

BOOK REVIEW

Dunne, T. and Wheeler, N.J. (eds.), *Human Rights in Global Politics*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1999) 360 pp. ISBN Paper: 0-521-64643-X (\$ 24.95) Hardback: 0-521-64138-1 (\$ 64.95)

The declaratory commitments of governments to protect and promote human rights and their compliance with these standards is in disjuncture. Human Rights Conventions seem to be ratified with no commitment to take action in response. It is this highly troubling disparity between the almost globally accepted standard for the protection of universal human rights and the daily denial of those basic rights to millions of peoples which the editors Tim Dunne and Nicholas J. Wheeler are taking up as a serious challenge. They have invited some of today's most influential scholars to reflect upon two questions which they identify as informing the contradiction between the idea of universal human rights and practices of human wrongs: the question of the foundation of human rights and their different interpretation.

In Part one, the philosophical basis of claims to universal human rights is being explored by Ken Booth, Jack Donnelly, Chris Brown, Bhikhu Parekh, and Mary Midgley who share the commitment of 'minimal universalism' without, however, signing up for liberal natural rights theory. Orthodox attempts to justify human rights in grand narratives of reason or nature are being criticized and replaced by different other approaches, whereby 'cosmopolitan pragmatism' proves to be most convincing – as the editors in their succinct introduction assess, too. Instead of metaethical foundations of human rights, 'cosmopolitan pragmatism' looks for a cross-cultural consensus on certain basic human rights. This combination of cosmopolitan moral awareness with a keen sense that political power is and will remain concentrated at the level of states, refers us to R.J. Vincent to whom indeed the editors have dedicated their timely book.

Cultural relativism is vigorously dismissed by Ken Booth as a 'tyranny' which imprisons human rights potentialities in a static, particularist and regressive discourse. The pragmatic claim of the



traditional approach (Dewey, Rorty, etc.) to build and develop western human rights culture, however, is being taken up by Andrew Hurrell at the end of Part two. Hurrell favors this pragmatic approach despite the advantage of a straight normative position which is wary not to confuse what is right with what is acceptable. Though, if the theoretically honoured 'ought' shall actually have a pull on the 'is', it needs to stay in contact with it. All the remarkable essays maintain this contact between their normative ambition and the multipolar and conflictual world order. It is further strengthened in Part two which investigates different features of power politics, international relation's most prominent characteristic.

From his analyses of genocidal politics, Richard Falk deduces a series of reformist steps concerning the enforcement of the genocid convention. Dealing with the problem of refugees, Gil Loescher argues that the existing human rights machinery needs to be strengthened and applied more effectively. Georgina Ashworth discusses the violence against women as one of the most pervasive yet least recognised human rights abuse in the world. Whereas she points to the progressive coalitions which women's human rights groups have forged, Mary Kaldor highlights the role of transnational civil society in holding state leaders and political groups accountable for their exercise of power.

Even if these advocated reform projects of world order are far from being realised yet, they give evidence that the 'normative emptiness' (Falk) of international relations is not bound to be a necessity. The hardening of an impressive normative structure and agreed standards of human rights, the end of the clash of ideologies, the move away from the statist conception of international society, the gradual but progressive diffusion of liberal values, and the wave of democratisation are positive developments to which optimistic western universalists can point. These developments towards a global human rights culture, however, are challenged and contradicted by deep-rooted philosophical and cultural divergences over the meaning and significance of human rights exemplified by the denial in practice of the very same rights, that are so widely applied in theory.

The tension between universalism and particularism in relation to the normative structure of the society of states cannot be downplayed. The potential of political clashes concerning the evolution of human rights as an international principle of justice which is subverting the Westphalian model of unlimited sovereignty remains to be taken seriously. Whether non-Western influences in international life can

provide a new normative momentum and what systems of government are most conducive to the protection of human rights are questions to be kept debated open-mindedly in the spirit of this collection of excellent essays.

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