

The Suffering Other and the Deserving Self; When Humanitarianism Intersects with Individualism and Neo-Liberalism

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Abstract : This paper draws on a three-year research project investigating everyday moral reasoning in relation to donations and prosocial behaviour in the humanitarian context. The analysis focuses on the principle of deservingness by which members of the public decide who and under which conditions to help and illustrates how the speakers engage in ideological dilemmas. The paper focuses on the theme 'Something for nothing' to examine how the position of 'deserving' and the speaker's rights and duties in relation to victims of humanitarian crises are negotiated. Discursive analyses of this dilemmatic storyline of deservingness illuminate the cultural and ideological resources buttressing this construction. They also illustrate how humanitarianism intersects and clashes with other ideologies and value systems. The presentation will focus on the role of Individualism underpinned by Neo-liberalism ideology. The data propose that neo-liberal ideology, which endorses self-gratification, materialistic and individualistic ethics play an important role in decisions regarding humanitarian helping. The paper argues for the need for psychological research to engage more actively with the dilemmatic nature of moral reasoning in the humanitarian context, and to contextualize decisions about giving and helping within the socio-cultural and ideological landscape in which the helpers operate.

Keywords : humanitarianism, individualism, ideological dilemmas, discourse, neo-liberalism, prosocial behaviour

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