

BOOK REVIEWS*Kathy Wang**Health Equity, Social Justice, and Human Rights*

Ann Taket

Routledge (June 2012)

ISBN 9780415613750

224 pages

\$48.95

In *Health Equity, Social Justice, and Human Rights*, Ann Taket explains the importance of linking health and human rights, and how combining these concepts into a human rights framework can support public health and health advocacy efforts.

Taket first describes and analyzes global, regional, national, and subnational human rights systems, and the mechanisms these systems use to address human rights. She also delves briefly into the theories, covenants, and charters that govern both the health and human rights communities as well. In describing the theory behind the “right to health,” Taket points out that human rights should be considered as a key social and cultural determinant to health. She also evaluates the relationship between health equity and human rights, as well as the effects of human rights on health and social policy.

Taket and her contributing authors incorporate case studies in her framework proposal, thus providing examples of the inherently similar discourse that can be used to describe human rights and health issues. For example, in her chapter on “human rights and health equity,” Taket provides both domestic and global perspectives, looking in one case at the importance of protecting and promoting health rights of indigenous Australians and focusing on domestic violence as public health and human rights issues. With these examples, the interrelationships of human rights and health are demonstrated to be essential in expanding the field of public health and in understanding illness and disease.

By combining a theoretical and judicial framework with concrete case studies and charts, Taket provides a convincing argument about the “instrumental value” in considering health problems as human rights issues.

Changing Planet, Changing Health: How the climate crisis threatens our health and what we can do about it

Paul R. Epstein and Dan Ferber

University of California Press (June 2012)

ISBN 9780520272637

368 pages

\$24.95

Changing Planet, Changing Health gives a detailed chronology and analysis of the status of climate change and its damaging effects on the health community. Drawing upon their experiences in the field and testimonies from other experts and researchers, Paul R. Epstein and Dan Ferber provide a thorough account of environmental health dangers, from the widening spread of disease vectors to the effects of increased incidence of natural disasters.

With a combination of case studies, personal accounts, and technical explanations, the authors explain how the climate crisis exacerbates problems of food crisis, sanitation, access to clean water, and other major components of the right to health. They present a convincing argument that these problems are not just limited to developing countries, but are also endangering the quality of life and methods of disease control for wealthier nations. The authors connect ecological disasters to their health-threatening effects, and in doing so offer another perspective on why climate change matters. The authors provide relevant hypothetical trajectories of climate crises, such as increased wildfires, widespread drought, and expansion of disease.

Epstein and Ferber also detail myriad individual actions and policy solutions that can be implemented to combat the climate crisis. They frame these solutions in terms of incentivizing the global economy to act, and urge a shift in the political paradigm to recognize the urgency of these issues.

Global Justice and Bioethics

Edited by Joseph Millum and Ezekiel J. Emanuel

Oxford University Press (February 2012)

ISBN 9780195379907

315 pages

\$42.30

Editors Millum and Emanuel have compiled a series of essays to link the philosophical questions about global justice, especially of bioethics, and the implementation of ideas and policies. The authors choose to address these issues in two distinct ways: Ideal theory involving more hypothetical defining of what is just and non-ideal theory regarding actual human behaviors.

In the introduction, Millum and Emanuel define key concepts and facts necessary to begin reading about the subject. They also outline the historical relationship between bioethics and political theory, as well as the more pressing problems of global justice and bioethics. The rest of the book concentrates on ideal theory, non-ideal theory, and the relationship between the two.

Throughout this collection of essays, it becomes clear that issues of global justice, such as the rationale for a fair distribution of global resources, nature and amounts of aid given to certain causes, and conflict between social action and cultural practices, are intrinsically linked to public health problems. By examining the bioethical rationale of our actions, the authors question the relationship between human rights and health care, individual and national obligations to international causes, and more. Since the authors themselves come from a wide range of political theory, bioethics, philosophy, scientific, and public health backgrounds, they bring to the book an assortment of viewpoints that allows for a more interesting read.

As the editors note, “These questions have more than theoretical interest; their answers are of direct practical import for policymakers, researchers, advocates, NGOs, scholars, and others.” This book is helpful for those who wish to better understand the roots of global health justice issues, and to learn why the private and public spheres should be working with an integrated approach to health and human rights.

Blue Covenant: The Global Water Crisis and the Coming Battle for the Right to Water

Maude Barlow

The New Press (June 2009)

ISBN 9781595584533

196 pages

\$16.95

In *Blue Covenant*, Maude Barlow seeks to impress upon the reader the importance of sustainable and equitable access to safe drinking water.

Starting with a thorough account of why our water sources are dwindling—from contamination and pollution to unsustainable welling practices and disruptive diversions—Barlow creates a sense of urgency around the supply of clean drinking water. She applies this idea of the global water crisis to all areas of the world, proving that it must be considered in transnational terms. Condemning the privatization of water distribution and rise of bottled water companies, Barlow explains why water should be considered a basic right and a public good in the context of all regions of the world. She suggests ways in which water can be used and extracted sustainably, without the exacerbating effects of over-withdrawal, such as desertification and a shrinking watershed.

With her use of detailed case studies, Barlow pro-

vides a compelling argument in support of the right to water. She provides compelling examples of why privatization is insufficient, describes how countries are struggling to meet water demands, and details conflicts that have emerged over water access. In addition, by offering a chronology and description of regional, national, and international laws and conferences revolving around the right to water, Barlow shows how this water crisis has been gaining visibility and importance.

Contested Illnesses: Citizens, Science, and Health Social Movements

Phil Brown, Rachel Morello-Frosch, Stephen Zavestoski, and the Contested Illnesses Research Group

University of California Press (December 2011)

ISBN 9780520270213

352 pages

\$29.95

In *Contested Illnesses*, Phil Brown, Rachel Morello-Frosch, Stephen Zavestoski, and the Contested Illnesses Research Group look at health and disease through the lens of politics and science. Geared towards an audience familiar with health social movements, the book delves deep into embodied health movements, qualitative methods of research, scientific analysis, and new approaches to ethnography.

The authors argue for a new interdisciplinary approach and collaboration when dealing with health social movements, especially in instances of contested illnesses where there is an intersection of socioeconomic underlying issues and a disconnected scientific community. As they explain, health social movements include the efforts to improve access and quality of health care, to reshape the public health and medical community perspective, and to “elimi-

nate persistent health inequalities based on race, ethnicity gender, class, or sexuality.”

In support of the collection of qualitative data through surveys and narratives, the authors provide and analyze several case studies where science, public health, politics, and environmental issues have collided. Each case study brings a different issue to the table, demonstrating, for example, the successful partnership of researchers, state agency personnel, and community members or the clash between labor activists and environmentalists. These chapters add weight to the authors’ arguments, contrasting substantive examples of conflict and collaboration in dealing with health social movements. In addition, the ethics, implications, and restrictions of biomonitoring studies and community-based participatory research are developed in the last few chapters, providing a full spectrum of topics.

Those interested in a different perspective on health justice, especially in regards to environmental health, will find this book full of information and ideas on how to change this field. By engaging methodology from a variety of disciplines, the authors make a well-backed case for why health social movements truly involve a wide range of players from scientific and public health communities, as well as those in social justice and policy.