

21. Berliner Colloquium zur Zeitgeschichte

Humanitarian Ethics

Hosts: Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann (University of California, Berkeley)

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Questionnaire

Session 1 Genealogies of Humanitarianism

Introduction Lasse Heerten (Free University Berlin)

Chair Tim B. Müller

Humanitarian ethics have infused international politics in the post-Cold War era. Joining forces with human rights law and advocacy, which has also flourished in the late twentieth century, their rapidly increasing prominence has ushered in new forms of humanitarian governance. However, humanitarianism has a much longer, complex and conflictual history. The humanitarian lexicon of post-Cold War humanitarian governance strongly echoes the language of the Enlightenment era. How do we connect these moments through a deep historical genealogy? Does humanitarian intervention as a political idea and practice of governance have a longer history that connects the 1990s and early 2000s to earlier times? How can we integrate the histories of slavery and anti-slavery, Empire and colonialism, as well as anticolonial or postcolonial movements and moments into this genealogy? Where do the histories of humanitarianism and human rights intersect, where do they differ, in particular if we do not only analyze them as concepts, but in concrete historical contexts? How does our understanding of humanitarian ethics change if we analyze humanitarian imagery as a constituent part of this history?

Session 2 Humanitarianism, Capitalism and the Global Market

Introduction Tehila Sasson (University of London/Centre for History and Economics, Cambridge)

Chair Ilana Feldman (George Washington University)

What is the connection between humanitarianism and the global market? How can we account for the development of a humanitarian industry—one which includes not only aid experts but also businessmen and ordinary people, who came to speak in the name of humanity at the close of the twentieth century? The question has been explored by the historian Thomas Haskell for the eighteenth century but has been less studied about the more recent histories of humanitarian emergencies. For Haskell, during the eighteenth century the growing force of the market economy altered the character of humanitarianism by providing tangible rewards to people who displayed a certain calculating code of conduct, while humbling others whose manner was more unbuttoned. But Haskell wrote his essay in 1981 and as such, his own formulation can barely witness for a new approach to market economy. The end of empires created the globalization of markets and goods as well as the rise of nongovernmental and commercial actors. How did humanitarian sentiments become the ethics of a new global market society? And how did moral sentiments come to shape not only contemporary politics but also new market relations?

Session 3 From Rights to Empathy?

Introduction Zain Lakhani (Harvard University)

Chair Stefan-Ludwig Hoffmann (University of California, Berkeley)

What does it mean to consider affect in politics? As scholars such as Didier Fassin and Miriam Ticktin have argued, affect has become integral to the highest levels of state policy over the past two decades, particularly around the adjudication of migrant and asylum claims. Yet, the role of empathy has often been an exclusionary one—used to limit the number of legitimate migrants through subjective and ocular metrics of credibility and fear.

Discussions of affect's misuse, however, have belied a more comprehensive understanding of its ability to mediate forms of personal truth. Violence against the hysterical woman, or the racial other who cannot feel pain was, to a large degree, made possible because their affect was not considered. Empathy in its truest sense, moderated through affective displays of fear, sadness, pain or hope, can thus play a powerful role in breaking down barriers between self and other, and mediating the racial and cultural divisions that have become integral to the subjective adjudication of contemporary rights.

This panel will thus consider what role affect should have in the political sphere. How can the turn to exclusionary metrics of affect and empathy be reframed in productive ways? In which ways does empathy and care differ sharply from the language of human rights that structured the political lexicon two decades ago? What is the role of "humanitarianism" in state policy itself, and what are the consequences for a state that acts on empathy rather than rights?

Suggested Reading

Didier Fassin, "Asylum", in: Didier Fassin, Richard Rechtman (eds.), *The Empire of Trauma. An Inquiry into the Condition of Victimhood*, Princeton UP 2009, 250-274

Nicolas Guilhot, "The Anthropologist as Witness. Humanitarianism between Ethnography and Critique", in: *Humanity* 3 (2012), 81-101

Thomas L. Haskell, "Capitalism and the Origins of Humanitarian Sensibility", in: *American Historical Review* 90 (1985), 339-43, 359-61, 547-566

Thomas W. Laqueur, "Mourning, Pity, and the Work of Narrative in the Making of 'Humanity'", in: Richard Ashby Wilson, Richard D. Brown (eds.), *Humanitarianism and Suffering. The Mobilization of Empathy*, Cambridge UP 2011, 31-57