Justifying punishment in International Criminal Law

The applicability of domestic principles to international crimes

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Abstract

The most salient characteristic of International Criminal Law (ICL) is its ability to inflict punishment on individuals. As punishment always requires justification, this study investigates what justifications ICL uses. Having concluded that ICL has heavily borrowed from domestic criminal law, chapter two outlines the various domestic justifications for punishment. Chapter three identifies retribution and deterrence as the main justifications of punishment in ICL. In chapter four and five the applicability of these two justifications for ICL is analyzed. It is found that the notion of individual moral culpability, so essential for the retributive justification, poses problems due to the collective nature and specific social environment of international crimes. These same circumstances also mean that a deterrent effect is hard to establish. However, political and military leaders are found to be more culpable and operate more rational, which means that punishment might have an deterrent effect on them. It is therefore concluded that ICL’s current focus on those bearing the greatest responsibility, born out of necessity, should be sustained for reasons of justifiability.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ICC</td>
<td>International Criminal Court</td>
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<td>ICL</td>
<td>International Criminal Law</td>
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<td>ICTR</td>
<td>International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda</td>
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<td>ICTY</td>
<td>International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia</td>
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<td>IHL</td>
<td>International Humanitarian Law</td>
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<td>IHRL</td>
<td>International Human Rights Law</td>
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<td>ILC</td>
<td>International Law Commission</td>
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<td>IMT</td>
<td>International Military Tribunal (Nuremberg)</td>
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<td>IMTFE</td>
<td>International Military Tribunal for the Far East</td>
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<tr>
<td>JCE</td>
<td>Joint Criminal Enterprise</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UNGA</td>
<td>United Nations General Assembly</td>
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<td>UNSC</td>
<td>United Nations Security Council</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table of contents

1 Introduction ........................................................................................................... 4

2 Justifications of punishment ................................................................................. 8
   2.1 Human Rights .................................................................................................. 10
   2.2 Retributive justifications ............................................................................... 12
      2.2.1 Individual responsibility and moral culpability ................................... 15
   2.3 Utilitarian justifications ................................................................................ 17
      2.3.1 Deterrence .............................................................................................. 18
      2.3.2 Incapacitation ......................................................................................... 20
      2.3.3 Rehabilitation ......................................................................................... 20
   2.4 Which justification? ...................................................................................... 21

3 Historical development ......................................................................................... 23
   3.1 The first proposal .......................................................................................... 23
   3.2 World War I and the Treaty of Versailles ....................................................... 25
   3.3 Post World War II ......................................................................................... 29
      3.3.1 International Military Tribunal in Nuremberg ...................................... 29
      3.3.2 International Military Tribunal for the Far East ................................... 31
      3.3.3 The Genocide Convention ...................................................................... 31
   3.4 The Cold War era slowdown and the work of the International Law Commission... 31
   3.5 The end of the Cold War, genocidal atrocities and the ad-hoc tribunals ........... 34
      3.5.1 The International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia ............. 34
      3.5.2 The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda .................................. 37
   3.6 A permanent international criminal court ...................................................... 39
   3.7 Which justifications? ..................................................................................... 39

4 Retribution in International Criminal Law ......................................................... 41
   4.1 Individual responsibility in International Criminal Law .............................. 42
   4.2 Command Responsibility and Joint Criminal Enterprise ............................ 44
   4.3 Rank-and-file perpetrators and leaders ....................................................... 46

5 Deterrence in International Criminal Law ......................................................... 48

6 Conclusion ........................................................................................................... 53
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