

An Ethical Foreign Policy?

Introduction

The purpose of this work is to explore whether it is possible to successfully implement an ethical foreign policy. To do this, the work will first provide background about how ethics entered into the discourse about foreign policy analysis (FPA) (Alden & Aran, 2012). This will provide the context for some of the problems that have been associated with ethics in foreign policy. The second section draws attention to this by showing how ethics, norms and moral principles differ in accordance with various frameworks and perception, i.e. from Kant's categorical imperative to utilitarianism (Brown, 2011) to virtue ethics (Gaskarth, 2011) to cosmopolitanism (Heins & Chandler, 2006), and there are further problems when considering if the state can be viewed as a moral actor (Brown, 2011). The last section of this study draws attention to how the ethical dimension that has been inserted into Britain's foreign policy since the 1990s (focusing specifically on Kosovo). Here, it is argued that while the intervention in Kosovo may consist as a case of an ethical foreign policy since it was a humanitarian intervention largely void of other interests (though there were some about the concern of NATO), there are nevertheless limitations because ethics and foreign policy always had a political dimension and it is further problematised by undecidability (Bulley, 2010). Because of this, the ability to implement or even achieve an ethical foreign policy might be idealistic and is certainly problematic.

A Background: Ethical Foreign Policy: Making the Case

The inclusion of ethics in FPA has not been the subject of much attention in contrast to the field of international relations (Bulley, 2014). There are many reasons for this, of which are explored more later, but one reason might be attributed to the realist theory which treats FPA as emerging on the basis of natural interest only (Chandler, 2003). Calls have been made however to try and focus on the way in which ethics might be involved in foreign policies (Smith & Light, 2001). The argument is fuelled by the recognition that the development of foreign policy is "socially emergent" (Bulley, 2014, p. 167), signifying that "meaning is created; it does not depend upon an external reality but also intersubjective social reality made possible by social communication" (Bulley, 2014, p. 167). That is to say, in simpler terms, foreign policy is socially produced and cannot be free of value judgments and concerns. Rosenau, who is considered the father of FPA (Smith, et al, 2011), had observed many decades ago that FPA does in fact concern a full range of processes "whereby people seek the meaning and hope to their lives" (Bulley, 2014, p. 168). So the potential to explore value judgments and concerns were there, but the inspiration to follow this line of thought was lacking.

Even among the constructivists, who recognize the importance of social construction in FPA, mostly they focused on 'values' and 'norms'. One example of this can be seen in the theory of normative power (Manners, 2002; Manners, 2006). Normative power is evident in for instance how the European Union influence what is considered normal in international politics but, equally notable, how it is able to export and successfully diffuse its own norms in international system (Manners, 2002). When considering norms is defined by Manners as 'how things should be, about judging and directing human conduct', it sounds similar to ethics since ethics is primarily about how people 'ought to act' (Bulley, 2014). Therefore, in the end, there has been a growing recognition about the importance to place ethics in the context of FPA analysis, an observation that has been growingly notable since the 1990s.

Indeed, the rights of ethics and foreign policy may also be seen in the way that it is taking precedence in foreign policy goals and actions, especially in the United States and Britain (a case that will be explored more later in the third section) (Bulley, 2010). As Gelb and Rosenthal (2003) point out, the United States has put ethics and morality at the forefront of the concerns for its foreign policy, from everything to promoting democracy as the reason to go to a war with Iraq to the then Bush administration's decision to examine China's human rights, particularly the treatment of its Muslim citizens. These developments of morality in foreign policy and

international relations are not entirely new. Indeed, Gelb and Rosenthal (2003) trace how, dating back to the "dawn of human history" (Gelb & Rosenthal, 2003, p. 3) there have been certain conceptions about war and how it should be fought, with St. Augustine arguing that a war needs a just cause and the attempt to make human rights universal value after the fall of the Nazi regime. As a result, some may argue that the shift towards an ethical foreign policy might be as a result of the growth of international human rights. This would signal a shift away from the realist approach to foreign policy, where it is meant to serve the national interest, to doing the right thing.

However, what becomes problematic, as will be discussed more in the sections that follow, is whether and to what extent, and arguably to whom, the stated moral principles and ethics are serving; that is, in other words, who is doing the right thing to do, and for what purpose. Indeed, examining these issues are especially crucial considering that one of the reasons ethics in foreign policy has assumed such importance is that there has been a shift of national interest and the growth of normative policy frameworks resulting from changes in the post-Cold War, whereby it is in the interest of states to create a "new ethical world order" (Chandler, 2003, p.) to shield away potential threats and thereby secure "the spheres of social reproduction required for maintaining the American - and Western - way of life" (Campbell, 1990, p. 280), revealing ethical foreign policy may be problematic science by the attempt to gain hegemony and power, to name just a few.

Problems with Ethics in FPA

Ethics to Whom?

The term 'ethical foreign policy' is fraught with difficulties (Chandler, 2003) and thus assessing whether it is possible to implement one is highly problematic. 'Ethical' conveys the idea that behaviour is aligned to some kind of moral principle, "what 'ought' to be done in a given situation" (Bulley, 2010, p. 442). Yet the moral principles of right and wrong or 'what ought to be done', in Bulley's (2010) coconceptualisation, differs according to cultural and individual perceptions. For instance, a realist would argue that the ethical duties of the government are restricted to the citizens of this state (Heins & Chandler, 2006). Cosmopolitan liberals would suggest that today's society is a global political community where the interest of human rights should take center stage and in between are "a wide range of sliding scale hierarchies of solidarity" (Heins & Chandler, 2006, p. 4).

The problems with the cosmopolitan perspective are highlighted by Chandler (2003) who argues that internationalising ethics, like the promotion of human rights, means that although everybody may have a stake in sharing responsibility for it, there is no accountability, which is considered essential in a modern democracy, since noncitizens cannot vote on the matter or hold the government accountable. For instance, the Iraqi people, just like the Afghanistan people, were not given any choice as to whether the desired liberation through the bombings of their towns and cities and thus humanitarian intervention, while they may have the capability of being seen as an ethical policy, are not really (Chandler, 2003).

Then there are various philosophical theories, which inform different perspectives of what ought to be done in a certain situation. Kant's categorical imperative says that people should behave in such a way that their behaviour could form the basis of a universal law (rather than treating human as a means to end) (Brown, 2001). So for instance applying this theory in the context of economic sanctions, the use of this as a foreign policy could never be considered to be ethical in because people, most often be vulnerable and the poor, are treated as a means to an end for the goal (Garfield, 2001). Indeed, economic sanctions have long been viewed as "instruments of mass destruction" (Rarick & Duchatelet, 2008, p. 50) when considering how those who are affected in sanctioned countries are often affect innocent people and not the state members for which the policy is intended. For instance, research (Garfield, 2001) on economic sanctions in Yugoslavia shows that health care officials were not able to access necessary resources, resulting in the stagnation of medical practice while drug use, violence and the

psychological and emotional trauma increase, while another study (Drury & Peksen, 2014) found that economic sanctions reduced the respect for women's rights and harmed them the most.

But Kant's theory is not the only one. The utilitarianism perspective shifts from willing acts to universal laws by directing attention to the need of behaving in such a way so as to advance the greatest happiness for all (Brown, 2001). There is also a virtue-based approach which does not give attention so much that behaviour focuses on the kind the character of the person "what sort of people they ought to be, what sort lives they ought to live" (Gaskarth, 2011 p. 413). As a result, when applied in the context of foreign policy analysis, scholars may look at the more subjective aspects of ethical decision-making among the key decision-makers, which moves the way of the discussion from ethics as "abstract rules or the objective completion of consequences" (Gaskarth, 2011 p. 413) but a result of people who make ethical decisions, as Gaskarth (2011) shows in the case of Tony Blair who, in 2003 decided to intervene in Iraq, was based on the virtues of political will, belief and foresight (even though it was characterised as a policy error and so virtues such as self reflection, self-mastery and foresight would have made that mistake less likely). This varying perceptions thus complicate the ability to assess whether of foreign policy can align with an ethical dimension given the differing perspectives of what ethics compromises of.

Can The State Act Ethically?

Another problem is whether it can be rightly assumed that the state is capable of acting ethically, if the state is capable of "being someone" (Brown, 2001, p. 20) rather than acting in accordance with the state centric view. Gaskarth (2010) argues that it is possible since foreign policy is the result of "subjects making choices in an ethical affairs" (p. 394) and observes that there is more "individual agency and foreign-policy decision-making" in the post Cold War now more than ever. Gaskarth (2011) points to the UK's decision to intervene in Kosovo, Afghanistan and Iraq as all individual choices of senior foreign-policy makers whereas the failure to act in Darfur are "sins of omission" (p. 394). This view has been criticized, especially considering that foreign policies are shaped not just by the beliefs of decision makers themselves by foreign policies are in need and influenced by social drivers and groups and even the media (Robinson, 2011).

This may be true, but by following the arguments of Thomas (2001), Bulley (2014) points out how ethics, namely, ethical norms, are embedded into the very nature of international state, producing and produced by the interests of the state, thereby dismissing the neorealist perspective that, in a system of anarchy, ethics is void of foreign policy. Rather, because ethic norms are embedded in the structure. To provide an example, there are power maintenance norms in which supports the structure of international society. One is the ethical norm which bans against the assassination of foreign leaders (Bulley, 2014). Every powerful state respects the norm even though it might not be in their interest since any violation of the norm would damage the legitimacy internationally of the state and their effectiveness of power. So here it is clear that ethical norms not only influence foreign policy choices but at the same time serving as constraints for what states do (Heins & Chandler, 2006).

Bulley (2014) takes the argument further, observing that foreign policy *is* ethics. He justified this on the basis that the foreign policy is a way to see how states view themselves in relation to others and "even when questions of 'ought' are not explicit in the practice of foreign policy, assumptions are made that presuppose a particular production of and relations otherness, a specific 'self' and 'other', and the way they ought to relate" (p. 174). That means, in short, policy contains insight into the way states view themselves in relation to others. One insightful study (Hansen, 2004) that regard it is the way in which, during the Bosnian war, the Balkans state was conceived as violent and barbarian while Western identity was civilized and control, which informed the foreign policy approaches taken on. As a result, Bulley (2014) suggest paying attention to the language of foreign policy to understand how the self and the other is understood and constructed. He believes that looking at foreign policy and his way after his opportunity to not only understand how the foreign is produced for the values and practices (ethics) but to examine the different ways may be possible to improve the solution for the better through this critique.

What Might an Ethical Foreign Policy Look Like?

This is made more apparent in the way that Britain cited including an 'ethical dimension' in its foreign policy in the late 1990s with the then foreign Secretary Robin Cook arguing that it was impossible to "evade that obligation by pleading that there is too much evil in the world for us to put it right" (Bulley, 2010, p. 446). An example of the implementation of this ethical dimension could be seen in Britain's decision to intervene in the Kosovo conflict. The then Prime Minister, Tony Blair, indicated that the violence was too terrible to stand by and watch without acting. This is thought to be example of the ethical foreign policy dimension, the desire to protect citizens from the human rights abuses that was being perpetrated by Serbia (Chandler, 2003). Although there were indeed other motives, including improving the credibility of NATO and possibly having the opportunity for new economic market, scholars believe that this does not remove the ethical dimension from the humanitarian motives because it is hard to find any action that is made purely from pure altruistic motives and so in that light one may see the decision to intervene as ethical (Bulley, 2010). It certainly seems to be more ethical than the so-called ethical reasons for getting involved in the war in Iraq, which according to the Bush administration was to remove Saddam, vicious dictator, for the improvement of the lives of the people of Iraq, where, in reality, it only acted because the war would further the interests of the US (Monbiot, 2003) (and thus one may claim that the war in Iraq was motivated or more realist purposes and reasons rather than ethical ones).

However, the case of Britain's ethical foreign policy approaches is not as clear-cut as that otherwise may be. Chandler (2000) pointed out the unethical dimensions of this policy, by observing that although the ethnic Albanians, once the Serbian state relinquished the powers over the territory, both NATO and UN officials did not feel the ethnic Albanians would be able to rule, more elastic over the administration of schools or the media (Chandler, 2000). Moreover, Bulley (2010), citing Campbell (1998) argues, "the dilemma of enacting responsibility renders humanitarianism as inherently and necessarily political" (p. 453). This is because an attack might be able to respect one group, the innocent civilians, by others might be killed as a result of the intervention and one might argue that state also has a response ability to protect those, too. Derrida (1996) points out this dilemma by observing

"There are also others, an infinite number of them, the innumerable generality of others to whom I should be bound by the same responsibility, a general and universal responsibility (what Kierkegaard calls the ethical order). I cannot respond to the call, the request, or even the love of another without sacrificing the other other, the other others" (p. 68).

So there is no moral dilemma that is, a paradoxically, embedded in the ethical moral policy and there will be always an 'undecidability' in terms of the outcome that the foreign policy will produce. Bulley (2010) claims this contention is however an aspect of every single area of life and the plane that foreign policymakers should embrace is to understand this 'undecidability' of ethics rather than claiming to know what the right thing to do is. As a result, rather than claiming knowing what the right thing to do is, foreign policymakers should acknowledge that the decision to engage in humanitarian aid and intervention is something that will "always remain political, and that the responsibility to protect will always be irresponsible" (p. 69) because of the moral dilemmas and the difficult choice that have to be made and the likelihood that people will die (or others more disproportionately harmed) as a result of decisions and actions made.

Conclusion

Overall, the purpose of this work was to explore whether it is possible to successfully implement an ethical foreign policy. This work for the possibility of this by first writing background about how ethics entered into the discourse of foreign policy, where it was largely motivated out of the dominance of human rights concerns and the possible hegemony intention of Western states to create a new ethical world order. However, determining whether it is possible to implement ethical foreign policy is fraught with problems because of different perspectives

that people have of ethics is (realists versus cosmopolitan versus those in the middle, the various philosophical theories and perspectives from Kant to utilitarianism to virtue ethics) and the questions of whether the state can be seen as 'someone'. The last section analyzing example of what an ethical foreign policy might look like by pointing to the decision of the UK to intervene in Kosovo, implicating that, at least outwardly, an ethical policy may be possible to implement that foreign policy is never apolitical and there will always be 'undecidability' and so in that regard an ethical foreign policy may be ideal.

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