

February 2000

Review of 'Moral Issues in Global Perspective' by Christine M. Koggel (ed.)

Tyler Veak

Liberty University, tveak@liberty.edu

Follow this and additional works at: http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/lib_fac_pubs

Recommended Citation

Veak, Tyler, "Review of 'Moral Issues in Global Perspective' by Christine M. Koggel (ed.)" (2000). *Faculty Publications and Presentations*. Paper 17.

http://digitalcommons.liberty.edu/lib_fac_pubs/17

This Book Review is brought to you for free and open access by the Jerry Falwell Library at DigitalCommons@Liberty University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications and Presentations by an authorized administrator of DigitalCommons@Liberty University. For more information, please contact scholarlycommunication@liberty.edu.

Christine M. Koggel, ed. Moral Issues in Global Perspective. [\$29.95] (cloth: ISBN 1-55111-186-1). Orchard Park, NY: Broadview Press.

Koggel clearly states her objective in offering this massive anthology, that includes over 70 authors: the 'current collections on moral issues...tend to feature the narrow band of agreements and disagreements of Western liberal theory and practice'; therefore, she offers this alternative collection to 'challenge our thinking about morality and moral issues as it has been shaped by Western liberal theory and to extend the inquiry beyond the context of North America' (xiv). The globalization of ideas (i.e., predominantly Western ideas) has increased our awareness of alternative belief systems and thereby necessitated a re-examination of the canons of the Western moral tradition. To this end, Koggel believes that the multicultural approach of this volume can serve as a basis for questioning and possibly transforming the canons of human rights, the 'essence' of human nature, and the relationship between the individual and society.

The collection is divided into three parts each focused on the questioning of one of the three canons just mentioned. There are a total of fourteen chapters, each of which has four to six articles from different authors. Koggel provides an introduction to each chapter in which she gives an outline of the main themes, and a brief summary of the different author's perspectives. In addition, there are 'study questions' and 'further reading' sections at the end of each chapter. The study questions are not the 'run of the mill' type questions that simply test the students grasp of the content; rather, they are fairly in depth, and attempt to aid the student in making connections between the various author's views within the chapter.

Each of the three part begins with a chapter on 'Theories and Critical Analysis', where the traditional liberal theory is presented along with several non-Western theoretical critiques of the liberal perspective. The remaining chapters of each part focus on the application of these theories and critiques to specific issues (e.g., Gender, or Race and Ethnicity). The intention is, therefore, to provide the student with the various Western and non-Western theoretical perspectives and then see how these various perspectives address specific moral issues.

Part I, 'Human Rights and Justice', presents the traditional liberal conceptions of rights and justice (as espoused by John Rawls's 'Theory of Justice', and the United Nation's 'Universal Declaration of Human Rights'), and then contrasts this conception with theoretical critiques of the attempt to universalize, or globalize, these liberal ideas. Chapter two examines the problems inherent in exporting the Western conception of rights and justice to other contexts such as Cuba, China, and South Africa.

Part II, 'Human Diversity and Equality', examines the assumptions of human nature that underlie the liberal conception of equality. In short, the Western attempt to essentialize human nature is critiqued through a presentation of various alternative conceptions. Following the initial chapter, which again focuses on theory and critique, there are five chapters that deal with the many types of discrimination arising from the attempt to export Western conceptions of diversity and equality. Chapters consist of the following issues: 'Race and Ethnicity', 'Gender', 'Sexual Orientation', (i.e., challenges to traditional heterosexual conceptions from feminism and homosexuals) 'Differential Ability', (i.e., discrimination against the disabled) and 'Poverty and Welfare.' These chapters/topics are not rigid, however. Koggel does a nice job of choosing selections that demonstrate that these issues, such as poverty and discrimination of race and gender, are woven together.

The final part, 'Individual Autonomy and Social Responsibility', begins with a chapter on traditional theories (e.g., Kant, and Mill) of individual responsibility, and the problems inherent in the extreme individualism these theories espouse. The central question is: to what degree should individual autonomy be emphasized over collective responsibility? The remaining chapters in this section examine individual responsibility as it applies to issues of 'Reproduction', 'Euthanasia and Health Care', 'Pornography and Hate Speech', 'Sexual Violence', and 'Animals and the Environment.' Included in these chapters are such alternative perspectives as abortion in Nicaragua, organ trafficking, trafficking women in prostitution, and indigenous perspectives of nature.

As with any anthology such as this, there are some limitations primarily because decisions about what to include and what not to include must be made. However, Koggel largely by-passes this problem with the sheer volume of contributors and by the range of issues covered. Nevertheless, some may find Koggel's characterization of the Western liberal tradition somewhat of a strawperson. Her criticisms of liberalism through the various alternative voices are definitely relevant, but the presentation of liberal theory in a few short excerpts is obviously stacking the deck to some degree. However, this problem could easily be remedied with a few supplemental texts for a course.

In addition, some may find Koggel's 'Preface', chapter introductions, and study questions a bit leading. A clear agenda is certainly appropriate in a single author work, but in an anthology such as this the narrow focus (i.e., decapitating liberalism via multiculturalism) seems out of place--that is, everything *but* the Western liberal tradition is OK. Finally, the connection between justice and political economy seems like an important omission. Clearly, long held ideologies must be questioned and transformed, and providing alternative voices from non-Western belief systems, as Koggel does, seems an appropriate means to this end. Nevertheless, the fact that many of these belief systems are tied to long standing social structures and material conditions must also be addressed for any genuine change (i.e., the commonly held view that liberalism is married to Capitalism and laissez-faire economics, is not sufficiently addressed).

Despite these relatively minor criticisms, this collection should prove invaluable in a variety of undergraduate courses. It should meet an increasing demand for course readings on multiculturalism and the conflict that globalization has brought to bear on traditional conceptions of morality and justice from a Western perspective. The collection is definitely appropriate for introductory courses in ethics, where alternative perspectives are desired. However, there are a sufficient number of articles dealing with poverty, women's issues, international development, and race and ethnicity, that make the text of use in a wide variety of introductory courses. With supplemental readings, the collection could be used in more advanced undergraduate courses as

well. Given the bargain price (\$29.95), an instructor need not feel guilty using only a third to one half of the articles for a particular course.

Word Count: 1062

Tyler Veak
Virginia Tech