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In the Name of Humanity: The Government of Threat and Care

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Scientists, activists, state officials, NGOs, and others increasingly claim to speak and act on behalf of "humanity." The remarkable array of circumstances in which humanity is invoked testifies to the category's universal purchase. Yet what exactly does it mean to govern, fight, and care in the name of humanity? In this timely collection, leading anthropologists and cultural critics grapple with that question, examining configurations of humanity in relation to biotechnologies, the natural environment, and humanitarianism and human rights. From the global pharmaceutical industry, to forest conservation, to international criminal tribunals, the domains they analyze highlight the diversity of spaces and scales at which humanity is articulated.

The editors argue that ideas about humanity find concrete expression in the governing work that operationalizes those ideas to produce order, prosperity, and security. As a site of governance, humanity appears as both an object of care and a source of anxiety. Assertions that humanity is being threatened, whether by environmental catastrophe or political upheaval, provide a justification for the elaboration of new governing techniques. At the same time, humanity itself is identified as a threat (to nature, to nation, to global peace) which governance must contain. These apparently contradictory understandings of the relation of threat to the category of humanity coexist and remain in tension, helping to maintain the dynamic co-production of governance and humanity.

Contributors. Arun Agrawal, Joao Biehl , Didier Fassin, Allen Feldman, Ilana Feldman, Rebecca Hardin, S. Lochann Jain, Liisa Malkki, Adriana Petryna, Miriam Ticktin, Richard Ashby Wilson, Charles Zerner

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Jose Gray:

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