Over the last two centuries, and particularly so over the last two decades, there has been an impressive expansion of humanitarianism: the desire to reduce the suffering of distant strangers. There is now a network of states, international organizations, and nongovernmental organizations that count themselves as part of the humanitarian sector. These organizations have helped to create, and been nourished by, a complex of normative and legal principles. The existence of this network and normative fabric have created something that resembles, according to Didier Fassin, a humanitarian government: [T]he administration of human collectivities in the name of a higher moral principle that sees the preservation of life and the alleviation of suffering as the highest value of action. While government might be too strong a word, governance certainly is not: human activities are now organized globally to help protect distant strangers and alleviate the causes of suffering. The intertwining of compassion and governance alerts us to the very real possibility that humanitarianism is much more complicated than the simple act of giving the gift of life to those in need. Humanitarianism, after all, is an ism, and all isms tend to be a lot less pure in practice than they are in theory.

This course explores the foundations, logics, dilemmas, and consequences of humanitarianism. Section I examines the underlying foundations and logic of humanitarian governance. Humanitarian governance is rooted in the basic supposition that we do and should care for distant strangers. But, historically and practically speaking, caring for distant strangers varies considerably. Accordingly, we consider the forces of compassion the conditions under which we care, whether today’s world is more compassionate than it was two centuries ago, and the tensions that are part of most modern discourses of compassion. In other words, we need to adopt an historical approach to humanitarianism. Furthermore, because humanitarian governance is a form of governance, and because all governance operates through different kinds of power, we must explore the forms and legitimating principles of the power in humanitarian governance. The concept of paternalism captures important dimensions of the power of humanitarianism, offering a mixture of care and control. Humanitarian governance justifies its power over others in the name of their welfare but when does concern for others lead us to want to take control of their lives?

Section II examines features of creative destruction. Although destruction might not appear creative, many people invest disasters with religious and spiritual significance, e.g. acts of God, and many humanitarians treat moments of destruction as providing opportunities for renewal, redemption, and progress. Creative destruction includes the two elements of humanitarian action to protect those whose lives are at immediate risk and to prevent future suffering by reducing the causes of harm. But how much power, force, and even violence can be justified in the desire to prevent human suffering? Do good intentions lead to good outcomes, and, if not, to what? What is the international community doing when it intervenes, or, rather, what does it think its doing? What is humanitarianism accomplishing? What can it accomplish? Who wins? We ask these guiding questions in a number of subjects: humanitarian intervention; emergency relief; the liberal peace, post-conflict peacebuilding and statebuilding. One of the consequences of humanitarian actors accumulating more resources, power, and authority is that there is growing concern about their (lack of) accountability. What do we mean by accountability? And are all meanings equal?
Requirements. All students must come to class prepared to contribute through discussion - which requires you to have read and reflected on the materials assigned for that class session. I will not give a grade for participation, but those who demonstrate through their class participation that they have read and considered the materials will help their final grade. All students must email 3-4 questions or observations that are provoked by the reading by the Tuesday evening immediately prior to Wednesdays class.

There are four written assignments for this class. You must do two reaction papers, worth 15% each. There is a term paper that will comprise 40% of your grade. Lastly, there is a final exam worth 30% of your grade.

Readings. There is a lot of reading in this course, including books, articles, essays, and reports. You must do the reading for each week before coming to seminar. The reading will be on reserve and the books available for purchase.


Office Hours. My office is at the Institute for Global and International Studies, ESIA, and my office hours are Wednesdays 10:00-12:00. The best way to reach me is either after class or by email at barnett@gwu.edu. My phone number is 994-9301.

Section I: The Principles and Logics of Humanitarian Governance

September 1 Introduction

September 8 Why Care?


September 15 Humanitarianism: Its Goals and Principles


*Short Paper Topic #1: Should impartiality, aid based on need, be the core of humanitarianism?*

**September 22 Nineteenth Century Roots of Humanitarianism**


**September 29 Twentieth Century Roots of Humanitarianism**


**October 6 Humanitarian Governance?**

Section II: 
Creative Destruction

October 13  Humanitarian Intervention

Evans, *The Responsibility to Protect*: Chapters 1-6, 10.

Short Paper Choice #2: Is the Responsibility to Protect a norm?

October 20  Emergency Relief

Linda Polman. Read Entire Book.

October 27  Humanitarian-Military Relations


Short Paper #3: What, if any, role should the military have in the delivery of humanitarian assistance?

November 3  Post-Conflict Order

Autissere: Read Entire Book.

November 10  Post-Conflict Reconstruction: Good Intentions

Short Paper Choice #4: You are the head of a post-conflict unit in [insert country of your choice]. Write a 3-4 page briefing paper identifying which post-conflict activities during the first six months require most weight and why.

November 17 Post Conflict Reconstruction: Good Outcomes?


December 1 Saving Souls

Fassin and Rachtman. Empire of Trauma (entire book except Part Two).

December 8 Accountability


Final Papers Due.