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Social Work and Human Rights: A Foundation for Policy and Practice. Elizabeth Reichert. Reviewed by Mel Gray.

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Elisabeth Reichert, *Social Work and Human Rights: A Foundation for Policy and Practice*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2003. \$49.50 hardcover, \$24.50 papercover.

Reichert's thorough and informative book on human rights makes an important contribution to the literature on this topic. Beginning with an overview of the history and development of human rights in the opening chapter, in Chapter 2 Reichert goes on to examine the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which she analyses clause by clause, at the same time identifying their implications for social work. International aspects of human rights and their application to the social work profession are the focus of the last two chapters, 8 and 9 respectively. Chapters 3 and 4 are jointly authored chapters with Robert J. McCormick on the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights respectively. The book thus provides a thorough knowledge of the three generations of human rights and the content of human rights declarations. Readers interested in direct guidance on applying human rights principles to practice will not be disappointed for social work's central role in working with disadvantaged groups is reinforced by Reichert's focus on 'vulnerable groups' including women (chapter 5), children, people with disabilities and or HIV/AIDS, gays and lesbians, older persons, and victims of racism (chapter 6).

However, Reichert writes about human rights as moral imperatives without any explicit discussion of their moral derivation or the fact that they only really make sense from a moral perspective. One would not expect people who did not hold a moral view of the person as deserving of respect, as having dignity and being able to choose freely for themselves to take rights seriously. At the same time, human rights are closely connected to notions of social justice. I do not agree with Reichert that no clear understanding of social justice exists in the international social work literature, although she might be a better judge than me on the North American literature, for clearly her book is about North America and aimed at North American readers. I would argue that it is precisely because social justice is central to social work's value system that we ought to take rights seriously

because justice concerns the way in which rights and resources are distributed in society. Here social work's principles of equality, equity or fairness, and the just distribution of resources come into play. Just as Wormer says in her introduction, 'social work, in the sense of the well-being of people, and human rights are inextricably linked' (p. ix), so too are the notions of social justice and human rights inextricably linked. While human rights might well encompass 'a more comprehensive set of guidelines for the social work profession' (p. 7) than social justice, and it is certainly in this vein that Reichert's book is written, these guidelines make no sense unless they are understood from a moral perspective and within a broader understanding of notions of social justice.

Readers looking for this broader philosophical perspective will be disappointed for Reichert makes no attempt to grapple with intractable problems in philosophy on the nature and grounds of rights. Reichert employs a foundational conception and a deductive approach to rights where one frames the laws or defines the conventions (for example, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights), then derives what rights a person has from these and seeks to apply them without question. As in other areas of social work, this technical approach does not sit well with more flexible postmodern and social constructionist perspectives which favour more inductive, grounded approaches working from the bottom up and wariness of universalising forces which overlook local cultures and practices. Reichert cites Ignatieff's view of claims to the universality of rights as another 'cunning exercise in Western moral imperialism' (p. 5).

Because Reichert takes a derivative view of rights and overlooks their moral and political basis, she skirts this crucial issue in current social work theorising. From this perspective, Reichert's book works for the context it addresses, namely North America, and for social workers favouring a cookbook 'how to do it' approach to social work. Broader political ramifications of North America's stance on human rights and their effect on countries around the world are not within the purview of Reichert's analysis. Yet at one level, I agree with Reichert, one has to start somewhere. While we might debate the meaning and derivation of rights *ad infinitum*, social workers are still faced daily with people in need requiring assistance. No harm hopefully can be done at the

individual level by applying a human rights framework to social work practice. However, I am more sceptical about human rights in the hands of nations bent on war. But the political character of rights, that is, recognition of the relationship between individual actions and broader political decisions is ignored when it is this broader political understanding embodied in discourse on social justice which shows how rights are inextricably bound up with the way in which society is ordered and its goods distributed and how individuals are affected by these arrangements. The idea that political morality should be based wholly or partly on the notion of human rights is a familiar theme in liberal theories and Western politics as Ignatieff recognises and other writers on human rights have clearly acknowledged this link. By overlooking the moral and political nature of rights, Reichert fails to see the inextricable link between human rights and social justice.

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Jenny Hockey and Alison James, *Social Identities across the Life Course*. New York: Pgrave Macmillan, 2003. \$75 hardcover, \$24.95 papercover.

Social identification across the life course examines the concept of social identities by reframing our perceived notion of aging. The task is to explain life processes and their impact on peoples' everyday lives that consider age as integral to one's identity and note that surprisingly little is known about age based identification. They explore research within the social sciences from two separate areas, social identity and aging across the life cycle. They contend that one cannot develop a frame of reference as how we come to age unless these areas of social sciences are integrated.

Many disciplines, such as sociology, economics, psychology, and so forth have produced theorists who have provided an understanding of aging from rather traditional dichotomous perspectives. We now expect specific age related categories to delineate the processes of aging. For example, in every aging category there are very distinct behaviors which make up and accompany