Collaborative Ethics: Development and Implementation

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that human rights abuses in Texas are no less obvious or endemic, only the public focus is missing. For example, the human rights of immigrant workers are violated when the construction industry in which they are employed does not provide safe and healthy working conditions, fair wages and equal remuneration for work of equal value, or they are prohibited from joining trade unions and other organizations or associations. The human rights of prisoners are violated when they are not given fair trials and when they are subjected to treatment that is degrading or lacking in respect for their basic human dignity. The fundamental right to life is violated by state-sponsored execution with alarming frequency. The human rights of indigenous people are violated when the state refuses to recognize their right to self-determination, and when state-sponsored projects (such as the construction of a wall on the US-Mexico border) impede their cultural practices and disrupt their access to traditional burial grounds and worship sites. The right of all people “to a standard of living adequate for their health and well-being... including food, clothing, housing, medical care and necessary social services...” is violated when thousands live outside under bridges and tens of thousands have no access to health care. Black and brown people, when they suffer police profiling, are suffering a human rights violation in the form of racial discrimination.

In Central Texas, as in the rest of the US, human rights are violated every day. Yet, ideological blinkers firmly in place, we often don’t recognize them as such. Perhaps more importantly, even when we do identify them, we fail to challenge the government on them, thinking strategically that it will be more effective to approach the problem in a different way. This is in part because the US has not ratified many of these international agreements on human rights, and therefore is not legally bound by them. However, human rights by definition derive from “the inherent human dignity of all people” and it is important to state that these rights exist, regardless of ratification, and that the US government has a moral obligation to respect them. By failing to do so, we let the US off the hook for its abuses, and in turn contribute to the prevailing logic that human rights violations don’t happen at home.

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