

play a progressive role in combating ideological illusion, such as when the philosophy in question demonstrates the dependence of certain beliefs or desires on the continued existence of particular configurations of power that would otherwise remain hidden” (p. 53). It would be helpful to know more about how illusion is to be determined. Is it the case that only beliefs which do not stem from some particular configuration of power are non-illusionary? In which case, how are we to tell when we have escaped such configurations? Similarly, by what standard is ‘progressive’ to be measured?

That is to say, giving up on ideal theory does not I think free Geuss entirely from the need to offer something positive, for example in support of his assertion that neo-Kantianism is ‘reactionary’ and that his own realist position is progressive. As it stands, Geuss is at his most interesting and persuasive when offering criticisms of ideal theorist such as Rawls. These seem to me as powerful and instructive as any that have yet been made. Political theorists would do well to heed them.

## A More Complicated Humanitarianism

A Review of *Humanitarianism in Question: Politics, Power and Ethics* edited by Michael Barnett and Thomas Weiss. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, pp 303 ISBN: 978-0-8014-7301-2, £ 16.95

By Stacey Lynn Fink

*Humanitarianism in Question: Politics, Power and Ethics*, edited by Michael Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss, is an insightful and much needed study of humanitarianism in an age where its importance is ever-rising. The book takes a critical look into the ontological anxiety of humanitarian organizations, the identity crisis that ensues, and the contemporary pressures and exogenous factors contributing to humanitarianism’s complex issues. What separates this work from previous research on humanitarianism is its comprehensive structure. As Peter J. Hoffman and Thomas G. Weiss point out in the final chapter, it is not only a book for the curious scholar, but it is also for the humanitarian worker, to be used as a guide for bridging the gap between knowledge and practice. The authors stress that to repair the damage thus far requires “not simply a humanitarianism that is strong, but one that is smart” (p. 285): emphasizing the need for humanitarianism to learn from social science research and apply it in the field.

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If you are looking for a book that provides more easy answers this is certainly not the one for you. The work is almost deliberately vague in providing ready, off the shelf solutions. It raises some of the most fundamental questions that arise regarding humanitarian organizations, exposing the good, the bad and the ugly of the field. Not only does Stephen Hopgood in chapter 4 highlight the complication of defining humanitarianism, he also brings to the discussion the complex relationship between power sources, the ethics of action and the importance of motivational purpose for action. Furthermore, he raises the important question of functionality. Are NGOs really superior to large corporations who see humanitarian action as good for business? Does the motivation for aid matter at the end of the day if mouths are being fed and lives saved? Hopgood exposes the distinct contradiction of the logic of a capital market in which humanitarianism is submerged, and the principles of humanitarianism to aid those that cannot give back.

It appears the most promising question regarding humanitarianism is that of accountability. Those closest to humanitarian organizations are all too familiar with the tedious process of filling out grant applications and applying for sponsorships by large-scale corporations. Such funding is typically large, however, the whopping sums usually come with a heavy burden. Corporate funding attaches the organization to the corporation like an investment banker to his billionaire. Corporations demand oversight of their humanitarian 'investment', requiring organizations to monitor their programs and produce quantitative data proving their success and efficiency. Numerous chapters of the book deal with the difficulties that arise between accountability and humanitarianism. Janice Gross Stein emphasizes the "deep divisions about principles and practices" that are complicated by "shifting currents of ethics, power and politics" (p. 125). Drawing issues similar to the Wal-Mart problem, accountability remains a strong set-back for humanitarian organizations on the ground. Whilst it is on the one hand important to be able to effectively deal with humanitarian crises, the humanitarian principles of impartiality, neutrality, humanity and independence are often threatened or compromised by the excessive pressure to measure.

What about the question of politics? The International Committee of the Red Cross speaks strongly of their desire to remain impartial. *Médecins Sans Frontières* has pulled out of regions to avoid political involvements. But the political climate has changed dramatically since the Cold War and organizations are often torn between remaining impartial and remaining to provide aid. Chapter 6 asks important questions regarding what degree of political involvement is 'too political'. Many organizations have adopted new strategies for tackling human suffering at its root cause, stopping rather than treating it. This however, becomes overtly political and contradicts the principles of neutrality. Similarly, ethnic conflicts where camps are overtaken or run by rebels, as in Rwanda, make it increasingly hard for aid

workers to remain impartial. The media and 'poverty porn' create a greater call from the masses for change in other countries that commit cruel human rights violations or those countries with civil rights abuses. Such calls for political change emanate from the West, but are they always welcomed, or are they rather liberal conceptions forced upon other countries? As this book shows, the line that separates humanitarian organizations from politics has become increasingly blurred, and there remain many unanswered questions.

The objective of the book, then, is to emphasize the questions that surround humanitarianism. Barnett and Weiss have created an exceptional assemblage of scholarly insight into the complex nature of humanitarianism. They draw on the weakness of humanitarianism's ontological structure and how it complicates the constant desire to build an industry out of humanitarian organizations. In a more interconnected, globalised world, people are bombarded with images from around the world, and humanitarianism has undergone an immense transformation as a result. While the book offers a few propositions for improvement, it is certainly not a handbook for a 'perfect' humanitarian organization. However, what it does do is dizzy its reader with a variety of important questions. If it is Barnett and Weiss' main objective to spur a scholarly stampede over the various elements of the subject, I think this book will succeed. Equally, the book is composed in a way that might be useful to the practitioner. It is certainly not meant only for the academic and is an intensely critical and interesting read for anyone fascinated by humanitarianism and humanitarian organizations.

## Imperialism, Human Rights and War

A Review of *Humanitarian Imperialism; Using Human Rights to Sell War* by Jean Bricmont. New York: Monthly Review Press, 2006, pp. 176, ISBN: 1-58367-147-1, Pbk £15.95

By Sarah MacKenzie.

Jean Bricmont is professor of theoretical physics, and therefore perhaps not the most likely of authors for a publication concerned with the subject of human rights and the political intentions of the U.S. However, this does make for a rather interesting perspective. Bricmont's book is not based on the science of politics; the author himself is well aware that the book might benefit from some quantitative elements. It is largely an expression of the author's conviction that American foreign policy has