



Sarah B. Snyder, *Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War: A Transnational History of the Helsinki Network*

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Review by: Mary Nolan

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Human Rights Activism and the End of the Cold War: A Transnational History of the Helsinki Network. By Sarah B. Snyder. Human Rights in History. Edited by Stefan-Ludwig Hoffman and Samuel Moyn.

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011. Pp. x+293. \$85.00 (cloth); \$68.00 (Adobe eBook Reader); \$68.00 (Mobipocket eBook).

Virtually neglected until two decades ago, human rights are now the subject of a vast and contentious historiography. The widespread emergence of human rights discourse in the 1970s, the subsequent proliferation of declarations, policies, and interventions, and the appearance of human rights movements across the globe give human rights a central place in contemporary history. Human rights lend themselves to intellectual and legal analysis as well as to political and diplomatic approaches, and, depending on how they are understood, women, gender, and economic development are integral to their history. By definition, human rights transcend the nation-state, even as they depend heavily on the latter for their realization, and thus lend themselves to now-popular transnational approaches. But historians of human rights disagree about virtually all aspects of their subject. Are human rights political and legal—or economic and social as well? Are they individual or collective? Did they originate in the eighteenth century, the nineteenth, after World War II, or in the 1970s? Has the driving force behind the elaboration of human rights norms and the efforts to implement them come from local movements, nonstate actors, institutions like the UN, or nation-states? Have governments embraced human rights discourse sincerely or cynically? Have human rights movements been effective in protecting individuals, expanding political and economic rights, and altering laws and state policies?

Sarah Snyder's study explores one of the best-known instances of human rights discourse and activism, the Helsinki process that culminated in the 1975 Helsinki Final Act and a series of subsequent monitoring meetings in Belgrade, Madrid, and Vienna and that saw the creation of the transnational Helsinki network, which came to include Soviet and Eastern European dissidents; new NGOs such as the American Helsinki Watch and the International Helsinki Federation; and the US government Helsinki commission. Snyder's work draws heavily on US government documents, NGO records, and the papers and memoirs of leading politicians and human rights activists in America and Europe. Like Daniel C. Thomas's book *The Helsinki Effect: International Norms, Human Rights, and the Demise of Communism* (Princeton, NJ, 2001), which focuses more on the articulation of human rights norms in the Helsinki Final Act than on subsequent monitoring of them, Snyder maintains in her work that human rights activism played a central role in altering Eastern European ideas and behavior. Indeed, she posits that on January 19, 1989, when the Soviet Union proposed to hold a conference on human rights in Moscow as part of the Helsinki monitoring process, the Cold War effectively ended.

Snyder's prime concern is with human rights advocacy, with the emergence, expansion, and operations of a transnational network in the wake of the Helsinki Final Act. While many studies have explored the messy politics leading to that declaration and its inclusion of human rights language, her story focuses on how its passage and the subsequent Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe meetings to monitor compliance with it transformed US attitudes. She highlights the role of Congresswoman Millicent Fenwick in promoting the creation of a US government Helsinki Commission, the embrace of human rights by President Carter, and the vigorous condemnation of the Soviet Union by Arthur Goldberg at the 1977 Belgrade meeting. Snyder describes the US Helsinki Commission as having "fostered a transnational network"

(50); it was “an essential advocate for and collaborator with” it (51). In her analysis, agency and initiative lie with the American state and Helsinki Watch. They gave, she argues, voice and leverage to Eastern European human rights activists. She draws effectively on the work of Thomas as well as that of Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink to describe in rich detail the “boomerang” effect: Eastern Europeans gathered and reported information on human rights violations, and the American government and Helsinki Watch, the forerunner of Human Rights Watch, publicized them. Using informational politics, symbolic politics, leverage politics, and accountability politics, they framed Communist actions as human rights violations and shamed governments in Eastern Europe.

Snyder admires American forms of advocacy. Unlike James Peck in *Ideal Illusions: How the U.S. Government Co-opted Human Rights* (New York, 2011), she neither questions the sincerity of the American commitment to human rights nor raises the issue of their strategic and selective deployment in the late stages of the Cold War. She does not believe that European reluctance to endanger détente by aggressively pushing human rights was justified. Snyder is confident that the Helsinki network was effective, at least in the long run. While acknowledging in depressing detail the Eastern European governments’ repeated repression of dissent—the imposition of martial law in Poland in 1981–83, for example, and the attacks on the Charter 77 movement in Czechoslovakia—she concludes that the Helsinki network “established human rights as an integral part of international relations” and “directly and indirectly influenced both Western and Eastern government to pursue policies that facilitated the rise of organized dissent in Eastern Europe, freedom of movement for East Germans and improved human rights practices in the Soviet Union” (244). As Snyder acknowledges in her more careful arguments, Gorbachev’s ideas changed for many reasons, and there was no straight line between 1975 and 1989.

Although the author insists that the Helsinki network was a key player, there is too little analysis of developments within the Soviet Union or other Eastern European states to determine the mix of direct and indirect influence she is positing or the weight that should be accorded to external forces, as opposed to the internal roots of the widespread Polish protest movement or Gorbachev’s gradual acceptance of human rights as part of Perestroika and Glasnost. Without Gorbachev and the subsequent loss of confidence by Communist elites that Stephen Kotkin has cataloged in *Uncivil Society: 1989 and the Implosion of the Communist Establishment* (New York, 2009), the Helsinki network would have continued to shame without producing change. And without the tumultuous and surprising events of 1989, for which Gorbachev and Eastern European actors, not the United States, were responsible, the Cold War would not have concluded. January 19, 1989, is chronologically and causally an unpersuasive date for its end.

MARY NOLAN

New York University

The Senses and the English Reformation. By *Matthew Milner*. St. Andrews Studies in Reformation History. Edited by *Andrew Pettegree* et al. Farnham: Ashgate, 2011. Pp. xiv+423. \$124.95.

It has long been a historiographical commonplace that early modern Protestantism was an austere and cerebral religion that firmly repudiated the extravagant sensual and material piety that was a hallmark of late medieval Catholicism. Elevating comprehension and cognition above emotion and experience, it was a discursive and intellectual faith