

threat to human rights in the world today, and that international economic integration affects security (civil) rights positively, while it may have negative repercussions for subsistence (economic and social) rights. While some of the contributions are based on empirical research and case studies, others are reflections about the topic of globalisation and human rights. None of the authors makes definite statements about his/her findings, and they all emphasise that further research is required to better understand the effects of global processes on human rights and vice versa.

Crucial to Brysk's conclusions on the case studies is her claim about the central role of citizenship in the protection of human rights. Ultimately, she believes that the detrimental effects of diverse processes of globalisation are more powerful than the simultaneously emerging new opportunities for the defence of human rights. States lose the capacity to protect the human rights of their citizens much faster than new models of transnational citizenship can emerge to make up for these losses. Predictably, threats to human rights are particularly harmful in fragmented states and affect the most vulnerable populations, who for the most part already have compromised or non-existent citizenship rights.

While the volume offers a first systematic attempt to explore the complex interactions between processes of globalisation and transnational human rights promotion, its conclusions regarding the exact mechanisms that can account for positive or negative interactions between globalisation and human rights remain preliminary. Owing to the diversity of contributions, the theoretical framework and the cross-study conclusions are vague. It would have been particularly important to identify in a more systematic manner the role of international institutions and other global actors in relation to the more general concepts of cosmopolitanism, commodification, and communication. International institutions simultaneously uphold a contemporary consensus and provide ongoing

sites of contention about human rights and their promotion. Fox's contribution shows how focusing on the role of an international institution (the World Bank) can yield more concrete conclusions about significant transnational mechanisms, without compromising assumptions about the essential ambiguity in the relationship between globalisation and human rights. Bob's piece on the variation of international opportunities for the mobilisation of local causes offers important insights on the crucial role of international institutions, broadly speaking, in securing the success of contemporary transnational campaigns.

What makes or breaks a local or transnational campaign for human rights in an era of globalisation is a question at the centre of this timely book. Future research will need to focus on the concrete actors representing abstract processes of commodification and communication, as well as on international institutions and other crucial intermediaries. Such efforts will contribute to the important task of further unpacking globalisation and its effects on human rights around the world.

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Dichter, Thomas

Despite Good Intentions: Why
Development Assistance to the Third
World has Failed
Amherst MA: University of
Massachusetts Press, 2003,
ISBN: 1 55849 393 X, 320 pp.

This remarkable book will and should be disturbing to the 'development business'. Thomas Dichter, who holds a PhD in Anthropology, has worked for some 35 years in development assistance—in the Peace Corps both as a volunteer and administrator, in various NGOs, in a donor foundation, in

USAID-related development contracts, and in the World Bank. The book has an innovative form: it has ten analytical chapters interspersed with 18 stories. Each story is a slightly fictionalised description (to 'protect the innocent') of his own experiences—or rather the experiences of one 'Ben Rymaker' who stands in for the author. The device works. Dichter tells the stories with the keen eye of an anthropologist, and his arguments in the analytical chapters have a persuasiveness grounded in a lifetime of analysis and experience.

What are the main arguments? Those who live in an era are sometimes the least aware of its presumptions and conceits. Hence Dichter starts with a history of development assistance during the modern post-Second World War era, an era endowed with the presumption that somehow the agencies of the more developed world could externally engineer the acceleration of history in the developing world. The development model of communism was one attempt to engineer the acceleration of history but that is now thoroughly discredited. Dichter focuses on the other path—the whole development industry that has grown up in the 'West'—first as offering a different path from communism during the Cold War and now simply as '*the road to development*'.

Dichter shows by his examples and analysis how the very effort to organisationally implement development assistance defeats the goal 'despite good intentions'. There are large differentials in power and resources between development organisations and those they presume to help. The organisational imperatives to 'show results' lead even the best-intended organisations to take over the driver's seat (usually pretending otherwise) and to make it worthwhile for the 'clients' to go along for another spin around the track. And the 'Dev Biz' is not only dedicated to 'do development projects' (as though they were akin to engineering projects); it has become a huge self-interested industry built on the continuing need for 'development assistance'.

Many ex-World-Bankers (myself included) are painfully aware that this critique applies to the Bank and other large multilateral and bilateral development agencies. The NGOs criticise these old dinosaurs of official development assistance (ODA) as being arrogant bureaucracies at the service of the powers that be. Surely the NGOs are the last best hope of development assistance? It is on this question that Dichter's book stands out from the usual critiques of ODA. He hardly bothers with old-hat Bank-bashing. The real message is that the NGO movement has, in its own way, accepted the paradigm of 'doing development' and has reproduced on a smaller scale the self-defeating logic of organisationally engineered development assistance. The logic is not changed by the NGOs' high-mindedness or good intentions—indeed the latter can lead to a type of pattern-blindness regarding the lack of sustainable developmental outcomes.

In my view, Dichter's argument is sound and the evidence is both persuasive and devastating. But the conclusions will not be received as glad tidings, particularly by those whose lower expectations of ODA are counterbalanced by high hopes for the movement of unofficial development organisations. What, in any case, is the author's 'remedy'? Once the assistance organisations open their eyes to their past problems, shouldn't the donors open their wallets even more so that the development business can now redouble its efforts in our post-9/11 world?

The beginning of wisdom, according to Socrates, is to know that we do not know. Socrates' partners in dialogue complained that his 'negative' arguments exploding their pretensions to knowledge would leave them numb—as if stung by a stingray (Plato 1949). Dichter's book may well have a similar effect on many readers. But it is only after thus being 'stung' that readers can begin to appreciate Dichter's seemingly counter-intuitive concluding argument for 'a radical reduction in development assistance'. Putting more fuel in the tank and keeping a lookout for yesterday's potholes will only

take us further down the wrong road. Aside from short-term disaster relief, the first step to improve development assistance is not more power and funding to the aid organisations but less. Less is more.

This is not a counsel of despair or cynicism. It is the beginning of a Socratic wisdom. The beginning is the numbing realisation of the failure of the old conception of virtue. But the remedy is not to switch over to some new teaching; it is to understand that virtue cannot be taught—or, in less metaphorical terms, that development cannot be engineered. The assistance organisations of today that make their living by offering their latest nostrums are like the Sophists of old Athens who made a business of offering to teach that which Socrates knew could not be taught. Only with less ‘help’ can the locus of initiative begin to shift back to those who see themselves as ‘needing help’. What little real external help might be subtly given must start again with the Socratic notions of ignorance and indirectness.

Dichter’s book should be placed in a broader intellectual landscape. In all the spheres of human interaction, there are fruitful relationships between helpers and doers. The goal is the autonomy of the doers, their capacity to help themselves free of external control (e.g. the educational philosophy of John Dewey or, more recently, that of the late David Hawkins). The well-intended helpers, no matter how deleterious their effects, will still describe their role as ‘helping people help themselves’ (which even appears in the World Bank’s Mission Statement!). But that is in fact a deep conundrum. The more the helpers become powerfully organised, institutionalised, and professionalised, the more they are in fact controlling and socially engineering the putative ‘doers’ and the more the ‘helpers’ defeat their proclaimed goal of ‘helping people help themselves’. ‘Direct help’ is an oxymoron, describing assistance that is ultimately unhelpful and counter-productive.

The late Ivan Illich developed this theme in his radical critiques of institutionalised

schooling (*Deschooling Society*), medicalising institutions (*Medical Nemesis*), professional ‘social work’ (*The Right to Useful Unemployment and its Professional Enemies*), and the general tendency in an increasingly service-oriented society to discover ‘needs’ to be catered to by professional helpers (*Toward a History of Needs*). Within education, it would be difficult to match the insider critiques of John Holt (*How Children Fail* and *The Underachieving School*, and then, in a more positive vein, *How Children Learn, Freedom and Beyond*, and *Instead of Education*), while John McKnight’s work develops these themes about social work and community assistance (*The Careless Society* and *Building Communities from the Inside-out*).

Dichter’s book is situated in this tradition. While there have been many critiques of development organisations, Dichter’s book is the most convincing across-the-board critique by an insider. It delves into the heart of the matter, identifying the root cause of the failure of development assistance not as ‘a set of problems to be addressed’ but rather as the very idea of institutionalising and socially engineering development assistance.

Reference

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Helton, Arthur C.
The Price of Indifference: Refugees and Humanitarian Action in the New Century
Oxford: OUP, 2002,
ISBN: 0 19 925030 8, 314 pp.

Arthur Helton has produced an important study on international refugee policy and