

10-22-1999

# Trends. The Myth of Apolitical Humanitarianism: The Nobel Prize and Doctors Without Borders

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## Recommended Citation

Editor (1999) "Trends. The Myth of Apolitical Humanitarianism: The Nobel Prize and Doctors Without Borders," *International Bulletin of Political Psychology*: Vol. 7 : Iss. 16 , Article 2.

Available at: <https://commons.erau.edu/ibpp/vol7/iss16/2>

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## International Bulletin of Political Psychology

Title: Trends. The Myth of Apolitical Humanitarianism: The Nobel Prize and Doctors Without Borders

Author: Editor

Volume: 7

Issue: 16

Date: 1999-10-22

Keywords: Doctors Without Borders, Humanitarianism, Political Psychology

Many humanitarians believe that their role and their mission--humanitarianism--is above, beyond, and without politics. They believe that they should attempt to provide for all who are in want and in need. That at no time should "sides" be taken or blame be apportioned. These humanitarians have problems with the recent awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize to the medical relief organization Doctors Without Borders.

Doctors Without Borders--besides providing much needed medical and health-related services--has identified perpetrators of violence and disaster, elucidated untoward consequences of succoring the morally, ethically, and legally guilty, and explicated the enmeshed, problematic nature of a political world. And this is as it should be. Any action or nonaction has a political consequence because of or regardless of intent. In a world of infinite need and finite resources, any action or nonaction is intrinsically imbued with politics because of or regardless of consequence.

To believe, state, or act otherwise is to live a fantasy. One might well work towards achieving a real world of less tragedy and evil. However, by believing oneself to live in a fantasy world--and that others should live in it as well--only can ensure that tragedy and evil go on. While this might make humanitarianism a growth industry, both means and ends become ever less humane. (See Auvinen, J., & Nafziger, E.W. (1999). The sources of human emergencies. *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 43, 267-290; Britt, T.W., & Adler, A. B. (1999). Stress and health during medical humanitarian assistance missions. *Military Medicine*, 164, 275-279; Summerfield, D. (1999). A critique of seven assumptions behind psychological trauma programmes in war-affected areas. *Social Science and Medicine*, 48, 1449-1462; The Peace Prize. (October 16, 1999). *The New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com>; Toffler, B. (October 18, 1999). Medical relief and a peace prize. *The New York Times*, p. A30.) (Keywords: Doctors Without Borders, Humanitarianism, Political Psychology.)