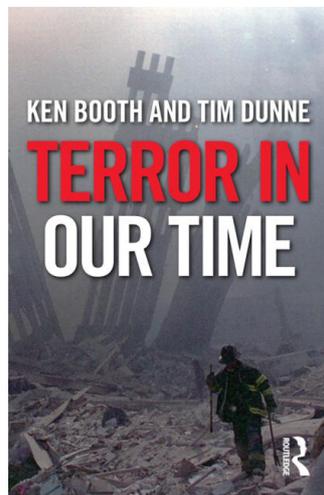


March 2013

'Human Wrongs in International Relations', 20 Years' On

This is an edited text of a talk given by Professor Tim Dunne at Aberystwyth University on 'Emancipatory Realism' in appreciation of Ken Booth's contribution to international politics. The conference was held on 15 and 16 March, and was organized by Kamila Stullerova and Jan Ruzicka.

It is an honour to be invited to this conference celebrating the work of a towering figure in International Relations (IR) with whom I have been fortunate to have co-edited a journal (the *Review of International Studies*) and, more recently, co-authored a book called *Terror in our Time* published by Routledge in late 2011.



The point of the conference, for me and for the organisers, is to revisit Ken Booth's contribution to several debates in the broad area of international politics – and let us remember that Booth¹ has had a significant impact on sub-field debates about security studies, IR theory, terrorism studies, peace research, strategic studies, IR historiography, and cosmopolitan thought.

For him these are not different debates, they are all part of an inquiry he describes as 'critical global theorizing'. It will be intriguing to see, over the course of the conference, which of the claims made on behalf of critical global theorizing generates the most intense interest and discussion.

The conversation that I want to have with Booth today is one that we started on the first day we met. It was a clear and crisp Spring morning twenty years ago (in 1993). I had come to Aberystwyth for an interview for a lectureship. The discussion that day was fairly brief. E.H. Carr and Hedley Bull featured – as they continue to feature in our thinking today (albeit in distinct ways).

Twenty years later, I can look back on a decade in the home of the discipline in the Department of International Politics where we built a thriving and dynamic research culture around the leadership of Ken and of course Steve Smith. It is with no little nostalgia that I remember these years spent with some of the great figures in contemporary IR – Ian Clark, Mick Cox, Toni Erskine, Andrew Linklater, Mike Williams, and Nick Wheeler, with whom I enjoyed a productive writing partnership that continues to inform how I think about current work on R2P.² While Ken Booth would not want to claim that he alone was responsible for the intellectual resurgence of 'Interpol', at the same time it is incontrovertibly the case that it would have been unthinkable without him.

Those years have not gone away. Figuratively, they are relived in how we teach and where we position ourselves in the discipline; literally, they are relived on occasions such as this conference, and in the on-going collaborative research that replenishes,

possibly reinvents, the 'Aberystwyth experience' for staff and students alike.

The key themes I will explore in the rest of my talk develop out of an engagement with the Second R.J. Vincent Memorial Lecture, given by Booth at the University of Keele on 6 May 1994. The title was 'Human Wrongs and International Relations'; the question I will be asking is how far do the arguments in this talk resonate 20 years on?

There is no better place to think about human rights than in the space between John Vincent's 1986 book *Human Rights in International Relations*³ and Ken Booth's 'Human Wrongs' lecture (later published in *International Affairs*).⁴ Both are classic texts in the sense that they leave us 'nowhere to hide', to borrow Booth's metaphor that was first aired in 'Human Wrongs'. (This was the view that Nick Wheeler and I took in our edited collection on *Human Rights in Global Politics*; a collection Booth inspired and which contains his long essay on 'Three Tyrannies of Human Rights').⁵

In the preface to *Human Rights in Global Politics*, we contrasted what we thought at the time was a 'key difference' between the two scholars, in our words, 'whether international society is a civilizing or a corrupting force'.⁶ On reflection, I think these words were ill-chosen.

Instead, to borrow Peter Vale's phrase, the ontological orientations of Booth and Vincent are '**compatibly different**'. It would be reasonable to infer from this the conclusion that the rights and responsibilities of states, allocated by virtue of their membership of international society, must be better integrated into the project of critical global theorizing.

Returning more directly to the Vincent memorial lecture, I would like to revisit three of the key themes:

- (i) Booth's characterization of IR and how and why it had been inhospitable to human rights thinking,
- (ii) his history and philosophy of human rights,

- (iii) his engagement with questions relating to the enforcement of human rights standards; here I am going to run the 'compatibility different' argument through the 'responsibility to protect' framework.

Disciplinary groundings: Human rights in IR

Booth stands in an ambiguous – or should I say agonistic – relationship to the field of IR. The familiar story of the discipline, 1919 and all that, is one that we should be both proud and ashamed of. Proud of the beginnings – the purpose and ambition that drove David Davies and this University to invent a new social science that took the 'international' as its level of analysis, and ashamed of the work of many who taught and wrote in its name.

'Human Wrongs' tells us more about the dark side of IR; indeed, if there is a discipline that fares well in the talk, it is moral philosophy. As an aside, in this work as in many others, Booth draws on an astonishingly diverse set of writings, from novelists, philosophers, journalists, musicians, historians, poets and civil society activists. His preference has always been to draw upon scholars and intellectuals who write books about things, rather than books about books.

He opens 'Human Wrongs' with the Isherwood line... 'I am a camera with its shutter open, quite passive, recording, not thinking'.⁷ The camera in the lecture is of course the field of IR with its reductive snapshots about what soldiers and diplomats do, rather than focusing on the imperative of 'real people in real places'.

Booth goes on to ask what he regards as an unanswerable question to the field of IR: 'what on earth do we think we have been doing for the last 75 years?' His answer is damning. Academics have performed the following social roles: 'provided festishizers of Foreign Offices'; turned the discipline into a museum of human heritage; become 'house-trained' critics of the powerful – those who 'adjust to their rulers' agendas, and flatter the power which

is ruling' and lastly, the strategists 'in their nuclear counting houses'. To which he adds: 'I speak as somebody who once performed it'.⁸

In place of the dismal science that IR became, 'Human Wrongs' sketches the calling for a different kind of IR. 'Global moral science' as he called it then, had to be:

- **Theoretically-informed** because 'there is no escape from theory,'⁹
- **Historically-grounded** because we need to know 'how we got this way' (a phrase of Kenneth Boulding's that Booth often cites)
- **Normatively-guided**, or as his later work *Theory of World Security* puts it, 'the desirability of the universal human community committed to egalitarian principles.'¹⁰

When the study of international politics is put in these terms, it becomes a broad approach that is shared with many other classic figures in the field. I cannot see any grounds for essential incompatibility between the Booth view of discipline, and the work done by Morgenthau, Aron, Wight, Herz, Wolfers, Bull, Claude, Hoffmann, Jervis and Mearsheimer. Where there might be a lively debate between Booth and these classical figures relates to the risks associated with acting upon 'the desirability of a universal human community'.

The point here is not to re-invent Booth as some kind of mainstream theorist; there has been no softening of his critical edge since the time of 'Human Wrongs'. Arguably, it has been IR that has changed in the last 20 years, and in the process, the positioning of leading theorists within it.

On the history and theory of human rights

Booth's work on human rights is highly theoretical, apart from the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights – which is as much an exhortation as it is an obligation – very few conventions or policy instruments are discussed.

In both 'Human Wrongs' and in 'Three Tyrannies' Booth articulates a strong cosmopolitan defence of rights.

This means taking on relativists of all persuasion – be they statist or culturalists or the philosophical relativists associated with the post-modern turn in political and social theory. As Booth put it, 'There are some ethnocentric ideas – and individual human rights is one of them – for which we should not apologize.'¹¹

So what makes this universalism morally justifiable, when other historical universalisms have led to misery, imposition and dispossession? Booth draws on Rorty's ideas of sentimentality¹² – or in Booth's better description – ideas of universal sociality. According to this view of the social world, it is an empirical truth that hospitality is widely shared among all societies, as is the care of the elderly, the young and the sick; conversely, torture and ethnically-motivated violence is almost universally regarded as being morally reprehensible.

The extent to which human rights are universal, as opposed to particularist, has been challenged by the historian Sam Moyn is his intriguing book *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History*.¹³ Moyn makes the controversial claim that international human rights are an invention of the 1970s, as the United States emerged from the shame of Vietnam and as other utopias became thoroughly discredited. To use a metaphor from another Booth article, human rights was a 'process utopia' rather than an 'end-state' utopia.¹⁴

My claim here is not that new histories of human rights are incompatible with Booth's story about an evolution of the regime through the struggle of 'powerless people',¹⁵ but that Moyn reminds us of the importance of taking into account US domestic political preferences in shaping the international normative agenda. This can be done, without I think, either reifying or valorizing the state (or the elites who act in its name) – two on-going concerns expressed by Booth in much of his work.

Moyn's account challenges the 'bottom-up perspective' that Booth associates with the global human rights regime. Yet here I want to argue that such narratives of liberal governments advancing

individual rights are 'compatibly different' from, rather than in opposition to, the 'bottom up' version that is central to Booth's philosophy of human rights.

What is to be done about Human Wrongs?

The pursuit of a philosophical account of human rights 'can only go so far' Booth reminds us.¹⁶ What is required is social action that enhances human rights and protects against human wrongs. Or, as Booth puts it in his lecture, 'a progressive agent is required, and for me it exists most consistently at present in the form of transnational social movements committed to world-order values'. He counter-poses his position with John Vincent who 'emphasizes the constraints of living within – and therefore the need to work through – the statist framework of international relations.'¹⁷

To me they are both right. Indeed, the technique of immanent critique provides a linkage between global civil society and international society. NGOs of course do a version of immanent critique on a daily basis – by constantly shaming governments in view of their inability to keep to their word.

Yet to insert that Booth and Vincent's positions are differently compatible is not good enough. Human rights has to address question of policy formulation and implementation. Such a challenge is neatly set out by Henry Shue when he argued:

'To claim that Hutu and Tutsi alike have a basic right not to be killed arbitrarily while stopping short of asserting a responsibility to protect people at risk of genocide, 'is not to be serious about implementing rights in the real world.'¹⁸

Here we get to what I think is a dilemma in Booth's work in this area – an 'agency' dilemma. Those progressive forces that made the human rights regime possible (on his account) do not have the capacities to respond to the outbreak of mass atrocity crimes.

The tools that exist to respond to genocide and other mass atrocity crimes are numerous, and include a range of sanctions that the UN Security Council can impose – from freezing assets, to ICC referrals, to trade, to banning civilian air travel, through to military intervention. Even at the hard end of the spectrum, intervention does not come in a singular form. It can be at the request of the host state (as in the case of Mali or Indonesia/East Timor) or against the will of the government (as in Libya and Kosovo).

Booth is no supporter of militarized interventions. He tells us in 'Human Wrongs' that humanitarian war 'is not to my taste, though it sounds like an improvement on other types of war.'¹⁹ It is not to his taste because it has a family resemblance to just war theory. We know from other essays, such as 'Duty and Prudence' and 'Ten Flaws of Just Wars',²⁰ why Booth holds the position that wars can be necessary but they are never 'just'.

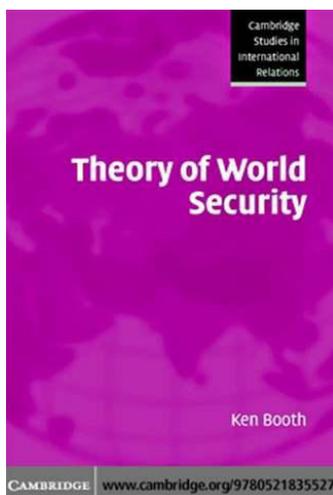
I would argue that many of the Booth's concerns about Just War theory are less prescient today than they were in 1999 – the year he opposed the escalatory response by NATO in the affairs of the Former Yugoslavia – in large measure because of the transition away from the doctrine of 'humanitarian intervention' to the framework of 'R2P'.

R2P is not presented by its supporters as a struggle between good and evil (though some critics like to portray it in this way), but rather, it is defended as a logical corollary of human rights. Taking protection from mass atrocities seriously requires a preparedness to take a range of coercive measures. Rights and responsibilities are two sides of the same coin.

The R2P framework set out in paras 138 and 139 of the 2005 World Summit Outcome Document is markedly different from key elements in the Just War tradition. 'Right intention' plays no part in the validation of coercive measures; 'legitimate authority' is not something that sovereigns can abrogate for themselves (as certain versions of the doctrine of

humanitarian intervention maintained) as the UN Security Council is the sole legitimate authority for 'timely and decisive military action'; and 'last resort' is something that requires argumentation and consensus.

Yet the most significant difference between R2P and the militarized humanism associated with Blair's 'doctrine of the international community' is that R2P is primarily about non-coercive measures – prevention and assistance. Most NGOs and many states that



support R2P think that the way you institutionalise atrocity prevention is precisely to nurture and support the kind of world order values defended by Booth in *Theory of World Security*. At the same time, trying to tackle the root causes of ethnic hatred should not stop the UN – and its member states – from seeking to develop more effective mechanisms for containing, or potentially rolling-back, the tide of genocidal violence.

In conclusion, Booth's lecture on 'Human Wrongs' and his other writings suggests an incompatibility between the agents of emancipation and the inter-state normative order. These brief remarks suggest a closer integration of both domains is both possible and desirable; it is, after all, what is happening 'out there' in the diplomacy of responsibility as member-states of the UN slowly and inconsistently implement an atrocity prevention regime.

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References

- 1 Following the convention established at the conference, I am using 'Booth' to signal a separation between the person, who is a friend and mentor, and the scholar and teacher.
- 2 Our work in this period included the following articles Tim Dunne and Nicholas J. Wheeler, 'Hedley Bull's Pluralism of the Intellect and Solidarism of the Will.' *International Affairs* 72, 1 (1996), pp. 91-108; Tim Dunne and Nicholas J. Wheeler, 'Good International Citizenship: A Third Way in British Foreign Policy.' *International Affairs* 74, 4 (1998), pp. 847-870; Tim Dunne and Nicholas J. Wheeler, 'East Timor and the new Humanitarian Interventionism.' *International Affairs* 77, 4 (2001), pp. 805-829; Tim Dunne and Nicholas J. Wheeler eds. *Human Rights in Global Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).
- 3 R.J. Vincent, *Human Rights and International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).
- 4 Ken Booth, 'Human Wrongs and International Relations.' *International Affairs* 71, 1 (1995), pp. 103-126.
- 5 Ken Booth, 'Three Tyrannies,' in Tim Dunne and Nicholas J. Wheeler eds., *Human Rights in Global Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 31-70.
- 6 Dunne and Wheeler eds. *Human Rights in Global*, p. x.
- 7 Booth, 'Human Wrongs and International Relations,' p.103.
- 8 Booth, 'Human Wrongs and International Relations,' p. 108-109.
- 9 Booth, 'Human Wrongs and International Relations,' p. 110.
- 10 Ken Booth, *Theory of World Security* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 8.
- 11 Booth, 'Human Wrongs and International Relations,' p.113. '[B]ut there are plenty for which we should', he adds, in 'Three Tyrannies,' p. 55.
- 12 Stephen Shute and Susan L. Hurley, *On Human Rights: The Oxford Amnesty Lectures* (New York: Basic Books, 1993).
- 13 Samuel Moyn, *The Last Utopia: Human Rights in History* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap of Harvard University Press, 2010).
- 14 Ken Booth, 'Security in Anarchy: Utopian Realism in Theory and Practice.' *International Affairs* 67, 3 (1991), pp. 527.
- 15 Booth, 'Three Tyrannies,' 54.
- 16 Booth, 'Three Tyrannies,' 64.
- 17 Booth, 'Human Wrongs and International Relations,' p.120.
- 18 Henry Shue, 'Limited Sovereignty,' in Jennifer Welsh, ed. *Humanitarian Intervention and International Relations* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 22.
- 19 Booth, 'Human Wrongs and International Relations,' p.121.
- 20 Ken Booth, 'Military Intervention: Duty and Prudence,' in Lawrence Freedman, ed., *Military Intervention in European Conflicts* (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell Publishers, 1994); Ken Booth, 'Ten Flaws of Just Wars.' *International Journal of Human Rights* 4, 3-4 (2000), pp. 314-324.

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