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# Why Fight: Humanitarianism, Principles, and Post-structuralism

David Campbell

## The Litany of Crisis and the Challenge for Humanitarianism

Bosnia, Rwanda, Chechnya, Somalia, Afghanistan, Sudan: names that signify eruptions of violence and the insufficiency of international responses as much as they designate territorial states. In this context of crisis—or what the International Crisis Group has dramatised as ‘millennial chaos’—the conventional political architecture and discursive resources of International Relations are being radically problematised.<sup>1</sup> Integral to this development is the way in which the political violence of the post-Cold War era (perhaps better understood as the ‘post-Cold War yet pre-epithet new era’) is both deployed through and gives rise to multiple sovereignties, parallel economies, and privatised militias, all of which involve non-traditional forms of political authority in ceaseless contestation with state practices.<sup>2</sup> Within the context of complex political emergencies, we thus see the formation of ‘emergent political complexes’ which disturb the conventional cartography of international order.<sup>3</sup> While such formations are neither conceptually nor politically novel, their importance can no longer be dissimulated by geopolitical modes of representation.

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This paper’s discussion of ethical issues in the context of humanitarianism represents the first instalment of an on-going research project tentatively entitled *Disaster Politics*. For my developing appreciation of humanitarian concerns I am indebted to the provocations of the Emerging Political Complexes Discussion Group, especially the contributions of Mick Dillon, Mark Duffield, Jenny Edkins, and Nick Stockton. For comments on this paper I am indebted to Bill Connolly, Costas Constantinou, Martin Coward, and two anonymous *Millennium* reviewers, whose reflections will help guide the overall project as much as they suggested revisions for this article. Of course, none of the above can be burdened with responsibility for what follows.

1. See the reports and descriptions available at the world wide web site of the International Crisis Group <http://www.intl-crisis-group.org/>; and Médecins sans Frontières, *World in Crisis: The Politics of Survival at the End of the 20th Century* (London: Routledge, 1997).

2. The quote is from Peter H. Liotta, ‘No Man’s Land: U.S. Grand Strategy in the Wake of Yugoslav Intervention’, *Mediterranean Quarterly* (Vol. 8, No. 2, 1997), p. 95. On recent developments, see Mark Duffield, ‘Post-Modern Conflict: Warlords, Post-Adjustment States and Private Protection’, *Journal of Civil Wars* (Vol. 1, No.1, 1998), pp. 65-102, and William Reno, *Warlord Politics and African States* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1998).

3. This phrase is Mick Dillon’s. See the recorded discussion in Jenny Edkins (ed.), *The Politics of Emergency* (Manchester: University of Manchester, 1997), p. 52.

Many challenges result from this situation, but few are as important as the question of how to frame a sense of responsibility for those seemingly distant from the crises, and implement a range of responses to disasters when the political domain is ambiguous and fluid. This assumes, of course, that one is at least uncomfortable with the prospect of turning a blind eye and disclaiming either interest or concern. That being the case, it is the rubric of 'humanitarianism'—conceived of as an unchallenged good characterised by impartial charity for a common humanity, and something which transgresses the confines of state sovereignty—which commonly provides the moral economy and discursive practices that seek to address the dilemma of enacting responsibility in the context of crisis.

However, the experience of relief operations in the above-named places has exposed the problems of humanitarian interventions when they operate in circumstances notable for the absence of clear lines to demarcate the 'good' from the 'bad', 'victim' from 'aggressor' (assuming such distinctions have been previously and unproblematically available).<sup>4</sup> The cherished values of impartiality and neutrality—which enabled humanitarianism to be cast as either apolitical or non-political, and thus, the domain for compassion—are increasingly regarded as tenuous in the context of crisis.<sup>5</sup> It would be wrong, though, to argue that the apolitical or non-political cast of humanitarianism is simply a casualty of recent events. It should instead be seen as something problematised by the condition of possibility for the concept itself, which renders humanitarianism as inherently and necessarily political. The insistence that the humanitarian is that which is distinguished from issues of the national interest or self-defence was evident, for example, in the governing idea that a war such as Bosnia was a humanitarian crisis but not a threat to vital interests, hence not an issue that warranted a determined intervention. As a result, the humanitarian needs to be appreciated as the null-site produced by and, thus, reinforcing the continuing operation of sovereignty, the *absence* made possible by the *presence* of sovereignty.<sup>6</sup> That humanitarianism is in this way dependent upon sovereignty is evident, for example, in the way international humanitarian law, while granting rights to individuals, gives duties to states; and the way in which the post-Cold War

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4. The question of humanitarian intervention should not be reduced to the question of whether states will act militarily in situations the security analysts call 'non-traditional'. As it is used here, the term 'humanitarian interventions' includes as wide an array as possible of political practices and political subjects.

5. For a succinct statement of the problems, see Pierre Gassman, 'International Humanitarian Action: Growing Dilemmas and New Perspectives for the Twenty-First Century', in Médecins sans Frontières, *op. cit.*, in note 1.

6. See David Campbell, 'Disaster Politics, and the Politics of Disaster: Exploring "Humanitarianism"', in Edkins (ed.), *op. cit.*, in note 3.

discourse of humanitarian intervention focuses largely on intervention in states by states with international approval.<sup>7</sup>

These factors notwithstanding, a number of recent proposals to think through the question of responsibility and the resulting character of responses to disaster emphasise the need to either limit or avoid the politicisation of humanitarianism through the construction of new codes for conduct and new principles for action organised around core values. Found in the Providence Principles of the Humanitarianism and War Project, and evident in the OECD's Development Assistance Committee Guidelines, they were made obvious in the conference on 'Principled Aid in an Unprincipled World' Britain hosted in April 1998 as part of its EU Presidency, where the opening speech of the Secretary of State for International Development outlined the need for key principles to establish a 'New Humanitarianism'.<sup>8</sup>

In all of these cases the rhetoric of universality and impartiality suggests that the new shares much in common with the old. What is novel about these demands for codes, principles, and core values, however, is an understanding that putative impartiality of humanitarianism has been challenged by the field experience of aid agencies, with particular emphasis on the idea that the provision of assistance often fuels the very conflicts it is supposed to ameliorate and, thus, diminishes the humanitarian credentials of impartiality and neutrality.<sup>9</sup> While some have taken this to license a call for the curtailment of humanitarian assistance, others (most notably Mary Anderson) have suggested the situation demands the adoption of a Hippocratic oath for aid, in which the founding principle to guide assistance has to be 'do no harm'.<sup>10</sup>

Increasingly influential, this socio-medical framing of crisis and response as governed by the Hippocratic requirement of eliminating harm argues that aid workers

7. G.I.A.D. Draper, 'Humanitarianism in the Modern Law of Armed Conflict', *International Relations* (Vol. 11, No. 3, 1992), pp. 239-51, and David J. Scheffer, 'Toward a Modern Doctrine of Humanitarian Intervention', *University of Toledo Law Review* (Vol. 23, 1992), pp. 253-93.

8. Larry Minear and Thomas G. Weiss, *Humanitarian Action in Times of War: A Handbook for Practitioners* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1993), pp. 18-41 and Development Assistance Committee, *DAC Guidelines on Conflict, Peace and Development Co-Operation* (Paris: OECD, 1997). The conference details area available at the WWW site of the Department for International Development <http://www.oneworld.org/dfid/>

9. 'Experience' functions in this argument as the foundation for new practices, even though the status of 'experience' is not so clear cut. As Joan Scott has observed, 'experience' needs to be appreciated as 'at once always already an interpretation...[which] is in need of interpretation. What counts as experience is neither self-evident nor straightforward; it is always contested, always therefore political'. Joan W. Scott, 'Experience', in Judith Butler and Joan W. Scott (eds.), *Feminists Theorize the Political* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1992), p. 37.

10. Mary B. Anderson, *Do No Harm: Supporting Local Capacities for Peace through Aid* (Cambridge, MA: Local Capacities for Peace Project, The Collaborative for Development Action, 1996), Chapter 4. For an indication of the way Anderson's ideas resonate in the field, see David Smock, 'Humanitarian Assistance and Conflict in Africa', *Journal of Humanitarian Assistance* <http://www-jha.sps.ca.uk/ataoi6.htm>, reposted on 4 July 1997.

always have a range of options to choose from in going about their business, and that once this range is fully appreciated understandings drawn from experience will make it possible to find at least one option that does not reinforce patterns of conflict and, thus, do harm. The argument concludes by asserting that once 'humanitarians' have conducted a diagnostic mapping of conflict settings and the experience to be drawn from them, it will be possible to make choices that 'eliminate negative impacts and maximize positive impacts'.<sup>11</sup>

Even within its own limited terms, the faith invested in the existence of options which will do no harm seems misplaced. For example, a common concern of aid agencies is that delivering assistance can require hiring armed guards from parties to the conflict to ensure safe passage, but that in so doing particular militias are being enriched and legitimised, thereby bolstering their capacity to fight. The Hippocratic approach recommends that previous field experience be examined to consider options and—as one example relevant to this conundrum—draws upon circumstances in Somalia. Instead of hiring armed guards, agencies there negotiated with local clan leaders, giving them the ultimatum that if they could not guarantee protection for staff and goods, the programme they were implementing would be withdrawn. The local leadership 'took responsibility for preventing theft' and (presumably) the programme proceeded unhindered without the employment of guards.<sup>12</sup> This discussion offers no details as to what in this instance taking responsibility involved, but even if it somehow avoided being implicated in the direct doing of harm, it is hard to see how this option avoided other socio-political consequences (such as the legitimisation of the 'local clan leaders') which, in turn, could have negative impacts, even harmful impacts. Above all else, the notion of 'do no harm' fails to articulate an affirmative political goal—the minimisation of harm being little more than a tactical question—and precludes the possibility that some affirmative political goals might require a fight in which some will, no doubt, be harmed.

This suggests, in accordance with its unproblematic rendering of experience, that the position of 'do no harm' embodies a particular set of assumptions about social ontology. It manifests a position which assumes 'we' are able to distance ourselves from others, diagnose a complex set of social and political relations, conceive of actions and practices designed to meet certain goals, and implement them as planned. Codes and principles are, thus, allegedly tied to definable if not predictable outcomes.

That a recognition of the complex and politicised nature of disasters gives rise to highly simplified codes, principles, and values as the means to address the politicisation of humanitarianism is more than a little paradoxical.<sup>13</sup> Nonetheless, it

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11. Anderson, *op. cit.*, in note 10, p. 58.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

13. The political complexity is acknowledged in Mary B. Anderson, 'Development and the Prevention of Humanitarian Emergencies', in Thomas G. Weiss and Larry Minear (eds.), *Humanitarianism Across Borders: Sustaining Civilians in Times of War* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1993).

represents a common conceptual disposition, because orthodox political thought operates by favouring 'moral reasoning over open political contest'. Modernity's 'preference for deriving norms epistemologically over deciding them politically' means that we are inclined to believe that the construction of normative frameworks can resolve political questions.<sup>14</sup>

As an argument designed to indicate the thought behind and establish the parameters for a new research project, this paper can neither fully articulate nor resolve the many challenges to humanitarian practice. Nonetheless, it can begin to take up the conceptual challenge of addressing the issue of responsibility and responses in ways other than through the legislation of fixed codes and principles, and suggest for humanitarian practice what the implications of this line of thought might potentially involve. First of all, though, pursuing this line of thought—which we might characterise as post-structuralist—involves making a space for it. That, in turn, requires a consideration of how it has come to be that the epistemological account of normative frameworks has trumped the political account of ethical practice. The vehicle for this will be an element of the debate between Jürgen Habermas and Michel Foucault, which has been influential in containing and circumscribing an appreciation of the ethico-political contribution of post-structuralism.<sup>15</sup> Extensively discussed within social and political thought, this dispute has considerable relevance to the current debates in International Relations concerned with the question of ethics. Its re-examination here will show how a reliance on codes and frameworks as guides for action prevents the development of a politics of responsibility potentially better attuned to the context of crisis.

### Fighting Positions

The reception of post-structuralist thought in Anglo-American circles, including the discipline of International Relations, has been more often than not marked by the belief it neither contains nor offers affirmative possibilities for ethics and politics. The case can be made that this is based, directly or indirectly, on Habermas's equation of postmodern thought and neo-conservative politics, and his concomitant description of Foucault and Jacques Derrida as 'Young Conservatives'.<sup>16</sup>

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14. Wendy Brown, *States of Injury: Power and Freedom in Late Modernity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1995), p. 47.

15. Post-structuralism cannot, however, be made synonymous with Foucault. Jean Baudrillard, for example, takes somewhat different tacks on the question of politics and resistance. As such, the discussion here involves a post-structuralist rendering of the issue rather than the post-structuralist account.

16. Jürgen Habermas, 'Modernity versus Postmodernity', *New German Critique* (Vol. 22, 1987), p. 13. The German cultural context of Habermas's equation is detailed in Andreas Huyssen, 'Mapping the Postmodern', in Linda Nicholson (ed.), *Feminism/Postmodernism* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1990), pp. 251-58. For a review of this issue more sympathetic (though not conclusively so) to Habermas than Foucault, see Nancy Fraser, 'Michel Foucault: A "Young Conservative"?', *Ethics* (Vol. 96, 1985), pp. 165-84. Similar issues are pursued in relation to Derrida in Nancy Fraser, 'The French Derrideans: Politicizing

One of Habermas' pre-eminent concerns with Foucault's work centred on the political possibilities that flowed from Foucault's genealogical approach. Habermas noted that in his political criticism Foucault 'resists the demand to take sides' and was sceptical of humanist critique (for Habermas this meant that which 'enters the field against the representatives of repression, exploitation, suppression *etc.*'). As a result, Habermas charged that, although it could be said that Foucault was politically engaged, his engagement emerges more from 'the postmodern rhetoric of his presentation than on the postmodern assumptions of his theory'.<sup>17</sup>

Habermas focussed his critique of Foucault's politics on the issue of how resistance relates to power. For Foucault (at least in the interview Habermas refers to), resistance is not thought of as the mirror image of power, but a force that is equally inventive, mobile, and productive as power. 'It has to be organized and stabilized...it has to come from below and be strategically shared'.<sup>18</sup> But, asked Habermas, 'if it is just a matter of mobilizing counterpower, of strategic battles and wily confrontations, why should we muster any resistance at all against this all-pervasive power circulating in the bloodstream of modern society, instead of just adapting ourselves to it?' If political resistance means 'tak[ing] up the fight', then, argues Habermas, 'a value-free analysis of the opponent is of use to one who wants to take up the fight'. However, not only does Habermas think that Foucault cannot accommodate the idea of a strategic analysis, he thinks that Foucault's problem runs deeper. Hence, his central question to Foucault: given the scepticism of humanism, the impact of genealogy, and the relationship between power and resistance, 'why fight at all?'<sup>19</sup>

Habermas girds his question with a quote from Nancy Fraser, who is similarly in no doubt that Foucault demands resistance to domination. 'But why? Why is struggle preferable to submission? Why ought domination to be resisted?'<sup>20</sup> It is a question which contains a charge that many critical of deconstructive thought and post-structuralist theorisations have, in a variety of manners and rhetorics, echoed. For instance, in questioning the impact for human rights of deconstruction, Terry Eagleton writes that not only is there an answer to the question of 'why?', but that it is a straightforward one. According to Eagleton, post-structuralists seem unable to appreciate that because 'someone is going to have to win and someone will have to lose...all the most important political conflicts are in this sense essentially *simple*—not,

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Deconstruction or Deconstructing the Political', *New German Critique* (Vol. 33, 1984), pp. 127-54.

17. Jürgen Habermas, 'Questions Concerning the Theory of Power: Foucault Again', in Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (Oxford: Polity, 1987), p. 282. This issue is well discussed in Tom Keenan, 'The "Paradox" of Knowledge and Power: Reading Foucault on a Bias', *Political Theory* (Vol. 15, No. 1, 1987), pp. 5-37.

18. Quoted in Habermas, *op. cit.*, in note 17, p. 283.

19. *Ibid.*, p. 284, emphasis added.

20. *Ibid.*, see also Nancy Fraser, 'Foucault on Modern Power: Empirical Insights and Normative Confusions', *Praxis International* (Vol. 1, 1981), p. 283.

naturally, in their character, but from the standpoint of whose cause is essentially just'.<sup>21</sup>

It is unlikely that Habermas or Fraser find things to be quite as straightforward as Eagleton, but both are sure that the answer to the 'why?' (which will provide the *what* that is just) cannot be found in Foucault's thinking. That is because each imposes on Foucault's thought a criteria in accordance with which the 'why?' has to be answered. According to Fraser, 'only with the introduction of normative notions of some kind could Foucault begin to answer this question. Only with the introduction of normative notions could he begin to tell us what is wrong with the modern power/knowledge regime and why we ought to oppose it'.<sup>22</sup> Fraser is willing to grant the 'theoretical possibility' that Foucault's language of domination and resistance could be evidence of 'the skeleton of some alternative framework'. But it is a possibility that, in the absence of 'clues in Foucault's writings as to what his alternative norms might be', means there is no 'completely new 'post-liberal' schema'.<sup>23</sup> The 'alternative post-humanist normative standpoint' that would legislate the criteria to distinguish between desirable and undesirable forms of power, which would constitute 'nothing less than a new paradigm of human freedom', is, to Fraser's repeated lament, apparently absent.<sup>24</sup>

The Habermas-Fraser concern with normative frameworks is dependent upon the same logic as the idea that new codes are required to confront the context of crisis. Habermas-Fraser, on the one hand, and Anderson's goal of harm reduction, on the other, are in pursuit of moral criteria to establish normative principles that would separate the 'good' from the 'bad'. As I shall argue in the fourth section of this paper, their shared problematisation of the possibilities does not mean we have to recur to a moral architecture in order to consider ethico-political questions. There is in Foucault's thought a radical refiguring of the question of human freedom which can do the work demanded, although it is work done in ways Habermas-Fraser (let alone Anderson) cannot recognise.<sup>25</sup>

21. Terry Eagleton, 'Deconstruction and Human Rights', in Barbara Johnson (ed.), *Freedom and Interpretation: The Oxford Amnesty Lectures 1992* (New York, NY: Basic Books, 1993), p. 124, emphasis in original. In International Relations, similar sentiments are evident, for example, in Ken Booth's lament about postmodernism not having an emancipatory agenda for 'victims across the world', and Mark Neufeld's insistence that being political requires one to take sides demarcated by a universalist conception of the good. See Ken Booth, 'Human Wrongs and International Relations', *International Affairs* (Vol. 71, No. 1, 1995), p. 116, and Mark Neufeld, *The Restructuring of International Relations Theory* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), pp. 108-16.

22. Habermas, *op. cit.*, in note 17, p. 284, and Fraser, *op. cit.*, in note 20, p. 283.

23. Fraser, *op. cit.*, in note 20, p. 283.

24. Nancy Fraser, 'Foucault's Body-Language: A Post-Humanist Political Rhetoric', *Salmagundi* (Vol. 61, 1983), p. 56, and Fraser, *op. cit.*, in note 16, p. 180.

25. The focus on Foucault here should not be read as implying that his thought, although significant, was necessarily pioneering in this regard. It is the object of attention here because of the way it was singled out by Habermas and Fraser, and because of the way some of Foucault's later thinking is suggestive for rethinking the politics of humanitarianism.

## The Onto-political: Against Humanism, for Life

All political interpretation, argues William Connolly, is 'onto-political'. That is, it 'contains fundamental presumptions that establish the possibilities within which its assessment of actuality is presented'.<sup>26</sup> The experientially-grounded social ontology of Anderson's argument for 'do no harm' as a new principle of humanitarianism illustrates this well, but the onto-political is a dimension more often than not occluded within the social sciences, particularly by those accounts which depend upon unacknowledged assumptions about an unproblematic reality. But it is also occluded by accounts—such as Habermas' and Fraser's—that assume particular parameters within which the question of the ethical and the political have to be judged. While a demand that one should articulate the normative criteria through which assessments are made—especially the reasons which enable one to answer the question 'why fight?'—seems to be not unreasonable, its 'reasonableness' is established via the assumption that a particular framework, paradigm, or standpoint of normativity is *necessary* for there to be such criteria, and that such normative criteria are *necessary* for there to a progressive answer to the question.

The fundamental presumption that enables the Habermas-Fraser position, and that is the condition of possibility for the assertion of normative framework being necessary, is the priority accorded to humanist critique and the metaphysics of subjectivity from which humanism is derived.<sup>27</sup> This metaphysics of subjectivity not only makes possible ideas of autonomy and rights as the basis of freedom, it gives rise to the notion that a theory of ethics should be constructed so as to secure those goods. It is in this context that perspectives which challenge the onto-political assumptions of traditional conceptions can be said to be 'against' theory and ethics, even as they instantiate their own ethical interpretations.<sup>28</sup>

Fraser recognises that Foucault's interpretations fundamentally reject this metaphysics of subjectivity and the humanist critique it enables.<sup>29</sup> Foucault's genealogical critique draws out the way in which 'Man'—'a strange empirico-transcendental doublet' that appears in the 'ambiguous position as an object of knowledge and a subject that knows'—emerged after René Descartes (but was not enthroned until the nineteenth century) as the essential, sovereign, and universal

26. William E. Connolly, 'The Irony of Interpretation', in Daniel W. Conway and John E. Seery (eds.), *The Politics of Irony: Essays in Self-Betrayal* (New York, NY: St Martins, 1992), p. 119.

27. Fraser, *op. cit.*, in note 24, p. 56.

28. For a discussion, see David Campbell and Michael J. Shapiro, 'Introduction: From Ethical Theory to the Ethical Relation', in David Campbell and Michael J. Shapiro (eds.), *Moral Spaces: Rethinking Ethics and World Politics* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1999). The affirmative quality of being 'against' certain formulations is detailed, for example, in John D. Caputo, *Against Ethics* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1993), and Dwight Furrow, *Against Theory: Continental and Analytical Challenges in Moral Philosophy* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1995).

29. Fraser, *op. cit.*, in note 16, pp. 166-70.

ground of knowledge.<sup>30</sup> This follows on from and develops Martin Heidegger's argument that 'every humanism is either grounded in a metaphysics or is itself made to be the ground of one'.<sup>31</sup> This metaphysical rendering of the essence of 'Man' is problematic, and not just because of the particular philosophical construction. It is problematic because the violence associated with the sovereignty of the self—principally the abjection of others it requires—means this construction is (paradoxically) insufficiently attuned to human-ness. As a result, a critique of this sort is not a question of dispensing with humanism *per se*. As Heidegger observes:

Through this determination of the essence of man the humanistic interpretations of man as *animal rationale*, as 'person', as spiritual-ensouled-bodily being, are not declared false and thrust aside. Rather, the sole implication is that the highest determinations of the essence of man in humanism still do not realize the proper dignity of man. To that extent the thinking in *Being and Time* is against humanism. But this opposition does not mean that such thinking aligns itself against the humane and advocates the inhuman, that it promotes the inhumane and deprecates the dignity of man. Humanism is opposed because it does not set the *humanitas* of man high enough.<sup>32</sup>

The key assumption that the argument of this paper makes—an assumption which requires further substantiation via a genealogical analysis—is two-fold. First, that the humanism of which Foucault and Heidegger are critical, a humanism with a questionable instantiation of the humane, provides the basis for international humanitarian law and our traditional understanding of humanitarianism. Second, that the continued reliance on this humanism of which Foucault and Heidegger are critical continues to underscore the New Humanitarianism, and in so doing, provides the foundation upon and in relation to which the search for codes, norms, and principles to govern responsibility in the context of crisis is being conducted.

In the interim, the first of these assumptions can be justified by reference to the International Committee of the Red Cross's (ICRC) seven fundamental principles adopted in 1965. Generally regarded as the basic norms of humanitarianism, they cover the importance of impartiality, neutrality, and universality (thereby establishing

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30. Michel Foucault, *The Order of Things: An Archaeology of the Human Sciences* (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1970), pp. 318 and 312. For a good overview of the historicity of humanism, see Tony Davies, *Humanism* (London: Routledge, 1997).

31. Martin Heidegger, 'Letter on Humanism', in David F. Krell (ed.), *Basic Writings: Martin Heidegger* (London: Routledge, 1993), p. 225.

32. *Ibid.*, pp. 233-34. In the prefatory note to 'The Philosophy of Hitlerism', Levinas posed a radical question: 'We must ask ourselves if liberalism is all we need to achieve an authentic dignity for the human subject. Does this subject arrive at the human condition prior to assuming responsibility for the other man in the act of election that raises him up to this height?' The answer could only be 'no'. Emmanuel Levinas, 'Reflections on the Philosophy of Hitlerism', *Critical Inquiry* (Vol. 17, No. 1, 1990), p. 63.

the supposed distance between humanitarianism and the political). Most important of all is the first principle—the commonly cited ‘principle of humanity’—which conforms to the contours of conventional humanism, being understood in terms of working ‘to prevent and alleviate human suffering wherever it may be found. Its purpose is to protect life and health and to ensure respect for the human being’.<sup>33</sup> Indeed, the construction of people as victims, incapable of acting without intervention, through the primacy of the concern with oppressed and devastated peoples, is the new humanist basis of humanitarianism.<sup>34</sup>

Problematising humanitarianism so that it is better attuned to the *humanitas* of man involves, therefore, rethinking the principle of humanity and recasting the subjectivity of victimhood.<sup>35</sup> However, it is important to recognise that the *humanitas* of man is not simply an alternative principle of humanity but a recasting of the notion that humanity is a principle. The *humanitas* of man refers not to a notion of human being, but a conception of being human. It signifies an economy of humanity, within which various renderings of human being distil and differentially value being human.

Foucault’s development of the Heideggerian critique of humanism can potentially provide a basis for the rehistoricised and repoliticised sense of humanity which can refigure humanitarianism. This refiguration, however, will not be governed by the normative frameworks in which Fraser invests so much faith. To this end, Fraser recognises that because Foucault’s critiques and interpretations fundamentally reject humanism’s metaphysics of subjectivity it ‘probably follows’ that he is unwilling to construct a new ‘normative Archimedean point for political critique’ because of the

33. Oliver Ramsbotham and Tom Woodhouse, *Humanitarian Intervention in Contemporary Conflict* (Oxford: Polity, 1996), p. 14. The ICRC principles were recognised as the norm by the International Court of Justice in the 1986 Nicaragua case. Minear and Weiss, *op. cit.*, in note 8, p. 8. See also the discussion in Hugo Slim, ‘Relief Agencies and Moral Standing in War: Principles of Humanity, Neutrality, Impartiality and Solidarity’, *Development in Practice* (Vol. 7, No. 4, 1997), pp. 342–52. The meaning of ‘humanity’ and its fundamental standards is currently an issue central to a number of agendas in the United Nations. See David Petrasek, ‘Moving Forward on the Development of Minimum Humanitarian Standards’, *American Journal of International Law* (Vol 92, No. 3, 1998), pp. 557–63.

34. Scheffer, *op. cit.*, in note 7, p. 259. According to Michael Ignatieff, the moral universalism of the human rights culture, with its narrative of compassion, is the basis for the sense that something must be done in response to disasters. See Michael Ignatieff, *The Warrior’s Honor: Ethnic War and Modern Conscience* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1998), where the ICRC is taken as the paradigmatic representation of this position.

35. See Liisa Malkki, ‘Speechless Emissaries: Refugees, Humanitarianism, and Dehistoricization’, *Cultural Anthropology* (Vol. 11, No. 3, 1996), pp. 377–404. This rethinking is required, in part, because the universality of humanitarianism’s humanism has paradoxically effected a dehumanisation of those subject to it. In contrast to the depoliticising sense of neutrality and impartiality that marks the New Humanitarianism (not to mention the old), practices embodying such an ethos would be components of what Malkki calls an ‘historicizing (and politicizing) humanism that would require us, politically and analytically, to examine our cherished notions of mankind and the human community, humanitarianism and humanitarian “crises”, human rights and international justice’. This rethinking is an imperative, ‘for if humanism can only constitute itself on the bodies of dehistoricized, archetypal refugees and other similarly styled victims—if clinical and philanthropic modes of humanitarianism are the only options—then citizenship in this human community itself remains curiously, indecently, outside of history’. *Ibid.*, p. 398.

injustices and violences such an Archimedean point would have to entail.<sup>36</sup> But what Fraser does not recognise or appear willing to concede is that this position calls her own insistence that there *must* be normative framework for criteria, judgement, and warranting into serious question. Paying heed to the onto-political assumptions in Foucault's thought makes it incumbent on Fraser to do the same for her own thought. Friedrich Nietzsche put it more bluntly:

How many there are who still conclude: 'life could not be endured if there were no God!' (or, as it is put among the idealists: 'life could not be endured if its foundation lacked an ethical significance!')—therefore there *must* be a God (or existence *must* have an ethical significance)! The truth, however, is merely that he who is accustomed to these notions does not desire a life without them: that these notions may therefore be necessary to him and for his preservation—but what presumption it is to decree that whatever is necessary for my preservation *must* actually *exist*! As if my preservation was something necessary! How if others felt in the opposite way! If those two articles of faith were precisely the conditions under which they did not wish to live and under which they no longer found life worth living!—and that is how things are now!<sup>37</sup>

Nietzsche's excoriation of those who presume the necessity of metaphysical supports found favour in Heidegger's thought. Significantly, for this argument, the intersections are more numerous. For just as Heidegger rejects humanism for its discordance with being human, yet does not want to dispense with the notion of humanism *per se*, so Nietzsche is scornful of the idea that thought requires a crutch, yet finds in humanity the justification for itself. In *The Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche declares that '[w]hat justifies humanity is its reality...that will justify it eternally. How much greater is the worth of the real human being, compared with any merely wished for, dreamed up, stinking, fabricated human being?'<sup>38</sup>

There is more than a little irony (and a need for some explanation) in the fact that the 'anti-humanist' positions of Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Foucault might recur to an idea of being human for ethico-political justification. However, in so doing, they are in accord with Emmanuel Levinas's view that 'modern antihumanism...is true over and beyond the reasons it gives itself' because 'humanism has to be denounced only because it is not sufficiently human'.<sup>39</sup> What, then, can be the status of this 'anti-humanist' economy of humanity that regards humanism as insufficiently humane

36. Fraser, *op. cit.*, in note 24, p. 66.

37. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak: Thoughts on the Prejudices of Morality*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), Paragraph 99, p. 52.

38. Quoted in Alan White, *Within Nietzsche's Labyrinth* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1990), p. 146.

39. Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise than Being or Beyond Essence*, trans. A. Lingis (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers, 1981), p. 127.

because of its ego-metaphysics? What, in this sense, characterises being human when rendered in non-humanist ways? What sort of warrant does the 'reality of humanity' provide for an 'anti-humanist' economy of humanity in the face of practices regarded as embodying 'inhumanity'? If one understood 'humanism' as exceeding the sovereign grounds of Man and embracing the relationship with the other to become, in Levinasian terms, a 'humanism of the Other', could this be the basis of an historicised and politicised humanitarianism?<sup>40</sup>

In *The Genealogy of Morals*, Nietzsche investigates the moral economy of ethical valuation, and calls for the value of certain values to be questioned. His concern is with the frameworks, laws, and principles devised by Man and deemed to be hostile to life. The problem is that the moral economy of Man ignores 'the essence of life, its *will to power*...one overlooks the essential priority of the spontaneous, aggressive, expansive, form-giving forces that give new interpretations and directions'.<sup>41</sup> Reading the notion of 'will to power' this way means it involves not the will to dominate, but the relationships of power, the 'form-giving forces', that make up the 'groundless energies of "life"'.<sup>42</sup>

The 'reality of humanity' that warrants an anti-humanist economy of humanity might, thus, be rendered in terms of, and to some extent secured by, the idea of 'life' in Nietzschean thought. As Connolly observes, 'life' is 'no more or less contradictory, problematic or incomplete than any final marker presented in other traditions'. What it does, though, is provide some distance from 'the presumptions and priorities lodged in those markers of intrinsic command or purpose (a god, nature as lawful regularity, the embodied self, the depth of grammar of language)'. As such, "life" and other terms of its type function in Nietzsche's thought as indispensable, nonfixable markers, challenging every attempt to treat a concept, settlement or principle as complete, without surplus, remainders or resistance'. In this sense, Connolly argues, 'life' might correspond to the role 'God' plays in certain theorisations (Levinas' perhaps)<sup>43</sup> where it is beyond any definite articulation, 'but it contrasts to most presentations of divinity

40. According to Derrida, Levinas does talk in terms of a "Jewish humanism", whose basis is not "the concept of man", but rather the other; "the extent of the right of the other". Quoted in Jacques Derrida, "Force of Law: The "Mystical Foundations of Authority"", in Drucilla Cornell, Michel Rosenfeld, and David G. Carlson (eds.), *Deconstruction and the Possibility of Justice* (New York, NY: Routledge, 1992), p. 22.

41. Friedrich Nietzsche, *On The Genealogy of Morals*, trans. W. Kaufmann and R.J. Hollingdale (New York, NY: Vintage Books, 1989), p. 79.

42. William E. Connolly, *Political Theory and Modernity*, Revised Edition (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993), p. 194.

43. 'God' is an important figure and site in Levinas' discourse that, according to Alphonso Lingis, is located in the ethical relation as 'the very nonphenomenal force of the other'. As such, Levinas neither reinscribes 'god's' ontotheological status nor avoids agreement with Nietzsche's account of the death of God. Alphonso Lingis, "Translator's Introduction", in Levinas, *op. cit.*, in note 39, p. xxxiii.

in that it does not embody a command, purpose or willful design to which humans are said to be drawn'.<sup>44</sup>

Life exceeds any purpose or identity to which people already conform; for every way of life, settled practice, or fixed identity produces difference in and around itself in the very process of specifying itself. The production of difference through the formation of identity, thus, becomes a sign of the excess of life over identity in the Nietzschean tradition. Life provides a precondition of identity while resisting the completion of any form of identity.<sup>45</sup>

In this sense, 'life' is the onto-political assumption of Nietzschean and post-Nietzschean thought. 'Life' can be coded in a variety of ways and appear in a variety of guises for a variety of different thinkers. For example, deconstruction's onto-political claim—and the reason why it is onto-political and not simply ontological—is that its figuration of the real in terms of 'life' contains within it a political imperative. This is evident in Derrida's articulation of the affirmative character of deconstruction. When asked by Richard Kearney whether deconstruction can 'ever surmount its role of iconoclastic negation and become a form of affirmation?', Derrida's response is that 'deconstruction certainly entails a moment of affirmation' not the least reason for which is that he 'cannot conceive of a radical critique which would not be ultimately motivated by some sort of affirmation, acknowledged or not'.<sup>46</sup>

The affirmation, however, does not derive from the conscious desires or intentions of a subject interested in deconstruction, but from the fact that 'deconstruction is, in itself, a positive response to an alterity which necessarily calls, summons or motivates it. Deconstruction is therefore vocation—a response to a call'.<sup>47</sup> As the vocation roused by alterity, deconstruction's onto-political claim is that our condition can be characterised by the problematic of identity/difference, where neither term can be understood except in relation to the other, and because of which claims about secure identities, traditionally authorised grounds, and the political necessities said to flow from them are met with a critical scepticism, even as they have to be invoked and rearticulated in responding to summons of alterity. The ethos of political criticism to

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44. Connolly, *op. cit.*, in note 42.

45. *Ibid.*, pp. 194-95. I have suggested how this idea of excess plays out in international politics in David Campbell, 'Political Excess and the Limits of Imagination', *Millennium: Journal of International Studies* (Vol. 23, No. 2, 1994), pp. 365-75.

46. Richard Kearney, 'Dialogue with Jacques Derrida', in Richard Kearney, *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers: The Phenomenological Heritage* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), pp. 117-18.

47. *Ibid.*

which deconstruction helps give rise is thus both dependent upon and constitutive of its onto-political rendering of our condition.<sup>48</sup>

In a similar onto-political vein (although terms other than 'life' are deployed) Foucault's thought depends upon 'a "reading" of the fundamental character of being that resists imputing a logic to it and affirms its alogical character'.<sup>49</sup> When Foucault writes that 'we must think that what exists is far from filling all possible spaces', and makes that possible by articulating (in a manner akin to the context of crisis well appreciated in contemporary international politics) an understanding of being as 'violent, pugnacious, disorderly...perilous, incessant...and buzzing', the parallels are clear.<sup>50</sup> As the next section will argue, this projection of the character of being necessary for this thought entails—despite Foucault's anti-humanist position—a conception of *being human* which provides an affirmative answer to the question 'why fight?', thereby accounting for the absence of the question mark in the title of this article.<sup>51</sup>

### Foucault, Freedom, and The Good Fight

Although one of Foucault's central tasks has been to reconceptualise the nature of power, emphasising its productive capacities and role in the constitution of subjects, this achievement has been overlooked by those who read him as only concerned with the ubiquity of domination and the difficulty of resistance. However, an attentiveness to some of Foucault's later work can reveal the misplaced nature of the concern that animated Fraser and Habermas.

Indeed, rather than emphasising *power*, Foucault argued that *freedom* 'is the ontological condition of ethics' and the possibility of politics.<sup>52</sup> Noting that he always referred to *relations of power* rather than simply *power per se*, Foucault observed that human relationships at all levels involve one person trying to control the conduct of the other. As a result, 'these power relations are mobile, reversible, and unstable'. Most importantly, Foucault stressed that 'power relations are possible only insofar as the subjects are free'. Within a dyadic relationship, Foucault argued, this meant that:

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48. This ethos of political criticism is discussed further in David Campbell, *National Deconstruction: Violence, Identity and Justice in Bosnia* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1998), Chapter 1.

49. William E. Connolly, 'The Ethical Sensibility of Michel Foucault', in Jeremy Moss (ed.), *The Later Foucault* (London: Sage, 1997), p. 116.

50. Quoted in *ibid.*, pp. 110 and 117.

51. Paul Patton, 'Foucault's Subject of Power', in Moss (ed.), *op. cit.*, in note 49, pp. 64-65.

52. Michel Foucault, 'The Ethics of the Concern of the Self as a Practice of Freedom', in Paul Rabinow (ed.), *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth*, trans. R. Hurley et al. (New York, NY: The Free Press, 1997), p. 284, and Patton, *op. cit.*, in note 51, p. 73.

If one of them were completely at the other's disposal and became his thing, an object on which he could wreak boundless and limitless violence, there wouldn't be any relations of power. Thus, in order for power relations to come into play, there must be at least a certain degree of freedom on both sides. Even when the power relation is completely out of balance, when it can be truly claimed that one side as 'total power' over the other, a power can be exercised over the other only insofar as the other still has option of killing himself, of leaping out of the window, or of killing the other person.<sup>53</sup>

The conclusion Foucault draws from this is significant:

*This means that in power relations there is necessarily the possibility of resistance because if there were no possibility of resistance (of violent resistance, flight, deception, strategies capable of reversing the situation), there would be no power relations at all. This being the general form, I refuse to reply to the question that I am sometimes asked: "But if power is everywhere, there is no freedom". I answer that if there are relations of power in every social field, this is because there is freedom everywhere.<sup>54</sup>*

This onto-political reversal turns many of the readings of Foucault on their head, and easily exceeds Fraser's demand for a new paradigm of human freedom to ground Foucault's thought. However, it should be observed that what is being proposed is not a transcendental ontology of freedom as a pre-condition of moral action (in the Kantian sense) but an historical ontology of the 'condition of action upon the actions of others (politics) and of action upon the self (ethics)'.<sup>55</sup> The historical character of this conceptualisation is evident when Foucault remarks that notwithstanding the idea that 'freedom is everywhere', 'states of domination do indeed exist. In a great many cases, power relations are fixed in such a way that they are perpetually asymmetrical and allow an extremely limited margin of freedom'.<sup>56</sup> Foucault has, thus, not replaced the ubiquity of power with a universal category named freedom; he has emphasised that relations of power only exist within a context of freedom, but that 'freedom exists only in the concrete capacities to act of particular agents' which are shaped by the relations of power.<sup>57</sup>

Being human for Foucault is, therefore, not a question of humans having (as for humanism and humanitarianism) an essential and universal matter prior to the involvement in relations of power. Foucault's being human is necessarily implicated

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53. Foucault, *op. cit.*, in note 52, p. 292.

54. *Ibid.*, emphasis added.

55. Patton, *op. cit.*, in note 51, p. 73.

56. Foucault, *op. cit.*, in note 52, p. 292.

57. Patton, *op. cit.*, in note 51, p. 73.

in and produced by those relations of power. Foucault's being human is, in this sense, simultaneously and in an inter-connected manner, a subject of freedom and a subject of power. This onto-political refiguration has important ethico-political implications. It means relations of power in and of themselves can neither be avoided nor considered 'bad', for without them—without relations of power understood as 'the strategies by which individuals try to direct and control the conduct of others'—society could not exist.<sup>58</sup> But which strategies are better or worse than others? Foucault considers this issue via the example of the pedagogical institution:

I see nothing wrong in the practice of a person who, knowing more than others in a specific game of truth, tells the others what to do, teaches them, and transmits knowledge and techniques to them. The problem is in such practices where power—which is not in itself a bad thing—must inevitably come into play is knowing how to avoid the kind of domination effects where a kid subjected to the arbitrary and unnecessary authority of a teacher, or a student put under the thumb of a professor who abuses his authority. I believe that this problem must be framed in terms of rules of law, rational techniques of government and *ethos*, practices of the self and of freedom.<sup>59</sup>

The talk of rules and rational techniques will surprise some, but they are being considered in relation to Foucault's ethico-political goal. When asked by an interviewer if this example establishes the 'fundamental criteria' of a new ethics as 'a question of playing with as little domination as possible', Foucault responds firmly that 'this is, in fact, the hinge point of ethical concerns and the political struggle for respect of rights, or critical thought against techniques of government and research in ethics that seeks to ground individual freedom'.<sup>60</sup> Minimising domination in society, while realising that a state devoid of relations of power is impossible, also stands as a principle consistent with Foucault's intellectual desire for a critical ontology of ourselves, where the task is to engage the 'limits that are imposed on us and an experiment with the possibility of going beyond them'.<sup>61</sup> The ethos that binds these positions is one in which there is an overriding concern for *autonomy*, but a conception of human autonomy situated within 'an analytics of power' rather than secured by 'a metaphysical conception of human being as essentially free'.<sup>62</sup>

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58. Foucault, *op. cit.*, in note 52, p. 298.

59. *Ibid.*, p. 299.

60. *Ibid.*

61. Michel Foucault, 'What is Enlightenment?', in Paul Rabinow (ed.), *The Foucault Reader* (New York, NY: Pantheon, 1984), p. 50.

62. Patton, *op. cit.*, in note 51, p. 73.

## Reasons to Fight, One, Two, Three...

This means that there are two post-Nietzschean, and especially Foucauldian, responses to the Habermas-Fraser question 'why fight?', which in turn could establish different predicates for the development of a new humanitarianism. The first response does not recognise the demand. That is, it argues that to phrase the issue in terms of what might be the criteria, distinctions or norms that would mobilise resistance as if resistance were a choice for being human is to misconstrue the nature of human being. Because relations of power are possible only in the context of freedom, because they are inescapable, and because they will inescapably impinge on the autonomy of the free subject, the practices of the self that bring the subject to being *must* involve resistance. In this sense, 'Foucault does not think that resistance to forms of domination requires justification. To the extent that it occurs, such resistance follows from the nature of particular human beings. It is an effect of human freedom'. Resistance is thus integral to 'life', so Foucault's onto-political articulation of being 'leads him away from rather than towards normative criteria for distinguishing acceptable from unacceptable forms of power'.<sup>63</sup>

The second response to the Habermas-Fraser question, because of the historical rather than transcendental ontology of being implicated in the idea of affirming 'life', is that while resistance is indivisible from being, it is nonetheless practised differently by different people in different circumstances. Just as there are degrees and states of domination so there are degrees and states of resistance. While recognising that no political theorisation, prior to its materialisation, can legislate for politics (at least while retaining a sense of the paradox of politics rather than effecting an authoritarian position), some elements of the ethos associated with affirming life can be articulated.

The principal element of the ethos associated with affirming life—given that affirming 'life' involves encouraging recognition of the radical interdependence of being and our inescapable responsibility to the other—effects a different figuration of politics.<sup>64</sup> It is one in which the overriding concern is *the struggle for—or on behalf of—alterity rather than a struggle to efface, erase, or eradicate alterity*. Such a principle is ethically transcendent if not classically universal and a powerful starting point, for example, in rethinking the question of responsibility *vis-à-vis* 'ethnic' and 'nationalist' conflicts.<sup>65</sup> It would declare that we should actively nourish and nurture antagonism, conflict, plurality, and multiplicity, not at the expense of security or identity—for this is not an either/or option—but in terms of security's and identity's contamination by and indebtedness to otherness. The burden of this principle is on

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63. *Ibid.*

64. An important consideration is whether 'recognition' is the key issue, or whether the question of 'life' and its affirmation is something which precedes recognition and all that concept entails.

65. This political figuration, its relationship to the Bosnian War, and examples of its materialisation, is the subject of Campbell, *op. cit.*, in note 48.

pluralisation, for contemporary international society is governed by fundamentalisation.<sup>66</sup>

Importantly, this political figuration encourages distinctions between antagonisms, conflicts, pluralities, and multiplicities. All is permitted, but not all forms of difference permit all to be. In this sense, a principle concerned with struggle for and on behalf of alterity cannot be read as an ethic of tolerance for the intolerable. While liberal conceptions of tolerance are insufficient when it comes to identifying the intolerable (just as liberal conceptions of humanism are insufficiently attuned to the human), the principle being articulated here goes beyond the static confines of tolerance and maintains that the active affirmation of alterity *must* involve the desire to actively oppose and resist—perhaps, depending upon the circumstances, even violently—those forces that efface, erase, or suppress alterity and its centrality to the economy of humanity. That which is to be opposed is not simply that which causes disturbance or irritation. There will always be an agonistic and sometimes antagonistic relationship between the numerous identities and settlements which variously contain difference. Life involves and requires resistance. Instead, that which is to be opposed are the relations of power which, in dealing with difference, move from disturbance to oppression, from irritation to repression, and, most obviously, from contestation to eradication. In other words, racism, xenophobia, neo-liberal globalisation strategies, ethnic-nationalist violence, fascism, and the like; ‘moral visions which suppress the constructed, contingent, relational character of identity’.<sup>67</sup>

Of course, when one names the worst historical excesses as paradigmatic cases for opposition, few would disagree. However, the second element of the ethos associated with affirming life is applicable to those contestable practices perhaps less immediately obvious. Foucault’s historicised defence of human autonomy draws attention to the various practices of governmentality which regulate selves and their behaviours. Part of the justification for the inescapable nature of resistance comes from the historical emergence (in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, alongside the new arts of government) of various practices concerned with ‘the art of not being governed’, a ‘sort of general cultural form, at once moral and political [and] a way of thinking’, an ‘art of not being governed, or of not being governed in this particular way, or at this price’.<sup>68</sup>

Foucault’s most obvious articulation of this attitude came through his activism in association with Bernard Kouchner and Médecins sans Frontières (MSF) as part of the

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66. For the necessary relationship of pluralisation to fundamentalisation, see William E. Connolly, *The Ethos of Pluralization* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1995).

67. Connolly, *op. cit.*, in note 49, p. 114.

68. Quoted in Duncan Ivison, ‘The Disciplinary Moment: Foucault, Law and the Reinscription of Rights’, in Moss (ed.), *op. cit.*, in note 49, p. 142.

committee, 'Un Bateau pour le Vietnam', in the late 1970s and early 1980s.<sup>69</sup> Kouchner, a founder of MSF and later a French minister for humanitarian affairs in the administration of President Francois Mitterand, had sent a team of doctors on board the ship *L'Ille de lumiere* to assist the 'boat people' fleeing Vietnam.<sup>70</sup> In June 1981, as part of an alliance with Médecins du Monde and Terre des Hommes under the banner of the 'Comité International contre le Piraterie', Foucault and others protested the violence of piracy against those who had fled Vietnam but had not yet been embraced by the regime of refugee protection. At a press conference in Geneva, Foucault offered a statement articulating the position of those protesting:

We are here only as private individuals, who have no other claim to speak, and to speak together, than a certain shared difficulty in accepting what is happening.

I know full well, and we have to face facts, that there is not much we can do about the reasons which lead men and women to prefer leaving their countries over living in them. That fact is simply beyond our reach.

Who, then, commissioned us? No one. And that is precisely what establishes our right. It seems to me that we must bear in mind three principles which, I believe, guide this initiative, like the many others which have preceded it (the *L'Ille de Lumiere*, the *Cap Anamour*, and *Avion pour le Salvador*, but also Terre des Hommes, Amnesty International).

1.—There exists an international citizenry, which has its rights, which has its duties, and which promises to raise itself up against every abuse of power, no matter who the author or the victims. After all, we are all governed and, to that extent, in solidarity.

2.—Beause they claim to concern themselves with the welfare [*bonheur*] of their societies, governments have arrogated to themselves the right to draw up a balance sheet, to calculate the profits and losses, of the human misfortune [*malheur*] provoked by their decisions or tolerated by their negligence. It is a duty of this international citizenry always to make an issue of this misfortune, to keep it in the eyes and ears of governments—it is not true they are not responsible. People's misfortune must never be the silent remainder of politics. It founds an absolute right to rise up and to address those who hold power.

3.—We must reject the division of tasks which is all too often offered: individuals can get indignant and speak out, while it is governments which reflect and act. It is true that good governments like the hallowed indignation of the governed, provided it remains lyrical. I believe that we must realize how often,

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69. Didier Eribon, *Michel Foucault*, trans. B. Wing (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), p. 267. Kouchner's initiative led to a split in the ranks of MSF and his founding of Medecins du Monde, an organisation which shared MSF's aims but pursued a more publicly prominent position. See 'Ethics, Sans Frontieres', *The Guardian*, 24 September 1993, p. 13.

70. Eribon, *op. cit.*, in note 69, pp. 278-79.

though, it is the rulers who speak, who can only and want only to speak. Experience shows that we can and must reject the theatrical role of pure and simple indignation which we are offered. Amnesty International, Terre des Hommes, Médecins du Monde are initiatives which have created a new right: the right of private individuals to intervene in the order of politics and international strategies. The will of individuals must inscribe itself in a reality over which governments have wanted to reserve a monopoly for themselves—a monopoly which we must uproot little by little every day.<sup>71</sup>

This piece was not published until after Foucault's death, and it was the newspaper *Libération* which in June 1984 gave it the title 'Face aux gouvernements, les droits de l'Homme', describing it as a new declaration of the rights of man.<sup>72</sup> Although this would seem to have reduced Foucault's argument to a liberal humanist understanding, the title accurately reflected the fact that the 'right' which Foucault theorised as productive came from no one or no place except recognition that 'we are all governed and, to that extent, in solidarity'. As such, it made clear the way in which Foucault's perhaps surprising deployment of a discourse of rights was a revaluation of liberal and humanist terms enabled by the agonistic and radically interdependent relationship with practices of governmentality rather than the pre-existing character of subjects with inherent rights.

Foucault's argument speaks, therefore, to the idea of a political bond enabled by government's continuing power and our implication in those practices of governmentality that traverse our life. It figures a new form of universality which does not rely on any a priori sense of essential sameness. It is, thus, a political bond with some similarities to that identified by Derrida as marking 'a new International':

There is today an aspiration towards a bond between singularities (not 'political subjects' nor even 'human beings') all over the world. This bond not only extends beyond nations and states, such as they are composed today or such as they are in the process of decomposition, but extends beyond the very concepts of nation or state. For example, if I feel in solidarity with this particular Algerian who is caught between F.I.S. and the Algerian state, or this particular Croat, Serbian or Bosnian, or this particular South African, this particular Russian or Ukrainian, or whoever—it's not a feeling of one citizen towards another, it's not a feeling peculiar to a citizen of the world, as if we were all potentially or imaginary citizens of a great state. No, what binds me to these people is

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71. Quoted in Keenan, *op. cit.*, in note 17, pp. 20-21. It is also excerpted, with a slightly different translation, in Eribon, *op. cit.*, in note 69, p. 279.

72. Keenan, *op. cit.*, in note 17, pp. 20-21. Keenan provides an insightful reading of the complexities implicated in this reworking of rights on pp. 22-32. This text is also discussed in Ivison, *op. cit.*, in note 68, p. 135, where Foucault's discourse of rights is similarly considered.

something different than membership of a world nation-state or of an international community extending indefinitely what one still calls today 'the nation-state'. What binds me to them—and this is the point; there is a bond, but this bond cannot be contained within traditional concepts of community, obligation or responsibility—is a protest against citizenship, a protest against membership of a political configuration as such. This bond is, for example, *a form of political solidarity opposed to the political qua a politics tied to the nation-state*.<sup>73</sup>

It is a political bond, therefore, which recognises that we are connected by the practices of government, but that we struggle with the strategies of governmentality which disciplines freedom. While it recognises the significant contribution of non-state actors, it is a political bond that is not inherently anti-state but is activated by the reduction of the political to the state, and seeks the contestation of imperatives associated with all specific political configurations (including potentially those of a non-state kind). It is a political bond that draws attention to numerous sites of possible interventions, and requires decisions on the part of individual and collective subjects in order to be materialised in those sites, even though it cannot legislate for that decisioning.<sup>74</sup> In this sense, it is a political bond which maintains resistance is a choice, but only in so far as the sites, strategies, tactics, and techniques of resistance have to be decided upon by any number of potential resisters. What is not a choice is the requirement of resistance once the onto-political rendering of 'life' and its affirmation *contra* sovereignty and strategies of governmentality is recognised. It is a political bond, therefore, which might offer a more productive predicate for humanitarianism than any of the other codes, norms, or values currently in circulation.

These related and highly suggestive remarks by Foucault and Derrida (two thinkers who were often in tension with one another) articulate dimensions of the ethico-political character of a post-structuralist attitude and their connection to progressive international politics. They are, most surely, in need of critical scrutiny and elaboration, for neither Foucault nor Derrida would want to suggest that they have definitively answered the question 'why fight?', at least in the same terms in which it was posed. That is because for each of them the question of politics is articulated along a different register from that conventionally used. It is this different political register, moreover, which has led many to read post-structuralist thought as logically

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73. 'Nietzsche and the Machine: Interview with Jacques Derrida by Richard Beardsworth', *Journal of Nietzsche Studies* (Issue 7, 1994), pp. 47-48, emphasis added. See also the discussion in Jacques Derrida, *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International*, trans. P. Kamuf (New York, NY: Routledge: 1994), especially pp. 84-85.

74. I explore the complexities of the politics of the decision, and the politics of Derrida's thought generally, in Campbell, *op. cit.*, in note 48, Chapter 6.

incapable of addressing ethico-political questions, by which critics have meant politics as we traditionally know it. Foucault outlines the problem as follows:

Political analysis and criticism have in a large measure still to be invented—so too have the strategies which will make it possible to modify the relations of force, to co-ordinate them in such a way that such a modification is possible and can be inscribed in reality. That is to say, the problem is not so much that of defining a political ‘position’ (which is to choose from a pre-existing set of possibilities) but to imagine and bring into being new schemas of politicisation. If ‘politicisation’ means falling back on ready-made choices and institutions, then the effort of analysis involved in uncovering the relations of force and mechanisms of power is not worthwhile. To the vast new techniques of power correlated with multinational economies and bureaucratic States, one must oppose a politicisation which will take new forms.<sup>75</sup>

Derrida has similarly observed that new inventions are required, and that the lack of fit between existing political codes and the radical nature of deconstructive thought says more about the metaphysical character of established political schemas, and the insistence they should be the standard, than the implications of critical inquiry.<sup>76</sup>

It is important to stress, however, that these reflections on the political inventions that are needed is not a case of simply stating a hope for the future, for non-state humanitarian practices always already embody at least some elements of the ethos articulated here. It is therefore significant to record that just as Foucault’s humanitarian activism spurred his political conceptualisations, Derrida has noted the promise of humanitarianism:

However insufficient, confused, or equivocal such signs may still be, we should salute what is heralded today in the reflection on the right of interference or intervention in the name of what is obscurely and sometimes hypocritically called the *humanitarian*, thereby limiting the sovereignty of the state in certain conditions. Let us salute such signs even as one remains vigilantly on guard against the manipulation or appropriations to which these novelties can be subjected.<sup>77</sup>

Derrida’s obvious concern for what we might think of as the necessary ‘impurity’ of humanitarian action—its sometimes questionable assumptions and problematic operation—aligns itself with Foucault’s equally unromantic account of the limits of

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75. Michel Foucault, ‘The History of Sexuality’, in Colin Gordon (ed.), *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-1977* (New York, NY: Pantheon, 1980), p. 190.

76. Kearney, *op. cit.*, in note 46, pp. 119-20.

77. Derrida, *op. cit.*, in note 73, p. 84.

non-state practices and underscores the fact that no political ensemble or practice should be free from problematisation (by which we mean the necessity of historicisation and politicisation).

This, then, is the third element of the ethos attuned to the affirmation of life, and returns us to the framing of this argument—the context of crisis, the search for the New Humanitarianism, the reliance in that search on codes and principles (such as the traditional principle of humanity of the idea of ‘do no harm’), and the challenge that can be drawn from this critique of humanism to this constellation. The central conclusion is that humanitarianism’s reliance on a metaphysical conception of humanism needs to be reworked in terms of strategies attuned to the affirmation of ‘life’ and being human, mobilised by the political bond and engaged in the struggle for or on behalf of alterity. That effort invokes a social ontology markedly different to that implicated in the technical rationality of the current debate about the creation of new codes, norms, and principles for a New Humanitarianism, based as it is on the idea that one can ‘do no harm’. It depends instead upon an onto-political interpretation which recognises that ‘responsibility demands incalculability and unpredictability, while freedom requires that we be responsive to the harms that invariably accompany the good we would do. In short, to live ethically, we must think and act politically’.<sup>78</sup>

### Concluding Reflections

Developing these themes, in future research animated by these concerns and themes, involves a number of dimensions. First and foremost, it involves a repoliticisation of humanitarianism so that its relationship to sovereignty can be problematised. This repoliticisation has to be aimed at both the role the sovereignty of the state plays in the technologies of humanitarianism, and the pivotal place occupied by the sovereignty of the person in the body of the victim. The first involves a genealogical investigation of how humanitarianism can be understood as an instrument and rationality of statecraft rather than a challenge to it, and the second an account of subjectivity constituted as ‘victims’, ‘devastated populations’, and ‘populations in distress’ through representational media and administrative practices.<sup>79</sup> Both these and other concerns have to be directed at the articulation of a radicalised humanitarianism which can better enable responses to disasters. This could be a development, despite

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78. Melissa Orlic, *Living Ethically, Acting Politically* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997), p. 169.

79. For work which already incorporates these dimensions, see Liisa H. Malkki, ‘Refugees and Exile: From “Refugee Studies” to the National Order of Things’, *Annual Review of Anthropology* (Vol. 24, 1995), pp. 495–523; Liisa H. Malkki, *Purity and Exile: Violence, Memory, and National Cosmology Among Hutu Refugees in Tanzania* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1995); and Francois Débrix, *Re-envisioning Peacekeeping: Simulation, the U.N., and the Mobilization of Ideology* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, forthcoming).

the critical appreciation of such groups that is required, of Médecins sans Frontières' position that there is not only a 'devoir d'ingérence' (duty to intervene) but a 'droit d'ingérence' (right to intervene). It could be a development which, by articulating a post-secular *caritas* that is open to and affirming of the *humanitas* of 'man' through the deployment of a new political bond animated by resistance to government, exceeds without replacing existing practices.<sup>80</sup>

In pursuing these directions, however, it will be important to recall the position(s) in relation to which this argument is situated, so that an appreciation of what this argument will not achieve—because of the terrain on which it is located—can be registered. This argument seeks to contest the drive for a new normative architecture—especially in the form of newly minted codes and principles—as a necessity for responses to the context of crisis. Because this drive depends upon and invokes a humanist metaphysic in its desire to secure the basis of a new humanitarianism, this article has explored some of the questions raised by the social and political ontology that is presupposed. This has been done via a consideration of the Habermas-Fraser insistence that Foucault should confess that he must have normative preferences if his position on resistance is to make, at least in their terms, any sense. In contrast, the major theme of this argument is that the insistence to derive norms epistemologically rather than decide them politically should itself be resisted. As a result, this argument is not about detailing a universalist justification for resistance for all time in all places.

Instead, the argument here, through its development of the onto-political assumptions of Foucault's position, focuses on the necessity of resistance to the relations of freedom and power implicated in being human. An answer to the demand Why fight? is, thus, always already located within the domain of life. It is that being human, because of the inescapable responsibility to the other that it involves, establishes the struggle for or on behalf of alterity, and against those forces which struggle to efface, erase, or eradicate alterity, as the political imperative or predicate of life.

However, while the pivotal nature of resistance to life, and the political imperative it enables, provides a powerful response to the question *why* fight, it does not *automatically* establish the fundamental but second-order questions of *when*, *where*, *how*, or *who with* and *what with* one should fight. As argued above, one has to make distinctions and take decisions in order to engage in the struggle for and on behalf of alterity. The political imperative that is integral to the ethos being unfolded here provides a number of orientations to these issues. However, one still has to decide what, given that ethos and its imperative, are those forces and practices which effect

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80. On the MSF position, see Philippe Garigne, 'Intervention-sanction and "Droit d'ingérence" in International Humanitarian Law', *International Journal* (Vol. 48, 1993), p. 671. On the notion of a post-secular *caritas*, see Romand Coles, *Rethinking Generosity: Critical Theory and the Politics of Caritas* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1997).

the shift from disturbance to oppression, irritation to repression, and how they can be contested, opposed, or defeated. It is at this juncture, of course, that the desire for a new moral framework is most commonly expressed. Whatever the attractions of such a construct, there is no escaping the fact that this process of decisioning about responsibility is irretrievably political and immune to epistemological equations. Much can be said about it in terms of the materialisation of the ethos in particular contexts, but little can be achieved by searching for abstracted theoretical formulas.<sup>81</sup> The exhaustion of conventional ethical theories and the poverty of traditionally conceived political action given the context of crisis suggests, therefore, that the time is ripe for a post-structuralist reappraisal of humanitarianism and its principles, so that new schemas of politicisation can be enacted.

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81. See Campbell, *op. cit.*, in note 48, especially Chapters 6 and 7.