

Taking Suffering Seriously: The Importance of Collective Human Rights, William F. Felice (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996), 253 pp., \$19.95 paper, \$57.50 cloth.

Within the limits imposed by the canons of modern scholarship, this is a passionate plea for the inclusion of collective rights among the human rights that have in the twentieth century assumed "a degree of importance similar to that which natural rights claimed in the eighteenth century" (p. 17). Felice follows Jack Donnelly in asserting that human rights are rights of the highest order. They thus take precedence over all other principles that might be used to justify or to limit certain actions or social arrangements. Into this select high-order company where rights of the individual have until now held sway, Felice would add collective human rights, which is to say the rights of social groups. Beyond that, his goal is to help create a "normative framework independent of nation-states to enhance and protect these rights" (p. 18). How well does Felice achieve this double and doubly ambitious goal?

Much of the book is devoted to making the case for collective human rights. No matter what a reader's predisposition in this matter, the argument as laid out here deserves close reading. In Part One, Felice proceeds systematically and sensitively to examine the need for and possibility of rights for groups defined by race and ethnicity, culture, gender, sexual orientation, poverty, and political oppression. In Part Two, he turns to an examination of some basic rights-theories to see what, if anything, they might contribute to the conceptualization and achievement of collective human rights. The headings in this section suggest the scope of his efforts: liberal theory, Marxist theory, and poststructuralist, postmodernist, and post-Marxist theories.

Because he has his goal clearly in mind, Felice is able to guide the reader through these tangled theoretical woods without getting lost and without getting sidetracked in the minutiae of scholarly argument. This makes for clarity and an argument that is so well-integrated and smoothly developed that it is a pleasure to read. The cost of this approach may be apparent only to specialists who see what has been left out of the argument in order to develop a point. It would, for example, be news to Louis Brandeis or Teddy Roosevelt or any of the Progressives that "the problem with liberal political theory" is that it does not address "structural, primarily economic, factors" (p. 130) since that is precisely what they were concerned about. Nor would the idea of collective human rights have been strange to Progressives who fought for the right of collective bargaining and for special protection for women workers as a gender-defined group. It did not take the 1990s to discover that a political right may be meaningless to those who are part of a group that is disadvantaged economically or in other ways.

What Felice has done, and done very well, is to bring this concern into the present, extend it to groups never dreamed of by the Progressives, and place the discussion in an international setting. In so doing, he has performed a signal service for all those concerned with human rights, whether individual or collective. His strengths are many. He does not blink at the difficulties that may be involved in the extension of collective rights. He presents opposing positions fairly. He moves with exemplary ease from apt example to theoretical underpinning and back again. If he does not meet his goal of creating a normative framework independent of the nation-state that would protect collective human rights it is because that part of his argument is not so well-developed as the part that argues for those rights in the first place. In this latter endeavor, he has made a case for collective human rights that will need to be addressed by anyone who thinks and cares about rights at all.

—Dorothy V. Jones
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