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**Edzia Carvalho on Human Rights: Politics and Practice. Edited by Michael Goodhart. New York: Oxford University Press, 2009. 455pp.**

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**Abstract**

A review of:

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**Keywords**

Human rights, Law, International relations, Politics, Sociology, Anthropology

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This edited volume on human rights by Michael Goodhart succeeds in achieving the goal set out in its introductory chapter: to provide a concise yet detailed introduction to the primary concepts and critical issues in human rights. This is a very useful resource on human rights aimed at undergraduate students or researchers who have only a cursory understanding of the subject. The book is divided into the two parts that give it its title: “Human rights and politics” and “Human rights in practice.” Each chapter is followed by a set of questions and a list of readings and links for the reader to pursue in his or her own time and for lecturers to use in discussion groups and seminars. Online tools on each chapter also give the web-savvy reader additional inputs for further research.

The first section of the volume examines the foundations and measurement of the concept and its “ideological (mis)use” in the service of national interests. Various approaches into this field of enquiry—law, international relations, comparative politics, sociology, and anthropology—are also summarized here with a brief overview of the findings generated in these disciplines. The chapters on the philosophical justifications of human rights by Anthony Langlois, international human rights law by Rhona Smith, and the sociology and anthropology of human rights by Damien Short deserve special mention for summarizing and simplifying complex concepts and arguments related to these themes.

Todd Landman’s chapter presents an overview of various human rights measures and their strengths and limitations. Tim Dunne and Marianne Hanson run through the three main schools of thought—realism, neoliberalism, and constructivism—in international relations and focus on how each school explains the role of human rights as a tool in inter-state relations before and after the Cold War. The authors also do well to address “the responsibility to protect,” which has been increasingly debated in international law and politics. In her chapter on studying human rights through the prism of comparative politics, Sonia Cardenas provides a short summary of the comparative method and then gives an overview of the literature on two complementary issues: the decision to repress and the decision to protect human rights. She pre-emptively addresses the chapters on democracy and global civil society, displaying one of the many cases of overlap in themes that creates an intricate fabric of issues, facts, and approaches in this volume.

The second section discusses four broad themes related to human rights. The chapters on democracy, transnational networks, and economic globalization touch upon the “determinants” of human rights. The rights of vulnerable groups like children, indigenous peoples, and internally displaced persons and refugees, as well as a section devoted to specific human rights violations due to genocide, torture, and sexual trafficking are also examined. The highlight of this section of the book is the focus on topical themes such as development, environment, humanitarian intervention, and transnational justice that also overlap with human rights. Many chapters include and interpret the findings from the most important quantitative studies in these research areas without scaring away the statistically uninitiated with undecipherable regression readings or jargon. Instead, keeping in mind the intended audience of the volume, most chapters in this section focus on case studies, using qualitative data or descriptive statistics to illustrate the policy

and practice of applying human rights standards. These range from historical cases (the repression of African-Americans in the United States and the effect of climate change on the lives and rights of indigenous peoples) to more recent events (the role of International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) in the creation of the International Criminal Court, the case of humanitarian intervention in Bosnia, and the issue of transitional justice in Uganda).

With the exception of the chapters on development and the environment, the rights included in the Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights are conspicuous by their absence. The exclusion of these rights may well be a reflection of the cognitive myopia of the international academic community towards them. In his concluding chapter, Goodhart suggests that these rights are part of the process of extending human rights to more people, in more conditions and in more domains. The inclusion of chapters on some of these rights, perhaps in the second edition of this volume, might shed further light on this politics of omission.

The chapters in this volume use an assortment of approaches to discuss concepts and issues in human rights for the benefit of a reader new to this subject of enquiry. Additional guidance is provided on the more complicated aspects of the topics, along with links to further reading. The book is highly recommended as a basic text for introductory courses and training programs on human rights.

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