

# Review

## ***International Human Rights, 4<sup>th</sup> ed.***

Jack Donnelly. Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 2013. 274 pp.

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Jack Donnelly's most recent edition of his well-known text, *International Human Rights*, provides an updated discussion of the evolution of international human rights since the end of World War II. Like previous editions, this book provides an accessible, relatively comprehensive, and self-consciously analytical treatment of the broad subject of international human rights. While the book is clearly intended for classroom use, and is indeed accessible enough to be understood by most upper-division undergraduates, it is not a "textbook" in the traditional sense, in that Donnelly is not shy about offering his own arguments and interpretations about a variety of controversial issues. Thus, while Donnelly makes significant efforts to be both accurate and fair, his treatment of the many concerns and controversies about human rights is hardly "objective." Yet this feature is actually an important strength of the book, in that it transcends the pedestrian discussion of the "competing views" in certain debates and actually provides clear arguments that are intended to challenge the readers' views on certain issues and provoke more critical and analytical thinking, as opposed to simply rote memorization and recitation of

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empirics. This goal is further advanced by Donnelly through the use of several thought-provoking discussion questions at the end of each chapter, which provide excellent points of departure for further discussion and debate in the classroom.

The present edition is a much more expansive treatment of the subject than previous editions of this book, and is organized under three broad sections or parts: the evolution and theory of human rights; global, regional, and transnational instruments and activities; and post-Cold War issues and cases. As such, part 1 begins with a broad and necessarily cursory chapter that discusses the emergence and evolution of human rights norms and laws since the end of World War II, culminating in an outline of the current international human rights regime. This is followed by two chapters discussing the theory of human rights. The first of these examines philosophical issues, the place of human rights in international society, and responses to realist criticisms of the very idea of human rights. The other theoretical chapter focuses on the universalist-cultural relativist debate and posits the issues of hate speech and discrimination based on sexual orientation, wherein the author stakes out what could be called a weak-universalist stance defending rules that prohibit such activities. The final chapter of the section on theory addresses human rights in the domestic context by specifically looking at human rights violations in South America during the 1970s and 1980s. While this chapter perhaps seemed somewhat out of place amidst other chapters that were far more theoretical, the empirical discussion nevertheless illustrates an important theoretical point about the relationship between domestic and global politics when it comes to mitigating human rights abuses.

Part 2 of the book contains seven shorter chapters that examine human rights activities and instruments at the global, regional, and transnational levels. In previous editions, this discussion was organized into two much longer chapters, though dividing it up into seven shorter sections makes the discussion much easier to follow and to make comparisons across different actors and levels of analysis. The chapters of this section cover substantial ground, beginning with the global and regional instruments (e.g., UN bodies, treaties, monitoring mechanisms), followed by a discussion of human rights in states'—especially United States—foreign policies, and an analysis of the role of non-governmental organizations and “transnational advocacy” groups in promoting and monitoring human rights compliance. The section concludes with a useful chapter that seeks to offer some clear comparisons among different international actors and between

international and domestic forces. While most of the examples in these chapters come from the Cold War era (e.g., Apartheid in South Africa, U.S. non-ratification of human rights treaties), this proves to be useful in setting up the final four chapters of the book that examine contemporary human rights issues and policy areas, the understanding of which requires at least some familiarity with the historical developments that occurred during the Cold War.

Part 3 of the book thus contains four chapters that cover a different issue or case in contemporary international politics pertinent to human rights. The chapters on human rights in China, humanitarian intervention, human rights and globalization, and human rights and terrorism, each combine a thorough empirical analysis of the issues at hand with a sophisticated, yet accessible, discussion that speaks to how and why human rights are violated and what can be done about such violations given the limitations of finite global resources and the often competing interests of states. While the policy debates about these issues are front and center, much of the discussion remains fairly theoretical and conceptual, as opposed to proposing concrete policy solutions.

Perhaps the most distinctive feature of this book is its fairly heavy emphasis on theory. In addition to having three separate chapters that address theoretical issues ranging from the philosophical grounding of human rights to the debate about the universality and relativity of human right standards, the author very effectively utilizes theory throughout much of the book. This is especially the case in the chapters that focus on specific human rights issues, whereby the author not only raises points that require the reader to think more theoretically (e.g., the moral bases for humanitarian intervention to stop genocides), but leverages theory to advance his own claims and arguments about these issues. While some students may be initially intimidated by the somewhat heavy theoretical focus, my own view is that this feature strengthens and enriches what might otherwise be a fairly descriptive text.

The other main feature of this text that distinguishes it from similar treatments of this subject is that it contains actual arguments advanced by the author, as opposed to simple description. This feature perhaps goes hand-in-hand with the self-consciously theoretical nature of the text, and will be of great interest to those instructors who wish to teach their students to develop their own arguments about these issues by leveraging theory in tandem with empirical evidence. In this sense, this book provides students with

the tools to only to understand the broad subject of human rights, but to think critically about it and develop their own analyses of complex events and issues.

Finally, as a pedagogical tool, the book is clearly intended for classroom use at the upper-division or introductory graduate level. The theory focus may not be the most appropriate for students in more applied or policy-oriented programs (though would still be useful in my opinion), but would be very useful for those students studying in political science programs with an emphasis in international relations and political theory, as well as students studying law who wish to gain a richer, more theoretically-informed treatment of what has historically been a largely “legal” subject. I would thus recommend the book primarily to students and scholars in the fields of political science, law, international relations, and philosophy; and secondarily to the more educated and informed “global citizen” who wishes to learn more about this complex topic and how to utilize theory to analyze and critique the variety of human rights issues in the world today.