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## A Critique of Charitable Consciousness

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A Critique of Charitable Consciousness

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
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## **ABSTRACT**

Despite a legion of criticisms from frustrated and reflective practitioners of humanitarian aid working in Africa and elsewhere, the fundamental problems surrounding NGO aid work persist; a critical mass of westerners are insufficiently receptive to these voices. I will demonstrate that this lack of receptivity is due to a set of implicit and explicit ideological commitments that comprise what I call 'Charitable Consciousness.' In this project I will describe the history of humanitarianism in the west, the Hegelian perspective with which to understand this history, and nature and structure of Charitable Consciousness. I will uncover the consequences of inhabiting this ideology and close with suggestions on how to confront and transform this perspective so as to encourage more productive aid work in the Global South.

**CHAPTER ONE:**  
**A BRIEF HISTORY OF HUMANITARIAN PRACTICES AND IDEOLOGIES IN THE**  
**WEST**

The purpose of this chapter is to offer a history of the development of humanitarian action in the west, with the concurrent evolution of one of humanitarianism's essential modern elements, mass media. The first task is to trace Europe's ideological transition from a quiet acceptance of pain and suffering in which the plight of others was not itself a siren call to aid, to the general belief that the desire to stop the suffering of others was a self evident tenet of human nature. Having established the conditions for this new European ethos, I will review Michael Barnett's text on the history of humanitarianism *Empire of Humanity*. I'll explore his "three ages" of humanitarianism, noting, among other things, his comparison of western humanitarianism with European colonialism. Thereafter, we will look more closely at the role that the utilization of mass media played over the course of humanitarian development in the twentieth century. We will observe how, in the wake of the Great War, humanitarian organizations such as the Red Cross became increasingly strategic, drawing on psychological research to craft the content and timing of their appeals to the general public for support. Once humanitarianism became media savvy, it is contended, it became a mass phenomenon.<sup>1</sup> In the

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<sup>1</sup> Kevin Rozario. "'Delicious Horrors': Mass Culture, the Red Cross, and the Appeal of Modern American Humanitarianism." *American Quarterly* 55.3 (2003): 417-55. Web.

course of this evolution, however, humanitarianism became partly constituted by pressures of mass media that fundamentally changed the way that it was conceived and practiced.

The telling of this history will provide the necessary context for an understanding of the development-focused, western, small scale, International Non-Governmental Organizations whose ideological construction is the focus of this work. Modern organizations traffic in very old narratives, often unaware of the history to which they are linked. We must see the ways in which these narratives have helped constitute and cement the naive ideology of “white saviorism” that continues to trouble development aid.

### **Echoes of the “Big Bang”: An Earthquake for a Prologue**

In 1755, the port city of Lisbon, Portugal and its surrounding areas suffered an earthquake whose strength is widely speculated to be between 8 and 9 on the Richter Scale.<sup>2</sup> The seismic event shook the city on the clear morning of November 1, All Saints Day, as a considerable multitude of residents worshipped within the hallowed walls of some of Europe’s most expansive churches, possibly less than 100 miles from the quake’s epicenter.<sup>3</sup> This unfortunate timing ensured that the quake, which rattled off in a series of three tremors, would shake the figurative foundations of theology as vigorously as it shook the real foundations of Lisbon’s cathedrals.

By the end of the 7-10 minute quake, most of these cathedrals had fallen atop their parishioners. In the densely packed residential districts, whose buildings rose as high as seven stories, families fled to staircases and city streets, only to be covered in rubble or washed in dust. When the rumbling stopped, survivors who were not trapped beneath debris made their way to

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<sup>2</sup> Edward Paice. *Wrath of God: The Great Lisbon Earthquake of 1755*. London: Quercus, 2010. Web. 72

<sup>3</sup> J. M. Martínez Solares and A. López Arroyo. "The great historical 1755 earthquake. Effects and damage in Spain." *Journal of Seismology* 8.2 (2004): 275-94. Web.

open spaces, in search of their loved ones. One such open space was down at the ports, where many gathered to book passage on vessels leaving the city. As they waited, or searched for others, they wept and cried to God for forgiveness with a fervor that deeply unsettled merchants and other visitors from more religiously moderate nations.<sup>4</sup> Other residents searched the wreckage for family members and friends. In doing so, they proved quite vulnerable to further harm; an aftershock hit an hour after the first quake, bringing down any buildings that had previously been weakened but still stood.

The shaking earth and dusty air, which darkened the day itself, were not the only elements to visit their terror upon Lisbon. Just a few miles from Lisbon at the mouth of the Tagus river, residents of neighboring Oeiras watched in astonishment as the water receded by more than a mile from the shore. Closer to Lisbon, the water receded nearly five miles, enough to reveal old shipwrecks on the river floor.<sup>5</sup> This flabbergasting ebb was followed by a horrifying flow. The fort that oversaw entry into the Tagus was hit by a 40 foot wave traveling at more than 400 miles an hour.<sup>6</sup> The terrifying surge traveled up the river to Lisbon. There, the wave was half as large but just as damaging as it rushed over the hundreds waiting at the docks up into the city. Some vessels that had boarded and were heading out to sea were themselves thrown back upon the land. Many were destroyed. An entire pier on which there were hundreds of people was now gone without a trace. One account described the bay as a “confused forest of tangled masts and a horrible cemetery of floating corpses.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Paice, 81. Protestants in this era had learned to be quite wary of Catholics who were consumed by fervor, as clergy had a habit of blaming calamity on those they saw as heretical or insufficiently pious.

<sup>5</sup> M. A. Viana-Baptista, et al. "Tsunami propagation along tagus Estuary (Lisbon, Portugal) preliminary results." *Science of Tsunami Hazards* 24.5 (2006): p. 329. Web.

<sup>6</sup> Paice, 97.

<sup>7</sup> Paice, 99.

The water, which crashed into the city and receded many times, was limited in its destruction only by the varying elevation of the city of Lisbon itself. However, the areas that were too high to be covered in waves were soon engulfed by fire. The original quake had knocked over candles and cooking fires, starting small blazes that few bothered to check given the greater immediate danger. But a strong wind swept through the city, fanning the flames into a blaze that would burn for days after the initial quake. All told, the quakes, aftershocks, fires and flooding transformed Lisbon into a half living city in ruin. Death tolls varied wildly in the aftermath, from 10,000 to 100,000.<sup>8</sup> While the specific numbers remain unclear, the significance of the event for European history is easily measured in the new public and scientific discourses that followed. Two lines of influence are easily seen in science and theology.

By the time the earthquake struck in 1755, there was already a growing body of literature focused on determining the natural causes of earthquakes. Contemporary theories varied quite a bit, from chemical reactions to electrical disturbances in the atmosphere.<sup>9</sup> Soon after the dust had settled on the Iberian Peninsula, authorities began collecting unprecedented amounts of data to aid in reflection on the phenomenon. With the help of the King of Portugal, who had appointed the Marquês de Pombal as head of emergency management, the Royal Society distributed questionnaires to town parishes. Before the end of the year, they had published a large body of eyewitness testimony. Many years after, they heard papers from intellectuals around Europe. Several thinkers made contributions to the understanding of quakes, including Immanuel Kant, who correctly identified that since the cause of the tsunami must have been the quake itself, the quake therefore originated at the ocean floor close to Portugal.<sup>10</sup> Most significant among the

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<sup>8</sup> Pereira, Alvaro S. "The Opportunity of a Disaster: The Economic Impact of the Lisbon Earthquake." *Journal of Economic History* 69.2 (2009): 466-499 Web.

<sup>9</sup> Paice, 217

<sup>10</sup> Paice, 218



scientific voices of the time, however was Cambridge astronomer and reverend, John Michell.

His 1760 paper posited that

a small quantity of vapour, almost instantly generated at some considerable depth, below the surface of the earth will produce a vibratory motion, so a very large quantity, (whether it be generated almost instantly, or in any small portion of time) will produce a wave-like motion.<sup>11</sup>

Michell's conjectures were the first step in fault theory. His work is seen today as the birth of modern seismology.

With the exception of Michell, Scientific understanding in the 18th century was, for the most part, not yet separated from religious understanding; most saw acts of nature as reflections of God's will. The task of science was simply to determine the processes and mechanisms of His expression. In this regard, the scientific minds of the day were not very different from their theological and philosophical contemporaries. For members of the clergy and other intellectuals, as well as for the European population at large, the earthquake was grounds for determining not the mechanisms of God's action but the message of God's wrath. Gottfried Leibniz had already posed an influential answer to this question in 1710. His *Théodicée* posited that the turmoil seen in the world was in fact, when taken with all that is good and beautiful, an indication of the world's perfection. *This* world was the best of all possible because it expressed a maximum of both order *and* diversity. Theological expressions such as this, which accounted for the "evil" in the world in a way that maintained God's perfection, found little purchase with Voltaire, whose *Candide* lashed out against Leibnizian optimism against the backdrop of the Lisbon quake.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> John Michell. "Conjectures concerning the Cause, and Observations upon the Phenomena of Earthquakes." *Philosophical Transactions* 51 (1759): 566-634. Web.

<sup>12</sup> To be sure, Voltaire also railed against Rousseau, who wrote to him in 1756 to offer a rebuttal to two poems that Voltaire wrote immediately after the quake. Rousseau sought to locate the misfortunes of humankind solely in human action, saying: "I do not see how one can search for the source of moral evil anywhere but in man's freedom and perfection—which are also his corruption. As for our physical pains: if sensate and impassible matter is, as I think, a contradiction in terms, then pains are inevitable in any world of which man forms a part—and the question then becomes not 'why is man not perfectly happy' but 'why does he exist at all?' Moreover, I think I have shown

Voltaire's work was as scandalous as it was widely read, but even the less learned Europeans of the day experienced great dissonance, as most believed in concert with Leibniz that "moral and natural evil were linked."<sup>13</sup> For many, the sheer magnitude of the Lisbon quake remained difficult to reconcile with a demonstrative theodicy in which God punishes those who deserve punishment. Few could agree that Lisbon was so full of sin that it merited destruction on the level that it suffered. Less progressive clergy, such as the prominent Jesuit Gabriel Malagrid, continued to advocate quite simply that God's ways were too mysterious to comprehend. But for many, "The Lisbon earthquake was the birth of the modern impulse to disconnect moral and natural evils."<sup>14</sup><sup>15</sup>

While most discussions of the response to the Lisbon quake focus on its catalyzing effect on science and moral reflection, there is another response worth noting. Less than a month after the quake, King George II requested permission from the houses of Parliament to send to Lisbon money and supplies, all of which would be paid for by the King himself. The request was unanimously and enthusiastically approved.<sup>16</sup> The Prime Minister and Duke of Newcastle met with merchants from Lisbon to determine what the city needed most. Together, they arranged for large quantities of beef, butter, and wheat to be shipped down, in addition to more than £50,000

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that most of our physical pains, except for death—which is hardly painful, except for the preparations that precede it—are also our own work. Without leaving your Lisbon subject, concede, for example, that it was hardly nature who assembled there twenty-thousand houses of six or seven stories. If the residents of this large city had been more evenly dispersed and less densely housed, the losses would have been fewer or perhaps none at all." Rousseau condemned humankind though he did not have, he said, strong theological commitments. Voltaire saw only the grossest fatalism. Rousseau to Voltaire, 18 August 1756, from J.A. Leigh, ed., *Correspondance complète de Jean Jacques Rousseau*, vol. 4 (Geneva, 1967), pp. 37-50; translated by R. Spang.

<sup>13</sup> Susan Neiman, "Leibniz's Theodicy: Are There Aftershocks?" [Leibniz's Theodicy: Reception and Relevance. Conference Presentation held in Lisbon Portugal.](#)

<sup>14</sup> Neiman, *ibid.*

<sup>15</sup> Malagrida, as it turns out, was quite disruptive to the reconstruction of Lisbon. Portugal suffered aftershocks for many months afterward, which he took as a sign that repentance was more important than rebuilding. He preached this message incessantly, until the Marquês had him executed. KARL FUCHS. "The great earthquakes of Lisbon 1755 and Aceh 2004 shook the world. Seismologists' societal responsibility." 14.02 (2006): 207-19. Web.

<sup>16</sup> Paice, 151

in cash. All told, England put more than £100,000 of relief on boats to Portugal. Spain also offered monetary assistance, in addition to waiving taxes on necessary goods that pass through its ports. Hamburg sent lumber for building. Even France, with whom Portugal had significant political tension, offered aid. These offers of assistance, taken with the quick responses of the King of Portugal and the Marquês de Pombal constitute the most extensive emergency relief effort in European history. This action of sending aid might make intuitive sense to modern readers, appearing to be a show of basic decency, but the possibility of such action was relatively new, a sign of a new ethos in Europe, one that, by most accounts, carried no such influence just a hundred years earlier.<sup>17</sup>

### **The Moral History of Aid in Europe**

Scholar of humanitarianism Michael Barnett, whose history of humanitarianism is the subject of the next section, says that the humanitarian impulse came about in a kind of “big bang.” That began in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. This is not to say that themes of charity or compassion were absent in daily life prior to the 1700s, but, as we will see, the feeling of sympathy that could translate into massive social and political organization across nations developed rather ploddingly in European philosophy and literature. To illustrate this, we will look closely at the rise of “The Man of Feeling” in the English intellectual tradition and its relationship to historical concepts of sympathy and pain. For the most part, our investigation will be centered on Anglo-American developments in reflection and later, humanitarian action.<sup>18</sup> Barnett says that

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<sup>17</sup> One can also make a case that geopolitics commitments and economic self interest played a role in the distribution of aid, but we will see in the course of this study that, while these things are often present where there is humanitarian activity, humanitarian activity cannot be *reduced* to these phenomena.

<sup>18</sup> This choice of focus will ultimately help us connect with the various organizations in question in the last chapter of this work. It also enables us to focus on humanitarian activity in former British colonies. This early commitment to Anglo-American history, however, is not positioned so as to exclude African perspectives, which will also be addressed.

humanitarianism itself had a founding moment, after which it became possible to think of there being a responsibility to help alleviate the suffering of distant others. He calls this founding moment the “Humanitarian Big Bang,” the “revolution in moral sentiments” that set the groundwork for all modern expressions of humanitarianism in the west.

The primary ideological formation that precipitates the possibility of unanimous vote in support of sending aid for a foreign power is “The Man of Feeling.” This figure was the subject of a body of literature that grew exponentially over the course of the eighteenth century. This literature was focused on “The identification of virtue with acts of benevolence and still more with the feelings of universal good-will which inspire and accompany these acts.”<sup>19</sup> This figure found his home in the cult of sensibility. R.S. Crane, whose lecture on the man of feeling in 1934 remains the most influential statement on the subject, says the figure is a triumph of a strain of thought that, while present throughout the ages, had never been popular until toward the middle of the eighteenth century, around the dawn of Enlightenment thought. The major proponents of sensibility were the Latitudinarians, a group of Anglican clergy active in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries.

The Latitudinarians de-emphasized the clerical power by minimizing the importance of doctrine. They instead focused on the health of the human soul, while attempting to overturn what they saw as the cynical theological perspectives of their contemporaries, the Puritans. “Latitude-men” like Joseph Glanvill saw in the Puritans a description of God as an arbitrary and hateful deity, one that designed that humankind suffer. Further, this religious perspective saw the works of humankind to be essentially worthless, having no weight at all when compared to naked faith in Jesus Christ.<sup>20</sup> In contradiction to this, Latitudinarians held that the most important aspect

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<sup>19</sup> R. S. Crane. "Suggestions Toward A Genealogy of the "Man of Feeling"." *ELH* 1.3 (1934): 205-30. Web.

<sup>20</sup> Crane, 209

of Christianity was not its metaphysical truths, but the practical consequences of its moral teachings. On this account, works were vitally important, as they were expressions of moral goodness. The ideal Christian was not one who feared God and followed doctrine, but one who is kind to other human beings just as Jesus was kind to his followers. They also asserted that it was not important to follow or honor church doctrine which did not encourage these tenets. Sermons throughout the latter half of the seventeenth century serviced this point, with many adding that mutual kindness and care are not simply qualities that God requires that we choose to cultivate, but a part of the human nature that God has instilled within human beings.<sup>21</sup>

What is novel in Latitudinarian teachings, Crane holds, is that their vision of charity is not simply the performance of a favorable and supererogatory moral action, but the natural outcome of a particular *feeling* in the heart of the actor. This emphasis on feeling was in open revolt to Hobbesian cynicism and the tradition of Stoicism, a philosophy still very much en vogue in the late seventeenth century. That feeling of benevolence is expressed largely as *sympathy*, a concept that, by the eighteenth century, had substantially altered in meaning from its original usage.<sup>22</sup> It is the construction of sympathy that gives us a clear indication of the content of the man of feeling, his place in the cult of sensibility, and the origins of the humanitarian impulse.

The sympathy of the man of feeling, says Andrew Cunningham, is *psychological*. This conception of sympathy is unique to the era of Enlightenment. Before that time, “‘sympathy’ usually referred not to a coming together of mental states, but to a coming together of physical

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<sup>21</sup> Crane, 211

<sup>22</sup> Its original use in English referred just to any kind of affinity that a thing may have with another thing. One example is “sympathy powder,” a kind of folk remedy that can heal a person simply by being applied to a handkerchief that is also stained with that person’s blood.

objects,”<sup>23</sup> a tendency that Cunningham traces from Aristotle up through the Renaissance. In the works of Chrysippus, the neo-Platonists, Pliny the Elder and others, sympathy denotes physical attraction or affinity, similar to a juvenile conception of attraction. Sympathy and antipathy, on this account, are most akin to attraction and repulsion, but with a wider scheme of applicability than most modern scientists would give them; to be sympathetic was to interact in some way that involves physical proximity. Sympathy was literally a “coming together” of different objects. This notion gradually fell out of favor as other explanations of natural phenomena found more purchase in scientific communities. However, it did not fade away entirely. By the Enlightenment, sympathy became a different kind of “coming together”; the metaphorical proximity of “mental states.”<sup>24</sup>

This new sympathy expressed the ways in which our own feelings join with the feelings of others, especially when they experienced pain. Take this excerpt of a sermon from prominent seventeenth century mathematician Isaac Barrow:

Even the stories of calamities, that in ages long since past have happened to persons nowise related to us, yea, the fabulous reports of tragic events, do (even against the bent of our wills, and all resistance of reason) melt our hearts with compassion, and draw tears from our eyes: and thereby evidently signify that general sympathy which naturally intercedes between all men, since we can neither see, nor hear of, nor imagine another’s grief, without being afflicted ourselves.<sup>25</sup>

Words such as this are joined by very similar expressions in the eighteenth century, from the likes of the Third Earl of Shaftesbury, David Hume and later Adam Smith. In all of these expressions, sympathy or fellow feeling is understood as an aspect of human nature, a quality with which we are born. Karen Halttunen cautions us to see not an awakening to the realities of human nature, but a kind of normative revision of societal impulses and tendencies in Europe in

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<sup>23</sup> Andrew S. Cunningham. "Was Eighteenth-Century Sentimentalism Unprecedented?" 6.3 (1998): 381. Web.

<sup>24</sup> Cunningham, 383

<sup>25</sup> Quoted in Cunningham, 386. Barrow, it is argued, is hard to distinguish from a Latitudinarian and a Cambridge Platonist--a member of a philosophical group that echoed the Latitudinarians from a more secular perspective.

the aftermath of all consuming tribulations like the Thirty Years War. These writings were the work of moral philosophers who inspired a cult of sentimentalism that “steadily broadened the arena within which humanitarian feelings were encouraged to operate...”<sup>26</sup> This broadening of the scope of who can be an object of sympathy is part of a larger “civilizing process,”<sup>27</sup> which has also changed our perspective on pain itself.

The rise of the cult of sensibility in literature and philosophy over the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries coincided with advances in medicine that helped replace older European conceptions of the necessity or usefulness of physical pain. Much earlier conceptions of pain from the Christian tradition held that great bodily discomfort was desirable because it could bring one closer to God.<sup>28</sup> In medicine this perspective was secularized to the simple thesis that the experience of pain was crucial to the healing of the body.<sup>29</sup> However, “By the 1750’s, the man of feeling had truly entered the operating room. And with him came the development of anesthetics.”<sup>30</sup>

The development of more viable means of anesthesia helped to create a kind of distance from pain that was already becoming the default social stance of the British middle class.

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<sup>26</sup> Karen Halttunen. "Humanitarianism and the Pornography of Pain in Anglo-American Culture." *The American Historical Review* 100.2 (1995): 303. Web.

<sup>27</sup> The “Civilizing Process,” which Hegel understands as a process of Spirit, is immensely complicated and its full conceptualization is not completely relevant for our purposes. However, one can come to approach the phenomenon with the help of Norbert Elias, who writes: “...which specific changes in the way people are bonded to each other mould their personality in a “civilizing” manner? The most general answer to this question too, an answer based on what was said earlier about the changes in western society, is very simple. From the earliest period of the history of the Occident to the present, social functions have become more and more differentiated under the pressure of competition. The more differentiated they become, the larger grows the number of functions and thus of people on whom the individual constantly depends in all his actions, from the simplest and most commonplace to the more complex and uncommon. As more and more people must attune their conduct to that of others, the web of actions must be organized more and more strictly and accurately, if each individual action is to fulfill its social function. Individuals are compelled to regulate their conduct in an increasingly differentiated, more even and more stable manner.” Norbert Elias. *The Civilizing Process: Sociogenetic and Psychogenetic Investigations*. Tran. Edmund Jephcott. Blackwell Publishing; Revised edition, 2000. Web. 365.

<sup>28</sup> For a compelling discussion of this idea, see the section on Saint Catherine in David B. Morris. *The Culture of Pain*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993. Web.

<sup>29</sup> Halttunen, 309

<sup>30</sup> Steven Bruhm. "Aesthetics and Anesthetics at the Revolution." *Studies in Romanticism* 32.3 (1993): 399-424. Web. 403.

Through advancements such as nitrous oxide, or “laughing gas”, pain ceased being a thing that the patient had to experience and therefore something that the doctor no longer had to inflict in the course of treatment. It became possible to be averse to pain, rather than accept its inevitability. This general aversion was coupled with sympathy in the literature of sensibility, where it continued to develop into the very end of the eighteenth century, where pain became “loathsome and revolting, a source of moral horror.”<sup>31</sup>

The cult of sensibility, through works literature and philosophy, medical advancement, and public and private discussion in England and beyond took the form of a discourse that itself continued to transform many years after the King of England sent £100,000 of supplies and money to Portugal. This discourse interacted with and helped frame and influence other events. I would like to examine some of the terms of this interaction, but first I would like to fill out the historical events in question, those depicting the rise and evolution of humanitarianism from Lisbon earthquake relief, to abolitionism, to the standalone institutions of humanitarianism that endure today.

### **Three Ages of Humanitarianism**

Michael Barnett’s *Empire of Humanity* is the only book length treatment of the history of humanitarianism in the west by a single author. While not flawless, it is useful to the process mapping out the major developments and challenges of European and American humanitarian activity. The following critical review of his work will focus on the transition of humanitarianism out of the cult of sensibility, the relationship between humanitarianism and colonization, and the modern developments of humanitarianism that set the background for my

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<sup>31</sup> Halttunen, 311



own analysis of modern small scale development NGOs operating internationally. We will begin with a brief overview.

Historian Michael Barnett says that the term “humanitarianism”, with its general meaning of organizing and acting on behalf of others, is two centuries old. It came into prominence at the turn of the nineteenth century on the heels of the humanitarian “big bang,” as discussed in the previous section. From that time, Barnett says, humanitarianism has developed three main features. The first is “compassion across boundaries.”<sup>32</sup> This does not necessarily preclude domestic activity, but humanitarians from very early on seemed willing to go beyond their sovereign borders. The second feature is “transcendental significance,” an admittedly esoteric formulation that is intended to indicate the willingness of humanitarians to make appeals to things greater to themselves, even when they do not make use of religious language. This transcendent principle might simply be the normative formulation of ‘global community’ or nineteenth century philosopher Emmerich de Vattel’s *humanité*,<sup>33</sup> a conceptualization of sympathy for all human beings. The last feature of humanitarianism is its attachment to Enlightenment era conceptions of governance. Humanitarianism carries the basic assumption that “it is possible to engineer progress.”<sup>34</sup> Humanitarian activity, then, is not simply the activity of individuals who are committed to compassion in their private lives. It is instead a concerted effort at constructing institutions from which to organize activity that fulfils the humanitarian ideal.

In enumerating these elements of humanitarianism, Barnett departs immediately from the attributions that many humanitarian organizations themselves give to the concept. The International Committee of the Red Cross, for example, stresses that the care of distant others

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<sup>32</sup> Barnett, 19

<sup>33</sup> Barnett, 50

<sup>34</sup> Barnett, 21

should be undertaken in ways that are impartial with regard to taking sides in political conflict, neutral in terms of armed conflict, and independent in operation from parties that have an interest in how the conflict ends. For Barnett, it is not clear that these stated ideals are as achievable as past humanitarians have assumed, certainly not enough to be the fundamental elements of humanitarian activity. However, he does recognize that neutrality, impartiality and independence are principles with which humanitarian organizations often struggle.

One of the reasons for this struggle is quite simply that there are different kinds of humanitarian organizations that can't reliably be said to be bound by the principles that supposedly ground the ICRC.<sup>35</sup> Sometimes, political or logistical realities make it difficult for humanitarians to stick to their established principles. Barnett says that, "we live in a world of humanitarianisms, not humanitarianism."<sup>36</sup> A distinction that he makes on this score is that between *emergency* humanitarianism and *alchemical* humanitarianism. The emergency branch "works on symptoms," engaging in relief efforts in the wake of natural and political disasters. The alchemical branch, by contrast, "adds the ambition of removing the root causes of suffering." This is the branch that is concerned with development humanitarianism. Barnett says that these two branches were fairly distinct from one another until the 1990s, when they began to interact on the ground in ways that raised serious questions about their mutual operation and whether it had been as distinct as they previously believed.

There are other tensions that Barnett mentions. In fact, he thinks that the tensions of humanitarianism are crucial to understanding humanitarianism and its history. In addition to the reality of different *humanitarianisms*, he articulates five more tensions. First, 1) humanitarianism is shaped by its contingent historical context. With this, Barnett offers the connected thesis that

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<sup>35</sup> The ICRC is a prime example. The organization has publicly broken with its claims of neutrality nine times in its history.

<sup>36</sup> Barnett, 10

2) “humanitarian ethics are simultaneously universal and circumstantial.”<sup>37</sup> By this, he means that humanitarian actors have to recognize the degree to which the modern ethical categories that define their work are not transhistorical or timeless.

Next Barnett points out a fundamental paradox at the core of humanitarian action, which is that 3) its interventions, no matter how benevolent, are also acts of control. These interventions tend to embody some form of paternalism, using power in a way that has grown increasingly precarious as states have become more involved in humanitarian intervention through the ages of humanitarianism. In keeping with this paradox, we can see how 4) “Humanitarian intervention both undermines and advances moral progress.”<sup>38</sup> Part of the tension here rests largely on the contingency of western ideas about the meaning of moral progress. The fundamental assumptions that ground some judgments are not always explicit for those who support humanitarian missions. Or, when they are explicit, they are accompanied by commitments that look less desirable or noble in the light of history. Principles that in the past were expressed as universally good are revealed over time to be Eurocentric, only of local benefit. Yet this deeply flawed framework can often lead to western initiatives that even those who exist on the margins of western discourses would recognize as a good thing.<sup>39</sup>

The last point Barnett raises about humanitarianism is 5) while humanitarianism is directed toward the needs of others, it also services the needs of the humanitarians. Here Barnett nods to the diversity of motivations for humanitarian action. Aid workers are often driven by a

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<sup>37</sup> Barnett, 11

<sup>38</sup> Barnett, 12

<sup>39</sup> The reasons for this recognition, however, cannot properly be understood without a review of the deliberation processes of aid beneficiaries and those who are close to them. This we will accomplish in chapter 4 when we investigate the encounter that Ugandans have with Westerners and other outsiders who have come to the region to offer various forms of assistance. It must also be noted that Barnett does not think it possible to study or participate in humanitarianism without having some notion of progress. For Barnett himself, it comes down to the “social relations of care,” in which the notion of community is expanded by an increased willingness to help those in need, especially when they lie outside of the older, constricted notion of community.

desire to do good and help others, but “some are motivated by a feeling of power and superiority, some by guilt and ... some by a desire to demonstrate their goodness to themselves and to others.”<sup>40</sup>

Many critical readers will see very little that is objectionable or revolutionary in Barnett’s list of the fundamental tensions of humanitarianism. Much of what he says would be true of any historical phenomenon. But these seemingly self-evident points, I think, give us some indication as to Barnett’s frustration with the humanitarians that he takes to be his primary audience. Humanitarians often get their history wrong, he says, offering up more of an etiology that fully justifies their present action than a nuanced look at the complicated past motivations which reveal the difficulty of fully justifying their present action.<sup>41</sup> So, while it certainly is the case that these tensions are important to remember in the course of our study, we must also know that our need to reference them so explicitly is itself a testament to the ideological commitments of many who are involved with western humanitarian aid.

Barnet separates humanitarianism in the west into three ages, which are defined by the social, political and economic climates that circumscribe them. The first stage, “imperial humanitarianism,” emerges from the “humanitarian big bang” and lasts until the end of WWII. It is characterized by the rise of humanitarian social movements and self-described humanitarian activity that, at first, happened largely outside of state channels (though the anti-slavery movement is an exception.). With the onset of the Great War, states came to have more direct involvement, though many humanitarians are explicitly motivated by colonial ideas about the civilizing process which present day humanitarians are at pains to avoid.

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<sup>40</sup> Barnett, 15

<sup>41</sup> Part of Barnett’s motivation for writing this history was his own encounter with what he eventually came to recognize as an incorrect history of humanitarianism, largely inspired by ICRC, which saw Henry Dunant’s book *Memory of Solferino* as the first inspiration for humanitarianism in Europe.

The second age, neo-humanitarianism, lasts from 1945 until the end of the cold war, and is here identified with the fall of the Berlin Wall. Neo-humanitarianism fills the “vacuum” of need left in the wake of decolonization efforts, which provide another point of entry and control for former colonial powers. Humanitarian organizations in this period find themselves manipulated by superpowers into acting on behalf of state interests. This in turn motivated humanitarian organizations to claim and establish political neutrality - a difficult prospect which continues to be of principal importance for humanitarian organizations such as the Red Cross. The Neo-humanitarian age sees the rise of the role of international banking in the supposed creation of a more peaceful world. Massive financial interests and combined state interests in the form of the United Nations help transition humanitarian activity from relief or emergency work to development work, a significant shift for humanitarians and those with whom they work.

The age of Liberal Humanitarianism starts in 1989 and continues into the present day. It comes out of a kind of “identity crisis” of humanitarianism that dominated the discourse in the late 1980s. The primary feature of this age, of course, is its emphasis on liberalism, its focus on human rights and its awareness of the mechanisms of globalization. In the age of liberal humanitarianism, humanitarian organizations focus on funding through deft usage of mass media and the lessons of psychology--institutions from which they have been learning for nearly a century.

Within each proscribed stage of this history are events and transitional moments that are important for our understanding of charitable consciousness. The modern ideological perspectives present in the field of humanitarian aid are not aberrations in the context of humanitarian history. Rather, they are the Hegelian *truth* of this history, endpoints of humanitarian developments over time, which destroy, carry forward and revise the perspectives

and practices from which they are descended. This review of Barnett's ages, then, are not only an establishment of the context of this study, but a description of key moments for the ideology that I have set out to describe and criticize.

### **Imperial Humanitarianism, 1800-1945**

Following what he describes as the humanitarian big bang, Barnett identifies the antislavery movement of Britain as the first major humanitarian program in Europe. The movement itself is notable because the sentiments that fueled it extended well back into the early period of the big bang itself. As Christopher Brown notes,

Slave Traders in Britain encountered public disapproval early in the eighteenth century, decades before the emergence of those cultural movements often credited for engendering antislavery sentiment, decades before the height of the Evangelical revival, or the apex of the European Enlightenment, or the emergence of a cult of sensibility.<sup>42</sup>

These cultural forces, however, did help turn this *sentiment*, with its clarified arguments against slavery, into a *movement*, whose members utilized particular tactics in order to gain support for their cause. These abolitionists, once active, undertook to fight for the rights of non-British, non-European subjects, a seemingly clear example of humanitarian compassion.

Beginning in the late eighteenth century, under the slogan of “Am I Not a Man and a Brother?”, those active in the anti-slavery movement authored and distributed pamphlets detailing their views. The most powerful tracts were often written by those with firsthand experience of the institution.<sup>43</sup> Often, arguments against slavery sought to establish British complicity with the practice, which was frequently discussed as an American practice and problem, though the British were also heavily involved in the trade. Abolitionists like William

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<sup>42</sup> Christopher Brown. *Moral Capital: Foundations of British Abolitionism*. The University of North Carolina Press; 1 edition, 2006. Web.. 37

<sup>43</sup> Brown, 43

Wilberforce would evoke the British Naval practice of impressment to get the public to empathize with the enslaved. Others challenged religious authority directly for not being more vocal about a morally repugnant institution. However, more effective than the words of those who were witness to slavery and moralists who sought support through philosophical argument, were the accounts of those who had been under the literal yoke of slavery.

Activists routinely funded tours of ex-slaves, who traveled Britain telling of their troubles--people like Henry "Box" Brown, who famously stowed away in a very small shipping crate to attain his freedom. Box Brown created a moving panorama called "A Mirror of Slavery." He premiered the work in Boston, but moved it and himself to Britain after the passage of the fugitive slave act in 1850.<sup>44</sup> The panorama, a series of images painted on a long sheet of fabric and bound in a kind of moving scroll, was usually accompanied by a lecture or music. As a form of entertainment, it was the moving picture of its day, drawing large crowds who were dazzled by the newness of a "moving" image and its ability to captivate audiences.<sup>45</sup> Even when they were not at the forefront of emerging mass media, the anti-slavery movement put together evocative displays, like those that "showcased slavery's brutality and its weapons of discipline, including thumbscrews, whips, and manacles."<sup>46</sup>

The anti-slavery movement in Britain and America was expansive, inventive and active for a very long period of time. Its activities contributed to the abolition of the transatlantic trade and, eventually, slavery itself within their combined territories. This does not mean, stresses Barnett, that the movement was wholly altruistic or unproblematic. For many abolitionists, the desire to free slaves or secure the common humanity of Africans was a tertiary motivation. As

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<sup>44</sup> Henry Box Brown. . *Narrative of the Life of Henry Box Brown, Written by Himself*. Digital ed. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 1999. Web.

<sup>45</sup> T. A. Goddu. "Anti-Slavery's Panoramic Perspective." *MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States* 39.2 (2014): 12-41. Web.

<sup>46</sup> Barnett, 58-59.

Brown notes, “Often activists took up the issue of slavery less because they cared about Africans than because they regretted its impact on society, on the empire, on public moral, or on the collective sense of self.”<sup>47</sup> Many in an era awash in sentimentalism wanted to put off the moral guilt they had come to feel in the face of their nation’s sanction of the slave trade. Even religious figures attacked slavery only when it was in line with other aims. Brown’s study of British and American Evangelicals in the late eighteenth century reveals a long history of indifference to slavery. Most evangelicals of the time “aimed to save souls, not change laws.”<sup>48</sup> It was only when they learned that slaveholders, especially in the Caribbean colonies, were largely indifferent to the spiritual welfare of their captives, that they began to advocate for abolition.<sup>49</sup> Put simply, they took to abolition after realizing that they *had to* in order to expand the power and influence of the Evangelical movement.<sup>50</sup> Also, taking up the now popular project of ending slavery was a way for them to broach the bigger subject of moral reform. “Because few in Britain participated in the slave trade, vilifying the practice would prove less threatening than asking the public to reconsider how they spend their Sunday afternoons.”<sup>51</sup>

Whatever the stimulus, by the beginning of the nineteenth century, the anti-slavery movement was large and influential. The efforts of evangelicals including the influential William Wilberforce were proving effective, and even after the British role in the transatlantic trade was curtailed, there was still work to be done. This work was that of the conversion of enslaved and freed Africans to Christianity and the general improvement of the lot of all who were, or would

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<sup>47</sup> Brown, *Moral Capital*. 26.

<sup>48</sup> Brown, 339.

<sup>49</sup> Key here is the experience of James Ramsay in St. Kitts in 1781. He reported to an influential evangelical family that Caribbean Elites luxuriated in tyranny and vice, disregarded the human dignity of the enslaved, and suffered heathens to remain in spiritual darkness.” Brown, 351.

<sup>50</sup> Interestingly, the eventual penetration of other forms of protestantism into slave quarters on the islands was the result of the same revelation. Anglicans, Methodists and Baptists took notice of the struggles of evangelicals and redoubled their efforts at conversion. This path of conversion harmed the cause of abolition, however, because slaves, particularly methodists, were discovered to be more subservient to their slaveholders. Brown, 356

<sup>51</sup> Brown, 386.



be, subject to European rule. This included the native inhabitants of British colonies in Australia, New Zealand, and regions of Africa. The idea was that Britain needed to atone for its sins, and its atonement took the form of “benevolent colonialism” with regard to colonial territories.

Here, Barnett explores the connection between early nineteenth century colonialism and humanitarianism, claiming that “the humanitarians of the period of Imperial Humanitarianism should not so quickly be condemned, and the humanitarians of the period of Liberal Humanitarianism should not be so quickly excused.”<sup>52</sup> He suggests that the widespread moral condemnation of colonial activity in the present age has, more or less, covered over a history of complicated deliberation in the hearts and minds of the colonizers of the nineteenth century, and it is in these deliberations that we see just how close the humanitarian elements of colonization are to contemporary humanitarianism. This is a sentiment echoed by Olúfẹmi Táíwò, who claims that, imperfect though they were, colonial missionaries of the early nineteenth century were concerned largely with the fates and even the personhood of native people.<sup>53</sup>

This imperfect concern, of course, was an expansion of the paternalism already present in the anti-slavery movement. Edmund Burke argued in 1783 that superior state powers like Britain should always exercise their power in a way that benefits the people that it rules. Britain “had a sacred duty to help civilized peoples prepare for sovereignty.”<sup>54</sup> However, this was only possible if the emissaries of the empire were tolerant of cultural and religious differences. Burke’s opinion on the need for religious tolerance largely fell on deaf ears, but his idea of colonization as a kind of trusteeship, the fulfillment of a responsibility to improve the world, carried forward

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<sup>52</sup> Barnett, 61

<sup>53</sup> Táíwò goes so far as to claim that even African historians fail to differentiate between early missionaries and the colonial administrators that largely replaced them over the course of African colonial history. On his narrative, there was genuine, if flawed, concern for the fate of Africans, concern that was quickly dissolved as more greedy and unsympathetic forces replaced them in the latter third of the nineteenth century. See Olúfẹmi Táíwò. *How Colonialism Preempted Modernity in Africa*. Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2010. Web.

<sup>54</sup> Barnett, 61

in many forms. As Barnett says, “France had *la mission civilisatrice*, Britain had the white man’s burden, and the United States had manifest destiny.”<sup>55</sup> Motivations for this perspective were buttressed by a developing science of humanity, which filled out the religion-inspired “great chain of being” with a typological hierarchy of race.<sup>56</sup> The net result was that both missionaries and colonialists agreed that the only way that Indians and Africans and Native Americans would become sufficiently mature--enough to rule over *themselves*--was through European intervention.

This is not to say, however, that missionaries easily got sanctioned by the state to carry out their missions. They lobbied Parliament for decades, but could not convince officials that the business of religion and government could be mixed. This changed in 1813 when missionaries made a moral argument linked to a practice in one of its colonies. The Indian practice of *sati*, the self immolation of the widow by her leaping atop the funeral pyre of her late husband, was universally reviled by colonialists. Missionaries argued that stopping such a practice was a humanitarian duty, and Christians were best suited to fulfill that duty.<sup>57</sup> Parliament agreed, and

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<sup>55</sup>Barnett, 62

<sup>56</sup> See Michael Blanton. “The Idiom of Race: A Critique of Presentism” in Les Back and John Solomos, eds. *Theories of Race and Racism: A Reader (Routledge Student Readers)*. London: Routledge; 1 edition, 2000. Web.

<sup>57</sup> It is well worth noting here some contemporary views on the practice of *sati* and the role that it played in bolstering missionaries’ access to colonial spaces. In the nineteenth century and now, Western perspectives on the practice give us a glimpse into the problems of the colonialist stance. *Sati* was not a global Hindu practice (quite far from it, as there is some question as to whether it was practiced enough by the time the British encountered it to even count as an Indian tradition). Nor was it universally accepted as legitimate by natives of India. In fact, criticism of the practice within India is about as old as the practice itself. In other words, it was a morally questionable practice that was mostly not accepted in its country of origin. However, *sati* came to have a very different meaning when the British stepped forward to ban it. As Uma Narayan argues, the practice became a kind of emblem of “Indian Culture”, something that even Indians who disliked the practice would jump to defend, because they were in fact defending British encroachment into Indian cultural traditions. The British, however, did not see the practice as something that was morally contested within India itself. They saw it as a kind of universal indication of the uncivilized nature of India. In true colonial fashion, they flattened the world that they encountered, seeing a false universality that confirmed their assumptions about their own superiority. The assumption that western culture is dynamic and non-western culture is static can in fact lead to non-western images of their own culture as static in the same way, as sometimes indicated by revivals of problematic historical practices. (When conservative elements in India late in the nineteenth century sought to revive *sati*, they did so on the grounds that it was a true Indian tradition, themselves unknowingly echoing historical British proclamations more so than Indian cultural history.) See Uma Narayan. *Dislocating Cultures: Identities, Traditions, and Third World Feminism (Thinking Gender)*. New York: Routledge, 1997. Web. and Uma Narayan and Sandra Harding. *Decentering the Center: Philosophy for a*

offered its official sanction, which extended certain protections to missionaries out in the colonies, and overturned a thirty-year policy of non-interference.

With the government providing sanctuary and security, missionaries entered places that they had previously been unable to reach. They spread Christian values, which in some cases pleased business interests, as Christianity from the British worldview made natives more compliant. Other capitalists were nonplussed, believing that this new approach would encourage native populations to demand equal treatment. Missionaries were often just as suspicious of business interests. Though they believed that the best way to spread civilization was through both “commerce and Christianity,” they were often disappointed with the behavior of administrators and businessmen, who showed little interest in the depths of the native life and would spend their free time in hedonistic revel.

These tensions grew more serious over time. Even though the superiority of the Christian religion was a cornerstone of their evangelical faith, some missionaries, over the course of daily interaction with their target populations, became skeptical of their use of cultural values that they coupled with Christian values, though the two were not necessarily inclusive. They came to regard aspects of native culture with less distance and more sympathy. As Barnett says, “some missionaries wondered which features of local cultures should be condemned and which ones could coexist with Christianity; reevaluated in their own identities, goals and relationships to other cultures; and even began to doubt the value of proselytization.”<sup>58</sup>

One event that cast clear doubt on the moral superiority of Europe and led to some soul searching among missionaries was the saga of King Leopold II of Belgium. In the 1880s, At the dawn of what became known as the “scramble for Africa”, Leopold made a bid to annex the

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*Multicultural, Postcolonial, and Feminist World.* Indiana University Press; Cloth First Published 1989 ed. edition, 2000. Web.

<sup>58</sup> Barnett, 69

Congo, a large section of the continent. He told European powers he would do it for the purposes of spreading Christianity and protecting the region from the encroachment of Islam. With their blessing, he set out to fulfill his true purpose, the forceful harvest of rubber from the Congolese jungle. At a time when other colonial powers were experimenting with ways to grow enough rubber to meet growing international demand, Leopold had discovered a way to quickly meet the needs of the market. He hired mercenaries and sent them into the villages of Congolese people. They kidnapped women and children, holding them hostage to force men to go increasingly deeper into the jungle to harvest. Villagers were not able to tend to their crops and any who strayed were brutally punished. In many cases entire villages were burned to the ground. By conservative estimates the death toll reached more than ten million over the course of a decade. One Swedish missionary, who set up a post in the Congo in time to witness an ultimately failed uprising, denounced the actions of Belgium in an explicit appeal to common humanity: “A man sows what he reaps. In reality, the state is the true source of these uprisings. It is strange that people who claim to be civilized think they can treat their fellow man—even though he is of a different color—any which way...”<sup>59</sup>

Just a couple years after a protracted public campaign finally led to Belgium removing Leopold from control of the Congo, missionaries met to discuss, among other things, the question of how to best preserve the dignity of the natives of the colonies. The attendees of the World Missionary Conference of 1910 had come to feel that they should be more respectful and wanted to find the best way to do this while also continuing to follow their mandate to minister to all nations. They also discussed their increasingly tenuous relationship with the state and business interests. They wanted a new commercial and Christian order, but found it profoundly

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<sup>59</sup> Adam Hochschild. *King Leopold's Ghost: A Story of Greed, Terror, and Heroism in Colonial Africa*. Houghton Mifflin, 1999. Web. It must be said, though, that the leader of this rebellion, Nzansu, put up a very good fight. His rebels battled Leopold's forces for more than eight months.

difficult to accept the free trade of opiates and alcohol. Yet they still had to be as impartial as possible, lest they be kicked out of the territories they occupied by government consent. While they tried to determine how to address the paradoxes that confronted them, others found that the best way to deal was simply to jettison the kinds of commitments that evangelicals had.

A new generation of activist came on the scene--one inspired by explorers and journalists, who wrote about colonial territories without the lens of business interest or religious mandate. Some of these activists banded together in 1896 called the Liverpool Sect, which touted different ideas that aimed to counter the pernicious universality of British conception of what counted as civilized: relativism and human rights. This emphasis was one way in which they could defend both culture and commerce. They took a decisively anti-missionary stance, as evidenced by one of their members, John Holt: “We have plenty of people trying to get to heaven by looking after the men’s souls in Africa, but very few who take a living interest in their bodily or material welfare--their political and other rights are the least thought of by any.”<sup>60</sup> These new humanitarians slowly threatened to crowd out missionaries as the sole moral voices of what was good for the colonies. But by the second decade of the twentieth century, they found themselves dealing not with non-Europeans abroad, but those within Europe who would be touched by conflict.

The idea of the nobility of war had become passé by the time the Great War engulfed Europe. This was partly due to the writings of Henry Dunant, who witnessed the aftermath of the battle of Solferino in 1859. More than 300,000 soldiers fought in the conflict, which saw the armies of France and Sardinia pitted against Austria. Thousands died and tens of thousands were wounded. Dunant was struck by the sheer scale of suffering, as well as the lack of help, on the

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<sup>60</sup> Quoted in Kevin Grant. *A Civilised Savagery: Britain and the New Slaveries in Africa, 1884-1926*. Routledge; 1 edition, 2004. Web.

battlefield. The severely wounded were left to die. On a tour of severely overtaxed French medical facilities, “it could be seen and realized how dearly bought and how abundantly paid for is that commodity which men pompously call Glory!”<sup>61</sup> Dunant described in heartbreaking detail the toll that war takes on the bodies and minds of all who must witness it and lamented the lack of a larger scale relief effort. He detailed his experience and his vision in *A Memory of Solferino*, which the ICRC would later recognize as its founding document.

Dunant, himself an evangelical, thought the horror of war could be remedied by a corps of volunteers to who could tend to the wounded. An organization from his homeland, the Geneva Society of Public Utility, agreed. He joined the group and together they set about seeing if such a task could be made official. They took the idea to some European states and initially encountered a tepid reception, but, as the conflict in Solferino illustrated, warfare in Europe was changing. New weapons and tactics were making warfare more brutal; the public, was growing more and more skeptical of military offensives.<sup>62</sup> At the same time, states were transitioning from large mercenary forces to standing militaries, a practice that sometimes involved conscription. This practice, of course, fueled the ideology of pacifism. In light of this, some states saw the possible benefit of persuading even those not in the military to come to its aid, overriding pacifist voices. These volunteers would bring provisions to the wounded and those who cared for them. This corps would not be very close to the front lines, but they would be a kind of medical support for the rest of the military, a kind of supplement to its forces. Also, In the performance of this task, they would be protected.

Another attractive element of the proposal from the committee was the notion of the regulation of warfare, at least among Christian nations. It was an idea that had been gaining

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<sup>61</sup> Henry Dunant. *A Memory of Solferino*. Web ed. Geneva: International Committee of the Red Cross Web.

<sup>62</sup> Barnett, 80

traction since the enlightenment, with Kant, Rousseau and de Vattel all suggesting some form of agreement between warring parties that describes acceptable behavior on the battlefield as well as the treatment of captured enemy soldiers. It also outlined the treatment of the volunteer corps, who would be immune from harsh treatment by soldiers on either side of a conflict. To distinguish themselves from the military, they decided, they would mark themselves with a red cross.

By 1864 the Geneva conventions had been signed by twelve European states and the International Committee for the Relief of the Wounded, or, as it later came to be known, the Red Cross, was free to build its numbers in preparation for the horrors of war. The first major nongovernmental organization, it comprised several autonomous societies that worked independently of one another in different countries, though they were bound by the principle of neutrality--no Red Cross society was to show preferential treatment to any side on the battlefield.

It was a mandate that they were not able to fulfill at the outset. In their earliest outings, Red Cross volunteers tended to care only for the wounded of their home countries. In some cases, some relief agencies purposefully skipped over populations that it knew to be suffering.<sup>63</sup> Those who would extend a hand to the wounded of opposing nations were often accused of aiding the enemy. The weight of nationalism was too heavy to be overcome by the spirit of neutrality.

These tensions, however, were cunningly addressed by the British reformer Eglantyne Jebb. She spread leaflets arguing that relief provisions should be mindful, first and foremost, of children.<sup>64</sup> In 1919, Jebb started the Save the Children Fund to address the great suffering that

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<sup>63</sup> Barnett, 83

<sup>64</sup> Jebb was arrested for spreading political tracts. In a fitting example of the spread of this new ideological perspective, she argued in court that her views were not political, but *humanitarian*.

swept Europe in the aftermath of the war. Crop yields were disrupted by conflict and retributory blockades prevent the movement of supplies.

The sheer scope of need in Europe during this period meant that NGOs needed to make adjustments of corresponding size. As Barnett says, “The severity and duration of the war meant that private voluntary agencies had to become bigger and develop the qualities of permanent organizations, with staff, rules, procedures, and headquarters.” At the same time, with mounting public pressure, states became more involved in relief and were quick to see the political benefits of working with NGOs through the post war crisis. They also started their own, specifically state sponsored organizations, like the High Commissioner of Refugees, which was started by the League of Nations, and the International Relief Union. The defining feature of organizations with such a close relationship to the state is that their activity was quickly limited so as not to go against state interests. League of Nation member states, for example, did all they could to stop the expansion of the classification of the refugee, thereby restricting the number of people HCR had a mandate to assist.<sup>65</sup> Meanwhile, more state independent organizations like ICRC began to look beyond European borders to see whether it could be of service in the colonies.<sup>66</sup> Other organizations, like Save the Children, went as far as China in its quest to provide relief for children.

These increases in aid organization activity depended on a particular international order, one in which the citizens of European nations could move freely through the colonial apparatus, which was well practiced at securing the safety of missionaries, its first humanitarians. But this

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<sup>65</sup> Barnett, 89

<sup>66</sup> This is not to say that there were no non-European branches of the Red Cross early on. The Sultan of the Ottoman Empire in 1865 sent notice that it was ready to sign on to the Geneva Conventions. Though, of course, its volunteer society couldn't use a cross and would instead adopt a crescent. Dunant and the rest of the committee didn't think that Muslims would be capable of sharing this vision. Though, later they would theorize that the Red Cross could be one way of bringing civilization to places that, while inferior to Christian nations, still had some measure of advancement. Barnett, 82



colonial framework didn't quite survive the Second World War, and the resulting changes in the international order also forced humanitarianism into some important adjustments.

### **The Age of Neo-Humanitarianism, 1945 to 1989**

Several factors following the end of WWII changed the humanitarian landscape. Europe once again suffered unprecedented destruction, which weakened both its economy and its hold on its colonies. Colonial residents wasted little time taking advantage of this, and a string of liberation struggles were set off across world, most notably on the continent of Africa, with more than thirty countries achieving political independence by 1965. This march of decolonization, unfortunately, led to a new era of neo-colonialism in which former colonial masters maintained certain privileges through means other than direct rule.

Also, in the wake of the war, two new superpowers emerged. The United States and The Soviet Union were powered by opposing political and economic perspectives which incited a period of sustained hostility severely affecting several countries across the world. The war may have been "cold" for the powers that compelled it, but for many other countries and people, for more than five decades, it was simply war.

Decolonization and the cold war created two important conditions for humanitarianism: a fear of insecurity and a bigger world of perceived need. It was into this context that the United Nations was born. The goal of the organization was to preserve world peace, a task with which it would struggle in light of the Cold War, which began just a couple years after the founding of the UN itself. One of the ways that it determined it could preserve peace was to encourage the economic and social stability of states. This meant preserving international public health through

the UN World Health Organization and encouraging food security through the Food and Agriculture Organization and, later, the World Food Program.

This concern for the preservation of peace was shared by the financial sector. By the time the United Nations had become an official entity, representatives from more than forty nations had already met in Bretton Woods, New Hampshire and agreed on the constitution and governance of an international monetary system. This agreement also saw the creation of two institutions: The International Monetary Fund and the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, or, as it later came to be known, the World Bank. It is the name of this last organization that gives us insight into a new focus of humanitarian activity after WWII. If state sponsored and private organizations were to help prevent conflict in places across the world, it would not be enough to provide relief in the event of a disaster. They would have to step beyond *relief*, or as Barnett describes it, “emergency” humanitarianism. Instead, they would have to focus on what Barnett calls “alchemical” humanitarianism, or simply, *development*. Only development could ensure that a society could flourish and be resistant to political disruption.

The first target of these development plans was Europe. The Marshall Plan was a cash injection into the European economy to help it recover from the war. One of the Marshall Plan’s architects, Walt Rostow, would later publish *The Process of Economic Growth: A Non-Communist Manifesto* in which he argued that economic growth comes in stages, beginning with “tradition society” and ending with “economic high consumption.” His theory of modernization was quite influential in the West, though it would come to be criticized heavily by mostly non-western voices.<sup>67</sup>

The first recipients of development aid and relief, here understood as monetary support for economic recovery, were the ravaged countries of Europe in the aftermath of the war. While

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<sup>67</sup> Sarah Bradshaw. *Gender, Development and Disasters*. Northampton: Edward Elgar Pub, 2013. Web.

the IMF and World Bank were not explicitly aid organizations, as Graham Hancock explains, their activity both in Europe and in the global south was inextricably linked with modernization theory. Its loans to what were then called third world nations were often contingent on the recipient nation making changes in its economic policy. The terms of these Structural Adjustment programs would become more severe over the years until the 1990s, when they would wreak havoc on developing nations.

Meanwhile, The American Red Cross, Catholic Relief Services (CRS), and the Cooperative for American Remittances to Europe (CARE) all mounted publically supported relief campaigns, with the monetary support of the United States government. Each of these organizations had a history of providing relief only to wartime allies. In keeping with the growing conception of humanity, CARE was among the first to break that pattern, though it had some internal struggles doing so.

It was not clear whether CARE would be successful at all. Its architect and co-founder, WWI veteran Arthur Ringland came up with the idea while working with the War Relief Control Board. He encountered a crowded field of relief organizations that were unsympathetic to having another player that would compete for funding, even one with the modest goal of sending packages from Americans to families in Europe. Some claimed that such packages were already being sent by the United Nations Relief and Rehabilitation Administration. Ringland disagreed. He felt that no agency was properly prioritizing who it was that should receive aid. In his view, most were simply supplying allies.

He eventually found support for CARE by getting officials from several agencies to agree to run the program together as a kind of co-op that could operate without fear of lost funding due to competition. Predictably, all of these voices in the mix made it difficult for the group to settle

on a core approach or even agree on the content of the care packages. CARE did not send its first package for many months after its formation. However, after a very successful advertisement campaign, in which it secured an endorsement from no less than President Hoover himself, they began to supply Europe.

These packages were paid for and sometimes packed by donors and volunteers. Donors were supposed to specify who was to receive the package that they paid for. However, many neglected to do this, opting instead to send blank checks. Sometimes donors would not even specify a recipient country. Those within CARE who shared Ringland's philosophy made sure to not issue media correctives on this practice; this allowed them to send packages to those it thought were the most needy, as opposed to those who had connections in the United States. Others in the organization were not comfortable with this. The issue came before the board, which took a vote as to whether to send blank checks back to their senders. At first, the board elected to send the checks back. Weeks later, after a small period of organizational attrition however, they voted again. Ringland's team finally won out. Most remaining board members who also worked for religious organizations, like Catholic Relief Services, resigned in protest. This was actually beneficial to CARE, as it was now able to tout its apolitical nature more forcefully. Religion and politics, it seemed to the remaining board members, no longer had a strong hold on the CARE package. This claim to political or religious neutrality did not hold for many other organizations. For every organization like Oxfam, which openly argued that even enemies of the state were deserving of relief when they suffered, other organizations carried through with de facto support of state powers.

In the war in Vietnam, for example, CRS worked more closely with the government than it initially let on. CRS, which was generously sponsored by the United States, had always

complimented US foreign policy in its work. But an exposé done by a journalist for a Catholic news organization changed things. Michael Novak of the National Catholic Reporter revealed, in a series of articles, the organization's activity, including the allegation that the CRS deliberately undersupplied non-Catholic refugees in the conflict, diverting those provisions to their US allies in the Popular Forces militia.<sup>68</sup> CRS tried to justify itself by saying that it was only these forces who could provide protection for the organization to do its work, but it lost the battle of public opinion, especially among Catholics in the West. Two decades after Novak's articles, one CRS president would remark: "The war in Vietnam produced many casualties at home and in the rice paddies, and one of them was the notion that political and humanitarian goals could be uniformly pursued in harmony."<sup>69</sup>

The conditions of the Cold War made it such that many volunteer organizations and charities could not focus on long term development projects; there was just too much emergency need. But the landscape changed once again after the great "thaw" and the onset of governmental reforms across the world.

### **Liberal Humanitarianism, 1989-Present**

The end of the Cold War ushered in what many thought was to be a new era of peace. The dissolution of the Eastern Bloc brought democratic reforms in parts of the world that had not previously known them, and western markets soon followed. Despite a general optimism felt after the crumbling of the Berlin Wall, many nations soon encountered a host of new challenges.

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<sup>68</sup> Scott Flipse. "The Latest Casualty of War: Catholic Relief Services, Humanitarianism, and the War in Vietnam, 1967–1968." *Peace & Change* 27.2 (2002): 245-70. Print.

<sup>69</sup> Quoted in Barnett, 149

These challenges are the result of what Barnett calls the breakup of the “coalition of the status quo.”<sup>70</sup>

It turned out that the Cold War had a kind of stabilizing effect on many “third world” nations. The United States and Russia had paid a great deal for their complicity in the each country’s machinations. Often, nations that received support distributed those resources through corrupt means, keeping much of the wealth for themselves and using the rest to silent any forces of opposition. Now that the superpowers that supported these allies were gone, the vacuum of support led to new security issues. New crises were not crises between states, or between the proxies of states, but within states. States were faced with civil wars, ethnic cleansing, coups, agricultural disasters, floods of refugees or internally displaced persons--this was the age of the “complex” emergency.

In response to this, in the late 1980s the United Nations took up the question of security in a more unprecedented way; it looked for ways to address crises before they even occurred. The fears of insecurity that had motivated the creation of the UN were now becoming a much bigger reality. The UN believed that a stable world order depended on stable states. The UN Security Council expanded its powers, establishing peacekeeping forces and official observers. They also became more receptive to the idea of military intervention for “humanitarian” reasons.<sup>71</sup>

Bretton Woods financial institutions also attempted to bring about this stability, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa, whose governments were beset by financial problems in the 80s. They introduced a version of their structural adjustment loans to struggling nations, which promised money in return for changes in their economic policy. These terms included cuts in

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<sup>70</sup> Barnett, 162.

<sup>71</sup> D. M. Malone. "The UN Security Council in the Post-Cold War World: 1987-97." *Security Dialogue* 28.4 (1997)394 Print.

government spending, especially education and health care, reductions in wages, the elimination of food subsidies, and the privatization of public works. These loan terms, which struggling countries had very little choice but to accept, were set with almost no regard for the specific contexts and struggles of the nations that accepted them. The results were, and continue to be, disastrous all around for the lower classes of every affected nation, an outcome which should have been obvious, says Graham Hancock:

“it is ... hardly surprising that the concerns and wellbeing of the poor, together with their energies, their enterprise and their potential, get ignored in the ‘adjustment process’. Such an outcome is inevitable in a system that allows policy reforms to be concocted by well-heeled stranger in collusion with the local elite: neither of these two groups has any direct experience of poverty.”<sup>72</sup>

The UN Security Council, the IMF and the World Bank all point to what Barnett sees as the growing dominance of liberalism in world economic and political affairs, with its “emphasis on the importance of markets, democracy and human rights for curing states of their ills and creating more peaceful and progressive societies.”<sup>73</sup> This form of liberalism was just as invasive as the paternalistic impulses that propelled western humanitarians out into the rest of world in eras past.

The new language of “liberal peacebuilding” was that of rights. “Rights talk seeped into every nook and cranny of world affairs,” exclaims Barnett.<sup>74</sup> In a world rendered more connected by the forces of globalization, talk of human rights extended past political rights, like liberty, to the civil and economic rights. Some organizations, like the United Nations Development Programme, even spoke of a right to development itself.<sup>75</sup> Aid organizations the world over were coming around to the notion that if relief, which many of them had been practicing, is to be

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<sup>72</sup> Graham Hancock. *The Lords of Poverty: The Power, Prestige, and Corruption of the International Aid Business*. New York: Atlantic Monthly Press, 1994. Web.

<sup>73</sup> Barnett, 164.

<sup>74</sup> Barnett, 167.

<sup>75</sup> Barnett, 167.

effective, it must be connected to development. The UN Secretary-General made this connection in 1992, arguing that since it is poor development that makes relief necessary in the first place, more organizations should focus on development. It was also in 1992 that the UN strengthened its own humanitarian powers, creating the Department of Humanitarian Affairs.

In this climate, non-state sponsored organizations began to flirt once again with the prospect of whether one can be political, as one often has to be while working in development, and still engage in aid work. Most veteran aid workers today consider this question, along with the events in the 1990s where it was brought to the forefront of humanitarian discourse, to be the great identity crisis of humanitarianism.<sup>76</sup> The events in question were the conflicts of Somalia, Bosnia, Rwanda and Kosovo. We will look at one incident illustrating the difficulty of maintaining neutrality and independence in the course of providing aid, which also shows how relief work gave way to development work.<sup>77</sup>

The Guerilla war in Somalia was fought largely by clans or militias, not internationally recognized armies. These clans also were not particularly quick to recognize the neutrality of relief organizations like Medecins Sans Frontieres, a kind of medical offshoot of the French Red Cross. In order to travel safely through the country to provide medical relief, the MSF paid for protection from local clans; this was the only way they could safely distribute care. It was a perilous safety, because as soon as a relief group would pay a clan, other clans would claim that the group was no longer neutral and tensions would be high. However, aid workers could often still operate, because as as one MSF worker put it, “if we get shot, then the NGOs leave, and

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<sup>76</sup> They are not quite right about this. Our investigation so far reveals that this is yet another manifestation of fundamental tensions that are always at play in western humanitarianism.

<sup>77</sup> For an exhaustive description of the problems of humanitarianism in the midst of conflict, see David Rieff. *A Bed for the Night : Humanitarianism in Crisis*. New York: New York : Simon & Schuster, 2002. Print.



there's nobody left to pay protection money or salaries.”<sup>78</sup> Meanwhile, the militias were taking big cuts, not just of money, but also of supplies. The MSF and other NGOs operating in the region, then, were indirectly supporting the conflict.

Problems like this led many NGOs to advocate along with human rights advocates and UN officials for military intervention. After five workers for CARE, whose operation had long since included many more activities than CARE packages, were killed in a gunfight over a dispute about protection money, the organization's president started a public campaign urging the UN to provide armed guards for NGOs. In 1992 the UN Security Council complied, but the plan backfired. Clans became much more hostile to aid groups and the Somali state took offense to the armed presence. Other groups that were still relying on Somali armed support could no longer do so safely. Long before the conflict ended, the MSF withdrew, but not before the UN protection plan led to more NGO related conflict.

In the complex emergency of Somalia, NGO neutrality was simply not tenable. The principle raised different problems elsewhere. In the aftermath of the genocide in Rwanda and its many humanitarian failures, the many NGOs that had been in the country when the fighting broke out wondered why they did not see the trouble coming. Some concluded that neutrality, for many working on the ground, amounted to a kind of political ignorance. By shutting out the political world and just focusing on “the work,” they rendered themselves blind to the coming storm, and their work ultimately pointless.

Considerations of NGO activity in troubled nations made many neutral relief-based organizations reconsider their neutrality and become more mindful of social justice. It was clear now that neutrality and independence, did not negate the often political effects of their actions. It was at this time that NGOs that were largely involved in relief became overtly political, and new

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<sup>78</sup> Quoted in Barnett, 173.

political NGOs were founded. Their willingness to engage politically manifested in their shift to development work. The new task was no longer to just provide a “bed for the night,” it was to eliminate altogether the need for temporary shelter.

In keeping with the narrative of wanting to create stable states, NGOs began to monitor elections, develop media and journalism programs, encourage cultural tolerance and rebuild government administrations. A new generation of donors, who had seen several crises unfold in near real time on their televisions, provided a great deal of support. The 1990s also saw a rise in human rights organizations, which are distinct from humanitarian organizations in that their goal is to exert pressure on governments to cease their abuses, not to work with communities to help them meet material or social needs. Even though humanitarian organizations did not spend their time and resources documenting and publicly shaming governments or regimes, they did adopt much of the language of rights, and media tactics of rights organizations, in their activities. Barnett sees the renewed focus on development, the language of rights, and the growing desire of humanitarian groups to do more as a kind of mission creep, very similar to the aftermath of WWII when relief agencies turned to projects of reconstruction. Starting in the late 1990s, he says, relief and development organizations were “tunneling toward each other.”<sup>79</sup>

One example of this transition is CARE International. Have changed the meaning of its acronym from the Cooperative for American Remittances to Europe to the Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere, it expanded from its original post war mandate to provide CARE packages to being a much larger scale relief organization, with most of its sponsorship coming from America. In the 1990s, CARE, like most aid organizations, went in search of more diverse sources of funding. It also tried to find a way to deal with its dissatisfied staff. Over the

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<sup>79</sup> Barnett, 197

course of its operation, CARE relief workers began to doubt whether they were working for an organization with effective policies.

Many relief workers saw the aftermath of complex emergencies, when those affected tried to get back to regular life. As near as they could tell, the everyday lives of the people for whom they provided relief were quite miserable. Even if CARE was able to address a food crisis, they had not done much for the economic or political system in which people found themselves. The food crisis was, often, just a symptom of a more complex problem. This was especially disheartening for CARE, as it had some experience with development programs--it had been working in development shortly after the rise of development theory in the 70s.

However, CARE's base assumptions about the nature of poverty were turning out to be wrong. They had previously focused on households and believed that poverty was simply an absence of basic goods, like clean water and stable agriculture. It became evident to them over time that in fact, the environments in which the households appeared had to be considered. This more holistic approach involved articulations of poverty and human rights. They then began to think in terms of a "relief-rights-development continuum."<sup>80</sup> CARE had changed from its inception as "apolitical service delivery" to a development organization that uses the language of rights to fight *holistically* against poverty long after the relief crisis in the target community has ended.

Now, in the course of embracing new languages of articulation, and expanding their donor bases, aid agencies like CARE accumulated more power. It became apparent that, with this accumulation of power, already foreshadowed by their increasing professionalism in decades prior, they were "losing touch" with target communities. Just as the World Bank offered up loan conditions that were drafted by distant experts ultimately ignorant of the spaces where their

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<sup>80</sup> Barnett, 200

terms would apply, development projects were increasingly decided on by NGO boards, without input from aid workers in the field. Unlike in past eras, where this paternalism moved fully unchecked, many aid organizations took notice of this and made efforts to correct it. One such corrective effort was participatory development. Participatory development involves surveying affected communities, taking stock of their needs and wishes, before going through with a development project. The idea had roots in radical development theory, though it very quickly devolved into yet another, more hidden, expression of paternalism.<sup>81</sup> The power of the expert continues to have a complicated relationship with “the will of the people.”

This simple articulation of the problem of participation can easily be used to describe a fundamental problem with modern western humanitarianism. That is, in the age of globalization and liberalism, in which humanitarian organizations are often large scale professional enterprises, awareness of classic structural or ideological problems is no guarantee of unproblematic work. But there is a large swath of humanitarian workers and supporters for whom critical awareness is a distant specter, and their ignorance is made possible by discourses of humanitarianism and a silent partner that is well worth addressing. Let us now examine the role of mass media in the construction of western humanitarianism.

### **A Return to Sensibility and the Rise of Mass Media**

Kevin Rozario recounts a stark example of the importance of the mastery of mass media for humanitarian organizations.<sup>82</sup> In 1917, American Red Cross representative Robert H. Scott

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<sup>81</sup> Cooke and Kothari, eds. *Participation: The New Tyranny?* London: Zed Books, 2001. Print. One reviewer of this work summarizes the problem thusly: “improved methodologies and techniques are unlikely to overcome the structurally asymmetrical power relationships between donors, usually Western, and those in the developing world they seek to aid.”

<sup>82</sup> 18/07/2009 19:40 Accessed.: *"Delicious Horrors": Mass Culture, the Red Cross, and the Appeal of Modern American Humanitarianism* Author(s): Kevin Rozario Source: *American Quarterly*, Vol. 55, No. 3 (Sep., 2003), pp.

braved the cold of Seward Alaska in an effort to start a new chapter among the city's residents. The United States was five years into the Great War, and the needs of the wounded and displaced in Europe were still mounting. Scott found a crowd at a local movie house and resolved to convince them of the value of the Red Cross. In front of the silver screen, he gave a most impassioned plea, vividly describing the suffering and horror of the war. The audience, however, was not impressed. He left the theater in doubt as to whether he could muster enough support for a Seward chapter of the Red Cross. They were unmoved by his appeal, he realized, because the movie they had watched beforehand, one full of "melodramatic atrocity," made his own tales seem tame by comparison. It was a problem that the Red Cross had been having, and one for which they only saw one solution: make their own melodramatically atrocious films.

Rozario follows his description of Scott's struggle in Alaska with the claim that "modern 'humanitarianism' is in fact a *creation* of a sensationalistic mass culture."<sup>83</sup> I think that position might be too strong, but the motivation for it is certainly understandable. While I have no special interest in defending his thesis, I do want to show that, while humanitarianism would not be able to be what it currently is without its adept use of mass media, including advertising, psychological research, and internet age viral marketing, it is also the case that the mechanisms of mass media have helped constitute some humanitarian practices.

In order to get the diverse funding they need to operate on sufficient scales without the challenges of government sponsorship, aid agencies have to pierce through public discourse with narratives that are not just true, but *effective*. As the troubles of Robert Scott show, humanitarians are not only in competition with each other for support, they are in competition with potentially anything that vies for the attention and money of the public, especially those things that utilize

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417-455 Published by: The Johns Hopkins University Press Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/30041983>. 55 Vol. Web.

<sup>83</sup> Rozario. 418.

similar narratives or images. This means humanitarians who depend on public or private donors for support have to be in the vanguard of fundraising tactics. We can see all of these things with an elaboration of Rozario's argument, which is focused on the Red Cross and its media depictions.

We have already observed the links between humanitarianism and the cult of sensibility. It was sensibility that formed at least one of the many explosions which made up the humanitarian "big bang". The continuing development of mass media, however, has changed the way that the "delicious horrors" have to be presented. As early as 1921, the American Red Cross realized the images of suffering which went out on their mailers were not having the effect that they used to have. "Tragic photographs of starved children and skeleton babies fail now to bring the response which could have been counted on a few years ago," wrote noted humanitarian and social reformer Lilian Brandt in her book, *How much Shall I Give?*<sup>84</sup> The culprit seemed to her to be compassion fatigue. An excess of images of suffering had saturated American consciousness, no longer bringing about the shocked moral response humanitarians had learned to transform into donations. In truth, it was a worry as old as the cult of sensibility itself, but here, it seemed to be quantifiable. Potential donors were consumers of media content, and as Sontag stated, "They need to be stimulated, jump-started, again and again. Content is no more than one of these stimulants."<sup>85</sup> Reliance on a pornographic or prurient interest in pain and suffering eventually leads to diminished returns.

Nevertheless, the Red Cross, along with other organizations who depended on donations, knew they had to somehow make their appeals even more vivid, or issue them more strategically. To find a better way, they did what advertisers of the time were doing--they turned to

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<sup>84</sup> Quoted in Rozario, 420.

<sup>85</sup> Susan Sontag 1933-2004. *Regarding the pain of others*. 1st ed.. ed. New York: New York : Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003. Print.

psychology. Psychologists in the twentieth century espoused views of the human mind contrary to those set forth by John Smith and the Earl of Shaftesbury. Instead of seeing rational reflection built upon natural sympathies, they postulated that human beings were largely constituted by non-rational impulses, and were thus susceptible to emotional manipulation. Those in control of the American Red Cross Magazine began to think not in terms of addressing rational sympathetic agents, but of creating depictions to achieve particular results. Lilian Brandt expresses this change of perspective herself, in her review of commercial enterprises that also need to reach people:

It is, however, as was natural, from the point of view of the agency which needs the money, not from the contributor's point of view: how to "appeal" in such way as to be appealing; how to attract the attention of those who can give and then hold it long enough to stimulate a response; how most effectively to reach and set in motion the springs to benevolent action. The contributor becomes a psychological problem.<sup>86</sup>

Brandt thought that philanthropic organizations had for too long ignored this aspect of fundraising and called for wholesale changes to the fundraising enterprise. These kinds of changes were indeed reflected in the activity of the Red Cross, which was in danger of being left behind by the new propaganda techniques deployed by the government and by Hollywood to gain support for the Great War.

During this time, says Rozario, "it was not easy to distinguish between the imperatives of patriotism and humanitarianism." In 1917 Woodrow Wilson established the Committee on Public Information, which was described by its chairman as "the world's greatest adventure in advertising."<sup>87</sup> The CPI oversaw a massive propaganda campaign including the screening of D.W. Griffith's *The Hearts of the World*, a film which differed from his earlier *Birth of a Nation*

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<sup>86</sup> Lilian Brandt. *How Much Shall I Give?* New York: The Frontier Press, 1921. Print.

<sup>87</sup> Rozario, 430.

in that its villains were Germans instead of African American men. The film was so violent that it was censored in New York, but the drama of the depictions helped raise enlistment nationwide.

Rozario says films like this helped erode Victorian perspectives toward seeing violence. Comparatively modest advertising efforts, like the American Red Cross Magazine, also had to up the ante with regard to its content. In 1914, it had already mastered what we should perhaps call the *empathy cue*, in which the reader is invited to think about what things would be like if the reader were the suffering subject described in the story. These cues would be followed by increasingly sensational descriptions of wartime suffering.<sup>88</sup> Readers did not look away. Rozario thinks there is little coincidence in the similarity of descriptive writing of the Magazine and the then burgeoning genre of pulp fiction. Upper class people who would not want to be seen reading “trashy” novels could be enthralled by the same kinds of tales, but maintain their moral superiority.

By 1917, the Magazine had adopted quite fully the language of the pulps, asking listeners in mailers:

Do you like stories--*real* stories--*true* stories--stories of heroism, stories of sacrifice, stories of humane effort? And do you like pictures, plenty of them and good ones? ... There are many intensely interesting, even thrilling and entertaining articles scheduled to appear in the Red Cross Magazine during the year...<sup>89</sup>

The magazine, which by this time had more than one millions subscribers, also reached out to businesses and sold them advertisement space. They directly implored their readers to purchase from the companies and brands whose advertisements they ran. “Thus,” Rozario says, “even as

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<sup>88</sup> Rozario offers a quote from American Red Cross magazine to illustrate: “One special agent of the American Red Cross, for example, told of coming upon hundreds of bodies stacked like cordwood along the sidewalk of a Mexican village. The semi-tropical sun blazed down upon these squares of human flesh relentlessly, and from the stacks of bodies blood ran in rivulets to the gutter. In passing these gruesome heaps, which were soon to be burned, he heard moans coming from them. He overturned certain of the piles and rescued living but badly wounded men-soldiers who probably had been unconscious and had seemed dead when thrown upon the sacks, -and in some cases saved their lives. Conditions like that, and worse, are encountered by the relief workers of the Red Cross.”

<sup>89</sup> Quoted in Rozario, 436.



political leaders were calling upon Americans to make wartime sacrifices, this humanitarian journal was equating acts of consumption with acts of virtue.”<sup>90</sup>

Rozario expresses doubts as to whether a humanitarian organization, from the rise of mass media in the beginning of the twentieth century into the present, can sustain successful campaigns without becoming sensationalistic and offering those who bear witness a vivid depiction of suffering intended to shock a desensitized consciousness. It is an issue taken by some organizations presently, like Oxfam’s promise to not appeal to its donors with photography intended to evoke emotional responses. “But even this mailing,” he says, “surely depends in part on the phantom spectacles of suffering that are conjured up imaginatively even as they are renounced rhetorically...”<sup>91</sup> Humanitarian organizations, on this score, cannot escape the ways in which they have engaged in mass media--so long as they depend on donors, they will have to use the established, sensational vocabulary of appeal, or, as we will see in the case of Invisible Children, introduce new terms into that vocabulary to rise above all other narratives.

It is important to note, however, that perfecting the art of the appeal has another important consequence, aside from contributing to a world in which depictions of suffering offer perverse titillation to possible donors. Advancement in the development of strategic media tactics, especially those in step with fictional depictions, creates the incentive for humanitarian appeals that do not ethically represent humanitarian practices. For a professionalized humanitarian organization, fundraising becomes a necessity not just for the particular tragedy for which they are attempting to provide relief, but for the maintenance of the organization itself. Conditions become perfect for a representational disjunct between the activity of the organization and its persona in mailers, movies and magazines. This has been a fundamental

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<sup>90</sup> Rozario, 437. We see here the roots of the modern phenomenon of “cause branding.”

<sup>91</sup> Rozario, 443.

problem for humanitarianism for quite some time, though often organizations do not experience as much backlash as, say a private business that uses deceptive marketing. This is because humanitarian work itself carries a kind of presumption of self-evident goodness that often puts it above critical suspicion. When NGO advertising practices are exposed as false, it very often is kept internal to the field, or “blows up”, as in the case of the American Red Cross’s initiatives in post-earthquake Haiti.<sup>92</sup>

The split between critical and uncritical aid work is also informed by the disunities of media representation. I intend to show how public appeals for support depend on particular narratives, especially about Africa, which create an expectation of resemblance that has a coercive effect on the communities some NGOs reach. Before showing this, however, I wish to make clear the interpretive scheme I will deploy in my criticism. That scheme will be inspired by the work of G.W.F. Hegel, to whom I now turn.

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<sup>92</sup> How the Red Cross Raised Half a Billion Dollars for Haiti -and Built Six Homes – Pro Publica, June 3 2015, <<https://www.propublica.org/article/how-the-red-cross-raised-half-a-billion-dollars-for-haiti-and-built-6-homes>>.

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## **CHAPTER TWO: HEGEL'S DIALECTIC**

Western Humanitarianism was seeded by a sweeping change in perspective regarding the necessity and acceptability of human suffering. These changes made “compassion across borders” widely thinkable and then commonplace. They also gave rise to different kinds of humanitarianism, in terms of both forms of practice and ideological motivations. Some of these ideologies have drawn more criticism than others, particularly those which have been termed “white saviorism” or “voluntourism.” I think these strands of humanitarianism are fundamentally cut off from elements of humanitarian history and thought which would encourage critical engagement with target communities, development theory, and the “home office”. In short, humanitarian discourses are curiously resistant to the merger of horizons touted by students of Gadamer and dialogic studies. Much like the rest of humanitarianism, these uncritical or naive resistant forms of the practice are the result of a certain kind of humanitarian perspective, an ideology. It is this ideology I want to examine in a way that can help change its more problematic elements.

As I see it, uncritical humanitarianism is durable, that is, it is an ideology that is highly resistant to change, largely deaf to criticism. It is also quite popular. I have seen firsthand that criticisms leveled against what many critical aid workers simply call “bad aid” are often sound, but fail to motivate uncritical aid workers to adopt critical perspectives. I believe this is because the critical aid worker does not have a sufficient model for thinking about the unique requirements of engagement with uncritical aid workers. They prefer direct criticisms and uses of

satire, invitations of dialogue, what Hegel might call “counter assertions.” I think that these are less effective than some possible alternatives. To make sense of such alternatives, I want to clarify the nature of the ideology of the uncritical aid worker, or at the very least, to establish an interpretive model that speaks to the seeming obtuseness of this perspective and the culture that sustains it. I think the philosophy of G.W.F. Hegel is a good source for such an interpretive framework, specifically the *Phenomenology of Spirit*.

Many philosophers continue to find Hegel compelling, and all must determine, as Croce said long ago, what is living and what is dead in Hegel’s philosophy. Or, as Zizek puts it, we must determine whether it is still possible to be a Hegelian. It seems to me unwise to ever declare a philosopher down for the count, but I am not interested in reviving or championing anything close to the totality of Hegel’s thought. His comments on Africa’s history, or lack thereof, alone are proof that his work should be approached with as much hesitation as interest. I do not wish to follow a set of proclamations about the end of history. Nor do I wish to push the view of Hegel as a thinker of a system so complete that nothing can lie outside of it. I have one primary interest I think warrants my foray into the *Phenomenology*.

Hegel does in fact offer an enlightening, if challenging, way of thinking through historical events, conflicts, and practices, all of which he sees as manifestations of particular types of thinking. He is also adept at describing how types of thinking change and revise themselves, all of which happens for him in ways that are unrelated to encounters with alternative perspectives. It seems to me that elements of this framework are worth considering in my search for ways of engaging a perspective that is resistant to revision. Thus, I think it is well worth reading Hegel as a thinker of transformation. I wish to explore how perspectives break down and emerge anew, with the hope I can help engineer ways for the uncritical aid perspective

to break down and become a more critical perspective. In this chapter I will discuss ideas from the *Phenomenology* which are relevant for the description and criticism of Charitable Consciousness. The principle commenter of Hegel I have recruited for this task is Terry Pinkard, whose unpublished translation of Hegel is by far the best in the English language.

### **Phenomenology: Overview**

The *Phenomenology* was originally titled, briefly, the *Science of the Experience of Consciousness*. An early advertisement for it, written by Hegel, said the book was about the “coming to be of knowledge.”<sup>93</sup> As an attempt to resolve the age old problem of skepticism in the theory of knowledge, it differs notably from previous attempts in western philosophy (save for Kant, so some extent) for its taking the phenomenological turn, looking not at the nature of objects and how our claims match up to them, but at what human consciousness must be like at a given moment such that objects show up in the kinds of ways that they do in the first place, and how it is that we can make claims about them.

For Hegel, the problem of knowledge was never framed properly. It was seen as a problem coming mainly from a field of competing knowledge claims that find their way to resolution, or not, through some kind of conflict. The problem, of course, is that competing knowledge claims do not have a way to resolve themselves in a manner which allows for there to be a single “victor,” because not only do the knowledge claims differ with regard to the content of their propositions, but they also appeal to different criterion of justification for their authority. For Hegel, different claims which appeal to different criterion for their validity cannot be resolved in any meaningful way, as the opposing parties would have to relent the very criteria for

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<sup>93</sup> News Sheets for the Jena Journal of General Literature, October 28, 1807



knowledge that makes it possible for them to make any claims whatsoever.<sup>94</sup> However, the perspective from which one self-conscious knowledge claimer makes his claims could itself change because of the ways in which his claims about the world are revealed to be flawed by evidence from his own experience. That is, contradictions in the ways the knower experiences what he knows might lead to a new perspective, one with new criterion. The process of failure and recovery brings about a change in knowledge, which, as Hegel sees it, is a kind of *relationship* between knower and known. Given *time*, then, this relationship changes how the knower knows himself as well as how the knower knows the known. This process of change is how knowledge claims are altered; including the knowledge claims which profess to be skeptical about knowledge claims themselves.

In thinking of the problem of knowledge as one moment in a development of human consciousness, Hegel introduces history into the process of making knowledge claims. Knowledge claims, from his view, are a kind of historical phenomenon. Competing knowledge claims do not so much fight with each other as struggle to ground themselves in ways which do not generate problems that require rethinking or generating new, different knowledge claims and justificatory criteria. For Hegel, the account of knowledge that, after a long process of failure and reformulation, manages to justify itself without seeding its own failure would be a true *Wissenschaft*. This "system of science" would not only be of consequence for philosophers, but as human consciousness is a product of human interaction, of culture, art, religion and scientific inquiry and philosophy, could influence change for the better in all aspects of society. Because these aspects of society help to constitute the human subject and its capacity to know, relevant aspects of the process of sufficiently grounding knowledge, such as the normativity of inferences, would have to be reflected in them as well. A properly grounded account would then

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<sup>94</sup> One need only think of the well-publicized debate between scientist Bill Nye and Creationist Ken Ham.

be a part of a kind of universal human subjectivity, something in which most sufficiently connected human beings would participate, since most of them, by virtue of being historical beings, played some role in the construction of this ultimate self-grounding account.

Alongside this fully developed human subjectivity, there may still be particular individuals who do not connect to it, those in whom these perspectives are only “present in intermingled traits.”<sup>95</sup> Thus, for Hegel, a crowded field of knowledge claims is a field of opportunities for development toward a comprehensive theory of knowledge that changes the movement of humanity as much as it does the mind of the philosopher in his armchair. The process of failure and reformulation that moves the development of mere knowledge claims into true knowledge is, of course, the dialectic.

The *Phenomenology of Spirit* is an explication of the dialectical development of human consciousness across European history, exploring the ways the dialectic comes to bear on all aspects of human life, especially reason, religion and the all encompassing culture. In the “story” of the *Phenomenology*, Hegel considers himself and the reader to be a sufficient vantage point in the process, whereby we can look back at aspects of development when self-consciousness did not “know” what it was doing, or how its failures of perspective would lead to new perspectives. The dusk of sufficient cultural development has made it possible for owls like Hegel and his audience to fly. Since this process is something that we can see fully, Hegel is able to determine just *how* it was that one perspective led to another. The intricate detail of the transformation informs us as to the “rationality” of the movement, showing us that it conformed to a determinable subjective and objective processes.

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<sup>95</sup>G. W. F. Hegel. *Phenomenology of Spirit*. Tran. Terry Pinkard. Print. §28. [All citations of the *Phenomenology* will refer to sections (§) instead of numbers.]

Within the pages of the *Phenomenology*, we find quite a few concepts to aid our overall criticism of humanitarianism. The primary concepts under consideration are the dialectic and the notion of knowledge claims, or the perspectives from which they are made as “shapes of consciousness.” Connected to these are particular moments in which the dialectic plays out, illustrating its movement and the consequences this movement has for cultural institutions, consequences that exist mostly at the level of civil society, like NGOs. The most useful of these, I believe, is the life or death struggle for recognition (with its subsequent failure), and the shift of ancient Greek society from immediate to mediated ethical life through the play *Antigone*. I will now examine these moments, and consider the context in which they appear.

### **The Dialectic and Shapes of Consciousness**

The opening chapters of the *Phenomenology* are concerned with what Hegel sees as the absolute ground of his project, the immediacy of consciousness. These chapters set the stage for the emergence of self-consciousness, the historical subjectivity that is followed in different ways throughout the rest of the *Phenomenology*. They also provide our first glimpse into the movement of the dialectic and the ways in which consciousness is compelled to follow where its dialectical development leads. While we do not need to dwell on the fine details of what are easily the *Phenomenology*'s most difficult passages, we will look at one example to seed our understanding of the dialectic.

The first mode of consciousness is Sense-Certainty. This is square one for consciousness, the equivalent of Hobbes' state of nature for his political theory, a supposedly presuppositionless starting point. Consciousness is understood by Hegel to take certain forms or shapes, that is, to have particular perspectives in which it takes some things but not others to be its *essence*, or as

Pinkard calls it, its “authoritative reasons for belief and action.”<sup>96</sup> The form of consciousness called sense-certainty is characterized by its immediacy, the fact that it is not aware of a distinction between itself and the objects of its perception. It is a “natural awareness of things in the world.”<sup>97</sup> From the viewpoint of the philosopher, which we share with Hegel, there is not yet awareness of any distinction between knower and known. It simply knows what it knows, hence, it has “immediate” experience of its world. In its immediacy, it apprehends the world but does not comprehend it.<sup>98</sup> As such, sense-certainty does not really take *anything* as its essence per se, aside from its presupposition of direct acquaintance with the objects of its perception, which it does not distinguish from itself. The trouble for sense-certainty comes, however, when the objects of its direct acquaintance reveal themselves to be unstable in a way which produces doubt about whether directness was ever even possible. Hegel describes the process by describing what things must be like for this shape of consciousness. It experiences its world as a kind of this-ness. That is, the world is *this, here, now*.<sup>99</sup> Unable to describe the properties of things, since this would presuppose a level of mediation that sense-certainty does not have, it simply expresses its world with the use of these indexicals.<sup>100</sup> The content of the *here and now*, however, is constantly changing. *Now* at one point might be day, and at another, night. However,

Because of the way in which the objects of sense-certainty vary, Hegel's point is that the use of demonstratives ("this," "here," and "now") share with the use of singular descriptive reference (such as "the cat in the hat") the features of being mediated by

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<sup>96</sup>Terry Pinkard. *Hegel's Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. Web. Variations of this phrase will appear quite often in the rest of this chapter.

<sup>97</sup> Pinkard, 23

<sup>98</sup> Hegel, §90. All footnotes beginning with the “§” symbol refer to paragraphs from the Phenomenology. Quotes are from Pinkard’s translation which, to date, is available on his web site. <http://terrypinkard.weebly.com/index.html>

<sup>99</sup> Hegel, §95

<sup>100</sup> Terry Pinkard. *Hegel's Phenomenology: The Sociality of Reason*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996. 25. Web.

"universals" - that is, being linked up with other sets of descriptions and therefore being forms of mediate knowledge.<sup>101</sup>

sense-certainty cannot maintain its perspective on the world because the supposedly pure form of awareness, its "this-ness", turns out to in fact necessitate the distinction between the "I" and the object, which are mediated by the ideal, or the universal. That is, sense-certainty realizes that it never possessed the direct awareness that it thought that it had. Insofar as sense-certainty has failed to fulfill itself on its own terms, the consciousness that subscribes to it must now adopt a new form. Hegel calls this new form, "perception," which is characterized by the awareness of things and their properties.

The brief saga of sense-certainty reveals to us some of the working of the dialectic. Sense-certainty experienced itself as fully justified in its direct awareness, but was brought up short by its own articulations of this supposed directness. It then learned it never had what it thought that it had, which it could only come to realize through its own activity. The terms according to which sense-certainty existed produced their own *negation*. That is, the very supposition of its own terms of justification contained both their own limits and the means to overcome those limits. A shape of consciousness, then, generates its own negativity and the result of its reckoning with that negativity is a change in perspective. This change in perspective itself changes consciousness, the object of its perception, and the way it relates to the object of its perception. Hegel stresses in the preface to the *Phenomenology* that the consciousness progresses, not because of the counter assertions of other shapes of consciousness, but because of the internal failure of a shape of consciousness to make good on the terms that it sets for itself.<sup>102</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Pinkard, 26

<sup>102</sup> Hegel, §24

Now, it is not completely given what new knowledge claims will accompany a particular shift in perspective. Although its content cannot be exactly predicted by the phenomenologist, in looking back at the dialectical development of consciousness, we are able to determine how it was that one form led to another. In this way, it is possible for us to say that these transitions were “rational.”

### **Self-Consciousness, Self-Certainty and Recognition**

Consciousness experiences two more movements in the *Phenomenology* before its self-undermining skepticism reveals its own self as an object of reflection. The failures of Sense-Certainty led to Perception, in which consciousness had a mediated awareness of its objects. But Perception encountered its own flaws, which revealed what it thought was a mediated awareness of objects was really the awareness of the representations of those objects.

As such, consciousness could not make sense of its perceptions without positing some background force that consciousness itself could not perceive, to account for the unity and continuity of the representations that it apprehended. Hegel called this shape of consciousness the Understanding. However, the supersensible force that consciousness posited to account for its experience itself turned out not to be a feature of the world which consciousness was trying to comprehend, but of consciousness itself.<sup>103</sup> In other words, consciousness’s efforts to articulate the background structure of a world it could not perceive turned out to be its articulation of *its own* ways of taking the world as the world.

In realizing this, consciousness implicated itself in its search for authoritative grounds for belief and action and this self-implication is, for Hegel, the dawn of self-consciousness.

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<sup>103</sup> Pinkard, 41

The shift from consciousness to self-consciousness in the *Phenomenology* is an important step because it introduces sociality into the ongoing search for self-grounding knowledge claims. Pinkard says that, insofar as self-consciousness is a relation of itself to itself,<sup>104</sup> “A self-conscious agent is con-scious of a world of sensuously perceived objects which exist independently of him, and he is aware of himself as a position in ‘social space,’ as taking these things as such and such, but not full self-consciousness, more like the suspicion of it.”<sup>105</sup> This “social space” is designated as such because it is a space of normativity that governs the activity of self-conscious in ways whose content is, at this early stage, not explicitly given to self-consciousness. “In more concrete terms,” says Pinkard, “all consciousness involves situating oneself within a determinate historical community with its standards for what counts as authoritative for belief and action.”<sup>106</sup>

The conditions under which the fledgling self-consciousness finds itself, however, is a far cry from what we would recognize as community, though it does contain the first requirement for membership in any community whatsoever: life. Self-consciousness is now its own authority, so to speak--it takes itself to be the thing that establishes what, for it, will count as authoritative, while also possessing desires over which it has no control. These are the biological necessities of any living organism, and these desires go against or abort self-consciousness’s supposed independence from anything outside of itself. In fact, these desires can be all consuming. Self-consciousness is thus at a crossroads of independence and dependence. It wants to confirm for itself it is independent, its own “essence,” but in order to do so, it must establish independence

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<sup>104</sup> Hegel, §167

<sup>105</sup> Pinkard, 47

<sup>106</sup> Pinkard, 47-48

from its desires. Hegel calls this compulsion the search for “self certainty,”<sup>107</sup> or, more recognizably, the desire for recognition.

Self-consciousness, then, can only come into itself in being recognized as authoritative by the only thing capable of recognizing him: another self-consciousness.<sup>108</sup> Another self-consciousness can provide recognition by confirming for self-consciousness that its own activity of distinguishing which desires are to count as authoritative reasons for action *really are* authoritative reasons for action.<sup>109</sup> Self-consciousness is in dire need of this kind of assurance. Its previous shapes of consciousness led to self-consciousness in the first place because they continually failed to produce reliable knowledge claims that didn't rely on external justification. Now that it has taken up its position in social space, now that it knows that it is the sort of thing which can take things as such and such, it feels anxiety about its own authority.

The other self-consciousness, however, is in exactly the same situation. It is a shape of consciousness that has participated in the same dialectical process, with the same anxious need for confirmation of its conception of itself. Pinkard notes that, because of this, the other self-consciousness “both *affirms* and *undermines* the subject's sense of himself...”<sup>110</sup> The two points of view are opposed to one another insofar as they both seek the same thing and cannot (*yet*, Hegel assures us) have both of their desires for recognition satisfied at the same time. The scene

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<sup>107</sup> Hegel, §186

<sup>108</sup> As, Pinkard says “Why this is the case emerges through the following reflections. In encountering another self-conscious agent, the subject encounters a different type of “object” in his world. Natural objects can satisfy desire in a straightforward way : Water quenches thirst, apples quench hunger. If the subject is to achieve satisfaction from an “object,” there must be something that the “object” does that affirms for the subject that it is indeed he, as the desiring subject, and not the object of desire who makes something into an authoritative reason for belief or action. If the subject is to maintain his independence, the object cannot impose reasons on the subject; the object cannot make the subject's reasons for belief and action into authoritative reasons. The subject seeks affirmation that this view of himself is indeed the true view, and he finds that he cannot do this purely in terms of desiring natural objects and fulfilling those desires, for he cannot determine which objects are to be there for him. It is only the “object” itself that can affirm this for him, and to do this, the “object” would have to present itself as something other than the subject, while at the same time also presenting itself as dependent on the subject for its conferral of recognition.” Pinkard, 53

<sup>109</sup> Pinkard, 51

<sup>110</sup> Pinkard, 54



is thus set for the encounter between the two self-consciousnesses to be one of conflict. This conflict must take the form of a life or death struggle for recognition.

The request for the confirmation of self-certainty, the confirmation that one self-consciousness in actuality has the superior subjective point of view that can serve as the sole constructor of authoritative knowledge claims, immediately meets resistance from the other self-consciousness that is making the same request. The meeting turns violent and the only way for either to emerge as victor is to affect a mastery over the natural desires which have bound them to life. The desire to live, then, must be set aside. This movement reveals independence from the natural desires that had helped generate so much anxiety in self-consciousness in the first place. The fighter who does not fear death is the most likely victor.

Of course, it is possible they will both be willing to fight to the death and one of them may perish in the conflict. Hegel says that such an outcome will result in no dialectical movement, and the surviving self-consciousness may simply join the ranks of the many “appearances” of knowledge that “spirit has set aside.” But in an outcome that sees one subject unwilling to risk life in the fight, a reality has emerged. In this eventuality, there is a victor and a loser. The victor achieves his goal of being recognized as the sole authoritative point of view, independent from all things. The loser confers this meaning upon the victor through the act of recognition, the attribution of authority as evidenced by his new orientation to the victor, that of dependence. The victor, Hegel says, becomes the Master and the loser, the Slave. This development, however, is far from final.

The winner is satisfied in being recognized by a vanquished opponent, but the story of the *Phenomenology* is the story of consciousness realizing it has not obtained what it had thought, and therefore spoiling its own satisfaction. The dialectic of the master and slave is no exception.

The master is satisfied in being recognized by the slave. The master's desires are affirmed and carried out by the slave. However the master, for all his thoughts of independence, depends on the slave for the recognition that affirms him as independent. The slave "mediates" the self-conception of the master. The master has no authority without the slave and thus is stuck in the same relationship of dependence that characterized his dependence on his own fleeting desires.

Meanwhile, the slave, in his labor, is experiencing a different revelation. Remember the slave submitted in the fight through the fear of death. For Hegel, the fear of death is an absolute fear, "the absolute melting away of everything that is stable."<sup>111</sup> Unknown to the slave, this fear of death in the face of another self-consciousness accomplished exactly that which the master's staking of life had accomplished: the raising of self-consciousness from its immersion in nature. However, the slave only becomes conscious of this in his labor. For it is in labor the slave, as Hegel says, "rids himself of his attachment to natural existence in every single detail: and gets rid of it by working on it."<sup>112</sup> So, what the Master learns in relation to the slave, the slave learns in relation to the product of his labor: that he is a source of authority. The motivating force of this labor, and therefore this realization, is the fear of the Master. It is this fear which, presumably, is the thing which separates the slave's labor at this stage from the labor of self-consciousness in satisfying its desires before it ever encountered another self-consciousness and engaged in the life and death struggle. From thinkers such as Marx and Kojève, we get the idea that this realization on the part of the slave is the beginning of the revolution that topples masters from their pedestals. This section is the inspiration for political theories of recognition that will make an appearance in next chapter. Scholars of recognition, such as Honneth and Sybil Anderson, give us valuable ways to think through citizenship and community life. We will elaborate on

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<sup>111</sup> Hegel, §194

<sup>112</sup> Hegel, §194

their uses of this Hegelian kernel soon enough, but as we leave this section on self-consciousness, we must say a few words before approaching the story of Antigone.

Contrary to the narratives from Kojève, the master-slave dialectic does not end with an overthrowing of the master. Rather, master and slave alike enter a new reflection on the nature of independence. They come to wonder whether external confirmation, which they had previously fought for, is even the kind of thing that can bring about the true confirmation of self certainty they had sought in the life or death struggle. It appears to them that this might not be the case, and that the only true independence is independence in thought, or as Hegel has it, Stoicism.

However, in giving up the possibility of external justification, self-consciousness finds it has no way to confirm whether what it thinks is really what it thinks as an independent self-consciousness in thought. That is, it has no means of confirming for itself whether its thoughts really are authoritative as independent thoughts. It is, in a sense, imprisoned by its own subjectivity. It thus comes to think there is in fact *no way* to determine what the authoritative grounds for belief might be. In so doing, the Stoic becomes the Skeptic. But skepticism, here understood as a kind of hopelessness about the possibility of justification, soon centers on the claim at the heart of skepticism, namely that there is no objective way to establish an essence, or that there is no way to objectively determine if there are any sources of knowledge. However, this claim, in itself, seems to have the weight of a claim that, sparse though it may be, is a definitive knowledge claim which violates the premise of skepticism itself. Thus self-consciousness is in the position of having beliefs but not knowing how those beliefs can be justified. Hegel calls this predicament “unhappy consciousness.”

It is the “resolution” of Unhappy Consciousness that makes possible the last three sections of the *Phenomenology*. The turmoil of Unhappy Consciousness turns out to be an

opportunity for resolution through various means of reflection. In this case, the ambivalence over the possibility that there can't be an objective justification for the subjective viewpoint turns out to be the first clue in a way to establish exactly that. Self-consciousness realizes this objective standpoint can in fact be established in three ways that Hegel addresses in three sections.

The first is Reason, in which the sources of knowledge are established through an intersubjective process dedicated to uncovering what knowledge claims can have the most authority by following a process of inquiry set up by the community of searchers.

It is here we find “science” and other European practices generally based in some conception of rationality and observation. The second is Spirit, or, as Pinkard conceives of it, “reflective social practices.” The idea of Spirit, and to some extent, Religion, is that there are elements of rationality embedded in these practices, and in living out social life, self-consciousness subjects understand themselves to be connected to the authoritative sources of knowledge that are embedded in the cultural institutions which govern daily life. The last is Religion, which is a symbolic reflection on what is to count as authoritative while in some cases abstracting the ultimate ground of authority into a supersensible realm grounded by faith. It is here we find parables and other stories that subjects use to understand themselves and their place in the cosmos.

All of these are not, however, mere shapes of consciousness. In their focus on the role of the community for establishing or grounding reflective knowledge claims, self-consciousness is now a “shape of spirit.”<sup>113</sup> Shapes of spirit differ from shapes of consciousness in that their knowledge claims reflect the sociality of knowledge themselves. Shapes of spirit encounter a

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<sup>113</sup> Hegel, §440.

world of norms, whether implicit or explicit, and these norms make possible and constitute any kinds of knowledge claims whatsoever. Pinkard explains them thusly:

...any shape of spirit embeds within itself a joint conception both of what the norms are within that form of life and what it is about the world that makes those norms realizable, what in the world resists their realization or tends to make their realization rare, and what in the world is thus to be expected. As embodying a tacit grasp of a unity of the “is” and the “ought” within which agents live, a shape of spirit thus forms the overall contours of the ways in which those people, individually and collectively, imagine how their lives, individually and collectively, ought to go and how they reasonably expect them really to go.<sup>114</sup>

Pinkard sees the shape of spirit as akin to Heidegger's being-in-the-world, where subjects inhabit a space of norms which are largely transparent to them. Hegel begins the section on spirit with what he calls “true spirit.” This is the shape of spirit entailed by what Hegel takes as the highest period of ancient Athens, in which the play *Antigone* makes its appearance.

The community which comprises true spirit is an *ethical* community, that is, a community in which individuals observe particular laws governing their conduct and thought. However, this ethical orientation is *immediate* in the same sense consciousness, in the very first chapter of the *Phenomenology*, is immediately related to its objects. For Hegel, this means the community of this period of ancient Greece exists in a kind of "spontaneous harmony" , in which they fully understand themselves in terms of the norms which govern Greek life in such a way that these norms do not appear at all. This is, quite simply, *the way things are*. This is *immediate ethical life*. The members of this community do not really comprehend the totality of the movement of the community itself. Rather, they see themselves as identical to the roles they occupy, whether it be man of woman, citizen or slave. They identify with these roles and act in accordance with them, unreflectively secure their harmonious action contributes to a harmonious

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<sup>114</sup> Terry Pinkard. "What Is a Shape of Spirit?." *Hegel's Phenomenology at 200*. Ed. Dean Moyar and Michael Quante.: Cambridge University Press, 2008.

whole, while not comprehending the whole itself. They are effectively blind to the contradictions that would be obvious if they could comprehend the totality of Greek culture.

Pinkard says, similar to sense-certainty, these conditions create the possibility for the emergence of a “reflective” individual who, once emerged, would have no recognizable place in this social order. Sophocles’ *Antigone* helps give rise to this reflective individual.

At its heart, the tragedy of *Antigone* is about a conflict between two characters who occupy different roles in society. Creon, the King of Thebes is a man who lives according to the divine law, the law of politics. His niece Antigone lives according to natural law, the law governing women and family. When Antigone’s brother Polyneices dies in the act of committing treason against the state, Antigone resolves to bury him, according to the commands of family law. Creon, in accordance with the commands of divine law, forbids his burial. In the ensuing conflict, both Creon and Antigone speak as though they are upholding the law and meaning of *the whole* of Greek life, not just the laws that govern their particular roles.<sup>115</sup> As tragic characters and as good Greeks, it is difficult for them to see that this moment has revealed the contradictions of Greek life. The story is quite different for the play’s audience.

The revelation of the possibility of such a contradiction brings the whole of Greek culture into view for the first time, making it impossible to maintain the shape of spirit for which this culture was a spontaneous harmony. It is revealed to the Greek audience that what they had previously connected to immediately, the ethics that governed their behavior, were in fact objects for their reflection. *Immediate* ethical life thus becomes *mediated* ethical life. In this case the ancient Greek audience, sparked by the conceptual challenge embedded in the tragedy of the play, come to realize the norms according to which they live are not simply the way things are,

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<sup>115</sup> Hegel, §465, 467, 472

but a system of rules they can *choose* to follow, among other rules that could also be chosen or simply mandated by an authority that itself was making choices which needed to be justified.

The ancient Greeks, on this account, come to renounce their presupposition of the beauty of Greek life and all that remains is the bare structure of cultural binding, the law, or, as Hegel calls it “the state of legality.”<sup>116</sup> Most scholars hold that this state of legality, of which Hegel speaks, is the shape of spirit that obtains in ancient Rome. The perspective in which statehood is defined by mere legality is, of course, a new shape of spirit, one which has renounced the beautiful lie of Greek culture and brings for Hegel doubt whether it is possible to have a proper ethical community. This would be a community which understands itself to live according to harmonious norms each individual wills for himself *and* for the community, but for reasons the community can identify through reflective social practices.<sup>117</sup> The narrative of Antigone is essentially a reflection internal to Greek culture which lays bare the contradiction of Greek life in a way that overcomes the blindness previously accompanying the immediacy with which Greece’s inhabitants understood themselves in relation to the norms which governed them. They did not come upon this reflection by way of an invading force, or a debate of ideas with a critic from beyond their borders. The vehicle of transformation was internal, delivered according to Greek conventions, containing nothing that was not already present in Greek life. The narratives of Sense-Certainty, recognition and Antigone all hold this in common, and all point to a notion of transformation which works through exposing the potential of internal conflict. This concept will serve to guide our understanding of charitable consciousness, an ideology I will now explicate within its historical framework.

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<sup>116</sup> Hegel, §475, 476

<sup>117</sup> Pinkard, “Shape of Spirit,” 6

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## **CHAPTER THREE: CHARITABLE CONSCIOUSNESS**

### **Hegel and Humanitarian History**

The *Phenomenology of Spirit* offers a creative take on historical developments within its Eurocentric frame. It does not do so as history, but as a kind of historicized knowledge bridged by dialectical thinking and a simmering background narrative of the “rationality” of that history. Though it forces great mental contortion from its reader, the reward can be a new way of thinking through or reading historical events which helps us make sense of how ideology, or consciousness, has oriented itself in humanitarianism, and why it is I believe we are faced with two kinds of western humanitarian activity today.

Reason, Spirit and Religion are each shapes of Spirit that involve or implicate one another across their development. Hegel says, for instance, the symbolic reflections of religion and the movements of reason play a role in the modern project of self-understanding subsumed under Spirit itself. Both reason and religion show types of reflections that are resolved in the collection of norm-governed social practices that partly comprise Spirit, in the very fact of themselves being significant justification-seeking social practices. Among the many configurations of Spirit, as the cultural imperatives that contribute to human understanding and action, Hegel described shapes which are more or less recognizable to us. In addition to the Ancient Greek Subject and the Roman legal subject, Pinkard identifies in the *Phenomenology*,

the Faustian agent, the sentimentalist, and the romantic subject, among others. I posit that a modern shape of spirit worthy of consideration is the humanitarian.

Humanitarianism, as a shape of spirit, expresses or reflects certain elements of modern life, while retaining elements of its sentimentalist roots. As a shape it is something in which individual subjects participate, whose assumptions and normative nudges are recorded in institutional and cultural practices. Shapes of spirit catch the totality of signs, expressions, mentalities, laws, norms of conduct, among other things, that cement a given perspective among a group of people. The wide net Hegel casts in terms of the “location” of a given perspective underscores his general opposition to individualism as the primary moment of personhood. How then, would the Hegelian describe the history and content of humanitarianism? I think it looks *something* like this:

The sentimentalism of the man of feeling was the answer to a problem. The preceding notions of the stoic, Hobbesian and puritan individual could not do the work of establishing for people what was really important about being human. As Pinkard says, ‘Sentimentalism is the logical result of demanding that the “individual” must be shown to have something “within” him that he can realize as an individual and that will nonetheless be justifiable from the objective point of view.’<sup>118</sup> The “natural” sentiments of humankind were a philosophical and theological ground upon which those Europeans who subscribed to it could understand their place in society and the world. Like most shapes of consciousness, several claims were implicit for the man of feeling. While it took its own “authoritative reasons for belief and action” to be particular *and* universal (thus fulfilling Spirit’s requirement of being objectively justifiable while also subjectively determined), its universalism, or transcendental significance, as Barnett called it, was really a *projected* particular, in this case a bias toward

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<sup>118</sup> Pinkard, 98

Christianity and Europe. This insufficient universalism was slowly revealed in colonial missionary interactions (anxiety over which were openly discussed at the missionary conference of 1910.). The religious aspect of this universalism was slowly, but not completely, replaced by a more secular conception of humanity, which carried forward the same reverence for humanity and reached deeper into European consciousness and colonial territories. As an expression of liberalism, it still relied on basic conceptions of empire and the unreflective supremacy of European perspectives on the good life. It also increased geographical and political reach and possibilities of financial support.

This perspective largely maintained itself across different political and social conditions; the crises humanitarianism often considered itself to be having were in reality mere situational dilemmas regarding the possibility of its continual action in the context of complex emergencies. The principles that humanitarians held close may have been self-described manifestations of humanitarian value, but they were revealed in these complex situations to be fundamental only to the performance of particular tasks, such as withstanding criticism or maintaining safety. That is, they were refinements that revealed to practitioners the nature of the complexity of work in the field, refinements which by their very nature had consequences for humanitarian self-conception.

As Barnett says, there are *humanitarianisms*, and the great division between them seems to be among those who are aware of the moral complications of aid work and those who think the field aligns with their subjective considerations of humanitarian principles. I think one way to accentuate this difference is to say a critical humanitarian regards the other as the true object of compassion, whereas the uncritical humanitarian carries forward the old sentimentalist flaw of using the other as a means of legitimating his own conception as a certain kind of subject. This naive humanitarian remains a “man of feeling,” who is deeply connected to his own “inner”

feeling of sympathy, whose commitment to helping others is a mirror reflection of their commitment to being a certain sort of subject, namely one who is able to confirm for themselves that they are the kind of subject who is “awakened” to their “natural” motivations to help others. A particular kind of regard of the suffering of others becomes a necessary step to achieving an implicit affirmation of their self-conception. They *are* in fact doing God’s work. Or they *really are* doing good for humanity.

The critical humanitarian is motivated by the values of compassion, but they hesitate to connect aid work with a confirmation of self-conception because they are skeptical about whether the success of a given project can ever be complete. On this interpretation, many aid workers who have been in the field for a while are always operating on the edge of an internal crisis, namely, a protracted state of skepticism about the value of their work, whether or not it can confirm for them that they are in fact the kinds of agents who are awakened to natural moral feeling. It is difficult to do this because the complex problems they observe cast doubt on the possibility that suffering of others can really ever be alleviated, and thus that the compassionate project of aid can ever complete itself. For this reason they see aid work as itself a field of constant adjustment and compromise more akin to state politics. Humanitarians of this sort, are often confronted by a lack of viable and productive alternatives to a given project, given the constraints in place on the work. They understand themselves only partly as making good on the liberal claims of compassion. Their default orientation to aid work is similar to that of any other member of a workforce. They see themselves as laborers whose motivation for working need not be reflected in every moment of the job. To these humanitarians, naive humanitarians often appear alien and sometimes infuriatingly annoying.

However, the operation of individual humanitarian subjects is just one aspect of the spirit of humanitarianism itself. I think that other important elements of humanitarianism, like institutional frameworks, communication methods, still carry to a large degree the sentimentalist assumptions of the early nineteenth century. The reductive perspective of old school colonialism, and the equally reductive narratives upon which many humanitarians have had to rely for the sake of donors, have created a kind of background spirit of aid work which sustains the naive perspective of charitable consciousness. This overarching framework serves to recreate naive humanitarian subjects. In particular, organizational structures and public perception have rendered the critical humanitarian a kind of silent majority, and therefore a functional minority, in the world of aid work.

In the first chapter I introduced the history of mass media in consideration of the history of humanitarianism itself. I follow others in thinking that humanitarianism could not exist in its current mass form, nor would it tell the particular stories that it tells, with particular elements of portrayal and appeal, if it were not for mass media. I want to continue the first chapter's discussion of mass media by detailing the "world" it has help reflect and construct for humanitarians who have not critically engaged with humanitarian history. While narratives that pervade mass media often have worldwide significance, we will settle on Africa in preparation for our look into some of the principle exemplars of charitable consciousness.

## **The African Imaginary**

What is Africa to the westerner in popular imagination? That is, what, for us, shows the sin of the “familiar and well known.”?<sup>119</sup> This imaginary will be a running totality of all signs and connotations one has to push through before it is possible to have a critical encounter.

Chinua Achebe refers to this popular western conception as simply, an image of Africa.

In his criticism of Conrad’s *Heart of Darkness*, Achebe notes “the West seems to suffer deep anxieties about the precariousness of its civilization and to have a need for constant reassurance by comparison with Africa.” Africa, he says, has become Dorian Gray’s portrait: “a carrier onto whom the master unloads his physical and moral deformities so that he may go forward, erect and immaculate.”

One need not look far for examples of this comparative evaluation. Upon his return from a trip to Zambia, L.A. Dodgers pitcher Clayton Kershaw described the revelations that arose from his time with children at an orphanage: “You come home and you see people striving to get more money, more cars, bigger houses and more possessions, thinking that will make them happier. You go to Zambia, it helps put things in perspective. You realize where happiness comes from, and it’s not from material goods.”<sup>120</sup> Kershaw went to Africa with his wife in 2011, ostensibly to assist with treatments for carriers of AIDS. The *New York Times* article that reports on his trip, however, focuses on his self-revelations and the author of the article herself shares his revelatory tone, saying: “The faces of the Zambian orphans Kershaw met during his visit have stayed with him, a rosin bag of images to help him maintain his grip on what really matters.”

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<sup>119</sup> Hegel, §31

<sup>120</sup> Karen Crouse, "Africa Trip Changed Dodgers' Kershaw - The New York Times," *New York Times* February 26 2011, : <<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/02/27/sports/baseball/27kershaw.html>>.

Africa can become a foil for western self-definition because of a more than a century of misconceptions about the continent. Many of these misconceptions are sourced from colonial history and deliberately propagated by emissaries of empire, like the teachers of the French education system to which a young Frantz Fanon was subjected.<sup>121</sup> The images are endlessly replicated; so much so that they have become the default understanding of Africa for most who have not actively studied the continent. Africanist Curtis Keim says these misconceptions are so strong that often studying Africa will not yield a picture clear enough for students to see without implicitly relying upon them. Keim describes a few of the mediums in which these misconceptions proliferate, taking most of his examples from the last forty years.<sup>122</sup>

The American education system, he contends has been a major culprit. He points to a study of school textbooks by Zekiros and Wiley, which noted that textbooks had been spreading misinformation about Africa for decades. In fact, students were more likely to have bad ideas about Africa in 12th grade after being educated on the continent than prior to beginning social studies in 7th grade. One of the reasons for this was because the textbooks themselves were “written by ‘armchair’ authors who rely on weak sources for their own information.”<sup>123</sup> These textbooks are most often taught by teachers who have no particular expertise in Africa and the results of their efforts are dismal. Admittedly, textbooks have improved in recent decades, but it is not clear the teachers have:

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<sup>121</sup> “The black schoolboy in the Antilles, who in his lessons is forever talking about “our ancestors, the Gauls,” identifies himself with the explorer, the bringer of civilization, the white man who carries truth to savages--an all-white truth. There is identification--that is, the young Negro subjectively adopts a white man's attitude.... Little by little, one can observe in the young Antillean the formation and crystallization of an attitude and a way of thinking and seeing that are essentially white. When in school he has to read stories of savages told by white men, he always thinks of the [African].... The Negro lives in Africa. Subjectively, intellectually, the Antillean conducts himself like a white man. But he is a Negro. That he will learn once he goes to Europe; and when he hears Negroes mentioned he will recognize that the word includes himself. Fanon, Frantz, 1925-1961, author. *Black skin, white masks*. New York : Grove Press, 1967. Print.

<sup>122</sup> Curtis A. Keim. *Mistaking Africa: Curiosities and Inventions of the American Mind*. 2nd ed. Boulder: Westview Press, 2009. Web.

<sup>123</sup> Astair Zekiros and Marlylee Wiley. "Africa in Social Studies Textbooks." *Wisconsin Department of Education* (1978)Web.

In a 1996 study of preservice social studies teachers, 82 percent thought there were tigers in Africa, 94 percent believed wild animals were common everywhere on the continent, 74 percent understood most Africans to be illiterate, and 93 percent were convinced that more kinds of diseases exist in Africa than in Asia and South America.<sup>124</sup>

Textbooks are not the only print medium that is home to misinformation about Africa. The now dwindling print media have often played a role, through the pernicious process of story selection. Very few column inches are dedicated to Africa, even in publications with high circulation such as the New York Times. Keim says that the stories that do make it tend to be what he calls “trouble in Africa” type stories, or stories that focus on “curiosities of Africa.”<sup>125</sup> Stories like this tend to be constituted by certain budgetary and geographical logistics. Journalists who cover stories are often based in big cities, or fly into big cities. Events that are farther from cities get less coverage. Journalists who are present on assignment often create stories with whatever information they can get before leaving to work on the next story. There are rarely more than a couple official Africa correspondents, so they can only be mobilized for so long in pursuit of a story. This means that they will often not have enough time to investigate a subject with sufficient depth. And in many cases, they will not even visit the location of the story itself: “News about Congo, Nigeria, or Zimbabwe might be broadcast from Abidjan. It sounds authentic because it comes from Africa, but it might as well be from the United States, which has equally good or better communications with most African cities.” One Africa correspondent called this method of getting stories “parachute journalism.”<sup>126</sup> With resources thus constrained, the subjects of these stories are often about deeply violent or tragic subject matter that is sure to capture reader interest. If it bleeds, the saying goes, it leads. Other stories might call to mind

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<sup>124</sup> Keim. 15. See: Bradley Rink (CIEE Study Center, Stellenbosch University), “From (Mis)Perceptions to Teachable Moments: Learning Opportunities On-site,” presentation made at NAFSA Annual Conference workshop “Rethinking Africa: (Mis)Perceptions and Realities,” 28 May 2007, Minneapolis.

<sup>125</sup> Keim. 18.

<sup>126</sup> Keim. 19.



some strange happening that the western reader will count as a novel distraction. Keim himself offers a sample from his own local paper, a story about Nigerian email scams. Stories such as these, however they may reflect reality, fail to reflect totality and as such they play into well worn stereotypes about Africans and African life.

If proper print journalism can contribute to bad ways of thinking about Africa, popular magazines cannot fare much better. National Geographic, while it has a great deal of content about Africa across the many years of its publication, has often shied away from stories about complex political and social realities. This tendency was pushed to the limit in the 1980s and 1990s, when many African nations were mired in political and economic troubles. “There are 1990s articles set in Congo and Malawi, but they treat Congo River travel and Lake Malawi water life, much safer topics than the countries themselves.”<sup>127</sup> Mostly, National Geographic focused on African Wildlife and rural Africans. These narratives, however, follow another stereotype about Africa, simply that it is a place of nature, with people who also live close to nature. This idea of Africa as “idyllic and prehistoric” is embedded in advertisements encouraging tourism in Africa, which most often focus on safari tours.

Though Keim feels television often fares better than print media, with the regular airing of ethnographies and documentaries on channels such as Discovery and History, there is still a prevalent narrative of Africa as nature. Documentaries about Africa, for example, rarely depict middle class Africans living city life. Keim feels that this lacuna has much to do with the notion of Africa as an exotic place that doesn’t really have an urban city center. His claims are justified perhaps, by a blog post that recently made rounds on social media. The author, a woman who flew to Nairobi on a mission trip was shocked to learn that not all Kenyans suffered in slums or

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<sup>127</sup> Keim. 21.

rural villages, and that areas of the city were just as upscale as any place she could visit in America:

My heart was prepared for dirt floors.  
For dirty laundry hanging everywhere.  
For kids that were half naked and covered in bug bites.  
People who couldn't speak English.  
not this<sup>128</sup>

The “this” to which she refers, as indicated in a photograph, was a well-stocked condiment aisle in a supermarket attached to a shopping mall.

Perhaps this blogger got most of her information from television news. Keim says most news programs; when they address Africa, cover only “war, coup, drought, famine, flood, epidemic, or accident.”<sup>129</sup> These, incidentally, are the same themes that appear in popular movies about Africa. Keim offers a list of recent films: *The Constant Gardener*, *The Last King of Scotland*, *Blood Diamond*, *Tears of the Sun*, *Lord of War*. To this I might add *The Ghost in the Darkness*, *Machine Gun Preacher* and *Sahara*. All of these films are centered around non-African, white protagonists and depict the countries in which they are filmed as a dark or unforgiving landscapes that can only be surmounted by conflict. In contrast to those cast in starring roles, Africans depicted in these films lack agency.<sup>130</sup>

Representations of the African imaginary are not only in media depictions. Just down the street from the University of South Florida, there is a longstanding problematic portrayal of Africa at the amusement park Busch Gardens. From its opening in 1959, the original name of the park was Busch Gardens: The Dark Continent. The park featured a zoo with African animals and

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<sup>128</sup> It didn't happen like I thought it would | Jestidwell's Blog, <<https://jestidwell.wordpress.com/2015/02/02/it-didnt-happen-like-i-thought-it-would/>>.

<sup>129</sup> Keim. 17

<sup>130</sup> It is a problem noticed by many Africans and some NGOs, one of which parodied the issue in this video: “African Men, Hollywood Stereotypes.” <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC9Apk-3mISZUQfZiwHMLYdA>

attractions with names like Kumba, Edge of Africa, and Congo River. Keim describes a 1970s poster advertisement for the park:

a white family in an African environment, the husband in a safari suit and pith helmet holding a chimpanzee and pointing to some off-poster sight, and the wife looking on passively. His children also follow his gaze, from the back of an elephant. An Arab or Swahili guide in flowing robes looks on, while three barely visible black African men dressed in loincloths carry the family's luggage.<sup>131</sup>

Another advertisement from the 1980s has a picture of an elephant, with adjoining text which reads: "A short drive from the gulf beaches brings you to 19th century Africa" and goes on to list the African animals that one can find there, included a white *tiger*.<sup>132</sup> Though protests eventually saw the "Dark Continent" moniker removed, the park continued to have questionable depictions of Africa. Sanitized, contextless nods to explorer and *Through the Dark Continent* author Henry Morton Stanley and fabricated "African-sounding" names like "Sheikra" themselves continue to transmit a nostalgia for colonial Africa.

In short, the machinations of mass media and popular culture, insofar as it reflects and constitutes shared perceptions, have contributed to notions of Africa as just as "dark" as Henry Morton Stanley's early description of it. This is true even before we consider humanitarianism. If we take another pass, however, at the role of mass media, we can see that humanitarianism itself is a principal offender in its contribution to the image that Achebe scorns.

We have seen already in the story of CARE the degree to which humanitarian organizations fear a crowded field of funders, with whom organizations must compete. And Robert Scott's experiences trying to set up a branch of the Red Cross in Alaska signal us to the way that a world of expanding media entertainment places a demand on humanitarian

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<sup>131</sup> Keim. 26.

<sup>132</sup> The inclusion of an animal not native to "The Milwaukee Sentinel - Google News Archive Search." The Milwaukee Sentinel. January 23, 1984: <<https://news.google.com/newspapers?id=GHwWAAAIBAJ&sjid=PxEAAAIBAJ&pg=2642,4272132&dq=busch+gardens+africa>>.

organizations to match the sensational content of other forms of media. In the present, these problems are only compounded, as communication technology and the rise of social media has given every aid organization instantaneous global reach, increasing opportunities for support, even as it also raises the possibility of criticism and competition. The question for us here is, how have humanitarian organizations that vie for public funding adjusted to media pressures?

One study suggests the primary way aid organizations engage with media is to “play the game.” Simon Cottle and David Nolan interviewed the communication managers at the Australian branches of large NGOs that were founded in the west.<sup>133</sup> They spoke to representatives from the Red Cross, Save the Children, CARE, MSF and World Vision. They found the realities of competition, not just with other aid organizations but with any other event that might be covered during the news cycle, has motivated aid organizations to be proactive about media relations and to adopt increasingly corporate stances toward their own representation, with some agencies understanding themselves as brands that must fight against being diluted by bad or insufficient publicity.

Aid organizations understand donor fund to be limited, and even though they broadly share principles and goals with other organizations, they understand that the only way to secure their ability to continue their own work and livelihoods is to edge out their competition.<sup>134</sup> This means aid organizations are in a sustained state of anxiety over the general state of public awareness of the organization and its work, that is, the state of their “brand awareness.” A vital component of the work of an aid organization, then, is marketing and promotion.

NGOs have a slight advantage over corporations that also have large market presences. Humanitarian groups do work that is newsworthy, and as such, they can integrate themselves

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<sup>133</sup> Simon Cottle and David Nolan. "Everybody Was Dying for Footage: Global Humanitarianism and the Changing Aid-Media." *Journalism Studies* 8.6 (2007): 862-78. Web.

<sup>134</sup> Cottle and Nolan. 865.

into the news cycle if they can present their work in ways that are amenable to the “media logic” that governs journalism. This means that NGOs must approach each news outlet differently:

... really what we are trying to achieve is, so to speak, matching their needs. Basically we know for instance what the needs of the ABC Radio PM program are, we know what kind of a program they have and we know roughly what works with the presenter and the producer. We would try and pitch the same story very differently to the Foreign News Editor at the Sunday Herald-Sun, who we have a good contact with and with whom we would go with a touchy-feely story, pulling at heartstrings and extremely personalized. With ABC PM it would be very much a higher level discussion about the causes of a certain issue, for instance in Sudan, why is it happening, why is it going on so long, why are there no solutions. For the Herald-Sun it would be our delegate there, saving the lives of babies ... (National Communications Manager, Australian Red Cross)<sup>135</sup>

Aid organizations are sensitive to how stories are packaged and also recognize the difficulty of generating interest for particular subject matter. In the case of Australia, that means knowing that it will be very difficult to embed a journalist with the MSF in certain locations: “...to get them to where we want to go which is, you know, *deepest, darkest Africa*, that’s very difficult. (Head of Communications, MSF Australia)”<sup>136</sup> The italics here are mine, as we must note the use of nineteenth century colonial language in the mouth of an aid representative who is actively trying to get support for their projects in Africa. The spokesperson here is either speaking through the perspective that they imagine the public to have, or this is their own perspective, or both. Either way, it informs us as to the awesome staying power of this damaging popular conception.

Aid agencies have also learned to furnish news sources with local voices. Cottle and Nolan say that there is a “global media hierarchy,” in which local news organizations seek out representatives from their home countries for comment on global events. Finding these subjects makes it possible for local news outlets to bypass global news outlets, like Reuters and the Associated Press. Thus, if a tourist in a foreign country gets footage of a natural disaster, that will carry more weight in the news of that tourist’s home country. The same goes for an aid

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<sup>135</sup> Cottle and Nolan. 867.

<sup>136</sup> Cottle and Nolan. 867.

worker that is on location, or, in the case of MSF Australia, the appointment of an Australian to the position of international president of the MSF. The president spoke to news media about the conflict in the Democratic Republic of Congo, but, as the MSF communication manager said, “I don’t think they were really that interested in Congo and it turned out in the story that they were more interested in the person, which is fair enough. They did more of a profile on the International President ...”<sup>137</sup>

The focus on local voices also have another effect. Since news sources and often aid organizations in their own media materials focus on the volunteers in the country of origin, the work of advocates in the country where the work is being done is often sidelined. This focus on “home connections”, say Cottle and Nolan, “inevitably underplays and marginalizes the active agency of indigenous aid workers (and victims) and thereby symbolically reinforces a highly Western-led and Western-centric view.”<sup>138</sup> This is a problem recognized by some aid organizations that push the significance of local voices in their own media, even as news narratives, which have a wider audience, often miss this point.

Another rung on the hierarchy of media significance is the celebrity. When famous people attach themselves to, or start their own organizations, all manner of potentially monetized attention follows them. Cottle and Nolan describe celebrity as a “generalizing cultural phenomenon,” in which famous people are a nexus of attention. Media provide the bridge through which regular people gaze at celebrities and follow their imperatives. Some aid agencies see the use of a celebrity “ambassador” as a necessity: “You can talk about it and you can have a community service announcement and you can have a wonderful little ad and the money is going to all these wonderful things, but until you’ve got a celebrity or a photo-worthy person up there

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<sup>137</sup> Cottle and Nolan. 870

<sup>138</sup> Cottle and Nolan. 871

to sell it, then it's going to be a steep hill..." says the public affairs officer for the Australian branch of Save the Children.

The use of celebrity to get support for humanitarian missions is highly problematic for Riina Yrjölä, who sees the nineteenth century colonial narrative loud and clear in most celebrity engagements, most notably in the work of Robert Geldof and U2 front man Bono.<sup>139</sup> Celebrities like these are often the least legitimate or accountable of any talker in the field. But more so, their fame allows them a larger share of the controlling narrative around not just a particular aid project, but of Africa itself. Following a large body of research, she says, "celebrities, through their performances and imaginaries, unify, explain and shape everyday life by providing sites of belonging, recognition and meaning. However, as wider cultural discourses, celebrities not only articulate specific cultural norms, values and ideals, but through them imaginaries and worldviews are opened, shaped and built."<sup>140</sup> The problem, of course, is that the worldview is so regressive. Yrjölä calls the image of Africa that celebrities put forward on behalf of humanitarian goals the image of "Contemporary Hell."<sup>141</sup> According to this image, Africa is a place of failure and chaos, for whose fate the west will be judged. As Bono once said: "I truly believe that when the history books will be written, our age will be remembered for three things: the war on terror, the digital revolution and what we did – or did not do – to put the fire out in Africa. History, like God, is watching what we do."<sup>142</sup> For Bono, Africa needs help that only "we," non-Africans can provide.

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<sup>139</sup> Riina Yrjölä. "The Invisible Violence of Celebrity Humanitarianism." *World Political Science Review* 5.1 (2009): 1-23. Web.

<sup>140</sup> Yrjölä. 4. See Chris Rojek. *Fame attack : the inflation of celebrity and its consequences*. London : Bloomsbury Academic, 2012. Print. and Richard Dyer 1945-. *Heavenly bodies : film stars and society*. 2nd ed.. ed. London ; New York: London ; New York : Routledge, 2004. Print.

<sup>141</sup> Yrjölä. 9

<sup>142</sup> Michka Assayas. *Bono on Bono: Conversations with Michka Assayas*:. London: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd, 2005. Web.

At the same time Africa is depicted as Contemporary Hell, it is also portrayed as what Yrjölä calls “the Eternal Home.” This narrative comes from the experiences celebrities and western visitors generally have when they visit poverty stricken areas of the continent. Interestingly, the significance of this narrative is brilliantly displayed in the metanarrative of a book of photography that Bono put out in 2006.<sup>143</sup> Yrjölä offers a fantastic description, saying that the book

depicts only Africans and the writer himself. All the Africans portrayed — with one exception — are children<sup>41</sup>. In majority of these black-and-white images, unaccompanied children stare directly at the camera, or are looking past it. The lack of colour suggests a turn to the past, articulating and establishing Africa as a continent outside of Western modernity and maturity, progress and protection. In the close-up shots of the children faces and bodies, the children show no emotions. They look blankly back at the camera from their empty and grey environments. These individuals do not appear to be in pain or dehumanised. They are clothed and fed. Rather, their agency is built on vulnerability, innocence and isolation which turns into activity in images that display the children together with Bono. Smiles then emerge on the children’s faces, action is shown with their clapping hands and curious gazes towards the white man. The story unfolds: isolation creates misery; togetherness brings happiness.<sup>144</sup>

For the privileged westerner, then, Africa is both a horrible place, full of war and famine, that needs to be resolved by programs started with large scale donations. At the same time, it is a place outside of western time, in which westerners can commune with the essence of life itself. Here we see even clearer how it is possible for Clayton Kershaw to feel so connected to “what really matters” at an Zambian orphanage, and also for the unnamed Christian blogger to be shocked at the sight of affluence in Nairobi. It becomes easy to see, then, how something like the spirit of the west, comes to have a particularly self-referential default, background vision of Africa, such that relating to the continent is a certain kind of self-relation, much like the portrait of Dorian Gray. It is equipped with this vision that the fledgling aid worker steps into the world of humanitarianism. From this vantage, it is overwhelmingly the case that the aid worker will be

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<sup>143</sup> Bono. *On The Move Bono*. Hallmark Gift Books, 2006. Web.

<sup>144</sup> Yrjölä. 13



inducted into a shape of spirit that I call Charitable Consciousness, one with several particular attributes which determine its world and stifle its critical growth.

As a shape of spirit, Charitable Consciousness carries particular assumptions about itself and its world. At the base of these assumptions is its essence, the reasons for belief and action that it takes to be authoritative. From the essence follows other related aspects of its structure. The essence is its confirmation of self-conception. The corresponding elements, I believe, are dialectical deafness, coercive mimeticism, and specious solidarity. Let us appraise each in turn, examining their existential structures and the historical developments which support them.

### **Confirmation of Self Conception**

We know now that, in the popular imagination of the west, narratives about Africa are still presented with nineteenth century conceptions. These ideas compel travelers from the west to be predisposed to particular kinds of experiences. For these travelers, an African nation is, for a *true* border crossing, not like traveling to a different state, or a place with relatively marginal difference, like that between the U.S. and Canada. Cultural Anthropologist Kathryn Mathers notes the ability to cross borders has become a feature of American identity, especially for members of the millennial generation, and time spent in Africa in particular provides for them moments of self-reflection through which they come to understand what it means to be American. In her studies of student populations that traveled to Africa, she found the common thread among them is that they regarded Africa as a space of discovery, but not necessarily that of a new culture: “Africa is exactly the destination where travelers expect to find themselves.”<sup>145</sup>

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<sup>145</sup> It must be noted that the notion of self-discovery in the context of a colonialist imaginary of Africa is not restricted to white people. African Americans, Mathers found, tended to operate with an image of Africa that was distinct from the one held by white people, but not one that was antithetical to colonialist conceptions. Black Americans held just as many bad ideas about Africa, and had revelations about their Americanness in many of the

This appears to be especially true for members of the aid industry, some of whom were named by Nigerian author Teju Cole in a now famous series of tweets:

- 1- From Sachs to Kristof to Invisible Children to TED, the fastest growth industry in the US is the White Savior Industrial Complex.
- 2- The white savior supports brutal policies in the morning, founds charities in the afternoon, and receives awards in the evening.
- 3- The banality of evil transmutes into the banality of sentimentality. The world is nothing but a problem to be solved by enthusiasm.
- 4- This world exists simply to satisfy the needs—including, importantly, the sentimental needs—of white people and Oprah.
- 5- The White Savior Industrial Complex is not about justice. It is about having a big emotional experience that validates privilege.<sup>146</sup>

The idea here, of course, is that much of this type of aid work--specifically the work of the people and organizations Cole mentions, which are largely focused on development and “awareness”--is directed not toward the world that needs improvement but to the “sentimental needs” of the improvers. Insofar as the aid worker is driven by a need to fulfill an ideal of self-reference, it seems to me their manifestation of sentimentalism has structural similarities to Hegelian self-consciousness as it moved out of the Understanding to Self-Consciousness in recognition.

Recall the early manifestation of self-consciousness is characterized by its *suspicion* of itself, which Hegel frames as its quest for “self-certainty.” Self-Consciousness became Self-Consciousness by being directed to itself from the negation of Understanding, since the ways in which it posited background forces that “hold together” its perceived world ended up just being

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same ways as white people. Kathryn Frances Mathers. *Travel, humanitarianism, and becoming American in Africa*. 1st ed.. ed. New York: New York : Palgrave Macmillan, 2010. Print.

<sup>146</sup> Collected in Teju Cole, "The White-Savior Industrial Complex - " [The Atlantic](http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/03/the-white-savior-industrial-complex/254843/) March 21 2012: <<http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/03/the-white-savior-industrial-complex/254843/>>.

articulations of the ways that consciousness can come to have a perception. This self-reflexive moment put Self-Consciousness on a path to confirm for itself whether it really was the authoritative source of its world. But in order to make the confirmation, it needed to be recognized by another self-consciousness. As an instance of charitable consciousness, the naive aid worker seeks out projects that may in fact be important or useful, but is motivated by the ways in which the activity of these projects can confirm for the worker their own conceptions of themselves as good or forward thinking or morally upright people. It is kind of sentimentalist remnant, the same element that critics located in the men and women of feeling in the eighteenth century, in which “...we take upon ourselves this burden of adscititious sorrows in order to feast upon the consciousness of our own virtue.”<sup>147</sup>

It must be noted that Charitable Consciousness does not perceive itself to be confirming for itself its own conception of itself in the course of working in development and public acclaim for its deeds. This movement is only visible *for us*--the philosopher-owls who have taken flight in the dusk of self-serving aid work--and for Charitable Consciousness *only after* it has endured the negations that bring about sufficient difference in its form to no longer warrant being called Charitable Consciousness. It is also the case that the confirmation of self-conception, as the essence of Charitable Consciousness, does not necessarily determine the quality of an aid project. We can imagine a legion of self-serving sentimentalists, say, voting to allow their King to send valuable supplies to an earthquake-stricken country to the south. Nevertheless, the essence of Charitable Consciousness also conditions the way that it sees the world in which it operates, separating it from self-criticism concerning its own projects.

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<sup>147</sup> Anna Barbauld. *The works of Anna Laetitia Barbauld: Lucy, 1781-1864*. Toronto: University of Toronto Libraries, 2011. Web. : <http://www.english.upenn.edu/~mgamer/Etexts/barbauldessays.html>

Consider the way Charitable Consciousness responds to criticism in the case of the Soccket. The Soccket is a soccer ball that stores electricity via an internal battery that absorbs the kinetic energy of being kicked around. It was developed by some Harvard graduates in 2008. After absorbing enough energy to charge the battery, one could then plug a lamp or some small appliance into it. The goal of the Soccket is to bring light to areas that don't have power. Its introduction in 2013 to an off-the-grid region in Mexico was initially successful, but very soon after children began to use the balls, the balls began to malfunction. In addition, the town in Mexico where they distributed the balls was very close to a city with a power grid, and many of the town's residents felt that what they needed was assistance expanding the infrastructure in order to power the whole town. When a journalist asked Soccket co-developer Jessica Matthews about this, she responded with incredulity not at the problem but at the fact that she had been criticized for the problem: "It seems like a general attack on ... young adults trying to do something good and it seems really sad this is something that you'd want to do."<sup>148</sup>

Charitable Consciousness, like all shapes of spirit, cannot accept claims from perspectives outside of itself as authoritative. Its quest for the confirmation of its self-conception, it believes, is satisfied by recognition from others. This means that it is often very late in recognizing bad or problematic outcomes of its work. This is why, we must note, Charitable Consciousness tends to be engaged in development work as opposed to emergency relief work. Complex emergencies tend to reveal the untenability of the sentimental remnant, as its associated elements of triage, immediacy and often fruitless struggle remove the ambiguous borders which

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<sup>148</sup> Tiny Spark: The Soccket: A Follow-up Investigation. <https://soundcloud.com/tinyspark/the-soccket-a-follow-up>

Charitable Consciousness needs to sustain itself.<sup>149</sup> In and through this ambiguity and the consensus regarding its work, Charitable Consciousness, we might say, is dialectically deaf.

### **Dialectical Deafness**

Charitable Consciousness is not only resistant to criticism; it often fails to recognize it as such. Teju Cole was met in the wake of his critical tweets with accusations of racism and comments comparing him to the Mau Mau. The co-creator of the Soccer ball noted only that it seemed wrong to try to criticize her NGO because of the obvious goodness of her mission. Public university talks that I have given on the ideological problems of development work were so often met with such non-responses to my criticism that I developed a talk about the problems that these responses reveal. Retorts ranged from “At least they’re trying to help! What are you doing about it?” to “This criticism is just going to diffuse the movement.”, to the frustrated attempt at a *reductio*, “well then I guess we can’t do anything about all this suffering!” All of these responses were reflexive, stemming from incredulity toward my criticisms. They are not so much defenses as they are rejections of the need or desire to defend. The perspective from which these claims are uttered is not a horizon that can be merged with the perspectives of those who stand outside of it. Charitable Consciousness is “deaf” to external perspectives, existing as it does in a closed loop between its confirmation of self-conception and consensus about its work that points to its self-evident goodness.

Many who research or work in humanitarianism have noted the problem of the default positive rating for humanitarianism. Didier Fassin says that many fall prey to what he calls the

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<sup>149</sup> My informal conversations with emergency workers seem to confirm this. While they can all attest to people fitting the white savior or charitable consciousness description among development workers, they could not identify the same traits in their own communities. Most agreed that the reason for this was not that naive aid workers were not attracted to the work, but that the work could not be long performed with that kind of naivete. Whether emergency organizations operated with a kind of programmatic naivete, however, is another story.

“Moral Untouchability of Humanitarianism.” He points to a history of insufficiently critical study. In the 1980s and 1990s, for example, many sociologists and anthropologists studying primarily emergency humanitarianism became default spokespeople for it.<sup>150</sup> There are critics, to be sure, but Fassin also notes that many criticisms of humanitarianism, especially those that are not simply externalist (that is, coming from non practitioners who couch their criticism in terms of how humanitarianism is a mere continuation of the neo liberalist or colonial project), still preserve the possibility of the “moral hero.” For Fassin, the idea of the moral hero is a poison to both humanitarian discourse and the way we conceptualize it.

But this hero continues to lurk in most humanitarian media. It is a message often portrayed in humanitarian media: NGOs feed children, build schools, and counsel war victims. In other words, as David Rieff says, “Here are a people engaged in an activity that is wholly admirable, and that one need not view skeptically.”<sup>151</sup> Rieff, echoing the implications of the study of Australian NGOs, notes that this has come about largely because NGOs have had more power than most in shaping their own coverage. The purportedly self-evident goodness of the project, together with the emotional appeal all but eliminates the demand for accountability that is more customary in other domains of life, such as business or politics. Even in a world of mass media, NGOs have a relatively easy time escaping heavy public criticism. Notable exceptions to this are the aftermath of very large natural disasters<sup>152</sup>, which mobilize enough public interest for follow-up reporting, and uncommonly popular NGO campaigns, such as Invisible Children’s Kony 2012. They are, however, relatively rare in comparison to the combined media presence of

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<sup>150</sup> He has in mind here the early work of Renee Fox, Nicholas Stockton and Fiona Fox. *Forces of Compassion : Humanitarianism between Ethics and Politics* 1st ed.. ed. Santa Fe, N.M.: Santa Fe, N.M. : School for Advanced Research Press, 2011. Print. Also see: Fiona Fox. "New Humanitarianism: Does It Provide a Moral Banner for the 21st Century?" *Disasters* 25.4 (2001): 275-89. Print. and: Nicholas Stockton. "In Defence of Humanitarianism." *Disasters* 22.4 (1998): 352-60. Print.

<sup>151</sup> David Rieff. *Charity on the Rampage: The Business of Foreign Aid (Book Review)*. 76 Vol. , 1997. Print.

<sup>152</sup> See: [How the Red Cross Raised Half a Billion Dollars for Haiti -and Built Six Homes - ProPublica](https://www.propublica.org/article/how-the-red-cross-raised-half-a-billion-dollars-for-haiti-and-built-6-homes), June 3 2015, <<https://www.propublica.org/article/how-the-red-cross-raised-half-a-billion-dollars-for-haiti-and-built-6-homes>>.

NGOs and this criticism alone cannot challenge Charitable Consciousness in a way that leads to it becoming aware of the impossibility of it being able to satisfy the essential terms it sets for itself. It is “plugged in” to the basic background understanding of aid work, which contains also reductive understandings of its primary fields of action, like Africa. These understandings very often lack a notion of the political and social power differentials that make them possible.

Because it is not an open horizon, Charitable Consciousness can interpret the world it encounters through the narrow vocabulary consistent with its view of itself, even when it finds itself in the environment that it has set out to improve, the domain of experience that we might be tempted to think of as the place where illusions are shattered. However, Charitable Consciousness will often encounter more explicit confirmations of this narrow perspective than others who visit the continent. This is because the worldview in which it is grounded is *coercive*. Let us examine this idea of coerciveness as it appears in the work of critical theorist Rey Chow.

### **Coercive Mimeticism**

Rey Chow uses the phrase “coercive mimeticism” to describe the phenomenon of the colonial subject being expected to resemble the western conception of the colonial subject. The project of colonization, she explains, immerses the colonized subject into a mire of values and institutions. The colonized must act in light of these values; to either imitate them, strive to reject them, or undertake a new project that inevitably references these values in some way. From the struggle with mimeticism come problems of agency, authenticity and representation for all involved.

For Chow, there are three levels of mimeticism, each a type of "cross-ethnic representation."<sup>153</sup> First is the forced imposition of the values of European culture in and through colonial expansion. Through the process of colonialism, the "white man" becomes the *original* man, the baseline from which all culture will be judged. The colonial subject, by extension, becomes "a bad copy," one who must "try, in envy, to become that from which she is excluded in an a priori manner."<sup>154</sup>

The second level of mimeticism offers a complication to this world of rigid imposed values. The colonized subject does not easily adopt or subsume European values. They struggle and the struggle takes many forms, including contradiction, dissonance, joy or defeat. The desire for whiteness is accompanied by the constructed shame of being black, even further complicated by shame over wanting to flee that blackness. Chow explains that the misery of colonial life lies also in the ambivalent and ambiguous space *between* the dichotomy of White and Other. Here there is a kind of perpetual crisis of agency for the colonized subject, the articulation of which we find in the works of Fanon and Bhabha. Those who are subject to European values live in a fluid, constantly vacillating world, not just one in which there are rigid hierarchies. It is in this space that the colonized find themselves to be in a "self-divided" space where there are many possibilities for selfhood, though they all still subsist beneath European cultural rule.

Chow describes the third level of mimeticism as "the level at which the ethnic person is expected to come to resemble what is recognizably ethnic."<sup>155</sup> In distinction to the *mission civilisatrice* of high colonialism, in which the colonizer attempted to recreate a European citizen in religion and affect, the normative power of the Western perspective forces the colonized

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<sup>153</sup> Rey Chow. *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2002. Print.

<sup>154</sup> Chow. 104.

<sup>155</sup> Chow. 107.



subject “to resemble the very banal preconceptions that have been appended to them, a process in which they are expected to objectify themselves in accordance with the already seen and thus to authenticate the familiar imaginings of them as ethnics.”<sup>156</sup>

Chow says that this expectation of resemblance is enforced in a kind of Althusserian interpellation, in which the colonizer or westerner hails the colonial subject, who, in responding, signals that she really is the kind of subject that the interpellative power constructs them as. For Althusser, this interpellative power was the ideological state apparatus, like the education system or the repressive state apparatus, as manifested in the police. In the case of the postcolonial world, Chow thinks the interpellative force is more simply what Jameson calls “community interdependence” or relative confinement to a designated ethnic space observed by outside forces who make claims on it. These outside forces are that of the westerner, who look to the ethnic space for an old image, similar to that depicted of Africa at Busch Gardens, and who expect the Africa that they encounter to be a reflection of that image. Those inside the ethnic space are hailed, and compelled to respond in a way that confirms the image, by confessing themselves to be this ethnic being. Chow says that this confession must take the form of a kind of exhibition, which manifests as “self-mimicry.”<sup>157</sup>

I think that Chow’s description of coercive mimeticism points to two important points about Charitable Consciousness. The first is that Charitable Consciousness is a vessel for the interpellative force brought against the postcolonial subjects it encounters. Obviously, Charitable Consciousness has very particular images it has set out to encounter, those that are cast as the foils for its confirmation of self conception. These are the images and narratives that have been shared across humanitarian media, which Barbara Harrell-Bond says are effective in “portraying

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<sup>156</sup> Chow. 107.

<sup>157</sup> Chow. 114.

refugees as helpless and desperately in need of international aid assistance.”<sup>158</sup> However, the image need not be for only refugees or internally displaced persons. Anyone who responds to the hail of Charitable Consciousness and the normative community it represents can help fulfill the confirmation of self conception. Crucially, Charitable Consciousness will almost always find what it seeks. The aid worker can achieve what one might consider to be cultural immersion and yet have no encounter with difference other than that which it has constructed.

The second thing the concept of coercive mimeticism alerts us to are the conditions under which African subjects become “complicit” in the machinations of Charitable Consciousness. It is here that we begin our reflection on the other side, so to speak of this engagement. Previously we have observed humanitarian history and ideology from a vantage placed clearly in the west. But in order to build a more complete conception of Charitable Consciousness and its world, we must consider the degree to which humanitarianism is a domain in which there occur particular encounters between western *and* postcolonial subjects who are each operating with their particular motivations. I think of the relation between these two subjects in the humanitarian field of activity as a kind of *specious solidarity* which furthers the ideological goals of each.

Much has been made of the different worlds that African Americans and White Americans often inhabit regardless of their proximity to one another. One is governed by pernicious disadvantage and the other is governed by privilege. White privilege is often seen as a kind of invisible power, one that often goes unnoticed by those who wield it as they successfully hail cabs or get approved for mortgages. It is invisible, though, because the wielder believes their experience is just “the way the world is.” On these grounds, they see those that accuse them of privilege as making things up to somehow distract from their own moral deficiencies. My own

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<sup>158</sup> Barbara Harrell-Bond. "Can Humanitarian Work with Refugees be Humane?" *Human Rights Quarterly* 24.1 (2002): 51-85. Print.

experiences in Africa suggest that this world of privilege exists in many places in Africa and operates in much the same way for many of the same reasons. During my time there, I found myself split between my own western privilege and the fact that I wasn't visibly western to most that I encountered. As such, I got to observe and speak to people in ways that I believe would not have been possible if I were white.

At hotels, I could speak to employees in a fairly straightforward way and be treated with basic courtesy. But I could observe other patrons treating the staff in abysmally patronizing ways. On one occasion at a hotel in Gulu, Uganda, I sat in the lobby waiting to be joined by fellow travelers. A group of travelers who seemed to be on a mission trip came in. The person who appeared to be their group leader spoke to the person behind the desk with terrible condescension, and in a display that struck me as grossly inappropriate, he compulsively touched the bellboys and other staff, putting his arm around them as he spoke of how much he loved God and Uganda. The scene recalled for me the passage in Griffin's *Black Like Me* in which Griffin, in disguise as an African American was party to a group of white men asking a group of black men about where they could find prostitutes. Griffin was most shocked that their behavior seemed to break the general veneer of distaste or at the very least, distance that normally governed relations between blacks and whites in the time and place that he was writing. "The whites, especially the tourists," he says, "had no reticence before us, and no shame since we were Negroes... We learned to spot these from the moment we sat down, for they were immediately friendly and treated us with the warmth and courtesy of equals."<sup>159</sup> I was overcome with the feeling that I was witnessing something gross, and part of my feeling came from knowing that there was no comparable event in my experiences living in America where this same person would feel so comfortable being in such physical and social contact with the African American

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<sup>159</sup> John Howard Griffin 1920-1980. *Black Like Me*. New York: New American Library, 1961. Print.

employees of a hotel. I saw this interaction as a signal of the mission group's induction into a place where they were granted more access to black bodies than they could ever expect to have stateside. And the primary supporting indication of this was the degree to which the hotel staff played along. It is not clear to me what these particular staff members thought about the interaction, but it is possible that they viewed it as a kind of occupational hazard--the condition of employment in such proximity to travelers who rarely if, ever, came to that particular lodge for any reason disconnected from the development aid or religious conversion. In a sense, they are simply returning the image that any tourist might expect upon their arrival in an exotic locale.

But the activity of white people goes beyond the universally problematic tourist interaction. In Gulu, I went to a Ugandan bank with the white woman who worked at the birth clinic I had come to visit. There was a long line, which she joined, briefly. Very soon a bank teller stepped out of an office, walked up to her, grabbed her by the hand and led her back into the office before closing its door. This was not a pre-established relationship, nor was it the case that she had come to deal in significant amounts of shillings.. Her skin color was itself a passport to the privilege of preferential treatment. She did not have to come for a big transaction because her race was itself a sign of wealth that needed to be treated like such. It was a similar conclusion to which Michael Maren came during his time in the Peace Corps: "With my English degree and suburban upbringing and white skin, I could walk into an African village and throw money and bags of food around. I could do anything I pleased."<sup>160</sup>

It is, of course, true that money plays a significant role in this treatment, especially in Gulu in the last decade. Travelers on mission trips and aid workers make such significant contributions to Gulu's economy that, in a town where the default coffee at every establishment

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<sup>160</sup> Michael Maren. *The Road to Hell : the Ravaging Effects of Foreign Aid and International Charity*. New York: New York : Free Press, 1997. Print.

where coffee could be bought served Nescafe, two free trade coffee shops sprouted up catering exclusively to white people. They even sold ice cream. Laura Edmondson has been particularly sensitive to the interplay of money and confirmation of expectation.

In the streets of Gulu, the allure of aid money was repeatedly displayed as Land Cruisers and Pajeros belonging to the World Food Programme, World Health Organization, Doctors without Borders, various branches of the United Nations, CARE International, and World Vision drove past the locals on foot or, at best, on bicycles. These signifiers of wealth provide an impoverished population with tantalizing glimpses into the seemingly limitless Euro-cash flow, affirming Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri's categorization of international humanitarian organizations as "among the most powerful and prominent in the contemporary social order."<sup>161</sup>

It is easy to see how this movement of wealth would attract attention in a place where there is relatively little wealth to spare. it is also easy to see why many Ugandan points of contact would be in the business of telling their narratives in ways that fit the stories that aid workers want to experience or tell. Edmondson thinks that Northern Ugandans are very well aware of this, and that their narratives of war and suffering are ways in which they can compete in the global market.<sup>162</sup> Thus, in the rehabilitative dramatic theater program in which Edmondson participated, she found the performances were not simply ways in which other Ugandans performed their stories in order to collectively heal. They were performed not just for the gaze of Ugandans, but also for the international audience; the narrative and methods of performance were always adjusted so they could play to the donors who made the World Vision-run program possible.

A Ugandan aid worker with whom I spoke also reflected this understanding. Ivan worked for the Dutch NGO War Child as a caseworker, arranging social support services for victims of the war. He was given 100,000 shillings a week to spend on these and other services, like school fees and medical bills. On occasion, the money would not arrive on time, or at all, which strained

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<sup>161</sup> Laura Edmondson. "Marketing Trauma and the Theatre of War in Northern Uganda." *Theatre Journal* 57.3 (2005): 451-74. Print. She quotes from Michael Hardt 1960-. *Empire*. Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge, Mass. : Harvard University Press, 2000. Print.

<sup>162</sup> Edmondson. 452

his relationship with the cases that he worked. Ivan and other workers felt that financial support was a very important means of emotional support for children, some of whom were soldiers in the war. He thought that it would have been better to have never had money than to have it some weeks and not others. War Child was funded by the Dutch government as well as private, mostly Dutch citizens. On occasion some of these private donors would come to Northern Uganda to visit. Ivan and his fellow caseworkers would be under pressure to present the operation in the best possible light and they played their role as best they could, since they knew that continued funding depended on their performance.

While Ivan recognized that NGOs were not perfect, he also noted that people expected more from NGOs than they did from the government and many aid projects could be very effective. In his opinion, though, NGOs also made people dependent upon them. So many NGOs were in the north, bringing so much money that it was often a better bet to cater to the needs of the NGO than it was to engage in some other productive work. Harrell-Bond reflects upon this relationship of dependence in the case of working with refugees.

What legitimizes the helpers' authority is not merely the presence of the refugees, but the maintenance of the exercise of their allotted functions: the helpers and those who need the help. The maintenance of these roles is independent of the actual needs or abilities of the refugees who in many cases could quite capably administer and distribute the aid among themselves, a fact so obvious it hardly requires pointing out.<sup>163</sup>

Harrell-Bond says that aid workers who provide services in refugee camps, in this case, those distributing supplies for UNHCR, often cast refugees themselves into one of two narratives. The first is that of the good, docile refugee, who is grateful for help. The other is the ungrateful, disruptive, manipulative refugee. This dichotomy is hardly a good reflection of the life of a refugee; it is, in fact more of a reflection of the rhetorical and organizational needs of the aid worker. Between the poles of this dichotomy lies the refugee, who is more than capable of

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<sup>163</sup> Harrell-Bond. 57

displaying docility or outrage, depending upon how they are treated by relief workers. Because they understand that they are being made by their benefactors to play roles, a fact that is often infuriating, but one to which they have very little choice to accept.<sup>164</sup>

On these accounts, I mean to show that the Africans encountered by aid workers, whether they be hotel staff or tour guides or refugees under a camp tent, have a very good notion of their place in relation to the perceptive needs of aid workers and tourists, and very often make perfectly informed choices about their own behavior in the presence of visitors. Of course, these choices are made in a postcolonial space affected by the existential considerations that Chow describes, so it is possible that the interpellative hail of Charitable Consciousness is answered with differing or oscillating degrees of sincerity. But the point remains: those who stand to benefit from the resources of western aid work are often acting from what economists would put down as rational self interest in choosing to fulfill the aid worker's or tourist's expectation of resemblance. It is a point that would go without saying were it not for the pervasiveness of the African imaginary. Because of this imaginary, Charitable Consciousness believes itself to be connected to a community of aid recipients with a bond that does not warrant suspicion or critical examination. This bond is specious at best. Charitable Consciousness cannot necessarily tell the difference between a sympathetic go between or a genuine encounter or the many gradations that lie between. Its model for this encounter is, quite literally, "an orphan that smiles in spite of it all."

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<sup>164</sup> Harrell Bond recounts one particularly horrid example of this forced role playing: "One refugee, a university student from the now Democratic Republic of Congo, talked about his experiences in Sweden where he was treated 'like a baby.' In my kitchen in Oxford, while helping me clear the table, he acted out how one of his 'helpers' spoke to him: 'Now, this is how you pick up a plate. This is the way you place it on the counter.' He went on, 'They tried to make me feel as if I were back to zero.' Even though he found a language class in Uppsala more appropriate for university entrance (his objective), he was forced to learn Swedish with a group of mixed ages and abilities, including persons who had never been to school. 'They would not allow me to work things out for myself,' he complained."

The structure of Charitable Consciousness, then, looks like this: As a shape of spirit that takes up the false universalism of its own cultural perspective, it seeks out an encounter that can confirm for it its own conception of itself as particular kind of moral agent, namely the moral hero, who acts from a place of selflessness. But in order to confirm that it is in fact this kind of agent, it must be recognized by others as such, that is, it needs external justification for what it is trying to establish internally by making reference to a community of believers that carry the same commitments. It thus needs a means of demonstrating its altruism, which it selects according to the standards of its false universalism. Charitable Consciousness coerces these subjects even as it believes itself to be in fundamental connection to them, deaf to the possibility of its own imposition.

It is much easier to think about *history* in Hegel than it is to think about *time*. But Hegel does say that there are some dialectical movements that, once established by the dialectic, are passed over rather quickly--sinking “to the level of exercises, and even to that of games for children.”<sup>165</sup> It seems to me Charitable Consciousness, insofar as it carries a sentimentalist remnant nearly three hundred years on from the emergence of sentimentalism, is not such an easily extinguished shape of spirit. It is also, we must note, not harmless. Charitable Consciousness as exemplified in individual aid workers, institutions, donors and media creations, has proved itself to be dangerous. One notable case in which this can easily be seen is Invisible Children.

### **Invisible Children and the Power of Media**

Individuals can participate in Charitable Consciousness in and through their motivations and actions. Institutions participate in Charitable Consciousness by having policies which lack

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<sup>165</sup> Hegel, §27



mechanisms for responding to criticisms or preventing individuals with particular ideologies from impacting the office or the field. Also, discourses replicate Charitable Consciousness, as discourses provide the normative social connections between individuals and institutions across time. While one can be a part of an uncritical humanitarian institution or discourse without adopting an uncritical ideology, the supreme ideological stance of that discourse or institution, as we have seen in discussions of institutional racism, can place limits on an individual's ability to help the institution make good on its stated goals. What happens then, when discourse, the institution and its members all share the same uncritical ideology? In this case, we can have an effective institution that either has problematic stated goals, or has appropriate goals and is unable to determine, through the cloud of its own ideology, whether it is meeting them. Such an institution is problematic on the grounds of the consequences of its action and its inability to address its mistakes in the midst of its action. This is the great danger of Charitable Consciousness. Having no clear mechanisms for adjustment, it moves forward in its commitment, affecting all who are caught in its wake. I believe this is what happened in the case of Invisible Children, Inc. Our view of the activity of this organization will be a sustained look at the way Charitable Consciousness operates and will also alert us to the possibility that this shape of spirit, if we cannot find a way to engage with it, could overtake all future humanitarian discourses which directly address private donors..

Invisible Children was founded in 2004 by Jason Russell, Laren Poole, and Bobby Bailey. A year before, Russell, who had just graduated film school, and his college aged friends decided to take a trip to Sudan to make a documentary about the conflict in Darfur. Their first major video, *Invisible Children: Rough Cut* they describe themselves as “naive kids” who understand that “media is life” on the search to finding the truth about just how bad the conflict in Sudan was.

“We were determined to face the danger head on and leave as warriors,” says Jason Russell over accompanying video of him walking up a rocky hill with a lush Sudanese landscape behind him. They didn’t uncover very much in Sudan, since most people in affected regions had fled. In search of Sudanese refugees in Uganda, they passed through Northern Uganda, which was then still in terror of the Lord’s Resistance Army. It was in Gulu that they discovered the night commuters.

The LRA is a paramilitary organization which, at the time of its founding, was dedicated to overthrowing the Ugandan government. In order to build its army, it depended on abductions, and the prime targets of these abductions were young boys living away from city centers in the Acholi region of Northern Uganda. In 2004, the conflict between the LRA and the Lord’s resistance army had been in motion for nearly seventeen years. The army at that time was deep in the bush and mostly active at night. This prompted hundreds of young boys who, in fear of being abducted, would walk from their villages in the evening and sleep in Gulu, which at the time was the biggest city and safest place to be. There they would sleep under whatever shelter they could find until the morning, when they would walk many miles back to their villages. Russell contended these children, known as the night commuters, were invisible in the eyes of the world.

After filming the night commuters and learning more about the conflict in Uganda, Russell, Poole and Bailey made the *Rough Cut* video and began to show it to their immediate community. They soon realized that calling attention to the LRA was their mission and the video became part of a grassroots campaign that consisted of showings at churches, high schools and colleges. By 2006, Invisible Children, Inc. reported more than 3.1 million dollars in income. While they described themselves as primarily an “Awareness” organization, they did set up an office in Uganda where they coordinated some development projects, like funding school fees

for children, setting up radio tours to help notify people in far off areas about LRA movement, and financing organizations dedicated to rehabilitating people who escaped the LRA and returned to the community. They also dedicated some resources to lobbying the United States government on behalf of military intervention to kill or capture the leader of the LRA, Joseph Kony.

Invisible Children capitalized on its grassroots support through slick and constant social media engagement and creative campaigns aimed at media savvy millennials. One such campaign was the 2007 event *Displace Me*, an “experiential” event in which participants brought cardboard and sleeping bags on an evening walk and campout, a symbolic night commute in honor of the displaced Ugandan children who Russell and company met years before. The event was held in several cities and brought tens of thousand of participants in a year that saw more than seven million dollars in revenue. But Invisible Children’s greatest production came five years later with the video *Kony 2012*.<sup>166</sup>

Invisible Children posted *Kony 2012* online in March of 2012 and quickly became the most shared video in the history of the internet, being viewed more than 100 million times in less than seven days.<sup>167</sup> The call to action at the end of the video helped Invisible Children claim more than 26.5 millions dollars that fiscal year.<sup>168</sup> With the success of the video came a cloud of criticism, however.<sup>169</sup> Scores of Africans made response videos on YouTube and others who were already critical of humanitarian aid set their sights on the narrative of the video, which they

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<sup>166</sup> Jason Russell. *Kony 2012*. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Y4MnpzG5Sqc> Vol. , 2012. Web.

<sup>167</sup> Samantha Grossman, "Kony 2012: Invisible Children's Campaign Becomes Most Viral Video Ever | TIME.com," *Time* March 12 2012, : <<http://newsfeed.time.com/2012/03/12/kony-2012-documentary-becomes-most-viral-video-in-history/>>.

<sup>168</sup> <http://invisiblechildren.com/financials/>

<sup>169</sup> Anjali S. Bal, et al. "Do good, goes bad, gets ugly: Kony 2012." *Journal of Public Affairs* 13.2 (2013): 202-8. Print.

accused of being an oversimplification at best and misinformation at worst.<sup>170</sup> The video opens with a call to human potential before moving to video of Russell explaining the LRA and Joseph Kony to his very young son. It then recaps the struggles of Northern Uganda before issuing a call to action that is framed by an expiration date, the end of the year. The call to action includes the purchase of bracelets, t-shirts and posters, as well as a call to bombard the social media accounts of famous people and politicians with information about the campaign. The Ultimate goal of this barrage was to encourage military intervention to find Kony, who by this time had fled Uganda for the Democratic Republic of Congo. But the subtext of the video is about how, “through social media, a young Western public now not only knows and cares about what is happening in the world, but also has the means to make a difference.”<sup>171</sup>

Invisible Children moved swiftly to, as they saw it, address criticism. CEO Ben Keesey posted videos on Vimeo and YouTube in which he called for questions and posted follow up videos. He answered questions, explicitly invoking Invisible Children’s commitment to transparency. Invisible Children also created a follow up video to Kony 2012, Kony 2012 Part 2: Beyond Famous, which posted to YouTube April 5th, 2012 just one month after the original Kony 2012 video was released. In addition, Invisible Children posted lengthy written replies to criticisms and objections on its web site.

This transparency, however, was the kind indicative of an organization with ideological commitments that made it deaf to the merely apparent nature of their ‘transparency’. Some of the objections that Invisible Children addressed were straw men, whose proper counterparts were

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<sup>170</sup> "Ishmael Beah Says ‘Kony 2012’ Simplistic and Unrealistic " The Daily Beast April 19 2012, : <<http://www.thedailybeast.com/articles/2012/04/19/ishmael-beah-says-kony-2012-simplistic-and-unrealistic.html>>.

<sup>171</sup> Johannes von Engelhardt and Jeroen Jansz. "Challenging humanitarian communication: An empirical exploration of Kony 2012." *International Communication Gazette* 76.6 (2014): 464-84. Print.

much more problematic for IC's campaign. For example, in response to the question "Are Ugandans for or against the Kony 2012 campaign?" they stated:

As everywhere else, reactions are mixed. Just as with any country or continent, it is dangerous to characterize the Ugandan nationality categorically. KONY 2012 has evoked a variety of responses from people all over the world—many positive, but some critical. The same is true within Uganda. We have found that many Ugandans welcome the film's message of stopping Joseph Kony, but some take offense at how the message was delivered. Admittedly, KONY 2012 was geared towards young, western audiences in an effort to raise awareness of what began in Uganda, but is currently taking place in DR Congo, Central African Republic, and South Sudan.<sup>172</sup>

This was an optimistic characterization. Very few in Northern Uganda were pleased. Many in the region did not even know about the video until an independent NGO run by current Nobel Prize nominee Victor Ochen hosted a screening. Al Jazeera covered the screening. Footage features a very angry Ugandan man in the Lire district who could not understand why a video about Joseph Kony could be so full of white people and captures the moment when anger over the video turns violent. Viewers begin to throw rocks at the screen, prompting all in view of Al Jazeera cameras to take off running. A viewing of the film in Gulu, Uganda hosted by Invisible Children did not fare much better. Though the official Invisible Children video of the events and the showing portray a pleased population, news reports told a very different story:

Dissatisfied with the content, the crowd pelted the organisers with stones, injuring a police officer identified as Pamela Inenu and two musicians hired to sing at the event. Police fired teargas at the crowd, and live bullets in the air, injuring dozens, who also lost valuables including phones and money.<sup>173</sup>

Ugandans were angry at the video for several reasons. For dramatic effect, it portrayed an old reality in Northern Uganda as though it was a current reality. It also portrayed Ugandans in a narrative of suffering that many had sought to keep in the past. Some of the people, who had

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<sup>172</sup> Invisible Children: Questions and Answers., 2012, <<http://invisiblechildren.com/about/q-and-a/> (accessed May 15, 2012).>.

<sup>173</sup> Sam Lawino, "Kony 2012 video makers using us to make profit, war victim says - National," Daily Monitor April 17 2012, : <<http://www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/-/688334/1387926/-/aw2cd3z/-/index.html>>.

been disfigured in the war were shown in the video and resented the use of their image. To others, it seems that the money that Invisible Children raised was not reaching Northern Uganda, which made Invisible Children seem more like a scheme than a helpful NGO. Even the Archbishop of Gulu denounced the video, saying that the film had “ill motives and geared towards igniting anger in the population to cause violence.”<sup>174</sup>

Invisible Children had planned another event in conjunction with the release of the *Kony 2012* video: A publicity campaign called *Cover the Night*. They were to gather in major cities in order to paste fliers and posters on every surface on which they could legally post. During the time I was in New York City, I worked with the founder of an NGO and a lawyer at NYU to put together a panel at which we would discuss *Kony 2012*.<sup>175</sup> Then we invited Invisible Children to the event. NYU secured *Democracy Now!* host Amy Goodman to moderate and flew in the host of the first screening in Northern Uganda, Victor Ochen. Invisible Children sent two representatives: Jolly Okot and Adam Finck, who worked at their Ugandan branch. Ultimately, there were six people on the panel, including myself.

I had imagined that the discussion would present an opportunity to, at minimum, force representatives of Invisible Children into a clear response over which they did not have editorial control. In reality, it was an occasion to see the lengths to which these Invisible Children representatives would go to avoid directly answering any questions, and to draft pseudo-responses not even worth quoting after other panelists raised serious issues with *Kony 2012*. At the end of the event, Okot and Finck left immediately, with Okot walking away from an interview by a fellow Ugandan journalist who had intercepted her near the elevator. It was here I realized the degree to which members of the Invisible Children organization lived in their own

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<sup>174</sup> Lawino.

<sup>175</sup> Panel discussion: “Reflecting on Kony 2012: Lessons Learned for Global Activism” <http://chrgj.org/event/panel-discussion-reflecting-on-kony-2012-lessons-learned-for-global-activism/>

world, so to speak, one shielded by a different social consensus, from which external criticism appeared to them as unwarranted hatred.<sup>176</sup>

Regardless of criticism, Kony 2012 was viewed as a success by millions of western participants. In the aftermath of its social media campaign and lobbying efforts, the Obama administration announced it would continue its military presence in Uganda and create a regional task force to help train the Ugandan army with skills it needed to catch Kony. In addition, Kony and two of his advisors were added to the War Crimes Rewards program, a bounty that held by the United States.<sup>177</sup> Invisible Children took credit for all of these things, though many critics noted these arrangements had been in the works for some time. Obama deployed Africom troops to Uganda in 2011 and the task force has already been established to some extent in Senate Bill 1067, The Lord's Resistance Army Disarmament and Northern Uganda Recovery Act of 2009.<sup>178</sup> If these outcomes were already in development, and not direct results brought about by social media pressure, what was the true impact of the Kony 2012 campaign? Quite possibly the only true causality which can be attributed to the efforts of the Invisible Children was diverting resources from better projects in Uganda.

I interviewed Victor Ochen, director of the African Youth Initiative, while he was in New York for the panel discussion.<sup>179</sup> He said the problem with international NGOs is their fundamental lack of contact with the communities they claim to serve. This is not the case for all of them, he stressed, but those who do well have learned how to connect. Invisible Children, he charged were completely disconnected. No one in the north knew that they were making such a

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<sup>176</sup> This may in fact be the reason that Jason Russell had a very public mental breakdown just a few weeks after the release of Kony 2012. "Kony 2012 Filmmaker Jason Russell Opens Up about Nude Public Meltdown." ABC News October 8, 2012.

<sup>177</sup> Lauren M. Gould. "The Politics of Portrayal in Violent Conflict." *Alternatives: Global, Local, Political* 39.4 (2014): 207-30. Print.

<sup>178</sup> <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/111/s1067/text>

<sup>179</sup> Ochen, Victor. 2012. Interview by Chioke I'Anson. Digital Recording. April 15. Manhattan, NY. <https://soundcloud.com/chismatic/nobel-prize-nominee-victor-ochen>

video, not even the Ugandan staff of Invisible Children. When Northern Ugandans did find out about it, which were really only those who made it to one of the two public screenings, they were justifiably suspicious. But the problems go deeper. Invisible Children set the date of the Cover the Night campaign to April 20th. This day, however, is a day of mourning for many in the North, especially those who live in Atiak. It was on that day in 1995 that an LRA lieutenant massacred more than two hundred people. Ochen believed that any NGO that had the interests of the people at heart would not hold an event of this sort on this day, and would not draft the language of their calls for support in terms of “making Kony Famous,” emblazoning his image on t-shirts:

Americans are confused as to the suitable use of the images of those who have recently caused great suffering and trauma. A glut of seemingly celebratory images of Osama bin Laden on the bare walls and signposts of New York City would not be tolerated. A contextually deceptive catch phrase like ‘Make bin Laden Famous’ would hardly be an acceptable way of framing the search for his capture.

Ochen felt that the best way for an international NGO to be of assistance was to partner with local NGOs. These are groups like his own AYINET, which do not work with the massive budgets that International NGOs have, but who understand the region and its challenges intimately. Local NGOs are frequently rendered invisible in NGO discourses by the same “media logic” explicated by Cottle and Nolan, in which hometown voices are prioritized at the expense of the other participants in the field.<sup>180</sup> It is perhaps no surprise then, that Ochen thought another thing that international Organizations should do is not be so “media oriented.”

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<sup>180</sup> Cottle and Nolan. 871: “This assimilated media logic constantly regionalizes and “brings back home” reports from disaster zones by finding local personnel and delegates--referred to by our interviewees in media speak as “our talent” and “stars”. This is perhaps understandable given the relation of media dependency that characterizes the situation of NGOs and which reflects wider patterns of global “regionalization” but it inevitably underplays and marginalizes the active agency of indigenous aid workers (and victims) and thereby symbolically reinforces a highly Western- led and Western-centric view.”



He recognized the narratives that get attention must promise big transformations, but the real work of healing is slow. "...If you anticipate a big leap, it risks you having to misreport realities."

Ochen's reflections are not particularly novel in the grand scheme of development aid. There is an entire field of critical development theorists and activists out there, and these are their basic starting points for their conceptions of aid work. However, the perspective represented by Ochen is a critical perspective, one which recognizes the complexity of aid work while also knowing, explicitly, the work cannot be undertaken for the sake of the fulfillment of self-reference. For this reason, many who embody this perspective approach aid work like it is a job among others, separated only by the commitment that one must make to forgo basic "first world comforts." Charitable Consciousness however, is so far from this perspective, that even when the poster depicts a war criminal, the true object of the campaign is the moral sensibility of the person holding the stapler. I would like to close with some limited reflections on how we might change all of this.

### **Conclusion: In Search of the Antigone Effect**

In order for there to be a change in Charitable Consciousness, the aid worker must have a *sufficiently dissonant* experience; One which will disrupt the reach for meaning that helps constitute the experience of the postcolonial world. It is an experience that promotes reflection and reveals, at least in part, the irreconcilable claims of the aid worker's mission. There is no predictable structure for this experience. Often, it will happen over the long course of one's engagement with the target population, particularly if this engagement is solitary, that is, independent of a larger community of aid workers. It may also occur through basic conversation with a knowing cynic, someone who can reinterpret the experience of the naive aid worker in a

way that exposes the commitments to which they have been blind. However the means, once it is experienced, the revelation will almost always be accompanied by a crisis of self- understanding. The aid worker will question the wisdom of identifying so closely with their helping mission. However, the naive ideology itself may still cast a shadow leading the aid worker to externalize, and reject, the internal process necessary to overcome the shape of Charitable Consciousness. Thus, to sustain their participation in Charitable Consciousness, they may claim “other” NGOs are doing bad work, or “other” individuals are living out the privileged cultural experiences that fulfill the self-conception of the humanitarian as a good person; “But *my* work is good.” The new knowledge of the perils of aid work are deflected to others for the sake of the maintenance of the naive aid worker’s self-conception.

Charitable Consciousness, then, must undergo a crisis that *doesn’t resolve*. My own conversations with development and relief workers in Uganda and South Sudan suggested that most western aid workers, once they are alerted to just how complicated and difficult aid work can be, become perpetually uncertain whether the work they are doing is effective at all, even when it is relief work that involves delivering food--an act that would seem to be unambiguously good, until one learns that food supplies can sometimes be expired, or alien to the diet of the target community. Aid workers who seemed to be critical were always torn, but worked in the field because they wanted to help people. This is not to say that their work was free of problems. They still had institutional problems and their own moments of sentimentalism. But, as moments, they were points in a crisis about the nature and possibility of effective aid work, on a spectrum that also included complete doubt about the effectiveness of any project and the notion that the kind of working being done just might work out for the better. This oscillation, I think, makes for a better aid worker than one who is certain of the good they are doing, though such a perspective

puts one in danger of burning out and running through a series of reifications that I have also observed, like the serial administrator, who has seen so little happen to improve life that she measures success in terms of simple completed tasks as opposed to any qualitative indicators.<sup>181</sup>

A traditional Hegelian might say that the only way to know how one shape of spirit leads to another is to look at its movement retrospectively. On this view, scheming for how one can encourage a transformation is extremely difficult at best. However, we must try. Charitable Consciousness is the dominant ideology of western humanitarianism whose reach is global; it has to be combated in effective ways and, as I hope I have shown, debates and open criticism are not good candidates. One possible option however, is to model for naive aid workers the process of transformation. In much the same way that Antigone presented to its ancient Greek audience a new way to think about Greek life without the raising the question as a philosophical point. To that end, I think one candidate for a perspective that might serve this role is a particular focus on failure.

The Canadian arm of the NGO Engineers Without Borders began, in 2008, to publish a document it called the “Failure Report” and it collected together a series of first person accounts of aid workers explaining a variety of projects that they had been involved with and how they have failed. In these accounts, the authors grapple with the causes of such failure. EWB Canada has published a new version of this report every year since 2008. What is of interest for us in these is that they seem to run directly counter to the many ways in which NGOs carefully manage their images. Here is a case in which an NGO asks its members to reflect on failure in a public way. Former EWB staffer Ashley Good expanded this effort and launched a web platform

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<sup>181</sup> “Burning out” is a common topic of discussion among these aid workers, as are conversation about why it is that they are engaged in aid work at all. J., "How to survive as an aid worker without losing your soul," The Guardian, March 23 2015, : <[http://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2015/mar/23/how-to-survive-as-an-aid-worker-without-losing-your-soul?CMP=share\\_btn\\_fb](http://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2015/mar/23/how-to-survive-as-an-aid-worker-without-losing-your-soul?CMP=share_btn_fb)>.

called “Admitting Failure” (Admitting failure.com) in which it is soliciting ‘failure reports’ from organizations not connected to EWB in an attempt to engage the wider development community in this process. It is a bold move for an industry in which there is heavy competition and a drop in reputation can lead to significant funding crises and even the death knell for one’s organization. However, as Sarah Lewis points out in the forward to the 2011 edition, the potential benefits in pushing through the ideological deadlock far outweigh the pitfalls:

A mistake is made in somewhere in rural Tanzania. It is not publicized—a donor might get upset. Two years later the same mistake is repeated in Ghana, six months later in Mali, and so the story continues as it has for 60 years. Inspired by the iterative approach in innovation, EWB knows that by hiding our failures, we are condemning ourselves to repeat them.<sup>182</sup>

The Failure Report is about institutional accountability--an important topic in its own right in the field of humanitarianism.<sup>183</sup> While there are serious problems with aid work and accountability, it is generally understood that accountability practices, when they exist, must be voluntary.<sup>184</sup> But standardized voluntary accountability practices have proved unappealing to both news and humanitarian media, and remain alien to institutions still affected by charitable consciousness.<sup>185</sup> The strength of the Failure Report is that it was successfully marketed. The report is slickly produced with a magazine like-layout, unlike most reports from aid organizations which carry the drabness of officiality. It was also accompanied by a campaign in which EWB staffers explained the usefulness of the report at aid conferences. In conversation with Ashley Good, she told me that some NGO workers were clearly intrigued by how they could package a failure report in a media-friendly production to attract more donors. Good was put off by this, but it

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<sup>182</sup> *Engineers without Borders: Failure Report*. Engineers Without Borders Canada, 2011. Web.

<sup>183</sup> It is a topic that many aid organizations neglect, according to a United Nations report. Jem Bendell. *Debating NGO Accountability*. New York and Geneva: United Nations, 2006. Web.

<sup>184</sup> The issue stems from the generally lax regulation on western NGOs. There are quite a few initiatives to this effect, like The Sphere Project, The International Transparency Initiative and the Humanitarian Accountability Partnership.

<sup>185</sup> It is a point sometimes belabored by veterans of aid work. [Part II: One Standard to Rule Them All](https://aidspeak.wordpress.com/2015/05/04/part-ii-one-standard-to-rule-them-all/), <<https://aidspeak.wordpress.com/2015/05/04/part-ii-one-standard-to-rule-them-all/>>.

seems to me that this is an encouraging sign. If the angle and format of the Failure Report, as they have presented it, is attractive to organizations who previously eschewed other legitimate accountability measures, it can serve as an injection of a possible critical perspective where there was none previously. Only there can it have a chance of normalizing the kind of self-reflection which can lead to a more critical shape of consciousness regarding humanitarianism.

Another way to provoke a sufficiently dissonant experience in Charitable Consciousness, I think, is the strategic use of first person narrative. When Charitable Consciousness has its own dissonant experiences over the course of its own experience, they take the form afterward of narratives of awakening. Engineers Without Borders Canada staffer David Damberger recounts exactly such a story in a TEDx talk, in which he recounts his return to a village in India to check up on a water retention project he helped construct.<sup>186</sup> He found the sophisticated setup of rainwater tubs and PVC pipes he and his team put together did not withstand the elements and completely broke down. Because he and his team were the only experts on the apparatus, no one fixed it and people simply went back to the old ways of collecting water, which seemed earlier to be less effective, but were now revealed to be superior since they did not depend on fragile plastic contraptions created by foreigners. It is a recognizable tale to most in the business of aid, but it is told from “within” the naive perspective. Antigone had much the same structure. The Greek audience recognizes themselves in the characters Antigone and Creon. These figures are not aliens to their ways of self-understanding. Sophocles is not making accusations at the Greek public, bidding them to “open their eyes.” The play simply places the characters in a recognizable world and allows that world’s contradictions to create the tragedy. Naive aid workers might also benefit from being exposed to these kinds of narratives, stories that, within themselves, make their own goals visible and then generate skepticism about these goals. From

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<sup>186</sup> [http://www.ted.com/talks/david\\_damberger\\_what\\_happens\\_when\\_an\\_ngo\\_admits\\_failure](http://www.ted.com/talks/david_damberger_what_happens_when_an_ngo_admits_failure)

this view, instead of holding debates or publicly criticizing an NGO or aid worker with a criterion of judgment to which those aid workers do not yet have access, critics can reach out with invitations to simply share stories from their own experiences in aid work, to include stories of transformative movements. These stories, whether they are told in conversation or transmitted over mass media need not be preceded by any qualifying claims or calls to action. They need only contain a story in which naive aid workers can recognize themselves enough to follow into the story's revealing contradiction.

It is also important that Charitable Consciousness encounter these stories at the right time. I spoke to Daniela Papi in 2012 when she ran an “education travel” company called PepyTours. She started the company as an ethical alternative to “Gap year” volunteering, in which college students go on “service” trips to other parts of the world. Papi herself had been on many such trips and had learned over time the services students provided to struggling communities were inconsequential at best and harmful at worst, even though they produced great feelings in the volunteer. Her tour company removed the service aspect and made the trip only about learning. From here, she began to give talks on the subject of the problematic nature of what we in the US would call service learning, or more cynically, voluntourism. She told me that, while it is possible to change students' minds about these often harmful short term helping missions, there are definitely better and worse times to make the attempt. The absolute worst time, she said, was while they were on the trip. This is the period of least sensitivity, when students would be much more vocal in asserting the value of their “work.” It was much more fruitful to approach people before they had cause to be excited about their tour.

The strategic use of stories of transformation might be a good way to counter the prevalence of Charitable Consciousness in individual aid workers. An attractively packaged

reflection on failure might even provoke some institutional reform. However, the biggest problem presented by Charitable Consciousness is its hold on donors, the public for whom colonial conceptions of Africa and the self-evident goodness of aid work are standard. This problem, is difficult to even think through, much less offer solutions for. When the public does turn critical against humanitarian aid, as in the case of The American Red Cross and its Haiti development efforts, it tends to be in uncomplicated ways which preserve the fundamental assumptions of Charitable Consciousness. The essence of the criticism seems to be something like “you have failed to build the houses that you said you would build and now we can’t feel good about the good we are supposed to be doing in the world.” Changes of consciousness across a critical mass of people happens very slowly, much like what the transition from Antigone, as a play attended by a Greek audience, to the legalistic consciousness of Rome must have been like in Hegel’s story. The mechanisms whereby the reflections that affect single individuals also reach the masses just might be on this same timeline, beyond our possible effective reach. This is not to say, however, that one should give up on trying to educate donors as to the complexity of aid work and the need to direct donations to more reflective organizations. Daniela Papi agreed that this was the case, and suggested that the best donors to approach were those who had large amounts of money, “so you can have a lot of impact every time they make a choice.”

Aid work is examined through many different lenses by critics, scholars and practitioners. Despite critical attention, basic problems involving aid work persist. It is my hope that adding yet another lens, though it may be from a nineteenth century enlightenment thinker, can be helpful in contributing to a coherent plan for the transformation of a common perspective.

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