

# Philanthropy Transformed: Emerging Change and Changes in Charities\*

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## Abstract

*Addressing the question "whither philanthropy" requires mapping "from whence philanthropy" before exploring emerging issues that could transform philanthropy, charity, and giving. This essay briefly sketches the roots of philanthropy in Western culture, and categorises the range of philanthropic activity that developed to the present. The issues that philanthropy has traditionally addressed are divided into acute (short-term) and chronic (ongoing) projects of amelioration, and acute and chronic projects of creativity. The essay then focusses on the key issue of emerging changes, and how they might impact three key components of philanthropy: philanthropic intent, philanthropic infrastructure, and the issues that philanthropic projects attempt to address. The final sections include a brief thought experiment exploring where emerging issues might take philanthropic activity in future, and suggestions as to possible points of leverage for immediate action.*

**Keywords:** benevolence, charity, giving, philanthropic infrastructure, philanthropy, emerging issues, change

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## Emerging Change: Challenges to Philanthropy

Every morning we confront a world of too many problems armed with too little time and too few resources. We are each bombarded with changes, erupting everywhere and challenging our capacity to create a better world. Those external changes reverberate and transform our interior landscapes as well: our goals and values evolve in response. What we think philanthropy is, and what we expect philanthropy to do, may be very different by the time our grandchildren are our age.

Only six years into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, and we can clearly see four impacts of its emerging technological infrastructure: the acceleration of human transactions; the extension of human reach; the

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blurring of boundaries and the blending of categories; and the demand for participation and co-creation. We have created innovative tools – and toys – and now those tools are re-creating us and our world. How will these changes, and others, affect the intent to give, the infrastructure of giving, and the array of issues to which we direct gifts?

This essay will raise more questions than it offers answers, but then the best answers will be products of a dialogue sparked by changes in our perceptions that such questions evoke. The December 2005 issue of *Alliance*<sup>1</sup> asks, "Whither philanthropy?" This essay also explores that question. It begins, however, by asking, "from whence philanthropy?" Michel Godet (2005), the eminent French futurist, advises that any sound foresight exercise begin by asking "who are we?" before asking "what can happen?" The challenge here is describing a "we" as diverse as the community of philanthropic activity in North America and Europe. But without an inventory of the structure affected, we cannot usefully assess the impacts of the approaching waves of change.

Thus the following pages offer: an outsider's admittedly naïve map of the historical roots and current framework of Western philanthropy; the potential impacts of specific emerging changes on the intent, infrastructures, and target issues of Western philanthropy; brief glimpses of potential longer-term transformations; and some initial suggestions for immediate points of leverage resulting from this bombardment of change.

## From Whence Philanthropy?

What are the roots of philanthropic intention and action? Even a quick inventory of primatology, psychology, and philosophy suggests overlapping foundations for giving. We are primates, and thus social animals. Reciprocity, sharing, fairness, and gratitude, as well as the rejection of inequity, are basic building blocks of community cohesion, as Frans de Waal's (1997) studies comparing primate and human nature illustrate. Among primates, the gift of grooming is the simplest and most vivid example of these behaviors of reciprocity. Mutual grooming serves to connect individuals and to enhance the quality of life for the group as a whole; so too do reciprocal acts of benevolence.

Moving from primatology to psychology, we can also see the roots of philanthropic action in Maslow's (1987) hierarchy of needs. As we progressively meet our own basic needs (physiological needs; security needs; love/belonging needs), our continued contentment and growth requires not only earning the respect of our fellows, but also finding deeper meaning in our lives and actions. Philanthropic behavior may create one path to the ego-transcendence that enables self-actualization in Maslow's framework. If we consider the relationship between individual and community from the perspective of Ken Wilber's (2001) grand synthesis, his "neo-perennial philosophy," then giving, charity, and benevolence offer one resolution to the essential tension between individual and collective, and interior and exterior needs. So philanthropic intent, and its attendant actions, are hardwired into us, address deep psychological needs, and provide one answer to the philosophical and spiritual dilemma of right living.

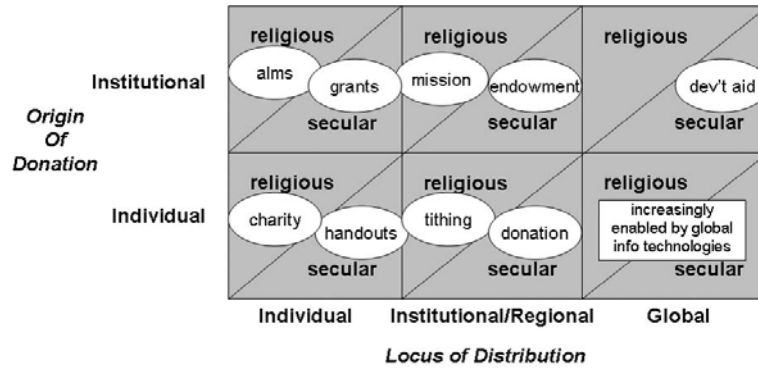


Figure 1. Structure of donation-distribution

With that cartoon sketch of the roots of philanthropic intent, we can turn from "who are we, as givers?" to "how do we give?" The development of the infrastructure for philanthropy follows the evolving complexity of human organization. At first, we offered charity to members of our extended families; then from our family to needy clan members, and then to unfortunates within our tribes and villages. Once our Judeo-Christian religious institutions emerged and began evolving their own complex economies, charitable action acquired a powerful intermediary. We extended the reach of our benevolence by offering tithes to our local church, which could then distribute alms to the deserving beyond our immediate village. Of course, power structures and public institutions were evolving as well, with community associations forming to undertake charitable works, aiming to improve security and stability for the community as a whole by succoring the needy (Cohen, 2003). While we also donated to these secular charities, the potential return on tithing and the subsequent distribution of alms to the poor was higher: redemption and a place in heaven. But that made the underlying motivation less about improving this world than assuring a place in the perfection of the next (it should be noted that while Judaism exhorts believers to charity,<sup>2</sup> it is much less focussed on the afterlife than Christianity).

With the rise of the merchant and then the middle class, a few of us accrued sufficient wealth to create our own charitable institutions. With the proliferation of philanthropic infrastructure, the issues addressed diversified. Beyond merely ameliorating the immediate suffering of the poor, the wealthy among us commissioned scientific and artistic works. Instead of merely offering grants on a project-by-project basis, we endowed universities and art museums. Our governments addressed chronic social needs with ongoing welfare programs and development aid. But whether religious or secular, the giving strategies of our Western philanthropic institutions emerged from an Enlightenment worldview – a worldview powered by the problem-solving paradigms of physics – to create what we might call ballistic philanthropy: specific targets, specific gift payloads, and specific project trajectories, evaluated by observing primary impacts. It is this culture of giving and these infrastructures that emerging changes will transform.

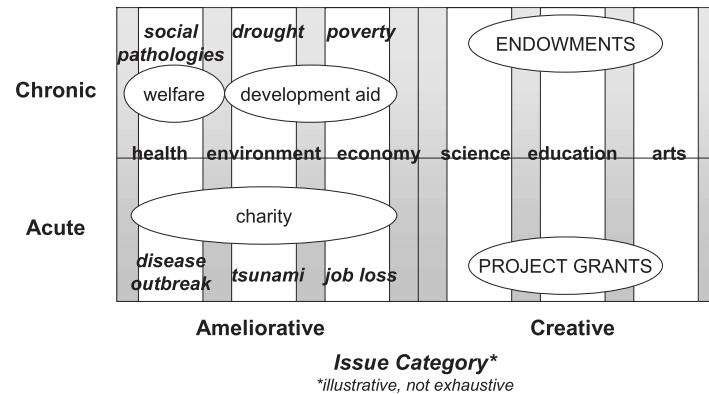


Figure 2. Issue structure

We can usefully sort the issues targeted by our philanthropic efforts into four categories: 1) acute, short-term problems – such as responding to immediate humanitarian needs of the victims of the December 2004 tsunami – that require acute ameliorative action; 2) acute, short-term opportunities – such as supporting further development of a specific invention or sponsoring an art project – that require acute creative support; 3) chronic, long-term problems – often systemic, such as poverty or pollution – that require ongoing ameliorative action; and 4) ongoing creative and generative opportunities – such as supporting basic science research, educational institutions, or arts institutions – that require ongoing creative support.

With that framework in place to organise our discussion of issues, we can now explore the potential impacts of specific emerging changes on the intent, infrastructures, and target issues of philanthropy, and touch on the effects of four broad categories of change – the acceleration of human transactions; the extension of human reach; the blurring of boundaries and the blending of categories; and the demand for participation and co-creation.

## Emerging Change and Philanthropic Intent

### Intent: motivation to give

How are we, the givers, changing? Three variables affect our ability to give, and what form our gifts take: our motivation to give, and the worldview supporting that motivation; the resources we have available to give; and the extent of our networks, the connections we can use to distribute gifts as individuals. Our motivation to give will be affected in future by a variety of changes. The first such change is global: the demographic, economic, and political shift in focus from West to East, and the rise of China and India in both sheer numbers and in economic power. Over the next two generations of philanthropists, the resource base – and the underlying cultural perspective – will shift from the Judeo-Christian West to the Buddhist-Confucian-Hindu-Shinto East (Self, 2005). In addition, Islam will overtake Christianity as the world's dominant religion in this century (Ontario Consultants on Religious Tolerance, 2006).

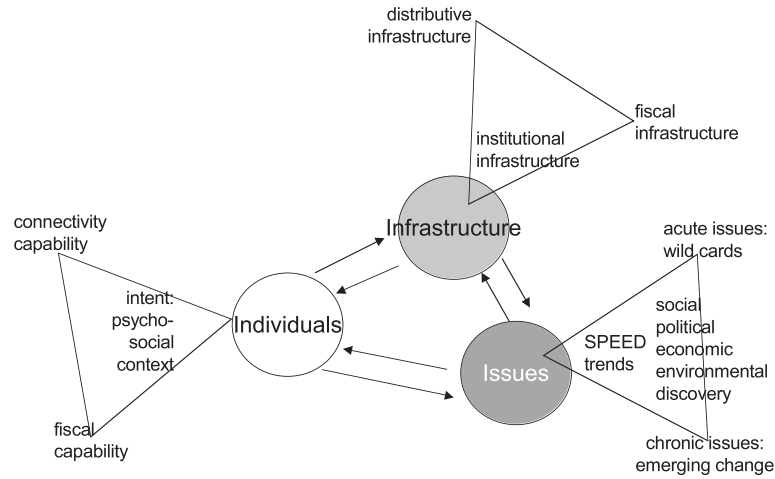


Figure 3. Where emerging change affects philanthropy

Given increases in professional mobility and our increasingly cross-cultural communities, these shifts will not only transform the cultural emphasis of international philanthropy, but also philanthropy within the US.

Each of these religions advocates charity, but differences in focus could change what kind of resources are available, how much is available, what problems are addressed, and how. For example, the Qur'an also exhorts the devout to contribute for the needy, in the form of the *zakat*, an alms tax required of every adult Muslim of adequate means. However, the rate of 2.5 percent is not levied on income, but on the value of all your possessions. How much might that increase the funds available for philanthropy globally? The monies are "for your kin, for orphans, for the needy, for the wayfarer, for those who ask, and for the ransom of slaves," also to support volunteers in *jihad* and pilgrims. As with Christianity, adherence to this devout practice enhances your likelihood of gaining Paradise. Hindu doctrine assumes that one's purpose in life includes paying the five debts, owed respectively to the gods, to parents and teachers, to guests, to other humans, and to all other living beings. The last two are particularly germane to philanthropy, as the debt to other human beings is repaid by treating them with respect, and the debt to all other living beings is repaid by offering good will, food, or any other appropriate help. This could increase a focus on in-kind or barter philanthropy. In Buddhism, the purpose of life is developing compassion for all living beings without discrimination, and to work for their good, happiness, and peace. Charity is taken seriously, and Buddhism has a long history of organizing for charitable purposes.

Finally, the rise of the Chinese economy, and the increase in the number of Chinese millionaires (it is estimated that more than 10,000 people in China have assets in excess of \$10 million (Watts, 2006)), means the influence of a neo-Confucian worldview on the international philanthropic scene. Traditional Confucian ethics stress the duty of successful individuals to give to charity; it is a mechanism to ensure the stability and security of the community, and thus the welfare of all. The virtue of

*ren*, translated variously as compassion, charity, or benevolence, is considered the most important virtue. However, after half a century of the Communist party affirming the state's ability to provide for public welfare, reviving these Confucian values may prove difficult. Furthermore, Confucian notions of who constitutes a worthy recipient could limit charitable scope. Charles Self (2005) comments, "The challenge of Confucian thinking is its narrower focus on the recipients of charity. Many in this tradition see no need to give to the poor who will not work as hard as they do."

In analysing the roots of philanthropic intent earlier, we covered primatological hardwiring, psychological motivations and values, and philosophical and spiritual worldviews. Having described a few trends touching the philosophical and spiritual foundations of philanthropy, we may next consider shifting values. Six seem particularly germane to philanthropy. First, movements like Slow Food<sup>3</sup> indicate an emerging backlash to hyper-consumerism, which is often accompanied by a need to "give back." Second, conditioned by the Amazon.com experience of individually tailored services, people increasingly expect that kind of individual tailoring from all service providers, including government and NGO / GROs. On a related note, they are also increasingly immersed in tailored, interactive environments that they themselves help create. Thus another trend is the rising demand for participation in the design of products and services, in order to exert personal control over the experience. People are coming to expect transparency and accountability from decision-makers, and that expectation underpins growing demands for corporate social responsibility. This could multiply the allies and resources potentially available for philanthropic action, as well as potentially decreasing the number of crisis issues generated by careless industries.

Our interconnected world is also supporting a shift to a more holistic, less reductionist worldview: people are increasingly aware of and acknowledging the complicated interconnections and feedback in the systems around us. This creates an increased awareness that simple solutions are rare: creating change requires sustained support. Finally, citizens are also increasingly acknowledging national governments' inability to address the complex, cross-boundary, multi-disciplinary problems, like global warming, that are often identified as the critical challenges of our time. People are instead looking to international coalitions of non-governmental organizations to address those problems. They are also organizing such initiatives themselves, as did Jody Williams, 1997 Nobel Peace Prize recipient, for her international work to ban land mines.

The last determining characteristic of our habit of giving is our primatological hardwiring. How, you ask, might that change? Two trends could potentially alter that, both emerging from the leading edge of science. Over the next fifty years, genetic therapies will be designed, licensed, and employed, initially for therapeutic reasons. But as familiarity breeds acceptance, we will inevitably redesign ourselves. Second, we are even now seeing the first steps toward the cybernetic human: the neuron-silicon interface has been proven in pilot studies embedding chips in the brains of handicapped users for prosthetic reasons. When we transform ourselves both genetically and by computer augmentation, how will we transform our sociobiological hardwiring? Trans-humanists talk about the "post-human future" – what will philanthropy

mean to post-humans?<sup>4</sup> Will Wi-Fi enabled computer chips embedded in our brains make nonsense of ego-transcendence by submerging our egos in an electronically mediated group mind? How might that redefine *agape*?

**Resources: our capacity to give**

With regard to available resources and our capacity to give, we are seeing impacts not only from demographic shifts, but also from technological impacts on lifestyles. We are getting older but remaining vigorous: this enables a longer working life in which to accrue wealth, but also means we have more energy, vitality, and interest in worthwhile activities post-career. Thus there are two potential benefits for growth in philanthropy: increased discretionary income available for giving as well as the possible increase in in-kind donations of professional expertise, teaching, and other skills. The coming intergenerational wealth transfer may be as high as \$40 trillion, resulting in a possible addition of \$100 billion each year in additional charitable giving (Ambrose, 2005). The potential for increased capacity to contribute in-kind, however, could be amplified not only by the backlash to consumerism mentioned previously, but also by the growth in free time among American workers: over the past four decades, the amount of time Americans can devote to leisure activities has risen between 4-8 hours per week (Aguilar & Hurst, 2006). Thus the interest in contributing to good works will be matched, in our aging population, with the vigor and the time to do so. The concept of seniors working for the Peace Corps and Vista is already established; we could see the equivalent of a Senior CityYear,<sup>5</sup> or given senior interest in travel, more eco-tourism and project tourism. One result could be a burgeoning in "hands on" philanthropy, as people engage in "go, see, do" experiential charity.

**Connectivity: our distributive capability**

Finally, the global information and communications technology has greatly enhanced our capacity to connect with other people and institutions, and distribute charitable resources directly: it has accelerated and extended our reach as individual philanthropists. The public response to the December 2004 tsunami is a startling example. In the United Kingdom, the outpouring of pledges from the population – submitted via their cell phones and the web as well as via mailed checks and in-person cash donations – so far, and so quickly, exceeded the government pledges as to embarrass the Labour government into raising its pledged amount. The appeal campaign's effectiveness was considerably enhanced by its collaborative "one-stop shopping" approach: separate charitable, emergency, and relief organisations work together as the Disasters Emergency Committee<sup>6</sup> to gather funds, raising £5 million overnight, £60 million by the end of the first week, and £300 million (over 500 million dollars) by the end of the campaign.

While a positive example of the way information and communications technology can accelerate individuals' support of philanthropic endeavours, and extend their reach around the world, it is not the best example. Unfortunately, because of the imperfect understanding many Western aid agencies and foundations had of local conditions and cultures, many of those resources were delayed in deployment, deployed in the wrong places, or deployed inappropriately. I can offer a better example of how global infor-

mation and communication technology accelerates and extends the capabilities of the individual as philanthropist from my own experience with the tsunami appeal. Knowing how crucial local knowledge is in crisis response, I looked for the website of the well-regarded Sri Lankan community development organisation, Sarvodaya.<sup>7</sup> They provide links that allow you to donate using either a credit card or PayPal. I was able to transfer money directly to them, and via global news reports could confirm that they were the first agency on the scene in many communities in Sri Lanka, only days after the tsunami hit. We should probably thank eBay for setting up PayPal: the first easily accessible, easily usable, trans-border, multiple currency on-line funds transfer system that enables anyone to be a charity, and anyone to be a donor: the first step towards total philanthropic disintermediation. A long-term result may be person-to-person micro-aid – individuals acting as Grameen Bank and offering small but effective amounts to other individuals.

### Emerging Change and Philanthropic Infrastructure

What changes might challenge the current infrastructure – the organization, administration, regulation, and channels – of philanthropy? The same paradigm shifts in our notions of organization that are currently challenging business. We are moving out of an industrial, Newtonian worldview into a more holistic one. We no longer see our world and the universe as a clockwork mechanism, but as an ecology instead. This shift from the mechanistic to the organic is accompanied by a new perspective on organizational structure. Rather than the top-down, command-and-control approach of a hierarchy, people are applying the self-organising, bottom-up approaches that characterize complex adaptive systems. That in turn shifts us from a deterministic view of change to one of evolution via adaptation to stimulus, and from ownership to open source access in managing intellectual property.

What does that mean for the infrastructure of philanthropy? Let's consider what the infrastructure of philanthropy does. It helps the philanthropist perceive problems; pinpoint people; manage money; and evaluate effectiveness. What issues does it handle well? Clearly defined problems in systems with obvious boundaries. What issues does it handle poorly? Pervasive, trans-disciplinary problems in dynamic systems with diffuse boundaries. Amnesty International, while not precisely a philanthropic foundation, nevertheless illustrates the distinction clearly.<sup>8</sup> They are effective at pinpointing individual prisoners of conscience and freeing them via a targeted media and correspondence campaign. Amnesty wants to broaden its efforts to combat the broader structures of violence and human rights abuse, but is struggling to design strategies effective against a diffuse, systemic problem: it's difficult to identify leverage points.

Unfortunately, humanity faces a plethora of systemic, trans-disciplinary, trans-border problems – and opportunities – with diffuse boundaries. The paradigm shift to adaptive, self-organizing systems could fight fire with fire: make the most of the opportunities offered by new communications networks, advanced computing capabilities, increasingly open international political boundaries and fiscal systems to create more open, flexible, and dynamic strategies to address diffuse systemic problems and opportunities. This does open the door to extreme "disintermediation:" the obsoles-



cence of historical infrastructure as a result of people managing services themselves online. Travel has been radically transformed by *Travelocity.com* and *Expedia*; real estate faces a similar transformation from *Realtor.com* and now *Zillow.com*; lending from *Zopa.com*. What new functions could foundations perform in a future where philanthropic logistics are increasingly online, automated, and disintermediated?

The innovations in information and communication technology contributing to this paradigm shift will also accelerate, extend, blur, and enhance participation in philanthropic organizational structures. Processes will *accelerate*: we can identify and notify other people more quickly about emerging problems; we can respond more rapidly to acute crises; and we can gather and distribute resources much more easily, efficiently, and quickly (think PayPal). Our reach will *extend*, in both macro and micro terms: we can share data to an unprecedented extent globally, and RFID "smart dust" monitors (Red Herring, 2004) can enable detailed identification, tracking, and monitoring of environmental, health, and cultural assets, perhaps leading to "watchdog philanthropy."

As philanthropic organizations evolve, they will adapt characteristics of other economic activities; this *blur* creates "venture philanthropy" and "commodity philanthropy". The former encompasses investments in creating businesses with philanthropic provisos regarding profit distribution or re-investment, of which Heifer International's "passing on the gift" approach is a prime example.<sup>9</sup> Heifer International is also an example of commodity philanthropy: creating a donation experience that offers donations as luxury commodities, in which donors can participate in creating a basket of donations which may be given as gifts, and come with appealing stories and illustrations. Oxfam Unwrapped follows a similar strategy, and offers a much broader range of charitable commodities.<sup>10</sup> Giving flocks of geese and ducks has become a Christmas tradition in my family. This is, however, very much about packaging the donation experience, as you find if you contact Heifer International and ask where your geese are going, that you have actually purchased virtual geese, or perhaps the Platonic ideal of geese – a notional flock that will be deployed somewhere, but not a specific flock. Nonetheless, the experience feels more participatory than just writing a check.

Globally networked computers have enabled innovations in organizing and deploying *participatory* philanthropy. The SETI@home project<sup>11</sup> is a model of self-organizing, distributive, in-kind philanthropy. It uses the connectivity of the World-Wide Web coupled with smart software to enable people to register their home computers as nodes in a global computational network: when they aren't using their home computers, the folks in Berkeley who need massive parallel computing power to analyse extensive astronomical datasets are. Imagine what interesting uses this kind of schedule maximizing software might enable of the extra leisure time Americans are acquiring – or of any other resource whose downtime is potentially donatable.

A more radical shift in the infrastructure of philanthropy – the 'technology' of giving and charity – might be from the instrumental, mechanistic, and economic to the metaphorical and moral, the spiritual, and the narrative. If the central goal of philanthropy is nurturing a better future by supporting ameliorative or creative action, then why limit philanthropic activity to mere economic resources and material manipula-

tion? Microvita theory, articulated by P.R. Sarkar, suggests that individuals can engender constructive change within the collective self by directly influencing the smallest building blocks of the universe, microvita. Microvita bridge consciousness and matter; they may be thought of as ideas, mores, perceptions that can propagate throughout the collective consciousness, through networks of social relations, revolutionising perceptions and thus creating open spaces for innovative social action (Bussey, 2008). This suggests a philosophical infrastructure composed more of spontaneous conversation, shared stories and narrative, and learning experiences as conduits to transfer the essence of positive change, in contrast to the foundations, bank accounts, websites, and charity events often the norm today. This meshes elegantly with the paradigms of self-organisation and emergence that are rising even in more material approaches to philanthropy: what microvita re-emphasises is deep re-enchancement of our world, and our place in it and our relations to the collective self, as creating profound leverage for change.

### **Emerging Change and the Targets of Philanthropy**

We do not lack for targets of philanthropy. Given that many of the great historic challenges are with us still – disease, poverty, oppression – it hardly seems necessary to collect more. But obviously with emerging change new problems emerge as well, which often fall through the holes in established public welfare nets. One of the most solidly researched lists of challenges facing humanity's future emerges from the international network of the United Nations University's Millennium Project<sup>12</sup>; this list runs the gamut from global warming to ethical market economies, the status of women, and participatory global decision-making. While extensively documented, and certainly worthy of attention, Millennium Project's challenges derive primarily from the problems of the present and current drivers of change.

Let us extend the discussion of challenges philanthropy might address farther into the future. By looking more closely at the potentially disruptive impacts of emerging change, we can offer an illustrative rather than exhaustive sample of issues, using the acute-chronic, ameliorative-creative framework specified previously. Matching our issue framework with the kinds of change data collected by environmental scanning, we can equate chronic issues with long-term trends, where acute issues, in change terms, are closer to "wild cards": high impact, low probability events which occur unexpectedly and demand quick response.

#### **Chronic targets / existing conditions or long-term trends**

##### *Ameliorative:*

Long-term trends that require ameliorative support arise across the social, technological, environmental, economic, and political categories: the following are examples of emerging changes with potential for strong, long-term impacts. The growth of a generation of AIDs orphans in Africa creates catastrophic problems for long-term human resources, the potential for future conflicts, and indeed the survival of African societies. Moore's Law accelerates turnover in computer-based consumer goods; in five years will our landfills be filled with CRT tvs? Growing damage to the world's

coral reefs could cause massive long-term ecological effects, as coral reefs are not only the home to almost a third of all fish species, they also protect coastlines from erosion. The rapid growth in destination tourism globally, and its use as an economic development strategy, could in the long-run erase the common heritage of mankind, as the impacts of increased traffic erode treasures like Jaisalmer,<sup>13</sup> Borobudur, Nan Madol, and Stonehenge. A critical long-term political trend is the disaffection of voters in established democracies, even as new democratic institutions are created elsewhere.

*Creative:*

Issues that require creative support – that is, support to innovate or create, or maintain society's capacity to do either – center in education, science, and the arts. In education, under-resourcing has created a catastrophic lag in transforming our educational infrastructure from its industrial-era mindset and organization to a resource that addresses the needs of the information age we are in or the age of converging technologies that will rapidly be upon us. In art, expression, and communication we are evolving from a print culture to a new oral culture immersed in graphic images and multi-media; we are moving from linear thinking to non-linear thinking. In both science and the arts, the most riveting breakthroughs occur at the intersection points where disciplines and perspectives collide. That collision causes turbulence, which in turn generates new ideas.

**Acute targets / weak signals or wild cards**

*Ameliorative:*

The possibilities for wild card crises are legion; these examples are often used in policy foresight discussions. The first unambiguous contact with extraterrestrial life occurs; panic ensues. Breakthrough enables commercially viable fusion power. Catastrophic calving of Arctic or Antarctic glaciers, or both, creates sudden sea-level rise, results in coastal flooding worldwide and millions of refugees in the developed as well as the developing world. The global stock market crashes. The UN collapses.

*Creative:*

On the upside, genius represents a classic wild card: physics awaits the birth of the woman who will solve the Theory of Everything, or the man who will unlock the limitations of  $E=mc^2$  and give us faster-than-light drive. More importantly to equity and sustainable economic growth, however, would be a radical energy innovation like table-top fusion. The blurring of lines between nanotechnology, biotechnology, information science and cognitive sciences could smear right across into the arts, and create some startling new artistic medium.

And *blur* really is the critical characteristic when identifying potential target issues for philanthropy: at what point do charities helping the underprivileged with health concerns, and charities providing children at risk with computers, blur into charities guaranteeing children at risk with access to the cybernetic augmentation that the next generation of middle class kids will take for granted? At what point do foundations supporting space exploration, and endowments supporting dance companies, blur into sponsors of micro-gravity performing arts? Or sponsors of GenTerra participatory transgenic DNA performances?<sup>14</sup>

This exploration implies two needs that philanthropic foundations should address in future: embracing inter-disciplinarity as issues increasingly cross neat focus boundaries; and engaging in impact assessment as the precursor to donation in support of creativity, especially innovations. These prospective challenges should provoke assessment of how well equipped philanthropic institutions are to respond to, or support, needs of this nature.

One last word on grand challenges: in my opinion, the meta-challenge for our time, the one challenge which, if met, would aid immeasurably in resolving all the others, is raising the quality and pervasiveness of education in our society and around the world.

### Philanthropy Transformed: Thought Experiments

The previous sections identified emerging changes that could potentially affect the intent, infrastructures, and target issues of philanthropy. As a result, we might see the gentle evolution of charitable activity – or, if a particularly strong wave of change hits with extreme rapidity, we might instead witness more radical transformations. Consider the following list of potential transformations as an exercise in thinking out of the box, challenging your assumptions, and invoking your creativity. For each "new model" offered, consider how you might have to redesign your current activities:

**Old model:** the needy come to us, caps in hand, for assistance, and compete for scarce philanthropic resources.

**New model:** it's a recipient's market – donors bid for the privilege of accruing good karma: "Karmic eBay."

**Old model:** good works get you into Heaven (Judeo-Christian-Islamic worldview).

**New model:** good works improve humanity and the planet, so that you are reincarnated into a heaven on earth (Hindu-Buddhist worldview): "renovating home for our next lives."

**Old model:** the collegiality of charitable and philanthropic foundations.

**New model:** increasingly strident articulation of competing philanthropic visions, with conflicting ideologies creating charitable projects working at cross-purposes, whose actions escalate as media feedback polarizes popular opinion and increases militancy of volunteers: "charity wars."

**Old model:** candidate recipients submit extensive applications;

**New model:** foundations don't wait for applications – they send smart software spiders out to discover relevant causes and projects: "automated philanthropy."

**Old model:** [based on a mechanistic, linear worldview] targeted distribution of funds to specific projects with subsequent evaluation of immediate, localized impacts.

**New model:** [based on an organic, non-linear worldview] scattering micro-donations across a chaotic pattern of recipients, seeding potential for positive change as an emergent property: "tipping point philanthropy."

**Old model:** philanthropic foundations.

**New model:** totally disintermediated philanthropy; foundations unnecessary: "everyone a philanthropist."

**Old model:** the more wealth, the larger the philanthropic project possible.

**New model:** the more vibrant, positive and pervasive the microvita, the more transformative and effective the philanthropic project possible.

**Old model:** philanthropy.

**New models:** philgynopy; philtechnopy; philecopy; phil \* py.

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Would your current activities work in all of these situations? Would they work in any of them? Which offers the most challenges to your current operating assumptions – why? To which situation could you adapt most easily? Do you see any of these as a preferred outcome? Based on your own observations of emerging change, what assumption-reversing possibilities for new models can you identify?

Or ask yourself, what conditions currently necessitate the existence of philanthropic foundations? Logistical necessity – the labour and networks required to collect and distribute gifts? Tax structures? Public policy? What trends and emerging issues of change might overturn these necessities?

### **Immediate Points of Leverage: Acting Now**

We are not yet facing such radical change, although we may in future. Mental preparation is our first best tactic when faced with onrushing waves of change: fine-tuning our ability to perceive the turbulence produced by change in all its complexity. This implies an ability to map systems and locate points where maximum leverage results from minimum input. Donella Meadows (1999), in *Leverage Points: Places to Intervene in a System*, offers a guide to discovering leverage points, but warns that "Leverage points are not intuitive. Or if they are, we intuitively use them backward, systematically worsening whatever problems we are trying to solve." The difficulty often arises because our focus on issues leaves critical parts of the system in which they are embedded outside our field of view. Widening that view not only helps identify leverage points, it enables us to think outside the box, to move beyond addressing symptoms to addressing causes.<sup>15</sup>

Two of the most effective leverage points – but the most difficult to use – are the goals of the system, and, at an even higher conceptual level, the mindset or paradigm out of which the system arises. This is where Sarkar's concept of microvita becomes particularly powerful: it creates a focus on the deep understandings within and among people that enable new perceptions and changed behavior. Fortunately, these are the levels at which philanthropy begins: the goal, or vision, of a better world (Friedman, 2003), which may have been produced by, and certainly may in its turn produce, a paradigm shift. Thus the resources required to affect key leverage points exist; consciously deploying those resources to create leverage would benefit from training in systems thinking. The Donella Meadows Leadership Fellows Program<sup>16</sup> offered by the Sustainability Institute offers a multi-year training model, but even compact one-day, two-day, or week-long training programs would enable philanthropists and staffers to perceive problems and suggest solutions more systemically and creatively.

Recognizing that the vision guiding philanthropic gifts is itself a resource for change implies another strategy: amplify the impacts of philanthropic vision by helping philanthropists find vision allies. Create a vision map of philanthropic institutions worldwide, identifying not only potential partners but also complementary and even

conflicting visions. While similar to the Network for Good,<sup>17</sup> rather than connecting individuals to institutions of interest, a vision mapping project would focus on conceptually linking foundations and charitable institutions to kickstart collaboration. This could help create virtuous feedback circles among foundations working on similar problems and *accelerate* positive change by amplifying the vision message, and also extend its reach across different venues and locales.

*Extend* philanthropic reach by finding vision allies internationally as well as domestically: a second phase of any vision mapping project could link in philanthropic foundations and networks across the globe, promoting a "sister charities" approach analogous to "sister city" relationships. Looking for allies in our philanthropic endeavours beyond our borders – whether those borders are geographic, disciplinary, or spiritual – enhances not only the varieties of leverage we can apply to create positive change, but also our ability to reframe problems and conceive creative solutions by borrowing our allies' cultural filters and perspectives.

Next, *put blur and blending* to use: cross-fertilise complementary visions by blending philanthropic categories. Use art for science's sake, and science for art's; support a graphic installation created to heighten awareness of an environmental campaign – Bruce Mau's Massive Change project provides one model.<sup>18</sup> Extend the reach of the message, the vision of a positive change, via an edgy "viral" campaign: have the artists create a vivid meme to produce a self-propagating message about the issue. Explore multidisciplinary, multi-institutional approaches in tackling complex problems: as the boundaries of issues blur, rendering them more complex to address, strategies must blend the perspectives and expertise of a wide range of foundations to succeed.

Finally, remember that the generation growing up now, and their children, will take for granted immersive, *participatory*, graphically sophisticated environments in which they will be co-designers, co-creators, and co-communicators of the information, stories, and experiences they are trading. They will grow up in the aesthetic economy, the Dream Society, the marketplace of ideas and stories (Dator & Seo, 2004). They will want to participate and tailor their philanthropic experience. Consider, therefore, how you might engage both donors and recipients together in creating foundation missions, strategies, and programs, and also in articulating compelling narratives, stories, and even myths of the future implied by your philanthropic vision. Engage people in creating their own stories of positive change, and by doing so transform their values and worldviews: you will create the change the stories describe.

## Glossary

[All definitions extracted from the Oxford English Dictionary, online.]

**Aid:** 1) Help, assistance, support, succour, relief, and 2) material help given by one country to another, especially economic assistance or material help given by a rich to a poor or underdeveloped country.

**Alms:** Charitable relief of the poor; charity; originally and especially as a religious duty, or good work; const. with *do, make, work*. Afterwards applied especially to the material substance of the relief, and const. with *give, bestow*, etc.

**Charity:** 1) Christian love: a word representing *caritas* of the Vulgate; 2) benevolence to one's neighbours, especially to the poor; the practical beneficences in which this manifests itself; 3) as manifested in action: *spec.* alms-giving – applied also to the public provision for the relief of the poor, which has largely taken the place of the almsgiving of individuals; 4) a bequest, foundation, institution, etc., for the benefit of others, esp. of the poor or helpless. The term, especially under the influence of legislative enactments, such as the statute on charitable uses ... has received a very wide application; in general now including institutions, with all manner of objects, for the help of those who are unable to help themselves, maintained by settled funds or voluntary contributions; the uses and restrictions of the term are however very arbitrary, and vary entirely according to fancy or the supposed needs of the moment; chief among the institutions included are hospitals, asylums, foundations for educational purposes, and for the periodical distribution of alms.

**Donation:** 1) The action or right of bestowing or conferring a benefice; the 'gift'; and 2) the action or contract by which a person transfers the ownership of a thing from himself to another, as a free gift.

**Endowment:** The property or fund with which a society, institution, etc. is endowed.

**Mission:** An establishment for missionary, evangelical, or humanitarian work at home.

**Philanthropy:** Love to mankind; practical benevolence towards men in general; the disposition or active effort to promote the happiness and well-being of one's fellow-men.

**Tithing:** To grant or pay one tenth of (one's goods, earnings, etc.), esp. to the support of the church.

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## Notes

1. The December 2005 issue of *Alliance* is here: <http://www.allavida.org/alliance/dec05a.html> and includes a special section on, "Whither Philanthropy? Looking Forward to 2025," guest edited by Katherine Fulton and Gabriel Kaspar.
2. "In the Jewish tradition, charity—or *tzedakah*—is seen as a means of achieving *tikkun olam* (the repairing or perfecting of the world) and is an integral part of spirituality and good religious practice" (from [http://www.ncfp.org/FGN-Oct\\_2004/UpFront.html](http://www.ncfp.org/FGN-Oct_2004/UpFront.html), "Faith and Family Philanthropy").

3. Information about the Slow Food movement, founded in 1986, is available here: [http://www.slowfood.com/about\\_us/eng/philosophy.lasso](http://www.slowfood.com/about_us/eng/philosophy.lasso) .
4. Information on the post-human future available from the World Transhumanist Association: <http://www.transhumanism.org/index.php/WTA/index/>.
5. Information on City Year is available here: <http://www.cityyear.org/about.aspx> .
6. Data on how quickly they raised the money for disaster relief is documented on their website here: <http://www.dec.org.uk/item/91> .
7. Sarvodaya is online here: <http://www.sarvodaya.org/>.
8. This anecdote gleaned from conversations with staff.
9. Heifer International describes "passing on the gift" here: <http://www.heifer.org/site/c.edJRKQNiFiG/b.201549/>.
10. Oxfam Unwrapped is online here: <http://www.oxfamunwrapped.com/>.
11. SETI@home is found here: <http://setiathome.ssl.berkeley.edu/>.
12. The Millennium Project offers numerous resources on their website at <http://www.acunu.org/>; they also publish their research annually as the *State of the Future* report. The fifteen global challenges are here: <http://www.acunu.org/millennium/challeng.html>.
13. As an example of tourist-based erosion, see this briefing by Jaisalmer in Jeopardy: <http://www.jaisalmer-in-jeopardy.org/aboutjaisalmer.html>.
14. See The Arts Catalyst page explaining a GenTerra performance by the Critical Arts Ensemble, here: <http://www.artscatalyst.org/projects/biotech/genterra.html>.
15. I would like to thank the gentleman who raised this point about philanthropy's unique capacity to think and work outside the box regarding problems and their causes, in asking Steve Case a question during Case's webcast keynote from the Charting a New Direction for Philanthropy Conference, Honolulu, Hawaii, 30 January 2006; it reminded me to highlight this capability of the systems perspective.
16. A description of the program is available at the Sustainability Institute's website here: <http://www.sustainabilityinstitute.org/fellows/#Program>.
17. As mentioned by Steve Case in his keynote to the Charting a New Direction for Philanthropy Conference, Honolulu, Hawaii, 30 January 2006; the Network for Good may be found here: <http://www.networkforgood.org/about/>.
18. The Massive Change website is here: <http://www.massivechange.com/>..

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