

Statement of the Editorial Collective

In recent decades, the traditional politics of ideological contest has been displaced by a politics of humanity. In many realms, left and right have given way to life and death. In both domestic and international contexts, the languages of human rights and humanitarianism are often spectacularly marshaled as moral claims to bolster multifarious policies and practices. And development—a central Cold War discourse—has evolved beyond strictly economic or institutional concerns to encompass matters once targeted in human rights activism and has expanded to address the acute humanitarian crises once treated as more episodic and temporary conditions.

The distinctions among human rights, humanitarianism, and development—which were once largely discrete categories—have blurred under the pressures of contemporary international politics, resource wars, and global policy. The integration of human rights, humanitarianism, and development under the rubric of “humanity” has meant, for better and worse, the erosion of the traditional meanings and applications of each. This convergence of the three concepts within a larger politics of humanity is arguably one of the signature phenomena of our time.

The global politics of humanity legitimates itself not on the old foundation of international humanitarian law or the more recent elaboration of international human rights; rather, it derives its legitimacy from its promise to generate new legal and political orders, to shape new social realities and relations, to establish new economic imperatives and interests, and to forge new cultural connections and values. And while the global politics of humanity is emphatically a politics of redemption, at least in its urge to mend, ameliorate, or even transform circumstances of disorder and atrocity, the very aspirational quality of the politics of humanity that lends it appeal often immunizes it from critical inquiry. The humanity to which activists and governments appeal—or hope to bring about—is never the same in each context, or even for all actors in the same project. These unacknowledged tensions, indeed, help define this novel form of global politics.

The goal of *Humanity* is to provide a single forum for the dispassionate, analytically focused examination of these trends and the political transformations that have reshaped the terms of liberation and idealism as well as the practices of domination and control.

For a number of years now, scholars working in their respective fields, publishing mostly in disciplinary journals, have been analyzing this convergence—its formative history and future implications. Many powerful insights about these ongoing transformations have emerged from diverse fields such as anthropology, history, law, literature, philosophy, and sociology. Too often, however, this work has remained cloistered from scholars in other fields and the world of practice, even though much of it shares a common intellectual genealogy; and the centripetal force of the disciplines has tended to perpetuate these divisions, even though all of them have a common stake

in the world. By encouraging novel approaches to the problems of “humanity” and inviting our readers and contributors to venture beyond their usual disciplines, we hope to clear some of the obstacles to conversation among scholars in various disciplines and between academics and practitioners. *Humanity* will provide an interdisciplinary forum to facilitate inquiry into the movement of human rights, humanitarianism, and development toward a politics of humanity—because “humanity” itself is a multidisciplinary question.

Most treatments of human rights, humanitarianism, and development—popular, scholarly, and activist—tend to remain tightly tethered to the agendas of the causes that gave them their original purpose and continuing energy. Our belief, as the editors of *Humanity*, is that the purposes of reflective activity and critique are not necessarily to refine and reform policies and to discover best practices. Advocacy and reform have their place, of course; but so too should analysis and critique, not just of methods, metrics, and goals but also of ideals and ideologies.

The mission of *Humanity* is to explore, from as many perspectives as possible, the multiple ways that invocations of “humanity” never tell the whole truth about the practices and people they defend or advance. For *Humanity*, “humanity” will always be a problem.