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Review of Humanity in Crisis: Ethical and Religious Response to Refugees

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***Humanity in Crisis: Ethical and Religious Response to Refugees.* David Hollenbach, S.J. Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2019. Paper, x+197 pp. ISBN 9781626167186.**

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David Hollenbach's *Humanity in Crisis* seeks to help address the contemporary scandal that an ever-growing number of people across the globe have been forcibly displaced from their homes due to conflict and deprived of their basic human rights. These crises demand a coordinated international effort; yet the pressures of human displacement, resulting in irregular migrant and asylum movements, have only dampened political will to respond effectively. The ever-amplifying pressures forcing people to move have been matched by progressive efforts of nation-states to assert control over migration patterns and regulate admission. As Hollenbach notes, this now means that a disproportionate burden of hosting displaced populations has now fallen on countries with the least capacity to do so (pp. 107-8).

The contemporary challenges of forced migration evoke enduring questions over the relationship between neighbors and strangers: what are the obligations of nation-states to those beyond their borders? What claims of justice can strangers make on political communities? Drawing from a range of ethical and religious resources, and in the wake of the limited achievements of the 2018 UN Global Compacts on migrants and refugees, Hollenbach aims to inform and support international efforts to address the seemingly-intractable crisis of forced displacement. He challenges self-protective national discourses that remain indifferent to those suffering beyond borders. Ultimately, Hollenbach holds out hope that, despite inward-looking populist backlashes, humanitarian responses can still prevail (p. 152).

Hollenbach traces a case for duties transcending borders by exploring ethical values that have driven the modern humanitarian movement, as well as the resources of religious traditions (with special attention to Catholic teaching and practice) that mandate care for strangers. These resources emphasize the significance of fundamental human rights and basic human equality that endure regardless of national membership. They thereby challenge the pretense of absolute territorial sovereignty, as national borders must always be "subordinate to the respect due to the dignity of every person" (p. 65). Further, increasing degrees of transnational networks today mean that we cannot treat nation-states as self-contained units that can be indifferent to those beyond themselves. Yet, as he also notes, neither are we a unified global community (p. 76).

Hollenbach challenges a conception of the moral significance of borders that considers them absolute rather than at the service of global regulation and national self-determination. Rather, "humanitarian principles, human rights, and religious norms relativize borders. They call for a moral solidarity that links people together despite their cultural, national, or religious differences" (p. 63). The challenges in responding to forced displacement crises demonstrate "the tensions between cosmopolitan universalism and nationalist particularism" and thus raises a call for "discovering ways to combine a normative commitment to the common humanity of all members of the human family with respect for the local, national, and regional differences that also support human dignity" (pp. 70-1). He finds resources to help reconcile this tension in the Jewish

scriptures' assertion of a special national identity that also entails onerous duties to strangers, as well as in the Catholic tradition's recognition of an 'order of love' (which regulates duties of care according to particular relationships and proximity) and the principle of subsidiarity. While identifying nation-states' negative duties not to harm, Hollenbach identifies positive duties that oblige the international community to provide assistance beyond their own borders. Most notably, he offers the 'Kew Gardens principle' as one raising a positive duty to assist others, where one has the capacity to respond to a grave threat in one's close proximity, regardless of any responsibility for it (pp. 97-102). Today's global interdependence means that proximity between nation-states cannot be considered only in geographical terms.

Hollenbach makes a compelling case for nation-states to recognize and act on their positive duties to assist refugees. However, given the massive scale of forced displacement and the various degrees of vulnerability across displaced populations, there still remains a need for identifying further ethical tools to guide nation-states and humanitarian agencies in discerning their most effective responses to particular crises, especially when facing competing demands. Moreover, in the complex circumstances of human displacement, nation-states with the capacity and responsibility to assist need additional tools to discern the most appropriate forms of support, whether that amounts to migrant admission, refugee resettlement, the provision of aid and development, or other innovative responses. One wonders if nation-states can legitimately curb or deter irregular asylum movements in the interests of supporting displaced populations of greater need, providing more effective assistance, or to prevent greater harm. Nevertheless, Hollenbach has provided a well-structured and well-illustrated overview of the current state of the problem, as well as the religious and ethical resources relevant for offering some hope of encouraging international cooperation on humanitarian crises.