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ALTHOUGH THE HUMAN RIGHTS AND HUMANITARIAN movements have accomplished a great deal, the dark sides of their efforts and the costs of those accomplishments are not often faced squarely. These movements have been insufficiently pragmatic, unwilling to acknowledge their power and weigh carefully the costs as well as the benefits of their interventions. At the same time, humanitarian pragmatism can also have unfortunate consequences, as the record of humanitarian law in legally privileging and legitimating death and injury in war makes clear. The human rights movement can shrink the available vocabulary for defining social justice, crowding out other machinery for human emancipation. Too often, it has been a vocabulary of the center against the periphery, suggesting

that there is an “international community” to back up its assertions and denunciations, when that is rarely true. Although human rights activists are rightly suspicious of the state, they conceive emancipation as a correct relation between an individual holder of rights and the state, placing the state center stage as the marker of human freedom and social justice and making solutions that require sharing and compromise more difficult among individuals who all think their “right” to redress absolute. Human rights and humanitarian law transform the inevitable decisions that go with governance—and war—into “judgments,” applications of principle, thereby discouraging those who rule and make war from experiencing the freedom of human responsibility. Most troubling, it encourages us to imagine we know where

social justice lies, always and everywhere—just implement these rights. But justice is not fixed: it must be made anew in each place and time. The challenge for activists is to take re-

sponsibility for participating in the politics of that creation, instead of hiding behind the mask of neutral expertise, advising others on how they might become humane. (DK)