that the estimation of consequences is significantly speculative, that therefore the prudential criteria of just war must be secondary, and that Britain's prosecution of war against Wilhelmine Germany in 1914-18 was justified, as was the invasion of Iraq in 2003.</p>
<p>3. References to the research (indicative maximum of six references)</p> <p>Biggar, N 'Saving the Secular', <i>Journal of Religious Ethics</i> (2008), pp. 157-78. DOI: 10.1111/j.1467-9795.2008.00378.x</p>

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Biggar, N *Religious Voices in Public Places*. Co-ed. with Linda Hogan. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009 (Biggar contributed a chapter and wrote the conclusion).

DOI:10.1093/acprof:oso/9780199566624.001.0001

Review: “the finest exploration ... is offered in Nigel Biggar’s essay... Biggar’s lucid conclusion ... This excellent volume ...” (James McEvoy, *Theological Studies*, 71/4 [December 2010])

Biggar, N ‘Specify and Distinguish! Interpreting the New Testament on “Non-violence”’, *Studies in Christian Ethics*, 22/2 (May 2009). DOI: 10.1177/0953946809103490

Biggar, N ‘The Road to Death on Demand’, *The Human Life Review*, XXXVI/2 (Spring 2010); republished as Biggar, N ‘Autonomy’s Suicide’ in *The Journal of Observational Pain Medicine*, 1/1 (2012).

<http://www.ioopm.com/index.php?journal=ioopm&page=article&op=view&path%5B%5D=15&path%5B%5D=49>

Biggar, N *Behaving in Public: How to Do Christian Ethics*. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2011. Available on request.

Reviews: “elegantly argued, accessible, and lucid... mature and charitable... Biggar advocates with... cogency, clarity, and consistency” (Edward Dowler, *Church Times*, 30 December 2011); “commendably clear... unfailingly fair... nicely illuminated” (Victor Lee Austin, *First Things*, November 2011).

Biggar, N *In Defence of War*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, September 2013. eBook available: <http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=9aozAAAAQBAJ>

Review: “This is a highly original and significant contribution.... It is the best book of this sort to have been written in recent years... The scholarship seems impeccable... This is a book that will have a broad, substantial impact, effecting a change in points of view that I expect will endure... [T]his is a seriously good piece of work” (anonymous pre-contract reader commissioned by OUP); “this book is a very good read. ...Biggar’s discussion is panoramic ... The book is exceptionally well conceived and developed” (anonymous clearance reader commissioned by OUP).

4. Details of the impact (indicative maximum 750 words)

In 2008, Professor Biggar’s work attracted a £250k benefaction from the former deputy Chief of Staff in President Carter’s White House to establish the McDonald Centre for Theology, Ethics, and Public Life. Within two years, the benefactor was so impressed by the Centre’s work that he decided to endow it in perpetuity with a further benefaction of £2,085,000. This arrangement was confirmed by formal agreements in March and April 2011. Both as an individual and through the reputation and facilities of the Centre, Biggar has injected the results of his academic work into the bloodstream of public discourse and advised numerous UK and international experts and members of government and the civil service.

Widening public understanding and debate

Biggar’s work on the ethics of killing, both concerning euthanasia & PAS and war, has reached a wide public audience through letters and articles published in the general media. Furthermore, these pieces have often prompted further commentary and debate before an ever-widening audience. For example, *The Times* published his letter, “Dangers of Dignitas and the Law” (18 July 2009), which was then republished alongside a letter by the celebrity lobbyist for the legalisation of PAS, Terry Pratchett, as ‘Exchange of the Week’ in *The Week* (23 July 2009), and finally quoted by Bryan Appleyard in *The Sunday Times* (2 August 2009) [i]. The following year, Biggar published a 4,000 word essay, “The Road to Death on Demand”, in the current affairs magazine *Standpoint* (March 2010), which was subsequently quoted by Dominic Lawson in the *Sunday Times* (28 February 2010) [ii], and republished in the American journal, *The Human Life Review*, XXXVI/2 (Spring 2010). *Standpoint* has an approximate circulation of 10,000, *The Week* 170,000, *The Times* 600,000, and *The Sunday Times* 1.2m. With regards to Biggar’s work on the ethics of killing and war, in July 2009 he debated on BBC Radio 4 with Alan Dershowitz, the (in)famous American jurist and political commentator, on whether contemporary counterinsurgency requires changes to traditional just war doctrine. In March 2010, the *Financial Times* (circulation 390,000) published his

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“Do not be so sure Invading Iraq was Immoral” [iii], which was republished in the *Straits Times* (Singapore, circulation 374,000) on 22 March 2010 and quoted on the American website *Commentary* [iv].

In April 2012 Biggar lectured under the title “Should Doctors Ever Kill?” at the world-famous Mayo Clinic at Rochester, MN, USA [v]. In October of the same year, he debated about the legalisation of PAS with Lord Falconer, its leading British parliamentary advocate, at Kings College London, under the title “At the End of the Day” [vi]. As a member of the Committee on Ethical Issues in Medicine of the Royal College of Physicians, Biggar has used his work to help persuade the College not to adopt a position of neutrality on the legalisation of PAS in the UK.

Influencing public policy

Professor Biggar has frequently been approached to provide information and advice to a range of policy makers, government officials, and practitioners. In November 2009, under the auspices of the Wyndham Place Charlemagne Trust, Professor Biggar delivered a lecture, “To Intervene or Not to Intervene: Ethical and Religious Reflections on Military Intervention for Humanitarian Purposes”, to a London audience of serving and retired civil servants [vii]. At the invitation of the Higher Command Staff Course at the UK Defence Academy, Shrivenham, he also spoke to forty senior British and foreign army, navy, and air force officers about just war on 15 February 2010 – and again on 21 February 2011.

In the wake of his piece “Do not be so sure Invading Iraq was Immoral”, Biggar was commissioned to write a 4,000 word article (“Iraq: What are the Morals of the Story?”) for the in-house journal of the Royal Institute for International Affairs (Chatham House), *International Affairs* (January 2011) [viii]. Biggar was then invited to debate the justice of the Iraq war with Dr David Fisher, former senior civil servant in the Ministry of Defence and recent author of *The Morality of War* (OUP, 2011) at Chatham House. Introduced by the renowned military historian Michael Howard, this debate took place on 22 March 2011 before an audience of two hundred, which included a number of Members of Parliament and high-ranking civil servants from the time of the lead-up to the war. This exchange between Biggar and Fisher was subsequently published as “Was Iraq an Unjust War?” in *International Affairs* (May 2011) [ix].

Biggar’s work on war has been further directly communicated through discussion with various senior members of UK and international Government departments and intelligence services via a series of annual colloquia on ethical issues in international affairs, which is co-sponsored by the McDonald Centre for Theology, Ethics, and Public Life in Oxford, and by Chatham House in London. To date this series has included meetings on:

- (1) National Interest and Foreign Policy (5 February 2010), which included senior members of the Foreign & Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence.
- (2) The Ethics of Intelligence Gathering (16 February 2011), which included senior members of the UK and US intelligence services.
- (3) The Ethics of Humanitarian Intervention in the Wake of the Libyan Crisis (10 February 2012), which included senior members of the FCO and MoD, together with experts on the Middle East.
- (4) The Ethics of Remote Weaponry (1 February 2013), which included American, German, and Dutch experts.

After attendance at these meetings, participants have made the following comments. John McLaughlin, former Deputy Director and Acting Director of the Central Intelligence Agency of the USA: “conferences I attended...were enormously valuable in my work in Washington, which involves service on various government advisory boards and teaching graduate students at Johns Hopkins University, many of whom are heading for important positions in the American government... The spirited debate among them...has already informed my teaching and influenced the advice I offer to our national security community in the United States” [1]. John Lloyd, Contributing Editor at the *Financial Times*, and columnist at Reuters.com and at La Repubblica: “The McDonald Centre at Oxford has, to my knowledge as a participant in several of its events, held high level seminars/conferences on the national interest... I believe it has made, and should continue to make, a difference to the national conversation on all of the matters it has tackled” [2].

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Edwina Moreton, OBE, formerly Diplomatic Editor and Deputy Foreign Editor, *The Economist*. "I have found the McDonald Centre series hugely and directly helpful in my work, which in reporting and editorial writing requires me to address a wide range of difficult yet topical issues... The quality of my own thinking, analysis and writing on these and other subjects benefited directly as a result" [3]. The importance of this series of meetings has been attested to by Iain Mathewson, CMG, formerly of the UK's Foreign & Commonwealth Office: "This continues as a unique series of colloquia, which were not available to government until the McDonald Centre launched them. Chatham House's continuing support is itself evidence of their value and impact. After a career in foreign intelligence collection followed by five years as an associate fellow at Chatham House's International Security Programme I know only too well how important a gap existed before the McDonald Centre began to fill it in 2010" [4].

Professor Biggar's work has also proved of direct influence to Members of Parliament and the House of Lords. On 31 January 2011, in the House of Commons' debate about Iran's potential nuclear weapons, the Rt. Hon. Dennis MacShane, MP for Rotherham, encouraged the secretary of state "to read the article in the current edition of *International Affairs* [January 2011] by Professor Nigel Biggar" and expounded on the arguments therein [x]. In a July 2013 discussion in the House of Lords in relation to the Syrian conflict, Baroness Falkner of Margravine stated her gratitude for the thoughtful discussions she had had with Professor Biggar [xi].

5. Sources to corroborate the impact (indicative maximum of 10 references)

Testimony from participants in McDonald Centre

- [1] Feedback comment from a former Deputy Director and Acting Director of the Central Intelligence Agency of the USA
- [2] Feedback comment from contributing Editor at the *Financial Times*, and columnist at Reuters.com and at La Repubblica.
- [3] Feedback comment from former Diplomatic Editor and Deputy Foreign Editor, *The Economist*.
- [4] Feedback comment from former member of the UK's Foreign & Commonwealth Office.

Online evidence sources

- [i] "Dangers of Dignitas and the Law" (*Times*, 18 July 2009), quoted by Bryan Appleyard in *The Sunday Times* (2 August 2009): <http://bryanappleyard.com/assisted-suicide/>.
- [ii] "The Road to Death on Demand" (*Standpoint*, March 2010), quoted by Dominic Lawson in the *Sunday Times* (28 February 2010): <http://www.thesundaytimes.co.uk/sto/comment/article20264.ece>.
- [iii] "Do not be so sure Invading Iraq was Immoral" (*Financial Times*, 11 March 2010), available at <http://www.ft.com/cms/s/0/c9114442-2c78-11df-be45-00144feabdc0.html#axzz2Ownk8SqK>
- [iv] Quoted by P. Wehner in "The Times they are a-changing", *Commentary*: www.commentarymagazine.com/blogs/index.php/wehner/255821.
- [v] "Should Doctors Ever Kill?" (Mayo Clinic, Rochester, MN, USA, 13 April 2012) is visible at: (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1pvqb1e4bZ0>).
- [vi] "At the End of the Day" (King's College London, 11 October 2012) is visible at (http://christianevidence.org/blog/entry/debate_on_assisted_dying).
- [vii] "To Intervene or Not to Intervene: Ethical and Religious Reflections on Military Intervention for Humanitarian Purposes" has been published by the Wyndham Place-Charlemagne Trust on its website at <http://www.wpct.org/publications.htm>.
- [viii] *International Affairs* "Iraq: What are the Morals of the Story?" <http://www.chathamhouse.org/publications/ia/archive/view/164163>
- [ix] The text of the Chatham House debate is available at <http://www.chathamhouse.org/publications/ia/archive/view/164421>.
- [x] "Iraq: What are the Morals of the Story?" (*International Affairs*, January 2011), cited by Denis MacShane, MP, in the House of Commons: *Hansard*, 31 Jan 2011, Column 571: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201011/cmhansrd/cm110131/debtext/110131-0001.htm>.
- [xi] House of Lords debate, Monday, 1 July 2013: Syria and the Middle East Motion to Take Note: <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/ld201314/ldhansrd/text/130701-0001.htm#1307012000328>