

2500 years of philanthropy – what comes next?

The history of philanthropy

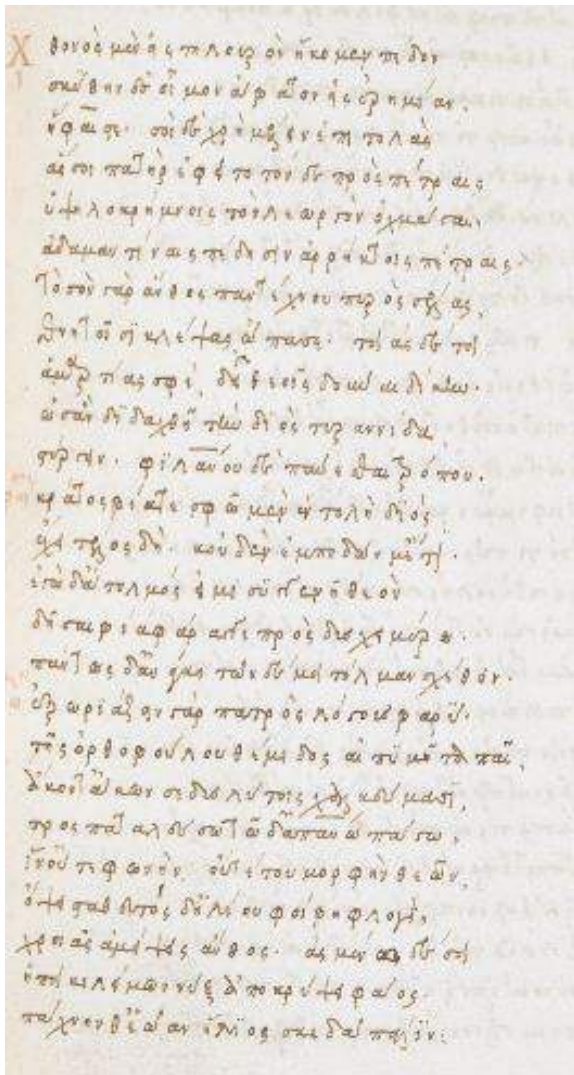
When I make a gift, I give a part of myself. So said the pioneering anthropologist Marcel Mauss who believed all gifts in some way involved sacrifice on the part of the giver. The history of philanthropy shows there is rather more to it than that.

Philanthropy today is commonly taken to mean a rich person giving a large amount of money to a good cause. But over the past two thousand years and more it has been, variously: a matter of honour, a religious commandment, a display of self-aggrandisement, a mechanism of political control, a vehicle for moral activism, an expression of enlightened self-interest, and even a stratagem for the rich to consolidate their power and privilege in society. Sometimes it is more than one thing at the same time.

What a close study of some of the documents lodged in the collection of the British Library shows is that there are two distinct traditions in philanthropy and these emerged early on. My book *Philanthropy – from Aristotle to Zuckerberg* shows that one of these traditions dominated charitable giving for 1000 years. And then there was a dramatic shift and the other tradition gained the ascendancy. To make philanthropy better in today's world we need to restore the balance between the two.

The Greek tradition

The word philanthropy has its origins a couple of hundred years before Aristotle. It first appears, 2500 years ago, as an *adjective* in Aeschylus's play *Prometheus Bound* where it is a term of abuse. Prometheus, the benevolent god, shared divine fire – a symbol of enlightenment and learning – with mere mortals. In doing this he incurred the wrath of Zeus and the other gods. They declared this treacherous action to be 'human-loving' – *phílos*, beloved, and *ánthrōpos*, a human being. Philanthropy was a controversial business from the outset, it seems.



Prometheus Bound, *Prometheus Vincetus*, traditionally attributed to Aeschylus, Burney MS 106, f. 79r. Line 11 is thought to be the first recorded use of the word 'philanthropic'

Philanthropy is first used as a noun by Socrates in *The Euthyphro* sometime around 400 BCE. Plato records his master as saying that he educated others, without charge, out of *philanthrōpía* – 'friendship for humankind'. Again the double-edge of philanthropy is evident; the same *philanthrōpía* led to the death of Socrates when his fellow Athenians accused his gift of free education of corrupting the youth of the city.



First printed edition of Plato's Euthyphro by H. Stephanus of Paris from 1578. The parallel text is in Latin and Greek.

At the heyday of Athenian democracy, in the fourth century BC, a system known as *leitourgia* was used to persuade members of the wealthy elite to finance a specific public cause – from funding a play or sending a team of athletes to the Olympic Games to extremely expensive projects like building a temple or a warship. Prominent citizens sought to outdo one another in the extravagance of their gifts, to show the superiority of their own civic virtue. Those who declined to pay risked ostracism and opprobrium. The early laws of Athens were described as 'philanthropic and democratic', suggesting that it was philanthropy which made humankind capable of self-government.

The use of the word philanthropy, in its modern sense, begins with Aristotle who insisted around 350 BCE that giving was about improving the moral character of the giver.



Ethica Nicomachea, Aristotle, 15th century, Add MS 14080, f.48r

At line 10-11 in this 15th century Byzantine edition shows the phrase *οὐ γὰρ ἐν τῷ πλήθει τῶν διδομένων τὸ ἐλευθέριον, ἀλλ' ἐν τῇ τοῦ διδόντος ἕξει* – ‘Generosity resides not in how much one gives, but in the moral character of the giver’.

But the general culture around Aristotle was less high-minded. The Romans later saw philanthropy as a political investment to buy the favour of the masses by distributing salt and olive oil, paying barbers to give free haircuts to the plebeians, and building baths, aqueducts, temples and roads on which the donors had their names inscribed with the legend *de sua pecunia fecit* – Built With His Own Money.

So in the Graeco-Roman world philanthropy was about education and the arts. It was about developing the good character of the donor. But it was also about honour, prestige, status and

reputation, and maintaining the social order. There was one key thing it was not about. It was not about kindness or a duty of common humanity. It was not about the recipients. It was about the rich rather than the poor.

The Hebrew tradition

But a parallel tradition of philanthropy was also developing in these ancient times. Forty days' journey to the east of Athens, one group of adherents to one of the Canaanite religions underwent a shift from worshipping many gods to believing only in one. Judaism brought a revolution to religion – and also to philanthropy.

Judaism declared from its very first text – the Book of Genesis which told the story of Adam and Eve – that God made every man and woman in his own image. (Genesis 1:27)



The Torah, The Lisbon Bible, Vol. 1, 1483, codex of the Portuguese school of medieval Hebrew illumination, Or. 2626, f.23r.

The verse 'So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them' Genesis 1:27

This was a revolutionary doctrine in a Middle Eastern world where only kings, emperors, and pharaohs were gods. It led to what Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks has called 'a profoundly anti-hierarchical understanding of society'. This radically altered the direction of philanthropy, a change later consolidated by both Christianity and Islam – the other faiths which rejected the worship of many gods in favour of one.

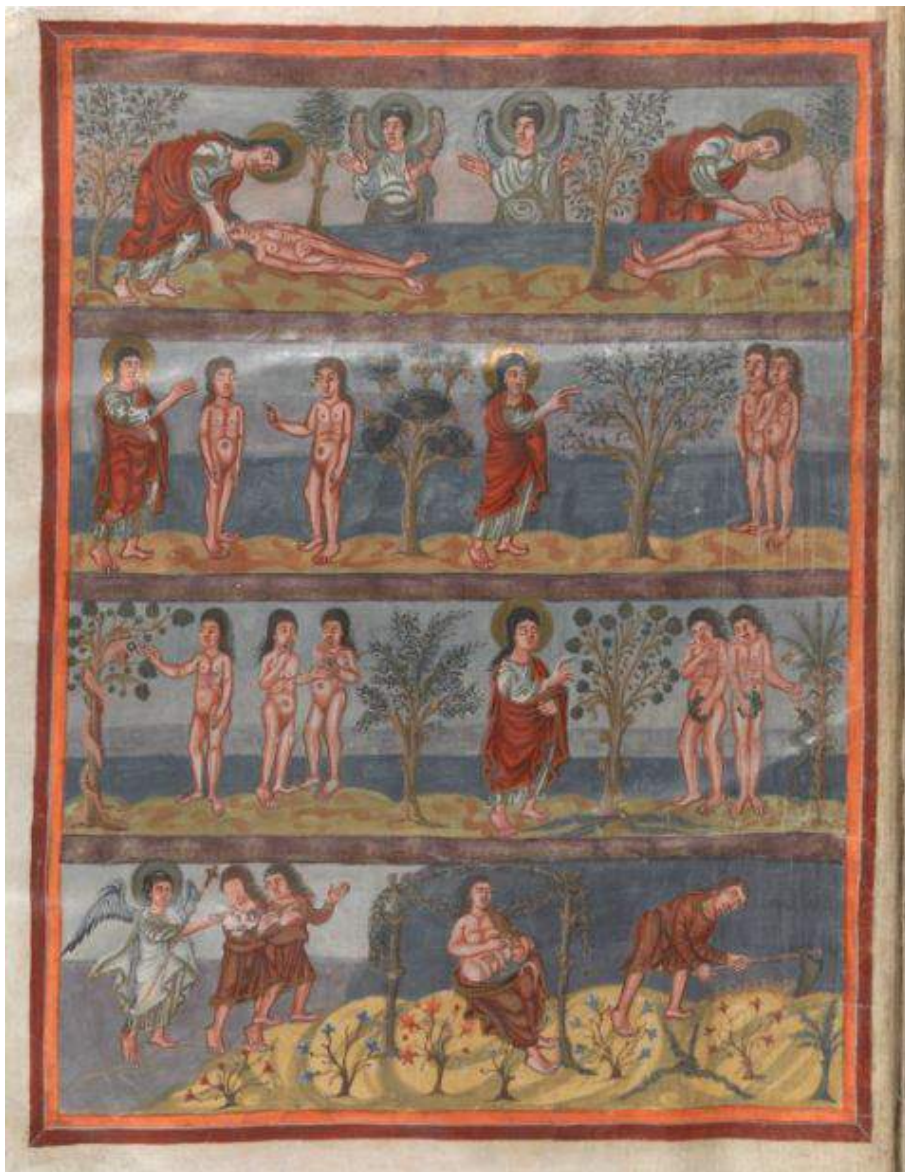


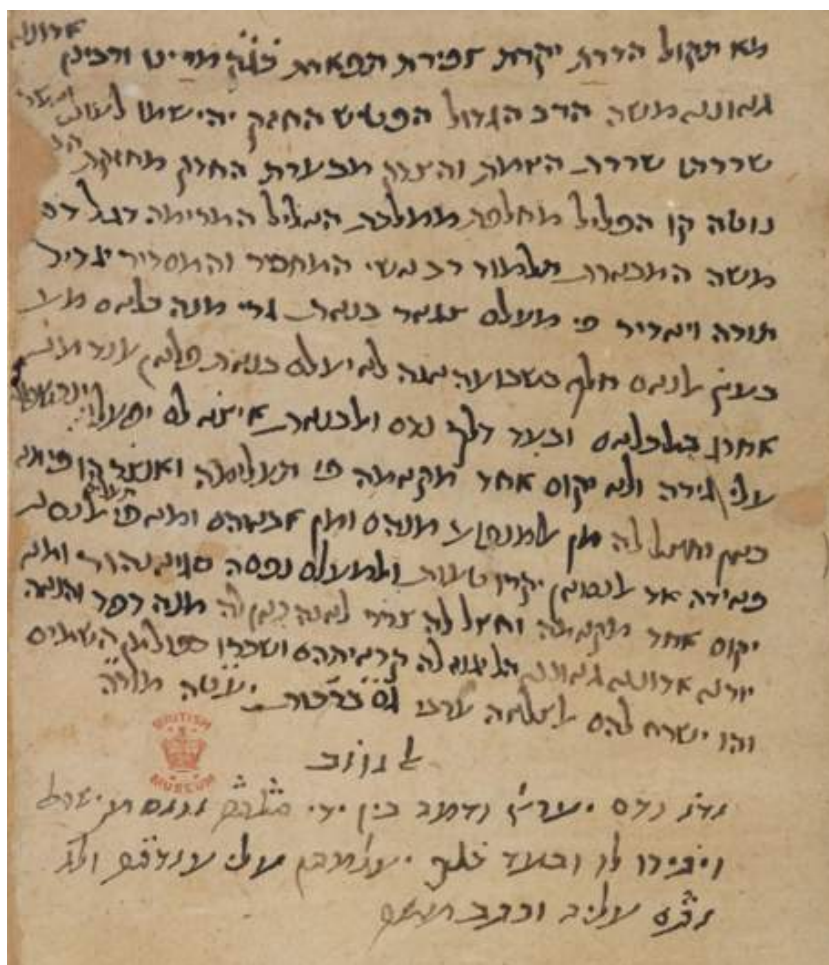
Image of Creation, from the Moutier Grandval Bible, Tours, 9th century, a one-volume copy of the Bible in Latin as revised by Alcuin of York. Add. MS 10546, f.5v.

This is one of three surviving illustrated copies of the Image of Creation produced in Tours at the Benedictine abbey of St Martin. It takes literally the idea that Adam and Eve are made in the image of God.

Judaism did more than bring a radical democratisation to ancient culture. It brought something else that was new. Judaism saw this one God as the epitome of generosity. Yahweh was spoken of as the God of the Poor, a phrase never applied to any Greek or Roman god. The stranger, the widow, and the orphan were repeatedly singled out as being deserving of charity. God had a special love for the poor and therefore so should all believers.

This is far beyond the understanding in the Graeco-Roman world of the few thinkers, such as the Stoics, who expressed sympathetic feelings towards the poor. Giving was no longer simply about social relationships, as it was with the Greeks and Romans. For the Jews it was a human echo of God's generosity towards humankind. Those who gave must not merely distribute food or money; they must share in God's compassion and empathy. This injected into philanthropy the idea that both those who gave and those who received were bound together in a relationship which was in some way reciprocal.

Later the greatest of the medieval Jewish sages Maimonides codified giving into a ladder with eight stages of ascending merit. The highest is helping others towards self-sufficiency. Among the great treasures of the British Library are selections from the 300,000 documents which two Victorian lady adventurers, Agnes and Margaret Smith, found in the *geniza* – a hidden chamber for sacred papers awaiting permanent disposal – in the Bin Ezra synagogue in Fustat, old Cairo. The papers cover the 250 years between 1000 and 1250. Among them were 500 written by Rabbi Moshe ben Maimon.



Autograph responsum of Moses Maimonides from the Cairo Genizah, She'elot u-teshuvot, Maimonides, 1135-1204, Or 5519B.

A handwritten document by Maimonides from the *geniza* of the synagogue in Old Cairo. The papers have been called 'the richest body of material for the history of poverty and charity in the Jewish world of the Middle Ages'. The final word is Maimonides own signature Mosheh (Moses).

The document is a ruling or *responsum* by Maimonides in a case concerning the breaking of an oath. But his great contribution to philanthropy, his hierarchy of giving, is set out in his 'Laws of Gifts to the Poor' or *Hilkhot Matnot 'Aniyim*.



'Hilkhot Matnot 'Aniyim', *Mishneh Torah*, 10:7-14, parchment codex, Harley MS 5699, f.48v.

The God of the Torah is more than the epitome of generosity. In Hebrew, the word for charity, *tzedakah* also means justice. The One God was a God of charity, justice and righteous judgement. All that was necessary to maintain social harmony – which is why the Jewish word for peace, *shalom*, means more than an absence of conflict: it encompasses health, well-being, prosperity, and justice. Judaism sets out to create a community in which the fortunate and the less fortunate can live in harmony together.



Mishneh Torah, Volume 2, Maimonides, 1472, Harley MS 5699, f.34v.

The embellished frontispiece in colours and gold at the beginning of Maimonides' Lisbon Torah, 1472, with initial-word panels with gold letters and penwork decoration and surrounded by full-border with foliate motifs and gold, inhabited by birds and animals.

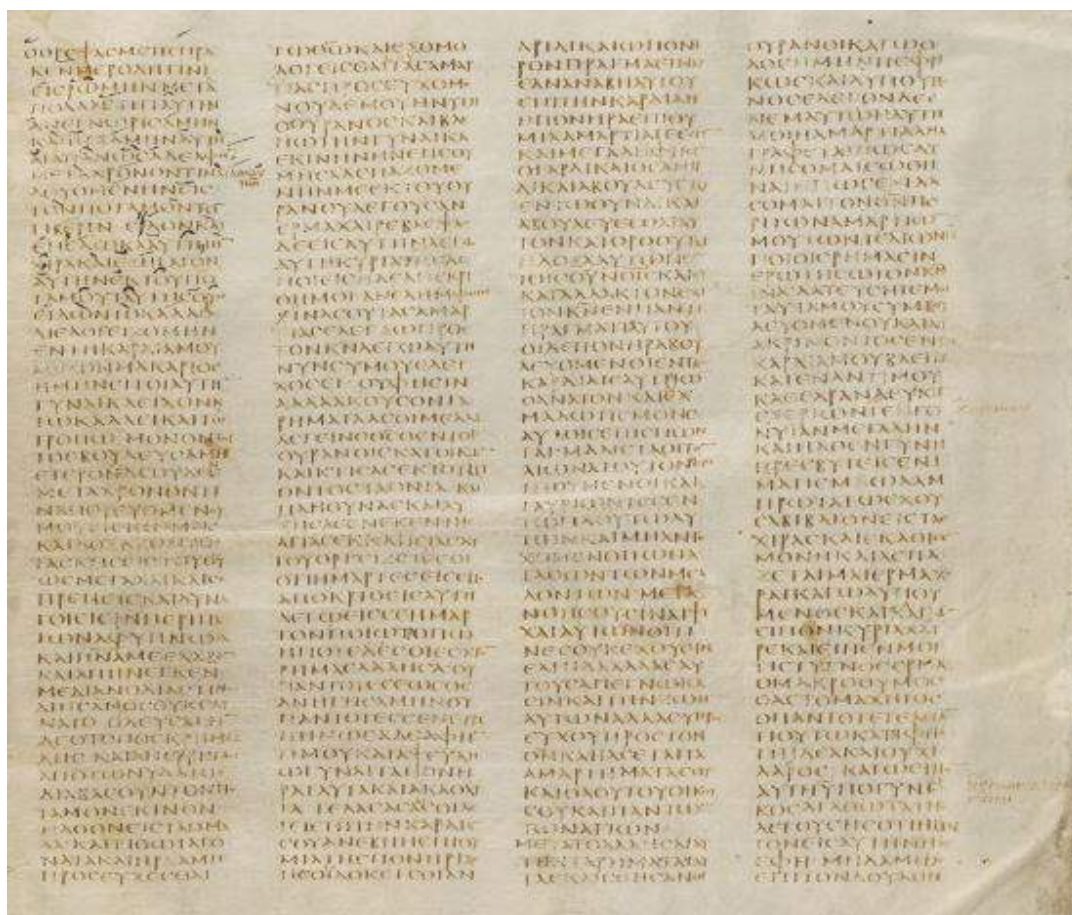
Two Traditions

So for the Greeks and Romans, *philanthrôpía* was about cementing society. But it was top-down. It was always a voluntary activity among the elite. By contrast, for the Jews, *tzedakah* was about community. It was two-way. And it was a religious obligation which fell on everybody.

These two philanthropic traditions have, by turns, dominated philanthropy for over 2000 years. They persist today in what *Philanthropy – from Aristotle to Zuckerberg* characterises as strategic and reciprocal philanthropy.

A Christian attempt at synthesis

There have been attempts to bring them together. One of the first was in a book which, in the early years of Christianity, was accorded a status alongside the Gospels – *The Shepherd of Hermas*, written around 150 AD. The earliest copy survives in one of the British Library's most precious items, the Codex Sinaiticus – one of the most important books in the world. The principal surviving portion of the Codex, comprising 347 leaves, is held by the British Library – with a further 43 leaves in the University Library in Leipzig, parts of six leaves in the National Library of Russia in Saint Petersburg and further portions at Saint Catherine's Monastery at the foot of Mount Sinai where it was preserved in the dry desert air for nearly 17 centuries. The manuscript was purchased for the British Museum from the Soviet government in 1933 with more than half of the money raised by subscription, thanks to the generosity of the general public.



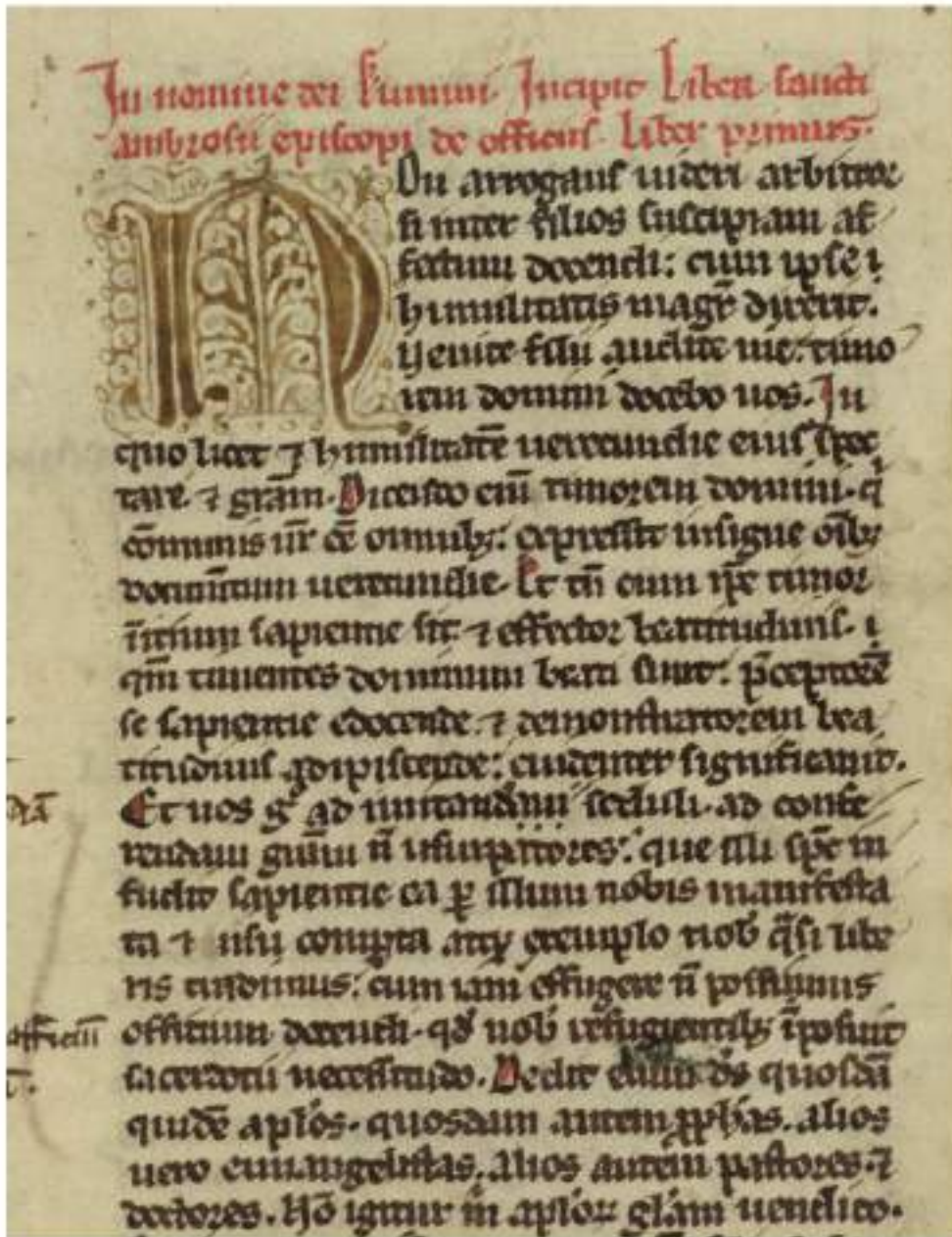
The earliest surviving copy of the Christian Bible, *Codex Sinaiticus*, Bible in Greek, in two volumes, 4th century. Add MS 43725, f.341r.

The Codex Sinaiticus is the earliest known copy of the Christian Bible. The 4th century manuscript, the oldest substantial book to survive Antiquity, was written between 330 and 350 AD. It contains a near complete copy of *The Shepherd of Hermas*.

The Shepherd of Hermas insists that the rich must minister to widows, orphans and the destitute. And the poor must pray to God on behalf of the rich – because God more readily hears the intercessions of a poor man. This, says Hermas, will bind rich and poor in a symbiotic relationship; what he described as being ‘like a barren elm tree around which is entwined a fruitful vine’.

The first great work on Christian philanthropy, written by Ambrose, Bishop of Milan, attempted again to embrace both traditions. In 386 AD Ambrose wrote *De officiis ministrorum* (*On the Duties of the Clergy*) modelled on the great work of moral philosophy *De officiis* (*On Duties*)

written by Cicero in the century before the birth of Christ. Ambrose set out to synthesise Roman Stoic principles and the Jewish qualities of humility, charity and self-denial, replacing the heroes of Rome with the holy figures of the Old Testament as models of behaviour for the newly Christianised aristocracy.

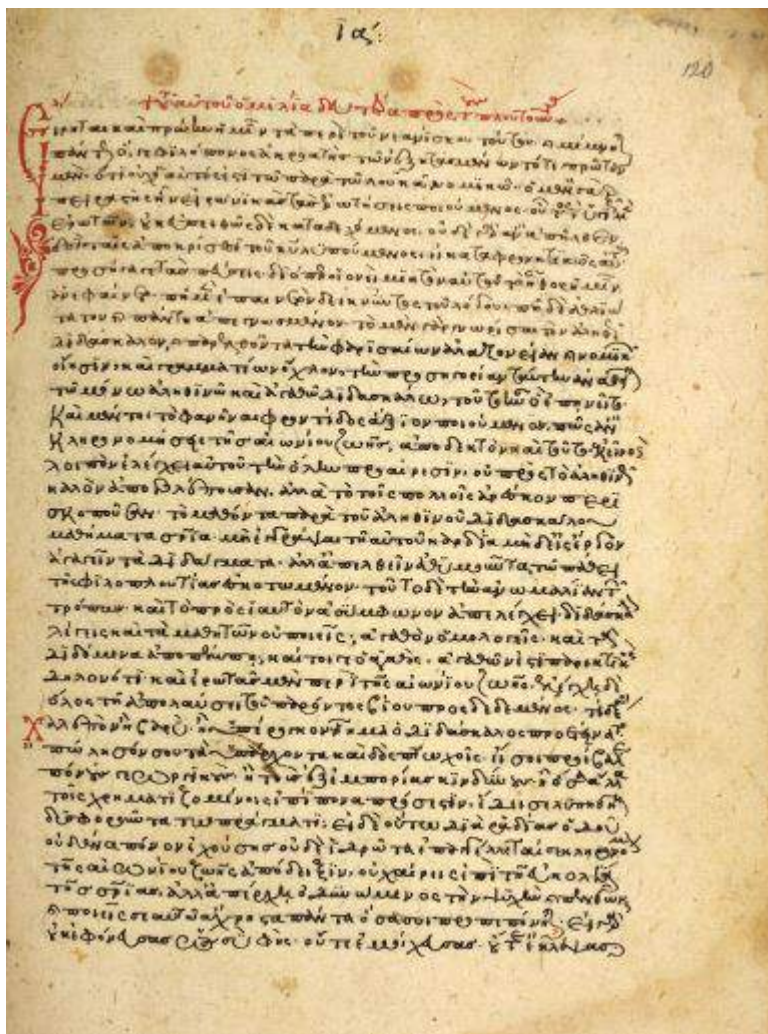


The first great work of Christian moral philosophy *De officiis ministrorum*, 386 AD, by Ambrose of Milan, which tried to bring together the Greek and Hebrew traditions of philanthropy, 14th century MS (Burney 283).

A thousand years of Christian charity

But attempts at integrating the two traditions were not a success. From the 4th to the 14th centuries the Jewish model of philanthropy as social justice came to dominate Christendom – and continued to do so for an entire millennium.

An older contemporary of Ambrose set the trend. Basil of Caesarea, the great exemplar of the new style of Christian bishop – who created the model for the modern monastery and opened the world's first hospital for the general sick – spent his own fortune to relieve a terrible famine in his homeland in 368 AD. That year he preached a sermon *On the Rich*. He insisted that giving was no longer merely a matter of honour, status, civic duty, or even emulation of God's generosity: it was a matter of justice.



Basil the Great's sermon *On the Rich*, c 368 AD, was also entitled by translators *On the Famine and the Drought* and *I Will Tear Down My Barns*. 15th century copy, Harley MS 5576.

That idea was enshrined in the work of Gratian, a monk theologian from Bologna. Around 1140 he created a great systematisation of the Christian inheritance which became known as *The Decretum*. It brought together the teachings of Clement, Basil, Ambrose and the other church fathers with the canons of the great Church Councils, and the decrees of popes across a thousand years. Justice in wealth was key to it.



The Decretum, Gratian, c1140, Arundel MS 490.

This 12th century French manuscript may have belonged to Clairvaux Abbey, then Eberbach Abbey and then in the 17th century to Thomas Howard, Earl of Arundel. It was purchased by the British Museum from the Royal Society in 1831.

For a thousand years giving was regulated throughout Europe by the Catholic Church. Charity was institutionalised in a system of tithes. Parishes distributed alms. Monasteries offered hospitality for travellers, nursed the sick, and cared for widows, orphans and the destitute. Church thinkers systematised rules on giving from which none were exempt. Monarchs, like Louis IX of France, still personally washed the feet of the poor.

Feudal society trapped serfs and peasants in lives of economic hardship but religion created a spiritual bond between giver and receiver. Medieval theologians spoke of the Doctrine of the Mystical Body. This held that all believers – whether rich or poor – were connected in some cosmic way to God and to one another. The rich had a duty to give, and the poor had a duty to pray for the salvation of the souls of their benefactors. There was a mutuality and reciprocity between those who gave and those who received. This was not a pious theory. Kings and bishops were united by that single vision and put it into practice. It was a teaching from which no-one in Christendom was exempt.

So for its first thousand years philanthropy was dominated more by the Jewish than the Greek tradition of philanthropy. But in the 14th century all that changed – with the arrival of the Black Death.

The Black Death changes everything

Between 1347 to 1351 a third to a half of the entire population of Europe perished in what people at the time called the Pestilence, the Blue Sickness or the Great Mortality. In England King Edward III saw his subjects reduced from some four million to perhaps two and a half million souls.

The terrible plague arrived in a society which was already changing. Increases in agricultural productivity in the 11th and 12th centuries had created surpluses of food and wool. Trade increased, a new merchant class arose, towns grew in size, the economy became monetised.

These were the first stirrings of capitalism and the beginning of the end for feudal society. Philanthropy was to change drastically as a result.

As the plague swept Europe the economy of the continent underwent a radical shift. With almost half the population dead, there was an acute shortage of labour. Fields went unattended, harvests rotted, ground went untilled, weeds and bushes overgrew the manorial strips of land, and the thatch fell from abandoned peasant hovels. Lords and bailiffs were deprived of their rents, or had to lower them. With fewer people to plough and harvest, land was abandoned as serfs and villeins went on the move in search of work or food. The nobility enclosed more land, for profitable sheep-grazing, forcing more serfs from their home areas.

Many labourers who had survived the plague found themselves with a new bargaining power and rose in open mutiny against the old feudal law and customs. Many simply deserted the lands to which they were feudally-tied and travelled to find landlords who were prepared to hire them at higher wages. Villeins, scenting freedom from the old serfdom, aspired to a better life with better conditions, and better food. Evidence of that is clear from perhaps the greatest of medieval poems, *Piers Plowman*, whose earliest version was written within a few years of the end of the first wave of the plague.

PERS PLOGH^m

An ancient English Poem, very Satirical.
This is called The Vision of Piers the
Plow Man, said to be written by
ROBERT LANGLAND of Cler-
gic in **Shropshire**

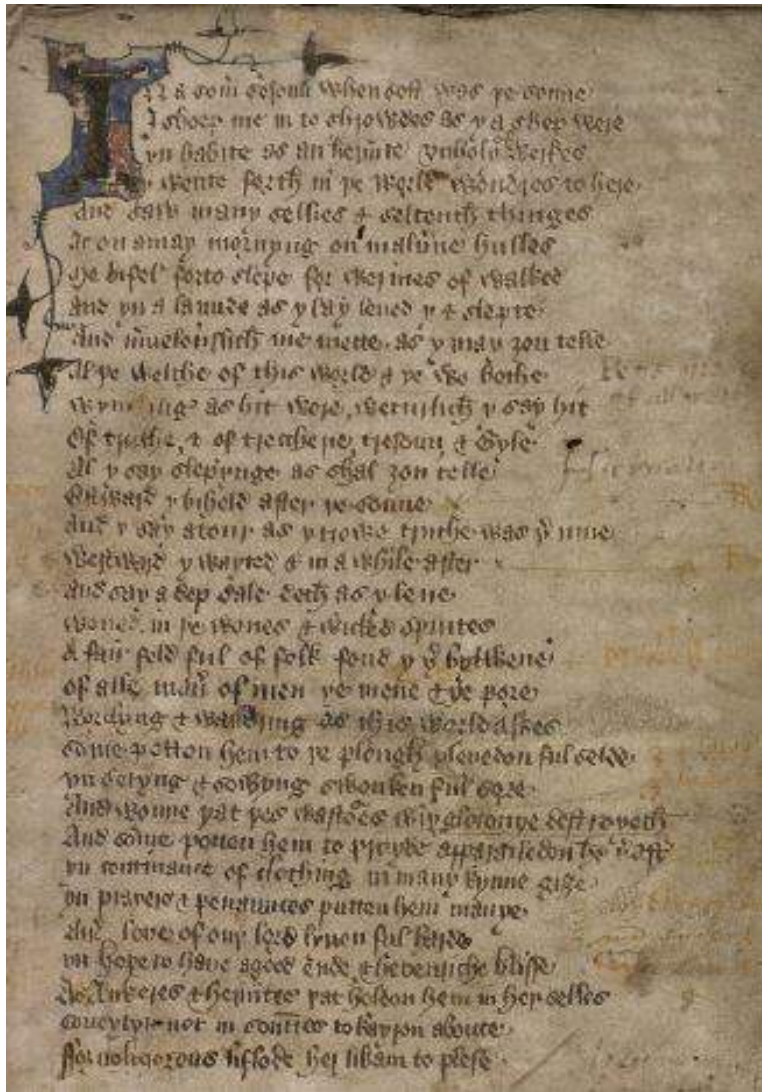
On the Inside of old Piers' Cover was this
Note. This Book was written & dictated
if 16th of the 14th of March y^e 2nd year of H^e
John of famous memory by Piers
Plowman, Penitenciarie or rather Ser-
vant to y^e said King as John Gower
records in y^e 7th Booke of his Confessio

Which, the Ink failing, transcribed
when I caused this valuable MS to
be new bound in June 1720 M^{rs} Johnson

but



William Langland, *The Vision of Piers Plowman* (C version), c1382 with 16th, 17th and 18th century additions, Add. MS 35157, f.3r



William Langland, *The Vision of Piers Plowman* (C version), c1382 with 16th, 17th and 18th century additions, Add. MS 35157, f.7r

First written around 1362, the poet revised the text in the 1370s and again in the 1380s. This C-Version is from around 1382 with 16th, 17th and 18th century additions. Missing portions of the original text have been supplied from the 1550 edition of Robert Crowley who after the Reformation deleted parts of the original to downplay its Catholic characteristics and added a preface and marginal notes which converted the poem into a powerful piece of anti-papal Protestant propaganda.

Its author William Langland writes:

*Labourers who had no land, but live by their own hands,
Deign not to dine these days on leftover cabbage.
No penny-ale may please them, nor piece of bacon.
But only fresh flesh or fish, fried or baked.*

Piers Plowman, C-version, Passus VI, line 307, my translation from the Middle English

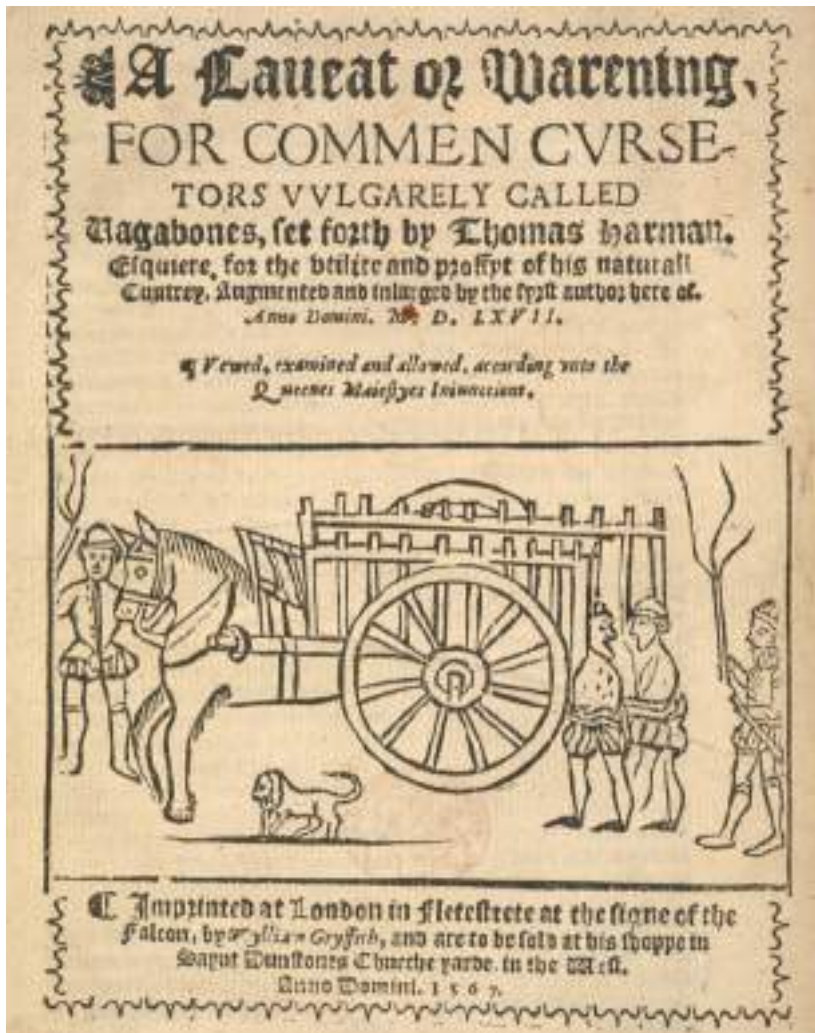
But though many of the newly-liberated peasants prospered, others did not. A tide of vagrant beggars swept the continent, provoking the rich to develop a much more hostile attitude to the poor. Where the poor had once been regarded with sympathy or pity these landless migrants – ‘masterless men’ with no firm roots and no fixed prospects who might foment insurrection – became seen as a threat to social stability. Langland laments that despite the harshness of the times, or perhaps because of it, old attitudes of charitable compassion evaporated:

*Prayers have no power to prevent these plagues
God is deaf now-a-days and deigns not to hear us.
But grinds the guilty into the ground.
And yet the worldly wretches are not warned by one another...
Nor portion their plenty with the poor, as pure charity prefers,
But in gaiety and in gluttony guzzle their good things
And break not their bread with the beggar, as the Book beseeches...*

Piers Plowman, C-version, Passus X, line 79, my translation from the Middle English

The Tudor poor laws

By the 16th century this attitude had been hardened, by fear and contempt. A new idea arose that the poor were in some way to blame for their own poverty. The infirm might still need help, but the ‘idle poor’ were now seen as in need of correction. A succession of poor laws under each monarch from Henry VIII onwards sought to achieve this. These new attitudes of suspicion are evident in a taxonomy of beggars drawn up in 1566 by an Elizabethan country magistrate, Thomas Harman. It carried the cautionary title *A Caveat or Warening for Common Cursetors Vulgarely Called Vagabones*.



A Caueat or Warening for Commen Cursetors vulgarely called Vagabones, set forth by Thomas Harman, Esquiere, for the vtillite and proffyt of his naturall Cuntrey. Augmented and enlarged by the fyrst author here of. Anno Domini. M.D.LXVII, 1567, Huth 114.

This sets out 24 classes and categories of beggars, rogues, vagabonds and fraudsters in Elizabethan England. The frontispiece shows a convicted beggar being tied to a cart and whipped through the streets.

Philanthropy from this point came to be as much about social control as public or private compassion. After the Elizabethan Poor Laws came the Poor Relief Acts of 1662 and 1691, the Workhouse Test Act of 1723 and then the Victorian Poor Law of 1834. All tightened controls on the poor. A disdain for the pauper was implicit in much 19th century charitable moralising. It was overt in the innate superiority of Andrew Carnegie, the man who as we'll see shaped 20th

century philanthropy. But the alternative tradition has persisted too, weaving in and out of the history of giving. It resurfaced in a new way after the Enlightenment.

A new kind of philanthropist

The first man in England actually to be called a philanthropist was John Howard. But his fame came not from giving away money but from dedicating his time, indeed his whole life, to improving the conditions in prisons. In 1773, having been appointed High Sheriff of Bedfordshire, he visited the county gaol and was horrified by what he saw. Within a year he had visited almost every prison in England and Wales and gathered enough evidence to persuade the House of Commons to pass two penal reform acts. By 1777 he had undertaken some 350 repeat visits to gaols all around the country and to a large number on the continent of Europe. That year he published a massive 500-page volume entitled *The State of the Prisons in England and Wales, with Preliminary Observations, and an Account of some Foreign Prisons*.

THE
S T A T E
OF THE
P R I S O N S
IN
ENGLAND AND WALES,
WITH
PRELIMINARY OBSERVATIONS,
AND AN ACCOUNT OF SOME
FOREIGN PRISONS AND HOSPITALS.

BY JOHN HOWARD, F.R.S.

An idle think the gay
Whom pleasure, power, and allsexie favour,
How ready yit to want, and doo good glory,
Shut from the common air,

THESE.

THE SECOND EDITION.

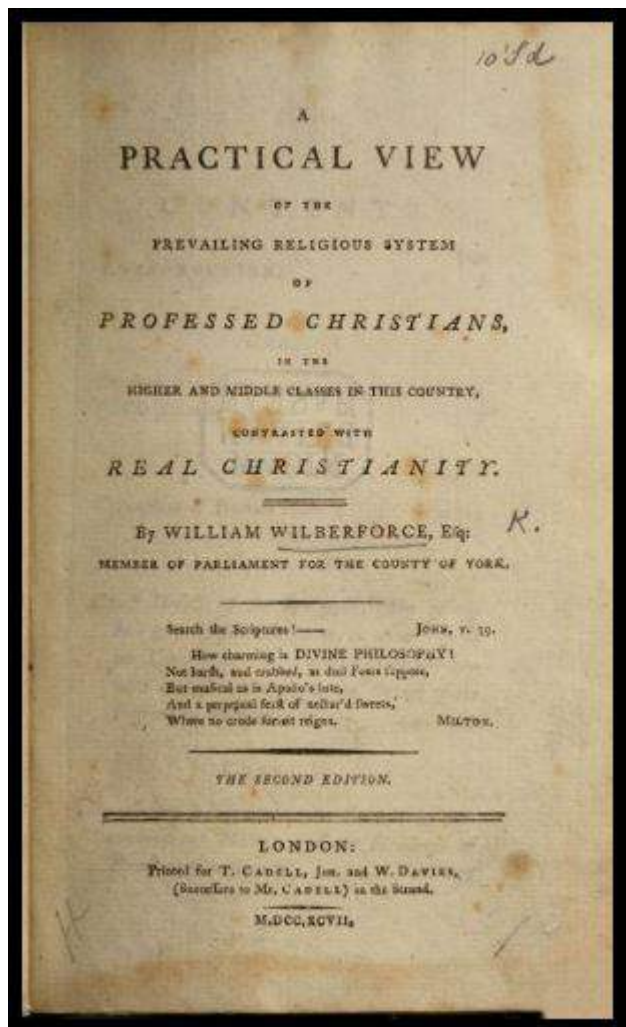
WARINGTON,
PRINTED BY WILLIAM BERRY;
AND SOLD BY T. CADELL IN THE STRAND, AND R. COXNEY
IN FLEET-STREET, LONDON.
MDCCLXXXIV.

John Howard, *The State of the Prisons in England and Wales, with Preliminary Observations, and an Account of some Foreign Prisons*, second edition, 1784, Digital Store 6057.de.8.

The book was widely read, not least because Howard fixed the price so low, to ensure wide distribution, that he failed to recover his printing costs.

Howard's fame as a philanthropist became international. On his foreign tours he was given access to the Queen of Hungary, the Emperor of Austria, the Empress of Russia and Pope Pius VI. Howard's systematic analysis and unsensational writing-style led him to be lauded, a century later, as a father of social science. It certainly made him the father of modern penal reform – and a new kind of philanthropist.

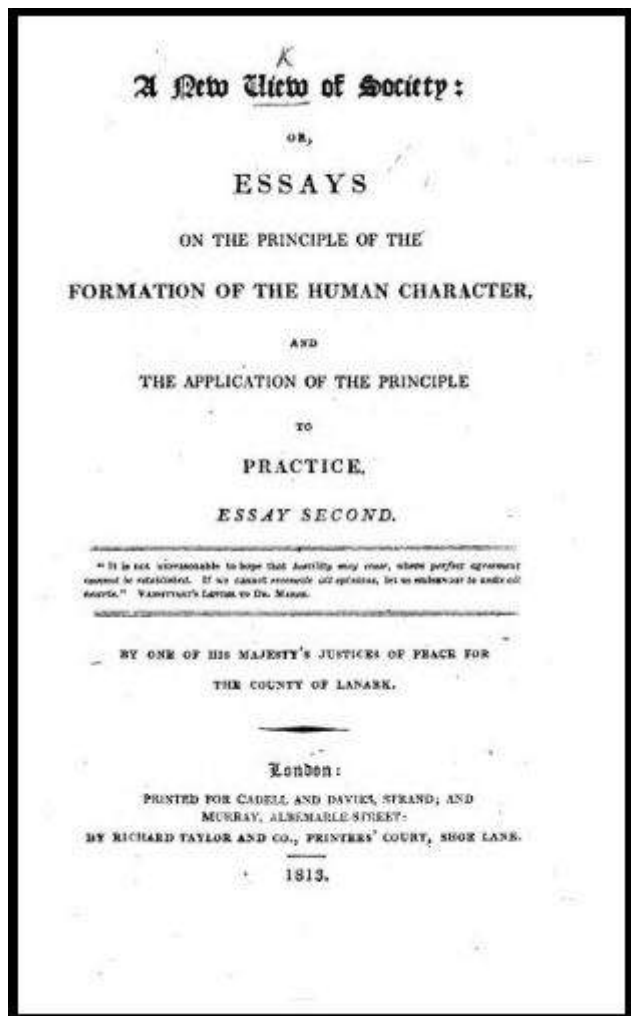
This new philanthropy believed it should be individuals rather than the state who must be the drivers of social change. The philanthropist was now a 'man of feeling' who could uncover moral truths by examining his emotional responses to experiences. Personal zeal replaced public policy. This was embodied in the other great philanthropist of the age, William Wilberforce who refused to be set back by the parliamentary defeat of his anti-slavery bills in 1791, 1792, 1793, 1797, 1798, 1799, 1804 and 1805 until he finally secured the abolition of the slave trade in 1807. Through all this he was driven by his zealous evangelical Christianity as is clear from his 1797 book *A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians in the Higher and Middle Classes of This Country Contrasted With Real Christianity*.



William Wilberforce, *A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians in the Higher and Middle Classes of This Country Contrasted With Real Christianity*, 1797, Digital Store 1117.h.6.

William Wilberforce called on his contemporaries to abandon their token Christianity and be converted to a vibrant evangelical conviction in *A Practical View of the Prevailing Religious System of Professed Christians in the Higher and Middle Classes of This Country Contrasted With Real Christianity*. The book was a bestseller and was translated into several languages. Wilberforce made goodness fashionable.

Another philanthropist heavily influenced by the Enlightenment was the factory owner Robert Owen. Owen lost his belief in Christianity at the age of 10 but powerfully embraced the Enlightenment notion of the perfectibility of humanity. Influenced by a combination of the writings of Rousseau and his own early experiences working in a cotton spinning mill in Manchester, Owen was convinced that if he created the right environment those who lived and worked in it would become good, rational and decent citizens. He set out his philosophy in *A New View of Society: Second Essay on the Principle of the Formation of Human Character*.

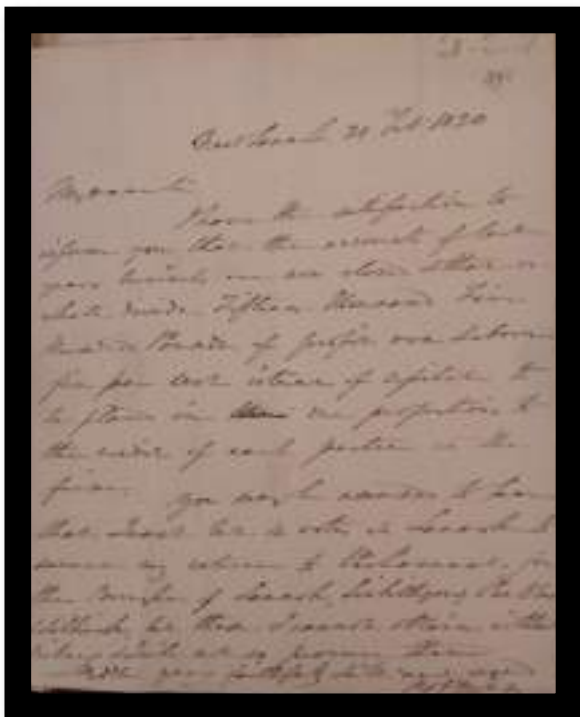


Robert Owen, *A New View of Society: Essays on the Principle of the Formation of Human Character*, London, 1813, Digital Store 1027.i.5.(1.)

The first Essay, dedicated to Wilberforce, was written in 1812. But it is the second which outlines his philosophy.

The essay contained the principles upon which he based the revolutionary educational and social reforms he instituted at his textile mills at New Lanark just outside Glasgow in 1800. There he introduced improved working hours and conditions, decent housing and schooling for his workers' children. The book has been called 'the first practical statement of socialist doctrine' though it was a utopian communitarianism compared with the revolutionary socialism of Engels and Marx which followed.

Owen's idealism is clear from this letter in the British Library collection in which Owen writes to the utilitarian philosopher Jeremy Bentham:



Letter from Robert Owen to Jeremy Bentham, written from New Lanark on 21 February 1820, ADD MS 33545.

Owen writes concerning the payment of a dividend from his New Lanark mills in which Bentham was an investor but, in an aside, reveals his unwillingness to succumb to the bribery which was commonplace in parliamentary elections in that period.

Owen, a philanthropic pioneer who blended enlightened self-interest with idealistic altruism, tells Bentham:

'You may be amused to hear that I want but 4 votes in Lanark to secure my election to Parliament for the Burghs of Lanark, Linlithgow, Peebles and Selkirk, but these I cannot obtain without bribery and I will not so procure them.'

Victorians – having it both ways

A succession of industrialists, from Titus Salt to George Cadbury, followed in Owen's paternalist footsteps seeking both to make a profit and to do good with their model factory villages. Such men embodied the best of Victorian capitalism. Mixed motives characterised much Victorian philanthropy.

The Victorian era – often seen as the highpoint of English philanthropy – vividly illustrates the tensions and interplay between the two great traditions of giving. No single individual embodies this more than Octavia Hill. This great pioneer of social housing for the poor invented a new slant on philanthropy – the idea of what is now called 'social investment' by inviting Christian socialists like John Ruskin and other philanthropists to invest in her housing projects rather than make outright donations. She called it 'five-per-cent philanthropy' after the return the investors were given, which was less than the commercial rate.

Her critics consider her a patronising moralising despot but with her high expectations of her lower-class tenants she revived a long-lost mutuality and understanding that the poor were to be partners in the enterprise of their own improvement. All this is succinctly demonstrated in her book *The Homes of the London Poor* which collected together essays she had written for various Victorian magazines.

THE
HOMES OF THE LONDON POOR.

I.
COTTAGE PROPERTY IN LONDON.*

THE subject of dwellings for the poor is attracting so much attention, that an account of a small attempt to improve them may be interesting to many readers, especially as the plan adopted is one which has answered pecuniarily, and which, while it might be undertaken by private individuals without much risk, would bring them into close and healthy communication with their hard-working neighbours.

* *Fortnightly Review*, November, 1866.

Octavia Hill, 'Cottage property in London', *Fortnightly Review*, 1866, reprinted in *Homes of the London Poor*, 1875. Digital Store 8277.aaa.10

Her attitude to the poor is clear from the way she describes them as separate from 'their hard-working neighbours' – though as she makes clear later in the same volume, in the second essay, 'Four Years' Management of a London Court', her tenants did work. But their employment was as labourers, casual workers, costermongers, hawkers and women who took in laundry – a 'class below' what was considered respectable in Victorian society. Still, she insisted they required 'educating' and needed to be 'urged to rouse themselves from the lethargy and indolent habits into which they have fallen' and be assisted to 'keep alive their own best hopes and intentions'.

forward with all the money necessary, and took the whole risk of the undertaking upon himself. He showed me, however, that it would be far more useful if it could be made to pay; that a working man ought to be able to pay for his own house; that the outlay upon it ought, therefore, to yield a fair percentage on the capital invested. Thus empowered and directed, I purchased three houses in my own immediate neighbourhood. They were leasehold, subject to a small ground-rent. The unexpired term of the lease was for fifty-six years; this we purchased for £750. We spent £78 additional in making a large room at the back of my own house where I could meet the tenants from time to time. The plan has now been in operation about a year and a half; the financial result is that the scheme has paid five per cent. interest on all the capital, has repaid £48 of the capital; sets of two rooms have been let for little more than the rent of one, the houses have been

kept in repair, all expenses have been met for taxes, ground-rent, and insurance. In this case there is no expense for collecting rents, as I do it myself, finding it most important work; but in all the estimates I put aside the usual percentage for it, in case hereafter I may require help, and also to prove practically that it can be afforded in other cases. It should be observed that well-built houses were chosen, but they were in a dreadful state of dirt and neglect. The repairs required were mainly of a superficial and slight character: slight in regard to expense—vital as to health and comfort. The place swarmed with vermin; the papers, black with dirt, hung in long strips from the walls; the drains were stopped, the water supply out of order. All these things were put in order, but no new appliances of any kind were added, as we had determined that our tenants should wait for these until they had proved themselves capable of taking care of them. A regular sum is set aside for

Octavia Hill, 'Cottage property in London', *Fortnightly Review*, 1866, reprinted in *Homes of the London Poor*, 1875. Digital Store 8277.aaa.10

The first houses she bought were in the inaptly named Paradise Place. When she acquired them they 'swarmed with vermin; the [wall] papers, black with dirt, hung in long strips from the walls; the drains were stopped, the water supply out of order'.

But if poverty and squalor were deemed to reveal the personal failure of her tenants, Hill considered herself their liberator with her mission to 'free a few poor people from the tyranny ... of a low class of landlords'.

A precursor of feminism Octavia Hill believed only women had the necessary sympathy to deal with the poor. Her rent collectors must all be ladies since their job was not just to collect money but to inspire the tenants and develop their love of beauty. Motivated by her mentor, John Ruskin, she believed her tenants needed trees, gardens, playgrounds and flowers.

The same impulse led her to campaign for the protection of green spaces in the city and to found the National Trust. 'The poor of London need joy and beauty in their lives,' she wrote, to

'stimulate their hope and energy'. For all her paternalism Octavia Hill's approach embodied an element of partnership and mutuality which brought something new to Victorian philanthropy.

Philanthropy and social justice

The greatest philanthropist of the Victorian era was Angela Burdett-Coutts who in 1837 inherited a huge banking fortune at the age of just 23. Half the eligible bachelors in London threw themselves at her feet in eager hope. Hundreds of begging letters arrived in the post every day.

Burdett-Coutts was a religious woman who first gave primarily to the church, its schools and missions, and other 'civilising' imperial causes. In this she was at first advised by the former prime minister, the old Duke of Wellington, who guided her from indiscriminate almsgiving to a philanthropy tinged with moral reform and social control – something which typified a large number of Victorian philanthropists.

But Burdett-Coutts made an interesting journey between the two traditions of philanthropy. Having begun with a philanthropy which was very much dedicated to cementing the existing social order, she switched to one more focused on social justice. The novelist Charles Dickens began an extensive correspondence with her – of which only one side, the letters of Dickens, survive. In them he writes of the field trips and enquiries he undertook in preparation for his novels. His letters gradually acquainted her with the reality of life for the poor in Britain's large industrial cities. Alarmed at Dickens' analysis of 'the condition of England' – and his insistence that the government was doing little to relieve the distress and poverty of those at the bottom of the social heap – the wealthy heiress began to direct her philanthropy there, with projects to help prostitutes and paupers, flower girls and chimney sweep boys.

and I trust you will be glad to hear
 that I have been in good health &
 my dear little boy, who is steady, diligent
 and industrious, is about to go to
 the office, and I am sure will do
 very well. I have been in the
 habit, though not going and coming
 just as I used to do, with respect
 to my health, which he may be considered as
 a very additional security for his
 young man's sense of responsibility and
 good reputation.

I hope you will be glad to
 hear that I have thought the best
 way of sending it.

Your dear little boy
 and his little girl
 Charles Dickens

Tuesday Evening
 Friday, 11th December 1857
 My dear little boy

I hope you will be glad to hear
 that I have been in good health &
 my dear little boy, who is steady, diligent
 and industrious, is about to go to
 the office, and I am sure will do
 very well. I have been in the
 habit, though not going and coming
 just as I used to do, with respect
 to my health, which he may be considered as
 a very additional security for his
 young man's sense of responsibility and
 good reputation.

I hope you will be glad to
 hear that I have thought the best
 way of sending it.

Your dear little boy
 and his little girl
 Charles Dickens

Letter from Charles Dickens to Angela Burdett-Coutts, 11 December 1857. Add. MS 85299

One of the many letters the novelist wrote to the heiress requesting she direct her philanthropy to a particular cause. Here he is asking her to find a job within Coutts Bank for the brother of a mutual acquaintance.

Later Burdett-Coutts, who was made a baroness in her own right by Queen Victoria, donated the enormous sum of a quarter of a million pounds to buy seed potatoes to send to Ireland during the great famine of the 1880s. She sent aid to aboriginal peoples in Australia and Borneo. She commissioned an engineer to devise a machine which could dry 1000 articles of linen in less than half-an-hour and sent it out to Florence Nightingale in the damp hospitals of the Crimean War. She even provided drinking fountains for dogs. So extensive and omnivorous was her giving that she became known as the 'Queen of the Poor'. Cockneys took her name as rhyming slang for boots. She appeared on cigarette cards. And when she died the eulogy at her funeral was delivered by the King, Edward VII.

Andrew Carnegie sets the template for 20th century giving

But top-down philanthropy was to triumph. Its great consolidation came when Andrew Carnegie became the richest man in the world in 1901 and turned to full-time philanthropy. Carnegie, a Scottish immigrant to America, made an unprecedented fortune in the railway, iron and steel industries. He was a follower of the English Victorian philosopher Herbert Spencer who applied Darwin's theory of evolution to human society. It was Spencer, not Darwin, who invented the phrase 'survival of the fittest'. In the United States a new class of mega-rich 'robber baron philanthropists' embraced Spencer's Social Darwinism, using it to declare that the rich were innately superior to everyone else – and better suited than politicians or ordinary people to decide how their money should be spent, in an era before income tax. Give money to the poor and they will just waste it on drink, Carnegie declared. Philanthropists know best, was his creed.

Andrew Carnegie set out his philosophy in 1889, as he approached the age of 60, in an essay in the *North American Review* entitled *Wealth*. Rhetorically it declared that 'the ties of brotherhood may still bind together the rich and the poor in harmonious relationship' but in practice it was a philosophy which lauded inequality. The former British prime minister William Gladstone read it and was sufficiently impressed to arrange for its publication in London in the *Pall Mall Gazette* where it was headlined *The Gospel of Wealth* – a title Carnegie himself later adopted for the work.

Gladstone then wrote a critique of it in the British monthly review *Nineteenth Century*. In the collection of the British Library is a proof of the article, corrected in Gladstone's own hand. Gladstone is broadly in agreement with Carnegie's approach but disagrees strongly with the billionaire's view of inherited wealth which the British politician proclaims to be 'a good and not an evil thing'. He also dissents from the philanthropist's call for the rich to give away the whole of their fortune in their lifetime:

MR. CARNEGIE'S GOSPEL OF WEALTH,
AND PROPORTIONATE GIVING.

Mr. ANDREW CARNEGIE has not yet travelled far into middle life, but his name has become one of ~~some~~ celebrity. As, however, this celebrity is special rather than general, he may require to be introduced by a few words to a portion of our readers. His life has been passed in America and Great Britain. He is happy in being one of those rare individuals whose lives and whose sympathies are so distributed, rather than divided, between two great countries, that they themselves have become part of the living nexus between them and their inhabitants. Born in Dunfermline he emigrated, as a very young lad to the United States; and beginning, it may almost be said, from zero, he has become, by virtue of his energy, industry, and ability, the possessor of a vast commercial fortune, and the greatest ironmaster in the world. By using the epithet commercial, I mean to signify not that it is less stable than other fortunes, but that it is a fortune engaged in supplying the fixed and circulating capital required for a gigantic and ~~is~~ growing business, and not allowed to heap itself up in immeasurable accumulations. What has become of the share of profits not devoted to the extension of the concern, will be sufficiently understood, when I state that ~~it has~~ been disposed of in practical illustration of the doctrines which it is the first purpose of the present paper to explain. In the account just given of this remarkable person, I have not been divulging confidential or private information. I have simply put together what is well known to all such as have obtained a general acquaintance with a career pursued in the face of day, and that in a country where beyond any other country, if the expression may be allowed, everybody knows everything about everybody.

Although Mr. Carnegie has spent by far the greater portion of the years he now numbers in America, yet he has made frequent and long visits to England or to his native land, and it is believed that he has the idea, if not the intention, of settling on this side the ocean. This may be interesting to some on the ground that his purse, which is a heavy one, seems to discharge ~~itself~~ as freely as ~~it~~ ~~can~~. But I think it will appear as we proceed that his doc-

consider-
able

still

its contents
have been
business

(If this is not
lied, may
have a comma
after 'Wealth')

it lies

is/had

3/1

4/1

1/2

1/1

4/1

Proof of Gladstone's review in *The Nineteenth Century*, November 1890, with corrections in Gladstone's own hand. Add. MS 44703

Andrew Carnegie was the biggest philanthropist of the Gilded Age of Philanthropy. His giving was on an unprecedented scale, building 3,000 libraries, parks, art galleries, museums and concert halls all around the world.

But Andrew Carnegie did not just Give Big, he set a new template for 20th century philanthropy. Carnegie shifted philanthropy away from the relief of poverty and towards causes like the arts, cultural infrastructure and elite educational institutions. He created the modern philanthropic

foundation. He made philanthropy more business-like. His philosophy that ‘he who dies rich, dies disgraced’ inspired generations of later mega-givers including Bill Gates, Warren Buffett and Mark Zuckerberg – all of whom share the same data-driven, command-and-control approach to giving.

Philanthropy in the 21st century

The role of philanthropy in public life has increased dramatically over the past two decades. The scale of this giving is enormous. The Gates Foundation alone has a bigger budget than do 70 per cent of the world’s nations. There are now more than a quarter of a million charitable foundations throughout the world – and 75 per cent of those have been established in the past 20 years. Between them they control more than \$1.5 trillion.

This brief survey has described the two major traditions which have interwoven throughout the past 2,500 years. Since the arrival of Andrew Carnegie, however, the model of philanthropy established under the Ancient Greeks has come to dominate contemporary giving.

It has huge advantages. The Gates Foundation spends more annually on global health than does the government of Germany. Its first big grant for malaria research nearly doubled the total amount of money spent on the disease worldwide. By helping finance the vaccination of 2.5 billion children Gates has virtually eradicated polio. It is spending hugely to improve nutrition, agriculture, maternal and child health, family planning, clean water and sanitation in the poor world.

But there are downsides, too, to this “philanthropists know best” top-down approach. When philanthropists make bad decisions who is to hold them to account? Even Bill Gates has made mistakes, though over the years he has learned from them, often under the influence of his wife Melinda who is much more people-orientated where Bill is in love with technological solutions.

As we have seen the alternative tradition – which began with the Ancient Hebrews and can be traced through medieval almsgivers, Enlightenment activists and paternalist Quaker capitalists – can compensate for the downsides of the top-down approach. Over the centuries this second tradition has embodied philanthropy as partnership rather than a form of benevolent despotism.

It has emphasised the dignity of the recipient and created a sense of mutual respect between those who give and those who receive. It does not look merely for problems which need solutions, it asks those burdened by problems for the best answers, and seeks to build a more harmonious society.

If philanthropy today can find ways to combine the strengths of these two traditions – and marry the precision of strategic philanthropy with the empathy of reciprocal philanthropy – it may go a long way to making the world a better place.

Philanthropy – from Aristotle to Zuckerberg by Paul Vallely is published by Bloomsbury. For more about the book go to www.philanthropyatoz.com