metaphors that I use; it is extremely difficult to write about humanitarianism without falling under the sway of religious iconography. But humanitarianism has forced me to do more than locate the place of religion in world affairs. It also has led me to accept that humanitarianism is a matter of faith.

Humanitarianism is nothing less than a revolution in the ethics of care. This revolution, like all revolutions, was created through a mixture of transcendental visions, politics, and power, and it has generated an assortment of successes and excesses. This revolution was carried out in the name of the international community, a community that was not as universal, transcendental, and cosmopolitan as its leaders presumed and that contained the politics that inhere in all communities. Expressive of an international community that is made up of ethics and politics, of solidarity and diversity, of emancipation and domination, humanitarianism's history tells us much about the changing global order in which we live. It is a sobering counterpoint to those who insist that transnational connections are humanizing global politics and diluting power. It is a rejuvenating counterpoint to those who believe that international history is best understood as cycles of tragedy with no possibility of progress. Humanitarianism is ethics vanquished and victorious. Humanitarianism's history is modern international history—and its future.

1

Co-Dependence:
Humanitarianism and the World

Throughout history, religious, spiritual, and philosophical commitments have inspired acts of compassion. If we equate humanitarianism with compassion, then humanitarianism is as old as history. But if we decide to limit the history of humanitarianism to when individuals started using the concept to characterize their actions and those of others, then humanitarianism is roughly two centuries old. Specifically, around the turn of the nineteenth century humanitarianism slowly entered into everyday vocabulary. Although there is no bright line to distinguish humanitarianism clearly from previous and current forms of charity, compassion, and philanthropy, three characteristics arose in the early nineteenth century, and have been present ever since, that are marks of distinction.

It slowly became associated with compassion across boundaries. In the beginning humanitarianism included both international and domestic action; it could refer to either abolitionists or advocates for child labor reform. Precisely when and why the concept of humanitarianism became reserved for border-busting action is unclear, though the creation of the ICRC in 1863 as the world's first official international humanitarian organization probably was a tipping point. The specific association of compassion across boundaries is related to the presumption that humanitarianism implies going beyond the call of duty. Who has duties to whom? People, organizations, and governments provide local assistance on a daily basis, and most of the time we describe them as fulfilling their duties and do not call them or their actions "humanitarian." Parents feed, clothe, and shelter their children,
and it would sound odd to describe such actions as humanitarian. A police officer responding to a crime is not a Good Samaritan—she is doing her job. Villages often have a moral economy that materializes when famine, destitution, and hardship strike; members of the community are doing their duty. We expect citizens and the government to act when another part of the country is struck by a natural disaster. Few in the United States characterized the Bush administration’s response to Hurricane Katrina in 2005 as humanitarian; it was acting (or failing to act) according to its responsibilities. It is only when such assistance crosses a boundary that we tend to call it humanitarian. What duties do we have to each other? It is impossible to identify them in advance precisely because they are formed in and around changing material forces and moral sentiments; are understood differently in different kinds of humanitarianism; and vary with the moral boundaries of the community.

Humanitarianism’s vow to help strangers in distant lands is related to a second defining characteristic: its transcendental significance. Although this is not a feature that is normally associated with humanitarianism, it figures prominently enough in the chapters that follow that I feel compelled to include it as a defining characteristic. By the transcendental I mean, quite simply, the belief that there is something larger than us. It is not unlike what some characterize as religious experience, which John Dewey, following William James, described thus: “The self is always directed toward something beyond itself and so its own unification depends upon the idea of the integration of the shifting scenes of the world into that imaginative totality we call the Universe.” In this manner the transcendental can embody a religious form, but not necessarily. Religious beliefs were critical to the origins of humanitarianism and continue to influence its unfolding. Yet humanitarianism tracks, in some ways, with the mythic versions of secularization, in which the secular replaces the religious as a source of authority and meaning. The world, of course, never became secularized, and neither did humanitarianism, which is why the sector maintains the distinction between faith and secular agencies. But secularly driven humanitarianism also has elements of the transcendental, which are especially evident in notions of humanity. For many who staff secular agencies, humanitarianism is a way of both expressing and bringing into existence an international community. In no way am I suggesting that humanitarians are saintly creatures because they are connecting the everyday to the transcendental. As I have already suggested and will soon elaborate, humanitarianism exists to attend to the needs of the giver and not only to those of the receiver. Nor am I suggesting that other forms of compassion are not also connected to some notion of the transcendent. Instead, I want to highlight how humanitarianism’s purpose is intertwined with the desire to demonstrate and create a global spirit.

Although humanitarianism might have this otherworldly quality, it also is very much of this world. Humanitarianism is imprinted by modernity, the Enlightenment, and the belief that it is possible to engineer progress. In this way, humanitarianism is connected to governance, and a stunning development of the last two centuries is the deepening and growing governance of humanitarianism. For much of human history acts of compassion were a largely private affair, the domain of the privileged, the pious, and the philanthropic. When individuals were in need, because of either their everyday circumstances or exigencies, they had to rely on the kindness of others. Beginning in the nineteenth century and continuing in the twentieth century, there was a growing zeal for creating institutions and other standing bodies, increasingly and self-consciously organized around the principles of rationality that are the hallmark of the modern organization. Also, the humanitarian movements of the nineteenth century, including those that were devoutly religious, frequently articulated a confidence in using modern scientific techniques and public interventions to improve the human condition. They largely imagined perfecting society, though, through markets and not with the heavy hand of the state. The nineteenth-century laissez-faire ideology slowly receded in the early twentieth century, as the state accepted more responsibilities for its citizens. Many of the same factors that led to the expansion of the welfare state also contributed to a growing willingness by Western states to expand various kinds of aid and assistance to vulnerable populations. Since World War I the organization of humanitarian action has largely followed the tremendous internationalization, institutionalization, and rationalization of global affairs. Today there exists an international humanitarian order.

What distinguishes humanitarianism from previous acts of compassion is that it is organized and part of governance, connects the immanent to the transcendent, and is directed at those in other lands. But, as discussed in the introduction, I treat humanitarianism not as a coherent whole but rather as a concept in motion that has several enduring tensions—the existence of multiple humanitarianisms; an ethic that are simultaneously universal and circumstantial; a commitment to emancipation that can justify forms of domination; the possibility (or not) of advancing moral progress; and an attention to the needs of both the giver and the recipient. Although these tensions are nearly intrinsic to humanitarianism, a global arena shaped their character, content, and intensity. Specifically, the forces of destruction, production, and compassion combined to generate three discernible ages of humanitarianism—an imperial humanitarianism, a neo-humanitarianism, and a liberal humanitarianism—and these ages shaped the meaning and practices of humanitarianism.

Although these global forces pushed and pulled humanitarianism over the decades, humanitarian organizations have some discretion over its
dealing with the world that, at times, appears to leave them with no good choices. The simple recognition that aid agencies are constantly struggling over what to do, that different agencies arrive at different answers, makes this discretion apparent. Although various factors influence these choices, three are particularly important.

Humanitarianism comes in many shapes and forms, but a critical difference is between a humanitarianism that largely limits itself to saving lives at risk—emergency humanitarianism—and a humanitarianism that adds a desire to remove the causes of suffering—alchemical humanitarianism. These different humanitarian identities lean toward different responses to two fundamental problems faced by all humanitarian actors: how to live in a world of states and other actors that are often responsible for the very suffering they want to relieve; and whether and how to take into account the needs of those who are often perceived as being too weak, uninformed, oppressed, or traumatized to help themselves. In response to the first problem, humanitarian agencies have crafted different kinds of principles, and in response to the second they have demonstrated varying sensitivity (though not very much) to the problem of paternalism. Notwithstanding these differences, there is one way in which they are alike: they depend on others for their resources. A longstanding hunch is that the more they depend on states, the more likely they will conform to their wishes, an argument that has some merit but whose extreme claims I find unconvincing. By recognizing the possibility that aid agencies can shape their fate, but not under the conditions of their own choosing, I recover the possibility that they can escape their circumstances to expand the global ethics of care.

The World of Humanitarianism

While humanitarianism has many mothers, and over the ages has been influenced by various bone-chilling events and idiosyncratic developments, critical has been the combination of the forces of destruction, production, and compassion. These forces do not operate in isolation but rather interact in various ways to define the age, opening up and closing off opportunities for humanitarian action, heightening and lessening the practical tensions of humanitarianism, and shaping the evolving meaning and practice of humanitarianism. These are not anonymous forces with a singular identity but rather have historical content and, in combination, produce the age of humanitarianism.

The Forces of Humanitarianism

The forces of destruction include acts and patterns of violence that endanger lives and the possibility of safety and security. They also affect how great and lesser powers conceptualize the relationship between state and human security. Violence has been a causeway for benevolence. Massacres, international and civil wars, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and war-induced famines have been a principal "call to arms." Changes in military technology and strategy furthered the desire to expand the laws of war and provide more protections and relief to civilians. Solferino triggered a pattern in which advances in the lethality of military technology led to efforts to ameliorate its destructive potential. The emergence of total war, the obliteration of the very unstable distinction between civilian and soldier, and the willingness of combatants to treat civilians as an object of strategy have led to new forms of protection.

Patterns of war are shaped by the strategic ambitions of great and lesser powers, and these patterns can influence both the opportunities for and the constraints on humanitarian action. If states believe, for whatever reason, that there is a convergence between their security interests and humanitarian action, then aid agencies will find new opportunities in the field and beyond; if otherwise, then they will confront significant barriers. Western states decided to establish the High Commissioner on Refugees following World War I primarily because they feared that mass population displacement in Europe would lead to regional instability. Humanitarian intervention is selective because states are usually willing to put their troops in harm’s only way when their security and economic interests are at stake.

Conceptions of international order and the precise relationship between domestic order and international order also have had a profound impact on the character of humanitarianism. There are two stylized views of international order. One claims that sovereignty and the principle of nonintervention, alongside a healthy dose of deterrence, can create stability; the other, that domestic order affects international order. These views have enjoyed different periods of acceptance: during the late colonial period, Western states argued that colonial states required lessons in civility before they could be expected to abide by the rules of international society; during decolonization and the Cold War, great hopes were placed on sovereignty and military power; and in the post-Cold War period there is a prevailing belief that states organized around democracy, markets, and rights make good neighbors.

The forces of production include capitalism and the global economy and ideologies regarding the state’s role in society. The debate over the relationship between capitalism and humanitarianism began the moment that formal organizations first appeared in the early nineteenth century and declared that they were trying to save the world from itself. One view is that capitalism is the structure and humanitarianism is part of the superstructure that aids capitalism’s reproduction and expansion. In The Communist Manifesto, Karl Marx identified “economists, philanthropists, humanitarians, improvers of the condition of the working class, organizers of charity,
members of societies for the prevention of cruelty to animals, temperance fanatics, hole-and-corner reformers of every imaginable kind as operating to smooth over social grievances and help improve bourgeois society. An alternative view observes that the dislocations caused by capitalism created the conditions for humanitarianism. Market expansion, industrialization, and urbanization undermined the existing religious and normative order. In response, religious and secular leaders proposed solutions that included new kinds of public interventions that would help restore a moral order, which, not coincidentally, was consistent with capitalism's requirements. For instance, industrialists saw rampant alcohol consumption as a significant hindrance to a stable and compliant labor force, so they supported emerging temperance movements that treated alcohol as part of the devil's bag of tricks and encouraged individuals to become sober, self-disciplined, and responsible.

The expansion of global capitalism, now known as globalization, also has affected humanitarianism's forms and functions, though how is a matter of controversy. Some, following classical Marxist thought, argue that capitalism's unquenchable drive to expand means that there will be a constant need to govern and integrate those that are, in Mark Duffield's phrase, on the borderlands. In this view, the discourse of development, while celebrated by humanitarians in the decades following World War II, was the latest chapter in the continuing saga of capitalism's attempt to incorporate those existing on the margins. Today's antipoverty campaigns follow in their footsteps. Others argue that humanitarianism does not so much integrate the borderlands as contain them. Not everyone will be able to enjoy capitalism's benefits, and in order for capitalism to survive it must quell any possibility that frustrations boil over into rebellion. Humanitarianism is a global welfare institution, and aid workers are social workers—appearing to be emancipatory when operating as mechanisms of social control.

Global capitalism needs humanitarianism. Ideologies regarding the state's proper role in society and economy also have shaped the demand for humanitarian assistance. During the nineteenth century's era of laissez-faire capitalism, individuals funded themselves, and various charitable and reform-minded organizations stepped in where the state refused or failed to tread. In the United States the combination of a growing urban underclass alongside the rise of oil and manufacturing tycoons led the latter to found various philanthropic and charitable organizations to improve human welfare. The rise of the welfare state after the 1920s increased the resources available for various kinds of aid programs. The post-1980s ideology of neoliberalism and the limited state created a greater demand for humanitarian organizations; Western governments favored NGOs for delivering services because they were presumed to be more efficient than either bilateral or intergovernmental organizations.

The forces of destruction and production help to account for the fluctuating demand for different kinds of assistance, the timing of outbursts of activity, and the stepwise internationalization of humanitarianism, but strategic and economic interests do not explain why individuals feel compassion for others. To do so requires attention to the forces of compassion. Why people feel compelled to respond to suffering remains something of a mystery. Theories abound, running the gamut from psychological—I feel guilty; to utilitarian—I like helping others; to religious—God commands me; to biological—I am genetically wired to act in ways that help the survival of the species. These theories, though, cannot explain the rapid development of institutions of compassion over the last two centuries. Nor can they explain the equally impressive change in the beliefs about who deserves assistance, what kind of assistance they require to develop their humanity, and what part they should play in defining their emancipation.

Most explanations of this growth highlight how Enlightenment processes have increased our awareness of suffering, our feeling that we are causally and morally responsible for the misfortunes of others, our confidence that we can make a difference, our belief that humans have certain basic rights, and our sense that our own humanity depends on adhering to certain moral codes. In this view, Enlightenment discourses have dissolved distinctions and made it more difficult to sustain, at least rhetorically, the claim that some lives are worth more than others. The Enlightenment did not create a superior human being, a position that Kant ridiculed by suggesting that we have an "overheated mind." Nor is Enlightenment a code word for secularism. The boundaries between the religious and the secular are porous; religion has motivated individuals to engage in compassionate action toward distant strangers; and secular discourses have not flattened distinctions. Instead, the claim is that a conjunction of material and ideological forces have formed a particular meaning of humanity.

These forces of compassion potentially contain an expansionary logic. The discourse of humanity, with its insistence that differences dissolve, has led to the care of previously neglected and even rejected peoples. Alongside humanity, the principle of impartiality, which claims that all individuals are equally deserving of respect and thus rejects discriminatory behavior, also contributes to a morally flat world. Furthermore, once one set of needs are attended to, then it becomes virtually impossible to refuse an adjacent or connected set of needs. Hugo Slim calls this "ethics creep." "Surely one cannot cure a wounded man," Slim observes, "only to send him back into battle or heal a small child only to discharge her back into a malarial area with no health education and primary health care system? If one sees and knows the deeper causes of a person's sickness, one is duty-bound to address it. Not to do so is morally irresponsible. It is this ethical logic that made most relief NGOs become development NGOs. And it is a good logic." A typical
experience for many aid workers entering the field for the first time is to feel especially touched by one child or family, to want to help them by giving them money, sponsoring a child’s education, or perhaps adopting the child, securing a job for the father or mother in the field office, or arranging for the family to migrate to the West. Consider the following statement by Paul Farmer:

Soon you find out that the children you are taking care of for their complex diseases also are not in school. Or you see the thousandth case of typhoid, and you know that is because people don’t have clean drinking water. Or you see a whole family living in a very tiny hut, all with tuberculosis, and you realize, of course, that not only do they not have access to care for tuberculosis, but they also don’t have adequate housing. And so it sort of opens up a Pandora’s Box. Once you start doing a good job taking care of sick people…and become involved in their lives and visit them in their home…and you discover that they are not just sick, but they are facing what seem to be insuperable problems."1

In a slightly more cynical tone, MSF’s Rony Brauman observes: “As the NGOs are happy to repeat, ‘the needs are limitless.’ This slogan provides a good interpretation of the humanitarian feeling, which is by definition unlimited because its object is suffering humanity, and it offers a prime fuel for organizational growth.”14 This expansionary logic helps explain the slow but steady accretion of humanitarianism in various nooks and crannies. Although these explanations help identify the conditions that incorporated more peoples and lengthened the list of needs, they cannot explain outbursts of compassion. My observation is that these ethical awakenings are produced by a crisis of faith and a process of atonement; these, in turn, are caused not by abstractions, God or law, but rather by a cataclysmic event. Ethics, observed the philosopher Emmanuel Levinas, is “first and foremost an event. Something must happen to me in order for me to stop being ‘a force that continues on its way’ and wake up instead to pangs of conscience.”17 But what is it about these events that deliver this kind of impact? While killing, destruction, and unnecessary suffering can give us pause and move us to act, arguably it is when we feel implicated in the suffering that we undertake the emotionally wrenching process of critical self-reflection. It is our behavior and not the behavior of others that unsettles. Humanitarianism is sustained by a particular story that we tell ourselves—that we are good, loving individuals. There are moments, though, when this narrative of the compassionate and loving self becomes impossible to sustain. There are encounters that can force individuals to reexamine everything they thought they knew about others and themselves, unleashing a spiritual anxiety.

Such moments can lead to a process of atonement—the expiation of sin. The concept of atonement is deeply religious, central to Judaism and Christianity, and while the practices of atonement have changed over the centuries, some of its fundamental features resemble how humanitarian actors respond to a crisis of faith. To begin with, there must be a recognition that a sin has been committed; this sin might be against God or against another human being, but the consequence is that a relationship has been broken and must be repaired. This recognition demands a response. Historically such responses have included a range of religious practices, and the goal of these acts of repentance is not necessarily to punish but rather to return one’s soul to its proper place. One venerable response is sacrifice. In ancient Judaism sins were expiated by sacrifices at the temple in Jerusalem; after the Jewish expulsion by Rome, prayer became its substitute. A fundamental tenet of Christianity is that Jesus Christ died on the cross to sacrifice and atone for the sins of others. Today the language of sacrifice continues, though not usually with demands for human or animal sacrifice.

However, sacrifice is often not enough. It also is essential that, as demanded by the Jewish prophet Ezekiel, repentance include “a new heart and a new spirit.” Outward expressions of this awakening include charity. To work for the poor, then, is not punishment but rather reparation. For those who are already working for the poor and perhaps, in this respect, symbolizing the atonement of others, the journey might be especially intense, emotionally burning. In general, atonement encapsulates the process of regeneration, purification, and restoration of a unity with humankind. Although the concept of atonement is typically reserved for individuals, a comparable process occurs in the community. Communities also tell stories about themselves, how they define material and moral progress and how they are loving, compassionate, and good. There are, though, events, that violently disrupt such self-conceptions, moments that compel the recognition of a breach between who they say they are and what they do. One of the shocks of World War II was that “civilized” people committed such barbarity toward civilians, not only because they were in the path of war but also because they were seen as inhuman and thus could be cruelly treated and disposed of. Once the community acknowledges its sins and shortcomings, then it must repent in ways that honor the dead. There are various ways to do so, including erecting memorials, creating ceremonies and days of remembrance, and engaging in other symbolic rites that are designed to remember the dead and recognize their suffering. Repentance also can include acting in ways that are intended to stop such action from ever happening again: “Never again.”18 In other words, the living are at the service of the dead, and the dead deserve not only cemeteries but also moral institutions.19 The living are a bridge between the dead that still walk among
Although I have singled out the forces of destruction, production, and compasion, an additional source of influence bears mention, even if I will not anoint it as a fourth force: technology. Changes in material and human technologies have not only unleashed the destruction and disintegration that have motivated humanitarian action, they also have expanded the opportunities for it. Changes in transportation technology have shortened the distance between those who have and those who need. Changes in media technology have made claims of ignorance unsustainable. Media imagery, beginning with the emergence of war reporting in the mid-nineteenth century and continuing with today's satellite, telecommunications, and web-based technologies, has increased public awareness, which, in turn, has created a demand that something be done in the face of conscience-shocking suffering. In the late nineteenth century, Edmund Morel and missionaries used the recently invented camera to publicize King Leopold's savagery in the Congo Free State. In Mark Twain's satire of Belgian rule in King Leopold's Soliloquy, King Leopold laments, "The Kodak has been a sore calamity to us....I was looked up to as a benefactor of a down-trodden and friendless people. Then all of a sudden came the crash! That is to say, the incorruptible Kodak." The video footage of the starving people in Korem, Ethiopia, in 1984 helped to galvanize action. Changes in human technologies also have improved the capacity to intervene. There has been radical improvement in emergency medicine, delivery systems, and logistical capacities; the consequence is not only are we more efficient at saving lives, we also have greater confidence that we can.

The Ages of Humanitarianism

There have been three distinct ages of humanitarianism: an imperial humanitarianism, from the early nineteenth century through World War II; a neo-humanitarianism, from World War II through the end of the Cold War; and a liberal humanitarianism, from the end of the Cold War to the present. Each age is distinguished by the constellation of the forces of destruction, production, and compasion, which, in turn, shaped the overall purpose of humanitarianism and constrained how humanitarian organizations confronted the ethical dilemmas of the day. As we move from one age to the next, though, two trends emerge: a discourse of humanity that extends more protections to more populations that were once neglected or reviled; and a growing governance of humanitarianism, rendering humanitarianism increasingly public, hierarchical, and institutionalized. Although there were no clean breaks between one age and the next, cataclysmic events largely associated with war proved to be turning points and accelerators of these trends. The following table summarizes the ages and their elements.
TABLE 1 THE AGES OF HUMANITARIANISM

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<tr>
<th>Forces</th>
<th>1800-1945</th>
<th>1945-1989</th>
<th>1989-present</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Destruction</td>
<td>Imperial Humanitarianism</td>
<td>Neo-Humanitarianism</td>
<td>Liberal Humanitarianism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Production</td>
<td>Great Power war and colonialism</td>
<td>Cold War and decolonization</td>
<td>Liberal peace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compassion</td>
<td>Commerce</td>
<td>Development</td>
<td>Globalization</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Sovereignty</td>
<td>Human Rights</td>
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The Age of Imperial Humanitarianism (chapters 2 through 4) spans from the early 1800s through World War II. As the forces of destruction and production destroyed a local sense of community, the forces of compassion encouraged individuals to widen their horizons and to imagine new kinds of obligations to one another. Fueled by new ideologies of humanity and a belief that Christianity and the West defined the values of the international community, liberal and religiously inspired humanitarians set out to nurture new kinds of compassion, accepted new responsibilities, and aspired to release civilizing processes to reduce human suffering. The forces of destruction and compassion led to the establishment of the ICRC and the Geneva Conventions. It also reflected a Eurocentric idea of international community. Motivated by the ideas of spreading Christian fellowship and rescuing the fallen, Dunant imagined voluntary organizations rushing to provide medical assistance on the battlefield. The ICRC assumed that only European states would be able to understand fully and comply with the laws of war; it was not until Japan and Turkey asked for admission that the ICRC debated and decided to expand the club because it might spread European society.

Notwithstanding the ICRC’s quasi-public standing, this burst of relief activity was largely a private affair. Sometimes movements would try and use the state for its purposes, most notably when the antislavery societies tirelessly petitioned the British Parliament. But most humanitarian action occurred outside of formal channels of governance; even the ICRC was not quite a public body, falling in the space between a private relief agency and a public international organization. It was only with World War I that states became involved in humanitarian action, creating several international humanitarian organizations, including the High Commissioner for Refugees, which revealed how far states had come in accepting new kinds of responsibilities for the vulnerable—but also how far they had to go.

The Age of Neo-Humanitarianism (chapters 3 through 5) begins with the end of World War II and ends with the cessation of the Cold War. World War II, decolonization, and the Cold War created a new space for imagining new kinds of commitments to the welfare of more populations overlaid by superpowers striving to harness humanitarian action to their interests. The end of colonialism created an institutional vacuum in the Third World, quickly occupied by the superpowers, nongovernmental organizations, and international organizations pledging to bring progress and modernity to the backward populations. Universal versions of humanity and the community of peoples slowly edged out straitened views of humanity. While the infantilizing civilizing ideology was no longer acceptable, the arrival of new forms of global governance alongside ideologies that proclaimed that the rich and powerful had an obligation to “teach” the rest of the world altered the tone more than the workings of paternalism.

The globalizing tendencies of humanitarianism alongside the dangers of a more state-centered architecture became particularly evident during humanitarian emergencies. After World War II, states limited the few existing international humanitarian agencies to Europe, but they capitalized on world events and the discourses of humanity and impartiality to claim a universal jurisdiction. But there was no doubt who was in charge. Now that states and their international organizations were becoming more central to humanitarian action, agencies began emphasizing principles such as neutrality, independence, and impartiality as a way to clear a space for themselves. It would prove painfully difficult to do, especially because aid agencies were increasingly dependent on states and international organizations for their funding. And even those who used their principles to keep their distance from politics were not always happy with the results, including an ICRC whose concept of neutrality led some to accuse it of cowardice in the face of crimes against humanity. In places like Biafra, Vietnam, Cambodia, and Ethiopia, aid agencies discovered that they were part of the war and pawns for combatants, struggling to figure out how close to get to politics without getting burned and how to deliver aid without unwittingly prolonging conflict or suffering.

We now reside in a Liberal Humanitarian Age (chapters 8 through 10). International security shares the stage with human security and ethnic, religious, and nationalist conflict, and the international community’s response is to create a liberal peace that might remove the causes of violence. The concern with the dangers failed states posed to themselves and others heightened after September 11, 2001, as major powers and international organizations produced a sense of urgency to those domestic conditions, including poverty and despotism, that were said to be breeding grounds for terrorism. Saving failed states was now a human security issue, too important to be left to nongovernmental organizations. Development suffered its own ideological crisis in the 1980s, but the urge to provide economic relief continued with the emerging globalization agenda. Globalization was creating
winners and losers, with a growing fear that there would be a revolt by the losers if their needs were ignored, fueling various global campaigns, including debt relief, development, and disease prevention. The world encountered the “end of history,” and while many distanced themselves from this vitriolic formulation, there was no escaping liberalism’s rising hegemony—
even as the challenge became how to accommodate universalism in a world of diversity and growing forms of provincialism that resulted from globalization and growing forces that were seen as enemies of tradition. Growing connections, facilitated by technological revolutions in transportation and communication, heightened a sense of community, evident not only in the steady stream of global campaigns to ban landmines, provide debt relief, make medicines accessible to the poor, and on and on, but also in changes in the meaning of state sovereignty and, most prominently and profoundly, the ascendant discourse of human rights.

This new global environment had major consequences for humanitarianism, creating new opportunities alongside new dangers. The eruption of civil wars, complex humanitarian emergencies, and mass murder campaigns around the world led to new forms of humanitarian action—aid agencies attempting to deliver life-saving assistance in the midst of war, states becoming increasingly involved in the protection and delivery of assistance, and a growing number of international organizations engaging in the resolution of war. Until the 1990s, relief, rights, and development agencies engaged in parallel play, rarely contemplating the relationship among their fields of activity. A decade of humanitarian emergencies and postconflict reconstruction projects, though, encouraged these organizations to begin coordinating and integrating their programs and ambitions. Humanitarian agencies became busily involved in postconflict reconstruction and peacebuilding, promoting democracy and human rights, pursuing a human security portfolio, addressing the causes of poverty with the creation of microfinance projects, attacking gender violence and inequality, and teaching local communities how to settle their disputes peacefully. The desire by the international community to extend new kinds of protections to civilian populations led to a “responsibility to protect.” Humanitarian intervention, once dismissed as illegitimate, was now in play, and humanitarian organizations that once sought to use states for humanitarian action now found themselves being explicitly used by states as a tool for their political and strategic objectives.

The Humanitarians

Until now I have focused on the world of humanitarianism, giving proper respect to the global conditions that made and remade humanitarianism over the decades. Too much respect, though, imposes a cost. It might cause us to imagine that the world and the humanitarianism of its creation has coherence or that humanitarian organizations are supplicants and replicants, captured by forces greater than them and acting according to their instructions. This is not the case. Humanitarianism is replete with tensions that owe to different traditions of humanitarianism, and different kinds of humanitarian organizations with different missions make different decisions under differently imagined ethical dilemmas and project different kinds of moral imaginations that challenge themselves and the world in different ways. Humanitarian organizations are both of and beyond the world. To recover the ambiguities, below I explore humanitarianism’s relationship of power to the powerful and the powerless; the distinction between emergency and alchemical humanitarianism; and whether and how money shapes moral choices.

The Powerful and the Powerless

Power is always present in humanitarian action, but humanitarian organizations tend to be more sensitive to the power that others have over them than they are to the power that they have over others. Humanitarians depend on others to do good, especially on states and others who have political and military power. Humanitarians often need the cooperation of the very groups that are responsible for the suffering or who will help only so long as it furthers their interests. The ICRC needs the cooperation of those states who are suspected of abusing prisoners of war, political prisoners, and detainees. Aid organizations often seek funding from the same governments that they believe have caused the suffering they want to alleviate. Relief convoys often must negotiate with the same rogues that are causing, and frequently benefiting from, mass starvation. Aid agencies try to minimize the compromises they make, but compromise they must.

Over the decades humanitarians have used, in some form, fashion, or combination, four principles to enable them to follow their values and not the interests of others. Humanity commands attention to all humankind. Impartiality demands that assistance be based on not on the basis of nationality, race, religious belief, gender, political opinion, or other considerations. Neutrality demands that humanitarian organizations refrain from taking part in hostilities or from any action that either benefits or disadvantages the parties to the conflict. Independence demands that assistance not be connected to any of the parties directly involved in the conflict or who have a stake in the outcome. One MSF official dramatized the importance of not taking government funds in the following way: “Can you imagine MSF convincing the Taliban [sic] of our neutrality if our operations were funded by your governments [from NATO]? For that matter, can you imagine the reverse? A health organization working in London or New York or Copenhagen
funded by the Taliban [sic]." Although there are various ways in which aid agencies have tried to maintain and assert their independence, both real and perceived, most prominent has been their desire to limit their financial dependence on states.

Like weak states that cling to their sovereignty because they have little else to protect them from powerful states, aid agencies clutch at these principles to create what is now called a "humanitarian space," a space where ethics can operate in a world of politics, one that allows aid workers to reach victims during times of war and limits what states can ask of relief agencies. These principles work, in part, because they are seen as "apolitical" and thus allow agencies to be innocent by association. Even though humanitarianism's perceived apolitical character is part confidence trick and part self-delusion, these principles help aid agencies do the impossible.

Nearly all humanitarians, regardless of dialect, claim to be in solidarity with the objects of their compassion—yet the relationship between deliverer and recipient contains its own inequalities. Some can choose altruism; others have no choice but to play the role of the vulnerable but always grateful pauper. Those that presume the authority to represent the suffering of others frequently (mis)appropriate the pain in ways that celebrate the deliverer and limit the capacity of the victims to express in their own words their suffering and sorrow. The very cultivation of compassion can generate little more than feel-good moments that immunize onlookers from real action that can have more tangible effects. The "gift" often comes with obligations and generates new forms of dependency and obligation. The passion of compassion can lead to a "politics of pity" that creates a distance between the observer and the suffering object.

While there exist various ways to dissect the power imbalance between the giver and the recipient, the concept of paternalism encapsulates many of the central ambiguities of humanitarianism. Humanitarianism and paternalism overlap in various ways. Paternalism can be understood as "the interference with a person’s liberty of action justified by reasons referring exclusively to the welfare, good, happiness, needs, interests or values of the person whose liberty is being violated." Humanitarian action is dedicated to helping others, and it frequently does so without soliciting the desires of those who are seen to be in need. Both, in this way, are motivated by an ethics of care. And, at the same time, both seek control over the lives of others. The philosopher Avishai Margalit dramatizes the point in the following way: "It is easy to adopt a tolerant attitude toward mistakes made by people to whom we are basically indifferent. But it is difficult with regard to people we care about, perhaps most of all with regard to our children. It is painful, sometimes unbearable, to watch them waste a distinct talent they have, behave irresponsibly regarding their health, or chose an obviously wrong spouse. Caring may easily play out at the expense of respect for the other’s autonomy."
who is the “human” that demands our compassion? Following Margalit, in order to be paternalistic we have to care enough about the person to worry about his or her welfare. This is relatively easy to do when considering those we know, especially immediate members of our families. But often we do not care enough about the welfare of others to be paternalistic. Although there are various reasons why we choose to care or are indifferent to others in need, critical to humanitarians is the “human.” The very notion of humanity, as the French anthropologist Claude Lévi-Strauss observed, is a recent invention. For most of human history, people tended to draw distinctions and to deny that those that were not like them might also be human, calling them subhumans, vermin, ghosts. There was no place for these outsiders in the community and, by extension, little reason to help them during hard times.49

Beginning in the nineteenth century, a more inclusive view of humanity slowly evolved, extending the boundaries of the community and expanding the number of people who were viewed as worthy of assistance. The anti-slavery societies had to fight against a fairly widespread view that Africans were not quite human, perhaps were not even capable of registering pain, as they urged their fellow citizens to recognize the humanity of people whom they had never seen and whose skin color differed from their own. Dunnant wanted Europeans to recognize the humanity of all soldiers, not just their own. Over time the principle of impartiality became wedded to the concept of humanity. Today the inclusive concept of humanity erases the grounds for discriminating against or in favor of a particular population, insisting that we help those in need and not merely those whom we know or like. I do not mean to suggest that people and institutions undertake some kind of objective calculation of need before deciding whom to help; many factors influence whom people help and where aid agencies go, including previous historical ties, proximity, and, not least, international, media-saturated, spectacles. Today we typically give to those for whom we feel “special responsibilities” even as we recognize the principle of impartiality. Humanity might now be all-inclusive, but this took a fair bit of work, and there are many imperfections.

Second, how do we know what is best for another person? Perhaps such needs are self-evident. The emergency room doctor treating an unconscious victim of a car accident cannot and should not ask for the individual’s consent. The same is true for the refugee camp doctor who is attempting to save the life of a victim of a landmine or a severely malnourished child. Yet much of humanitarian action does not occur during life-or-death circumstances but instead during less dramatic situations. It is difficult to know someone else’s needs, especially when crossing moral, political, social, and cultural boundaries, as humanitarians do. A striking feature of the history of humanitarianism is the rarity with which humanitarians ask the recipients what they want but instead rely on their own judgment. There are many reasons for this confidence: a belief that God is on their side; that they represent the best of humanity; that they have the expertise because of their experience and education; and that a victim’s lack of resources or education indicates that he might not know what is in his best interests.

Regardless of the sources of such certitude, the humanitarian frequently wants to reform societies to remove the causes of suffering. However noble, such goals are premised on several, potentially less enlightened, sentiments. Such reforms can only take place through power and politics, which, of course, revisits the possibility of paternalism and the justification for deciding for others what is in their best interests. Although interveners frequently appeal to humanity and universal values to justify their interventions, these seemingly egalitarian principles and values, especially in the context of intervention, nearly always presume a ranking of what is superior and what is inferior. In the very same speech in which Lévi-Strauss recognized the rather dramatic development of the concept of humanity, he also observed that even inclusive views incorporate hierarchical notions of humanity.40 In short, humanitarians proclaim that they act in the name of universal values; desire to spread those values with the aim of enabling all members of the community to realize their humanity; and, therefore, operate with notions of where communities reside on some continuum of progress.

Emergency Workers and Alchemists

While humanitarianism comes in many shades, two are significant for understanding how humanitarian agencies try to change the world and how they confront the challenges in their path—emergency humanitarianism and alchemical humanitarianism, which differ in their goals, principles, and relationship to politics and therefore have different relationships to the world and to their populations of concern.41

Emergency humanitarianism concerns the provision of relief to those in immediate peril; leaves to the principles of neutrality, impartiality, and independence; and has a hands-off attitude toward politics. Agencies that fall into this camp, including the ICRC and MSF, largely focus on keeping people alive. Nothing more. In an address to NATO officials in December 2009, Christophe Fournier, international president of MSF, drew a line between a bare-bones humanitarianism and everything else:

Our ambition is a limited one. Our purpose is not to bring war to an end. Nor is it humanitarian to build state and government legitimacy or to strengthen governmental structures. It’s not to promote democracy or capitalism or women’s rights. Not to defend human rights or save the environment. Nor does humanitarian action involve the work of economic
development, post-conflict reconstruction, or the establishment of functioning health systems. Again, it is about saving lives and alleviating suffering in the immediate term. This marks a fundamental difference between our two ways of thinking. What you do in Afghanistan today is for the Afghanistan of tomorrow. What we do in Afghanistan today is for today. We heal people for the sake of healing people.45

The ability of emergency humanitarians to carry out this modest but essential task, they argue, depends on following the principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence.46 These principles create a “humanitarian space,” a sanctuary for aid workers and victims. Only by honoring these principles will states give the access to the populations at risk; being viewed as taking sides or playing favorites can cost the lives of those in need and the aid workers.

Emergency humanitarianism labors to separate humanitarianism from politics.44 The ICRC’s mandate mentions explicitly its apolitical character. Many of the postwar international humanitarian agencies created by states, including the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), are defined as apolitical and are commanded to stay out of politics. This division of labor works for emergency agencies because it provides a discursive space for agencies to operate. Rony Brauman, a former president of MSF, forcefully argues that “humanitarianism is not a political issue and it should remain separate from political maneuvering.”44 Emergency humanitarians will not get a strong argument from states, who generally prefer humanitarians to know their place. They can protest all they want, but those in this camp, Brauman included, practice politics. It is about a particular brand of politics. Operating in the spirit of Michel Foucault’s famous aphorism that “the misfortunes of men must never become the silent left-overs of politics,” they practice a politics of resistance, of humanity, of protest against an international sacrificial order that sacrifices so many in the name of justice, of life.46 Henry Dunant was outraged that politics might treat its soldiers as disposable victims. As guardian of international humanitarian law, the ICRC continuously lobbies states to honor the Geneva Conventions; these acts resemble politics, especially for those who are accused of violating them.47 Bernard Kouchner and the others who founded MSF were members of various leftist organizations, participated in the student movement in Paris in May 1968, and then went to Biafra and other war zones because it represented a new style of politics. MSF sent a medical team to Baghdad in the days preceding the American invasion in 2003 not because it wanted to save lives, since it did not expect the Iraqi government to give it authorization to work, but instead to stand in solidarity with the vulnerable and to enact a politics of resistance.48 Several former MSF presidents or vice presidents have held elected office—including, most famously, Bernard Kouchner, who served as the United Nation’s proconsul of Kosovo after the 1999 invasion and is now France’s foreign minister. MSF’s principle of witness often influences its decision to deploy to or remain in the field; in many circumstances they cannot save lives but can make a political statement by being present.49 In general, emergency agencies work to maintain the appearance of being apolitical because it helps them practice their kind of politics.

Because emergency humanitarianism generally confines itself to saving lives, it tends to avoid the worst connotations of paternalism—but not completely. Saving lives would seem to avoid many of the possible sins of paternalism because of the presumption that people want to live, a presumption so strong that it can be assumed even in the absence of consent. In fact, I once had a discussion with a longtime member of MSF who commented that one reason why MSF chose not to go beyond emergency relief was that they were worried about becoming paternalistic. But restricting activities to emergency medicine does not eliminate the possibility of paternalism. After all, doctors are frequently accused of treating patients like inanimate objects that are to be manipulated for their own good. As another MSF worker once confessed, they work in environments of radical inequality, and it is impossible to avoid paternalism, no matter how much they try.

Alchemic humanitarianism involves saving lives at risk and addressing the root causes of suffering; operates with a less binding set of principles; and treats politics as a necessary and at times even welcome feature of humanitarian action. What does alchemy have to do with humanitarians who want to make the world a better place? The relationship might be subtle and slightly insulting, but the association is far from contrived or unfair. Although alchemy is now understood as a pseudo-science (at best), and alchemists are associated with the fanciful desire to transform unassumings metals into gold and silver, alchemists tried to bring together the physical and spiritual worlds in order to produce a new and more valuable object. Alchemists were treated as experts, possessors of knowledge with the capacity to create highly valued and, at times, nearly sanctified objects. And even some of the most revered scientists of the modern age were devotees of alchemy, including Sir Isaac Newton.49 Although it is fashionable to call humanitarians the new missionaries, it is more accurate to call them the new alchemists, given their attempt to harness the science of the day to transform social, political, economic, and cultural relations so that individuals can lead more productive, healthy, and dignified lives. Those engaged in development, peacebuilding, and community empowerment strategies frequently use empirically grounded research, trial-and-error methods, and close observation to draw inferences that can guide future action; to the extent that they do, then they are on much firmer ground than the original alchemists (and in this sense, the label is unkind and unfair). But when
the conversation turns to how to produce peace, or how their individual programs might contribute to peacebuilding, I am less certain that they are any more justified in their confidence than the medieval alchemist in his Midas touch.

Alchemical humanitarianism emerged in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. Decades before Donant wrote his stirring memoir, various intellectuals, politicians, jurists, and clergy started an impressive number of reform movements with the intention of arresting the apparent disintegration of moral society as a consequence of rapid industrialization, urbanization, and market expansion. Drawing from a mixture of religious and Enlightenment ideas, they pushed for public interventions to alleviate suffering and restore society’s moral basis, concentrating on domestic issues such as temperance, charity for the poor, child labor, public education, and, most famously, the abolition of slavery. The urge to reform and transform intensified over the decades, bringing more of daily life under its domain. This broader movement suggests a connection between early-nineteenth-century abolitionists, the late-nineteenth-century missionary movements, the mid-twentieth-century development agencies, and the early-twenty-first-century peacebuilding programs.

Alchemical humanitarianism judges the merits of impartiality, neutrality, and independence in each individual situation. These principles can help aid workers do their work, but not always. At times combatants will not give them access, no matter how principled these agencies claim to be. Civilians are not only war’s unintended victims; they can also, in fact, be its intended targets. Because genocide, ethnic cleansing, and crimes against humanity can occur only if civilians are left unprotected, those carrying out such depravities have little interest in letting in well-intended outsiders. Under these circumstances, how do principles of neutrality and independence help the victims? How did neutrality help the victims of the Rwandan genocide? Moreover, because their ambitions include trying to remove the causes of suffering and vulnerabilities, it is nearly impossible to appear neutral.

Alchemical agencies, therefore, have a more complicated relationship to politics. Like emergency agencies, they cherish being perceived as apolitical because it facilitates their ability to work without triggering the suspicion of the state or local elites; they often present their activities as technical and not political in order to avoid suspicion. Yet if agencies want to remove the causes of suffering, then they will have to get their hands dirty with politics. They will have to advocate for the redistribution of political power, the reallocation of resources, and the enforcement of rights. They certainly can insist that they are not political, but local elites, who would be the likely losers of any reforms, know better. Furthermore, resource-starved humanitarian agencies cannot and need not tackle this ambitious agenda on their own. States can help. It is because of the tireless lobbying, pleading, cajoling, and shaming on the part of humanitarian organizations that, on occasion, states have responded to the tragedies around the world, adopted more progressive foreign policies, and marshalled their considerable power for good. Advocacy is politics by another name. Politics, far from being the enemy, can be a brother in arms.

Given the desire to remove the causes of suffering through various kinds of interventions, for alchemical humanitarianism paternalism has always been imminent or present. The nineteenth-century missionaries and liberal humanitarians were paternalistic, often quite unapologetically so, on the assumption that these childlike populations needed adults to civilize them. Today there is such stigma attached to paternalism that no right-thinking humanitarian would ever admit to it, but in many instances paternalism exists in all but name. It is only recently that many humanitarian agencies have undertaken needs assessments or incorporated the views of local populations. As I previously noted, there are many reasons why they have traditionally neglected or discounted local opinion, including the belief that they have superior knowledge and the conviction that they need to ignore the loudest voices, often those who have the guns and who are most committed to defending the status quo, if they are going to promote social change. In any event, I do not want to bury or praise humanitarians for their paternalism, only to insist that, like death and taxes, it is a near-certainty.

For much of humanitarianism’s history, emergency workers and alchemists were aware of each other but tended to go about their business without paying too much mind to the other, except during times of war. During the nineteenth century, those wanting to humanize war in Europe and those wanting to improve the lives of the native populations in newly acquired colonial territories had little reason to coordinate their activities or even exchange views. World forces, though, encouraged both sides to expand their horizons. Beginning slowly with World War I, picking up steam in World War II, and then galloping at full speed after the end of the Cold War, humanitarians began actively to consider the relationship between relief and reconstruction. These considerations, toward the end of the century, turned into a full-fledged debate between emergency humanitarians and alchemical humanitarians about what humanitarianism is and how it should be practiced. Tensions run high because a lot is at stake, including lives, resources, and status.

**Money and Morals**

Humanitarianism requires more than morals—it also requires money. Until a few years ago, the perpetual struggle of NGOs to keep their operations running was barely mentioned, conveying the impression that staff were
so consumed by saintly principles that they gave little thought to earthly matters like budgets. This was always far from the truth. Money is scarce, but populations in need certainly are not. Although there are moments, frequently during well-publicized disasters, when humanitarian organizations are flush with funds, usually they are worried about their income. This can be a tiring, endless, and stressful problem. Fundraising might have killed Eglington Jeph, the founder of Save the Children. By her account she was terrible at fundraising, was wearing herself out in the process, but felt that she had to lead by example. "It was strange," Jeph writes, "that I knew perfectly well that I was killing myself, and that I was killing myself for nothing." Longtime members of World Vision International (WVI) remember the old days, long before it was one of the world’s largest and best-funded aid agencies, when they would hold all-night prayer meetings to pray for contributions to stay afloat.

Because good causes do not sell themselves but rather have to be sold, aid agencies have developed considerable marketing prowess. Relief agencies have used modern marketing techniques, circulating heart-stopping, graphic pictures of human suffering and catchy slogans that communicate both urgency and a confidence that money would make a difference. They obtain celebrity endorsements and tie-ins with companies. They cultivated the media in order to garner favorable coverage, "brand" themselves and their operations, and associate themselves with the defining issues and events of the day. There is nothing new about this marketing acumen. Eglington Jeph used all kinds of marketing techniques, including distributing leaflets with pictures of starving babies and taking out newspaper advertisements imploing people to give pennies to save the life of a child. As one founding member of CARE reflected, "If there was any publicity stone left unturned, I can't think what it could have been." Because fundraising can be too important to be left to volunteers, Sunday collection plates, and door-to-door campaigns, many agencies hire professionals to staff new publicity departments and outside consultants to develop and deliver the message. As one high-ranking WVI staff member unapologetically recalled: "We were a marketing machine. We worked with ad agencies. We took it all very seriously." In direct contrast to the British tradition of volunteerism, Oxfam did the heretical and hired professionals. MSF was one of the first relief agencies to experiment with direct marketing, an experiment that paid considerable dividends.

Some activities are easier to market than others. Emergencies have been a relatively easy sell. Individuals can readily see the need and imagine how their contribution can save lives. Accordingly, many agencies put their marketing machines into high gear the moment an emergency erupts. In fact, a good emergency can keep an agency running in the black for months. One WVI staff member assertively defended the tendency to pull out the cameras first and then the energy bars on the grounds that people give most generously during emergencies; however crass and manipulative it might appear to be to use the suffering of others to solicit funds, it works, providing more resources for other programs in need. Many agencies understand that they are walking a fine line between utilitarianism, where the publicized misery of some might generate the resources needed to alleviate the misery of many, and exploitation, where pictures reduce the poor to stick figures and remove their dignity. But they believe that they have to risk commodifying the suffering of strangers because nothing else works quite as well. So, in the spirit of Bernard Kouchner’s la loi du tapage (the law of hype), they will advertise if not embellish the tragedy in order to tap into the guilt of the rich.

As agencies sell the cause, they also sell themselves. Resembling the humanitarian version of "what is good for General Motors is good for America," many act as if "what is good for the agency is good for the cause." In response to a rather lackluster early few months, CARE in 1947 stepped up its efforts at self-promotion, believing that promoting itself was promoting its cause and that by promoting the cause it was promoting itself. When Lutheran World Relief was deprived of its traditional source of funding in the 1970s, it immediately developed a marketing strategy designed to keep its name in the public eye.

Oxfam’s rise owed in part to its astute self-promotion. The agency placed ads in newspapers, journals, and other public outlets in order to raise its visibility, publically thanked its contributors in order to encourage loyalty, and actively attempted to brand itself so that when people thought of, for instance, world hunger they would think of Oxfam. In 1958 it helped to create the World Refugee Year and, later the same year, the very well covered Freedom From Hunger Campaign in order to bring attention to the needy and satisfy its own cravings for publicity and funding. In 1960 Oxfam used the Congo to burn "the image of the starving African child onto the collective British conscience" and, in the process, catapult itself "into public view as the British medium for prompt relief to famine victims in faraway places." Another example of Oxfam’s marketing acumen is its well-publicized clothing campaigns; in fact, it may have meant more to the organization than to the those in the Third World. Until the 1950s much of Oxfam’s activities revolved around its clothing drives, but shipping clothes is expensive, and the types of clothes that the wool-wearing British tended to donate hardly matched the needs of, say, the famine-stricken Indians in Bihar. Consequently, staff began to question whether to continue Oxfam’s emphasis on clothing. For many the answer was an emphatic yes. Clothing was part of its very identity. Even if this was an expensive identity to maintain, clothing had the additional benefit of being registered in accounts as money equivalent, which lowered Oxfam’s overhead expenses to around
10 percent, a figure that would impress donors of Oxfam's leanness. Lastly, clothing drives provided a way to maintain Oxfam's grassroots support; the physical act of dropping off clothes at an Oxfam shop created a tangible bond that could not be duplicated by writing a check. Oxfam continued as is. While Oxfam might not make clothes, clothes helped to make Oxfam.

The vital question is: will aid agencies sell out their principles as they sell themselves and suffering? One increasingly popular portrait is of aid agencies "scrambling" for resources, ready to do and say (and to not do and to not say) whatever it takes to win the affections of their donors. Humanitarian staff have told me tales of organizations holding their tongue because they did not want to bite the hand that fed them, or deciding to go into one area and not another because that was where the money was. One former senior staff member of a major relief agency recalls the reaction of a colleague in the foundation office to the news that he and others were successfully moving toward a plan for prevention: if we reduce the death toll, then we will have a harder time raising money. Sometimes doing well matters more than doing good.

Although these stories make good copy, the claim that aid agencies are willing to suspend their principles to satisfy their donors is largely based on innuendo, speculation, anecdote, and incidental correlations—not systematic evidence. Several years ago, in fact, I made plans to investigate these claims. Drawing from resource dependence approaches, my straightforward hypothesis was that the more dependent the aid agency is on states, the more likely it will alter its policies so that they are consistent with the states' interests. The hunch, therefore, is that aid agencies, such as MSF and World Vision International, that do not depend on states but instead on public contributions will have an easier time doing what they think is right and not bending their principles to satisfy the interests of states. Conversely, those agencies, such as International Rescue Committee, CARE International, Catholic Relief Services, and UNHCR, that are heavily dependent on states are presumed to be more willing to alter their policies in order to secure their resources. With this resource dependence model in hand, I began collecting the data to test the argument. However, I found myself frustrated time and again by the absence of credible information. Aid agencies are notoriously poor bookkeepers, especially prior to the 1990s, and tended to categorize similar activities in different ways and different activities in similar ways. Correlations regarding the relationship between financial dependence and activities cannot be trusted.

In addition to these methodological obstacles, my thinking also began to evolve in a slightly different direction; I became more interested in those moments when humanitarian agencies interrogate their ethics and less interested in whether their policies line up with what their donors want. Of course there is likely to be a relationship between the two; having money can make it easier to follow one's conscience. But in addition to the possibility that aid organizations might undergo such self-examination without necessarily coming to the conclusion that they must change in a fundamental way, in my research I became convinced that money matters much less than identity in understanding the conditions under which agencies undertake such a process.

Before proceeding to discuss one of the conditions that is likely to trigger such an ethical journey, it is important to note that organizations are built like draft horses, designed to put one foot in front of the other, never looking sideways and certainly never looking backward. There are many reasons why organizational change tends to be incremental and why organizations typically avoid the kind of painful soul-searching that typically must accompany a radical change. Change is costly. Aid organizations will rightly worry about whether they are harming their own existence by moving in new directions. There are the obvious financial costs involved, as well as the potential for rupture with existing donors. Aid agencies, like all of us, are more sensitive to losses that can be measured in the present than future intangible gains. Organizations are built to be suspicious of radical change, obsessed with rules, comfortable with tradition, and addicted to habit. In the end, to undertake true change requires the courage to look oneself in the mirror and risk seeing something unrecognizable—something we generally avoid.

Yet aid agencies can and do undertake the necessary ethical labor, considering not only their strategies but also their missions. Periods of financial crisis—when the agency nears bankruptcy or experiences hard times—are certainly a major cause of organizational change. Desperate times call for desperate measures, as the saying goes. But organizations that are experiencing severe economic pressure, at least the organizations in this book, are not willing to do anything to stay afloat. Instead, they keep one eye on their principles, the other on their donors' perception of their legitimacy. In other words organizations will revise their principles to accommodate the organizational changes they need to make to survive. The history of humanitarianism reveals many examples of this process.

Humanitarian organizations also can undertake wrenching soul-searching when they believe that they have acted in ways that violate their basic principles, contributed to harm and injustice, or prolonged the suffering of others. In other words, relief agencies that suffer crises of faith are potentially more likely to reconsider and potentially change their fundamental principles. Relief workers can vividly recall circumstances that have forced them to reexamine their basic understanding of the community, who is a member, what members need and deserve, how the weakest members might participate in their own emancipation, and how their own humanity has been affected. In this respect, aid agencies experience their own process
of atonement. After its silence in the face of the death camps during the Holocaust, the ICRC reexamined a policy of neutrality that appeared to give comfort to the killers. After it finally acknowledged that it had responded to the genocides in Bosnia and Rwanda with indifference, the UN undertook a very painful process of introspection. As many aid agencies discovered over the last decade, sometimes the unintended consequences of their programs are a result of their failure to listen to the people they wanted to help. What triggers a crisis of faith is difficult to predict, and how that crisis is resolved is equally uncertain and dependent on many situational factors, including money, but at the very least it is important to acknowledge the possibility that aid agencies can try to stop focusing on the world at large and interrogate their own motives. Aid agencies are sometimes the first to tell the international community what it must atone for and how to do so, and even they must occasionally look in the mirror and imagine what they have done and what they have become. It is at these very moments of self-doubt that humanitarians demonstrate the capacity to act beyond the here and now.

PART I

The Age of Imperial Humanitarianism
THE REVOLUTION in moral sentiments and the emergence of a culture of compassion is one of the great unheralded developments of the last three centuries. Although charity and benevolence were part of everyday life, they were not a central part of organized society. In this way the revolution in compassion resembled the corresponding revolution in capitalism and the states system: there were pockets of long-distance trade and even wage labor prior to the seventeenth century, and there were certainly interstate rivalries prior to the seventeenth century, but there was a grand transformation in the global economy and the states system in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Something similar happened to compassion beginning in the eighteenth century as it moved from part of the private realm and into the public realm, and the alleviation of human suffering became a defining element of modern society.

Evidence of this sea change in compassion can be observed from strategically placed historical outposts. Throughout history, various religious and lay figures practiced compassion in their daily lives, but there was no regime of sympathy. In the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, Latitudinarian preachers, in an offshoot of Anglicanism, sought to combat puritan pessimism regarding human nature and introduce a realm of virtue oriented around a new spirit of benevolence. Some historians credit them for laying the groundwork for a new doctrine of sympathy and feeling; regardless of their actual impact, they were pushing a new set of ideas.\textsuperscript{1} According to the literary historian R. S. Crane, the doctrine of
humanitarianism and the notion of the sympathetic man began to make inroads in the mid-eighteenth century, commenting that this development was "something new in the world—a doctrine, or rather a complex of doctrines, which a hundred years before 1750 would have been frowned upon, had it ever been presented to them, by representatives of every school of ethical thought." Although most of these acts and discussions concerned neighbors helping neighbors, at times they extended to foreigners. In 1755 a massive earthquake crushed Lisbon, inspiring one of the first pan-European relief efforts. In eighteenth-century France, a philosophical movement helped to popularize the concept of humanité, implying a deeply felt concern for the welfare of one's fellow human beings. In this spirit, Emmerich de Vattel, a seminal figure in the history of modern international law and international relations, claimed that nations are bound by "humanitarian obligations" (offices d'humanité). These humanitarian obligations are "the mutual assistance and duties which men owe one another as social beings who must help each other for their self-preservation and happiness and in order to live according to their nature." But it was not until the late eighteenth century that organized compassion became part of the everyday. Reflecting on developments in the late eighteenth century, Hannah Arendt observed:

History tells us that it is by no means a matter of course for the spectacle of misery to move men to pity; even during the long centuries when the Christian religion of mercy determined moral standards of civilization, compassion operated outside the political realm and frequently outside the established hierarchy of the Church. Yet we deal here with men of the eighteenth century, when this age-old indifference was about to disappear, and when, in the words of Rousseau, an "innate repugnance at seeing a fellow creature suffer" had become common in certain strata of European society and precisely among those who made the French revolution.

At another point Arendt observed that by the early nineteenth century, rapidly modernizing Europe began experiencing a "passion for compassion." The extraordinary was becoming ordinary. A rapidly growing number of standing organizations, committees, and societies began forming to alleviate suffering, at first locally and then more remotely. Additional evidence of the growing centrality of compassion can be found not only among its admirers but also among those who were less than charmed. Arendt was not always fulsome in her praise of compassion. She worried that compassion could become part of a politics of pity, and the basis for violent excesses of modern revolutions. Others, likewise, worried that a politics of pity might have the effect of removing the humanity of the object being pitied or giving the weak a new form of control over the powerful. By the end of the nineteenth century, Friedrich Nietzsche grimaced at how modern philosophes were demonstrating a new "predilection for an overvaluation of compassion," whereas before they appeared to be unified on the "worthlessness of compassion." Love it or hate it, compassion was becoming part of modern life.

There is greater consensus on the fact of this expansion of compassion than on the question of which of its many possible causes were most consequential. The Hobbesian image of a mechanical, nearly soulless, asocial individual lost influence to the growing belief that compassion was a natural human instinct and a measure of a person's worth. Evident in a range of texts, including Adam Smith's Theory of Moral Sentiments, there was a growing appreciation for the human capacity to exhibit sympathy, a virtue inextricably related to the emerging discourse of "humanity." While sympathy, much like humanity, exhibited real limits, the emerging language of natural rights helped to dissolve existing categories of inclusion and exclusion. In late-eighteenth-century revolutionary France a rights discourse led to the extension of citizenship to Europe's "other"—the Jews. This period also witnessed the ascending idea of an autonomous self that was capable of using reason and making moral judgments, which, in turn, gave rise to a concern with those factors that hindered that autonomy and the capacity for learned thought.10 Technological advances in communication and transportation caused individuals to become more aware of the suffering of others in distant lands, ways they might have contributed to that suffering, and approaches to alleviating it.11 The clergy viewed these developments as consistent with and nurturing Christian notions of love, compassion, and charity. Humanitarianism represented a new "historical stage in the education of the emotions."12 Enlightenment processes helped to translate sympathy into collective action. The Scientific Revolution and a growing science of government that concerned the protection of individual liberties and intervention for the public good stimulated a newfound confidence in the human capacity to make a difference and encouraged a "collective belief in the possibility—and desirability—of disinterested service in the cause of human moral improvement."13 These evolving beliefs contributed to a change in the organization of society for relief and charity. Whereas once the local religious institution oversaw the collection and distribution of charity, increasingly individuals organized into citizens' groups, associations, and committees to provide immediate relief and to agitate for greater public attention to the destitute and the vulnerable. As the historian Frank Klingberg astutely remarked: "All the humanitarian currents and forces of the [nineteenth] century may be thought of as the struggle for the organization of a civilized social life, with the economist, the churchman, the reformer, the poet, the satirist, and the legislator each working in many related 'causes' for the change of social conditions."
The third development was a logical extension of the first two and perhaps the most revolutionary of them all: the desire to go beyond relief and to attack the very causes of suffering. Traditionally, charity translated into various forms of alms-giving and helping people survive one day to the next. Increasingly, though, it had come to be seen as not enough, a shift that owed to several factors. The growing confidence in scientific knowledge and its application to human affairs translated into a belief that it was possible to improve the human condition. Moreover, charity was feared to bring out the worst in people, encouraging a dependent, irresponsible, undisciplined personality. As J. D. Roberts wrote, moral reform became tied up with a set of culturally evolving assumptions about the responsibility of individuals for their own actions—about their capacity to choose between vicious and virtuous conduct....At core it became a debate about the cultural control of the "animal appetites"—greed, lust, violence and (if it counts as an appetite) indulgence—all human propensities which have the potential to disrupt the fulfillment of social obligation to family, employer, neighbors, civil authority and God.

To address the causes of suffering required new forms of intervention that would alter society and humankind.

This humanitarian revolution was made possible not only by a change in moral sentiments and intellectual technologies but also by a period of rapid societal transformation marked by an expanding market, urbanization, and modernization. Political, social, and economic forces were breaking down existing political communities and encouraging individuals to envision new forms of solidarity and responsibility that were at a greater social distance. These transformations were also producing dislocations. The agricultural and industrial revolutions that increased economic output were also eroding rural society, causing populations to search for economic opportunities in increasingly dense cities. Settling into overcrowded urban slums far from their homes, these newcomers labored and loitered outside their traditional safety nets, fended for themselves in disorienting environments, and became seduced by all kinds of opprobrious activities. Public hangings were treated as public sport and seemed to bring out the vilest responses by crowds. Prostitution thrived and was supported by men of all classes. Alcohol was consumed with incredible passion and regularity, leading to all kinds of unsavory behavior according to many reformers of the age. Children were hardly a protected category and routinely witnessed—and often participated in—these salacious, lustful public activities.

The economic and social ferment catalyzed a period of tremendous religious experimentation, though evangelicalism was perhaps most important for the development of humanitarianism. Evangelicalism was a broad-brush term that can refer to any of the many Christian denominations that emerged with the Reformation, but in the late eighteenth century the evangelical movement was defined by several features: an emphasis on the conversion experience and being saved; the Bible as the only source of religious authority; a duty to share one's beliefs with others in various kinds of settings; and a focus on Jesus' death on the cross and his good works as the pathway to salvation.

Evangelicalism was closely associated with "awakenings." An awakening occurs when an individual emerges from a religious slumber and becomes spiritually alive. These awakenings occurred largely in and through revivals, emotional events in which sinners confessed and begged for salvation. While there were various strands of revivalism, they shared a belief that the individual can approach God on his or her own and has the free will to choose whether or not to be saved; an emotional, life-changing event aroused salvation; and the individual "maintained religiosity and salvation through continued experiences, inward piety, and right moral behavior." Evangelists were central to this process, and the best of them were charismatic and theatrical, using sophisticated methods of persuasion that raised the emotional temperature conducive to inducing religious conversion.

The very idea of an awakening represented a brush against the religious grain of the time. The doctrine of predestination, the belief that all humans are inherently sinful and can do little to save themselves, dominated religious interpretation. Evangelicalism and the revivalist movement, though, was premised on the belief that individuals possessed free will—they could choose to be saved, shifting salvation from God to the individual. Evangelicals began to spread the good news, and with considerable urgency. The great awakenings were bound up with millenarianism, the doctrine that the final judgment was fast approaching. To prepare themselves for the end of days, they needed to create a more perfect religious society. Such religious sentiments, of course, were hardly new; they were prominent among the first settlers in the United States and became a part of American culture, perhaps best known in John Winthrop's famous 1630 sermon, "A Model of Christian Charity." The New World would prepare for the next one. In any event, the increasingly powerful evangelical movement was acting with greater urgency.

The evangelical movement led to charitable activities and a burst of social reform. By no means did religious activists monopolize the reform movement. Also present were secular humanitarians, who shared with the religiously minded a belief that a lack of justice in contemporary society required a change in the conditions for the improvement of societal welfare, even as they disagreed on who was to blame, with some secular humanitarians claiming that Christianity itself was the problem.
Yet it is difficult to imagine this rather robust social reform movement without religion. Evangelicalism transformed religion into reform. Evangelicals believed that the purpose of life was to serve God, which translated into a struggle for personal salvation and to “save the souls of others.” This missionary impulse demanded urgent action because of the fear that “men were going to hell around them; they had to make every effort to save as many as they could.” And there was every reason to believe that society was going to hell. They were surrounded by evidence of society’s rot and all manner of sinning. These contemporary evils were being nourished by overpopulated, dreary industrial cities that were eroding traditional family life, the existing religious order, and society’s mores. The discovery of one moral ill invariably led to the identification of another.

In response, evangelicals, along with secular elites, established myriad organizations that seemed prepared, as one association later put it, to “re-dress . . . every oppression that is done under the sun . . . . For the cure of every sorrow by which our land or our race can be visited, there are patrons, vice-presidents, and secretaries. For the diffusion of every blessing of which mankind can partake in common, there is a committee.” They created aid societies of all kinds: for aiding stranded seamen and the widows of clergymen; for recovering the bodies of the drowned; for establishing good Christian families; and for converting Gypsies to Christianity. In Britain a “Tory humanitarianism school of thought” connected feelings of revulsion against oppression and misery with social action, claiming such graduates as the abolitionist William Wilberforce and Tory labor reformers like the elder Robert Peel, Richard Oastler, and Michael Thomas Sadler. In the United States religious sentiments associated with evangelicalism gave rise to various kinds of social reform and charitable movements that had a defining impact on the development of civil society.

Evangelicals, who wanted to save souls through acts of individual conversion and to build a more perfect, civilized, society, were hardly anti-modernist or leery of politics. While evangelicals were reacting against the Enlightenment’s assault on religion, their emphasis on reason and rationality meant that they saw no contradiction between reason and religion. In fact, modernization could stimulate religiosity and was interpreted as a sign of Christianity’s superiority. Although evangelical political thought included a healthy wariness of the state—for they were worried that the state might intervene in religion if the boundaries became blurred—evangelicals nevertheless were ready to work through and with the state to accomplish their goals. Politica, in short, was essential for creating a proper Christian nation. As George M. Thomas observes:

Revitalism radicalized . . . mainstream Protestantism: A moral citizenry must actively construct the Kingdom of God. Viewing themselves blessed by God with foundational documents of democracy, Christians were to push forward and directly transform the nation. This led to an emphasis on social reform movements that had as their goal the defining of citizenship by building moral categories into the legal order, citizenship, education, and work. These reforms included temperance, abolition, observation of the Christian Sabbath, and public schools.

Anything that obstructed salvation had to be remedied or removed, and rather than let nature take its course, it was possible to harness the modern science of government to accelerate the process.

Humanitarianism revealed an emancipatory spirit that included dissolving boundaries of indifference, creating new forms of community and obligations among its members, and instilling new kinds of commitments on the part of the fortunate to the welfare of the less fortunate. Migrating from the backstreets of London to colonial outposts in northern India and West Africa because of colonialism, capitalism, and Christianity, these humanitarians began preaching a unity of mankind, encouraging individuals to identify with the suffering of others and demonstrating compassion to all living creatures. Those involved in missions of charity, including both alchemical and emergency agencies, were aware that in any era of empires power was never far behind, and they tried to find ways to distance themselves from the powerful. And as they engaged in their humanitarian actions, they were aware that the powerful and the civilized could sin with the best of them and thus were part of the problem.

This humanitarian spirit also incorporated ideologies of paternalism. Although humanitarianism contained discourses of human equality, they also existed alongside discourses of Christianity, colonialism, and commerce that deemed the “civilized” peoples superior to the backward populations. This superiority, in turn, gave them a moral obligation to assure their suffering and help them improve their lot by ridding them of the traditions that had condemned them to a life of misery. Intervention, in other words, was intended to produce emancipation and liberation as defined by the civilized. In this way humanitarianism’s emancipatory spirit also contained mechanisms of control. It targeted specific populations that might be particularly restive and used a variety of nonviolent techniques to contain the possibility of violence and rebellion. These interventions would not only give food, shelter, and hope to the indigent and thus take the edge off of rebellion, they would also help to wean the new moral order. What humanitarianism could give, humanitarianism could also take away.

Although the emergency and alchemical branches of humanitarianism shared the general commitment to helping distant strangers and deepening new forms of transnational solidarity, the commitment of the former to protecting soldiers and of the latter to saving humans and humanity led
to important differences between the two. Both worried about being too closely associated with those in political power, but those in the alchemical camp had more to gain by using the power of the colonial administrators and foreign merchants. Both were influenced by many of the same forces of compassion, namely a Christian and civilizational mentality, but those on the emergency side rarely ventured outside of the geopolitical realm and had difficulty, at first, imagining codes of compassion being accepted by non-Christian powers; those in the alchemical camp were more keen to see compassion not only as saving lives but also as saving souls and societies. Both had a transnational orientation, but the emergency humanitarians tended to limit themselves to Europe, while those in the alchemical camp expressed a truly global perspective. Both were wary of politics, but given the desire by those in the alchemical camp to engage in sweeping reforms that would remove the causes of suffering, they had difficulty not venturing into sensitive areas claimed by the state. Their differences notwithstanding, they are part of the same family.

FOR MANY students of humanitarianism and human rights, it all began with the antislavery movement. Because of the volumes dedicated to its history, I need briefly mention only a few points that are critical to my argument. The antislavery movement was an historic breaching of established categories of humanity. As Adam Hochschild observes, “It was the first time a large number of people became outraged, and stayed outraged for many years, over someone else’s rights. And most startling of all, the rights of people of another color, on another continent.”

There was no single cause of this moral awakening. Instead, various world-turning developments combined to produce an outcome that only a few decades before few had reason to believe would ever exist. The age of rights and an unprecedented willingness to see all humans as capable of reason and thus born with some natural rights played a role. The Enlightenment and a newfound passion for human liberty influenced Granville Sharp, one of the early and relatively unheralded abolitionists, and many other pioneers of humanitarian action. New religious doctrines created new possibilities for salvation and for seeing others as having humanity. Nearly all of the founding abolitionists were evangelicals, and Quakers were overrepresented in the ranks, preaching that all humans were the Lord’s children and thus should be treated with equal respect and decency. Other evangelical sects dominated the leadership and the rank and file, who viewed slavery as inhumane and as a moral and physical barrier to the spiritual awakening of the slaves. Protestant missionaries also contributed to the growing
antislavery sentiment, as they tried to reconcile their desire to convert the slaves with the barbaric treatment of the slaves by slave owners who were hardly demonstrating Christian virtues. Indeed, many of the early antislavery leaders were not opposed to slavery as such; instead, they were horrified by the treatment of the slaves and the failure to give them proper religious instruction and, accordingly, championed a "Christian moral economy centered on reciprocal duties and obligations rather than on a liberal political economy organized around individual rights and liberties." The antislavery slogan, "Am I Not a Man and a Brother?" though probably coined by a rationalist Cambridge churchman in 1788, gained currency among evangelicals because it paired their religious identity with a sense of moral responsibility toward others (figure 2).

The antislavery leadership engaged in various tactics to encourage the British population to sympathize with the plight of the slaves. They authored pamphlets that detailed the practices and consequences of slavery. They put a human face on slavery by sponsoring tours of former slaves who told stories of their enslavement and emancipation. They assembled traveling displays that showcased slavery's brutality and its weapons of discipline, including thumbscrews, whips, and manacles. They challenged the public to consider whether they were implicated in this cruelty because every morning and afternoon they enjoyed their tea, in which they put sugar produced by the slave islands in the Caribbean. On this note, William Wilberforce preached how all Britons "ought to plead guilty, and not to exculpate ourselves by throwing the blame on others." The abolitionists attempted to get the British people to imagine the meaning of losing one's freedom, as many could because of the practice of impressment by the British Royal Navy. They challenged the religious establishment to defend a practice that inflicted such cruelty. Demonstrating considerable ingenuity and boundless determination, and possessing many of the characteristics that are now associated with successful social movements, the abolitionists drew from the experiences of their fellow crusaders in the American colonies and their experiences in other reform campaigns as they invented new techniques of persuasion to convince the British public that there was no principled or pragmatic justification for slavery and that Britain's very moral character was on trial.

Yet not all streams of antislavery sentiment, including some of its famous leaders and sects, were motivated primarily by the welfare of others. As examined in his detailed study of the abolitionist movement, Christopher Brown argues that antislavery activists might not have had economic interests, but they campaigned against slavery as a way of commenting on public morals, critiquing the conduct of the British Empire, expanding evangelicalism, shielding themselves from further guilt, and laying claim to a new kind of moral purpose from the British nation. "A few, to varying degrees, did take a genuine interest in the welfare of the enslaved," writes Brown, but what truly moved the abolitionists can be understood as being driven by self-regarding, self-concerned, and even self-validating impulses. In other words, they viewed the antislavery movement not only as an end in itself but also as a means to ends that were much closer to home and deeply personal.

The campaign to end slavery was swimming against the strong tide of history and economic and political interests, but it achieved a series of victories. The original campaign aimed at ending the Atlantic slave trade and the slavery of the Africans and their descendants in the Caribbean and North America. The first victory was the Abolition Acts of 1806-07; twenty-five years later, the climactic victory was the emancipation of the slaves on August 1, 1834. Yet their mission was hardly complete. Slavery was a sin everywhere, not just in the British Empire, so they kept going until the prohibition was universal. And even after they had successfully outlawed slavery, there was the problem of enforcement, debates about what to do with slaves that had escaped from places that still allowed slavery, and the continuing existence of labor practices that kept individuals in slave-like conditions. Various kinds of societies for the protection of native
populations, including, most famously, the Aborigines' Protection Society, joined forces with the antislavery movement.

The antislavery movement cultivated considerable compassion for distant strangers—and paternalism too. As the British public increasingly sympathized with the slaves and came to learn of their homelands and lives, they began to entertain obligations that went beyond the slaves' liberation and to consider how they should help develop their humanity. In this way, a sense of shared humanity and claims of mutual obligation could lead to paternalism; in other words, mutual obligation was not so mutual, and obligation meant not leaving them alone but rather becoming more involved for their own good. Slaves were human but not fully so or equal to white Christians. In a few decades biological theories of race would emerge to explain their perceived backwardness, but at this moment the British, many of whom had never seen an African, attributed their primitive state to various features, including race, religion, superstition, and lack of education. Abolitionists could not very well liberate the slaves and then leave them to a life of suffering and damnation. Instead, the Christian peoples had a duty to civilize them. At a dinner in 1816, William Wilberforce declared that free slaves would come to appreciate their protected position: “Taught by Christianity, they will sustain with patience the suffering of their actual lot...and will soon be regarded as a grateful peasantry.” Far from peculiar, Wilberforce's belief that imperialism and colonialism were creating new opportunities for humanitarian action was standard fare.

There was no moral justification for caring for liberated slave populations when so many others also seemed to be suffering from a combination of backwardness and European exploitation. Accordingly, there was a “new vigor towards those peoples who, while nominally free, were seen as suffering seriously from the impact of European expansion—Canada's Indian peoples, Pacific Islanders, New Zealand’s Maoris, the Aborigines of Australia, and the indigenous peoples of South Africa.” Although colonialism certainly nurtured such sentiments, they existed long before colonialism entered its most intensive phase. Feelings of compassion mixed with evangelicalism to stir a demand for a benevolent colonialism to atone for past sins. “Atonement,” writes the historian Andrew Porter, “involved not acts of contrition alone, but the performance of good works from which the doer might also benefit. Here lay the possibility of marrying Christian duty with secular self-interest, something the humanitarian coalition had already shown could become politically unstoppable.”

Colonialism and Compassion

Most of us now summarily dismiss any possible claim that colonialism might have had anything to do with compassion. Although colonial powers frequently depicted their rapacious behavior as for the benefit of the local populations, and many probably even believed it, today we give little credence to such outlandish possibilities. I have no intention of defending colonialism, but do want to suggest that, the relationship between colonialism and humanitarian sentiments is more complicated and, that the relationship contains elements that have a contemporary resonance. Or, to put the matter a little more provocatively, the humanitarians of the period of Imperial Humanitarianism should not be so quickly condemned, and the humanitarians of the period of Liberal Humanitarianism should not be so quickly excused.

The age of European exploitation and conquest forced the powerful to contemplate their relationship to local populations, especially once new discourses of humanity emerged in the late eighteenth century. The central questions were: What was the purpose of colonial power? How might it be legitimately used in relationship to the colonized? Importantly, few looked on the idea that might makes right, and most wrestled with how to use their considerable power responsibly and in ways that would benefit the ruled. This ideology of trusteeship is closely associated with Edmund Burke's views on the purpose of the empire. Addressing the British Parliament in December 1783 on the occasion of a debate on the East India Bill, Burke spoke of the relationship between the powerful and the powerless in the context of colonialism in the following way:

All political power which is set over men, and...all privileges claimed...in exclusion of them, being wholly artificial...and derogation from the natural equality of mankind at large, ought to be some way or other exercised for their benefit. If this is true with regard to every species of political dominion, and every description of commercial privilege...then such rights or privileges, or whatever else you choose to call them, are all in the strictest sense a trust; and it is of the very essence of every trust to be rendered accountable; and even totally to cease, when it substantially varies from the purpose for which it alone could have lawful existence.

The British government, he argued at various moments, had a sacred duty to help the civilized peoples prepare for political sovereignty. While the ruled did not give their consent, the imperial ruler could assume a tacit trust because of its superiority if and only if it agreed to tolerate differences, especially in the area of religion. Burke's views gained an important platform when news from abroad suggested that the British were not as enlightened as they made themselves out to be. One notable moment occurred in the late 1780s at the infamous trial of Warren Hastings, the governor-general of Bengal from 1774 to 1784 who was accused of corruption and abuse of power. At stake in the trial was not only the purpose of colonial rule but also its limits—while it could include forms of civilization, it should
respect local cultures, traditions, and religions. The campaign against slavery and colonialism on trial exposed how the supposedly civilized British engaged in acts of cruelty, and Burke took the unpopular stand of calling into question British colonial practices. Yet however much he railed against the abuses of empire, he nevertheless "sketched out an ideal of benevolent stewardship." He was not opposed to colonialism but rather objected to a colonialism that was irredeemably exploitative.

Nineteenth-century colonialism included an ideology of trusteeship, with the defining themes of civilization and conversion. Shaking away any possible stigma regarding the relationship between imperialism and slavery, the nineteenth century witnessed a burst of cultural and civilization confidence among the Great Powers. Nearly all colonial powers justified their expansion and conquest of other peoples in terms of some form of civilizing mission: France had la mission civilisatrice, Britain the white man's burden, and the United States manifest destiny. These explicitly paternalistic ideologies were accompanied and fueled by racist theories of human evolution that postulated a spectrum of humanity, from the backward dark-skinned races to the civilized Caucasian Europeans. Alongside discourses of humanity and similarity were discourses of difference that created new forms of hierarchy, producing a view that the colored races were not quite fully human and could be treated differently from Caucasians, and the white Christians race had a responsibility to rescue the backward races from disease, destitution, and depravity.

Importantly, evangelical and liberal thought joined forces, burying a Burkean perspective that advocated cultural and religious toleration. Evangelicals had a difficult time tolerating other religions, knowing that the damned could make the choice to be saved. Many liberals of the period held that power and emancipation lived together comfortably. For instance, the liberal John Stuart Mill defended British imperialism in India on the grounds that it would help the Indians develop the mental capacities and social institutions to become free-thinking, reasoning peoples. His views dominated the times, and critics of colonialism and civilizing projects were a minority.

Now feelings of obligation to distant strangers in the colonial context could produce tragic forms of paternalism illustrated by the heartbreaking response of the British colonial authorities to the famine in northern India in 1837–38. Once the British East India Company controlled a sizable area of India in the late eighteenth century, it became implicated in the periodic food shortages and their fatal consequences. In response to the famine of 1803–04, the colonial administrators debated whether they should intervene or let markets rule. Following their Smithian ideology, the desire to ensure that colonies did not become a burden on the public treasury (colonialism being sold as a self-financing enterprise), and British military interests, the administrators refused to take any action that might interfere with how the market might distribute the food supply, including banning the exports of food. Millions died who might have been saved.

In 1837 another devastating famine in northern India wiped out an estimated 15 to 20 percent of a population of eight million; disembled all dimensions of social, political, and economic life; and created everyday spectacles of emaciated people, skeletons alongside roads, and animals feeding on human remains. Much had changed, though, in the thirty years since the previous famine. The anti-slow movement had caused the British public to broaden its moral imagination and to recognize its special responsibilities to the colonized. In Britain there now existed a network of welfare societies to help the very poor. Although most of these were church-based societies, there was a growing expectation that the state should help, or at least not aggravate matters. Significantly, in 1834, just three years before the famine, Parliament passed the New Poor Law, which implicitly recognized that the state had an obligation to help the poor (and then move them back into the labor market). These developments influenced the thinking of the British authorities in India. At first they drew from their familiar laissez-faire tool-kit, which increased the price of food, the incentive to export food to high-income regions, and suffering. Because the market was killing people, there was growing pressure on the British authorities to take more concerted action. Drawing inspiration from recent welfare policy in Britain, they created a "works of public utility," one of the first instances of the application of "modern principles" to enable famine relief. By putting people to work, they could buy food.

Having undertaken this unprecedented intervention, British colonial authorities now began claiming that the state was humanitarian and describing public works as charity. They imagined doing more than saving lives, however. They also wanted to combat a growing "moral decadence." The famine had produced a breakdown in "law and order," and British authorities hoped that its new public works policy would feed people while teaching them moral discipline. The policy, though, was not working—or perhaps it was working too well. The British were paying starvation wages and working the labor force to the point of collapse. But the desperately poor had no choice but to seek these death-inducing wages, and the line kept growing. The British now worried that this program was becoming too expensive and breeding a dependent, lazy Indian, so it cut wages. When this move had little impact on the demand, it created an every-other-day work policy. The British were caught in a paradox: they wanted to honor basic political economy practices that valorized the market but nevertheless felt compelled to consolidate their ideological position by adopting new methods of welfare provision. And there was only so
far they would go in trying to remedy the famine. The British might put food into the mouths of starving Indians, but they refused to address the causes of poverty, which preordained a future of famines and interventions that recreated the conditions for famine. What mattered was limiting mass death, not preventing it. The British were taking the unprecedented step of “protecting” the population, accepting a new humanitarian responsibility consistent with a general reluctance to “adopt open-ended responsibilities and ... limit the endlessly rising costs of direct Imperial intervention even inside its own colonies.”

The famine that ravaged the Indian population nourished the British colonial state. Although British policy was making little headway against the famine, it refused to consider the possible contribution of traditional, indigenous systems of relief. Assuming that Christian charity was naturally superior to local methods, an attitude that was consistent with the emerging view in Britain that public institutions were superior to private charity because they were believed to be less prone to corruption and abuse, the effect of the famine was to place more of the poor in the hands of a colonial state. Taking on new obligations created a new apparatus of control. Shifting the locus of relief to the state effectively gave the British colonial authorities more power over the populations, though without any appreciable improvement in their welfare. Moreover, Indian labor was building roads and infrastructure, allowing British authorities to expand and tighten their grip on India. Thanks in part to a new ideology of humanitarianism, the early British colonial state was partly built on the skeletal remains of the Indians.

Missionary Humanitarianism

The centerpiece of Christian mission is to cross frontiers, geographical, cultural, economic, social, and political, in the service of Christ and his Kingdom. The period of classical missionary activity, beginning in 1792 with the publication of William Carey’s Enquiry into the Obligations of Christians to Use Means for the Conversion of the Heathens and concluding with the 1910 World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh, represented the only sustained humanitarian activity during the period of European expansion and colonialism. Evangelicalism was a major reason for this new energy. While Christian missionaries held varying views of non-Western peoples, not all of them enlightened, they imagined a common humanity. Importantly, and in contrast to ideologies built on biological theories of race, they believed in a fundamental unity of humankind. Because all were children of Christ, all could be saved. “The missionary project,” emphasizes Brian Stanley, “was only sustainable if there was a belief in the possibility of assimilation and the fundamental unity of humanity.” The problem, though, was that the backward populations did not know they had a choice between light and dark. Accordingly, evangelicals set out to spread the gospel and provide all nonbelievers with the opportunity to embrace Jesus Christ as their Lord and savior. Adopting militaristic language like a “crusade against idolatry” and the “war for salvation,” missionaries fanned across the world to give heathens the opportunity to restore a “right relationship” with God. Nonbelievers could be saved, and evangelicals could know they had done their duty and atoned for the sins of slavery and colonialism. Figure 3 captures a stereotypical representation, with the nicely civilized missionary showing mercy for the unfortunate peoples of the world.

The missionary and abolitionist movements drank from the same evangelical well. Many individuals belonged to both movements. Consider William Wilberforce. In 1823 and in the context of a campaign to end slavery in the British Empire, he argued that slavery was a sin against Christianity and that Christianity could civilize the liberated slaves. In response to the charge that the slaves’ liberation would lead to moral ruin, Wilberforce argued that slavery had led to defects in the human character.
and that there was considerable evidence that Christianity could lead the slaves and the backward races out of darkness and into light. He wrote:

But it is in Sierra Leone, that long despised and culminated colony, that the African character has been most effectually and experimentally vindicated. The first seeds of civilization were sown there by the Christian philanthropy of Mr. Graeville Sharp. . . . It is in Sierra Leone that the great experiment on human nature has been tried; and there it has appeared that the poor African barbarians, just rescued from the holt of slave-ships, are capable, not merely of being civilized, but of soon enjoying, with advantage, the rights and institutions of British freemen. 30

His plea excludes the possibility that freed slaves might be left alone; instead, Christianity must deliver slaves and other African populations from backwardness.

The abolitionist and missionary movements also drew inspiration and learned from each other. 31 Missionaries began organizing into societies and seeking the formal assistance of the state around the same time that other aid societies and abolitionist groups were doing so. The London Missionary Society began in a London coffee house in 1794, growing out of the evangelical movement and inspired in part by the anti-slavery movement, which, in turn, reciprocated some interest. 32 Tactics successfully practiced by one movement were subsequently employed by the other. In 1793 Wilberforce used the occasion of the renewal of the royal license of the East India Company to advocate for opening Christian missions and native schools. Following on the established principle that the British should not mix business and religion, Parliament soundly rejected the amendment. After failing for several years to get the British colonial authorities to authorize and support missionary activities, in 1813 a coalition of missionaries and abolitionists tried a new tactic—tying missionary work to the Indian rite of sati, the ritual self-immolation of widows. For them, missionary work was humanitarian, and humanitarianism was best served by Christianity. After decades of failure, the missionary movement won the passage of a law that explicitly recognized the right of a Christian country to propagate Christianity in its colonies. 33

The missionary movement’s difficulty overcoming the objections of the British state and the East India Company illustrates the converging and diverging interests of missionaries, colonists, and capitalists. Missionaries viewed colonialism and capitalism as providing new opportunities to bring civilization and Christianity to backward populations. Colonialism instilled in missionaries tremendous confidence and allowed them to travel to once-inhabitable lands. In fact, the failure to respond to these new opportunities might well trigger feelings of guilt and remorse. 34 After all, Britain’s fortunes were a sign of God’s grace, giving Britain and evangelicals special responsibilities for helping the native peoples. 35

Missionaries also believed that colonialism and commerce could help civilize the local populations. Christianity, commerce, and civilization were a trinity for progress. The native populations were defined by what they lacked—beginning with Jesus Christ and continuing through a long list of items that they associated with the civilized, Christian West. 36 Drawing from fashionable evolutionary theories of the day in which the environment was presumed to influence the traits of the species, missionaries aimed to introduce modern institutions such as schools and health clinics and emphasized the importance of hygiene (cleanliness was next to Godliness). 37 They also preached new forms of self-control and discipline, including chastity, sobriety, and hard work, which were viewed as essential for a Christian character. Colonial administrators and foreign traders found such projects highly desirable, if only because, if successful, the local population would become more compliant, easier to control, and develop tastes and values that were consistent with the interests of the West. 38

Missionaries of all kinds trumpeted the dynamic duo of “Christianity and commerce.” Beginning with slavery, evangelicals had steadfastly claimed that free labor and commerce were a path to civilization. Commerce would supplant illegitimate dealings such as the slave trade, spread a Christian material culture that would promote consumer desire for additional British goods, and nurture a Protestant virtue of self-discipline as the colonized sought to become part of the wage labor force in order to buy more goods. 39 When the missionary and abolitionist Thomas Powell Buxton undertook an expedition to Niger to battle slavery, he brought with him the weapons of civilization—the idea of creating modern farms, trading networks, and churches to give the people of the Niger River Valley an economic alternative to slavery. Christianity, commerce, and civilization, he wrote, “can penetrate to the root of evil, can teach [the African] to love and to befriend his neighbor, and cause him to act as a candidate for a higher and holier being.” 40 The legendary British general Charles George Gordon, who died in Khartoum fighting the Mahdi, personified the mixture of Christianity, civilization, and humanitarianism. Celebrated for his bravery in battle, his Christian piety, his battles against Islam, and his accomplishment of ending the slave trade in the Sudan, Gordon was among the many in England who believed that ending the slave trade required opening up the Sudan to European influence through commerce. 41 Yet missionaries did not always see eye to eye with colonial administrators or foreign capitalists. Missionaries believed in the unity of humankind and wanted to emancipate the local populations, beliefs not necessarily shared by administrators and settlers who placed power and profits above Christianity. 42 In many places, the settler communities stifferly resisted missionary work, fearing that if the indigenous peoples became Christian, then they would demand to be treated as equals. 43 Administrators and the home office often worried that missionaries wanted to use the state’s scarce resources for religious quests that might lead to rebellions. 44 For this reason
British colonial authorities prohibited Christian missionary activity in places such as northern Sudan. When British missionaries first advocated the abolition of the Indian sati in the late eighteenth century, they had to fight the official position of the East Indian Company of indifference to all dimensions of Indian society, an indifference that translated into a 1772 company policy of noninterference concerning religion and local institutions. Utilitarian rather than principled factors drove this policy: the company feared that any attempted reform would be interpreted by the local population as proselytization, perhaps igniting a revolt, which would hardly be good for business. When British authorities finally changed their position it was because the governor-general had calculated that it was worth taking the risk of political instability in order to convey to the British public an image of an enlightened rule, to show, by example, good governance, progress, and the superiority of Western civilization.

Missionaries and humanitarianists were dependent on the colonial state to provide the proper security, legal, and normative framework, but in one area they were relatively independent: financing. Unlike most contemporary humanitarian agencies that frequently depend on official assistance, missionary societies relied on parishes and congregations at home. To the extent that missionaries and hometown donors shared basic beliefs, missionaries did not have to worry that they might be acting in ways that threatened their funding base. But they did not always see eye-to-eye. Missionaries, at times, could articulate genuine respect for local cultures and traditions, positions that funders sometimes found permissive and indulgent.

Missionaries and foreign capitalists also clashed at various moments. Foreign capitalists often viewed missionaries as meddlesome busybodies, ready to incite unrest among the population, an accusation previously leveled by slave owners. Missionaries looked suspiciously on foreign capitalists who seemed to be willing to do anything to make a profit, who seldom exhibited Christian principles, who desired to transform individuals into consumers, promoting not righteousness but rather hedonism. They repeatedly clashed over free labor. The movement to abolish slavery gave way, at times, to a desire to end other forms of indentured labor and the labor trade. In Australia, missionaries, frequently working closely with the Aborigines' Protection Society and the Anti-Slavery Society, tried to regulate labor, a position that plantation owners found deeply objectionable. In general, because evangelical missionaries recognized that heathens could become civilized and that the civilized could be sinners, they often found themselves in a difficult position.

Although missionaries preached the unity of humankind, many if not most believed that Western, Christian civilization was vastly superior to local cultures in almost all ways. Citing scripture, they argued that the same new Testament which affirms the oneness of all persons before God also contains the stark antithesis between the children of light and the children of darkness, between the narrow gate and the wide gate, between kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of this world. Jesus himself spoke of his coming as a force that would bring division and not peace, setting sons against fathers and daughters against mothers. Missionaries had a well-earned reputation for viewing derivative the habits and customs of the local populations and treating them as less than fully human, even though they could become Christians. And even if they became Christians, they were still inferior to the highly civilized missionaries. As Gustav Sobom put it, "Hierarchies were welcomed and adored by missionaries. The equality of Africans was a matter of principle and potential, not a suggestion of immediate egalitarianism."

The popular image in the nineteenth century of missionary work and humanitarianism as a paternalist enterprise that wanted to destroy other cultures and transform the native populations into miniature, deeply romanticized, versions of themselves and the West had a strong basis in fact. Yet some missionaries wondered which features of local cultures should be condemned and which ones could coexist with Christianity; reevaluated their own identities, goals, and relationship to other cultures; and even began to doubt the value of proselytization. As one set of 1873 missionary instructions commanded: "Do not ANGLICISE YOUR CONverts. Remember that the people are foreigners. Let them continue as such. Let their foreign individuality be maintained. Build upon it, so far as it is sound and good; and Christianize, but do not needlessly change it. Do not seek to make the people Englishmen. Seek to develop and mould a pure, refined Christian character, native to the soil." When missionaries acknowledged that Western civilization brought not only salvation but also unimaginable cruelty—a defining theme of the anti Slavery movement that appeared periodically over the century, most famously in the campaign to end King Leopold's genocidal reign over the Congo—they were forced to take a hard look at themselves. Many missionaries accepted the criticism that they were paternalistic and imperialistic, which coincided with the growing influence of new interpretations of social gospel that highlighted equality, justice, and solidarity. There was even a new and more positive evaluation of non-Western cultures; the colonial encounter could force them to reevaluate their own identities, values, and understanding of self in relationship to the colonial "other." Over time, many missionaries shifted from saving souls to saving societies, helped along in part by the development of a scientific, professionalized philanthropic sector that was much more interested in the here and now than the hereafter.

The World Missionary Conference (WMC), held in Edinburgh, Scotland, in 1910, captures the politics of community and emancipation that defined the age. The title of the conference says it all: The World Missionary
Conference to Consider Missionary Problems in relation to the Non-Christian World. The conference's underlying premise was that the world contains an underlying unity that is currently divided between the Christian and non-Christian Worlds, and the challenge was to expand the former and shrink the latter through a more scientific enterprise. In preparation for the meeting, the conference planners created committees on several themes, including relations with political power and how to prepare the missionary. It is difficult to exaggerate the ambition and the accomplishment. The organizing committee wanted their discussions to be informed by empirical analysis and not guesswork; this "scientific" turn was a natural outgrowth of the development of a professional field of missiology—the application of scientific methods to assess missionary practices, a movement led by the American evangelist A. T. Pierson. Accordingly, the committee surveyed hundreds of missionaries, who, in many ways, were the anthropologists of their day, having lived for years among the "natives," observing their cultural and religious practices. The majority of the missionaries responded, many with lengthy, detailed reports. The committee then summarized the findings into eight books that were organized around the quest to increase the impact of missionary work.

Reflecting a world view in which missionary activity was integral to Western expansion, in attendance were some of the period's most important religious, political, and economic figures. The presiding officer was Lord Balfour, who opened the conference with a warm statement from the king of England. The American delegation included Rear Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan; William Jennings Bryan; John Mott, an eventual winner of the Nobel Peace Prize in 1946 and one of the best-known evangelical ministers of the period; and Seth Low, the former mayor of New York City and president of Columbia University. Theodore Roosevelt could not attend, but he did send a very warm letter of congratulations that reflected on the conference's importance to the Western international order. It was an impressive gathering in a spectacular setting (figure 4).

While all people had the right to hear the gospel and the opportunity to convert, the experience of the missionaries was that not all people were equally receptive. Accordingly, a major concern was identifying where, when, and how missionary work was most successful. Toward that end, and following the fashion of the times, they created a hierarchy of civilizations, arraying societies in terms of where they fell on a civilization scale. Being closer to civilization, however, was no assurance of greater receptivity to the gospel: missionaries had a difficult time in nearly civilized Japan and a much easier time in less civilized Korea. The conference was particularly worried about "Mohammedanism," as missionaries reported their lack of acceptance in Islamic societies and noted that Christianity was losing ground to Islam for the souls of nonmonotheistic peoples in places like sub-Saharan Africa. Registering alarm and anxiety, the conference highlighted the urgent need to confront Islam, limit its gains, and, if at all possible, send it back to Arabia.

The conference also reflected on the relationship of the missionaries to the local populations and the colonial powers. Missionaries obviously wanted to spread the gospel but, reflecting the spirit of the times, also desired to recognize the dignity of other peoples and the possibility of Christianity's expansion without needing to transform all aspects of society. As the Commission proudly observed:

It is interesting to note the way in which the missionary becomes the champion of the people among whom he lives. Their national unity, their language, their institutions (where plainly anti-Christian or immoral) become dear to him. The reproof that missionaries desire to Europeanise the inhabitants of mission land, if ever true, is now abundantly false. Their anxiety everywhere is that the land in which they dwell should work out its national destiny, aided where need be by the higher cultural of the West.

This was a difficult balancing act: bringing Christianity to backward populations while recognizing the principle of cultural autonomy—even though this culture was viewed as "lower" and Christianity could not be easily contained to one sphere of life. One possible middle ground was
the longstanding strategy of indigenization—to create “self-governing” churches that were rooted in the local communities and no longer needed external support. But middle grounds are rarely stable. The conference viewed colonialism and missionaries as two forces working together to spread civilization. The duty of government, as they put it, is “to restrain evil and promote good,” and “both missions and governments are interested in the welfare of nations.” Colonialism was central to spreading Christianity. The colonial powers were Christian nations, pursuing not some secularized version of the national interest but rather making possible a Christian world order, providing unprecedented opportunities for spreading the word, and boosting the confidence of missionaries. Consequently, those in attendance did not necessarily perceive a conflict between their own sense of nationalism and a Christian state that would help spread civilization that would better humankind. Colonialism was good for Christianity, as Christianity was good for colonialism. As stated in the seventh book:

Penetrating into barbarous lands before the advent of any civilised Government, they have, by moral influence alone, mitigated war and slavery, and cruel and abominable usages, and prepared the way for an enlightened and civilised rule; and where civilised rule has followed then, they have proved, both in official and unofficial positions, the best mediators between the new, strict, and exacting Government and the suspicious native races, resentful of interference with their ancient ways, evil and good alike… They have won an influence which has made the task of governments comparatively easy; and everywhere they continue to manifest and inculcate that loyalty to and co-operation with governments, without which the latter indeed may rule, but without which they cannot fit a people for the higher task of ruling themselves.72

Although the conference paradoxed the marriage of missionary work and colonialism, there are limits to all marriages. The long history of government-mission relations included considerable conflict, particularly when colonial administrators and settler communities tried to enlist missionaries in activities that the religiously minded found unjust or when administrators believed that missionaries were stirring the pot. Consequently, the conference set up various rules that were intended to avoid conflict, including demonstrating loyalty to governments, avoiding political agitation, and teaching the local populations to respect the colonial administrations. They asserted a functional equivalent to the principle of neutrality, as missionaries avoided confronting the colonial government because it might jeopardize access to populations in need. Following the maxim of “rendering unto Caesar the things that are Caesar’s and unto God the things that are God’s” (Matthew 22:21), they attempted to maintain a line between themselves and politics. Matters of governance were the domain of the state, matters of religion were the domain of the church, and both the government and the church needed to recognize each other’s sphere of authority. For some participants, the conference itself was dangerously stepping into a new realm—the political.

Yet there were limits to what missionaries would tolerate from colonial powers. Missionaries had a duty to “exercise their influence for the removal of gross oppression and injustice, particularly where the government is in the hands of men of their own race… provided that in so doing they keep clear of association with any political movement.” Much like many contemporary relief organizations of today, missionaries wanted to protect certain fundamental rights of the population but in an apolitical manner, if apolitical is defined as nonpartisan. The conference censured the opium and liquor trade and forced labor for being immoral and un-Christian. Opium and alcohol numbed the masses and were conduits of evil, and missionaries had a strong track record of condemning all forms of slavery. Importantly, though, while missionaries might take a “demand” approach to these problems (encouraging natives to find Christ and “just say no”), colonial governments and foreign capitalists also could need reforming because, in many cases, they had introduced and profited from these evils. In this regard, the late-nineteenth-century controversy over Belgium’s “humanitarianism” in the Congo, where King Leopold’s rapacious and genocidal rule left hundreds of thousands dead, provided a solemn reminder that the West could also be cruel. Although the French-born Edmund Morel rightly gets considerable credit for publicizing King Leopold’s crimes in the Congo and the hollowness of his humanitarian credentials, missionaries also played an important role. The atrocities in the Congo tapped into a longstanding issue that confronted all those who identified with the abolitionists: there was a thin line between slave labor and some forms of “free labor,” and many colonial powers tolerated slavery in everything but name. What made such systems of servitude particularly appalling to many abolitionists and their inheritors was that these imperial labor systems had the declared purpose of removing all forms of gross exploitation.

Those at the World Missionary Conference were meeting against the backdrop of a religious authority that was increasingly competing with, and would soon be eclipsed by, a secularizing world. The first signs of a humanitarianism that once felt little need to justify itself in religious discourse became more fully apparent with the rise of the first generation of human rights activists. There was considerable overlap between the two, especially since both had a strong interest in civilizing and protecting local populations and in ending all form of slavery. Whereas missionaries cited God, the nascent human rights movement, drew from the distinctive liberal, humanistic tradition.
But there were differences between the two. Each offered different assessments regarding whether and when local populations might be ready to govern themselves. Missionaries typically believed that the colonies would require considerable oversight and the local cultures would have to be thoroughly transformed before the population could be entrusted with self-governance. Human rights activists argued in favor of a form of cultural relativism that accepted that Western peoples were indeed superior to the colored races, but, at the same time, local populations had cultures worthy of respect and could soon realize an ability to run their own affairs. Illustrative of this growing tide of human rights was the Liverpool Sect, established in 1896 with the express purpose of campaigning for rights and insisting on forms of cultural relativism. Rights-oriented humanitarianism also got a boost from Mary Kingsley, the spirited explorer whose journeys in Africa gained widespread fame. While holding to the view that Western society was superior to African society, she nevertheless railed against missionaries and cultural conversion. Edmund Morel also broke with the missionaries in the Congo because of the discrepancy between their insistence on conversion and his insistence on cultural relativism and commerce. A religiously inspired humanitarianism was increasingly sharing ground with a secular alternative.

The cross-cutting trends in humanitarianism were particularly evident in the Western orientation toward the colonial peoples after World War I and in the creation of the League of Nations. Influenced by Woodrow Wilson’s Fourteen Points and the principle of self-determination, the League of Nations established a mandatory system that gave the colonial powers a “sacred trust” to prepare the colonial peoples for independence. Article 22 of the League of Nations Covenant used language that was simultaneously novel because of the emphasis on independence and familiar because of the overt paternalism:

To those colonies and territories which as a consequence of the late war have ceased to be under the sovereignty of the States which formerly governed them and which are inhabited by peoples not yet able to stand by themselves under the strenuous conditions of the modern world, there should be applied the principle that the well-being and development of such peoples form a sacred trust of civilization and that securities for the performance of this trust should be embodied in this Covenant. The best method of giving practical effect to this principle is that the tutelage of such peoples should be entrusted to advanced nations who, by reason of their resources, their experience or their geographical position, can best undertake this responsibility and who are willing to accept it, and that this tutelage should be exercised by them as Mandatories on behalf of the League.

Not only is the sentiment familiar, but, according to Eric Weitz, it was lifted nearly wholesale from the General Act of 1885.

Although the concept of a sacred trust had Christian foundations and many missionaries saw the mandatory systems as premised on Christian principles of trusteeship, for many leaders, and especially for those outside of the West, it explicitly referenced not God but rather humanity. The “civilized” trustee was expected to raise the “savage.” Following in the secularizing spirit of the times, humanitarian began using the phrase “native interests” to emphasize the importance of material welfare over spiritual needs, and imperial forces began to drop “Christianity” from the slogan of “Christianity and commerce” and “moral” from the siren call of “moral and material improvement.” Illustrating the shift, the most influential postwar statement on empire, Sir Frederick Lugard’s The Dual Mandate in British Tropical Africa makes no explicit reference to Christian duty. Although religious discourses helped to give legitimacy and substance to many of the new global institutions of care in the twentieth century, one of the striking features of the new era was the apparent willingness of individuals to cite humanity and not God as their reason for caring for the welfare of others. Regardless of whether it was because of God or humanity, the League of Nations, its mandatory system, and its skeletal humanitarian network imagined not only saving lives but also getting at the root causes of suffering.

Imperial humanitarianism reflected the spirit of the times even as it occasionally tried to challenge them. Colonialism, Christianity, and commerce, according to many humanitarians of the period, could provide the will and the way to emancipate slaves, save sinners and souls, and position backward societies on the path of civilization. It embodied the unapologetic paternalism of the period, with missionaries and liberal humanitarians sharing the belief that they had a duty to civilize and improve the lives of the native populations. Because of their commitment to improve their lives, though, they were not always on the same page as colonial administrators and merchants, at times acting as the protector of local peoples and calling attention to the uncivilized behavior of Europeans. And there were even instances in which missionaries and other liberal reformers began to reflect critically on their own attitudes and came to believe that local cultures had their own integrity and value. But whether they cited God or humanity, the humanitarians of the period still saw themselves as agents of the transcendental.
NOTES TO PAGES 38-39
11. Ibid., introduction.
16. Selden-Jones, End to Poverty?
18. Ibid., 3.
19. Humanitarianism's multi-layered origins, see Klngberg, "Evolution of the Humanitarian Spirit," 260; Lewis and Williams, Private Charity in England, 1747–1757. According to Roberts, three lines of inquiry dominate the debate regarding the causes of moral reform in England: capitalism and industrialization are the structure and reformers are the superstructure helping to stabilize a class-ridden society undergoing tremendous strain; moral reformers resolved societal conflict, but unlike the first perspective does not reduce conflict to an economic base; and an emerging civil society and public sphere becomes developed and used by reformers. Roberts, Making English Morals, 4–14.
20. Toronto, Moral Boundaries, 56.
22. Randall, "Churches and the Liberal Tradition"; Roberts, Making English Morals, 46–48; Smith, "Historic Waves of Religious Interest in America"; and Fiering, "Irresistible Compassion." As far as the general role of religion in humanitarianism, Lyons asserts that "there is scarcely any great humanitarian crusade of the nineteenth century, from the abolition of slavery to the abolition of war, in which various churches of Christendom, either as institutions or through their individual members, did not play a prominent role." Internati- onalism in Europe, 245.
23. Although forms of evangelicalism existed throughout Europe and wherever there was Protestantism, the most concentrated and intensive activity occurred in the United States and England. For overviews of this period of evangelicalism, see Maznik, Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism; and Noll, Rise of Evangelicalism.
24. In the United States there were several awakenings; the first was closely associated with the eighteenth-century movement of Jonathan Edwards and George Whitefield; the sec- ond, at the turn of the nineteenth century, helped to institutionalize the very idea of social reform in the United States. In Britain a moral crisis emerged in the late eighteenth century because of the loss of the American colonies, tremendous population flows, urbanization, and other structural changes, leading to what appeared to be a "moral breakdown." Roberts, Making English Morals, 31–38.
26. Ibid.
28. Alongside the expansion of Protestant evangelism was Catholic missionary work. From the beginning of the first explorations, the Jesuits established outposts among the indigenous peoples. In the United States, unlike the Protestants who used the public school systems, print media, and public policy to try to convert citizens, American Catholics developed an extensive network of charitable organizations, schools, hospitals, and assorted programs that were linked by the Catholic Church. Although evolving partly as a counterbalance to Protestant evangelism, the influence of Protestant culture on the evolution of Catho- lic charitable and welfare societies also was evident in the development of a relationship between personal piety and social service, especially those branches that had a liberal, pro- gressive orientation. Ibid., 54.
29. The Calvinistic idea of social responsibility and reform had a lingering effect. The idea of social responsibility existed among the prophets of ancient Israel, and then Christianity fused the traditional Judaic concern with the idea of resurrection and Jesus as the Messiah; notably, concerns about social decay became linked to an apocalyptic view in which the

CHAPTER 2
2. Crane, "Suggestions towards a Genealogy," 206–7. See also Haltenun, "Humanitarianism and the Pornography of Pain?"
8. Nietzsche, On the Genealogy of Morality, 7, cited from Moy, "The Last Utopia," On modernity and loss, see Pippin, "Nietzsche and the Melancholy of Modernity." For an insightful discussion of the historical meanings and origins of the related but not coterminous concepts of sympathy and empathy, see Moy, "Empathy in History."
Kingdom of God would create a new social order. This apocalyptic vision lay dormant until the establishment of the Roman Church, became popular once again with the Protestant Reformation. They were soon joined by Calvinist thought, and then reemerged with the radical changes of the late eighteenth century. Ibid., 54–55.

30. For broad commentaries on the link connecting structural change, religious reform, and humanitarianism, see Caufman, “Humanitarianism, Past and Present”; and Curti, “Changing Patterns.”

31. Renwald, Humanitarianism and British Colonial Policy.


36. Quoted in Hochschild, Breaking the Chains, 144.

37. Ibid., 144.

38. Link, “Samuel Taylor Coleridge and the Economic and Political Crisis.”

39. Young, Bearing against Sin; and West, Politics of Revelation and Reason.


41. Thomas, Revivalism and Cultural Change, 77; Gambier, “Anthemel Reform,” in Charity, Philanthropy, and Civility in American History, 123–33; and Nah, “For the Sake of Conscience.”

42. Thomas, Revivalism and Cultural Change, 78–79.


44. Caufman, “Humanitarianism, Past and Present,” 54; see also Parmelee, Rise of Modern Humanitarianism.


CHAPTER 3

1. For studies of the development of abolitionist thought and mobilization against the slave trade in Britain, see Brown, Moral Capital; Hochschild, Bury the Chains; Descher, Capitalism and Anti-Slavery; Oldfield, Popular Politics and British Anti-Slavery and Kingsberg, Anti-Slavery Movement in England.

2. Hochschild, Bury the Chains, 5.

3. Ibid., 45, 87.

4. Caufman, Politics of English Dissent, 47. A religious commitment did not necessarily lead to an enlightened view on slavery. There were clergymen, evangelicals, and religious folks who favored slavery. See Bellot, “Evangelicals and the Defense of Slavery.”

5. There is, of course, tremendous debate over how to understand the motives of the abolitionists and their relationship to capitalism. See Donald, “Toward a Reconsideration of Abolitionists”; Thomas Haskell, “Capitalism and the Origins of the Humanitarian Sensibility,” 2004., 1 and 2, and Ashworth, “Relationship between Capitalism and Humanitarianism.”


8. Quoted in Festa, Sentimental Figures of Empire, 188, 201.


11. Caufman, Politics of English Dissent, 46; Festa, History of West Africa, 117–18; Renwald, Humanitarianism and British Colonial Policy; and Festa, Sentimental Figures of Empire, 64–65, 203.

12. Hochschild, Bury the Chains, 134.

13. Ibid., 227. Plessi?, the idea that what would replace slavery and what a British empire free of slavery would look like, some of the early abolitionists argued that a diversified trading system from western African would help local populations and lead to more prosperity for the empire. Toward that end, in the late eighteenth century the British government supported a scheme in Sierra Leone, which, in effect, tied the abolitionists to a new push for imperialism. Brown, Moral Capital, 322, 328.


17. Festa, Notes to Pages 60–66, 247. 111–18. See also Renwald, Humanitarianism and British Colonial Policy.


20. Grant, Civilized Savagery.

21. Dicks, Scandal of Empire.

22. Festa, Sentimental Figures of Empire, 236–37.

23. Pitts, Turn to Empire, 14–16.

24. Grant, Civilized Savagery.

25. For three excellent intellectual histories of the leading thinkers on the subject of the relationship between liberalism and imperialism, see Mutha, Enlightenment against Empire; Pitts, Turn to Empire and Melta, Liberalism and Empire.


27. Pitts, Turn to Empire; Melta, Liberalism and Empire; and Mutha, Enlightenment against Empire.

28. This account draws entirely from Sharma, Famine Philanthropy and the Colonial State. See also Davis, Late Victorian Holocaus.


33. Ibid., 172; Porter, “Trusts, Anti-Slavery, and Humanitarianism,” 229.

34. Porter, Religion versus Empire? 32–38; Stanley, Bible and the Flag, 63, 161; and Renwald, Humanitarianism and British Colonial Policy, 49.

35. Stanley, Bible and the Flag, 63–64.


37. Although farrier in terms of numbers and influence, the American missionary movement also made a mark. It differed from its European co-religionists in several ways. Because there was no established or state church in the United States, American missionaries tended to rely more on voluntary contributions. (However, many of the most important European missions and missionary societies—like the Baptist William Carey and the Moravians—were also voluntary and separate from state-established churches.) Moreover, because the United States was expanding westward and not overseas, except in the case of the Hawaiian Islands, it was less closely associated with commercial or strategic ambitions. Indeed, many missionaries had difficulty upholding the attention and protection of American officials. Curti, American Philanthropy Abroad, 138–39. That said, American missionaries resembled their European co-religionists in several ways. They had similar origin; born of evangelical churches, shades of millennialism, and the belief that even savages were children of God and could be saved, they descended on the unsuspecting armed with the Bible and the conviction that conversion was the path to salvation. Of course, missionaries got considerable help from a United States government that desired to “civilize” the Native American populations. See Sanborn, Converting California and Mexico, Final Promise.

38. Wills, Appeal to the Religion, Justice, and Humanity, 64–65.

39. "As the original Victorian anti-slavery organizations receded to the political margins, the leadership of the British anti-slavery movement passed to the Protestant missionary..."
societies, which embraced abolition as a central cause in their civilizing mission, especially in Africa." Grant, Civilized Savagery, 26.
34. Stanley, Bible and the Flag, 68-69.
37. Bassford, Imperial Hygiene, and Hayes, Imperial Medicine.
38. Grant, Civilized Savagery, 19; see also Stanley, Bible and the Flag, 70-74.
40. Boddy, Civilizing Women, 17-18.
41. Porter, "Trusteeship, Anti-Slavery, and Humanitarianism," 229, and, Porter, Religion versus Empire? 283. For an innovative examination of the role of missionary protestants in sowing the seeds for potential anti-colonial unrest and democratic development, see Woodbury, "Dividing Ellis." 15.
42. Hiney, On the Missionary Trail, 30.
43. Porter, "Religion, Missionary Enthusiasm, and Empire," 222. A classic case is how the British population’s desire to stamp out the slave trade led to the ill-fated British expedition to the Sudan in 1822, opposed on strategic grounds by Prime Minister William Gladstone. See Holt, Manhunt in the Sudan, 32-44; and Neillands, Desert Wars, Gladstone. See Holt, Manhunt in the Sudan, 32-44; and Neillands, Desert Wars, Gladstone.
44. Boddy, Civilizing Women, 4. See also Spurz, Rhetoric of Empire.
45. Cassels, "Bentinck"; van der Veur, Imperial Awakeners, 41-43; and Prits, Turn to Empire, 13.
46. De Gruchy, "Who Did They Think They Were?" 212-15.
47. Rees, Humanitarianism and British Colonial Policy, ch. 6; Stanley, Bible and the Flag, 90; Hall, Civilizing Subjects; McHale, "Deceasing Observance of Justice.
48. Varg, "Motives in Protestant Missions," 73; Stanley, Bible and the Flag, 73, 78-83; Rees, Humanitarianism and British Colonial Policy, ch. 6.
49. Darch, "Missionaries as Humanitarian?" 12.
53. Porter, "Trusteeship, Anti-Slavery, and Humanitarianism," 216-17; Cooper and Stoler, Tensions of Empires; Lerner, "Reformulating Identities," 6; Tillerson, The State and Colonial Power, 15; and Imperial Networks; and Lambert and Lester, "Geographies of Colonial Philanthropy.
55. Hochschild, King Leopold’s Ghost. Henry Morton Stanley was originally given the task but was replaced by Henry Morton Stanley, who commanded the Lualaba, Signifying its double intention of opening up the Congo and the brutality that made it a subject of eventual contest. What was particularly feared was the ability to treat the labor force, but rather that the Congo state was put up various obstacles in their way. Sjolblom, "Missionary Image of Africa," 9.
56. Porterfield, "Protestant Missions," 64-65; see also Rosenzweig, "Mission to the World.
57. Cooper and Stoler, Tensions of Empires; Lerner, "Reformulating Identities," 6; Tillerson, The State and Colonial Power, 15; and Imperial Networks; and Lambert and Lester, "Geographies of Colonial Philanthropy.
58. Curtis, American Philanthropy Abroad, ch. 6; and Porterfield, "Protestant Missions.," 60.

CHAPTER 4
1. Ignatieff, "Warrior’s Honor," 110.
2. For an overview of the origins of the laws of war, see Best, War and Law Since 1500; Macalister-Smith, International Humanitarian Assistance; and Reisman, Laws of War.
3. Forsythe, Humanitarians, 13; and Boissier, From Solferino to Tsushima, 20.
4. For a review of pre-1864 movements toward the idea of relief and the laws of war, see Boissier, From Solferino to Tsushima, 125-63.
5. For statements regarding the ICRC's religious roots, see Andre Dandurand, History of the International Committee of the Red Cross, 49; and Boissier, "Henry Dunant," 411.
7. Ignatieff, Warrior’s Honor, 112.
8. Some of the stiffest opposition to Dantzig’s proposal came from those who might have been expected to support it—those who also were campaigning for greater medical relief. Florence Nightingale, for instance, refused to support the proposals on the grounds that the job of saving soldiers was too important to be left to amateurs and that military organizations had both the responsibility and the potential capacity to improve their medical relief. Consequently, if Dantzig's proposals became reality, it might harm the goal of medical relief because it would displace energy into creating volunteer bands that did not have the professional training to help soldiers. See Hutchinson, Champions of Charity, 39-41. Eventually the real successes in helping the wounded came from innovations in medical technology and military organization, spurred in part by the realization that those armies that gave their soldiers top medical care were the armies that could patch up their soldiers and get them back to the front—and win.
9. Hutchinson, Champions of Charity, 30; Mauzein’s study of the U.S. Sanitary Commission led him to conclude that the absence of neutrality meant that physicians had a more difficult time tending to the wounded. Boissier, From Solferino to Tsushima, 102.
10. For an invaluable study of how humanitarianism can become co-opted by and central to war mobilization, see Taithe, "Red Cross Flag.
11. Hutchinson, Champions of Charity, ch. 4.
12. Ibid., 203.
13. Important, there was no discussion of how international humanitarian law might apply to the rapidly colonized world.
14. Ibid., 143.
15. Ibid., 204; see also Moorehead, Dantzig’s Dream, 12.
16. Beaumont, Penser dans l’urgence, 45-47; Taithe, "The Red Cross Flag in the Franco-
17. For instance, there was an outpouring of support in the U.S. and Europe in response to the Russian famine of 1891. Rosenberg, "Missions to the World," 248. For an overview of American philanthropic activities in the pre-World War I period, with particular emphasis on the role of ethnic groups in mobilizing assistance, see Curtis, American Philanthropy Abroad, chs. 1-7.
18. Curtis, American Philanthropy Abroad, 270-76.
19. Mulley, Woman Who Saved the World, 63. See also Mahood, Feminism and Voluntary Action, which focuses more on the social and cultural context of her life.