Caring Without Sharing: Philanthropy's Creation and Destruction of the Common World

Amy B. Schiller
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CARING WITHOUT SHARING:
Philanthropy’s Creation and Destruction of the Common World

by

AMY SCHILLER

A dissertation submitted to the Graduate Faculty in Political Science in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, The City University of New York

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Caring Without Sharing: Philanthropy’s Creation and Destruction of the Common World

by
Amy Schiller

This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Political Science to satisfy the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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ABSTRACT

Caring Without Sharing:
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Amy Schiller

Adviser: Corey Robin

This dissertation explores the multiple possibilities for philanthropy to build and to undermine the common world. Political science treatments of philanthropy have focused mainly on its role in the development of civil society, with a recent turn towards critiques of philanthropy as an instrument of elite power and tension between private wealth and democratic governance. In this dissertation, I examine how philanthropy can be either hierarchical or solidaristic, as well as ways in which it can reduce beneficiaries of philanthropy to instrumental roles, rather than building enduring spaces in which all can flourish. Based on genealogical tracing of philanthropy's evolution from ancient to contemporary contexts, I propose a framework for philanthropy to, under certain conditions, build and care for the common world, where philanthropic gifts create and maintain enduring spaces and institutions that allow the public realm to be the domain of appearance and plurality. Hannah Arendt translates philanthropia as “a readiness to share the world with other men.” This work proposes a new framework for political theories of philanthropy, one that can determine its role in public life based on donors' commitment to an enduring world and to sharing with others the responsibility for its care.
For my grandparents,
Bobby and Howie Schiller
Estelle and Jack Slutzky
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"Make for yourself a teacher, acquire for yourself a friend and judge every person with favor."

_Pirkei Avot 1:6_

“Make for yourself a teacher.” So begins a quote from a book of Mishna called _Pirkei Avot_, or _Teachings of Our Fathers_. I have encountered this verse many times. I did not begin to grasp its true meaning until Corey Robin came into my life.

The verse is a maxim about allowing others to shape us and remaining receptive to what they have to offer. We are to “make” our teachers for ourselves because it is our responsibility to seek out someone who inspires excellence, who humbles us and shows us what our best efforts might look like, often well beyond what we imagine our capabilities to be. Being taught is an active state, one we create as much as our teachers do. We have to choose to receive their wisdom, even when the demands feel relentless, the standards impossible. As Corey’s advisee I have had the immense privilege to make for myself such a teacher.

The verse goes on to say “acquire for yourself a friend.” Someone who is both teacher and friend, without whom I would not have survived, to say nothing of thrived and enjoyed, this formative chapter of my life is John McMahon. John is the brightest constellation of the most disparate stars. His very existence reconciles so many false dichotomies: instrumental and generous, rigorous and gentle, strategic and kind. His guidance and support are wells to which I hope to return eternally.

I thank Carol Gould for her early encouragement and her influence on my critique of philanthropy, which was deeply informed by her Philosophy of Karl Marx seminar. Leonard Feldman taught the very first course I took at the Graduate Center, and from day one has provided me with feedback that is incisive but always delivered with warmth and encouragement. They both model academic life informed by activism, culture, and friendship. It has been an honor to have them on my committee.

My friendship with Rachel Brown is one of the biggest gifts of graduate school. Something was put right in the world in the moment when she decided to befriend a girl whose chocolate-stained hands were flipping through Rilke, and in every hilarious, poetic, harmonious moment ever since.

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I landed at the Graduate Center through serendipity, specifically the combination of seeking an affordable master’s program in New York City and the recruitment efforts of Jack Jacobs (via his wife and my then-client, Susan Milamed). I’m so glad things worked out as they did. CUNY educated several of the grandparents to whom this work is dedicated, and despite its many challenges it remains a center for intellectual life in New York City and a path to economic stability for many of the city’s inhabitants. In particular, I am so grateful to have learned from Rosalind Petchesky, Susan Buck-Morss, Uday Mehta, Benedetto Fontana, and Jack Jacobs. I arrived in 2011 eager to study political writing with Peter Beinart, and it was under his tutelage that I published my first major public-facing work. John Kinsky’s work on the private-public tension of New York City’s parks was hugely helpful to me. Every time I see Robyn Marasco, whether at the Graduate Center or the gym, I walk away inspired to invest even more in developing my intellectual skills (to say nothing of my pull-up form). I was fortunate to make friends with several dazzling colleagues outside of my program, including Ashna Ali, Wendy Tronrud, and Iemanja Brown. Special thanks go to Margaret Cook, who has soared away from the Graduate Center but was hugely helpful to me in my early years and remains a dear friend. Theresa Moses and Earl Fleary patiently assisted me with important deadlines and details. I was fortunate to have wonderful mentors at Brandeis University, particularly Marion Smiley and Bernard Yack, my advisers in, respectively, Women’s and Gender Studies and Political Science. I will never forget Harleen Singh whispering in my ear at department graduation, “maybe we’ll welcome you back here as a colleague someday” – a moment that may well have catalyzed this undertaking.

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Oh look, more Mishna! “If there is no flour, there is no Torah; if there is no Torah, there is no flour,” Pirkei Avot 3:21. A life of study can be deeply fulfilling, but one needs economic security to make it sustainable. What made my graduate study possible were the marketable skills provided to me through years of fundraising consulting, all of which started with Raymond P. Happy. Because of him, as well as Eric Javier and Sevil Miyhandar, I have a vocation that sustains me and inspires me as a scholar. Lauren Cherubini has been my rock in every way possible – my anchor client and one of my most trusted friends. Ami Dar, Lorene Straka,
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I am blessed with devoted friends and sweethearts, who distracted me, encouraged me, fed me, humored me, and gave me community. These include Rose Thomas Bannister and Bob Bannister, Mary Galeti, Liz Skeen, Darnisa Amante, Kate Forester and Conrad Rushing, Paul Heckler, Tsivia Finman, Rachel Paneth-Pollak and Leo Gertner, David Sweeney, Elissa Goldstein, Naomi Adland, Debbie Vishnevsky, Tami Reiss, Noam Cohen, Ory Frumin and Rachel Berkson, Russ Agdern and Marisa Harford, Rachel Grant Meyer and Sarah Strnad, Rob Levy and Haley Greenwald-Gonella, Erika Scott and Noah Hertz-Bunzl, Evan Kalish, Emily Loubaton Tedeschi, Jonathan Horowitz, Nancy Block Reid, Sherri Cohen, Jason Meyer, Harpo Jaeger, Anat Halevy Hochberg, Kean Tonetti, Mamie Kanfer Stewart and Justin Stewart, Alyssa Frank Reichman, Jocelyn Berger and Stephanie Kolin, Sarah Kaplan, Anna Henderson Slade and Willis Slade. My gym and yoga communities have been sources of deeply necessary support and well-being, and so my thanks go to Laura Tulumbas, Kevin Lamb, Nicky Bienstock, Christine Boutrous, Alice Crandall, Cheryl Cipriani Lopate, Mace Duncan-Ohleyer, and Flien Moes.

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I dedicate this dissertation to my grandparents, Bobby and Howie Schiller and Estelle and Jack Slutzky. Their support enabled me to embark on graduate school and to write this dissertation. More importantly, their lived examples of generosity, lifelong learning, and dedication to building community inspired me to begin it. I am beyond grateful that they share in the joy of completing it.
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Introduction

From spring of 2010 until autumn of 2012, my professional life involved driving every day from Brooklyn, New York to Short Hills, New Jersey to run a capital campaign. The campaign was for a synagogue that reminded me in so many ways of the one in which I grew up – a large yet close-knit, prominent yet welcoming Reform temple, with a passionately engaged community.

“Capital campaign” refers to a fundraising drive of unprecedented size and scope, devoted to large projects that represented investment in the ongoing financial and physical sustainability of the institution. It is the period of time in which people devoted to the organization are asked to provide gifts above and beyond what they might consider a standard annual contribution, to help finance major purchases, construction, renovation, or other large-scale projects.

As the consultant in charge of testing, designing, and managing one such campaign, I ended up building close relationships with many synagogue members. This, too, was a reflection of the synagogue’s specialness; many members were very attached to their temple and devoted to ensuring its success. Whether dropping off kids at religious school, or volunteering at the monthly homeless shelter, or Shabbat services, this synagogue was a part of their daily lives. In my conversations with them, I learned what this synagogue represented for their families, the contrast it provided to the rest of their busy, driven lives. They would say things like, “we switched schools, we have so many different things going on, but the synagogue is where we stay grounded.” Many called it their “second home.”

My first year of coursework at the Graduate Center included part-time consulting to the synagogue as they concluded their campaign. This community was in the back on my mind as an example of how philanthropic efforts can bring out different sides of people. As my workload increased and their campaign entered its last and least-intensive phase, a year passed when I did not enter the building that had defined almost two years of my life, as all the construction for which I had fundraised had actually taken place.
Then I returned for the opening night gala. It was a housewarming party for six hundred people, all celebrating what they each considered their sacred home. The community had raised nearly a million dollars over the original goal. When I rounded the corner into the renovated entrance courtyard, my breath caught and I nearly burst into tears. That night, I had dozens of warm and delighted hellos. People reminisced about our early conversations in congregants’ living rooms about what then seemed like a daunting project to renovate a forty-year-old space that already had tremendous significance to its inhabitants. Temple spaces had new names, some in honor of people I had personally persuaded to make the biggest single gift of their lifetimes. I looked at the donor wall silently for several minutes, retelling in my mind the story behind every single name listed there.

This formative professional experience has come to represent my dearest hopes for what philanthropy can do and what it can mean for people. It showed me how philanthropy can manifest the ability to appear before one’s community, to disclose one’s deepest attachments and commitments, to reflect a plurality of people each showing up in their own way, to build something they would all share in common. However, I am deeply familiar with the less desirable expressions of philanthropy, the ways in which it has encouraged the consolidation of power among the elite, and the way its discourses have encouraged donors of every level to expect more control, more guarantees, more security in the outcome of their gifts, like customers rather than collaborators, and certainly more than citizens. Given philanthropy’s frequent undermining of public life, what possible defense can be mounted?

Philanthropy has the potential to either strengthen or to undermine public life. To see both possibilities clearly requires re-examining how philanthropy has operated in different contexts, and a set of criteria for evaluating different philanthropic activities rather than categorically praising or condemning the sector as a whole. A motivating belief of this project is that, when performed in ways that encourage solidarity and build lasting public things, philanthropy has a singular and important role to play in securing the common world.
The three motivating topics of this project are: what concerns can be properly addressed through philanthropy; why broad philanthropic participation matters; and why philanthropy is an appropriate mechanism for achieving both an enduring worldly environment and a plurality of appearances within it. One major aim of this project is to redirect the aim of philanthropy away from sustaining biological life, which is an increasing trend as approaches that focus on quantities of lives saved or livelihoods improved continue to gain traction. Instead I argue that philanthropy is better suited to world-building, through constructing and maintaining non-instrumental spaces and institutions like museums, memorials, and parks. One topical example of this comes from The Shed, a recently-opened center for contemporary interdisciplinary art, located at the otherwise behemoth commercial live-work colony on New York’s far west side, Hudson Yards. Justin Davidson’s positioning of The Shed reflects my thesis on what exactly such non-instrumental and explorative institutions can offer:

There is one grain of unpredictability in Related’s [Hudson Yards’ developer] grand oyster, one hope for humanism at Hudson Yards: the Shed, a lavishly funded but endearingly weird headquarters of interdisciplinary art...From a developer’s point of view, the Shed is a unique amenity, a museum–cum–concert venue steps from your office or kitchen...At the same time, though, contemporary arts institutions, unlike real-estate developers, have a high tolerance for failure and unpredictability.¹

The Shed is the only nonprofit institution at Hudson Yards. Its role as the “grain of unpredictability” and “hope for humanism” exemplifies what such spaces and projects do: they offer the possibility of transcending, even resisting, a collapse into cycles of production and consumption and relentless commodification. They provide the possibility of initiating something new, while serving tangible reminders of a world and ideas that endure beyond our immediate needs. Philanthropy builds signposts to humanity’s potential to create and to endure beyond our own mortality.

At the same time, such signposts cannot only be monuments to a small group of people who attempt to claim a place in the world for themselves only. World-building must be a project of co-creation, rather than imposition of one or a few people’s vision. While the electoral realm is not the same as the philanthropic, in American politics the number of political contributions and the average size of contribution have become increasingly salient factors in judging political candidates’ relevance to a broad electorate. Power reflects the initiatives of many individuals, disclosing their commitments and preferences through financial contributions. If philanthropically funded institutions are to foster attachment to the public realm, that is best accomplished by having a robust collective identifying itself as part of that public, and ideal forms of donor recognition will facilitate just that. If the temporality of structures is one key axis for determining philanthropy’s worldliness, then the degree of shared power and participation is the second. These axes correspond to several characteristics of Hannah Arendt’s political realm: appearance, contingency, endurance, and plurality.

Even with the previous two insights, one motivating question remains: to what extent is philanthropy normatively desirable? The precondition of any philanthropy is discretionary capital, of any amount, but often in extraordinary sums. While I offer preconditions that would redirect some of what is now private capital into more democratically-directed processes and institutions, I still leave room for the existence of surplus and desirable uses for it within philanthropy. One reason for doing so is that I believe even under the most egalitarian government committed to every citizen’s material security, there will always be something not provided by those means. Perhaps it will be niche art or scholarship, perhaps a park or a house of worship, but there will be something that depends on voluntary commitment to bring it into existence, for reasons that will not be legible to the larger governing apparatus, at least not to the extent of complete funding. The other reason for maintaining this possibility is that such opportunities provide necessary moments of individual appearance and natality. Even in a more economically balanced society, opportunities to initiate and persuade others to bring a new part
of the world into being are crucial to being human. I see maintaining them a form of love for that humanity.

**Outline**

Chapter One provides a review of the literature on philanthropy, as well as new thinking on Hannah Arendt. Political science scholarship on philanthropy has generally taken one of two approaches. The foundational literature portrays philanthropy as part of civil society, a practice that encourages pluralistic interests and acting in the interest of the common good. More recently, political scientists have started to look more closely and more skeptically at philanthropy's influence on public life, as economic inequality leads to philanthropy at a grander scale, with grand ambitions to match. I trace the emergence of the lines of critique throughout the past twenty years: first, the assertion that philanthropy is actually undermining civil society rather than strengthening it, second, that philanthropy is hollowing out the state through backdoor privatization of its operations as well as hoarding untaxed revenue for private discretion, and third, that philanthropy is funding the takeover of the state, through influence on public policy. I also address proposals for new ways of practicing philanthropy that have emerged in light of these critiques. I propose that philanthropy has the potential to do all that previous scholars have demonstrated, to build and to undermine civil society. Therefore, what is needed is a framework and criteria for what kinds of philanthropy have these respective effects. For that, I turn to Arendt and her interlocutors. The literature most relevant to this project addresses the question of material need, and how to reconcile such needs with the idea of worldliness. The relationship between life and world, the vulnerability of the human body and the solidity of the built world, is a crucial question for my study of philanthropy, specifically what philanthropy should rightly provide and why, as well as where it overreaches.

Chapter Two elaborates on this relationship, focusing on the interdependency of phenomenology and relationships. I examine how, in Arendt, appearance intervenes where we
might otherwise reduce everyone and everything to its functional value, thus implying and validating an expiration date for everything populating the world. The lasting world teaches us to look beyond the cycles of consumption and production through the existence of things that endure beyond — outside, even — of functional purpose. I argue that worldbuilding does not diminish human life; it instead contains, honors and lends meaning to human lives and therefore encourages an understanding of other people that has the potential for solidarity rather than instrumentalization. Culture includes the maintenance of things whose purpose is to appear and to represent beauty. Therefore, culture contains the signposts that encourage a proper public mentality. This chapter closes with a matrix, a graphic representation of how endurance and solidarity, on the one hand, and instrumentalization and sovereignty, reinforce one another. This matrix is a guide for evaluating the practices and objects of philanthropy, historically and in the contemporary moment.

The subsequent three chapters elaborate on how those practices have shifted, in ways that have, on balance, yielded an instrumental, biopolitical, and sovereignic milieu in philanthropy. In Chapter Three, my genealogy of philanthropy shows the effects of two world-historical shifts, first the emergence of early Christianity, then the early modern welfare state. These shifts affected the shared understanding of what philanthropy should do for society, and the relations that resulted from different approaches vis-a-vis building a common world or sustaining basic survival. My trajectory traces how the original model of building a shared world of human cultivation was explicitly rejected for one of sustaining bodies for some external purpose, whether salvation or labor. In the Gilded Age, this trajectory intensified as charity became more formalized and operated on a grander institutional scale than ever before, yet simultaneously, new possibilities emerged for philanthropy that would engender solidarity and civic identity. At times this came through a return to classical eugertism, meaning the sponsorship of civic institutions like museums, parks, and libraries. Another version came from
the settlement houses, which managed to combine material sustenance with fuller human cultivation amongst their residents, and encouraged cross-class advocacy for political reforms.

Chapter Four, however, demonstrates how the present moment is a high-water mark for philanthropy that imposes rather than co-creates, that liquidates rather than builds the world. Financialization has overtaken the philanthropic realm, reducing nonprofit interventions to their measurable outputs and proposing investment and consumerism as superior modes of deploying capital to social issues. The epistemological shift is most significant here, as I show how today’s philanthropists pursue their projects with the detached analytical standpoint of a tech engineer or investment banker (which many of them are), and have convinced givers at all levels to expect control over the results of their gifts. One extreme expression of the contemporary philanthropic gestalt, the Effective Altruism movement, explicitly rejects any gifts that might build an enduring world, in favor of constantly re-calculated returns, measured in the number of years of life yielded by different nonprofit interventions. Contemporary philanthropy is not just overtaking more worldly forms of philanthropy — it is actively rejecting them and casting them as ethically undesirable.

Finally, Chapter Five provides redemptive examples of how philanthropy has and can continue to build the common world. I return to Arendt as well as Bonnie Honig, to articulate the importance of the built world in facilitating attachment to the public realm and to other people. Fundraising campaigns oriented towards projects that fulfill this promise also enact appearance and solidarity in their recognition methods, be it the first-ever “crowd-funding” campaign to build the Statue of Liberty’s pedestal or the recent completion of the National Museum of African-American History and Culture. These profiles are expansions on the experience I had at the Short Hills synagogue: communal efforts that celebrated individual attachment and pride, and gave them a form and a home in the world.
Chapter 1
Philanthropy in Political Science Literature

This project is part of a small but growing body of scholarship that challenges the once-conventional claim that philanthropy is part of civil society, a complement to government and a facilitator of civic participation in public life.¹ Countering the arguments of the late 20th century, recent scholarship offers a more skeptical view of philanthropy’s public benefit, particularly in a context of widening economic inequality.² These newer treatments view philanthropy as having shifted from a complement to the state to its antagonist and underminer. Scholars now argue that, rather than contributing a public good, philanthropists seek to claim public goods for their private control. In other words, philanthropy is not necessarily assumed to transform private control into public benefit.

Philanthropy’s blend of private money and public impact makes the topic noteworthy under neoliberalism, an ideological regime that conflates or subsumes public benefit with market activity.³ Samantha King and KJ Saltman were the first to identify a neoliberal influence on contemporary philanthropy.⁴ In response to the classical treatments of philanthropy as additive to civil society, new lines of inquiry include: concern about the size and accountability

of private philanthropic foundations; the spread of market-based language and frameworks within philanthropy discourse; the irreconcilability of private accumulation and wealth-holders’ desire to address major social problems; the introduction of privately-funded stakeholders into public policymaking; general consolidation of elite power, at the expense of democratic counterweights; and the unchecked rise of technocratic approaches that major philanthropists impose on social change initiatives. In sum, these criticisms show how philanthropy acts as a privatizing and anti-democratic force, one that reinforces the supremacy of the market’s ideologies, frameworks, and leadership.

Foundations of Political Science Treatments of Philanthropy

The foundational literature for philanthropy studies comes from civil society theorists, who view giving as an expression of goodwill and voluntary public spiritedness. Bruce Sievers, who has produced several critiques of the takeover of philanthropy by market-based ideologies and vocabularies, also names philanthropy as one of the “seven core elements” of civil society and “society's most important assets for combining private and public purposes.” According to this literature, civil society functions as a mediating sphere between state and market and nurtures democratic participation. Payton characterizes philanthropy as not just part of civil society but as its defining praxis; it is one of “the four elements that make America work.” Both Payton and Fleishman argue that philanthropy and American democracy are interdependent. According to

6 Bruce Sievers, *Civil Society, Philanthropy and the Fate of the Commons*. (Lebanon, NH; Tufts University Press, 2010), xiv.
7 Sievers, 122.
Payton, “[the] future of the free, open, and democratic society is directly linked to the vitality of the philanthropic tradition” while Fleishman names philanthropic foundations as “an integral part” of the American civic sector, “an unprecedented social phenomenon...arguably the most dynamic, inclusive and democratic society the world has ever seen.”

To Sievers, the philanthropic sector advances the normative value of the public good, which is often under siege: “one might look to philanthropy...to help restore the balance in civil society in favor of a public mission...[and] champion its renewal.” Sievers and Payton express optimism about and faith in philanthropy’s macro-level commitment to the public good (not just the varied interests of its practitioners, but the overarching ideal). Fleishman concurs: “Without foundations...public discourse on government policy and social issues would be greatly impoverished...” According to Sievers, philanthropy is one of the seven constitutive elements of civil society, along with the rule of law, private associations, a system of free expression, and normative traditions of individual rights, tolerance and the common good.

Political scientists also see philanthropy’s relationship to the state as complementary. Philanthropy can supplement the state by offering noncompeting avenues for public action, sometimes in ways that transform minority concerns into broader public priorities, as private funders invest in research, advocacy, or alternative institution-building on subjects that public institutions ignore. According to Robert Reich, the democratic failings of philanthropic foundations are redeemed by what he calls “the discovery argument”:

Foundations operate in support of...‘discovery”—an experimentalist approach to funding and assessing long-time-horizon policy innovations—they can be important contributors to democratic societies.

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10 Fleishman, 71.
11 Sievers, xvii.
12 Fleishman, 89.
The notion of philanthropy as an incubator of government policies and methods emerged from a narrative about mid-century philanthropy’s role in shaping public policy. Examples include the Ford Foundation’s funding of what eventually became the Public Broadcasting Service and the Carnegie Corporation’s sponsoring of studies that became the federal Pell Grant program. Perhaps the most potent example of foundations as vital buttresses for state policy is the Aaron Diamond Foundation, which in 1987 devoted all of its resources to AIDS research, well in advance of government funding for such projects at the National Institute of Health and research universities.

These examples demonstrate how philanthropy has served as a laboratory for public policy, a private catalyst for what can only be fully realized through state policy. This analysis places philanthropy as an ally to the state, where it utilizes its unique strengths to incubate programs, gather and analyze data, and experiment with different approaches to major issues, yet positions those efforts in service to actions that can be adopted by the state, as the mechanism for achieving maximum improvement. The mid-twentieth-century history of philanthropy demonstrates a reciprocal humility about the scale of each sector and a division of labor that maintains the pragmatic value of flexible, private capital while preserving the democratic values of state institutions.

Theorists of this persuasion ascribe a great deal of power to the state, and therefore see philanthropy as a necessary supplement or counterweight to the state, but never a direct competitor. The philanthropy pluralists evaluate philanthropy’s relationship to the state as a realm that preserves minority interests without necessarily encroaching on the legitimacy of the state.

Maribel Morey shows the extent to which, even in the Gilded Age, philanthropists were subordinate to the government (specifically the presidency), and how profoundly that relationship has since been inverted, to the point where government figures now seek the goodwill of philanthropists. When Andrew Carnegie sold Carnegie Steel to J. Pierpont Morgan,
he sent a letter to incoming president Theodore Roosevelt describing his happiness at the opportunity to show gratitude and love to the country by funding the Carnegie Institution of Washington as a national institute for scientific research. Carnegie asked for the president’s approval and invited him to serve on the Institution’s first board of trustees. Roosevelt accepted the invitation but expressed “contemptuous abhorrence” towards Carnegie in private correspondence, adding, “[all] the suffering from Spanish war comes far short of the suffering, preventable and non-preventable, among the operators of the Carnegie steel works.”

According to Morey, “a big difference between Carnegie’s moment and [now] is who in the philanthropy-government relationship is doing the admiring and pursuing.” Morey uses a White House summit sponsored by President Obama’s White House Office of Social Innovation as a point of comparison. The very existence of this office demonstrates the courtship of private donors on the part of government: the Office of Social Innovation’s mission was “giving social entrepreneurs and other non-profit leaders a greater voice in public policy debates of the day.” The Obama Administration sought to build a policy agenda around new practices in the social sector: nonprofits with earned income strategies, impact investing, corporate social responsibility. To that end, it hosted several conferences on non-profits and philanthropy at the White House.

Covering one of those conferences, Johnson and Johnson heir Jamie Johnson wrote that an administration official encouraged the attendees to “embrace the White House” as a partner and catalyst in helping philanthropists put their ideals into practice. Where Carnegie sought the approval and imprimatur of the White House in launching his philanthropic initiatives,

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15 Morey, “Philanthropy and the White House.”
representatives of the president now sell the federal government as a partner to philanthropists. In some cases, the people being courted are not the existing philanthropic decision-makers but their heirs, the next generation of potential philanthropists. Johnson describes their demeanors at this Summit as passively arrogant — they “seemed to have sat back and listened, waiting for an emotion or a thought to draw them in,” reflected their awareness that the White House was seeking their prestige and resources.

The inversion of the power dynamic between government and philanthropy tracks a larger shift in how philanthropy’s practitioners and spokespeople see their role in society. This shift challenges the consensus that philanthropy supports democracy and supplements the state. Now philanthropy reflects the celebration (or at least, lack of regulation) of private wealth, and rather than supplementing the state as a form of democratic action, it operates more as an extension of the market. Sievers noted how the then-newly en vogue “venture philanthropy” might distort the role of philanthropy in encouraging a thriving civil society:

Nonprofits may be drawn though competition into emulating business practices that distort their missions. Sector-blurring, therefore, may pose a serious challenge to the nonprofit sector, calling more for a border patrol than a welcome wagon—with the urgent requirement for all of us to gain increasing clarity about what makes the nonprofit mission distinctive.18

The colonization of philanthropy by market ideology and practice took several forms over the past several decades. The pluralism thesis, that philanthropy enhances democracy by enhancing pluralistic voices and institutions, became vulnerable when philanthropists began using their giving to influence policy for public education (and elsewhere), and when private foundations had grown in scope and ambition without corresponding oversight, and in fact with tax-deduction benefits. At the same time, philanthropy was increasingly described not as a gift made for the public good but as an investment or a purchase intended to generate specific social

17 Johnson, “White House Hosts Next Generation.”
returns. Some felt that philanthropy should operate more like an extension of for-profit investment, in a manner called “philanthrocapitalism,” while “strategic philanthropy” discourse advanced increasingly technocratic approaches to broader social problems. These trends have culminated in a broader ideology: philanthropy as a regime of privatization, another method by which elites can exert control and dictate the terms of public life.

**Hollowing Out Civil Society: Philanthrocapitalism**

In their 2008 book *Philanthrocapitalism*, Michael Green and Matthew Bishop argue that philanthrocapitalism involves a novel way of doing philanthropy, one that emulates the way business is done in the for-profit capitalist world. This would include using commerce to generate revenue as well as applying more analytical and quantitative evaluation methods to social missions. They also propose that “capitalism itself can be naturally philanthropic.”

Citing a wide range of activities under the umbrella term of philanthrocapitalism, they argue that money-making can directly yield charitable dollars. For example, an investment fund can donate half of every percentage point of profit to a connected foundation for helping children throughout Africa. Venture capitalists put together “growth capital” for nonprofits, backing projects like microfinance that promise to recover and reinvest small loans to entrepreneurs in poor communities. These examples are particularly explicit manifestations of merging of nonprofit and for-profit entities and practices, and asserting that one can serve the other with maximum efficacy. The book profiles major names in philanthropy like Bill Gates, George Soros, Pierre Omidyar, and Michael Bloomberg who have influenced how philanthropy is practiced and

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discussed, in ways that reflect the philanthrocapitalist “win-win” mentality. As Joel Fleishman wrote in a sympathetic review, philanthrocapitalism represents “the new noblesse oblige.”

The release of Philanthrocapitalism provoked critical responses from practitioners in philanthropy and the nonprofit sector. In his 2010 book Small Change, Michael Edwards argued that this new economic philanthropy discourse, with its turn towards market practices and rubrics, was undermining political organizing and replacing collective demands for public goods with individual efforts. A funding fad like microfinance only increased access to self-employment opportunities, without addressing larger obstacles that might be resolved through policy changes:

Microfinance...finances consumption, including spending on health and education that are vital for the future, but that doesn’t move [poor people] out of poverty on its own. That requires other and more complicated measures to develop a sustainable livelihood...to address the deeper issues...that keep certain people poor – land rights, for example, or patriarchal social structures; and to get governments to redistribute resources on the necessary scale...”

David Bosworth’s essay “Cultural Contradictions of Philanthrocapitalism” went a step further, stating that the production of wealth generates the very social inequalities that the same beneficiaries claim to address and resolve through philanthropy:

Rather than simply offering a compensation for the system’s flaws, it also demands a conversion to that same system’s philosophy...As such these are not acts of material generosity so much as ones of intellectual and managerial hubris.”

Both Edwards and Bosworth identify how business and market thinking damages civil society. Bosworth’s diagnosis of hubris is borne out by the ambition of contemporary philanthropists

22 Michael S. Edwards, Small Change: Why Business Won’t Save the World. (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler, 2010), 40
who use this new form of social spending not only to improve the world, but to set the terms by which those improvements happen.

Hollowing Out the State: Philanthro-Policymaking and the Anti-Democratic Charitable Foundation

The trajectory of philanthropy scholarship vis-a-vis the state can be traced through the evolution of one scholar in particular: Rob Reich. In earlier treatments of philanthropy’s role in democracy, Reich has supported the pluralism thesis, in which philanthropy can advance minority interests and concerns. In his most recent book, Just Giving, Reich criticizes philanthropy as a “plutocratic exercise of power,” whose entwinement with government policy is problematic rather than supportive. If philanthrocapitalism represents the colonization of philanthropy by market-based practices and a way in which philanthropy now acts in opposition to civil society rather than one of its elements, the joint trends of philanthro-policymaking and the growth of charitable foundations represent ways in which philanthropy undermines the state. In her 2011 article, “Why PhilanthroPolicymaking Matters,” Robin Rogers pointed out how philanthropist claimed policymaking authority. Like philanthrocapitalism, philanthropolicymaking applies to several different things. At its most basic level, it can refer to private funding towards organizational change within the public sector (i.e. research or pilot programs into new ways of conducting public programs). Popular media outlets like Forbes, along with the field-defining trade magazine, the Stanford Social Innovation Review (SSIR), covered various ways in which philanthropic funding could help governments “innovate” in producing good public outcomes. In a 2013 article for SSIR, Nikhil R. Sahni, Maxwell Wessel, & Clayton M. Christensen, described how “public sector innovators are improving government by replicating the market conditions that have long fostered breakthrough innovation in the private

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sector.”

25 Sahni, Wessel and Christensen use the District of Columbia’s Department of Transportation’s shift away from public employee-monitored parking meters to a remotely-managed, mobile-phone-based system, administered by a private firm; interestingly, SSIR cites the development of a national 911 system, funded by the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation throughout the 1970s—26 a precedent that eventually encouraged greater government oversight rather than private subcontracting. Today, this form of philanthropic influence over the state introduces the same private market logics and practices into the state, but with the stated interest of strengthening government operations.

A more expansive and aggressive form of philanthro-policy making is the use of philanthropic funds to advocate for a particular approach to a public policy issue, at times through research, at times through direct lobbying or (very specific and restricted) offers of capital to fund the philanthropist’s project under public auspices. Philanthropically-funded lobbying goes beyond assistance with how governments implement policy. Instead, philanthro-policymaking refers to donors using their capital to change the ideology and content of policy as a whole. Philanthro-policymaking also goes beyond transparent forms of citizen activism. As Kristin Goss’s research shows, large gifts are used to engage both publicly and privately in the governance process in ways that move beyond giving to political campaigns.

Public education and poverty alleviation are two examples where philanthropic funding for research, marketing, and organizing around policy issues has convinced public actors to


26 See Scott Kohler, “The Emergency Medical Services Program of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation.” Casebook for The Foundation: A Great American Secret. Ed. Joel Fleishman, Scott Kohler (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007). “In 1973, only 11 percent of people in the areas supported by the Johnson Foundation program had access to 911, or some equivalent emergency phone number. By the program’s end, in 1977, 95 percent of them did...progress in the Foundation’s forty-four grant areas did serve as a model of the emergency phone number’s effectiveness. In this way, Foundation dollars were the spur that encouraged subsequent federal support.
make major changes, up to the overall framing of a public policy issue. Sarah Reckhow traces this in her book on public education, *Follow the Money: How Foundation Dollars Change Public School Politics*, and Erica Kohl-Arenas does the same for poverty alleviation in *The Self-Help Myth: How Philanthropy Fails to Alleviate Poverty*. Kohl-Arenas’s study demonstrated how foundations “fail to address poverty and inequality by setting firm boundaries around definitions of self-help” and set the terms of the debate in a way that “[shifted] the focus away from the social, political, and economic relationships of power that produce and maintain poverty.”

She uses three case studies of philanthropic intervention into farm worker organizing efforts in California, all of which demonstrate foundations pressuring a worker’s movement to move away from labor rights organizing and towards less controversial policy areas, such as migrant workers receiving “pathways to citizenship,” which are more appealing to agricultural employers.

Reckhow and other scholars point out that in public education, Bill Gates, Eli Broad, and the Walton Family are now top influencers on policy. All three pursue education portfolios with the same components: charter schools, high-stakes standardized testing for students, merit pay for teachers based on improved test scores, firing teachers and closing schools when scores don’t rise, and longitudinal data collection on the performance of every student and every teacher. The day before the first Democratic presidential candidates’ debate in 2007, Gates and Broad announced that they were jointly funding a $60 million campaign to get both political parties to address the foundations’ version of education reform. Linsey McGoey points out that the Gates Foundation is now the largest single private supporter of U.S. primary and secondary education, and its favored reforms include increased standardized testing, online education, pay-for-performance for teachers, and increased data collection to measure both student and teacher

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performance. Arne Duncan, Obama’s Secretary of Education, worked closely with both foundations and shared many of their goals for education reform.

In a 2013 roundtable, the Boston Review asked if foundations were inherently anti-democratic. The responses show the lingering tension between supporters of philanthropy as an element of civil society and critics who see a consolidation of elite power that is used to shape public life without any accountability or resistance. Reich reiterated the pluralism and innovation arguments in favor of philanthropy writ-large, applied here to foundations:

Because donors have diverse preferences about the goods they wish to fund philanthropically, foundations can be a source of funding for the minority public goods or controversial public goods that a democratic state will not or cannot fund. Foundations thus partially decentralize the definition and production of public goods.28 To scholars who are extrapolating the implications of philanthropic activity in the poverty alleviation and public education sectors, philanthropic dollars have only become stronger as a form of political influence. They have centralized, rather than de-centralized, approaches to providing public goods. New research offers insight into how philanthro-policymaking exerts control over the state, taking over policy discussions from many angles: agenda-setting through neutralization of mass political movements, think tanks and other research efforts that justify a particular approach to policy, supplemental funding that influences how public institutions operate. As opposed to expanding democracy, there is little democratic counterpoint to the dollars used by philanthropists to shape public policies — a problem that is exacerbated by the tax incentives extended towards private dollars earmarked for charitable purposes, which currently enjoy extensive protection from both taxation and external oversight.

A standard nonprofit grantmaking foundation operates under few requirements: a board of directors composed of at least three members, spending a minimum of 5% of its assets each year, filing a 990 tax return detailing each grant, the beneficiaries, and the amounts given.

Compliance with these requirements allows the assets of the foundation to remain untaxed, as charitable giving in escrow. Large foundations are not unprecedented; the Carnegie Corporation was founded with $125 million in 1911, equivalent to $3.3 billion in 2017. However, the scale of today’s major foundations dwarfs that of Carnegie, which caused major controversy at its founding. The assets of the Gates Foundation and the Gates Trust together total more than $65 billion.\footnote{Reich, “What Are Foundations For?”} If the combined entities were a nation, it would have the 65th-highest GDP in the world. When combined with donors’ aforementioned interests in shaping public policy, foundations must be considered a tool for lobbying, one that circumvents both the liabilities of taxation and of any independent oversight, while also a tax incentive structure for hoarding wealth and enabling private discretion over its use.

Meanwhile, new financial vehicles provide even more discretion and protection from taxation, without a mandate for any minimum annual spending (which foundations do have). Where a foundation has to perform charitable giving on an annual basis, and demonstrate that it holds board meetings and spends 5% of its assets, a donor advised fund operates like a charitable checking account for donors wishing to write off gifts without necessarily directing it to specific nonprofits. Some donor-advised funds are held at charitable banking arms of firms like Fidelity or Vanguard, while others are housed at community foundations. They are especially useful as vehicles for highly-appreciated assets (real estate, securities) which otherwise would be subject to significant taxation. Parking these assets with a charitable holding party is sufficient to protect them from capital gains taxes, while claiming a charitable deduction on that year’s taxes. The donor then submits requests for any grants they do want to make, at any time. The donor’s tax benefits are therefore secured before actually allocating any gifts for nonprofits. National Philanthropic Trust reports that donor-advised funds held around $85
billion in 2016 and grew to $110.1 billion in 2017.\textsuperscript{30} One firm, Schwab Charitable, reported that the 2017 changes to the tax code spurred a 91 percent increase in new donor advised funds.\textsuperscript{31}

When tax policy, financial vehicles, and documented instances of philanthropic activism are placed alongside each other, political scientists can see how the relationship of philanthropy to the state might be more antagonistic than supplementary. Philanthropists are more aggressive than ever about using philanthropy as a form of lobbying or directly shaping policy, they are simultaneously starving the state of tax revenue through vehicles that increasingly favor donor control over public accountability. Philanthropy therefore is colonizing the state, while simultaneously weakening the state’s claim over their assets or even transparency over expenditures that are nominally beneficial to the public.

**Philanthropy As A Regime of Privatization**

What philanthrocapitalism, philanthropolicymaking, and the growth of charitable financial vehicles all share is an ideology of increasing the influence of privately-held and privately-pverseen money over public life. In contrast to the civil society thesis, philanthropy is now being examined as a way of funding social welfare that operates as an alternative to, rather than an extension of, the state, with less transparency, oversight, or public participation in decision-making. Based on this line of critique, philanthropy is a practice that hollows out, instead of reinforcing, both civil society and the state. As philanthropy has been infused with market discourse and practices, and philanthropists become more ambitious about influencing public policy, the most holistic critiques of philanthropy offer interpretations of how it functions as an overall regime of privatization. The first wave of criticism, which began around

philanthrocapitalism, focused on the hollowing out of civil society, while the second focused on the colonization of the state by philanthropists. The culmination of those tandem trends is found in critiques that show how philanthropists are engaged in an epistemological process as much as an operational one, turning all sectors, including philanthropy, into a version of the market. To these critics, the privatizing regime of philanthropy encompasses donors becoming more powerful, sovereign, and detached from the societies that their gifts will affect, which is supported by the methods of designing and evaluating philanthropically-supported programs.

The professionalization of giving, adaptation of quantifiable metrics, and reliance on technocratic methods to address social problems have yielded what Kentaro Toyamo, previously a Gates Foundation employee, calls “packaged interventions” and “the cult of technology.”32 Kavita Ramdas describes her experiences as the Executive Director of the Global Fund for Women, which involved conflicting worldviews between staff members and potential funders, wherein the latter sought to identify discrete issues — maternal mortality, income inequality, education levels, etc. — to more precisely direct their philanthropic resources. From Ramdas’ perspective,

The GWF and similar organisations have worked for years to explain that women’s rights live in the murky and unclear intersections between economic inequalities, discriminatory traditional and cultural practices, political and personal lack of power, and violence - in the home, in intimate relationships, and on the streets and battlefields. For this reason, the Global Fund for Women has sought to support women’s own articulations of their struggle for justice and equality by working at various levels and within all the structures where women and girls are systematically disempowered. Yet, as we seek to raise funds from new sources, we find ourselves struggling for ways to "sell" our model...33

In Ramdas’ example, philanthropy operates as a privatizing ideology. The discourse with potential donors requires clear (presumably quantified) costs and benefits, and a strict focus on singular problems that can be unilaterally improved. The practices of the organization itself are

thus marketized. Susan Ostrander argues that philanthropy now provides donors increased control, through mechanisms like donor-advised funds and philanthropic advisers, alongside the increase in donor oversight, following the re-articulation of giving as a form of investment.34

This dynamic does not encourage deliberation or shared decision-making power with funding recipients or proposed beneficiaries. As Catherine Tumber described this new mentality,

The suffering are units to be managed effectively; the more of them so managed, the better from an ethical perspective...putting painful, conflict-ridden political recourse at a dim remove. That is what happens when you reduce self and others to quantifiable widgets, much as the global financial markets regard us.35

Thus, citizens become consumers, donors who relinquish control over funds into investors who manage their “yields,” and philanthropists into social engineers who seek to manage humanity towards their own ends.

**Alternative Paths for Philanthropy**

New visions for philanthropy that recognize and try to reclaim philanthropy from its current milieu of technocracy and privatization include those of Jeremy Beer and William Schambra, who look to historical precedents where philanthropy was more localized, and Chiara Cordelli and Emma Saunders-Hastings, who propose ways of limiting philanthropists’ discretion both in terms of how much money they have to donate as they choose, and in terms of reducing their oversight over use of donated funds. These alternatives all respond to the rise of donor power — over grantees, public institutions, and widespread understandings of what obligations elite members of society have to others.


Beer and Schambra represent what might imperfectly be called the “restorationist” response to the neoliberal turn in philanthropy. In contrast to the global roaming of influential philanthropists, ever in search of better yield per philanthropic dollar, Beer advocates “philanthrolocalism” a philosophy of giving that prioritizes helping one’s own place of residence, neighbors, religious, cultural and civil associations, and environment. Both Beer and Schambra reject the professionalized, jargon-laden practices of “strategic” philanthropy, favoring a folkish loyalty and earnest civic dedication over the sterile calculations of experts. Schambra views a return to an epistemologically humble, relationship-driven model of philanthropy as return to Tocquevillean and Aristotelian ideals. To Schambra, philanthropy that supports face-to-face contact with one’s fellow citizens and shared, concrete actions to help those in need provides training in self-governance and citizenship. Schambra aspires to a “vast, bewildering and ever-growing profusion of nonprofits” in the face of demands to streamline, strategize, and otherwise engineer social progress from a detached perch of expertise. Both Schambra and Beer want to return to philanthropy as a non-market practice, one that more closely resembles the foundational interpretation of philanthropy as a component of civil society — but they believe that is only possible on a small, community-by-community basis, and with local control in the place of grand strategy. These proposals overlap with those of Saunders-Hastings and Cordelli, but the latter mount their critiques more firmly on justice grounds. To them, philanthropy is only an exercise of civic bonds if basic material rights are enjoyed by all citizens.

Saunders-Hastings praises a model of direct cash transfer, which has often been implemented on a global scale, transferring money to poor households in Kenya, Uganda and Rwanda, by the organization GiveDirectly. The appeal of this form of giving is that recipients alone decide the use to which they will put their funds. These are unconditional cash transfers, rather than mediated grants or microloans with specified business purchases. Where Schambra and Beer see geographic limitation as the key to reducing donors’ power, Saunders-Hastings
proposes that less oversight by donors over recipients’ use of funds is the key to changing the balance of power:

programs like GiveDirectly should be celebrated for their forthright anti-paternalism: they treat recipients as competent to decide how to spend charitable funds, without the tutelage of millionaire “trustees.” In that sense, these programs represent an important advance, and a useful baseline against which to assess other kinds of philanthropy.\textsuperscript{36}

Chiara Cordelli’s proposal builds on Saunders-Hastings’ recommendation of reducing donor oversight over recipients, and says that donors are not entitled to any personal discretion in the choice of their gifts. To Cordelli, the discretion afforded to philanthropists to donate to any cause of their choosing without regard for unmet needs must be curtailed and their philanthropic dollars considered a form of back pay for under-contributing to fundamental public goods. If a citizen has surplus capital to use for philanthropic projects, but the possession of such capital results from insufficient taxation, that capital is not rightly owned and must be restored to public provision. Cordelli argues that one cannot steal a bike and then provide the victim of the theft with a microwave as replacement but rather should only give back the bike or its equivalent.\textsuperscript{37}

Cordelli therefore rejects both the investor and the co-citizen vision of philanthropy, and proposes that a pluralist civil society is less important than a baseline of “sufficientarian” justice that would resemble retroactive re-taxation. Philanthropic resources must be claimed for things like basic healthcare and education, as compensation for harm caused by reduced taxation and cuts to public goods. According to Cordelli, in circumstances where the state does not fully fund “justice-required goods,” citizens cannot be assumed to have discharged their distributive duties. Donations should be made as if repaying a debt, rather than indulging personal identity, beliefs, or personal attachments (as they would be in Beer and Schambra’s vision). Her overriding standard is that donors’ money be spent exclusively on “bringing their co-citizens as

\textsuperscript{36} Reich, et al, \textit{Philanthropy in Democratic Societies}, 255.
close as possible to a pre-harm baseline, defined according to sufficientarian principles of justice.”

The question for philanthropists then becomes not, what is the “best” use of “my” funds, but rather, have I contributed my just share to the public’s needs, such that I may now turn to more expressive choices in giving? Cordelli avoids naming specific goods or services that would be considered public needs, but for a mention of public education and maternal and neonatal medical care as “time-sensitive” in addition to “justice-required” on the basis of harm. This expectation still demands some illustration of what would be categorized as a “justice-required good,” that is, the state’s baseline distributive responsibility, and what is an expressive good, one provided due to the tastes of a particular donor. Ted Lechterman provides a helpful framework for distinguishing between the two. Echoing Cordelli, Lechterman proposes that the state is “required to provide goods that are instruments of basic justice,” which includes goods related to the provision of a decent social minimum, such as basic education, health insurance, legal insurance, and unemployment insurance.

Cordelli and Lechterman both see basic justice as the first-order priority. Cordelli’s proposal works around the current reality of under-taxed wealth by reclaiming it to function as if it were in fact public revenue, repaying a debt to society (with a precise definition of what exactly the debt in question is.) Lechterman goes beyond Cordelli’s proposed method of redistribution to say that philanthropy is both incapable and normatively undesirable as the provider of basic goods. Rather than egalitarian distribution of resources, Lechterman’s normative ideal is democratic sovereignty: if these vehicles for basic justice are not provided by the state, but by private benefactors, “citizens are deprived of the equal opportunity for influence over matters that affect their most basic interests.”

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38 Reich, et al, Philanthropy in Democratic Societies, 272.
40 Lechterman, 3.
the social minimum undermines the principle of democratic sovereignty, and therefore the ability for citizens to have equal status as such.

The division between what is rightly the role of the state, that is, providing justice-required goods, and what might be appropriately funded by philanthropy becomes clearer as Lechterman identifies causes that “address matters that are distant from those of basic justice”: festivals, museums, space exploration, research into rare medical conditions.\footnote{Lechterman, 4.} That is, things not universally required for the “decent social minimum.”

These new proposals for how philanthropy should be practiced have begun to focus on not just how philanthropists should operate, but what goods philanthropy can and should fund. The distinction that Lechterman and Cordelli draw between material need and things that are perhaps supplemental, or less urgent, is an important one for philanthropy, but perhaps for different reasons than the ones they identify. What these new voices on philanthropy point to is the importance of dealing with material needs as matters of justice, but there is a corollary to this point. Philanthropy can fund things which do not serve an urgent, instrumental purpose, creating and sustaining enduring, common spaces for their own sake. Arendt’s work on worldliness, culture, and new explorations of her distinction between the social and the political, help to ground a more capacious, nuanced, and generative theory of philanthropy, one that accounts for what philanthropy can provide alongside critiques of how it currently undermines public life.

**New Thinking on Arendt and the Social-Political Divide**

Interpretations of Arendt’s understanding of the political and social realms provide theoretical scaffolding for philanthropy’s significance in public life. *On Revolution* and *The Human Condition* contain Arendt’s most prominent arguments against economic and material concerns dominating the political realm. What Arendt calls “the rise of the social” is the subordination of
the public realm to the unceasing demands of animal necessity. The problem with needs is that they do not “appear.” They do not endure long enough to manifest beyond ephemeral impulses. “The naked greed of desire” and "the desperate longing of needs" must be transformed into things that "are fit to enter the world." Arendt’s seeming exclusion of material needs from the political realm, claiming they are inappropriate matters for debate and political action, has prompted much criticism. New considerations of this aspect of Arendt’s thought, however, help elucidate a relationship between the cycle of necessity and the enduring world. New work from theorists like Ayten Gundogdu, Stephen Klein, and Ella Myers all reexamine the traversibility of the social and political realms, along with the related significance of an enduring common world. In Rightlessness in An Age of Rights, Ayten Gundogdu pursues a reading of “Arendt against Arendt,” destabilizing and resisting some of the more problematic distinctions of Arendtian thought. Gundogdu re-reads the lines between social and political as “not fixed but politically contested.” To Gundogdu, as well as Myers and Klein, Arendt demands translation, mediation, and representative practice that re-articulate material suffering as a matter of shared, universal concern.

Alternative paths for philanthropy focus to varying degrees on the nature of the relationship between donors and recipients, as well as re-politicizing of material needs. Therefore, Arendt’s description of the conditions for cultivating proper “political” relationships, along with new evaluations of the role of material needs in her thought, have much to contribute to a political theory of philanthropy that includes both critique and redemptive possibilities. Their work complements the emerging body of thought regarding the proper role of

philanthropy. Myers relates most directly to this question, as she is incorporates “charitability” as an ethic that she directly contrasts with Arendtian worldliness. All three offer a helpful reframing of the social-political distinction as mentalities rather than static categories, and a critique of both instrumental thinking and the temptation to reduce economic matters to mere instrumental calculation.

One way Myers accomplishes this radical redefinition of needs within Arendt is by positing needs like hunger as “not merely a problem or a pity but a fundamental violation.”45 Hunger becomes a worldly thing when it is translated as a shared condition, around which people rally and advocate, rather than a singular need. Gundogdu makes a similar argument. Rather than exempt material needs from the political realm, Gundogdu casts Arendt’s critique of the social turn in the French Revolution as the opposite: a failure to properly politicize poverty.46 Gundogdu’s Arendt demands translation, mediation, and representative practices that re-articulate material suffering as a matter of shared, universal concern. Material needs are not in themselves political concerns because their existence, when untranslated, only generates instrumental approaches: how to quickly and effectively allocate or distribute material provisions and alleviate (not permanently eradicate) the dangers of their absence. The difference between the social and political is their orientations — instrumentalist calculation versus normative deliberation. These poles are mirrored in Ella Myers’ Worldly Ethics, which provides a helpful framework for critiquing some forms of philanthropy, while also missing possible opportunities to reclaim philanthropy as an activity supportive of the political realm.

Myers is one of the few theorists to treat the framework of giving as a force that shapes us as political (or anti-political) subjects. Myers’ critique of what she terms the “charitable ethic” of the dyadic relationship echoes and refines existing treatments of philanthropy as anti-political, and offers important criteria for one half of my project, which is to identify exactly how

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45 Gundogdu, 114.
46 Gundogdu, 66, emphasis added.
philanthropy manifests as worldly or unworldly activity. Myers identifies three aspects of the charitable ethic (that is, an ethic concerned primarily with a singular Other as its object, rather than the Self or the world) that render it unfit to sustain worldly politics. The charitable ethic is based on hierarchy, and dependency on the part of the recipient; it responds only to immediate material needs, and relocates collective concerns into a realm of private benevolence.

The charitable ethic Myers criticizes is drawn largely from Levinas, specifically his mandate to “recognize the priority of the other.”47 The charitable ethic (as proposed by Levinas) demands responsibility to the Other on the basis of the Other’s vulnerability and dependency. The ability to recognize and accept this responsibility is Levinas’ definition of what it means to be human; he frequently describes charity or devoted care in such terms, leading Myers to paraphrase that “the self is born from charity.”48 Levinas’s absolute responsibility to tend to the needs of another assumes that the Other in question is suffering in some way and depends on one’s provision of service. In other words, the Other has a claim on a person’s care and support, but not as an equal.

The term charitable primarily refers to the original use, as caritas, meaning behavior of devotion to others, though at times Myers conflates this disposition with the contemporary practice of donating time and/or money. Indeed, the financial transactions that constitute charity as an activity, rather than a relational quality, also enact inequality between the givers and recipients. Furthermore, charitable giving is discretionary rather than obligatory, rendering the lived experience of charity as one of asymmetry, at least of resources.

Myers finds an instrumental character in the charitable ethic in its elevation of basic needs as the ideal form of service. Under Levinas’ framework, the self who responds to the call of the Other is one “who supplies bread.”49 The needs of the Other are specific, immediate, and

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48 Myers, 59.
49 Myers, 72.
tangible; they can be dispensed benevolently and conclusively. Here, Myers’ reading of Levinas has its strongest resonance with the concerns voiced by Arendt. Arendt describes compassion as a feeling suited for private relations but dangerous for political life precisely because the dyadic experience of compassion lacks any "capacity for generalisation."\textsuperscript{50} Political engagement requires detachment from the immediate vulnerability of others precisely because attempts to generalize compassion transform a dyadic relationship between two subjects into a diffuse and objectifying pity for undifferentiated people in need. This in turn yields the hierarchical relations that Myers locates in the Levinasian charitable ethic, where recipients of charitable care categorically lack agency and equal capacity.

Additionally, Myers’ concern about an ethic directed towards a concrete, specific end, namely, the fulfillment of basic biological needs, echoes Arendt’s concern about poverty as a basis of political action, described most fully in \textit{On Revolution}. The French Revolution, in Arendt’s portrait, represented the overwhelming force of material necessity. A revolution powered by people driven by basic biological needs means their post-oppression vision is one of guaranteed abundance rather than freedom.\textsuperscript{51} Necessity and survival demand instrumental responses, but a politics based on securing definite outcomes (bread, shelter) eliminates the possibility of continued, open-ended deliberation among equals. The acute dialectics of life and death, survival and annihilation, leave public space without any form of politics beyond immediate provision. Myers and Arendt share a concern that instrumental and survival-oriented provision precludes political relations. Arendt calls this mentality “compassion,” while Myers’ version is the “charitable ethic.” To Myers, a problem with the charitable ethic is the reduction of a larger shared condition to a dyadic relationship formed over a singular Other’s need.

\textsuperscript{51} Arendt, \textit{On Revolution}, 64.
Myers’ vision of worldliness only addresses the interpersonal relations required for solidarity, while neglecting the physical infrastructure that might encourage and nurture those relations. Myers defines worldliness as the capacity to make a thing exist for the consideration of others is the practice of worldliness; in doing so, “the world” comes to mean not just the build human environment but anything that could be considered an object of shared concern — nature, animals, legislation. She refers to “the tangible and intangible world”\(^{52}\) to expand the definition of things include contingent situations, moments of mobilization, and changes in discourse. This commitment to defining the world as *anything* extrasubjective — any object, phrase, issue, legislation, or element of nature — neglects the role of tangible space.

Klein argues that a welfare state, rather than representing a surrender of the political realm to the demands of the social, reflects “the worldly dimensions of the economic -- conditions that allow economic matters to appear as possible objects of public deliberation and action.”\(^{53}\) To Klein, welfare institutions do not allow material concerns to become worldly, rather, they manifest the worldly dimensions that already exist within economic matters, as both individual needs and shared interests. Interests are worldly objects, insofar as they require public deliberation, even as they originate in specific material needs. Klein uses property as an example of how economic things can be simultaneously expressions of an instrumental function (the need for a place to live) and of worldliness, in the creation of durable objects and spaces.\(^{54}\)

As Arendt herself writes in *The Human Condition*,

> there is in fact nothing that does not in some way transcend its functional use, and its transcendence, its beauty or ugliness, is identical with appearing publicly and being seen.\(^{55}\)

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\(^{52}\) Myers, 112.


\(^{54}\) Klein, 867.

Klein takes this to mean that functional use does not preclude worldliness in an object or institution. Welfare institutions — Klein refers specifically to Bismarckian social reforms like sickness, disability, and old age insurance — can contain worldly activity while retaining their functional purpose. They can translate necessity into an object of collective action, especially if they are governed by a wide variety of participants, including workers and activists.\footnote{Klein, 866.} So long as they are also spaces of plurality and (thus) genuine deliberation, welfare institutions are spaces of appearance, judgement, and participation, simultaneously worldly and instrumental.\footnote{Klein, 868.}

Many of Arendt’s interlocutors describe “the social” as a realm of cyclical short-term desires, in which consumption is the primary aim, leading to a world focused only on the next fulfillment of immediate need. What Klein, Gundogdu and Myers offer are ways of redeeming the social question from the realm of un-freedom, and finding ways in which material concerns are already addressed in worldly ways. This new view helps to clarify what, exactly, is so corrosive about a philanthropy that is instrumental and profoundly imbalanced in its power relations. Given that material necessity and the enduring world are positioned as foils to one another, the questions become: how to re-politicize causes that are currently supported by philanthropy, how to criticize the colonization of philanthropy’s vocabulary and practices as not just a privatizing turn but an un-worldly one, and how philanthropy can support the creation of a shared world. Arendt translates \textit{philanthropia} as “a readiness to share the world with other men.”\footnote{Hannah Arendt, \textit{Men in Dark Times}, (London: J. Cape, 1970), 25.} Which practices, vocabularies and institutions support this ideal? That is the central question of this project and its contribution to new work on philanthropy and Arendt.
Chapter 2
Philanthropy as Arendtian Worldbuilding

The main entrance to the Central Library of the Brooklyn Public Library displays an inscription by Roscoe C. Brown. The first sentence engraved above the left-hand door (facing from the street), the second above the right:

The Brooklyn Public Library through the joining of municipal enterprise and private generosity offers to all the people perpetual and free access to knowledge and the thought of all the ages.

Here are enshrined the longing of great hearts and noble things that tower above the tide, the magic word that winged wonder starts, the garnered wisdom that never dies.

A close read of these inscriptions illustrates how the work of Hannah Arendt might apply to the study of philanthropy.

The Brooklyn Public Library is required to operate as a free, publicly-available library system, but it is an independent nonprofit organization, rather than a public agency.1 It is funded by the New York City and State governments, the federal government, and private donors. The library openly recognizes the importance of philanthropy to its existence, from a “Donate” button and giving societies listed on the website, to facilities like the S. Stevan Dweck Center for Contemporary Culture, opened in 2007, and the Shelby White and Leon Levy Information Commons, opened in 2013 following a $3.5 million gift from the Leon Levy Foundation. In other words, it is, as the inscription reads, a “joining of municipal enterprise and private generosity.”

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1 “The said corporation is hereby declared to be a corporation with which the city of New York may contract for the construction and maintenance of free libraries,” Brooklyn Public Library Articles of Incorporation, Section 3, Lines 1-2 (1902), https://www.bklynlibrary.org/sites/default/files/documents/trustees/Articles-of-Incorporation.pdf (accessed February 3, 2019).
As a philanthropically-supported entity, the library’s public facade reveals much about the *raison d’etre* of such institutions — specifically, what special contribution they make to human society, such that others are inspired to take part in them and potentially support their continued maintenance. Many of the terms used in the inscription invoke Arendtian ideals about culture and worldliness. First among these is the word “enshrined.” The library exists as a physical monument, a tangible touchstone for “the longing of great hearts and noble things,” in other words, remarkable moments and attachments otherwise lost in “the tide” of time. The library takes these things and enables them to “tower above” said tide, to become a form of “wisdom that never dies,” whose existence is “perpetual.” Here in one sentence is reification in service to deeper attachment, immortality, the promise of lasting beyond the unceasing rhythms of life and death. Lastly there is also the universality of the library belonging “to all the people,” existing outside of commodification through “free access,” ensuring a plurality of participants and solidarity among them. The Arendtian alchemy in this inscription is in its honoring of both ephemeral things and their reification, which in Arendt’s work is expressed through pairing moments of new initiative with their enshrinement in the shared world.

Philanthropy combines financial exchange, social status, public obligations and private attachments. It can be expressed in ways that build a common world, intended for sharing with all citizens, or in ways that impose surveillance and a reduction of others to their biological survival (a tendency across modern society that was one of Arendt’s central concerns, and which she once diagnosed in charitable efforts on behalf of stateless people.) To define the ideal role for philanthropy using Arendt’s concepts, I begin by re-reading the relationship between “life” and “world” in Arendt’s thought. My presentation of philanthropy uses this distinction between living human bodies and the built environment that contains humankind, and articulates how a focus on structures and bodies orders social relations. This exploration attempts to reckon with the many examples of philanthropy building structures using financial gains accumulated through the exploitation of human life and labor. Andrew Carnegie’s fortune rested on breaking
unions and exploiting workers, which must be noted alongside any examination of his biggest philanthropic legacy, a vast network of local libraries. More recently, members of the Sackler family have named spaces in the most prestigious museums in the world, with fortunes made in part from Oxycontin, a drug whose aggressive prescription campaign is responsible for much of the 21st century opioid crisis. Given how often seeming “worldly” philanthropy can conflict with a respect for human life, as the latter provides the surplus necessary to perform the former, there must be a better framework for balancing the two. It is Arendt’s own seeming disdain for “life” that provides the ideal opportunity to rearticulate a better dynamic between mortal bodies and immortal structures, thus resolving a difficult dynamic in both Arendt’s work and in contemporary philanthropy.

Therefore I begin by proposing that, despite the frequent configuring of “life” and “world” as opposites in Arendt, they are not antagonists but complements. The human world exists to honor and lend meaning and significance to life, rather than to elevate structures above life cycles. Seen in this way, the relationship between time, space, and human beings becomes clearer. It is from the standpoint of this relationship that I argue philanthropy is best suited to pursue initiatives of the sort that Arendt sees as so crucial to lending shape and meaning to human life. Emphasizing the symbiosis between life and world helps obviate the risk that a

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theory of philanthropy may end up advocating for grand inanimate spaces at the expense of the living human body. To work through this problematic, I demonstrate two different circuits within Arendt where temporality and architecture shape the character of social relations. I take from Arendt a commitment to permanence and to art as a corrective to the otherwise overwhelming focus on consumption and functionality. This corrective role also has the ability to engender relationships of solidarity rather than pity or domination. A mentality of instrumentality yields relationships of sovereignty over others, with both spaces and people seen as potentially disposable. By contrast, a mentality of worldliness provides for the possibility of non-instrumentality, in spaces and in people. It is this connection between worldliness and appreciation for humankind — even, per the etymology of philanthropy, love of humankind — that I propose certain kinds of philanthropy can cultivate.

The Living World

Arendt emphasizes the importance of the world of appearances as a home, not just for humanity in the abstract, but for living bodies. She asserts that the important thing for life to be valued is a durable world that contains and lends significance to the existence of people. In Life of the Mind, Arendt speaks of birth and death as experiences shared by all living things as finite beings who appear into a world that will outlast them. Metabolic processes can therefore be reconciled with “plurality, appearance, display, self-assertion, and individuality.”

Several of Arendt’s interlocutors see her as hostile or dismissive towards the physical body, following her apparent division between the private realm, driven by physical necessity, and the public realm in which freedom, spontaneity, and judgement are possible.

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4 Jeremy Arnold, “Caught in Penelope’s Web: Transformations of the Concept of Life from The Human Condition to The Life of the Mind.” Constellations 23(4), 608-620 (2016), 608.
5 See Seyla Benhabib, “Feminist theory and Hannah Arendt's concept of public space,” History of the Human Sciences, 6(2), 97-114 (1993); Louise Mabille, “Arendt, the Body and the Loss of
Tambornino even goes so far as to say that, to Arendt, “the body does not contribute to politics but threatens it.” Yet Arendt uses the body as her central metaphor. It is the phenomenon of birth, natality, that characterizes her understanding of humanity as having potential for creating something recognizably new. However much she eschews the visceral, fluid, animal processes of the body, the moment of birth - more specifically, the hopes and possibilities that newly exist as a result of a new and singular life - is simultaneously animal and human. The new beginning in the world is the existence of a new living being, but for Arendt what is most significant about birth is the ability for a new life to “make itself felt in the world.” “Felt” is a notably tactile and sensory term. By using the metaphor of birth to illustrate a metaphysical concept like natality, Arendt manifests the capacity for initiating something new within the living body and its sensations. The manifestation of new possibility, the surprise of creation, manifested into a visual signpost, happens most universally through the birth of new people. In fact, what Arendt seeks is a harmony (in keeping with her classical bent) between life and world, a container that properly renders the ephemeral visible, and thus lends lasting meaning to mortal lives.

The “potential greatness of mortals” is in the possibility of earning a place in “everlastingness;” Arendt’s everlasting is one of remaining visible to other human beings. Other people and shared space are the two key ingredients of the human world, and they must exist in tandem. The two elements upon which “the whole whole factual world of human affairs depends” are 1) remembrance, “the presence of others who have seen and heard and will remember,” and 2) reification, “the transformation of the intangible into the tangibility of things.” The most important shared characteristic between mortality and immortalization is

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7 Tambornino, 10.
9 Arendt, Human Condition, 95.
finitude: “The notion of an absolute beginning or an absolute end is among them — does not tell us more than that we are indeed finite beings.”

10 The structures of Arendt’s world are in service to life insofar as they lend significance, they affirm and honor the existence of life: “Life...has an altogether different meaning if it is related to the world...the chief characteristic of this specifically human life...[is that it] can be told ultimately as a story.”

11 The cycles of bodily need — to eat, to cleanse, to discharge — are the same as those of animals; human beings only achieve humanity proper as their lives evolve into narrative, stories that can be articulated, moments that can be preserved in memory. Life as a story often centers around key objects, spaces, and shared memories and experiences. In other words, an individual’s life is derived from the collective structures of the world.

The notion of reification as protection for that which is ephemeral yet worthy of remembrance can be seen in Arendt’s parallels between action and the body. It is telling that she sees her mode of “action,” initiative acts that occur as if a flash of heroism, as the closest connection to natality. Action is “the political activity par excellence,” as it manifests “newness,” unprecedented speech or events that, beyond its own content, “presents the capacity of beginning something anew.” The closeness of action and natality thus marks natality as a foundationally political phenomenon.

12 Arendt claims that action, speech and thought are “as futile as life itself,” perhaps meaning something closer to “as fragile as life itself,” as delicate in their ephemerality. The world, however, exists as, not the foil to, but the transformation of such fragility into enduring form:

10 Arendt, Life of the Mind, 201.
11 Arendt, Human Condition, 97
12 Arendt, Human Condition, 10.
13 See Jeffrey Champlin: “This alternate conception of the political ultimately depends on Arendt’s conception of natality: If there is to be the possibility of something truly, radically new, there must be a distinctive way for a person to be politically born. From ““Poetry or Body Politic: Natality and the Space of Birth in Hannah Arendt’s Thought Diary.” Artifacts of Thinking, Reading Hannah Arendt’s Denktagebuch, Ed. Roger Berkowitz and Ian Storey (New York: Fordham University Press, 2017), 144-145.
In order to become worldly things...they must first be seen, heard, and remembered and then transformed, reified as it were, into things—into sayings of poetry, the written page or the printed book, into paintings and sculpture, into all sorts of records, documents, and monuments.¹⁴

Here is the root of the mutually dependent relationship between life and world — all things require a container, the abstract possibilities need tangible expression/manifestation, even in the fragile form of an infant body (as much as the fragility and demands of the body Arendt sees as threatening.) Equilibrium, rather than conflict, between ephemerality and permanence is the dynamic Arendt seeks between life processes and the world that contains and memorializes them. She describes the artificial world of human-made things and structures and says, “Within its borders, each individual life is housed, while this world itself is meant to outlast and transcend them all.”¹⁵ To say each life is housed is to say each person is sheltered in a place from which she develops into her specificity and displays it to others. The world of things may outlast the finite lives it holds, demonstrating a desire for bodily existence to be preserved and memorialized in some fashion. What makes earth and the civilizations built within it into uniquely human habitats are boundaries — none more than the boundary of death around life to contain and shape it.

Arendt puts physical life itself in closer relationship with the enduring world in *The Life of the Mind*, where Arendt’s very definition of life focuses on the enduring world specifically for the purpose of holding a lifespan and reflecting its moments of appearance:

To be alive means to live in a world that preceded one’s own arrival and will survive one’s own departure. On this level of sheer being alive, appearance and disappearance, as they follow upon each other, are the primordial events, which as such mark out time, the time span between birth and death.¹⁶

Lauren Berlant describes this alchemical transformation of the decaying body into enduring reified form. In the film *In Country*, the relatives of a deceased Vietnam veteran attempt to

reconcile with his death. Several family members travel to Washington D.C. and locate their
loved one’s name at the Vietnam Memorial. They climb a ladder to trace the engraved name.
Contact with the monument, though, means more than gaining deeper, if prosthetic, intimacy
with the man’s remains:

The monument makes the father’s life public: only the immortalizing impersonality of
U.S. citizenship can bring Samantha and her family resolution, happiness and peace.
*Engraved in monumental time, it is as though his physical self were only
now truly dead...while in contrast his national self still lives in a state of
pure and enduring value.*¹⁷

The monument itself may indeed be an impersonal, nationalizing form of reification, a
formalization of the deceased man’s significance in the world. Berlant’s reading can illustrate
how Arendt’s argument regarding the need to sanctify life through durable objects. The delicacy
of life — both its demands for survival and its moments of distinction — is held by fabricated
objects, fulfilling what Honig identifies as a “holding environment.”

We vest Things with meaning, but Things also do the same for us: they anchor, limit, and
orient us...Things “house the memories created by Action (poems, memorials,
sculptures, museums and histories) [providing] a secular immortality.”¹⁸

Consider, therefore, that the Arendtian relationship between life and the world as that of a
buried body to its gravestone. The stone exemplifies a relationship between bodies and artificial
structures whereby they each demand the need for the other — for reification, and for future
audience. The existence of a life that has been lived constitutes the need for a monument in its
honor. Far from overshadowing the significance of life, it exists to mark, to reify, life in a
manner that perpetually honors the lifespan of the lost body (down to the traditional inscription
formula of birthday to date of death.)

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¹⁷ Lauren Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City*, (Durham, NC: Duke
¹⁸ Bonnie Honig, “What Kind of Thing Is Land? Hannah Arendt’s Object Relations, or: The
310.
These interdependencies extend to the relationship between *newness and permanence* — to initiate something and to preserve it in immortal form — and *difference and solidarity* — to exist as unique individuals and to be bound in relationship to others. The structures of the world define the relationships that flourish within them, but only with the presence of living beings. As important as the concrete form is, it exists as a container for the ongoing constellation of past and present deeds. In respectful recognition of, and support for, the ephemerality of the lives and deeds that occurred within the structures of the world, they ought to stand with the sole purpose to endure, appearing in perpetuity.

By contrast, it is formlessness, meaningless, and nihilism around life that scare Arendt most. The very existence of boundaries on earth are what mark it as a human realm, as opposed to the unbound realms that in her work are sometimes invoked as “space” and sometimes as “eternity,” both of which represent what she calls “a nowhere” from which we appear, and to which we disappear, with our life on display in between. The possibility of endlessness carries with it an inevitable detachment and unmoored-ness, and finally a profound loneliness at having no defined place or relations with others to define oneself and validate one’s existence:

> Birth and death presuppose a world which is not in constant movement, but whose durability and relative permanence makes appearance and disappearance possible...without a world into which men are born and from which they die there would be nothing but...the deathless everlastingness.¹⁹

Such a life is hardly recognizable as what Arendt sees as a proper human lifespan, one that can be articulated as a story.

**The Un-World: Eternity, Outer Space, and Sovereignty**

In the absence of boundaries — spatial and interpersonal, among others — Arendt finds her most consistent fear, that of a unbounded void annihilating the unique potential of human

beings and in turn reducing them to their biological existence. Arendt’s treatments of, respectively, eternity, outer space and modern science, reflect her concern that the dissolution of boundaries brings the dissolution of human bonds. I use “un-world” to refer to both “eternity” in religious language and “outer space” in the modern secular vernacular. The “un-world” is a realm without definition or temporal development. It lacks the very frameworks in which individual lives can unfold and gain meaning. As the specificity of place becomes the infinity of space, individuals are no longer identifiable by or in relationship with others. As the world becomes more like the “un-world,” a habitat lacking in permanence and recognition, human relationships lose their stabilizing anchors. The loss of a tangible, lasting human world also undermines relationships of plurality and solidarity fostered by a shared environment and shared distinctions of place.

The dynamic between the loss of the built world and the collapse of human relations is made clear in Arendt’s analysis of capitalism. Arendt views property as a source of both assets and purpose to its respective holders, a concrete place in the world where boundaries of land and title could distinguish individuals by the specificity of their residences -- their terroir, even. In Arendt’s narrative, capitalism transformed stable, tangible property into mobile, abstract, ephemeral wealth. As Jennifer Ring puts it, the most destructive result of the modern economy and its alienation of people from their world is “the importance of permanence [taking] a back seat to... fleeting, intangible human experience.” The expropriation of land from the peasant class deprived them of a place in the world and therefore a stake in its continuity. Each dispossession undermined each person’s attachment to the world, leaving the cultivators of land as laborers who embodied only the transient security of biological sustenance. Wealth accumulation is process without concrete end, an economic modality that resembles the

continuous, boundless cycles of the life process. possibly only when “the world and the very worldliness of man are sacrificed.”22 In such a form of society, human effort becomes solely instrumental, its products reduced to disposable objects of consumption. Everything fulfills the mandate for reproduction. Without a world stage, or any defining physical boundaries to provide a sense of individuality, human beings become atomized into biological units, our very physical life, *zoe*, resembling the “changeless eternal recurrences” that characterize the boundless “un-world.”23

The instrumentalization of humanity emerges from a geography where some can survey others from above. The unboundedness, ceaselessness, and domination inherent in capitalist dynamics are characteristics of the un-world. The un-world provides a perspectival imaginary for mastery over the human realm. As a religious space, non-human characters like angels and gods survey the conduct of humanity from above. As “outer space,” a boundless void, it contained the same possibility of mastery and dominion, by modern humans rather than divinities.

The perspectival shift that Arendt identifies as “the Archimedean point,” represents the attempt to transcend the tactile world in order to grasp and order it.24 Such a point attempts not to cultivate the world but to separate humanity from it, as an object to be unhinged to liberate human beings from its natural forces.25 Exploration that once arose from “the age-old desire for simplicity, harmony and beauty...love of the world”26 is sacrificed to the search for a world that humans can order and control through their tools of knowledge-gathering. The promise of transcending the embodied condition of boundedness, to the earth and to other people,

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22 Canovan, 83.
introduced the possibility of mastery from a cosmic standpoint, “the virile man standing in the sun.”\textsuperscript{27} Arendt asserts that modern science undermines “common sense”; it calls into question a shared sense of reality, accessible by human senses, and thus undermines the possibility of commonality from which “common sense” emerges. Once a shared way of accessing the world is lost, the equal yet unique dignity of every human being is undermined, replaced with allegedly objective measures that evaluate human worth.

The remove from the world offered by “space” is the manifestation of the Archimedean point, the qualitative shift from natural science driven by observation, to a “universal” science removed from nature, which reduced the world to an object of mathematical calculation.\textsuperscript{28} Once shrunken, the human world became a “large-scale biological process” where speech and everyday language would be replaced with the “meaningless formalism of mathematical signs.”\textsuperscript{29} In her essay “The Conquest of Space and the Stature of Man,” Arendt portrays the modern turn towards data and measurement as this same disenchantment of the world and human nature. Arendt cites the rise of algebraic symbols rather than sense data, which abstracted the process what had been sensory observation and distanced the scientific observer from the direct experience of the world:

it was an instrument, the telescope, a work of man’s hands [that encouraged reliance on mathematical calculations]...nothing indeed could be less trustworthy for acquiring knowledge and approaching truth than passive observation or mere contemplation. In order to be certain one had to make sure.\textsuperscript{30}

As the tactile experience of the world became more distanced and abstracted, human beings were left with “a universe whose qualities we know no more than the way they affect our measuring instruments.”\textsuperscript{31} As the world became reduced to its measurability, so too did its

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\textsuperscript{27} Arendt, \textit{Human Condition}, 262.
\textsuperscript{29} Hannah Arendt, \textit{Between Past and Future} (New York: Penguin Classics, 2006), 279.
\textsuperscript{30} Hannah Arendt, \textit{Human Condition}, 290.
\textsuperscript{31} Arendt, \textit{Human Condition}, 261.
inhabitants: scientific inquiry also reduced humans to their measurable, calculable, experimentally verifiable and, not least, predictable functions. Through the mapping of life processes, the human becomes analyzable and thus rendered in operational terms. Subsequently they became publicly relevant only as members of the animal species of man, whose biology and behavior can be determined, predicted and eventually controlled scientifically. Rational calculations of efficiencies and the aim to ascertain life and its outcomes transcribe the norms of biology onto all of human behavior. Laura Bazzicalupo and Clarissa Clo summarize Arendt’s objections:

When the cyclical metabolism of life occupies the entire public space in which the circle of production and consumption cannot be broken, we are ruled by necessity and survival, which is neither human nor politically free.32

While worldliness encourages bonds between humans and respect for the subjectivity of others, un-worldliness reduces other people to their calculable components. Measurement, for Arendt, is the foundation of surveillance, and the start of replacing human natality with algorithmic predictability. As human beings become unbound, abstracted, and reduced to data points, observed from a position of cosmic detachment, instruments of measurement begin to inform a singular way of engaging with the world. Once data becomes more predictable, the scientist can design interventions that will achieve a desired outcome.

Science and technology, for Arendt, strengthen the mentality of totalitarianism, a worldview that seeks to predict and control human behavior using the patterns of biological laws. This mentality yields a distorted politics that seeks to “stabilize” men in order to liberate the forces of nature or history. The plural, contingent, “tumultuous and inaugural” qualities that Arendt prizes become compressed into systems of tracking and predictability. Contingency is the key to this freedom because if “action has no end,”33 then no single person can define or achieve

32 Laura Bazzicalupo and Clarissa Clo, ”The Ambivalences of Biopolitics.” Diacritics 36 (2) 109-16 (2006), 112.
33 Arendt, Human Condition, 233.
a desired outcome. The mandate of such a regime is instead the opposite of Arendtian politics: to control life in an effort to eliminate its uncertainties.

**Art Against Instrumentalization**

Separation from the human world brings its reduction to utility, where action is overtaken by means-ends. As people are flattened into data sets of natural processes and their possibilities for action are foreclosed into algorithms, then individuals disappear without attaining lasting significance. Rather than a story, with moments of unexpected turns and surprising decision, individual lives enact the functional demands of life in an automated, “tranquilized” daze.

What preserves the possibility of distinctiveness and natality are worldly things that cannot be reduced to functional use. Arendt’s essay, “The Crisis in Culture,” refines her position on how worldliness is sustained. The demands of cyclical, consuming life can be all-powerful, and the enduring structures of the world are threatened by the demand to serve an immediate function, or collapse through destruction or neglect:

> Life is indifferent to the thingness of an object; it insists that every thing must be functional, fulfill some needs. Culture is being threatened when all worldly objects and things, produced by the present or the past, are treated as mere functions for the life process of society.\(^{34}\)

Arendt’s caveat, that “only when survival is assured do we speak of culture,”\(^ {35}\) acknowledges the fundamental need for bodily security and well-being. Her concern, however, is that without cultural infrastructure, the very possibility of transcending the cycle of need and use will fall away. The cycle of need and fulfillment-of-need is relentless. It consumes and can seem all-consuming. Without markers that distinguish things-for-use and things-with-intrinsic-value, we might reduce everything to usefulness, which stamps things and people alike with an expiration

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\(^{34}\) Arendt, *Between Past and Future*, (New York: Penguin Classics, 2006), 204.

\(^{35}\) Arendt, *Past and Future*, 206.
date once their respective functions are fulfilled. Works of art are important as capsules that contain human aspirations to earthly mortality. In the work of art, “something immortal achieved by mortal hands, has become tangibly present, to shine and to be seen, to sound, and to be heard, to speak and to be read.” The appearance of the work of art happens for the sake of others to see and feel this appearance. Works of art are the apex of the human condition, “the most intensely worldly” forms of human activity.

The work of art’s expansion beyond utility is a praxis for relating to other human beings in ways that encompass more than their functions to us. The aspiration to worldly immortality, that is, immortality that manifests as appearing before generations of other human beings, underscores the value of remaining in the presence of others, even without living in their present. There is no use-value in those interactions across time; one of the parties cannot perform or receive any functional contribution. Rather, they exist to signpost continuity, and in so doing to elevate human relationships themselves above the calculations of functional benefit. In “Crisis in Culture,” Arendt describes the importance of beauty’s irrelevance to functionality, and how enduring and beautiful structures manifest the ideal of worldliness:

The cathedrals were built *ad maiorem gloriæ Dei*; while they as building certainly served the needs of the community, their elaborate beauty can never be explained by these needs, which could have been served quite as well by any nondescript building. Their beauty transcended all needs and made them last through the centuries; but while beauty, the beauty of a cathedral like the beauty of any secular building, transcends needs and functions, it never transcends the world.

Arendt’s pivot to culture, rather than only art, allows for the possibility that everyone can perform worldliness without necessarily creating works of art. Culture is both noun and verb, according to its Roman origins: “from *colere*, which means ‘to cultivate, to dwell, to take care, to tend and preserve.’” There is appearance, and there is the caring for those appearances, as a

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37 Arendt, *Past and Future*, 204.
38 Arendt, *Past and Future*, 211.
continuation of the worldly mentality, a “common sense of individuals to attend to the things of
the world.”

This definition of culture provides a proto-political orientation, one where the world’s
continuity attains significance and continuously encourages people to look beyond immediate
instrumentality. The architecture of the world influences the relations between people, which
leads to (or forestalls) the possibility of political action. Arendt describes the world as a stage,
which includes the physical structure of the platform and the wings, as well as the presence of an
audience to complete the desired moment of display:

just as the actor depends upon the stage, fellow-actors, and spectators, to make his
entrance, every living thing depends upon a world that solidly appears as the location for
its own appearance, on fellow-creatures to play with, and on spectators to acknowledge
and recognize its existence.

The location of each person’s appearance is simultaneously structural and relational — there are
both a stage and other players that make up the world and allow for the fluidity and spontaneity
of onstage goings-on. Appearance, therefore, is two things simultaneously, a merger of
phenomenological, physical manifestation, and relational, a plurality of observers. Compared to
the aforementioned gravestone, a less morbid example of this relationship between the object
world and interpersonal relations is the wedding canopy, a space that designates the significance
of the people within it, but requires their presence for the structure to fulfill its purpose.

Work that tends to the permanent world cultivates appreciation for continuity, for
bounded fate, for humanity’s extension beyond the individual self and her own time. Human
beings have the ability to imagine beyond the life cycle of one generation; we therefore can
create an “objective” world, one with structures that house the ongoing exploration of humanity
and orient our common life to be in dialogue with generations past. “Strictly speaking, politics is
not so much about human beings as it is about the world that comes into being between them.

39 Arendt, *Past and Future*, 211.
and endured beyond them.” The world, as a tangible stage upon which human histories and history unfolds through events, connects the plurality of men, while simultaneously holding space to ensure the freedom of men to engage in political action. Only through the existence of a shared world do matters of biological cyclicality achieve worldly meaning, in which life can gain a narrative and events can unfold. Alienation from the world reduces human beings to their biological function; the robustness of the physical world reminds people to consider and commit to something more lasting than their immediate needs.

**An Arendtian Framework for Philanthropy**

The mutual significance that the enduring world lends to ephemeral life and the importance of solidarity lead me to conclude that a philanthropic milieu concerned with the saving of lives represents the ultimate obstacle to the Arendtian political mentality: not the social question, but an exclusively social answer; not the existence of basic material need, but a response to it that is entirely instrumental. Reducing things and people to their instrumental ends, destroys the norms and institutions that sustain the world: artificial objects, spaces and institutions that established boundaries between individuals and facilitated their ability to engage in action.

Returning to Arendt’s essay on culture, the life process emerges as the great foil to her world-building ideal. The potential for philanthropy to cultivate worldliness requires rejecting exclusive fixation on biological life in favor structures and spaces that reify human appearances. Philanthropy enacts many of Arendt’s concerns around whether humankind would become subsumed to the life process and thus lose the ability to build a world. The “world” as a habitat for politics requires physical structures that link each life to a larger civilizational history. Enduring things that manifest beauty apart from function encourage a way of engaging with others elevated beyond their usefulness. An Arendtian framework for philanthropy, therefore, requires two elements: a phenomenology and the relationships it engenders.
One of the earliest known uses of the term philanthropy, in Aeschylus’s *Prometheus Bound*, aligns almost seamlessly with Arendt’s framework of worldliness. Fire is the gift referenced most frequently in the play, but Prometheus actually bestows upon humanity “every art,” the knowledge and skill needed to build a human civilization, one strengthened by creation that outlasts the cycles of nature. In Arendtian terms, we might say that Prometheus’s gift is the capacity of humans to work, to build a durable world in which a collective could form. Prometheus also provides a second gift: “blind hope” or optimism. George McCully points out that the two gifts are complementary, in a manner that echoes the dynamic between Arendt’s Work and Action: the skills to fabricate a material world, and the capacity to imagine new possibilities. The Human Condition echoes the classical myth of the founding of civilization, where the human potential for artificial creation distinguished humanity from animals. Before receiving this capacity to create and to imagine possibilities beyond the immediate circumstances of survival, people were proto-humans. Love of humanity is, therefore, less about benevolent largesse than about the capacity to realize our full potential to create a civilization. Prometheus’s love was not pity for the abject state of the proto-humans (which might have led him to only give sustenance) but for the potential of human natality. The term McCully gives to this potential? Culture.

In *Men in Dark Times*, Arendt translates *philanthropia* as “a readiness to share the world with other men.” Sharing the world requires an orientation of solidarity, includes the weak and the strong, poor and wealthy, as co-builders of a common world. I would put philanthropy’s world-building potential in precisely this overlap, of philanthropy’s founding commitment to humanness, and Arendt’s re-centering of those same values for human continuity. More specifically, philanthropy’s political potential is in its preservation of non-instrumentality, the ways in which it encourages the transcendence of immediate need and

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reifies the things of the world. In building a shared and enduring world, philanthropy as a culture praxis constitutes subjects who perform world-changing acts with the knowledge that they will belong to humanity, offering a stage upon which people can appear to and build relationships with others.

The World Monuments Fund (WMF), a nonprofit founded in 1965 to address the “accelerating destruction of important artistic treasures throughout the world” exemplifies Arendt’s idea of preserving the things of the world for generational continuity. From Angkor Wat to Venetian canals to Jewish sites in the former Soviet Union, the WMF has provided technical and financial support to cultural preservation projects at over 600 sites. Their case for support reflects precisely the question of culture’s value in light of threats to human life. The WMF asserts that, in its disaster recovery-related projects, “humanitarian needs come first...yet thoughtfully restored cultural heritage sites can be a powerful force that galvanizes communities during the years and decades it takes to rebuild.” In other words, after we save lives, people need to remember who they are besides their bodies. The communal act of reclaiming the built environment is what fosters an understanding of others, and oneself, as more than a collection of functions, as well as the infrastructure for individual appearance, which is to say, the simultaneous appearance of a plurality of others.
Chapter 3
A Genealogy of Philanthropy

Philanthropy is defined today as voluntary financial contributions to state-approved organizations and/or individuals who perform work that does not generate financial profit for shareholders or those individuals, but rather some form of service or advocacy on behalf of others. Within that practice is a lifeworld of processes, discourses, and activities. Philanthropy encompasses fundraising events like galas and auctions, legal and financial structures ranging from foundations to annuities to donor-advised funds. Philanthropy is now a professional practice that includes associations for practitioners, consultants and advisers for those giving funds away and those seeking them, along with trade publications and institutes of academic study. Philanthropy contains financial exchange, social status, a meeting point for public interests and private attachments, civil society and public policy.

Philanthropy’s evolution intersects with many other historical shifts: the transformation of government, from city-states to empires to nation-states to global networks; the transformation of market exchange, from material forms of exchange to increasingly abstract and invisible forms; the emergence of articulated individual self-consciousness and subjectivity. Philanthropy is a microcosm for what human initiatives were considered worthy, who deserved to benefit from them, and how responsibility for them was distributed. The evolving uses and rationales for philanthropy reveal the priorities of a given society, particularly with regard to needs that fall outside of what is provided by the self or community. Philanthropy contains political valences throughout history, insofar as its practices reflect the priorities of communal life and the attitudes, institutions, and processes that ensure their provision.

The genealogy offered in this chapter traces two significant historical turns: the religious turn under early Christianity and the biopolitical turn under the early modern state. The religious turn brought an abandonment of forms of philanthropy that originated in Greek eugertism. Under this turn, gifts that built a shared common world were abandoned as the poor,
rather than the general public, were isolated as the intended beneficiaries of charitable giving. Following this isolation, the biopolitical turn of early modernity intensified the instrumentalization and surveillance of the poor. Such attitudes, alongside the emergence of the state, resulted in Poor Laws, which codified two statuses: potential laborers, who did not deserve charitable support, and perpetual dependents. The late nineteenth century saw the emergence of professionalized philanthropy that used social science techniques to intervene on a large scale in matters of human welfare (primarily disease and poverty), accompanied by further surveillance and disciplining of the poor under urbanization and industrial capitalism. Yet the same period saw a simultaneous re-emergence of philanthropy that built enduring structures for culture, scholarship, recreation and conservation. Therefore, several polarities can be located in these shifts, all of which culminate in forms of philanthropy that emerged in the Gilded Age, which in turn provide critical precedents for the philanthropy in the contemporary moment.

The first polarity is relational. Who is the audience for whom philanthropy is performed, and how do donors perceive their accountability to others?). The second is degree of investment in the object world. To what extent does philanthropy prioritize enduring structures and institutions, versus immediate material sustenance?

These polarities align with the overarching distinction between “world” and “life” in Arendt’s phenomenology. The distinction between world-driven and life-driven forms of philanthropy can be found in the difference between the classical definition, the love of what it means to be human, and the emphasis that many iterations of philanthropy have placed on biological life. Shifts from worldly philanthropy to biopolitical philanthropy carry implications

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1 These polarities are addressed to some extent in the debate over “charity” versus “philanthropy,” wherein charity is seen short-term, emotional, immediate response, focused primarily on rescue and relief, whereas philanthropy represents a long-term, strategic, systemic intervention. However, those distinctions still treat giving as a response to social challenges involving basic welfare, rather than considering the broader range of causes and their different temporalities. I consider both the longevity of a gift’s output and the degree to which an instrumental or pre-determined outcome motivate giving to both be important factors, and therefore complicate the charity-philanthropy binary.
for the relationships between donors and beneficiaries. As the beneficiaries of private generosity shrunk from the public of fellow citizens under the Greco-Roman model, to “the poor” as a class under the medieval model, poor people were understood as uniquely vulnerable and dependent rather than citizens with claims on more elite members of society. The affective orientation of pity rather than solidarity emerges here, as does the practice of consuming through charitable “purchasing” of redemption. By demonstrating that medieval charity and modern philanthropy, including the “scientific philanthropy” of the nineteenth century, continued this biopolitical turn, the nature of present-day philanthropy becomes clear: a focus on life and population management, a lack of concern for earthly permanence, and an instrumental view of the beneficiaries of one’s gifts.

Devoted Benefactors of The City: Eugertism and the Origins of Philanthropy

According to Paul Veyne, giving in ancient Greece (specifically from 300 BC to CE 300) can be described as “civic eugertism.” Eugertism was the private sponsorship of a city’s public spaces and gatherings, including public buildings, festivals, and city institutions such as schools. Pliny’s gifts to his hometown of Como, for example, include a library, subsidies for a school, and funds for public baths he bequeathed in his will, along with an endowment for a public banquet. The inscription on a statue of Marcus Ulpius Carminius Claudianus in Aphrodisias, erected around AD 170, provides a comprehensive list of eugertistic gifts made for the benefit of the city. They span edifices, athletic and cultural facilities, public utilities and endowments for public activities as described on the honorary inscription:

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4 Veyne, 9-10
an endowment of 105,000 denarii to provide public works in perpetuity, out of which 10,000 denarii were paid for the seats of the theatre, and the reconstruction of this street on both sides from its beginning to its end, from its foundations to its wall coping, has felicitously been begun and will continue; in the gymnasion of Diogenes he built the anointing room with his personal funds and, together with his wife Apphia, he walled round the great hall and entrances and exits; he supplied at his own expense all the sculptures and statues in his public works; he also provided the white-marble pillars and arch together with their carvings and the columns with their tori and capitals; he established an endowment for the distribution of honoraria in perpetuity to the most illustrious city council and the most sacred council of elders; he often distributed many other donatives to the citizens, both those living in the city and those in the countryside; he often distributed other donatives to the whole city council and council of elders; he often made free gifts on every occasion, in keeping with the city’s wishes, to citizens and aliens alike; he installed numerous drains in the swamps on the occasion of the channelling of the Timeless river; he often and felicitously carried out embassies; he was all his life long a devoted benefactor of his city.  

The extent to which these expenditures were voluntary is debatable; Arthur Hands and Naphtali Lewis both categorize them as “liturgies,” or a form of taxation. Lewis views liturgies as obligatory payments that nonetheless retained a degree of discretion from the donor. Hands and Marc Domingo Gygax view their use as more explicitly transactional, as payments in exchange for assuming honorary office.

Though classicists differ on the motivations and interests that the eugertai — a city’s wealthy benefactors — pursued in their giving, they agree that eugertism contains several key characteristics. First, eugertism was performed in a relationship of mutual recognition between demos and elite. The eugertai sought the honors afforded to a city’s most generous benefactors, therefore as the pursued audience, the demos had influence over their eugertai. According to Arjan Zuiderhoek, public honors constituted “a public, political act”:

public honours were a vital ideological instrument for affirming the legitimacy of the existing socio-political order in the cities. They afforded the non-elite citizenry a means of expressing consent with the current division of power in society.”

Though Gygax views the underlying motivation for eugertism as more transactional than munificent, he nevertheless identifies reciprocity as the main characteristic of eugertism. Gygax

6 Zuiderhoek, 8-9.
interprets the ongoing tensions between the demos and the elite as one “full of gifts and counter-gifts, actions to force donations and to prevent them,” which made eugertism “a territory for confrontation and negotiation,” and demonstrating a bounded quality where demos and elite possessed agency and mutual claim on each other. Between 205 BC and 201 BC, the city of Cos held an open appeal for donations to “defend the polis.” The donation had to be proposed in the assembly, where the demos voted in favor or against accepting a given pledge. The practice of eugertism was not merely unidirectional benevolence; notables were “required” to be generous, and the people “expected” this. Within eugertism, gifts of money transformed into enduring displays of communal strength and solidarity and wealth “was more generally regarded as a trust in which every member of the community had a share.” In fact, philanthropon was defined as both the donor’s expenditure and the reaction of the recipients. In contemporary terms, both a gift to a college and the inscription memorializing the gift or a dinner in the donor’s honor would qualify as philanthropon, in keeping with the root concept of reciprocity. Gifts and counter-gifts were the vehicle for what Zuiderhoek calls, “a process of subtle and skilled political negotiation between benefactors, their fellow elite-members and the demos.”

Second, eugertism reinforced collective bonds by building shared spaces and rituals that would provide benefits of pleasure and cultivation to all. In Politics, Aristotle describes how as the people see “splendidly decorated temples and buildings” and enjoy banquets and feasts, they will “wish to maintain the constitution.” The Athenian practice of the theorikon exemplifies the blend of munificence, self-interest, and civic boundedness in Greek forms of giving. The

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7 Gygax, 19.
8 Gygax, 21.
9 Veyne, xvii.
12 Zuiderhoek, 10.
13 Aristotle, Politics, VI, 6, 7.
theorikon was the provision of the cost of a theater ticket to enable the poorer classes to participate in the city’s celebrations. A fourth-century politician called theorikon the cement of democracy. Aristotle noted that it was indeed meant to solidify civic pride rather than address poverty through cash redistribution. Those who benefited received these gifts not because they were poor, but because they were citizens.

Even efforts to meet basic needs were cast as magnificent gifts to the community rather than mercy for the needy. One particularly glorious form of eugertism was the building of infrastructure for basic utilities like water. One donor gave eight million sesterces to secure a water supply for Aspendos in Asia Minor; Tiberius Claudius Atticus gave double that amount to subsidize the building of an aqueduct for Troy. Even swamp drains were included in gifts recognized and honored by a donor’s city. Hands identifies these sorts of gifts as “[providing] an amenity from which the poor might derive equal, or almost equal, benefit along with the rich.”

Under eugertism, philanthropy was an expression of communal solidarity and humanistic expansiveness, one that did not focus specifically on the needs of the poor, but rather wrapped them into broader initiatives to secure general well-being.

Urgent material needs were accounted for, but under a different rubric than voluntary gifts that yielded public glory. Henrik Bolkestein finds in the Stoic tradition that attention to the destitute and needy could not be considered charitable, as such assistance was a requirement. Seneca describes small acts of necessary mercy, like water for the thirsty, crusts for the starving, and coins for the beggar, as part of traditional obligations. Failure to respond accordingly risked curses known as the arai Bouzygeiai. Helping the destitute survive was an obligation, carrying

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14 Hands, 67.
16 Hands, 144-45. Hands also surveys practices related to corn subscriptions, reserve funds, and doles in Greek and Roman cities and finds that “there is no indication of...discrimination in favour of the lower classes nor has there been any tendency regard public distributions as doles instituted primarily to aid the destitute,” 115.
no special rewards, only potential punishment in cases of callousness or neglect. Anyone in a position to be of such service could not evaluate the recipient’s worth nor should he expect a return. Such small gifts seem to Seneca to be trivialities for the donor, unworthy of the glorious and performative forms of giving that centered on the public square. Segmenting the needs of the poor in this way may have minimized their significance, but it avoided the fetishizing the poor and their needs, or glorifying easily-performed acts of assistance. Eugertism concerned itself with the common world, rather than with bare life. Even gifts towards securing a water supply were celebrated as magnificent structures more so than rescue services, while gifts of sustenance were considered standard behavior, rather than glorious displays.

**The Religious Turn: From Greek Eugertism to Christian Charity**

Compared to Greek traditions, Christian charity possessed an entirely different “ideology, agents and behavior.” Veyne identifies almsgiving, which came to prominence under early Christianity, as eugertism’s “successor,” but this succession meant a shift in priorities, from edifices and public pleasures to sustenance that specifically benefited the poor. Under Christianity, the poor transformed from people with unremarkable yet obligatory needs to “charged figures in the social imagination.” The religious turn isolated poor as a social category rather than wrapping them into a larger social fabric. Sermons delivered by Augustine, Ambrose, and other Christian bishops explicitly challenged the civic mentality encouraged by eugertism. Augustine instructed the rest of the clergy to personally confront wealthy Church

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18 Veyne 19, 26.
19 Bolkestein describes a similar change that originating in pre-Christian giving practices in Egypt and Israel, which coexisted with the Greco-Roman “Wohltätigkeit,” beneficence within ones community. A focus on the poor in early Judaic societies infuses what later becomes Christian charity.
20 Brown, 9.
members and challenge them to give to the poor instead of the games and circuses.²¹ In part, this was due to the church’s competition with the city for philanthropic dollars. Additionally, the Church’s protected status in Constantinople was contingent on its care for the poor masses (not just fellow Christians). Persuading Christians to give to the unglamorous poor, instead of the glory-filled crowds of their own cities, required a paradigm shift.

The temporal horizon of gifts was newly contested under the religious turn. Eugertism was concerned with earthly glory (“things of this world”) rather than the afterlife.²² If giving to the poor presented little earthly benefit, the horizon now extended to benefits that would be available in the afterlife, namely the expiation of sin. The religious turn introduced an isolation of the poor both as special objects of concern and, correspondingly, bearers of benefit to their benefactors. This rhetorical shift, undertaken quite intentionally by early Christian leaders, simultaneously de-territorialized giving and transformed relationships of solidarity into ones of pity.

The idea of “treasure in heaven,” a metaphorical transposition of dazzling structures from the earthly realm to the eternal, circulated widely among early Christians, as exemplified by a story in the Dialogues of Gregory the Great. A pious cobbler tithes a portion of his earnings every week to the poor assembled at the shrine of Saint Peter. Every Saturday, when the cobbler goes to Saint Peter’s, he has a vision of a mansion being built in heaven (one vision notes that the house’s bricks are “of pure gold.”) The treasure that the cobbler believes he is giving away to the poor is actually being transferred to heaven in his name.²³ Whereas physical structures are permanent and immutable, the liquidity of money allowed a Christian to imagine that gifts released to the poor could be transformed in the afterlife into rewards that resembled their earthly counterparts. Meanwhile, in at least one instance, Augustine rejected gifts from

²¹ Brown, 35.
²² Veyne, 27.
Christians that built the church’s earthly infrastructure in favor of a “steady flow of funds to the poor.” When the heiress Melania the Younger and her husband Pinianus came to Carthage after the Gothic sack of Rome in 410, they began funding large monasteries and new churches. Augustine instructed them to instead establish endowments to perpetually fund care for the poor, as well as support for clergy, to “have a memorial for ever in heaven and earth.”24 At that point, the Greek and Roman approach to building grand earthly structures was undesirable even if donors made such gifts on behalf of the church. In part, the problem was that the church could not sustain the demands of a large physical plant without consistent funding, but more important, such gifts prioritized earthly outcomes, rather than heavenly ones. Givers did not work directly with the poor; the church acted as middleman, thus distancing donors from concretizing the direct results of their gifts25 (as Brown puts it, they were asked to “lose [their wealth] heedlessly into the faceless mass of the poor.”)26 In the performative cycle of Christian faith, gifts were surrendered to unspecified earthly outcomes with the understanding that they would be returned in the eternal realm. The rejection of concrete earthly outcomes in favor of heavenly reward was the first of several ways in which, under Christianity, financial wealth, in all of its fungibility, was supposed to connect heaven and earth, overcoming the “brutal antithesis between...pure spirit and dull matter.”27

The loss of worldliness in Christian giving deterritorialized philanthropy, and in so doing separated it from communally embedded relationships. Where eugertism reinforced civic solidarity (even if it simultaneously underscored differences in wealth), the relationships between donors and recipients under early Christianity took on a more hierarchical cast. Brown identifies this shift from “horizontal” to “vertical” relationships in gift-giving as an extension of Christian orientations towards the divine.

24 Brown, 20.
26 Brown, 24.
27 Brown, 31.
The dependency of the poor on alms mirrored the dependency of all humans on the mercy of God. In medieval Christianity, the Latin terms that referred to the poor underscored their helplessness and rendered them pitiable ("miserabilis," "inops/insufficiens"). While this shift may have taken place to cultivate compassion and even awareness of the poor as subjects of concern, the result was that charity assumed a posture of pity instead of civic solidarity. The poor became abstracted microcosms of human wretchedness, particularly as compared to divine might. The hierarchical relationship was therefore necessary for two theological objectives: to persuade Christians to prioritize the rewards of the afterlife over those on earth, and to internalize their humility and dependency on a merciful God. To “remember the poor,” as Paul wrote in his Letter to the Galatians, was to perform across the great distance in human society the generosity that God showed across the distance between the divine and earthly realms, where all of humanity could be as easily forgotten as the poor. As money was able to travel from earth to heaven (laundered through alms to the poor), so too could gifts of money establish connections between the living and the dead, and between God and humanity.

Not only were gifts to the poor viewed as down payments for heavenly rewards but they were the means by which Christians would enter heaven. In the early Christian imaginary the poor became intermediaries and vessels of good deeds, rendering charity an act that would yield personal returns, a form of investment for the donor’s eventual benefit. Augustine perfected this formulation and became its most influential messenger: “The poor to whom we give alms! What else are they but porters through whom we transfer our goods from earth to heaven?” He invoked metaphors of commercial trade, particularly the idea of taking the risk to invest with the promise of eventual return on said investment, analogizing alms to the vague poor as an

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29 Brown 32, 44.
investment in a far-away land, a form of *traicecticium*, an advance purchase that would generate great future returns.

    God wishes you to invest what you have [in heaven], not to throw it away...Our Lord God wishes us to be merchants of a kind...For example, a merchant says to his friend, take gold from me here and give me oil in Africa. He travels without traveling and has already gained what he wanted.”

Here the motivation to give was not compassion for those in abject need, as the bishops might have claimed to differentiate charity from eugertism, but perhaps the original “venture” or “strategic” philanthropy, terms that would later come into vogue in the late 20th century. Such instrumentalization of the poor — as vehicles for a donor’s ends, and as more reliable investments than worldly pleasures — was only possible through the introduction of a new temporal horizon that introduced the eternal world and argued for its superiority to the mortal one. Voluntary giving changed from a reciprocal system of mutual recognition among citizens to a one-way expression of pity to the abject poor. The poor represented a utility, a means by which the non-poor could gain salvation, whose bodily survival was a priority only insofar as it credited the soul of the donor in the afterlife.

    George McCulley summarizes the move from pagan to Christian forms of giving as “the first paradigm shift in philanthropy’s long history” in which

    gifts...for civic enhancement yielded to in-kind distributions of small agriculture surpluses to neighboring poor; desire for public respect and citizenship gave way to the pursuit of Christian salvation and the Kingdom of Heaven.

These transformations in the primary actors, infrastructure, conceptualization, and vocabulary cumulatively changed the mentality of philanthropy, recasting relationships between the self, community, mortal world and the divine. These larger shifts include: deterritorialization, in both the horizon of a gift’s impact (the mortal world versus the afterlife) and in the form those gifts took (physical structures or festivals versus basic sustenance); a vertical relationship of pity

31 Brown, 91-92.
and dependency from donor to recipient in lieu of reciprocal bonds of civic obligation; and the emergence of charity as an instrumental activity, wherein the recipients were vehicles for a calculated goal, specifically the returns the donors would receive in the future.

Eugertism was an incubator of Arendtian worldliness, found in works of art because they possess a “useless” or non-instrumental quality. Such gifts were devoted to building a world to last permanently, beyond the life span of any individual donor. Perhaps most importantly the relations between eugertism’s donors and beneficiaries were far more egalitarian than the postures of pity that first instrumentalized the poor for the redemption of the rich, and then subjected them to surveillance and control. The Church’s rejection of the human world in favor of the afterlife, and its shift from horizontal relations between donors and community to vertical ones between donors and the pitiable, dependent poor, together yielded an instrumentalization of the poor as vehicles for a donor’s desired outcome.

The three major changes in attitudes towards giving lay the groundwork for the later biopoliticization of philanthropy: 1) permanent structures and humanistic pursuits like arts and letters were replaced by a constant stream of material sustenance, keeping the bodies of the poor alive, 2) the audience for one’s gifts changed from one’s fellow humans to the heavenly judges, whereby charity becomes an instrument of otherworldly redemption rather than earthly celebration and 3) the horizontal relations between donors and fellow citizens became a vertical relationship between God and humanity — a relationship of benevolent mercy that was eventually replicated between humans, the rich taking pity on the poor.

**The Biopolitical Turn**

As Christianity narrowed the range of recipients of philanthropy to the poor, the purpose of philanthropy became increasingly focused on the human body. The instrumentalization of the

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poor under early Christianity only intensified. Where the bodies of the poor served as vessels for eventual salvation, they became vessels of labor power or objects of pity. The main institution of philanthropy in the medieval era was the hospital, which encompassed all forms of care for vulnerable bodies: transients without shelter, the local poor who could not support themselves, and the sick who could not afford treatment. The biopolitical turn refers to the shifting institutional locus from the hospital to the almshouse or the poorhouse. These institutions emerged to address the poor as a social problem, following agricultural dispossession, urban growth, and changing labor markets. As philanthropy isolated dependent bodies as its objects, donors, clergy, and public officials became more inclined to measure their utility and to control the uses of funds donated on their behalf. Following the religious turn, the biopolitical turn is an intensification of discipline and surveillance upon the recipients of charitable gifts, centered around an increasingly systematic evaluation of bodies’ needs and capacities. What started as a sentimental and devout commitment to help the poor eventually became an approach of discipline, suspicion, and indentured labor.

A biopolitical lens offers an opportunity to see changes like increased donor oversight, institutional formalization, and focus on biological sustenance as interwoven tendencies under a singular trajectory, one that extends into contemporary philanthropy’s paradigms and practices. During the transition from the medieval to the early modern eras, the human body’s vulnerabilities become important as units of measurement, and their collective stewardship became the object of the state. The position of the church as pastoral guardian, responsible for sustaining life and monitoring the population under its care was transferred to the state itself:

> the christian pastor [sic] will have to account for every sheep. a numerical and individual distribution will make it possible to know if he has really concerned himself with every one of his sheep...Salvation is first of all essentially subsistence. The means of subsistence provided, the food assured...pastoral power is the power of care... an art of ‘governing men’ ...the origin, the point of formation, of crystallization, the embryonic
Pastoral power, originating in Christian notions of shepherd-flock relationships (between clergy and laypeople, and God and humankind), yields “a field of intelligibility,” a position of supervision from which calculations of human life are devised and applied to physical phenomena such as fertility, disease, and morbidity. The evolution of pastorality into biopolitics manifests in medieval charity and its transformation in the early modern era, specifically through an increasingly punitive “bestialization” of charity recipients as potential sources of labor. The evolution of the medieval hospital, followed by the secularization of charitable giving, offer an illustration of Foucault’s thesis about biopolitics as administration of basic material life, for purposes of cultivating docile and productive populations.

The overall evolution of hospitals bears this out. Guenter Risse traces the hospital’s character from a “house of mercy” to a “house of segregation,” in the Middle Ages, and in modernity, a “house of science.” Risse’s historicization of the hospital’s progression from a house of mercy to a social organization to a space of clinical intervention offers a framework for how hospitals and the charity practiced within them enacted the Christian pastoral’s transformation into modern biopolitics.

Hospitals were initially Christian charitable foundations for the overnight care of transients or immigrants, the local poor lacking in support networks, and the sick who could not afford treatment. They were the primary vehicles of medieval charity, and starting in the 12th

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35 See further in Security, Territory, Population: “the structures of pastoral power, as the hinge or pivot of these different elements external to each other...take it as, as the principle establishing relations between them, as the switch point between these elements...the point of view of pastoral power...enables us to take up these things and analyze them...in the form of strategies and tactics.” 215-216.
36 John Henderson, Peregrine Horden and Alessandro Pastore cite Risse’s grand narrative in the introduction to their anthology The Impact of Hospitals, 300-2000 (Bern, Switzerland: Peter Lang AG, Internationaler Verlag der Wissenschaften, 2007) but find it overly reliant on medicalization as a turning point in the modernizing of hospitals.
century, they proliferated to assist growing numbers of poor and displaced people.\footnote{Adam Davis, “Hospitals, Charity, and the Culture of Compassion in the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries.” In \textit{Approaches to Poverty in Medieval Europe: Complexities, Contradictions, Transformations, c.1100-1500}, ed. Sharon Ann Farmer (Turnout, Belgium: Brepols, 2016), 23-45.} The center of medieval charity became the suffering human body, requiring ongoing palliative care. Their purpose was defined in theological terms, using evocative language to depict the suffering and dependency of their residents. The Holy Spirit Hospital in Pfullendorf, founded in 1256, described its mission as:

\begin{quote}
the exercise of the works of mercy [is] for the salvation of the faithful...the naked shall be clothed, the hungry fed, the weak refreshed, women cared for in the six weeks before childbirth, widows, orphans, and pilgrims who come from every direction shall not be denied food and shelter...
\end{quote}

The type of care practiced in the hospitals provided palliative comfort for ill and aging bodies while encouraging prayer to prepare the souls for the afterlife.\footnote{Lindberg, 59.} Yet these prayers were not just expressions of penitence and piety, they represented valuable testimony on behalf of their object. Hospitals became popular recipients of donations and testaments with “the common directive that the recipient was to pray for the soul of the benefactor.”\footnote{Lindberg, 69.} Under medieval Christianity’s system of incentives and rewards that supporting the practice of almsgiving, church preachings spotlighted the “unfortunates,” as those whose prayers would serve as the best testimonials for salvation. The “involuntary poor” (as in, anyone not a clergy member who took a vow of poverty) served

\begin{quote}
a salvic function...for those who gave charity...thus the involuntary poor served a crucial function in providing the opportunity for penitential almsgiving.\footnote{Davis, 27.}
\end{quote}

Carl Lindberg describes this as the “poverty-alms-salvation complex.”\footnote{Lindberg, 69.} The positioning of the poor and the sick as not only vessels for a donor’s good deeds, but witnesses testifying on the...
donor's behalf, continued and intensified the Augustinian tradition of instrumentalizing the poor to motivate the rich to give. Adam Davis identifies an “almost quantifiable link” between salvation and almsgiving. The shift from “almost” quantifiable to explicitly defined equations of gifts and promised outcomes is a key part of philanthropy’s biopolitical formalization.

Starting in the 13th century, gifts to hospitals became more explicitly transactional, requesting certain amounts and frequency of prayers to be made on a donor’s behalf. In their study of poverty and poor relief in medieval and early modern Europe, Catharina Lis and Hugo Soly reinforce the argument first made by Augustine and continued through medieval church teachings: that the poor mediate between earth and heaven, such that alms to support their survival “functioned as an investment in the hereafter.” As with any investment, donors in the medieval era began to seek more scrutiny and reassurance that their payments would yield the intended benefits.

Changes in how bequests to hospitals were made points to increased donor surveillance and control. Davis describes twelfth- and thirteenth-century bequests as relatively indiscriminate; including gifts to every religious and charitable institution in a given region. Some accounts show that by the 13th century, donors took a bolder approach towards specifying their gifts’ intended results. Bequest were a popular form of giving; by the 14th century, 40% of

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43 Davis argues that the transaction narrative of medieval giving ignores this affective turn in medieval theology, towards mercy for those suffering and personal sacrifice to improve their well-being. Sarah McNamer (Affective Meditation and the Invention of Medieval Compassion, University of Pennsylvania Press 2009) and Judith M. Bennett (Conviviality and Charity in Medieval and Early Modern England,” Past and Present 134 (February, 1992), 19-41) argue that medieval devotional literature strove to provoke empathy with Christ’s suffering, producing “a revolution in feeling,” McNamer’s refers to this revolution as “the invention of compassion.” According to this narrative, charitable support for hospitals expressed newfound sensitivity for the suffering of Jesus, with the proliferation of charities demonstrating a “cultural shift in sensibility” rooted in altruism and empathy, rather than social control or self-interest.

testaments in Barcelona, and 90% of those in Rodez contained bequests to hospitals. In Teofilo Ruiz’s study of bequests in 13th-century Castile, after 1200, benefactors become more discriminating in their allocation of charitable gifts. Donors began placing conditions on their bequests, with the expectation that specific services would be performed on their behalf, such as the performance of masses and anniversaries. The increased use of conditions on gifts enacted a degree of control over recipients reflects emboldened attempts to control recipients, along with increasingly granular calculation of the returns for one’s gifts. Charity towards hospitals continued Christian understanding of giving for a donor’s eventual benefit, but with increased specificity and control that resembles an investor building a diversified portfolio, designed to optimize the eventual outcome.

Such instrumentalization of the poor centered on their physical vulnerability. Hospitals assigned even the most abject people a utility to others. Yet the theological utility of their prayers conflicted with the material demands of housing and caring for the poor, particularly in times of economic crisis. In the town of Ieper, new hospitals were founded anew in 1226, 1270, 1276, and 1277, years when the wool supply was low and unemployment high. In periods of higher employment, hospitals discharged the previously-admitted poor, to seek work. Michel Mollat, Andrez Vauchez and others note a cultural shift in attitudes towards the poor, with growing suspicion that beggars were potentially able-bodied.

As charity took on new institutional forms between the Middle Ages and early modernity, the bodies of the poor continued to serve an instrumental purpose. As Max Weber describes, the sixteenth century saw “the great historic process in the development of religions, the elimination of magic from the world,” particularly the repudiation of more mystical paths to salvation. This theological shift is reflected not in the introduction of instrumentalization of

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the poor, but the use to which they were put. In medieval charity and hospitals, the “worth” of hospital residents was always in the potential utility of their bodies, but in a way that transfigured their earthly helplessness into theological influence. By early modernity, the category of needy now required more evaluation and segmentation; Reformation poor relief orders stated that “only the truly needy should be supported; all others must leave or work.” As the more metaphysical purposes of the poor fell away, and earthly productivity became the measure of virtue, allowing people to remain dependent was itself sinful. Any potential to achieve the virtue of industry and discipline had to be seized. As Weber put it, “with the dying out of the religious root, the utilitarian interpretation crept in unnoticed.”

In early modernity, charity maintained focus on the body and its utility in ways that dovetailed with the secularization of poor relief, as the modern nation-state coalesced and took on increased responsibility for social welfare. As towns and cities became the destination of a new social order, centralizing need in urban centers, shifting the locus of giving from religious orders to the state. Newfound fears of disorder, disease, and potential losses to the labor force yielded an approach to charity that was more “practical,” and arguably more disciplinary. At the same time, the emergent class of merchant capitalists sought cheap, obedient labor to perform simple tasks, such as spinning wool, winding silk, beating hemp, or rasping dyewood, as in the London Bridewell established in the 1550s or the Amsterdam workhouse opened in the 1590s. In the later medieval period, the hospital as a religious institution was subsumed to the increasing drive to systematize poor relief and more actively manage local economies and labor

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47 Lindberg, 125.
48 Weber, 120.
forces. Under the new political-economic milieu, new classes like the Tudor merchants “scorned and discarded alms, the mechanism of medieval charity, since they were profoundly persuaded that casual, undisciplined charity was as ineffective as it was wasteful.”50 Here, charitable giving had to be more carefully watched, its beneficiaries more carefully qualified, so as not to “waste” charity on those who could work, and whose dependency on others’ generosity might spread habits of indolence and crime. As Lis and Soly put it regarding pre-industrial charity, “at its best [it] merely saved the recipient from immediate starvation...altruism was roomy enough to sanctify poverty but restricted enough to relieve only minimal needs,”51 or in other words, to sustain labor-power. The most abjectly ill or weak provoke compassion, while the potentially able-bodied provoke suspicion. Both require sustained attention to the body and its capacities (or lack thereof).

What changed in the early modern era was the application of emergent technologies of surveillance, which maintained charity’s exclusive focus on poverty while transforming a posture of pity into one of control and sovereignty over the lives of the poor. The combination of limiting charity to ensuring basic survival, combined with the surveillance for the ability to work and the coercion into labor as charity’s counterpart, yielded a biopolitical mentality that defines early modern charity.

One of the earliest and most influential works of secular poor relief is Juan Luis Vives’ 1526 treatise *De subventione pauperum*, an analysis of poverty and proposal for public works to prevent its spread. Vives developed his vision of formal organized welfare programs after living in Bruges and observing the challenges of poor populations in urban areas. Vives proposed formal organized welfare programs like public works to provide full employment and an increase in hospitals to properly serve the sick, aged, and mentally ill. The organizational

51 Lis and Soly, 32.
methods recommended by Vives began with a city-wide list, onto which all poor people, whether residing in hospitals or elsewhere, were registered. To be on the list, individuals needed to establish a clear reason why they need support, and those in good health had to explain why they weren’t working. Poor people in sufficiently good health would either be sent back to their cities of origin or put to work (Vives cites the wool industry and public works as sources of employment).

Under such a system, welfare institutions were co-constituted with indentured labor. Support for the poor was connected to and justified by the assurance that only those in genuine distress would receive help. Lis and Soly call this framework for early modern social welfare the “trinity of charity-control-labour duty.” Vives’ vision was realized in institutions like the *Aumone generale* in Lyon. Established in 1531 after a rise in grain prices, the *Aumone* was a welfare institution that provided rations while enrolling the children of the maintained poor in training schools for silkmaking. Once the children’s education was complete, they had to enter the service of craftsmen. The merchants of Lyon viewed the *Aumone* as an instrument of social control through centralized poor relief, beginning with a registry of the poor.

A key turning point from medieval charity to modern social welfare came in 1560, when, “some sixty western European towns created, roughly simultaneously, a coordinated alms system with controlling and regulating functions...poor relief evolved into a continuous and selective system, in large measure applied by public bodies.” Policing the divisions between who was idle, who impotent, and who able-bodied, was by then a task for new bureaucratic oversight. By the sixteenth century, many municipalities had drafted poor laws, most of which contained provisions for setting the able-bodied poor to work. In England, the Poor Relief Act of

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53 Vives, 103.
54 Lis and Soly, 94.
55 Lis and Soly, 204-205.
56 Lis and Soly, 92.
1662, also known as the Settlement Act, codified this approach to the social question and became a foundational document in legal regulation of charity and labor. The language makes explicit the mutually constitutive nature of charity and work: The impotent poor (people who couldn’t work) were to be cared for in an almshouse or a poorhouse. Relief was only for those unable to work -- the elderly, blind, or otherwise physically infirm. Meanwhile, the able-bodied poor were sent to a House of Industry where working materials would be provided, the “idle poor” were to be sent to prison, and pauper children became apprentices.

Rather than a disjuncture between religiously-driven sentimental compassion and the analytical calculations of early capitalism, the biopolitical turn continued and formalized the instrumental purposes of the poor. Recipients of charity remained reduced to their physical sustenance; by the sixteenth century that bodily focus became centered on the extent of their labor capacity. The early modern state formalized techniques that originated in the medieval hospital: evaluation and listmaking to tally and categorize people as either legitimate dependents or potential workers, increased conditions on charitable gifts, and the use of charity to extract and control future behavior from beneficiaries. These changes provide one extreme of the types of relationships fostered by philanthropy, in this case relationships of sovereignty, reinforced by the objectification of its recipients as vessels of labor-power. In the nineteenth century, this form of philanthropy becomes even more dominant with the rise of industrial capitalism. However, the extremes of wealth and poverty in the Gilded Age also brought about new ways of using philanthropy in service to an enduring common world and relationships of solidarity.

The Culmination of Biopolitics and the Return of Eugertism in the Gilded Age
The nineteenth century contained the rise of philanthropy as an independent, formal sector in public life. Philanthropy’s increased prominence in public life came out of both extremes of economic inequality: the poor were increasingly concentrated and visible in urban centers and
industrial labor, particularly during economic depressions. Meanwhile, the ascendant elite amassed fortunes on a previously unimaginable scale, and sought new ways of using their wealth for a variety of public purposes. Robert Treat Paine commented on the latter half of the nineteenth century as “a noble outburst of the energies of good men to help suffering brethren.”  

Paine’s phrasing underscores the continuity, if not intensification, of the biopolitical tendencies of the preceding medieval and early modern eras. The vertical relationship remained intact: good men helped those who suffered and therefore depended on others’ goodwill. A focus on the body was evident in the charitable directories of the 1880’s, which listed up to one hundred pages of organizations whose work centered on “combating disease, pauperism, ignorance and crime.” As with the English Poor Laws, charitable assistance in the nineteenth-century U.S. attempted to encourage its beneficiaries to work, and to remain economically secure through their own economic and moral prudence. According to Robert Bremner, American charity reformers

wanted to help the poor but were so fearful of pauperizing them that the only commodity they dared offer was advice. That they gave liberally: hints on household management, admonitions on waste, intemperance, and idleness, and sermons on the virtues of self-help.

The charity reform movement became more focused and institutionalized after the depression of 1873-78, which caused major hardship on a national scale. To reformers, the emergency conditions meant that claims of need were not sufficiently investigated, nor were safeguards against needy people getting multiple sources of assistance maintained. The mandate to evaluate whether peoples’ needs were real, and whether charitable assistance would increase their dependency, were both extensions of the disciplinary and evaluative attitude towards charity that began in the early modern era. The poor were portrayed only in regard to their

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58 Bremner, 86.
59 Bremner, 60.
60 Bremner, 92.
subsistence-level needs and the conditions of their bodies, and further instrumentalized as potential labor sources, contingent on proper motivation. Once again, the pastoral concern for the poor morphed into discipline of their conduct and surveillance of their bodily well-being. By this time, reformers had particular techniques and institutions in mind to formalize the management of charitable distribution, including closer monitoring of every facet of a beneficiary’s life. Even amidst increased disciplining of the poor, alternative mentalities emerged in Gilded Age philanthropy. The settlement house movement presented a different model of engagement with the poor, one that built relationships of solidarity and friendship across classes, and inspired political activism on matters like labor relations and public sanitation. A key component of the settlement houses was a more comprehensive approach to serving the poor, including education, culture, and recreation — in other words, treating beneficiaries as people rather than units of potential productivity. Such an approach encouraged an understanding of poverty that focused on substandard conditions, rather than personal character, as the cause, and addressed it through political activism that articulated the settlement house residents’ needs as public demands.

Simultaneously with the settlement house movement was the establishment of large publicly accessible institutions of learning, culture and recreation, funded by the new industrial rich. Between 1870 and 1892, the number of millionaires in the U.S. grew from 100 to 4,047, a number which multiplied tenfold by 1916.61 This class of newly wealthy Americans build new libraries, museums, and hospitals across the nation, including Carnegie Hall, the Enoch Pratt Free Library, the Lick Observatory, the Metropolitan Museum of Art, and Stanford and Vanderbilt Universities. For these donors, giving played a role in justifying the political economy of industrial capitalism. Yet it also built a number of institutions that continue to foster the

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ability to flourish beyond economic productivity, and to reinforce public, universally available goods.

Therefore, the manifold tendencies that re-emerge in the nineteenth century revived the contrasts of the religious turn: worldly structures versus otherworldly reward, imaginative projects versus functional assistance, civilizational cultivation versus biological sustenance. Material subsistence and imaginative cultivation coexisted in the minds of Gilded Age philanthropists, rather than in opposition, as in the earlier split between Greek and Christian forms of giving. The mid- and late-nineteenth century contain an especially strong commitment to disciplining and managing the poor, specifically through “scientific charity,” which sought to apply social science techniques and greater professionalization of charitable efforts to address the social question. Simultaneous with those developments is the reality that some philanthropic efforts by major Gilded Age figures built enduring institutions that have fomented relationships of solidarity, provided opportunities for autonomous cultivation, and affirmed the importance of the arts, humanities, scholarship, and the natural world. These contradictory examples demonstrate the extent to which the Gilded Age was a decision point, where the full spectrum of philanthropy was on display.

In mid-nineteenth-century charitable societies, the possibility of dependency or fraud was addressed through the use of “friendly visitors,” whose role was to ascertain the particular needs of each household (i.e. referrals, coal, food, etc.). The volunteers who performed this duty for the Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor (founded in 1843 in New York City) brought with them a pamphlet by their founder Robert M. Hartley, which instructed the poor on how to budget for and prepare inexpensive meals and calculated the cost savings of alcohol abstinence. In the case of the Young Men’s Christian Association, local secretaries and volunteers underwent training on compiling survey data, initially for purposes of assessing opportunities for religious worship, later broadened to document the presence of saloons,
brothels, sanitary facilities, and recreational spaces.\textsuperscript{62} Josephine Shaw Lowell, one of the main champions of scientific charity, recommended that homeless and destitute people be housed in institutions that provided “physical, moral, mental and industrial training,” where strict discipline would cure the idleness that caused vagrancy.\textsuperscript{63} A favored cause of mid-century philanthropists was the establishment of schools for poor children, which continued even after the implementation of a public school system to train needy children in vocational and domestic arts.\textsuperscript{64} Without such grooming, the fear was that charity would encourage indolence and dependency.

By the late nineteenth century, the imperative to avoid pauperism and to discipline the poor culminated in the scientific charity movement. By the 1870’s, it was not only the recipients of charity who needed paternalistic management, but charitable organizations themselves. This “new” charity brought the values of the biopolitical turn of medieval and early modern charity — instrumentalization, sovereignty, and zoeification — to their culmination and most explicit expression. Charity reformers saw the magnitude and multiplicity of poverty relief organizations as a problem, requiring more scientific, or cautious, analytical approaches, for effective disbursement. Their interventions for greater centralization and oversight had a meta-Foucaultian effect: “at long last, the charitable impulse was being disciplined.”\textsuperscript{65}

The professionalization of giving started in what was known as the “charity organization movement” in London and became popular in the U.S. following the depression of 1873-78. As soup kitchens, bread lines, shelters and coal distribution proliferated, reformers like Josephine Shaw Lowell and Frederick H. Wines became concerned about the duplication of assistance and lack of safeguards against fraud. In 1874, the National Conference of Charities and Correction

\textsuperscript{62} Bremner, 42.  
\textsuperscript{63} Josephine Shaw Lowell, \textit{Public Relief and Private Charity} (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1884), 69.  
\textsuperscript{65} Bremner, \textit{From the Depths}, 86.
was established to oversee almshouses, asylums, orphanages and schools for the blind and deaf. The minutes of the Twentieth National Conference of Charities referred to the “diffuse and chaotic” charity given to the “clamorous and impudent,” and complained that poor relief was misspent either as graft or as encouragement to indolence and bad character. Among their concerns was that there was not enough attention to the individual needs and conduct of recipients of charity, and that organizations needed to apply more discrimination in their allocations. Frederick H. Wines wrote,

> the great problems of all charity, public or private, is how to diminish suffering without increasingly, by the very act, the number of paupers; how to grant aid, in case of need, without obliterating the principle of self-reliance and self-help.\(^6^7\)

The goal of the charity organization movement was to coordinate the work of many charitable initiatives both to ensure efficiency and to prevent charitable dollars from being improperly disbursed to undeserving applicants. The consolidation of charity organizations, beginning in 1870, encouraged administrative efficiency, but in the name of more rigorous scrutiny. When asked what percentage of donations to the Charity Organization Society of New York would be given directly to the poor, Lowell proudly responded, “not one cent,”\(^6^8\) and would instead serve only as a source of referrals and information.

Amidst the nineteenth century’s increasing objectification, surveillance and disciplining of poor people, alternative approaches to philanthropy emerged, in part as a reaction to the more intrusive methods of poverty relief. The stigma of poverty as a failure of character, to be resolved with better habits, became complicated even for major advocates of disciplinary charity. As social workers and reformers gathered information on how individuals ended up in poverty, factors like industrial accidents, wage theft, and illness came up so frequently that even

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\(^6^6\) Official proceedings of the annual meeting, Twentieth National Conference of Charities, 1893. 54.
\(^6^7\) Second Biennial Report, Board of Public Charities of the State of Illinois, 1872.
the biggest champions of scientific charity came to understand the significance of larger forces on individual's lives. Robert M. Hartley, founder of the New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor, began as a pious temperance advocate in the 1830’s. Initially, he visited distilleries to attempt to persuade owners and managers that their work perpetrated evil and sin. Yet these visits yielded a far more concrete observation about the harm perpetuated by the industry: the filthy conditions of cows kept at distilleries, whose milk was sold to tenement families. Hartley investigated the supply chain of distillery cow milk and found a correlation between its sales and the rise in infant mortality rates, and campaigned against it until the New York state legislature prohibited its sale in 1864. In 1889, Josephine Shaw Lowell resigned from the New York State Board of Charities to devote her time to the labor movement, saying,

The interests of working people are of paramount importance...and the indifference and ignorance and harshness felt and expressed against them by so many good people is simply awful to me...If working people had all they ought to have, we should not have the paupers and criminals.

By the close of the Gilded Age, the theories of poverty that had shaped the scientific charity movement, particularly its adherents’ concerns about enabling vice and dependency, had been rejected by the movement’s leaders. In 1917, Mary Richmond, who began her career at the Charity Organization Society of Baltimore, published Social Diagnosis, the foundational text of social work as a profession. Social work grew out of the disciplinary “friendly visitor” but ended up refuting the danger of pauperism by identifying systemic causes of poverty, while establishing best practices in social work, which involved more relationship-building and shared power with a social worker's clients.

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As much as major figures of this period articulated a detached, analytical, and controlling philosophy of philanthropy, fixated on physical sustenance and personal character, the process of actually performing charity at times led to greater empathy for the poor and enthusiasm for social, rather than individual, reform. Even the most paternalistic of philanthropists could, with sufficient exposure to the lives and characters of poor people, develop both appreciation for them as equals and consciousness that their living conditions were the result of systemic factors rather than individual choices. Increased contact with the living conditions of poor people enabled members of the middle and upper classes to see them as whole people. Settlement houses like Hull House in Chicago and the College Settlement in New York City (founded in 1889 and 1886, respectively) became the model of alternative, more solidaristic forms of philanthropy. Jane Addams, founder of Hull House, encouraged humility on the part of the middle-class settlement workers: “You know the poor, if you take the pains to know them, and you do not know the poor, if you do not take the pains to know them.” In contrast to the intrusive research performed by charity officers to assess the proper amount of assistance to each petitioner, research in settlement houses was informed by local ethnographic knowledge and cultural idiosyncrasies. These insights were deployed to make demands to government on behalf of the poor, not upon the poor themselves. Addams identified the distinction in attitudes between paternalistic charity and neighborly solidarity:

A most striking incongruity, at once apparent, is the difference between the emotional kindness with which relief is given by one poor neighbor to another poor neighbor, and the guarded care with which relief is given by a charity visitor to a charity recipient... The condescension of young middle- and upper-class settlement volunteers “evaporated” through such immersive contact, and was replaced by outrage at “the unjust conditions working

people strove to overcome and eagerness to be their political allies in those struggles.” By learning from the immigrant poor as neighbors and friends, the settlement houses cultivated a political consciousness, wherein residents advocated for more public parks, better schools, an increased minimum wage, housing and child labor laws, and decent, nondiscriminatory provision of public services. Jacob Riis called settlement houses “fulcrums for the level of reform.” In one section of Twenty Years at Hull-House, Addams wrote about her advocacy for improved garbage collection and sanitation in the 19th ward where Hull House was located, pressuring the alderman for better services, and eventually serving for a time as the ward’s garbage inspector to identify for the city exactly where the garbage was that needed to be addressed.

This relationship-driven approach meant that settlement houses likewise rejected the instrumental interventions of charities focused on basic survival. Settlement houses expanded the range of assistance provided to the poor well beyond subsistence, cultivating the intellectual, artistic and recreational interests of poorer residents. They included playgrounds, classes in music and art, even a branch of the public library in the case of Hull House. The inclusion of opportunities for recreation, art, performance, and scholarship in settlement houses reinforced the commitment of their founder to the notion that volunteers should celebrate the full humanity of their residents, which allowed middle-class people to learn from poorer residents. By including these opportunities, settlement house leaders also affirmed that philanthropy was not merely a tool for ensuring survival and enabling productivity, that its recipients were full human beings entitled to a full range of pursuits.

Mary Simkhovitch articulated precisely this contrast between forms of philanthropy that objectified the recipients, and the kind practiced at Hull House, which was far more humanistic:

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75 Bremner, From the Depths, 65.
76 Bremner, From the Depths, 66.
where others thought of people of the slums as miserable wretches deserving either pity or correction, settlement residents knew them as fellow human beings... we knew not only poverty and crime but also the intelligence and ability and charm of our neighbors77

In the case of settlement houses, charitable giving translated into cross-class relationships and civic engagement. One crucial element of the settlement houses that enabled such solidarities to flourish was the inclusion of art, leisure, recreation, and education as part of their interventions. Settlement houses connected these universally-enjoyed pursuits with broader civic purpose, which continued in the nineteenth-century revival and reimagining of eugertism, including the establishment of community chests.

Now known as the United Way, the community chest movement began in Cleveland in 1914, when Frederick H. Goff established the Cleveland Foundation, a pooled fund of money for the city’s overall improvement. The format of the Cleveland Foundation was in its governance: rather than the “dead hand” model of a deceased donor’s wishes determining uses of the foundation’s funds, Goff created a “living hand” in a public tribunal, composed of “men or women interested in welfare work, possessing a knowledge of civic, educational, physical and moral needs of the community.”78 The foundation pooled money from anyone who wished to contribute, which allowed citizens of a wide range of means to participate. This format, of a community chest that exists for the ongoing good of a given community, sustained and governed by that community’s members, expanded rapidly, with the number of community chests increasing from 39 to 353 between 1919 and 1929.79

Community chests exemplify the revival and update to eugertism that took place in the Gilded Age, not only in the relationships fostered by participation by donors as well as trustees,

77 Simkhovitch, 73.
but in the institutions that they funded. At times, community chest funds were allocated to
direct relief efforts, but instead of poverty-centric projects, they funded institutions that, much
like the ancient version, built out the common spaces of the city. While larger in scale than the
settlement houses, the combination of holistic humanity and shared power extends to the
community chest movement, in which many beneficiaries have a say, and philanthropy is used
to build universally accessible cultural and educational institutions. Today, the Cleveland
Foundation notes its support for educational and cultural institutions such as the Cleveland
Orchestra, the Cleveland Museum of Art, and the Great Lakes Exposition. In those institutions,
however, is evidence of the eugertistic mentality encompassing giving at both modest and grand
levels.

The industrial barons of the Gilded Age left public-minded legacies in the form of access
to art collections for museums, and endowments for building and operating concert halls, parks,
universities, and more. Substantial giving to educational and cultural institutions, often free and
open to the public, exploded in the latter decades of the nineteenth century. Mid-century
bequests by Joshua Bates (1852) and John Jacob Astor (1853) to found libraries in Boston and
New York “presaged what as to become one of the standard forms of philanthropy in the second
half of the nineteenth century.”\(^{80}\) Donors to new scholarly and cultural institutions framed their
gifts in what Oliver Zunz calls “the universal language of the new American philanthropy.” In
Jeptha Wade’s 1892 deed of gift for the land on which the Cleveland Museum of Art now stands,
Wade writes that the institution built on said land much be “for the benefit of all the people,
forever.” Such statements echo the aspirations of Greek benefactors to achieve immortality
through a legacy of beneficence. Likewise, they revive the contrast between the eugertistic gifts
that strove to benefit all citizens and alms intended to only serve the needs of the poor. Though
such institutions were funded as grand projects that celebrated the fortunes of their donors, and

advertised their civic mindedness, their universal access, longevity and encouragement of activities for their own sake provided an alternative for philanthropy, beyond objectifying and managing the poor. This eugertistic form lent itself, at times, to public deliberation, shared power, and a more expansive civic identity.

Andrew Carnegie and The Contradictions of the Gilded Age

On July 9, 1892, the Utica, New York Saturday Globe published a cartoon showing two Andrew Carnegies conjoined at the hip. One, smiling, handed out a model library and a check; the other held out a notice telling workers that their pay had been slashed. “As the tight-fisted employer, he reduces wages that he may play philanthropist,” the caption read. The two-headed Carnegie was a satirical portrait of hypocrisy, one that diminished philanthropy’s contributions in comparison to unjust labor practices and economic structures. A closer look at Carnegie’s giving reveals a weightier contribution to the enduring common world, not to an extent that cancels out his exploitative practices and accumulation of wealth, but that reveals Gilded Age philanthropy’s dualism, spanning the full spectrum of humanism and biopolitics.

In 1889, Carnegie published the article, “Wealth,” that was later renamed “The Gospel of Wealth.” Carnegie’s Gospel states that the man of wealth is “strictly bound as a matter of duty to administer [wealth] in the manner which, in his judgment, is best calculated to produce the most beneficial results for the community.” Buried in this mandate is a crucial assumptions: that the man of wealth “has,” by the very fact of his wealth, the judgement required to determine how money might be put to best use for others to thrive. To Carnegie, “the rich man is not the

beneficiary of his own decisions or his wealth, he is merely the trustee and agent for his poorer brothers.” But the supposed humility of stewardship immediately gives way to hubris, for these men offer to others their “superior wisdom, experience, and ability to administer.” In fact, money had to be consolidated into the possession of a few wealthy men. If distributed in small quantities among the people in the form of higher wages, this surplus wealth "would have been wasted in the indulgence of appetite, some of it in excess."\(^{83}\) Carnegie so believed this "gospel" that, according to biographer David Nasaw, Carnegie’s philanthropy encouraged him to be even more ruthless a businessman and capitalist. Recognizing that the more money he earned, the more he would have to give away, he pushed his partners and his employees relentlessly forward in the pursuit of larger and larger profits, crushed the workingmen’s unions he had once praised, increased the steelworkers’ workday from eight to twelve hours, and drove down wages.\(^{84}\)

Here is the most cynical rationale for philanthropy on full display: legitimatizing the wealthy’s right to economic domination. Yet this attitude makes Carnegie’s funding choices even more intriguing, as they present a contrast of sorts. Universities, libraries, hospitals, laboratories, public parks, and meeting and concert halls all represented “ladders on which the aspiring can rise.” By this, Carnegie meant, they provided resources for the cultivation of the self, mainly but not exclusively in service to economic mobility. In explaining his thesis about “ladders” for the poor, Carnegie wrote that Peter Cooper, Enoch Pratt and Senator Stanford set an example of benefiting their communities through parks, and means of recreation, by which men are helped in body and mind; works of art, certain to give pleasure and improve the public taste, and public institutions of various kinds, which will improve the general condition of the people...\(^{85}\)

According to Carnegie such institutions present a more holistic approach to how exactly the poor might improve their lot. Additionally, they are more universal in their potential benefits


\(^{85}\) Carnegie, *The Gospel of Wealth*
than gifts targeted specifically towards the sustenance of the poor. Universal access can be a powerful and politically significant factor in using philanthropy to promote solidarity. Consider the response of the city of Denison, Iowa upon inaugurating a Carnegie-backed public library in 1904. *The Denison Review* noted that the library “should become the literary center of Denison, a source of inspiration and profit to all...[in] it every citizen can feel at home and at perfect liberty to enjoy its advantages.”86 Today, the library continues to pride itself on offering “the rich and the poor the same thing.”87

The universal access and enduring mission of Carnegie libraries is all the more significant in the case of the Carnegie Library in Washington, D.C., Built with the equivalent of $10.2 million from Carnegie, it was the first desegregated public building in the nation’s capital, and served as Washington’s main library until 1972.88 In the American South, some cities rejected Carnegie’s offer because they feared their libraries would have to be open to black patrons. This was an understandable assumption, as part of Carnegie’s formula for determining whether a town qualified for funding to build a library was a requirement that the library “provide free service to all.”89 However, Carnegie ended up splitting the difference between his commitment to universalism and the intractability of racial segregation: in the early twentieth century funded libraries in segregated regions that were specifically for black patrons, such as the Carnegie Colored Library in Savannah, GA, which was petitioned for by the Colored Library Association of Savannah.90

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87 Mitchell, “Andrew Carnegie”
88 Mitchell, “Andrew Carnegie”
90 Jessica Leigh Lebos, “Savannah’s Carnegie Library recognized as one of Georgia’s 10 Most Beautiful.” *Connect Savannah*, May 10, 2017. Philanthropy has played a particularly significant role in establishing alternative institutions to support education, welfare, and political organizing among black Americans, where public institutions were segregated. Notable examples include the Rosenwald Schools founded by Julius Rosenwald and the Peabody Education Fund, which generated three funds specifically for black educational institutions.
Additionally, Carnegie required cities to commit to allocating ten percent of the construction costs as the annual budget for maintaining the library, and to paying the salaries of its staff. It was of crucial importance to Carnegie that the libraries have public support — so important that towns could also reject Carnegie’s offer to build their library. A fully endowed institution, to Carnegie, would obviate the need for public commitment. This idea has complicated meaning — on the one hand, Carnegie’s own statements underscore his commitment to the idea of self-help and avoiding dependency, on a civic as well as an individual scale (“An endowed institution...violated [the rule] which requires recipients to help themselves.”)91 However, this insistence on a fully accessible library as a public good speaks to a rather eugertistic vision of philanthropy and its role. In this instance, it could create enduring structures that would enable independent self-cultivation, which represented the public good and civic cohesion. Even the structure of the libraries themselves had a (likely unintended) consequence of fostering independent exploration rather than carefully managed and disciplinary practices. Libraries were run under a “closed stacks” system, where a patron had to request a book to be retrieved by a librarian. Carnegie intended to reduce labor costs by requiring “open stacks” practices, but the byproduct was “greater autonomy for patrons to browse and discover books and subjects on their own.”92

Carnegie libraries combined two elements of Greek eugertism: reciprocity between donors and the beneficiary communities, and universally accessible, enduring structures that anchored cities’ public life. They were also subject to approval by their recipients, and fostered independent cultivation rather than managed assistance. As a philanthropist, Carnegie exemplifies the multiplicity that defines philanthropy in the Gilded Age, at once maximally exploitative and cynical, and yet a facilitator of publicly available, enduring, non-instrumental

institutions. Carnegie libraries in particular show the interdependency between what philanthropists fund — particularly their purpose and intended longevity — and the relationships fostered in the public spaces shaped by their gifts. Philanthropists can hold personal ideologies that justify their own power, while creating spaces and institutions that cultivate relationships of solidarity. In the Gilded Age, the eugertistic tradition that receded under the rise of biopolitics (both writ large and in philanthropy specifically) re-emerges, reviving a way of doing philanthropy that can build a common world in modernity.

The Industrial Revolution and subsequent Gilded Age contains the culmination of the instrumentalizing tendencies, which first emerged as charity became a religious practice focused on salvation, and later intensified with the emergence of biopolitics. Nineteenth-century philanthropy completed the early modern translation of pity into discipline, as the management of poor populations became an increasingly urgent priority. The continuity between religious charity and biopolitical approaches to the social question is particularly explicit in a term used to describe the class of charity professionals of the nineteenth century: “a cautious, statistical Christ.”93 The term summarizes surveillance, quantitative assessment, and religious principles of “caring” for the poor, in a way that reconciles the previous eras’ phases of incorporating control and discipline into methods of providing charity to the poor. The Gilded Age ultimately had three key features, which underscore both ends of the spectrum for philanthropy’s political significance: the continuity and increased systematization of surveillance and discipline over the physical body; the revival of eugertism in the form of massive gifts towards civic institutions like libraries and museums; and an approach to caring for the poor that emphasized solidarity and shared political demands, as well as the importance of non-instrumental pursuits in revealing the full humanity of both poor and rich citizens.

The Foundations: The Legacy of the Gilded Age

The Gilded Age contained multiple and contradicting tendencies — at times, intensified surveillance and suspicion towards the poor, at others, profound cross-class solidarity. Poverty was often the general concern of many philanthropists, but while some efforts imposed solutions on poor people in the name of securing their basic well-being, others were more holistic in their approach, viewing the poor as full people who deserved to pursue their own interests and education. Philanthropy sometimes took the form of teaching poor families how to manage their household budget or stop drinking, and at other times it meant providing libraries and parks for universal access and individual autonomy, with the opportunity to cultivate one’s own interests. The Gilded Age continued the well-established mentality of instrumentalism and discipline towards the poor, but it also contained the revival of humanistic giving, to establish enduring institutions to anchor communities and foster appreciation for nature, art and scholarship. All of these tendencies can be found in the microcosmic example of Andrew Carnegie’s philanthropy, yet one facet of nineteenth and early twentieth philanthropy determined its lasting legacy, that of the charitable foundation, including Carnegie’s.

The foundations that titans of industrial wealth like Carnegie launched were unprecedented, as legal and financial instruments, but also in their scope, size, and purpose. These foundations are still major actors in today’s charitable sector, thanks to the extraordinary endowments resulting from industrial fortunes, but equally important is the precedent they set for future generations of highly influential and ambitious philanthropists.

The ideological legacy of the late nineteenth century can be found in the contemporary enthusiasm for “scientific” approaches to giving — that is, emphasis on quantifiable measurement and “packaged interventions” into questions of basic life and sustenance. The late nineteenth century is the key precedent to contemporary philanthropic practices and vocabulary, as the second Gilded Age revives (only) one of the patterns of the first: a focus on the
physical body, increasing embrace of social scientific disciplines to manage the bodies of the poor in particular.

The charitable foundation is a fairly recent vehicle for giving, marked mainly by legal and fiscal categories that originated in the early twentieth century. Today, philanthropists’ accounting vehicle of choice is “donor-advised funds,” meaning, accounts that hold funds that are classified as charitable donations, but not yet disbursed to nonprofit organizations. Such vehicles serve at least two purposes: they allow donors to deduct all funds parked within them from their taxes, and they provide a platform for philanthropists to proactively define and pursue the strategy for what they want their philanthropy to achieve, rather than reacting to a relentless stream of appeals.

The original version of this concept — a separate entity that both houses assets and pursues an independent social intervention strategy — emerged in the early twentieth century, as the tycoons of the Gilded Age had both fortunes to steward, and ideals about how they could best be put to use. The emergence of the nonprofit sector in the nineteenth century, with formal structures and governing bodies as well as a critical mass of both lay and professional participants, led to formalization within American tax policy. In 1913, the U.S. Congress passed the Revenue Act of 1913, which exempts organizations devoted to “religious, charitable, scientific or educational purposes from paying federal income tax, and in 1936 approved the exemption of charitable gifts from taxation. The movement towards establishing independent foundations began prior to this formal tax designation. George Peabody established the Peabody Education Fund in 1867 in an attempt to repair the education system in “the most destitute parts of the South” following the Civil War. Peabody’s approach to funding influenced many of the most influential donors, such as Carnegie and Rockefeller. He is remembered as “the father of modern philanthropy,” in large part due to the innovation of creating a trustee-led entity to pursue a dedicated intervention into a particular sector. Jabez Curry, one of the first general agents of the Peabody Education Fund, differentiated Peabody’s carefully considered
benefactions from the “sudden ebullitions of charitable impulse, excited by some object of pity.”

Philanthropists like John D. Rockefeller emulated Peabody’s approach as a way of “transcending charity’s limitations—and eschewing its enticements,” to sentimental generosity.

The “scientific” approach to charity in the mid-nineteenth century evolved into a slightly different mandate for major philanthropists than how it began — by the early twentieth century, the term was less a critique of the sector’s diffusion, and more an aspiration to be as thoughtful as possible in using the full scope of one’s money and expertise. Where scientific charity’s reformers sought greater precision in determining who would benefit most from gifts, the multi-millionaires attempted to use similar precision in determining what causes to spend their money on, and what methods to use when intervening in a social problem. Ben Soskis writes that the new philanthropy “would be governed by rational analysis and the sober calculus of the laboratory and boardroom.”

The Russell Sage Foundation, founded in 1907 by Margaret Olivia Sage following her husband’s death, was explicitly connected to social science research as its central method, even its raison d’etre. From its start, the foundation sought to apply social science research to “develop effective, systemic solutions to social problems.” In 1913, John D. Rockefeller, Sr. formed the Rockefeller Foundation, which took a business-like approach to giving that approached gifts and their possible outcomes as investments, a mentality that has come to define much of contemporary giving. The Rockefeller Sanitary Commission, which was launched in 1909, then taken under the auspices of the Foundation and disbanded in 1914, successfully eradicated hookworm in the American South. The commission becomes a model for future philanthropic involvement in public health issues, which includes funding medical research, dispensing vaccines, and spreading awareness about disease prevention and treatment.

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95 Soskis, “Both More and No More.”
worldwide. The Rockefeller Foundation would go on to pioneer the Green Revolution (1941-1956) in sharing improved methods of cultivating crops that helped alleviate famine.

Today, the philanthropic mentality contains a decided preference on the part of emerging major philanthropists to reject the humanistic tradition in favor of an ever-refined *techne*-based biopolitical one that expands on its nineteenth-century precedents.
Chapter 4
Contemporary Philanthropy

"The Moon is a dead world...shaped largely by impacts.”
Exhibition Text, The Moon Model, American Museum of Natural History

Theresa Gouw is the richest female venture capitalist in the United States. However iconoclastic a successful venture funder may be in choosing projects to back, Gouw’s giving philosophy is squarely in line with dominating principles of contemporary philanthropy: giving should operate like a for-profit investment decision and should show quantitative proof of its efficacy. An organization must demonstrate its efficacy within a data-driven rubric but with enough room for improvement that a single person’s intervention can be affirmed as transformative and “impactful.” In Gouw’s case, she makes her giving decisions “the same [way] she does when she is deciding to invest in a tech startup,” by looking for management teams she trusts to implement a grand vision and thorough measurement of progress against the organization’s stated goals. Without those indicators of credibility, Gouw declines to get involved “because she won’t be able to know if her support is having any impact.” Such principles are common in a philanthropy culture increasingly dominated by analytical professions, specifically, finance and technology. In addition to collapsing philanthropy into investment activity, Gouw’s expectation of personal validation underscores another prevailing trend, a secondary way in which philanthropy is becoming conflated with instrumental and sovereign modes of wielding money, in this case, with consumerism.

The philanthropist-as-investor and the philanthropist-as-shopper share important attributes: an expectation of a specific result based on their gift, one that is legible in some

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3 Di Mento. “Theresa Gouw”.

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familiar manner, be it through dashboard analytics or a product that equates to a specific charitable output. The demands of the philanthropist-as-investor and the philanthropist-as-shopper result in an objectification of the beneficiaries of philanthropy, who become flattened into data points and marketing slogans. These tendencies invoke Hannah Arendt’s concerns about a modern fixation on measurement, reducing causes and people to merely “the way they affect our measuring instruments.” The abstraction of social improvement to quantifiable and predictable outcomes, calculated and tracked from a position of the analytical, removes and transforms philanthropy into a controlling, biopolitical activity, transforming it from a worldly activity to a disconnected and un-worldly one.

This transformation has precedents throughout the historical development of philanthropy, beginning with the religious turn under early Christianity and then through the biopolitical turn of early modernity. As philanthropy focused upon bodies, it intensified the focus on people’s utility (whether for otherworldly salvation or earthly labor), and the power of donors to use their generosity to discipline individuals and institutions towards the donors’ desired outcomes. Mid- and late-nineteenth-century philanthropy completed the early modern translation of pity into discipline and sovereignty, as the management of poor populations became an increasingly urgent priority. The late nineteenth century saw the emergence of a form of “scientific charity,” a movement among the new Gilded Age elite to apply the methods of measurement from their business interests to resolving the problem of poverty.

Today, the growth of wealth and influence from the technology and finance sectors has expanded scientific charity’s scope, applying its refined techniques and pervasive ideologies of neoliberalism to upon philanthropy. Neoliberal individualism posits that every person is a consumer capable of making discerning choices, which reinforces an approach to a philanthropy rooted in donors acting as consumers: surveying options, determining criteria, making informed decisions on how and where to give, and evaluating the results of their gifts to determine whether loyalty to a given cause would be sufficiently justified. Contemporary philanthropic
discourse seeks to compress philanthropy into modes of investment and consumption. From elite and highly influential donors to mass-market brands, the expectation of giving as a practice that yields concrete returns has pervaded the very lifeworld of philanthropy.

Today, elites have turned away from donation- and non-profit based transactions in favor of market-based efforts (at times called “social enterprise” or “venture philanthropy”). Informed by his experience as a Microsoft executive and consultant to the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Kentaro Toyama, describes a “cult of technology” in the operating principles of philanthropy. Government officials, business leaders in the technology sector, and philanthropists (or, frequently, figures who fall into two or more of those categories) have adopted the principles of this cult, specifically, an extreme focus on quantitative data as the key factor in grant-making decisions, along with a demand for increasingly granular measurements of nonprofit performance. Major philanthropists demand immediate, measurable financial returns for their benevolent efforts. Kavita Ramdas, Executive Director of the Global Fund for Women described in 2011 how donors increasingly prefer to restrict their gifts to solving specific and discrete issues such as maternal mortality, income inequality, and education, rather than the core costs of running the organization as a whole.

Current philanthropic practice is...driven by the need to find technological solutions, the same “fix-the-problem” mentality that allowed business people to succeed as hedge-fund managers, capital-market investors, or software-developers...the realization that development has to do with people, with human and social complexity, with cultural and traditional realities, and their willingness to struggle with the messy and multifaceted aspects of a problem, have no cachet in this metrics-driven, efficiency-seeking, technology-focused approach to social change.5

In today’s philanthropy, the epistemological primacy of data and measurement is combined with an embrace of commodity consumption as a means toward altruistic ends. This approach to

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philanthropy explicitly opposes other norms and practices that might drive giving, supplanting them with a sovereignty over beneficiaries (both the receiving institutions and the individuals served by them).

Today the philanthropic mentality contains a decided preference on the part of emerging major philanthropists to reject its humanistic traditions in favor of an ever-refined \textit{techne}-based one. This chapter will elaborate this through a discourse scan, to show the rise of key terms in major philanthropy publications, and profiles that analyze philanthropy’s unworldly turn in greater depth.

**Discourse Scan**

Philanthropy has risen steadily over the past decade, hitting record highs in 2014, 2015 and 2016, with the total documented dollars committed to philanthropy in the United States now at over $400 billion.\textsuperscript{6} Interdisciplinary centers focused on philanthropy are proliferating including those at Indiana University, Duke University, University of Denver, Stanford University and The Graduate Center of City University of New York. In addition to the main trade publications of the nonprofit sector (\textit{The Chronicle of Philanthropy}, \textit{NonProfit Quarterly}, \textit{Advancing Philanthropy} and the \textit{Stanford Social Innovation Review}), new online publications have emerged over the last several years, such as \textit{Inside Philanthropy}, HistPhil.org and \textit{Philanthropy 2173}. Three significant new books on philanthropy were published in 2018 alone: \textit{Just Giving} by Robert Reich, \textit{Decolonizing Philanthropy} by Edgar Villanueva, and \textit{Winners Take All} by Anand Giridharas, which was also a \textit{New York Times} bestseller.\textsuperscript{7}

In this expanding philanthropy discourse, we see the rise of particular terms originally used in for-profit contexts: the words “venture” and “metrics” appear in social welfare literature,

\textsuperscript{7} \textit{The New York Times} Best Sellers, Hardcover Nonfiction, September 16, 2018.
and “social enterprise” and “venture philanthropy,” are increasingly popular within philanthropy discourse. Longitudinal data confirms that philanthropy writ large is appearing more frequently in published works, particularly within the last twenty years. Figure 1 shows a steady growth in the frequency with which “philanthropy” appears in published books, starting in the mid-1980’s, and reaching its highest measurable percentage in 2008 (the latest searchable date within the ngram). The term "charitable giving” has likewise risen through the last third of the twentieth century, but at a more modest rate and a much lower frequency overall.

![Frequency of “philanthropy” and “charitable giving” in all publications, 1960-2008. (Source: Google ngram, accessed March 2, 2019)](https://example.com/frequency.png)

Within increasing philanthropy discussion overall, terms typically used in for-profit contexts, particularly for describing business models and pitching to investors, are showing up more frequently in literature dealing with social history and social reform. The terms highlighted here are “venture” and “metrics,” first as standalone words within the broad literature on social reform. Each of those terms has appeared more frequently in social science literature, specifically works on social reform, including but not limited to philanthropic interventions, since 1995 (see Figure 2).
“Venture philanthropy” and “social enterprise” are hybrid terms that bridge for- and non-profit efforts and approaches; their overall frequency has risen, respectively, since 1990 (see Figure 3). Venture philanthropy is the model demonstrated by Theresia Gouw’s approach, that is, treating giving choices as investments, by monitoring performance according to specific measurable elements, presuming active involvement on the part of the donor to help guide the recipient organization to better performance (as one would do with a company one is funding), and structuring one’s overall giving as a portfolio that must generate, in total, optimal returns according to the determined measurements. “Social enterprise” is a useful signifier insofar as the term exists to distinguish itself as not-philanthropy. The practice bridges business exclusively dedicated to profit, and charities exclusively devoted to social improvement. Social enterprises can generate revenue, and seek to build an ongoing stream of money and/or skill-building in lieu of constant requests for charitable funding. “Social enterprise” is often invoked...
to clarify that a funder is informed by the methods and mentality of the for-profit sector, rather than a more sentimental or less analytical approach to charitable giving.

Figure 3: Frequency of “social enterprise” and “venture philanthropy” in all publications, 1960–2008. (Source: Google ngram, accessed March 2, 2019)

For example, Marissa Sackler, a young woman whose family philanthropic tradition tends to involve large gifts to educational or cultural institutions⁸, says that she finds the term philanthropy old-fashioned and prefers to call herself a “social entrepreneur.”⁹ Her current venture is an “incubator” that seeks to help charities generate a wider network of followers and donors, through a team of experts in technology, design, and media.

Finally, both the hybrid terms and “metrics” as a grafted for-profit term have appeared more frequently in trade publications for the philanthropy sector. “Venture philanthropy” first emerges in publicly searchable philanthropy industry publications in a 1998 article. The article, “New Charity Hopes to Infuse Non-Profit World With Business Thinking,” profiles an organization called New Profit Inc., one of the first organizations to self-identify with venture

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⁸ The Sackler family, as discussed elsewhere, has funded prominent spaces at museums including the Metropolitan Museum of Art, the Guggenheim Museum, the Serpentine Gallery, and the Louvre.
philanthropy. New Profit Inc. operates with the same incentives as a for-profit investment group, including benchmarking the achievements its investors wanted to see from their beneficiaries, and offering employees bonuses based on the success of their respective charity portfolios, which founder Vanessa Kirsch said would be treated like investment bank portfolios, with an emphasis on competition and “picking winners.”

Five years later, the Stanford Social Innovation Review published its first issue. The first article of its first issue, “How High-Engagement Philanthropy Works,” by Christine W. Letts and William P. Ryan, addressed the “increasingly popular and controversial funding approach called high engagement, or venture philanthropy.” To date, SSIR has published 197 articles (print and web) related to venture philanthropy to-date; several recent articles address the spread of the venture philanthropy approach to philanthropy beyond the United States. A 2007 article from the Chronicle of Philanthropy underscores the growing significance of measurement in the sector. A group of Wharton Business School alumni made an anonymous gift to establish the “Center for High Impact Philanthropy,” motivated by the trouble they faced “evaluating how much impact their gifts were having.” In another article, the Chronicle quoted the then-president of the Fairfield County Community Foundation saying the hedge fund managers who comprised her donor pool were “not interested in giving back in a general way” and wanted philanthropic opportunities with “result metrics.” Figure 4 collates the total searchable appearances of these terms in prominent trade publications, starting in 2002.

11 Gray, 12.
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<th>Articles in Chronicle of Philanthropy (#)</th>
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*Table 1: Increase in mentions in philanthropy trade press (Chronicle Of Philanthropy and Stanford Social Innovation Review), 2002-present*

The proliferation of terminology drawn from finance and technology corresponds to the greater representation of donors from those sectors among top U.S. philanthropists. The Chronicle of Philanthropy compiles an annual “Philanthropy 50” report, which profiles the year’s biggest donors and analyzes significant trends. In 2015, tech donors provided 49% of total giving from the members of the Philanthropy 50 list. In 2016, donors from finance had greater representation on the list, but many notable donors from the sector, like Bill Ackman and John Overbeck, emphasized that their philanthropy was similarly influenced by the possibility of using technology and quantitative measurement to spur social change. In 2017, donors from the tech industry accounted for 60% of Philanthropy 50 giving.\(^\text{15}\) By 2017, finance and technology sector donors reached their highest counts on the list, at sixteen and eleven respectively, for a combined percentage of 54% of the top donors that year.

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\(^{15}\) The influence of tech leaders is even greater than what the Philanthropy 50 suggests, as many of them pursue social good through limited-liability corporations or for-profit ventures.
Table 2: Donors by Sector 2015-18. Source: The Chronicle of Philanthropy

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The increased representation of these industries means greater influence in overall philanthropic priorities and methods. Donors from finance and technology sectors have encouraged others to conduct philanthropy more like consumer or investment activity, to the point where members of the donor class emphasize how unlike philanthropy their philanthropy is. This shift in mentality has produced a philanthropy discourse that flattens any of the practice’s unique qualities. When the Clinton Foundation’s founding adviser Ira Magaziner told *The Atlantic*, “this is not charity,” or it is repeated that, “millennials have found a need to reinterpret the traditional boundaries of philanthropy...[into an] approach more fitting to our generation, Social Entrepreneurship,” we can see a rejection of the kind of philanthropy that provided enduring, non-instrumental goods and institutions — giving that did not produce a measurable return.

From the philanthropy press coverage and the profiles that follow here, growing and influential forms of philanthropy exemplify sovereignty — one-sided donor control — and instrumentality — an attitude that sees philanthropy’s aim as solving problems. The trend towards greater donor sovereignty has been confirmed in recent research by behavioral scientists Elizabeth Dunn, Ashley Whillans, and Eugene Caruso, who find that giving

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motivations often reflect self-perception, leaving wealthier individuals likelier to give when requests appeal to their sense of self-reliance and individual power. A 2017 study tested two appeals for an organization dedicated to ending extreme poverty. One message emphasized “agentic” messages about an individual’s potential impact, with the concluding pitch containing the god-like implications of “the life you can save.” The second message emphasized a communal appeal about “what all of us can do together to reduce poverty,” concluding, “together, we can save a life.” The agentic messages increased the total amount of money that individuals in the sample donated by approximately 82%. Philanthropy is increasingly a matter of individual discretion, analysis, and selection, with each person seeking proof of her discrete contribution, rather than a communal project. However, narrative is cheap; any organization can supply stories or anecdotal data that demonstrate how recipients have benefited from its interventions. In their simplest form, these measurements are found in annual reports and other promotional materials: the number of lives saved, meals served, or college educations secured. Many philanthropists now believe that an organization’s success and worth can be evaluated exclusively through such numerical measurements. A recent report by the Boston Consulting Group (“How Tech Entrepreneurs Are Disrupting Philanthropy”) names “trust in the power of data” as a major quality of philanthropists today. If philanthropy is supposed to “solve” problems like poverty and disease, as these donors believe, it must operate at a scale that can be represented only through quantitative assessments. The affected individual is too small and too subjective a unit to demonstrate a similarly meaningful advantage in giving to one nonprofit over another; only data can do that.

The three profiles below examine in greater depth and detail how financialization and instrumentalism have taken over philanthropy. The contemporary moment combines instrumentality, financialization, and the biopolitical aspects of contemporary philanthropy; all of which continue and intensify such tendencies from early Christianity, early modern welfare, and the Industrial Revolution.

**Robin Hood Foundation**

Founded by hedge fund billionaire Paul Tudor Jones, Robin Hood is sustained by major donations from the financial sector; attendance at its annual gala is all but required for hedge fund managers and private equity partners. Its mission is to fight poverty in New York City, using parameters and tools that draw from those used by such financial professionals. According to its former executive director, David Saltzman, “our strategy was to learn from the best thinking from the investment world and try to apply it to the nonprofit world.” Robin Hood’s approach is to treat New York City poverty, and the organizations tackling discrete aspects such as education, nutrition, and health care, as options for financial bets, like those made in a investment portfolio. Their grant selection and evaluation processes use all the fine-grained quantitative analysis and constant evaluation that managers would bring to their for-profit market choices. They apply investment world principles like “add value” and “get results,” under the assumption that the Foundation can quantify each individual nonprofit’s impact. Similarly, those tools can be used to determine the specific degree of impact generated by a Robin Hood Foundation gift; such effects can be calculated in isolation to determine whether Robin Hood is maximizing the unique value of its philanthropic dollars across all organizational options in its philanthropic portfolio.

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Robin Hood’s process for assessing its grant allocations is called “relentless monetization.” One hundred and sixty-three “metric equations,” covering the quantitative impact of interventions ranging from asthma treatment to job training, are spelled out in a 142-page document on the foundation’s website. The metrics are used as part of the foundation’s “Benefit-Cost Analysis,” which applies a standard measurement of success to all grant recipients. This measurement calculates increased income per person, over estimated years of extended life, and then creates a ratio of those per-person lifetime earnings per dollar of philanthropic funding. Robin Hood also controls for organizations’ potential to get funding from other sources, or benefit from efforts made by other anti-poverty nonprofits. The recipient organization is evaluated according to these formulas, specifically, how much social value (again, measured in beneficiaries’ individual lifetime earnings) is added to their work through Robin Hood Foundation’s intervention.

Speaking to the Stanford Graduate School of Business, Robin Hood Foundation representatives explained that “we work with [grantees] to set specific goals. They’re expected to meet these goals” with regular benchmarks. For a school, for example, these benchmarks might include attendance, rates of graduation, and college attendance rates. Foundation staffers also meet with grantees at least three times per year, of which one visit is a surprise visit. Every one of the foundation’s two-hundred-plus grantees undergoes a Benefit-Cost analysis every year. Like private equity investors looking to turn around companies, Robin Hood provides its grantees with consultants on financial management, legal practice, and organizational strategy, with the hope that these grantees will benefit as much from the intellectual capital as the financial capital. Continued funding is largely dependent on whether or not the grantee meets

the quantitative goals Robin Hood has set. Ten to fifteen percent of the foundation’s grantees lose their funding every year (much like a fund firing the lowest-performing managers every year.) As with any investment, performance determines Robin Hood’s next move. According to Saltzman, if programs “are successful at saving lives...[and] at meeting the goals that they’ve agreed to, we’ll try to help them grow and become stronger.”

A short video on Robin Hood’s website contains an image that encapsulates this culture of surveillance and power — at the center of symbols of education, medicine, food, and housing (plus a single icon for the arts, the tragedy-comedy masks of theater) is an enormous watchful eye (see Figure 6). The voiceover text for this image says, “Through our system of metrics, we keep a careful watch on the performance of our investments.”

Figure 4: “Metrics” video still (Source: The Robin Hood Foundation, https://www.robinhood.org/what-we-do/metrics/, accessed March 17, 2018)

22 Arrillaga-Andreessen and Chang, 5
23 Arrillaga-Andreessen and Chang, 5
Not only does Robin Hood continue to embrace the application of financial market ideology to the social sector, but it touts the level of surveillance that it imposes on its grantees. Grants are considered investments, detached analysis takes the place of relationship, numbers replace the often complex experience of progress in the face of poverty.

Yet as extreme as Robin Hood’s methods may seem, its approach has been influential among recent generations of philanthropists. Chris Addy, a partner with Bridgespan who works with nonprofits, calls Robin Hood Foundation a “philanthropy finishing school” for a generation of financiers. Whether through direct contact with Robin Hood Foundation or through contact with social and professional circles of the donor class, a rising number of donors view their giving as an investment that requires returns - a “social return on investment” (that is, number of people affected in the desired ways) as well as a financial return on investment (in this context, meaning that their gift triggered, or “leveraged,” more philanthropic contributions, thus further diversifying funding and validating the initial investment.)\textsuperscript{25,26} From 2000 to 2005, Robin Hood’s assets more than tripled, from $66 million to $210 million, with external contributions quadrupling from $25 million to $102 million. Currently the largest private anti-poverty organization in New York City, Robin Hood views itself as a pioneer in “venture philanthropy,” i.e. applying the financial sector’s methods of due diligence and strictly measured outcomes to the social sector.\textsuperscript{27}

In September 2014, Robin Hood hosted a panel for signers of The Giving Pledge, a movement launched by Warren Buffett and Bill and Melinda Gates in 2010 to encouraging rich people to give away more than half of their fortunes during their lifetimes. The Giving Pledge has become an influential identifier for new philanthropists, who often submit open letters declaring their motives and objectives for joining the pledge. Several of these letters reflect the

\textsuperscript{25} Diane Gingold, “New frontiers in philanthropy,” \textit{Fortune} (July 2000), \url{http://www.timeinc.net/fortune/sections/}.
\textsuperscript{27} Arrillaga-Andreessen and Chang, 2.
analytical approach of Robin Hood and similar grantmaking organizations. The 2014 session focused on the role of metrics in philanthropy and “how individuals can use them to make more informed and effective charitable investments.” Bill Gates and Paul Tudor Jones presented on measurement, Robin Hood’s chief economist presented on its system of metrics, and leaders of longtime Robin Hood grantees like Grameen America, a microlender, presented on how Robin Hood’s methods have helped them fight poverty more effectively.

Robin Hood has faced criticism in the nonprofit media. The co-executive director of charity evaluator GiveWell, Holden Karnofsky, has written that the foundation appears more interested in “quantifying good” than in “real impact.” Karnofsky does not consider that such quantification may well be what the donors and staff believe to be “real impact” or question why these donors would be particularly invested in systems of measurement, nor what that preference might suggest about their understanding of philanthropy’s purpose. The commitment to quantification is perhaps taken for granted compared with the threat of the donor class using philanthropy writ large to legitimize their wealth and exert power over public institutions.

Such metrics, and the process that created them, are arguably the substance of contemporary philanthropy. They demonstrate the fundamental irony of Robin Hood Foundation’s name: where the original mythical figure treated wealth as ill-gotten gains the Robin Hood Foundation treats wealth as legitimizing the process of its accumulation, proof of the validity of financialization and its techniques. The omniscient panoptic eye of surveillance over organizations and their beneficiaries reinforces hierarchy, rather than equalizing all


through collective redistribution. Rather from “stealing from” the rich, the Robin Hood Foundation underscores the myth that the rich are models to be emulated, and their beneficiaries are correctly understood as their dependents, their mentees, and their vehicles for highly-controlled generosity. The demand for measurability is complemented by a need for those results to indicate progress towards a determined result — in the case of Robin Hood, a measurable improvement in health and economic productivity that indicates mobility out of poverty, at least on a per-person basis.

The increased demand for direct correlation between donations and specific isolated results moves philanthropic activity ever-closer to actual commercial transactions. The idea that some form of social good can be narrowed to a predetermined, singular outcome (an “expected return”) distills philanthropic activity to an even more concrete monetized transaction. This trend is evidenced by the turn to commodification initiatives that promise to make giving a fully integrated and seamless element of shopping — the ultimate “expected return” activity.

One-for-One, Micro-Loans and Commercialized Philanthropy

In 2011, at the Next Gen: Charity conference, keynote speaker and clothing mogul Mark Ecko proudly declared that “the future of non-profit is for-profit.”30 Ecko’s cause of choice was reducing corporal punishment in schools. He lamented the inefficiency of lobbying through state governments: “It took six million dollars and eight years to change the law in one state out of twenty...which is a terrible return.” He also noted the “non-market-like conditions” of the political sector. The question of “returns” on one’s voluntary contributions echoes the intensive quantification performed by Robin Hood and other venture philanthropists. Yet market talk manifests in other ways for smaller givers. A number of “commodification for good” ventures,

such as TOMS shoes, Project (RED) merchandise, and FEED bags have emerged since 2006. (RED), FEED, and TOMS all sell products that blend necessity and novelty — a branded tote bag, T-shirt, or pair of canvas slip-on shoes — the sales of which generate donations made by the companies to, respectively, AIDS research or meals in Kenya. On FEED’s website is an assertion that encapsulates the ambition of these types of initiatives: “people’s choices of what to buy and wear have the power to change the world.” These efforts do not seek to augment or even adapt philanthropy using techniques from the for-profit sector. They seek to supplant the idea of philanthropy entirely, by integrating donations with consumer spending.

The most extreme version of this differentiation comes from Project (RED), a branding initiative that applies its logo to merchandise and donates a portion of the profits generated from purchases to the Global Fund, to combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and tuberculosis in Africa. Its president, Tamsin Smith, proclaimed, “(RED) is not a charity. It is simply a business model.” Bobby Shriver, one of the co-founders, told the New York Times:

> Gap...wanted to do a T-shirt and give us all the money. But, we want them to make money...We want people buying houses in the Hamptons based on this because, if that happens, this thing is sustainable.\(^{31}\)

What makes (RED) sustainable under this logic is the promise of consumers’ renewable appetites for ever-proliferating branded products. With a charitable donation, the post-facto benefit is an intangible and arguably ephemeral sense of satisfaction, and no direct correlation between dollars donated and outcomes for beneficiaries. By contrast, purchases of a cause-branded product provide a more concrete return to the purchaser: a commercial transaction of mutually-agreed value, including the cost of whatever charitable donation is made as a result of the purchase. Rather than giving to an ideal or into the unrestricted budget of a nonprofit, the consumer-donor knows precisely what she receives in return.

A byproduct of this merger of charitable impulse and consumer power is that it has spread beyond the obvious commercial forums and into forms of giving where there is no product per se, but where the demand for personal selection and oversight extends to the beneficiaries themselves. Here, the parallels between nineteenth-century paternalism and surveillance of the poor reappear intersect with twenty-first-century technology. Kiva.org is a website that updates “person-to-person” appeals (such as “sponsor a child”) with digital representation. It takes pictures and stories of individual applicants for microcredit loans. These representations are highly personalized, with color-coded bar graphs demonstrating how far each individual borrower has to go to reach their intended loan amount, biographical details and itemized lists of what the loan will purchase.32 Individual givers feel that they possess significant influence over whether this individual will receive her loan or not. This combination of information and specificity is precisely the appeal for people who want to know, in detail, the difference their particular contribution has made to another person in need. The process of sifting through pictures and brief profiles is analogous to the endless scroll of online shopping and online dating. David Roodman, a reporter and blogger with the Center for Global Development, called it “eBay for microcredit.”33 In 2009, Roodman revealed that Kiva’s operating structure was far less personalized than had been advertised and that individual donors had far less direct influence over the fate of individual borrowers than Kiva’s marketing implied. Specifically, Kiva lists borrowers who have already been approved and received their

32 As of November 3, 2016, the website provides color-coded bar graphs for each borrower specifying the amount sought and how close each borrower is to goal. Once a visitor clicks to contribute, the bar advances, to indicate her money’s role in reaching the specific goal. Once a goal is reached the graph turns green. The website copy says loans are not funded until the goal is reached, and individual lenders are notified by email reporting that “your” microloan was paid.

microfinance loans from an intermediary lender. Contributions to Kiva go towards a pool of loan repayment capital for those microfinance lenders, not to the individual borrower in question.

As several commentators noted, many nonprofit organizations navigate the fine line between motivating people to give by associating each gift with a hypothetical outcome (“$10 buys a child lunch for a week,”) and promising direct control for each donor’s exact gift, to be spent on precisely the invoked outcome. Kiva may have strained the limits of that marketing technique, blurring the line between what a giver’s money specifically purchases and the kinds of things their money might hypothetically purchase. The more telling revelation is how deeply attached many of their donors are to the package of consumption and control that Kiva promised. In an online comment, “Kate” wrote,

Kiva...proactively misled users in my opinion (such as myself) with quotes throughout the website that spoke of loans going to specific lenders...that was part of my initial fanfare of Kiva. I thought they were doing something really special by going that route...In plain English, I really felt I was enabling the poor business owner that I chose.\textsuperscript{34}

The operating principles of choice, control, and individual sovereignty over not just the transfer of money but the fate of another human being composed the affective package offered by Kiva. Kiva went beyond the model of, “purchase a novelty item to generate surplus that becomes a donation,” and then further still beyond the promise that “your donation functions as a purchase of items or services provided to individuals.” The Kiva borrowers themselves were the product. The modalities of consumption were applied to actual “poor business owners.” This mentality so overwhelmed other modalities of financial transfer that people were offended when their perceived, carefully chosen “purchase” of another person’s future, functioned in reality more like an financial investment.

The consumer paradigm still has an element of altruism involved, but the central subject shifts from the recipient to the donor - altruism as part of the commodity being purchased. Nicholas Kristof succinctly exemplified this dynamic when he tweeted, "Just made a new microloan on www.kiva.org to a Nicaraguan woman. Great therapy: always makes me feel good." A guaranteed return, on a carefully chosen yet distant recipient, with the promise of enabling someone else's livelihood.

There are two consistent parts to the logic of this “marketized philanthropy." One is the instrumental pragmatism of embracing the retail consumption model, wherein consumer appetite is the most reliable means of parting people from their money. Giving becomes a “seamless” part of shopping, which transcends psychological obstacles that delay people from giving outright. Amazon Smile is perhaps the most visible form of “one-click" philanthropy, in which Amazon donates 0.5% of a customer's purchase to the charity of their choice, building in small automatic corporate donations and thus incentivizing further purchases. Independent platforms like Giving Assistant exist exclusively to link nonprofits with consumer brands through similar bundled “donations" within purchases. When consumers sign up to use Giving Assistant, the platform redirects “cash back" rewards at brands like Target to go to a user's selected charities. Giving Assistant promises that such bundling will “foster a culture of giving," that the charitable connection will alter the character of consumer purchases -- “transforming everyday shopping into charitable giving," — rather than the opposite, in which the ease of shopping undermines more intentional ways of giving.

The second factor is a differentiation of this method from more straightforward giving by describing the consumer pitch as a more dignified alternative to appeals based on helping people in need, or fulfilling an obligation to give back, which do not promise direct rewards for

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donors. Lauren Bush Lauren (George W. Bush’s niece) explained her creation of FEED, a for-profit entity that creates simple, eco-friendly tote bags that factor the cost of donating school meals to children in Rwanda via the UN World Food Program, thus:

I don’t want to go around and beg people for money, I’d rather sell them a product...it can’t be just an emotional sell, people have to buy a product...that they’re proud of.37

The forfeiture of emotional appeals and the enthusiasm for the limitless profit motive explicitly reject the more abstract and emotional rewards of philanthropy in favor of the transactional satisfaction of the consumer experience. In their support of entrepreneurship that yields social good as a byproduct, would-be philanthropists now reject the idea of donations or philanthropy. Philanthropy follows the market by making the individual consumer the central actor, reducing the recipient to an object, as demonstrated by the tag line for Giving Assistant, in which the individual shopper’s mandate is to “earn big, give back, and feel good.” As Elizabeth Dunn and Ashley Whillans demonstrate, “agentic,” appeals which emphasize a singular individual’s ability to make a difference — “sometimes, one person needs to come forward and take individual action,” — generate larger donations than appeals which are more communal — “one community needs to come forward and support a common goal.”38

**Effective Altruism**

Effective Altruism is a philosophy first articulated by Peter Singer, and subsequently adopted by many newly wealthy technology executives, including Facebook co-founder Dustin Moskovitz and Elon Musk. Effective Altruism’s popularity in the tech sector is due in large part to its

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38 Ashley V. Whillans and Eugene M. Caruso, “Agentic appeals increase charitable giving in an affluent sample of donors,” *PLoS ONE* 13, 12, (2018): e0208392. In this study, the target donor group was alumni of a particular business school. Of those who chose to donate, the group that viewed an “agentic” appeal gave an average of $150 more.
promise of what Derek Thompson called “doing good with scientific exactitude.” The
movement’s leadership evangelize for their philosophy through a network of think-tanks and
organizations that research and rank charitable causes (sometimes called “meta-charities.”)
These include two organizations (both of which exist under the auspices of the Centre for
Effective Altruism, with headquarters in Oxford and Berkeley): Giving What We Can encourages
people to hand over at least 10 percent of their future incomes for philanthropic purposes;
80,000 Hours provides advice on career choices with the aim of maximizing social benefit. Since
2009, Giving What We Can has grown to 2,014 members, who have collectively donated more
than $16 million to “highly effective” charities and have pledged to donate more than $780
million over the course of their careers. Like the Robin Hood Foundation, Effective Altruists
are committed to quantification above all other approaches; commensurately, their solutions
focus on individual accumulation and redistribution. Nowhere is this clearer than in one of EA’s
top recommendations, “earning to give.”

A notable element of Effective Altruism is its perspective that it is possible to know one is
doing the “most” good and to orient one’s entire life around maximizing one’s achievement of
good. Effective Altruism makes recommendations about the percentage an individual should
give and how to make career choices that will maximize the amount generated according to that
formula. Singer uses his student, Matt Wage, as the ur-example of this approach:

[Wage] was accepted by the University of Oxford for postgraduate study. Many students
who major in philosophy dream of an opportunity like that—I know I did—but by then
Wage had done a lot of thinking about what career would do the most good. Over many
discussions with others, he came to a very different choice: he took a job on Wall Street,
working for an arbitrage trading firm. On a higher income, he would be able to give

39 Derek Thompson, “The Greatest Good,” The Atlantic (June 15, 2015),
https://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2015/06/what-is-the-greatest-good/395768/,
(accessed March 10, 2019).
40 Jennifer Rubenstein, “The Lessons of Effective Altruism,” Ethics & International Affairs 30
much more, both as a percentage and in dollars, than 10 percent of a professor’s income.\footnote{Peter Singer, “The Logic of Effective Altruism,” Boston Review (July 6, 2015), http://bostonreview.net/forum/peter-singer-logic-effective-altruism, (accessed March 10, 2019).}

In other words, becoming an investment banker is a greater absolute good because it generates more income than direct service professions, income which can be subsequently deployed to charities with the greatest social effect.\footnote{There does not appear to be any acknowledgement of Andrew Carnegie’s “The Gospel of Wealth” as a precedent for this belief system.}

The other arm of Effective Altruism’s ideological apparatus is a network of meta-charities that qualify and rank nonprofits’ effectiveness for EA adherents to use when giving away their maximized earnings. These meta-charities include GiveWell, The Life You Can Save (founded by Peter Singer), Good Ventures (founded by Facebook co-founder Dustin Moskovitz and his wife, Cari Tuna, who have pledged to give away most of their money), Animal Charity Evaluators (an 80,000 Hours spin-off) and the Open Philanthropy Project (a collaboration between GiveWell and Good Ventures). Effectiveness is determined on the basis of “impact per dollar,” similar to Robin Hood’s method, but applied universally across geography and sector. According to Dylan Matthews, the aim of such organizations, guided by tenets of Effective Altruism, is

putting the vast spectrum of human suffering into numbers. The only aspect of charity worthy of analysis is how much bang donators can expect to get for their buck [in] cost per life saved or quality-adjusted life-years.\footnote{Dylan Matthews, “I spent a weekend at Google talking with nerds about charity. I came away ... worried,” Vox (August 10, 2015). https://www.vox.com/2015/8/10/9124145/effective-altruism-global-ai, (accessed March 10, 2019).}

Quality-adjusted life years is a unit that allows welfare economists to compare benefits across different interventions. One QALY is a single year of life lived at 100 percent health. Using people with AIDS as an example of isolating interventions, a year as an AIDS patient not on antiretrovirals is worth 0.5 QALYs, while a year with AIDS lived on antiretrovirals is worth 0.9
QALYs. Under this rubric, global poverty alleviation is among the favored areas of giving for effective altruists precisely because the number and longevity of human lives can be counted. Furthermore, the cost of basic interventions, like a malaria net, is a cheaper expenditure per life saved in the global South. All but one of the “top charities” recommended by GiveWell and Giving What We Can focus on treating neglected tropical diseases; the Against Malaria Foundation is GiveWell’s most-recommended charity because the “return” on malaria-resistant nets is measurable and provides the most favorable dollars-to-life ratio. EA meta-charities are in principle open to endorsing any organization that can be shown to do the most good.

However, they systematically prioritize organizations that provide public health interventions and cash transfers over those that engage in political advocacy because the effects of the former are easier to measure and compare. GiveWell estimates that it has directed more than $336 million to what it sees as highly effective charities since its founding in 2007. Critics of Effective Altruism have raised concerns about the reductiveness of EA’s commitment to quantification and what Iason Diamond refers to as its “welfarist understanding of value,” in which goodness is understood as the reduction of acute suffering and averting premature loss of life. Additionally, EA’s methodology has come under criticism for its technocratic bias and its preference for organizations whose missions and methods align with EA’s standards of measurability. MacAskill has acknowledged these biases within EA and defends them on the grounds that measurement techniques themselves will improve and a commitment to doing the “most” good requires comparative analysis. A more serious criticism of EA is its foreclosure of

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48 MacAskill, 39-42
other approaches to social welfare, whether through explicit rejection of other approaches to philanthropy or its irreconcilability with political advocacy as a less quantifiable approach to social change.⁴⁹ Amia Srinivasan points out that political change is all but illegible under Effective Altruism:

What’s the expected marginal value of becoming an anti-capitalist revolutionary? To answer that you’d need to put a value and probability measure on achieving an unrecognizably different world – even, perhaps, on our becoming unrecognizably different sorts of people. It’s hard enough to quantify the value of a philanthropic intervention: how would we go about quantifying the consequences of radically reorganizing society?⁵⁰

In fact, EA’s instrumentality when it comes to human welfare corresponds with the reduction of social action to consumer behavior. Among the lessons that Jennifer Rubenstein identifies in EA’s “hidden curriculum” is the heroic individualism the movement promises to each member of its donor class.⁵¹ Peter Singer’s archetypal effective altruist, Matt Wage, framed his awakening with just such heroic overtones:

[Wage calculated] how many lives he could save, over his lifetime, assuming he earned an average income and donated 10 percent of it to a highly effective organization, such as one providing families with bed nets to prevent malaria, a major killer of children. He discovered that he could, with that level of donation, save about one hundred lives. He thought to himself, “Suppose you see a burning building, and you run through the flames and kick a door open, and let one hundred people out. That would be the greatest moment in your life. And I could do as much good as that!”⁵²

The sovereign power of the single effective altruist to generate surplus to donate, and discern where it should be directed, “precludes more promising forms of connection, such as political solidarity.”⁵³ Nowhere in EA is the methodology modulated by other forms of knowledge production or sharing power with actual poor and sick people.⁵⁴ Instead, Catherine Tumber describes EA’s biopolitical standpoint as follows:

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⁴⁹ Rubenstein, 518.
⁵⁰ Srinivasan, 3.
⁵¹ Rubenstein, 520.
⁵² Singer, "Logic".
⁵³ Rubenstein, 522
⁵⁴ Rubenstein, 523.
The suffering are units to be managed effectively; the more of them so managed, the better...That is what happens when you reduce self and others to quantifiable widgets, much as the global financial markets regard us.\textsuperscript{55}

The converse of solidarity is the particular blend of governmentality and consumerism provided at the market-oriented end of the nonprofit sector: an objectification of philanthropy’s beneficiaries as mere bodies to be counted and bundled into great “deals” per donated dollar. MacAskill describes philanthropy performed under EA as a smart consumer choice; donating to organizations proven most effective at saving lives is “like a 99 per cent off sale, or buy one, get 99 free. It might be the most amazing deal you’ll see in your life.”\textsuperscript{56} This approach, which Rubenstein sees as the primary pitch of EA, boils down to “showing how easy it is to save lives cheaply” and to co-opt potential revolutionary ferment.\textsuperscript{57} Angus Deaton addresses this attitude head-on, calling GiveWell “the Consumer Reports for altruists, listing value for money and establishing the minimum cost of saving a child’s life. It is the illusion that lives can be bought like cars.”\textsuperscript{58}

Effective Altruism is the culmination of the anti-political tendencies identified in the consumer philanthropy in Kiva and the metric-driven grantmaking of the Robin Hood Foundation. MacAskill and Singer have constructed the Effective Altruism framework on the foundation of global capitalist ideals like obsession with efficiency, a belief in technocratic power to address to social problems through expertise and not political struggle. The movement combines the supremacy of quantitative data; a reductive instrumentality that regards biological well-being as the unit of impact worthy of (or at least available for) measurement; at minimum a


\textsuperscript{56} Srinivasan, 5.

\textsuperscript{57} Rubenstein, 511.

\textsuperscript{58} Deaton provides a cautionary tale of this biopolitical instrumentality with President Paul Kagame of Rwanda, whose government-sponsored health care for mothers and children has increased his international legitimacy: “He has become one of the darlings of the industry and a favorite recipient of aid. Essentially, he is “farming” Rwandan children, allowing more of them to live in exchange for support for his undemocratic and oppressive rule.”
tacit acceptance of global financialized capitalism and at most an embrace of wealth accumulation and consumer discourse; and possibly the suppression of more radical routes toward equity as the rationale for adopting EA principles in giving. Each characteristic demonstrates an extension of philanthropy’s antipolitics and possibly reactionary approach from precedents in early Christianity, the modern welfare state, and the Gilded Age. The combination of virtuous self-improvement through maximizing one’s generosity and the donor’s position as a savvy consumer\textsuperscript{59,60} reminiscent of the mercantile, transactional philanthropic subjectivity articulated by Augustine. The measurement of impact in lives per dollar draws directly from bio-political governmentality, beginning with the counting and management of populations for reasons of aggregate health and economic productivity. The heroism of the individual donor’s wisdom and his deserving of accumulated wealth hearken back to Andrew Carnegie’s “Gospel of Wealth.” Singer himself celebrates the fact that his positions at elite universities allow him to teach “very bright, hardworking students like Matt Wage, who are likely to have a disproportionately large influence on the world.”\textsuperscript{61} Effective Altruism combines the historic bio-political and transactional approaches to philanthropy into a single philosophy. EA has come under extensive and strong criticism for its instrumentality, its rigid commitment to quantification, the sovereign, individualistic power promised to its donors, and its flattening of beneficiaries from fellow humans into biological units. A movement rooted in the assumption that certain people will inevitably have disproportionate power over others is definitionally anti-political. Such a mentality presumes that some will shape the world for — not with — others.

There remains, however, a stronger counterargument to be made against Effective Altruism, one which addresses the downside of its ideological ambition. Effective Altruism insists upon rejecting all other approaches to philanthropic decision-making as insufficiently

\textsuperscript{59} MacAskill, 23.
\textsuperscript{60} Rubenstein, 521.
\textsuperscript{61} Singer, 2.
welfarist and therefore immoral. For example, donations to elite universities will have minimal impact-per-dollar due to the size of endowments. The movement does not only say that gifts to global poverty relief are better but that giving to other organizations is morally wrong.\(^{62}\)

Alongside that assertion is EA’s comprehensive ideological apparatus, in which the very vocabulary and operations of nonprofit organizations would adjust to conform to their evaluative standards, and individuals make their philanthropic commitments coextensive with their choice of career.\(^{63}\) Singer says as much when he expresses the hope that EA would grow to the point of influencing the giving culture of both affluent and developing nations (he believes there are promising signs of such effects).\(^{64}\)

EA’s case rests entirely on accepting its epistemology of bio-political utilitarianism; whenever its philosophers acknowledge that other philanthropic priorities and rationales exist, it is to showcase their inadequacy according to EA’s framework. To the extent that they account for the possibility that less “impactful” organizations have value, they allow that such value may register for effective altruists under different conditions. Simply put, it is possible that donations to education, art, and even domestic poverty relief in the United States, become more comparatively “effective” once the effects of acute poverty are alleviated through EA-guided philanthropy.\(^{65}\) Yet Singer reveals a possible caveat for effective altruism’s immediate instrumentality, one based on a respect for elite scholarship, when he writes about redirecting donations away from universities like Yale and Princeton,

should effective altruism ever become so popular that these educational institutions are no longer able to do important research at a high level, it will be time to consider whether donating to them might once again be an effective form of altruism.\(^{66}\)

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\(^{63}\) Rubenstein, 523.

\(^{64}\) Singer, “Logic.”

\(^{65}\) Singer, “Logic.”

\(^{66}\) Singer, “Logic.”
Along with most followers of Effective Altruism, Singer assumes a long runway between current cultures of giving and the paradigm shift they seek, wherein giving decisions would be made exclusively on the basis of measurable impact. What happens at the hypothetical inflection point is less clear: if, in thirty years, philanthropic giving has largely shifted to global poverty relief, presumably there will be a gap in which museums, parks, educational institutions, and the like would experience a major loss of funding. Singer acknowledges that this might require a rebalancing of what is then considered “effective” — but the totalized focus of EA only allows for so much admission that such a scenario represents a significant downside of the biopolitical approach currently practiced by EA. Furthermore, the possibility that donors might redirect their attentions to the arts once acute global poverty is solved seems unlikely given that EA’s framework would have systematically delegitimized such institutions for several prior generations, in order to achieve its ideological project of measurable effectiveness and direct life-saving. This loss of a common world — its endurance, contingency, imaginative and non-instrumental qualities being precisely the reason Effective Altruists would neglect it to the point of starvation — may well be irreversible. Biological well-being may be improved, but once such discerning heroism is unnecessary, what are these newly healed human beings to do without places and options for exploring and shaping their world, beyond their renewed physical capacity? What are their heroically-revived lives for?

**Conclusion**

These profiles illustrate continuities between various historical elements of philanthropy: both the Robin Hood Foundation and Effective Altruism express the isolation and abjectification of the poor — that is, the dramatization of their dependency and the severity of their needs — that began under the religious turn and early Christianity. They also quantify the well-being of poor people as a way of verifying their own discernment, in much the same way that Augustine promised that alms would function as an investment in unseen outcomes, and would ultimately
redound to donors as testimonials to their character. Many of the for-profit philanthropic initiatives likewise objectify their beneficiaries, translating improvements in the lives of poor people into perks of consumer purchases, or into the product itself. Meanwhile the monitoring of results, now not only at the individual level but the organizational one as well, speaks to increasing surveillance and discipline on the part of donors, in a clear continuation of practices that began under the Poor Laws of early welfare and intensified throughout the Industrial Revolution. Finally, the focus on physical survival, at the expense of all other possible causes for philanthropy, speaks to a heightened commitment to bio-politics within contemporary philanthropy, all the better to track a number of lives saved, how many years added to a life, and the increase in earnings during those years — a process which began in the medieval hospitals as they fixated on physical distress as the criteria for who would receive charity.

All of these tendencies coalesce into a form of philanthropy that is heavily economized. People are now data points; their standard of living is meaningless insofar as a delta of change can be calculated around it, and giving is now a purchase — rather than a founding that can engender a range of outcomes, a gift is a purchase of a pre-determined outcome. Philanthropy now resembles a form of global population management, the oversight of bodies en masse and the interventions best guaranteed to sustain them and enable their improved productivity. In other words, an Arendtian nightmare, in which humanity is reduced to predictable and ceaseless patterns of biological sustenance and production.

These studies map onto the two-axis framework — phenomenological and relational. The interdependence between the two is clear when we consider the impermanence, the constant flux, of funding generated by the Robin Hood Foundation and the Effective Altruism movement — both see constant evaluation and reshuffling for optimal results as best practices — and the highly sovereignic relationships produced under those funder relationships. The very real possibility of losing funding if an organization does not perform adequately leads to tremendous anxiety and pressure. Individual beneficiaries, meanwhile, are hardly partners in co-
determination of their fates — they may or may not reliably receive certain services or programs, and their visibility to funders is limited to data points. Effective Altruism disdains the idea of permanent institutions and structures as insufficiently trackable and modular — some might see the incalculability of a museum’s value to society as a feature, but to Effective Altruists it is the ultimate bug, and only the constant re-calculation of discrete units of improvement can serve as sufficient evidence of a cause’s worth. Finally, the consumer models of philanthropy all point to a subsumption of thoughtful deliberation to that which can be accomplished quickly and without separate thought, consumed as a product instead of built as an enduring artifact.

All of this points to a loss of thought, of contingency, of permanence — of humanity’s full capacities and a world that nurtures them. A betrayal of continuity and a longer temporal horizon come from a commitment to constant surveillance and analysis, in service to maximizing bare sustenance. The ability to guarantee results, which are performed by (rather than co-created with) people depending on charitable assistance for survival, is an especially proto-totalitarian and inhuman approach to philanthropy. The irony of this unworldly and anti-political turn in philanthropy is clarified further by the Effective Altruism movement’s focus on artificial intelligence research. The Effective Altruism Foundation published a policy paper on the need for more research into the effects of artificial intelligence in 2015; it was the dominant topic of that year’s Effective Altruism Global conference. As of February 2019, the Effective Altruism Foundation published remarks from their 2018 conference that raised questions about the urgency of examining risks from AI, but concluded that as a funding area, it was still “an unusually good bet.”67 Yet their giving philosophy requires the dismissal of any institution or modality that provides a non-robotic way of approaching and experiencing the world. Contemporary philanthropy’s commitment to saving human lives, in the most efficient manner,

could well come at the expense of a human world for those people to inhabit and help shape. Such tendencies contrast with the Promethean model of philanthropy, namely, expanding the human capacity for imagination, creation, and cultivation in a shared, open-ended fashion.
**Chapter 5**  
Worldly Possibilities for Philanthropy

“I began noticing in every corner where I looked evidences of a living hand, even in the bricks, in the arrangement of each brick. Some hand placed them there—some hand had placed the whole universe in front of me.”  
Allen Ginsburg

In 1993, my father received a mailer at our home in Shaker Heights, Ohio, offering an opportunity to include him and our family in a soon-to-be-completed sports complex and civic revitalization project in downtown Cleveland. Gateway, as the project was known, was under construction by then, on the former site of the dilapidated Central Market, a publicly-owned market stall space that had long been in disrepair, especially after a fire destroyed its initial location at the intersection of Carnegie and Ontario.\(^1\) The Gateway project included two stadiums: the indoor arena then known as Gund Arena,\(^2\) where the Cleveland Cavaliers basketball team would relocate from the distant suburban Coliseum, and Jacobs Field,\(^3\) a baseball stadium for the Cleveland Indians, on a winning streak after decades at the bottom of the Major League.\(^4\) Sports are civic glue in Cleveland; the Cavaliers’ 2015 national basketball championship brought a national record of 1.3 million people into the streets for the downtown parade. Urban development projects are frequently controversial, but Cleveland in the early 1990s embraced the possibility of a downtown space people would be excited to visit and around which they could share a civic identity.

The Indians’ golden era was just starting when my father responded to the invitation and made a small contribution to the completion of Gateway, Jacobs Field in particular. His $125

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\(^1\) Central Market is its own story of public space, arguably the inverse of how and the Gateway project exists in a larger context of public funding, including the 1991 sin tax passage. For more on the broader context of how this public space came into being and the different political, economic and affective bonds that emerged from the financing tools used to create it, see Jay Miller, “Gateway project was long in the making,” *Crain’s Cleveland Business* (March 23, 2014).

\(^2\) Officially renamed Quicken Loans Arena in 2016.

\(^3\) Officially renamed Progressive Field in 2008.

\(^4\) See the 1993 classic film *Major League* for a fairly accurate satire of the Indians’ previous hopelessness.
contribution was recognized with a brick at the Jacobs Field Commemorative Plaza. As of 1994, my name and my brother Sam’s name sat engraved on a tile, first placed near Gate C under the statue of Bob Feller, and now relocated to the plaza near Gate A, in Quadrant 13, Row 22, Column 18. Every year, whenever we went to baseball games, my father, brother and I would enter the stadium through Gate C, by the statue of Bob Feller, to make sure we paid a visit to the tile reading “Amy Bess/Samuel Max Schiller.” Each time, it was a special moment, seeing our tile alongside other tiles, knowing this stadium was new once and that we played a small part its creation. We could connect our personal attachment to a bigger one, to our city and our community, by seeing our names in public space.

(Figure 5: Brick at Progressive Field, Cleveland, OH. Source: Cleveland.indians.mlb.com, accessed March 24, 2019).

I asked my father what motivated him to make this commitment and to cast his children’s names in this commemorative plaza. His response reflected a desire for personal placement in public space as a source of meaning and attachment.

I wanted to have something we could look at that connected you to this new part of Cleveland. I imagined a place where a lot of people would walk by, it would be a meeting place and a connection point and I wanted it to have a personal meaning. I knew it was
going to be a special place, and I wanted you guys to feel connected to the specialness of the place, to have a tangible sense of belonging.\textsuperscript{5}

In this anecdote is the possibility of a philanthropy compatible with and even supportive of democracy. In the warm embrace of my family, this brick is a personal legacy bound up with participation in the broader public world. Not all namings manifest this quality. Large ones like Steven Schwartzman’s 2008 $100 million gift to name the main branch of the New York Public Library\textsuperscript{6} are more controversial, and rightly so: large scale and exclusionary in nature, such namings are attempts to claim public space rather than sharing it, they are more world-claiming than world-building. The difference may come down to aesthetics. A wall of names, recognizing contributors to fundraising efforts of eras past, can be a moving display of collective imagination and generosity of many that generated a shared benefit. The brick with my and my brother’s names is one among many, our special corner within a plurality of others. Redeeming philanthropy from its unworldly slide in the current moment thus requires at least one element: that acts of philanthropy be done in the spirit of a shared world, that those acts reinforce what exists between people and encourages their commitments to one another. More specifically, philanthropy can — and in fact must — fulfill Arendt’s and Honig’s visions of public attachment through shared objects and spaces, by preserving ways of appearing before and within a plurality.

\textbf{Justice and Pre-requisites for Worldly Philanthropy}

The requirement that philanthropy cultivate attachment to the shared world raises a key question: To what extent does the existence of surplus capital reflect an \textit{a priori} betrayal of a shared world? Even my dad’s ability to send a relatively small contribution (compared to the

possible scale of philanthropic gifts) is nevertheless indicative of surplus wealth; many of our fellow citizens do not have the same means to mark their presence in this public square. This must be addressed before expanding on my vision of philanthropy as a vehicle for world-building and worldliness. Otherwise the existence of philanthropic capital may itself be suspect on justice grounds, and the legitimacy of its worldly uses undermined by the urgent problems caused by economic inequality.

The criteria for philanthropic capital to be considered worldly are:

1. Is this gift performed with money improperly taken from public oversight and obligations?

2. Does its use encourage further obligation to the public?

The first question is an especially urgent concern given that in the United States, the charitable tax deduction costs the federal government an estimated $50 billion dollars annually, more than the combined total budgets for Temporary Assistance to Needy Families, school lunches and Head Start. Following the increase in the standard deduction in 2017, only households who can afford annual itemized contributions over $24,000 benefit from the tax-deductibility of their gifts. Given the perverse incentives of the U.S. tax code, which regressively favor reducing taxes through charitable giving, or even charitable bank accounts known as donor-advised funds, it is reasonable to question philanthropy as a practice reinforcing public attachment if the funds to pursue it have been excessively withheld from public oversight.

According to Chiara Cordelli, in circumstances where the state does not fully fund “justice-required goods,” citizens cannot be assumed to have discharged their distributive duties. To Cordelli, the discretion afforded to philanthropists, to donate to any cause of their choosing without regard for unmet needs, must be curtailed and their philanthropic dollars considered a form of back pay for under-contributing to fundamental public goods. If a citizen

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has surplus capital to use for philanthropic projects, but the possession of such capital results from insufficient taxation, that capital is not rightly owned and must be restored to public provision; one cannot steal a bike and then provide the victim of the theft with a microwave as replacement, but one should only give back the bike or its equivalent. The question for philanthropists then becomes not, what is the “best” use of “my” funds, but rather, have I contributed my just share to the public needs, such that I may now turn to more expressive choices in giving?

This expectation still demands some illustration of what would be categorized as a “justice-required good,” that is, the state’s baseline distributive responsibility, and what is an expressive good, one provided due to the tastes of a particular donor. Ted Lechterman provides a helpful framework for distinguishing between the two. Echoing Cordelli, Lechterman proposes that the state is “required to provide goods that are instruments of basic justice,” which include “goods related to the provision of a decent social minimum, such as basic education, health insurance, legal insurance, and unemployment insurance.” The division between what is rightly the role of the state, that is, justice-required goods, and what might be appropriately funded by philanthropy becomes clearer as Lechterman identifies causes that “address matters that are distant from those of basic justice”: festivals, museums, space exploration, research into rare medical conditions. That is, things not universally required for the aforementioned “decent social minimum.”

If we are to pursue a worldly philanthropy, it must follow from and proceed in tandem with a requirement for a publicly-provided social minimum. Philanthropy’s worldliness is contingent upon simultaneously supporting collective demands upon the state to meet needs for

9 Reich, et al, 272.
11 Lechterman, 27.
which philanthropic spending would be both insufficient and normatively harmful. Education, housing, child care, labor rights, and public health are key aspects of life that must be administered with public funds and oversight, to minimize exploitation (a possibility given that these things are baseline needs) and to normalize them as universal goods rather than purchasable commodities. They are not appropriate objects of philanthropy but of politics, collective demands that reflect basic communal obligations. The “political” realm here refers to the spaces and practices that make demands for such public provisions, on grounds of shared normative values. This follows Ayten Gundogdu’s version of Arendt, in which basic needs must become political demands, translated into policies that can range from free public daycare to wage theft enforcement to affordable housing units. Philanthropy cannot be exactly political in this way, because as previous chapters have shown, such philanthropy will end up providing instrumental and elite-driven solutions. Such a framework eventually reinforces hierarchy, sentimentalizes what must be articulated as a right and a demand, and instrumentalizes the world and its people. Material concerns require political translations and remedies both for their own efficacy, and to protect philanthropy’s ability to remain non-instrumental. To briefly restate Arendt’s own caveat: “only when survival is assured do we speak of culture.”

If philanthropy should not provide the vehicles of basic justice, conversely, it should provide things which supplement, expand, and enhance public life, alongside market and state forms of provision. Lechtermann mentions festivals, museums, and space exploration. These genres are more than supplement improvements to a citizen’s quality of life: they can foster a sense of belonging in the world (which can be enhanced by opportunities to add one’s personal signature to public space, alongside others). The worldly project of philanthropy is to make the earth more of a home, and to encourage inhabitants of the spaces and institutions it provides to feel at home in the world. Philanthropy can accomplish this as a singular act that does not get

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subsumed into anonymity (unless that is a donor’s request). The tension and ultimate resolution between the requirements of the social minimum and the desire to locate oneself in the shared world comes, once again, from my father:

Fundraising can be very emotional when you take public money away from other uses. But I had bought into the original notion that there was value in public money being spent on community spaces and I was wiling to add my personal money to the public money. [The project] was well-thought-out, about renovating a portion of the city, and bringing life to a part of the city that was dying.¹³

A key aspect of the gift that resulted in my brick was my father’s belief that his gift was part of a larger effort to build a stronger, more vibrant world -- to make our city more of a home for its residents.

This brings the second criterion for worldly philanthropy into closer focus: Does a gift or a philanthropic project encourage greater attachment to the public? Bonnie Honig and Arendt provide a roadmap for how such encouragement might occur through the physical world.

**The Things of the World: Honig, Arendt, Art and Appearance**

In the need for spaces and things that embody public-ness, philanthropy that makes the shared world its object can encourage attachments to the world and to other people. Institutions like museums, libraries, and public monuments create meeting grounds; the process of articulating the need for them and the role they play in bringing new interests and concerns into public view likewise expand the world of common concerns. Additionally, philanthropy is the only realm of financial allocation without the obligation to be instrumental. Philanthropy, unlike private for-profit enterprise or public administration, does not have to produce quantitative returns or conform to democratic accountability. What Arendt and Honig illustrate is the importance of an enduring common world, composed of physical spaces and institutions that house non-instrumental activities that preserve and celebrate the world beyond its consumption.

Philanthropy is not optimally suited for controlling the means of distribution of material goods. In the Arendtian sense of the political, however, philanthropy may be an optimal activity. It enacts appearance before a community, a love for the world beyond oneself, the establishment of spaces and institutions in which to explore the human condition. Arendt’s description of culture echoes Prometheus’s gifts: not just fire, but “every art” needed to create a world habitable to humans:

The world culture derives from colere — to cultivate, to dwell, to take care, to tend and preserve — and it relates primarily to the intercourse of man with nature in the sense of cultivating and tending nature until it becomes fit for human habitation.14

This making of a human world from nature, through loving care rather than domination, is a “mode of intercourse prescribed by civilizations with respect to the least useful and most worldly of things.”15 Such a mode in turn encourages a valuing of “things as things” and of spaces for such things to appear. As things appear, so too can people. Arendt’s rhetorical question of whether “this proper kind of intercourse with beautiful things...has something to do with politics,” is answered in the affirmative by virtue of their shared publicness.16

For Arendt, giving the world structure and form is the great mandate of being human. Human beings have the ability to imagine beyond the life cycle of one generation; we therefore can create an “objective” world, one with structures that house the ongoing exploration of humanity and orient our common life to be in dialogue with generations past and future. One analogy Arendt draws is the difference between a group of people seated around a table which brings them together while preserving a healthy differentiation, and a group of people without a table to bring them together.17 The stability and structure provided by the table applies to public life, where public institutions that exist in perpetuity (public buildings, parks, monuments, etc.)

14 Arendt, Past and Future, 208.
15 Arendt, Past and Future, 211.
16 Arendt, Past and Future, 215.
stabilize and organize the human collective. In this sense, the realms of culture, knowledge, and cultivated nature are incubators of the political mentality, particularly appearance and world-building. A truly worldly philanthropy allows the world to emerge as that which lies between individuals; philanthropy, properly situated, is best suited to pursue initiatives of the sort that Arendt argues lend shape and meaning to human life. If, “[strictly] speaking, politics is not so much about human beings as it is about the world that comes into being between them and endured beyond them,”\(^ {18}\) then bringing things into being that exist between and beyond people is a crucial contribution of philanthropy to collective political subjectivity. Philanthropy can manifest key principles for Arendt’s political ideal, namely, non-instrumentality, permanence, and plurality. In tracing the dynamic between culture and politics, philanthropy can be seen as a praxis that cultivates a commitment to enduring, non-instrumental spaces and objects for convening that are so vital to caring for the world.

Things that endure are crucial to Arendt’s definition of the world. Such things provide both spatial and temporal anchors and orientations. The products of work contextualize and elevate human civilization beyond species survival; to Arendt, only human beings are capable of transforming the earth into a permanent dwelling place, specifically by producing relatively durable artifacts.\(^ {19}\) Not only durability but consciousness of an object’s permanence, in contrast to the finitude of human life, inspires in people a commitment to a world that exists and lasts beyond themselves. Reification is the path to “entering the world,” how a thing becomes part of the shared human experience.\(^ {20}\) Without this “guarantee [of] permanence and durability,” Arendt writes, “a world would not be possible at all.”\(^ {21}\) Great acts only become immortal in sculpture, plaques, museums, memorials, and the like, in what Bonnie Honig calls “a secular


\(^{19}\) Arendt, *Human Condition*, 2; 134-135.


\(^{21}\) Arendt, *Human Condition*, 94.
immortality.”

This immortality continues through the cross-temporal dialogue of witnessing a thing’s existence:

a premonition of immortality...something immortal achieved by mortal hands, has become tangibly present, to shine and be seen, to sound and be heard, to speak and to be read.

In her essay “The Crisis in Culture,” Arendt expands on the significance of endurance as the opposite of both consumption and utility. Functionality “is the quality which makes [an object] disappear again from the phenomenal world by being used and used up.” Utility gives objects finitude, implies that they last only as long as they are of use, and therefore do not signify any temporality outside the cycle of consumption.

Worldliness therefore depends upon endurance for the sake of continued appearance, well past any cycle of utility. Arendt refers to cathedrals as an expression of worldliness in the form of enduring and beautiful structures, whose glory cannot be attributed to usefulness:

The cathedrals were built ad maiorem gloriam Dei; while they as buildings certainly served the needs of the community, their elaborate beauty can never be explained by these needs, which could have been served quite as well by any nondescript building. Their beauty transcended all needs and made them last through the centuries; but while beauty, the beauty of a cathedral like the beauty of any secular building, transcends needs and functions, it never transcends the world.

Arendt’s description of art and worldliness proposes ways of seeing such creation as a tether between generations. Patchen Markell proposes that this “bond that holds people in an ongoing relation of presence and attention to each other and to their world” is Arendt’s version of power, a manner of shared atmospheric understanding. Things, particularly things created to endure and appear, are testaments to human ability to differentiate between their immediate temporal existence and their obligation to the ongoing evolution of civilization. The reverence

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23 Arendt, Human Condition, 168.

24 Arendt, Past and Future, 205.

for their example and attempts to perform new ones comprise *amor mundi*, love of and care for the world.

In *Public Things*, Honig expands upon the relationship between Arendt’s phenomenology, particularly the significance of work and fabricated objects as “the spine and soul” of *The Human Condition*, and how this phenomenology fosters ways of relating between people. For Honig, public things bring people together in a tangible, embodied manner. The processes of democratic society are made sturdier through physical manifestation and signposts; places that are public remind us we are part of a public. In part this is because infrastructure, like bridges, sewers, and roads, literally link individuals to a larger network of human society. Public things, however, are also spaces like squares, parks, and pools, places without a utility other than remaining open for congregation.26 Their stability signals the possibility of collective experience, and the common shared-ness of those objects reflect back each person’s belonging to a shared world.27 Togetherness is a precondition of deliberation and contestation; things and spaces beget the processes of relating that cultivate democratic subjectivity. Public things, therefore, cultivate attachment to others — they bring citizens into the affective circuits of democratic life.28 As they gather people, public things make action in concert possible because they produce the conditions that make such collective concert possible.

Many of these kinds of spaces and structures are made possible at least in part through philanthropy. Such sponsorship of public life is arguably ideal for Arendtian purposes. Longstanding structures are not justified or evaluated under electoral and/or for-profit rubrics; they inherently outlast cycles of the market and elections. As the state has itself been colonized by market rationalities, philanthropy provides a way to revive a spirit for public things. Public

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26 Pools can also be considered fitness facilities, but are not advertised or priced in a manner commensurate with other spaces that exist primarily for purposes of physical exercise. Their primary purposes are public congregation and recreation.
things are meant to signal our embeddedness in a larger social fabric, and to re-enchant that embeddedness into a project of building a world for and with others.

Public things should not, however, be anonymizing. The idea is not a common world into which all individuals merge, but one in which each individual’s distinctiveness can find expression and affirmation, which can only come from a larger public. Part of the ability to feel embedded is the opportunity to appear before others in expressions of “self-display and virtuosity.” Appearance is connected to the potential to do or speak or generate something new as an expression of each human being’s distinctiveness. Such moments of expression form a person’s life story, with climactic moments of initiation and self-display. The stage of the world exists for actors to play upon it; people build the stage of the world so they might appear upon it.

Philanthropic naming opportunities can demonstrate the mutual reinforcement between the physical world and the relations fostered within it. Almost all fundraising efforts, particularly with a physical element, involve opportunities for donors to be recognized, with varying degrees of visibility, size, and significance of the spaces involved (i.e. a hospital wing, a park bench.) To be sure, the balance is often imperfect; public spaces with naming rights can easily feel suffused with an individual’s drive for self-display, such that their publicness is imperiled. However, when appropriately scaled, naming spaces for donors (or a donor’s chosen honoree) have a role in contextualizing and humanizing public things.

One of Honig’s examples, the public telephone, shows the value of naming opportunities. To Honig, the public phone is noble in its anonymity, a thing that hides in plain sight until someone needs to use it. The ordinariness of shared objects like a public phone confers a universality, the way some New Yorkers see the subway as a great equalizer for its riders, rich

and poor. Where Honig sees a necessary humbling effect in the public phone’s stolid, unremarkable presence, the challenge of enchantment demands individual attachments that coalesce into stronger, more conscious reinforcements of publicness.\(^{31}\) Naming conventions allow for historical marking and attribution in spaces and buildings that otherwise simply exist without context or identity. They allow individuals to appear in a tangible way that acknowledges the presence of witnesses to those appearances. A name on a bench, a fountain, a library, is part of the fabrication and memorialization of a human life and its story. They indicate not just that a thing exists around which people can freely congregate, but that some people intended to create that space and took a form of action to build it, purely so that others might see and appreciate it. As pointed out by Markell, durability is the first layer of “thing-ness,” with the second layer being “memorability,” which is achieved only as a consequence of an object’s enduring presence.\(^{32}\) Both permanence and memorability are what allow a work of art to transcend both “the sheer functionalism of things produced for consumption and the sheer utility of objects produced for use.” Such transcendence of functionality “is identical with appearing publicly and being seen.”\(^{33}\)

In the profiles that follow, philanthropic initiatives have brought into being spaces that simultaneously reinforce attachment to a larger community, provide opportunities for individual distinction, and endure as symbols to future generations, reminding us of the importance of culture, leisure, education, and contemplation.

Several things — of varying sizes, locations, and subjects — have been brought into the world through philanthropy, and in turn have shaped the public imaginary. While it may be worthwhile to have these things in the world without attribution, arguably the process of creating them, the action that is a fundraising campaign, formed moments of collective initiative

\(^{31}\) Honig, Public Things, 30-32.
\(^{33}\) Arendt, Life of the Mind, 172-73.
with space for individual appearance. They are in turn memorialized in the “works” yielded by these campaigns of persuasion and of self-declaration before others.

The Statue of Liberty is often thought of as a gift from France, but the donations that brought the statue into its permanent and public space were from Americans, and hard-won, through a mass campaign for small gifts. Designed by French sculptor Frederic Auguste Bartholdi and paid for by the government of France, the statue itself was a diplomatic gift. American citizens were was responsible for the Statue’s pedestal, as confirmed by the 1877 Congressional bill agreeing to locate it on Bedloe's Island. The pedestal’s architect, Richard Morris Hunt, had professional connections to the moneyed elite, having designed their homes and offices. The enormous fortunes of Cornelius Vanderbilt, John Jacob Astor, Joseph Drexel, and the like, would presumably have been at the fundraising committee’s disposal. Yet members of the new industrial elite gave token amounts or refused to give at all. By 1885, the committee proved unable to raise $250,000 for a granite plinth for the statue. New York Governor Grover Cleveland rejected the use of city funds to pay for it, and Congress could not agree on a funding package. Among the reasons for the high-dollar fundraising difficulties: the statue was too abstract and conceptual; the wealthy industrialists had not yet turned from amassing wealth to giving it away; residents of other states saw no benefit in funding an adornment of New York City’s harbor. One explanation, though, invoked the hostility of the rich to the statue’s symbolism. In 1883, Joseph Pulitzer wrote,

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35 Nearly $6.5 million in 2018.
37 Khan, 74–76. Mark Twain was solicited for a contribution to an album of artists’ sketches and letters to be raffled as a fundraiser for the pedestal. He sent a check instead, but included a unique objection to the statue in the accompanying letter: “But suppose your statue represented [Liberty] old, bent, clothed in rags, downcast, shame-faced, with the insults and humiliation of 6,000 years, imploring a crust and all hour’s rest for God’s sake at our back door?...That’s the aspect of her which we need to be reminded of, lest we forget it - not this proposed one, where
we have more than a hundred millionaires in this city, any one of whom might have drawn a cheque for the whole sum...but do they care for a Statue of Liberty, which only reminds them of the equality of all citizens of the Republic?38

Pulitzer began a fundraising campaign to target working-class Americans, one that prefigures the crowd-funding craze of the twenty-first century, including promised tokens of gratitude. Any donation of $1 (equivalent of $26 in 2018) received a 6-inch replica of the statue, every $5 donation garnered a 12-inch replica.39 Even with these prizes, more than three-quarters of the donations were less than one dollar.

Perhaps a stronger motivation was the opportunity to see one’s name in the newspaper as a proud contributor to the effort. Pulitzer’s paper paper kept a running tally of contributions, printed updates and letters from the public on its front page, and between March-August 1885 it displayed every donation to the Statue of Liberty fund.40 The possibility of appearance before the public, enabled by philanthropy, was clearly valuable to the Bender family, whose March 22 announcement itemized each member’s respective contribution to their $2.65 total:

Philip and Eliza Bender, 50 cents each; (children) - Anna, 25 cents; Frannie, 25 cents; Leonard, 10 cents; Frank, 15 cents; Alice, 10 cents; Ralph, 10 cents; Carri, 10 cents; Miss Nicey 25 cents.41

In just five months, the campaign raised $101,091, more than the $100,00 necessary to complete the pedestal and send a gift to the sculptor. Over 120,000 people gave, yielding an amount equivalent to $2.6 million in 2018. It is almost too fitting for an Arendtian theory of philanthropy that Pulitzer’s newspaper was known as The World.

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38 Khan, 188.
40 Khan, 172
From the beginning, the Statue of Liberty was intended as a worldly object—a figure meant to endure as a reflection of a public ethos. Bartholdi intended to celebrate the specific American ideal of “liberty” as a light emanating from a democracy of such world-historic significance. The statue’s place in the American public imaginary is indisputable. Beyond liberty, the statue became linked with immigration through a different type of thing, a poem by Emma Lazarus, “The New Colossus,” affixed to its pedestal.

In the case of Lazarus’s poem, yet another fundraising initiative brought it into being. In December, 1883 the New York Academy of Design held an Art Loan Exhibition to raise funds for the pedestal, featuring displays of fine art, lace, stained glass, armor, antique furniture, and literary manuscripts. Lazarus wrote “The New Colossus” specifically for the exhibition, where it was read by the director, F. Hopkinson Smith. Lazarus’s poem claimed the statue for the downtrodden, its liberty an offering to the most desperate—“and her name, Mother of Exiles”—rather than a display of triumph for the whole world to witness. The poet James Russell Lowell wrote to Lazarus a few days after the opening of the Art Loan Exhibition: “Your sonnet gives its subject a raison d’être which it wanted before quite as much as it wants a pedestal.”42 In 1903 Lazarus’s friend Georgina Schuyler raised enough money to engrave the poem on a bronze tablet and place it on the second floor of the Statue of Liberty, in still another instance of philanthropy reifying an act and making it an enduring piece of the world.43

Both Lazarus’s poem and Pulitzer’s fundraising campaign claimed the statue as an object of public solidarity. The ability to appear through financial contribution gave working-class donors a sense of pride and responsibility towards the city. Their philanthropy shaped the world both in terms of landscape and in shared attachments to democratic ideals; without the Statue,

the paradigmatic symbol of America, particularly as a refuge for immigrants and exiles, would not exist to shape and orient the public imaginary.

Another example of philanthropy creating a new thing, both in the space it built and the subject it brought into being, is the National Museum of African American History and Culture, opened in Washington D.C. in September 2016. The building, the collection, the financial gifts, and the vocabulary used by donors and fundraisers to describe the importance of this new meeting ground all demonstrate the world-building effect of philanthropic efforts. The museum is definitionally public, as part of the Smithsonian Institution consortium, and serves as “the only national museum devoted exclusively to the documentation of African American life, history, and culture.”44 While a 2003 Act of Congress "founded" the museum, bringing it into being required the stuff of any museum: a building, a collection, and financing to pay for capital and operational expenses. Congressional funding only provided half of the $540 million required to build, populate and staff the museum. Private donations made up the other $270 million, in a fundraising campaign that was a watershed moment in black American philanthropy. African Americans made up 74% of donors who gave $1 million or more, including Alfred Road Baptist Church, which made a collective gift of $1 million, while several church members made additional seven-figure gifts to the museum.45 The museum started with no collection; through extensive travel and outreach, the curatorial team amassed 40,000 artifacts.

The building itself is styled as a public thing, a dark, commanding presence on the National Mall that signals the gravitas of its subject. The building’s bronze panels provide a dark armor, the ironwork patterns of the scaffolds reflect sunlight and allow for observation of the

other surrounding buildings. The thing-ness of the museum is also its legitimation as an enduring, provocative public space, which, in its subject of concern, also expands definitions of what is spoken and seen and held in common. One donor, Earl Stafford, explained his gift in worldly terms, with regards to the museum’s permanence and its role in expanding a shared commitment to racial justice:

I want this for my children and grandchildren . . . for generations unborn who will better understand how we fit into this great American fabric...This is going to have far-reaching importance not only in the African American community, but in all of America.46

As in the case of the Statue of Liberty pedestal, worldly philanthropy and the significance of tangible, enduring things are not limited to major gifts or enormous buildings. More than 100,000 donors joined the Museum as members, starting at $25 contributions per year. That membership number is the highest of any Smithsonian museum. Lonnie Bunch, the Museum’s executive director, emphasized the importance of a very small but significant thing for smaller-dollar donors, the membership card. He recalled one family’s (donated) membership card to the N.A.A.C.P. dating to its formation in the early 1900s: “That family kept that little card all of those years because it was something that gave them a sense of ownership. It was evidence of their stake in history.”47

A stake in history and a sense of ownership are the hallmarks of a larger, more solidaristic, democratic world. Here, philanthropy enacts agency, appearance, and the raising of new concerns for public consideration. Furthermore, its application is not to fulfill any part of

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the cycle of physical need, but to construct a permanent institution whose purpose is to exist, display, and provoke deliberation.

So stark is the contrast between worldly philanthropy and un-worldly, instrumental, arguably de-humanizing charity, that President Obama pointed it out in his remarks at the museum’s opening: “[African Americans] are not a burden on America, or a stain on America, or an object of pity or charity for America. We’re America.”48 Such a statement is all the more notable given the subject of the museum, with the names of all donors -- from $2.5 million to $25 — displayed as evidence that, through this project of articulation, construction, and collective bringing-into-being, the people it honored were true partners in expanding the world, not only for their own sake but for everyone with whom it is shared. Their philanthropy made them partners in building the world.

Just as the Schiller family brick outside Jacobs Field is a small manifestation of “appearing” via philanthropy, philanthropy towards projects of a smaller scale than a monument or museum of national stature illustrates more accessible acts of worldliness. Such localized world-building fosters solidarity, as stated by Bill Schamba: Americans are still prompted by and seek to sustain our small, “human scale” associations, which gently draw our hearts and minds out of self-absorption and into the larger channels of public life.49

Perhaps no worldly space has a gentler power than a garden. The garden invokes Arendt’s definition of culture as colere, humanity cultivating, tending and preserving nature, caring for the world while making it fit for human habitation. In western New York, separated from Route 394 by a fence and a few feet of landscaping, sits a small public garden known as the

Bird, Tree and Garden Club Arboretum. The Arboretum is a plot of land donated by Henrietta Ord Jones in 1915 to the Bird Tree and Garden Club, which she co-founded. The Arboretum was dedicated in 1917 as a nature classroom for the club’s educational programs. Several memorial trees have flourished there ever since, including a sugar maple to honor Amelia Earhart, which was planted in 1929 from a seed of the maple outside her childhood bedroom window.

Today the Arboretum, under the continued management of the Bird, Tree and Garden Club, contains benches, perennial beds, butterfly gardens, and biodiversity within the shrubs and tree canopy. It remains a space for education as well as contemplation, particularly with the addition of new plant markers in 2018 at the Arboretum’s rededication. The markers were a gift of Susan Brandse, daughter of former Bird, Tree and Garden Club president Helen S. Davis, and were chosen for their height, durability, font type and size, and inclusion of both the English and Latin names of plants, all of which made them optimal human aids in absorbing the diversity of the surrounding nature. As much as the initial land donation created the Arboretum, the plant markers claim the space for human presence, for people to learn and understand the workings of nature with an enduring, yet well-integrated intervention, making nature legible to people and cultivating their attachments to it. The plant markers, iron archway, benches, and even a birdbath donated by Thomas and Mina Edison, all mark the clearing as a named, tended-to space. This careful balance between human and nature comes through in the remarks made by Maureen Rovegno at the Arboretum’s centennial rededication on July 8, 2018.

...the Garden is the place wherein human creativity and divine majesty are fused; where the ingenuity of humanity and the beauty of Nature are productively connected. Gardens are a place wherein the ephemeral meets the eternal, and where the eternal meets the human hand.  

The human hand in this case is that which makes earth into a world, a place of appearance and recognition, comprised of artifacts that preserve the continuity of existence through cycles of  

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death and rebirth. So meaningful are these small plant marker interventions that the Bird Tree and Garden Club’s four honorees were each issued their own personalized marker, for placement within the Arboretum at the locations of their choosing. Furthermore, plant markers from the earliest years of the Arboretum’s existence (1915 and 1916, see below) were on display, courtesy of the Cooper family, direct descendants of Henrietta Ord Jones who now inhabit the cottage next door to the one she lived in.

(Figures 6-7: Original Arboretum plant markers. Source: The Chautauquan Daily)

The rededication of the Arboretum was just one occasion in which small acts of philanthropy were recognized as world-building efforts. The members of the Bird, Tree and Garden Club embrace their mandate to preserve and care for their corner of the world. At the close of her remarks, Rovegno described the Arboretum as “a learning laboratory, as well as a sanctuary of beauty and restoration of the spirit.” The Arboretum is one example of philanthropy that protects non-instrumental spaces, where sanctuary, contemplation, and wonderment — all ways of practicing love of the world — are available to all.

The Promethean definition of philanthropy as the bestowment of “every art” upon humanity, and the capacity to build a common world, resonates with Arendt’s ideas of culture and world-building. The previous case studies show the potential for philanthropy to build common spaces and allow individuals to “appear” in public, with others, and to mark the effort made by previous generations to attend to the world for the sake of future inhabitants. The
Michelangelo Foundation underscores why exactly philanthropy in the form of voluntary financial donations is a preferential method for such projects, and demonstrates how philanthropy can be a uniquely humanistic endeavor.

In 2016, Johann Rupert, a luxury-goods merchant, launched The Michelangelo Foundation, with headquarters in Geneva. The Foundation celebrates and expands public exposure to handmade craftsmanship, and attempt to preserve the cultural heritage expressed in artisanal practices and objects. While formal documentation is not available,51 the Foundation website states that its programs include “building networks of like-minded artisans,” “facilitating apprenticeships,” and “nurturing global recognition for the Continent’s applied arts culture.”52 Especially noteworthy is the explicitly humanistic language that Rupert uses to explain the Foundation’s raison d’etre. To Rupert, craftsmanship is the lingering presence of human endeavor in crafting the material world. He is concerned with the rapid pace and relentless growth of luxury manufacturing, at the expense of human involvement. At the Foundation’s launch, Rupert said, “it’s time to give back and to put the human being back at the center of our systems.” The Foundation’s website further explains that Michelangelo was chosen as their symbol because he revered the beauty of the human body, creating works of enduring excellence and exemplified the ideal of a human being at the center of a picture “sometimes eclipsed by machines and technology.”53 The Arendtian values of permanence, beauty, and human imprint are all encapsulated in the mission statement of the Foundation: “We value a person’s ability to make lasting objects of beauty.”54

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51 For example, U.S. grantmakers are required to provide 990 tax forms detailing each fiscal year’s grants and financial data. Swiss nonprofits do not provide an equivalent that is accessible at the time of this writing.
Two years after its official launch, the Michelangelo Foundation’s first major public program was a cultural exhibition and conference called *Homo Faber: Crafting a More Human Future*. Held in Venice at the 4,000-square-meter Giorgio Cini Fondazione on San Maggiore Island, the conference filled its galleries, libraries, cloisters and even swimming pool with installations, workshops, and panels on craft techniques, traditions, and economies. Specialities on display ranged from jewelry and ceramics to specially-crafted globes, stoves and ropes. *Homo Faber*’s press statements emphasize the humanistic aims of the conference and the Foundation:

*Homo Faber* is fuelled by an ardent belief in the power and value of real human engagement... The exhibit will provide a panoramic view of European fine craftsmanship but it will nevertheless have a singular undercurrent: what human beings can do better than machines.\(^5^6\)

Additionally, the conference and the Foundation’s interest in culture as the vehicle for a common world are evident in the statement by Isabella Villafranca Soisson, curator of *Homo Faber*, who described cultural heritage as “a common asset, like water, like air.”\(^5^7\) Culture can be considered a common asset that sustains all humanity if it is something that endures to be shared and encountered by many, in perpetuity.

Thus, the Foundation displays almost word-for-word fidelity to Arendt’s assertion of culture’s importance, in preserving a love of the world as an enduring home for humans in the face of total liquidation and alienation. Equally noteworthy is Johann Rupert’s implication that philanthropy alone is the proper means for culture’s preservation. His most direct statement on this comes from a response to an interview question as to whether he saw the Foundation as an

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\(^5^5\) The Giorgio Cini Foundation was created by Count Vittorio Cini, in memory of his son Giorgio, in 1951 on the Island of San Giorgio Maggiore, with the aim of restoring the Island of San Giorgio Maggiore and of creating an international cultural center. The complex dates back to 1500, and features Renaissance architecture along with 16th and 17th-century artworks.

\(^5^6\) Paton, *New Foundation*.

extension of his business: “I hate that corporate and social responsibility stuff,” and that efforts like the Foundation were “the right thing to do.” Rupert’s economic critique focuses on the liquidating effects of late capitalism and ascendant technology: he feels new fortunes are made with dangerous speed, that artificial intelligence and automation will erase the need for humanity as well as the possibility of middle-class wage-earning. Philanthropy is the necessary tool because there will likely never be a robust market for handmade globes, for example — and, according to Rupert and his colleagues, perhaps that should not be the goal. The goal is preservation and cultivation, but not expansion into mass production, i.e. exactly the undermining force in human excellence and care for the world.

A more holistic accounting of philanthropy identifies the various conditions under which it can be proto-political or anti-political. Arendt’s version of the anti-political mentality foregrounds instrumentality, narrow materialism, and sentimentalism as orientations that pre-empt and undermine potential solidarities and the particular human capacity for world-building. This critique allows for a more capacious, nuanced, and generative account of philanthropy, both in its charitable ethical expressions, as explored by Myers, and in its worldly potential, which fulfills Arendt’s understanding of culture and care for the world. The project of building an enduring world need not necessarily be an elite one, even if such projects are more frequent and visible than the quieter contributions towards everyday public spaces. Philanthropy enables many of the characteristics that Arendt values in the political realm: appearance, permanence, plurality, and memorability. Furthermore, philanthropy that builds a common world enhances our personal attachments to that world, and to the collective process by which it is maintained.

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Bibliography


