

## CONFLUENCES

### EDITORIAL NOTE

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**I**nfluence is an ambition that all academic journals have. This one is no exception. Its *raison d'être* is to urge the relevance, for the study and promotion of human rights, of bringing together the diverse academic projects of furthering the understanding of

- (a) the situation of human rights in the Mediterranean region,
- (b) the structure of that situation, and
- (c) the legal, political and ethical theory of human rights.

Understanding the situation calls for studies that report and map the issues arising in the region; understanding the structure calls for studies whose results would aid the promotion of universal rights in the region. Both would contribute to the embedding of a universalist set of rights, criteria and discourse in a particular region of the world.

The aims of legal, political and ethical theory, basing themselves on the Mediterranean region, would move as it were in the opposite direction. The journal has encouraged the advancement of the Universal Declaration by means of the exploration of different Mediterranean philosophical and cultural avenues leading towards it. It has also encouraged such explorations in the conviction that the result might well enrich the understanding of the very universality of human rights, and in this sense constitute a Mediterranean contribution to a global understanding of human rights that transcends geography.

It might be said, therefore, that this journal has sought influence by pursuing an agenda of 'confluence' – allowing itself to be seen and used as a meeting point and tributary of various projects. While that

is the overarching mission of the journal as a whole, however, it has been decided to call a special, new, occasional section by this name. Its aim will be to bring together a particular miscellany of writings.

It is a point that has often been made about human rights discourse: it serves, among other purposes, as a common framework in which debates and radical disagreement about governing powers may take place. Ideally, this framework would serve to clarify the issues, if not dissolve the disagreements. In practice, however, it is evident that a second-order discussion is also needed: a debate to settle radical disagreements concerning the criteria that would serve to adjudicate disagreements about human rights issues. And it may help such heuristic debates if a correlative space were devoted to the confluence of rival apprehensions of the situations and structures in which human rights questions were embedded in the region.

Hence this new section, 'Confluences'. For its first appearance, two very different, rival assessments are presented, without judgment. Both address the Israeli/Palestinian conflict, although not to the same degree; and both embed it in a wider conflict, although the understanding of the nature of that conflict is not the same. The two articles are radically different not just in terms of the evaluations that they propose, or even in terms of the method of diagnosis. They differ also in terms of what is to count as diagnosis: one article is couched in terms of autobiographical witness (although it is informed by social and political theory); the other is couched in terms of a grand social psychological theory of 'alienation' (though not in a Marxist sense). Several other differences could be pointed out, not the least of which would be the factors treated as salient by one account and ignored by the other. But it is, also worthwhile to indicate some underlying shared assumptions: In both accounts, cultural pathology is premised on what appears to be a shared understanding of what constitutes human flourishing, and of normal and normative responses to such pathologies. Above all, the two accounts of pathology appear to be anchored in an implied account of rights.

The aim of presenting these two papers together is not to suggest that they form a notional natural pair, or even a complementary whole. They do not represent the full range of possible understandings on the issues raised. Above all, they were not conceived as engagements in dialogue.

It is, rather, the point of the new Confluences section to bring into a kind of dialogue papers that were not written with that intention, to create a space for engagement, in the hope that underlying assumptions, rival and shared, might become more apparent in the confluence of ideas and analyses.