

from the various discourses to which it is connected: gender, innocence, civilization. Her analysis suggests, by contrast, almost a historical inevitability to the current state of affairs. If so, this leaves hanging an important ethical question, just as any path-breaking work of international relations theory should do: What are the ethical and practical consequences of destabilizing the concept of the “innocent civilian”—which, even in its essentialized, gendered, and inadequate guise arguably provides *some* protection in war *some* of the time to

some civilians—without simultaneously reinvesting it with an alternative, nongendered moral foundation?

I do not know the answer, but this thoughtful book will certainly inspire students to debate the question.

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Poverty and Morality: Religious and Secular Perspectives, edited by William A. Galston and Peter H. Hoffenberg (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 312 pp., \$97 cloth, \$29.99 paper.

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This latest in the Ethikon Series in Comparative Ethics offers a valuable collection of articles for understanding the normative dimensions of poverty. Covering the six major religious traditions and such secular perspectives as classical liberalism, contemporary liberal egalitarianism, Marxism, and feminism, the book also contains a chapter on the natural law tradition and an opening chapter by Sakiko Fukuda-Parr on the nature and trends of global poverty and inequality from the perspective of developmental economics.

Poverty and Morality gives us a wealth of information on how the six major religions—Hinduism, Buddhism, Confucianism, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity—view poverty and our obligations to the poor. These traditions regard the plight of the

poor as a moral and spiritual challenge for the rest of us. The theistic traditions struggle to explain the baffling theological question of why the poor suffer in God’s world if it is due to no apparent fault of their own, whereas the Hindu tradition focuses on the idea of karma and reincarnation, which de-emphasizes God. Buddhism preaches compassion toward all living creatures and charity for the poor, but more fundamentally it prescribes mindfulness and simplicity—the Buddhist middle way—for overcoming life’s miseries, which are due to people’s cravings and excesses. In contrast, Confucian humanism is more socially engaged, and emphasizes virtue in both rulers and subjects in order to create social cohesion and respond to social ills, such as poverty.

Notably, all of these traditions address the question of our degree of responsibilities to the poor, both near and far.

In the chapters on secular moral traditions, the focus largely shifts from the duty of charity to the obligations of justice. On the question of the plight of the global poor, classical liberalism displays its traditional ambivalence toward global justice, liberal egalitarianism shows more openness to the idea, and both Marxism and feminism embrace the distant needy in displays of solidarity. However, it is the human rights movement, whose origins are often credited to the natural law tradition, which seems to offer a more viable institutional direction to these questions.

As Stephen J. Pope writes in his chapter, entitled “Poverty and Natural Law”: “Understanding the complex and multidimensional reality of poverty demands that we take into account not only its ethical dimensions but also its economic, political, cultural, and other dimensions.” Surely, *Poverty and Morality* is not meant to provide a comprehensive study of the nature and causes of, and remedies for, poverty. But even to explore just the ethics of poverty requires a multifaceted approach consisting of, at the least, a thematic discussion of both religious and secular ethical teachings, along with their implications for such real world issues as consumerism, warfare, global institutions, international law, and the history and politics of domination and subjugation. In other words, probing the ethics of poverty requires a critical discussion of the politics of poverty. The book, however, does not take this route. Instead, it explores a few select normative dimensions of poverty without investigating their political grounding in the real world.

Consequently, the book suffers from a structural problem of focus, depth, and

thematic progress. In view of what Fukuda-Parr calls the “massive size” and “grotesque inequality” of global poverty, and given the slow pace of progress in reducing poverty and the increasing polarization between the spheres of affluence and deprivation both within countries and between them, any study of the moral dimension of poverty must look at real world issues to decide on the practical and political viability of moral prescriptions, both religious and secular.

If, for example, one were to examine the efficacy of human rights directives in the real world, one would note that, despite the gradual emergence of a global human rights culture over the last fifty years, severe poverty and radical inequity are still not recognized as urgent human rights concerns. Indeed, this “holocaust of neglect,” to use Henry Shue’s phrase, perpetuates deprivation, destabilization, and violence, creating untold misery for millions of people in the global South. This is a typical recipe for creating failed or “rogue” states. All too often, affluent and powerful nations become aware of this neglect when it is too late and the march to preventive “humanitarian” military intervention—now presumed to be necessary—is already underway. Alternatively, a preventive, non-interventionist developmental ethic that promotes sustainable development and stable political institutions could take us beyond the preventive use of force, if such an ethic were employed as a systemic antidote to the inequity and neglect in the world. Indeed, proactive engagement with the right policies not only makes people generally better off but it can avert the need for military intervention, thus saving them from all the horror and misery that war brings with it. This is one example of how ethics applied to practice and politics

can better guide us in understanding the real-world challenges of poverty and deprivation.

Cross-pollination between religious and secular ethics can also create an enriched vocabulary for global justice that can provide useful policy guides for helping the global poor. For example, Amartya Sen is often cited in several chapters of this collection, but his innovative idea of global justice is not mentioned. Sen's comparative method of pursuing justice over injustice is based on the imperative of going beyond the Rawlsian limitations of reasonable pluralism to what Sen calls "the plurality of impartial reasons" rooted in today's expanding circle of global democratic human-rights approaches. Drawing from the parable of the Good Samaritan in the Gospel of Luke, where Jesus questions the idea of a fixed neighborhood, Sen reinforces this idea with the notion that the global community has become one large neighborhood. Citing Buddha's discourse on the asymmetry of power among not only humans but between humans and animals, he argues for a more demanding and expanding mutuality of obligation that would go beyond the limitations of a reciprocity-based self-interested cooperation.

For Sen, we have responsibility to the global poor precisely because of the stark inequality between us—our power and their vulnerability—and not necessarily because of any symmetry that requires contract, cooperation, and reciprocity. Thus, Sen's idea of justice, though not without its share of critics, is a powerful attempt at turning the duties of love and compassion found in the teachings of great religious leaders and reformers into an expanding obligation of justice, thereby emboldening liberal egalitarianism by going beyond the Rawlsian law of peoples and its limited duty of assistance.

Poverty and Morality would also have benefited from a comparative and critical evaluation of the ideas in different religious traditions. The chapters on each religion remain mostly insular, so they read like an insider's narrative without being challenged. In the chapter on Hinduism, for example, Arvind Sharma argues that moral anomalies in life do not pose a crisis of faith for Hinduism due to the doctrine of karma. According to this line of reasoning, everyone gets his or her karmic due—if not in this life, then in some other life—so there is justice. To a nonbeliever, however, this sounds rather strange. The takeaway is that no injustice occurs when billions of people worldwide suffer from the misery of their poverty. That may strike one as absurd, but it is no more absurd than the Christian response to the problem of evil, which holds that there is no undue suffering in the world because God has His reasons, even if we do not know what they are.

The idea of the best possible world is unfalsifiable, hence vacuous, as is the reincarnation hypothesis. Both ideas are sustained only by faith, which indicates that theology cannot provide us with a rational explanation for the injustice of poverty. Worse yet, it often seeks out poverty as a target of charity for spiritual progress. As Michael Walzer notes in his afterword to *Poverty and Morality*, "At the end, poverty demands a political response." It is precisely this approach that is largely missing here.

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