

history that produced the national narratives that world and global history seek to overcome, and this hierarchy could stand some adjustment as well. If global history is to truly 'reshape the landscapes of knowledge and revamp the institutions of knowledge production' (p. 234), it must do so for students, situated in 'institutions of knowledge production' more than they ever will be again.

As editors, our most common response to articles submitted to *JGH* that have promise is to 'make this more global'. The advice we provide for authors on how to do so varies considerably, with no one pattern or single paradigm working in all cases. Given the range of answers that global historians have to the question that forms Conrad's title, such eclecticism – what Carlo Ginzburg long ago called the 'elastic rigour' of good history – seems likely to continue.

The Great War and the origins of humanitarianism, 1918–1924

By Bruno Cabanes. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014. Pp. vii + 390. Hardback £59.99, ISBN 978-1-107-02062-7; paperback £21.99, ISBN 978-1-107-60483-4.

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Bruno Cabanes' *The Great War and the origins of humanitarianism, 1918–1924* is an accomplished contribution to the international history of the post-First World War period in general and of the rise of modern humanitarianism in particular. The Great

War was great not only because of the magnitude of the destruction it caused but also because of how it transformed international society. Cabanes' major contribution is to delve into the intensification and internationalization of humanitarian action, triggered by the war, sustained by the continuing aftershocks, and then solidified by the West's belief that the best way to address its own war-induced inhumanity was by renewing its commitment to humanity.

The book is organized into an introduction, five substantive chapters, and a conclusion. The Introduction sets out the historical and conceptual background by outlining the destruction caused by the war and the enlarged and more nuanced sets of concepts invented to understand and respond to the mass human suffering. In the main chapters, five distinct areas of domestic and global intervention to alleviate suffering are examined, each chapter pivoting on one of the grand personalities associated with the cause. Chapter 1 tells the fascinating story of the emerging belief in France that veterans and their families (and some other war victims) were entitled to support by the state. The hero of this chapter is René Cassin, who would later gain fame because of his contribution to the post-Second World War movement to create international human rights. As the scholarly literature on the development of the modern, liberal welfare state has shown, such states could only make war by asking for sacrifices from their citizens. In return, citizens, not least veterans, expected recognition, material relief, and rights. Chapter 2 tells the story of the various ideological movements and historical forces that helped give rise to the International Labour Organization. Using the figure of the French socialist and reformer Henry Thomas, Cabanes charts the growing rise of a managerial and technocratic approach to global governance and labour.

Chapter 3 ventures into the more familiar humanitarian territory of stateless peoples, and focuses on the heroic role of the Norwegian explorer Fridtjof Nansen. Much of what is found here is already well known. Unfortunately, the stress on Nansen tends to diminish the importance of state interests for understanding why a sense of responsibility to refugees was confined to the Russian refugees at this particular moment, and why the incipient refugee rights were so limited and short-lived. Indeed, a more systematic focus on state interests would have heightened Nansen's remarkable contributions. Chapter 4 examines the professionalization of humanitarian aid. It is largely told through the person of Herbert Hoover and through the filter of the Russian famine in the aftermath of the 1917 Revolution. Again, much of the material will be familiar to students of the period. It is worth noting that Cabanes at times makes more of the moment than is warranted. While there was a certain professionalization of aid, it was not in the sense of an aid profession but rather the attempt to apply more 'scientific' methods and modern organizational techniques to keeping people alive in crisis situations. Cabanes goes on to assert – beyond what the evidence can sustain, in my view – that this was a turning point in the development of a 'right' to receive aid and in the growing solidarity with victims of natural disasters. Chapter 5 tells the story of the emergence of international children's rights and the formative role of the Jebb sisters in that cause. The Conclusion returns to the introductory theme of the move from humanitarian rights to human rights.

The stories in this book are well told, informative, and interesting. However, I am not convinced that they support Cabanes's claim that humanitarianism in general and the concept of 'humanitarian rights' in particular originated in the Great War. I have

several reservations. I assume that the reader is supposed to take the 'origins' in the title figuratively and not literally, because Cabanes certainly knows that there was little truly original about the response to mass suffering during and after the war; these responses had precedents. It is more defensible to argue that there was a transformation. But to sustain the concept of transformation it is important to distinguish clearly the before from the after. However, Cabanes does not really tell us about the before, at least not in the kind of detail to determine whether there was a meaningful transformation. I am certainly prepared to accept the argument that the Great War was a turning point and perhaps even a great transformation, but a little more analytical groundwork on his part would have helped to convince me of that.

The Introduction and Conclusion implicitly suggest that the real breakthrough was the emergence of the concept of 'humanitarian rights', a concept that Cabanes might properly claim as his own. Humanitarian rights, he seems to suggest, contained a bit of the old in the form of humanitarianism and a bit of the new in the form of human rights. As he puts it, there emerged 'a new kind of humanitarian narrative' (p. 6) that focused on the 'discourse on the rights of these victims'. Does this neologism 'humanitarian rights' advance or hinder our understanding of humanitarianism? It depends, of course, on what one means by humanitarianism and human rights. Unfortunately, Cabanes' argument falls short at this critical juncture. There is almost no account of the history of the theory and practice of humanitarianism prior to the First World War, little attention is paid to the kind of global campaigns that many historians are researching at present, and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) is hardly mentioned. Furthermore, two of the five substantive chapters

cover topics – the rights of victims of the war, and labour – that are not typically included in accounts of humanitarianism. Cabanes is certainly entitled to engage in conceptual stretching if he wants, but he does owe the reader an explanation and defence.

Much the same can be said for the language of ‘rights’. There is an interesting body of scholarship developing around the evolution of international human rights, and much of this is attentive to the process whereby different kinds of actors become entitled to make claims, and to the corollary process whereby different kinds of actors incur obligations to defend these rights and punish those who are violators. Cabanes notes many different rights claims – states’ rights, children’s rights, labour rights, veterans’ rights, refugee rights, and so on. To what extent does it help to lump all these rights together? Is our understanding of the history of international human rights advanced, for instance, by using the concept of ‘rights’ in a discussion of the growing entitlement claims by war veterans and the rise of the welfare state? Again, Cabanes is certainly entitled to engage in conceptual stretching, but the reader is also entitled to know more about how his usage differs from the current conversation.

The conceptual move made by Cabanes is intriguing because it blurs the boundaries between humanitarianism, on the one hand, and human rights, on the other. He argues that victims are now entitled to rights and, presumably, can lay claim to those rights. In what way were these actually discussed as ‘rights’? I am not sure. Part of the problem, as I noted above, is that Cabanes never fully defines his notion of humanitarianism or human rights. In its place, he conveys the impression that the language of rights came to be used to protect groups of victims as a consequence of war and other disasters. My sense, though, is that ‘rights’ is too clumsy

a term. This is apparent in Cabanes’ opening discussion of the claims by French veterans that they were owed various kinds of protections and entitlements because of their service. He acknowledges that this was hardly a novel development. The history of modern European warfare, as argued by Charles Tilly and others, may be narrated as the exchange of military service for an expansion of citizenship, rights, and entitlements. The post-First World War period may be understood in this light. But to what extent is this about ‘human rights’? That is unclear. Presumably, these were not rights given to all individuals, but rather benefits and entitlements owed to particular individuals as a consequence of their national service. To say that we are now talking about the group rights of veterans strikes me as an unhelpful expansion of the meaning of rights, at least in the international context.

By positing the existence of the term ‘humanitarian rights’, Cabanes has wandered into an interesting debate, but unfortunately he does not fully engage with it. The debate centres on the relationship between humanitarianism and human rights. Are these distinctions with or without a difference? And do these distinctions and their differences change with the historical times? What does it mean to talk about human rights at this moment? Cabanes enters this debate through his suggestion that we are seeing the merger of humanitarian rights and human rights (p. 9). This is a very provocative claim. Unfortunately, Cabanes asks but does not answer whether and how human rights differ from humanitarian rights. It is also not clear if any actors from the period were using this terminology. Certainly not the ICRC. It spoke in the language of law, but not of rights, and, as many of its chief interpreters insist, categorically rejected the language of rights in favour of the language of needs. So, if the actors themselves were not using terms

such as ‘humanitarian rights’, then perhaps Cabanes is trying to suggest that this term better captures some important historical changes. But exactly how is unclear. The war was a decisive turning point, and presumably extended new kinds of protections to vulnerable populations. But the content of this shift – what it meant for the claims that individuals could make on states, or the kinds of expectations that they could have during times of war – is left unexplored.

Despite these reservations, this a very welcome, well-written, and well-researched book that captures nicely some of the important post-First World War developments in European and international society.

The guardians: the League of Nations and the crisis of empire

By Susan Pedersen. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2015. Pp. xviii + 571. Hardback £22.99, ISBN 978-0-19-957048-5.

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The League of Nations, the forerunner of the United Nations, has traditionally been described in terms of failure. This is because the organization failed to stop the aggression of the revisionist powers Japan, Italy, and Germany in the 1930s and the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939. Since the late 1980s, however, there has been a reappraisal of the League, with historians focusing more and more on its humanitarian and technical functions instead of on its efforts to maintain world peace. Especially over the last decade,

we have seen a blossoming of League studies. The latest and most impressive product of this revisionist school is *The guardians* by Susan Pedersen, in which she describes and analyses the history of the mandates system of the League and its influence on the international order during the interwar period.

The introduction and first three chapters form the first part of *The guardians*. In this part, Pedersen provides a historical context for the creation and functioning of the League and the birth of the mandates system at the Paris Peace Conference in 1919. During the First World War, the German and Ottoman empires lost their African, Pacific, and Middle Eastern territories to the Allied Powers. If the occupying Allied countries had had it their way, they would have annexed these former colonies straightaway. However, the new international norm of Wilsonian self-determination current at the end of the war and the Bolshevik challenge hampered this.

The mandates system invented at the Paris Peace Conference was a compromise from the start. It made a distinction between developed and less-developed mandated territories. Mandated countries could be treated as provisionally independent nations (‘A’ mandates, the Middle Eastern Arab territories); being in need of more tutelage but not to be administered as part of the mandating powers’ colonial territories (‘B’ mandates, German Africa other than South West Africa); or as territories best administered under the laws of the mandatory as integral portions of its territory because of their low level of civilization (‘C’ mandates, South West Africa, plus postcolonial Oceania). The mandatory powers – Britain, France, Japan, South Africa, Belgium, Australia, and New Zealand – were supposed to govern in the interests of the local population. As a result, slavery, forced labour, liquor traffic, and other abuses were not