The ZEA and the ZED:
Examining Zones of Ethical Agreement and Disagreement between Premillennial Dispensationalism and a Realism approach to International Relations

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Abstract
The eschatological belief of Premillennial Dispensationalism has been a cornerstone of the fundamentalist evangelical belief system in the United States. As will be discussed in this paper, the ideological claims in Premillennial Dispensationalism have a history of permeating foreign policy despite the fact that International Relations is typically characterized by a more secular paradigm. Premillennial dispensationalists over the past few decades have been skillful at perpetuating their belief that the bible predicts upcoming international conflicts and that all disputed land will be returned to Israel. The interaction between Premillennial Dispensationalism and the prevailing, more secularized practices of International Relations was the central area of inquiry in this paper. This eschatological ideology of Premillennial Dispensationalism seems in many ways to be in opposition to the pervasive Realism-based approach to International Relations however there is little existing information on specific ways in which these two ideologies are different or possible ways in which they are similar.

The research presented here used theoretically based qualitative content analysis methodology to further describe and examine these areas of differences and possible areas of similarity to further our understanding of the relationship between these two seemingly competing ideas about foreign relations. The theoretical content analysis methodology sought to find and describe possible zones of ethical agreement (ZEA) and zones of ethical disagreement (ZED) between Premillennial Dispensationalism and a Realism-based approach to International Relations.

Keywords: Eschatology, Realism, International Relations, Religion, Ethics, Philosophy

Introduction

Fundamentalist evangelicals in the US, although highly diverse, have had regressions and revivals throughout their history. They constitute a powerful religious group that has survived perceived and actual threats from a socially, scientifically and politically evolving nation. Arguably, the most influential tenet that has supported the ability of this group to be revived is the group's success at promoting a belief in biblically prophesized events that include the return of land to Israel, a period of war during the Tribulation, and mass annihilation during and after the battle of Armageddon. The specific term given to this belief system is Premillennial Dispensationalism. Ernest R. Sandeen states "Ever since its (Fundamentalism) rise to notoriety in the 1920s, scholars have predicted the imminent demise of the movement. The Fundamentalists, to return the favor, have predicted the speedy end of the world." (1970, p.ix). Contemporary Realism-based International Relations practices tend to employ a more secular and not religious paradigm to explain and guide how nations ought to act in the international system. Premillennial Dispensationalism and a Realism-based approach to International Relations both claim to know how international relationships ought to transpire however one makes an appeal to religious ideology whereas the other an appeal to secularly based ideology.

Some research questions that have emerged out of these competing belief systems are: Is a belief in an imminent world war driven apocalypse and subsequent religious salvation truly as incompatible with contemporary international peace keeping practices as it appears?, Is it possible to believe in an unavoidable period of tribulation and the emergence of an anti-Christ while also supporting diplomatic resolutions to international conflicts?, How can a group, whose main perceived enemy is the secularization of society, support peace efforts made from a secular and not religious inception?, Are there any areas in which these two ideologies can agree?. The research presented here sought to examine the complexities of these questions by using a theoretical content analysis of the literature and the propositions made in the arguments for Premillennial Dispensationalism and a secular Realism-based approach to International Relations.

A theoretical content analysis methodological approach to Premillennial Dispensationalism and Realism-based International Relations was suited to the research questions asked above because it allowed for an in depth look at the rationalization process of a certain group based on content coming from the literature and the propositions of their stated belief system. A literature and proposition based content analysis methodology facilitated the uncovering of the theoretical underpinnings within the premises of the arguments of both these ideologies.

The first goal of this research was to describe and further understand the theoretical substructures of Premillennial Dispensationalism and a Realism approach to International Relations. The second goal was to analyze and describe the ethical underpinnings of both these ideologies. The third goal of this research was to describe and examine areas of possible ethical agreement between two competing ideas of how foreign relations ought to transpire. The aim was that this research would uncover possible ideological zones of ethical agreement (ZEA) between the fundamentalist evangelicals and the secular peace keeping efforts that are generated from a single nation or a multi-national agency. The fourth and final goal was that the information

presented here would add to the body of knowledge on resolving conflicting ideological positions between the constantly interacting religious life and the secular life.

Conflicting Ideologies: A Statement of the Problem

In referring to Premillennial Dispensationalism and a Realism-based approach to International Relations as ideologies Slavoj Zizek's conception of ideology was employed as

> …anything from a contemplative attitude that misrecognizes its dependence on social reality to an action-oriented set of beliefs, from the indispensable medium in which individuals live out the relations to a social structure to false ideas which legitimate a dominant political power. (2012, p.3)

According to some interpretations of biblical prophecy the world is set to go through seven main epochs. These are the Rapture, Tribulation, Armageddon, Millennium of Peace, Final Revolt, Final Judgment, and Eternity of Peace. Each of these epochs is called a dispensation. Fundamentalists tend to believe that we are currently in a period that is prior to the Rapture and therefore prior to the Millennium of Peace. Those that believe this are therefore said to be Premillennial Dispensationalists. A Realism-based account of International Relations asserts that recognized nation States possess an inalienable right to self-protection, self-governance and self-determination. States are in a constant struggle for different forms of the finite resource of power and any act is legitimized if its intention is State self-interest. In Premillennial Dispensationalism fundamentalist Christian believers are the main actors therefore the unit of analysis is socio-religious groups. In Realism-based International Relations States are the main actors therefore the unit of analysis is sovereign States.

Exploring the effect of the eschatological concept of Premillennial Dispensationalism of fundamentalist evangelicals in the US on their attitudes toward international conflict attempted to further uncover the role of religion in popular opinion on foreign policy and International Relations. The belief in an imminent biblical Armageddon contains propositions that are contingent upon international conflict and therefore it seems that a lack of international conflict threatens the validity of the propositions inherent in Premillennial Dispensationalism. A Realism-based understanding of International Relations also views conflict as inevitable but focuses on peaceful resolutions as a desirable solution as long as it is in the self- interest of States not to engage in war. Considering the goal was to analyze the ideological interaction between these two views of foreign relations, the methodology was meant to increase the understanding of differences and similarities through discovering and examining some of the theoretical underpinnings of the seemingly incompatible propositions of Premillennial Dispensationalism and a Realism account of International Relations.

The Religious Ideology

Premillennial Dispensationalism is an eschatologically based religious ideology that explains an order of events that will result in the fundamental change of the world and society as it currently exists. Premillennial Dispensationalists believe in a certain order of eras in which the most saintly Christians first ascend into heaven (the rapture), then the remaining Christians and non-believers endure years of chaos and

there is the emergence of the antichrist (the tribulation), followed by an epic fight between God and the Devil (the battle of Armageddon), and ending in 1,000 years of peace on earth for all Christians and Jewish converts (the millennium) (Lahr, 2007). Following the millennium of peace, premillennial dispensationalists believe that Satan will be released from hell in one last uprising (the final revolt), be defeated, and then a final judgment and an eternity of peace for all believers will ensue with all non-believers being condemned to eternal dystopia or being destroyed (Boyer, 1992). Prior to the Armageddon, the world is expected to descend into chaos from wars and natural disasters and those of the Jewish faith will be returned to their homeland in Israel. These events are believed to be indicative that the end is unfolding in accordance with a dispensationalist context of future events (Lahr, 2007).

The predictions in Premillennial Dispensationalism described above are primarily founded on the teachings of John Nelson Darby (1800-1882), an ordained minister of the Irish Protestant church (Boyer, 1992). Darby rooted his prophetic dispensations in his subjective interpretations of bible scripture. Cyrus Scofield (1843-1921) built upon Darby's teachings and produced the Scofield Reference Bible, in which he combined the bible with his interpretation of the script within Darby's dispensationalist framework (Boyer, 1992). Scofield's reference bible is the single most influential and ubiquitous text that has promoted Premillennial Dispensationalism and has given rise to the fundamentalist movement in the US. According to a 2003 poll conducted by the Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life, 63 percent of self-identified evangelicals stated that they believed in the second coming of Jesus and the role of Israel in obtaining the fulfillment of biblical prophecy (2005). This belief system is firmly rooted in the subjective interpretations of Darby and Scofield's biblical references and reinforced by church leaders who subscribe to these interpretations.

The argument for Premillennial Dispensationalism as subscribed to by fundamentalist evangelicals in the US contains four main premises or propositions. The truth and proof of the propositions are unable to be independently or empirically verified because they are based on faith. They are understood to be true under a belief that the bible is inerrant and the subjective interpretations of it are true. The propositions are therefore unfalsifiable in nature. The propositions made in Premillennial Dispensationalism are explained in table 1:

Propositions	Premillennial Dispensationalist Argument
PD1	The World as we know it is finite and has been predestined to end according to the following future dispensations: The Rapture, The Tribulation, Armageddon, The Millennium of Peace, The Final Revolt, The Last Judgment and the Eternity of Peace.
PD2	According to the dispensations the world must go through a period of war and the Holy Land must be returned to Israel before the dispensation of millennium of peace on earth can occur.
PD3	Only the 'souls' of the Christian believers and Christian converts will be saved during the Tribulation and Armageddon.
PD4	The final outcome is eternal utopia for Christian believers and eternal dystopia for all others.

Table 1: Propositions of Premillennial Dispensationalism

To put these premises into the Premillennial Dispensationalism argument: If the world will end according to predestined biblical dispensations, then the world must go through a period of war and strife and only Christian believers will be saved and inherit the world. If Christian believers inherit the world there will be a peaceful utopia on earth. Else Premillennial Dispensationalism is not true, then the world does not have to go through a period of tribulation and the status quo of religiously pluralistic inheritance of the earth will be maintained. If Premillennial Dispensationalism is not true, the inerrancy of the bible and the foundations of fundamental evangelicalism will be proved false.

The Secular Ideology

A Realism-based understanding of International Relations (RIR) in this research was operationalized as being an *Ideology in which sovereign States recognize they are operating in a relative state of anarchy and the rationality and morality of any action with or against another sovereign State is based on some form of Raison D'Etat (national self-interest)*. The foundation of this definition can be considered *Realpolitik* in that States are primarily governed by self interest in all interactions with other sovereign States thereby making theories of power and power politics of essence. A Realist definition of International Relations is often criticized as being Euro or Western centric because of its subscription to the Westphalian system which originated in Europe (Kayaoglu, 2010). The definition provided here was no exception and the limits of choosing a description that excludes the wealth of non-western concepts of International Relations was acknowledged. Although there are many limitations of this definition, it is compatible on many levels with Premillennial Dispensationalism which was helpful later in the theoretical coding and analysis sections of the methodology.

The propositions of a Realism approach to International Relations are shown in table 2 below.

Propositions	Realism-based International Relations Argument
RIR1	States recognize their right to sovereignty and that right in other States.
RIR2	All States are operating in an international system that is mostly characterized by anarchy.
RIR3	The international environment is anarchic therefore conflict between nations over power is inevitable.
RIR4	States operate in a zero-sum power framework therefore some States will have influence and be more prosperous than others.
RIR5	The rationality and morality of a sovereign State is determined by the level to which it satisfies national self-interest.

Table 2: Realism-based International Relations

The argument of RIR, goes as follows: If States recognize their right to sovereignty and that of other States then there is the absence of a hierarchy. If there is the absence of a hierarchy, States are operating in an environment of anarchy. If the environment is anarchic then conflicts over different forms of power are inevitable. Power is finite therefore some States will gain power to the detriment of others and some States will be more prosperous and influential than others. Any interaction of a State with another State is deemed rational and moral insofar as it satisfies national interest.

Methodology

A qualitative content analysis typically has a system based on eight steps: 1) Choosing a research question, 2) Deciding on sources of data, 3) Constructing a frame for coding the data, 4) Categorizing the data into the codes, 5) Testing the coding frame, 6) Re-evaluating the coding frame and changing it if necessary, 7) Analyzing the results, and 8) Discussing findings (Schreier, 2012). In the first step of choosing the research question, a gap in the literature of studies that investigated the theoretical and ethical underpinnings of Premillennial Dispensationalism and its relationship to contemporary Realism-based approaches to International Relations (RIR) was observed.

Step 1: Choosing a Research Question

In examining this gap during the first step of the content analysis methodology, the research questions were constructed toward producing a theoretical and ethical description of both these ideologies with the hope of finding areas of agreement in a thick and rich theoretical description. The primary research questions were, "How do selected theories account for Premillennial Dispensationalism and RIR?", "How do selected ethics theories describe the ethics of Premillennial Dispensationalism and RIR?", and "Are there any ethics based commonalities between Premillennial Dispensationalism and RIR?".

Step 2: Choosing Sources of Data

In embarking upon the second step of deciding on sources of data, it was found that in order to produce a theoretical and ethics based description of the ideologies, the sources of data would need to include scholarly articles, books, text books, polling data, newspaper articles and the Scofield reference bible. The books and articles used were primarily authored by renowned scholars in the fields of religion, international relations, and/or politics. The polling data came from prominent polling agencies such as Gallup and the Pew Research Center or from quantitative data collected through academic research. The quantitative methodologies were all public and reviewed for rigor before use in this paper. Although vestiges of eschatology date back to BC eras, the sources of data were primarily confined to John Nelson Darby's Premillennial Dispensationalism and information about how this belief is practiced and used during the twentieth and twenty-first centuries in the US.

Step 3: Creating a Coding Frame

The concept-driven coding frame created reflected the extensive prior research conducted during the literature review of the topics and theories to be used. In the work presented here the central area of inquiry was a theoretical and ethical description of these two ideologies. The coding frame therefore reflected the descriptive goal of the research. The three main categories of the coding frame for a theoretical comparative content analysis of Premillennial Dispensationalism and RIR were, 1) Theory based description, 2) Ethics Theory based description, and 3) Emergent ethics based commonalities in description.

The *Theory based description* dimension contained five sub-categories which were 1) Theory informs ideology, 2) Theory supports ideology, 3) Theory refutes ideology, 4) Theory Explains resultant actions and behaviors of subscribers to ideology, 5) Theory says nothing about ideology. The *Ethics theory based description* dimension used a logic based concept driven coding frame. In the *Ethics theory based description* category the presence or absence of moral justifiability was assessed therefore this type of coding was best suited. The sub-categories for this dimension were 1) Morally justifiable, 2) Morally unjustifiable, 3) Dependent on unknown variable and 4) Neither morally justifiable nor unjustifiable. The content used in this process of coding was based on the propositions made in the ideological arguments of Premillennial Dispensationalism and RIR.

The final major dimension was *Emergent ethics based commonalities in description*. As in the previous ethics theory dimension, the third dimension used a logic based concept-coding to test for the presence or absence of ethical commonality between the two ideologies. The three sub-categories of this dimension of the coding frame were 1) Ideological propositions agree, 2) Ideological propositions disagree, and 3) Ideological propositions neither agree nor disagree. The propositions that were coded for ethical agreement constituted the Zone of Ethical Agreement or ZEA and the propositions that were coded for ethical disagreement constituted the Zone of Ethical Disagreement or ZED. The coding frame presented here had undergone the testing and re-evaluating steps of a qualitative content analysis methodology. In the testing and re-evaluation steps various changes were made in order to produce a rigorous coding frame that reflected the central area of inquiry expressed in the research questions. Figure 1 is a graphical representation of the coding frame inclusive of its sub-categories.

Step 4: Categorizing the Data

The fourth step in a content analysis methodology is categorizing the data into the coding framework (Schreier, 2012). In this step various print and online sources such as books, text books, newspaper articles, polling data, and scholarly articles were used and categorized in the literature review. The content of this literature review was then used to distill out the major arguments and propositions that would comprise the basis for the content to be analyzed from the various theoretical and ethical perspectives. Books, text books and scholarly articles were also used as material for choosing a spectrum of theories through which to use in the *Theory based description* dimension of the coding frame. Two different spectrums of theories were used for Premillennial Dispensationalism and RIR respectively based on applicability. The theory spectrum used for Premillennial Dispensationalism included Christian Realism, Dominionism, Presuppositional Apologetics, Universalism, Particularism/Group Narcissism, Social Conflict Theory, and Just War theory. The theory spectrum for RIR included Realism, Liberalism/Democratic Peace Theory, Constructivism and Secular Humanism. The information from analyzing the ideologies through these respective theory spectrums were categorized in terms of whether the theory informed, supported, refuted and/or explained resultant actions of those that subscribe to the ideology.

The next dimension of the coding frame to be used was the *Ethics theory based description*. The purpose of this dimension was to take one step deeper into our understanding of Premillennial Dispensationalism and RIR from an ethics

perspective. The Ethics theory based description analyzed the propositions made in both ideologies using teleological ethics theories, meta-ethics theories and deontological ethics theories. The ethics theories spectrum that was used consisted of Utilitarianism, Egoism, Existential Ethics, Ethical Nihilism, an ethical account of Anarchism, Divine Command Theory, Natural Law Theory and Kantian Ethics. This spectrum of ethics theories was then applied to the propositions made in both the ideologies and coded for whether the theories considered the propositions of the ideologies as morally justifiable, morally unjustifiable or neither morally justifiable nor morally unjustifiable. The propositions made in the Premillennial Dispensationalism argument were therefore examined through all of the theories listed above to determine if and how they are ethical or not according to said theory. The same was done with the propositions made in RIR. Every proposition of both ideologies was therefore systematically analyzed according to every theory that constituted the ethics spectrum.
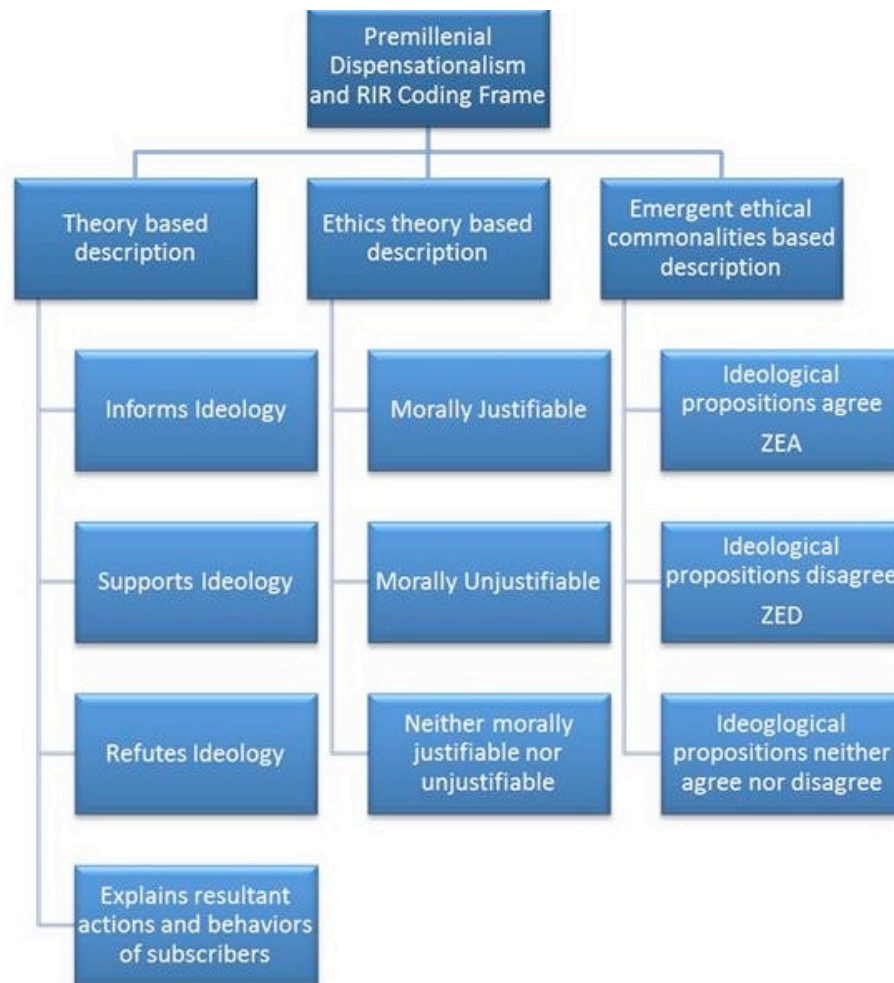

Figure 1: Coding Frame Chart

The third dimension of the coding frame was *Emergent ethical commonalities based description*. The analysis in this section used the results of the *Ethics theory based description* coding analysis of the propositions as material to code the information

according to whether or not propositions were in ethical agreement or not. In using this coding system, propositions that can agree or disagree on their ethical position according to a certain ethics theory were highlighted by being put into the sub-categories of ideological proposition agreement, ideological proposition disagreement or neither. The propositions that are coded to agree comprise the ZEA or Zone of Ethical Agreement while the propositions that are coded for disagreement constitute the ZED or Zone of Ethical Disagreement. A Venn diagram was used to highlight the results of this coding analysis.

Step 5 & 6: Testing and Re-evaluating Coding Frame

The coding frame was tested to see if it could produce a Theory based description of the ideologies and an Ethics theory based description. It was noted that certain theories overlapped and therefore needed to be combined such as Liberalism and Democratic Peace Theory. New subcategories such as "Neither morally justifiable nor morally unjustifiable" also needed to be added to the coding frame.

Step 7 & 8: Analyzing the Results and Discussing Findings

In this step the results of the theory, ethics theory and ethical commonality based description were analyzed in terms of what information was produced from categorizing information about the ideologies. Any emergent themes and new insights into certain aspects of Premillennial Dispensationalism and RIR were noted. The results were analyzed and presented as continuous text according to the main categories of the coding frame. The final step in this methodology is discussing the findings. In this step the results were summarized and the research questions were revisited to see how and if the findings answered the research questions. In addition the discussion of the findings included how the findings can be used, how it adds to existing literature and opportunities for future research on the topic.

The ZEA and the ZED: Premillennial Dispensationalism and a Realism-based approach to International Relations

Premillennial Dispensationalism is a religious ideology that makes a clear claim of knowledge as to how world affairs will transpire in the future. RIR is a secular ideology that seeks to account for the dynamic forces governing contemporary and future International Relations that developed out of a historical context that was rife with great wars between powerful hegemonic empires. The literature review showed that both these ideologies exist in tandem and both exert influence over International Relations in tandem. A Realism-based ideology is clearly more influential than Premillennial Dispensationalism but there is still an observable struggle between the religious and secular at the international level as evidenced by the power and popularity of the Christian Zionist movement in obtaining disproportionate aid for Israel in the US. A Realism-based approach finds this act increasingly difficult to justify.

The findings here have suggested that although these two ideologies seemed to completely contradict each other, they both agreed that self-interest was the primary concern and basis for rationalizing the morality of a given act. In the case of

Premillennial Dispensationalism the self-interest was based on that of the religion and its believers. In RIR self-interest was based on that of the State. A secure world that provides more happiness than pain was the ultimate goal for both these ideologies. The main discrepancy was that for Premillennial Dispensationalism only Christian believers were deemed worthy of enjoying such peace and, in RIR the right to a more peaceful existence was universally applied.

Findings

The findings of this research highlighted many of the nuances of the ideologies of Premillennial Dispensationalism and a Realism-based approach to International Relations. The literature review of the ideology showed that its history has endured various challenges from the secular world such as being considered unpatriotic due to its initial pacifist stance during the Cold War and a growing liberal sentiment among evangelicals. The ideology has endured and now has a powerful politically active group in the Christian Zionist movement in the U.S. A theoretical analysis highlighted that Premillennial Dispensationalism, insofar as it is unverifiable, is essentially a narrative of world domination for a particular religious group. It is a religious ideology that makes an appeal to a Christian God and the inerrancy of the bible over any appeals to humanism. A Realism approach to International Relations is based on a more humanist goal that seeks the creation of a more secure world that views conflict as necessary to balancing power and maintaining general security on a universal level.

The ethics of Premillennial Dispensationalism is based on a subjective interpretation of perceived objectively existing moral laws imparted to humans by God through the bible. The objectivity of such moral laws is unable to be proven in the same way that God has been unable to be empirically proven. Premillennial Dispensationalism is an ideology based on unfalsifiable claims that can provide individuals with life purpose and a promise of reward by virtue of believing. It provides an easier option to feeling the weight of the responsibility for creating individually rationalized concepts of morality. Existentialist philosophers would firmly condemn such blind acceptance of morality on the basis that no objectively knowable morality exists and one ought to never stop attempting to rationalize and develop their own authentic moral code.

Premillennial Dispensationalism has an ethical base that is primarily concerned with its own survival. The survival of the religion and the survival of believers are what are of most importance. Premillennial Dispensationalism is a proclamation of the salvation of Christian believers and insofar as God's commands are considered always morally justifiable, any action that saves and preserves believers is also considered always morally justified. Self-interest for Christians is therefore a morally justifiable basis for rationality. Premillennial Dispensationalism lacks any of the humanist appeals of ethics theories such as Natural Law theory and Kantian ethics. Premillennial Dispensationalism does not consider existence, procreation, social life, or education as universal human rights. In the final dispensation of the 'Eternity of Peace' only Christians will have the right to exist on a religiously homogenous earth. A religious ideology such as this also treats humans as means and not as ends in themselves. According to this ideology, all of humanity exists for the sole purpose of serving God's wishes and brining about his commands of a predestined future.

The ethical analysis and description of a Realism-based approach to International Relations concluded that in general it was a much more ethical ideology than Premillennial Dispensationalism according to the theories used. States were used as the primary actors in the analysis and it was revealed that the system views all States as having equal rights to State sovereignty, and in having that right, they also have the freedom to self-realize and create their own subjectively derived moral codes and laws. Realism showed more concern for the overall preservation of human existence and equal rights to survival. The ethics based description found that between these two ideologies, the religious ideology was found to be less morally justifiable than the secularly based ideology according to the spectrum of ethics theories used.

The area of agreement between the two ideologies from an ethical standpoint was that self-interest is always an acceptable basis for rationality and that the goal is a more peaceful and stable world environment. The most powerful ethical disagreement between the two ideologies was that Premillennial Dispensationalism views that only Christians are worthy of salvation and a safer world environment whereas a secularly based Realism account of International Relations asserts that such a right to exist in a more stable world is universal. A believer in Premillennial Dispensationalism can also support secularly driven peace keeping practices because as long as God has not explicitly forbidden it, it does not violate his command as is morally justified. A State that agrees with a Realism-based definition of International Relations can agree with the propensities of Premillennial Dispensationalists efforts to support Israel as long as it continues to satisfy the self-interests of the acting State.

Conclusions

Fundamentalist evangelical movements in the U.S. have been vocal in their strong support of Israeli aid and any US foreign policy that endorses combat with Arab nations (Baumgartner et al., 2006). They comprise powerful lobby groups in Washington which are specifically concerned with foreign policy (Ruotsila, 2008). In addition, according to polls conducted by the Pew Research center, evangelicals are more likely than non-evangelicals to support the decrease in foreign aid spending while also being strongest proponents of increased military spending (Grant, 2011). The anti-internationalism sentiment and the propensity toward supporting military spending of this group are of particular concern when combined with their political activism.

The research presented here intended to add to the field of understanding as to how religious and secular ideologies continue to co-exist and interact in a constantly changing social environment. The methodology used in this analysis was meant to add from a research perspective by providing a framework of distilling the theoretical underpinnings of two competing ideologies and find areas of agreement within their ethical framework. In addition, from a practical and theoretical perspective practitioners can use the idea of finding a ZEA or Zone of Ethical Agreement as a point at which consensus can begin being built between two ideologies and assist in mediating the ongoing struggle between the religious and the secular. The process of examining competing ideologies from a theoretical perspective can potentially be used to find the ethical agreement between other competing ideologies such as Realism and Liberalism or Capitalism and Communism. Future research can be done on how this theoretical ethical agreement can be highlighted and used in practice

during negotiations and mediations with parties that possess very different ideological systems.

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