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Abstract: This article contributes to the international political theory of humanitarianism by unpicking the politics of humanitarian action's simplest expression: saving human lives in the name of humanity. Both saving lives and defining notions of common humanity are closely interrelated acts of power. What saving a life means depends on a prior definition of humanity; humanitarians' acts of rescue are the measure of their commitment to humanity. The politics of rescue and the politics of humanity are inextricably linked. The article explores four facets of this nexus. First, it considers the meanings of rescue, from saving bodies to saving lives, linked to contingent understandings of humanity. Second, it turns to the rescuers, for whom rescue performs particular functions, not least the need to preserve a sense of self. Third, it situates their often narcissistic motives in relation to the consequences of humanitarian action. Fourth, it addresses the power imbalance inherent in rescue and the problem of causing harm. It concludes that rescue is always an act of presumption, but one that can be tempered by humanitarian actors willing to embrace their role as 'moral politicians' (Walzer), aware of their power and their dirty hands, and open to contrasting understandings of humanity.

Keywords: International political theory, Humanitarianism, Humanity, Rescue, Altruism, Humanitarian Intervention.

I. INTRODUCTION

> Whoever saves one life, it is as if he saved the entire world.[1]
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> (Talmudic saying)

> Whoever has saved a life, it is as if he has saved the whole of humanity.[2]
>
> (Qur'anic verse)

> To save a life is to save all of humanity.[3]
>
> (motto of the Syrian White Helmets)

The three almost identical statements above capture a core intuition of humanitarianism, despite none of them issuing from 'typical' humanitarian actors. Much about the concept of humanitarianism is highly contested. But few would disagree that it depends on an idea of common humanity, and that at its heart sits a commitment to saving lives.

Ideas of humanity and rescue, or salvation, are central to the development of professionalised, institutionalised humanitarianism.[4] But not only a professional

[1] Martin Gilbert, The Righteous: The Unsung Heroes of the Holocaust (London: Transworld, 2002), p. xiv.

[2] Liisa H. Malkki, The Need to Help: The Domestic Arts of International Humanitarianism (Durham, NC.: Duke University Press, 2015), p. 231.

[3] Raed Al Saleh, 'My Staff Are Trying to Save Lives in the Rubble of Ghouta. Who Will Help Us?', The Guardian (22 February 2018).

[4] Michael Barnett, Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2011); Michael Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss, 'Humanitarianism: A Brief History of the Present', in Michael Barnett

humanitarian can carry out a humanitarian act. What is often missing from the International Relations, international political theory and humanitarian studies literature is sustained consideration of the ethico-political implications of more spontaneous humanitarian acts, whether the individual mobilisations and acts of resistance that led to the formation of the White Helmets in Syria (among many other grassroots humanitarian actors), or, at an even more individualised level, rescues of Jews during the Holocaust by those subsequently honoured as the Righteous Among the Nations. I argue that we should recognise their acts as humanitarian because they bring together the attempt to save a human life with the commitment to a common humanity, not because they are engaged in the neutral, impartial and independent provision of relief.[5]

This article explores the relationship between the two emblematic concepts of humanity and rescue, paying particular attention to the practices of power they embody and perpetuate, even at the individual scale – for to have the power to save is to have the power of life or death. As one of humanitarianism's most constructive critics, Liisa Malkki, has noted, "every power implies a kind of politics".[6] Humanitarianism can thus usefully be

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and Thomas G. Weiss (eds.), Humanitarianism in Question: Politics, Power, Ethics (London: Cornell University Press, 2008).

[5] Three of the four 'classic' humanitarian principles, alongside humanity. Interestingly, where spontaneous humanitarianism becomes institutionalised, as with the White Helmets or Syria Civil Defence, to use their official name, they often draw on that classic package of humanitarian principles, as evidenced by Syria Civil Defence's Charter of Principles. The point of this article is not to jettison the core humanitarian principles entirely, but rather to suggest that there is a prior level of analysis, in terms of understanding the ethico-political contours of humanitarianism, that is rarely explored. Syria Civil Defence, 'Charter of Principles', http://syriacivildefense.org/sites/default/files/COP.pdf.

[6] Malkki, The Need to Help, p. 205.

understood as a politics of humanity. The article addresses the intersection between the politics of humanity and the politics of rescue, arguing that this nexus represents the beating heart of humanitarian politics.[7] In mapping out this intersection, the article makes an original contribution to the international political theory of humanitarianism, enriches our understanding of the ethico-political contours of humanitarian action, and fills a gap in fully exploring the meaning of rescue, rather than assuming its meaning to rescuer or rescued.

But the article also addresses a gap in International Relations more broadly, making the case that studying rescue allows us better to grasp some of the tensions that have bedevilled the practice and implementation of military humanitarian intervention and the Responsibility to Protect, as well as the more conventional humanitarian practices evoked above.

The idea of rescue is at the heart of the nexus between humanitarianism and International Relations, which as a discipline tends to privilege the study of military humanitarian intervention, usually problematised in terms of the breach, or reconfiguration of sovereignty it entails, or the clash between 'order' and 'justice', rather than what rescue

[7] In her major study of the political ethics of humanitarian INGOs, Jennifer Rubenstein argues plausibly that the social role of rescuer is both normatively problematic and too narrow to describe the actions of such agencies. However, my aim here is to focus on concepts, roles and practices that are constitutive of the very idea of humanitarianism, not present an exhaustive account of the varied social roles humanitarians, and humanitarian agencies, embody. Jennifer C. Rubenstein, Between Samaritans and States: The Political Ethics of Humanitarian INGOs (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015), pp. 29-33. It is also important to note the title of one of the foundational texts of the international political theory of humanitarian intervention, by Michael Walzer. It does not, however, really engage with the actual relationship of rescue – focusing instead on the decision to intervene or not. Michael Walzer, 'The Politics of Rescue', Social Research 62:1 (1995).

actually means.[8] This leads to language often evocative of a cavalry "coming to the rescue" (a common phrase in the IR literature) embedded in imaginaries or fantasies of rescue.[9] Even the most nuanced account of the topic within mainstream IR, Nick Wheeler's *Saving Strangers,* arguably contains an intermingling of rescue and emergency imaginaries in setting up the issues: "A supreme humanitarian emergency exists when the only hope of saving lives depends on outsiders coming to the rescue."[10] Focusing in on the content of rescue, as carried out in the name of common humanity, opens up a set of tensions and questions that can help to explain the very mixed recent record of state-led rescue.

[8] A much-cited quote from IR's urtext on military humanitarian intervention is: "humanitarian intervention exposes the conflict between order and justice at its starkest" (italics in original). Nicholas J. Wheeler, Saving Strangers: Humanitarian Intervention in International Society (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 11.

[9] For instance: "R2P breaks new ground in coming to the rescue." Thomas G. Weiss, Humanitarian Business (Cambridge: Polity, 2013), p. 152. The phrase "rescue fantasies" comes, significantly in the light of Edward Luck's former role as Special Advisor to the UN Secretary-General on the Responsibility to Protect, from Edward C. Luck and Dana Zaret Luck, 'The Individual Responsibility to Protect', in Sheri P. Rosenberg, Tibi Galis, and Alex Zucker (ed.), Reconstructing Atrocity Prevention, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2016), p. 215. Cited in Morgan Brigg, 'Humanitarian Symbolic Exchange: Extending Responsibility to Protect through Individual and Local Engagement', Third World Quarterly 39:5 (2018), p. 844. The idea, building on Charles Taylor's work on social imaginaries, of emergency imaginaries within humanitarian action, is outlined in Craig Calhoun, 'The Imperative to Reduce Suffering: Charity, Progress, and Emergencies in the Field of Humanitarian Action', in Michael Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss (eds.), Humanitarianism in Question: Politics, Power, Ethics (London: Cornell University Press, 2008); 'The Idea of Emergency: Humanitarian Action and Global (Dis)Order' in Didier Fassin and Mariella Pandolfi (eds.), Contemporary States of Emergency: The Politics of Military and Humanitarian Interventions (New York: Zone Books, 2010).

[10] Wheeler, Saving Strangers, p. 34.

Throughout, I juxtapose the experiences of 'spontaneous humanitarians', professional humanitarians, and other actors, such as state actors engaged in military humanitarian intervention. Indeed, one of the aims of the article is to consider the question of rescue across all three types of actors, since, for instance, collective memories of the acts of the Righteous Among the Nations are hardly incidental to contemporary calls for powerful states to intervene to save distant strangers subject to mass atrocities; professional humanitarians' experience of what can go wrong in negotiating others' humanity for them under the banner of rescue can tell also us much about the potential for military humanitarian intervention to cause harm beyond the level of 'collateral damage'. In particular, I think it is helpful, especially when thinking about the act of rescue itself within humanitarianism, to take spontaneous acts of rescue as our touchstone. They allow us to reason from a concrete, visceral act that is recognisably humanitarian, without having to pin down *ex ante* the boundaries of what humanitarianism is, and thus what humanitarian rescue might look like. But it is also important to note that the leap from the spontaneous to the institutionalised, from the individual to the collective, magnifies substantially the problems of power disparity that are intrinsic to the rescuer-rescued relationship.

Section II. considers what is being rescued, whether human bodies or human lives, tangible or intangible humanity, and finds that humanitarians must engage with both dimensions. In either case their engagement is shaped by power relations, whether in deciding how best to save a human body, or in defining an underlying conception of common humanity that may not fully be shared by the 'rescued' party.

As such, Section III. argues that we need to consider the role of the rescuer more thoroughly, and the functions that rescue fulfils for those engaging in it. It highlights the prevalence of salvationist tendencies and the desire to find a saving idea. Rescue

imaginaries are a key part of the humanitarian imaginaries that frame humanitarian actions and reinforce the power relations identified in the first section. At the same time, if we are not to reify an impossibly demanding altruism, it seems valuable for humanitarian acts of rescue to be embedded in actors' self-understanding and, indeed, self-interest.

How then ethically to assess the motivations of putative acts of rescue, when they might just be, if not humanitarian alibis for misconduct, then the self-flattering delusions of the powerful? This is core terrain for international political theory: how to weigh humanitarian motivations or intentions against real-world consequences? Section IV. tackles this problem. It concludes that consequences matter, but that we cannot disregard the sources of humanitarian solidarity either: commitments to common humanity embedded within actors' complex identities. It is the negotiation amongst all these factors, within a common conversation about the importance of saving lives in the name of an ever-shifting notion of common humanity, that ultimately allows us to make judgements about what might constitute a humanitarian act of rescue.

Section V. addresses head-on the multi-layered potential for rescue to cause harm that emerges throughout the article, and which arises from the inherently presumptive native of humanitarian action in contexts of power disparity. As the first two sections revealed, harm and violence can come from treating the other merely as body, and not as complete human; it can come from imposing one's notion of humanity upon the other, a particular peril because it is often precisely one's conception of humanity that pushes one to act, to save the other but also oneself. Finally, the perceived need to employ violence towards humanitarian ends admits no easy answers, for the definition of those ends takes place within, and not outside of, the humanitarian conversation. Hands are unlikely to remain clean. Humanitarians need to embrace the politics of their endeavour and present

themselves as what Michael Walzer calls 'moral politicians', able to learn from spontaneous humanitarians not just their commitment to saving lives, but also their humility.

II. RESCUING BODIES OR SAVING LIVES? THE MEANINGS OF RESCUE

This section considers different ways of thinking about the meaning of rescue, from thin accounts of saving human bodies to much thicker ones of saving human lives. It argues that there is no neutral, objective way of doing so. All rely on necessarily provisional accounts of what humanity is, embody specific relations of power, and raise particular challenges for humanitarian practice. The challenges of rescue cannot be understood without grasping the contingent, dynamic character of the conceptions of common humanity that inspire it, And, in particular, how this might be shaped or distorted by putative rescuers.

Sometimes, the meaning of rescue, and its place within our understanding of humanitarianism, can appear clear. On the one hand, in a warzone a doctor can stem the flow of blood resulting from a potentially fatal gunshot wound, or at a feeding station during a famine a child can be brought back from the brink of starvation. On the other hand, we are often faced, as with the haunting picture of Alan Kurdi, with evidence of a life that could all-too-easily have been saved, but was not.[11]

[11] Cases such as Kurdi's should, I think, make us slightly queasy at the somewhat mechanistic, abstracted way in which the "Shallow Pond theorists", to borrow Kwame Anthony Appiah's phrase, draw on archetypes of drowned children or other stylised examples of suffering to make their points. A famous example is of course Peter Singer's classic 'Famine, Affluence and Morality'. Kwame Anthony Appiah, Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2006), p. 173; Peter Singer, 'Famine, Affluence, and Morality', Philosophy & Public Affairs 1:3 (1972). On the danger of omitting nuance from moral reasoning, see

Behind those individual stories lie multi-faceted structural problems. Wider injustices or intractable conflicts underpin the threat to life, or indeed the fact that rescue is an option for some but not others. Kurdi's life could have been saved not only by rescue-at-sea. While it would probably be too much to ask, both conceptually and practically, of humanitarianism that it resolve the crisis that led to his fatal journey, perhaps the stroke of a pen could have allowed his journey to take place safely strapped into an economy seat on a plane bound for Europe.[12]

For particular people, on a particular day, the meaning of rescue can become narrow, clear and visceral: live or die; survive or perish. Though a conception of humanitarian crisis as merely a certain quantity of bodies on the brink of death can never sufficiently describe what is at stake in the conduct of humanitarian politics, some notion of humanitarian crisis as a threat to bodily survival remains an important practical basis for conceptualising humanitarian action. It follows that we should take seriously the idea that the heart of humanitarian action lies in the saving of human bodies.

This characterisation of the object of humanitarian rescue presents some obvious advantages. We know roughly how many calories a human body needs to survive another day, how much blood a body can lose before it expires, what medicine might cure or

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Chris Brown, 'Poverty Alleviation, Global Justice, and the Real World', Ethics & International Affairs 31:3 (2017). The bigger problem, which admittedly I may be reproducing here in referring to Kurdi, is powerfully set out in Sherene H. Razack, 'Stealing the Pain of Others: Reflections on Canadian Humanitarian Responses', Review of Education, Pedagogy, and Cultural Studies 29:4 (2007).

[12] On the humanitarian-security nexus on Europe's border, and how the functions of saving and policing, rescuing and catching often intermingle, see Ruben Andersson, 'Migration', in Tim Allen, Anna Macdonald, and Henry Radice (eds.), Humanitarianism: A Dictionary of Concepts (London: Routledge, 2018). On calls for safe passage to Europe, see Joanne Liu, 'EU: Your Fences Kill. Provide Safe and Legal Passage.', msf.org (2015).

manage a fatal disease. This leads to conceptions of life-saving as that which, very simply, keeps human bodies alive, to be assessed and responded through scientific and technical expertise. The path to matching a person in need with a person in a position to help them is by no means simple. But prior to this problem is a bigger risk to conceptualising humanitarian action solely in terms of bodily life-saving.

The issue is the way that the terms of rescue can come to determine an individual's humanity, imposing a definition of their identity so narrow it becomes a straightjacket. If, to save a human being it becomes sufficient to save a human body, that risks reducing the humanity of the rescued to a set of biological properties, to a kind of 'bare life'.[13] Admittedly, sometimes one gets the impression that for Giorgio Agamben and his many followers within critical humanitarian studies, this leads to the extreme position that there is little more to humanitarian rescue than biopolitics, and that a refugee camp cannot in any meaningful way be distinguished from a concentration camp. They are both "sites of hierarchical power", in Norman Geras's phrase, and such sites are, for those of a biopolitical bent, the key loci of modernity and of modern social life.[14] Against this, we might recall Primo Levi's admonition against this kind of undiscriminating conflation: "There's no gas

[13] Giorgio Agamben, Homo Sacer: Sovereign Power and Bare Life, trans. Daniel Heller-Roazen (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998). See also Peter Nyers, Rethinking Refugees: Beyond States of Emergency (London: Routledge, 2006), pp. 36-41 and 84-85.

[14] Geras is not referring specifically to Agamben. But Geras' phrase and Levi's riposte capture the issues perfectly. Norman Geras, The Contract of Mutual Indifference: Political Philosophy after the Holocaust (London: Verso, 1998), p. 100.

chamber at Fiat".[15] That is, all sites of hierarchical power do not necessarily imply a slippery slope towards extreme abuse.

Nevertheless, two important points emerge from this. The first is that it reminds us that the moment of rescue is necessarily one of radical power inequality between rescuer and rescued.[16] At best this can strain the ability of each to identify with the other.[17] At worst this can indeed lead to us rescuing for the other a very different idea of common humanity from that which we claim for ourselves. But in many respects, the play of this power disparity is much more nuanced. I shall return to this dimension of the problem in subsequent sections. The second point is that human bodies can never be sufficient descriptions of human beings, at least within the context of humanitarianism, wherein common humanity necessarily asserts itself as weightier than mere common biology.

This is the crux of the matter when it comes to understanding what humanitarianism is rescuing, the sense that a human being is not just a human body and that we cannot derive a satisfactory account of humanitarian action purely from bodily need. Is the rescue of human bodies a necessary but not sufficient condition for the rescue of a human being? Certainly, the claims of a humanitarian perspective that consistently ignored present bodily suffering would very soon ring hollow. But acts of memorialisation of dead individuals or

[15] Ibid.

[16] Mary B. Anderson, 'Aid: A Mixed Blessing', Development in Practice 10:3 (2000).

[17] '"You Save My Life Today, but for What Tomorrow?" Some Dilemmas of Humanitarian Aid', in Jonathan Moore (ed.), Hard Choices: Moral Dilemmas in Humanitarian Intervention (Oxford: Rowman & Littlefield, 1998), p. 151.

lost communities can plausibly be understood as humanitarian acts.[18] They address injustices committed by those who would erase people from history, and construct narratives that aim to prevent future injustices. The enormous body of Holocaust literature does this in several ways: it recovers some of the detail and complexity of the human lives that were annihilated, and reminds us of those acts of courage in the face of inhumanity that led to acts of rescue, or of attempted rescue. The wishful, indignant call of 'never again' is, among other things, an instance of humanitarianism using the process of memorialisation of those rescued and unrescued to obviate the need for future rescue. While it may seem that this idea of memorialisation as rescue is a story about prevention, about rescue-in-advance, there is also perhaps a sense that it is also a last-ditch act of rescue which aims to save something of the humanity of those who were not rescued in the bodily sense.[19]

Dwelling on the intangible meanings of rescue takes us close to religious discourses of salvation (see Section III.). But this intangible sense of rescue also speaks to the more practical notion of *témoignage,* situating testimony squarely in the present, central to much of the French humanitarian tradition, and especially important to MSF.[20] For José Antonio Bastos: "[even] if it is impossible to help the refugees, we must keep trying, and find the truth of what is happening, and we must speak. Sometimes speaking is the only action that

[18] Thomas W. Laqueur, 'Mourning, Pity, and the Work of Narrative in the Making of "Humanity"', in Richard Ashby Wilson and Richard D. Brown (eds.), Humanitarianism and Suffering: The Mobilization of Empathy (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

[19] On memory and humanitarianism: Rachel Ibreck, 'Memory', in Tim Allen, Anna Macdonald, and Henry Radice (eds.), Humanitarianism: A Dictionary of Concepts (London: Routledge, 2018).

[20] On MSF and témoignage see D. Robert DeChaine, Global Humanitarianism: NGOs and the Crafting of Community (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2005), pp. 82-90.

is possible. To not speak is to fail the *possibility of humanity*."[21] The implication is simply that, at times, if we cannot rescue the individual lives under threat, we can at least save a "possibility of humanity".

Even in the case of a single individual, at a single moment in time, humanitarian action as rescue potentially has to negotiate - and this negotiation is profoundly political and characterised by particular relations of power - conceptions of humanity across a wide range of contexts, which include humanity as a set of biological properties and humanity as ethical, political and legal identities. For some, these include less tangible notions of a soul or of unity with a divine being. For others, they might include the ability to care, love, laugh and cry.

Humanity can be understood, violated and rescued across all these dimensions. The complexity of that which is to be rescued and preserved is inextricably interwoven with the complexity of how we articulate the distinctiveness, value and beauty of humanity. Attempts to pin it down once and for all fail, as a lepidopterist's display case must always fail to reveal the most vital characteristic of the butterfly: its mesmeric flight. Among influential recent attempts to grapple with this complexity, Martha Nussbaum's list of the central human capabilities is a thoughtful and rich questioning of what constitutes a human life, of what people should be able to do and be to live a life that might be considered fully

[21] My italics. Cited in James Orbinski, An Imperfect Offering: Dispatches from the Medical Frontline (London: Rider, 2009), p. 290.

human, including, for instance the ability to have an emotional and imaginative life.[22] But ultimately, as an answer, it proves unsatisfactory, precisely because it takes the form of a list, and such a document is always likely to be more plausible as a political programme to enable more humane lives than as a description of humanity itself.

A list cannot quite ever succeed in capturing the boundless and unpredictable creativity of a Mozart or a Shakespeare. Nussbaum may come closer than most, by trying to capture the potentialities of human life, and taking seriously the things, like love, that really give it meaning.[23] She makes a good case for a human life conceived of according to the central capabilities as being much less nasty, brutish and short than any number of alternatives. But the intangible, by definition, still eludes such an exercise. We are unlikely to place such a list in our time capsules, for to do justice to its ambitions is to acknowledge its inevitable provisionality. This provisionality is something that Anne Phillips's *The Politics of the Human* captures well, its anti-foundationalism drawing on the "contrast Sartre makes between saving someone as abstract man (or human) while annihilating him in his specificity and particularity".[24]

Thus the dilemma that, when it comes to potential acts of rescue, there may be profound tensions in terms of which elements of a perceived common humanity may be

[22] The list is evolving, but a good account can be found in Martha C. Nussbaum, Women and Human Development: The Capabilities Approach (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), pp. 70-86. Her list consists of: life; bodily health; bodily integrity; senses, imagination, and thought; emotions; practical reason; affiliation; relationship with other species; play; control over one's political and material environment.

[23] See also Political Emotions: Why Love Matters for Justice (London: Belknap Press, 2013).

[24] Anne Phillips, The Politics of the Human (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), p. 18.

rescued. Some elements may be saved, others sacrificed, with all the violence that implies.[25] In contexts of forced migration, for instance, there are real dilemmas about whether the humanitarian act is to try to save the most bodies or to try to save the context and way of life within which people conceptualised their own humanity. One may well involve sacrificing the other.[26] This dilemma can permeate an individual's experience of rescue. Caroline Moorehead's *Human Cargo* demonstrates that many refugees who are relocated and attain bodily security, who are rescued in quite a concrete way by institutionalised humanitarianism, nevertheless often experience a numbing, irreplaceable loss of all the other elements, beyond their own immediate bodily security, that add up to a human life beyond the mere passing of days.[27]

This tension is of course primarily experienced by the rescued. But it also characterises some of the sharpest dilemmas of humanitarian action by potential rescuers. Naturally, other considerations beyond the rescue of those in danger, such as political expediency, often condition the actions of potential humanitarian actors. But there are also dilemmas about whether, say, in effect to collaborate in forced displacement, in order to save people in the short term. Variations of this kind of dilemma have been experienced widely within the 'humanitarian international', for instance in the creation of 'safe' areas in Bosnia in the early 1990s, in the delivery of aid in refugee camps in (then) Zaire in 1994-

[25] On sacrifice and triage, see Peter Redfield, 'Sacrifice, Triage, and Global Humanitarianism', in Michael Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss (eds.), Humanitarianism in Question: Politics, Power, Ethics (London: Cornell University Press, 2008).

[26] On how humanitarianism can aggravate the issues by dehistoricising and depoliticising refugees, see Liisa H. Malkki, 'Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization', Cultural Anthropology 11:3 (1996).

[27] Caroline Moorehead, Human Cargo: A Journey among Refugees (London: Vintage, 2006).

1996, or in the violation of the principle of *non-refoulement* in disbanding those camps.[28] Of course, in facing these dilemmas, humanitarian actors are necessarily imposing their own conceptualisations of rescue, and what it means to be rescued.

It is clearly hard to gain a clear picture of what saving a human being, beyond saving a human body, entails. Bodily survival is vital, but is never likely to be sufficient to make sense of the negotiation of what a common humanity might be or entail. The dilemmas evoked above, wherein humanitarian actors have to choose between which kind of act of rescue will better honour their conception of a common humanity, also make clear the fact that, ultimately, it is their conception of that common humanity which will inform the decision taken. It is therefore their conception that will be saved or lost, along with the human lives at stake. Rescue 'in the name of humanity' usually means rescue in the name of a very particular understanding of humanity. Saving a body carries the risk of diminishing the human life it embodies, while trying to save a thicker notion of human life risks imposing another, rather different notion of human life.

III. THE ROLE OF THE RESCUER

The previous section brought to the fore the subjectivity of the rescuer, and so it is to that role we now turn. What functions does the role of rescuer serve for those who embrace it? This section explores the role and the position of the rescuer, alive to the central problem that, in articulating a conception of wounded common humanity in response to the

[28] Fiona Terry, Condemned to Repeat? The Paradox of Humanitarian Action (London: Cornell University Press, 2002); Samantha Power, Chasing the Flame: One Man's Fight to Save the World (London: Penguin, 2008).

suffering of another, the concerned agent risks defining the other's humanity for her, albeit perhaps for the very 'best' of motives.

The ethical stakes are raised when it comes to engaging in potential acts of rescue, for the moment of rescue is, almost by definition, one in which one agent hold's the other's life in her hands. How she understands and characterises the other's humanity is in her hands as well. While she may want to deny this power, she must also will it. This is well illustrated by Roger Rosenblatt:

> If you really knew what drives me - and I imagine drives most of my colleagues when we go to places where people are suffering things that no people ought to suffer - it is the impulse to rescue. The impossible, illogical, entirely emotional, impractical, impolitic impulse to take those children in my arms - and adults in my arms - and save them. If you have ever watched a man or a woman or a child die from starvation, you know the powerlessness of mortality, and you so want to be a god at that moment and to be able to breathe life into a fellow creature.[29]

This states very clearly something that is arguably a necessary correlate of the desire to engage in humanitarian action and save human lives: the desire to play God (and the relationship between a God and its creation cannot be one of equals).

Though merely a figure of speech for Rosenblatt, the character of a quasi-religious, or indeed avowedly religious mission is writ large across the history of humanitarianism. This speaks to an irony of modern humanitarianism. It was enabled by the opening up of a

[29] Again, a negative articulation: "suffering things that no people ought to suffer". Roger Rosenblatt, 'Introduction to Rescue: The Paradoxes of Virtue', Social Research 62:1 (1995), p. 6.

particular intellectual space by humanist and then Enlightenment thinking, largely against the strictures of religious dogma. However, as humanitarianism emerged as a framing for practical action, much of the motivation of those who engaged in humanitarian action remained deeply religious, linked to powerful ethical codes such as Christian charity.

This was clearly the case during the one of the first modern international humanitarian campaigns, to abolish the Atlantic slave trade.[30] The campaign was characterised by discourses of humanity and freedom, visceral reactions to revelations about the cruelty of the practices involved, and strong conceptions of religious mission. For some abolitionists, what they aimed to save might have been simply the tortured bodies of the slaves, to be released from bondage to engage in, develop, or rediscover their own projects. For others, the object of rescue was the freedom of the Enlightenment's universal, perfectible man. For many, the key objects of salvation were people's souls. The slaves were to be freed not to become fully human on their own terms, but rather to become fully human in the only acceptable way, as Christians to be saved, if not in this life then in the next. Important to many abolitionists, perhaps the dominant concern, was the salvation of their own souls, the preservation of which became, in their eyes, incompatible with the owning of slaves.

A militant religious drive for salvation was a major factor in the development of institutionalised humanitarianism in the nineteenth century, imbricated with other salvationist (and colonial) projects, such as the floods of missionaries spreading out across the world, or, at the domestic level, the creation of organisations like the Salvation Army. The humanitarianism of, say, Gladstone encompassed campaigns to save far-flung

[30] See for instance Adam Hochschild, Bury the Chains: The British Struggle to Abolish Slavery (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2005).

Christians, notably in Bulgaria, and nocturnal missions to 'rescue' 'fallen women'.[31] In the same era, the campaigning journalist W.T. Stead linked his sensational reports on atrocities in Bulgaria to his own spiritual self-preservation and avoidance of damnation.[32] A happily 'fallen' nineteenth century humanitarian, Byron, mocked the naïve tendency of his contemporaries in the London Greek Committee to conceive their putative objects of rescue in a manner equally detached from the lived experience of the actual people at stake.[33] Philhellenes obsessed with ancient Greece were no doubt dismayed to find an absence of philosophising Classical Greeks to save when they arrived on the shores of a contemporary Greece heavily under Ottoman influence. To take another different conception of what is being saved, Andrew Carnegie's "scientific philanthropy" embodied a vision of the human perfectible through the application of modern scientific knowledge.[34]

Underpinning the humanitarianism of Gladstone, Byron or Carnegie is the ease with which humanitarianism can become associated with utopian projects and the projection of an idealised humanity. The persistence of this tendency is powerfully critiqued by David Rieff, who sees contemporary humanitarianism as taking on the role of "saving idea", "central to the Western imagination" because of its persistence as the last "moral fable" left

[31] On Gladstone's nocturnal rescue missions, see Roy Jenkins, Gladstone: A Biography (New York: Random House, 1997), pp. 100-15; Anne Isba, Gladstone and Women (London: Hambledon Continuum, 2006), pp. 99-121. On the Bulgarian episode, see Martha Finnemore, The Purpose of Intervention: Changing Beliefs About the Use of Force (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2003), pp. 62-63; Jenkins, Gladstone, pp. 399-414; Richard Shannon, Gladstone and the Bulgarian Agitation 1876 (Thomas Nelson and Sons: London, 1963).

[32] Laqueur, 'Mourning, Pity, and the Work of Narrative in the Making of "Humanity"', p. 35.

[33] Gary J. Bass, Freedom's Battle: The Origins of Humanitarian Intervention (New York: Knopf, 2008), p. 78.

[34] Calhoun, 'The Imperative to Reduce Suffering', p. 79; 'The Idea of Emergency'.

standing.[35] As such, the idea of rescue underpins what Craig Calhoun calls the 'emergency imaginary'.[36] Indeed, I would argue that humanitarian action always depends on a 'rescue imaginary' through which we construct the terms of the humanitarian social encounter. And close to the concept of the imaginary lurk the notions of fantasy and delusion - we are still very clearly failing sufficiently to challenge and reduce the role of 'white saviour complex' within humanitarian action.

The challenge is to prick the bubbles of delusion without engendering hopelessness. For Rieff, "humanitarianism is a hope for a disenchanted time. If it claims to redeem, it does so largely in the limited sense that in a world so disfigured by cruelty and want it intervenes to save a small proportion of those at risk of dying, and to give temporary shelter to a few of the many who so desperately need it."[37] Rieff defends the minimal, visceral act of providing "a bed for the night" - a minimal, partial act of rescue. But he is sceptical about the way it also nourishes that "longing for salvation [which] is all but hardwired into Western culture". When it comes to the bigger picture, it "is a saving idea that, in the end, cannot save but can only alleviate".[38]

But Stephen Hopgood's work suggests that this humble approach may not be sufficient for many of those engaging in humanitarian action, for they crave a justificatory framework within which to define their moral authority, even when they are not concerned

[35] David Rieff, A Bed for the Night: Humanitarianism in Crisis (London: Vintage, 2002), pp. 91-93.

[36] Calhoun, 'The Imperative to Reduce Suffering'.

[37] Rieff, A Bed for the Night, pp. 91-92.

[38] Ibid., p. 86.

with saving souls, but merely bodies.[39] Laura Hammond also notes the tendency of professional humanitarians to elevate their principles "to the level of the secular-sacred".[40] For religious strands of humanitarianism, the framework is clear, as is the redemptive power of acts of rescue. But returning to Rosenblatt's quote, even the most avowed atheist, confronted with an expiring child, will either yearn for a God-like power to rekindle life, or a God-like, transcendental authority to denounce that suffering as wrong and unjustifiable. Even if the conception of the human invoked is not a religious one, it goes significantly beyond mere embodiment. While the chosen, practical act of rescue may well be limited to an act of bodily life-saving, with the attendant risks of negotiating with the other only on the basis of 'bare life', the context of that act of rescue can never be limited to the practical act, for it is always embedded in a struggle to articulate and preserve a thicker, more intangible sense of common humanity, albeit one that may be narcissistic and contain its own sources of violence and suffering.

However, there remains "a possibility of humanity" connected to that visceral experience of a human life in danger, and therefore a possibility of rescue if the more intangible meanings of humanity at play for the rescuer is in synch with the requirements of the situation. Moreover, does it matter if I think you're saving my body, while you think you're saving your and/or my soul? This leads to the question of how to weigh motives,

[39] Stephen Hopgood, Keepers of the Flame: Understanding Amnesty International (London: Cornell University Press, 2006); 'Moral Authority, Modernity and the Politics of the Sacred', European Journal of International Relations 15:2 (2009).

[40] Laura Hammond, 'The Power of Holding Humanitarianism Hostage and the Myth of Protective Principles', in Michael Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss (eds.), Humanitarianism in Question: Politics, Power, Ethics (London: Cornell University Press, 2008), p. 189.

intentions and consequences, and the broader location of humanitarian rescue within international ethics.

Before delving deeper into that discussion, I will consider the voices of the Righteous. According to the testimony of Rescuers, the category of common humanity was particularly psychologically salient for them. But in engaging in reactions of rescue, the visceral played a part, and also threatened the integrity of the Rescuers' identity, sense of self and humanity. For Otto, "the primitive had certainly a strong part in my motives." He also evoked a fellow rescuer, "a woman who said she was tired of hearing about her spirit, courage, and nobility. 'I did it because of self-respect,' she said, 'a lot of self-respect.'" For Otto: "I like the word self-respect because it is what I said before. It is one of the egotistic components in my motivation. I respect more and feel good about it and this is a very good definition."[41]

This suggests that humanitarian rescue is always both about saving the other and saving one's sense of self. It is both other-regarding and narcissistic, and the two elements are not really separable. The problem here, of course, is that the risks of failure are not necessarily equivalent. For the rescuer, the risk may be a loss of self-esteem, for the other, death, another facet of the inherent inequality of rescue. This pushes us to explore further how we might plausibly characterise rescue meaningfully, and to ask whether there is any stable basis to assess an act of rescue and say that it is consistent with an account of humanitarianism.

[41] Kristen Renwick Monroe, The Hand of Compassion: Portraits of Moral Choice During the Holocaust (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), p. 97. For a study of religious cultures and acts of rescue, see Pearl M. Oliner, Saving the Forsaken: Religious Culture and the Rescue of Jews in Nazi Europe (London: Yale University Press, 2004).

IV. DO MOTIVES MATTER?

So far, this article has delineated the idea of rescue within humanitarian action as something that oscillates between self and other, that is always infused with power relations, and which involves a constant (political) negotiation of what humanity means and entails. Given how central the promise of rescue is to the ethical status of humanitarianism, understanding the ethics of rescue is thus crucial. On what basis, if any, can we make qualitative assessments of acts of rescue, in a manner that can honour the meaning(s) of rescue for both rescued and rescuer? This section draws on discussions within international political theory to elucidate this question, in particular the interplay between motives, intentions and consequences in framing our judgements about putative acts of humanitarian rescue.

Yad Vashem accords the title of 'Righteous among the Nations' according to both the acts themselves and the motives behind them.[42] The question of motive is a key touchstone in humanitarian debates. For many, the absence of a motive entirely consistent with the act of rescue calls into question the validity of that act, whatever the outcome. In fact, three distinct variables are worth considering here: motives, intentions and consequences. The tensions between them have been usefully explored within international political theory in relation to military humanitarian intervention. For Terry Nardin, an "agent's intention is

[42] Monroe, The Hand of Compassion, p. 287.

what he chooses to do; his motive is the dispositions and desires that explain his choice".[43] Motive relates to our reason for action, intention to how we plan to act. Nardin also notes that motive and intention are often used interchangeably. When it comes to the carrying out of the act itself, another element comes into play: the means of rescue, which will be examined in Section V. For now, we will concentrate on the interplay between motives, intentions and consequences, arguing that, for different reasons, all are important, but that they function at different levels of the humanitarian endeavour.

In a characteristically provocative piece, Stephen Hopgood asks whether, if the core justification of the practice of humanitarianism is to save lives, a consequentialist logic ultimately imposes itself upon the process of deciding how those lives should be saved.[44] If it can be done best by a profit-seeking company, then why not? After all, is humanitarianism not always motivated by a variety of different justifications? The piece provokes partly because in raising the question of money and profit, it touches upon an issue with which

[43] Terry Nardin, 'Introduction', in Terry Nardin and Melissa S. Williams (eds.), Humanitarian Intervention, Nomos XLVII (New York: New York University Press, 2006), p. 10. A debate between Fernando Tesón and Terry Nardin in the aftermath of the invasion of Iraq usefully fleshes out these issues. 'Humanitarian Imperialism', Ethics and International Affairs 19:2 (2005); Fernando R. Tesón, 'Ending Tyranny in Iraq', ibid.; 'Of Tyrants and Empires', Ethics and International Affairs 19:2 (2005). For a summary of debates on motives and intentions in the context of humanitarian intervention, see Anthony F. Lang, Jr., 'Humanitarian Intervention', in Patrick Hayden (ed.), The Ashgate Research Companion to Ethics and International Relations (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 138-41. See also James Pattison, Humanitarian Intervention and the Responsibility to Protect: Who Should Intervene? (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), pp. 153-80.

[44] Stephen Hopgood, 'Saying "No" to Wal-Mart? Money and Morality in Professional Humanitarianism', in Michael Barnett and Thomas G. Weiss (eds.), Humanitarianism in Question: Politics, Power, Ethics (London: Cornell University Press, 2008).

many professional humanitarians are profoundly uncomfortable. The Red Cross principle of voluntariness is rarely mentioned in analytical work, because it is generally not seen to carry as much weight as ideas such as impartiality or neutrality. But arguably it still goes deep into professional humanitarians' sense of self, and suggests that for many, doing the right thing for the right reasons remains crucial (even if they are uncertain as to what the right thing might be).

This fits into Hopgood's analysis of humanitarianism's oscillation between sacred and profane.[45] To focus only on effectiveness risks forfeiting a sense of transcendental moral authority. Yet the "keepers of the flame", in becoming gatekeepers of their practice, risk dwindling impact on the real world. Fine motives, or plausible declared intentions alone can never be enough if they do not lead to meaningful outcomes. For James Orbinski, "[the] moral intention of the humanitarian act must be confronted with its actual result".[46] Hopgood's argument challenges us to ask whether there is any better way of defining humanitarianism than the vague, but visceral, notion of the existential act of saving a life. His conclusions come close to Rieff's: humanitarianism should scale down its ambition and stick to saving some lives and providing some beds for the night.

On its own terms, Hopgood's line of argument is difficult to rebut. One possibility, from within the practice, is suggested by Rony Brauman, MSF's preeminent *éminence grise*. We might accept the consequentialist logic of varying sources of life-saving relief, such as armies or corporations. But that does not necessarily mean we have to label the action humanitarian and to locate it within humanitarianism. It can be valuable on moral grounds

[45] 'Moral Authority, Modernity and the Politics of the Sacred'. See also Keepers of the Flame.

[46] 'Moral intention' is ambiguous in this context, probably best read as relating to motive. James Orbinski, 'Nobel Lecture', 10 December 1999.

other than those described as humanitarian.[47] Brauman's point is logical in terms of defending the operational principles needed to run a consistent humanitarian practice. But ultimately, the distinction cannot hold if we see humanitarianism as a wider context for the negotiation of common humanity and human solidarity. In this negotiation, surely what is crucial is not what professional dedicated humanitarians are willing to do, but precisely what those who are not might be. Humanitarianism is as much about expanding the latter as the former.

At best, this is about bringing into the conversation actors, like those carrying out acts of rescue during the Holocaust, who are not conventional humanitarian actors but whose acts get to the heart of what we mean by the term humanitarian. At worst, it is about limiting the excesses of actors with very different agendas. Humanitarianism teases out the minimal, not just maximal, understandings of our common humanity and what is required to preserve or save it. For instance, part of the role of international humanitarian law is to define what one should accord one's enemies out of common humanity. Brauman and Hopgood both share a consequentialist vision of life-saving action, they merely differ on the significance and placement of the boundaries of 'humanitarian' action within that.

A consequentialist approach to saving lives can coexist perfectly well with a concern to take intentions seriously, as long as the intentions correspond to the articulation of outcomes, and are not simply collapsed with a deontological account of a "correct" humanitarian motive. In the context of humanitarianism, it is especially important to make a clear distinction between motive and intention, for humanitarianism is a context in which

[47] Rony Brauman, 'Masterclass: A Review of the Last Two Decades of Humanitarian Assistance' (paper presented at the 'Who are the Humanitarians Now?' Seminar, Humanitarian and Conflict Response Institute, University of Manchester, 24 November 2009).

different motives can coalesce into a shared intention to act in pursuit of a certain kind of outcome. As Nick Wheeler puts it: "the key question is not the purity of motives but the relationship between motives and humanitarian outcomes."[48] The common phrase 'good intention' is problematic because it often means 'correctly-motivated intention'. The idea of a single legitimate humanitarian motive for rescue is a category error, which reduces 'humanitarian' to a synonym of 'altruistic'. We can have mixed, diverging motives, but share the determination and declared intention to engage in an act of rescue linked to ideas about the importance of common humanity. One might be interested in the preservation of an immortal soul, the other in a sense of consistency with a political ideology in which the care for others is important, the third feel the need to expunge a previous act of cruelty. It makes more sense to discuss the role of motives within humanitarianism, rather than humanitarian motives as such. It is the political negotiation of different motives that leads to intentions.

At a different level of analysis, motives present the biggest qualification to a purely consequentialist account of acts of rescue within humanitarianism. Within humanitarian practice, a consequentialist logic is ultimately irresistible if the goal of the practice is to maximise life-saving action. But the previous two sections, in discussing the complexities of articulating the meaning of saving a human life, suggest that, if the idea of saving lives is to be assigned value, we have to engage with the ways in which such value is generated. The goal of the practice, even narrowed down to the saving of human lives, is deeply complex in its possible meanings. The goal of saving human lives exists in a wider social context, one in which the goal is articulated and defined as valuable. The goal is such a fragile one, its betrayals so frequent, that it becomes vitally important to understand how it can come to be valuable and spur people to action. So we have to turn back to the reasons why people

[48] Wheeler, Saving Strangers, p. 47.

save other people, and take motives seriously in a more general sense. It is not a question of finding some pure humanitarian motive, but rather of drawing together the threads of why a sense of solidarity can emerge sufficient to call for and generate acts of rescue, that is, to coalesce into concrete intentions.

Returning to the Rescuers of Jews during the Holocaust: if a sense of common humanity makes it important and desirable that Jews be rescued, the rescue of Jews can plausibly become a humanitarian campaign within which not every individual act has to be linked back to a pure 'humanitarian motive'. To do so would be unnecessarily demanding, untestable and a misunderstanding of the breadth and complexity of humanitarianism as a category. Yet, to understand the development of the view that it is desirable that Jews, or others, be rescued under the auspices of a common humanity, it also seems valuable and important to look at the particular reasons given by those who did exactly that.

When those reasons are examined, they reveal that a search for purity would be fruitless. For Otto: "I also examined myself whether it wasn't part of showing off, and it was".[49] When asked, "did you see your activities with the Resistance as being primarily political or primarily as a result of your humanitarian instincts?", he responded "Both. Both. Both."[50] For Knud, 'humanitarian' motivations were inextricably mixed with a strong desire to resist German aggression at all costs, and the desire to protect Jews as fellow Danes.[51] What is interesting is precisely that the rescuers were very different, 'ordinary' people (or at least people who saw themselves and their actions as ordinary) who engaged in exceptional activity according to a similar pattern. Very different lives and experiences fed into common

[49] Monroe, The Hand of Compassion, p. 91.

[50] Ibid., p. 95.

[51] Ibid., p. 180.

ways of interpreting and acting on the situation they saw before them. Different and complex sets of life choices led to a moment in which they felt they had no choice but to act. Their perceptions of what was at stake were very similar: they all felt the salience of belonging to a common humanity, the resonance this had within their sense of identity, and that the integrity of their sense of self depended on the consistency of their actions with their self-understanding.[52] So in understanding the rescue of Jews during the Holocaust, we can characterise rescue in a number of different ways, including the practical rescue of Jews (in which a consequentialist logic should be seen as important at an aggregate level, lest we return to the position that the only valid acts of rescue were ones done for impeccable reasons), the saving of the sense of self of those who felt compelled to rescue. Kristen Monroe also points to the acts of rescuers saving the very 'possibility of humanity' evoked above:

> Resistance to genocide is not just an affirmation of universalism in which every human being is entitled to rights and equal treatment by virtue of being born human. It is more than simply seeing the humanity in the Jews, more than seeing the bonds that connect us. It is also a cherishing, a celebration of all the differences - individual and group - that allow for human flourishing, set firmly within the context of universal worth. This is what the rescuers protected for all of us when they resisted genocide, prejudice, and ethnic violence. Their very ordinariness, their very humanness, encourages us to look deep within our own souls and ask if we, too, do not possess this possibility.[53]

[52] Ibid., p. 237.

[53] Ibid., pp. 265-66.

Within the context of humanitarianism, then, rescue can plausibly entail a consequentialist logic once articulated, but we must look beyond that logic to understand the reasons behind its articulation. Humanitarian action can be invalidated both by a lack of tangible results, and by lack of justification for why those results might be valuable. It cannot, however be assessed at the level of intention, for that will yield an impoverished account explaining neither inputs to nor outcomes of the politics of humanity.

Furthermore, when we look at how motives and intentions intersect in contemporary professionalised humanitarian practice, where the identification with a common humanity is clearly articulated, we see that individual humanitarians inevitably have complex, idiosyncratic reasons for actually engaging in humanitarian action.[54] Humanitarian rescue depends on notions of common humanity being nested amongst, and intertwined with, (both individual and collective) actors' other commitments and interests. It depends on actors' self-understanding, indeed self-interest, incorporating a humanitarian component that might be activated due to an entirely different need or interest of the actor. In Wheeler's *Saving Strangers*, motives come into play not in the guise of providing an illusory humanitarian purity but insofar as they are compatible with action promoting the emergence of norms legitimising humanitarian intervention.[55] As academic debates on military humanitarian intervention morphed into ones on the Responsibility to Protect, Chris Brown made the important point that for it to succeed in its aims, it needed to shed its

[54] Malkki, The Need to Help. Hugo Slim, Humanitarian Ethics: A Guide to the Morality of Aid in War and Disaster (London: Hurst & Co., 2015), pp. 13-14.

[55] Wheeler, Saving Strangers.

antipolitics and its goals become embedded in the self-understandings and interests of key powerful actors.[56]

But that inevitable privileging of the interests and preferences of powerful actors in acting in the name of humanity, needs to be tempered by the voices of whose who may plausibly call humanity by a different name. That is, claims of saved human lives need to be challenged by the reality of those lives before and after intervention, and considered in relation to what may have been lost or sacrificed along the way. Latent throughout the article so far has been the possibility of humanitarians, in their presumption, causing harm or violence, and the final section will address this problem head on.

V. VIOLENCE, POWER AND POLITICS

We had to burn the village in order to save it.[57]

(American soldier in Vietnam)

This notorious quote reminds us of the risks immanent in a heroic salvationism – the power to rescue is a power easily abused, and the potential of humanitarian action to cause harm is now widely recognised. Among others, Mary Anderson's work noted the negative side-effects that humanitarianism can have, such as the way aid can exacerbate conflict, or create dependency.[58] She famously called for humanitarianism to strive to "do no harm", an aspiration that remains influential today.[59] But is this remotely possible?

[56] Chris Brown, 'The Antipolitical Theory of Responsibility to Protect', Global Responsibility to Protect 5:4 (2013).

[57] American soldier in Vietnam, cited in Rieff, A Bed for the Night, p. 258.

[58] Anderson, '"You Save My Life Today, but for What Tomorrow?'"'.

[59] Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace - or War (Boulder: Lynne Rienner, 1999).

It is vital, in a study of rescue in humanitarian action, to focus in on the problem of causing harm, which was a constant implicit tension in Sections II. and III. The problem emerges from the most paradoxical aspect of rescue, which is in turn perhaps the defining paradox of humanitarianism: humanitarians seek to act based on some notion of shared, equal humanity. Yet to act is to seek and claim power, to engender inequality.[60]

The moment of rescue is necessarily a radically contingent and undetermined one, wherein different conceptions of the human are negotiated, but negotiated in a context of fundamental power disparity. This context of inequality, though, is necessary to the possibility of rescue, just as it is in many areas of our social life, such as fire-fighting or in an intensive care unit. We might well think that acts of rescue are valuable and tolerate, or even promote, such inequalities. But we must recognise the potential for harm inherent within them. The most obvious instance is where the potential rescued agent does not see themselves in need of rescue at all, and the act of rescue actually becomes the main, unwanted, driver of change in their life.

The possibility of missionary excesses can never be completely overcome, for the moment of rescue is one of life's "presumptive occasions", to borrow Michael Walzer's phrase.[61] Walzer uses the example of preventing a suicide, choosing to emphasise the overriding value of life, even though we cannot fully know how much worth that value retains for the attempted suicide. The question of how much we need to know about the

[60] "Engender" in every sense, witness recent revelations about high-profile INGOs including Oxfam and Save the Children. See also Róisín Read, 'Embodying Difference: Reading Gender in Women's Memoirs of Humanitarianism', Journal of Intervention and Statebuilding 12:3 (2018).

[61] Michael Walzer, Thick and Thin: Moral Argument at Home and Abroad (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1994), p. 16.

other in order to save them is crucial for humanitarianism.[62] But perhaps humanitarianism can never know enough, constantly negotiating the earthly and the intangible. Therefore humanitarian action must always be seen as a presumptive occasion to some extent, with potential for immense rewards, but also immense harms.

But even in cases where a large part of the act of rescue is clearly agreed upon between rescuer and rescued, the act can still cause harm, for instance in limiting, or appearing to limit, the rescued's humanity and possibilities to that particular relationship of bodily rescue. In many entrenched refugee situations the body is nourished but the humanity is left on life-support. The danger of this is particularly high in the kinds of contexts in which humanitarian acts of rescue are called for, precisely because they are contexts of radical and rapid change, in which a conception of restorative rescue, to a life similar to that which went before, may well be impossible.[63] In that case, the rescuer faces choices about what new and different life they are enabling or imposing.

There is also the question of unintended side-effects. The provision of food aid is notoriously difficult precisely because of the distortions it can impose on local economies and livelihoods, and its ambiguous role in the political economy of conflict. Two decades ago, Alex de Waal, writing on famine, argued that "[the] greatest harm done by the humanitarian international is to create delusion":

[62] David Luban, 'The Romance of the Nation-State', Philosophy & Public Affairs 9:4 (1980); Michael Walzer, 'The Moral Standing of States: A Response to Four Critics', Philosophy & Public Affairs 9:3 (1980).

[63] On restorative rescue, see Amir Pasic and Thomas G. Weiss, 'The Politics of Rescue: Yugoslavia's Wars and the Humanitarian Impulse', Ethics & International Affairs 11 (1997).

> Western governments and donating publics are deluded into believing the fairy tale that their aid can solve profound political problems, when it cannot. The humanitarians deceive themselves about their own importance. Most significantly, local people ("recipients" or "beneficiaries") are deluded into believing that salvation can come from other than their own actions. Some tangible material benefits (many fewer than are commonly believed) are delivered, but at the cost of sustaining this tremendous, institutionalized delusion. Meanwhile, the real reasons why people survive and conquer famine are obscured.[64]

Professional humanitarianism has learned from such criticisms and developed much since then.[65] But the deeper point, about people's agency and role in their own survival still rings true when set against the imaginaries embodied by subsequent humanitarian projects such as the Responsibility to Protect.[66]

For Rieff, "it is impossible to really do no harm".[67] This links to his sense that it is important to acknowledge that the context of humanitarianism is failure, and therefore thinking that we can step into such contexts and do no harm must always be entirely illusory.[68]

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[64] Alex de Waal, Famine Crimes: Politics and the Disaster Relief Industry in Africa (Oxford: J. Currey, 1997), p. 221.

[65] Mass Starvation: The History and Future of Famine (Cambridge: Polity, 2017).

[66] Frédéric Mégret, 'Beyond the "Salvation" Paradigm: Responsibility to Protect (Others) Vs the Power of Protecting Oneself', Security Dialogue 40:6 (2009).

[67] Rieff, A Bed for the Night, p. 22.

[68] Ibid., p. 304.

Most controversial of all is the problem of violent means, arguably the crux of whether military humanitarian intervention can plausibly be situated within humanitarianism. The issue is not whether the ICRC should have a standing army. Rather, the question is whether professional humanitarian organisations' many reasons for distancing themselves from the use of violence imply excluding the use of violence entirely from the wider discussion about humanitarian rescue.

Rieff argues that by allying itself to the use of force, humanitarianism risks undermining its ability to do any good. He criticises the obscuring of the reality of violence by defenders of humanitarian violence.[69] Rieff is not a pacifist, and believes that force may be sometimes morally required, but he distinguishes the moral justification of the use of force from the practice of humanitarianism. As Orbinski puts it: "Humanitarian action exists only to preserve life, not to eliminate it".[70] The Talmudic saying that prefaced this article is preceded by the idea that whoever destroys a life, destroys an entire world.[71]

But surely Rieff's intuition that force should be used to stop a genocide, and his notion that humanitarian violence is wrong stem from the same discussion - a humanitarian discussion about the universal value of human life and the need to defend a common humanity. Though ultimately coming down on the same side of the argument as Rieff, Hugo Slim notes that:

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[69] Ibid., p. 216.

[70] Orbinski, 'Nobel Lecture'.

[71] The Rescuer Otto also notes this. "On my medal, the Yad Vashem Medal, there is an inscription. It says, 'Whoever saves one life, he has saved the entire humanity.' And I think the inversion of that is also true. Whoever kills one innocent human being, it is as if he has killed the entire world." Monroe, The Hand of Compassion, p. 88.

> The paradox of humanitarian violence should be allowed to raise its head and not simply be shouted down by humanitarian purists and critics of neo-liberal hegemony, for it represents a serious moral problem. The fact that the best way to restrain extreme violence and to protect civilians might be to use violence itself is a moral paradox that needs careful attention, not simple slogans.[72]

It is clearly inappropriate to envisage organisations like the ICRC and MSF using or advocating force. But that is not the same thing as saying that stopping a genocide with force is not part of the same humanitarian discussion. If humanitarianism is the conversation through which we describe and understand the worst excesses of cruelty and inhumanity, it cannot exclude *a priori* action that emerges precisely as a response. We should always be sceptical of justifications for the use of force. But can we really exclude force once and for all from our understanding of how humanitarianism functions? Is it not possible that violence may always be the worst way to honour our sense of humanity, but on very rare occasions the only way to save or preserve it?

Humanitarian identity should not become co-terminus with particular agents across all time and all actions engaged in by the relevant agent. That would be a very ahistorical reading of humanitarianism.[73] Immaculate humanitarian identity is not necessary to engage in humanitarian rescue in the name of a common humanity. Arguably the tendency to think the contrary reflects a desire to preserve the moral authority and voice within international

[72] Hugo Slim, 'Violence and Humanitarianism: Moral Paradox and the Protection of Civilians', Security Dialogue 32:3 (2001), p. 337.

[73] Barnett, Empire of Humanity: A History of Humanitarianism.

politics of particular humanitarian actors. The impulse to rescue looms large in our understanding of what humanitarianism is. But it necessarily coexists with the desire to pre-empt future occasions for suffering, to engage in rescue-in-advance through the elaboration of laws, institutions and practices. An obvious example here is the development of human rights. Perhaps when it came to designing a more just system that obviated the need to rescue at all, someone who had spent their life publicly arguing against prejudice on the basis of race or religion would be able to make a more coherent input. We may well require high priests of humanitarianism, to go back to Hopgood's point about sacred and profane. We need not ask these high priests to get their hands dirty, but merely tolerate within the politics of humanitarianism, within the politics of humanity, some who accept that burden.

This potential burden is complicated in two ways. First, the agents involved in actual humanitarian action are more likely to be collective agents. But my argument, while positioning itself against a blanket exclusion of violence from humanitarian action, fails to account for an important dimension of the actual use of violence in humanitarian acts of rescue, since it almost always involves 'collateral damage'. As Michael Doyle puts it: "the necessarily 'dirty hands' of violent means often become 'dangerous hands' in international interventions."[74] The presumption of the rescuer is scaled-up, and they are confronted with an irresolvable equation with rescued people on one side and victims of collateral damage on the other. So some of the violence involved will very likely represent a moral crime on the very terms of the humanitarian project at stake. In his seminal essay on dirty hands, Michael Walzer writes that in the case of a politician who carries out, or orders a moral crime to be carried out:

[74] Michael W. Doyle, 'A Few Words on Mill, Walzer, and Nonintervention', Ethics & International Affairs 23:4 (2009), p. 354.

> he [sic] committed a moral crime and he accepted a moral burden. Now he is a guilty man. His willingness to acknowledge and bear (and perhaps to repent and do penance for) his guilt is evidence, and it is the only evidence he can offer us, both that he is not too good for politics and that he is good enough. Here is the moral politician: it is by his dirty hands that we know him. If he were a moral man and nothing else, his hands would not be dirty; if he were a politician and nothing else, he would pretend that they were clean.[75]

The figure of the moral politician is particularly interesting in the context of humanitarianism's politics of humanity. It is this kind of actor which might be tentatively situated within humanitarianism (perhaps within a government or a military force) to engage in acts of rescue. The moral politician is different from the high priest within the politics of humanity, but they are both part of the same broad enterprise (an iterative and contingent humanitarian conversation). There are obvious problems here, such as the danger of state leaders co-opting humanitarians as a "force multiplier".[76] But this section aims merely to suggest that while they should always be approached gingerly, there is at least the possibility that violent means might occasionally be included within humanitarianism, broadly understood, to defend the idea of a common humanity and human life, as well as particular human bodies.

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[75] Michael Walzer, 'Political Action: The Problem of Dirty Hands', in David Miller (ed.), Thinking Politically: Essays in Political Theory (New Haven & London: Yale University Press, 2007), p. 284.

[76] Nicolas de Torrente, 'Humanitarian Action under Attack: Reflections on the Iraq War', Harvard Human Rights Journal 17 (2004), p. 9.

The problem of humanitarian violence reminds us of the possibility of tragedy, in the genuine sense of the term, inherent in the humanitarian enterprise: professional humanitarians are frequently in positions where all the options at their disposal involve doing wrong in a morally important way.[77] De Waal has argued that the tragedy of humanitarians is precisely that ultimately they are unable completely to escape the possibility of acting cruelly.[78] That is, they cannot entirely avoid causing precisely the kind of suffering that spurred them to act in the first place. This makes a strong case for embracing the role of the 'moral politician', for as Rieff argues: "[the] virtue of the political is that the case for making the most tragic of all public decisions becomes controversial and a matter for public debate, rather than some kind of categorical moral imperative whose need to be undertaken is deemed to be self-evident."[79] The challenge for putative humanitarians then, is how to face up to their moral and political responsibility in such situations, for they are not easily avoided or pre-empted.

VI. CONCLUSION

Humanitarianism cannot be reduced to the concept of rescue, but acts of humanitarian rescue undoubtedly represent the heartbeats of its politics. The moment of humanitarian rescue is one of the key 'presumptive occasions' of our moral lives. Humanitarians must presume much about those they aspire to rescue, not least the content of their humanity.

[77] Chris Brown, 'Tragedy, 'Tragic Choices' and Contemporary International Political Theory', International Relations 21:1 (2007).

[78] Alex de Waal, 'The Humanitarians' Tragedy: Escapable and Inescapable Cruelties', Disasters 34:s2 (2010).

[79] Cited in Ian Smillie and Larry Minear, The Charity of Nations: Humanitarian Action in a Calculating World (Bloomfield: Kumarian Press, 2004), p. 1.

They must will the power to rescue, but acknowledge and manage the politics that accompanies that power. Part of this politics is the negotiation of what rescue means, and thus what saving a human life means, a task surely beyond the capacity of any humanitarian actor. Moreover, humanitarians, in attempting to save others, are often seeking to save themselves.

This article has elucidated and grappled with this puzzle. First, it established that whether rescuing a body or saving a life, humanitarians must acknowledge both the limitations and partiality of the conceptions of humanity that underpin their action, and their role, as powerful actors, in determining these. Some frameworks for thinking about common humanity may be more flexible and fluid than others, but all remain provisional, and contain the potential to impose oneself on the other, possibly to the latter's detriment (all the more so if they are embedded within broader structures of power, as is the case with state-led military humanitarian intervention of the Responsibility to Protect).

The article then explored the function the role of rescuer plays for the self. It argued that salvationist narratives, whether sacred or secular, are hard to escape, and form an important part of our humanitarian imaginaries. As such, best to identify the 'possibility of humanity' amid our particularities, rather than seek a hegemonic universalism.

It is easier then to see how the inevitably mixed motives of any humanitarian actor might contribute to acts of rescue that are acknowledged as humanitarian by both rescuer, rescued and bystander alike: the conversation about what humanitarian rescue looks like is informed both by the humanitarian impulses of those who act, and by the broader negotiation of what our shared humanity entails.

The problem, though, is that the power of the former is often such that other voices are crowded out, hence the potential for harm to be caused through a narrow or

inappropriate vision of the human bodies and lives at stake. Furthermore, it is hard to define the use of violent means completely out of the humanitarian toolkit, making listening to voices that might contest its inappropriate usages all the more important. At the centre of this problem sits the humanitarian actor, no longer able spontaneously to act on impulse, but rather forced to pause and deliberate, to acknowledge the power wielded, and the necessity of embracing the role of the 'moral politician', alive both to the potential tragedy of the position, and to the humility needed to limit it by recognising, and seeking to save, something of the humanity of others.

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