

***Global Poverty, Injustice and Resistance***, Gwilym David Blunt (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 2020) 290 pp., cloth £69.99, eBook \$80.

In this work of non-ideal theory, Gwilym David Blunt flips the existing narrative on ethics and extreme poverty by examining the global poor's right to resist. This is a refreshing intervention in a debate that has consistently focused on the duties of the affluent at the expense of taking seriously the ethical dilemmas of the oppressed. It is particularly welcome given the concern that taking the perspective of the affluent contributes to a process of *othering* that disempowers the subjects of oppression and adds to their already weighty burdens.

The book contributes to an emerging movement in political philosophy that examines the duties of the oppressed. Beginning from the assumption that the global institutional order violates the human rights of the poor, Blunt asks what they may do in order to fulfill their rights. The content of the book follows directly from this flip in perspectives. He begins with a thoughtful re-examination of global poverty and inequality (chapter 1), before considering the enforceability of human rights—subverting the perennial theme to examine whether right-holders themselves can enforce their rights (rather than whether foreign powers can do so) (chapter 2). Blunt proposes that those who have their rights systematically violated by the international order have a right to resistance. The book then proceeds to argue that extreme poverty triggers this right (chapter 3) before evaluating the justifiability of various strategies of resistance. Blunt includes injustice-avoiding strategies such as illegal immigration (chapter 4) and break-away communities like the Zapatistas in Mexico, as well as attempts at justice promotion through transnational social movements (chapter 5), redistributive war (chapter 6), and sabotage and terrorism (chapter 7). In doing so he moves the debate on resistance beyond actions that seek to promote justice to *injustice-avoiding* actions through which the oppressed seek to escape injustice. This is a particularly relevant focus given the extreme unlikelihood that activists will succeed in producing institutional or political changes that end extreme poverty. The book concludes with a discussion of duties of resistance that fall on the affluent (chapter 8). Throughout the book Blunt seeks to eschew the thought experiment approach that has recently dominated contemporary political philosophy, instead drawing on legal conventions and historical examples. However, he struggles to fully move away from the thought-experiment based literature, often returning to it to bolster his conclusions. Furthermore, the book suffers from not including a methodology section outlining the

rationale for the innovative approach adopted and from not explaining the role of legal convention in his normative arguments.

The book is admirably pluralist: following a strong tradition in practical ethics it aims to show that the conclusions advocated can be accepted by those with a range of theoretical approaches. However, covering so much ground means that some of the arguments are a little rushed. The book could also benefit from being a bit bolder: the sub-conclusions are often tentative, and the author seems to shy away from advocating truly controversial conclusions.

The strongest contribution of the book is the discussion of the moral status of illegal immigrants and those that support or undermine their efforts (chapters 4 and 8). Here the book is at its best: tackling a real-life moral issue of immense practical significance and giving a novel interpretation of the problem. Blunt calls on us to consider illegal immigration as an instance of “injustice avoiding,” “impure” resistance (pp. 105–106). Seen in this light, it is a moral act that other people should support and not undermine. This is a strong and controversial stance that is defended in a number of distinctive ways.

Blunt uses an analogy with runaway slaves to suggest that illegal immigration is a justifiable act of escape from oppression and likens supporters and enablers to the underground railway that helped slaves escape North to enjoy relative freedom. An issue with Blunt’s arguments here is that it is not clear that illegal immigrants actually do succeed in avoiding the violation of their human rights, given the fact that they are extremely vulnerable to the abuse of these rights once they arrive in their new country of residence. In fact, there is a case to be made that because illegal immigrants typically have no effective recourse to law they are in fact *more* vulnerable to having their human rights violated in their new country than they were in their country of origin. When illegal immigrants report crimes committed against themselves they can be imprisoned and deported, and this threat often prevents them from doing so. Furthermore, in becoming illegal immigrants people enter and live in a country where they have no political rights. Where their home country permitted them to vote or run for office this represents a loss in representation. Nor is it clear that emigrating frees them from the threat of extreme poverty, as they typically have little recourse to public funds and are intensely vulnerable to extreme forms of exploitation including modern slavery. In terms of oppression and domination illegal immigrants in a new country are subject to interactional domination, as anyone who knows their status can wield significant power over them by threatening to have them deported. They are also subject to systemic domination as a matter of course because, as non-citizens, they have no right to co-determine the law. Thus, using the framework Blunt adopts in this chapter (p. 107), we can see that an illegal

immigrant will often face myriad new and difficult challenges, making it difficult to argue that illegal immigration can always be seen as a means to evading injustice. Thus Blunt's claim that illegal immigration provides respite from the worst effects of poverty (p. 4) can be questioned.

As Blunt rightly points out, escaped slaves likewise were still oppressed, exploited, subjected to racism, and vulnerable to recapture once they escaped slaveholding states and yet we should still consider their escape an injustice-avoiding act of resistance. The 1793 and 1850 slave clauses allowed escaped slaves to be chased into the north, and the Dred Scott case in 1857 showed they were not protected by the US constitution. Thus, the threat of being enslaved if caught meant slaves who escaped north could not securely enjoy a free existence or freely access public institutions. However, in spite of the injustice and alienation they faced, their situation in terms of human rights and dominations was unquestionably *improved* rather than *worsened* by their escape from slavery. The same cannot be confidently asserted of illegal immigrants, except in cases where they must flee to avoid immanent death or significant harm, as is the case with war, famine, natural disasters, and extreme forms of political persecution.

Blunt does recognize that illegal immigration does not provide a "permanent exit" from oppression. He suggests that impure resistance expresses the desperation of the oppressed and is a means through which they "undermine norms and operational structures by challenging them" (p. 106). In doing so he appeals to the concept of "infrapolitics," a term coined by the political scientist and anthropologist James C. Scott that identifies actions as *political* that are not traditionally characterized as such. These acts tend to be non-public and even anonymous, and when brought together with many other such acts, can lead to political change. These strategies work by eroding support for dominant social and political institutions from the bottom up, undermining existing laws and practices, and in some cases replacing them with alternatives. Acts of infrapolitics present a threat to hegemonic norms and dominant political structures through irreverent and covert action. Where acts of illegal immigrants become pervasive they could lead to the erosion of borders and the injustices these borders perpetuate. However, many contemporary states systematically tolerate large numbers of undocumented workers (sometimes on seasonal basis) as their economies rely on exploiting this labor pool. For example, 52 percent of U.S. farm laborers are undocumented. This suggests that instead of being denied opportunities by tightly enforced borders, a large portion of the global poor are absorbed into the socio-economic system of neighboring affluent states, acting as an exploited underclass without legal protection. In this context,

there is a risk that acts of illegal immigration, rather than *undermining* an unjust socio-economic system, actually help *reproduce* unjust intra-national social structures that enrich the affluent and violate the rights of the poor. If this is the case it is unclear how these acts are a productive form of infra-politics.

*Global Poverty, Injustice and Resistance* is a provocative intervention that offers a fresh perspective on ethical and political questions of real-life import. Blunt's book subverts debates on global poverty and immigration in a way that demands serious attention from scholars interested in these topics and should provoke significant debate.

—ELIZABETH KAHN

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