PART I

Human Rights as the Bedrock of Social Justice

Part I lays the basic foundation of this book, beginning in Chapter 1 with the rationale for human rights as the bedrock for social justice so that in this millennium no government would dare say it is against human rights. Other sources of human wisdom can also be used to create a socially just world—the Golden Rule, notions of duty to one's neighbor, loving one's enemies, and commitment to nonviolence of major spiritual belief systems. Acknowledging the importance of these perspectives, this book presents only a human rights argument as the foundation for social justice, though indeed, human rights often mirrors much of such wisdom.

Governments' fear of denying the importance of human rights is in large measure an immediate response to the atrocities of World War II, but it also represents a legacy of global repugnance for horrors such as the transatlantic slave trade and genocide against Indigenous Peoples. Chapter 1 focuses on the major document that arose from the ashes of World War II, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, drafted by a committee chaired by an American—Eleanor Roosevelt. That document, increasingly referred to as customary international law by which all governments must abide, consists of five crucial notions fundamental to social justice concerns: (a) human dignity; (b) nondiscrimination; (c) civil and political freedoms; (d) economic, social, and cultural rights; and (e) rights to solidarity.
Helping and health professionals, also aware of the importance of human rights principles, have in various ways incorporated these rights into their ethics codes and curricula to assist them in socially just practice. Human rights offers a kind of universal language and set of agreements allowing those involved in helping to engage in dialogue. In Chapter 1, I argue that we must have a culture that supports a “lived awareness” of human rights principles in our minds, bodies, and hearts.

Adhering to such principles will not be easy, for creating and maintaining social justice is a struggle. The prototypical character Sisyphus, condemned by the gods to roll a boulder up a hill, only to watch it roll back down, nevertheless reflects the possibility of joy in the struggle. Working for a socially just world will not be easy, and Chapter 1 concludes with some provisos urging social activists not to demonize the “enemy” or give in to narrow definitions of human rights as a pretext for humanitarian intervention.

Chapter 2 presents the human rights triptych. In the center is the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, with the declarations and conventions that flowed from it on the right panel and implementation measures on the left. Viewing human rights as historical-philosophical compromises among the values of various religions, schools of thoughts, and historical epochs, this chapter outlines the history of the human rights concept, from antiquity through the Middle Ages, Renaissance, Age of Enlightenment, and Age of Industrialization and includes select government input into the drafting of the Universal Declaration.

The chapter then discusses important core principles of major international human rights documents, beginning with the United Nations (UN) Charter and moving to documents ratified by the United States, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), and the Convention Against Torture (CAT). It also discusses documents the United States has not ratified, such as the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (ICESCR); the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW); the Rights of the Child (CRC); and the Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. It is possible to glean from the core principles of these documents those human rights that have relevance for socially just practice in the helping and health professions.

Finally, after a brief discussion of other human rights regimes, such as the Organization of American States, the African Union, and the European Union, Chapter 2 discusses such international implementation measures as
U.S. reports to human rights monitoring committees, with particular attention to health issues (e.g., disparate infant mortality, longevity, and disease rates among various minority groups). It concludes with a discussion of the viability of various world conferences with attendant platforms of actions to ensure government accountability.

Part I provides the necessary knowledge to understand more fully and implement more effectively the levels of intervention possible in the helping and health professions. Part II focuses on human rights documents as guiding principles for social action and service for helping and health professionals; however, by merely relaying the major principles of and debates over human rights and social justice activism, Part I is in itself a social action. Expanding our consciousness about human rights and social justice can potentially change our symbolic thought processes. Questioning how the present social order adheres to human rights principles could lead to socially just and informed action and service to humanity and the world, of which we are all stewards.

Note

1. *Indigenous Peoples* is capitalized consistent with a burgeoning social movement recognizing those who have had an historical presence on lands prior to colonialism and who wish to transmit to future generations their cultural patterns and identities. Whereas extremely rich and diverse patterns exist among roughly 5,000 such groups known more commonly in the United States as Native American or Alaskan Native, the term Indigenous Peoples is used in such statements by indigenous representatives as the 1996 Report of the Working Group: "We, the *Indigenous Peoples* present at the Indigenous Peoples Preparatory Meeting on Saturday, 27 July 1996, at the World Council of Churches, have reached a consensus on the issue of defining *Indigenous Peoples* [italics added]" (Workshop on Data Collection and Dissagregation for Indigenous Peoples, 2004, p. 4). It must also be emphasized that "naming" something is more specific to Western cultures, such as the naming of "tribes," biological nomenclature, and psychiatric diagnoses. So-called tribes, for example, may have been wanderers (not in a pejorative sense), often as a subsistence lifestyle. Indigenous elders may pass on to youth a dynamic knowledge about trees, birds, animals, and explanations for others' behavior. This knowledge would then need to be unlearned in a Western educational system based on more static nomenclature and terminology. Biological taxonomy, for instance, might break down phenomena into smaller parts, from kingdom, phylum, class, order, family, genus, and species, to variety, an atomistic view of the nature of things as emphasized by the Roman Epicurean philosopher Lucretius. An indigenous understanding might look at the world in a more connected sense, as a tree branch bending, indicative of an eagle's respite for an extended period.
The purpose of this book is to examine how the powerful idea of human rights can help us create a socially just world. Technically, human rights do not exist. However, human needs do, and human rights provide the legal mandate to fulfill human need. As the preface states, this work is based on the assumption that human rights are the cornerstone—the bedrock, if you will—of social justice. Human rights mirror the social-environmental contexts of the time—values that have more or less crystallized into rights, often embedded in constitutions and/or other ethical codes of conduct, serving as guiding principles for a way of life. In turn, these values mirror a complexity of philosophical, psychological, sociological, anthropological, and other variables. As also discussed, social justice is a struggle to unite friends, allies, and partners in fair and equitable practices, as the term’s etymological roots suggest. This book is an effort to grasp some of these underlying complexities, which will provide the framework to implement social action and service initiatives for the helping and health professions.
Rationale for This Work

The rationale for this book is simple: Today, no government would dare say it is against human rights. This attitude is quite a switch from the Conference of Evian, called in 1938 by the United States in response to the abuses of the Third Reich. The conclusion of that conference was that no nation had the right to interfere with another’s domestic affairs. Was the real issue, however, that many countries did not want to bring attention to the mistreatment of their own citizens—for example, public lynchings in the United States; the Soviet Union’s Gulag, an area roughly the size of France, in which many political prisoners were kept; and European policies of torture in African colonial countries? After another failed attempt at the Bermuda Conference to deal with wartime refugees, one of the worst pogroms in history—the Holocaust—resulted in the deaths of roughly 10 million innocents, mostly Jews but also Roma, homosexuals, Poles, Jehovah’s Witnesses, and others inimical to the Fuhrer’s policies. Such conferences were late in coming.

Other atrocities the world failed to reckon with included the transatlantic slave trade, the genocide against Indigenous Peoples, and the massacre of the Armenians, to cite a few. But over the years, human rights issues such as apartheid in South Africa, the killing of civilians in China’s Tiananmen Square, female genital mutilation in Somalia, and, in the United States, the death penalty, childhood poverty, and allegations of torture at Guantanamo Bay, have become the concerns of almost the entire world community. For whatever reason—perhaps technological innovations such as the airplane, film, or radio—it has become increasingly easier and quicker to “bear witness” to the abuse of human dignity of other members of the human family. Certainly, such violations “shock the conscience of humanity,” as asserted in the Preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, a document emerging from the ashes of World War II that has become the authoritative definition of human rights standards and is increasingly referred to as customary international law (Buergenthal, Sheldon, & Stewart, 2002; Fikartiga v. Pena-Irala, 1980; Wronka, 1998a, 1998b). It can also be said that the United States is a rights-based culture (Stone, 2001) in part because of its Bill of Rights, a beautiful but limited document describing rights as they are increasingly understood in the global community.

Whenever gross injustice occurs, something perhaps about the human condition moves us to act on behalf of social justice. The French existentialist Gabriel Marcel (1967) saw this impulse as proof of a Supreme Being, of God; for Paul Tillich (2000), it is our ultimate concern; and Carl Jung wrote about the 2-million-year-old person within each of us who is a seat of wisdom (Hannah, 1981). Whatever one calls it, a spiritual profundity in the
A 1934 Photo of Inmates at Dachau Concentration Camp\(^2\). Listening to a Speech by Hitler. Much of the world looked the other way during the pogroms of the Third Reich, as it did during the transatlantic slave trade and genocide against Indigenous Peoples. It is questionable whether such behavior still exists given situations in Darfur, the Congo, Kashmir, and Palestine, rampant discrimination, let alone pockets of extreme poverty worldwide, and nearly a billion people starving each day. The challenge is to resolve conflicts in direct, nonviolent, and dignified ways in accordance with human rights. Out of the carnage of World War II, the social construct of human rights was born, an idea late in coming.

Source: United States Memorial Holocaust Museum.

The human condition calls for action and service to humanity in the face of injustice. This book is an attempt to get in touch with this inner spirit and, paradoxically, to move us outward beyond ourselves.

A major repercussion of World War II, therefore, was the belief that such outrages should never again occur. The United Nations (UN)\(^3\) was founded at the San Francisco Conference on October 25, 1945. Immediately, the UN formed a committee to draw up a document to which all member nations could agree. The word document comes from the Latin word docere, meaning “to teach,” and human rights documents can be excellent teaching tools to reinforce the lessons learned from the scars of experience (Rosenstock-Huessy,
1969). An American, Eleanor Roosevelt, chaired the drafting committee, and on December 10, 1948, the General Assembly endorsed the Universal Declaration of Human Rights with no dissenting vote. Since then, other international human rights documents have been developed by not only the UN but also other regional international bodies, such as the African Union and the Organization of American States, as well as nongovernmental organizations' (NGOs) such as Amnesty International and the International Fourth World Movement. Examples include the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights (ACHPR), and the Inter-American Convention on Forced Disappearances (IACFD). An important NGO document is the Declaration on the Rights of Human Rights Defenders and Action Plan, drafted in 1998 by human rights activists at the Human Rights Defenders Summit in Paris, commemorating the 50th anniversary of the General Assembly’s endorsement of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

It is impossible to discuss all these documents and the mandated government reports on compliance with the declarations and conventions. Instead, I will attempt to identify international human rights law, including major aspects of human rights theory and practice that should have relevance to social justice in general and to the helping and health professions in particular. The International Federation of Social Work, for example, has called social work a “human rights profession, having as its basic tenet the intrinsic value of every human being” (United Nations, 1994, p. 3). The National Association of Social Work has forthrightly stated that it “endorses the fundamental principles set forth in the human rights documents of the United Nations . . . [and that] human rights be adopted as a foundational principle upon which all of social work theory and applied knowledge rests” (Falk, 1999, p. 17).

Other professions have also asserted the importance of human rights in various ways. The American Sociological Association (2005) “urges all governments . . . to uphold the spirit and the substance of the articles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and other international agreements that [assert] the importance of full equality of all peoples and cultures” (p. 2). The American Psychological Association (2007) emphasizes in the Preamble to its Ethics Code that “psychologists respect and protect civil and human rights” (p. 2). The first principle of medical ethics for the American Medical Association (2007) states, “A physician shall be dedicated to providing competent medical care, with compassion and respect for human dignity and
rights” (p. 1). Provision 1.1 of the American Nurses Association Center for Ethics and Human Rights (2007) asserts: “A fundamental principle that underlies all nursing practice is respect for the inherent worth, dignity, and human rights of every individual” (p. 3). The American Public Health Association (2005) states at length,

Being cognizant that human rights provide the ethical framework for public health practice . . . and recognizing that human rights refers broadly to those rights . . . articulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and subsequent international, regional, and national agreements, declarations, charters, and laws, including the right to health . . . acknowledging that human rights conventions have implications for health and health professionals . . . further acknowledging that the right to the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being . . . [We encourage] schools and educational programs in the health professions to make human rights a fundamental component of their curricula. (p. 2)

Other major organizations, such as the American Anthropological Association, the Association of Human Service Professionals, the American Political Science Association, to mention a few, have also made human rights statements. But one thing is clear: The idea of human rights is slowly seeping into the global consciousness. In these days, when time with our families is at a premium, environmental degradation is ever increasing, the threat of nuclear war constantly looms on the horizon, and roughly 40% of the world lives on less than $2 per day, often making mere survival a challenge, implementing human rights principles has an urgency beyond question.

**Toward the Creation of a Human Rights Culture**

To deal with and ultimately overcome these pressing issues, it is most important that independent scholar-practitioners be willing to commit themselves to creating what is known as a human rights culture. The challenge is to create a socially just world in which one’s lived awareness of human rights principles is known not only cognitively but in one’s heart—dragged into one’s “vital labors,” to coin a term from the French philosopher cum child psychologist, Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1967). It is worth emphasizing that only chosen values endure. Such a culture cannot be forced; it must be chosen. Thus, a just society is possible only if everyone on Mother Earth chooses to implement such principles. We must, then, reflect on some preliminary interrelated, yet distinct, points.
The Importance of Words

First, it is important to understand the etymological roots of the words culture, instrument, and education. Culture comes from the Latin cultura, meaning “tilling, cultivation,” or the preparation and cultivation of land for crops. Often, this is an arduous task. Certainly, it requires the right tools. Ultimately, given our connectedness, a good tilling of the soil must be done correctly, with no pesticides or artificial fertilizers, to produce more healthful and nourishing crops. The word instrument, from the Latin instrumenta, means “tool.” Fundamentally, this book is about human rights instruments, which mirror the collective wisdom of the world community as understood by UN membership. Thus, the Universal Declaration and its progeny are our educational tools, through which we positively affect the quality of life for all. Quality of life, however, ought not be improved on the global scale only, but also in our local communities and everyday lives.

Human rights principles, if lived correctly, would definitively affect our educational institutions, places of employment, and practice settings when we engage in social action and service to others. The word education has two possible etymological roots: the Latin educere, meaning “to lead out,” and the Latin educare, meaning “to grow, nourish, strengthen.” Human rights instruments, then, being primarily educational tools, should help expand our consciousness—that is, lead us from the darkness of the cave, in a Platonic sense, to view the world in a new light and nourish us in the process. For example, as I state in Human Rights and Social Policy in the 21st Century (Wronka, 1998b),

United States constitutions concur fundamentally with the Universal Declaration’s first generation or negative rights, which consist of civil and political guarantees. There appear minor correspondences, most notably in states’ guarantees for education, with the Universal Declaration’s second generation or positive rights, which consist of economic, social, and cultural rights. Apart from some states’ concerns for duties to the community, there are no correspondences with the Universal Declaration’s third generation or solidarity rights, which consist essentially of the right to a just social and international order in which human rights can be realized. (p. 219)

Many Americans think the United States is the best in regard to implementing human rights. However, a reading of federal and state constitutions demonstrates that numerous constitutional guarantees of many fundamental human rights are lacking. The etymological roots presented here therefore lead us to the basic question of how human rights instruments can serve as educational tools to enlighten us and move us toward social action and
service. Such a task might be extremely difficult in that certain actions would need to be groundbreaking.

Information as Power

Second, it is necessary to acknowledge that information is power. To say that homelessness or lack of health care shouldn’t exist is one thing. But the Universal Declaration, asserting that adequate shelter and health care are human rights, without a doubt serves as an instrument for social change. And the fact that the U.S. Constitution, the supreme law of the land, does not acknowledge these rights is a compelling argument to move public sentiment toward social justice, at least as defined by international human rights standards.

Though, unfortunately, not many people know what their rights are, the launching of the UN World Program for Human Rights Education (HREA, 2005), emphasizing the right to know one’s rights, is auspicious. Ms. Roosevelt, “whose FBI file was thicker than a stack of phone books” and on whose head the “KKK put a price” (Public Broadcasting System, 2000), said it well:

Where, after all, do universal human rights begin? In small places, close to home—so close and so small that they cannot be seen on any maps of the world. Yet, they are the world of the individual person; the neighborhood he lives in; the school or college he attends; the factory, farm or office where he works. Such are the places where every man, woman and child seeks equal justice, equal opportunity, equal dignity without discrimination. Unless these rights have meaning there, they have little meaning anywhere. Without concerned citizen action to uphold them close to home, we shall look in vain for progress in the larger world. (U.S. Department of State Report on Country’s Human Rights Practices, 1993, p. xix)

That woman’s courageous understanding that human rights education must go beyond the school setting, to raise awareness of its relevance for the workplace and in everyday life, underscores the need for a radical character transformation, from focusing on the local to the global arena. A major question is whether mere cognitive awareness of human rights can help us create meaningful and long-lasting social change throughout the world.

The Vulnerability of the Human Condition

A third point is the vulnerability of the human condition. Is the study of concepts such as human rights culture, lived awareness, and character transformation
merely a privilege of the middle and upper classes? Are these terms, at worst, just elitist, helping-profession babble? Perhaps. In a world where nearly 1 billion people living on the verge of starvation is a daily fact of life, who has the time for what the philosopher Jeremy Bentham called “nonsense on stilts” (cited in Wronka, 1998b, p. 194)? Was our former ambassador to the United Nations, the late Jeanne Kirkpatrick, correct when she referred to the Universal Declaration as a “letter to Santa Claus . . . Neither nature, experience, nor probability informs these lists of ‘entitlements,’ which are subject to no constraints except those of the mind and appetite of their authors” (Laqueur & Rubin, 1990, p. 364)?

Human rights is a powerful idea, and it is a bizarre stereotype that those living in extreme poverty are too tired to fight and advocate for social justice (Lappe, Collins, & Rosset, 1998). Human rights can assist anyone—the very rich, the very poor—in establishing the framework necessary to create a socially just world. The debate must focus on human rights for all, and we must believe that such a world is possible. It is unfortunate that human rights discourse sometimes “collapses” into elitist language, but perhaps that only mirrors human vulnerability, if not our frailty. Although Eleanor Roosevelt wanted a document, not for the doctors of jurisprudence but rather for the intelligent layperson, the Universal Declaration itself occasionally lapses into elitist and legalistic language. This text, written with the same audience in mind, is not free from similarly unwieldy vocabulary. Ultimately, however, human rights and social justice are simple concepts to grasp; their basic thrust is common human decency. We must constantly ask if we are really speaking to or at others rather than with them as partners in struggle.

Reluctance of Governments and Other Powerful Entities

In moving toward this human rights culture, the foundation of social justice, it is important to keep in mind the general reluctance of governments, which may act collusively with other powerful entities. As a general rule, governments tend to be reluctant to provide for the human rights of their citizens without massive public support of such rights. Former Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis (Riak, 2001) may be right in calling government our omnipresent teacher; however, in contemporary times other powerful entities, such as corporations—some with growing concentration of wealth and corresponding power greater than that of governments—the media, and the military, seem to have an even more profound influence on values formation. This new millennium has also witnessed a growth in international agreements, such as the North Atlantic Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), and the power of international players such as the World Bank (WB), the
International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Trade Organization (WTO), who may also collude with governments.

Citing the growing chasm between the richest and poorest people on the planet as today’s most serious universal problem, former President Jimmy Carter, in accepting the Nobel Peace Prize, stated that “citizens of the ten wealthiest countries are now seventy-five times richer than those who live in the ten poorest ones, and the separation is increasing every year not only between nations but also within them” (Carter, 2002, p. 18). Indeed, the ratio of wealth between the world’s poorest and richest nations is 1 to 103 (UN Development Program, 2005). Furthermore, Lappe and colleagues reported in 1998 that General Motors sales were greater than the gross national product of 169 countries (1998), and by the end of the last millennium, Microsoft market capitalization had even passed that of General Motors (Brown, Flavin, & French, 1999). Such economic disparity also exists within countries like the United States, where chief executive pay is approximately 535 times the average employee’s salary and 1% of the population controls 47% of the net financial wealth (Morgenson, 2004). In addition, the United States, with the highest per capita income in the world (Kivel, 2004), dominates the world film industry (UN Development Program, 2005). The media can influence both young and old to uncritically adopt the consumer lifestyle of the rich and famous, especially those of the United States, which has become a primary model for global policy making (Steiner & Alston, 2000). Furthermore, governments spend at least $1 trillion on the military per year, with U.S. spending making up nearly half that amount (World Almanac, 2005). The international agreements and players mentioned earlier, who are greatly influenced by governments and corporations, often encourage privatization in exchange for loans given ostensibly to develop infrastructure, such as hospitals and schools.

Numerous questions arise: Where might our social actions be most helpful? How can or should activists work collaboratively, rather than confrontationally, with governments, corporations, the media, the military, and other international players? A most basic question is how to speak “truth,” as mirrored in human rights instruments, to the powers that be? Or are those in power already aware of truth, and must our social actions be to unveil truth together?

The Importance of Socialization

Fifth, one must acknowledge the importance of socialization. Only about 10% of Americans have ever heard of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, putting into serious question the values we transmit to our youth.
Nearly every American child knows the story of Abraham Lincoln’s austere beginnings, from birth in a log cabin to later become president. Children also know about George Washington’s honesty, telling the truth—that he cut down the cherry tree. The issue is not whether George may have been hungry, put in harm’s way by a falling tree, or even why he had access to an axe. Subtly, society teaches that people can rise to the top by telling the truth, but putting children in harm’s way is of secondary importance.

Our educational system may also emphasize basic human selfishness, labeling theorists who advocate socially just societies as utopian and unrealistic. But numerous pockets of communities have believed in the value of sharing—kibbutzim, religious communities, and traditional indigenous communities, for instance. In addition, the mirroring of cultural values in schools and the media can teach children to give higher priority to having than to being, which the French existentialist Gabriel Marcel (1965) saw as a growing social problem. Indeed, only a handful of countries allow advertising on children’s programming, on grounds that it is unethical to persuade children to consume products of dubious value that fail to fulfill their promises and also lead to obesity and the onset of early diabetes.

The psychiatrist R. D. Laing’s (1962) notion of hypnotization to the lebenswelt (everyday life) may be relevant here. The helping and health professions come to accept such givens as private or government programs to help the poor, when they should be working to eliminate the poor who need help in the first place. Or they may accept managed care based on corporate models that easily make us dulled, if not blinded, to more amorphous struggles—for example, against an educational system not attuned to building a socially just world on the foundation of human rights. It is only too easy to stay within our comfort zones, making Hannah Arendt’s famous phrase “the banality of evil” chillingly true, and bleaker still for those in professions meant to help others.

Moving From the Mind to the Heart to the Body

Finally, to implement human rights principles, we need to make a journey from the mind, to the heart, to the body. Knowing these rights is no guarantee that we learn them, in the true sense of learning, which ought to lead us to reconsider fundamental assumptions of our lives and entail major experiential transformation (Colaizzi, 1978). Acquiring knowledge is infinitely inferior to developing a critical attitude (Freire, 2004); people must come to their own realization of the utility of a particular concept in their lives and the lives of others. It may be possible to teach clients that living well is the best revenge, but unless that concept is lived—dragged into the everyday life—it really has no meaning.
The same can be said for human rights principles. Learning that health care is a human right, then spitting this knowledge out on a multiple-choice exam is a questionable exercise. To create a society that takes such a right seriously and acknowledges its interdependence with other rights, however—that is something! Independent experts have been appointed by government leaders to develop human rights instruments from their collective wisdom, and our struggle is translating this knowledge into lived realities that will enhance the quality of life for everyone. Table 1.1 concisely summarizes these issues, with select corresponding questions they might pose.

Next, we examine some of these human rights in greater depth.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1.1</th>
<th>Preliminary Issues to Consider While Moving Toward the Creation of a Human Rights Culture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Issue</strong></td>
<td><strong>Select Question(s) Posed</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The importance of words: etymologies of <em>culture</em> as “tilling,” <em>instrument</em> as “tool,” and <em>education</em> as “leading out” and “strengthening”</td>
<td>How can human rights instruments effectively serve as groundbreaking tools to lead us out of the darkness of the cave?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information is power</td>
<td>Does a mere cognitive awareness of human rights lead us to a socially just world? How can such information be powerful, moving people in positive directions?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vulnerability of the human condition</td>
<td>How can people speak <em>with</em> rather than <em>at</em> or <em>to</em> others as partners in struggle and do so irrespective of class or other differences?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reluctance of governments and other powerful entities</td>
<td>Should energies be directed at or with governments, corporations, the media, the military, and/or international players such as the IMF and WTO? How can social activists engage collaboratively, rather than confrontationally, with power? Should one speak truth to power, or are the powerful already aware of truth?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Importance of socialization</td>
<td>How can the educational system and other socializing entities be responsive to issues pertaining to social justice? Does the educational system socialize children, adolescents, and adults into accepting selfishness and violence as a given? Is cooperation fundamental to the human condition?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Continued)
Five Core Notions of Human Rights

To better appreciate the rest of this work, readers may wish to at least skim the Universal Declaration and select portions of other human rights documents, in particular, CEDAW, CERD, and CRC (see earlier text), which can be found in the appendices. For the time being, please pay particular attention to Articles 22 through 30 of the Universal Declaration, which state, in part:

Everyone has the right to rest and leisure, including reasonable limitation of working hours. . . . (Article 24)

Everyone has the right to a standard of living adequate for the health and well-being of himself and his family, including food, clothing, housing, and medical care and necessary social services, and the right to security in the event of unemployment, sickness, disability, widowhood, old age or other lack of livelihood in circumstances beyond his control. . . . Motherhood and childhood are entitled to special care and assistance. All children, whether born in or out of wedlock, shall enjoy the same social protection. (Article 25)

Do these articles sound like the U.S. situation? Roughly 47 million people here lack health insurance, 3 million people are homeless, and 10 million working-age adults are unemployed. Not very socially just, is it? Perhaps the powerful idea of human rights might assist us in dealing with these and other issues.

In brief, then, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights consists of five core notions. I emphasize the word core, from the French le coeur, meaning “heart.” Let us never lose sight that our ultimate quest is a change of heart.

Human Dignity

The first notion is human dignity; Article 1 states in part that “all humans are born free and equal in dignity and rights.” This notion appears to emanate
from the Judeo-Christian-Islamic tradition, indicative of the preponderance of Western and a few Islamic nations involved in drafting the declaration. Genesis 1:27 states, “God created man in His image,” which according to Talmudic scholar Ben Azzai embodies the ultimate and supreme worth of the individual. Christians also accept the sanctity and dignity of the human person proclaimed in Genesis. Similarly, the holy Koran asserts in Sura, “Verily, we have honored every human being.” According to Muslim scholar Riffat Hassan (1982), the Koran upholds the sanctity and absolute value of human life.

Nondiscrimination

If all humans are worthy of dignity, we must have nondiscrimination, the second crucial notion. That is, to have rights, the only criterion is that a person is a human being. Consequently, one must act justly toward others “without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religions, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status,” as Article 2 asserts, in part. Although a person’s humanity is obvious, history is replete with attempts to reject it. The Supreme Court’s Dred Scott decision ruled that an African American man was “property.” The early European settlers in the Americas often debated whether the indigenous people were humans or animals (Zinn, 1990). To this day, the challenge of the helping and health professions is to view humans as human, not as interesting cases, diagnoses, clients, or research subjects, and to create a socially just world where people have rights, irrespective of any peripheral or superficial characteristic that may lead to discrimination.

Discrimination also occurs on the basis of such intangibles as distance and time. For example, the bombers in World War II dropped shells less discriminatorily when at higher altitudes. Thus, the less visible the results, the more justifiable the horrors of such actions may appear. Similarly, keeping one’s distance from others, and spending less time with them, may lead to forgetting their humanity, resulting in their objectification, if not oppression. Although many of us may use diagnostic terms to describe clients, such as having a personality disorder, we resent others referring to our own family members that way because we are physically closer to them and spend more time with them.

Civil and Political Rights

The third core notion is civil and political rights—that is, the liberty to pursue this quest for human dignity free from discrimination and the abuse of political authority. This right is outlined roughly in Articles 3 to 21, which state in part: “Everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and
religion” (Article 18), and “Everyone has the right to freedom of opinion and expression” (Article 19). Also called first-generation or negative rights, they essentially stress the need for government not to interfere with the basic human need to express oneself verbally or in writing or to practice one’s religion. They arose primarily in response to the abuse of tyrannical monarchs in the 17th and 18th centuries and resulted in documents such as the U.S. Declaration of Independence and the U.S. Constitution’s Bill of Rights. The major influences behind these documents were the rights expressed by Enlightenment theorists like John Locke to life, liberty, property, and freedom from arbitrary rule and by Thomas Jefferson to the pursuit of happiness.

Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights

The fourth crucial notion is economic, social, and cultural rights, which are second-generation or positive rights. This idea asserts that government provides for basic necessities to ensure an existence worthy of human dignity. Articles 22 through 27 delineate these rights, an example of which was stated earlier in Article 25. Such rights include, but are not limited to, food, health care, education, meaningful and gainful employment, special protections for mothers and children, security in old age, participation in a community’s cultural life, and rest and leisure. Economic and social rights arose predominantly in reaction to the abuses of industrialization that became increasingly evident in the 19th century, resulting in massive poverty amid affluence. The Soviet Constitution of 1936 exemplifies these rights. Theorists such as Gracchus Babeuf, Thomas Paine, and Karl Marx were influential in the development of positive rights. For example, in the Rights of Man, Thomas Paine advocates rather eloquently for the prevention of poverty so that

the hearts of the humane will not be shocked by rag[ged] and hungry children, and persons of seventy or eighty years of age, begging for bread. The dying poor will not be dragged from place to place to breath[e] their last. [And] widows will have maintenance for their children and not be carted away, on the deaths of their husbands, like culprits and criminals. (Fast, 1946, pp. 255-256)

Solidarity Rights

The last crucial notion of the Universal Declaration is solidarity rights in Articles 28 through 30. Although these rights are still in the process of conceptual elaboration, they are the result of the failure of domestic sovereignty, most notably during the final years of the 20th century, to deal with global issues such as pollution, war, development, self-determination, the oppression
of indigenous and other peoples, natural and man-made disasters, and the emergence of nationalism in Third World countries that is also concerned with global redistribution of power in international forums, economic prosperity, and other important values (Claude & Weston, 1992). These articles emphasize the fundamental human right to intergovernmental cooperation and the notion that for every right there are corresponding duties and limitations. Thus, international cooperation is necessary for global food distribution, but people also have the duty not to overconsume.

Although these solidarity rights are not explicitly stated in the Universal Declaration, its emphasis, for example, on the right "to a social and international order in which rights and freedoms set forth in the Declaration can be fully realized" (Article 28) sustains them. Some examples are rights to self-determination, cultural diversity, a clean environment, peace, development, international humanitarian disaster relief, international distributive justice and preservation of the common and cultural heritages of humanity, such as the seas, space, cultural and religious monuments, and heritages in general. In *Project for a Perpetual Peace*, the noted philosopher Immanuel Kant recognizes the hypocrisy of nations and asserts that moral actions must come from a profound sense of duty (Curtis, 1981), paving the way for including the idea of solidarity in human rights discussions. Although which human rights are more important is controversial, solidarity rights are generally less well known than the other sets of rights. They are, however, extremely significant; the right to peace, for example, is becoming increasingly abrogated, with expanding wars in the Middle East as of this writing and military spending at the dawn of this millennium reaching record levels (Renner, 2005). Furthermore, the average number of natural disasters in the world in the last 30 years has skyrocketed from approximately 200 in 1975 to 1,700 disasters in 2001 (Montanari, 2005), creating greater urgency not only to provide for victims of hurricanes, earthquakes, and tsunamis but to prevent the escalation of such disasters by reducing greenhouse emissions, educating others about adequate safety procedures, and developing adequate warning systems.

Roughly 20% of the global population controls 86% of the world’s gross product (Kivel, 2004), often through entities other than governments. Former President Jimmy Carter, in accepting the Nobel Peace Prize in 2002, articulated well the urgency of this problem:

*The most serious and universal problem [today] is the growing chasm between the richest and poorest people on earth. . . . The results of this disparity are root causes of most of the world’s unresolved problems, including starvation, illiteracy, environmental degradation, violent conflict, and unnecessary illnesses that range from Guinea worm to HIV/AIDS.* (Carter, 2002, pp. 18–19)
The Interdependence and Indivisibility of Rights

It is important to recognize that human rights are interdependent and indivisible. Hence, freedom of expression, religion, and access to information (civil and political rights) are of questionable value if people lack education, gainful employment, health care, food, and shelter (economic, social, and cultural rights) or live in a polluted environment and a world at war (solidarity rights). The right to food—meaning that it is available at a reasonable cost, nutritious, easily accessible, and culturally appropriate (Eide, 1987)—is also linked to global climate change, which tends to reduce food production by producing more droughts, desertification, and paradoxically excessive rainfall in some areas (Gore, 2006; Montanari, 2005).

Take another right—health care. Good quality health care is possible only if there are educated people to provide it, thus requiring a society committed to the right to education. Also needed is a just social order to pay for it, perhaps through progressive taxation. Simply stated, each person must pay her or his share for the “general welfare,” an often neglected phrase in the Preamble to the U.S. Constitution. Meaningful (i.e., socially useful) and gainful (i.e., reasonably paid) employment would also be necessary to help alleviate the social and economic strains of raising a family that could result in domestic violence (Gil, 1992). Children often experience the residual effects of the low wages of their parents, who are under constant pressure to provide for their families and still have security in their old age—another human right. Children might be hard pressed to learn in school or even take part in the business of childhood (i.e., play) because they are worrying about family problems. Such problems could be alleviated by better social protections, many of which are covered in the Universal Declaration.

When we speak of one human right, therefore, we must find ways to integrate others. The United States has argued, however, for the priority of civil and political rights. This attitude is perhaps best exemplified by former U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations Morris B. Abram, who wrote in part that “development is not a right. . . . [and] little more than a dangerous incitement because it implies that fundamental freedoms cannot be fully realized until all people enjoy the right to development” (Abram, 1991, p. 1). Part of our challenge, therefore, is to create an open dialogue on the importance of developing a just social and international order, which would have implications for all human rights.

Before viewing these notions, as summarized in Table 1.2, it may also be necessary to acknowledge that these notions roughly correspond to those expressed in President Franklin Roosevelt’s (1941) Four Freedoms speech:
Introduction

In the future days, which we seek to make secure, we look forward to a world founded upon four essential human freedoms. [Human dignity and nondiscrimination are implicit.]

The first is the freedom of speech and expression everywhere in the world [negative freedom].

The second is the freedom of every person to worship God in his own way everywhere in the world [negative freedom].

The third is the freedom from want, which translated into world terms, means economic understandings, which will secure to every nation a healthy peacetime life for its inhabitants everywhere in the world [positive freedom].

The fourth is freedom from fear—which, translated into world terms, means a world-wide reduction of armaments to such a point and in such a thorough fashion that no nation will be in a position to commit an act of physical aggression against any neighbor—anywhere in the world [solidarity right].

Norman Rockwell immortalized these words in his *Four Freedoms* paintings reprinted on page 22 with permission.

The challenge, then, is to provide all human rights for all people—for "every person, everywhere" as proclaimed on a banner over Amherst Common in Massachusetts during Human Rights week, the week of December 10, when the General Assembly signed the Universal Declaration. The banner also urged the public to take part in the annual reading of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights followed by a candlelight vigil, a macro social action strategy to move toward the creation of a human rights culture.

Finally, let it be said that the case of *Filartiga v. Pena-Irala* (1980), which ruled in a U.S. federal court against a torturer for an act committed in Paraguay, was a major breakthrough. Justices Feinberg, Kaufman, and Kearse of the Second Circuit ruled that official torture is now prohibited by the law of nations. This prohibition is clear and unambiguous and admits no distinction between treatment of aliens and citizens. . . . This prohibition has become part of customary international law, as evidenced and defined by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. [italics added] (630 F.2d 884–885)

In brief, Mr. Pena-Irala, the alleged torturer and police officer, had tried to settle in Brooklyn, New York, as an illegal alien, while Dr. Joel Filartiga was living in Los Angeles. On learning of Pena-Irala’s whereabouts, Filartiga
Figure 1.2  Norman Rockwell’s *Four Freedoms* Paintings (clockwise from the upper left): “Freedom From Fear,” “Freedom From Want,” Freedom of Worship,” and “Freedom of Speech”. These corresponded to Roosevelt’s Four Freedoms, which became substantive principles in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

*Source:* Printed by permission of the Norman Rockwell Family Agency. Copyright © 1943 the Norman Rockwell Family Entities.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Articles of the Universal Declaration</th>
<th>Crucial Notion</th>
<th>Examples</th>
<th>Philosphic-Historical Legacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Article 1</td>
<td>Human dignity</td>
<td>Equality, freedom, the duty to act in a spirit of brotherhood and sisterhood</td>
<td>Judaic-Christian-Islamic tradition; the U.S. Declaration of Independence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Article 2</td>
<td>Nondiscrimination</td>
<td>Based on race, color, sex, language, religion, political opinion, national or social origin, property, birth, or other status</td>
<td>Judaic-Christian-Islamic tradition; the U.S. Declaration of Independence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articles 3–21</td>
<td>Civil and political (or first-generation or negative) rights</td>
<td>Freedoms of thought, religion, expression in oral and written form; access to information; rights to privacy and a fair and public hearing</td>
<td>The U.S. Constitution's Bill of Rights; Roosevelt's Four Freedoms speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articles 22–27</td>
<td>Economic, social, and cultural (or second-generation or positive) rights</td>
<td>Rights to meaningful and gainful employment, rest and leisure, health care, food, housing, education, participation in the cultural life of the community; special care and assistance for motherhood and childhood</td>
<td>The Soviet Constitution of 1923; Roosevelt’s Four Freedoms speech</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Articles 28–30</td>
<td>Solidarity (or third-generation) rights</td>
<td>Rights to a just social and international order, self-determination, peace, preservation of the common and cultural heritages of humanity, development, humanitarian disaster relief, and international distributive justice</td>
<td>The failure of domestic sovereignty, a reawakening of Third World nationalism, and increasing global maldistributions of wealth; Roosevelt’s Four Freedoms speech</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*The Universal Declaration is increasingly referred to as customary international law, by which all countries must abide. All rights are interdependent and indivisible.

**Solidarity rights are still in the process of conceptual elaboration and get their sustenance from Articles 28 to 30, which emphasize the right to a just social and international order and that rights have corresponding duties and limitations.
brought him to a U.S. court for the torture and death of his son, Joelita, then 17 years old and held in prison in Pena-Irala’s custody. The federal court ruled against Pena-Irala. Although he left the United States before damages, ranging in the millions, were collected, this case is very symbolic. The Universal Declaration thus, as customary international law, means that all nations must abide by its principles. What has become known as the Filartiga Principle has never been overturned. An impressive body of law has evolved from that decision, with the hope that not only torture but other human rights—such as health care, security in old age, and special protections for motherhood and children—will, with support of a growing public consensus, become legally mandated (Wronka, 1998a, 1998b, 2004).

The conclusion must be “Human rights for every person, everywhere.” Socialized to think global social justice is merely a utopian ideal, our initial reaction might be that it is impossible. But who would have thought that with the invention of gunpowder, submarines, jets, and rockets would someday have the firepower they now have—as much as all the munitions released in World War II? Presently, the entire human race can literally be destroyed in a matter of days, if that long. If nightmares can become reality, why not dreams of social justice? There is no reason humanity cannot share visions of peace at the table of brotherhood and sisterhood, becoming a truly Beloved Community, as often proclaimed by the late Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.

Social Justice as Struggle

Human rights documents, then, are tools that can help create a human rights culture, which is a lived awareness of human rights principles from the global to local levels. Ultimately, social policies, administrative decision making, and other practice interventions ought to reflect essential human rights principles such as human dignity and nondiscrimination. As stated earlier, however, to correctly till the land to create a socially just world, metaphorically, the soil must be free from insecticides, pollutants, and artificial fertilizers to produce an abundant crop—that is, a socially just world. It is very easy, however, to distort this idea of human rights, to pollute it, without awareness of certain provisos or warnings. To say that rhetoric about human rights, as well as free trade and democracy, has taken over the world is an understatement! One hears, for example, of Saddam Hussein’s wanton killing of the Kurds, a worthy concern certainly. But rarely does one hear about domestic human rights violations, such as children living in extreme poverty. Before discussing these provisos more fully, we need to regard social justice as struggle, with a brief consideration of Albert Camus’ portrayal of the mythical character Sisyphus.7
Sisyphus as the Prototypical Human Rights Defender

Myths, which tell stories and speak of struggles since the beginning of time, can serve as models for social action. Carl Jung uses the Odysseus myth to illustrate the struggles of the consciousness against the powerful and often sinister forces of the animus and anima, represented by the beautiful call of the Sirens and the monsters Scylla and Charybdis (Hannah, 1981). More specifically, Paul Ricoeur (1967) calls those myths “traditional narration[s] . . . which can provide grounds for . . . [a]ll the forms of action and thought by which man understands himself and his world” (p. 5). Sisyphus was condemned by the gods to push a rock up a hill, never quite reaching the top before it rolled back down, whereupon he resumed his endless struggle. Camus (1991) states that because of a “certain levity in regard to the gods,” Sisyphus had gone so far as to trick Death by putting “death in chains,” causing Death to cease on Earth for some time. Pluto had to dispatch the god of war, to liberate Death from the conqueror’s hands (p. 119). After being granted permission to leave the underworld to chas-tise his wife for betrayal, followed by an overly prolonged stay on Earth, the gods later had to issue a decree for his return to the underworld, where his rock was ready for him.

But Homer describes Sisyphus as the “wisest and most prudent of mortals.” Indeed, Camus calls Sisyphus

the absurd hero . . . [a]s much through his passions as through his torture. His scorn of the gods, his hatred of death, and his passion for life won him that unspeakable penalty in which the whole being is exerted toward accomplishing nothing. This is the price that must be paid for the passions of this earth. (p. 120)

Camus reminds us, too, of Oedipus’s final cry that “the nobility of my soul, makes me conclude that all is well.” He ends by telling us that

Sisyphus’s silent joy is contained therein. . . . [He] teaches the higher fidelity that negates the gods and raises rocks. He too, concludes that all is well. . . . The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man’s [and woman’s] heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy. (p. 123)

Myths exist so the imagination can run with them, giving them continuing significance. Sisyphus, indeed, teaches us that, despite the possibility that the gods or the powers that be will rebuke or punish us for our passions, there is joy in struggle. Or as Norman O. Brown, a countercultural leader of the 1960s, used to say, “In hilaritas tristia; in trisita hilaritatis” (Lectures on Giambattista Vico, Duquesne University, 1973). Translated literally, this
means, “In happiness, there is sadness; in sadness, there is happiness.” This is the paradox of joy in struggle. Ultimately, we may even have to grapple with the possibility that the gods will unleash death on us in our quest for social justice, as happened to Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, Jr., Mahatma Gandhi, Crazy Horse, and the lesser known Olympe de Gouges, whose courage in writing a Declaration on the Rights of Women led to her execution by guillotine on November 6, 1793.

Also, our struggle is ultimately ambiguous. As Sisyphus never quite reached the top with his rock, we may never have complete certitude that the quest is the right and only one. Yet despite the ambiguities, we must be consoled that, like Sisyphus, “the absurd” person must in “silent joy” be “still on the go. The rock is still rolling” (Camus, 1991, p. 123).

Chapter 3 discusses this struggle in more depth. Briefly, if initiatives focus one’s energies on engaging in social action and service for whole populations, they will always be problematic. Thus, if a person engages in a macro, or primary, intervention—for instance, implementing a right to adequate shelter as an amendment to the U.S. Constitution—many people would still be homeless and in need of adequate shelter. On the other hand, engaging in a secondary intervention, such as writing a grant proposal for a homeless shelter, then opening such a shelter or perhaps a soup kitchen, would leave undone development of strategies such as a constitutional amendment that might have longer-lasting effects. In other words, human rights defenders and social justice advocates will never quite reach the pinnacle of success. Their efforts, like the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, will never be perfect and always open to criticism. But the struggle itself should be enough to fill one’s heart.

Thus, those wishing to create a socially just world, built on a foundation of human rights, can obviously be described as absurd heroes or heroines—absurd in that their work, often riddled with ambiguity, is neither completely nor precisely done. But Sisyphus is also wise and prudent. He has learned wisdom from his efforts and found joy in them. Maybe more important, however, Sisyphus has a higher sense of fidelity, transcending even the gods. Indeed, the helping and health professions call for the highest fidelity (plausibly from the Latin fido, meaning “faith”) to the healing powers of clients and patients themselves so that they too might put “death in chains” and find joy in doing so.

Some Initial Provisos for the Human Rights Defender

For a socially just world, local and global, to flower in a soil rich in human rights, our grounding must be free from the rhetoric, if not falsehoods, surrounding human rights discourse. War, for example, is bad . . . very bad.
But isn’t invasion often presented as the only way to help another country’s people advance their human rights? True, there are evil people in the world who must be stopped. But surely, there are more creative ways to provide for the human rights of others than killing people, a most obvious human rights violation.

These provisos, caveats, and warnings can also emphatically demonstrate that human rights work is not as perfect or cut-and-dried as it might seem. It is easy, for instance, to equate human rights work with concrete actions, such as eliminating the death penalty or the abuse or torture of prisoners. But protecting human rights ultimately means implementing the entirety of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This calls for a vision of a socially just world, to wrestle with the numerous uncertainties and intangibles, the structural forces, “an unjust social and international order” (Article 28), that result in violations of human rights. These caveats also show that those in power might abuse this powerful idea of human rights, and it is therefore necessary to demand a reckoning. True, activists, like Sisyphus, may suffer for such insolence toward the powerful. To suffer is a person’s individual choice, a decision arrived at in one’s meditative life. It is also important to acknowledge the wisdom of Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. that unearned suffering can be redemptive.

The Doctrine of Humanitarian Intervention

The first proviso is that governments have often used human rights as a justification to invade other countries, a doctrine known as humanitarian intervention, which has recently been discredited (Boyle, 2004). There may be much truth to the mistreatment of Germans in the Polish Corridor or the genocide against the Kurds by Saddam Hussein, but one can easily argue that the invasions of Poland in World War II or, more recently, of Iraq had hidden agendas. The situations were different, but world domination or control of Iraq’s plentiful natural resources (such as oil) may have played more important roles than humanitarian concerns. Indeed, the U.S.’ policy model, as of this writing, is gradually taking over Iraq, with increasing reports of managed care in the hospitals, high tuition fees in universities, and increasing use of private transportation. Previously, health care and higher education were universal entitlements paid for by taxes rather than privately financed as in the United States. Certainly, the grotesque activities of a dictator need to be dealt with. Yet it’s important to keep in mind that the model of health care and education in Iraq before the invasion and in Europe more closely approximates the principles of the Universal Declaration.

Also, why was female genital mutilation so much in the public eye only during the U.S. invasion of Somalia, a strategically located country? Violence
is antithetical to human rights principles. Only nonviolent actions can have a lasting effect, as evidenced by King John’s signing of the Magna Carta with the Barons of Runnymede. Our model ought to be Gandhi, who said, “Nonviolence is the first article of my faith. It is also the last article of my creed” (cited in Partington, 1992, p. 297). One must be cautious. Wholehearted opposition to the abuses of the Kurds is important, but the question is whether violence can effectively remedy such human rights violations, especially in the form of contemporary war, in which roughly 90% of casualties are civilians.

The Hypocrisy of Governments

A second caution emanates from the first. Put bluntly, one must always be alert to the hypocrisy of governments (or other powerful entities, as previously discussed) as the major driving force in the human rights arena, rather than true humanitarian concern. As the famed community organizer Saul Alinsky was fond of saying, he wanted the establishment to sit on “their own petard” (Alinsky, 1989, p. 152). The word petard in the French means “firecracker.” In other words, if policy makers want to make a noise, they must listen to the roar of their own words. If the powerful talk about human rights in foreign countries, as they often do in political discourse, then they must also make a noise about their own country’s human rights violations. President Bush has said, for instance, that “human rights are non-negotiable.” It is important to remember Eleanor Roosevelt’s response to Eric Sevareid’s question, “Would you say then that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is dangerous to governments?” She replied: “Yes . . . oh, yes” (cited in Wronka, 1998, p. 89).

Profit, narrowly defined as immediate monetary gain rather than the fulfillment of human need vis-à-vis human rights principles, may also underlie human rights arguments. Thus, free speech arguments can be pretexts for violence in the media or advertising on children’s television. Freedom of speech, though a human rights value, is questionable if it means continually exposing people to violence in the media. It is only too easy to model behavior on violent heroes, and now heroines, in video games and other media, dulling people’s senses to the horrors of war. Pointing out such hypocrisies ought to be part of the work of human rights defenders.

The Sanitization of Oppression

Third, the human condition is such that we constantly seek meaning, trying to make sense of the world, especially in the face of uncertainties,
horrors, and a human-initiated hastening of death. Thus, it is important to be on the lookout for the sanitization of oppression. In our quest for meaning, it is easy to think we understand something by naming, or categorizing it. Such reasoning, however, may convince one of “knowing” something when the category itself may be merely a euphemism-masking oppression. The helping and health professions are replete with diagnostic categories or other forms of classification, such as intelligence quotients, scores on achievement tests, or axes of understanding. It is easy to engage in what Lifton (2000) calls the human propensity to call a cabbage a rose or a rat a rabbit. Despite the best of intentions, cataloging people based on color, class, culture, or gender may create a self-fulfilling prophecy (Zola, 1983). Labeling someone with a personality disorder (e.g., schizophrenic, paranoid, oppositional-defiant) may actually be a veiled insult.

Human rights is certainly a worthwhile value in helping people. Yet it is important to constantly be on the lookout for use of flowery or technical language that masks oppression. Is the world, despite our increasing discourse about human rights, democracy, and global free trade, a better place now than prior to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights? The gap between the world’s richest and poorest is growing each day, yet we often hear of the need to “fight for democracy” to implement human rights for all. Furthermore, roughly 2.5 billion people in the world live on less than $2 per day, constituting 40% of the world population, making each day a struggle merely to survive. In the middle of the 20th century, the ratio of the gross domestic product of the 20 richest countries was roughly 18 times that of the poorer countries. At the turn of the current millennium, this ratio has more than doubled to 37 times, a situation evoking the image of a champagne glass with a large concentration of income at the top and a thin stem at the bottom. In fact, the ratio of income of the poorest to the richest people in the world as a whole is 1 to 103 (UN Development Program, 2005).

Is a world wrought by free trade and human rights a democratic world? Looking at the United States, Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis said it well: “We can either have democracy in this country or we can have great wealth concentrated in the hands of the few, but we cannot have both” (cited in Danaher, 1996, p. 36). Yet in the United States, “1% of the population controls 47% of the net financial wealth” (Kivel, 2004, p. 19). Are these instances of class and global apartheid?

The point is that to truly take human rights seriously in the quest for social justice, the gauge must be the fulfillment of human need and human development. The human need to be treated with dignity is always apparent,
and treatment modalities of the helping and health professions ought to be consistent with a need so fundamental to the human condition. Yes, knowledge of human needs is imperfect. Yet one can easily argue that people have biological needs for food and clean water; social-psychological needs for affiliation, care, and love; productive-creative needs for meaningful participation in the community; security needs for trust; self-actualization needs to develop to one's potential; and spiritual needs for human dignity and an existence with meaning and coherence (Gil, 1998). If such needs are fulfilled, social justice is achieved. Veiled insults and euphemisms will not fulfill human need. However, used as a guide to fulfill human need, human rights ought to undo the burdens of oppression that surround us, whether in the form of expert-oriented (Katz, 1982; Wronka, 1993), hierarchical helping and health professions or the pretext of human rights to engage in "free" trade that actually masks oppression, as global data indicate.

Narrow Definitions of Human Rights

Fourth, it is very easy to define human rights in narrow terms. The human rights movement owes a lot to the painstaking work of groups such as Amnesty International. Its initial case-by-case approach and adoption of political prisoners has led to growing public awareness of the importance of human rights as a force for social change. Such an approach brought to light the human rights abuses in the former Soviet Union, and the eventual destruction of the Gulag. A case-by-case approach has its merits, but some integration of cases is still needed to reveal how they are inextricably linked to other violations of human rights and a socially just domestic and international order. Similarly, in addition to concern for imprisonment for religious practices, allegations of torture, and implementation of the death penalty, these concerns must also be integrated with social order issues such as structural violence and questionable economic and social arrangements.

The point is that some groups and the media often define human rights in rather narrow terms, focusing on the prolonged detainment and allegations of torture of prisoners of war in Guantanamo Bay, for example. Certainly cruel and unusual punishment violates fundamental human rights standards. It is important to treat all humans with justice, tempered with mercy. But if peace were considered a human right and war eliminated, there would be no prisoners in Guantanamo in the first place. Another case in point is apartheid in South Africa; although legally forbidden, de facto (i.e., in fact), the practice continues. The question becomes, why are activists more concerned about South Africa than about high infant mortality rates in Burkina Faso,
where one in five children dies before the age of 1? Is this because South Africa has a sizeable white population and human rights work in general has a “Eurocentric bias” (Steiner & Alston, 2000)? These questions are not simple to answer. Perhaps the point to keep in mind is that, like Sisyphus, who found joy in struggle and ambiguity, we may never to reach the heights of perfection. People can, however, share the struggle and the happiness of reflecting together on such issues (Merleau-Ponty, 1964).

Demonization of the Other

Fifth, one must be on guard to avoid demonizing the Other. Rights talk can easily become a means of taking cheap shots at one’s “enemy.” This was perhaps more apparent during the Cold War between the United States and the Soviet Union in the 1980s. Reports of the imprisonment of political prisoners and the misuse of psychiatric medications in Soviet hospitals flooded the American media. Similarly, the communist press was inundated with images of homelessness, unemployment, and Ku Klux Klan gatherings and stories of the long strand of broken promises and treaties with the U.S. government. It is doubtful that Tiananmen Square would have been in the media if China were not a communist country. Today, we often hear about the denial of the women’s right to vote in Muslim countries.

The challenge, however, is to find a way to use “humility not arrogance”—the words of former President Bill Clinton, inscribed on the walls of the Holocaust Museum in Washington, DC—to provide human rights for all. The enemy must be demystified, so to speak, and we must engage in constructive dialogue in ways that also acknowledge human rights violations in our own country. So talk of forbidding women the right to vote in a Muslim country ought to be balanced by acknowledgment of a paucity of women legislators in the United States, fewer than in certain Muslim countries. The challenge is to somehow extricate oneself from parochial viewpoints, engage in constructive dialogue with different cultures, and recognize a shared humanity rather than to engage in spurious finger pointing. Jane Addams, sometimes referred to as the mother of social work, a peace and social justice advocate, proponent of an ethic of reciprocity and world citizenship, and first president of the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF), is an excellent example of someone who refused to give into evil images and stereotypes of even those government officials and corporate heads in power. She listened unceasingly to the oppressor and the oppressed, confident in the importance of listening to all views, however unfavorable. Ultimately, her efforts were successful, as evidenced by the famed Settlement Houses she established and her excellent work as Sanitation Commissioner
for Chicago. She is shown in Figure 1.3 with Eleanor Roosevelt and Elinor Morgenthau, both devotees of Addams’s work.

Human Rights Documents as Human Creations

Sixth, let us always be aware that human rights documents are human creations themselves. Independent experts appointed by governments to comment on human rights reports (discussed in Chapter 3) may have privileged situations in the system and lead lives divorced from struggle. That is

Figure 1.3  Eleanor Roosevelt (center), Chairperson of the Drafting Committee of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, with Jane Addams (right), Sometimes Called the Mother of Social Work, and Elinor Morgenthau (left), Teacher and Director of Plays at the Henry Street Settlement House in NYC, at Westport, Connecticut, 1929. They refused to demonize others and recognized the importance of creative dialogue and social action to eradicate social injustice.

Source: The National Archives.
Introduction

not always the case, and a privileged life certainly does not always translate into lack of concern for the underdog. And many underdogs, after attaining better positions, wave good-bye to their neighborhood cronies. The challenge, therefore, is always to include public participation in the actual formulation and implementation of human rights documents. These documents are by no means perfect, and the voices of the marginalized are needed to construct and implement human rights principles. Eleanor Roosevelt admitted the Universal Declaration was

not a perfect document ... Being, as it must be, a composite document to meet the thoughts of so many different peoples, there must be a considerable number of compromises. On the whole, however, it is a good document. We could never hope for perfection no matter how many times we revised the Declaration, for one could always see something a little better that one might do. (UN Department of Public Information, 1950, pp. 15–16)

The Universal Declaration, for example, did not mention the rights of people with disabilities or gays, lesbians, bisexuals, transsexuals, or the intersexed (the 1 in 2,000 infants born with ambiguous genitalia). Interpretations of human rights evolve, as do human rights documents. Human rights is not the silver bullet to slay the werewolf of an ugly social order preying on the human family; it will not wholly transform the world into a society more amicable to human development. Something about the human species continually searches for the silver bullet, the quick fix.

There is no quick fix, but the human rights concept is a powerful tool. But who knows? Maybe in the next century (or even tomorrow, next month, or next year) another idea will come along that is as powerful as, or even more powerful than, human rights or social justice. Maybe visitors from another galaxy, travelling perhaps 1 million light-years, will land on Earth, and the Earth will join forces with these beings to thwart the growth and development of the human species. Perhaps the rallying cry will be “Planetary species rights!” In the latter part of the last century, the movement was from civil to human rights, as Malcolm X eloquently stated, in the context of the African American experience:

The problem of the Afro-American ... should be taken out of the national context into the international arena. ... It is a world problem. ... Instead of calling it a civil rights struggle ... look at it as a struggle for human rights [italics added] ... and use the United Nations’ avenues, its Human Rights Commission ... [as] more of a chance of getting meaningful results ... and the moral support of the world. (Sterling Entertainment Group, 1992)

Martin Luther King, Jr. echoed this sentiment when he said, “I think it is necessary to realize that we have moved from the era of civil rights to the era
of human rights" (cited in Cho, Crooms, Dorow, Huff, Scott, & Thomas, 2006, p. 4). For the time being at least, the debate must ultimately be about human rights for all.

Cultural Relativism as Possible Pretext

Humans obviously are embedded in cultures, which at times are themselves inimical to fundamental human rights principles. There should be no discrimination based on culture, ethnicity, or religion. Yet, some cultural practices purposefully inflict pain—foot-binding in traditional China; sati, the tradition of a woman throwing herself on her husband’s funeral pyre; devdase, the tradition of a woman being sacrificed to the gods; or female genital mutilation—failing to meet the “just requirements of morality, public order and the general welfare in a democratic society,” as enunciated in Article 29 of the Universal Declaration. But we must question such cultural practices with humility, for a culture condemning female genital mutilation in another culture may promote anorexia nervosa among its young women, not to mention an arms buildup that could result in the massacre of millions of innocents. Only with humility and through open discussion and debate with groups most affected by such practices can we have any meaningful and creative dialogue.

Table 1.3 summarizes the seven provisos discussed in this chapter.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Caveat</th>
<th>Explanation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The doctrine of humanitarian intervention</td>
<td>Preemptive invasion of another country for ostensible human rights abuses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The hypocrisy of governments</td>
<td>The failure of one government to acknowledge human rights abuses in its own country while lambasting another for violations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The sanitization of oppression</td>
<td>The giving of a category or diagnosis based more on class, religion, political opinion, or administrative expediency than on illness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Narrow definitions of human rights</td>
<td>The refusal to view one right within the entire context of other human rights principles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonization of the other</td>
<td>The need to extricate oneself from parochial viewpoints and spurious fingerpointing, refusing to give in to stereotypes and evil images, acknowledging a shared humanity of both oppressor and oppressed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Caveat</td>
<td>Explanation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human rights documents</td>
<td>The need to see human rights documents as reflecting the context of the time— limited at times but with tremendous potential for personality transformation from the individual to the national to the global community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cultural relativism as possible pretext</td>
<td>The need to engage with humility and creative dialogue with cultures whose practices appear inimical to human rights standards</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*These provisions are testimony to the fact that the work of activists will always be fraught with numerous difficulties and ambiguities. However, realizing that social justice is a struggle, which may cause rebuke from the powers that be, human rights defenders must decide to take them on in a joyful spirit, like the mythical character Sisyphus, as popularized by Albert Camus.*

## Summary

The purpose of this book is to examine how the social construct *human rights* can serve as a foundation for a socially just world. These rights, legal mandates to fulfill human need, are interdependent and indivisible. The book’s rationale is that today, no government would dare say it is against human rights, an almost complete turnaround from the conclusion of the Conference of Evian (1938). Although late in coming, given the experience of Indigenous Peoples and African Americans, to mention just a couple of human rights violations, it was called in response to the atrocities of the Third Reich, but it concluded that no country had a right to interfere with another country’s domestic affairs. Out of the ruins of World War II was born the United Nations and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the authoritative definition of human rights standards, signed by the General Assembly with no dissent on December 10, 1948. The Universal Declaration contains five crucial notions: (a) the right to human dignity; (b) the right to be free from discrimination; (c) civil and political rights; (d) economic, social, and cultural rights; and (e) solidarity rights.

This idea of human rights has become so powerful that the helping and health professions have acknowledged, in various ways, the importance of incorporating human rights into their curriculum and practice. Ultimately, the aim is to create what is called a “human rights culture,” a lived awareness of human rights principles, so that every person, everywhere can have his or her needs met and be treated with dignity, fundamental to social justice. Such a culture can exist, not only globally but also at the local level, even in our communities, schools, places of employment, and everyday interactions. As activists work toward implementing human rights principles, it would help to
reflect on certain ideas—for one, that the journey from the mind to the heart is a long one. Human rights instruments can serve as tools to “till the soil” and create a foundation from which human needs can flourish.

Mindful of the joy in struggle, as in the myth of Sisyphus, it is important to understand that, just as the Universal Declaration is not a perfect document, neither are social actions perfect. We need a broad vision, because numerous ambiguities will emerge as we work toward social justice. One needs to work on a case-by-case basis; but also to change unjust social order. Keeping our eyes on the prize—that is, the creation of a human rights culture—will also necessitate keeping our eyes on the lies. We must be constantly vigilant to a number of provisos and caveats—pretexts by the powerful for humanitarian intervention, government hypocrisy, use of violence to advance human rights, the sanitization of oppression, narrowly defined human rights, the demonization of the Other, certain cultural practices—and aware that human rights documents, as creations themselves, are constantly evolving.

Ultimately, the question to ask is not necessarily “Wouldn’t the world be a better place if everyone had a good job, health care, and security in old age?” Rather, such questions would be more powerful couched in human rights terms. Employment, medical care, and security in old age are undeniably human rights that would help us create persuasive arguments to fulfill human needs and enhance human development. It is important to never lose sight of the power of this idea of human rights. Recall Malcolm X’s statement that the struggle is no longer about civil rights, but human rights (Sterling Entertainment Documentary, 1992).

Because human rights discussions cannot take place in a historical-philosophical vacuum, we now need to present a history of the human rights idea, culminating in the endorsement of the Universal Declaration, a historical-philosophical compromise. Following this discussion, the book elaborates some essential themes from major human rights instruments issued after the Universal Declaration. For the sake of expediency, the appendices summarize in tabular form the themes of the human rights documents discussed in this book. This scaffolding of rights ought to give helping and health professionals a solid sense of human rights principles that can provide a basis for social justice, and corresponding social action and service initiatives.

Questions for Discussion

1. A major theme of this book is the interdependence and indivisibility of human rights. Are time limits or other restrictions for welfare benefits in the government-sponsored welfare program, Temporary Aid to Needy Families
(TANF), and the emphasis of the presidential initiative, the No Child Left Behind Act, on standardized testing consistent with the principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights? Why or why not? What other policies are consistent and/or inconsistent with human rights principles as discussed so far? Comment on the following statements: (a) Human rights is fashionable. Wherever one goes one hears about human rights. But nothing gets done. It is time to move on. (b) It would be great if human rights were fashionable. Then we would truly have health care for all, meaningful jobs at living wages, security in old age, and no child living in poverty.

2. Does the doctrine of humanitarian intervention represent noble principles, or is it actually an excuse to invade another country for hidden agenda? In war, does one side “demonize” the other, or does each feel that it is fighting for a just cause, the furthering of human rights principles? If the former, how can relations be improved so that there is openness, dialogue, and resolution of conflict? Can the same principles be used for groups that demonize each other, such as the Left demonizing the Right and vice versa? Do you feel that the helping and health professions to some extent demonize one another or do they act out of true humanitarian concern? In public discourse, for example, one hears of psychiatry, lambasting the American Psychological Association for its endorsement of interrogation techniques at Guantanamo, noting that the U.S. military is the largest employer of psychologists. Psychology also appears to have expressed concern of the overmedicating of our children by psychiatry. Furthermore, one is more prone to hear about the former, as the pharmaceutical industry is the most profitable sector since World War II, arguably having more control over the shaping of public opinion. And where do social work and nursing, more female-dominated professions, fit into this scenario of caricature? What do you see as the greatest obstacles to implementing human rights principles? How would you overcome them?

3. Have you ever received a diagnosis? How was it helpful? Was it unhelpful in any way? Did it contribute to your understanding? Is the story of the fairy tale character Rumpelstiltskin relevant in any way? (When named, he tore himself up.)

4. Abraham Lincoln, author of the “Emancipation Proclamation”, often emphasized the importance of being a sincere friend in one’s writing, speech, and actions. This is not different from the etymological meanings of “social justice” (as described in the Preface) as equitable treatment among friends. Think of those who were sincere friends to you; now think of your words and actions as a sincere friend to others. What are some similar themes?
How can you translate this spirit of friendship so that it has meaning in your everyday life and community?

5. Does your profession adequately integrate human rights standards in its curriculum and in practice situations in the field? Has your profession ever engaged in the “sanitization of oppression”? Give some concrete examples.

6. If only chosen values endure, what nonviolent and noncoercive strategies might be most effective for realizing human rights principles by having a human rights culture, moving from the mind to heart to the body, that is, dragging its principles into one’s everyday life and becoming part of the collective consciousness of the community? Or do you feel it is not necessary to strategize anything, that things should just happen? Or do you feel it is necessary to have such a culture in the first place?

7. How should one respond to a dignitary who says that the Universal Declaration of Human Rights is like a “letter to Santa Claus,” as did our former ambassador to the United Nations, Jeanne Kirkpatrick? Does it represent nothing but “airy” and “utopian” ideals, hardly realizable in a world so full of war and strife? Or are its principles realizable for every person, everywhere?

8. How would the Universal Declaration look if it were drafted today? Would it include additional categories of discrimination? What other rights might it also assert? Where would the notion of duties and limitations of rights fit in? Comment on the following scenario: Sarah recently read the Universal Declaration and now feels energized to confront discrimination in all its forms as enunciated in Article 2. But not only does she want world peace, she desires, as Gandhi says, to “be change you want to see in the world.” She then goes to an Internet dating site and enters various criteria for a partner in regard to age, race, income, health, height, body weight, and so on. She oscillates between feeling guilty for her perceived hypocrisy and thinking that dating is just another thing. After scouring the personals, half jokingly, yet half serious, she asks her friends to help organize a convention of good-looking, financially secure, emotionally stable men. (Of course, Sarah could be Tom, and the convention needn’t be the opposite sex.)

9. Describe a situation in which someone helped you—really helped you. What happened exactly? Now describe a situation in which someone thought he or she was helping you, but the intervention actually hurt you in some way. What happened exactly? Did that person act like he or she knew what was best for you? Did you feel demeaned—for instance, like a “poor weak” person in need of “help”? What can be learned from these experiences for the helping and health professions? Now describe a situation in which you felt
someone treated you with dignity. Then describe a situation in which you treated someone with dignity. Now think of a situation in which someone treated you in an undignified way and one in which you treated someone without dignity. Is it easier to think of situations in which you were treated with dignity or no dignity? What does this show about our culture? What can be done about it?

10. This book argues that human rights is the cornerstone—the bedrock, if you will—of social justice and that human rights ought to be discussed in relation to other guiding principles of major spiritual and religious belief systems, humanistic manifestos, and indigenous teachings. What other guiding principles have you found helpful in your everyday life that you feel can help in creating a socially just world? How do you think these principles are similar and/or different from human rights principles you’ve learned so far? Try to keep those principles in mind while reading the rest of this book and continue to compare human rights with the values you have learned to cherish throughout your life.

Activities/Actions

1. Organize a reading of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on December 10, Human Rights Day. Try to be where and when many people are around, such as downtowns and parks during lunchtime or soon after work. Afterward, just stand around, have a candlelight vigil, and ask if anyone would like to say something . . . anything. Stand and stand and stand. For many conducting this action, it will be very cold outside. Standing there itself may be a sign of commitment to stand up for human rights. Be ready to speak with the media with a prepared statement or extemporaneously about the Universal Declaration as customary international law, a document drafted under the leadership of an American, or a document that needs to be incorporated into U.S. law.

2. Scour the newspapers looking for articles that deal with a human rights situation in another country. Write a letter to the editor commending her or him for raising public awareness about that particular human rights issue. But integrate the idea that there are also human rights issues in the United States, such as millions lacking access to health care, adequate shelter, and security in old age. If you are brave, bring up peace as a human right, suggesting that the world’s largest arms supplier is violating this right.

3. If you are from the Left, believing in government responsibility to provide for human need, go to a meeting of people on the Right, who believe in
privatization of social programs. Show them the Universal Declaration and tell them that an American, Eleanor Roosevelt, was chairperson of the drafting committee of that document. Begin a dialogue about its principles. See if you can agree on ways to achieve those principles.

4. Begin a movement in the helping and health professions to catalogue endorsements of the Universal Declaration and the seven major conventions following it. In the left-hand column, list, for example, the Council on Social Work Education, the National Association of Social Work, the American Psychological Association, the American Nurses Association, the American Public Health Association, and the American Medical Association. Mark with Xs those documents (listed across the page; see Table 1.4) that correspond to the professional organization’s respective endorsements.

Table 1.4 A Human Rights Endorsement Grid: Endorsements of Human Rights Documents by Professional Organizations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Human Rights Document</th>
<th>Universal Declaration</th>
<th>ICCPR</th>
<th>ICESCR</th>
<th>CRC</th>
<th>CEDAW</th>
<th>CERD</th>
<th>CAT</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CSWE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NASW</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>APHA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AMA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As you progress in the next chapter, basic principles of documents following the Universal Declaration will become clearer. You may wish, at some later time, to see how your organization feels about specific principles, such as CEDAW, which calls on governments to provide the means for parents to balance family and work life. You may also wish to include other documents more pertinent to a professional organization, like the Protection of Persons with Mental Illness or Principles of Medical Ethics. In addition to professional organizations, what NGOs might be included? If organizations have endorsed documents, how would you, or should you, monitor an organization’s compliance with human rights documents?

5. To borrow from Gandhi, imagine the poorest, most helpless person you have ever seen and ask yourself if the next step you take can be of use
to that person. Now try to change your life so that your next step would be of some use to that person. Do this exercise with other classmates. See who can make the first step. If you are able to get up from your seat, discuss how you might plan to change your life. If you have trouble leaving your seat, discuss some of the obstacles that prevent you from doing so.

Notes

1. Although for grammatical reasons the words human rights are treated here as plural, the term should be understood as singular in meaning. Rights are interdependent, equal, and indivisible. Ultimately, one right is meaningless without taking into consideration other rights. Freedom of speech, for example, is of questionable value if a person is homeless or lives in a world at war. Adequate shelter and peace are also considered human rights.

2. Concentration camp is actually a misnomer. They were really death camps. Questions arise concerning other concentrated areas, such as our inner cities and reservations where African American and Native American men have a longevity rate of roughly 43. Although these are not death camps per se, unjust social and economic arrangements may have taken the place of barbed wire, amorphous brute forces leading to premature deaths. But given widespread and pervasive human rights violations like extreme poverty, including nearly 1 billion who go to bed starving each night, rarely mentioned in public discourse, what may really be closed off is our minds, products of questionable socialization processes emphasizing profit and the inevitability of war rather than human development for all as a viable possibility. From the Latin campus, meaning “theater of action,” such camps may have also provided a setting for a kind of observation, if not voyeurism, on the part of personnel, including helping and health professionals, to engage in research with a merciless pleasure, purportedly to improve the human condition.

3. It is a great irony that the United Nations, of which the United States was a major architect, does not appear to be as valued here as it is in many parts of the world. One can easily argue that the UN has its share of issues. Restructuring of that global institution is a worthwhile goal, yet it might be wise to heed the age-old injunction to “examine the log in one’s eye, before plucking the speck from another.” Nearly every community organization has its share of issues. The UN, however, deals in conflict resolution with entire nations, not merely individuals, groups, street gangs, or professional committees. The UN, a voluntary organization, is also only as strong as its member states want it to be. Besides, “If it bleeds, it leads.” Violence sells; and prevention, which is much of the work of the UN, does not. Often an unseen actor in world affairs, it is extremely influential in numerous ways, such as the eradication of polio and worldwide efforts to combat the AIDS pandemic and global poverty.

4. It is unfortunate that the negative connotations of the prefix non are associated with such important citizens’ groups fighting on behalf of human rights and social justice. Similarly, there are nonprofits or groups for nonviolence, which also
has negative connotations. Terms such as NGO and nonviolence, therefore, are used with some hesitation, but they are the terms most commonly recognized.

5. Eleanor Roosevelt wanted nonsexist language in the final version of the Universal Declaration but was unsuccessful in her attempt. Despite this limitation, it is commonly understood that words such as he, him, himself, and brotherhood also mean she, her, herself, and sisterhood. The Universal Declaration also asserts the importance of motherhood requiring special protections as it should. It is conceivable that if drafted in this new millennium, fatherhood and/or parenthood would also merit worthy consideration.


7. This book uses human rights defender interchangeably with terms such as social activist and social justice advocate for reasons mentioned in the Preface. Perhaps Jose Martí’s words, popularized in the song “Guantanamera,” un hombre sincero, loosely translated as a “sincere person,” aptly describe someone aspiring to create a world of human dignity, rights, and social justice.

8. Although it is customary to use the adjective American as pertaining to the United States, this book will often use the more accurate United States or U.S. as the correct modifier. A cursory glance at any map would show that numerous countries make up the Americas, both North and South. Also, for an in-depth discussion of this doctrine and issues pertaining to cultural relativism in the context of U.S. foreign policy, see Noam Chomsky’s The Umbrella of U.S. Power (2002).


10. The “Other” in this work refers to Emmanuel Levinas’s (1906–1995) notion that another person is inextricably linked to one’s self by concerns for social justice. The Other therefore is in no way apart from the experiencing person, but rather inextricably linked. Germanic notions of dasein, mitsein, and mitwelt, loosely meaning that being in the world is being with others, also echo this notion of human interconnectedness. Ultimately, the presence of the Other is shared, calling for responsibility and challenging the self to question indifference in the face of social injustice. See particularly Levinas’s Totality and Infinity (2001).