



All Things Considered, Should Egalitarian Movements Accept Philanthropic Funding?

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Abstract

Philanthropy is a contentious and often polarising topic within egalitarian social movements. There are good reasons for this. Philanthropy is reliant on the inequalities inherent in the capitalist system, is fundamentally at odds with democratic relationships, and can moderate or control the activities of recipients. This article therefore starts from the premise that philanthropy violates egalitarian ideals in very significant ways. However, it goes on to suggest that, absent a ruptural change that would drastically weaken the bases of philanthropic wealth, there is a strategic and contingent case for its selective use so long as it pushes existing configurations of power in more egalitarian directions. In making this case, the article draws primarily on the work of Wright (2010) but also on recent developments in the political theory of philanthropy. It calls for a critical literacy around philanthropy that combines an openness to experimentation with a clear-eyed sense of its significant risks. In this respect, it outlines specific conditions and strategies that movements should adopt if they pursue or accept philanthropic funding. Firstly, movements must deliberately articulate and actively defend their transformative vision, clarifying in the process the tactical place of philanthropy within this. Secondly, they must resist funder conditionalities, and preserve egalitarian modes of organising in the face of practices which undermine participatory ideals and threaten relations of care and solidarity. The article's chief contribution is to integrate normative insights with lessons from the sociological literature on movement-philanthropy relations, for the sake of systematically untangling a live and troublesome issue within the praxis of radical movements.

Keywords Philanthropy · Egalitarian social movements · Erik Olin Wright · Political equality · Affective equality · Ngoisation

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Introduction

On 22 May 2015, 62% of Ireland's electorate voted to change the country's Constitution so that people of the same sex would have the right to marry. Two weeks prior to this remarkable referendum, Breda O'Brien, a member of conservative Catholic organisation the Iona Institute, published an article on the funding of three pro-marriage equality groups— Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN), Marriage Equality, and the Irish Council for Civil Liberties— as part of her weekly opinion column in the *Irish Times*. Citing figures publicly available on the website of the Atlantic Philanthropies¹ —the three organisations' main funder at that time— O'Brien noted that GLEN had received \$4,727,860 from the foundation between 2005 and 2011. 'The most successful lobby group in Irish history' she wrote, 'was swimming in greenbacks'. She quoted directly from Atlantic-commissioned evaluation reports, also available on the foundation's website, focusing especially on their finding that Atlantic funding had enabled GLEN to 'ramp up' its work and move from being 'a voluntary organisation with a single-funded [*sic*] post working on gay HIV strategies' to 'a full-time, highly professionalised lobbying machine ... [working] "inside" the machinery of government'. She made much of the fact that, according to another Atlantic report, finance from the foundation (\$475,215) had facilitated marriage equality in setting up a full-time office and engaging in 'backroom' tactics such as 'hiring professional political advisers who were working with the government on other issues to report back on the government's thinking on same-sex marriage'. The push for constitutional change, she declared, was being orchestrated by 'a slick, elite movement of highly educated professionals funded from abroad' (O'Brien 2015).

In framing the campaign in this manner, O'Brien vastly underplayed the strength of the grassroots movement for change, the breadth and depth of public deliberation during the campaign, as well as the profound social and cultural shifts— not least the greatly reduced power of the Catholic Church— which underpinned the successful 'yes' vote. Nevertheless, while her complaints should certainly be viewed as part of a last-ditch strategy by opponents of social liberalism in Ireland to portray themselves as victims of a new orthodoxy, her article does touch on some important and potentially troubling questions for egalitarian politics. In speaking, however instrumentally, to the public role of privately funded institutions, it prompts us to consider the democratic consequences of philanthropy's interventions in public policy, the manner of its funding for non-governmental organisations (NGOs), and the modus operandi of its recipients.² The aim of this article is to grapple with some of these

¹ The Atlantic Philanthropies was a limited-life foundation established by Irish-American Chuck Feeney (O'Clery 2007). Between 1982 and 2020, it gave grants totalling \$8 billion globally (the Atlantic Philanthropies n.d.), \$1.1 billion of which went to causes in the Republic of Ireland. 50% of this went to higher education, with the remainder going primarily to the fields of aging; children and youth; health; and reconciliation and human rights (Collins 2017). Atlantic also played a major role in Northern Ireland, especially in the field of higher education and in activities related to the peace process where \$351 million was donated to these and other causes (McKay 2017).

² O'Brien's comments centred partly on the fact that it was *foreign* money at play, and in doing so, she seemed to be raising the spectre that national sovereignty was under threat. But her article also targets privately funded organisations perceived to be operating in opaque and unaccountable ways, and it is these aspects of her critique that I am concerned with in this article.

concerns.³ Specifically, I wish to unpack whether philanthropic resources should be used by egalitarian movements in the struggle for a more just world and, if so, on what grounds. By egalitarian movements, I mean groups engaged in collective action against oppression, including, but obviously not limited to, the inter-locking systems of capitalism, patriarchy, and racism. By philanthropy, I am referring to planned giving by wealthy people for public causes that is typically institutionalised in foundations or other organisational forms. Crowdsourcing,⁴ charitable giving by ‘ordinary’ people, and donations to political parties or candidates are excluded. My analysis is grounded in a radical conception of equality, that is to say, by a commitment to emancipatory politics in which the social structures which generate inequality and stymie human flourishing are transformed (Baker et al. 2009; Fraser and Jaeggi 2018; Wright 2010). But, as I will explore, it is precisely such commitments which render the role of philanthropy in activism so contested.

The article proceeds as follows. Having established some context, I set out the egalitarian case against philanthropy. Then, drawing primarily on the work of Wright (2010), but also on developments in the political theory of philanthropy, I develop a strategic case for the selective use of philanthropy as a contingent and time-bound response to a deeply unequal world. I then detail conditions and strategies that movements should adopt if they seek or accept philanthropic funding, drawing especially on the theorisation of political and affective equality developed by Baker et al. (2009). I argue for a *critical literacy*⁵ around philanthropy that is attuned to its unjust origins and undemocratic nature, as well as the risks it can pose to transformative goals and egalitarian organising. The paper’s chief contribution is to integrate normative insights with lessons from the sociological literature on philanthropy, for the sake of systematically untangling a live and troublesome issue within the everyday praxis of radical movements.

³ I am aware of, and sympathetic to, arguments which problematise the push for gay marriage on the basis that it normalises a conservative institution and privileges one form of household or relationship (Dugan 2008). In Ireland, the ‘yes’ campaign was dominated by personal stories of familial love, pride, and regret, and of the pain of homophobia. The vote became as much, if not more, about the equal recognition of gay, lesbian, and bisexual people generally, than the legal right to marry. So, while it should by no means be viewed as the last word on LGBTQ+equality, and while having to ‘ask’ fellow citizens for the same rights was rightly regarded as an indignity by many, in this context, the referendum’s outcome, on a number of counts, can be regarded as an advance for egalitarianism.

⁴ Questions concerning the role of crowdsourcing in democratic societies are worthy of exploration, but its features are quite different to the kind of philanthropy featured in this paper. Crowdsourcing typically involves relatively small sums of money from a large group of people. In principle, therefore, it provides a channel for ordinary citizens to meaningfully influence the policy process, rather than a means to further empower the wealthy, which is my chief concern here.

⁵ I have borrowed this framing from Fergal Finnegan.

Context

While the rise⁶ in philanthropic giving since the turn of the 21st century, and the corresponding expansion of philanthropic involvement in public policy,⁷ have attracted significant scholarly and popular attention (e.g. Alexander et al. 2021; McGoey et al. 2018; Reich et al. 2016), philanthropic intervention in public affairs is by no means new. Nor are anxieties about its democratic consequences, particularly in the US where foundations have been a prominent feature of public life since the early 1900s. Sievers (2010, p. 384) notes, for example, that over the course of the 20th century, there were ‘periodic eruptions of concern about the role of unaccountable private wealth as exercised through private philanthropy’. What does seem novel about current trends, however, is the diversity of institutional forms which philanthropy now takes, the complexity of the networks in which philanthropy is often embedded (Callahan 2018; Salamon 2014), and, critically, the political and economic climate in which it operates (Horvath and Powell 2016). Contemporary philanthropy is asserting its political clout at a time when faith in private actors’ ability to manage or solve social problems has risen, while the legitimacy and capacity of the social or redistributive state have diminished (Horvath and Powell 2016). Thus, the ‘eruptions of concern’ documented by Sievers are far more muted in contemporary mainstream politics (Horvath and Powell 2016); in fact, in the US (Toepler 2018a), but also in countries such as Australia (McGregor-Lowndes and Williamson 2018), Ireland (Forum on Philanthropy and Fundraising 2012), the UK (Daly 2011), and Russia (Jakobson 2018), governments are promoting and collaborating with philanthropy to an unprecedented degree. Crucially, philanthropy’s growing involvement in public policy has happened during an era of profound political and economic inequality, when democratic decision-making has become increasingly subordinate to the interests of capital (Crouch 2004; Gilens and Page 2014). When US liberals call for wealthy progressives to sponsor the fight against big money in politics (Penniman and Simmons 2013), or to pool resources to reverse the policy gains made by the Right (Democracy Alliance n.d.), it is both a rallying cry to save democracy and a symptom of its deeper malaise. Relatedly, in the US and elsewhere, the expansion in philanthropic giving has occurred at a time of marked popular alienation from the institutions of liberal democracy and of emboldened authoritarian politics (Brown 2019)—a politics which, paradoxically, attacks the unaccountable power of mega-philanthropists such as George Soros to bolster its own anti-democratic agendas

⁶ The size, history, and development of philanthropy of course vary significantly by country and region. But there is clear evidence of upward trends across several countries, most dramatically in the United States. Toepler (2018b) notes that in the US, there were 30,000 foundations and \$9 billion in grants in the early 1990s. This grew to approximately 90,000 foundations and \$50 billion in grants by 2017. Of the approximately 19,000 philanthropic foundations in Germany, 54% have been established since 2000 (Anheier et al. 2018). In Sweden, 1660 new foundations with assets totalling €1.3 billion were established between 2002 and 2012 bringing the total number of foundations in 2012 to 14,500 (an increase of 13%) (Wjkström and Einarsson 2018).

⁷ One indication of contemporary philanthropists’ engagement in public policy is Goss’s (2016, p. 445) analysis of 194 major US philanthropists which found that 53% had ‘serious policy interests’ in such areas as public-school reform, civil rights, climate change, and gun regulation.

(Mudde 2019). Such a context makes questions concerning the role of philanthropic organisations in contemporary democracies all the more pressing.

Philanthropy and Egalitarian Ideals

Evaluating philanthropy's role in egalitarian change raises at least two, overarching normative questions. The first is whether it is *unobjectionable* on grounds of equality. For reasons outlined below, the answer to this question must be no. The second question is whether, despite the strong egalitarian arguments against it, it might be justifiable to use philanthropy to address some of the economic, political, cultural, and affective inequalities which characterise contemporary societies. I think the answer to this is a conditional yes, and the bulk of this article is devoted to elaborating upon, and defending, this position.

With respect to the first question, I begin from the premise that philanthropy violates egalitarian ideals in very significant ways. Philanthropy arises from, and helps to legitimate, inequalities inherent in the capitalist system: inequalities of wealth and income, of control over the productive process, of the esteem and rewards attached to different forms of work, and the subordination of caring and solidary relations (Baker et al. 2009; Fraser and Jaeggi 2018; McGoey et al. 2018; Wright 2010).⁸ Philanthropy is also objectionable politically. It gives donors the power to make decisions about issues of public policy, decisions which typically exclude the voices of those affected by them (MacKenzie 2021). Even where those affected are included, it still gives the donors much more influence than other citizens (Cordelli 2016; Pevnick 2016; Saunders-Hastings 2022). Moreover, because these decisions are not based within the democratic state, they are not part of a coherent public strategy that can compensate for their unjust effects (Cordelli 2016). Nor can they be rescinded by democratic decision. MacKenzie (2021) points out that philanthropy violates the democratic principle of provisionality, that is, the right of political communities to revise or revoke collectively binding decisions. This is so because the founders of philanthropic organisations are permitted to impose restrictions on how their money is spent into the future, even after they have died. From a republican perspective, philanthropy is also objectionable as a form of arbitrary power because donors can give or withdraw their money at will without the need to track the interests of those affected (MacKenzie 2021). Finally, philanthropy works to undermine relations of equal respect and solidarity. The resource inequalities upon which philanthropy depends generate differences in status that are incompatible with the idea of equal citizenship (Cordelli

⁸ As indicated in the Introduction, this article is premised on a radical conception of equality, what has been usefully called equality of 'condition' (Tawney 1964; Baker et al. 2009). In this respect, it adopts a broadly anti-capitalist stance. However, philanthropy is problematic also from a liberal egalitarian perspective. Even if liberal egalitarians accept some of the inequalities inherent to capitalism, they certainly want a far more regulated, socially just economic system than the one that currently predominates, and from which contemporary philanthropists have benefited. Moreover, as the discussion in this section shows, philanthropy violates some basic liberal democratic principles, and so is objectionable on both liberal and radical egalitarian grounds. Following from this, many of the conditions set out in the second part of the paper, with the probable exception of some of those in the 'goals' section', are relevant to egalitarian movements who do not adopt a fully anti-capitalist position, though they speak especially to movements in radical traditions.

2016; Pevnick 2016). Philanthropy reduces citizens to supplicants, particularly when it is responsible for the provision of basic services (Cordelli 2016). Further, as argued by Beerholm (2016, p. 225), philanthropy erodes democratic solidarity by supplanting citizens' obligations to jointly provide for the welfare of others, an obligation that can only be served via 'our shared political institutions'.

The objections just outlined provide a valuable yardstick for evaluating the extent to which philanthropy falls short of egalitarian ideals (see Valentini 2012). The problem is that, in and of themselves, they are inconclusive for deciding what to do in a complex, unjust world. For instance, on the face of it, constricting philanthropy's involvement in public life offers one way of addressing its undemocratic character. However, as Saunders-Hastings (2022, pp. 82–83) points out, such a move could shore up democratic inequalities in contexts where political institutions are already captured by the interests of the rich. She argues that 'the more that public institutions suffer from defects in their democratic legitimacy, the less we may trust them to regulate and restrict philanthropy for democratic purposes'. Drawing on the example of climate advocacy, she notes that, 'restricting (only) elite philanthropic influence without addressing industry influence over elected officials might amount to unilateral disarmament rather than the assertion of democratic control'. In approaching the question of elite philanthropy, she insists, we must consider 'the broader ecosystem of influence'. By the same token, I would like to suggest that, taken alone, the objections previously outlined are insufficient in guiding difficult strategic and tactical decisions faced by movements that are committed to emancipatory social change, but that may struggle to sustain their activities in contexts where other sources of financial support are unavailable, insufficient, or hostile to their aims. As Robeyns (2008, p. 352) observes, 'the road from ideal principles to effective justice-enhancing action is long and potentially thorny'.

Accordingly, I want to shift the focus to the second overarching question mentioned above, namely whether philanthropic money can legitimately be put to work in the transition to a more equal society. I would like to suggest that the answer to this question is a cautious and conditional yes. Unquestionably, there are activists who will balk at this stance, owing to normative objections of the sort outlined above, or because of a commitment to autonomous politics, or due to bitter experiences of how philanthropic-movement relations can play out in practice—the literature abounds with stories of co-optation, control, and funder caution (e.g. Browne 2010; Francis 2019; Kohl-Arenas 2016). I share a clear affinity with such perspectives (McCrea and Finnegan 2019), but I think that there may be scope to move the debate forward. For one thing, anti-egalitarians have made flagrant use of foundations to successfully advance their interests (Callahan 1999; 2018; Hertel-Fernandez et al. 2018; Mayer 2016). Contemporary egalitarianism, by contrast, is institutionally weak (Fraser and Jaeggi, 2018). And, despite individual movement successes, and pockets of socialist experimentation (Guinan and O'Neill 2020; Wainwright 2018), the overlapping problems that we collectively face—from the climate crisis to racial injustice—remain daunting in their scale and urgency. While it is true that working together to independently resource our movements can be a source of conviviality, learning, and solidarity—a form of praxis in itself (Guilloud and Cordery 2007; Souza 2019)—the cost of autonomous fundraising, and of being resource-poor more generally, should

not be underestimated. The myriad tasks required of successful movements demand time, energy, and emotional resilience. Undertaking this work with little money can be an immense drain on activist commitment.

The suggestion here is not that egalitarians should emulate all of the tactics and strategies of their opponents. Nor that they should rush headlong into philanthropy's problematic embrace. Instead, my goal is to contribute to radical praxis by reflecting on the tensions and trade-offs that movements face should they accept philanthropic funding, and, in the complex and non-ideal societies in which we live, to identify strategies at their disposal to minimise them. To begin, I turn to the theoretical resources advanced by Erik Olin Wright whose work on 'real utopias' (2010) seeks to build real egalitarian change in the here and now, but in a way that holds fast to transformative political goals. In this respect, it offers a valuable starting point for delineating the normative parameters within which philanthropic support might be considered.

A Strategic Case for (some) Philanthropy: Insights from Erik Olin Wright

In *Envisaging Real Utopias* (2010), Erik Olin Wright sets out a careful diagnosis and critique of the harms caused by capitalism, a systematic account of emancipatory alternatives, and a theory of social transformation. A key element of the latter is his analysis of transformative strategy within which he distinguishes between three strategies of emancipatory change. The first of these, *ruptural* change, most closely associated with revolutionary Marxism, is characterised by a full-frontal attack on capital and state, and a sharp, system-wide break with existing social institutions and structures. Wright is sceptical of the feasibility of such a strategy in the current historical juncture, but he also points to its moral constraints arising from the harms (e.g. the effects of economic dislocation) that would likely follow in its wake. Importantly, though, while he distrusts a totalising idea of rupture, he regards as essential 'the logic of rupture', and, in particular, its 'conception of struggle as challenge and confrontation, involving victories and defeats, rather than just collaborative problem-solving' (p. 371).

He contrasts rupture with *metamorphosis* within which the space for new forms of social empowerment is enlarged and the dominance of capitalism and other systems of oppression is eroded. Social empowerment is a vision of radical democracy; it is the concept Wright uses to refer to the subordination of state and economic power to collective control. The two approaches to metamorphosis he describes are *interstitial* and *symbiotic* strategies of transformation. The former, most associated with anarchist politics, seeks to build alternative, egalitarian social relationships within 'the shell of the old', i.e. within dominant power structures. He regards this as a feasible and desirable means of extending social empowerment but sees it also as insufficient in virtue of its distrustful view of the state. For this reason, for Wright, a theory of transformation must also incorporate what he terms *symbiotic* strategies, within which social empowerment facilitates problem-solving that also serves the interests of dominant groups. He argues that episodic opportunities arise for significant challenges to 'the institutionally imposed limits of possibilities' within capitalist democracies: '[w]hen these institutional limits of possibilities block the exit options

for powerful elites and open up empowered forms of popular participation, then collaborative problem-solving experimentalism can become a real possibility for movements in the direction of democratic egalitarianism' (p. 364). The classic example of this strategy, as Wright outlines, was the post-World War II pact between labour and capital. Gilabert and O'Neill (2019, n.p.) offer some contemporary possibilities, such as the imperative for massive state investment in public goods in the face of climate breakdown, and in response to automation. The latter, they write, threatens both the social and economic security of workers, and the rate of corporate profits due to the drop in consumer demand it may entail. If resultant state policy decouples economic security from people's position in the labour market, conditions for the growth of social power from below could be enhanced, thereby 'expand[ing] knowledge about the workability of egalitarian, democratic, and solidaristic forms of economic activity, and strengthen the motivation to extend their scope'.

In considering whether philanthropy can play a role in expanding social empowerment, it is worth highlighting Wright's conception of social systems as 'ecosystems', rather than coherent organisms (Wright 2018), and economic structures as hybrids. Thus, to say, for example, that a society is capitalist is to say that it is dominated, but not completely defined, by capitalist power. This is significant because it means that 'emancipatory transformation should not be viewed mainly as a binary shift from one system to another, but rather as a shift in the configuration of the power relations that constitute a hybrid' (Wright 2010, p. 367). This perspective helps us to move beyond potentially paralysing or divisive reform/transformation dichotomies. With respect to my purposes here, it suggests that, absent a ruptural change which would eliminate, or drastically weaken, the bases of philanthropic wealth, movements can justifiably use philanthropic money so long as it pushes existing configurations of power in more egalitarian directions.

Different but nonetheless complementary arguments have been advanced within the growing literature on the political theory of philanthropy. In a brief intervention on the topic, Robeyns (2019, p. 1176) suggests that philanthropists should use their plutocratic power to resource disruptive citizens demanding drastic action on the climate emergency and other 'wicked' problems that, due to their in-built short-termism, 'our democratic institutions, as we currently know them, are structurally unable to address'. From a Rawlsian perspective, Cordelli (2016) contends that in contemporary unequal societies without systems of fair taxation, a duty of distributive justice requires that citizens push for more just political institutions, including giving to advocacy organisations campaigning for such outcomes. Significantly, this is the only ground upon which she believes that philanthropic giving can be regarded as distributively just. Cordelli (2016, 2020) insists that philanthropic support for justice-required goods such as health and education must be regarded as a duty of *reparative* justice, that is to say, a mechanism through which a particular harm to the poor can be at least partially repaired. The harm to which she refers is that caused by the removal or inadequacy of public goods, a harm for which the rich are liable, and which leaves the poor in an unfree state, understood in a Kantian sense as a state of undue dependence (Cordelli 2020).

What is notable about Cordelli's intervention is its time-bound, contingent justification for philanthropy. She frames the reparative duty to fund collectively required

goods as provisional, in both a temporal and normative sense. It is temporally provisional, in that its ultimate goal should be the transition to public provision where ‘philanthropy is no longer needed as a means to return to others what is rightfully their own’ (2020, p. 239). And it is normatively provisional because of its inherent contradiction: absent just political institutions, the freedom of the poor both relies upon, and is incompatible with, philanthropically supported social goods.

The case for philanthropic-movement alliances is also provisional, and in the next two sections I sketch out what this means in more concrete terms by outlining the conditions which should attach to the pursuit or acceptance of philanthropic money. In doing so, I would like to suggest that movements need to cultivate a critical literacy around philanthropy, one that combines an openness to experimentation with a clear-eyed sense of its significant risks. Two broad areas of praxis require particular care and attention. Firstly, movements must reflect on, deliberately articulate, and actively defend their transformative vision, clarifying in the process the tactical place of philanthropy within this. Secondly, they must preserve egalitarian modes of organising in the face of funder conditionalities, and in the face of practices and norms which undermine participatory ideals and threaten relations of care and solidarity. In addition to justifying these conditions, I share several insights from the sociological literature that are relevant to building the critical literacy that I advocate.

Philanthropy, Movements, and Transformative Goals

I ask of projects of social transformation within capitalism whether or not they *point beyond capitalism* because of a desire to eventually move beyond capitalism, but not because this implies these projects only acquire their values and improve the conditions of life of people once capitalism is transcended. (Wright 2012, p. 399, my emphasis)

This statement by Wright on the place of emancipatory values within his thinking hints at a key point of tension between two broad views of social change within and across progressive movements. One, crudely speaking, regards politics as being primarily concerned with specific issues or ‘wins’ in the here and now. Another embraces a conception of politics in which inter-connected struggles are situated within a wider project of emancipation (e.g. Baker et al. 2009; Cox 2018; Fraser and Jaeggi 2018). Within this latter vision of change, a particular reform—changing a Constitutional provision to allow same-sex marriage for instance—is pursued for its immediate value in recognising gay people’s lives and in naming the harm caused by their exclusion and denigration. But it is also pursued in order to deepen democratic relationships, forge solidarities, and enlarge the prospects for transformation over time.

For those in the first of these ‘camps’, philanthropy’s involvement in egalitarian reform is unlikely to be problematic. However, and as I have earlier implied, those who espouse the second view, and who avail of philanthropy to advance their aims, must walk a particularly difficult tightrope. They face the risk of normalising philanthropy as just another ‘partner’ in the process of social change, thereby obscuring its

unjust origins and the democratic problems inherent in it, and contributing to a movement landscape in which wider emancipatory goals seem less credible. To attenuate this risk, organisations must clearly, consistently, and deliberately articulate their transformative commitments—including the goal of transforming the economic system upon which philanthropy's existence depends. In tandem with this, they must clarify and articulate the role of philanthropy in their work, that is to say, as a tactical, contingent response to an unjust world. Robotically pursuing philanthropy as an end in itself must be avoided; instead, it should be dispensed with when no longer needed, or when other opportunities arise. Furthermore, and though it should not be a condition of accepting money given time and other constraints, there is scope for funded organisations to promote more broadly a critical literacy around philanthropy. This can be achieved by, for instance, sharing, or hosting discussions on, the by now large critical literature on philanthropy that has been written for both academic and non-academic readers (e.g. Callahan 2018 ; Edwards 2010; Giridharadas 2020; McGoey 2016).

One possible objection to the set of conditions just outlined is that critiquing philanthropy and the economic system upon which it relies, might alienate funders altogether. This is certainly a risk, but there is also evidence to indicate that it is not an inevitable outcome (e.g. McCrea 2016). More fundamentally, I think that diluting this condition on the basis that it may threaten organisations' current or future financial support brings us into unwelcome territory: economic injustices are central to contemporary egalitarian struggles, and it is difficult to challenge inequality if we do not name its generative causes. This form of self-censorship would also shore up the political inequalities between philanthropy and movement organisations that I discuss later in this paper.

In protecting their egalitarian commitments, there is much that organisations can learn from the extensive literature on movement co-option. One lesson from this is that philanthropic power is not typically exerted through what Kohl-Arenas (2016, p. 12) calls 'clear capitalist agendas or unified grand visions'. Rather, she explains, it is 'a piecemeal process of adapting, negotiating, and eventually incorporating and neutralizing the leadership and strategies of radical social movements at different historical junctures'. This can occur, for instance, through the application of ostensibly neutral managerial frameworks which can channel or contain political activities (e.g. Mueller-Hirth 2012), or through the normalisation of discourses that obscure the structural bases of oppression (e.g. Kohl-Arenas 2016; Trimble 2021). Awareness of the often stealth-like nature of co-option, allied with regular reflection on, and articulation of, transformative goals mentioned above, may lessen the chance that organisations will modify their aims to satisfy donor priorities. It may also leave them better equipped to navigate funding relationships, identifying and taking advantage of times when movement goals either align with those of foundation executives (e.g. Ostrander 1995) or intersect to a degree sufficient to secure meaningful wins (e.g. McCrea 2016).

Philanthropy and Egalitarian Organising

In this section, I attempt to justify several conditions that organisations should observe with respect to how they organise if they seek or accept philanthropic funding. This is important because *how* we do politics is bound up with the human flourishing to which egalitarians aspire, but also because the sociological literature has demonstrated that movement modes of organising can be significantly impacted by philanthropic intervention. This impact is especially evident with respect to funder conditionalities, participatory norms, and relations of care and solidarity. In what follows, I therefore focus my analysis on political equality and affective equality, as conceived by Baker et al. (2009).

Political Equality

Earlier in this article, I outlined the various ways in which philanthropy undermines democratic relationships. Here I want to dig a little deeper into some of the political inequalities associated with philanthropy as they relate to organising. In doing so, I draw on the conceptualisation of political equality developed by Baker et al. (2009) which is multi-dimensional and therefore broader in scope than that employed by other political theorists (e.g. Brighouse 1996; Dahl 2006). For Baker et al., political equality refers not only to equality of power or influence (though this is of course primary) but also to four other dimensions of equality, namely resources; respect and recognition; working and learning; and love, care, and solidarity. The point here is not just that political (in)equality is linked with or caused by these other dimensions—such that, for example, greater access to material resources can lead to greater political power. Rather it is to say that political equality is partly *constituted* by these dimensions. This is because they each contain politically relevant sets of relationships that impinge upon an individual's or group's capacity to participate in political decisions. Thus, political participation and influence are both enabled by, and facilitate access to, politically relevant resources (e.g. finances, social networks), to the respect and recognition which can accrue through political engagement, to politically relevant learning, or to relations of care and solidarity nurtured through political activity (Baker 2005; Baker et al. 2009).

Several political theorists have highlighted ways in which the political inequalities inherent in philanthropy can be tempered. Chief among these has been the call for the inclusion of affected communities or recipients in philanthropic decision-making (Cordelli 2020; Saunders-Hastings 2022; Sievers 2010). A particularly detailed picture of what institutional forms democratised philanthropy could take has been developed by MacKenzie (2021), who models his ideas on the participatory budgeting process pioneered in Porto Alegre, Brazil; indeed, Porto Alegre is one of the cases Wright offers in his book as an example of 'empowered participatory governance'.⁹ As Saunders-Hastings (2022, p. 89) points out, participatory grant-making does not solve the democratic problem of philanthropy—philanthropists remain free to choose which causes or communities to support—but it does challenge 'the entitlement to

⁹ For a contrary view on Wright's framing of the emancipatory potential of Porto Alegre see Panitch 2020.

control'.¹⁰ Assuming that there is a genuine transfer of power, it also has epistemic value, bringing to the fore new forms of knowledge and creativity and empowering people who know best about their own lives (Young 2000), while offering opportunities for acquiring the politically relevant resources, learning, recognition, and relations of care previously mentioned.

For these reasons, faced with the option of support from a democratically organised philanthropic organisation, and one governed along conventional hierarchical lines, the egalitarian case for choosing the former scarcely needs to be laboured. Nonetheless, despite some notable exceptions (e.g. Barrett Cox 2021; Ostrander 1995), participatory models of grant-making remain relatively rare. It strikes me, therefore, that until such approaches become widespread, movement acceptance of philanthropic funding should not hinge on this condition. What does seem non-negotiable is that recipients use whatever agency they have to agitate for greater political equality in philanthropic relationships. And they must, of course, organise their own work in a politically egalitarian way. This is critical if movement organisations are to offset the political advantages conferred upon them via philanthropic investment, if they are to resist reproducing the political inequalities they claim to oppose, and if they are to build social power.

What does this mean in practice? For starters, where possible, recipients of philanthropic donations should try to push funders towards more participatory forms of grant-making. They should also speak up when foundation executives *qua* representatives of private wealth engage directly with policy-makers. Crucially, organisations should commit to collectively resisting the direct or indirect imposition of conditions by philanthropic funders. Such conditions take various forms, but may involve insistence upon, or preference for, performance-based management (discussed more below), and direct donor involvement in NGO governance structures (Ostrander 2007). It can also involve incentivising particular policy goals, or prioritising and rewarding elite forms of advocacy that privilege credentialised knowledge and exclude wider constituencies (Lang 2013). It is worth noting here that funders (and their recipients) cannot delimit their influence in this regard. Owing to what DiMaggio and Powell (1983) call 'normative isomorphism', a process that arises through the interaction and interchange of professionals, even NGOs not directly funded by philanthropy may adopt these donor-driven norms.

Challenging funding conditionalities is important in order to reject the inherent paternalism at play here—a paternalism that is contrary to equality of political influence but also to equality of respect for other people's status as equals with the right to

¹⁰ An exception to this is Cordelli (2016, 2020), who argues against donor discretion because, without just institutions, what the rich give is not in fact their own. She also argues that funding for time-sensitive, justice-required goods must be prioritised. I agree with Cordelli that philanthropic allocations should be democratically determined, but that does leave us with the problem identified by Saunders-Hastings about how this would work where democratic institutions are themselves complicit with the inequalities from which wealthy donors have benefited (see Saunders-Hastings 2022, Chap. 10, note 16). Notably, Cordelli's (2020, p. 254) theory has implications for why we should democratise philanthropy. She advocates for the inclusion of disadvantaged communities in philanthropic decision-making and for giving community representatives a veto on foundations' programmes within their community, but argues that recipients' preferences should not determine the broad goal of philanthropy which should remain bringing the worst-off above a threshold of sufficiency.

make decisions over matters which affect them (MacKenzie 2021; Saunders-Hastings 2022). As Saunders-Hastings (2022, p. 97) writes, paternalism contains ‘the explicit or implied judgment that an agent is deficient or inferior in her ability to choose or act well on her own behalf’ and so philanthropic conditionalities are often ‘shaped by negative judgments about the recipients’ ability to use open-ended gifts or resources wisely’. It is also important to contest conditional funding in order to protect an ideal of civil society, however imperfect, as a *public* sphere in which citizens are free to associate, deliberate, organise, and dissent as they see fit.

In all of this, movement organisations must reckon with the hard lessons of funding-driven ‘ngoisation’, a process in which organisations come to occupy the position of ‘proxy publics’, substituting for genuine citizen participation, mediating citizens’ access to policy makers and reducing the democratic role of NGOs to that of any other lobby group (Lang 2013). Accordingly, instead of concentrating decision-making power and campaigning activities in a cadre of managerial and policy professionals, funded organisations should be democratically organised. Organisations must be inclusive of disempowered social groups, at best organised and led by some of their members. They must also, following the multi-dimensional conception of political equality outlined above, reject a division of labour that limits the practice of interesting or ‘important’ political work, and the learning that can ensue, to any one person or group within the organisation (Baker et al. 2009). Organisations must distribute within the wider movement opportunities for political education that are enabled by philanthropic money and, wherever possible, commit to participatory forms of knowledge production. The latter does not preclude the organisation undertaking or commissioning expert-led research or policy analysis that does not involve deep participation, but results should at a minimum be discussed and reviewed by members and/or wider constituencies. Politically relevant resources acquired or consolidated through philanthropic investment should also be shared within the movement. This includes, where possible, financial resources, but extends also to intellectual resources (such as legal knowledge), cultural resources (such as public communications expertise), or access to politically advantageous social networks.

In addition, organisations should develop systems of accountability both to the constituencies whose interests they seek to advance, and to the wider citizenry (Lang 2013). They should establish fora in which members of the public can learn about and, where appropriate, influence the organisation’s work, but also gain information and raise concerns about the role of philanthropy. Finally, because movement building should take precedence over institution building, funded organisations should cease their relationship with philanthropy if collective goals can be better secured by resourcing other groups.

Affective Equality

A second set of conditions with respect to organising relates to the need for funded organisations to sustain caring and solidary relations, both internally and with other activist groups. Care and solidarity are fundamental egalitarian concerns. They form part of what Baker et al. (2009) have termed, the affective system, that is, the structural system of social relations concerned with providing and maintaining

relationships of love, care, and solidarity, a system which is interwoven with—but autonomous from—the political, cultural, and economic systems (Baker et al. 2009). Affective equality has both distributional and relational aspects, though it is the latter aspect that is most relevant to my concerns here.¹¹ An affective egalitarian perspective regards love, care, and solidarity as core to human flourishing and seeks to transform social structures or practices which inhibit people's capacity to experience such relationships. Care and solidarity are understood here as a being on a spectrum. They each represent relations of mutual concern, co-operation, and inter-dependence, but solidarity is a 'tertiary care sphere that is more collective in form [than love and care]' (Lynch et al. 2009, p. 47).

The desire for, and acceptance of, philanthropic funding can undermine care and solidarity within and across movement organisations by fostering or exacerbating competitive relations. For example, some philanthropists, often with the acquiescence of their recipients, try to build 'high-performing' organisations, and weed out 'weak' players in the 'market' of social change, by encouraging competitive approaches such as branding and mergers or by introducing performance management systems that reward or penalise staff, or the organisation itself, in response to targets and metrics (Grossman et al. 2013; Guilloud and Cordery 2007). At a more basic but related level, competitive relations can arise when organisations are vying for the same limited pot of money. Such trends are problematic because, as stated, care and solidarity are intrinsically valuable, but also because they can block the very collaboration and alliances required to secure egalitarian goals.

The point is not, as any seasoned activist will confirm, that the availability or intervention of philanthropy is the sole cause of intra-organisation/movement competition or division. Rather it is to suggest that funding can worsen these lurking tendencies. Consequently, organisations should consciously commit to caring and solidary relations even if they pursue funding. They must reject outright marketised organisational practices that entrench and legitimate capitalism's competitive logic. They can also neutralise competitive relations by sharing information across the movement about available funding streams, and, where necessary, providing support in completing funding applications, especially to groups with less experience or insider knowledge of such processes. This should happen even if such a move might jeopardise an organisation's own funding success. 'Claiming' a social issue, policy goal, or campaigning approach as one's 'own', as a means of distinguishing the organisation from 'competitors', must be avoided. Related to this, organisations should resist the temptation to claim exclusive credit for specific policy 'wins'. While the skill and hard work of particular individuals and groups should of course be acknowledged, such tactics obscure the reality that most advances for egalitarianism are a complex, collective achievement typically built on the work of generations of activists. They also

¹¹ Affective inequality in a distributional sense refers to inequalities in the doing of love, care, and solidarity work (e.g. the gendered, racialised, and classed nature of care-giving in the global care economy), and inequalities in the receipt of love, care, and solidarity (e.g. inequalities in access to health or elderly care) (Baker et al. 2009; Lynch et al. 2009). This aspect of affective equality therefore involves a commitment to the equal distribution of love, care, and solidarity (e.g. through transformations of working arrangements, prison conditions, gender conditioning, and so forth), as well as of the resources required to sustain them (Baker 2015).

undermine the wider emancipatory project mentioned above, within which individual organisations or ‘sectors’ are regarded as allied, mutually enhancing sites of struggle.

Conclusion

As an egalitarian, approaching the topic of philanthropy, particularly at the current historical juncture, is unsettling. In this article, I have attempted to chart a path through its inevitable dilemmas. I have suggested that, in the absence of a profound anti-capitalist break and a radical project of democratisation, philanthropic power in the here and now cannot be fully ‘solved’. Therefore, in the context of the urgent ecological, political, and economic problems we collectively face, there is a strategic case for movements to use philanthropic money, but only within certain normative parameters. In setting out these parameters, I have advanced certain conditions that movements should observe if they seek or accept philanthropic money, and have done so on the basis that these conditions are not just desirable, but also feasible. I concede that for some activists, they might set the bar too high; for example, in the messy world of activist politics, groups may opt to prioritise one egalitarian principle or strategy over another—submitting, say, to some funder involvement in governance, if it allows the organisation to build power and solidarity in other spheres. But such trade-offs should be an exception rather than the rule, and should be deliberated upon and articulated in a manner which reflects this. This will help distinguish such compromises from an unreflexive, ‘funding-at-all-costs’ approach that risks cementing the political and affective inequalities egalitarians claim to oppose, while leaving progressive causes more vulnerable to attacks of the sort outlined at the outset of this article.

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