

# HUMANITARIANISM IN QUESTION

*Politics, Power, Ethics*

*Edited by* MICHAEL BARNETT AND THOMAS G. WEISS

CORNELL UNIVERSITY PRESS  
ITHACA AND LONDON

Copyright © 2008 by Cornell University

All rights reserved. Except for brief quotations in a review, this book, or parts thereof, must not be reproduced in any form without permission in writing from the publisher. For information, address Cornell University Press, Sage House, 512 East State Street, Ithaca, New York 14850.

First published 2008 by Cornell University Press  
First printing, Cornell Paperbacks, 2008

Printed in the United States of America

#### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Humanitarianism in question : politics, power, ethics / edited  
by Michael Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-8014-4486-9 (cloth : alk. paper) —

ISBN 978-0-8014-7301-2 (pbk. : alk. paper)

1. Humanitarian assistance. 2. Humanitarianism.  
3. International relief. I. Barnett, Michael N., 1960–  
II. Weiss, Thomas George.  
HV553.H86 2008

361.2'6–dc22

2007036965

Cornell University Press strives to use environmentally responsible suppliers and materials to the fullest extent possible in the publishing of its books. Such materials include vegetable-based, low-VOC inks and acid-free papers that are recycled, totally chlorine-free, or partly composed of nonwood fibers. For further information, visit our website at [www.cornellpress.cornell.edu](http://www.cornellpress.cornell.edu).

Cloth printing 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1  
Paperback printing 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2

## CONTENTS

Acknowledgments	vii
List of Abbreviations	ix
1. Humanitarianism: A Brief History of the Present MICHAEL BARNETT AND THOMAS G. WEISS	1
2. The Rise of Emergency Relief Aid JAMES D. FEARON	49
3. The Imperative to Reduce Suffering: Charity, Progress, and Emergencies in the Field of Humanitarian Action CRAIG CALHOUN	73
4. Saying “No” to Wal-Mart? Money and Morality in Professional Humanitarianism STEPHEN HOPGOOD	98
5. Humanitarian Organizations: Accountable—Why, to Whom, for What, and How? JANICE GROSS STEIN	124

## HUMANITARIANISM

### *A Brief History of the Present*

MICHAEL BARNETT AND THOMAS G. WEISS

For the last two decades, humanitarian organizations have been careening from one major emergency to another. Although aid agencies never anticipated that the end of the cold war would dampen the demand for their services, they certainly were not prepared for the challenges that they were about to encounter. Some of these spectacles made front-page news and profiled their heroic and not so heroic activities. In Somalia, relief workers attempted to save hundreds of thousands of people from conflict-induced famine generated by warlords seeking food aid to feed their ambitions. In Bosnia they provided relief to those trapped in so-called safe havens—the United Nations Security Council intended them to be a sanctuary from Serbian attacks, but they quickly became prisons of violence. In Rwanda they were largely absent during the genocide itself but soon began attempting to save millions of displaced peoples in camps militarized and controlled by the architects of the genocide. In Kosovo, Afghanistan, and Iraq, they were funded by and operated alongside the invading parties, and then discovered that they were treated as enemy combatants by opposing factions. In addition to these “loud” high-profile disasters there were “silent” orphans in places such as Pakistan, Congo, and northern Uganda, where aid agencies tried to feed the needy with scant resources in a hostile context. The end of conflicts produced other challenges, as aid agencies aimed to help survivors reclaim their lives and rebuild war-torn societies. Humanitarian

organizations have been in a constant motion, frantically attempting to keep pace with the new, growing, and unanticipated demands.

Analyses of humanitarian action in the post-cold war period typically highlight two defining trends. The first is the growing willingness and ability of outsiders to help those at risk. Radical improvements in information technology and logistical capacity, growing international support for a duty to aid and a responsibility to protect victims, multiplying numbers of relief organizations, and spikes in available resources offer the promise of an enhanced collective capacity to provide war victims with relief, rescue, and reconstruction. Although the slow-motion genocide in Darfur and other tragedies are stark reminders that good thoughts and solemn proclamations are never enough, there now exists an international network that can act when and if called. Although these pledges serve as a bittersweet reminder of unkept promises, they at least represent the possibility of a more just world order.

The second trend reflects the mounting dangers that complex emergencies pose for humanitarianism.<sup>1</sup> Although willing to answer the call, humanitarian organizations have been generally ill-equipped for what they have found: war zones where civilian populations are the intended victims, where access is difficult, where aid workers are in danger of being received as a threat or as a resource to be captured, and where their own physical safety is in doubt. Their standard operating procedures provided little guidance for how they might operate in places such as Bosnia, Rwanda, Afghanistan, and Iraq, forcing them to improvise constantly. When, if ever, should they request armed protection and work with states? Would armed protection facilitate access or create the impression that aid workers were now one of the warring parties? Should they provide aid unconditionally? What if doing so means feeding the armies, militias, and killers who are responsible for and clearly benefit from terrorizing civilian populations? At what point should aid workers withdraw because the situation is too dangerous? Can aid really make a difference? The contemporary moment has proved so challenging that even stalwart defenders of humanitarianism concede that the moral necessity of humanitarian action is no longer self-evident.<sup>2</sup> Aid workers, thus, should be forgiven if they seem almost nostalgic for the supposedly more straightforward emergencies of the past.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> See, for example, Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999); Mark Duffield, *Global Governance and the New Wars: The Merging of Development and Security* (London: Zed Books, 2001); and Peter J. Hoffman and Thomas G. Weiss, *Sword and Salve: Confronting New Wars and Humanitarian Crises* (Lanham, Md.: Rowman & Littlefield, 2006).

<sup>2</sup> Ian Smillie and Larry Minear, *The Charity of Nations: Humanitarian Action in a Calculating World* (Bloomfield, Conn.: Kumarian, 2004), 4.

<sup>3</sup> See, for instance, the final report from a European Community Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO)-ICRC seminar, "Humanitarian Action: Perceptions and Security," Lisbon, March 27–28, 1998, 6.

These two trends, the first suggesting that humanitarianism is experiencing a golden era and the second that it is descending into a new dark age, have combined to cause the humanitarian community to engage in soul-searching about who they are, what they do, how they do it, and what impact their efforts have. This conversation has been animated by three identity-defining questions.

First, what does humanitarianism aspire to accomplish? For many it is best identified with the provision of relief to victims of human-made and natural disasters. For others, though, humanitarianism does not end with the termination of the emergency; just because lives are no longer at immediate risk does not mean that suffering has ended or that other destructive forces that might appear in the future have been removed. No longer satisfied with saving individuals today only to have them be in jeopardy tomorrow—the infamous “well-fed dead”<sup>4</sup>—many organizations now aspire to transform the structural conditions that endanger populations. Their work includes development, democracy promotion, establishing the rule of law and respect for human rights, and postconflict peace building. These more ambitious projects expand the ability of aid workers to help more people in need and are designed to create the possibility of a more hopeful future—but, for better and worse, they coincide with and sometimes become part of the grand strategies of many powerful states.

Second, what are the defining principles of humanitarianism? In his famous desiderata, Jean Pictet of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) identified seven core principles: humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, voluntary service, unity, and universality. The first four principles, though, arguably constitute the core.<sup>5</sup> Humanity commands attention to all people. Impartiality requires that assistance be based on need and not on the basis of nationality, race, religion, gender, or political opinion. 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 should not be connected to any of the parties directly involved in armed conflicts or who have a stake in the outcome; accordingly, there is a general rule that agencies should either refuse or limit their reliance on government funding, especially if the donors have a stake in the outcome.

<sup>4</sup> This expression from the late Fred Cuny was first popularized by Roberta Cohen, “The Displaced Fall through the World’s Safety Net,” *Christian Science Monitor*, February 6, 1997.

<sup>5</sup> For discussions, see Jean Pictet, *The Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross* (Geneva: Henry Dunant Institute, 1979); David Forsythe, *The Humanitarians: The International Committee of the Red Cross* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005); Fiona Terry, *Condemned to Repeat? The Paradox of Humanitarian Action* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press); Thomas G. Weiss, “Principles, Politics, and Humanitarian Action,” *Ethics and International Affairs* 13 (1999): 1–22; and Larry Minear, *The Humanitarian Enterprise* (Bloomfield, Conn.: Kumarian Press, 2002).

For some, these principles are nearly sacrosanct and constitutive of humanitarianism, in essence defining what it is. These principles also serve as functional guidelines because by adhering to them agencies can better provide relief and protection. If aid agencies are perceived by combatants as partial, allied with the opposing side, or as having a vested interest in the outcome, then they will have a difficult time getting access, or even worse, they may become targets. These principles, if followed and respected, create "humanitarian space" that provides a sanctuary for aid workers and victims. Others agree on the general desirability of these principles but insist on moving beyond idealistic dogmatism toward making them contingent on how effective they are in specific situations. And, under certain conditions, they can be so dysfunctional as to be counterproductive. How does neutrality help the victims of ethnic cleansing and genocide? If states are the solution to humanitarian emergencies and are required to end mass killing, then what good is independence?

Third, what are humanitarianism's relations to politics? One perspective, most closely identified with the International Committee of the Red Cross, is that politics is a moral pollutant. The crux of the issue concerns the precise degree of independence. Indeed, many relief agencies nearly define the very meaning of humanitarianism as the opposite of "politics" and work hard to distinguish their actions as apolitical.<sup>6</sup> Although they confess that it is impossible to completely seal off humanitarianism from politics, they nevertheless insist that agencies must guard that border. Activities such as human rights, development, democracy promotion, and peacebuilding are political because they propose to treat causes and not symptoms and thus are implicated in a politics of transformation. The more that aid agencies depart from the ICRC's template of principles, the more political they will become, and the more difficult it will be to provide relief.

The contrasting position holds that it is neither possible nor desirable to separate humanitarianism and politics. It is impossible for humanitarian agencies to be apolitical. Their actions have political consequences, and they are viewed by those on the ground as political. The necessity of becoming political, however, is driven not only because of consequences or perceptions but because of the intention to alter the conditions that cause suffering. It is all well and good to deal with symptoms in the thick of an emergency, but afterward any attempt to

rebuild lives and societies will necessitate an encounter with politics. It cannot be avoided, nor should it be. Moreover, humanitarian agencies cannot and need not engage in these activities on their own. They are resource starved, and states should be sought and welcomed as partners in promoting progressive change.

This contemporary debate over the purposes, principles, and politics of humanitarianism reveals a struggle to (re)define the humanitarian identity. Although it is a tad melodramatic to claim that humanitarianism is in the midst of a full-blown identity crisis, humanitarian agencies do exhibit an anxiety associated with deep ontological insecurity. Several features of this debate over the humanitarian identity are particularly noteworthy. To begin, similar to all debates about collective identities, there is an attempt to mark the boundaries between social kinds. Identities are not only personal or psychological, they also are social and relational, generated by the actor's interaction with and relationship to others; therefore, identities are contingent, dependent on the identity's location within a structured context. As aid agencies debate who they are and what practices are reflective of their identity, they simultaneously reveal who they believe they are not and the practices that they deem illegitimate. The attempt to define the humanitarian identity, in other words, reflects a desire to define difference. Although identities are always being negotiated and thus difference is constantly being constructed, over the last twenty years global developments, such as the growing prominence of states in relief-oriented activities and the proliferation of postconflict operations, have weakened once reasonably settled distinctions between humanitarianism and other areas of social life. Boundaries blur as aid agencies perform functions once viewed as the domain of the state and states perform functions once viewed as the domain of relief agencies.

The debate over the humanitarian identity reflects a search to recapture the unity and purity that is tied to its presumed universality. What unifies humanitarianism? There always have been different strands of humanitarianism that are constituted and defined by different configurations of practices, principles, and understandings of the proper relationship between politics and humanitarianism. Arguably, though, the ICRC's definition of humanitarian action—the impartial, independent, and neutral provision of relief to those in immediate need because of conflict and natural disasters—was the industry standard until the late 1980s. Humanitarianism, in this view, meant relief and nothing but relief. Although other organizations such as Save the Children, CARE, and Oxfam also began as relief organizations and thus initially saw themselves as part of the humanitarian system, once relief was no longer a priority they soon tackled reconstruction and development activities and no longer identified as closely with a "humanitarian" system still very much defined by relief, leaving ICRC as the unchallenged guardian.<sup>7</sup>

<sup>6</sup> In this way, humanitarianism has a logocentric quality, which Jacques Derrida observes is in play whenever "one privileged term (logos) provides the orientation for interpreting the meaning of the subordinate term." Peter Nyers, "Emergency or Emerging Identities? Refugees and Transformations in World Order," *Millennium* 28, no. 1 (1999): 21. For discussion of this discursive and binary relationship, see Mark Cutts, "Politics and Humanitarianism," *Refugee Survey Quarterly* 17, no. 1 (1998): 1–15; Liisa Malkki, "Refugees and Exile: From 'Refugee Studies' to the National Order of Things," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 24 (1995): 495–523; Minear, *Humanitarian Enterprise*, 76; Daniel Warner, "The Politics of the Political/Humanitarian Divide," *International Review of the Red Cross* 81, no. 833 (1999): 109–18.

<sup>7</sup> Although aid agencies might aspire to reduce suffering, suffering is an inherently subjective category that has received considerable attention from anthropologists in the last decade. See

Global developments, and especially the end of the cold war, have called into question ICRC's hegemonic position, frayed humanitarianism's unity, and dissolved the boundaries between humanitarianism and other activities. If humanitarianism, for instance, now includes development, human rights, democracy promotion, gender equality, and peace building, then exactly what distinguishes it from these other areas of life that are populated by various interest-driven actors, including states? The search for unity represents nothing less than an attempt to fix a meaning to humanitarianism and repair breaches in its increasingly porous boundaries.

This search for unity also relates to a desire to restore purity. For many in the contemporary age, to be a humanitarian is to respond to the suffering of others regardless of their identity, to act selflessly, to do what can be done to save lives, and to place humanity above all other considerations. Stated differently, it rebels against a world that typically orbits around interest, politics, and power and communicates through violence, destruction, and bloodshed. Not without good reason, aid workers are routinely celebrated as righteous heroes, as the "last of the just."<sup>8</sup> Humanitarianism is treated as a symbol of what is good about the world, as the world's superego, as suggestive of the possibility of a more humane world. Humanitarianism's popularity has been on a steady rise over the last century. After a century of ideologies that committed mass crimes in the name of the search for a more perfect society, it offers a seductive simplicity, suggests no grand commitment, and allows a new generation to find solidarity not in ideas of progress but rather in projects of moral urgency and caretaking.<sup>9</sup> To protect the Rwandans from genocide, to help the Vietnamese boat people, to feed the famine-stricken Ibo of Nigeria, to tend to the survivors of the 2004 tsunami, to call for action in Darfur is to act with a moral clarity that is depressingly rare in this cynical age. Yet an increasing number of practitioners and pundits have challenged this presumed purity over the last two decades. The Rwandan genocide, probably more than any other event, shattered humanitarianism's self-confidence in its own virtue and opened the floodgates to critical interpretations.<sup>10</sup> Aid agencies seem to be driven by both values *and* interests, especially evident where some appeared to be "pornographers of death," caring more about constructing heroic images of themselves for donors than about the plight of victims.

Arthur Kleiman, Veena Das, and Margaret Lock, eds., *Social Suffering* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997).

<sup>8</sup> David Rieff, *A Bed for the Night: Humanitarianism in Crisis* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2002), 333.

<sup>9</sup> Alain Finkielkraut, *In the Name of Humanity: Reflections on the Twentieth Century* (London: Pimlico, 2000), 91.

<sup>10</sup> For a sampling of this literature, see Johan Pottier, *Re-Imagining Rwanda* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002); Alex de Waal, *Famine Crimes* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press).

There is now agreement that good intentions are not enough, if they ever were. Results matter. The spectacle of aid agencies feeding the perpetrators of the Rwandan genocide in refugee camps alongside victims presented harsh lessons about intentions—humanitarian actors are supposed to "do no harm" or at least "minimize the negative effects of their action."<sup>11</sup> As aid agencies allied themselves with states and donors, they made compromises that slowly corroded their core values and beliefs. In Kosovo many aid agencies were so intent on rescuing the Kosovar Albanians from the Serbian forces that they subordinated themselves to NATO and nearly disregarded the civilian casualties in Serbia and the principle of aid based on need.<sup>12</sup> The expansion of humanitarianism seems to have come at a high price. The issue has become whether and how humanitarianism can preserve its ethics.

These debates over the boundaries, unity, and purity of humanitarianism recur in questions relating to its purported universality. Although the idea of saving lives and relieving suffering is hardly a Western or Christian creation, modern humanitarianism's origins are located in Western history and Christian thought. Consequently, tensions have always existed between the presumed universality of humanitarian organizations and their Western roots. Humanitarians have frequently used their goals and principles as evidence of their universal orientation and appeal. They have aspired to save lives regardless of their own nationalities, religions, cultures, or other identity markers. They have operated according to the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence to underscore their depoliticized and universal character. This claim to universality was never as stable as partisans might have imagined. It was constantly challenged by countervailing forces that viewed universal claims as a move by the wealthy and powerful to impose their worldviews on the weak and vulnerable. These challenges have become more pointed in recent years, as a number of agencies have become more closely linked to Western states and committed to a politics of transformation that diffuses and protects values associated with the West. The growing critique of humanitarianism's universalism represents a mortal threat to its very identity.

For card-carrying members of the international humanitarian community, there is much at stake in this dialogue over humanitarianism's purpose, principles, and relationship to politics. Humanitarianism is a practical endeavor, not a parlor game. In emergencies, it involves setting up feeding stations, providing medical facilities, delivering food, building shelters, and protecting the rights

<sup>11</sup> For the "do no harm" pledge, see Mary B. Anderson and Peter J. Woodrow, *Rising from the Ashes: Development Strategies at Times of Disaster* (Boulder, Colo.: Westview, 1989), and Mary B. Anderson, *Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support War—or Peace* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1999). For the "minimize the impact," see Terry, *Condemned to Repeat*, and Sarah Kenyon Lischer, *Dangerous Sanctuaries: Refugee Camps, Civil War, and the Dilemmas of Humanitarian Aid* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).

<sup>12</sup> Tony Vaux, *The Selfish Altruist* (Sterling, Va.: Earthscan Publishing, 2001).

of vulnerable populations. After the end of the emergency phase, shattered lives need to be repaired and reconstructed. The challenge evolves from keeping individuals alive to creating the conditions so that they can survive on their own. Aid workers often experience considerable hardship and run considerable risks as they place their lives on the line to help those in need. Sometimes their only protection in war zones is the respect that they are given by combatants because of the presumption that they are only there to keep people alive.<sup>13</sup> The goals, principles, and conceived relationships to politics are not rhetorical statements that become buried in filing cabinets or innocuously displayed in mission statements on brochures and websites. Rather, these expressions of identity govern the means and ends of humanitarian action as well as shape what are viewed as the safest and most effective ways to establish lifelines to vulnerable populations.

For those on the outside looking in, the anxiety and debate over the humanitarian identity may come as something of a surprise. After all, humanitarianism appears to be thriving. It is now firmly established on the global agenda. There is a growing acceptance of the legitimacy of humanitarian action. Funding has skyrocketed. There are more organizations, states, and agencies dedicated to the idea of relieving the needless suffering of afflicted peoples than ever before. There exists a virtual Global Positioning System (GPS) that allows relief to be delivered to victims in a matter of hours. Why, then, do those in the sector act as if they are slipping past their golden years rather than enjoying their golden age? What are the forces that have so thoroughly shaken the humanitarian sector that they have unleashed this ontological insecurity? Why is there such anxiety amid all these accomplishments? What, precisely, has changed?

In this book the contributors critically analyze the causes and consequences of a contested humanitarianism. We address three questions. First, what features of humanitarianism have changed? Although we do not aspire to provide a definitive answer, we draw from a range of theoretical traditions in order to better understand some of the changes. How have the boundaries of humanitarianism changed? Which organizations are humanitarian and why? Have the organizing principles changed over the years? Are aid agencies changing their relationships with the great powers in the international system as well as with various combatants in war zones? What mechanisms are in place to ensure transparency and accountability? As part of the exercise, we evaluate change with a deep appreciation of historical context. Although we are most concerned with those global forces that have come together to shape the present and future of humanitarianism, any discussion of change is premised on a temporal comparison. Much of the practitioner-generated discussion takes the end of the cold war as its baseline. The adjective "new" and the noun "paradigm shift,"

in our view, are more narrative sleights of hand than they are historically accurate. Ethical dilemmas have not been making their maiden appearance during these last two decades. Humanitarian organizations have always struggled to maintain the boundaries between themselves and other organizations that are viewed as motivated by interests instead of principles. Humanitarianism has a long and meandering history, and different strands of humanitarianism have always existed. Many of the thorny questions and policy debates that animate the field should more fully consider this past.

Second, what has led to this profound questioning of humanitarianism? Although we do not seek to uncover any master variables, all of the contributors recognize that there have been changes in what we call the forces of destruction, production, and salvation. The increased severity and duration of wars has created a growing demand for more and different kinds of interventions. Forms of globalization, ideologies of political economy, discourses of development, and attempts to deal with all forms of poverty have affected where humanitarian organizations go, what they do, and how well they are funded. Social movements, inspired by a range of religious and philosophical positions and committed to helping those in need and trying to save the world from itself, have contributed to the meaning and practice of humanitarianism. Humanitarian is not separate from the world that it attempts to civilize; in many respects, it is its creature.

Third, which aspects of humanitarianism should be called into question? In this book we are most interested in three—politics, power, and ethics. In part because of global developments, relief agencies are increasingly involved in a broad range of activities that are largely defined as "political," and other organizations that are quite comfortable with politics have increasingly engaged in humanitarian activities. Any consideration of politics requires a discussion of power. Humanitarian organizations have been in painful self-denial about their relationship to power, preferring to see themselves as weak and vulnerable as those whom they are helping. But their growing resources, their broader ambitions, and their relationship to global structures puts front and center the issue of power. Humanitarianism is largely understood as the ultimate of ethical acts, but a range of ethical positions leads to a range of different evaluations of humanitarian action, suggesting that one person's noble act might be another's sin.

In the next section we provide a brief overview of humanitarianism and presents criteria that distinguish humanitarianism, the humanitarian act, and the humanitarian system. We then use the concepts of the forces of destruction, production, and salvation to mark three distinctive periods of humanitarianism from the nineteenth century to the present; doing so allows us to begin to identify broad trends in humanitarian action and to better situate the present in historical context. Practitioners and observers routinely claim that the humanitarian sector has significantly expanded over the last twenty years, and we assemble some basic facts and figures against which such claims can be

<sup>13</sup> See Nicholas J. Wheeler, *Saving Strangers: Humanitarian Intervention in International Society* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

evaluated. In the final section we provide an overview of the central themes of the book—politics, power, and ethics—suggesting how humanitarianism is constituted in various ways by these concepts, and how humanitarian actors attempt to define them in ways that further their ambitions.

### Humanitarianism: Definition and Identity

Many histories of a concept begin by proposing a nominal, objective definition and proceed to demonstrate how practices related to that definition have expanded or intruded into other concepts. If we followed this path, we would offer a definition of humanitarianism and then explore how it has become institutionalized and internationalized, as well as how various activities that are frequently associated with humanitarianism are, in fact, better understood in relationship to other concepts and categories. Many have taken this tack, perhaps most provocatively David Rieff. In *A Bed for the Night* he offers a definition that largely rests on the independent, neutral, and impartial provision of relief to victims of conflict and natural disasters. He then proceeds to show how the failure of various relief-oriented actors to honor that definition has led to humanitarianism's corruption and caused it to resemble colonialism and imperialism. Yet Rieff's observation is best seen as a strategic intervention into a debate, a desire to draw the boundaries of humanitarianism so that there is no hint of politics or power. In so doing, he romanticizes humanitarianism's history and denies how the meaning and practices of humanitarianism have been as historically fluid as the world in which it operates.

Any historical account of humanitarianism, as Craig Calhoun's discussion reminds us, must face the challenge of defining its boundaries so that it is possible to write a coherent narrative while recognizing that as a social construct its meaning is both the product of contestations and historically contingent. Our strategy for navigating between the fixed and the fluid is premised on our observation that since the first institutionalized usage of the concept of humanitarianism in the early nineteenth century, participants themselves have identified several critical issues that distinguish humanitarianism from other domains of social life.<sup>14</sup> Specifically, many within the humanitarian sector tend

<sup>14</sup> Drawing from Quentin Skinner's claim that historians must avoid projecting their own concerns onto the past, Claire McLisky insists that humanitarianism must be understood in terms of the meanings it held for those who used the term; in the context of Aborigine protection societies in Australia in the nineteenth century, humanitarianism was used by critics of these protection societies in a derogatory way—humanitarians are moralizers and busybodies—and those advocating reforms preferred to present themselves in other ways. "Due Observance of Justice, and the Protection of Their Rights": Philanthropy, Humanitarianism, and Moral Purpose in the Aborigines Protection Society circa 1837 and Its Portrayal in Australian Historiography, 1883–2003," *Limina* 11 (2005): 57–66.

to conceive the ideal humanitarian act as motivated by an altruistic desire to provide life-saving relief; to honor the principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence; and to do more good than harm. Those actions and organizations that stick to these goals, intentions, principles, and outcomes are unambiguously humanitarian; the further the distance between the act or organization and these criteria, the less plausible is the claim. Because very few organizations or acts achieve this idealized status, most reside in various shades of gray. There is widespread agreement that the essence of humanitarian action is to save lives at risk. This commitment is most visible when relief is delivered to those whose lives hang in the balance. At times these threats are caused by natural events. Hurricane Katrina and the Kashmir earthquake in 2005, the tsunami of 2004, and Hurricane Mitch in 1999 left thousands dead and hundreds of thousands needing relief. At other times, the harm is caused by human beings. War, genocide, ethnic conflict, and other forms of organized violence are the major reason why lives are at stake.<sup>15</sup> Humanitarian action also is intended to help those for whom harm lurks in the future. Many humanitarian organizations publicize human rights violations, work to alleviate poverty, and provide access to medicines to prevent or reduce suffering.

But what sort of causal distance should be permitted between the act and the outcome? To define humanitarianism so that it includes nearly all conceivable acts that might potentially alleviate suffering would stretch the concept to the point of uselessness. Many state activities, from the provision of welfare support to job training, could conceivably be deemed "humanitarian." Multinational corporations might claim to be part of the humanitarian sector because of the proposition that international trade leads to economic growth, economic growth leads to increased incomes and tax revenues, increased incomes and tax revenues can translate into improved health care, and improved health care can reduce rates of mortality and morbidity.

To avoid either grossly speculative or justificatory claims, many insist that intentions matter—the act must be intended to save lives and reduce suffering. The term "humanitarians" frequently connotes altruistic individuals giving unto others without expecting anything in return, and potentially sacrificing something in the process. Although most humanitarian organizations avoid the language of altruism, they stress something of a synonym—"voluntarism." Sometimes "voluntary" is translated as "unpaid." J. Henri Dunant's original proposal for establishing a relief corps was premised on unpaid volunteers.<sup>16</sup> Yet another interpretation of voluntarism, one that probably better captures

<sup>15</sup> This book focuses on humanly produced disasters because they are largely responsible for producing the debates and propelling the changes within humanitarianism. However, there is a fine line between "natural" and "human-made" disasters, and while nature has an objective reality, there is a social distribution of risk that is humanly produced.

<sup>16</sup> Henry Dunant, *A Memory of Solferino* (London: Cassell, 1947).



its present meaning, emphasizes those who willingly accept a dangerous undertaking, who exhibit a certain sprit of selflessness, and who are ready to sacrifice for others. What matters is not whether an individual is paid but rather whether economic compensation is a primary or secondary motivation.

Yet do Dunant's volunteers exist? Provocatively characterized by one veteran as "selfish altruists," aid workers give to others but expect power, esteem, and social status in return.<sup>17</sup> They might be exceptional human beings, but they remain flesh-and-blood, complicated creatures who have a mixture of motives and feelings. The professionalization of the sector and the attempt to retain highly valued staff and attract employees from the private sector has introduced familiar rewards into the contemporary humanitarian sector. Salaries, benefit packages, and pensions have become competitive. Humanitarianism might not be a career like any other, but for many it is increasingly a profession as well as an avocation.<sup>18</sup>

Those within the sector also distinguish humanitarian action on the basis of the principles of humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence. Although aid organizations might disagree on when the operating principles of independence and neutrality are functional for promoting various desired outcomes, they are in general agreement that the principles of impartiality and humanity are not merely designed to help achieve particular ends but are defining features of their very identity. The principle of humanity is expressive of a general commitment to "prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found," "to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being," and to "promote mutual understanding, friendship, co-operation and lasting peace amongst all peoples."<sup>19</sup> Humanity, in this fundamental way, is connected to cosmopolitanism—the claim that each person is of equal moral worth and a subject of moral concern, and that in the "justification of one's choices one must take the prospects of everyone affected equally into account."<sup>20</sup> Impartiality presumes that all those at risk, regardless of their identity, deserve equal attention and consideration. The desire to help those who are suffering regardless of place and politics means that international borders, identities, and ideologies do not circumscribe obligations to victims.<sup>21</sup> Humanitarian organizations are expressing a cosmopolitan ethic as they relieve suffering and save

lives, and in this fundamental way they are different from other organizations, such as states, that do the same.

Increasingly those in the sector also include outcomes as an essential characteristic. Until the 1990s, aid agencies rarely contemplated whether their actions did more good than harm—they presumed that good intentions were evidence of good outcomes. Such presumptions were shattered, though, by long-running killing in the Balkans and frenetic genocide in Rwanda, and the demand from donors that aid agencies demonstrate that their actions had their intended effects. Assessing impact has proved to be an empirical challenge, a theme explored by both James Fearon and Janice Gross Stein in their chapters. Moreover, the measurement of benchmarks has profound ramifications for relief agencies, inviting comparisons with other kinds of organizations, including for-profit firms and even militaries. If greater capabilities and lower costs are the bottom line, as Stephen Hopgood provocatively argues in chapter 4, then a commercial enterprise such as Wal-Mart could in theory be a relief organization. What if such an organization is more efficient than nonprofit ones and thus saves more lives? Do the recipients of blankets, food, and medicine really care if the money comes from the U.S. government and then is "laundered" through a nonprofit agency? Do they really care if these life-saving goods are delivered by the U.S. military or Kellogg, Brown and Root (KBR)?

Because the criteria used to define the humanitarian act are susceptible to intrusions, contradictions, and disturbances, it should come as little surprise that there are similar debates over what qualifies as a humanitarian organization. We are willing to bet that most citizens, if asked to identify a humanitarian organization, would immediately respond by naming a nongovernmental organization (NGO) from which they have received an appeal in the mail such as Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF), CARE, Save the Children, World Vision International, Catholic Relief Services (CRS), or Oxfam. This familiarity probably owes to their perceived qualities, including their relief-oriented activities, intentions, principles, and general ability to deliver on their promises. But NGOs do not have a monopoly in the sector.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>17</sup> Vaux, *Selfish Altruist*.

<sup>18</sup> Stephen Hopgood, *Keepers of the Flame: Understanding Amnesty International* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006).

<sup>19</sup> Pictet, *Fundamental Principles of the Red Cross*.

<sup>20</sup> Charles Beitz, "Cosmopolitan Liberalism and the States System," in *Political Restructuring in Europe: Ethical Perspectives*, ed. Chris Brown (London: Routledge, 1994), 124. Also see Andrew Linklater, *The Transformation of Political Community* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1998), chap. 2.

<sup>21</sup> Craig Calhoun, "A World of Emergencies: Fear, Intervention, and the Limits of Cosmopolitan Order," *Canadian Review of Sociology and Anthropology* 41, no. 4 (2004): 375–95.

<sup>22</sup> Hugo Slim playfully but perceptively mocks those who claim that humanitarian agencies have a monopoly on relief: "First, I wonder if there is an analogy between humanitarianism and humour. Laughter is a universal good. What would the world be like if only clowns were allowed to be funny and make people laugh? This would be a terrible world that confined humour to a professional class and restricted a universal human desire and capacity. At times, it can sound as if NGO humanitarians are suggesting something similar about humanitarian action. It is something that they want everyone to value and enjoy but which only they are allowed to do. Often, by implying this, they can come across as smug and self-righteous. If this is what they really think, then this is humanitarian professionalism gone mad." Hugo Slim, "Humanitarianism with Borders? NGOs, Belligerent Military Forces and Humanitarian Action," *Journal of Humanitarian Assistance*, <http://www.jha.ac/articles/a118.htm>.

Because of their presumed attributes, many intergovernmental organizations—including the World Food Programme (WFP), United Nations Children's Emergency Fund (UNICEF), and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR)—also are counted. The ICRC is the patriarch of the system and is neither, strictly speaking, nongovernmental nor intergovernmental; it is in a category by itself because states provide the bulk of its resources and also gave it a particular mandate—to develop, protect, and disseminate international humanitarian law—but individual citizens, and not states, are members. What of the host of charitable and philanthropic foundations that fund and implement programs? For instance, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation—already the world's largest foundation before the \$30 billion gift from Warren Buffett in 2006—has targeted various life-threatening diseases. It is only the most recent in a long line of philanthropic and charitable organizations, including the Ford, Rockefeller, and Agha Khan foundations, that might be included because of their presumed qualities.

What of states and commercial firms that occasionally provide assistance? For organizations that have pledged loyalty to humanitarianism's core principles, the answer is a visceral "no." However, if what matters is the reduction of suffering in catastrophes, then a more subtle response is demanded. States can and do contribute to relief and thus can save lives. Since 1990 the business community has provided significant financial support, delivered relief, and encouraged others to contribute to the cause. Although nonprofit agencies will grudgingly acknowledge the contributions of states and commercial firms—and thus might consider them to be part of the humanitarian sector—they nevertheless insist that they are not humanitarian organizations because their motives are all wrong. States and commercial firms have more than saving lives on their minds when they deliver relief: states generally get involved when their foreign policy interests are at stake, and the private sector recognizes that being seen as doing good can be good for business. Existing humanitarian agencies that use motives and principles—and not outcomes—to justify their differentiation should not be so self-assured, because the criteria might not be as favorable to humanitarian organizations as they think. Although for-profit relief enterprises are largely driven by contracts and not by perceived need, even not-for-profit agencies are obliged to recognize economic imperatives, and thus financial concerns shape their decisions and activities. Moreover, we should not be so ready to assume that the latter necessarily have purer and nobler motives than those in for-profit firms; there is plenty of evidence that staff in both sectors have a mixture of motives.

This discussion of the criteria frequently used to identify the humanitarian act and organization has three implications. One is that there are more gray than either black or white areas—certainly much more than many in the humanitarian sector are prepared to acknowledge. Although venerable aid agencies like to use these criteria to legitimate their activities, to generate status, and even to determine who controls access to resources, the distinguishing boundaries are

rather porous. Another is that there is considerable diversity both within the humanitarian sector and even within individual agencies. There are agencies that focus on medical relief during times of war and agencies that provide relief and a host of other activities whose intent is not to save lives but to provide long-term empowerment. Even agencies such as MSF that focus on medical relief in emergency situations can become political as they feel the tug to provide long-term care and to alter political and economic arrangements in order to improve access of the world's poor to drugs.<sup>23</sup> Last, and hardly least, the criteria that are used and the weight assigned them are generally driven by those within the sector. Although there might be principled reasons why existing humanitarian organizations want to preserve existing distinctions, there also are self-interested reasons why they have a stake in keeping membership limited, including the desire to maintain their autonomy and resource base.

### Destruction, Production, and Salvation

The terrain on which humanitarians walk is nourished by the forces of destruction, production, and salvation.<sup>24</sup> The *forces of destruction* include those acts of violence that place individuals at immediate risk. Massacres, international and civil wars, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and war-induced famines have been a principal "call to alms."<sup>25</sup> Changes in military technology and strategy furthered the desire to expand the laws of war and provide more protections and relief to civilians. At times states have seen intimate connections between their security interests and humanitarian emergencies. These acts of violence, though, would probably not lead to international action were it not for their very visibility. 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

<sup>23</sup> Over the last decade various practitioners and scholars have offered a range of classifications and taxonomies that are intended to define critical differences among aid agencies. Some criteria include big versus small, secular versus religious, European versus American, and full-service versus relief-oriented. The claim, in other words, is that these differences in nationalities, mandates, organizational cultures, and size are relevant for understanding what humanitarian organizations do, how they react to circumstances in the field, and how they respond to external pressures. For different approaches, see Abby Stoddard, "Trends in US Humanitarian Policy," in *The New Humanitarianisms: A Review of Trends in Global Humanitarian Action*, ed. Joanna Macrae, Humanitarian Policy Group Report 11 (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2002); Weiss, "Principles, Politics, and Humanitarian Action"; Smillie and Minear, *Charity of Nations*, 192; and Michael Barnett, "Humanitarianism Transformed," *Perspectives on Politics* 3, no. 4 (2005): 723–41.

<sup>24</sup> We thank Bud Duvall for suggesting this formulation.

<sup>25</sup> Hugo Slim, *A Call to Alms: Humanitarian Action and the Art of War* (Geneva: Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, February 2004).

awareness, which, in turn, has created a demand that something be done in the face of conscience-shocking suffering. States do not always wait for their citizens to demand action. At times they decide that their security interests might be furthered by humanitarian action. They tend to become most pained when the suffering intersects with their already existing security interests, and they are not averse to legitimating their foreign policy actions by flying the flag of humanitarianism.

The *forces of production* include capitalism and the global economy, ideologies regarding the state's role in society, and the funding environment. The debate regarding the relationship between capitalism and humanitarianism emerged 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 line of thought treats capitalism as the structure and humanitarianism as part of the superstructure that is functional for capitalist 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 society for the prevention of cruelty to animals, temperance fanatics, hold-and-corner reformers of every imaginable kind" as operating to smooth over social grievances and help improve bourgeois society.<sup>26</sup> Similarly, some accounts of the end of slavery treat the abolitionists as closet capitalists, or as pushing on an open door because slavery was no longer economically viable and new forms of labor relations were desirable given changes in the agrarian economy and industrialization.<sup>27</sup>

An alternative view does not reduce humanitarianism to the functional needs of capitalism but instead traces how dislocations caused by capitalism prepared 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 to restore a moral order—a moral order that also could further capitalism. For instance, industrialists saw rampant alcohol consumption as a major problem; 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.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>26</sup> In his commentary on "Conservative, or Bourgeois Socialism," *Communist Manifesto*, chap. 3. Cited in M.J.D. Roberts, *Making English Morals: Voluntary Association and Moral Reform in England, 1787–1886* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 5.

<sup>27</sup> See David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in Western Culture* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1966); and John Ashworth, "The Relationship between Capitalism and Humanitarianism," *American Historical Review* 92, no. 4 (1987): 813–28.

<sup>28</sup> For a review of this literature, see Thomas Haskell, "Capitalism and the Origins of the Humanitarian Sensibility, Part 1," and "Capitalism and the Origins of the Humanitarian Sensibility, Part 2," *American Historical Review* 90, no. 3 (1985): 547–66.

Almost two hundred years later, a similar debate exists regarding the contemporary relationship between economic forces and moral action. Some suggest that the when, where, and why of humanitarian action can be reduced to economic imperatives. This charge is frequently leveled at states when they undertake or support humanitarian action. NGO activities also have been coupled with the needs of capitalist expansion and stabilization. Their postconflict stabilization programs include, for instance, market-oriented development. But their presence might be more than temporary. In the global South, a stripped-down state pursuing structural adjustment programs increasingly is obliged to call on outside humanitarian organizations to provide basic social services. At such moments NGOs are performing statelike functions and might be characterized as "parastatal." Aid agencies, in short, are becoming welfare workers as the neoliberal state outsources its basic welfare functions while focusing on the needs of the private sector. As Fiona Terry warns, "If aid organizations pursue conflict resolution and peace-building activities, they are likely not only to increase the negative consequences of humanitarian action, but to further exonerate states of their responsibilities in these realms."<sup>29</sup>

Ideologies regarding the state's proper role in society and the economy also have shaped the demand for humanitarian assistance. During the nineteenth century's era of Dickensian capitalism, various charitable and reform-minded organizations stepped in where the state refused or failed to tread, while in the United States the combination of a growing urban underclass alongside the appearance of oil and manufacturing tycoons led the latter to create and support various kinds of philanthropic, charitable, and humanitarian organizations to improve human welfare.<sup>30</sup> The emergence of the welfare state during the 1930s increased the resources available for their activities. The post-1980s ideology of neoliberalism and the limited state created a greater demand for humanitarian organizations.

The discourses of globalization have shaped the professionalization, bureaucratization, and rationalization of the humanitarian "firm." Indeed, "the formal [humanitarian] system has adopted many of the routine practices of modern welfare provision in Western states," according to Hugo Slim, a veteran commentator on humanitarian action. "To this end, it has tried to adopt a modern bureaucratic model of management and organization to shape and sharpen its fast-growing organizations whose smaller antecedents were originally based on simpler notions of charity, volunteerism, activism, and social service."<sup>31</sup>

<sup>29</sup> Terry, *Condemned to Repeat?* 245.

<sup>30</sup> See Gertrude Himmelfarb, *Poverty and Compassion: The Moral Imagination of the Late Victorians* (New York: Vintage, 1991), and Himmelfarb, *The Idea of Poverty: England in the Early Industrial Age* (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1984).

<sup>31</sup> Hugo Slim, "Global Welfare: A Realistic Expectation for the International Humanitarian System?" *ALNAP Review of Humanitarian Action in 2005: Evaluation Utilisation* (December 2006), 20. Available at [http://www.odi.org.uk/ALNAP/publications/RHA2005/rha05\\_Ch1.pdf](http://www.odi.org.uk/ALNAP/publications/RHA2005/rha05_Ch1.pdf).

Moreover, increasingly Western governments have turned to NGOs because they were supposedly more efficient in delivering services than either bilateral or intergovernmental organizations.<sup>32</sup>

Some of this is, undoubtedly, positive, especially if it allows them to save more lives with the same resources. Yet such discourse is not value neutral. As Stephen Hopgood vividly observes, language has changed substantially. Humanitarian organizations speak of "beneficiaries," have offices that cultivate "clients," make use of their "brand," aspire to increase their "efficiency," and adopt modern "accountability" and governance mechanisms. Further, as Janice Gross Stein notes in chapter 5, understandings of accountability imported from the business world usually privilege the donor over the recipient. A heightened emphasis on efficiency and the search for objective indicators of success might lead to the displacement of goals that are not easily quantified, such as the desire to restore dignity to victimized populations and to create a genuine cosmopolitanism.

The funding environment shapes the opportunities for and the forms of humanitarian action in various ways. 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, more common is the constant concern for maintaining the funding base. Appeals to donors must tug on their heartstrings and convince them that they can help make a difference. Some donors ask for little or nothing in return. Such faith-based organizations as World Vision International, the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC), and Lutheran World Relief depend on religious constituencies and thus can count on core funds with few preconditions attached. Those agencies that rely on official funding are less fortunate because they must manage relations with finicky, temperamental, demanding governmental donors that expect to have some control over how these funds are used. In the 1990s the amount of funding available for humanitarian activities nearly tripled, but increasingly these resources came from a handful of powerful states, were earmarked, and were accompanied by greater controls and conditions to try to ensure that the donors got something for their money. Organizations such as the International Rescue Committee found themselves dedicating more and more time at their board meetings to the problem of trying to maintain a high public profile in order to manage their relations with the U.S. government, from which it received the bulk of its funding.

An additional feature of the funding environment is the competition for scarce resources. Competition can have various effects. It can encourage agencies to become more effective at existing tasks; to specialize in different areas, such

as sanitation, shelter, and medicine; to compete for market share by expanding into new areas such as democracy promotion and peace building; to stress public relations and attempt to develop and protect their brand; to move into high-profile areas such as advocacy and deemphasize less-captivating areas such as building latrines that nevertheless might save more lives; and to change their principles, priorities, and policies so that they are more consistent with the demands of their funders. These countervailing pressures are present in nearly every high-profile emergency.

The *forces of salvation* concern moral discourses, religious beliefs, ethical commitments, and international norms that generate an obligation to help distant strangers. Although such imperatives are as old as humankind, in the nineteenth century ethical commitments began to be institutionalized and internationalized. The Enlightenment and Christian reform movements helped to foster the discourse of humanity and the rights-bearing individual, to dissolve superficial differences in favor of a community of humankind, and to create a faith in the possibility of using social institutions to bring progress to society and perfect the individual.<sup>33</sup> The institutionalization of liberalism—emphasizing freedom, progress, development, individual autonomy, and liberty—has historically translated into support for democracy, markets, human rights, and the rule of law. In turn, the dominance of liberalism in the humanitarian sector is linked to the possibility of engineering a peaceful and productive society.

Religious beliefs also contribute to a humanitarian ethic. Charity is a long-standing religious value. Christianity's notion of love and compassion includes the idea of charity and obligations to strangers.<sup>34</sup> *Zakat*, which roughly translates to voluntarism, is one of the five pillars of Islam and reflects Islamic identity, commands various forms of charity, and is intended to foster solidarity within the community.<sup>35</sup> *Tzedakah* and the idea of repairing the world makes charity and good works part of the Jewish identity.<sup>36</sup> Although there is tremendous historical and cross-cultural variation regarding whether faith demands a missionary impulse and whether charity extends to those outside the community of the faithful, many religions hold that charity is a cornerstone of religious identity.<sup>37</sup>

Yet arguably, and as Craig Calhoun explores in chapter 3, it is Christianity and Christian faith-based organizations that so far have had the most significant

<sup>32</sup> Finkelkraut, *In the Name of Humanity*, chap. 1.

<sup>33</sup> Norman Fiering, "Irresistible Compassion: An Aspect of Eighteenth-Century Sympathy and Humanitarianism," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 37, no. 2 (1976): 195–218.

<sup>34</sup> M. A. Mohamed Salih, "Islamic NGOs in Africa: The Promise and Peril of Islamic Voluntarism," in *Islamism and Its Enemies in the Horn of Africa*, ed. Alex de Waal (London: Hurst, 2004), 146–81.

<sup>35</sup> See, for instance, Ina Friedman, "Jewish Soft Power," *Jerusalem Report*, July 24, 2006, 11–12.

<sup>36</sup> See Ephraim Isaac, "Humanitarianism across Religions and Cultures," in *Humanitarianism across Borders: Sustaining Civilians in Times of War*, ed. Thomas G. Weiss and Larry Minear (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1993), 13–22.

<sup>37</sup> Joanna MacRae et al., *Uncertain Power: The Challenging Role of Official Donors in Humanitarian Action*, Humanitarian Policy Group Report 12 (London: Overseas Development Institute), 18–21.

influence on contemporary humanitarian action. They were present at the creation—usually dated to the nineteenth century—and, in fact, helped to give it life. The various “awakenings” fed into new kinds of social reform movements: Quakers and evangelicals took the lead in abolitionism, various missionaries were at the forefront of trying to improve the lives of those at home and the colonized, and faith-based organizations were prominent in delivering relief to victims of war and natural disasters. The “just war” tradition has found its way into standard operating principles, including most recently the responsibility to protect.<sup>38</sup> The image of the Good Samaritan is widespread throughout the industry. Among the top contributors to international assistance are such religion-inspired NGOs as World Vision, CARE, Catholic Relief Services, and Oxfam. Although relatively modest in resources, the Christian pacifists play a disproportionate role through the AFSC (Quakers) and the Mennonite Central Committee. Although many have distanced themselves from their proselytizing origins and are fairly secular in their activities, some of the criticism waged against Western humanitarian organizations centers around the limitations of their Judeo-Christian cultural bias among what are increasingly Muslim clients, as Laura Hammond notes in chapter 7.

Also important are international laws, norms, and principles. The meaning of sovereignty has varied from one historical era to the other, and these variations matter greatly for what humanitarian actors can and should do. During colonialism, humanitarian action by colonial states and missionaries was frequently presented as intended to help create self-governing and civilized states that could become independent and sovereign. Over the last twenty years, a shift has occurred in the meaning of sovereignty—away from a view that the state possesses absolute sovereignty to the view that citizens are sovereign, that states have obligations to their citizens, and that if states either cannot or do not fulfill these obligations then the international community inherits that responsibility.<sup>39</sup> The discourse of human rights also has shaped the demand for various kinds of interventions that were presumed to help protect individuals from abuse and to give them the opportunities and capabilities that they require to improve their lives.<sup>40</sup> In general, the discourses surrounding rights, sovereignty, and justice have slowly but impressively created new standards for

states, provided new metrics of civilization, and suggested a new rhetoric of justification for intervention on behalf of the weak and powerless.

### Three Periods within Humanitarianism

The configuration of the forces of destruction, production, and salvation affect the purposes of humanitarianism in a given era. We posit the existence of three periods—from the early nineteenth century through World War II; from 1945 until the end of the cold war; and from 1990 until today, with the possibility of some important discontinuities following the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks.<sup>41</sup>

Contemporary forms of humanitarianism, as Craig Calhoun describes in chapter 3, began in the nineteenth century as a consequence primarily of the forces of production and salvation.<sup>42</sup> The context was the perceived breakdown of society and emergence of moral ills that were being caused by rapid industrialization, urbanization, and market expansion. Drawing from a mixture of religious and Enlightenment ideas, various intellectuals, politicians, jurists, and members of the clergy adopted the language of humanitarianism to describe their proposed social and political reforms and to push for public interventions to alleviate suffering and restore society's moral basis. Their ideas were responsible for and connected to such movements as temperance, charity for the poor, regulations regarding child labor, and mass education.<sup>43</sup> On occasion, though, they looked outward. Their most celebrated achievement occurred in 1831 when British abolitionists campaigned successfully to outlaw the transatlantic slave trade.

If war-related international humanitarianism had an inaugural moment, it was in 1864 with the establishment of the International Committee of the Red Cross and the emergence of international humanitarian law.<sup>44</sup> In response to the circumstances of fallen and injured soldiers, humanitarian activists pursued an immediate goal—to convince states to give them access to these populations at risk. The popularity and resonance of the idea were enormous; within three

<sup>38</sup> As with all generalizations, there are exceptions. Some scholars have studied non-Western origins of “just war” theory. For example, see James Turner Johnson, *The Holy War Idea in Western and Islamic Traditions* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1997), and Johnson, *Just War Tradition and the Restraint of War: A Moral and Historical Inquiry* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1981).

<sup>39</sup> Michael Barnett, “The New United Nations Politics of Peace: From Juridical Sovereignty to Empirical Sovereignty,” *Global Governance* 1, no. 1 (1995): 79–97.

<sup>40</sup> David Chandler, *From Kosovo to Kabul* (Washington, D.C.: Pluto Press, 2002), chap. 1; and, Bronwyn Leebaw, “The Politics of Impartial Activism: Humanitarianism and Human Rights,” *Perspectives on Politics* 5, no. 2 (June 2007): 223–40.

<sup>41</sup> Michael Barnett is developing this argument in *Humanitarianism: A History* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, forthcoming).

<sup>42</sup> For various statements on the origins of humanitarianism, see Fiering, “Irresistible Compassion,” 195–218; A.R. Humphreys, “‘The Friend of Mankind’ (1700–60): An Aspect of Eighteenth-Century Sensibility,” *Review of English Studies* 24, no. 95 (July 1949): 203–18; and Maurice Parmelee, “The Rise of Modern Humanitarianism,” *American Journal of Sociology* 21, no. 3 (1915): 345–59.

<sup>43</sup> See Samuel Clyde McCulloch, *British Humanitarianism: Essays Honoring Frank Klingberg* (Kingsport, Tenn.: Church Historical Society, 1950).

<sup>44</sup> See François Bugnion, *The International Committee of the Red Cross and the Protection of War Victims* (Geneva: ICRC, 2003), chap. 2.

years the grassroots campaign produced the ICRC and the Geneva Conventions. An unsuccessful effort at Brussels in 1874 to consider a draft of the laws of war drawn up by Tsar Alexander II met with more success later and formed the basis for the 1899 and 1907 Hague Conventions.

The relationship between colonialism and humanitarianism is more complicated than the reductionist view that the latter was an outgrowth of and justification for imperialism. Certainly there is some basis for that position.<sup>45</sup> King Leopold, for example, justified his genocidal exploitation of the Congo as advancing civilization and as a humanitarian project.<sup>46</sup> The missionary frequently could be a "civilizing" agent, easing the way for external domination. Yet there were instances in which missionaries called for colonial interventions that state leaders believed was against their imperial interests; a classic case here is how the British population's desire to stamp out the slave trade led to the ill-fated expedition to the Sudan in 1882, an expedition opposed by British prime minister William Gladstone.<sup>47</sup> Some missionaries were outraged by the un-Christian behavior of foreign merchants who engaged in all forms of debauchery and exploitation.<sup>48</sup> In the late nineteenth century various missionary organizations began to develop self-doubts about the idea of conversion on the grounds that it led to a denigration of local traditions, customs, and cultures.<sup>49</sup> Thus, although humanitarianism was often invoked as an alibi for interest-based interventions, in many cases it came to oppose colonial sentiments and actions.

Humanitarianism's next great leap forward occurred as a consequence of the two world wars of the twentieth century. Many of the most familiar of today's nongovernmental and intergovernmental organizations emerged in reaction to these forces of destruction. In response to the refugees created by the Russian Revolution, the League of Nations established the High

<sup>45</sup> Frederick Cooper, "Modernizing Colonialism and the Limits of Empire," in *Lessons of Empire: Imperial Histories and American Power*, ed. Craig Calhoun, Frederick Cooper, and Kevin Moore (New York: New Press, 2006), 65–67; Alice Conklin, *A Mission to Civilize: The Republican Idea of Empire in France and Africa, 1895–1930* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998); and Ann Stoler and Frederick Cooper, "Between Metropole and Colony: Rethinking a Research Agenda," in *Tensions of Empire: Colonial Cultures in a Bourgeois World*, ed. Ann Stoler and Frederick Cooper (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 1–56.

<sup>46</sup> Adam Hochschild, *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa* (New York: Mariner Books, 1999).

<sup>47</sup> See P.M. Holt, *The Mahdist State in the Sudan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1970), 32–44; and Robin Neillands, *The Dervish Wars: Gordon and Kitchener in the Sudan* (London: John Murray, 1996), 23–34.

<sup>48</sup> Amanda Porterfield, "Protestant Missionaries: Pioneers of American Philanthropy," in *Charity, Philanthropy, and Civility in American History*, ed. Lawrence Friedman and Mark McGarvie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 49–69.

<sup>49</sup> Emily Rosenberg, "Missions to the World: Philanthropy Abroad," in *Charity, Philanthropy, and Civility in American History*, ed. Lawrence Friedman and Mark McGarvie (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 242.

Commissioner for Russian Refugees (1920–22), headed by Fridtjof Nansen, who subsequently expanded his mandate to include other continental populations. Two holdovers from his efforts, the Intergovernmental Committee for Refugees and the High Commissioner for Refugees, fused in 1943 to form the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration (UNRRA). NGOs, in most cases, were ahead of states in the area of refugee relief (and lobbying states to do their share). Russian refugees prompted two English sisters, Eglantyne Jebb and Dorothy Buxton, to found Save the Children. The advent of the Nazi regime led Albert Einstein to start the International Rescue Committee.

The specter of rampant inhumanity during World War II led an "international community" to work for a different future. It would be a gross mistake to see the resulting surge in institution building as the triumph of humanitarianism. After all, the demand for new institutions, laws, and inspirational slogans was a response to the utter desecration of the very idea of humanity and an inversion of Enlightenment principles. That said, the Holocaust and concentration camps, the firebombings, and the use of nuclear weapons led diplomats and activists to call for the protection of civilians, the dispossessed, and human dignity. The very idea of human dignity led to such normative humanitarian pillars as the 1945 United Nations Charter, the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, the 1948 Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, and the 1949 Geneva Conventions (and eventually the 1977 Additional Protocols).<sup>50</sup> There also was a growth in intergovernmental and nongovernmental machinery. UNRRA was revamped in 1946 as the International Rescue Organization, which became the UN High Commissioner for Refugees in 1951; although it was supposed to be a temporary agency limited to European refugees, it soon became a permanent feature in global affairs. UNICEF had a similar institutional biography. In 1942 a group of Quakers founded the Oxford Committee for Famine Relief (later shortened to Oxfam) to respond to the Greek famine. Shortly after the end of the war, Lutheran World Relief, Church World Service, and Caritas International came into being—fostered by Lutherans, the U.S. National Council of Churches, and the Vatican, respectively.

Decolonization and the emergence of a development discourse also fed into a desire to reduce suffering in what was not yet called the "third world" or "global South."<sup>51</sup> Development became, to some, a novel tool to combat the twin scourges of war and inequality, the new just cause. The World Bank—whose acronym remains IBRD, International Bank for Reconstruction and

<sup>50</sup> Paul Rabinow, *Human DNA* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 103.

<sup>51</sup> For good discussions of development in world-historical context, see Arturo Escobar, *Encountering Development* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Frederick Cooper and Randall Packard, eds., *International Development and the Social Sciences* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); and Gilbert Rist, *The History of Development: From Western Origins to Global Faith* (New York: Zed Books, 2002).



Development—was founded initially to “reconstruct” and “develop” Europe, but it soon expanded enormously its development activities in newly independent countries. As mentioned, many of the relief organizations established in response to the needs of the victims of the European wars turned their attention to reconstruction and then development following the return or resettlement of the wounded and displaced. Oxfam, CARE, and Catholic Relief Services all got their start providing relief during World War II but quickly became involved in poverty alleviation and development.

The end of the cold war triggered the latest chapter as the forces of destruction, production, and salvation have combined to help expand and reconfigure the humanitarian system. In the next section, we discuss the growth in numbers and resources, but here we concentrate on several historical and conceptual underpinnings. The first has been an expanded definition of a “threat to international peace and security,” the trigger for involvement by the UN Security Council. During the cold war, the council defined threats to international peace and security as disputes between states that might or had become militarized, conflicts involving the great powers, and general threats to global stability.<sup>52</sup> After the cold war—and in reaction to the growing perception that domestic conflict and civil wars were leaving hundreds of thousands of people at risk, creating mass flight, and destabilizing entire regions—the council authorized interventions on the grounds that war-induced disasters imperiled regional and international security. One reason why the Security Council redefined peace and security was because of the emerging relative significance of “new wars.” Although there is considerable debate regarding whether the dynamics of warfare are new, emergencies were increasingly on the international agenda and in the media spotlight.<sup>53</sup> As states paid more attention to them, they linked these vulnerable populations to an expanding discourse of security, which further heightened their visibility. The result was a new label, “complex humanitarian emergencies,” to depict the ugly and confusing reality of a “conflict-related humanitarian disaster involving a high degree of breakdown and social dislocation and, reflecting this condition, requiring a system-wide aid response from the international community.”<sup>54</sup>

<sup>52</sup> N.D. White, *Keeping the Peace* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1993), 34–38; Michael Howard, “The Historical Development of the UN’s Role in International Security,” in *United Nations: Divided World*, ed. Adam Roberts and Benedict Kingsbury, 2nd ed. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), 69–70.

<sup>53</sup> Hugo Slim, “Protecting Civilians: Putting the Individual at the Humanitarian Centre,” in *The Humanitarian Decade: Challenges for Humanitarian Assistance in the Last Decade and into the Future*, vol. 2, ed. Office of the Coordinator of Humanitarian Assistance (New York: United Nations, 2004), 154–69.

<sup>54</sup> Duffield, *Global Governance and the New Wars*, 12. See also Weiss, “Principles, Politics, and Humanitarian Action,” and Philip White, “Complex Political Emergencies—Grasping Contexts, Seizing Opportunities,” *Disasters* 24, no. 4 (2000): 288–90.

There is some controversy regarding the relationship between this expanding peace and security agenda, humanitarianism, and state interests. It is highly doubtful that states experienced a “great awakening” and substituted a moral outlook for national interests. Arguably most important was a recalculation of the relationship between interests and the potential impacts of humanitarian disasters in an increasingly connected world. These emergencies were having regional and sometimes international consequences, feeding into the view that there was a close relationship between domestic and international order. Because failed states are a threat to themselves and others, they must be “saved,” and the surest antidote to domestic instability is the injection of human rights, markets, and democracy.<sup>55</sup>

Moreover, since 9/11 many countries, especially the United States, have viewed counterterrorism and humanitarianism as crime-fighting partners, with failed states as sanctuaries and staging platforms for terrorists. Humanitarian organizations, in this view, can become part of wider “hearts and minds” campaigns, attempting to convince local populations of the goodness of armies invading in the name of stability and freedom. In his now infamous words, U.S. secretary of state Colin Powell told a gathering of private aid agencies that “just as surely as our diplomats and military, American NGOs are out there [in Afghanistan] serving and sacrificing on the frontlines of freedom. NGOs are such a force multiplier for us, such an important part of our combat team.”<sup>56</sup>

States also discovered that humanitarian action could avoid or postpone more costly political decisions and actions, a development labeled as a “humanitarian alibi” by frustrated aid workers who felt that they were being used by states. UN High Commissioner for Refugees Sadako Ogata, for one, became an outspoken opponent of such contrivances: “There are no humanitarian solutions to humanitarian problems.”<sup>57</sup> The major powers authorized UNHCR to deliver humanitarian relief in Bosnia in part because they wanted to relieve the growing pressure for a military intervention. Regardless of whether or not states had the right motives, they were providing new opportunities for humanitarian action in areas that formerly had been largely off-limits. Yet to the extent that aid became a substitute for politics and a sop to hopeful publics, aid could, according to Alex de Waal, lead “Western governments and donating publics to be deluded into believing the fairy tale that their aid can solve profound political problems, when it cannot.”<sup>58</sup>

Much like the response to World War II, the crises of the turbulent 1990s helped catalyze new movements that were intent on protecting and rescuing

<sup>55</sup> Barnett, “New United Nations Politics of Peace.”

<sup>56</sup> Secretary of State Colin Powell, Remarks to the National Foreign Policy Conference for Leaders of Nongovernmental Organizations, October 26, 2001.

<sup>57</sup> Sadako Ogata, *The Turbulent Decade: Confronting the Refugee Crises of the 1990s* (New York: Norton, 2005), 25.

<sup>58</sup> de Waal, *Famine Crimes*, 221.

those in danger. Several features stand out. One was growing public awareness, which, in turn, helped feed the desire to do something. Such awareness was made possible by real-time media coverage of humanitarian emergencies. To be sure, there were important precursors to what became dubbed the "CNN effect" or the "BBC effect." Most famously, the haunting, near biblical-like pictures of the Ethiopian famine in the mid-1980s helped to stir not only public concern but also to launch Band Aid/Live Aid.<sup>59</sup> Since then media coverage has been an important element in capturing the public's attention and mobilizing international action. None of this is lost on media-savvy aid workers who understand the power of the image and the need to control information, and thus spend considerable energy cultivating contacts with reporters and journalists. As long as there have been nonprofit agencies, there have been dedicated staff who understood that a good public relations department and friends in the media is one way to increase the visibility and thus increase the donations that make the organization run. CARE's miraculous growth in its early years owed much to a sophisticated and controlled presentation of its activities.<sup>60</sup> Oxfam's willingness to jump ahead of other aid agencies in famine-stricken Cambodia in the late 1970s was due partly to a desire for the inevitably good publicity that would come from being the lone Western aid agency working in postgenocide Cambodia.<sup>61</sup>

Another development was the growing internationalization and institutionalization of human rights. The United Nations became the focal point for its emerging centrality. Once human rights were relegated to Geneva's UN bureaucracy and NGO watchdogs, but in the 1990s the Security Council became more deeply involved in interpreting, protecting, promoting, and monitoring human rights. Human rights became essential components of several UN peacekeeping operations, most notably in the cold war battlegrounds of Central America—El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala. In Rwanda and Haiti human rights missions were deployed simultaneously with peacekeeping operations. Although the results of these operational experiments were mixed, it remains noteworthy that human rights became central to the Security Council's agenda and part of an expanded definition of legitimate threats to international peace and security.

Perhaps the surest and most controversial expression of the Security Council's newfound interest in human rights was its growing willingness to use

military force for human protection purposes, that is, "humanitarian intervention."<sup>62</sup> The cold war Security Council occasionally acknowledged the existence of humanitarian issues, but the faint rhetoric outstripped resources. No resolution mentioned the humanitarian dimensions of any conflict from 1945 until the Arab-Israeli war of 1967, and the ICRC was not mentioned until 1978.<sup>63</sup> In the 1970s and 1980s "the Security Council gave humanitarian aspects of armed conflict limited priority . . . but the early nineteen-nineties can be seen as a watershed."<sup>64</sup> Not only was the Security Council undergoing a rebirth after its comatose condition during the cold war, but its resolutions contained repeated references to humanitarian crises as threats to international peace and security. In December 1992 UN Security Council Resolution 792 broke all records in making eighteen references to the "H" word in authorizing U.S.-led action in Somalia. There seemed to be no turning back.

The growing involvement of the Security Council in the internal affairs of states and the justification of that involvement on humanitarian grounds signaled a shift in the meaning of sovereignty. Once sacrosanct and beyond reproach, sovereign states were now expected to respect their citizens as much as their neighbors and faced sanctions if they behaved otherwise. Whereas their legitimacy once appeared to have divine origins, now it was dependent on their possessing such characteristics as the rule of law, markets, and democratic principles. State sovereignty essentially became conditional and based on implied dual contracts between the state and its society and among states. What happened when states either did not satisfy those conditions or broke the contract? Some members of the international community of states began to assert that they had at least a responsibility and perhaps a right, although not an obligation or duty, to step into the breach and protect vulnerable populations.

Although there were whispers of an international duty to protect civilians, most famously in the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide and in some human rights norms, the real momentum in this direction was largely a post-cold war phenomenon. Various statements, documents, events, and forces opened up the normative space for new kinds of humanitarian intervention, but several moments were particularly influential because they helped to articulate and legitimate such a claim. In the late 1980s and early 1990s, Francis M. Deng and Roberta Cohen formulated "sovereignty as responsibility" to help generate support for international action

<sup>59</sup> Nik Gowing, *Media Coverage: Help or Hindrance in Conflict Prevention?* (New York: Carnegie Commission on the Prevention of Deadly Conflict, 1997); Warren Strobel, *Late Breaking Foreign Policy: The News Media's Influence on Peace Operations* (Washington, D.C.: United States Institute for Peace, 1997); and Larry Minear, Colin Scott, and Thomas G. Weiss, *The News Media, Civil War, and Humanitarian Action* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1996).

<sup>60</sup> Philip Curti, *American Philanthropy Abroad* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Transaction Press, 1982), 491–93.

<sup>61</sup> William Shawcross, *The Quality of Mercy: Cambodia, Holocaust, and Modern Conscience*

<sup>62</sup> See Thomas G. Weiss, *Humanitarian Intervention: Ideas in Action* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007).

<sup>63</sup> Christine Bourloyannis, "The Security Council of the United Nations and the Implementation of International Humanitarian Law," *Denver Journal of International Law and Policy* 20, no. 3 (1993): 43.

<sup>64</sup> Th. A. van Baarda, "The Involvement of the Security Council in Maintaining International



to aid and protect internally displaced persons (IDPs).<sup>65</sup> At around the same time, the Security Council, at various moments, partly legitimated its interventions in places such as Somalia because of the need to protect those human beings on the margins of a civil war. As a consequence of interventions taken (Kosovo and East Timor) and not taken (Rwanda), in 1999 Secretary-General Kofi Annan articulated his "two sovereignties."<sup>66</sup> The subsequent diplomatic uproar led to formation of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS),<sup>67</sup> whose final report argued that when states cannot or will not protect their populations, then the international "responsibility to protect" kicks in. ICISS's articulation of this international norm in 2001 was obscured by the fallout of 9/11 but remains popular, as demonstrated by the endorsement of the responsibility to protect at the 2005 World Summit.<sup>68</sup> In general, as Michael Barnett and Jack Snyder note in chapter 6, there are more forms of intervention by more different kinds of actors under the rubric of humanitarianism than ever before.

Humanitarianism also has been affected by the forces of production; by the ascendance of a business discourse of markets, efficiency, accountability, and effectiveness; by shifting ideologies regarding the state's role in the economy and society; and by new funding patterns—subjects that are addressed by Stephen Hopgood (chapter 4), Peter Redfield (chapter 8), and Janice Gross Stein (chapter 5). Partially as a result of the availability of financial resources, the number of humanitarian organizations has grown severalfold over the last two decades. Whether the "marketplace" unleashes a "scramble,"<sup>69</sup> there is little question that an environment of scarce resources creates a competitive

<sup>65</sup> See, for example, Roberta Cohen and Francis M. Deng, *Masses in Flight: The Global Crisis of Internal Displacement* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1998); and Roberta Cohen and Francis M. Deng, eds., *The Forsaken People: Case Studies of the Internally Displaced* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 1998). A history of this itinerary is found in Thomas G. Weiss and David A. Korn, *Internal Displacement: Conceptualization and Its Consequences* (London: Routledge, 2006).

<sup>66</sup> Kofi A. Annan, *The Question of Intervention: Statements by the Secretary-General* (New York: UN, 1999).

<sup>67</sup> International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty, *The Responsibility to Protect* (Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, 2001); and Thomas G. Weiss and Don Hubert, *The Responsibility to Protect: Research, Bibliography, and Background* (Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, 2001). An updated bibliography and both books are available at <http://web.gc.cuny.edu/RalphBuncheInstitute/ICISS/index.htm>.

<sup>68</sup> 2005 World Summit Outcome, General Assembly Resolution A/60/1, October 25, 2005, paras. 138–39. The topic also figured prominently in the key background documents: UN, Report of the High-level Panel on Threats, Challenges and Change, *A More Secure World: Our Shared Responsibility* (New York: UN, 2004), paras. 199–209; and Kofi Annan, *In Larger Freedom: Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All*, UN document A/59/2005, March 21, 2005, paras. 135–36.

<sup>69</sup> Andrew Cooley and James Ron, "The NGO Scramble: Organizational Insecurity and the Political Economy of Transnational Action," *International Security* 27, no. 1 (2002): 5–39.

dynamic for status, power, and authority. These developments have led many to criticize aid agencies as being more worried about their own survival than the survival of their beneficiaries. Specifically, the claim is that as the share of resources dedicated to emergency and postconflict assistance was expanding, aid agencies had the incentive and the opportunity to develop programming that could be sold to well-funded donors. The ability to resist donor conditions or to stay on the sidelines over principles remained a possibility mainly for a handful of small pacifist NGOs—the Quakers and the Mennonites. For others, the debate was not about whether to compete but how. Dining with the devil became a foregone conclusion, but how they rationalized and chose to make such repasts palatable varied by agency.

The forces of destruction, production, and salvation combine in different ways in distinct historical periods to help define the meaning, scope, and scale of humanitarian action. Although their relative weights also shift within periods and are also experienced differently in different parts of the globe, we identify four identifiable historical trends. Humanitarianism is constantly being reshaped by the world in which it tries to mitigate suffering, and any attempt to assess the current moment must be premised on a clear-eyed view of a truly complicated past. There are different strands of humanitarianism that have had different relationships to the forces of destruction, production, and salvation. The meaning of humanitarianism has expanded and increasingly includes what were once considered distinctive features of global social action, such as human rights, economic development, democracy promotion, and peace building, which increasingly are bundled together in a general ethic of moral caretaking and the reduction of suffering. Humanitarianism has become institutionalized, internationalized, and prominent on the global agenda. It is an orienting feature of global social life that is used to justify, legitimate, and galvanize action.

## A Survey of the Contemporary Landscape

There is a widespread impression that the last twenty years of global turbulence have led to an increase in the scope, scale, and significance of humanitarian action. Our brief historical survey and our own analytical work over this period certainly support such a generalization. However, we proceed gingerly for two reasons.

The first is that there are other historical periods that might be comparable to the current moment—perhaps not in terms of absolute size and scale, and clearly not in terms of the technological capacity to reach vulnerable populations, but certainly in terms of ambitions and constraints on access. Said differently, many contemporary accounts convey the impression that humanitarianism began with the end of the cold war, failing to demonstrate much historical memory and thus restricting any capacity for meaningful comparisons across

periods. For instance, aid workers sometimes talk as if Rwanda were the first time that they confronted militarized camps; such a conversation conveniently forgets experiences in El Salvador, Lebanon, Cambodia, and Pakistan in the 1970s and 1980s. Those suggesting that the dangers of being too closely identified with a warring faction started with Somalia in the early 1990s overlook the controversial positions previously taken by aid agencies in such places as Vietnam, Biafra, and Nicaragua during the cold war. Those hinting that it is only in the last twenty years that aid agencies have had to debate the value of neutrality and independence ignore the extent to which such debates accompanied the Holocaust, the intervention in Cambodia in 1978, and pervasive crises in Ethiopia since the late 1960s.

The lack of historical perspective relates to a second qualification. There is a fundamental absence of longitudinal data on basic categories such as expenditure, income, number of organizations, and activities. James Fearon provides his own compilation of various ways to measure the increase in emergency relief, which is a point of departure for the essays in this book. Although we need not present his illustrations here, it is worth noting his struggle to assemble some common stylized facts. The reasons that analysts all encounter a host of problems in establishing baselines include the following: agencies and the military are often not forthcoming; reporting periods vary; disbursements and commitments are not always distinguished; there is an absence of common reporting requirements even among countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD); and beneficiaries are hard to count.

Last, the problem is more fundamental than the fact that no one has collected the data; we wish that it were as simple as funding some intrepid graduate students to assemble data sets. Instead, the obstacle is that prior to the 1980s very few organizations kept track of changing mission statements, sources of income, how and where they spent funds, and relationships with partners. The manipulation of numbers, as Fearon notes, often seems political, and fund-raising agendas and better reporting may account for at least some of the growth. And even for those war zones for which data exist, there is reason to doubt the figures and to worry about the lack of standardization and common definitions among organizations. Over the last twenty years, this lack of basic information comes together with tremendous growth, the professionalization and rationalization of many of these organizations, and high staff turnover—the Red Cross movement, 25 percent; CARE, 35 percent; and MSF, 50 percent.<sup>70</sup> The combination of these factors presents a challenge to embed the present in historical perspective—as does the need for harder numbers and comparative analysis, highlighted by James Fearon in chapter 2.

All that said, there is strong evidence that the humanitarian sector has undergone significant change since the end of the cold war, most noticeably in

its population density, its resources, and its activities. To begin, there has been a tremendous growth in the sheer number of humanitarian organizations.<sup>71</sup> How much? This depends on who counts and who is worth counting. As previously discussed, there is a debate about what is and is not a humanitarian organization. Most surveys include nonprofit relief agencies. Presently there are an estimated twenty-five hundred NGOs in the humanitarian business, but only about 260 are serious players—based on a 2003 UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) roster (which no longer is updated) that listed those active in humanitarian response at the time. This figure excludes those NGOs not engaged in relief or the myriad mom-and-pop organizations that crop up around certain emergencies. In 2001, the half dozen or so largest NGOs controlled between \$2.5 billion and \$3 billion, or between 45 percent and 55 percent of all global humanitarian assistance.<sup>72</sup>

Although we do not have longitudinal data regarding international agencies, a recent survey of U.S.-based private voluntary agencies engaged in relief and development offers a reasonably good picture of growth over the last seventy years. In 1940, at the start of World War II, there were 386 organizations, but the number dropped to 97 in 1945, 62 in 1950, and 57 in 1960. It then started rising thereafter—83 in 1970, 167 in 1980, 267 in 1990, and 436 in 2000.<sup>73</sup> Not only has the total increased but so too have the dimensions of the largest among them. The dozen or so that represent the bulk of aid programming and personnel have all been in existence for some time. Dramatic crises account for spikes in the numbers of agencies on the ground. For instance, over 200 international NGOs were reported on the ground in Sarajevo and Kigali. The numbers of people working for the NGO component of the humanitarian sector grew by 91 percent from 1997 to 2005, while overall the international humanitarian system (if the UN system and the ICRC are also included) experienced a 77 percent surge in personnel.<sup>74</sup>

But even these figures might potentially undercount the number of agencies and personnel because of the tendency to focus on those based in the West. To some extent, this bias accurately reflects the sector, whose resources and institutions mainly come from the industrialized world. Yet there also is a very active

<sup>71</sup> For a good overview of the expansion of the humanitarian sector, see Randolph Kent, "International Humanitarian Crises: Two Decades Before and Two Decades Beyond," *International Affairs* 80, no. 5 (2004): 851–69.

<sup>72</sup> Development Initiatives, *Global Humanitarian Assistance 2003* (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2003), 56.

<sup>73</sup> Rachel McCleary and Robert Barro, "U.S.-Based Private Voluntary Organizations: Religious and Secular PVOs Engaged in International Relief and Development, 1939–2004," *Non-profit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, December 2007.

<sup>74</sup> Abby Stoddard, Adele Harmer, and Katherine Haver, *Providing Aid in Insecure Environments: Trends in Policy and Operations*, Humanitarian Policy Group Report 23 (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2006), 16.

relief sector in the non-Western world, most obviously in Islamic countries, which account for about half of the victims of wars since the 1990s. There is much more speculation than concrete knowledge, and, unfortunately, because of September 11 much of the attention is now directed at the putative connections between Islamic charitable organizations and terrorist networks.<sup>75</sup>

In addition to NGOs, international organizations are also prominent in the sector. But which ones? UNHCR and other aid agencies were born as humanitarian organizations. Other international organizations were created decades ago to foster development but are increasingly involved in relief and reconstruction, including the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the World Bank. A similar dynamic exists for UN specialized agencies—for example, the World Health Organization (WHO) and the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO)—whose once almost nonexistent disaster programs have expanded to meet the new demand and availability of funding. Consequently, institutions that might not have counted as humanitarian in the 1980s are so today. There also has been a growth in the number of international and regional organizations whose primary responsibility is to coordinate assistance, including the European Community Humanitarian Aid Office (ECHO), the UN's Inter-Agency Standing Committee and Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA, preceded by the Department of Humanitarian Affairs, DHA), and a host of coordinating mechanisms in the United States and Europe for NGOs (such as InterAction and the International Council for Voluntary Action).

Furthermore, states, for-profit disaster firms and other businesses, and various foundations are increasingly prominent members of the relief and reconstruction sectors and perform humanitarian functions. While Western states are most prominent, more and more governments are responding to disasters of all sorts. For example, whereas sixteen states pledged their support to Bosnia in the mid-1990s, most from the West, a more diverse group of seventy-three came to the 2003 pledging conference in Madrid for Iraq, and an unprecedented ninety-two responded to the December 2004 tsunami. Such important non-Western donors as China, Saudi Arabia, and India have accounted for up to 12 percent of official humanitarian assistance in a given year, and their influence in certain crises—for example, Afghanistan or Palestine—is significant. We know little about whether they “follow the major Western states in their rationales for aid interventions, their policy priorities, and their choice of response channel.”<sup>76</sup> Nonetheless, the international system remains essentially a North American and Western European enterprise: “It works wherever it

can in international society but is not really owned by all of international society.”<sup>77</sup> In short, we understand surprisingly little about the population explosion of organizations that contribute to various forms of relief.

There also are more financial resources than ever before, as James Fearon makes clear in chapter 2. Private contributions have increased, but most impressive has been the growth of official assistance. Between 1990 and 2000 aid levels rose nearly threefold, from \$2.1 billion to \$5.9 billion, and in 2005–06 undoubtedly were over \$10 billion.<sup>78</sup> Moreover, as a percentage of official development assistance (ODA), humanitarian aid rose from an average of 5.83 percent between 1989 and 1993 to 10.5 percent in 2000.<sup>79</sup> Over a longer period, total ODA has shrunk, but the humanitarian component has continued to grow. “From 1970–1990 humanitarian aid was less than 3% of total ODA,” calculated a team from the Overseas Development Institute. “While ODA . . . as a whole has been declining as a share of donor countries’ national wealth or Gross National Income (GNI), humanitarian ODA has been growing. In 1970 Development Assistance Committee (DAC) member countries gave 0.4 of a cent in humanitarian aid for every \$100 in national income. In 2001 it was 2.3 cents.”<sup>80</sup>

A few donors were responsible for much of this increase, now constituting an oligopoly. In spite of its miserly performance at the bottom of the OECD's per capita ODA scale, the United States is the lead humanitarian donor by a factor of three; in 1999, for instance, its outlays to humanitarian organizations exceeded the total assistance of the next twelve largest Western donors. Between 1995 and 1997, it provided 20 percent of total humanitarian assistance, and then in the following three years its contribution rose to 30 percent. The second largest donor is the European Union, followed by the United Kingdom and several other European countries, Canada, and Japan.

The increase in aid also has been accompanied by more conditions and restrictions on how that aid might be used. Multilateral aid is technically defined as that channeled through intergovernmental organizations, which thus is supposedly not earmarked. These organizations, therefore, are supposed to have discretion over how the money is spent—although it would be naïve to think that UN organizations, for instance, would disregard the expressed preferences of major donors. Bilateral aid can mean that the state dictates either to a multilateral organization how money is spent or gives the money to a nonmultilateral organization such as NGOs. Earmarking is when the donor

<sup>77</sup> Slim, “Global Welfare,” 21.

<sup>78</sup> Smillie and Minear, *Charity of Nations*, 8–10, 195.

<sup>79</sup> Macrae et al., *Uncertain Power*, 15. For a good overview, see Judith Randel and Tony German, “Trends in Financing of Humanitarian Assistance,” in *The New Humanitarianisms: A Review of Trends in Global Humanitarian Action*, ed. Joanna Macrae (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2002), 19–28.

<sup>80</sup> Development Initiatives, *Global Humanitarian Assistance 2003*, 14–15.

<sup>75</sup> For a less salacious account, see Abdel-Rahman Ghandour, *Jihad Humanitaire* (Paris: Flammarion, 2002).

<sup>76</sup> Adele Harmer and Lin Cotterrell, *Diversity in Donorship: The Changing Landscape of Official Humanitarian Aid* (London: Overseas Development Institute, 2005), quotes from 3 and 6, statistics from 7 and 5.

dictates where and how assistance may be used, frequently identifying regions, countries, operations, or even projects; this is especially useful if governments have geopolitical interests or pet projects.

Since the 1980s there has been a dramatic shift away from multilateral aid and toward bilateral aid and earmarking, which Michael Barnett and Jack Snyder point to as part of an increasingly strategic use of humanitarian assistance. In 1988 states directed roughly 45 percent of humanitarian assistance through UN agencies. After 1994, however, the average dropped to 25 percent (and even lower in 1999 because of Kosovo).<sup>81</sup> Although one reason for this shift is the desire by states to eliminate the possibility of lax responses by the UN and other multilateral agencies, they also want to earmark to ensure that aid follows from their priorities. Accordingly, states' interests rather than the needs of affected populations increasingly drive many funding decisions. For instance, of the top fifty recipients of bilateral assistance between 1996 and 1999, the states of the former Yugoslavia, Israel/Palestine, and Iraq received 50 percent of the available resources.<sup>82</sup> In 2002 the impact of 9/11 was already obvious as nearly half of all funds given by donor governments to the UN's twenty-five appeals for assistance went to Afghanistan.<sup>83</sup> If funding decisions were based solely on need, then places such as Sudan, Congo, northern Uganda, and Angola would leapfrog toward the top of the list rather than remain neglected at the bottom. When wars were raging in the Balkans, for example, it was in per capita terms ten to twenty times better to be a war victim there than in Africa. From 1993 to 2000 almost half of the funds from ECHO were disbursed in Europe. In that same year consolidated appeals generated about \$10 per capita for North Korea or Uganda but \$185 for southeastern Europe.<sup>84</sup> In general, while non-Western donors have entered the market and there was more aid than ever before, the vast bulk of resources were controlled by a few donor countries that were more inclined to impose conditions and direct aid toward their priorities, undermining the principle of impartiality. It is now a multitiered system, with the least fortunate getting the least attention.

There also has been an expansion of the activities associated with humanitarianism. Although humanitarianism does not have a singular meaning and set of practices associated with that meaning at any particular time, there nevertheless is persuasive quantitative evidence of expansion—of funds, agencies, and aid workers. Organizations that were once dedicated to relief have expanded into other domains, and organizations that were dual mandate but never really

considered the relationship between relief and nonrelief goals now are obliged to do so. With institutions moving both upstream toward helping in the midst of war and downstream toward postconflict peace building and, ultimately, development, there are few UN organizations or NGOs that do not claim the mantle of such broad-brush humanitarianism.

Finally, there are not only more NGOs involved in some aspect of humanitarianism but also there are more individuals and institutions active in war zones. The growing presence of NGOs in these violent environments relates to claims that the current moment can be distinguished from earlier periods by the risks involved to aid workers. In this past decade some two hundred civilian UN staff (that is, not including military peacekeepers) have been killed in almost fifty countries, and another three hundred have been taken hostage. The ICRC has lost over forty staff on mission. A recent study of the impact of firearms on aid workers notes that between July 2003 and July 2004 at least "one hundred civilian UN and NGO personnel died due to targeted violence."<sup>85</sup> And then there is Afghanistan and Iraq. In Afghanistan alone, at least twenty-six aid-agency staff died in 2004.<sup>86</sup> The intrepid MSF decided that enough was enough and withdrew after five of its professionals were murdered in mid-2004. Two assaults in Iraq in particular have shaken humanitarians to the core. The August 19, 2003, attack on UN headquarters in Baghdad caused twenty-two fatalities, including the charismatic head of the mission, Sergio Vieira de Mello. Six weeks later, on October 28, a car bomb was delivered in a white ambulance painted with a Red Cross symbol and killed fifteen at the ICRC's headquarters. In August 2006 seventeen staff from Action Against Hunger (Action contre la Faim, or ACF) were brutally murdered in Sri Lanka; what makes their deaths even more shocking was that they were involved in post-tsunami relief and not the civil war between the Sri Lankan army and the Tamil Tigers.

These trends and episodes have fueled a debate regarding whether aid workers of today are more vulnerable than ever before and, if so, why—with some claiming it is because of the new wars, others claiming that it is because of the too close association with states, and still others that it is because of banditry and personal grudges. The beginning of an evidence-based response came recently in the form of the first thorough quantitative analysis of the past decade's trends. It confirmed that the number of attacks and fatalities had doubled between 1997 and 2005. But such an increase has to take into account that there were more aid workers in the field than ever before. There has been a trend toward more attacks, but it is not as alarming as some observers have claimed.

<sup>81</sup> Randel and German, "Trends in the Financing of Humanitarian Assistance," 21.

<sup>82</sup> Ibid., 27.

<sup>83</sup> Smillie and Minear, *Charity of Nations*, 145; and Oxfam, *Beyond the Headlines: An Agenda for Action to Protect Civilians in Neglected Countries* (Oxford: Oxfam International, 2003), 2. Also see Macrae et al., *Uncertain Power*.

<sup>84</sup> International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, *World Disasters Report 2003: Focus on Ethics in Aid* (Bloomfield, Conn.: Kumarian, 2003) 19–22.

<sup>85</sup> Cate Buchanan and Robert Muggah, *No Relief: Surveying the Effects of Gun Violence on Humanitarian and Development Personnel* (Geneva: Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue, 2005), 7, 9.

<sup>86</sup> Carlotta Gall and Amy Waldman, "Under Siege in Afghanistan, Aid Groups Say Their Effort Is Being Criticized Unfairly," *New York Times*, December 19, 2004.

Specifically, "the annual number of victims per 10,000 aid workers in the field averaged five in the first half of the period and six in the second."<sup>87</sup> There also is some evidence that NGOs are more likely to be targeted, but there is considerable variation and the cases of Iraq and Afghanistan might be outliers that are distorting the moving average.

Finally, the bulk of outrage in the West tends to focus on expatriate aid workers when, in fact, a growing percentage of agency personnel are drawn from the local population and are increasingly vulnerable. Indeed, to the extent that Western aid workers increasingly remove themselves from the field because of the perceived risks and substitute their labor with local labor, the distribution of risk might be shifting toward local workers. In any case, relief workers can no longer assume (if they ever could) that their good intentions give them immunity—a tragic point highlighted by Laura Hammond in chapter 7, who also explores the "performance" value of violent attacks on humanitarians.<sup>88</sup>

### Critical Interrogations

Humanitarian organizations generally present themselves as outside of politics, devoid of power, and ethically chaste, but the essays in this book provide critical reflections on these claims. Indeed, this moment, in which humanitarianism's boundaries are in dispute, is particularly revealing of how humanitarianism is intertwined with politics, power, and ethics. The essays, in this spirit, explore tensions and instabilities as well as suggest various ways in which humanitarian organizations attempt to manage them.

### Politics

Routinely, aid organizations portray their efforts as apolitical. Such statements make good copy and frequently accompany the mantra that humanitarianism exists when politics fails—they insist that we treat humanitarianism and politics as existing in separate domains. However, any boundary between the two is a social construction and thus is dependent on how knowledgeable actors attempt to create, maintain, and define these categories and the criteria for the segregation. Consequently, rather than embracing the representation offered by aid agencies, it is better to examine closely how different

aid agencies operate with different and potentially contradictory conceptualizations of humanitarianism and politics, and then to critically assess that relationship.

Many relief-oriented agencies operate with a definition of humanitarianism that is restricted to the impartial, independent, and neutral provision of relief, which, in their judgment, makes it apolitical. Yet humanitarianism is hardly outside of politics, as most of our contributors argue, and especially so Janice Gross Stein and Peter Redfield. In fact, many aid workers are drawn to humanitarianism precisely because it makes a clear political statement in a world that needlessly sacrifices so many. In this way, they live Michel Foucault's admonition that "the misfortunes of men must never be the silent leftover of politics."<sup>89</sup> Their refusal to be silent is itself political. But how noisy can they be? The ICRC, for instance, famously works quietly behind the scenes, believing that this tactic is the best way to help those in need. Yet even this quintessentially apolitical agency sees its role as spreading humanitarian norms and changing national laws and international norms—that is, it is involved in "humanitarian politics," as David Forsythe pointed out long ago.<sup>90</sup> Indeed, ICRC's insistence on acting impartially, to the extent that it does not challenge grave injustices, is potentially complicit with murderers and thus reinforces a murderous status quo. The ICRC silence during the Holocaust led to accusations, and self-recriminations, that its position of neutrality meant that it had acted as an accomplice of the Nazis.<sup>91</sup>

MSF, on the other hand, believes in a more rebellious and rowdy humanitarianism. Its defining concept of *témoignage*, which roughly translates as "giving witness," is intended to be active and not passive. Bearing witness is not only supposed to call attention to the world's problems but also to force action. How is this not political? Moreover, MSF goes beyond relief. At present it is involved in a high-profile campaign to provide "access to medicines" to the global poor. Although some at MSF might like to assert that this is about saving lives and not getting involved in politics, we suspect that pharmaceutical companies would disagree: calls for the production of generics clash directly with international patents as well as the interests of powerful states and pharmaceutical companies.

Other aid agencies that operate with a more expansive definition of humanitarianism are unapologetic about their intervention on behalf of the world's poor. They attempt to redirect the world's allocation of resources and desire

<sup>87</sup> Stoddard, Harmer, and Haver, *Providing Aid in Insecure Environments*, 1, 13.

<sup>88</sup> Nicolas de Torrente, "Humanitarian Action under Attack: Reflections on the Iraq War," Paul O'Brien, "Politicized Humanitarianism: A Response to Nicolas de Torrente," and Kenneth Anderson, "Humanitarian Inviolability in Crisis: The Meaning of Impartiality and Neutrality for U.N. and NGO Agencies Following the 2003–2004 Afghanistan and Iraq Conflicts," *Harvard Human Rights Journal* 17 (2004): 1–39.

<sup>89</sup> Michel Foucault, *Dits et écrits* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), vol. 4, 708, as quoted by Finkelkraut, *In the Name of Humanity*, 88.

<sup>90</sup> David P. Forsythe, *Humanitarian Politics: The International Committee of the Red Cross* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1977).

<sup>91</sup> Jean-Claude Favez, *The Red Cross and the Holocaust* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

to restructure global social relations. At times such ambitions mean that they have to get their hands dirty, to make messy compromises and alliances with self-interested states.<sup>92</sup> Although these activities might appear to be quintessentially political, aid agencies nevertheless frequently claim that they are apolitical because they are operating on behalf of humanity and furthering universal values. Obviously, defending moral claims is always political because one set of moral claims is invariably being advanced over another set. But to the extent that humanitarian agencies present themselves as champions of shared values, they can project the appearance of being beyond politics.

Being apolitical is a convenient fiction that can only be sustained through rhetorical flourishes and discursive practices that allow for a particular category of politics. Aid agencies have defined their actions as apolitical because either they are interested in saving lives and not saving societies or because they are operating according to universal values. But this presentation is hard to sustain when humanitarianism is precariously situated between the politics of solidarity and the politics of governance. Humanitarian workers traditionally saw themselves as apolitical insofar as they defied the dominant systems of power and were in solidarity with the victims of a "sacrificial order."<sup>93</sup> As they become increasingly implicated in governance structures, they find themselves in growing collaboration with those whose influence they once resisted. Such a development means that humanitarianism's "politics" are now more visible, and the relationship between humanitarianism and power is now more complex.

### Power

Although humanitarianism is frequently presented as devoid of power, this claim represents both a comfortable myth that aid workers tell themselves and simultaneously helps manufacture their power, which rests on their authority. Authority can be understood as the ability of one actor to use institutional and discursive resources to induce deference from others.<sup>94</sup> When individuals have authority, we frequently know it because we give them the right to speak and we defer to their judgment (not that we necessarily do what they say). This

<sup>92</sup> For these and other compromises, see Thomas G. Weiss and Peter J. Hoffman, "Making Humanitarianism Work," in *Making States Work: State Failure and the Crisis of Governance*, ed. Simon Chesterman, Michael Ignatieff, and Ramesh Thakur (Tokyo: United Nations University Press, 2005), 296–313.

<sup>93</sup> Jean Hervé Bradol, "The Sacrificial International Order," in *In the Shadow of "Just Wars": Violence, Politics, and Humanitarian Action*, ed. Fabrice Weissman (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2004), 1–22.

<sup>94</sup> Michael Barnett and Martha Finnemore, *Rules for the World: International Organizations in World Politics* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press). Also see Bruce Lincoln, *Authority* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994), and Richard Flatham, *The Practice of Political Authority*

makes authority slightly different from power. Power is frequently understood as the ability to get someone to do something that they do not want to do. We do not say that an armed robber has authority; we say that such a thief has power because he has a weapon. That said, there is no stark border between authority and power. Sometimes deference is a sign of acceptance, that is, evidence of persuasion and conviction of the rightness of the actor's judgment. At other times, such deference is better understood as acquiescence or even submission because the actor does not believe it can act otherwise. At such moments, deference more nearly resembles Max Weber's claim that authority is domination legitimated. It is because the exercise of authority often contains elements of consent and coercion that the concept of authority is part of the conceptual family of social control, the same place where the concept of power is housed.

There are at least four kinds of authority.<sup>95</sup> First, there is rational-legal authority, made famous by Weber: in modern society those organizations, such as bureaucracies, that are organized around impersonal rules and objective decision-making procedures are conferred authority. These kinds of organizations are valued because they are perceived as efficient, objective, and rule governed. Delegated authority exists when one actor hires another actor to act on its behalf. The authority, in this respect, is borrowed.<sup>96</sup> Expert authority exists when an actor's voice is given credibility because of his or her specialized training, knowledge, or experience.<sup>97</sup> Moral authority exists when an actor is perceived to be speaking and acting on behalf of the community's values and interests and defending the lives of the weak and vulnerable.

As discussed in the chapters by Craig Calhoun, Stephen Hopgood, and Janice Gross Stein, humanitarian organizations traffic in all four kinds but their authority largely rests on their expertise and moral standing. Their expert authority comes from, first, practical and specialized knowledge regarding how to best help victims and, second, their ability to provide accurate eyewitness accounts of the situation on the ground.<sup>98</sup> MSF's *témoignage* includes a range of practices, including dramatic reporting about what it sees, not only to bring more international action to a cause and medical relief to the underserved but also to elicit new kinds of outside intervention. The moral authority of MSF emanates from the perception that it expresses humankind's highest

<sup>95</sup> This discussion draws from Barnett and Finnemore, *Rules for the World*, chap. 2.

<sup>96</sup> Darren Hawkins, David Lake, Dan Nielson, and Michael Tierney, introduction to *Delegation under Anarchy*, ed. Hawkins, Lake, Nielson, and Tierney (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006). For a discussion of delegation, see J. Bendor, A. Glazer, and T. Hammond, "Theories of Delegation," *Annual Review of Political Science* 4 (2001): 235–69.

<sup>97</sup> R. Smith and B. Wynne, eds., *Expert Evidence: Interpreting Science and the Law* (New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1989); and John Scott, *Power* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2001), chap. 5.

<sup>98</sup> Abby Stoddard, *Humanitarian Alert: NGO Information and Its Impact on U.S. Foreign*



ideals, is value driven rather than interest driven, and acts not for itself but rather for vulnerable populations.<sup>99</sup>

Yet in recent years various critiques of humanitarian organizations, in essence, have disputed the bases of their authority. Claims of "who elected the humanitarian agencies" have implicitly objected to their assertion that they legitimately speak on behalf of the subjects of their concern. The entrance of new deliverers of relief, including states, international organizations, and even commercial firms, has weakened their claim to being the "experts" because they no longer hold a monopoly on information. Moreover, many claim that humanitarian organizations are too interested in their bottom lines. Their growing willingness to work with states and for grander political projects also has undermined their claim that they are acting on behalf of universal values. These criticisms, then, subvert a presentation of self as apolitical and as acting on behalf of others, potentially undermine their very capacity to act and thus the very basis of their power, and compel a critical examination of the power of humanitarian organizations.

Power can be understood as "effects that shape the capacities of actors to determine their own circumstances and fate."<sup>100</sup> These effects can be either regulatory or constitutive. Regulatory effects occur when one actor manipulates incentives to shape the behavior of another actor. The most famous definition of power—the direct control by one actor over another so that one actor compels another actor to do something that it does not want to do—falls into this category.<sup>101</sup> Moreover, conversations about power typically revolve around material resources, such as money and weapons. It is because humanitarian agencies appear materially weak that we frequently suggest that they do not have power. Yet humanitarian agencies aspire to control the behavior of others, and they utilize symbolic and normative techniques toward that end. For instance, they famously "name and shame" violators of international humanitarian law, leveraging available resources like modern-day Davids facing a world of Goliaths. Almost all of the major aid organizations have turned to "advocacy" and developed impressive marketing and lobbying capacities that are intended to change the behavior, policies, and generosity of those who have the capacity to improve the lives of the world's poor and victimized.

Moreover, many NGOs and UN organizations are hardly materially challenged from the perspective of their beneficiaries, and aid agencies frequently operate from a position of dominance vis-à-vis those with whom they purportedly stand in solidarity.<sup>102</sup> Authority is conferred, but, as both Laura Hammond and Peter Redfield ask in chapters 7 and 8, do the beneficiaries actively confer such authority on aid agencies? To what extent is their consent truly sought? Do agencies operate on implied or assumed consent? Furthermore, sometimes purveyors of aid operate in a heavy-handed way. For instance, many tie assistance to outcomes, which clearly reflects their power to insist on a particular programming direction. Finally, power still exists even when those who dominate are not conscious of how their actions are producing unintended effects.<sup>103</sup> Those hurt when aid encourages criminal or exploitative behavior certainly experience the power of the deliverer even if it was not the latter's intention to create such damage. Moreover, the very principles that humanitarian organizations use to generate their ethical positions also can have powerful and harmful effects, for example, the ICRC's institutional stance during the Holocaust and the UN's performance during the genocide in Rwanda. Neither ICRC nor UN staff intended to cause harm or perpetuate atrocities. Hence, power is best understood from the perspective of the recipient, not the deliverer.

Constitutive effects highlight the social construction of reality, how discourse and fields of action facilitate and constrain activity; determine how the possible and impossible become defined; shape what is considered normal and natural; define what are deemed the categories of action that are desirable; influence the best means to achieve aspirations; and determine what counts as a problem that needs to be solved as well as who is best able to solve it.<sup>104</sup> Because these discourses make it possible to think and act in some ways and not others, and because they privilege some actors and disempower others, they have differential and highly unbalanced effects.

In this view, humanitarianism is both constituted by underlying discourse and has constitutive effects that create, define, and map social reality. The category of humanitarianism, as we argued earlier, is an artifact of various historically produced and socially situated discourses. Mark Duffield observes that the meaning of contemporary humanitarianism is affected by the discourses of development and liberal security, which empower humanitarian organizations, legitimate them, give them a social purpose, and shape their identity.<sup>105</sup> The

<sup>99</sup> See William Fisher, "Doing Good? The Politics and Antipolitics of NGO Practices," *Annual Review of Anthropology* 26, no. 451 (1997): 439–64; James Ferguson, *The Anti-Politics Machine: "Development," Depoliticization, and Bureaucratic Domination in Lesotho* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1990); Cris Shore and Susan Wright, "Policy: A New Field of Anthropology," in *Anthropology of Policy: Critical Perspectives on Governance and Power*, ed. C. Shore and S. Wright (New York: Routledge, 1997), 3–41.

<sup>100</sup> Michael Barnett and Raymond Duvall, "Power and International Politics," *International Organization* 59, no. 1 (2005): 39–75.

<sup>101</sup> Robert Dahl, "The Concept of Power," *Behavioral Science* (1957): 201–15.

<sup>102</sup> See David Kennedy, *The Dark Sides of Virtue: International Humanitarianism Reassessed* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004); and Duffield, *Global Governance and the New Wars*.

<sup>103</sup> Peter Bachrach and Morton Baratz, "The Two Faces of Power," *American Political Science Review* 57 (December 1962): 947–52.

<sup>104</sup> Clarissa Hayward, *De-Facing Power* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 30, 35.

<sup>105</sup> Duffield, *Global Governance and the New Wars*. See also his *Aid Policy and Post-Modern Conflict: A Critical Review*, Occasional Paper 19 (Birmingham, U.K.: School of Public Policy, 1998).

discourses of failed states, emergencies, and victims help to generate particular ways of understanding social situations, creating grounds for legitimate action and new forms of intervention. The discourse of "emergencies" can have a powerful effect, helping to frame situations in some ways rather than others.

Humanitarian organizations are constituted by such discourse and are actively involved in the production of reality. Because of their social position and symbolic standing, humanitarian agencies are among the few that have the social capacity to designate a situation as an emergency.<sup>106</sup> In other words, humanitarian agencies have the ability to help determine who receives attention and who does not. The shaping of reality, in this critical way, has material consequences. There is an important transition between situations in which aid agencies act to reduce the vulnerability of victimized populations to those in which they perpetuate the vulnerability and dependency of these same populations.<sup>107</sup> No longer content with treating symptoms, aid organizations are tackling the "root causes" of disease, conflict, and poverty. Toward that end, they have attempted to intervene in a nearly limitless set of social problems that demand to be catalogued, controlled, and solved. Humanitarian organizations are part of a broader set of globalizing forces that are involved in controlling and remaking the world. Increasingly, aid agencies are part of a broader project of governance and the details of human existence.<sup>108</sup> Humanitarian agencies, in short, might be simultaneously improving the welfare of victims and inadvertently diminishing it as the result of other actions.<sup>109</sup> Humanitarian organizations are produced by the world that they attempt to tame.

Although humanitarian agencies might like to pretend that they are objective and value neutral, represent universal values, and act on behalf of humanity, this "reality" may not be obvious to the supposed recipients. As a recent report regarding existing and future challenges to humanitarianism succinctly puts it:

Many in the South do not recognize what the international community calls the universality of humanitarian values as such. . . . Humanitarian action is viewed as the latest in a series of impositions of alien values,

<sup>106</sup> See David Keen, *The Benefits of Famine: A Political Economy of Famine and Relief in Southwestern Sudan, 1983–1989* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

<sup>107</sup> Also see de Waal, *Famine Crimes*.

<sup>108</sup> For related arguments that draw directly from the work of Giorgio Agamben, see Didier Fassin and Paula Vasquez, "Humanitarian Exception as the Rule: The Political Theology of the 1999 Tragedia in Venezuela," *American Ethnologist* 32, no. 3 (2005): 389–405; and Miriam Ticktin, "Where Ethics and Politics Meet: The Violence of Humanitarianism in France," *American Ethnologist* 33, no. 1 (2006): 33–49.

<sup>109</sup> As Foucault crisply noted: "People know what they do; they frequently know why they do what they do; but what they don't know is what they do does." Quoted in Hubert Dreyfus and Paul Rabinow, *Michel Foucault: Beyond Structuralism and Hermeneutics* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1982), 187.

practices, and lifestyles. Northern incursions into the South—from the Crusades to colonialism and beyond—have historically been perceived very differently depending on the vantage point.<sup>110</sup>

Although there is unlikely to be *one* view from the global South, if humanitarianism is increasingly perceived as reflective of globalization and Westernization, then there undoubtedly are good reasons why many in the Southern Hemisphere might view aid agencies as the "mendicant orders of Empire."<sup>111</sup>

Local actors, though, are not helpless in the face of these global interventions. Much like the anticolonial leaders who used the liberal discourse of autonomy and rights to argue for national self-determination and independence, local activists have proven adept at using the discourse of humanitarianism to challenge its putative universalism and to call on alternative traditions in order to resist external forces. Moreover, knowledgeable actors can become aware of discursive tensions and fissures, and use that knowledge in strategic ways (e.g., deconstructing or inverting the discourse) to increase their sovereignty, control their own fate, and remake their identities.<sup>112</sup> As Laura Hammond (chapter 7) and Jennifer Rubenstein (chapter 9) observe, local elites and warlords can manipulate the self-understandings of humanitarian actors and the language of humanitarianism for their own gain and at a cost to humanitarian organizations.

### Ethics

Four ethical positions dominate the discussion regarding how we should judge and evaluate humanitarian acts.<sup>113</sup> One position is deontological or duty-based ethics. Frequently deriving from Kantian claims, some actions are simply good in and of themselves regardless of their consequences. Ethical action, therefore, consists of identifying these intrinsically good actions and then performing one's moral duty. Where does such a moral duty originate? In a word, in "humanity." We are to respect humanity as an end in itself and such ends are linked to the idea that we have obligations to others, which include helping others, within limits, achieve their goals as they define them. Humanitarian

<sup>110</sup> Feinstein International Famine Center, *Ambiguity and Change: Humanitarian NGOs Prepare for the Future* (Medford, Mass.: Tufts University, August 2004), 55. Also see Feinstein International Center, *Humanitarian Agenda 2015: Principles, Power, and Perceptions* (Medford, Mass.: Tufts University, September 2006).

<sup>111</sup> Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Empire* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001), cited in Antonio Donini, "Humanitarianism in the 00s: Is Universality under Threat?" paper presented at the 2006 annual meeting of the International Studies Association, San Diego, California, March 26–28, 2006.

<sup>112</sup> Hayward, *De-Facing Power*, 34–35.

<sup>113</sup> For an overview of the differences between and overlaps among deontological, consequentialist, and virtue ethics, see Marcia Baron, Philip Pettit, and Michael Slote, *Three Methods of Ethics* (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1997).



actors frequently articulate some sort of Kantian or duty-based imperative to act because of essential obligations that exist as a by-product of their collective humanity. Ethical action, in short, is defined by the act.

In increasing numbers, many aid workers also apply a second position, consequentialist ethics, which has assumed greater relevance as such personnel attempt to take into account the "grand strategies." The central idea is that the rightness of an action is determined by whether it helps to bring about a better outcome than its alternatives. We are morally obligated, therefore, to act in a way that will produce the best consequences. Four controversies surrounding this approach include trying to measure the following: consequences for whom; whether we should think in terms of the consequences of individual acts or rules governing domains of actions; the appropriate time horizon for evaluating consequences; and the uncertainty that surrounds any action and its possible effects. There is now a recognition that humanitarian relief will almost always have some negative and unintended consequences—it is quite likely that someone might be disadvantaged, and it is impossible to know all of the effects of aid. The issue, therefore, is whether, on balance, it does more harm than good.<sup>114</sup>

Accordingly, many humanitarian agencies, sometimes at the insistence of their donors, increasingly attempt to gauge the effects of their policies and projects. As they are discovering, though, it is quite difficult to develop and deploy such assessment tools, especially during times of war, thus complicating their ability to determine whether their actions, in the end, are ethical. If the numbers do not necessarily add up, how can calculations be meaningful? "‘Moral calculus’ is not a highly developed form of mathematics," write Marc Lindenberg and Coralie Bryant. "It is hard to know whether one hundred lives saved is worth the price of having inadvertently helped to prolong a conflict by a month. It is even hard to document the numbers of lives lost and saved in such situations."<sup>115</sup> The focus of the 2003 annual report from the Red Cross Movement was on ethics in aid: "The tensions between promoting peace and saving lives, and between order and justice are not the only clashes of moral goods involving the humanitarian ethic. An equally common problem arises when it seems impossible to realize two rights simultaneously without compromising one of them."<sup>116</sup> Along these lines, Michael Barnett and Jack Snyder in chapter 6 examine

<sup>114</sup> See, for example, Hugo Slim, "Doing the Right Thing: Relief Agencies, Moral Dilemmas, and Moral Responsibility in Political Emergencies and War," *Disasters* 21, no. 3 (1997): 244–57; Duffield, *Global Governance and the New Wars*, 90–95; and Des Gasper, "‘Drawing a Line’—Ethical and Political Strategies in Complex Emergency Assistance," *European Journal of Development Research* 11, no. 2 (1999): 87–114.

<sup>115</sup> Marc Lindenberg and Coralie Bryant, *Going Global: Transforming Relief and Development NGOs* (Bloomfield, Conn.: Kumarian, 2001), 76.

<sup>116</sup> International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, *World Disasters Report* 2003, 12.

how the concern with consequences is leading aid agencies and states to contemplate and develop grand strategies that sometimes coincide and sometimes conflict.

Third, virtue ethics focuses on the "virtuous individual and on those inner traits, dispositions, and motives that qualify her as being virtuous."<sup>117</sup> Unlike deontological and Kantian ethics that attempt to locate moral rules, and consequentialist ethics that assess actions based on the effects on some desired good, the concern of virtue ethics is with the character and quality of the individual and his or her inner states and reasons for actions. Observers who attempt to label or stereotype aid workers typically assume that their vocation reflects something about their inner character and quality, that they demonstrate virtues such as heroism, compassion, and courage. The trend toward a utilitarian and consequentialist ethic, according to some aid workers, can go too far and cloud unnecessarily and unfairly those virtues that should be valued and encouraged.<sup>118</sup>

A fourth ethical tradition sees ethics as produced by momentary interactions and by face-to-face encounters. In the spirit of this branch, the claim is that all ethics are situated and thus can only be understood in their historical specificity and must actively involve all those who might be affected by a decision.<sup>119</sup> The danger of duty, consequentialist, and virtue ethics is that they can generate a detachment from the object of their actions. Both duty ethics, because it is premised on moral rules, and consequentialist ethics, because it relies on welfare principles, can lead to abstracting and sacrificing the particular and the individual to the universal and the collective.

Virtue ethics, because of its obsession with character, can create a narcissistic, self-absorbed humanitarian that objectifies and silences beneficiaries. Although somewhat harshly put, Alain Finkielkraut captures this danger as he writes of an MSF tradition that pleads impartiality as it heals the world:

The global doctor . . . may have no agenda, but that does not mean he cares very much about the suffering individual—about his reason for being, the world he wants to build, the causes of his persecution and suffering, the meaning he gives to his history and perhaps to his death. Save lives: that is the global mission of the global doctor. He is too busy feeding rice to hungry mouths to listen to what these mouths are saying. Words do not concern him. He turns his attention to murdered populations, not to eloquent voices, to the transparent language of complaint,

<sup>117</sup> Baron, Pettit, and Slore, *Three Methods of Ethics*, 177.

<sup>118</sup> Richard Bedell, "The Explanatory Power of the Virtues in MSF," in *My Sweet La Mancha* (Geneva: MSF International, 2005), 128–31.

<sup>119</sup> The work of Emmanuel Levinas is relevant here and is examined by Simon Critchley and Robert Bernasconi, eds., *The Cambridge Companion to Levinas* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

not the opaque tongues of individual nations. The bodies he cares for are disembodied.<sup>120</sup>

The danger of a generic focusing on bodies as victims is that history disappears, politics becomes amputated, and the individual withers. Indeed, this outcome is particularly injurious to a humanitarianism that claims to desire to restore dignity to individuals, to develop connections that dissolve boundaries, and to deepen cosmopolitanism.

There are various tensions between and among these ethical positions that make it nearly impossible to provide fixed evaluations of whether a particular action is, in fact, ethical. As Jennifer Rubenstein (chapter 9) and Peter Redfield (chapter 8) ask, how are we to judge the humanitarian mantra of aid based on need? Should aid agencies expend unlimited resources to save those most in peril, or should they economize their resources and attempt to calculate how they can be most efficient and thus, given a defined level of resources, save the greatest number? The many contributions to MSF's *La Mancha* process vividly display the array and interrelations of different ethical traditions, including virtue, consequentialist, deontological, and medical ethics.<sup>121</sup>

The tensions between ethical positions are captured in a fascinating conversation between Paul Farmer and his biographer, Tracy Kidder. Farmer's NGO, Partners In Health, went to nearly heroic lengths and spent \$20,000 to try to save a child from a rare disease by evacuating him from the hills of Haiti to Boston's Massachusetts General Hospital—where he died a few days later. Expressing his and others' reservations, Kidder wondered whether staff time and money might have been allocated differently and possibly saved hundreds of lives. Farmer responds by attacking the underlying moral terrain of the consequentialist-driven ethic—costs and benefits that largely pivot on the claim that money is more important than lives. So, he proceeds, why are we not discussing the failure of the airline to waive the costs of the flight or the ability of doctors to command such a high fee for their services? He then rejects the very basis of the consequentialist ethic, arguing that, in essence, the moment that he plays God and decides to self-consciously determine who can live and who can die is the moment he no longer sides with the “losers” but instead is fundamentally one of the “winners” of global order.<sup>122</sup>

This discussion of the politics, power, and ethics of humanitarianism begins the long overdue process of making visible and audible an actor that is largely

absent and silent in many operations and policy-oriented conversations—the recipient. Most relief agencies now sheepishly confess that they have largely proceeded without much input from those who are supposed to benefit from their concern. The reasons for this omission are many. Aid workers assume that the vulnerability of recipients owes to their general lack of power. There is a sense that aid workers know more and know better, caused by the presumption that beneficiaries' poverty, situation, illiteracy, and provincialism make them incapable of making informed decisions.<sup>123</sup> Aid workers excuse their inability to get informed consent, especially in emergency conditions, because of the nature of the situation—when lives are on the line, like doctors in an emergency room, they must act now and ask questions later. The discourse of “needs” suggests that context matters little—that food, shelter, medicine, and water are biological requirements that do not vary. In the main, there are relatively few in-depth practitioner-generated or scholarly analyses about the supposed beneficiaries of humanitarian action. Rarely, as Jennifer Rubenstein reminds us in chapter 9, are recipients treated as either practical or moral agents with the capacity to affect their own lives or determine their fates, or agents whose views should be actively integrated into what counts as ethical action.

This situation is beginning to change slowly. As a consequence of their recognition that the failure to give voice to the vulnerable represents an ethical transgression (and violates the practical spirit of restoring dignity, a key goal of humanitarianism) and contributes to failures in the field, aid agencies are beginning to introduce various policy innovations.<sup>124</sup> Beginning in the mid-1990s they began to evaluate whether they made a difference; toward that end, they introduced camp surveys; developed performance indicators; and created new methodologies and instruments that can better assess effectiveness and magnify the decibel levels of those whose murmurs were barely audible. Scholars of humanitarian action have not done much better in terms of making visible the subjects of concern, but in this collection of essays Peter Redfield, Laura Hammond, and Jennifer Rubenstein have taken steps toward rectifying this moral omission.

This book is a first, not last, step in making the beneficiaries agents in their own right. It aims to encourage others to examine this critical area of modern global life and institutionalize humanitarianism as a bona fide field of scholarly inquiry, themes to which we return in the conclusion chapters. Ultimately, of course, we hope that this book and future analytical efforts does more than advance careers and entice younger scholars to do research in this field. We are persuaded that better social science will help lift “the fog

<sup>120</sup> Finkelkraut, *In the Name of Humanity*, 89. Also see Raymond Duvall and Himadeep Muppidi, “Humanitarianism and Its Violences: Bodied Worlds and the Politics of Care,” paper presented at International Studies Association meeting, March 2007, Chicago.

<sup>121</sup> MSF International, *My Sweet La Mancha* (Paris: MSF, February 2006).

<sup>122</sup> Tracy Kidder, *Mountains beyond Mountains: The Quest of Dr. Paul Farmer, a Man Who Cured the World* (New York: Random House, 2004), 286–89.

<sup>123</sup> Liisa Malkki, “Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization,” *Cultural Anthropology* 11, no. 3 (1996): 377–404; and Malkki, “Refugees and Exile.”

<sup>124</sup> This is one of the major findings of the Stanley Foundation, *UN on the Ground* (Muscatine, Iowa: Stanley Foundation, 2003).

of humanitarianism"<sup>125</sup> and increase the welfare of affected populations by improving the efficiency of efforts to aid and protect them. To date, there has been too little genuine learning, as Alex de Waal taunts us: "The humanitarian international appears to have an extraordinary capacity to absorb criticism, not reform itself, and yet emerge strengthened."<sup>126</sup>

Although some within the humanitarian system might believe that this is the first time that the very spirit of humanitarianism and its executing partners have had their very *raison d'être* assailed, such a reaction demonstrates the lack of historical knowledge. Humanitarianism has been challenged time and again since its appearance in the early nineteenth century. Its relationship to politics, power, and ethics has been a constant concern. Many in the sector have demonstrated tremendous courage over the last decade in their willingness to examine self-critically what they had done and how they might do better. The essays in this book contribute in much the same spirit and hopefully demonstrate to both aid workers and scholars that there is much to be gained from a partnership dedicated to a critical investigation of humanitarianism in action.

<sup>125</sup> Thomas G. Weiss and Peter J. Hoffman, "The Fog of Humanitarianism: Collective Action Problems and Learning-Challenged Organizations," *Journal of Intervention and State-Building* 1, no. 1 (2007): 47–65.

<sup>126</sup> de Waal, *Famine Crimes*, xvi.

## 2

## THE RISE OF EMERGENCY RELIEF AID

JAMES D. FEARON

In this chapter I will examine broad patterns in emergency relief aid over time and consider possible explanations for these patterns. There are many problems with the available data, but existing material suggests the following summary account.

Civil war spread widely throughout the third world from 1945 to a high point in the early 1990s, followed by a gradual decline in the number of ongoing conflicts. This caused an enormous increase in the total number of refugees, from around three million in 1975 to a high of eighteen million in 1991. Since 1991 the number of refugees has steadily declined—tracking the decline in the number of civil wars—to fewer than nine million in 2005.

Total emergency relief aid appears to have increased sharply over the whole period, probably beginning its rise in the 1980s but possibly not leaping upward until the early 1990s. Despite the 50 percent decline in the world's refugee population since 1991, emergency aid has continued to increase dramatically, in real terms, over the last fifteen years.

These trends pose a puzzle. Why the continued rise in relief aid despite fewer ongoing civil wars and a sharp fall in refugee populations? Though the data considered here do not allow a definitive answer, what we have suggests two main explanatory factors.