

Voluntarism and Philanthropy: What Does the Future Hold?

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As Jack Benny once said, "I don't deserve this honor, but then I have arthritis and I don't deserve that, either."

This gathering is representative of the field of philanthropy in its diversity of goals, its complexity of organization, and its wealth of talent. It should also be a reminder that we do not move from one side of the desk to the other when we go from making grants to applying for them. The symbolic piece of furniture should not be a desk but a table with many sides, with most of us occupying different chairs at different times. There are places at the table for business and government as well as for the third sector; places for volunteers and trustees and professionals and other paid employees; places for public agencies, for for-profit and for nonprofit corporations --and for the expanding number of organizations that are a mixture of all three.

I have looked over the list of those who accepted the invitation to be here tonight. Some of us have eaten at every place at the table; all of us have even waited on the table at one time or another. We share a great many experiences as part of our involvement with voluntary action for the public good.

The institutions and organizations represented here include some that I have been most closely associated with. There is nothing particularly special about my list that would make it better than anyone else's here. This audience includes more than 35 grant making organizations and a slightly smaller number of nonprofit organizations (and that is unusual). It reflects education and philanthropy, of course, but also minorities, medicine and health, human rights and dropout prevention, relief and development, scholarship in the humanities and research in science, religion and the arts and law. In the past few weeks I have participated in gatherings of similar diversity and influence in Columbus, Ohio, Charlottesville, Virginia, Indianapolis, San Francisco, and Philadelphia. (In the process I've also learned that US Air has set out to become the Long Island Railroad of the airline industry.)

I also looked at what part of the philanthropic tradition each of you represents and then held up my own list of involvements alongside that. Collectively, I asked myself, what have we been up to?

The reason I ask that question, as some of you know, is because I have in recent years been preoccupied with the receding future. (As someone younger than I am once said, "the future is much like the present, only longer.") Although ours is the first generation in the history of the world whose greatest anxiety is living too long, my interest is focused

on the future of those who are now children and young people. I approach the subject in very personal terms. I often look at the future not in abstract and disinterested terms but in terms of our son David and his friend Carleen; in terms of our grandson Joey and his mother Heidi; and in terms of the memory of our sons Joe and Matt. These people personify for me both the great promise and the great vulnerability of life, its exciting prospects and its real risks.

In returning to academic life, I have also become directly involved with the education of other young people. Now I will also begin to measure the future in terms of the needs of students such as those in the undergraduate honors program in Political and Social Thought. Those are the kinds of people I hope, who will later come to the Miller Center of Public Affairs as scholars and public servants to participate in the study of the presidency.

Now that I have joined Mr. Jefferson's university, I turn to him more often than before for advice and for moral as well as political insight. One of the wonderful things about living in Charlottesville is the sense of history everywhere: government and presidents and leadership and public philosophy beautify the intellectual landscape as the dogwood adorns the natural one. The other day, as Polly and I were on our way to a gathering on campus, I noticed this quotation on the base of a statue of Jefferson:

I am closing the last scene of my life by fashioning an establishment for the instruction of those who come after us. I hope that its influence on their virtue, freedom, fame, and happiness will be salutary and permanent.

Most of us are not involved as Jefferson was in the founding of new institutions, but instead in efforts to sustain them and improve them. Even so, most of us have also been involved in the creation of new organizations and new causes, as well as in reforming old organizations and renewing old causes. Each of the people here represents a cluster of them. In that sense, each of us acts as agent for a set of social values and priorities, a point of view, a way of deciding and acting in the world. We're all quite busy at it, and we are all conscious that we don't always succeed. But most of us probably agree -- albeit somewhat ruefully -- with what Bernard Shaw once wrote: "A life spent making mistakes is more useful than a life spent doing nothing."

If we force ourselves to think of what we're doing in terms of its influence on the virtue, freedom, fame, and happiness of those who come after us, what is it that we would want to say to them? Jefferson and others made it possible for us to live in a free and open and democratic society, and I argue that that is the core of what we should be trying to preserve. I also believe that the philanthropic tradition -- voluntary action for the public good -- is essential to our survival as a free and open and democratic society. Only if those values survive, I believe, will the children and young people of the future have the same opportunity that we have had to shape their lives, to accept and modify and enrich and pass on the values they think most worth preserving.

That slogan sounds good, of course, but giving substance to it is very difficult. With Harold Macmillan I believe that one of the central purposes of an education is to know when someone is talking rot -- even when that someone is oneself. Whenever I try to wax eloquent, my conscience sends back a faintly skeptical echo, forcing me to hold the fuzzy images closer to the heat of reality to see whether they sharpen or simply melt away. If it is possible to wax eloquent it is also possible to wane eloquent. And so what I want to do is to talk about the future in terms of some of the specific things I have been working on and trying to write about, to see whether I'm headed in the right direction. Mine is a transition from one set of roles to another, with much overlap. (If you think of changing career in terms of the metaphor of embarking on a voyage, I'm still on the dock.) I'm trying to identify what is relevant from my past that might be relevant to my future. I'll mention five things.

1. The first is virtue. I gave a talk two weeks ago at the American Philosophical Society in Philadelphia on "Virtue and Its Consequences." I've been trying to figure out whether the idea of philanthropy as a virtue would shed any light on what we do. Immediately prior to that lecture I spent a couple of days with a group of corporate contributions officers brought together by the Council on Foundations to talk about the ethics of corporate philanthropy. I suggested to the corporate seminar that it might be useful to think about corporate ethics in terms of classical and religious ideas about virtue.

I met strong resistance. "Virtue" is an unattractive word. It conjures up memories of narrowness and repression rather than the effort to achieve the good life. Two ideas came out: the first is that there is better, more enlightened language available, and the second is that pragmatic, utilitarian values are preferable. "What works" is most important.

That was just before the Gary Hart scandal, which seems to me to illustrate that the ancient virtue of prudence may still be important today. And, because I have been thinking about virtue, I read as many of the editorial commentaries on the Gary Hart case as I could. In the course of that I discovered that no one had pointed out the connection between the Hart case and three other important news stories. The first was the case of the Marine guards in the embassy in Moscow: the connection between someone's so-called "private" sexual life and national security. The second news story was about evangelist Jim Bakker: it reminded me that prominent people are vulnerable to scandal and may go to great lengths to repress word of it. As a consequence, public figures are susceptible to blackmail. Private sexual activity again becomes a security matter. Finally, the biggest news story of the decade is AIDS, yet none of the commentaries mentioned that AIDS is as much a threat to a philandering president as it is to everyone else. Mr. Reagan has suggested that we all be prepared to submit voluntarily to tests for drug abuse. While the Hart case was in fullest display, Secretary Bennett and Surgeon General Koop were debating whether testing for AIDS should be mandatory or voluntary. For presidential candidates, too?

I am puzzled, thinking of that cluster of news stories, how we can continue to treat "fooling around" as if it were risk free for our generation and mortally dangerous for the next one. I am also puzzled about how we will deal with the problem of casual sex among

prominent figures in public life once we face up to it. It is a dangerous subject, but it can't be left alone. I don't know whether the Miller Center will tackle it, but someone will have to. We won't be able to study the presidency seriously anymore without trying seriously to study presidential character, presidential vice as well as presidential virtue.

2. The discussion of corporate ethics prompts me to mention the question of the ethics of the university. I have made two speeches, participated in a seminar and written an essay in recent weeks on the divestment controversy. There are two issues to be raised, I think, the first most directly affecting philanthropic values and practices, the second most directly affecting the mission of the university.

Issue one: Should colleges and universities (and other organizations) which on moral grounds divest themselves of stock held in companies doing business in South Africa (or doing business there in ways that are thought to be morally unacceptable) continue to accept philanthropic contributions from those same companies? Should the companies retaliate in some way by cutting off contributions or by redirecting their grants elsewhere? Divestment is potentially a very large issue, because it raises the problem of the freedom of universities to criticize corporate practice, and because it is so difficult to put limits on its application.

The second issue -- that of the mission of the university -- comes up because a significant number of people -- "significant" means enough to get my attention -- believe that the university, like the church, must act as the conscience of the society. The university as an institution has two moral obligations with reference to South Africa, according to this argument: it must not contribute even indirectly to evil, and the university must also take aggressive collective action to raise the moral standards of the society.

In a symposium last week on the future of the university at Ohio State, I tried to argue the alternative view that the unique mission of the university is to defend and sustain and improve the quality of thought and discourse. Should the university compromise its commitment to that aspect of its mission, for whatever reason, the society will be left without any institution qualified to perform that function. We would then be less free.

3. Philanthropy in America is so ambitious that becoming involved in it means thinking about morality and freedom and justice. That's why it makes such an attractive subject for undergraduate education. After Philadelphia and before Columbus I went to Indianapolis for the announcement of the new Center on Philanthropy at Indiana University. The Center is made possible by a grant of \$4 million from the Lilly Endowment, and joins other new centers at City University here, at Duke, at Case-Western Reserve University, as well as the first of them all, John Simon's Program on Non-Profit Organizations at Yale.

To study philanthropy means to study it warts and all. It is time to surface all the critiques of philanthropy that have developed over the centuries. To understand the case for something means to have confronted squarely the case against it. Such confrontation in

philanthropy will also mean that its critics will have to elaborate their arguments and defend them.

There are two opinions about why foundations and corporations aren't more generous in their support of the study of philanthropy. There is growing evidence that that is no longer the case, but I'll mention the opinions, anyway. The first is that it would be unseemly for grant makers to study themselves (as if grant making were the only important element in philanthropy worth studying). The second opinion is that grant makers, especially, don't want to find themselves criticized or second-guessed. Neither opinion should carry weight.

I believe very strongly that we must study this tradition if we are going to improve it and pass it on. Serious study won't happen unless two other things happen: the first requirement is that scholars in many fields -- in law and medicine and public administration and business as well as in the humanities and social sciences -- must take the study of philanthropy seriously. That won't happen, of course, unless they have financial support to do so, and that is the second condition.

The study of philanthropy is not simply an academic matter, of course. All of us in this room have been engaged as volunteers or professionals in grant making and fund raising. We think that our experience means that we know something about how the field works. The fact is that practitioners rarely examine their assumptions, just as scholars rarely have personal experience to bring to bear. That is why I hope to organize a Seminar on Philanthropy at the University of Virginia modeled on the seminar at Columbia. That model brings together practitioners from grant making and from nonprofit work, professionals and volunteers and scholars. Developing such a seminar is hard to do, and it was less successful while I was chairman of the seminar on philanthropy at Columbia than I wanted it to be. Despite that, the continuing seminar or some variation on it is the best model for continuing education in philanthropy that I've found yet, and it should be widely replicated.

4. Next spring I will teach a course in philanthropy in the Program on Political and Social Thought at Virginia. I've had it in mind all the while I've been working on the book I've been trying to write. One of the illustrations I will use is the philanthropic response to the Ethiopian famine, which the Columbia Seminar spent a year-and-a-half talking about. The seminar set out to examine a series of topics like that, drawn from a variety of fields as diverse as the support of the arts and efforts to aid the homeless. My notion is that there is implicit in what we do a kind of science, a domain of knowledge and behavior, parallel to politics and economics, that might be called "philanthropics." It would be the study of the organization, methods, and principles of voluntary action for the public good. During the past few months I have spent much time on the telephone -- as well as waiting in Allegheny Commuter's cattle pen at Pittsburgh airport. Some of the phone conversations have been with the staff at Technoserve. I have served for some years on the board of Technoserve, but during the last couple of years I have been particularly interested in their efforts to tease out and communicate the lessons they have learned from twenty years of community development in Central America and Africa.

Technoserve's experience has broad implications, because the lessons they have learned are important to international relief and development everywhere. Our son Joe, who worked ten years in Africa for Catholic Relief Services, would have read Technoserve's new publications with intense interest. He would, being the son of his father, have argued about them and disagreed with them and tried to formulate his own.

It is in the extreme circumstances of relief and development in the poor countries of the world, or in the plight of dropouts and others here in the poorest sections of our cities, that the basic values of charity and philanthropy are made most clear. Such values are often obscured in large, affluent, complex institutions like the great foundations and corporations and universities represented here. It is obvious that a Technoserve has much to learn from the Rockefeller foundations and the Exxons, as well as from the universities. It is not so obvious, but also true, that my colleagues in the foundations and in business, at Hofstra University and C.W. Post College, and at Indiana and Virginia, have much to learn from organizations like Technoserve.

5. One of my first tasks at the Miller Center is to become involved with the study of science advising. The Center hopes to launch a national commission to advise future administrations about how to make science and technology a part of the thought-processes of the White House. My brief service as a member of the Board of Governors of the New York Academy of Sciences involved me with the Science Policy Association. Their breakfast meetings are the most elegant intellectual gatherings I have ever attended in New York -- the present gathering excepted, of course. They bring leading scientists and executives and university and government officials together to talk about important issues of public policy. Those meetings illustrate the final point I want to make this evening about how the philanthropic system works.

These words seek to reaffirm some beliefs about philanthropy while suggesting at the same time that the discourse we are engaged in is exploratory. We don't know all the questions, much less the answers. Most of our decisions are made in the face of ignorance and uncertainty, and we are much more at the mercy of luck than we like to admit.

That is not all bad. Luck is what brought me to Virginia, and to Exxon before that, and to those other stops along the way. Luck has had a lot to do with past opportunities, and luck has made possible the good life that I have been privileged to enjoy. It was luck to have been born into a great tradition of philanthropy and public service. It was luck to have been born in the right country. It is like to have met people like my three bearded friends Vartan Gregorian, Bob Gale, and Arnie Shore, and the rest of you.

Vartan Gregorian is proud of his ethnic heritage, and profoundly informed about it. He is also one of the best Americans I know, sensitive, knowledgeable, deeply committed to democratic values. Bob Gale is one of the most effective people in American higher education, a secret that he doesn't want revealed. Arnie Shore, who succeeds me as head of Exxon Education Foundation, is already widely known and respected as one of the most helpful and considerate people in his field. He is smart, as Vartan and Bob are smart, but the admirable qualities of each of these men go well beyond their intelligence.

They are people of imagination, enterprise, and character. From my perspective, the tradition is in good hands.

The principle of serial reciprocity says that children repay their parents by what they give their children. You and I owe our parents a lot. That means we also have a lot to pass on.

I suspect that Mr. Jefferson would be very pleased. Not altogether satisfied, but pleased.