Evolution Without Progress? Humanitarianism in a World of Hurt

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Abstract   Many theories of international relations contain a narrative of progress and explain that progress with reference to evolutionary imagery. This article examines critically: the relevance of Darwinian and Lamarckian models of international relations to the evolution of international ethics and institutions; and the possibility that the ethics and norms are likely to be more consistent with existing world orders than challengers to it. Specifically, this article draws from evolutionary social science and organizational theory to develop a framework to explore the initial diversity of the meaning and practices of humanitarianism; how the combination of environmental mechanisms and organizational culture led many humanitarian agencies to adapt to their environment in ways that incorporated politics; and the subsequent countermovement by some agencies who wanted to purify humanitarianism. I then apply this framework to explain the recent history of four international aid agencies. I conclude with several observations regarding how the model as applied to these cases allows us to examine critically the selection mechanisms that do and do not account for ethical change and how scholars of international norms, ethics, and progress should be attentive to how principled actors are creatures of the world they want to transform.

Many theories of international relations contain the promise of progress. Liberal approaches suggest that the world is getting better in many ways, in large part because of the expansion of liberal democracies. Liberal states have various qualities that make them good neighbors: more transparent and thus more trustwor-

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thy, more inclined toward inclusive debate and dialogue, more likely to settle their differences through wordplay and not gunplay, and more inclined to respect and honor human rights.[1] A considerable body of constructivist scholarship tracks the steady evolution and institutionalization of "good" norms that countermand power politics.[2] English School theorists have identified a change from a system of states, to a society of states, to a global society with elements of cosmopolitanism.[3] Critical theorists are famous for demonstrating how power masquerades as progress, but they nevertheless stay on the lookout for evidence of emancipation.[4] Although international relations scholars have no more agreed on a meaning of progress than they have on a meaning of life, their writings suggest a strong normative preference for inclusive deliberation to unilateral decisions made by "deciders," for cosmopolitanism and humanity to chauvinism and discrimination, and for practices based on generalized ethics to a politics of the powerful. Importantly, they are finding empirical evidence to suggest that they are not waiting in vain.

Evolutionary theory informs many of these narratives of progress. International relations scholars have proposed evolutionary theories of cooperation, learning, the democratic peace, multilateralism, international organizational change, and the institutionalization of norms.[5] Although these contributions draw from different interpretations of evolutionary theory, and some more explicitly than others, they share a concern with the conditions under which the dynamic relationship between environmental selection mechanisms and human choice produces an enlightened outcome. Under the right conditions, states can learn to cooperate, create zones of peace, establish new forms of international governance, and develop various kinds of ethical principles that give states and peoples more control over their lives. Once these practices are established there are strong material and cognitive incentives that make them durable. There is the ever-present likelihood of moral backsliding, but it is possible to learn from past mistakes and to act collectively toward conceptions of progress.

Humanitarianism—the desire to relieve the suffering of distant strangers—could be the poster child for evolutionary progress. Although the concern for and sense of obligation to distant strangers is as old as antiquity, in North America and Europe in the nineteenth-century, humanitarianism entered a modern age as formal organizations emerged in a range of areas dedicated to the idea of providing relief to those in immediate danger, reducing the suffering of the masses, and

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1. See Slaughter 1995; and Hurrell 1990.
2. See Price 2008a and 2008b; Keck and Sikkink 1998; Finnemore and Sikkink 1999; and Finnemore 2004.
3. See Wheeler 2001; Hurrell 2007, chap. 12; Jackson 2000; and Buzan 2004.
4. See Linkalter 1998 and 2007; Shapcott 2008; Eckersley 2008; and Booth 2007.
5. On cooperation, see Axelrod 1984. On learning, see Haas 1991; and Adler 1991. On the democratic peace, see Cederman 2001a and 2001b. On multilateralism, see Downs, Rocke, and Barsoom 1998. On environmental governance, see Bernstein 2001. On international organizational change, see Viola and Snidal 2007. On norm institutionalization, see Finnemore and Sikkink 1999; and Kelly 2008.

eliminating the causes of harm. Early expressions of these humanitarian senti-
ments include the campaign to abolish the slave trade, missionary work, and the
creation of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and inter-
national humanitarian law. During the course of the twentieth century, there has
evolved a vast institutional machinery to provide all kinds of assistance to pro-
tect individuals from harm and to remove the root causes of suffering. This global
institutionalization of compassion is an evolution, if not a revolution, in inter-
national ethics.[6]

If so, why are the humanitarians in such a frenzied state? The answer: the
"politicization" of humanitarianism. Certainly all humanitarian agencies acknowl-
edge that humanitarianism is the offspring of politics, that their activities have
political consequences, and that they are inextricably part of the political world.
Despite this, humanitarian actors have held that humanitarianism and politics are
separate endeavors, have asserted that their ability to relieve suffering is depen-
dent on being viewed as outside of politics, and have labored to keep humanitar-
ianism and politics apart.[7] For humanitarian organizations, humanitarian action
and politics are binaries; it is nearly impossible to alter the meaning of humani-
tarianism without altering the meaning of the "other."[8] The foundational purpose
of humanitarian action, to relieve suffering, is an act of humanity, not politics.
Humanitarianism's principles keep politics at bay. Humanity commands attention
to all humankind and inspires cosmopolitanism. Impartiality demands that assis-
tance be based on need and not discriminate on the basis of nationality, race,
religious belief, gender, political opinions, or other considerations.[9] Neutrality
involves refraining from taking part in hostilities or from any action that either
benefits or disadvantages the parties to the conflict. Independence demands that
assistance should not be connected to any of the parties directly involved in the
conflict or who have a stake in the outcome, namely states. The principles of
humanity, impartiality, neutrality, and independence depoliticize humanitarian action
and create a "humanitarian space"—a space insulated from politics. By keeping
humanitarianism separate from politics, humanitarian actors are able to help those
in need.

Yet during the past two decades, a humanitarianism that once did not do poli-
tics now does.[10] Humanitarian organizations have incorporated human rights,
democracy promotion, and even building responsible states into their activities—
activities once defined as political by those in the humanitarian sector precisely
because they touched on governance and power. Additionally, aid agencies have

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6. For an overview of the recent expansion of the humanitarian system, see Blondel 2000; de Waal
1998, 68–72; Minear 2002, chap. 1; Macrae 2002; and Barnett 2005.
7. See Barnett 2005 for a review of this definition and the boundaries between humanitarian and
politics with particular reference to organizations.
8. See Nyers 1999, 21; Cutts 1998, 3; Warner 1999; and Minear 2002, 76.
9. Pictet 1979.
10. See Macrae 2002; Weiss 1999; Chandler 2002; Moore 2000; Duffield 2001; and Fox 2001.

begun to associate more closely and willingly with states. Although they always have had a hate-love relationship with states—states are both a cause of and a solution to suffering, aid agencies have become more willing to coordinate their policies with states and their international organizations because of their belief in converging agendas. Is the marriage of politics and humanitarianism a match made in heaven or hell? Although some have suggested that this might be the "golden age" of humanitarianism because it is better funded, better supported, more widely celebrated, more organizationally adept, and better able to save lives than ever before, this is a decidedly minority position.[11] Instead, most insider accounts worry that becoming political has soiled humanitarianism, allowed statism to trump cosmopolitanism, and sacrificed ethics on the altar of interests.[12] The recent evolution of humanitarianism, in this view, has led not to progress but rather to crisis.

This article draws from evolutionary social science and organizational theory to develop a framework to explore the initial diversity of the meaning and practices of humanitarianism; how the combination of environmental mechanisms and organizational culture led many humanitarian agencies to adapt to their environment in ways that incorporated politics; and the subsequent countermovement by some agencies that wanted to purify humanitarianism. Resource dependence and sociological institutionalist models provide important insights into how goal-oriented and culturally inscribed actors respond to a world of change and why, over time, there are strong pressures to conform to their environment. Yet these models, many quite familiar to scholars of international relations, have limitations that can be usefully supplemented by insights from evolutionary social science.

Evolutionary theory, especially when applied to cultural systems, is fraught with controversies and this is not the place to review them or provide a primer for international relations scholars. Three of its agreed-upon features provide important insights for understanding the possibility of evolution without progress.[13] First, whereas many contemporary approaches to institutional change are concerned with institutional isomorphism and the institutionalization of a discourse, idea, or norm, evolutionary approaches are attentive to the presence of ongoing variation. In other words, while much of international relations theory, especially constructivist approaches and those interested in processes of socialization, diffusion, the fixing of meanings, and intersubjective consensus, is attentive to the winnowing process, it is equally important to look out for sources of future diversity. Second, whereas many liberal and constructivist approaches highlight how princi-

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11. Slim 2004.
12. See Rieff 2002; Minear 2002; Donini 2004; and Duffield 2001.
13. For general statements regarding evolutionary approaches to international relations, see Thayer 2000 and 2004; Spruyt 1994 and 2001; Fazal 2004; Patrick 2001; Thompson 2001; Florini 1996; Kahler 1999; Adler 1991; Sterling-Folker 2000; the special issue of *International Studies Quarterly* 1996; Viola and Snidal 2007; and Gilady and Hoffmann 2008.

pled actors, transnational movements, and moral entrepreneurs are agents of change, evolutionary social science focuses on the environmental selection mechanisms (though not to the neglect of choice). By illuminating the environmental determinants of international ethics, I will be able to more fully consider how states, politics, and power shape international ethics. Lastly, because adaptations that are a good fit for one environment might be dysfunctional for another, evolutionary social science guards against a Whiggish view of history.[14] Humanitarianism is both a creature and a creator of this world. Whether the outcome is progressive or regressive is a matter of debate and depends mightily on whose ethical metrics are used.

This article is organized as follows. The first section briefly discusses the central tenets of evolutionary social science and then combines them with branches of organizational theory to develop a generalized framework to explain the evolution of a political humanitarianism. Because evolution involves a dynamic process of variation, selection, and further variation as a consequence of contingency, learning, and choice, it is impossible to construct a theory of evolutionary change, per se. Yet we can generate some specific propositions and expected tendencies based on an assessment of the "state of the world," the identification of the dominant selection mechanisms, and the likely strategies organizations will adopt as they respond to new challenges.[15] Specifically, I argue that how aid agencies adapted to the new security challenges of the 1990s was shaped by their relative dependence on states for their resources and their humanitarian identity. The general observation is that the more dependent are aid organizations on states, the more likely they will conform to their interests. Yet the existing organizational identity also can be causally consequential for how staff interpret and respond to both resource and security challenges. I posit that there are two kinds of aid agencies—"emergency" organizations that limit their purpose to relief, and "alchemic" organizations that include the desire to eliminate the causes of suffering. Alchemic organizations will be more prone toward politics than will be emergency organizations because of the former's desire to reduce vulnerabilities and improve welfare. In short, the framework is intended to demonstrate how environmental selection mechanisms and the humanitarian identity captures the evolution toward a political humanitarianism, the variation in response across agencies, and the subsequent diversity.

The second section uses this framework to explore the recent histories of four humanitarian agencies: CARE International, the United Nations High Commissioner of Refugees (UNHCR), World Vision International (WVI), and Médecins Sans Frontières (MSF). Because these four agencies confronted the same security environment but had distinct configurations of resource dependence and identity,

14. For other statements by international scholars that explicitly recognize that evolution need not mean progress, see Adler 1991; Haas 1997; and Bernstein 2001.

15. See Mayr 1988, cited in Lewis and Steinmo 2007, 16. Also see Bernstein et al. 2000.

their configuration is expected to account for variations in their willingness to incorporate politics into their programs and mandates. Alchemical and dependent agencies should be most inclined to adopt politics because it is consistent with their identity and they will be rewarded for doing so. Emergency and independent agencies should be the least likely, with independent alchemic and dependent emergencies agencies staking out a middle position. Specifically, the expectations are that because CARE International is alchemic and resource dependent, it will be receptive to politics; WVI is alchemic and independent, it will "approach and avoid"; UNHCR is emergency and resource dependent, it will accommodate itself to politics; and MSF is emergency and resource independent, it will oppose the incorporation of politics. The framework predicts the general outcomes in all four cases; however, it overlooks other environments and selection mechanisms, namely the religious environment for WVI, and the professional field for MSF. In the conclusion, I offer some comments on the unexpectedly important role of identity in explaining evolutionary change, and develop the theme of evolution without progress, exploring how the environment can have a pronounced impact on the principles of principled actors and enmesh them into the very world orders that they want to resist and transform.

Evolving Humanitarianism

Evolution is a dynamic process of change that "involves variation, selective retention, and new sources of variation."[16] In the context of cultural systems, the concern is with a change over time in "the distribution of a cultural attribute ... that can vary across a population of individuals, or subgroups of them (for example organizations)." This change is driven by a systemic selection process that "augments the frequency of some forms or values of that attribute relative to others. That selection can be related, in principle, at least, to relative efficacy or 'fitness' ... In most cases there are forces which introduce new variety. While certain features of the time paths so generated may be roughly predictable, this dynamic process goes on without any central planner or plan guiding it."[17]

Diversity

Diversity is the distribution of a cultural attribute, practice, or trait across a population. I am interested in the diversity of practices associated with humanitarianism. Humanitarianism broadly concerns the desire to relieve the suffering of distant strangers, but there is considerable diversity among agencies regarding

16. Nelson 2006, 493.
17. Nelson 2007, 350.

which suffering matters and how such suffering should be relieved. Some human-
itarian institutions want to relieve all manner of suffering, including suffering
caused by poverty (development) and exploitation (slavery), while others focus
only on the suffering of those whose lives are threatened by man-made or natural
disasters (emergencies). Some humanitarian institutions subscribe to the view that
humanitarian action requires observance of the principles of impartiality, neutral-
ity, and independence, while others are not as concerned with how relief is
delivered.

Because I am interested in the post–Cold War evolution of humanitarianism, I
attend to the distribution of practices in the immediately preceding period. Three
features of the post-1945 period stand out regarding the diversity of humanitari-
anism. First, the definition used by the ICRC and other public international bodies
was nearly hegemonic—the impartial, neutral, and independent provision of relief
to victims of war and natural disasters.[18] Yet there were other humanitarian insti-
tutions such as Oxfam, Catholic Relief Services, and CARE International that
wanted to relieve the suffering of people in emergency (war) and nonemergency
(poverty) settings; that addressed symptoms and causes; and that treated the prin-
ciples of neutrality and independence not as axioms but rather as useful guide-
lines. Second, and related, there were two ideal types of aid agencies—emergency,
which limited itself to relief, and alchemical, which tackled symptoms and causes.
These kinds of aid agencies were part of humanitarianism since the beginning
(ICRC is an emergency agency and the London Missionary Society is a good exam-
ple of an alchemist organization), but they began to clash over their differences as
alchemist agencies gained institutional power after the end of the Cold War.[19] Impor-
tantly, while the categories are fixed, aid agencies can evolve and thus migrate
from one category to another. Three, as already discussed, all humanitarian orga-
nizations, emergency and alchemic alike, wanted to keep humanitarianism sepa-
rate from politics. Sometimes the distinctions between humanitarianism and politics
were written into their mandates, as was the case with the ICRC and the UNHCR.
At other times, it was part of norms and discourse. Many religious aid agencies
worried that if they violated the principle of the separation of the church and the
state and became involved in politics, then the state might interpret this breach as
an invitation to interfere in religion.[20] Other organizations that tackled the causes
of suffering saw themselves as outside of politics because they treated their inter-
ventions as technical; for instance, they were helping people learn how to fish and
did not concern themselves with whether or not individuals had fishing rights or
access to credit and markets.

18. Barnett and Weiss 2008.
19. I use the term alchemic because alchemists, and the field of alchemy, desired to transform and
transmute existing metals and materials in order to enhance their value and prolong life. For other
categorizations, see Weiss 1999; Duffield 2001, Stoddard 2002; and Feinstein International Famine
Center 2004, 54.
20. Nichols 1988, 13–17.

Selection and the Environment

Selection concerns the mechanisms that account for changes in the distribution of beliefs, practices, and behaviors. A central claim of evolutionary theory is that the selection mechanism resides in the environment. Indeed, Darwin's principal breakthrough was to propose natural selection as the principal cause of evolution. Some social scientists, drawing directly from biological models, argue that market capitalism and interstate politics generates a competition for survival, famously, a "survival of the fittest," and businesses and states have no choice but to adapt to the environment—or perish. Importantly, the environment retains all choices and organizations have none; adaptations are explained at the level of the environment and not the level of the unit.

Some branches of organizational theory, especially sociological institutionalism and resource dependence, also treat the environment as the locus of selection. Organizations largely depend on their environments to provide resources they need to survive, reduce organizational insecurity, and accomplish their goals. In a statement that captures the core elements of a resource dependence approach, but might equally apply to evolutionary social science, Pfeffer and Salancik write that "organizations survive to the extent that they are effective. Their effectiveness derives from the management of demands, particularly demands of interest groups upon which the organizations depend for resources and support... There are a variety of ways of managing demands, including the obvious one of giving in to them."[21]

Organizations need material resources, including technologies to carry out their tasks and money to pay for the technology and their staff. Organizations also require symbolic resources, to be perceived as legitimate and as serving a useful function. This is not only an end in itself but also is a means toward securing the material resources they require for accomplishing the organization's goals, including survival. The willingness of others to fund their activities is contingent, in part, on their perceived legitimacy and whether they are viewed as acting according to the community's values. Indeed, for nonprofit organizations, legitimacy is particularly critical; unlike for-profit firms, nonprofit organizations do not generate their own source of revenue and therefore rely heavily on their perceived legitimacy for generating external support.[22]

Organizations often exist in multiple environments that can impact their effectiveness and survival. Humanitarian agencies are affected by three distinctive but overlapping environments. One environment is comprised of patterns of conflict. With the end of the Cold War, there emerged a new conflict environment, characterized by "new wars" and "complex humanitarian emergencies," a

21. See Pfeffer and Salancik 2003, 2. See also Aldrich 1999, 49; and DiMaggio and Powell 1991.
22. See Dobbin 1994, 126; Scott 1987; and Meyer and Rowan 1977, 140.

"conflict-related humanitarian disaster involving a high degree of breakdown and social dislocation and, reflecting this condition, requiring a systemwide aid response from the international community."[23] While these emergencies were less novel than some hyped at the time, they did cause humanitarian agencies to question whether the old rules applied to the new circumstances.[24] Presumably those agencies that adapted most effectively and efficiently to the new security challenges, thus better helping others to survive, would survive themselves.

Because states have the diplomatic, financial, political, and military resources to further or obstruct humanitarian action, they are a major part of the environment for humanitarian organizations. Beginning in the 1990s, states became more open to humanitarian action, which certainly boded well for aid agencies wanting to do more. States became more generous than ever before. Between 1990 and 2000, aid levels rose from $2.1 billion to $5.9 billion, a nearly threefold increase.[25] Working through the United Nations (UN) and other multilateral organizations, states began to extend more protections to vulnerable populations, to define the purpose of force in humanitarian terms, and to think seriously about their responsibilities to protect distant strangers. The 1990s became a more permissive environment for aid agencies wanting to expand.

Yet states' newfound affection for humanitarianism arguably was owed not to a "great awakening" that substituted a moral outlook for long-standing national interests but rather to a recalculation of the relationship between their security interests and humanitarian disasters. Humanitarian emergencies were having regional and sometimes international consequences, causing states to "discover" a relationship between domestic and international order. Failed states, the source of many humanitarian emergencies, were a danger to themselves and others. They had to be "saved"—and powerful states and international organizations began to claim that the surest antidote to domestic instability was the creation of stable, legitimate states organized around human rights, markets, and democracy.[26] Also, since the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, many countries, especially the United States, began to see counterterrorism and humanitarianism as crime-fighting partners, with failed states as sanctuaries and staging platforms for terrorists. Humanitarian organizations, in this view, can become part of wider "hearts and minds" campaigns, attempting to convince local populations of the goodness of invading armies in the name of stability and freedom. In his now infamous words, U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell told a gathering of private aid agencies that "just as surely as our diplomats and military, American NGOs are out there [in Afghanistan] serving and sacrificing on the frontlines of freedom. NGOs

23. Duffield 2001, 12.
24. Hoffman and Weiss 2006.
25. See de Waal 1998; Cooley and Ron 2002; Smillie and Minear 2004; and Randel and German 2002.
26. Paris 2004.

are such a force multiplier for us, such an important part of our combat team."[27] Finally, states learned that humanitarian action could avoid or postpone more costly actions, a development called a "humanitarian alibi." For example, the major powers authorized UNHCR to deliver humanitarian relief in Bosnia not because they wanted to end the suffering but rather because they wanted to reduce the growing domestic and international pressure for a military intervention.[28]

Third, there is a normative structure that constrains and enables humanitarian action. One of the truly remarkable developments of the post–Cold War period was the explosion of laws, norms, and principles that created a "humanitarian imperative"—the claim that international community can and should protect populations at risk.[29] The expansion and coalescence of this imperative was evident in a range of areas, including the rising discourse of human rights, the growing claim that sovereignty is conditional on how states treat their citizens, the growing legitimacy of humanitarian intervention, the language of a responsibility to protect, the desire to save failed states and undertake postconflict reconstruction, and the stress on conflict prevention. There were greater opportunities for humanitarian action than ever before and aid agencies that once found their way blocked during the Cold War now found themselves with greater access to populations in need and able to provide all manner of relief and protection.

Environments can contain compatible selection mechanisms, but not always. Accordingly, an adaptation that is "fit" for one environment might be "unfit" for another. Because states used the lens of state interests to define their protection practices, aid agencies had to worry that there might be a divide between how they defined humanitarianism and how states did. States followed their interests and not the principle of impartiality—some lives, namely those in strategic locations, were worth more than others. States were increasingly earmarking and imposing restrictions on where and how aid was spent.[30] To the extent that there was a gap between what aid agencies and states wanted, aid agencies could experience tremendous pressure to change their policies. Sometimes states delivered threats to try and get aid agencies to act where and how they wanted. At other times the "marketplace" shifted the material and normative incentives in ways that made agencies alter their programs.[31] Eventfully, the surge in the number of emergencies was accompanied by an explosion of aid agencies, creating greater competition for resources and thus greater pressure on aid agencies to conform to the wishes of states. If the complex emergencies rewarded agencies who could successfully adapt and save as many lives as possible, the new constellation of security interests rewarded agencies who successfully adapted to the needs of states.

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27. Secretary of State Colin Powell. Remarks to the National Foreign Policy Conference for Leaders of Nongovernmental Organizations, 26 October 2001.
28. Ogata 2005, 25.
29. Eliason 2002, 11.
30. See Macrae et al. 2002, 15; and Randel and German 2002.
31. See Smillie and Minear 2004; and Cooley and Ron 2002.

As Andrew Natsios, a former administrator for U.S. AID and former vice president of WVI put it, "there is a gap between people receiving the services and the people giving the money to pay for the services. It is a fragile system of accountability."[32]

   The ability of aid agencies to secure the resources they need to save lives does not entirely depend on instrumentalizing states. While all agencies depend on others for their resources, the critical issue here is how dependent they are on states and whether their interests coincide. Following Pfeffer and Salancik's definition of resource dependence, dependence can be measured by the relative magnitude of the resource and the centrality of the resources; the agency's discretion over the allocation and use of the resource; and how many states provide support.[33] Aid agencies are wary of being financially dependent on states, which is why they carefully monitor the percentage of their budget that derives from states, and especially from those states that are reputed to attach conditions. MSF and World Vision International, which receive most of their income from private contributions, are the envy of the aid world.

Selection and the Organization

Evolutionary social science and organizational theory agree that the environment influences but does not determine how organizations adapt. Biological and cultural systems differ precisely because the actors that inhabit the latter are knowledgeable, reflexive, and capable of learning.[34] These Lamarckian-inspired arguments, in other words, shift the selection mechanism from the environment to the actor, akin to those theories of international relations that bring agency back into structure.[35] There are several issues here that are particularly relevant for understanding the evolution of the humanitarian system. To begin, organizations are reluctant to conform to their environment because doing so can harm their autonomy. All organizations want autonomy because they want to control the conditions of their work. The less autonomous they are, the more beholden they are to outside actors who might use their leverage in ways that potentially threaten the organization's goals, principles, and rules. Accordingly, autonomy is a subsidiary goal for organizations and organizations who resist their environment will enjoy more decision-making discretion and greater flexibility when choosing how to respond to new contingencies.[36] Aid agencies are expected to be particularly sensitive to a loss of autonomy to states because it can undermine their impartiality, independence, and neutrality,

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   32. Author's interview, 8 April 2008.
   33. Pfeffer and Salancik, 2003, 44.
   34. Nelson 2006.
   35. For the debate about what is precisely a Lamarckian perspective and how this might differ from a Darwinian perspective, see Nelson 2006 and 2007; and Hodgson and Knudsen 2006a and 2006b.
   36. Oliver 1991, 150. For similar applications to international relations, see Barnett and Coleman 2005; and Hawkins et al. 2006.

both perceived and real. Again, this is why so many agencies are so careful about their sources of funding.

Although several organizational variables can influence adaptation, I am particularly interested in the relationship between the organization's identity, organizational culture, and organizational learning. The organizational culture concerns the identity of the organization and its relationship to "the solutions that are produced . . . to meet specific problems, and then how those solutions become institutionalized as rituals, values, and ultimately as rules."[37] Because the organizational culture shapes the kinds of changes that staff believe are consistent with their identity, different identities will lead to contrasting positions regarding what are acceptable responses to new problems, opportunities, and circumstances. In the case of humanitarianism, we can expect emergency and alchemical organizations to vary in what they believe are legitimate goals and means.

Yet the organizational identity does not directly shape how the organization responds to its environment. Instead, there is likely to be a division within the organization over how to interpret the rules and the mandate, which cautions against facile claims that adaptation and learning are synonymous. Those following Darwinian-influenced versions of evolutionary theory typically favor the language of adaptation, generically understood as any change in the organization that increases its fit to the environment. Those following Lamarckian-influenced versions are more open to the possibility of learning, in which new knowledge is used to reflect on both the means and the ends of the organization. As Haas summarized, "learning differs from adaptation in its dependence on new knowledge that may be introduced into decision making."[38] Both kinds of change are clearly possible. It is likely that in the heat of an emergency, aid agencies can be fairly characterized as adapting as best they can. However, the decision by the agency whether to enter into the political world is likely to be a product of learning because such an identity-defining development will not be taken lightly and instead will be informed by a consideration of their values, new knowledge, and emerging theories. It must be stressed that these adaptations or "lessons learned" need not deliver progress and, instead, can produce dysfunctional and even pathological outcomes.

How might learning and adaptation interact with the search by agencies to secure the resources that enable them to maintain the organization's survival and the survival of vulnerable populations? One hypothesis is that the debate will be shaped significantly by those units, departments, and coalitions that can convincingly claim that their strategy can reduce uncertainty, manage important dependencies, and help the organization obtain more resources, that is, minimize organizational insecurity—without necessarily compromising its principles.[39] We should expect, in other words, a spirited debate. But the character of the debate is unlikely to

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37. Vaughan 1996, 64.
38. Haas 1997, 16.
39. Pfeffer and Salancik 2003.

resemble a Habermasian public sphere; instead it will be structured by those who hold positions of power in the organization.

Resources, Identity, and Selection

The combination of organizational identity and resource dependence generate expectations regarding how likely the agency is to respond in a political manner to the new security challenges in the 1990s. This is shown in Table 1.

TABLE 1. *Mapping organizational responses*

Kind of agency	Resource Dependent	Resource Independent
Alchemic	Accept	Give-and-take
Emergency	Accomodationist	Confrontational

Because they operate with a broader understanding of the objectives of humanitarianism, work in both emergency and nonemergency settings, and have a more flexible view of the principles of independence and neutrality, alchemical agencies will be more likely to incorporate politics into their activities. In conflict situations, alchemical agencies will be more likely to seek the assistance of states and in postconflict settings, they will be more likely to consider how to integrate relief with other policies that are designed to remove the causes of conflict, otherwise known as a relief-rights-development continuum, and to become integrated into broad peacebuilding agendas.[40] Also, the willingness of these agencies to conform to state preferences will be highly dependent on their resource dependence: those that are highly dependent will be more likely to become more "political" and those that are less will be more likely to find a comfortable compromise.

Because they limit themselves to relief in emergency settings and hold that the principles of neutrality and independence are the best way to maintain their access to lives at stake, emergency organizations will be more fearful of politics. Those emergency organizations that are dependent on states will be more open to incorporating politics, though because most emergency organizations strive to be independent they are less likely to have a pattern of financial dependence on states. In this respect, an important difference between international and nongovernmental organizations is that the former are formal agents of states whereas the latter are not. So, for instance, we should expect emergency agencies within the UN system

40. Duffield 2001 and 2007.

to be more compliant than private voluntary emergency organizations. The ICRC is an interesting hybrid because it is dependent on funding from the Swiss government, and while there is evidence that at times it altered its policies to coincide with Swiss interests, overall the Swiss government has provided funding without strings or expectations.[41]

Evolution, Progress, and Future Variation

Adaptations that might be a good fit for one environment might not be for another, which is one reason why evolutionary social scientists avoid the language of progress. Evolution does not mean progress—it refers to the pattern of change within a population and makes no claim regarding whether that pattern is moving in a desirable direction. For many humanitarian institutions, there was tremendous uncertainty about not only how to respond to emergencies but also whether their adaptations, especially those that accommodated politics, might transfigure humanitarianism. Furthermore, notions of progress depend on the ethical metrics that are employed to judge adaptations. For instance, some treat the creation of the ICRC as a moral milestone because it helped to humanize war, while others cast it as a legitimating device for a system of war and a facilitator of patriotic nationalism.

Because variation and selection is an ongoing process, we must be attentive not only to the mechanisms that direct change but also to the sources of subsequent variation. Subsequent variation can have several sources, including accidental departures that are akin to mutations, and path-dependent-like evolution in which surviving practices depend less on their "fitness" to the environment and more on locked-in habits and routines. I am particularly interested in planned variation. In other words, subsequent variation is not random but rather is a result of human reflection, learning, and ingenuity. As we will see, MSF reacted to the new security environment and the willingness of aid agencies to incorporate politics into their policies by gravitating toward a "pure" humanitarianism, that is, a humanitarianism free from politics, not only because it would be better at saving lives but also because it would save humanitarianism from itself.

One last point. I have assumed that these environmental changes were exogenous to the humanitarian system and not a consequence of them. While there are some interpretations of evolutionary social science that do include the attempt by the actors to design their environment in a way that furthers their values and interests, I have omitted this consideration for analytical purposes. However, empirically speaking, many international humanitarian agencies expend considerable effort on "advocacy," lobbying states to discover their inner humanitarian, draw connections between their strategic interests and humanitarian action, and create a new

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41. See Baudendistel 2006; and Forsythe 2005.

legal and normative environment that would open the door to new kinds of interventions. In other words, rather than conform to their environment, they were trying to make the environment conform to them. It is a matter of debate whether these efforts have been effective. It also is quite possible that states could determine who they listened to and could ensure that any accepted reforms did not threaten their interests.[42] Whether or not evolutionary social science can accommodate organizations changing their environment I will leave to others, but resource dependence models acknowledge this very possibility.[43]

Humanitarian Organizations in a World of Hurt

Aid agencies of the 1990s confronted a new, more complex environment because of the combination of a proliferation of emergencies across the globe, the growing need to deliver aid to those caught in the middle of war, the challenge of postconflict reconstruction, and a more permissive international environment for humanitarian action, notably, the growing willingness of states to support financially, diplomatically, and militarily new forms of intervention. But the environment opened the door for agencies not only to do more, but, more importantly, to engage in action they once defined as political and thus beyond the pale of humanitarian action. Would they incorporate politics into their existing mandates and programs? The expectation is that the more dependent they are on states for their resources, the more likely they would be to incorporate politics, and that alchemical agencies would be more likely to do so than would emergency agencies because it was consistent with their organizational culture. CARE International, UNHCR, WVI, and MSF each had different configurations of identity and dependence, and thus the expectation is that these variables account for the shift toward a political humanitarianism, as well as which mechanisms are likely to have the greatest affect on the different kinds of debates within the agencies regarding how to respond to the new environment, and the variations in response.

TABLE 2. *Kinds of responses and illustrative cases*

Kind of agency	Resource Dependent	Resource Independent
Alchemic	Accept: CARE	Give-and-take: WVI
Emergency	Accommodationist: UNHCR	Confrontational: MSF

42. Krasner 1995.
43. Pfeffer and Salancik 2003.

As we will see, while the model does a reasonable job of predicting the outcomes and the general drift toward a political humanitarianism, it overestimates resource mechanisms, underestimates identity, and overlooks some other features of the environment, namely religious forces for WVI and the professional field for MSF, which also influence the direction of organizational change.

UNHCR

States created UNHCR in 1951 as a highly dependent, emergency humanitarian organization, limited to the relief of refugees, and shunning any hint of interfering in the internal affairs of states. UNHCR depended on voluntary contributions, nearly all of which came from states.[44] States defined a refugee as someone who had crossed an international border, thus denying protection to those who had not managed to escape their homeland and ensuring that UNHCR kept away from the politics of refugee-producing countries. Also, states rejected an already existing definition of protection that included both "legal and political" elements in favor of "international protection" because politics was viewed as divisive, controversial, and permitting interference in the internal affairs of states. "Protection" became legal protection, which meant assisting refugees by "identifying them, issuing travel documents, assisting in obtaining recognition of their various legal statuses, and advocating ever more precise guidelines for handling recognized refugees."[45] Reflecting on the meaning of international protection during the Cold War, Sadako Ogata said:

> UNHCR essentially waited on the other side of an international border to receive and to protect refugees fleeing conflicts. This approach was determined by the very concept of international protection of refugees which would come into play if, and only if, victims of persecution or violent conflict fled their homeland. It was also dictated by the concept of state sovereignty and the consequent reluctance of intergovernmental organizations, such as UNHCR, to be seen as being too involved in the internal conditions of countries of origin that might give rise to refugee movements.[46]

Moreover, states substituted "humanitarian" for "political" and thus worked to ensure that UNHCR knew its place. As a humanitarian and apolitical organization, states created UNHCR to help coordinate the operations of states and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and to provide legal assistance to refugees. Stated negatively, states prohibited UNHCR from exploring the causes of refugee flight, which, by definition, were matters of sovereignty and politics.[47] If there remained any doubt that as a humanitarian organization UNHCR was to be reso-

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44. See Loescher 1993, 137 and 2001, 349–50 on UNHCR's resource dependence.
45. See Kennedy 1986, 5. See also Coles 1989, 79–80; and Holborn 1975, chap. 4.
46. Ogata 1996. See also Ogata 1999a, 202–4.
47. See Kennedy 1986, 14–15; and Holborn 1975, 89–90.

lutely apolitical, one only needed to glance at paragraph two of its statute: "the work of the High Commissioner shall be of an entirely non-political character; it shall be humanitarian and social."[48] These restrictions did not necessarily bother UNHCR staff, who were pleased to stay out of politics, which only would have created trouble for them with states and complicated their ability to protect refugees.[49] In part because of its "humanitarian" nature over the subsequent three decades, UNHCR became a global organization that provided all kinds of assistance, all the while shunning politics.[50]

Beginning in the 1980s, though, there emerged some cracks in its antipolitics position because of a change in the situations faced by refugees and a financial crisis. Prior to the 1980s, UNHCR's preferred solution to refugee problems was asylum and resettlement, but then various forces steered it toward repatriation. By the late 1970s, Western and developing states resented the heavy demands placed on them by the refugee regime, were resentful of the growing refugee populations in their countries, at times violently forcing refugees to go home, and were now adopting, according to the High Commissioner, a policy of "deterrence."[51] States expected UNHCR to do its part, and UNHCR had little choice but to go along— refusing would not help the refugees, many of whom were in immediate danger, and it would certainly complicate UNHCR's relationship with powerful patrons. Moreover, the growing refugee population residing in semi-permanent cities was a fiscal sinkhole for UNHCR, leading it to look for ways to reduce their numbers and alleviate some of the financial pressures.[52] Although external pressures arguably dominated UNHCR's new attitude toward repatriation, it is critical to note that as a refugee organization it was committed to helping refugees, many of whom wanted to go home and were "spontaneously repatriating."[53] Consequently, a policy of repatriation could be the result of principles and not pressures.

Because of these changes and pressures, UNHCR began to peer into the domestic politics of states. UNHCR's repatriation practices included a commitment that refugees return home with "safety and dignity," which invariably necessitated examining the political and human rights climate that would affect their reintegration. UNHCR also began to consider the relationship between refugee repatriation and economic assistance, which allowed UNHCR to launch a "high-profile international initiative."[54] By the 1980s, UNHCR was monitoring the politics of refugee-producing countries and the factors that would affect repatriation, a development

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48. Statute of the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, United Nations Document A/RES/428, 14 December 1950.
49. On the differentiation between the political and the humanitarian in UNHCR's mandate, see Kyoichi 1998.
50. Barnett 2001.
51. See Skran 1992, 8; and Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme, "Note on International Protection," 31 August 1983, 3.
52. Pitterman 1985, 51–54.
53. Warner 1994.
54. Crisp 2001, 3.

given further support by the arrival of the new High Commissioner, Jean-Pierre Hocke.[55] Soon thereafter UNHCR began proposing concepts such as "state responsibility," and "root causes," stating that refugees flows were caused by "violations of human rights and, increasingly, by military or armed activities," and exploring how these factors prevented the successful repatriation of refugees.[56] Such developments were making it more difficult, at least for the High Commissioner, to distinguish the political from the humanitarian.[57] Highly aware that it was treading into sensitive waters, UNHCR carefully monitored each step of the way for the first signs of push back from states.

The 1990s and its new security environment created new pressures and opportunities for UNHCR to become more deeply involved in the affairs of states. Civil wars and collapsed states were producing massive refugee flows, destabilizing neighboring countries and entire regions; in many instances, population displacement was not simply a tragic by-product of war but rather its intended effect. Refugees were now seen as bound up with international peace and security, a point that Ogata repeatedly made to the United National Security Council.[58] As refugees moved from the sidelines to the frontlines, so too did UNHCR. Beginning with the 1991 Iraq War and then blossoming with Bosnia, UNHCR began to bring relief to displaced peoples instead of waiting for displaced peoples to get to relief on the other side of the international border. Soon UNHCR became the "lead agency" in humanitarian action. The numbers of returning refugees expanded. Between 1985 and 1990, roughly 1.2 million refugees went home, but in the following five years, often in the context of peace agreements, that number exploded to nine million. These refugees needed to be reintegrated and UNHCR had a comparative advantage given its previous experience.[59] Repatriation opened the door for UNHCR to become more involved in the internal affairs of states. Repatriation also led to in-country assistance, internal protection, development, human rights, and peacebuilding.[60] By 1997 the agency redefined reintegration so that it was virtually synonymous with 'sustainable' return, that is, a harmonious relationship between returnees, civil society, and the consolidated state.[61]

A 1991 document captured the emerging spirit of the times and a window into future developments. The UNHCR's Working Group on International Protection explored the viability of its apolitical credentials given its growing involvement in

55. Loescher 2001, 248.
56. Loescher, 2001, 249. On prevention, see Chimni 1993, 444. On root causes, see Coles 1989, 203; and Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme, "Note on International Protection," 31 August 1983, 2. On "state responsibility," see UNHCR, Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme, "Note on International Protection," 27 August 1990, 8.
57. Hocke 1986, cited in Kyoichi 1998, 55.
58. See UNHCR, Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme, "Note on International Protection," 27 August 1990, 7; and Ogata 1999a and 1996.
59. Crisp 2001, 9.
60. See Macrae 1999, 2–3; and Crisp 2001.
61. UNHCR 1997; cited in Macrae 1999, 3.

the refugee-producing country. It made four observations. First, "the evolution of UNHCR's role over the last forty years has demonstrated that the mandate is resilient enough to allow, or indeed require, adaptation by UNHCR to new, unprecedented challenges through new approaches, including in the areas of prevention and in-country protection." Refugee rights, the document noted, are part and parcel of human rights; thus, UNHCR's role as protector of refugee law legitimates its growing concern for the violations of human rights that cause refugee flows. Second, the UN General Assembly recognized UNHCR's humanitarian expertise and experience for justifying its expansion into activities not traditionally defined within the Office's mandate.[62] Third, "the High Commissioner's nonpolitical mandate requires neutrality;" but "neutrality must be coupled with a thorough understanding of prevailing political and other realities." Fourth, whereas once humanitarianism meant avoiding the "political" circumstances within the home country and honoring the principle of noninterference, it soon began to include aspects of the state's internal affairs.

These developments elevated UNHCR's profile and international relevance, a welcome relief to an organization that had spent the previous decade worried about its future.[63] During the 1980s, states had increasingly questioned UNHCR's relevance and effectiveness, and by the decade's end it was experiencing a major financial crisis.[64] The 1990s presented not only new challenges for the organization but also new opportunities to demonstrate its continued importance. Ogata wrote: "we have gone the extra mile to carry out our mission, and sometimes we had to do what others were not ready or not prepared to do… [W]e should not give up on a project just because it does not fit into traditional schemes… In order to be financed, in a highly competitive environment, UNCHR must develop, new interesting approaches to fulfill its core mission."[65] Developing "interesting" approaches was good for refugees and their agency. In general, states were signaling to UNHCR that it could become more involved in political areas once kept under lock and key, a situation that many in UNHCR believed rewarded the organization for what it should be doing anyway.

Yet there was a division in the agency regarding how far it could go without jeopardizing its "humanitarian" and "apolitical" character.[66] The principal division in UNHCR on these matters was between the "fundamentalists" and the "pragmatists." Fundamentalists maintained a more "legalistic" approach to refugee matters, emphasizing law, the mandate, and various mechanisms that would ensure their impartiality, neutrality, and independence, and were likely to reside in the legal and protection divisions of the organization. The "pragmatists" argued for a

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62. UNHCR, Executive Committee of the High Commissioner's Programme, "Note on International Protection," 25 August 1992, 4.
63. See Crisp 2001, 7; and Cunliffe and Pugh 1999.
64. Loescher 2001, 262–3.
65. Ogata 2005, 347.
66. Coles 1989, 211.

more flexible interpretation of refugee law and UNHCR's mandate, for becoming involved in broader international peace and security issues, especially as they pertained to helping create and sustain a more stable and democratic home country that would protect and not threaten repatriating refugees. In other words, UNHCR could maintain its principles while satisfying its patrons. Importantly, the pragmatists were represented by High Commissioner's office and High Commissioner Ogata herself.[67] Although Ogata claimed to want to find a middle ground between those who embraced and rejected politics, she clearly favored the former, defining "humanitarian" as any action that increased the well-being of the individual while avoiding those controversies that were highly political and best handled by states.[68] In other words, go as far as possible without getting its head chopped off. UNHCR now defined humanitarian assistance to include prevention, which was always preferable to the cure, and the attempt to foster respect for human rights in order to curtail refugee flows. It insisted that this development did not imply that it was political because it was operating with the consent of the state (except in those circumstances where there was no state to give consent), but humanitarianism now included practices once associated with politics.[69]

CARE

In October 1945, twenty-two private, civic, cooperative, labor, and religious organizations established the "Cooperative for American Remittances to Europe," best known as CARE, to send surplus American food to the hungry in Europe.[70] Very quickly its famous CARE package expanded from basic supplies to include other kinds of assistance to help individuals move from "help to self-help."[71] Once Europe no longer required basic assistance, beginning in the 1950s, CARE's "needs-based orientation" led it into the developing world.[72] By the end of the 1980s, CARE had a global reputation as a leading NGO in the development field, a master of complex logistical operations, and a technical expert in local community development and deliverer of basic needs to marginalized populations.

CARE's rapid rise, and its surpassing of many of its creators in terms of scale and reach, was made possible by the U.S. government. Perhaps most important was the government's food aid program in general and P.L. 480, best known as "food for peace," in particular. After Catholic Relief Services, CARE was the second-largest beneficiary of the U.S. food assistance program.[73] Consistently

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67. Barnett and Finnemore 2004, chap. 4.
68. Coles 1989, 244–5.
69. See also UNHCR 2000; Ogata, 1996; Forsythe 2001; Loescher 2001, 363; and Kyoichi 1998.
70. After several name changes, it is now the Cooperative for Assistance and Relief Everywhere.
71. Campbell 1990, 46.
72. Ibid., 66.
73. Author's interview with Philip Johnston, Atlanta, 2 November 2006; see also Campbell 1990, 155.

throughout the Cold War decades, CARE was receiving roughly 60 percent of its funding from the U.S. government, and the United States believed that it was getting something for its money.[74]

CARE's tremendous financial and political support from the United States meant that its independence and thus its separation from politics was under constant question. For much of the Cold War, and especially until the Vietnam War, CARE claimed that it furthered U.S. national interests even if it was not its instrument.[75] In other words, CARE and the U.S. government had coinciding interests, but CARE never tried to coordinate its policies with the United States in any way (a claim that crumbled with the Vietnam War). In addition, it argued that it was apolitical because it avoided the domestic politics, power, and governance of those countries it assisted. Its rhetorical position was sustained and justified by its self-presentation as development agency that managed complex operations and efficiently delivered services, all technical and not political matters; and a discourse that treated development as technique because it taught skills and thus avoided politics, power, and governance. CARE's two major divisions, development and relief, agreed on the separation of the agency from politics. Relief workers treated politics as a minefield that stood between them and those who needed relief. Development workers prided themselves on their managerial expertise. Both constituencies valued CARE's reputation as the federal express of the aid world. Asked if CARE was political prior to the 1990s, former CARE president Philip Johnston emphatically responded, "No. Never."[76]

Yet during the 1990s, CARE underwent a dramatic process of organizational change that led it, at first grudgingly and then willingly, into politics. It became a "rights-based" agency that sought to transform societies and reform international and national public policies. As one high-level CARE official put it, "we used to say we were 'non non non' but now we are political and we see this."[77] In contrast to UNHCR, there is no evidence that this change was propelled by its resource dependence. At the same time that CARE was revisiting its organizational culture, it also was striving to diversify its funding base and reduce its dependence on the U.S. Also, CARE was focusing on social and economic rights, whereas the U.S. government preferred its rights to be political and civil. Its advocacy work frequently led it to oppose American foreign policy. Nor is there evidence that CARE adopted the rights language with the expectation that it would be rewarded for doing so. In fact, many CARE officials asserted that the general view at the time was that embracing rights might cost them. An organization that built its reputation and generated much of its income based on service delivery might be mortgaging its future. Former CARE president Peter Bell, who oversaw the change, insisted

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74. See Bloomstein 1954, box 2, 414.
75. Harold Miner, Address, 31 March 1960, CARE Archives. Cited in Curti 1988, 499.
76. Author's interview, Atlanta, Ga., 2 November 2006.
77. Author's interviews with CARE officials, Atlanta, Ga., 1–2 November 2006.

that moving toward rights was not a marketing device.[78] Indeed, he continued: "We would do informercials for RBA [Rights Based Approach] on TV, and it was a complete loser. We were told by consultants to go back to the starving baby and emergencies. We decided to swallow the lost dollars."[79] In general, while CARE did attempt to respond to the demands of its donors, it largely focused on improving the quality of its programs and reducing their cost, and locating additional sources of support—not changing its priorities.[80]

CARE gravitated toward rights and politics because of considerable reflection regarding shortcomings in the field, a leadership change that stimulated, organized, and channeled these internal discussions toward a rights framework, and a belief that the inclusion of politics would address chronic issues of deprivation, poverty, and violence. By the late 1980s, staff had become profoundly dissatisfied with the status quo, and events of the 1990s would not make them happier. Development had fallen on hard times in the 1980s, development assistance was harder to come by, and there was mounting evidence that CARE's policies were not effective. CARE staff can easily narrate the progression of their unease and their proposed solution. In the 1970s, there was the African food crisis, which led to a consideration of the multiple causes of food scarcity, including the Amartya Sen–associated argument regarding the relationship between authoritarianism and famine. Staff also began to research how individuals and families cope and survive during famines and severe food shortages, which, in turn, led to a greater interest in household decisions. Importantly, as they searched for the causes of the programs' failures, they circled around the omitted variables of rights and politics.

These considerations led to the Household Livelihood Security (HLS) in 1994.[81] Before HLS, CARE, as with many development agencies, typically treated households as distinct and relatively independent units that required more inputs to put food on the table and escape chronic poverty; reducing poverty, therefore, amounted to generating more income and, hopefully, then investing that income wisely so that it could improve the family's circumstances. A major problem with this orientation, CARE staff concluded, was that it extracted the household from its environment and thus ignored the structural causes of poverty. This conclusion challenged CARE's service delivery mentality. Delivering more services was not the answer, changing the environment was. CARE was now stepping outside of the friendly confines of its technical and managerial world and into politics and power.[82] Accordingly, as it developed the HLS, it also dissected the "the relative power relationships within and among households and authority structures."[83] It now began to think "holistically," that is, to integrate politics into its operations.

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78. Author's interview, Atlanta, Ga., 2 November 2006.
79. Author's interview, Atlanta, Ga., 2 November 2006.
80. Henry 1999, 115, 116.
81. Frakenberger, Drinkwater, and Maxwell 2000, 1–4.
82. Author's interview with CARE staff, Atlanta, Ga., 2 November 2006.
83. CARE, n.d., "Frequently Asked Questions About RBA," 3.

Soon thereafter CARE began to use the language of rights, to see individuals as rights-bearers and governments and others as rights-protectors, and to tie rights to poverty and development. In 1999, CARE pulled together these threads into the "Unifying Framework for Poverty Eradication and Social Justice," where it highlighted the need to alter social positions to improve social equity; human conditions to improve livelihood security; and the enabling environment to improve governance.[84] Politics and rights were part of the antipoverty equation.

Relief workers also were struggling over how to improve their policies, though they were doing so in a context of humanitarian emergencies. For the most part CARE workers, as with relief workers everywhere, were consumed with the immediate challenge of saving people. Once conflict gave way to a postconflict process, though, they began to explore the relationship between relief and reconstruction. Rights became a natural bridge between the two—especially once rights were framed to include both relief and livelihoods. At this point, CARE staff joined the chorus of others in the field who were speaking of a "relief-rights-development" continuum. Additionally, relief workers began to tire of providing little more than a bed for the night, to explore the causes of vulnerability, and to use the language of mitigation. Such reflections immediately led relief workers to draw a straight line between rights, politics, and causes of suffering.[85]

The executive office at CARE played an important role in organizing and channeling these discussions. Johnston, a longtime member of CARE, resigned as president in 1992 and was replaced by Peter Bell. Bell embodied the very split between the humanitarian and the human rights communities: a former chair of America's Watch, the precursor of Human Rights Watch, and a member of the boards of both HRW and CARE. Bell came to the office convinced that CARE had to get beyond technique and consider rights and empowerment, a position that CARE staff feared would transform their relief and development organization that quietly worked behind the scenes and sought the cooperation of governments into a rights-fighting organization that shouts at governments, stomps its feet, makes noise, and names and shames.

Fearing a backlash, the executive office moved cautiously. At first it distinguished between needs and rights. A rights-based perspective presumes that people have claims to "minimum levels of treatment, services, and opportunities," simply because of their humanity. Consequently, individuals are entitled to these items, not because they need them to survive or live a life with dignity, but also because they are entitled to them. Their starting point was the Universal Declaration of Human Rights because of its broad support by the NGO community, and because its orienting concepts such as dignity, justice, and empowerment were part of CARE's values. This exercise was followed by a discussion that focused on how rights are understood at the local level. CARE also held a conversation on

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84. McCaston 2005.
85. Author's interview at CARE headquarters, 6 November 2006.

its core values, ultimately creating a vision statement that employed the language of rights, dignity, and empowerment.[86]

In November 1996, CARE's International Board launched a formal examination of the relationship between its activities and human rights. Working with the Ford Foundation, it sponsored a series of field-based studies that used a "human rights lens" to examine CARE's activities. These cases led CARE to further explore the possibility of a more systematic appraisal of the benefits and risks of such an approach, but with "remarkable consensus" among senior staff from eighteen field and home offices on the need to integrate a human rights perspective into CARE's relief and development programs.

By the end of the 1990s, CARE had gravitated toward a rights-based approach (RBA). According to CARE, RBA focuses on "people achieving the minimal conditions for living with dignity. They are not only civil and political rights, but also social, cultural, and economic rights. At a basic level, we focus on the rights related to livelihood security—such as nutrition, education, and economic opportunity. But we also consider other conditions influencing livelihood security and, more broadly, life with dignity—such as personal security and participation in public affairs."[87] In other words, a right-based approach conceivably includes all kinds of cultural, religious, social, economic, and political activities.

An organization that once rejected "politics" now embraced it—and the only question was how political it should be. Bell, who once worried that the mere mention of politics might cause a riot, now used the concept without fear. Nearing the end of his tenure, Bell reflected on these changes. In the early 1990s, CARE had been a "service delivery" organization that prided itself as a master in its ability to control … complex logistical systems [and on its] technical and apolitical" character. Not anymore. Although it knows that as a "humanitarian agency," it must remain independent, impartial, and nonpartisan, it also knows that it "must understand and grapple with power relations. We have come to realize that our commitment to reducing—and ultimately ending—extreme poverty is, by its very nature, political. This is not the CARE that our parents would have known!" Previous definitions of neutrality no longer made sense. Whereas once neutrality meant a "commitment to be apolitical (that is, to avoid any contact with or input into public affairs or matters of governance)," Bell continued, now neutrality allows CARE to stand in favor of principles even as it avoids partisanship.[88] In sum, whereas humanitarianism once was viewed as the opposite of politics, now politics and humanitarianism share the same space and are opposed to "partisanship."

86. Author's interview with Peter Bell and other senior staff, Atlanta, Ga., 4–6 November 2006.
87. Peter Bell, "Presentation on Rights-Based Approaches," Interaction, Washington, D.C., 7 November 2001.
88. Ibid.

World Vision International

Founded in 1950 by Dr. Bob Pierce, an evangelical minister, with a modest focus on orphanages in South Korea, WVI is now one of the largest NGOs in the world. WVI's rapid rise owed in part to his pioneering message—the importance of combining evangelism with social action. Until Pierce's time, most fundamentalists, much like many of their co-religionists, believed that religion and the state should stick to their assigned roles—religion saves souls and governments perform social action. Moreover, fundamentalists looked down on what they believed were the excesses of liberal church organizations, which, beginning at the turn of the century, seemed to be more passionate about humanitarianism than salvation. There were divisions within evangelicalism, most importantly between the fundamentalists and the new evangelicals. In addition to doctrinal differences, the new evangelicals broke with the fundamentalists because the former wanted to emphasize social concerns. Prior to Pierce, though, the new evangelicals had not crossed the line from emphasizing social concerns to doing social action—but Pierce dared them to do so.

Doing social action had some basic "don'ts and do's." It discouraged doing politics. The founders of WVI were not oblivious to how their actions could have political consequences. In fact, its founder hoped that evangelism might counterbalance communism. Writing in 1958, Pierce observed that "the Communists are further ahead of us in evangelizing the world than they are in science. All over the world the Russians are outpreaching us, outsacrificing us, outworking us, outplanning us, outpropagandizing us and outdying us in order to gain their ends."[89] Saving souls was both a means and an end, but the battle for salvation would be waged not in the house of politics but in the fields of the Lord. The new evangelicals were as respectful of traditional state-church boundaries as any other protestant denomination. Honoring Matthew 22:21, "Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's, and unto God the things that are God's," they avoided politics and they expected politics to avoid religion. Doing social action, though, must include evangelism. As evangelicals, they believed they had a responsibility to spread the word and that social action was both an opportunity to do so and a religious duty. Adopting the methods of the Reverend Billy Graham and at times working closely with his "Youth for Christ," WVI held revival meetings throughout Southeast Asia, and, as recalled by one longtime hand, operated as "rice bowl Christians"—a serving of rice came with a slice of gospel.[90] Aid and missionary work went hand-in-hand.

Although today WVI towers over other all other NGOs in terms of its budget, during its first three decades it struggled to stay solvent. One veteran WVI official recalled attending all-night prayer meetings in the mid-1960s where they prayed

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89. Quoted in Whaites 1999, 412.
90. Whaites 1999, 412.

for enough donations to cover the payroll.[91] Child sponsorship was a major source of revenue, but it was earmarked and thus could not be used to cover WVI's other emerging programs. However tempting, WVI refused to seek significant funding from Washington because it feared any possible interference in its religious programming. (In 1962 it established the World Vision Relief Organization, a de facto relief office that allowed WVI to receive government funding, all the while maintaining a boundary between WV and WVRO in order to maintain its autonomy, but it was not a major source of revenue.) WVI was living hand-to-mouth, constantly scrambling to fund its rapidly expanding network of programs. Its nearly overnight rise from anonymity and destitution to fame and fortune owed largely to the publicity it garnered in various emergencies, beginning with its Operation Seasweep in 1979 to rescue the Vietnamese boat people. As with many aid agencies of the period, emergencies became a breadwinner for WVI.

During the Cold War, WVI went through some rather remarkable organizational changes, including de-emphasizing its traditional evangelism and becoming more like a standard development agency. There is little evidence that the search for resources caused this change. Instead, more decisive were a combination of broader environmental shifts and internal debates. To begin, during the Vietnam War, WVI, as with many large American aid agencies, had become nearly an instrument of the U.S. war. Afterward it labored to sever its association and strove to emphasize needs over broader American interests. For instance, it provided aid in Cambodia after the Vietnamese invasion of 1979, which placed it on the opposite side of U.S. foreign policy.

Moreover, in the late 1960s, WVI shifted from its emphasis on orphanages and child sponsorship to community development. Although child sponsorship programs had been extraordinarily popular with Americans, field staff began to question their value as they discovered that giving money to a single child in a poor family had little lasting impact because the child remained in an underprivileged community. In response, WVI staff drifted into community development. As one WVI field staff recalled, "It was not as if we said, 'let's do development,' but we wanted to do something besides traditional sponsorship" because of its limitations.[92]

Moreover, the growing emphasis on development coincided with and encouraged the agency's decision to downplay its religious character. Development required not more religion but rather greater technocratic expertise. By the mid-1970s, WVI's president, Stanley Mooneyham, was cautioning his audience that traditional evangelization practices were unsustainable, many of WVI's texts began to lose the overt missionary emphasis as WVI staff increasingly referred to themselves as relief and aid workers, and WVI established a separate "ministry" to be known as development and with a focus on poverty and helping people help them-

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91. Author's interview with World Vision official, Monrovia, Calif., 27 November 2005.
92. Author's interview, Monrovia, Calif., 28 November 2005.

selves.[93] Although it still retained features of its missionary days, even its adoption of new terms, such as "Christian witness" were intended to stress how religion was a motive for social action but whose goal no longer stressed conversion.[94]

A final reason why the agency lost its missionary zeal was because of a process of internationalization. WVI expanded rapidly during its first quarter century, creating dozens of missions and chapters around the world. This internationalization, though, was straining its American and evangelical identity, as these "partners" were less beholden to evangelism, American-style, and were demanding a greater say over the direction and content of the organization. The result of these internal debates included a "Declaration of Internationalization" on 31 May 1978, which formally put the international in WVI and, more importantly, reduced the centrality of proselytization. In general, WVI began de-emphasizing the religious content of its programs, moving toward a distinction between the religious and the material world, and increasingly resembling secular development and relief agencies.

WVI turned in a more political direction around the end of the Cold War, but there is little evidence that its search for resources played much of a role.[95] Until the 1990s, WVI kept its vow to abstain from working with and accepting contracts from states and multilateral organizations in any significant way, but beginning in that decade it relaxed its position for several reasons. It wanted to diversify its funding base and reduce its reliance on sponsorship to increase its flexibility. Emergencies, postconflict reconstruction processes, and state agendas created new funding opportunities. It believed that capitalizing on official assistance could further its private fundraising, and vice versa. WVI did not go down this path carefree. As WVI President Graeme Irvine wrote: "We must be fully aware of the implications of becoming what has been called a "public service contractor," with consequent pressure to conform to the requirements of major funding sources in contradiction with our essential character."[96] In order to guard against that possibility, WVI pledged to limit its revenue from official sources to 20 percent, and it has kept its word.

WVI's decision to turn toward politics, with an explicit consideration of social justice, inequality, access to power, and poor people's movements, resulted from disappointments with its programs' effectiveness, a concern that its programs needed to reclaim their spiritual and religious character, and religious debates. As already noted, at its creation, WVI emphasized relief and religious conversion, all the while following a traditional line regarding the separation of the church and the state, and then in the 1980s became more technocratic. But as soon as WVI began drift-

93. Whaites 1999, 414.

94. Author's interviews with WVI officials, Monrovia, Calif., 28–29 November 2005. See also Myers 1999; and Whaites 1999, 414–15.

95. See Graeme Irvine, "Strategic Directions for World Vision International, 1990–92," 7; and World Vision International, "New Vision Journey Findings—Executive Summary," 2002.

96. Graeme Irvine, "Strategic Directions for World Vision International, 1990–92," 6–7.

ing in a more technocratic direction there was a concerted conversation in the agency over the relationship between religion and development. After much debate, WVI adopted the language of "transformational development," understood as incorporating the material and spiritual aspects of development. Several factors account for its rise and significance. There was a growing dissatisfaction with a "modernist" approach to development that assumed that material inputs were separate from spirituality. In addition, those in the agency were periodically taking their "temperature" to see if they were "Christian enough" and began to try and identify a Christian perspective on development.[97] This had been an ongoing concern, and beginning in the 1990s, the conversation turned to the connection between Christianity and social justice, peoples' movements, and fundamental rights.[98] Furthermore, as with much of the aid community, WVI began to consider the relationship between relief and reconstruction and how to tackle the causes of violence, injustice, and hardship. In general, WVI broke away from its traditional religious confines and into the political world as it addressed explicitly issues of power, governance, and justice. Although it avoided the language of "politics" because of its long-standing discomfort, favoring euphemisms such as "advocacy," WVI's humanitarianism now occupied some of the same ground it once conceded to Caesar.

Médecins Sans Frontières

Biafra and the ICRC were the parents of MSF.[99] Biafra is rightly credited with opening a new chapter in humanitarian action; while the suffering was hardly unprecedented, the international response was. After achieving its independence from Britain in 1960, Nigeria descended into political turmoil, and in 1966, after a string of coups, the Nigerian army and various ethnic groups began attacking the Ibos, especially in the northern regions where they were a visible and vulnerable minority. Thousands of Ibos died and two million more fled east to the region of Biafra where the Ibos were the ruling majority. On 30 May 1967, the Ibo rebels declared independence, and the government's response was swift and severe, leaving even more dead and displaced. As part of its military strategy, Nigeria imposed a blockade on Biafra, hoping to starve the rebels into submission. Lagos was partially successful. A famine soon descended on Biafra and tens of thousands lay dying, but the rebels refused to surrender. Unknown to aid agencies at the time, the Ibo leadership was doing little to reduce the effects of the famine because it concluded that international sympathy and support, and thus its very political and military objectives, were dependent on playing the famine for all its worth.

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97. Author's interview with former World Vision International official, 12 June 2008.
98. Much of the intellectual history and theological foundations for the move toward transformational development is covered in Myers 1999.
99. For histories of MSF, see Brauman 2006; Vallaeys 2004; Weber 1995; Ninin and Deldique 1991; and Taithe 2004.

Biafra became a *cause célèbre* in the West, attracting world attention and aid agencies, many of whom were openly siding with the Biafri cause and were using food shipments to smuggle weapons. ICRC was caught in the middle. It was not supposed to move faster than the Nigerian government would allow because, by mandate, it was obligated to get its consent, and it was temperamentally cautious to a fault. Consequently, it labored to get an agreement between the Nigerian government and the Ibo rebels for a humanitarian corridor, and with each day that passed more Biafris died of hunger and the more weak-willed it appeared. Under tremendous pressure to act, in late summer 1968, it finally defied the Lagos government and started delivering aid without its explicit consent. The Nigerian military threatened to treat the ICRC as a hostile party, the ICRC stood its ground, and Nigeria followed through on its bluff, attacking ICRC camps and killing several aid workers.

Several French Red Cross workers were among those outraged by the famine, ICRC's go-slow policy that reminded them of its "see no evil" response to the Holocaust, and the military attack on the relief operation. After they returned to Paris, they met several French left-leaning journalists and decided to create a new organization—MSF—in 1971. These two groups shared a common cause in providing emergency relief, but they differed on whether and how to deliver relief while denouncing human rights violations.[100] Would governments open their borders to a bunch of rebellious, radical, human rights-oriented doctors that they thought might stir up trouble? The journalists largely favored a policy of quiet diplomacy, nearly resembling the ICRC's position. MSF's most famous founder, Bernard Kouchner, had no interest in establishing a miniaturized version of the ICRC and wanted to create an organization that would make noise and bring attention to the world's suffering populations. Ultimately the organization opted to err on the side of discretion. "Neutrality" was established as the default option and any deviation required prior approval by a committee. Accordingly, most of MSF's principles were nearly identical to ICRC's, and even its novel principle of *témoignage*, otherwise known as witnessing, did not seem all that revolutionary. Yet, the very fact that MSF styled itself as a relief and human rights organization made it unusual in a time when there were few explicitly rights-based organizations and almost none in the area of emergencies.

MSF set out to practice a different style of humanitarianism, one that allowed many of these veterans of French leftist politics to find an outlet for their political commitments.[101] Notwithstanding the previous agreement to be neutral to maintain its credibility and access to those in the field, MSF's political sympathies influenced its interventions. During the early to mid-1970s, MSF sided with the Palestinians in Lebanon and with the Sandinistas in Nicaragua, prompting Paul

100. Vallaeys 2004, 46, 64, 126. See also Bernier 1992, 50, 114–5; and Ninin and Deldique 1991, 88–89, 101–15.

101. See Weber 1995, 114–22, chap. 8.

Berman to quip that MSF was "a sort of medical wing to the world guerilla movement."[102] Coming from leftist politics and wanting to publicize mass suffering and injustice, many MSF staff pledged neutrality but their political commitments shaped their actions.

From the very beginning, MSF established the principle of financial independence from states. Although different chapters would define independence differently, they agreed that, at the least, it meant not taking much funding from states. In MSF's view, financial autonomy would allow it to speak truth to power, gain access to those in need, and maintain credibility and legitimacy. If it was going to be solvent and free from state largesse then it would have to develop a public constituency. Beginning in the mid-1970s, MSF experimented with various kinds of marketing campaigns, finding itself overwhelmed by the response every time.[103] By 1988, 70 percent of MSF's funding came from 560,000 donors, giving it a fair amount of independence.

MSF underwent a major, wrenching, organizational change beginning in the late 1970s, and it had little to do with resources and everything to do with how to respond to new challenges in the field. By the late 1970s, a new generation of MSF workers, many of whom underwent baptism by fire in the refugee camps in Cambodia and Thailand, wanted the organization to spend less time mugging for the cameras and more time providing effective medical care.[104] According to Claude Malhuret, the opposition leader within the MSF and future MSF president, MSF had to become "a perfect machine, a solid structure, equipped with means, with our materials, and with our emergency logic."[105] It had to create medical teams that could both respond to momentary emergencies and provide long-term care for those in camps. Kouchner and his allies worried that the proposed professionalization and bureaucratization would transform its staff into "bureaucrats of misery" and "technocrats of charity."[106] After an acrimonious debate and against the backdrop of the Vietnamese invasion of Cambodia and the plight of the Vietnamese boat people, Malhuret's position emerged victorious.[107] Defeated and bitter, Kouchner quit the organization that he helped to found. During the following decade, MSF became a much more professional agency, but its politics were never far behind even if it spent more time worrying about camp life than international public policy.

The wave of emergencies that followed the end of the Cold War produced a new set of dilemmas for an organization that was committed to saving lives but worried about being closely identified with states whose muscle was frequently needed to end killing. In other words, MSF was confronting a radically new envi-

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102. Berman 2005, 232.
103. See Vallaeys 2004, 497; and Bortolotti 2006, 66.
104. See Bortolotti 2006, 49; and Weber 1995, 122–28, 134.
105. Vallaeys 2004, 246, 248.
106. Brauman 2006, 72–80.
107. See Bortolotti 2006, 51; Vallaeys 2004, 198–9, 251–52; Brauman 2006, 65; and Weber 1995, 125–30.

ronment in which states were increasingly ready and willing to provide armed protection for aid workers and even to contemplate the use of military force to defend human rights. The right course was hardly obvious and MSF shifted positions with the circumstances. In response to the Iraqi attack on the Kurds following the Gulf War, MSF appealed to the UN to intervene. In Somalia, MSF responded to the famine and the growing violence against aid workers by seeking armed protection, and, when that not only failed but seemed to militarize the situation, decided to withdraw. In Bosnia, MSF criticized Western governments for using humanitarian assistance as a way to avoid more decisive action that would save lives. Humanitarian action, under these circumstances, only seemed to prolong the suffering. In one outburst, MSF's president Rony Brauman, speaking as a "citizen," insisted that "the hills of Sarajevo must be shelled. We must declare war on the Serb nationalists."[108] In Rwanda, the organization called for a military intervention and took out a full page ad in *Le Monde* that declared, "You cannot stop genocide with doctors." The problems of intervention became compounded when Rwandan camps were held hostage by the genocidaires; famously, MSF-France withdrew on the grounds that humanitarian assistance was prolonging suffering, not alleviating it.[109] In general, in these and other instances, MSF had highly charged debates over the limits of humanitarian action, whether state-led humanitarian action was reducing or increasing human misery, and what should be humanitarianism's relationship to states.[110]

The growing presence of states in humanitarian action was symptomatic of the general emergence of a political humanitarianism that left MSF feeling considerably uneasy. Indeed, it seemed that the more political humanitarianism became, the more MSF wanted to defend a "pure" humanitarianism. Although some argue that MSF had the luxury of going its own way because it had an independent resource base, it is important to note that this independence was a product of an identity that warned against relying on states. In any event, MSF's identity was both a major reason for its separatist stance and a product of this new, more political environment. This antipolitics position can be seen in various areas. It became increasingly reluctant to associate with states carrying big sticks. At a major assembly in 1995, convened in part to discuss the impact of the changing international system on humanitarian action, MSF pledged to ask more questions before associating with states in any way, shape, or form. As one staffer put it, MSF would become much "less hasty in the formulation of political recommendations and consequences ... and ... more prudent in the definition of our own role in order to fully assume the responsibilities we accord ourselves."[111] James Orbinski was

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108. Vallaeys 2004, 666.

109. Terry 2002.

110. For a good overview of these events from the perspective of MSF and the debates within the organization in response to them, see Weber 1995, 476–560; and Weissman 2003.

111. Marine Buisonnière, "La Mancha, Here We Come!" *La Mancha Gazette* (MSF Internal Newsletter), May 2006, 2.

elected president of MSF in 1999 in part because of his firm belief that humanitarianism and politics must be kept apart.[112] The mixing of the military and humanitarian aid in places such as Somalia, Kosovo, Iraq, and Afghanistan, it concluded, was hindering the ability of aid workers to get access to people at risk, and turning them into enemy combatants.[113] In general, the conclusion was that "just wars" could lead to unjust outcomes.[114]

While many aid agencies were experimenting with different ways to build a linkage between relief and reconstruction, were actively promoting human rights and democracy, and were becoming increasingly involved in matters of governance, MSF criticized these developments precisely because they would pollute humanitarianism with politics. Even though MSF was already doing long-term care in nonemergency settings, it refused to participate in postconflict reconstruction. As one member emphasized: "A lot of other NGOs talk about the need for reconstruction—well, I don't want to be engaged in reconstruction, because I don't want Mr. Taliban to think I'm trying to rebuild his country as part of the U.S. strategy. I want to be able to go to him honestly and say, 'All we're trying to do is keep people alive, to provide medical care for people who are wounded or sick. We're not trying to build your country at all, that's not our job.' "[115] In addition to keeping its distance on the ground, at the numerous conferences that took place to examine the new humanitarianism, MSF argued that whatever postconflict reconstruction was, it was most certainly not humanitarian. Strangely enough, it now found itself sitting alone with the ICRC.

Most strikingly, MSF even began to worry about its association with human rights and its founding principle of *témoignage*. When MSF introduced the principle of *témoignage*, there were few human rights organizations and ICRC's policy of quiet diplomacy dominated the humanitarian world. But whereas MSF once was ahead of the curve now it was part of a pack of rights-bearing agencies, and it was not always thrilled about the company it was keeping. MSF watched as powerful states began to wrap themselves in the discourse of human rights and NGOs seemed to privilege "rights" over "need."[116] One of the quite notable developments in this regard was that human rights became something of a dirty word at MSF. In countless interviews, I have been told by MSF workers that MSF is *not* a human rights agency. Yes, they would concede, it incorporates rights into its mandate, but it is not a rights-based organization, by which they meant an agency that was more interested in promoting freedom than basic needs. During the La Man-

112. Orbinski 2008.
113. See de Torrente 2004; and "La Mancha: Current Status and a Way Forward." 2004, author and place unknown.
114. Weissman 2003.
115. Quoted from Bortolotti, 2006, 222.
116. See Rony Brauman, "MSF and the Limits of Humanitarian Action," *My Sweet La Mancha* (July-October 2005), 144; Francoise Bouchet-Saulnier, "Humanitarian Responsibility and Humility—or How to Relate our Actions to our Principles, to Relate What We Do to What We Say," *My Sweet La Mancha* (July–October 2005), 133; and de Torrente 2004.

cha process in 2005, an all-MSF debate over its future principles, there was considerable discussion of the meaning of *témoignage* as it related to the kinds of rights work being done by other agencies, and a constant fear that MSF might look like other agencies.

At stake, from MSF's perspective, was not only its identity but also the species of humanitarianism. Humanitarianism, as it kept insisting in its texts, documents, and public events, concerned the impartial, neutral, and independent relief to victims of conflict and natural disasters. It was the opposite of politics. States might use military force to protect civilians, but this was not humanitarianism. NGOs might be engaged in various kinds of postconflict reconstruction projects, but this was not humanitarianism. These could be worthwhile activities, but they were political and were not humanitarian. What was taking place was not simply the expansion of the concept or its wrong-headed appropriation. Instead, it was humanitarianism's transfiguration beyond all recognition. Once humanitarianism became political and included all these other activities then it would become increasingly difficult for humanitarian agencies to do what they were supposed to do—save lives at risk. By moving away from any hint of politics in public, even as many staff conceded in private that they were political in various ways, MSF was attempting to maintain a space for humanitarianism. MSF's response to the changing and increasingly politicized times was to engage in planned variation—to save humanitarianism from politics.

Conclusion

The recent history of humanitarianism contributes to the growing body of evidence that world politics has an evolutionary character. Humanitarianism certainly evolved in a way that enhanced its "fit" to its new environment. The growing prominence of states, the new funding patterns, the shifting normative structure that put the human at the center of law, norms, and rights, and the changing patterns of conflict, combined to compel aid agencies to incorporate practices once defined as political and thus outside the bounds of acceptable company. UNHCR, WVI, CARE, and MSF were fairly representative of the population of aid agencies and thus captured the secular trend toward a political humanitarianism. The model not only helps to explain the broad direction of change in humanitarianism, it also provides insight into the variation in response. As expected, UNHCR, CARE, and WVI all became more political, though with varying degrees of enthusiasm and hesitation, and MSF recoiled.

Yet the model and the empirical findings offer several corrections and cautionary tales regarding evolutionary models of international relations and the often implicit presumption that evolution is synonymous with progress. The case for an evolutionary model is not simply that it captures the environmental pressures that compel organizational change but that it identifies the selection mechanisms that explain the distribution of beliefs, practices, and behaviors. Although I recognized

that humanitarian agencies exist in several overlapping environments, following standard evolutionary arguments as applied to organizational theory and international relations theory, I assumed that a central selection mechanism concerned the competition for resources. All humanitarian agencies, just like all organizations that do not produce their own revenue, have to secure their resources from others if they are to survive (and to help others survive in the case of humanitarianism). I further claimed that the critical issue was financial dependence on states, assuming that the more dependent aid agencies are on states, the more they are likely to follow them down the road of politics. UNHCR, in this respect, fits the argument. As an international organization that is dependent on states in every possible way, the pressure to change was relentless. Although there were pockets of resistance from staff who feared that the agency was going too far and that this emergency agency was becoming too political, they lost out to a powerful coalition who argued that changing with the times was good for the agency and good for refugees.

The competition for resources did not play a major role in the responses by the other agencies. There are two possible reasons. As in the cases of WVI and MSF, they were relatively independent of state financing and thus could decide for themselves, on the merits of the argument and not on the resource implications of their future direction. As in the case of all three agencies, they were secure, organizationally speaking. Unlike UNHCR, which emerged from the 1980s worried about its relevance, WVI, CARE, and MSF were in no immediate danger of losing legitimacy or their funding base. That said, many at CARE worried that if it moved from what it was known for and into the unknown then it might suffer financially— but they decided to push ahead anyway. Also, all three refused the opportunity to pick low-hanging government contracts if they felt doing so ran counter to their principles. Indeed, the recent decision by CARE to stop taking food aid from the U.S. government, hardly a symbolic gesture given its importance to CARE's budget in the past, suggests that aid agencies can walk away from the hand that feeds them if they are convinced that their feeding is taking food out of the mouths of the needy.[117] If MSF and WVI had the luxury of being able to ignore the competition for resources because they were relatively resource independent, it is important to recognize that their resource profile was a direct reflection of an identity that worried about being dependent on states precisely because they did not want to become an effect of this selection mechanism.

While the competition for resources was not a driver of organizational change, identity was. This conclusion deviates from a growing body of literature that paints humanitarian agencies as near ambulance chasers.[118] Although there were clear differences between emergency and alchemical agencies in their response, their identities did not lead directly to their response. Instead, internal debates figured

117. CARE USA 2006.
118. See Cooley and Ron 2002; de Waal 1998; and Smillie and Minear 2004.

centrally on the relationship between their identity and the challenges of the day. Agencies were not merely adapting to their environment, they were engaged in a lengthy and at times spirited debate regarding the relationship between their values, new knowledge, and goals.

Another reason why the competition for resources proved less causally forceful than expected was because these agencies were embedded in other kinds of environments that had an effect on their identity, which, in turn, shaped their responses. As a religious agency, WVI was deeply influenced by broader debates within Christianity in general and fundamentalism in particular. WVI was a result of a split within the evangelical community regarding how to marry evangelism and social action, and theological debates continued to have an impact on its identity and its programs. Also, WVI's religious identity changed as it internationalized. Specifically, the rise of semi-independent national chapters led WVI to find a common denominator on some basic issues, including the role of missionary work. These dynamics, however, were partially shaped by resource demands. Part of WVI's internationalization was contingent on local chapters finding local resources, which had the effect of encouraging them to assert their views during international discussions.

MSF also was influenced by the emerging "field" of humanitarianism. Although humanitarianism certainly existed prior to the 1990s, it was hardly recognizable as a distinctive field. During the 1990s, though, it developed regular interactions among the members, an increase in the information and knowledge that members had to consider, a greater reliance on specialized knowledge, and a collective awareness that members were involved in a common enterprise.[119] Importantly, as a field it was developing not only new procedures and techniques but also a shifting belief that its rationalizing means were to be directed at reducing the causes and the consequences of emergencies. MSF's response was influenced by a fear that this field was developing in a way that was steering humanitarianism toward something unrecognizable, helping to account for an important source of future diversity within humanitarianism.

The environmental influence on humanitarianism has two implications for international relations scholars, and especially those interested in norm institutionalization and international ethics. There is now a considerable body of literature that demonstrates how principled actors have softened the sharp-elbowed world of interests, civilized states, and transformed the very structure of world politics.[120] Yet there has been relatively little consideration of where these principled actors get their principles. Their identity, principles, and practices are not created from thin air but rather are shaped by their environment, an environment that con-

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119. The concept of a "field" derives from DiMaggio and Powell 1983, and the broader argument as applied to humanitarianism is developed in Barnett 2005.
120. See Keck and Sikkink 1998; DeMars 2005; Khagram, Riker, and Sikkink 2002; Risse-Kappen 1995; Risse, Ropp, and Sikkink 1999; Price 1998 and 2003; and Thompson 2001. For alternative, more critical, views, see Bob 2005; Duffield 2001 and 2007; and de Waal 1998.

tains various kinds of mechanisms that can and do force them to develop in ways that potentially increase their "fitness" to survive in the environments they want to change. There are many examples of the possibility of the practical ethics of aid agencies becoming politicized, mainstreamed, and tamed as a consequence of external pressures and the attempt by humanitarian actors to find a pragmatic path. The UNHCR's evolution is a good example of an agency that has had to continually accommodate itself to the interests and ethics of states. This does not mean that it no longer tries to represent the interests of refugees, but it does suggest that UNHCR's interpretation of what those interests are might be more aligned with the view from states. ICRC's principles, and especially its vow of silence, was itself a response to a world of sovereign states, and the red cross movement later became defined by patriotic nationalism that suffocated cosmopolitanism.[121] The ebbs and flows of capitalism, business discourses, and changes in the ideology of public management have influenced the purpose and ethics of humanitarian action.[122]

This suggests, secondly, that NGOs (and international organizations) might themselves be helping to reproduce and expand the very world order that they claim to resist. This has been an important theme of critical international relations theory, particularly those branches inspired by Karl Marx and Antonio Gramsci. It is a very real possibility that must be taken more seriously by all students of transnationalism. Certainly many humanitarian agencies do, worrying that their agendas are serving the interests of powerful states, that they are furthering a liberal world order that advantages some over others, and that they are part of governance structures that place them in positions of power over the very people they claim to want to emancipate. Evolution, therefore, does not imply progress. Those scholars that apply evolutionary theory to study conflict dynamics recognize that geopolitical competition can sometimes reward the "fittest," defined in terms of the nastiest, and thus make no claims regarding the relationship between evolution and progress. So, too, have several scholars of the constructivist tradition, particularly those who are attentive to the complex relationship between power and politics.[123] Still, we need much greater attention to the possibility that evolution need not mean progress, that the power that appears to be driving forms of moral improvement might become entangled in already existing power inequalities, and how what appears to be progressive and emancipatory might in fact open the door to new forms of domination.

Yet these same actors also can evidence ethical agency—the capacity to critically reflect on their principles and their relationship to the existing world order, that is, demonstrate something akin to ethical innovations that can generate new kinds of practices. Actors not only adapt, they also learn. Those dedicated to emancipation can become aware of their possible complicity and try to imagine an alter-

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121. Hutchinson 1997.
122. See Macrae et al. 2002, 18–21; Stein 2008; and Hopgood 2008.
123. See Haas 1997; and Adler, Crawford, and Donnelly 1991.

native ethics. No environment is so totalizing that it completely eliminates the capacity for critical reflection, strategic and manipulative behavior, and ethical agency. One of the striking features of the process of change within humanitarian agencies is that they are constantly taking their "temperature" (to quote from the former staff of WVI who was referring to the agency's Christian values). It is this readiness for critical inquiry and introspection that helps to safeguard against the possibility that those who traffic in ethics will become a mere facsimile of the world they attempt to change. It is the ability to step outside of existing arrangements, to adopt a critical position, which helps ensure that adaptations to existing international orders do not always evolve in the ways that make comfortable the powerful.

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