



The Dark Sides of Virtue: Reassessing International Humanitarianism

David Kennedy

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In this provocative and timely book, David Kennedy explores what can go awry when we put our humanitarian yearnings into action on a global scale--and what we can do in response.

Rooted in Kennedy's own experience in numerous humanitarian efforts, the book examines campaigns for human rights, refugee protection, economic development, and for humanitarian limits to the conduct of war. It takes us from the jails of Uruguay to the corridors of the United Nations, from the founding of a non-governmental organization dedicated to the liberation of East Timor to work aboard an aircraft carrier in the Persian Gulf.

Kennedy shares the satisfactions of international humanitarian engagement--but also the disappointments of a faith betrayed. With humanitarianism's new power comes knowledge that even the most well-intentioned projects can create as many problems as they solve. Kennedy develops a checklist of the unforeseen consequences, blind spots, and biases of humanitarian work--from focusing too much on rules and too little on results to the ambiguities of waging war in the name of human rights. He explores the mix of altruism, self-doubt, self-congratulation, and simple disorientation that accompany efforts to bring humanitarian commitments to foreign settings.

Writing for all those who wish that "globalization" could be more humane, Kennedy urges us to think and work more pragmatically.

A work of unusual verve, honesty, and insight, this insider's account urges us to embrace the freedom and the responsibility that come with a deeper awareness of the dark sides of humanitarian governance.

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