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About the Journal

The mission of *Philanthropia* is to advance the understanding of philanthropy and civil society from the perspectives of the humanities and normative theory. Toward that end, we invite article submissions from disciplines such as History, Philosophy, Literary Studies, Religious Studies, Classical Studies, Theology, Linguistics, Anthropology, Ethics, Communications, Rhetoric, and Political Theory.

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Foreword

I am honored to introduce the second issue of *Philanthropia*, which invites you to read across disciplines and traditions of inquiry. It challenges you to make judgments about matters both empirical and normative as philanthropy's roles in our world are analyzed, expressed, and reimagined, in contexts both contemporary and historical, and with reference to philosophers, artists, and poets. It is what we expect from an endeavor rooted in the humanities that helps us cultivate a discerning capacity to make judgments and craft insights. It embraces an expansive understanding of the voluntary will, where knowledge is bound to remain contingent and provisional, dependent on imaginative as much as systematic approaches.

You have before you a kaleidoscope of insights and provocations to enrich your thoughts and deliberations on philanthropy. And wonderfully so. Too many conversations in my everyday in the university begin with the deadening qualifier, "as a (insert your discipline) I see the matter in a particular way." Despite the widespread conviction that insights and discoveries are bound to come from the combination of disciplines and from puzzles that reside at their interstices or through grand aggregations of methods, we continue to reproduce our knowledge in the iron cages of disciplines. This is where *Philanthropia* works against the grain, embracing the challenges and joys of traversing disciplines and stretching one's judgment beyond the confines of one's scholarly training. I may not know much about a particular field of inquiry, but I think I should approach it through the many ways I have learned to discover as a human, only one of which is the likely narrow training that certified me in a particular discipline.

Still, in a narrow, more technical sense of justifying knowledge claims, you should at least know how to make the case for the location of your tradition of inquiry and how it relates to other traditions that also seek to understand philanthropy. In a more expansive and imaginative sense, you should embrace the generosity implicit in the possibility of sharing discovery – for what are our traditions of inquiry but rule-based communities. I find it exhilarating to join a community of discovery that challenges and invites you to cast your judgement beyond what is already known. How else does knowledge advance?

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T.S. Eliot and *Four Quartets*: The Wisdom Way

Abstract

This essay explores T.S. Eliot's Four Quartets as a poetic embodiment of wisdom, spiritual maturity, and cultural renewal in response to the fragmentation of Western civilization following World War I. Through detailed commentary on each quartet—Burnt Norton, East Coker, The Dry Salvages, and Little Gidding—the analysis situates Eliot's work within both classical and Christian traditions, drawing connections between Heraclitus's concept of Logos, St. John's Gospel, and Erasmus's translation choices. The essay traces Eliot's intellectual and spiritual evolution, his integration of theology, poetry, and cultural critique, and his challenge to the reductionism of modernity. The Four Quartets, it is argued, offer a path toward personal and civilizational transformation grounded in humility, sacramental awareness, and the unitive fire of divine love.

Keywords:
T.S. Eliot, Four Quartets, Logos, Christian Humanism, Cultural Renewal

Introduction: Eliot and the Fragmented West

T.S. Eliot emerged as a poetic, literary, religious, and philosophic presence after the carnage and tragedy of WWI—some called this the "lost generation". Such a period of time was aptly summed up by Hemingway in his classic novel, *The Moveable Feast*[1], or Yeats not to be forgotten or ignored poem, *The Second Coming*[2] —such memorable lines as "the best lack all conviction and the worst are full of passionate intensity" or "the centre cannot hold / mere anarchy is loosed upon the world", warning messages inscribed on the wall of our culture and civilization. I could also mention Thomas Mann's classic, *The Magic Mountain*[3], as a symptom of the same dissipated ideological ethos. The West had, increasingly so, lost any notion of what it meant to be human, the core and centre imploded, fragmentation and identity politics the norm. How were the most insightful and sensitive to navigate the inclement cultural weather, find

1 Hemingway, Ernest. 1964. *Ernest Hemingway. A Moveable Feast.* New York: C. Scribner's Sons.
2 Yeats, William Butler. 1920. The Second Coming. *The Dial. Volume LXIX, Jul-Dec,* p. 466. Edited by Scofield Thayer. New York, N.Y.: The Dial Publishing Company.
3 Mann, Thomas. 1924. *Der Zauberberg.* Berlin: S. Fischer.

some solid shoreline and disembark so they could think and live a more human and humane life that embodied the common good as articulated in the fullness and dialogical nature of the Great Tradition? In short what did it mean to care for, tend, and love what it meant to be human, or to be philanthropic?

Most of Eliot's poems in the 1920s very much embodied and reflected the divided inner soul within the lives of the cultural canaries; despair, cynicism and a minimal lack of focus or direction being the ongoing reality. The publications that, in chronological order, reflect Eliot's deep immersion in the disoriented and lost generation, from *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock* (1917)[4], *Gerontion* (1920)[5], and *The Wasteland* (1922)[6] to *The Hollow Men* (1925)[7], articulate, in the most compelling manner, the sheer lack of what it means to be human in a mature manner and what it means to deteriorate, in many ways, into Dante's Inferno, Dante a definite mentor to Eliot. It is important to note, though, that even though much of Eliot's poetry in the 1920s reflected the ennui and disorientation of the post WWI generation, his article in 1919, *Tradition and the Individual Talent*[8], pointed to a classical vision of the self and society in which the individual only has a fullness to their soul and thinking to the degree they realize that they are part of a larger Tradition they can draw from and interpret for their times and ethos. And so, the tension of Eliot in his thinking, philosophy, and literary output of the 1920s, which reflects a disoriented and lost generation, is but a reflection of one way that self and society can take, but those who are immersed in Tradition know their individual tendencies and leanings, when viewed from the fullness of the human journey, are limited and can be enriched by drawing from ancient wells also. It was these ancient and life-giving wells that Eliot turned to in the late 1920s to both critique the reductionism of his generation and point to a much larger vision of the greater and higher good.

Act I in Eliot's Christian Pilgrimage

The turn by T.S. Eliot in the late 1920s to Christianity occurred about the same time as the turn by C.S. Lewis to Christianity. Sadly so, Lewis and the Inklings often dismissed and mocked Eliot throughout most of the 1930s into the mid-1940s, and Eliot would not publish the writings of Lewis and the Inklings. It was Charles Williams that brought Eliot and Lewis together for a dinner at Oxford in 1945, where both men realized they were climbing the same mountain but from different places. Dinner done, Williams died the next day and Lewis and Eliot became close friends until Lewis' death in 1963. Both men worked on an updated version of the Psalter from the Coverdale Bible. But, back to Eliot's journey to Christianity.

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4 Eliot, T. S. 1917. The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock. *Prufrock and Other Observations*, 9-16. London: The Egoist.

5 Eliot, T. S. 1920. Gerontion. *Ara Vus Prec*, 11-18. London: The Ovid Press.

6 Eliot, T. S. 1922. The Waste Land. *The Dial, July-Dec. Volume LXXIII*, 473-85. Edited by Scofield Thayer and Gilbert Seldes. Greenwich, Connecticut: The Dial Publishing Company.

7 Eliot, T. S. 1925. The Hollow Men. *Poems 1909-1925*, 123-8. London: Faber & Gwyer.

8 Eliot, T. S. 1919. Tradition and the Individual Talent. *The Egoist.* Vol. 6, Sept., No. 4, 54-5, & Dec., No. 5, 71-2.

Eliot began a series of annual poems in 1927 called the Ariel Poems. There were six poems in the series each dealing directly or indirectly with Christianity:

1927: Journey of the Magi[9]
1928: Song of Simeon[10]
1929: Animula[11]
1930: Marina[12]
1931: Triumphal March[13]
1954: Cultivation of Christmas Trees. [14]

Each of these poems reflect, from a variety of angles, Eliot's ever deeper probes into the Christian vision from either an explicit or implicit direction. And, in 1928, *For Lancelot Andrews*, [15] the book containing a series of essays that point to Eliot's interest in both the Caroline Divines and other significant thinkers. It was, though, Eliot's "conversion poem", *Ash Wednesday* (1930)[16] that, in much compact depth and detail, clarified his understanding of the layered nature of the process of inner transformation and the life of wisdom and love as the highest virtues on the journey. And, *Thoughts After Lambeth* (1931)[17] made it obvious that Eliot's faith journey was not just a private, creedal, or parochial one. Eliot realized that spirituality if not grounded in the life of the church could become yet another distraction and diversion, Lambeth being the largest gathering of Anglicans to consult and articulate a global vision of the Anglican way.

We can see, then, that Eliot's early turn to Christianity from 1927-1931 took him ever deeper, but also ever more public in a variety of unfolding ways. Eliot published in many genres including literary criticism, dramas, poetry, social and political commentary, ecclesial reflections, volumes of letters, and ironic and timely humour. And many there were, I might add, who turned on Eliot as he turned to Christianity, his critics assuming Christianity was over and done, a relic of the fading past. But, to Eliot's classic poetic vision of refinding and rebuilding the broken ways of Christendom and Christianity, and recovering the centre that Yeats had lamented was gone and could not hold, Eliot held high the chalice of the Great Tradition in all its nuanced, subtle, probing, and layered reality.

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9 Eliot, T. S. 1927. *Journey of the Magi.* London: Faber & Gwyer.
10 Eliot, T. S. 1928. *A Song for Simeon; Drawing by E. McKnight Kauffer.* London: Faber & Faber.
11 Eliot, T. S. 1929. *Animula; Wood Engravings by G. Hermes.* London: Faber & Faber.
12 Eliot, T. S. 1930. *Marina; Drawings by E. McKnight Kauffer.* London: Faber & Faber.
13 Eliot, T. S. 1931. *Triumphal March; Drawings by E. McKnight Kauffer.* London: Faber & Faber.
14 Eliot, T. S. 1954. *The Cultivation of Christmas Trees.* London: Faber & Faber.
15 Eliot, T. S. 1928. *For Lancelot Andrewes : Essays on Style and Order.* London: Faber & Gwyer.
16 Eliot, T. S. 1930. *Ash-Wednesday.* London: Faber & Faber.
17 Eliot, T. S. 1931. *Thoughts after Lambeth.* London: Faber & Faber.

Eliot and *Four Quartets*

Heraclitus

The *Four Quartets* was published in 1943[18], but the first of the quartets, "Burnt Norton", was published separately in 1936[19]. I will, though, for the sake of limited space, deal with the *Four Quartets* as a finished and completed poem, a compact and demanding poem, yet packed with dense wisdom and insight for the journey. And just as a musical quartet brings together four instruments-people whose produced sound makes for a united vision, so Eliot's *Four Quartets* is meant to be read in the same way.

The entrée to the *Four Quartets* is two aphoristic quotes from Heraclitus. The translations of these short reflections have been done in different ways, but the initial quote, differently nuanced in translations, consciously so, contrasts the way of the *Logos* (presencing of reality that comes to one and all if they are attentive) with *Phronesis* (those who interpret-misinterpret the *Logos* to serve and indulge egoistic and narcissistic ends and purposes). Much of *Four Quartets* is an extended commentary on two paths walked and two destinations reached as a result of different trails taken. The second shorter aphorism by Heraclitus highlights how the path taken both up and down is much the same, the path taken the dominant metaphor. What then the relationship between the *Logos-Phronesis*, paths taken and destinations reached?

Burnt Norton

"Burnt Norton" is the pathway into *Four Quartets* and there are five poems in this section as there are in the other poems. The literal and historic approach to the poem notes that Eliot and Emily Hale visited the estate that Sir William Keyt burned to the ground in 1741. But the metaphor of the destroyed manor can also be read as the burning and destruction of the estate of historic western thought and civilization that Eliot and peers were living with as part of the lost and disoriented generation. This conscious destruction of centuries of beauty, order and culture had, understandably so, left his generation nothing but ashes with no sense of the grandeur of what once was and why it was.

This is why Burnt Norton: 1 begins with "Time present and time past / Are both perhaps present in time future". There is the past of what Burnt Norton was and time present for what it is—both walk a culture into the future and what such a future might be. There is the idealized and romanticized past that Eliot discerningly dissects in Burnt Norton: 1 that distorts historic reality but is the "deception of the thrush". Indeed, "human kind / Cannot bear very much reality" in all its layered and complex realities, so the longing to refind the centre and live from it can also distort and selectively interpret, in a sanitized way, the time past—this is often a temptation of conservatives as they lament time present and its dismissal of the past and the implications of doing so.

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18 Eliot, T. S. 1943. *Four Quartets.* New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company.

19 Eliot, T. S. 1936. Burnt Norton. *Collected Poems, 1908-1935*, 183-191. New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company.

Burnt Norton: 2 drills into the complex and at odds nature of the human soul and society, "Garlic and sapphires in the mud", the human condition, nature, animals, and the constellation torn between contradictions and a deeper pattern that is "reconciled among the stars." It is, though, the tension between "the still point of the turning world" in the midst of what seem to be contradictions—the contemplative and the active; the active, when rightly understood, the pathway into the core and centre, the still point that reconciles the seemingly irreconcilable tensions. The deeper experience of such a way of seeing and being is described in an intricate and truer to deeper experienced way, the deeper dive in *Burnt Norton*: 2 needing many a lingering and meditative read.

Burnt Norton: 3 is a conscious contrast to Burnt Norton: 2, the latter the pathway to depth and a heeding of the *Logos*, the former a being uncritically immersed in the *Phronesis* of modernity and postmodernity and its multiple mirages and distractions. The graphic and not to be forgotten metaphors in Burnt Norton: 3 cannot but remind the reader of Dante's *Inferno*, addictions to the fleeting and transient, blown higher, thither and yon by the irrelevant "distracted from distraction by distraction / Filled with fancies and empty of meaning". But, for those who see their lives, increasingly so, empty of meaning, hollow men and women, living in a wasteland, the home and mansion of their soul burned to the ground and in ashes, the finale to Burnt Norton: 3 offers a pathway out of the carnage and devastation. It is in a letting go of such thinness and destructive ways that a new beginning can be made— "descend lower" into the darkness that will, in time, be the light out of the cave.

Burnt Norton: 4 brings such a transition into challenging focus. There is the dark night of the soul in which "Time and the bell have buried the day, / The black cloud carries the sun away." And there can be a sense of desertion and isolation in which the sunflower, clematis, fingers of yew, and Kingfisher's wing pull the soul in different directions. Yet there is light ahead on the path—indeed "the light is still / At the Still point of the turning world"—the *Logos* of light and the light of *Logos*, ever present and presencing.

Burnt Norton: 5 clarifies, in sharp relief, the tensions, clashes and the difficulties between various types of interpretive words (*Phronesis*) and the presencing of the *Logos*.

> […] Words strain,
> Crack and sometimes break, under the burden,
> Under the tension, slip, slide, perish,
> Decay with imprecision, will not stay in place,
> Will not stay still.

And there is also: "The Word in the desert / Is most attacked by voices of temptation." How is the eternal Word—the Logos—to be properly heard amid so many counterfeits? For Eliot, there is always a pattern of reality that strains to be seen and heard, acted upon and realized—a pattern that is itself movement, "as in the figure of the ten stairs" (John of the Cross being given the nod). It is Love, though, that is the highest "Between un-being and being, / Sudden in a shaft of sunlight" that, if attentive, illuminates much and directs the restless

heart, mind, and imagination to the deeper rebuilding of Burnt Norton, the mansion and manor of the soul and society. What then is the next phase for Eliot in the rethinking of the place of the centre still point, and how to live from such a place in the moving and turbulent world? Such is the pathway to walk to East Coker.

East Coker

East Coker in Somerset, England is where Andrew Eliot (Eliot's line and lineage) left England in 1669 and sailed to the Massachusetts colony. The parish church in East Coker (St. Michael and All Angels') is where Eliot's ashes are housed. Such connections highlight for Eliot and the reader the connection between time past, time present, time future. We are all, whether aware of it or not, part of a larger unfolding historic drama—such was the theme and thesis of Eliot's essay "Tradition and the Individual Talent".

East Coker: 1 observes the rising and falling, waxing and waning of human projects and plans over the decades and centuries, hopes and dreams, goals accomplished, new goals articulated—and to what purpose such straining and building for what will be, in time, demolished and forgotten? "Houses rise and fall" or "Houses live and die" houses being both buildings and people. And, if a person was to observe the ritual of peasants dancing, men and women coming together, children birthed, Nature's ever shifting seasons, who is this person who dwells in such a short period of time, then is gone? We are all, whether we consent or not, on the perennial wheel of time as it ever turns and turns, waxing for short period of time, waning, then gone—what remains? What is worth the building when all that is built will perish and be replaced? Needless to say, such a perspective can lead to a sort of folding of the hands and wondering why bother doing anything. But there is more if the next steps on the upward and downward path are to be walked; this view from the trail must be noted and not ignored.

East Coker: 2 turns again to the vagaries of Nature and the message of the Constellations, both forms of knowing and being part of learning how to navigate the journey of time. Such a poetic approach with which Eliot began East Coker: 2 he needs to rethink—it's too epic and bordering on the melodramatic. Is it to elders we should turn for wisdom, their autumn years, in principle, meant to bear fine fruit? And yet, many are the elders that have not dug deep, have not allowed the Logos to live in them, to shape and form, mature and make them what they could have been. Eliot sums up various ways of being deceived. This section ends with sagacious advice as the path upward and downward ever continues:

> The only wisdom we can hope to acquire
> Is the wisdom of humility: humility is endless.
>
> The houses are all gone under the sea.
>
> The dancers are all gone under the hill.

This advice by Eliot is elementary yet often, too often, ignored—don't be attached or addicted to the transient, for all, in time, will go under—humility, when rightly understood, reveals such an obvious reality.

East Coker: 3 walks the reader into yet deeper darkness, yet fuller light, the shakers and makers of industry, intellectual class, and political elite all have their day in the sun, then are gone. The seeming light must be seen as darkness until the fuller light can be seen. And so "O dark, dark dark. / They all go into the dark". What path to be taken, then? Eliot offers three poignant illustrations in this transition season between seeing the darkness as light and the true and purer light. What seems to be the darkness of God is the beginning of light—just as when lights in a theater go out, there is a temporary darkness before the fuller screen is lit up, or when a subway stops between destinations in the dark, the dark is temporary, next station light again. Or, under ether seeing yet not seeing until the ether wears off, healing accomplished. This brings Eliot to his reversal of a deeper seeing, of a being wary of hoping but for the wrong things, having faith in the wrong things, loving the wrong things, and even being hesitant of trusting how we think. The task of learning how to wait, be still, and bracket even thinking, "for you are not ready for thought", points, aptly and wisely, four times to "You must go by…." This going reverses the socially accepted places to go for meaning and purpose—there is much letting go, reseeing and rebuilding from another place and foundation, the seeming wisdom of *phronesis*, not that of the *Logos*. East Coker: 3 is one of Eliot's most compact and incisive poems on soul formation and an alternate way of seeing, and what will be seen and lived from such a pathway and place arrived at.

East Coker: 4 builds on East Coker: 3. How is such a path to be walked, both up to what must be seen and down again, the path the same both up and down. East Coker: 4 is significantly Christological (Christ the Divine "wounded surgeon") his healing art bringing health and life again to those that are, in fact, deeply ill. Often, "our sickness must grow worse" before we visit the Divine Physician, "The whole earth is our hospital / Endowed by the ruined millionaire". East Coker: 4, given the fact Eliot's ashes are at the parish church, ends with the eucharist as the Divine medicine and the suffering of Easter Friday the pathway forward.

> The dripping blood our only drink,
> The bloody flesh our only food:
> In spite of what we like to think
> That we are sound, substantive flesh and blood—
> Again, in spite of that, we call this Friday good.

Just as each of the poems in East Coker strategically and consciously build on one another, the musical concerto, four quartets, five significant songs intertwined, so East Coker: 5 brings the sacramental journey to an end and close. "So here I am, in the middle way, having had twenty years— / Twenty years largely wasted". And so begins the Dante like journey, language ever an imperfect instrument for Eliot's "raid on the inarticulate". There is a sense in which Eliot, when dealing with the larger, ultimate issues, leans in the direction of the *via*

negativa or the *apophatic way*. There is an unfolding mystery on the pathway up and down, but there is a trail nonetheless. But on such a journey, there are the resources of those who have thought and lived lives, but such a recovery is the task of each generation. "There is only the fight to recover what has been lost / And found and lost again and again". And "there is only the trying. The rest is not our business." And the *fini* to this poem, yet again, about the faithful journey.

> Old men ought to be explorers
> Here and there does not matter
> We must be still and still moving
> Into another intensity
> For a further union, a deeper communion

Such is, in many ways, the end and *telos* of the pilgrimage. The contrast between the fire razed world of Burnt Norton and the parish church of St. Michael and All Angels' in East Coker brings to the fore what has been deconstructed, the slow process of creatively rebuilding, and the small yet new life emerging from the local level of the parish and parish church in East Coker.

The Dry Salvages

Those who enjoy kayaking can launch from Rockport (just east of Boston) and paddle their way to the dry salvages; tides coming and going, but the dry salvages never submerged in the rising tide, birds aplenty on the white rocks. Such are the poignant metaphor and poems in this section of *Four Quartets*.

The Dry Salvages: 1 Eliot walks the reader into the ongoing life of Nature, the attempts by Humans to dominate and control Nature; and yet the best of technical skills, when Nature demands its due, are feeble and weak. The theme of water as ever in movement, ever an obstacle to human industry, ever the life of fishermen, ever lost lives in such lives lived in ocean storms—in short, the sheer fragility of human making, dominance and control. There are the warning bells and buoys humans can make and create, but even then not enough to ease the worries of our all too human tragedies and losses that Nature will bring. Can humans rise above, like the dry salvages, the destructive tides of life, the painful consequences of Nature when fully unleashed?

The Dry Salvages: 2 enters the deeper world of Nature bringing the tragic into the human journey, and how humans process such realities on their ongoing journey. There seems "no end of it, the voiceless wailing, / No end to the withering of withered flowers". And so, what is Eliot to make of the pattern that once seemed to explain much when the tragic shreds such a pattern, a discarded image that Lewis once so defended? The Dry Salvages: 2 is a longer drawn out poem on time and its ravages, the relentless reality of destruction and the grief of human pain, multiple images and metaphors summoned forth by Eliot to walk the reader to such painful places. And the dry salvages and life there? Where are they to be found? The kayak journey to the salvages asks much effort, ever more so if waves and wind from the shore line are more demanding.

The Dry Salvages: 3 introduces the reader to the Indian god Krishna and Krishna's sagely advice about the future being a "faded song" and the poem ending with Krishna's advice to Arjuna about "On the field of battle. / Not fare well, / but fare forward, voyagers." The Dry Salvages: 3 is in many ways a sustained critique of the naïve liberal notion of history as progress, the ability and technical skills of humans to overcome the seeming brutality and uncertainties of life. Eliot shared with many of his generation a sustained critique of history as an ever unfolding ascent and optimism. As Krishna rightly noted, the actual journey is a battle, and it is on this field humanity must "fare forward" (a term often used by Eliot). Eliot walked the tightrope between the tragic and comedic way of life and the dry salvages articulate the complex nature of living such a trying tension, the ebbs and flows of life, tides rising and falling, dry salvages often faint patches to be salvaged in the storms of life.

The Dry Salvages: 4 returns to a distinctly religious theme, "Lady, whose shrine stands on the promontory". Again, the image of the sea and lives lost, families grieving as a result, communities shattered. There is, though, and from such a place and position, the dry salvages can be seen and steadied on, the "figlia del tuo figlia" and "Perpetual angelus".

The perpetual angelus can be interpreted by Eliot in a variety of ways—the fog bell floating on the ocean, warning sailors, Incarnation of Christ in the midst of human suffering, and the Roman Catholic commemoration of the incarnate Christ done with the ringing of bells. So, for Eliot, there is hope not despair, but a hope that does not ignore the tragic element of life, hope, if heard. There is the ringing of the bells in the midst of suffering, both the resurrected Christ and the East Coker parish church sacramental paths forward, up and down, up to the vision and safety of the dry salvages, bells ringing and angelus, and down to the rages and tragedies of time.

The Dry Salvages: 5 presses into the longings of humanity (mostly misguided) to understand how to read the signs of the times—so many distractions and false conclusions to such deciphering attempts. Both at the larger political and global level, or the much smaller personal and interpersonal levels, "The point of the intersection of the timeless / With time," Eliot suggests "is an occupation for the saint". But why only the saint and not those who do not go through the fire of purgation, illumination, and union? The difference between the saint and the average person, often distracted by one distraction after another, unfocussed and lacking minimal discipline, is "a lifetime's death in love, / Ardour and selflessness and self-surrender." And so, in many ways, dry salvages are those saints, those bells ringing, the perpetual angelus, if rightly understood and internalized, that reveals to the attentive the deeper vision of the living Logos in opposition to the deception of the *Phronesis* thrush.

Little Gidding

I was fortunate when at Cambridge in the 1990s to spend some lingering time at Little Gidding—such is Eliot's fleshed out answer, to the ashes of Burnt Norton, the hope of East Coker parish, the dry salvages, and hints of light and life in the

darkness of his ethos. Nicholas Ferrar (1592-1637) and family settled at the deserted Little Gidding site and, in time, turned it into a contemplative community. The Puritans accused it of being Arminian and a protestant nunnery, but its roots were, simply, a classical catholic Anglican way of living the deeper communal life. The patron saint of the Anglican Oratory of the Good Shepherd is Nicholas Ferrar. Why did Eliot end *Four Quartets* with "Little Gidding" and how are these final poems his answer to both the razing of thought and culture as depicted in Burnt Norton and hints forward in East Coker and Dry Salvages?

Little Gidding: 1 opens with "Midwinter spring is its own season", such a season between what is passing and what soon to be birthed. Such a birthing is about the journey, from various places, diverse beginnings, to this sacred site, many throughout the decades, wartimes and times of peace coming to such a sacramental and holy ground. "And what you thought you came for / Is only a shell, a husk of meaning". What is deeper than the shell and husk when meditatively lingering at such a place? Much needs to be let go, the load lightened, and it is at Little Gidding that

> […] the dead is tongued with fire
> Beyond the language of the living.
> Here, the intersection of the timeless moment
> Is England and nowhere. Never and always.

Little Gidding: 2 begins with the dying of a passing season; much is ending, metaphors revealing such a reality and yet, in the seeming ending, ends are always beginnings for Eliot. The poet meets a stranger, a sage of sorts. The former teacher of Eliot, in an extended reflection of sorts, hovers with the journey lived, the lessons learned, what the silly and thin, what the substantive. And the imperfect nature of the human pilgrimage is summed up by:

> From wrong to wrong the exasperated spirit
> Proceeds, unless restored by that refining fire
> Where you must move in measure, like a dancer.

And as quietly as the teacher came

> He left me, with a kind of valediction,
> And faded on the blowing of the horn.

How then, in such a journey to be trekked, when much has been distorted and minimized, does the poet go about purifying "the dialect of the tribe"?

Little Gidding: 3 meditates on the difference between mature and immature detachment and indifference, and the layered and complex meaning of thoughtful liberation and freedom—so many distortions and counterfeits to see through, and what the role of both memory and the purifying fire in clarifying the differences? The inner reflections for Eliot highlight, all so poignantly, how those, in time, who once opposed and turned on one another, once having crossed the river and on the other side of time, see things in a more reconciliatory manner. In short,

We cannot revive old factions
We cannot restore old policies
Or follow an antique drum.
These men, and those who opposed them
And those whom they opposed
Accept the constitution of silence
And are folded in a single party.

The site of Little Gidding, as history itself, both reflects intense oppositions and polarizations, but the higher union and communion is its iconic gift. And twice in this poem, drawing from Julian of Norwich the much loved saying, "all shall be well, and / All manner of things shall be well." But this occurs with "the purification of the motive / In the ground of our beseeching."

Little Gidding: 4 is a shorter poem yet packed with the image of the descending dove, the flame of purification and, in the end, "the choice of pyre or pyre— / To be redeemed from fire by fire." It is Love, at the end, that purifies, transforms, burns the dross from the gold so the pure gold of our new being will be revealed from being concealed. Such is the message, the deeper the tale of Little Gidding as place, symbol, and icon when understood and internalized.

Little Gidding: 5 begins with a common theme in the various poems: "What we call the beginning is often the end / And to make an end is to make a beginning." Much is said in this final poem, but the final lines are a synthesis of both Julian and Dante:

And all shall be well and
All manner of things shall be well
When the tongues of fire are in-folded
Into the crowned knot of fire
And the fire and the rose are one.

Such is, when rightly understood, when the doorway of Little Gidding is walked through, the sanctuary and cathedral of the new society, culture, and civilization; those who have been open to be transformed in community into their new being—in some ways, Augustine's city of God.

Erasmus and *Logos*

It is significant that Eliot begins *Four Quartets* with a quote from Heraclitus and his comparison of *Logos* with *Phronesis*. St. John uses the notion of *Logos* in the 1st verse of *John*. Heraclitus and John spent many of their years in Epheseus. When Erasmus was doing his updated translation of the New Testament and *John*, he translated *Logos* from the Greek to the Latin as *"sermo"* rather than *"verbum"*. Why did Erasmus do this, and what is its relationship to Heraclitus, Eliot's use of Heraclitus, and *Four Quartets*?

Erasmus chose *"sermo"* rather than *"verbum"* to translate *Logos* for the simple reason that a living and dynamic sermon embodies and incarnates the life of the

teacher speaking living truths into the lives of the listeners—both are engaged in a dialogical and dynamic relationship, *Logos-Sermo*, quite different than the more abstract and more detached way of being, from the transformative experience of living that is internal to ideas, ideas themselves but pointers to life. There is no doubt that the *Four Quartets* is a form of *Logos* embodied as a poetic *sermo*, Eliot speaking soul to soul, heart to heart, mind to mind to his attentive listeners. If the poem is understood as a form of probing insights into the human journey, the dismantling of the west, the burning of its culture, and the slow and wise rebuilding, then *Four Quartets* can be seen as a cultural *Logos-Sermo*, the unitive fire of Divine Love, the highest of all the seven virtues, *Phronesis and verbum*, lower levels of knowing and being needing the purifying fire to become the rose.

Amor Vincit Omnia

About the Author

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Toward a Deeper Understanding of Donor Intent

Abstract

Donor intent lies at the center of some of the most ethically complex and highly contested debates in philanthropy, yet the concept remains conceptually fuzzy and undertheorized. Recent trends make it even more essential that we know what we are talking about when we talk about donor intent. This article develops a new framework for understanding donor intent, addressing two key questions: how is donor intent expressed, and how do these expressions vary? Drawing from theoretical analysis of existing debates and a systematic scoping review of scholarly and practitioner literature, we present two typologies. The first identifies the comprehensive range of possible expressions of donor intent – the myriad aspects of giving that intent might affect – grouped into three broad categories: Focus and Principles, Governance and Operations, and Strategies and Practices. The second summarizes four core dimensions along which these expressions might vary: Specificity, Openness, Permanence, and Influence. This deeper and more precise understanding of donor intent is meant to help inform the debates and ethical dilemmas that arise around donor intent in philanthropic practice, and to help structure future theory and research by scholars studying this core philanthropic concept.

Keywords:
Donor Intent, Donor Control, Family Foundations, Philanthropic Ethics, Philanthropic Governance

Introduction

Some of our most passionate ethical debates in philanthropy arise around the idea of "donor intent." People fight to honor or preserve it, often as the primary guiding compass for all giving. Others decry it as disconnected from real needs in the world or the real work of achieving impact – or worse, as yet another source of undue power wielded by plutocrats, even if long dead. Talking about donor intent is often emotionally fraught, yet conceptually vague. It is a hot topic, but a fuzzy one. And it doesn't help that it comes to the forefront most often in moments of conflict and dispute over that intent. Engaging carefully with an ethically complex subject like this is hard to do during a contentious court case.

Both our practical and scholarly deliberations would benefit tremendously from greater clarity about what we are talking about when we talk about donor intent. What are the various meanings of this somewhat odd term? To what does it apply? How does it vary? What questions does it raise, not just for donors (or their descendants) but for everyone else around the philanthropic table? Unpacking and understanding the many facets of donor intent is even more crucial today as recent trends in the field are adding new layers of complexity to these perennial and often loaded questions.

This essay aims to move us toward a deeper, more practically useful, and more conceptually rigorous understanding of donor intent by identifying the range of ways it is expressed in philanthropic action, and by proposing a typology of the core dimensions of this complex yet undertheorized concept. Building this deeper understanding is meant to help inform the debates and ethical dilemmas that arise around donor intent in philanthropic practice, and to help structure future theory and research by scholars looking to understand this essential concept in philanthropic studies. The proposed conceptual framework here is not meant to be definitive, but rather to invite future work and applications to refine and expand it.

The Limits of Historical and Current Debates

An Omnipresent Concept, Often Disputed

Donor intent has been a philanthropic concern throughout the long history of giving. Historians tell us that many donors in ancient societies were like donors of today; they usually gave for specific purposes and often attached expectations for the use of their gifts, whether they were giving to a mendicant outside a temple, building a public bath, or giving to widows and orphans.[1] Donors have almost always had explicit purposes in mind, and very often have the power to enforce adherence to those purposes. Donor intent seems always there, beneath the surface of daily practice, even as our attention is trained on other challenges of the day.

It isn't surprising, then, that donor intent is part of the history of ethical teachings and arguments about philanthropy. From Aristotle's argument that virtue means giving for the right purpose, to the principle behind both Christian almsgiving and Islamic zakat that believers should focus on giving to the poor above all else, the intention behind giving has long been highlighted. There have also been ethical arguments against overly prioritizing the donor's intent and their role in enforcing it. In the Jewish tradition, the "Mishnah Torah" of Maimonides puts all forms of anonymous giving at a higher level on his "ladder" of tzedakah than any forms in which the donor is known.[2] The donor's wishes are considered very low in ethical importance.

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1 Jenny Harrow, "Donor Intent and Donor Control," in *International Encyclopedia of Civil Society,* ed. Helmut K. Anheier and Stefan Toepler (New York: Springer, 2009), 610–16; Paul Vallely, *Philanthropy: From Aristotle to Zuckerberg* (London: Bloomsbury Continuum, 2020).

2 Felicia Waldman, "Poverty and Charity in the Jewish Tradition," *Studia Hebraica* 7 (2007): 34–50.

Andrew Carnegie's[3] well-known guidelines for good giving – what others came to call his "gospel" even if he didn't use that term – included a fervent argument for why he intentionally gives to some causes and not others. His contemporary, John D. Rockefeller, set up his foundation with the vague mission of serving the "well-being of mankind",[4] but elsewhere Rockefeller too took a stand on better and worse donor intentions, explaining which approaches and purposes he felt constituted the "best philanthropy".[5]

In more modern ethical writings about philanthropy, donor intent remains at the center. Payton and Moody[6] describe philanthropy as "voluntary action for the public good," placing great emphasis on how a moral orientation toward the "good" intended by the action is necessary for that action to even be considered philanthropic.[7] Philanthropy is defined by the philanthropist's public good intent. The utilitarian "effective altruism" philosophy (and movement) at first glance seems opposed to any value being placed on a donor's own goals or personal passions, saying good philanthropy is "issue-agnostic".[8] But digging deeper we can see that Effective Altruists actually believe there is only one acceptable philanthropic purpose – to save as many lives as possible and thereby achieve "the greatest good for the greatest number." They also certainly support donors giving very explicit directions about how to achieve that purpose.[9] Donor intent matters in guiding the execution not selecting the issue.

Donor intent has been, and continues to be a concern for all types of donors, from various foundations – corporate, community, independent, etc. – to individual and collective givers alike. So-called "donor-advised funds" (DAFs) that have grown in popularity in recent years put front-and-center – in the name of funding vehicle – the primary and ethically proper role of donors to direct the use of gifts. More broadly, donor intent takes on special significance – and added challenges – in what we usually label, "family philanthropy".[10] Often the original donor(s), who defined the various elements of their intent, are still deeply and passionately involved with the giving. Often their descendants and other kin – those with an emotional tie to the original donor – are also involved. Honoring

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3 Andrew Carnegie, "Wealth," *North American Review* 148, no. 391 (1889): 653–65.

4 Raymond B. Fosdick, *The Story of the Rockefeller Foundation* (London: Routledge, 2017).

5 John D. Rockefeller, "Some Random Reminiscences of Men and Events," *The World's Work*, October 1908.

6 Robert L. Payton and Michael P. Moody, *Understanding Philanthropy: Its Meaning and Mission* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008).

7 See also Dwight F. Burlingame, "Altruism and Philanthropy: Definitional Issues," *Essays on Philanthropy,* no. 10 (Indianapolis, IN: Indiana University Center on Philanthropy, 1993).

8 Eric Friedman, *Reinventing Philanthropy: A Framework for More Effective Giving* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2013).

9 Peter Singer, *The Most Good You Can Do: How Effective Altruism Is Changing Ideas about Living Ethically* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2015).

10 Philanthropy Roundtable, "Donor Intent and Family Foundations Can Be a Dangerous Mix," *Philanthropy Roundtable*, December 23, 2021; Michael P. Moody, Allison Lugo Knapp, and Marlene Corrado, "What Is a Family Foundation?" *The Foundation Review* 3, no. 4 (December 20, 2011): 47–61.

intent takes on added meaning in these situations. And enforcement of intent is often more passionate in family philanthropy as well. This is why we all nod and smile when hearing the old joke about the family foundation founder saying to the board, "All in favor of my plan, say 'Aye.' All opposed, say 'I resign.'" Also, over time in giving families, original donor intent begins to carry the weight of becoming "legacy," and the process of stewarding that intent-as-legacy raises additional challenges.

Despite this central and persistent presence of donor intent behind everyday philanthropic practices and in core teachings, we usually only think and talk deliberately and intensively about donor intent when controversy about it arises. In these cases, the debate over intent usually ends up occurring in court, or in other situations that can lead to dramatic consequences, such as intra-family rifts or the end of long-standing relationships between donors and recipients. This means we are often forced to try to understand donor intent, to parse its meaning and elements, in the heated environment of extreme cases.

Many readers might recall the blowup in 2008 after hotel magnate – and so-called "Queen of Mean" – Leona Helmsley left the bulk of her multibillion-dollar estate to a charitable trust that she directed should focus on "provision of care for dogs".[11] This limited directive was eventually overturned in the courts for being too restrictive under state charitable laws, allowing trustees to give to broader purposes. In the UK, trustees of the Diana, Princess of Wales Memorial Fund have been criticized for having "scant regard… for the issues she was concerned about".[12] Another famous example settled in the courts was the Robertson family's lawsuit against Princeton University alleging they had not honored the stated purpose of their predecessor's gift – made 40 years earlier – to fund the training of students for public service.[13] These cases are rarely simple and clear, so they tend to make the issue of donor intent even fuzzier.

In many instances, the legal doctrine of "*cy près*," meaning "as close as possible," is used to devise what a donor would want to happen when questions about that are raised. [14] Note, though, that this preserves the power of the original donor's wishes, treating those wishes as the primary decision criteria, even if they are vague or outdated. Clearly, we need a way of understanding donor intent that is more complex and nuanced than "as close as possible."

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11 Ray D. Madoff, "What Leona Helmsley Can Teach Us about the Charitable Deduction," *Chicago-Kent Law Review* (2010).

12 Tobias Jung and Kevin Orr, "What Lies beneath? Spectrality as a Focal Phenomenon and a Focal Theory for Strengthening Engagement with Philanthropic Foundations," *International Journal of Management Reviews* 23, no. 3 (May 11, 2021): 312–29; Anna Pukas and Lyle Somerset, "Was the £100m Diana Fund a Disaster?" *Daily Express*, July 21, 2011.

13 Douglas E. White, *Abusing Donor Intent: The Robertson Family's Epic Lawsuit against Princeton University* (St. Paul, MN: Paragon House, 2014).

14 Susan N. Gary, "The Problems with Donor Intent: Interpretation, Enforcement, and Doing the Right Thing," *Chicago-Kent Law Review* 85, no. 3 (2010); Allison Anna Tait, "The Secret Economy of Charitable Giving," *Boston University Law Review,* May 10, 2017; Olivier Zunz, *Philanthropy in America: A History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012).

Current Debates Beg Deeper Questions

As the headline-making controversies over donor intent suggest, the public debates about donor intent in philanthropy today often become two-sided, black vs. white affairs. This is certainly true for the field-wide ethical debate over whether donor intent should be prioritized in philanthropy in general, and over which choices and whose voices should be privileged.

On one side, critics of an over-emphasis on donor intent[15] argue that donors already have too much control, that giving them the power to make key decisions about such significant resources is dangerous and ethically suspect in a democratic society.[16] They argue that philanthropy too often privileges donors' subjective interests over objective assessments of what is really needed to make an actual social impact. They also say donors shouldn't shackle organizations with too many restrictions, earmarks, or requirements, but should instead seek input from grantees and beneficiaries, and determine their intent through careful assessment of what sort of giving will create real impact. In this view, the public, not just donors, should have a clear voice in directing philanthropic choices.

On the other side, advocates for the primacy of donor intent[17] make both moral and practical arguments in favor of what they often call "philanthropic freedom." Some say curtailing donor intent is what is undemocratic because it restricts individual freedom, and doing so restricts the innovation and entrepreneurship that is vital to a thriving civil society. A few echo Carnegie in arguing donors should have the right to decide how to distribute their own money, either because "it's their money" and/or because they have proven they are best equipped to administer our social largesse for the public good. And many claim that curtailing donor intent and freedom has a chilling effect on charitably-minded donors – and potential donors – disincentivizing giving and ultimately leading to a significant reduction in philanthropy. They say trust the donors to make individual choices that will lead to the public good, just as we – as Adam Smith instructed – should trust businesspeople to pursue their self-interest in a way that collectively advances the public interest.

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15 For example, *The Givers: Wealth, Power, and Philanthropy in a New Gilded Age*, by David Callahan (New York: Vintage Books, 2018); *No Such Thing as a Free Gift: The Gates Foundation and the Price of Philanthropy,* by Linsey McGoey (London: Verso, 2016); Susan A. Ostrander, "The Growth of Donor Control: Revisiting the Social Relations of Philanthropy," *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 36, no. 2 (June 2007): 356–72.

16 Megan E. Tompkins-Stange and Robert B. Schwartz, *Policy Patrons: Philanthropy, Education Reform, and the Politics of Influence* (La Vergne: Harvard Education Press, 2020); Rob Reich, *Just Giving: Why Philanthropy Is Failing Democracy and How It Can Do Better* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2018).

17 For example, *Why Philanthropy Matters: How the Wealthy Give, and What It Means for Our Economic Well-Being*, by Zoltán J. Ács (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013); Protecting Donor Intent: How to Define and Safeguard Your Philanthropic Principles, by Jeffrey J. Cain (Washington, DC: Philanthropy Roundtable, 2012); How Great Philanthropists Failed and You Can Succeed at Protecting Your Legacy, by Martin Morse Wooster (Washington, DC: Capital Research Center, 2018).

Examples of this either/or debate about donor intent abound in contemporary philanthropic discourse. The push for "strategic philanthropy"[18] called for more proactive donors pursuing their own carefully devised approaches to the causes of their choosing, while the now-popular initiatives for more "trust-based" or "participatory" philanthropy[19] – which arose in part as a counter against the strategic philanthropy trend – de-emphasize exclusive donor control. In mid-2023, an op-ed in the *Chronicle of Philanthropy* co-authored by leaders of prominent institutions,[20] argued that philanthropy is best when donors are free to pursue their own passions and missions in a sort of "marketplace of ideas" in the sector. This classic "charitable cause pluralism" argument[21] was met with loud backlash from critics, saying that we shouldn't just let "the intentions of rich mostly white people in power" decide where philanthropic money flows.[22] In the U.S., this two-sided, heated debate over donor intent is embodied in two organizations on either side: The Philanthropic Roundtable defending donor intent as sacrosanct, and the National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy arguing for more community voice and less donor dominance.

Implicit in the arguments made by these two sides are assumptions – usually unquestioned – about what donor intent actually is, what it applies to, and how it functions in everyday philanthropy. And if we begin to interrogate those assumptions, we see that thinking carefully about donor intent requires a more subtle understanding, one that is transcends either-or.

More Than Mission

Donor intent is not only more complicated than the usual contentious or black-or-white debates portray it, it is also expressed in more diverse ways than we often acknowledge. Donor intent is often seen as only about "mission," or more specifically about the choice of cause. At times, consideration is widened a bit to "mission, vision, and values," which are often core directives set by the original donor(s).

But as you think more carefully about what donors might have opinions about or might want to control, you realize that donors can be directive about

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18 Paul Brest and Hal Harvey, *Money Well Spent: A Strategic Plan for Smart Philanthropy*, 2nd ed. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2018).

19 Cynthia M. Gibson, Chris Cardona, Jasmine McGinnis Johnson, and David Suarez, eds., *Participatory Grantmaking in Philanthropy: How Democratizing Decision-Making Shifts Power to Communities* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2024).

20 Heather Templeton Dill, Kathleen Enright, Sam Gill, Brian Hooks, Darren Walker, and Elise Westhoff, "We Disagree on Many Things, but We Speak with One Voice in Support of Philanthropic Pluralism," *Chronicle of Philanthropy*, April 13, 2023.

21 Benjamin Soskis, *Charitable Cause Pluralism and Prescription in Historical Perspective* (Washington, DC: Urban Institute, 2023).

22 Vu Le, "No, Not All Philanthropic Views Are Good, and Many Don't Deserve Our Respect," *Chronicle of Philanthropy*, April 20, 2023.

way more than just mission and cause area.[23] Donor intent can refer to specific funding strategies, to preferred (or restricted) geographies for giving, to ideal forms of engagement with grantees and beneficiaries, to a level of tolerance for risk or an interest in innovation, to the intended role for future family members, and to much more. In fact, with the rise of more strategic and donor-engaged philanthropy, it is not uncommon for donors or foundations to have an explicit "theory of change" that they want deployed in all aspects of their giving.[24] Indeed, having this comprehensive statement of intent in all aspects of your giving strategy is seen as a sign of an engaged, proactive, conscientious donor.

The work of implementing or following donor intent – like all ethical situations – is more complex than just deciding between "do it" or "don't do it." We already know that donor intent is often vague, like Rockefeller's original mission statement, but it can also be extremely specific – e.g., "these funds must be used to help 7th-grade girls in Alabama succeed in math." It can be fixed and unchangeable for perpetuity, or open to exceptions and adaptations, or reinterpretations over time, either by design or by necessity. And donors can put in place mechanisms to control how their intent is executed, or they can leave that to others. For instance, we know that the enactment of donor intent is a key and primary indicator of any family foundation leader's success.[25]

Consider, as an example, a donor who has had personal or familial experience with cancer and wants to direct their newly established family foundation to that cause. They can decide to focus on cancer research over treatment, or maybe to focus only on cancer in women or children. They can direct the foundation to only fund certain innovations in research, or only certain institutional partners, or they can leave such choices up to the staff or outside experts. They can allow for general operating grants for research labs, or they can rule out certain expenses like support staff salaries. They can declare all of these choices as directives that the foundation must always follow, or they can give their future descendants serving on the foundation board some measure of discretion to adapt the goals or strategies as the world – and cancer itself – changes. And on and on. In this example and others like it, donor intent covers more than just the choice of cancer as a cause.

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23 Virginia Esposito, ed., *Splendid Legacy 2: Creating and Re-Creating Your Family Foundation* (Washington, DC: National Center for Family Philanthropy, 2017); Curtis W. Meadows, "Philanthropic Choice and Donor Intent: Freedom, Responsibility, and Public Interest," *New Directions for Philanthropic Fundraising* 2004, no. 45 (September 2004): 95–102.

24 Michael Quinn Patton, Nathaniel Foote, and James Radner, "A Foundation's Theory of Philanthropy: What It Is, What It Provides, How to Do It," *The Foundation Review* 16, no. 1 (June 1, 2015).

25 Joseph Palus, "Role of the Foundation Leader in Defining Grantmaking Areas of Interest and Strategy," in *Leadership in Nonprofit Organizations: A Reference Handbook*, ed. Kathryn A. Agard (Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publications, Inc., 2011), 719–26.

Goal and Method

We need a deeper understanding of donor intent to move beyond the simplified debates, to inform complicated and contentious disputes, and to advance our scholarship of such a central ethical concept in philanthropy. We need to disentangle its many possible expressions and identify its core dimensions and variations. This article develops that deeper understanding by drawing from existing uses of the term, as well as conceptual explorations of its range of potential meanings. It devises two typologies meant to capture, first, the full range of possible expressions of donor intent in philanthropic practices, and second, the core dimensions on which those diverse expressions can vary.

Our purpose here is the theoretical development of a concept that is central to many ethical dilemmas and debates in philanthropy, as well as to the emerging interdisciplinary field of philanthropic studies. We hope to advance thinking about donor intent, and to allow for more structured and subtle discussions of the ethical complexities of philanthropy. The goal here is not to propose an explanatory model meant to hypothesize when donor intent will arise or will matter in certain ways and when in others, nor to offer a normative theory of whether donor intent should or should not be prioritized in philanthropic work (as many of the proponents and critics discussed earlier have already done). Rather, we want to offer greater conceptual specificity, and a set of clear categories, that can then have potential benefits for both practice and scholarship.

We develop these typologies using both theoretical reasoning and a structured review of existing literature and current usage in public and professional philanthropic discourse. We started with our own initial identification of key expressions and categories derived from years of observation of debates and discussions about philanthropy, and then enlarged and refined this categorization through a scoping review[26] of uses of donor intent – and related terms – over the past two decades in key practitioner and scholarly forums.

The usage analysis and scoping review first identified a few keywords related to donor intent, including: "donor intent," "donor control," "funder intent," and "donor restriction(s)." These terms were then thoroughly searched in three academic databases - Scopus, Web of Science, and ScienceDirect – two key practitioner-focused platforms – stories in the Chronicle of Philanthropy, and writings collected by the organization, Philanthropy Roundtable – as well as several other practitioner publications.

Only writings published in English during a twenty-year period – January 2004 to April 2024 – were included in our analysis. Some uses of these search terms were excluded, including: if the term was used in relation to topics such as studies of blood or organ donations, of governmental support for international economic development and foreign aid, or of ecological studies of food sharing.

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26 Micah D. Peters et al., "Scoping Reviews: Reinforcing and Advancing the Methodology and Application," *Systematic Reviews* 10, no. 1 (2021): 1–21.

After excluding some publications using the above criteria, on the academic side we analyzed a total of 56 peer-reviewed journal articles and 18 books or book chapters, most of which contained multiple uses of the relevant concepts. The journals were in different disciplines, such as public management, law, management, business and economics, political sciences, and sociology. The two most common were *The Foundation Review and Nonprofit* and *Voluntary Sector Quarterly.* These uses were uploaded to the Covidence literature review platform for systematic summaries that clarified different meanings of donor intent-related terms.

For practitioner publications, we used the ATLAS.ti software for qualitative coding and analysis. A total of 451 uses of donor intent-related terms were analyzed this way. The most common sources were the Roundtable's "Donor Intent Hub" and "Donor Intent Resource Library" databases.

Expressions of Donor Intent

As noted, too often people assume donor intent is solely captured in a mission statement. The heart of a donor's intent can certainly be expressed in the core mission of some institution or fund they establish. But not all donors who have intentions for their giving create mission statements, let alone formal processes or organizations to implement those. And even mission statements usually have multiple dimensions that can be considered – or potentially changed – separately. For example, as missions get adapted over time, they might retain some original elements (like a cause focus) but revise others (like the geographic focus).

Thinking about how donor intent might be expressed beyond mission statements, the potential complexity of donor intent increases even further. In fact, observing philanthropic practice closely can show how the designs and plans of a donor can affect most every aspect of the giving process. Donors can express clear opinions about many aspects of their giving, from the how, to the what, to the where, and even the why.

A useful and accurate understanding of donor intent needs to allow for this diversity of potential areas of expression. In Table 1, we offer an attempt to list the range of potential areas of expressions of donor intent, which fall into three categories: 1) the focus and principles of a donor's giving, 2) a donor's choices about governance and operations, and 3) a donor's preferred strategies and specific giving practices. This list was developed initially based on a careful reflection on ways donors in observed practice have articulated their intent, and then refined to make sure the list captured the multiple expressions found in our usage review.

Table 1: Potential Expressions of Donor Intent

Category	Area of Expression	Description
Focus & Principles	Mission	Core purpose, intended impact, or public goal of giving
	Vision	Ideal world or outcomes giving can help create
	Values	Guiding principles and beliefs informing giving
	Causes/Issues	Areas of giving or programmatic foci
	Place	Geographic focus or restrictions on giving
	Legacy	Desired, enduring impact or reputation from giving
	Equity Orientation	Prioritization of equity, diversity, justice in giving
Governance & Operations	Vehicles	Choice of, rules for various giving vehicles
	Staffing	Leadership, management, advising structure
	Board	Structure and roles of board members
	Family Roles	Eligibility, roles, and engagement by family members
	Partners	Roles of other formal partners and other stakeholders
	Transparency	Degree and type of disclosure or access
	Investing	If endowed, policies and guidelines for investments
	Contingency Planning	Plans for possible future scenarios
Strategies & Practices	Style/Method	General strategies and preferences for how to give
	Rules/Guidelines	Specific instructions or restrictions for how to give
	Theory of Change	Model for how strategy leads to desired outcomes
	Innovation	Willingness to try new methods in giving
	Risk	Tolerance for risk in giving or in investments
	Recipient Engagement	Approach to partnerships and engagements
	Collaboration	Strategy for working with other stakeholders
	Learning	Processes for learning and improving as a donor
	Evaluation/Measurement	Processes for evaluating results of giving
	Time Horizon	Preference for limited-life or perpetual giving

It is important to recognize that this is a list of potential expressions, and any particular donor (or giving institution created by a donor) will likely only emphasize their intentions for some of these aspects of giving. The other aspects not dictated or encouraged explicitly can develop over time, remain more implicit, be determined by others involved, or solidify in other ways outside of donor control. In fact, in many cases, donors are fairly narrow about the elements of giving that they express clear intentions for. Also, not all of these areas of expression are relevant in every giving situation and for every donor. Not all

donors create endowed funds, for instance, so items related to those (e.g., staffing or investment preferences) are not part of their donor directions. And not all donors are open to explicit learning or evaluation, or other practices.

The diversity and size of this list show just how complicated donor intent is. Again, it potentially affects all aspects of the philanthropic process. It can involve both internal elements, such as how family should be engaged, and external elements, such as the ideal social impact from giving or relationships with outside stakeholders. Donor intent can influence very practical and short-term choices as well as general and long-term ones. In fact, this list is likely not exhaustive, and our purpose here is to offer it as a starting place for future refinement and application.

Some might protest that this list expands the notion of donor intent too far, arguing that the concept should be restricted to only general or high-level goals from donors, or only to the most essential choices or the most fervent directives of donors. But the fact is that, in the daily work of giving, donors might have clear and strong opinions about any of these areas, and those opinions usually carry weight and get implemented. Our understanding of donor intent needs to take account of all potential expressions like this – again, regardless of our normative position about whether there should be more or less weight given to such expressions. The following sections consider possible expressions in each broad category.

Focus and Principles

Of course, statements of mission and ultimate vision are often key expressions of a donor's intent. These can be very specific or very general. They might just outline a broad goal like providing health care to children, or they might detail much more explicit intended impacts from giving. Values are also one of the more common areas of donor intent expression, as donors often see their giving as a vital extension of their core personal values.[27] These values are usually meant to be infused across multiple parts of giving – to influence all elements of a donor's foundation, for example – so this expression of intent can have ripple effects.

Causes or issue areas are another very common element of giving that donors specify or seek to control. This makes sense as these are often tied to the donor's personal passions or experiences – e.g., the program areas of a family foundation are often connected closely to the causes that matter most to the original donor(s). The importance of this sort of choice to donors is one reason why workplace giving programs have increasingly allowed individuals to earmark which causes or organizations their contributions support.[28] Geography might be fully or partially designated and restricted based on donor wishes, such as when a donor gives in the community where they live or where they've earned their

27 Ibid., 23E.

28 Emily Barman, *Contesting Communities: The Transformation of Workplace Charity* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006).

wealth. Also, the geographic designations can range from very local to explicitly global – e.g., some donors such as the Gates family are deliberately global in their intended geography.[29]

Legacy is a concept that is frequently tied to intent, as it is in a sense the living-on of intent, and is seen as closely tied to the original donor or the past history of the family. Legacy can arise unintentionally or by default, of course, and can be negative.[30] But for many donors, their enduring legacy is something they hope to control – or at least to set in motion on purpose. And in many philanthropic families, legacy is explicitly shaped by the successive generations. Finally, we added a category for "equity orientation" after finding in our systematic review that this was an area that donors increasingly have strong views and directives about. While a focus on equity, diversity, justice, or related goals is often counterposed to an emphasis on what powerful donors want, for some donors, it is at the heart of what they want to accomplish with their giving, and they want this orientation to affect all aspects of how they give.[31]

Governance and Operations

A decision about giving that donors usually have much control over, and views about, is the choice of philanthropic vehicle. This can at times be driven solely by legal considerations or situational factors, but donors usually are intentional in this choice. And in today's philanthropic landscape – with new vehicles being created, such as charitable LLCs, new types of collaboratives, and so on – there are an increasing number of options for donors to choose from and/or to combine.[32] Donors might explicitly decide to create, for instance, a main foundation for the whole family as well as separate DAFs for individual family members. Donor intent can be expressed here also in terms of specific rules or guidelines about the use of different vehicles for different purposes and by different family members or descendants.

The issue of staffing, per se, is not one that most donors will need to decide whether they want to control or not, as most donors do not establish staffed institutions – even the majority of foundations are unstaffed.[33] But if there is such an institution, donors will at times want to shape that organizational structure, including the role and selection of leadership. For most donors above

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29 Ibid., 15M.

30 Saphira Maude Baker, Kelly Chopus, Casey Cox, and Anita McGinty, "Unplanned Donor Legacies: How to Avoid Them, and How One Family Foundation Corrected Course with an Evaluation," *The Foundation Review* 10, no. 3 (September 1, 2018).

31 Cheryl Dorsey, Jeff Bradach, and Peter Kim, "The Problem with 'Color-Blind' Philanthropy," *Harvard Business Review*, June 5, 2020.

32 Nicholas Tedesco and Michael P. Moody, "The Future of Family Philanthropy," *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, September 12, 2022.

33 Susan P. Price and Alice Buhl, *Current Practices in Family Foundations: A Study in Support of the Pursuit of Excellence Assessment Process* (Washington, DC: National Center for Family Philanthropy, 2009).

a certain level of giving, also, their "staffing" choices might be focused on the intended role of philanthropic advisors. Issues of governance apply to an even broader range of philanthropic vehicles, and governance can be a clear area of donor preference. This might relate to the composition of a board of a family foundation, the roles and eligibility of family members to participate in DAF decisions, or the role of non-family members. It could also cover the decision rules for giving, for situations in which more than just an individual donor is involved – e.g., is unanimity of the board required, does anyone have veto power, etc. More broadly, donors can express their intent about the engagement of other stakeholders or partners, such as with institutions where they establish scholarships, or on-going relationships with community foundations.

With current trends and popular critiques calling for more transparency by donors, they are even more likely today to have an opinion about the level of disclosures and public access they grant to their decision-making, internal processes, or other information.[34] Another trend is the rise of "impact investing" – or what used to be called "mission-related investing" among foundations – and accordingly, this has become an even more common area of expression of donor intent among those donors who use endowments. Donors might be very explicit about how and to what extent they use environmental screens on their investments, for instance, or they might refuse on principle to put any restrictions on investments, arguing for a sole focus on maximizing returns to increase the giving budget. Both are expressions of donor intent. Finally, planning for possible scenarios, and for the future of a donor's giving or giving institution, is a facet of philanthropic work that donors can seek to control. They might insist on establishing clear plans in case of external threats or changes in the family, or they might want legal safeguards to ensure their intent is carried out, such as in the sort of cases mentioned earlier.[35]

Strategies and Practices

The "how" of giving is something about which donors very often express their intent. Donors frequently set the general strategy for their giving, either explicitly in planning or implicitly through the style and method they use – and that later generations usually try to follow.[36] This might include preferences like giving to the same trusted institutions or spreading gifts around to many organizations. Donors might give directions to conduct thorough due diligence before giving, or they might intentionally "go with my gut." A range of more specific strategic choices made consciously by donors include rules or intended guidelines such as only supporting programs, not operations, structuring gifts in careful ways to ensure continued donor control, making only matching

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34 National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, *Criteria for Philanthropy at Its Best* (Washington, DC: Author, 2009).

35 Ibid., 14G.

36 Peter Frumkin, *Strategic Giving: The Art and Science of Philanthropy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

grants, etc. These specific donor-prescribed rules and guidelines can be positive – e.g., "we will fund grassroots organizations with multi-year grants" – or negative – e.g., "we do not give endowment grants." Even ostensibly "no strings attached" giving often involves some measure of donor intention.[37] As suggested, translating original donor intent into on-going strategy can become a long-term family process.[38] The most explicit form of strategic plan for giving is a formal theory of change or logic model that lays out how certain intended outcomes or impacts will ideally result from particular interventions and activities – input to output to outcome to impact.[39] This intentional strategic model is usually developed either with deep donor involvement, or with following the original donor intent clearly in mind.

Donors vary in how willing they are to try new methods and to change their existing approach or method, and this openness to innovation is itself a potential expression of donor intent. Some donors insist on always giving in one tried-and-true way, while others are constantly looking for a new funding tool or a creative new idea. This willingness to innovate is also related to a donor's appetite for risk, an element of their intent which can apply to both risks in their giving and in their investments. The importance of this expression of donor intent is growing, as newer donors have been found to be more eager to take risks.[40]

Many donors, whether giving large amounts or not, make explicit choices about how they want to engage with the people and groups they support. Some desire a hands-on relationship with recipients, and some prefer to be hands-off – but to the extent that they specify their ideal engagement they are expressing donor intent. And this is one area in which donor intent – or donor control, as it is often seen from the recipient's perspective – can have tremendous consequences for the exercise of power in giving.[41] Foundations that institute methods like "trust-based philanthropy" or "participatory grantmaking" are making an explicit choice about their ideal relationship with grantees.[42] Intent around relationships also arises in donors' preferences for whether and how to collaborate (or not) with other stakeholders, such as other donors or foundations.

In recent years, learning and evaluation have become a more salient part of philanthropic practices, and are becoming more common areas of donor intent

37 Claire Dunning, "No Strings Attached: Philanthropy, Race, and Donor Control from Black Power to Black Lives Matter," *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 52, no. 1 (January 6, 2022): 29–49.

38 Kelly C. Medinger and Angela R. Logan, "Creating Choices before Making Choices: One Family Foundation's Journey to Finding a Strategic Focus," *The Foundation Review* 7, no. 4 (December 1, 2015).

39 Ibid., 24.

40 Sharna Goldseker and Michael P. Moody, *Generation Impact: How Next Gen Donors Are Revolutionizing Giving* (Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley and Sons, 2021).

41 Adam Meiksins, "10 Ways Donors Can Be Less Than Helpful," *Nonprofit Quarterly*, April 14, 2015.

42 Ibid., 19.

expression. Donors might have well-defined ideas for how they want their giving to adapt based on learning. They might set up their foundation as a "learning organization" with feedback loops of continuous learning and adaptation.[43] Other donors might be more informal or unintentional about learning, or have no intention of it at all. Similarly, the openness to, and approach for conducting evaluations and measuring results, determining success or failure, is an increasingly common area of donor direction in the giving process.[44] Finally, specifying the time horizon for their giving vehicle(s) is also a popular topic of donor control today. It is common now for donors to make very explicit choices about whether they want to establish a vehicle that gives on in perpetuity, or whether they want to set a limited lifespan and "spend down" or "sunset" at some point. Foundations often establish plans for what will happen if they have to, or choose to, close down. This, too, is an example of donor intent.

Core Dimensions of Donor Intent

As noted, the way that donors express their intent about any of those aspects listed above can vary from aspect to aspect. They can be stringent and unwavering about some things, and flexible about others. Some aspects of their wishes they want to live forever, and some they leave open to change.

To help get a better handle on these dynamics, and deepen our understanding of donor intent in general, we need to identify and categorize the core dimensions on which these variations in donor intent occur. Table 2 summarizes four such dimensions: specificity, openness, permanence, and influence. Each dimension is presented in terms of a continuum along which expressions of donor intent might vary, and examples of the poles of each continuum are provided.

This typology of dimensions was developed in a similar fashion to the list of areas of expression in Table 1. And like that previous table, it is meant to help improve our practice and actual ethical debates about donor intent, and to inform future scholarship, but it is not offered as a definitive list. We invite refinements and revisions based on attempts to apply this conceptual framework.

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43 Jennifer Chubinski, Kelley Adcock, and Susan Sprigg, "Challenges and Opportunities in Philanthropic Organizational Learning: Reflections from Fellow Grantmakers," *The Foundation Review* 11, no. 1 (2019); William M. Plater and Genevieve G. Shaker, "Artificial Intelligence and Philanthropy: The Cybernetics of Philanthropy from 1974 to 2024," *Philanthropia* 1, no. 1 (November 29, 2024).

44 Helmut K. Anheier and Diana Leat, *Performance Measurement in Philanthropic Foundations* (London: Routledge, 2019).

Table 2: Dimensions of Donor Intent Variation

Specificity	*Degree to which a donor is explicit about their intent (any aspect).*	***Vague*** ⟷ ***Explicit*** "Promote the well-being of humanity" ⟷ "Give books to orphan children in Honduras"
Openness	*Degree to which a donor's intent can be changed or deviated from.*	***Changeable*** ⟷ ***Restricted*** "Adapt strategy to fit nonprofit needs" ⟷ "Never fund general operations"
Permanence	*Degree to which a donor's intent is meant to endure.*	***Time-limited*** ⟷ ***Perpetual*** "My children can change our strategy" ⟷ "We will always give in Chicago"
Influence	*Degree to which a donor enforces the following of their intent.*	***Hands-off*** ⟷ ***Controlling*** "At the discretion of the grantee" ⟷ "Approval from Mrs. Jones required"

In theory, all of the various expressions of donor intent in Table 1 could vary across each of the four dimensions in Table 2. To take just one example, a donor's original choice of causes can be vague or explicit, can be restricted or open to change, can endure perpetually or be time-limited, and can be enforced in a domineering way by donors or left uncontrolled.

In any given case or for any particular donor (individual or institutional), some dimensions might be much more important and relevant than others, and the expression of donor intent might be on the very edge of one continuum but in the middle of others. These descriptions of the core dimensions of variations do not only have to be applied post facto. They can also have practical use to donors (or their descendants or institutions) as they decide how they want to establish their donor intent priorities in the first place.

The following sections explore each core dimension of variation in more depth.

Specificity

This dimension refers to how vague or how explicit the donor intent is on some aspect of giving. For example, John D. Rockefeller's original foundation goal to serve the "well-being of mankind" is a good example of a vague intent about mission. A specific intent about the rules of board governance might be when the founders insist that "the board will always make grant decisions by majority vote of all trustees present in the same room." Also, recall that any given donor's intent about some aspects of giving can be very explicit (e.g., "give books to orphan children in Honduras") while other aspects are left quite undefined (e.g., no indication of preferred strategies used to help those children or how much to engage with local Honduran stakeholders).

At times, when a donor is vague about their intent for some aspect of giving, it is deliberate. Insurance magnate John D. MacArthur, who co-founded the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, stated "I'll make [the money]. You people, after I'm dead, will have to learn how to spend it".[45] For many donors like this, the lack of specificity is, in a way, their intent. They want to give discretion to others to make good choices without constraint.

Other times, unspecific intent is more unstated intent – and this is all too common in the annals of family philanthropy. While this also provides a measure of freedom to those charged with carrying on the donor's legacy of giving, the vagueness can often be a source of frustration. For example, the David and Lucille Packard Foundation heirs actually wished for their parents to have been more specific in the practical aspects of their legacy.[46] Like other multi-generational giving families, they were left to divine many parts of donor intent by inferring it from the original donors' actions, from their own memories of conversations, etc. Some families are left without even those indicators – or they have some indication of specific intent in one area, like geographic or cause focus, but not in others.

In his seminal book on foundations, Joel Fleishman[47] suggests avoiding overly specific directives to prevent donor hubris, but then later acknowledges that some amount donor guidance can provide essential focus. And we know that there are plenty of examples of problems arising when donors are too vague and when they are too explicit.

As with other dimensions, we are not making any claims here about which end of the continuum is right or wrong. Many observers conclude the ethically best path is that donors be specific about those aspects of their giving that they want most to specify, those they feel strongest about, while inviting input and allowing wide latitude on other aspects.

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45 Adam Meyerson, "When Philanthropy Goes Wrong: Henry Ford Didn't Intend to Be 'Giving Folks Things,'" *Wall Street Journal*, March 9, 2012.

46 Susan Packard Orr, "Things We Wish Our Founders Had Told Us: Interpreting Donor Legacy," *National Center for Family Philanthropy,* November 29, 2016.

47 Joel L. Fleishman, *The Foundation: A Great American Secret; How Private Wealth Is Changing the World* (New York: PublicAffairs, 2009).

Openness

This dimension refers to how much any given aspect of donor intent is open to revision, deviation, or exception. It also covers how open the donor's intent is to input from, or even outright modification by other parties, whether internal (family members, staff, advisors) or external (grantees, beneficiaries, other partners, and stakeholders). Openness is often (though not always) what we mean when we use the word "discretion" in talking about donor intent. If a donor's intent is more open, it allows for more discretion, something that advocates for more discretion argue is important to adapt to changing times or to incorporate innovations.[48] Note, though, that a donor's intent can be changed by the donor as well, and many living philanthropists embrace this openness to adapt their giving and refine their intent.

It is common for philanthropic institutions to change over time, whether in some aspect like mission that affects the entire organization, or in something more specific like the approach to formal evaluation or impact investing that might emerge in response to field trends.[49] And most philanthropic practitioners would likely say that being too restrictive about too many elements of giving will eventually lead to trouble – e.g., an inability to adapt as social problems change or as new and better solutions are invented. But having too much openness can also cause problems such as a lack of real impact due to the lack of sustained focus, or greater disagreements among descendants or staff with different opinions about how to use their freedom to adapt.[50]

Note that "openness" and "specificity" are distinct dimensions. It is probably most common that if a donor is very specific about some aspect of their giving, they will not be very open about that as well – e.g., "Our family will always support the camping program of the Boy Scouts but no other parts of the organization… and this is my final decision!" But it is also possible that a donor can be specific yet still open – e.g., "We dedicate our entire giving budget to supporting whale conservation in the Pacific Ocean, but leave it to the discretion of a team of marine biologists how best to distribute that money." And it is possible, though rare, for a donor to be vague but also closed to any possible exception or outside input. Many nonprofits prefer, of course, that donors are both vague and open – e.g., when DAF creators tell the community foundation sponsoring the fund that they should "give generously for whatever the community residents say they need."

The openness dimension is often the focus of the contentious legal disputes that bring donor intent into the headlines. In these cases, donors or their family or representatives often claim that the nonprofit partner is "deviating from the original intent" of a gift, or "not following the spirit of the donor's wishes." However, except in cases of extreme openness or extreme restrictions,

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48 Kathy Annette, Wade Fauth, and Allison Ahcan, "The Blandin Foundation: The Journey to a Theory of Philanthropy," *The Foundation Review* 7, no. 4 (December 1, 2015).

49 Renée A. Irvin and Eren Kavvas, "Mission Change over Time in U.S. Family Foundations," *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 49, no. 1 (August 12, 2019): 5–28.

50 Ibid., 23M.

the practical question usually comes down to whether the changes being made by the recipient institution – often done for good reason, to adapt to new circumstances or meet emerging needs – are appropriate interpretations and adaptations of intent. The doctrine often used by courts to decide such cases, as we noted earlier, is "*cy près*" or "as close as possible." A related legal guideline is the "doctrine of deviation," which allows courts to change something specific about a donor's provisions for a gift, if circumstances make the original terms impractical or counterproductive to the original purpose.[51]

One of the most famous and contentious donor intent cases, the fight over the Barnes Foundation, illustrates the central importance and complexity of this openness dimension.[52] Albert C. Barnes was a visionary but eccentric collector of modern art, who amassed an unparalleled collection and displayed it in a quirky way in a small museum outside Philadelphia. Barnes stipulated a great many details about the future of the collection and the foundation that he created to manage it – including that it would never be loaned or moved out of the original building. In this way, using the typology here, we can label Mr. Barnes' donor intent as both very specific and not very open. However, financial troubles and other issues after Barnes' death led trustees to propose a move to a new location in central Philadelphia. This led to an extended legal (and ethical) fight over whether such a change should be allowed, even if necessary for the future of the institution, when the intent was so clearly restricted. In the end, and partly by invoking the doctrine of deviation mentioned above, the move was allowed, and the Barnes Foundation collection is now a major tourist attraction in the city.

Another case that is often presented as the opposite of the Barnes scenario is that of the Daniels Fund.[53] Started by Bill Daniels, a World War II veteran who made his millions in cable television, the Fund was called out in the years after his death for moving too far away from "what Bill would want." The Fund's leaders responded by engaging in a deliberate attempt to investigate and clarify their donor's intent, going back to primary source documents and details about Daniels' life to decide which changes he would have liked and which he wouldn't have. In this case, there seemed to be a large measure of openness to the intent originally, but those charged with implementing the intent were eventually forced to limit that openness in order to meet what they saw as their ethical obligations as stewards.

Permanence

This dimension refers to how long any given aspect of donor intent is meant to be implemented and enforced. The default with most expressions of donor intent is that they are meant to be permanent – though this is often assumed

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51 Ibid., 14T.

52 John Anderson, *Art Held Hostage: The Battle Over the Barnes Collection* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003).

53 Evan Sparks, "Back to Bill," *Philanthropy Magazine*, Fall 2011.

rather than stated outright. But donors can potentially put a very explicit time limit on any of their intentions – and this they usually do state clearly.

For formal giving vehicles like foundations or DAFs, this dimension is most notably expressed in the decision to exist in perpetuity or not – the "time horizon" expression of donor intent listed in Table 1. As noted, more and more donors are choosing to make their vehicles "limited life," emphasizing "giving while living".[54] And advocates for this can be found on both sides of the broader debate with the philanthropic sector about donor intent, with one side saying perpetuity increases the chance of straying from the donor's wishes, and the other side saying perpetuity preserves donor power and control for too long. However, there are still plenty of donors choosing perpetuity for their vehicle.

Again, though, the dimension of permanence applies to many other expressions of donor intent beyond just this ultimate time horizon choice. Aspects of governance, strategy, and even core principles can potentially be meant for only a limited time. Also, it is common for donors to intend some elements of their giving to be permanent and some temporary. A foundation might state that a certain principle must endure – e.g., "our foundation's commitment to diversity and inclusion will be an enduring value" – but then put an explicit end date on other parts of giving – e.g., "when the third generation of the family comes on the foundation board the requirement to give only in the greater Houston area will be lifted."

The loudest voices on this dimension of donor intent are those who see permanence as a problem. They argue that donors who insist their wishes need to be implemented in perpetuity take the necessary tool of flexibility out of the hands of those who must do this implementation. This means future needs might go unmet, potential opportunities for improvement or greater efficiency might be lost, and future generations might have little motivation to get involved if future adaptation is impossible. In fact, when a donor's intent is on the right side of each of the first three continua of dimensions – when it is explicit, restricted, and perpetual – this severely limits (or even halts) discretion of any sort.

The most dramatic examples of these challenges with permanence are cases in which a donor's permanent intentions simply cannot – or should not – be followed anymore. This is the famous "dead hand" problem often raised in legal cases around philanthropic institutions.[55] Think of donors who set up scholarships for children to attend "whites only" schools, or to support research into diseases that have been eradicated. Or consider the example offered by one of the most famous anti-perpetuity donors of all time, Julius Rosenwald,[56] who described an endowment created in 1851

54 Ray Madoff and Benjamin Soskis, eds., *Giving in Time: Temporal Considerations in Philanthropy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2023); Heidi Waleson, Giving While Living (New York, NY: The Atlantic Philanthropies, 2017).

55 Evelyn Brody, "From the Dead Hand to the Living Dead: The Conundrum of Charitable Donor Standing (Symposium)," 41 *Georgia Law Review* 1183 (2007).

56 Julius Rosenwald, "Principles of Public Giving," *The Atlantic Monthly*, May 1929.

to assist travelers passing through St. Louis on the famous Oregon Trail. The mission of that endowment vanished a few years later. More broadly, Rosenwald and others consider perpetual giving institutions ethically suspect for many reasons, not least of which is that they preserve for the future money that could be spent on urgent problems today.

Still, there are also strong advocates in favor of permanence in at least some aspects of a donor's intent. Some say it helps families who wish to create an enduring philanthropic legacy. Others point to ways it can free those who must implement a donor's vision, not just handcuff them. Serazin,[57] for instance, insists that permanent giving plans and directives not only provide crucial guidance to staff or later generations, but can foster creativity and avoid the dangers of "short-term thinking."

As with other dimensions, there is a strong appeal to taking a middle ground position. Donors can designate the parts of giving that are most crucial to them as permanent, but allow others to end or to change over time – e.g., to address new social challenges, to incorporate new family interests, and to meet the evolving needs of recipients. And again, we can see how the different dimensions are distinct – being explicit and unchangeable does not necessarily mean being permanent, even if donors often choose those ends of the spectrums together.

Influence

This dimension refers to the extent to which donors exert control and influence over the implementation of their intent. On one end are the hands-off donors who – while they still might have very clear and directive donor intentions – do not feel they need to be involved in enforcing those plans or rules. They might have a DAF at a community foundation and occasionally give "advice" on where to distribute funds, but they are fine with those funds going out anonymously (giving them less chance to influence their use once given), and/or they give wide latitude to the foundation staff to pick causes or organizations based on what the community really needs.

On the other end are the deeply engaged – and at times domineering – donors who want to oversee every aspect of their giving to ensure their wishes are followed. To be clear, calling these donors "controlling" is not meant to portray them negatively in all cases. Sometimes this control is expressed more as a desire to be personally engaged and involved in a way that the donor feels can make giving more successful for everyone. However, many of the critiques of philanthropy do focus primarily on this dimension of donor influence, arguing that trying to actively enforce one's donor intent exacerbates already problematic power imbalances in the giving relationship, and discounts the expertise and autonomy of the other parties in that relationship.[58]

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57 Andrew Serazin, "Donor Intent is Critical to Strategic Philanthropy," *Stanford Social Innovation Review,* Summer 2021.

58 Ibid., 15O.

The influence that donors might exert is often direct, with living donors being hands-on in their oversight. But influence can also be indirect through how the donor establishes procedures or institutions to exert this control in their stead and/or in the long term. We can see this indirect form of influence in family foundations or multi-generational institutions such as DAFs or others. Once the founding donor(s) have passed, their level of desired influence over implementing their intentions lives on in how the descendants act and how the institution gives.[59]

Donor influence over the enforcement of their intentions can also be seen in cases of donors regulating recipients, even after the donor has become a "dead hand" in control. They might create so-called "donor governance" mechanisms that require nonprofits to check with the donor or their descendants before any major decisions or changes in the use of funds, or they may require continual transparent reporting by the funded organization of how funds are being used in line with the donor's original wishes.[60] We also see this enduring control by donors in cases where the donor or their descendants allege a breach of donor intent, and try to enforce adherence to it through the courts. This was the case with the Robertson family's lawsuit against Princeton mentioned earlier, where the university eventually returned millions to the family. A similar dispute has arisen between the Pearson family and the University of Chicago, where the family says they lost confidence that the university would follow intent and demanded the return of their gift.[61] That case has yet to be resolved. These cases raise yet another legal concept that is relevant for understanding donor intent: "donor standing," the legal right of donors to bring such suits over adherence to their intentions.[62]

Finally, we again see how donors tend to choose being on one end or the other of the different dimensions – but that the dimensions remain distinct and donors can make seemingly opposing choices on different dimensions. Being interested in more influence often coincides with a donor wanting to be more explicit, more restrictive, and more permanent in various aspects of giving. But a donor could potentially be very engaged in implementing their intentions even when those intentions are open to change and time-limited. This is why keeping the four dimensions separate is essential if we want this deeper conceptual understanding of donor intent to be accurate and useful.

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59 Ibid., 10M.

60 David Yermack, "Donor Governance and Financial Management in Prominent U.S. Art Museums," *Journal of Cultural Economics* 41, no. 3 (August 1, 2017): 215–35.

61 Dawn Rhodes, "Pearson Family Members Foundation Sues University of Chicago, Aiming to Revoke $100M Gift," *Chicago Tribune*, May 23, 2019.

62 Ibid., 55.

Conclusion

Donor intent is at the heart of many of the most contentious and complex ethical debates in philanthropy – and the crux of many of the court cases too. Yet our understanding of donor intent is not up to the task of helping us navigate these debates – let alone informing further scholarship on this central ethical concept in philanthropic studies.

This article sought to develop a deeper, more multi-faceted, and more useful understanding of donor intent. It looked to answer two basic yet complicated questions: how does donor intent get expressed? and how do these expressions vary? We develop here a conceptual framework that details the range of potential expressions of donor intent – that is, the myriad aspects of giving that intent might affect – and it outlines the four core dimensions along which any of those expressions of donor intent might vary.

Donor intent can affect most aspects of giving, so our list of potential expressions of donor intent is extensive and ideally comprehensive. But any given donor is unlikely to express their intent about more than a few of these elements of the giving process – in fact, many donors say little about their "intentions" when giving, and we can only infer those intentions from their actions. Nevertheless, a conceptual framework like this needs to account for all the possible expressions.

Each of the different areas of donor intent expression can also vary along the continuum of each of the four dimensions: Specificity, Openness, Permanence, and Influence. However, again, in any given case where some element of donor intent sits within the range of these dimensions, it is probably going to be unclear and unstated – or it might be obvious and well-defined on one dimension and uncertain on others. But the typology of four dimensions is meant to capture all possibilities in theory.

The four dimensions are distinct, and any given expression of donor intent will vary in independent ways on each dimension. However, in practice, we see patterns in where expressions of donor intent fit along the four continua. For example, foundations that are very explicit about their geographic focus or their approach to engaging with recipients seem more likely to be more restrictive about whether these preferences can be changed. They are probably more likely to insist that these intentions remain in place permanently, and to want to be actively involved in enforcing them. But there are many other possible combinations of the different dimensions. And it is an empirical question now how likely the scenario above is among donors – a question we hope our framework can now help future scholars answer.

This conceptual framework is based on careful research and thought, but we present it here as a proposed typology that invites refinement from others. First, we hope scholars are now able to use this framework to inform future research. This might include collecting data on the frequency of different areas of expressions of donor intent among different philanthropic actors – e.g., individuals vs. institutions, donors from different cultures, donors giving at

different levels, etc. Research could look at the patterns across the different dimensions, answering questions such as whether donors with vague expressions of intent are also more likely to be hands-off, and so on. Qualitative analysis could examine differences in the ways that donors describe their intent, and whether these change in certain real-life circumstances, such as major stages in a donor's journey or in moments of crisis or dispute. Ethics scholarship can consider the implications of how donor intent is expressed for various moral dilemmas and disputes in the field, from power dynamics between donors and recipients, to the trade-off of philanthropic freedom and public accountability, and more.

Additionally, we hope this framework can benefit philanthropic practitioners and practice, and can improve our often-unstructured public debates about this fuzzy concept of donor intent. Donors might find this framework useful as they think about their own intent. What aspects do they care most about? And how explicit, restrictive, or involved do they want to be? Those charged with implementing a donor's intent – from descendants to staff to advisors and others – can have better conversations about the nature of that intent, and better grasp the amount and type of the discretion they have (or don't have). The framework could perhaps even be useful in legal cases, defining the issues involved or offering ideas for which criteria to emphasize in order to resolve disputes.

This framework for understanding donor intent will be needed even more as recent trends in philanthropy continue to add both weight and complexity to donor intent issues. Debates over questions like "Do donors have too much control?" or "Are restrictions on giving bad?" or "Who should determine the best strategy to solve a social problem?" are more prominent and pressing than ever. Calls for transparency by donors are pushing for more detailed explanations from them about their intent. The rising generations of new donors seem to be prioritizing different aspects of intent than previous generations. And the increasing pushback against donor control, as well as the popularity of new approaches for bringing recipients' intentions into the conversation, make it even more essential that we know what we are talking about when we talk about donor intent.

Our goal in this paper was theoretical and conceptual, not normative. We do not take a position on which kinds of donor intent expressions are better, how much weight donor's voice should be given compared to the views of others, or where donors should stand on any of the four dimensions. However, we do take a stand in favor of donors providing greater clarity about their intent – even if they want to cede significant control – and we hope this framework helps them do that. We also hope this framework helps philanthropic families reflect more deeply, and perhaps find their own balance or sweet spot on some dimension of donor intent, in order to then create greater impact from their giving. That is our intent.

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Daniel Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year*: Images of Philanthropy in Times of Crisis

Abstract

Daniel Defoe's "A Journal of the Plague Year" has challenged readers who want to categorize the work. It is written as a journal of a plague survivor and has appeared to some as a factual account of what the narrator saw and to others who see it as a work of fiction, the consensus of most readers. But for both kinds of readers, the narrator is central to their experience of the novel. Although representing himself as a simple recorder of events with an occasional reflection included, the narrator becomes for readers a complex and compelling character. Some of his most fascinating facets emerge as responses to the plague and the conflicts he addresses as he encounters situations that require his help. His reactions to these opportunities for philanthropic acts constitute a pattern of moments for the narrator, and for his readers, to reflect on how to help in a time of crisis.

Keywords:
Narrative Strategy, Plague Accounts, Moral Choices, Philanthropic Acts

Daniel Defoe lived and wrote in an age that saw the emergence of a public sphere that created a need for access to information about matters of social, political, and cultural concern to that public. Defoe tried a series of enterprises before settling on journalism and pamphlet writing to earn his living. In 1722 he published *Due Preparations for a Plague*, a set of recommendations for citizens to survive a plague. *Due Preparations* is a didactic piece and grounds much of its advice in religious beliefs and practices. For most modern readers it appears as serious, but plodding, and not likely to move many citizens to action. Defoe followed up later that year with *A Journal of the Plague Year*, a fictionalized journal of a plague survivor, and it has had a much greater impact then and now due to Defoe's skill at writing in the emerging genre of the novel.

Daniel Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year* offers an extremely realistic and convincing portrayal of life in a city gripped by bubonic plague. Indeed, Defoe's contribution to the early development of the novel is his commitment to presenting realistic fictions as he does in *Robinson Crusoe, Colonel Jack*, and *Moll Flanders*. Until early in the twentieth century many readers regarded it

as nonfiction.[1] The narrator, identified only as "H.F.," compels the attention of modern readers because they recognize that his position as operating with both the somewhat scientific perspectives he develops during his stay in London, and his religious assurance that a providential God will direct the right outcome for him whatever it may be, echoes the uncertainty that characterizes their own lives. What unites the modern reader and the narrator is the uncertainty both face in dealing with a catastrophic event and the need to make the right decisions in a crisis.

A crisis such as a plague, an earthquake, or a violent storm offers an occasion for, and a perspective on philanthropic activity. A crisis threatens and disrupts the lives of individuals and communities, and, in that highly charged space, all parties come up against many of the fundamental truths about themselves and their communities. Individuals must always see to their safety and survival, but how they respond as they turn toward their community creates moments for philanthropic actions. *A Journal*, especially in the figure of the narrator, focuses on those moments of committing to acting for the good of others and for the community as a whole. Defoe uses the narrator as a lens for examining, among other things, the experience of facing a huge crisis and making the constant set of extraordinary decisions inevitable in a crisis.

Critical treatments of *A Journal* have over time noted the tension between the focus on survival and self-sufficiency and H.F.'s impulse to stay in touch with his fellow citizens and help them when he can. He also, as noted below, announces to the reader his motive for writing the piece as an attempt to help others who at some later time might find themselves facing the terrible experience of dealing with a plague. Two important studies in the 1970s offered competing perspectives on the novel and set the tone for much subsequent critical discussion of *A Journal*. Everett Zimmerman suggested that the figure of the narrator at the end surviving the plague and promoting a positive vision for the value of self-sufficiency is Defoe's answer to facing a crisis.[2] Maximillian E. Novak, on the other hand, suggested that the city of London and its citizens, who arose resilient and strengthened by the crisis, and maintained their community throughout are the lesson readers should take from the novel.[3] A more recent critic, Peter Degabriele, argues that *A Journal* presents a need for a space between survival through isolation and a secure place in a state-determined civil society:

> The novel insists, then, that neither the social contract as the prescribed form of public relations, nor the withdrawal into privacy and self-sufficiency from all social relations can eliminate the necessity of an intimate and unguaranteeable encounter with an other. Defoe's novel

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1 For a full treatment of the historicity and fictionality of A *Journal of the Plague Year*, see Bastian, Frank. "Defoe's Journal of the Plague Year Reconsidered." *The Review of English Studies* 16, no. 62 (1965): 151-173.

2 Everett Zimmerman, "H.F.'s Meditations: *A Journal of the Plague Year*," *PMLA* 87 (1972), 417-423

3 Maximillian E. Novak, "Defoe and the Disordered City," *PMLA* 92, 1977, 241-52

> insists that neither the state, as envisioned by Hobbes, nor the individual, as envisioned by so many historians and critics of the novel, are secure bulwarks against the encounter.[4]

Degabriele argues that the novel ultimately depicts a space outside the dichotomy of state and individual that enables relations among individuals to establish bonds and mutual responsibilities, a space within which self-sufficient individuals can engage with others for mutual benefits and personal attachments. Such a space encourages interactions recognizable as philanthropic activity.

The reader of *A Journal* is drawn into the narrative by H.F.'s careful establishment of his credibility by writing in a format, the journal, that requires its writer to be direct and forthright. The decision to publish presumably may come later, but the actual writing seems in the moment and without consideration of audience. Defoe works hard to create credibility and the sense that the narrator is just writing as events occur, but he also complicates the narrator's persona by the narrator's announced wish that his journal will be of use to readers who might benefit from his experiences and his advice on surviving a plague:

> I have set this particular [the decision to stay in London] down so fully, because I know not but it may be of Moment to those who come after me, if they come to be brought to the same Distress, and to the same Manner of making their Choice and therefore I desire this Account may pass with them, rather for a Direction to themselves to act by, than a History of my actings, seeing it may not be of one Farthing value to them to note what became of me.[5]

Defoe offers a narrator who seems to be straightforward in his recording of events and sincere in his wish to help readers. H.F. records the events around him and offers his reflections on these entries, but always with an eye on providing lessons for his readers. That advice begins with help in responding to the need for survival and his evolving understanding of how individuals can avoid the plague, but he increasingly turns his attention to how groups of those individuals can help each other and how the greater community can become resilient enough to emerge from the crisis, perhaps even stronger than before the crisis began.

The usefulness of *A Journal* as a help to others was part of its original intention and a significant part of the philanthropic themes recognizable throughout the novel. In 1720 bubonic plague had broken out in Marseilles and was expected to arrive in England in late 1721 or early 1722. The Prime Minister, Robert Walpole, who had worked closely with Defoe in producing political pamphlets in the previous decade, asked Defoe to write something that

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4 Peter Degabriele, "Intimacy, Survival, and Resistance: Daniel Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year*," *ELH* 77, no. 1(Spring, 2010) 1-23

5 Daniel Defoe, *A Journal of the Plague Year* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 9. All subsequent quotations from *A Journal* will be from this edition.

would convince Londoners to prepare for the arrival of the plague and plan to survive the onslaught. Walpole was preparing a bill to require infected people to quarantine in their houses and knew it would be highly unpopular. In its origins, then, *A Journal* is aimed at creating a public good.[6] Defoe's careful attention to engaging the reader and convincing them that the narrator is trustworthy and knowledgeable builds the reader's confidence in the advice and the likelihood that *A Journal* will have its desired impact.

Defoe's focus in *A Journal* extends beyond advice on survival for individuals to offering models of good citizenship with abundant stories of Londoners helping others, sometime at great peril to themselves. H.F. repeatedly commends the civil authorities for their readiness to stay on in the plague to carry out their duties as well as the carefulness and integrity of those acts of civil responsibility. H.F., who is very careful to protect himself in his occasional forays out into the city, represents a complex version of someone doing good sometimes, but also keeping a safe distance from the danger. Defoe complicates his narrator as more than an exemplar of good behavior. He shows the reader the difficult time the narrator has in shaping his own responses to the suffering his fellow citizens are facing. One image captures the narrator's complex response to the plague: H.F. in his lodgings, watching out the window the progress of the plague and the effects it is having on the citizenry in the street below. H.F. tells the reader about the early effects of the plague in his neighborhood and explains his somewhat unique position:

> "…I cannot speak positively of these Things; because these were only the dismal Objects which represented themselves to me as I look'd thro' my Chamber Windows (for I seldom opened the casements) while I confin'd my self within Doors, during that most violent rageing of the Pestilence;" (90)

Windows afford him a view of the plague's effects but protect him from actual contact. He is deeply interested in the plague itself and the people affected by it, but that interest cannot turn into action while he stays inside. The difference between feeling sympathy and taking action is central to approaching philanthropic issues; H.F.'s isolated physical position introduces the complex relationship between his deep interest in the effects the plague is having and his removed presence in dealing with it. H.F. staying protected within his lodgings shows him taking care of himself first and foremost. His narrative up to this point has focused primarily on the situations surrounding the advance of the plague across neighborhoods toward him and not very many encounters with other people.

H.F.'s isolation behind his windows parallels the isolation of infected people quarantined behind the doors of their houses. He devotes extensive attention

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6 See Manuel Schonhorn's treatment of *A Journal* as more than a "simple and narrowly conceived defense of the quarantine measures" and his argument that Defoe has constructed a celebration of the values and resilience of an earlier England. Manuel Schonhorn, "Defoe's Journal of the Plague Year Topography and Intention." *The Review of English Studies* 19, no. 76 (1968): 387-402.

to the laws that required quarantine and the enforcement of the laws, as well as the many different arrangements quarantined people had to make to support themselves while behind their doors. Isolation becomes a theme throughout the early parts of the novel. When H.F. does venture out into the streets, he does encounter people in distress and, although with much hesitation at first, helps them as best he can. H.F.'s relationship with the reader shifts from being only a guide to the aspects and elements of a plague, to someone who can suggest what demands the plague makes on a person's conscience and how to address those moral responsibilities.

The narrator, driven he says by his curiosity, does go out to see the effects of the plague. His response to what he sees in these forays is heartfelt and he expresses how much he wishes he could share with the reader the actual depths of the suffering he encounters:

> I wish I could repeat the very Sound of those Groans, and of those Exclamations that I heard from some poor dying Creatures, when in the Hight of their Agonies and Distress; and that I could make him that read this hear, as I imagine now I hear them, for the Sound seems still to Ring in my Ears. . . If I could but tell this Part, in such moving Accents as should alarm the very Soul of the Reader, I should rejoice that I had recorded those Things, however short and imperfect. (90)

Defoe presents H.F. as both engaged deeply by the plight of Londoners and protective of his own safety throughout. Like his ability to hold seemingly contradictory views on the origin and meaning of the plague, H.F., and perhaps Defoe, represents the difficult and complex positions of a person faced with a catastrophic event. H.F. struggles with conveying the enormity of the suffering he has encountered, suffering so great that he expresses a hope that the reader can grasp something of what it is like because getting a feel for the suffering is central to understanding the full extent of the catastrophe.

The inability of the narrator to find the words to approximate the suffering that surrounds him becomes a theme in *A Journal*. After reporting that "It was a lamentable thing to hear the miserable lamentations of poor dying creatures calling out for a minister to comfort them and pray with them," (90) H.F. reflects on the power of sounds and the inability of a written text to convey the full reality of the suffering. The narrator's concern about the limits of written accounts, of course, is a limit for every writer, but Defoe seems to be using this theme as yet more evidence of the narrator's sincerity and compassion as well as a call to the reader to be ready to regard every account of the suffering in London as something even more touching than the description could convey. From this point on the reader is to understand that all descriptions of suffering are to be accompanied by the groans and sobs which the narrator, whom the reader trusts, had told us are part of a full response to the account of the plague. The narrative stance developed by Defoe in passages such as these places a responsibility on the reader not only to take the account seriously, but also to become involved in the emotions and real-life applications of the lessons to be learned from the text.

H.F. presents another dimension of the complexity of doing good in his tracing how the plague progresses through London. He keeps a close watch on the Bills of Mortality, the weekly listing of deaths in all the parishes in London, an approach modern readers might recognize as a form of epidemiology. [7] Initially he watched the lists to gauge how close the plague would come to his area. What he notices over time is that poorer neighborhoods and densely populated neighborhoods, which he notes are often one and the same, have the highest rates of contagion and deaths. He then develops a theory about how people can survive the plague by moving away from poor, congested areas. In making these calculations based on his observations, H.F. exhibits something like a scientific habit of mind, an aspect that his readers will recognize as valuable in a crisis, especially as H.F. has been at pains to distance himself from all the quacks and seers whom he argues played on the fear of a frightened public when the plague arrived. In the moment, H.F.'s observations cannot benefit Londoners as there were few newspapers or other public media in 1665, but they are of great value to readers in 1722 looking for advice on surviving the plague.

Readers will also notice the contrast between the scientific attention H.F. pays to the Bills of Mortality and the strong religious beliefs he expresses early in the novel as he was deciding whether to stay in London or leave for the country as so many affluent Londoners were doing. He looks at a series of complications – the arrangements for someone to watch his brother's property, the lack of horses to get out of the city, the servant who was to travel with him deserted him – as particular providences indicating that he should throw himself on God's providence. He finally turns to bibliomancy to make his decision and the passage he turns to makes up his mind to stay. These religious convictions reflect Defoe's Puritan upbringing, and his steadfast religious principles inform his writings.[8] H.F. regularly reflects on the plague as a manifestation of God's punishment on a sinful London. He is harsh in recounting the deeds of those who turned to drinking, gambling, and abandonment of moral duty, and celebratory of those who remained faithful to their religious commitments. Puritans often saw adversity as a test for those living a pious life. H.F. regularly turns from a story of an admirable person to examine his own conscience, an inward-facing practice central to Puritan belief. H.F.'s religious faith shapes a good deal of his narrative choices and perhaps shapes the reader's view of him as a deeply religious person. Throughout the novel he uses his Puritan religious beliefs and values to frame episodes in his narrative and to justify opinions he offers on some of the events. That contrast adds to the complexity of the narrator as the novel develops. Austin Flanders captures this dual aspect of H.F.'s psychological make-up and places it in historical context:

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7 Norman S. Fiering treats this aspect of *A Journal* in "Epidemiology in Literature: The Case of Daniel Defoe," *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, vol. 15, no. 3, 1985, pp. 455-472.

8 See J. Paul Hunter, *The Reluctant Pilgrim: Defoe's Emblematic Method and Quest for Form in Robinson Crusoe* (1966) for a sustained examination of Defoe's religious influences shaping his fiction. Maximillian E. Novak offers an extended treatment of Defoe's Puritanism in *Daniel Defoe: Master of Fictions,* Oxford University Press, (2001).

> The narrator's refusal to give up a providential view of the plague reflects the struggle of seventeenth and eighteenth centuries to retain a humanistic view of the social community. Throughout the *Journal* he vacillates between understanding the plague as a purely naturalistic phenomenon and ascribing to it and its consequences a moral significance, although the opposition does not surface as a conscious intellectual dichotomy. [9]

Because plagues, almost by definition, leave few to tell their stories, the nature of the choices made in such a crisis are rarely known and so offer a rare opportunity for the reader. Modern readers will recognize the simultaneous presence of both strong religious beliefs and a scientific habit of mind as something that sometimes creates conflicts for them, but seem to coexist comfortably in H.F.

The narrator warrants the reader's attention and trust because he is a good, compassionate man and his responses to the suffering he encounters acts as both an indicator of the depth of his compassion and, once readers have some reassurance of that depth, a measure of how extensive is the suffering caused by the plague. The narrator reports often how a sad sight affected him and brought tears to his eyes. One lengthy account of a waterman whose family had been infected and were now quarantined suggests Defoe's emphasis on the narrator's empathy. After hearing the man's story, the narrator says "And with that word I saw the tears run plentifully down his face; and so they did down mine too, I assure you" (92). After another exchange with the waterman, the narrator exclaims:

> ". . . and with that I observ'd, he lifted up his Eyes to Heaven, with a Countenance that presently told me I had happened on a Man that was no Hypocrite, but a serious, religious, good Man, and his Ejaculation was an Expression of Thankfulness that, in such a Condition as he was in, he should be able to say his Family did not want." (92)

The observation by the narrator tells the reader how sensitive he is to not only the plight of others, but also to the virtues embodied in the waterman's actions. In addition, the qualities that H.F. identifies in the waterman are also true of him, at least insofar as recognizing the waterman's qualities suggests the capacity for those strengths in him. Later in that same passage H.F. tells the reader how the waterman's situation and demeanor stood as reprimand to his own presumption because the waterman had acted so courageously in the face of necessity, while he had a choice to flee the plague, a chance the waterman and his family never had due to their station in life. Toward the end of their conversation H.F. donates four shillings to the family, doubling what the waterman had been able to earn over the past week and then notes that he does not have words to capture the depth of the waterman's thankfulness, nor did the waterman have words enough, and they just stood there crying together.

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9 W. Austin Flanders, "Defoe's *A Journal of the Plague Year* "and the Modern Urban Experience," The Centennial Review, vol. 16, no. 4 (Fall 1972), 347.

All these compassionate responses, however, act more as credential-building for an attractive and trusted narrator than they do of predictors of great things to come from the narrator. Throughout the novel H.F. makes some contributions toward helping those he meets and offers many words of advice. He develops a sound theory on how to survive the plague and he offers perspectives on the public policies put into place to alleviate suffering and reduce the risk from the plague, but he does not take actions of his own to relieve suffering. As mentioned earlier, the contrast between the need out in the streets and the shut windows creates an ambiguity about the reader's relationship with H.F. He is reliable, deeply sympathetic, and he succeeds in bringing the reader into the concerns the novel raises, but is not himself a model of straightforward philanthropic action. H.F. perhaps has his greatest impact in presenting the complex experience of being in a crisis and, in the midst of confusion and challenge, develops a good and admirable account of himself.

Defoe keeps his narrator distanced to ensure his reliability and to emphasize the objectivity as he reasons through the complex data the plague presents to develop his theory on how to survive. But that aloofness clashes with the narrator's engagement with the caring and compassion that characterizes H.F.'s responses to the people he meets and the suffering he witnesses as he moves out from the protection of his windows. Although H.F. models a philanthropic sensibility rather than actual philanthropic acts, he does present a number of examples of good and bad behaviors. He describes and condemns the people who rob and steal in the chaos of the advancing plague and the quacks and charlatans who sell quick cures and magical protections, but he also offers accounts of neighbors helping each other, civil servants going above and beyond the call of duty, and the steadfast support of government officials.

A Journal of the Plague Year, then, engages the reader in a detailed and convincing encounter with a city under siege from the bubonic plague. The fiction is fascinating because it deals with a compelling subject, but it also challenges the reader to carry out an examination of conscience about the responsibilities of any citizen in a time of crisis. The figure of the narrator becomes a focus of these concerns, both in his own actions (and their absence) as well as of the events he describes. Whatever its success in shaping the civic consciences of eighteenth-century Londoners, it retains its power to help contemporary readers to engage their own sense of where they stand in relation to their own plagues and community crises.

About the Author

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Treating Philanthropists as Harshly as Politicians: Is it Justified?

Abstract

This paper examines the intersection of politics and philanthropy, conceptualized as the "political-philanthropic system," wherein "view groups"—entities organized around shared worldviews—utilize political and philanthropic mechanisms to shape society. Drawing on historical and contemporary examples, the analysis delves into the dynamics of power, influence, and accountability within this system, questioning whether philanthropists who support politically-aligned objectives should be treated with the same harshness as politicians. It asks whether it is defensible to expose them to smear campaigns, public ridicule and scorn, and the like. Through an exploration of the philosophical and sociological underpinnings of worldviews, this study highlights the systemic nature of political-philanthropic interactions, the ethical dimensions of their operations, and the practical implications for public discourse. The paper concludes by advocating for tailored accountability measures for philanthropists, distinct from those applied to politicians, while promoting adversarial scrutiny to safeguard the integrity of civil society. The study ultimately advances a framework for understanding and regulating the role of philanthropy in political rivalry.

Keywords:
View Group, Political-Philanthropic System, Worldview Rivalry, Soft Power

Introduction

The intersection of politics and philanthropy represents an important arena of power and influence in contemporary society. While politics is the domain of statecraft and coercive authority, philanthropy operates as a softer, often poorly regulated force shaping society. Together, they form what I term the "political-philanthropic system," a structure that spans from the thoroughly local to the altogether global wherein rival "view groups"—entities bound together by the shared worldviews of their members— continuously compete to mold society according to their visions.

My use here of the term "worldview" is idiosyncratic: it refers to views about the world as much as to views about particular "worlds" nested within the world. Additionally, the definite article does not denote the greatest world imaginable, but only the greatest world we as humans can successfully steer. While we

seek to know about the greatest world imaginable – whether it is called the Universe, Being, or Creation - the greatest world that humans can effectively design is the Sovereign State.[1] It includes within it many particular worlds in various institutional domains: education, religion, welfare, and more. It is these "worlds" that can be controlled, or at least planned, managed and steered to follow a "worldview", to which I refer here. As I will explain, I reserve the term "ideology" only for worldviews geared specifically for the State.

This paper begins by posing a moral-political dilemma, as a kind of exercise: Should philanthropists who support politically-aligned objectives be treated as harshly as politicians? In my terminology, both politicians and philanthropists (and judges, journalists and other professionals for that matter) belong to certain view groups.[2] But what should be the rules of engagement in view group rivalry? To approach this exercise, we must first understand how politics and philanthropy are interrelated in their pursuit of implementing worldviews. In doing so, we reveal the dynamics of the political-philanthropic system. The dynamics consist of the ever-present striving of view groups to remake worlds in their image. The fabric of the social is woven (in part) from this competition of visions. But this does not mean that "everything is political," for not every attempt at remaking the world, or a world is coercive.[3]

A few basic, well-known observations drive the discussion: Human beings are not just individuals; they bind together into groups. And some groups are not content merely to exist—they seek to project their inner sense of order outward onto the world. Each group carries a vision of what is good, just, or proper, i.e. a worldview. The group's flourishing is bound up with making the external world resonate with its inner vision. There are many groups and their visions differ, giving rise to a ceaseless dynamic. No single group's vision can permanently hold sway; the field is always in motion. This is not a mere conflict over resources. It is a rivalry over the very form of the shared social reality. Some spheres (education, culture, etc.) are important battlegrounds, but the state is the "big world"—the overarching structure. Control over the state allows a group to impose its worldview more broadly and durably. In any society composed of plural groups, there will arise a perpetual dynamic of contestation, as groups seek to shape both partial and comprehensive social structures in accordance with their worldviews.

If we see the ceaseless striving of view groups as a fundamental social dynamic, philanthropy appears not as an occasional intervention but as the engine driving much of this process.

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1 By "effectively" I mean possessing independent robust capabilities to enforce sovereign decrees. Thus, supra-national organs that rely on sovereign states for enforcement of any of their decisions are secondary, dependent entities and as such not "effective" in the sense I mean here.

2 Anybody with the maturity of mind to have a worldview can belong to a view group.

3 This does not mean that all politics is inherently coercive, but vice versa: everything coercive relies on the state's monopoly on legitimately deploying violence. Seizing (coercive) state power is the objective of politics, thus all coercion is ultimately backed by political power. But politically gained state power uses coercion only as a final resort.

View groups require resources to spread their worldviews—people, time, money, institutions. Philanthropy supplies at least some of this fuel, funding educational institutions, think tanks, cultural projects, activist networks—everything that allows a worldview to expand from conviction into reality. In modern, democratic and pluralist societies, state power is not easily seized and maintained. Philanthropy allows view groups to act both preemptively and for the long run—building soft power in education, fashioning the public mind through media and culture, and creating "facts on the ground" before political power is won and while it is being utilized. Philanthropy speeds up the worldview contest—it lets groups "leap ahead" of their formal political strength. Politics is constrained—laws, elections, compromises. Philanthropy is far freer. It allows groups to forge the underlying social terrain—what people think is normal, desirable, or possible. It operates by cultivating shifts in culture, values, and knowledge. A view group is often a coalition of funders and intellectuals, organizers and media figures, all aligned by shared vision and enabled by philanthropic resources.

Drawing on historical and contemporary examples, I provide a framework to investigate the intersections of power and influence within this system. Returning to the dilemma/exercise, I conclude by weighing the ethical considerations of treating philanthropists like politicians and suggesting guidelines for how the former should account to the public at large.

The Desire to Implement Worldviews: Politics and Philanthropy

Imagine you perceive a legislative proposal to be direly threatening to your vision of your country, and you discover that an organization funded by philanthropists is promoting it. Imagine your government pursuing a national security policy that you consider disastrous, and you discover that an organization funded by philanthropists is involved in shaping that policy by various influence mechanisms. Imagine your child's school implementing an educational program that you find abhorrent, and you discover that an organization funded by philanthropists has been systematically working to get that program onto the school agenda.[4]

Understandably, in each of these cases, you would be upset. You might be so anxious and angry that you would be willing to demonstrate in front of the said philanthropist's home, harass her in public, or donate money to organizations

4 It is true that the law (especially tax codes) in many jurisdictions distinguish between philanthropy and lobbying efforts. In this paper, I do not attack this distinction directly (that would require an entirely different paper), but the overarching theme here is that this distinction is tenuous when the lobbying or influencing is done in the name of a worldview. The realms blend. Donors who want their worldview implemented want results, and they put their money where they can get them: direct interventions as well as influencing legislature or even running candidates into office - these are just means to an end. Lawyers are hired to deal with the legal fictions that might obstruct such efforts. If legal or regulatory push comes to shove, donors can always engage straightforwardly in politics, relinquishing the reputational or tax benefits involved in positioning their efforts squarely within philanthropy.

that send activists to do these things and target her character negatively in the press. In other words, you might consider it justified to treat her as harshly as politicians from the party you oppose. Assuming (controversially) that such tactics are indeed justified in the case of politicians, does it follow that they are justified in the case of philanthropists?

"It certainly follows," one might argue, "in the case where the philanthropist is a crucial contributor to the attempts to get such contested worldviews realized. There is no difference between her and a politician in that regard. And just like a politician, the philanthropist might be susceptible to the application of intense social and psychological pressures, which is a legitimate tactic in a democracy."

"Wrong," an interlocutor might retort, "the donor is a private individual, and as such she should be immune from the kind of treatment politicians can expect. She does not have any coercive powers. She has no part in a monopoly on a formal, sovereign, coercive policy-shaping and decision-making apparatus the way incumbent politicians have. If you do not like the worldview or conception of the good that she is advancing, you are free to advance your own worldview and let them compete in the marketplace of ideas. That is how a healthy civil society operates. The norms of civil society should not be the same as the uncivil norms that unfortunately we have come to expect in politics."

The first speaker might resist this line of argument, saying, "A deep-pocketed, strongly opinionated, and dedicated donor can be a very important figure with real sway over events and their results, not unlike an office-holding politician in that respect, whether or not she has coercive power. What matters is the power to get results. A philanthropist of this sort has more impact than most other figures in the philanthropic-civil society sphere and also more than many politicians. Perhaps only a charismatic leader of a powerful organization is comparable to her. But that leader's power also has to do with money, by which I mean the ability to raise money from many sources to enable the organization to operate. Such leaders are not dependent on this or that individual donor, even if they report to their donors collectively. In any event, such leaders should expect the same treatment as politicians too."

Unconvinced, the interlocutor might say, "The same treatment from whom? Politicians have known, elected opponents, and supporters of their opponents may very well try to apply all those pressures. But who are the philanthropists' opponents? What 'opposition' does a civil society organization and its leaders have? Whatever your answer may be, you must admit that it is a vague state of affairs. Sorting out the philanthropic-civil society sphere into rival camps as in politics is a matter of interpretation, and as such it is prone to misinterpretation, including the malicious kind, especially when angry passions rise. It is bad enough when civic life is fraught with constant protests against office-holders, instead of having political differences contained within designated political institutions, most notably parliament. Aren't politicians paid to do that? What good is it when citizens spend so much time marching? Civic protests against policymakers are already divisive. You must admit that that is a price we pay as a society as a whole, even if your own side gains from it politically. Grudgingly, we can accept that price because the right to protest is indeed inviolable, but it

should be avoided on account of the harmful divisions. Instead, you try to justify spilling out all that rancor into an even wider orbit, that of philanthropy and civil society. You leave no place in society for respectful, rational deliberation between people with different opinions who give each other moral credit. It seems there is no moral credit in politics anymore. Now you want there to be none anywhere?"

To begin unraveling this dilemma, it is necessary to state an unsurprising proposition: the desire to implement a worldview is a driving force both in politics and in philanthropy. It is not the sole driving force, for both politics and philanthropy can take place with little regard to worldviews. A political power struggle can be predominantly personal or driven by material interests. Likewise, a philanthropic gift may be driven by some personal or material motivations which have little to do with one's political convictions. Besides, humans are social animals, and some people experience pleasure in the pro-social act of giving, for its own sake. This is ancient wisdom. In Seneca's words, "(w)hat then are gifts and good deeds? They're generous acts, done in an eager and voluntary spirit, that bring joy, and also reap joy, from the act of giving."[5] It is plausible that the desire to implement a worldview is a distant or weak factor in such cases. Nonetheless, having accepted these caveats, it is still unremarkably true that worldviews are considerable factors in both politics and philanthropy.

What are Worldviews?

What are worldviews? How are they formed? What common qualities do they share? These are debated questions, and various answers have been put forward. I follow Wilhelm Dilthey's conception whereby "life is the ultimate root of a worldview,"[6] and that "all worldviews that undertake to give a complete solution to the riddle of life regularly contain the same structure."[7] He explains:

> This structure is always a complex nexus in which on the basis of a world-picture questions about the meaning and sense of the world are decided, and ideals, the highest good, and the governing principles for the conduct of life are derived. This structure is determined by the laws of the psyche; according to these laws, our conception of what is actual in the course of life underlies the evaluation of whether conditions and objects are pleasurable or displeasurable, satisfying or dissatisfying, worthy of approval or disapproval. This evaluation of life then becomes in turn a supporting level for determinations of the will.[8]

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5 Seneca, *How to Give: An Ancient Guide to Giving and Receiving,* trans. James S. Romm (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2020), 23.

6 Wilhelm Dilthey, Ethical and World-View Philosophy, ed. Rudolf A. Makkreel and Frithjof Rodi, trans. Rudolf A. Makkreel, Selected Works vol. VI (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), 254.

7 Dilthey, Ethical and World-View Philosophy, 258.

8 Ibid., 260.

Worldviews differ widely because life conditions, influenced by history, politics, climate, and culture, are widely different, "as are the human beings that grasp that life." Moreover, "worldviews assume different shapes that struggle with each other to claim power over us."[9] Such struggles do not tend to resolve themselves through reasoning alone, disconnected from life events. Worldviews survive, thrive, or go extinct through a process akin to natural selection: "special formulations of a type may be refuted, but its rootedness in life endures and continues to be active and is always producing new configurations".[10]

I continue Dilthey's line of thinking but with an emphasis on that dynamic aspect of worldviews that wishes to change the world, what he calls "the will." Politics can change states of affairs through government policy, whereas philanthropy can act independently, founding and funding institutions that implement worldviews, as well as influence the people who walk through the gates of established institutions.

I propose that at the core of a worldview there is a relatively stable set of interconnected convictions with regard to states of affairs in various areas.[11] In this context, convictions are *beliefs strong enough to be acted upon*. The convictions sit alongside whatever other components make up worldviews: values, exalted sources of authority, beliefs with regard to the past and to the future, and the like.

I would also like to emphasize a number of features of worldviews relevant to their role in politics and philanthropy:

Worldviews are social attractors. At a certain point in time, one may not have articulate beliefs. One may have no more than vague intuitions that a state of affairs is, say, unreasonable or immoral. But once one encounters a worldview that gives names to things, expresses judgments in understandable terms, derives (validly or not) conclusions from certain premises, and portrays role models in situations typical to the area being viewed, one may be drawn to that articulation and adopt it as one's own. This dynamic has played out in the coming of age of countless youth. To quote Montaigne: "the more empty a soul is and the less furnished with counterweights, the more easily its balance will be swayed under the force of its first convictions."[12] In other cases, usually later in life, one already has a worldview but is attracted by a different one. This can lead to conversion, albeit through a typically tortuous process, as the pull of both worldviews is felt. Some worldviews succeed in attracting great followings, while at the opposite end of the range there are those that fail to gain adherents altogether.

Worldviews are social glue. In addition to attracting followers, they keep them together. It is an elementary sociological reflection that people who view states

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9 Ibid.

10 Ibid., 262.

11 The following account resonates with Max Weber's conception of worldviews. For an exposition of his conception see Stephen Kalberg, "The Past and Present Influence of World Views: Max Weber on a Neglected Sociological Concept," Journal of Classical Sociology 4, no. 2 (2004): 139–63, https://doi.org/10.1177/1468795X04043931.

12 Michel de Montaigne, *The Complete Essays*, trans. M A Screech (London: Penguin Books, 1987), 200.

of affairs in a similar manner are disposed to discuss them in company, polishing their positions, improving their comprehension, resolving tensions within the worldview, and so on.[13] They spend time with each other and form relationships. They play and evolve with their own language games within their group. Political language games can be used to inspire confidence in a leader or a plan for action, to create hope, and to unite a group. They can be used negatively to smear opponents, play on fears, and downplay the failures of the speaker's or audience's side. Worldviews absorb such uses and many others besides, solidifying them and making them deployable to adherents.

Worldviews are signposts. They are not purely observational or descriptive, even though they contain observations and descriptions. They tell people what has to change in a certain area. This in part explains their attraction, for they include judgments and thus calls for action. In an uncertain world, a call for action – a simple command what to do now, tomorrow, next week – is already a bold and appealing gesture. A call may be revolutionary, in cases where their crafters strive for them to be truly all-encompassing, or at least comprehensively applicable. Alternatively, their reach may be limited. The point is that people coalesce around worldviews they find attractive, and once in agreement, they form movements and institutions to seek the power necessary to enact them, at any range or scale.

Worldviews can be inextricably tied to foundational or pivotal events as well as to the lives of exceptional, exemplary individuals. These events and lives are typically sanctified and mythologized with utmost reverence. The Revelation at Mount Sinai and the Crucifixion of Jesus Christ come to mind.

Worldviews can travel far and wide, both in time and in space. Once released, they are detachable from their crafters' control, intent, and circumstances. Like seeds, they may even be dormant for lengthy periods, only to spring up in hospitable conditions at some point. The rebirth (viz. the Renaissance) of humanistic worldviews established in classical antiquity many centuries later within Western Europe is a striking example of this potential.

I have noted that both politics and philanthropy are motivated at least in part by the desire to realize worldviews. The basic features of worldviews as discussed result in the formation of a system or a socio-political mega-structure in which politics, philanthropy, and civil society merge. This is not a hidden system. We inhabit it. But its units are not simply worldviews, for worldviews are not moral agents in and of themselves. To the description of this system, I now turn.

The Political-Philanthropic System

As humans, we are moral agents. We make choices and are morally responsible for our actions. While individuals are the fundamental unit of moral agency, humans are only effective in worldview-guided action when they act in groups.

13 On resolving tensions in worldviews, or what can be termed "the dynamic autonomy of worldviews," see Kalberg, "The Past and Present Influence of World Views: Max Weber on a Neglected Sociological Concept," 145-8.

An individual, by himself, is not comparable on any scale to a social movement or institution. As James Madison observed in Federalist No. 49: "the strength of opinion in each individual, and its practical influence on his conduct, depends much on the number which he supposes to have entertained the same opinion. The reason of man, like man himself, is timid and cautious when left alone, and acquires firmness and confidence in proportion to the number with which it is associated."[14] In the context of statehood, it is more precise to speak of citizens—members of political communities—rather than just humans, when considering the exercise of political agency.

Worldviews in and of themselves are not moral agents, but when citizens are associated around a worldview, they form a group with all the features of a worldview combined with moral agency distributed among its members. I suggest calling such entities "view groups," analogous to the concept of "interest groups." View groups act as social attractors, social glue, and signposts, consisting of agents who raise and use resources to advance their worldview in myriad ways. These groups operate over time frames that allow effectively stable endeavors to take place. Today, there are countless such view groups, collectively making up the "political-philanthropic system."

The concepts of "ideology" and "worldview" (and, by extension, "view group") may seem similar or even synonymous to some readers, but there are distinctions to be made. I seek to reserve "ideology" to denote worldviews that are strictly political in the sense of being designed as blueprints for control over sovereign states. My reasons for this restriction are as follows.

First, the widespread concept of "ideology" carries Marxian connotations accumulated throughout its two-hundred-year history. These connotations can be misleading, particularly the Marxian assertion that ideology is a tool of control, a false consciousness imposed by the class of owners of the means of production to pacify and exploit the proletariat. I see no reason to presuppose that a worldview is always an external tool of control by an "oppressor" group over an "oppressed" group. Such a situation would only be the case in pathological instances, and I do not share the view that human history is predominantly pathological. Normally, a worldview is an internal feature of a group; members of a view group adopt those views through many possible life circumstances, of which having them imposed by an external, stronger group is only one. In addition, Marx's concept of ideology necessitates dividing society into "classes" as the fundamental grouping. I do not agree with this presupposition. As has been noted by Marx's critics before, while "class" is indeed a significant social category historically, so are families, nations, professions, political parties, churches, and numerous other groupings. Neither class nor any of these groupings has been proven by anyone to be the ultimate socio-historical determinant.

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14 Alexander Hamilton, James Madison, and John Jay, *The Federalist Papers*, ed. Lawrence Goldman (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 251.

Thus, I reject the Marxist conception of ideology.[15] Despite this, had Marxian connotations been the only problem with the concept of ideology, one might still follow scholars such as Clifford Geertz[16] or Michael Freeden,[17] who have sought to recalibrate it, relieving it of that baggage. However, there is a further, unrelated reason to favor a different concept. As Freeden notes: "Once we begin to talk of a million ideologies, we abandon common sense, as well as missing out on their political flavor."[18] This is precisely the point I seek to make: let us distinguish between worldviews geared specifically for statecraft, for party platforms, for control over the "big world", from all the rest. While Freeden's remark may hold true for ideologies, it does not apply to worldviews. Philanthropy is well-suited to the notion of a very large number of view groups, which typically operate at a more granular, retail level rather than at the wholesale level of ideologies.

Worldviews can be about specific domains or "worlds," not necessarily *the* world. For instance, people may develop exceptionally rich worldviews about artistic pursuits—such as a specific genre of music—that deeply consume their thought processes. Even Dilthey's idea of "world-views that undertake to give a complete solution to the riddle of life" can be applied to worlds nested within worlds. All worldviews are inherently partial; we live within various worlds folded into a larger universe. Comprehensive worldviews seek to expand to understand everything, but they inevitably break at the borders of their own ignorance. Partial worldviews, meanwhile, focus their energies internally, eventually reaching their own limits. This idea maps well onto the way philanthropy functions across different areas—education, welfare, religion, culture, and so forth.[19]

In Freeden's conception, ideologies inherently involve the groups that adhere to and utilize them, specifically political groups. The terminology I propose keeps two distinct notions—worldview and view group—separate. It is not a reification to say that worldviews exist even if no one actively adopts them at a given time. An optical instrument can exist without being used.

15 I lean towards viewing it as a set of socio-political representations rather than a form of distortion and dissimulation. According to some scholars, it can oscillate between both. See Eve Chiapello, "Reconciling the Two Principal Meanings of the Notion of Ideology: The Example of the Concept of the 'Spirit of Capitalism,'" European Journal of Social Theory 6, no. 2 (2003): 155–71.

16 Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 193–233.

17 Michael Freeden, *Ideology: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

18 Freeden, 97.

19 One can illustrate this with examples: If a music educator has an incredibly elaborated view of how young musical talents should be cultivated, that is a partial worldview. The "world" of music education is vast and since we are finite creatures, it can exhaust one's resources. There is no clear connection to anything comprehensive. If an advocate for the disabled has a strong, highly developed view about using sports to raise the quality of living for disabled people, that is a partial worldview. Such people dedicate their careers to such enterprises, leading their view groups. This is the realm of philanthropy. Albeit it is true that there exists a psychological tendency to diverge from small worlds to the big world, but the space is too short to develop this topic here.

The concept of view groups also accommodates internal disagreements and debates. It emphasizes that people sufficiently agree on a view of the world to cooperate over time. Cooperation need not always be formal or reached through explicit agreements. Effective view groups consist of members who control key assets, hold influential positions, or are well-represented in critical professions: judges, lawyers, bureaucrats, journalists, academics, clergy, military professionals, business leaders, and philanthropists are all possible members.

View group members do not necessarily know each other personally. They adhere to a shared worldview, meaning they hold convictions strong enough to prompt action, enabling cooperation even without personal relationships. These convictions are not simply a reflection of material interests; they are influenced by other factors, including informal and sociological factors like friendships or residential patterns.

In our pluralistic civilization today, we are surrounded by countless view groups. This is due not only to human creativity in historical flux but also to technology and institutions that preserve and disseminate the language games in which worldviews are expressed. These view groups are the cradles of the crafters of our political visions, philanthropic missions, and organizational purposes. When articulated freely by founders, mission statements hark back to espoused worldviews, which in turn might trace their roots to larger ideological traditions—with modifications at the retail level.

In this overflowing plurality of worldviews, some individuals hold especially firm convictions, making them highly likely to act on these beliefs. When this is coupled with an abundance of private capital—owing to economic trends such as privatization—it results in an infusion of capital into worldview-driven philanthropy. This is the essence of the political-philanthropic system: countless view groups acting within the framework of politics and philanthropy, shaping policy and society.

Questions, Subsystems, and Subtopics

Before we go back to utilize the idea of a political-philanthropic system comprised of view groups to address the dilemma at the beginning of this essay, it is worth exploring other questions that emerge and subtopics that develop. That moral-political dilemma raises just one question among many. The questions that could prove fruitful are those that deal with the subsystems of this system and those that push us to explore related subtopics.

Comparing Systems

A possible line of questioning is one of comparison: what can we learn about the political-philanthropic system from comparing it to other systems? For instance, we can explore its similarities with what is known as the military-industrial complex, a term that President Dwight Eisenhower introduced in his cautionary farewell address in 1961.

The military-industrial complex is comprised of interest groups, rather than view groups. That is a significant difference. The term denotes a dangerous, pathological, or corrupt state of affairs, where instead of having a military

clearly and unequivocally subordinate to a democratically elected government, a country has a profit-motivated defense industry whose components might share commonalities of interest with certain factors in the military. Together, they could be powerful enough to influence the government's foreign and defense policy.

In contrast, the idea of a political-philanthropic system (rather than a complex) is not intended to denote a dangerous, pathological, or corrupt state of affairs. Instead of commonalities of interest, the dynamic of the political-philanthropic system is driven by a plurality of worldviews. As long as there is freedom of association, and as long as politics is largely a contest between parties divided along ideological lines, view groups will establish and fund philanthropic organizations to advance their worldviews, aligning with political actors along similar lines.

The similarity to the "military-industrial complex" lies in the sense that influence and worldview-advancement mechanisms across a society are distributed within this system. Worldview-driven civil society is one grand parliament, and as citizens, we are one donation, one volunteer effort, or one speech-act away from taking part in it. The bar of entry into this "parliament" is much lower than that of formal lawmaking bodies.

Subsystems and Their Dynamics

One never just enters the entire political-philanthropic system as such. One joins an organization, and finds oneself within one "subsystem" or another. Once adopting a conviction as one's own, and acting upon it together with like-minded people, one becomes part of a view group, which in turn is likely part of a much larger subsystem. A subsystem moves in a definite direction, while the system as a whole is full of subsystems that clash or are otherwise uncoordinated. A subsystem is a group of view groups with some level of coordination between them.

What factor coordinates the movement of a subsystem? It is precisely a shared conviction, a belief strong enough to be acted upon. A view group, by definition, shares a worldview, at whose core is a chain of convictions. One or more convictions can be shared with other view groups, which then coalesce and vie for power and influence throughout society in an attempt to follow through on the conviction(s). One of the roles of philanthropy is to fuel this dynamic, as it establishes and funds institutions (educational, cultural, etc.) that seek, among other goals, to add adherents who believe in the conviction.

Friction arises with opposing subsystems moving in different directions. Philanthropy throws ever more resources at the friction points, but also at logistics and mobilization points, seeking breakthroughs that amount to gaining more adherents and discouraging rival view groups. This dynamic generates new ideas, new convictions, changing conceptions, and even new concepts. Philanthropy is a major source of energy for this dynamic. It is a directed source of energy, guided by the convictions of the philanthropists at a given time, with all the unintended and even unimagined consequences that such a dynamic can cause. Here, I suggest that philanthropy is important for the history and sociology of ideas, perhaps more than is commonly acknowledged.

Convictions and the Role of Philanthropy

Consider convictions regarding poverty. In contemporary parlance there is a tendency to talk about "inequality" rather than poverty. But I would like to discuss "poverty" precisely because it has such a long history. Indeed, poverty is one of the most characteristic concerns of philanthropy. It can induce a range of philanthropic attitudes and emotions—care, shame, guilt, anger, pity, and compassion.

Take, for example, the conviction: "An affluent society should never allow its members to suffer abject poverty or lack of opportunities." Rooted in both individual and collective life experiences common in industrialized economies advanced enough to reach a certain level of general affluence, this conviction lies at the core of the worldviews behind welfare programs, both governmental and philanthropic. It is a vital tenet of modern "liberalism" (as Americans understand this term) and "social democracy" (in European parlance). View groups seeking its implementation enshrine it within party platforms they control, support candidates who promise to enact it in policy, and establish and fund philanthropic organizations whose mission statements are dedicated to it. It is central to a large, sprawling political-philanthropic subsystem.

In general, it hardly matters whether or not worldview implementation is successful, as long as view group members continue to hold on to the convictions. Explaining failure, assigning blame elsewhere, or reconceptualizing it as something other than failure becomes part of the worldview itself, fortifying it from the trials of experience. Some view group members, viz. intellectuals, specialize in saving the worldview from possible disappointments due to perceived failures, which if acute enough, can lead to loss of membership in the view group, and even to its dissolution.

Since the beginning of the Industrial Era, the conviction regarding poverty or inequality has been frequently sermonized and spread throughout modern societies in many ways, stirring consciences and urging the establishment and funding of institutions to supply remedies, as well as the inclusion of these ideas in party platforms and policies. This conviction is at the heart of modern liberalism in the United States, gaining adherents during the Progressive Era in the wake of urban squalor among new immigrants and solidifying as central to a major party platform due to the traumatic events of the Great Depression.

New Deal policy, supported by Keynesian economics, and the newly redefined "liberal" subsystem—focused on egalitarianism, big government, the welfare state, and social justice—was rooted in this conviction. At earlier times, the philanthropic arms of similar view groups included institutions like the Settlement House movement.[20] The political arm favored certain policies, and this trend was consistent across both politics and philanthropy.

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20 On the Settlement House Movement, see Alan Ryan's chapter "The Philanthropic Perspective after a Hundred Years" in Giving: Western Ideas of Philanthropy, ed. J. B. (Jerome B.) Schneewind (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1996), 76-97.

Connected to this conviction are smaller, charismatic subsystems that form around certain modern liberal politicians, such as former presidents. These are formidable in their own right but are small compared with the encompassing liberal political-philanthropic subsystem. Here we find a subtopic to explore: charismatic subsystems—those strongly connected to the convictions of a charismatic leader, who succeeds through the power of personality to secure followings for associated view groups.

The aforementioned conviction is tied to modern conceptions of rights, equality, and the proper function of the state. Another possible subtopic to explore is the relation of philanthropy to these specific issues, as a source of energy for transformations in their conceptions. This is especially true with regard to the modern notions of socio-economic rights. It includes what one may call "deontological philanthropy"—a current of philanthropy convinced that it is one's duty to secure rights for others. A study of this subtopic would explore the conviction, as well as others in the realm of welfare and beyond, and how these create this specific current.

Liberal vs. Conservative Subsystems

In the United States, this "liberal" political-philanthropic subsystem has for decades been clashing with an opposing subsystem—the "conservative" one. Adherents of the conservative subsystem in American politics might also agree with the imperative for affluent societies to alleviate poverty and supply opportunities. However, this is moderated by a separate, even stronger conviction: "Over-powerful government poses unique threats to liberty and human dignity." Under this conviction, while it is acceptable that "an affluent society should never allow its members to suffer abject poverty and lack of opportunities," it is not the role of government to alleviate poverty and create opportunities, but rather the role of business and charity.[21] Conservatives might also take a more nuanced approach, and say that even if government must play a role in alleviating poverty, utmost attention should be given to efficiency and avoiding unintended consequences, such as welfare dependency.

This conviction is rooted in life experiences as well. Confronted with the dual problem of alleviating poverty while guarding against government overreach, a subsystem of view groups gathered around convictions in praise of market economies. From there, it is a small step to the conviction that winners and leaders in market economies should take upon themselves the role of philanthropists. Writing about the late 19th-century conservative W.G. Sumner, Jerry Muller relates: "As opposed to those who regarded poverty as the result of the exploitation of workers by the captains of industry, Sumner asserted that the problem of poverty arose from natural scarcity. The solution to the problem, he declared, lay in the development of economic institutions that created greater productivity. It was above all those of greater intelligence and industry who were responsible for the real increase in material well-being which had already

21 By "charity" I mean simply in this context philanthropy geared towards the poor

occurred and would increase in the future if the competitive market mechanism was allowed to function, he argued."[22] Echoes of Andrew Carnegie[23] can clearly be heard in these ideas, which were later developed much further by Friedrich Hayek[24] and others, and found their way into influencing politics.

The clash between liberal and conservative subsystems can be understood through their differing approaches to poverty alleviation and government intervention. The liberal approach advocates for direct government action and social safety nets, while the conservative approach emphasizes individual responsibility, market solutions, and direct charity. This ongoing ideological-view group conflict shapes the political-philanthropic landscape, with both sides contributing to the broader discourse on the role of government, business, and philanthropy in society.

Philanthropy and Political Language

Looking at these two subsystems side by side, we see another subtopic emerge: philanthropy and political language. What Freeden says about ideologies is entirely true about view groups: "ideologies compete over the control of political language as well as competing over plans for public policy; indeed, their competition over plans for public policy is primarily conducted through their competition over the control of political language."[25] Sway over political language is achieved through education, and the dissemination of ideas in civil society, which can be enabled by philanthropy. Worldviews, philanthropic mission statements, and political platforms are connected. Between them, convictions are embedded and developed.

Language games help build and reinforce worldviews by painting some groups, individuals, and opinions as possessing certain traits. Some words or phrases are used rhetorically for these purposes, regardless of the validity of the arguments. Teamwork between the political arm and the philanthropic arm of view groups achieves these objectives using language—not necessarily in a strategic or premeditated way, but rather naturally, even subconsciously, fashioning language for political goals.

Freeden continues: "One lesson we may derive from the study of semantics is that whoever exercises such control is in a strong position to determine the political practices that members of a society will consider, or at least be capable of imagining."[26] My sole modification is to say that it places view groups at the heart of the political-philanthropic dynamic.

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22 Jerry Z. Muller, *Conservatism: An Anthology of Social and Political Thought from David Hume to the Present* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 235.

23 Andrew Carnegie, "Wealth," *North American Review* 148, no. 381 (1889): 653–64.

24 Friedrich August von Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom* (London: G. Routledge & Sons, 1944).

25 Freeden, *Ideology: A Very Short Introduction*, 55.

26 Ibid.

Citizenship and Philanthropy

Somewhat related to the first conviction regarding poverty is the following: "Fairness demands that an affluent country should allow entry to impoverished noncitizens." This conviction is shared by many (but not all) in the liberal subsystem, while it is largely absent in the conservative subsystem, unlike the agreement regarding alleviating poverty. This showcases different approaches to citizenship, leading to another subtopic: philanthropy and citizenship. Connected to this is the observation that citizens, insofar as they have a public life, take it up within view groups. It also relates to the republican ideal of active citizenship.

Peter Singer's work connects here, especially his conviction that: "If I am walking past a shallow pond and see a child drowning in it, I ought to wade in and pull the child out, and it makes no moral difference whether the person I can help is a neighbor's child ten yards from me or a Bengali whose name I shall never know, ten thousand miles away."[27] An opposing conviction might read: "I agree regarding a child drowning in a nearby pond, but physical distance, as well as other kinds of distance, make a moral difference."

Exploring Subtopics

Philanthropy, Imagination, and Utopia

Karl Mannheim's concept of "deviant attitudes towards reality,"[28] as discussed by Paul Ricoeur, provides a compelling lens to view philanthropy as a creator of new "social realities." These realities require humans to fill roles and depend on physical resources—both of which philanthropy can provide. Ambitious projects like AI development or space colonization exemplify this transformative potential. These endeavors often blend utopian aspirations with practical resource allocation, reshaping our collective imagination and possibilities. What happens when rival view groups embrace clashing utopian visions? Such visions operate on a much larger scale than mere "social change". This dynamic raises questions about the legitimacy of private actors in creating realities that affect society at large.[29]

Philanthropy and Clandestine Operations

Cross-border philanthropy can play a critical role in the target country, influencing international relations. This capability can be co-opted by intelligence agencies, operating as an extension of soft power. Initiatives like the Congress for Cultural Freedom - a Cold War CIA-funded pseudo-foundation - demonstrate how philanthropy can be mobilized by states to defend or propagate worldviews or ideologies on a global scale. This interplay between

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27 Peter Singer, "Famine, Affluence, and Morality," *Philosophy & Public Affairs* 1, no. 3 (1972): 229–43.

28 Paul Ricoeur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), 2.

29 David Callahan, *The Givers: Wealth, Power and Philanthropy in a New Gilded Age* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2017).

philanthropic initiatives and geopolitical strategies underscores the complexity of using non-state resources for state-like influence.[30]

Philanthropy, Politics, and Worldview Revival

Philanthropy has historically been a catalyst for the revival of worldviews, often reconnecting contemporary societies with their intellectual and cultural roots. The revival of humanitas during the Renaissance offers a particularly compelling illustration of philanthropy's transformative role. During this period, wealthy patrons such as the Medici family in Florence invested vast resources into the arts, education, and scholarship, enabling the rediscovery and celebration of classical texts and ideas. This philanthropic support did not merely preserve cultural heritage but actively helped redefine the intellectual and artistic horizons of Europe, greatly contributing to the development of modern Western civilization.

Similarly, the revival of Jewish sovereignty in what is known in the Jewish tradition as "the Land of Israel" or "the Promised Land" reflects how philanthropy and political will converge to realize long-standing convictions. Philanthropic support played a pivotal role in establishing institutions that laid the groundwork for modern Jewish statehood. These examples demonstrate philanthropy's ability to bridge temporal and spatial divides.

Normative Questions and the Rules of Engagement [31]

Up to this point, the questions have concerned including the idea of a political-philanthropic system in historical descriptions, descriptions of current events, and the history and sociology of ideas. But there are also normative questions that must be addressed, as this paper seeks to do.

These normative questions include:

- Limits of Power on View Groups: In addition to well-rehearsed ideas about limits on political parties and branches of government, should there also be clear limitations on the power of view groups?
- "Rules of Engagement": What are the permissible actions in the rivalry between view groups vying for power throughout state and society? Understanding that philanthropy plays a role in this competition, the specific question posed at the beginning of this essay is one instance of these broader questions.

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30 See Frances Stonor Saunders, *Who Paid the Piper?: The CIA and the Cultural Cold War* (London: Granta Books, 1999).

31 The goal of this paper is to develop a broad conceptual scheme applicable to many questions. But the narrative arc is to begin with a normative question, develop the systemic concepts, and circle back to the question better prepared after we've covered theoretical ground.

The Stakes

The impassioned tensions between view groups or between larger subsystems (which comprise various view groups connected through one or more convictions) are a perennial feature of the political-philanthropic system. Given the ubiquity of this system and its constant presence in the lives of large numbers of citizens in democracies, it is imperative to agree on the rules of engagement. View groups amass power throughout numerous institutions in society, and philanthropy is a central tool for this. Should there be clear limits to their power? For instance, should a particular view group be allowed to capture academia, the judiciary, or the media?

The idea of "separation of powers" takes on a different interpretation when applied solely to the political system compared to its application to the political-philanthropic system.

The stakes are high: philanthropy consists of a very large number of worldview "weights." If these weights tend to fall to the extremes, society can become factionalized and destabilized—potentially leading to civil conflict. If there is less capital in the hands of philanthropists, this danger diminishes. However, in our times, there is a great amount of capital controlled by philanthropists, many of whom act as lay leaders who can easily follow their whims when funding institutions.

In the next section, I will circle back to the original question about whether philanthropists should be treated like politicians.

Back to the Moral-Political Dilemma: Should Philanthropists Be Treated Like Politicians?

Having named and begun exploring the political-philanthropic system, we can now address the original dilemma: Should philanthropists be treated as harshly as politicians? The argument can be made that since both philanthropists and politicians act as agents of view groups, attempting to implement worldviews, they should be subject to similar forms of scrutiny and accountability.

Let us first determine the baseline for how politicians from rival view groups are treated and then consider to what extent this should differ when applied to philanthropists. Should there be no difference—and if not, why? If there is a difference, what justifies it?

In determining the baseline, we must first clarify to whom it applies. When we discuss the limits on how politicians and philanthropists are "treated," we refer to members of the opposing view group, and not just citizens in general. "Members of the opposing view group" include office-holders and individuals with special influence, such as philanthropists who wield considerable resources. The baseline we are establishing falls under the "rules of engagement" that govern rivalry between view groups.

Our inquiry centers on what tactics are permissible for members of one view group to deploy in attempts to prevent a politician from the opposing

group from enacting policies. These tactics must fall within an absolute moral boundary, although they may vary in nature. Consider the types of events that hinder politicians: social pressures, psychological manipulation, political opposition, and ultimately removal from office. While assassination and changing a politician's worldview both prevent policy implementation, they are certainly not morally equivalent. Similarly, tactics like corrupting the judicial system to indict and eventually imprison a politician fall into a different category from, say, appealing to their constituents to erode their support.

This moral boundary is crucial, but it moves in relation to context: some pressures are permissible for politicians in some contexts but would be inappropriate in other contexts. Politicians face social, psychological, political, and diplomatic pressures, often as part of the expected gamesmanship inherent in their profession. The scale of politics often brings such pressures into the public domain, manifesting through mass protests, intense media coverage, or personal attacks that would be unacceptable in most other walks of life. Were such tactics to become widespread, it would spell a dangerous downward spiral into factionalism and civil strife.

Politicians, as public servants wielding coercive power, are expected to withstand pressures from which others can rightly expect to be immune. This expectation aligns with their accountability to the public. They must be alerted if their policies harm any part of society. The methods used (outside the formal electoral processes) include protests, press critiques, and even cruel satire—all tools meant to keep politicians in check.

Philanthropists, on the other hand, do not hold coercive power, nor do they directly decide policy. They influence policy indirectly by funding initiatives, always at least one step removed from direct decision-making.[32] If this degree of separation carries no significance in determining permissible tactics against philanthropists, it effectively means that any member of a rival view group could face similar tactics to those politicians endure. But norms and laws protect regular citizens from these pressures.

If we were to engage in a public smear campaign against a co-worker simply because of a political disagreement, it would be a serious moral violation. We recognize these individuals are not politicians and lack coercive influence. This is reflected in defamation law, where private individuals are more protected from defamatory statements than public figures. In this vein, each degree of removal from political authority reduces the legitimacy of aggressive tactics used.

Philanthropists operate within civil society. The norms of civil society differ from those of the political sphere. The political sphere controls monopolies over sovereign decision-making apparatuses, whereas civil society is defined by a plurality of institutions. The former possesses practices such as elections, constant

32 As noted above, it is well-known that in many jurisdictions, currently and historically, legislators and policy-makers have enacted various forms of distinction between "charitable" causes and political ones. This has implications for regulation and taxation. I deliberately avoid this very large topic in this paper, since I seek to approach it philosophically, and to maintain and defend such a distinction with philosophical rigor is neither a simple matter nor my goal.

media coverage, lobbying and more. The stakes are high and the norms reflect that. The latter is more relaxed: a view group is always free to establish a new institution if it finds the current ones lacking. This suggests that philanthropists should not be subjected to the same treatment as politicians. Yet, given their key role in advancing certain worldviews by funding their view group's activities, there must be ways to hold more powerful philanthropists accountable.

What are legitimate ways? I suggest shining a light, according to the well-known principle that "sunlight is the best disinfectant". But in what sense? The view group model suggests that we interpret "sunlight" as exposure to reasoned criticism *from rival view groups*. This is not the idea of "transparency", which means to make as much information about donations accessible to the public. While that idea is valuable in and of itself, I am referring to something else: that philanthropists and their entourages engage in sustained, deliberate dialogue with their rivals from other view groups.[33] This is not the mode of protest, of shouting contests, of rhetoric and propaganda. This is the mode of actually defending one's positions and actions in front of your rivals.

There are two well-established models that can be made routine in relevant cases. The models are well-known, but their application must allow for exchanges between rival view groups[34]:

1. **Journalistic Model: The Adversarial Interview**

Investigative journalism can be used much more for philanthropy. Journalistic entities themselves are part of view groups, and it would serve the public well if journalists from competing view groups were to interview philanthropists and ask hard questions. There are ethical codes, standards, and procedures in place for this kind of work. A norm whereby philanthropists who seek to advance a worldview agree to interviews, not from their own view group but from competing ones, can be established. This ensures that philanthropists who are active in advancing their worldviews sit down with adversarial journalists and submit themselves to serious questioning. This is quite different from sycophantic interviews, which are worthless as far as public scrutiny is concerned.

2. **Academic Model: Conferences with Rival View Groups**

Philanthropists and their professional staff should also be expected to participate in conferences, workshops and the like, where they can engage with adversarial scholars, policymakers, and the public. Forums like these can provide opportunities for rational deliberation and civil debate between competing view

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33 Insofar as such things already happen, then it is commendable and there should be more. Insofar as they are lacking, they should exist.

34 I do not claim that these models are perfect or non-corruptible. In politics the journalistic model already exists yet is up against many challenges. But as mentioned above, the stakes in politics are as high as they get, and so the incentives for non-cooperation or corruption are also high. If a politician or a party consider it disadvantageous to engage in rational deliberation, especially defense of positions in dialogue with rivals, then it will not happen, even though parliaments are literally built for that. But these are not reasons to abandon parliaments. One can only hope that philanthropy will go down better pathways.

groups. This is quite different from academic platforms that merely provide echo chambers for the dominant view groups who control academic institutions, isolating and shielding them from their rivals.

Submitting to such scrutiny is essential for maintaining accountability and fostering a healthy civil society. While philanthropists should not face the same harsh tactics as politicians, they must be open to questioning and dialogue.

Conclusion

The above analysis reveals that the political-philanthropic system is a pervasive and influential structure in contemporary society, with view groups serving as its active agents. Both politics and philanthropy are partially driven by the desire to implement worldviews, but the means and norms governing these domains diverge. While philanthropists lack the coercive authority of politicians, their substantial influence demands accountability. However, subjecting them to the same harsh treatment reserved for politicians risks undermining the norms of civil society and further factionalizing public discourse.

Instead, this paper argues for mechanisms of accountability that respect the unique role of philanthropy, including adversarial journalism and inclusive academic forums. These approaches can better foster debate, promote rational deliberation, and maintain the health of a pluralistic democracy. Ultimately, establishing clear norms for the interactions between rival view groups, as well as the roles of politics and philanthropy within this system, is essential to balancing the competing demands of influence, responsibility, and civil engagement.

About the Author

Guy Schultz is a political philosopher and research fellow at the Institute for Law and Philanthropy at Tel Aviv University. His work explores the intersection of philanthropy and politics, focusing on worldview rivalry, legitimacy, and the normative frameworks that shape civil society. He holds a PhD in philosophy, with a dissertation on John Rawls's concept of 'the basic structure of society,' and teaches a Master's-level course on philanthropy for students of Public Policy. Schultz's current research develops the concept of "view groups" as collectives competing across political and philanthropic domains, and examines the implications of these struggles for democratic stability. He is also engaged in conceptualizing the basic moral distinction between humans and artificial intelligence, as part of a broader inquiry into the societal risks posed by advanced AI systems.

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The Birth of Compassion: Lear on the Heath

Abstract

This article explores the transformative power of compassion as depicted in Shakespeare's King Lear, focusing on Lear's journey from arrogance and power to humility and empathy. Centered on Act 3, Scene 4—where Lear stands exposed on the heath amidst a storm—the analysis shows how suffering leads Lear to recognize his shared humanity with "unaccommodated man." The piece argues that through witnessing Lear's transformation, readers and students alike can cultivate deeper compassion and fellow-feeling. By examining the symbolic and literal barrenness of the heath, the article highlights how Shakespeare uses landscape and adversity to strip Lear of pretenses, bringing him closer to a universal human vulnerability. Ultimately, the article suggests that such literary encounters can serve as moral education, fostering compassion as a foundation for peace and justice in both personal and social contexts.

Keywords:
Compassion, King Lear, Transformation, Human Vulnerability, Moral Education

Compassion cannot be a costume we don or an act we put on. Instead, it must come from within, our actions expressing genuinely peaceful thoughts and feelings. As such, each of us bears responsibility to cultivate compassion within ourselves and to extend it to others. One of the best means of cultivating such a compassionate presence is through the encounter with great works of history, art, philosophy, and literature, especially those that capture the transformation of anger into acceptance, fear into forgiveness, and conflict into peace.

One of the greatest depictions of such a transformation in world literature, at least in my experience, is found in Shakespeare's *King Lear*. At the beginning of the play, Lear is a man whose word is law. Accustomed to getting his way, he is quick to resort to violence. He is also arrogant and acts both rashly and irresponsibly, bending others to his will through sheer power. Yet by the end of the play, he has been transformed by the suffering he has both witnessed and endured into a different person, one capable of compassion for the travails of others. He has been liberally educated – his fellow feeling has been liberated through his encounter with "unaccommodated man."

Similar though perhaps not so dramatic transformations can take place in students. Having vicariously experienced what Lear has been through, they too can discover the true extent of their compassion for the plight of others. When we recognize that we are all cast from the same human alloy, all cut from the same human cloth, intolerance, hatred, and violence become unnatural responses, not the way anyone would treat a brother or sister. In composing *King Lear*, Shakespeare has bestowed upon us a precious gift. When conditions are right, immersion in this tale, whether on the page or the stage, can awaken in us the realization that peace and justice in the world begin with compassion in each human heart.

Let us turn to the text itself. To begin with, we must understand what is meant by heath. A heath consists of open, rather level land that is poor for raising crops. It usually features scrubby vegetation and offers no cover in the way of trees or even bushes. It is also relatively infertile, with acidic and sandy soil, and typically found in a dry climate, especially so in summer. In many cases, heaths are man-made, in the sense that natural woodland and forest vegetation have been cleared by grazing or burning. As this account implies, a heath is no place to find oneself in a raging thunderstorm.

In Act 3, scene 4 of *King Lear*, the very center of perhaps Shakespeare's greatest tragedy, Lear and his companions find themselves on just such terrain – a heath – amid just such a maelstrom. Lear himself, who has transferred his kingdom to his daughters Goneril and Regan, has been turned out of their houses and now rages at their ingratitude, lack of respect, and cold hearts. With Lear is Kent, his loyal advisor, who has been forced to disguise himself because Lear, in a fit of fury, has banished him on pain of death from the kingdom for speaking truly. Also with him is the king's fool, who like Kent speaks truth to the erstwhile king in a way no one else can.

During this scene, they encounter Gloucester, a loyal lord who has been betrayed by his bastard son, Edmund, as well as Edgar, Gloucester's legitimate son, who has been falsely implicated by Edmund in a plot to betray his father and is now disguised as Poor Tom o' Bedlam, a homeless man. Bedlam refers to Bethlehem Hospital, a notorious asylum for the mad founded in the 13th century just outside the city walls of London.

To repeat, Lear and his companions find themselves on the heath in the midst of a terrible tempest. Lear is a rare man, a king, whose word has been treated as law and who has, up to this point, engaged in very little self-examination. With no one to gainsay him, he has not given much thought to himself or the place of man in the larger scheme of things. But the tables have now turned. He is no longer king, and he is beginning to find himself confronted with some unaccustomed questions.

Of what moment are the title of king, the raiment of a sovereign, or royal edicts in such a place as this? Despite a lifetime of pomp, the lashing winds do not spare him, the pouring rain does not swerve to avoid him, and thunder and lightning do not appear and disappear at his word. No, they assail him with the same force they would the lowest commoner, or even a beast. Lear and his men find themselves in a situation where the conventions of human society no longer

obtain, where all men are fundamentally equal. Along this journey, he has lost much in the way of wealth, power, and honor, but he has gained something as well – the possibility of wisdom and compassion.

The scene opens with the ever-loyal Kent, always looking out for the king's best interests in a way the sovereign himself cannot, urging Lear to enter a hovel that offers shelter from the storm. "The tyranny of the night's too rough for nature to endure," he warns. Immediately we are presented with a stark contrast between convention and nature. It is in the realm of human affairs that the play's two great tyrannies have taken place – Lear's daughters throwing him out of their houses and Gloucester betrayed by his bastard son. Yet Kent refers to a meteorological tyranny, the storm itself, which knows nothing of such seemingly manmade boundaries. The irony is biting – what good will Lear's life of unchallenged rule, with its stark distinctions between the mandatory and the forbidden, do him here?

Lear, however, wishes to be left alone. To him, the storm seems nothing in comparison with the great wrong he has suffered at his ungrateful daughters' hands. There is a tempest raging around him, but there is also a tempest churning away in his mind, one on which he cannot bear to loosen his grip. His lust for vengeance is so great that he refuses to be distracted by Kent's counsel to enter a warmer, drier place, shielded from the storm. He wants to carry on roiling in his rage. And yet he recognizes the absurdity of his stance, crying out, "O, that way madness lies; let me shun that; no more of that." Finally, he consents and moves to enter the hovel.

But then his eyes fall upon the fool, and for the first time in the drama, throughout which he has seen events from only his own regal point of view, he begins to think of someone other than himself. To the fool he says, "In, boy; you first. You houseless poverty – nay, get thee in. I'll pray, and then I'll sleep." Before Lear can think of sleep, he must first pray. And for what will he pray? Vengeance upon his foes? The restoration of his crown? The end of his sufferings? No, instead he prays for the

> Poor naked wretches, whereso'er you are,
> That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm,
> How shall your houseless head and unfed sides,
> Your loop'd and window'd raggedness, defend you
> From seasons such as these? O, I have ta'en
> Too little care of this! Take physic, pomp;
> Expose thyself to what wretches feel,
> That thou mayst shake the superflux to them,
> And show the heavens more just.

For the first time in a long time, perhaps his entire life, Lear begins to look at life from the vantage point of the poorest of his subjects, people who lack shelter, food, and clothing, the protections and comforts the king has always taken for granted. Seeing the storm from their point of view, he begins to feel compassion for them, and this fellow feeling translates into action. He sends the fool ahead of himself into the shelter. He begins to realize that he has always thought too

much of himself, of what matters to a king, and too little of what matters to a man, perhaps even to the point that he has practically ceased to see himself as human.

Now Lear wishes to put aside his pride, to feel what wretches feel, that he might share with them the excess he enjoys beyond what is strictly necessary to live. In so doing, he would show the heavens more just, a remarkable phrase that might suggest that he will show the godly realm to be fairer than he has been, that he will show himself more compassionate than pitiless nature, or that he will finally align his conduct with the dictates of the divine.

Out of the hovel staggers Poor Tom, shouting "Fathom and a half, fathom and a half!" Presumably, a ship (perhaps Lear, or the whole state of Britain?) is in danger of running aground. The fool warns them not to enter, mistaking Tom for a spirit. In at least one sense this is apt, for there is something profoundly spiritual about Edgar. An innocent who has failed to suspect another's treachery, he has been compelled to renounce nearly all that man's artifice has to offer – home, clothing, kitchen, and even his very name and biography. When Kent demands that he come forth, Poor Tom shouts that he is being pursued by a foul fiend.

Lear, on whom wisdom has only just begun to dawn, is still partially entrapped by his overweening concern, asking, "Hast thou given all to thy two daughters? And art thou come to this?" When Lear sees someone in torment, he supposes they have suffered the same wrong as he. Yet Tom responds, "Who gives anything to poor Tom?" In other words, what have I, or have I ever had, to give? Do you not see what I am? But Lear, still obsessed almost entirely with his own wounds, can only assume, "What, have his daughters brought him to this pass? Couldst thou save nothing? Didst thou give them all?"

To the contrary, Tom shares a tale of even more terrible woe, having been chased by the foul fiend through fire and flame, driven to the brink of suicide even, but in his density all Lear can hear are the cries of a man betrayed by his daughters. Tom cries, "Tom's a-cold! Do poor Tom some charity, whom the foul fiend vexes."

Lear has been betrayed by his daughters, but Poor Tom, the innocent Edgar, has been attacked by the devil himself, suggesting that there are autonomous forces of evil in the world, pursuing the corruption of man. It is Tom, not Lear, who poses an essential question that Lear himself must consider – are good and evil parts of creation, independent of human beings, or are they merely the product of human volition? Everyone knows that heaths and storms are natural, but what about virtue and vice? Are they mere human conventions, or in distinguishing between the two, do we recognize a distinction intrinsic to reality itself?

Kent, who acts as one of Lear's guides to reality, tells him, "He hath no daughters, sir." Lear is incensed, crying "Nothing could have subdued nature to such a lowness but his unkind daughters." Lear is so curved in on himself, so preoccupied with his own wounded pride, that his tragedy at times takes on a comical cast. He wonders if he should punish his own flesh as poor, naked Tom is doing, prompting Tom to observe that this is the same flesh on flesh that

spawned Lear's daughters in the first place. Are we, seemingly like Tom, mere animals, composed of little more than tissue, whose innate drives impel us to eat and copulate? Or are we something more?

The fool observes, "This cold night will burn us all to fools and madmen." Can humanity withstand such a severe existential onslaught?

Edgar responds with a miniature rendition of the laws of God, the Ten Commandments:

> Take heed o' the fiend; obey thy parents;
> keep thy word justly; swear not; commit not with
> man's sworn spouse; set not thy sweet heart on proud
> array. Tom's a-cold.

Edgar has neither given offence nor suspected in others the propensity to do so. He has lived according to the laws of God and man. He has respected the dividing line between good and evil, obeyed his father, kept his word, eschewed swearing and adultery, and shunned pride. Yet what has become of him? He has lost everything, including his own identity, which were it recognized by others, would be the death of him. He has lived blamelessly but been transformed into Poor Tom, and Tom's a-cold.

Does nature take no account of human goodness? Is the entire distinction between good and evil no more than a human fabrication, with no basis in reality? Tom wonders as much, and so too must Lear, who has led a life perched atop society's edifice.

Lear presses Tom to tell him who he has been. Tom reports that he was a serving man in a proud household, yet he "did the act of darkness to serve his mistress's heart." He "swore as many oaths as I spake words, and broke them in the sweet face of heaven," loved wine and dice, and proved himself "false of heart, light of ear, bloody of hands." Having presumably learned his lesson, Tom advises his companions to "Let not the creaking of shoes nor the rustling of silks betray thy poor heart to woman: keep thy foot out of brothels, thy hand out of plackets, thy pen from lenders' books, and defy the foul fiend." Tom is speaking for Edgar here, and he represents a man who has not given up the faith. Having stumbled down the wrong path, he advises others to stick to the straight and narrow.

Lear answers,

> Why, thou wert better in thy grave than to answer
> with thy uncovered body this extremity of the skies.
> Is man no more than this? Consider him well. Thou
> lowest the worm no silk, the beast no hide, the sheep
> no wool, the cat no perfume. Ha! here's three on 's
> are sophisticated! Thou art the thing itself:
> unaccommodated man is no more but such a poor, bare
> forked animal as thou art. Off, off you lendings!
> come unbutton here.

Lear begins tearing off his clothes. Why? Because he has glimpsed for the first time that he, too is, at base, the same thing, an unaccommodated man, and he wishes to see himself and become what he really is, for the first time joining another bare human being. What is a man, once all the trappings of civilization have been removed? Is it only in beholding such an utterly naked creature that we truly glimpse the human?

Or is a human being something more along the lines of what Aristotle called a political or social animal – namely, one that is not and cannot become itself except through family and community? To be sure, our clothes are mere lendings, always shaped by the particular culture in which we live and potentially out of place the moment we find ourselves in another place and time. Yet perhaps an utterly unadorned specimen of Homo sapiens is barely human at all. We require something more than what nature provides other animals – something along the lines of parents, teachers, and friends, and food, clothing, and shelter in order to become the creatures we are meant to be. Tom, the very least of these his brothers, has revealed what it means to be human, and the newly enlightened Lear leaps aboard.

The throne, the court, and the bureaucracy have been Lear's bailiwick for as long as he can remember. And yet, he has never really felt one with his people, a state of alienation that has hidden from him his appropriate orientation in life. He could make laws and punish those who fail to obey, but laws made by a half-blind man cannot properly promote families and communities, ensure that children are well raised, or encourage people to share their best with one another. How many times has Lear refused not only to hear the truth but also to allow its messenger to live? Man is indeed a forked – that is, two-legged – animal, but Lear is discovering that what matters most is not our physiognomy but the narratives that shape us. Does evil triumph over good? Is the good worth fighting for, even so? To what degree do the earthly and heavenly realms respect the same goods and evils?

Upon the scene comes Gloucester, who, having learned that all persons should not be trusted, asks the men of the party to identify themselves. Edgar, his own disguised son, launches into a description of Poor Tom's miserable existence, eating "the swimming frog, the toad, the tadpole," "cow dung" for salads, and "the old rat and the ditch-dog," suffering whippings "from tithing to tithing," and enduring both punishment in the stocks and imprisonment. His food is not cooked, he is punished even in his giving, and his very life is little more than a miserable punishment.

Gloucester asks Lear, "Hath your grace no better company?" regretfully observing that the fallen king finds himself among the absolute lowest dregs of humanity. If anyone has reason to curse his existence, it is Poor Tom, who seems to his unseeing father to have nothing to offer but the plea that "Poor Tom's a-cold."

Gloucester bids Lear to go in with him. He recognizes that his first duty is still to the erstwhile king, not his daughter's "hard commands" to bar their doors and let this "tyrannous" night take hold of him. Risking his own life, he chooses to seek Lear out and bring him to a place where both fire and food are ready. Again, the word tyrannous heightens the irony. The heath, the storm, and

the cold seem hell-bent against the king, determined to deprive him of shelter, comfort, and perhaps even life itself. Yet who would deem the weather just or unjust, obedient or rebellious? These are human categories that apply to the likes of Lear's daughters, who have turned out their father and his paltry retinue into this dangerous night. They, the ungrateful daughters, are the ones acting tyrannously.

Yet Lear will not go, at least not yet. Instead, he demands, "First let me talk to this philosopher," referring to Poor Tom. "What," he asks, perhaps echoing Aristophanes' comic play The Clouds, "is the cause of thunder?" In other words, where does thunder, and by extension, this storm, come from? Is it a mere stage in the unfolding of nature's course that takes no notice of man and human affairs, or has it been sent by the heavenly realm as punishment for wrongs done? Lear would, if he could, interrogate the storm to learn if it, like the whirlwind in the Book of Job, has something to say.

Yet since the booming thunder is otherwise mute, Lear turns to a fellow human being who has endured all the suffering that life can mete out, to see what he makes of thunder. If the Greek tragedian Aeschylus was right, and it is from suffering that wisdom comes, then no one could lay higher claim to the title of philosopher than Poor Tom, for no one has suffered more. Lear even calls him "learned Theban," echoing the title of one of Aeschylus' most famous tragedies. To speak with Tom is what Lear most desires, even if it means bearing yet more of the storm's terrible fury.

Kent asks Gloucester to importune the king again to accompany him, but Gloucester cannot blame him. Lear's own daughters would welcome his death. Like the king, Gloucester senses that he himself is almost mad, recalling what he has suffered. He thinks of his son, whom he loved as much as any father, yet who now has become an outlaw from his own blood that seeks his very life. "The grief," says Gloucester, "hath crazed my wits." Of course, unseeing Gloucester is wrong about this. It is not his blameless son Edgar but his bastard son Edmund who has truly betrayed him.

Yet again Lear begs the "noble philosopher" to accompany him, to which Poor Tom can only respond, "Tom's a-cold." Lear will go, but only with him, declaring "I will keep still with my philosopher." When Gloucester and Kent agree, Lear bids Tom, "Come, good Athenian." Yet they must proceed in silence, for fear of detection. The king and his noblest advisors must move quietly in the darkness, mindful of the fact that the law, the police, and the prisons have swung to the other side. They, though in some crucial respects the same men they have always been, now find themselves on the side of the hunted.

The scene's last words are Poor Tom's:

> Child Rowland to the dark tower came,
> His word was still, "Fie, foh, and fum,
> I smell the blood of a British man."

Rowland was one of the knight-heroes of the Charlemagne legends, at this point in Tom's story just setting out to earn his knighthood. It is the blood of

a British man he smells, but what does it mean to be British? Does a British citizen enjoy certain rights that the law must respect? Does he have a right to meet his accuser, to present his case, to be adjudicated fairly, and to appeal when injustice has been done? Or, as in the ancient fairy tale "Jack and the Beanstalk," is a British man nothing more than a morsel to be consumed by Leviathan, a mere animal of prey most notable for its aroma and edibility?

Like the Cyclops of the Odyssey, who invites Odysseus and his men to share a meal in which he means to make them the main course, is the state of Britain nothing more than a machine that does the bidding of whatever tyrant happens to be sitting at the controls on its throne? Will Lear, like Jack, manage to escape the terrible giant he has loosed upon his erstwhile kingdom?

In one sense, Lear has suffered grave injuries, culminating in his utter vulnerability to the storm on the heath. Yet he has also gained something of great worth – the opportunity to behold unaccommodated man. In so doing, he begins to recognize that the moment of events cannot be weighed strictly by the fact that they happen to him. What happens to Lear is not necessarily what matters most, nor is he necessarily what matters most, at least to the extent that others sometimes endure more than he. His eyes are opened, and he begins to appreciate the fragility of all human beings, himself included. The most significant lesson he learns from the fool comes not in words but in witnessing the poor wretch's defenselessness. Poor Tom is an absolute revelation.

Lear is not only a witness to vulnerability but also a participant in it. He too is lashed by the same wind, deafened by the same thunder. In feeling in his own flesh what wretches feel, he begins to learn the best use of his means, which once included wealth, power, and majesty. He begins to appreciate that he enjoyed more than he needed, a superflux, and that his excess could be shared in a way that would spare others some of life's severest misfortunes. One who always entered first, he has become the kind of man who encourages his comrades to enter shelter ahead of him.

And yet animality takes him only so far. Our capacity to feel for the hungry, the sick, and the homeless is enhanced when we have known these extremities ourselves, yet a human being is not a mere animal. We are also storytellers, and Lear needs to learn that his story, though great, is not shared by all or even most. Tom forces Lear to recognize that others have known sufferings and injustices of their own, and that at least in some cases, their woes may outweigh even his. Tom the philosopher cannot tell him the origin of thunder, nor can he guarantee him that the world is something other than the sort of place where the strong do what they will and the weak suffer what they must. But it is a place where compassion is possible, and to feel such compassion, Lear and we must be drawn outside ourselves in a kind of ecstasy.

Even though Poor Tom has every reason to give up, to follow the devil's heed and make an end of himself, he carries on. An eater of swimming frogs, he could have become Tolkien's Gollum, but instead he clings to the conviction that good and evil must be respected, knowing that, though profoundly naïve, his alter ego Edgar's life was free from treachery. Tom may be a-cold, but he is also courageous, persisting in the face of nearly insurmountable odds, reality itself seemingly conspiring against him. His state in life is piteous, yet also triumphant, in the sense that his spirit is not broken. Later in the drama, he

will succor his own blinded father and even set affairs of family and state aright by triumphing over his diabolical half-brother. In doing so, however, he will triumph even more, by recognizing that Edmund is not half but fully his brother.

In asking Tom to tell his tale, Lear indicates that he has at last arrived at the point where he can see others in pain and recognize that they too have stories. Tom's made-up tale is that of a wastrel, a prodigal son, one who has frittered his life away in debauchery. Yet it does not end there. For he has also learned something from his supposedly misspent life, the importance of following the path of goodness. His code, consisting of many of the Ten Commandments, represents a sort of triumph, and the fact that he can share his experience makes his story profoundly redemptive.

So moving is this possibility that Lear wishes to join Tom, to tear off his clothes and become one with this stripped-down version of a human being. Real human compassion, friendship, and community require that we connect at this level, something no bureaucracy can ever manage. Lear now knows that he is first and foremost not a king but a man, differing only superficially, if at all, from others of his kind. He is learning the true limits of a ruler's power and the true magnitude of what even a bare, forked but storytelling animal can truly reveal. As a philosopher, Tom loves and pursues wisdom, and Lear has come to understand how high over mere power wisdom truly soars.

Perhaps we will never know for certain where thunder comes from, or how our notions of good and evil are woven into the fabric of reality. But this much we can know for sure: we can recognize a fellow human being on the heath, learning not only his bodily torments and deprivations but also his tale of woe. We can reach out in genuine fellow feeling, attempting to attend, comfort, and offer aid to even the most wretched among us. To those shivering a-cold, we can offer the warmth of human fellowship.

Lear will never again wield the royal scepter as before, not so much because it will never again pass within his grasp, but because he now recognizes more choice-worthy possibilities, including the path of compassion and forgiveness. He will sally forth into what life remains for him a different kind of knight, known less for his sword than his heart, a heart bearing esteem and affection for poor unaccommodated man and answering the call not to violence but service. Shakespeare invites us to see that if there is hope for humanity to diminish conflictual situations and enhance prospects for peace, it lies to a substantial extent in first-rate liberal arts education and the encounter, through it, with texts such as this. Only with compassion in our hearts can we hope to build a more just and peaceful world.

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