

Michael Ignatieff. *The Ordinary Virtues: Moral Order in a Divided World.* Harvard University Press 2017. 272 pp. \$27.95 USD (Hardcover ISBN 9780674976276).

Does interfaith and intercultural dialogue promote peace? Has the discourse and spread of human rights impacted the daily lives of the world's poorest and marginalized? What enables or thwarts the possibility and reality of virtue? How does globalization contribute to such questions: does the local always trump the universal; thick (familial and local) relations given priority over (distant, far-away) thin encounters—and is that necessarily a moral setback? To mark the 100th anniversary of Andrew Carnegie's endowment of the Church Peace Union (now the Carnegie Council for Ethics) to foster peace through interfaith dialogue, the Council established a three-year project made up of Michael Ignatieff, the council's director, its Global Ethics Fellows, and contacts in key areas throughout the globe to investigate such questions on the ground, 'ethics in action' (3). The three-year project has resulted in this profound and stimulating book—though one not without some weaknesses.

Ignatieff and some members of his team spent a week or a few days in each locale, meeting mostly with activists, fellow academics, politicians, and local leaders. The places chosen (in chapter order) were Jackson Heights (Queens, New York), Los Angeles, Rio de Janeiro, Bosnia, Myanmar, Fukushima, and South Africa.

Taking the subway into Queens, and then meeting local religious and cultural leaders, Ignatieff cited the religious diversity of the borough and the high number of languages spoken. He was also struck by the reality of different groups living 'side by side,' mostly in toleration, not primarily because of choice, with the city's harsh economic disparities. In Los Angeles, the team met with a group of high school students from an impoverished, predominantly Hispanic area, who work on a bilingual newspaper. They also met with former gang members who mediate between gangs, trying to establish peace and limit violence. Ignatieff also spoke with religious leaders helping to bring the city together, particularly after the 1992 uprising, following the acquittal of the police officers who beat African-American Rodney King. For Ignatieff, any flourishing of the ordinary virtues needs civic and institutional moral stability and protection. For most people, struggling with day-to-day living, the ideals and discussions of human rights are not priorities, if they are even known. Where civic trust breaks down or government institutions are corrupt, then even ordinary virtues become tenuous. The first two locales were from poor communities in a wealthy country, but what about elsewhere?

In the Santa Marta favela of Rio de Janeiro, the residents are hemmed in by the threat of violence and institutional neglect. The favela continues to suffer from blight and poverty even as the 'rise of rapid globalization' (73) enriches others in Brazil. For local insights, Ignatieff met with Major Priscilla, a local policewoman in charge of Santa Marta, and walked through the favela with her. Fortuitously, Ignatieff happened to be in Rio during the economic protests in June 2013, where he adds a telling quote: 'the experts had told us that Brazilians were resigned to corruption. The demonstrations told a different story' (84). What follows is a few snippet quotes from those protesting, but it would have been useful to hear more sustained comments from the demonstrators.

The chapter on Bosnia is the best chapter in the book, outside the excellent introduction and conclusion (where Ignatieff reflects upon and analyzes his key arguments around the issues of globalization, governance, ethics, local contexts, and human rights). As Ignatieff had lived in Yugoslavia while a child for a few years and has written three books on the country, this chapter had a greater depth and layering which was not as evident in some of the others. In light of the horrific wars and suffering from the early 1990s, Bosnia is an apt place to examine how and whether ideals of human rights and equality are meaningful. Of particular note is Ignatieff's meeting with four

mothers of Srebrenica, whose husbands were victims not only of Serbian atrocities, but of UN (and Dutchbat) negligence. There are no easy answers, certainly no comforting ones, on what role the ordinary virtues play amidst a genocide, nor on any role for an extraordinary virtue like forgiveness after genocide.

In Myanmar, Ignatieff met with radical Buddhist monk Wirathu, whose hatred of Muslims has been well documented. Again, the context is precarious, a country for decades ruled by a military junta, only recently, tentatively, opening up to wider democratic ways. Echoing the recent plight of the Rohingya Muslims who again held the world's attention in December 2016 and January 2017, Ignatieff discussed their treatment based on his visit in 2015, while also focusing on the bind of Aung San Suu Kyi. In the most honest moment of the book, Ignatieff notes how he and his team were 'only passing through' (136) and so it was easy to speak of universal human rights and violations, but it is more difficult to uphold those ideals when times are still uncertain, allies unclear. We need 'to recognize the limits of fellow feeling,' Ignatieff writes and admits how they have to 'live with the consequences' (136-137).

The visit to Fukushima presented the case of virtues amidst natural disasters and the threat of nuclear damage, while the final chapter on South Africa highlighted the role and place of virtue in another politically fragile country. The South Africa chapter also contained multiple layers, again perhaps because Ignatieff had written about South Africa before, and because it included more of the voices of the poor themselves, like young single mothers in the slum of Zama Zama who have to engage in sex work to pay bills or obtain desired items like a 'cell phone, hat, or a pair of shoes' (187).

Overall, the project's initiative and funding had the right intention; the work is lucidly written; and provides much ground for reflection, linked by the questions opening this review. Individual readers, with connections to these places, may or not find those chapters as in-depth or nuanced as those they are less familiar with. Any time experts, even well-intentioned, well-connected, and well-funded, fly in and out of an area to get a glimpse of local conditions, gaps and possible distortions may accrue. Though the aim is clearly to see how human rights discourse and the liberal democratic ideals impact the most marginalized, it is their unique voices that are not heard as much as hoped. Such interactions usually only come after embedding in an area for some time, or with the proper connections, prioritizing a desire to listen and hear such voices. In Rio de Janeiro we heard extensively, as noted, from Major Pricilla, and her voice, especially as a woman in the Brazilian police force, was an important one to highlight, but the chapter would have been enhanced if the team had sought unscripted, local, fortuitous encounters with the truly ordinary, especially those from the favelas, quoting their words and their phrases. Days just wandering, unguided and unled by anyone with local agendas, may have helped bear, if not more fruit, than fruit of a different kind, adding more complexity and nuance.

My fear of a well-intentioned, but still superficial presentation was most evident in the chapter on Jackson Heights. Ignatieff may have taken a few subway rides from the power-cauldron of midtown Manhattan to arrive at 'the bleak square' of Jackson Heights, but underneath the well-written prose, I was left with a sense of voyeurism, symbolized here in this observation in the Rio de Janeiro chapter: 'we watched, for example, as a stretcher, carried by two teenagers from Santa Marta and two policeman, gingerly navigated the steep and winding steps of the favela, transporting an old man with a heart condition' (77). If the Council viewed life an hour by subway away as another virtual world, how could it begin to realistically, with nuance and layers, depict the foreign places they would also travel to? Not everyone can spend months or years in fieldwork, and certainly not in

four continents. For a more focused, developed account of these places, there are seminal works available. Of Fukushima, read *Ghosts of the Tsunami*; or of Queens, read *City of Gods*, for example.

Ultimately, though, is there a sharp tension and disconnect between the so-called ordinary virtues and human rights discourse? I agree with Ignatieff that gaps remain; that stable institutions are needed for full moral flourishing; but it is both the local and the global; human rights discourse and ordinary virtues that are the way forward, one reinforcing, even in tension, the other. Carnegie's plan and vision still has much work to do. Going forward, it needs more sustained, on the ground contributions from the most marginalized it seeks to serve, and ideally, should partner with and learn from.

Peter Admirand, Dublin City University