

## Book reviews

### *One World: The Ethics of Globalization*

By PETER SINGER (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 235 pp. with index, \$21.95 [ISBN 9 780300 096866].

Peter Singer is a distinguished Australian philosopher recently transplanted to New Jersey as the Ira W. DeCamp Professor of Bioethics at the University Center for Human Values at Princeton University. Singer is a model of an engaged intellectual who does not shy away from addressing contemporary social and political controversies, and he has a gift for explaining sophisticated ethical issues and arguments without reliance on philosophical jargon. Singer is one of the leading contemporary utilitarian moral philosophers, and has built an international reputation elaborating and defending a form of preference utilitarianism in earlier works such as *Practical Ethics* (1979, 2nd edn 1993), and many other publications. He is probably best known for his provocative defense of animal welfare in his *Animal Liberation* (1975, 2nd edn 1990), in which he proposed that species membership is as irrelevant to moral status as race or sex. In his often-reprinted article 'Famine, affluence, and morality' (1972), he famously argued for strict duties across borders for alleviating the suffering of those living in extreme poverty. This most recent book goes further than any of his previous works in addressing the ethical challenges presented by globalization. It is based primarily upon the author's Dwight H. Terry lectures delivered at Yale University in November 2000, but has been expanded and updated to take into account the altered geopolitical landscape since September 11, 2001.

Singer is well aware that the utilitarian ethical ideal of impartial universal benevolence has always been a hard sell. Most of us humans are inclined, whether by nature or by custom, or by a combination of both, to be morally partial to their own children, spouses, parents, close friends, neighbors and fellow countrymen, or generally, to other human beings 'in proportion to their affinity to ourselves' (p. 153, quoting Henry Sidgwick). The sufferings of distant strangers, especially those of different ethnicities, nationalities and races, if they

matter to us at all, tend to get short shrift in terms of our sense of moral concern and responsibility. We are inclined to care about their well-being only to the extent that we can understand that the protection of their interests makes some difference to the protection of the interests of our own kith and kin. Whether this conventional moral outlook is an immutable feature of the human moral condition, or whether it can perhaps be modified towards greater inclusiveness by the contemporary processes that are collectively termed 'globalization', is the central question of this book.

Singer's response to this question emerges most clearly in the penultimate chapter of this book, in which he argues for a rule utilitarian or 'two-level' theory of moral partiality under which it is possible to justify some kinds of special duties to 'our own kind' from the impartial perspective of what benefits humanity as a whole. For instance, the special duties of care that parents have towards their own children can be seen as justified because, given the available evidence about human nature having been evolved to promote parental protection of immature offspring, it is very difficult if not impossible to eradicate parental favoritism towards their own children, and because, 'the care of loving and partial parents is likely to be better [for the children themselves] than the care of impartial parents or impartial community-employed carers' (p. 162). Similar arguments can be constructed for special duties of care towards friends and spouses, and to those to whom we owe special obligations of gratitude. But Singer rejects the view that moral partiality along lines of racial, ethnic or national identity can be similarly justified. According to Singer, 'we should value equality between societies, and at the global level, at least as much as we value political equality within one society' (p. 173). Although he takes him to task for failing to apply his theory of justice outside national societies, Singer thinks we should apply something like the late John Rawls's principle of departing from equality only when doing so benefits the worst off, globally, to the problem of mitigating extreme poverty.

In practice, this would mean taxing people in the rich countries to provide development aid to people in the poorest countries. He

points out that although the United Nations has set a target of 0.7% of Gross National Product for development aid, few rich nations come close to reaching this level, with the government of the United States being the worst offender, giving only 0.1% of GNP per year in such aid. According to his calculations, if all of the 900 million or so people living in high-income countries were to donate 0.4% of their disposable income to organizations that are helping the world's poorest of the poor, we could meet the Millennium Summit's goal of halving global poverty by the year 2015. Foreign aid in this amount is not too demanding a moral ideal, and for Singer such aid is not merely morally optional charity since those 'who do not meet this standard should be seen as failing to meet their fair share of a global responsibility, and therefore as doing something that is seriously morally wrong' (p. 194). Such a cosmopolitan ethical prescription, however, runs up against the uncomfortable fact that under the conventional moral view, 'despite the lip-service most people pay to human equality, their circle of concern barely extends beyond the boundaries of their country' (p. 182).

In the opening chapter, Singer mentions Karl Marx's thesis that 'a society's ethic is a reflection of the economic structure to which its technology has given rise' (p. 12). Just as feudal society was based on the power of human and animal muscles, and industrial capitalism was based on steam and internal combustion engines, so our contemporary society with its jet airplanes, container ships, and global telephone, fax and Internet communications gives us 'a global society with the transnational corporation and the World Economic Forum' (p. 10). Singer proposes that, 'Our newly interdependent global society, with its remarkable possibilities for linking people around the planet, provides the material basis for a new ethic' that will 'serve the interests of all those who live on this planet in a way that, despite much rhetoric, no previous ethics has ever done' (p. 12). However, unlike Marx, Singer is no historical determinist and he thinks that a straightforward causal linkage between technology and social ethics is a 'dangerous half-truth', but 'still an illuminating one'. Despite the forces of globalization, most people's moral outlooks are still anchored in the idea of nationalism, and in the view that we owe special obligations of concern only to those members of our own 'imagined communities' of co-nationals. But if we can imagine a moral community consisting of millions of strangers

with whom we share only the attribute of common citizenship, why can't we also imagine a global moral community based on the idea of shared humanity? His central thesis is that 'how well we come through this era of globalization (perhaps whether we come through it at all) will depend on how we respond ethically to the idea that we live in one world' (p. 13). Singer sees the historical challenge of constructing the notion of a global moral community as one 'we cannot refuse to take up', since 'the future of the world depends on how well we meet it' (p. 201). Whether or not such a 'global ethics' can gain widespread acceptance is an open question, one whose answer depends primarily on the ethical and political choices we make.

In the chapter on global climate change Singer gives a qualified endorsement to the Kyoto Treaty, citing the findings of the 2001 Third Assessment Report of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change that argues that most of the global warming trend over the past 50 years is attributable to human activities, in particular, greenhouse gas emissions, and predicts that this will cause the Earth's average temperature to rise from between 1.4° and 5.8°C by the year 2100. Such an increase in global temperatures is expected to lead to an increase in destructive hurricanes, the spread of tropical diseases, a decline in food production in Sub-Saharan Africa and a rise in the sea level, among other effects. This prospect, he says, 'forces us to think differently about our ethics' (p. 19). In particular, it should make us ask the question, 'What is a fair or equitable distribution of the costs and burdens of coping with the effects of global climate change?.'

Singer proceeds to analyze four principles of justice or fairness that might be invoked to answer this question: a historical principle of compensatory justice that says 'the polluter pays', and three alternative time-slice distributive principles: equal shares for everyone, aiding the worst off and the utilitarian greatest happiness principle. According to the historical principle, since the rich industrialized countries are the largest historical emitters of greenhouse gases, they should bear the greatest share of the burden, or, 'to put it in terms a child could understand, as far as the atmosphere is concerned, (since) the developed nations broke it', they 'owe it to the rest of the world to fix the problem with the atmosphere' (pp. 33–34). But Singer allows that relying only on this principle would produce an unacceptably heavy burden on the developed nations, and assumes that the poorer nations are willing to overlook the past and enter into an agreement on how much

each nation should be allowed to emit henceforth.

According to the egalitarian principle, nation-states should be allowed to emit greenhouse gases in direct proportion to their population, with a present allocation of roughly 1 metric ton of carbon emissions per person, and future per capita allocations based on credible estimates of a country's future population. Such a system would be even-handed, but would produce different results for different countries; for instance, India would be able to increase its emissions to three times what they are now, while the United States would have to reduce its emissions to no more than one-fifth of their present levels. Similar results are reached using the other two principles, leading him to conclude that under any of these ethical principles, 'the United States and other rich nations should bear much more of the burden of reducing greenhouse gases emissions than the poor nations – perhaps even the entire burden' (p. 43). The present *laissez-faire* system allows emitters to reap economic benefits for themselves, while imposing costs on third parties who may or may not share in the benefits of the polluters' high productivity. That is neither a fair nor an efficient outcome' (p. 48). His preferred solution to the problem is to enact a well-regulated system of per capita entitlements combined with a global emissions trading scheme that would force emitters to internalize the true costs of their activities.

In view of this analysis, Singer finds the position of the Bush Administration in refusing to sign onto the Kyoto Treaty until the lesser developed but more populous nations such as India and China agree to cut their emissions, 'particularly odious from an ethical perspective', and 'flagrantly self-serving'. It is, he says, as if 'a person who has left the kitchen tap running but refuses either to turn it off, or to mop up the resulting flood, until you – who spilt an insignificant half-glass of water onto the floor – promise not to spill any more water' (pp. 44–45).

The chapter that is likely to be of greatest interest to readers of this journal is Chapter 4, 'One Law', which is based on his Amnesty Lecture at Oxford in February 2001, in which Singer examines the issue of reconciling humanitarian intervention with the doctrine of state sovereignty. In it Singer casts his lot with those who have been arguing for a revised notion of national sovereignty under which it may be ethically justifiable to intervene, in the last resort by means of military force, to rescue peoples who are being systematically murdered

by their own governments. Singer's analysis of contemporary responses to genocide based on international law largely parallels the conclusions of the Canadian government's International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (2000), chaired by Gareth Evans, which proposed two criteria for justifiable military intervention on humanitarian grounds:

1. *large-scale loss of life*, actual or apprehended, with genocidal intent or not, which is the product either of deliberate state action, or state neglect or inability to act, or a failed state situation; or,
2. *large-scale 'ethnic cleansing'*, actual or apprehended, whether carried out by killing, forced expulsion, acts of terror or rape. (p. 126)

According to the commission's report, when these criteria are met, 'there is not merely a right to intervene, but an international responsibility to protect those who are, or are in imminent danger of becoming, victims of these acts' (p. 127, quoting 'The Responsibility to Protect'). Singer also endorses the commission's view that 'state sovereignty implies that the state has a responsibility for the protection of its own people', and, thus, 'when a state is unwilling or unable to fulfill that responsibility ... the responsibility falls on the international community, and more specifically, on the Security Council' (p. 134). However, for Singer the threshold for military intervention is lowered when the government at fault is not minimally democratic but instead came to power and rules by force. But, even in such cases, Singer imposes an additional utilitarian criterion as the final arbiter: namely, that the intervention will do more good than harm. Under this proposed ethical standard, which, by the way, is also part of traditional just war theory, while it may have been justifiable to intervene against Serbia in the case of Kosovo, it would not be justifiable in his view to intervene in the cases of Chechnya or Tibet, because of the predictably high costs to the civilian populations of these regions should there be an attempt by outside forces to liberate them from the governments of Russia and China. This is not just a nod to political realism and power politics, in Singer's view, nor is it an ethical 'double standard'; rather it follows from the utilitarian principle that 'tells us not to intervene when the costs of doing so are likely to be greater than the benefits achieved' (p. 139).

It is interesting to apply this analysis to the US-led war against Iraq. In the eyes of many the drum beat for war to disarm Iraq was nothing but a thinly disguised excuse for imperial aggression by the US and Britain, despite the fact that Saddam Hussein is most probably guilty of serious war crimes and crimes against humanity, and perhaps even genocide against the Kurds. Would Singer's moral standard argue for permitting such an international intervention if the UN Security Council had authorized it and it would be likely to produce more good than harm? Although he does not discuss it directly, it is likely that Singer would not be impressed by the Bush administration's arguments for 'regime change' in Iraq.

In a recurrent theme, he is highly critical of the policies of the government of his adopted country of residence to block or undermine international global governance initiatives: 'It has to be said, in cool but plain language, that in recent years the international effort to build a global community has been hampered by the repeated failure of the United States to play its part' (p. 198). American exceptionalism, whether in regard to the Kyoto Treaty, to making the international trading system fairer, the establishment of the International Criminal Court, or in contributing its fair share in development aid to poor countries, is currently the greatest single obstacle to 'developing the ethical foundations of the coming era of a single world community'.

He sees this obstacle in moral terms; the central axis of debate can be seen as a contest between two contemporary ethics: an emerging cosmopolitan ethic, like Singer's, that aims to create a democratic global moral community based on the ethical ideal of caring for all who live on Earth, and the traditional view of those political realists who want to perpetuate a global Pax Americana based on military might and on the imperial principle articulated by President George Bush senior that holds 'What we say goes'. Given the record of previous American administrations in the field of foreign policy, it is difficult to believe that the current President Bush and his advisors have the best interests of humanity in mind. In fact, Singer begins his book by quoting the present President Bush's statement regarding his reasons for refusing to sign onto Kyoto as an indication of the ethical position he believes to be wrong: namely, that it is the duty of national leaders to put the interests of their own citizens first.

Singer sees the way forward in the gradual development of an international system of democratic and global governance institutions,

which while falling short of a world federal government could still function effectively to protect humanity from these kinds of global threats. Despite the pattern of American exceptionalism, he expects that other nations, particularly those in Western Europe, will proceed to develop such global institutions, and that eventually the United States will be shamed into going along, or that its leaders will eventually realize that they cannot expect to gain the cooperation of other nations in matters such as its 'war on terrorism', unless it avoids being seen as the 'rogue superpower'. There is, however, little hope that the US will suddenly become a magnanimous hegemon. The carefully reasoned arguments of a tweedy Ivy League professor can be expected to have zero influence on thinking within Washington's realist policy-making establishment. But one can certainly hope that Singer's writings will inspire his readers to adopt a more cosmopolitan ethical perspective and to join hands with others who are laying the foundations of a global moral community.

**Morton Winston**

*Barbed Wire: A Political History*

By OLIVIER RAZAC, trans. Jonathan Knight  
(New York: New Press, 2000), 132 pp.

Olivier Razac offers a tidy book on the political meaning of barbed wire in the twentieth century. The first part examines how barbed wire appears in three moments of intense destruction: in the American prairies in the nineteenth century, in the trench warfare of the First World War and in the concentration camps of the Second World War. In the prairies, barbed wire was used because it was light, cheap, durable, easy to install, resistant to desert heat and difficult to bend or break. In the war context, these qualities were valued, but more importantly barbed wire was easy to replace quickly, absorbed direct fire from artillery, and was invisible until the advancing troops were nearly upon it.

For Razac, these constitute moments where barbed wire assumes its 'clearest and most significant political implications'. Beware the American who misunderstands what political means here. Razac is not interested in how barbed wire caused political events as much as he is in its meaning in the symbolic imaginary of the twentieth-century political thought. He devotes a large part of each chapter to analyzing movies, poems and other representations of barbed wire. Westerns depict misleadingly how

barbed wire caused 'the end of freedom' in the Wild West. First World War literature uses barbed wire to depict the horrors of modern war. After the Second World War, barbed wire represents the moment of extreme captivity.

This is what Razac means by barbed wire in 'its pure form' (p. 4), that is, the moment when it leaves the mundane history and becomes symbolic. Razac admits that his case about the First World War is not as strong, since here barbed wire did not symbolize the event. 'It never became a metaphor of war, because it does not symbolize the entire conflict, or even the fighting in the trenches'. But in so far as it evoked the destructive nature of war, it 'could be said to have the "artistic" role' as part of an "overall aesthetic"' (p. 49). The reader will no doubt think of many other uses of barbed wire. In the train in which I now ride, barbed wire stretches on either side of the tracks to prevent living beings from being run over. Occasionally, I see a power station terminal surrounded by wire, protecting humans from electric hazard. But these ubiquitous uses do not matter to Razac because they are not symbolic, have not entered into our political imaginary, and so do not have meaning.

Razac insists on this 'pure' meaning of barbed wire because he aims to link this analysis to the work of Michel Foucault. Foucault argued that, in the last two hundred years, the way we exercise power had changed. Classical power was characterized by the law, by the sovereign state's power to take life (by war or punishment) or let live. But gradually states came to see their populations as resources, integral to the state's survival. Carefully managed populations provided healthy soldiers, vibrant economies and good tax returns. So states exercised power in new ways. On the macro-scale, this involved a panoptic survey of populations – policing activities, gathering statistics and organizing policies. On the micro-scale, this involved regulating behavior (diet, education or skills) carefully, what Foucault called 'disciplining'. In the modern age, the power to take life or let live was displaced by the power to foster life or disallow it to the point of extinction, what Foucault called biopower.

In three middle chapters, Razac aims to link barbed wire to the notion of bio-power. He argues first that barbed wire came to 'govern the frontier of life and death' (p. 75), then that barbed wire, unlike walls for example, is a technology specifically for guiding living beings (p. 85), and finally relates barbed wire to panoptic surveillance. These chapters are not

very convincing. Razac concedes that barbed wire, unlike panoptic surveillance, 'is not concerned with the general behavior of those observed' (p. 92). Video surveillance is the true heir to panopticism, as Razac points out in the final chapter. Similarly, the fact that something is made solely for living beings does not qualify it as an exercise of biopower. Whips, from the Roman *flagellum* to the Russian *knout*, also guided living beings. Like barbed wire, whips gathered herds of humans (slaves, political prisoners) and animals, and killed the beast. Likewise, whips transformed humans into beasts, a powerful living metaphor, but not particularly tied to a change in modern power relations.

Razac's case thus turns or falls on explaining on one point clearly: *how* barbed wire governed and transformed the frontier of life and death. But here, Razac, or the history of barbed wire, is less than clear. The way barbed wire affects life depends very much on how it is placed on the ground. Laid down as a line, it creates a state's frontier that drives the Indians into forbidding environments and interrupts their migrations. Laid down as parallel lines, it creates a no-man's land between two sovereign armies trying to move a border. Placed down as a circle or a square, it creates a 'within' but what happens within this space is nothing that barbed wire shapes or determines. When it is electrified, it acts like sovereign power – taking life or letting live. When it is not, it could be biopower or at least animal husbandry, but that depends on what is deployed on the inside.

Perhaps, ultimately, Razac's thesis depends not on Foucault's biopolitics but on Barthes' *Mythologies*. Barthes argued that plastic symbolized capitalism, a product that colonized any social situation, molded to any function and yet cheapened the relationship at the same time. Barbed wire is characterized by plasticity. It is the kind of plastic most suited for modern violence, molded into every type of human conflict and cheapening life as it unravels.

At any rate, if one took Razac's Foucaultian referent seriously, then there are grave conceptual problems. Razac maintains that barbed wire maps onto panopticism, in that it creates a border, an authorized area to be managed and a forbidden zone. Unfortunately, this is not an example of biopolitics but, rather, of sovereign power, which lays borders. Foucault himself observed that state sovereignty (which also has an inside and an out) maps onto biopolitics, but is not bio-power. Sovereign power is characterized, as a concept, by *duality*, either to kill or to let live. Biopower is characterized by a scale of gradations, of fostering life

(increasing its vibrancy, doubling its power, fortifying its sinews) or disallowing it (slowly weakening life's vital elements without necessarily killing).

When Razac asserts that 'barbed wire becomes a tool of extreme polarization,' this is his obscure way of saying that barbed wire creates *legal* borders. These are sovereign state lines where 'on one side, the interior, rights are protected, and life is bettered' and on the other 'the exterior, the arbitrary is unleashed, people accelerate destruction, and they manufacture death' (pp. 81–82). Razac's turn to juridical language to talk about the politics of space will be welcome to human rights scholars who found Foucault's disregard of the place of law in modern politics distressing. But in Foucault's terms, biopolitics *depends* on the contrast with the sovereign's juridical power, his laying down the law, to gain its analytic meaning. By juridicizing bio-politics, Razac has fatally emptied the concept of any theoretical purchase.

To show that barbed wire is part of the politics of biopower, Razac needs to locate a situation where states are trying to govern populations as resources with barbed wire. This would be a condition where one undermines how a people lives, *both individually and as a group, by careful gradations without causing genocide*. Such situations exist, but they are part of the mundane world of history, not the symbolic realm that animates Razac's interest.

Modern guerilla warfare, for instance, depends on using populations as resources.

Guerillas shelter in populations, and states terrorize populations to root out the guerillas. The classic example – though by no means the only one – is the barbed wire around the Casbah of Algiers in 1958 which interrupted how terrorists moved in Algiers, fostered life here, disallowed it there, without killing. French doctrines of counter-revolutionary warfare, from Indo-China to Algiers, exemplify a biopolitics of barbed wire. By focusing on the genocide of Germans and Americans and less on the biopolitics of Massu, Razac shows a remarkable blindness to how France contributed to the inhumanity of the modern world. That is the human rights lesson. The analytic-historical lesson is to choose one's examples wisely. The cultural lesson here is simply less Hollywood, more 'Battle of Algiers'.

Historians looking for an account of how barbed wire fits into social history will leave disappointed, for, contrary to the subtitle of this book, there is little here. Social scientists will be offended by the way Razac substitutes the 'meaning' of events for their actual political causes. Philosophers will be intrigued by Razac's use of philosophical concepts to reflect on empirical particulars, but they will not find either the archival work or the theoretical discipline that characterized Foucault's work. The educated reader will delight in Razac's survey of the modern political imaginary, and those who do cultural studies will walk away quite satisfied.

**Darius Rejali**