

Philanthropy in Action

Robert L. Payton

Philanthropy: Voluntary Action for the Public Good

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The Social Philosophy and Policy Conference (SPPQ) was the first time that professional philosophers had convened for a comprehensive discussion of philanthropy. My purpose was to present some of the situations and problems that confront philanthropy in action that could be illuminated by moral philosophy.

The Ethiopian Famine Relief Effort

Few things have more effectively captured the public sentiment in recent decades than the televised news reports about the Ethiopian famine first broadcast in the United States in 1984. The images dramatized suffering on a large scale among innocent people, particularly among defenseless children. The reports themselves indicated that literally millions of lives were in jeopardy, and that beyond immediate death by starvation there was also the prospect of large numbers of people mentally and physically maimed for life by lack of protein

The surrounding conditions were shown to be almost unbelievably harsh: large numbers of people crowded into refugee camps—or, even worse,

unable to get into those camps at all. Thousands of people were reported to have died en route to the relief centers.

The political environment was also one of civil disorder. A government that described itself as Marxist-Leninist was engaged in drastic social and economic reform, including relocation of large numbers of people. A civil war between the central government in Addis Ababa and the secessionist rebel forces in Eritrea greatly complicated the situation. Public resources were diverted to weapons and warfare rather than to relief efforts, and the central government attempted to block relief shipments to rebel territory as part of its military strategy.

The neighboring countries of the Sudan and Somalia, also suffering severely from the drought, were drawn into the Ethiopian crisis. Somalia has been engaged in sporadic warfare with the government of Ethiopia for some years; the two sides have exchanged international sponsors (the U.S. and USSR). Sudan, divided by ethnic conflict north and south, proclaimed a policy of sanctuary for refugees fleeing from Ethiopia, even though its own resources to assist the refugees were critically needed by its own people.

The philanthropic constant in this situation might for present purposes be identified as the international relief community, led largely by American private voluntary organizations (PVOs), but also including international agencies such as the UN refugee commission and other private agencies such as the French organization called Doctors Without Borders. The PVO community had warned of the impending crisis long before it became headline television news. A few American agencies were already in Ethiopia when the news story broke in the United States, even though the Ethiopian government's relations with the United States were at the lowest diplomatic level.

The Ethiopian crisis continues-deaths are estimated at 2,000 a day after a year of exceptional international effort although the attention given to the crisis by the media has diminished sharply and shifted to other issues (most notably South Africa). What are some of the questions that have occurred in the course of the philanthropic response to the Ethiopian famine? Are they issues that might apply to similar crises elsewhere in the world?

- Is civil disorder the key? Drought in other African countries (most notably Botswana) has not resulted in suffering comparable to that in Ethiopia. To what extent should governments be held accountable for the suffering of their people in such circumstances? Does international relief ease the political burden on a bad government in Ethiopia?
- What is the true role of the famine relief effort? The sums raised, although historic in terms of voluntary giving for relief purposes, are a small fraction of the sums and supplies provided by governments. Is the role of private philanthropy that of consciousness-raising rather than the actual relief of suffering?
- To what extent should these problems be dealt with by voluntary giving~' The scale of the financial need and the high levels of political action necessary to stabilize the country and the region exceed the grasp of voluntary action. Does voluntary giving obscure the need for more drastic and costly political action?
- On what basis can governments justify assistance to peoples where no significant political interest or benefit can be served? Our political "ally" in the region is Somalia; why should we help Somalia's principal enemy? Ethiopia has no importance to American economic interests; why invest a billion dollars in short-term refugee relief when the problem is likely to

recur and there will be no discernible or measurable benefit to the United States?

- Finally, what is the role of the news media? By extension, what are the appropriate uses of the media by entertainers acting as volunteers to raise money for famine relief? What impact will fund-raising initiatives launched in behalf of Ethiopian famine relief have on large-scale fund raising for similar or even different purposes? Will international communication make international fund raising a new force in societies where private giving has been modest or non-existent?

War and Revolution in Central America

The emergence of a Sandinista-dominated Marxist government out of the revolution against the Somoza government of Nicaragua has led to a strongly negative response from the government of the United States. The Reagan administration has given active support to rebel forces in opposition to the Sandinistas. At the same time, U.S. policy has supported the government of El Salvador against rebels that reportedly receive support from Nicaragua. Similar civil and international military action, polarizing forces around extremes of left and right at the cost of moderate influences, is taking place in Honduras. Peace initiatives have been sponsored by other governments (the Contadora group) as well as by the United States (the so-called Kissinger commission), and by a wide range of private voluntary organizations.

To a much greater extent than in Ethiopia, religious groups have sought to influence public policy toward Central America-supporting Administration policy as well as opposing it. Voluntary action by church groups to provide "sanctuary" for refugees fleeing Central America has challenged

immigration and refugee policy directly. Highly publicized legal action initiated against church groups has generated increased financial as well as moral support. Other religious groups that support Administration policies have raised funds for humanitarian aid for the Nicaraguan rebels-funds that the Administration has been unable to extract from Congress. (The IRS classification of some of these nonprofit organizations is not made clear in newspaper reports.)

- The essential question is the freedom of action claimed by and accorded to voluntary nonprofit organizations seeking to influence or change U.S. foreign policy-by direct action outside the United States.
- Can "humanitarian aid" be kept humanitarian in military situations? Are private contributions in fact fungible? Do they free up other funds for military purposes?
- Should boundaries be placed around the activities of church groups in foreign affairs? Is the separation of church and state jeopardized by the roles played by church groups in Central America?
- Does political action by churches and others undermine philanthropic behavior? How might we draw the line between politics and philanthropy?

Controlling Nuclear Weapons

This is the title of a new book by Robert Dahl which examines the question in terms of the trade-off between "democracy and guardianship."¹ At what

¹ Robert Dahl, *Controlling Nuclear Weapons*, The Frank W. Abrams Lectures, Syracuse University Press, 1985.

point does a democracy yield its democratic processes to the decision of experts when the consequences of error are catastrophic?

No issue is more familiar. Philosophers and others have engaged in extended discussions about it: A recent issue of *Ethics* was devoted to the topic.²

In terms of philanthropic action, the range of activities has spread across vast public rallies in Central Park in behalf of the nuclear freeze; teach-ins and student referenda at Brown University; the development and distribution of course materials and teacher guides by the Institute for World Order; and investment in academic research at a cluster of leading universities and research centers by the Carnegie Corporation.

Many have called for a massive effort to concentrate philanthropic resources and energies on this issue. The actual amount of funds currently allocated is probably small, in the total scheme of philanthropic giving. The numbers of people called to the debate, however, by educational and religious institutions, appears to run into the millions.

To what extent should private voluntary organizations influence U.S. nuclear policy? To what extent should U.S.-based organizations attempt to influence the policies of other governments? To what extent is direct action of the kind most dramatically illustrated by Greenpeace justified within the framework of the philanthropic tradition? What is the role of the media in this issue? Are philanthropic organizations accorded different editorial treatment from that given to governmental and private economic points of view?

South Africa (See the following essay, "Tainted Money.")

Seldom has an issue become so intertwined among the three sectors. Private voluntary action has led to effective pressures on business corporations and on inter-governmental relations.. Religious organizations have again played a leading role, along with civil rights groups.

South Africa appears to have drawn attention away from the Ethiopian famine as the leading issue of African affairs pressing on the public consciousness. Voluntary efforts have become linked with political as well as religious and social groups within South Africa. The principal multinational corporation effort to improve the lot of South African blacks has been led by a black American clergyman (Leon Sullivan). Business corporations and philanthropic foundations have been the principal sponsors of black South Africans studying in the United States under a program managed by the institute for International Education. The American Chamber of Commerce in South Africa was the focal point of a South African fund-raising effort, supplemented by funds from the United States, to build a vocational school in Soweto. Colleges and universities with African studies and Afro-American studies programs have been the campus focal point for debate about the issue.

- What are the rights of private voluntary groups outside South Africa in supporting anti-apartheid protest that lead to violence and death of South Africans?
- Is the strategy of disinvestment justified by religious organizations and educational institutions if the consequences are harmful to their own financial stability?

² Special Issue on Ethics and Nuclear Deterrance, *Ethics*, vol 95,no.3,1985.

- Should philanthropic efforts in South Africa aim at longterm reform or short-term disruption?
- Are the philanthropic interventions in support of apartheid in South Africa (Jerry Falwell) or in opposition to it (almost everyone else) examples of American cultural imperialism? How do they differ?

Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts

The arts present the most permeable boundaries among the three sectors. Not only do for-profit and not-for-profit interests co-exist with a variety of public agencies, initiatives that begin in one sector mature in another. Foundation-supported artists make recordings with for-profit recording companies; tax-exempt theaters become the home of subsidized productions that eventually become highly profitable. Individuals are supported by sales of their work, by foundation grants, and by grants from public agencies (such as the state arts councils and the National Endowment for the Arts).

Lincoln Center is a familiar and symbolic hub of such activity, but many similar institutions have been established across the country.

- Should public and philanthropic funds be used to support activities that become profit-making?
- Should philanthropic funds, by definition not-for-profit, be permitted to result in private benefit? Should distinctions be drawn among artists, producers, and others in this regard?

- Does philanthropy subsidize elite culture with public money? Should public opinion be enlisted to validate or even guide the arts when public and philanthropic monies are involved?
- Should not-for-profit philanthropic enterprises be permitted to supplement their base income with resources earned by profit-making activity?
- Should access to the arts be free? Does the right to education have a cultural counterpart in the arts?

The Homeless

The homeless and derelict populations of large cities such as New York have increased substantially in recent years. Part of the cause appears to be reduced public funds for welfare; of perhaps even greater significance has been the decision to "mainstream" large numbers of the mentally ill and others thought to be at risk in modern urban environments.

A well-publicized controversy arose in New York City in 1983 over the rights of religious organizations serving the homeless under city contracts. The Salvation Army and the Roman Catholic Church objected to requirements that, as contractors to the city, they sign statements affirming nondiscrimination in employment for homosexuals. The case appears to be a classic example of the conflict of two social goods.

- Do charitable organizations have special rights under the law that exempt them from legislation deemed to be in conflict with their ability to carry out their charitable objectives?
- Does charitable assistance to the poor lead to pauperization?

- Does charitable assistance to the poor relieve families of their obligations to family members who may be retarded or otherwise found "unacceptable" or too burdensome in the home?
- Have private agencies, especially those representing specific and strong religious convictions, be permitted to intervene in the lives of the homeless with financial support from public as well as private sources? Does the combination of efforts of New York City and the Salvation Army in behalf of the homeless violate the separation of church and state?
- Does public charity acting around rules of civil service develop workers in sufficient number and professional commitment to deal with the growing population of homeless, the mentally incompetent elderly, and those terminally ill? In the past, many if not most workers in these fields of service have been drawn to them by religious calling. Can a secular society inspire service of similar levels of self-sacrifice?

Social Philosophy and Policy

This last example deals with the thorny questions that grow out of reflection on the relationship of money and ideas, of means and influence.

The present conference is an example of private voluntary funds being used to encourage the discussion and publication of the thoughts of philosophers and others about "Private Philanthropy and the Social Good." As this essay has attempted to demonstrate, the role of private philanthropy is far broader than fund raising and grantmaking, although it appears that most academics limit their reflection on the tradition to this single dimension. Some of the examples cited here—controlling nuclear weapons, the Central

American conflict, the efforts to defeat apartheid in South Africa—call to mind the extensive interaction among campus-based academics, intellectuals in publishing and media, and the alliances of secular intellectual with religious spiritual forces.

In some cases, the philanthropic objectives to be served come in conflict with the sources of support. The risks fall on *all* participants in a philanthropic venture, not simply on those whose money is involved. More than money is in the game for the participants—status, prestige, reputation, and credibility are also at risk. This is often especially true in situations that are thought to be controversial: Risk is shared by corporations who may alienate shareholders and prospective investors; by churches divided into contending factions within local congregations; by colleges and universities drawn into sometimes disruptive debates about external issues, debates that may antagonize otherwise sympathetic donors, parents, or prospective faculty members.

The larger public agenda advanced by a non-profit organization may jeopardize the original and life-giving mission of the organization itself. Funds to supplant the funds lost to higher causes seem to be in short supply. The consequences of action may be ennobling and organizationally fatal at the same time.

The self-interest of donors is often lamented; less often heard is concern about the self-interest of recipients. Philosophers who deal with social and political philosophy deal routinely with explosive material, not only in the classroom, but in their published work. Because some ideas of intellectual interest to philosophers are offensive in the larger society, it is often difficult for philosophers to find patrons or sponsors. (On occasion that is all too frequent, the threat to open philosophical discourse about issues or positions that are unpopular comes from within the academy rather than

from outside. The most effective pressure on an academic may be that posed by hierarchical superiors in whom are vested powers over tenure decisions and promotion.)

Philosophers who affirm the standard of reason are also vulnerable to charges of bias, partisanship, and ideology when dealing with social issues. They may sometimes be rewarded for that same partisanship, of course, by pleasing those in the friendly camp, whether the camp is filled with internal or external allies. But discourse suffers when partisanship triumphs, when interest—political, economic, or social—seems to outweigh rational argument.

It is difficult for the non-philosophers to know how to cope with situations in which the experts—the philosophers—accuse one another of ideological distortion. In complex political situations, the facts are difficult to obtain as well as to interpret; the "data" are harder to control than in the scientific laboratory. It is much more difficult to reach agreement on public policy issues such as world hunger, political stability and peace in Central America, efforts to improve the prospects for world peace in the face of mass annihilation, and so on. Such issues raise difficult and often imprecise questions of the sort put forward here. Yet such issues cry out for the wisdom as well as the skills of those who devote their careers to thinking carefully about the social world and its values.

- To what extent does the world of philanthropy behave as a marketplace, where different styles, fashions, and ideologies compete for support? To what extent do (and should) intellectuals compromise their intellectual objectives in order to win support?

- Is the marketplace of grants materially different from the campus competition for students or the publishing competition for readers? Should different standards of behavior be expected of the participants?
- How should philosophers be paid? ("Generously!" cried out one listener when I posed that question to another audience. For more, see Part I, "Major Challenges to Philanthropy,") By earning their income from the sale of their work as teachers, writers, consultants, and lecturers? By subsidy from government agencies? By individual patronage? By subsidies in the form of grants from foundations and corporations? By some or all of the above?
- How should grantmakers choose among the possible investments in social philosophy and policy? Should the goal be to encourage work on issues at the fringe of reflection and speculation, or should the goal concentrate on more immediate and practical objectives?
- What are the most successful models of the subsidy of philosophy? Which models appear to be most reliable over time?
- Is the philanthropic relationship corrupting in the realm of ideas as it is sometimes alleged to be in the realm of charity and almsgiving?
- Are philosophers to be trusted more in dealing with sensitive issues of social policy than are foundation executives, corporate executives, agents of government?

Conclusion

PHILOSOPHICAL INQUIRY

The hope of this paper is that it will cause trained and experienced students of philosophy to give clarity and direction to the philosophical discussion of philanthropy, as broadly defined here. What are the philosophical methods appropriate to addressing these particular questions?

Treated philosophically, the cases briefly defined here might prove to be the basis for extracting the ill-defined principles of philanthropy. They might help to bring to conscious reflection the inconsistencies, paradoxes, and contradictions between philanthropic behavior in different settings.

How do the specific questions reveal larger social issues? For example, to what extent may they be used to consider in concrete terms some of the underlying trade-offs between the short-term and long-term? They force us, I believe, to consider the political dimension of philanthropic action—the gray area between public education and consciousness raising, on the one hand, and lobbying, on the other. How might we begin to formulate a defensible distinction between philanthropy intended to improve the quality of life in the community and political action that proclaims the same high purpose?

Moving from specific examples of philanthropy in action (more fully and carefully delineated than they are sketched out here, of course), we can begin to identify the characteristics of voluntary action. It would seem from the cases themselves, for example, that there is a greater readiness for interaction among the not-for-profit, for-profit, and governmental sectors during times of crisis and times that are more normal.

Such observations might, in turn, eventually carry us to higher levels of philosophical discourse: For example, to what extent is the philanthropic

dimension determinative of the social order? To what extent does philanthropy reveal the nature of society?

PHILANTHROPY IN EDUCATION

The emphasis of this essay has been on the contribution to social philosophy and policy that might result from a better understanding of philanthropy in action. The conference itself has called upon distinguished scholars to address the underlying fundamental questions raised by philanthropic values and behavior; practitioners of various sorts have approached the subject from a different perspective. The study of philanthropy should be considered in the framework of education as well as that of research, policy, and practice. How should philanthropy be approached in teaching? The illustrations of philanthropy in action that make up the second part of this book appear as grist for most of the disciplinary mills of the humanities and social sciences. I have proposed that we deal with their philanthropic dimension explicitly, within the framework of existing courses and curricula.

What are the principles of philanthropy, and how are they taught and learned? By systematic investigation in formal academic study, or by experience and the guidance of mentors in the context of voluntary service? What are the appropriate methods of philanthropy, the methods that best protect the integrity of the philanthropic relationship? Is the model of non-profit organization effective? Can voluntary initiative carry the burden of important social needs, of advancing the spheres of distributive justice? Must charity be coerced?

These questions may be appropriate to liberal education in preparation for a life of public service. They may be of considerable consequence in the

general education of young Americans as citizens. They are questions, however, that go well beyond technical competence. Technical competence is also required of young people these days, as is competence in verbal and mathematical expression and reasoning, and the useful skills of dealing with others. (The skills of dealing with other people are of special importance in situations where responses are not obligatory and where self-interest is often unclear. These are common situations when people come together for public purposes.) Questions of value, purpose, morality, and meaning are raised by exploration of philanthropy in action. They are also questions of the kind that most people still think of as philosophical questions. Does philanthropy then have a proper place in the philosophical curriculum?