

BOOK REVIEWS

Global Health and Global Health Ethics

Solomon Benatar and Gillian Brock

Cambridge University Press, 2011

ISBN 9780521146777

350 pages

\$62

Benatar and Brock explore the obligations and challenges surrounding the improvement of global health in their new textbook. The editors posit that a comprehensive understanding of ethical issues concerning health is necessary for the promotion of sustainable and healthy living conditions, both locally and globally.

Beginning with an overview of relevant definitions in global health, the book moves to an exploration of central issues in global health ethics and the obligations of states and other actors to improve public health. A keen analysis of several determinants of ill health examines crucial issues of our day, such as international arms trading, the crippling debt of poor countries, and civil war, as well as their global health implications. Benatar and Brock outline and evaluate several high profile approaches to improving the status of health around the world. The authors conclude that considerable multidisciplinary research, community engagement, and material resources will be necessary in order to improve global health, but call for universal hope that it can be achieved, invoking Nelson Mandela's famous words, "It always seems impossible until it's done." [JF]

The Right to Health

Gunilla Backman, ed.

Studentlitteratur, 2012

ISBN 9789144067803

368 pages

\$50

The Right to Health expounds on the central theme that a functioning, accessible, and non-discriminatory health system is necessary for the realization of the right to health. The student guide illuminates the various disciplines involved in the practical applications of this concept, including the fields of health, human rights, law and ethics. Based on Backman's law course "Theory and Practice of Health and Human Rights," the goal of the book is to equip students with a basic understanding of these disciplines and how they can interact to improve health outcomes and create stronger health systems.

The chapters are written by experts in their respective fields, and the first section of the book introduces a theoretical overview of the international human rights legal system and the philosophical theories of nationalism and cosmopolitanism in relation to health-related international obligations. The second section applies the right-based approach to health theories from the previous section to case studies, ranging from maternal mortality in Peru and the global neglect of those suffering from mental disability. The book illuminates the nexus of medicine,

public health, ethics, law, and the right to health.

The Human Right to Health

Jonathan Wolff

W. W. Norton & Company, 2012

ISBN 978-0393063356

208 pages

\$23.95

Jonathan Wolff explores all angles of the philosophical dilemma at the heart of establishing a human right to health: “On the one hand, the reasons for asserting a human right to health seem overwhelming. On the other, a universal human right to health seems impossible to satisfy in the current conditions of the world.” So begins the task of examining a historical stalemate in order to prescribe a practical path towards a healthier humanity. Wolff examines the criticisms of the concept of a human right to health that stem from both its moral foundations and its practical applications and implications. He provides a detailed case study of the HIV/AIDS epidemic to demonstrate the deeply rooted link between the theory of health as a human right and this global health crisis. Wolff addresses the economic and institutional barriers to the fulfillment of the human right to the highest attainable standard of health for all, but also emphasizes the immense future benefits of investment in human health and provides valuable insights for the formulation of a course of action. The result is “an exercise in cautious idealism” — one that addresses a critical issue through a lens of practicality

and optimism.

The Right to Health in International Law

John Tobin

Oxford University Press, 2012

ISBN 978-0199603299

330 pages

\$140

John Tobin offers readers a thorough and necessary discussion of the current meanings and legal obligations that stem from the global responsibility to “respect, protect, and fulfill” one’s right to health. He artfully explains the evolution of the concept of health as a human right in historical, theoretical, and philosophical terms in order to describe its nature and understand its implications in a global context. The text provides a rich history of health rights based in international law and its conceptual foundations. Tobin emphasizes the needs for a methodology describing the meaning of the right to health in international law, and later provides one that relies on the persuasion of relevant parties to adopt a singular interpretation.

The meaning of health in the context of human rights is clearly explicated, as well as the extent to which states are obligated to recognize their citizens’ right to health. In order to illuminate the scope of this obligation, Tobin analyzes the pertinent example of harmful traditional practices, such as female genital cutting and corporal punishment, through the lens of international law. Tobin’s overarching argument is that although the “parameters of international assistance and cooperation are not yet fully drawn,” it is

indeed possible to outline the obligations that states have in order to “respect, protect, and fulfill” the right to health that their populations possess.

Regulating Corporate Human Rights Violations

Surya Deva

Routledge (January 2012)

ISBN 9780415668217

296 pages

\$145

Surya Deva’s new book on the humanization of business sets out to address three crucial and timely questions: Why companies and corporations have human rights responsibilities, what the scope of these responsibilities is, and how businesses, particularly multinational corporations, should be held accountable for human rights violations. The author opens with a study of the 1984 toxic gas leak in Bhopal to demonstrate a classic case of inhuman business, one in which a multinational corporation not only violated human rights but was able to skirt accountability for their transgressions.

Deva offers an analytical framework with which to evaluate existing regulatory initiatives to hold businesses accountable for human rights violations on the basis of five variables: the source of the initiative, its content, the targeting approach, the levels of operation, and the nature of its compliance strategy. According to this framework, an initiative is effective if it succeeds at both preventing and redressing rights violations. Deva outlines the argument for both the existence of human rights obligations of companies and what the explicit standards should be for multinational corporations operating in other countries. To address the question of accountability, Deva proposes an integrated theory of regulation that calls for integration between issues of both human rights and business, between the fundamental challenges

of “humanizing business,” and among all levels of regulation.

This book makes a compelling theoretical and practical case for the incorporation of human rights priorities into business, and provides a clear outline for action.