Both More and No More:
The Historical Split between Charity and Philanthropy:
Benjamin Soskis

In the urtext of modern philanthropy, "The Gospel of Wealth (1889)," Andrew
Carnegie set out to instruct his peers on the proper means of disposing of a personal
fortune. But before laying out the virtues of the active administration of wealth for the
public good, he first had to demonstrate the folly of alternative approaches. Leaving
millions to one's children risked spoiling them, while money bequeathed to the public
after death was all too often spent in ways that contravened the donor's intent.
Posthumous giving was both foolish—preventing the giver from employing the skills he
had honed in accumulating his wealth toward its redistribution—and selfish, suggesting
that the giver would not have left his gifts at all had he been able to bring them along to
his final destination. To die rich was thus to die "disgraced."

Carnegie saved his fiercest denunciations for yet another mode of ill-considered
giving. "Of every thousand dollars spent in so called charity to-day," Carnegie famously
announced, "it is probable that $950 is unwisely spent; so spent, indeed as to produce the
very evils which it proposes to mitigate or cure." In fact, he argued, "one of the serious
obstacles to the improvement of our race is indiscriminate charity." It would be better for
such money to be thrown into the sea.[1]

Carnegie's low estimation of "so called charity" was widely shared by his peers.
From the moment that John Winthrop urged his fellow passengers aboard the *Arbella* to
mold their new settlement into a "Modell of Christian Charity," Americans have long
regarded themselves as a nation of exceptional givers. Yet by the final decades of the
nineteenth century, charity no longer inspired a sense of millennial zeal. It had become
associated in the popular mind largely with almsgiving, a practice dismissed by large
swaths of the public as inefficient and demeaning—a sin against the market and against
democratic institutions and norms. Labor leaders and laissez-faire zealots, radicals and
reactionaries, as well as many of those in between, could unite around a yearning for an
"end to charity." "There is perhaps no fact more strange than the contempt and the
misunderstanding which have settled down on 'charity,'" noted one observer in 1901.
"Call it anything you will, people seem to say, but, however charitable your act or your
gift may be, do not call it 'charity.'"[2]

Some took this counsel quite literally; in the early decades of the new century,
many of the leading organizations and networks of social welfare provision dropped the
word 'charity' from their titles, embracing in its stead terms like "welfare" or "service"
that did not carry the stigma of the provision of material relief. Their leaders complained
that the poor were shunning their assistance because of the word and harbored little
affection for it themselves. In 1915, for instance, the attendees of the California

[1] Andrew Carnegie, "The Gospel of Wealth," in Carnegie, *The 'Gospel of Wealth' Essays and Other
Writings* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 7, 11, 12.
[2] C.S. Loch, "Charity and its Problems," *Charity Organisation Review* 10, no. 59 (November 1901), 233.

Conference of Charities and Correction emerged from their annual meeting with a new designation: the California Conference of Social Agencies. As the opening speaker at the conference declared to the delegates, "Your [old] name is a misnomer. You are ashamed of it. You no longer believe in charity or correction as those terms are used."[3]

While charity's star dimmed, modern philanthropy's was beginning its ascent. In fact, many of the individuals responsible for designing and directing the institutions and ideologies that would come to define modern philanthropy—the foundation and ideas of scientific giving, most particularly—were among those pushing to topple charity from its pedestal. In his account of George Peabody's educational philanthropy, Jabez Curry, one of the first general agents of the Peabody Education Fund (the first philanthropic foundation in the US), differentiated Peabody's carefully considered benefactions from the "sudden ebullitions of charitable impulse, excited by some object of pity." In his autobiography, John D. Rockefeller made clear his opposition to "giving money to street beggars" (while asserting his commitment to abolishing the conditions that created beggars in the first place). When Jerome Greene, one of Rockefeller's chief advisers, was charged with spelling out the "Principles and Policies of Giving" that would guide the Rockefeller Foundation, one of the first he stipulated was that "Individual charity and relief are excluded." And Robert de Forest, the New York lawyer instrumental in establishing the Russell Sage Foundation, was a founding member of the New York Charity Organization Society, which dedicated itself to battling the scourge of "indiscriminate giving."[4]

And so the coincidence of the depreciation of traditional charity and the rise of modern philanthropy was by no means accidental. Indeed, in many respects the promotion of the one was premised on the deliberate demotion of the other. Philanthropy vaulted itself into public acclaim upon charity's supposed debilities. Modern philanthropy would be efficient, whereas most charitable giving was wasteful. Philanthropy would turn its attention to regional, national, and even global problems, while charity's scope was parochial. Philanthropy would address root causes, whereas charitable giving preoccupied itself with palliatives. Philanthropy would be governed by rational analysis and the sober calculus of the laboratory and boardroom, whereas most charitable giving was prompted by sentimental impulses, and was even, at heart, a selfish endeavor. Transcending charity's limitations—and eschewing its enticements—became a mark of maturity, the badge of the seasoned, selfless giver. At their most aggressive, philanthropists engaged in a sort of supersessionist crusade; by extirpating the underlying causes of social ills, they would do away with the need for charity in the first place.

---

[3] Andrew J. F. Morris, *The Limits of Voluntarism: Charity and Welfare from the New Deal through the Great Society* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 33; "Twenty-five Years and After," *Charities and the Commons* XIX no. 9 (November 30, 1907), 1142-1144; "Social Agencies," *Survey* XXXIII no. 26 (March 27, 1915), 690.

[4] J.L.M. Curry, *A Brief Sketch of George Peabody and a History of the Peabody Education Fund Through Thirty Years* (Cambridge, [Mass.]: University Press, 1898), 18; John D. Rockefeller, *Random Reminiscences of Men and Events* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Page & Company, 1913); 173-4, 141-2; Ron Chernow, *Titan: The Life of John D. Rockefeller, Sr.* (New York: Random House, 1998), 314; J.D. Greene, "Principles and Policies of Giving," Folder 163, Box 21, Series 900, Record Group 3.1, Rockefeller Foundation Archives, Rockefeller Archive Center, Tarrytown, New York; Robert De Forest, "What is Charity Organization?" *Charities Review* 1, no. 1 (November 1891), 2.

Generations of philanthropic leaders have inherited this antithesis, up to our own day. Charity still serves as a negative reference point against which to define the vocation of philanthropy. Whatever philanthropy is—it is *not* charity. So, in 2005, the newly installed head of the Council on Foundations, the former congressman Steve Gunderson, made clear that one of his primary aims was to educate the public on the difference between charity and philanthropy; the demands made upon foundations in the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina had convinced him that the crucial distinction was lost on many Americans. Philanthropy, he insisted, was about "problem-solving." "It's more than just the immediate emotional response to a need"—presumably the purview of charity. "[I]t's about taking a strategic approach to long-term problem solving, with *strategic* being the operative word," he said, with the insinuation that charity was both impulsive and short-sighted. Similar views were echoed by Vartan Gregorian, president of the Carnegie Corporation, at the presentation of the Carnegie Medal of Philanthropy in 2009. "Philanthropy is not charity," he announced. "Philanthropy works to do away with the causes that necessitate charity." And when in 2013 the Rockefeller Foundation published a history of the institution in honor of its centennial, they titled it *Beyond Charity: A Century of Philanthropic Innovation*.[5]

There is no doubt that conceptual polarities can serve as powerful heuristics. And it is certainly true that the contrast between charity and philanthropy has helped to clarify the task facing the leaders of the philanthropic sector. But in at least two respects, the contrast has impeded clear thinking on the nature of that charge. In each case, a historical investigation into the relation between charity and philanthropy can restore some of that clarity. First, the divide between charity and philanthropy is almost always promoted from the latter's perspective. That is, philanthropy peers down at charity from the heights of its own self-regard. The view from the other direction—the corrective charity offers to philanthropy—is less often considered. Yet at precisely the moment that philanthropy invoked the limitations of charity to define its own prerogatives, charity was developing a powerful counter-critique that highlighted its own imperatives to call out the dangers and conceits of philanthropy.

If a historical appreciation of the charity-philanthropy antithesis can illuminate the gap between the two, it can also highlight efforts to bridge the divide. Some of the boldest pioneers of the practice of philanthropy acknowledged the rebuke represented by charity and some of the most devout defenders of charity at the turn of the century recognized the legitimacy of philanthropy's critique. In their own ways, the leaders of what became known as the scientific charity movement—a primary source of the theories of giving that informed early philanthropists—and a vanguard of Catholic charity reformers did not deny the tensions between charity and philanthropy. Instead, they sought to cultivate them, believing that charity and philanthropy could function as productive if sometimes wary partners. It's a partnership that we would do well to

---

[5] This dichotomy is now being exported into the global arena. In a comprehensive report on philanthropy in BRIC nations, Joan Spero writes, "this distinction between charity and philanthropy reflects a major difference between the approach of most major U.S. and Western foundations and giving in many newly developed countries." Joan Spero, *Charity and Philanthropy in Russia, China, India and Brazil* (2014, Foundation Center), vii. Gunderson quoted in *Philanthropy News Digest*, October 16, 2005, accessed at http://foundationcenter.org/pnd/newsmakers/nwsmkr_50th.jhtml?id=160000002; "Carnegie 'Family' Awards Medals for Philanthropy," *impulse* 20 (December 2009), 1; Eric John Abrahamson, *Beyond Charity: A Century of Philanthropic Innovation* (New York: Rockefeller Foundation, 2013).

revitalize today. For philanthropy is more secure when supported by charity's correctives; and charity is stronger when braced by philanthropy's critiques.

I. <u>The Early American Roots of the Charity-Philanthropy Divide</u>

From the earliest days of settlement to the Revolution, the contrast between charity and philanthropy lay dormant, largely because the term *philanthropy* did not come into common usage in the United States till the 1780's. Indeed, for much of the eighteenth century, and for a good part of the nineteenth, the two terms complemented each other. Or rather, in an American context, 'charity' was granted a meaning capacious enough to encompass many of the impulses and institutions that would later fall under philanthropy's domain. And so the ethic of charity initially harbored within itself the tensions that would come to define its relationship with philanthropy.

What did early Americans mean when they spoke of charity? Scholars of American social welfare provision, taking a cue from the sociologist Max Weber, have made much of the "rationalization of charity" within the first century after settlement. By this they mean that, through the promptings of Puritanism, charity became increasingly impersonal and instrumental; it manifested itself less as an expression of love than as a means of achieving some objective social good. As one Rhode Island minister declared in 1805, the Lord rewarded the charitable "in proportion to the usefulness of an object." This object was most often the alleviation of proximate distress, and though charity could take the form of moral guidance or a comforting word, it increasingly assumed a monetary or material form, and did so through mediated channels. But the rationalization of charity could also require withholding it in some occasions, if by doing so the giver stirred the potential recipient to productive labor. So rather than "knitt" the community together, as Winthrop urged, charity could instead establish divisions within it. The title of a 1752 sermon delivered by a prominent Boston clergyman made this point clearly: "The Idle Poor secluded from the Bread of Charity by the Christian Law."[6]

Yet the rationalization of charity in early America was never absolute. A more traditional understanding of charity persisted, one that aimed not to bolster the hierarchies of the social order but to develop sympathetic bonds between giver and recipient that momentarily annulled social divisions. Although few early Americans regarded poverty as a holy state, the precariousness of life, the way a single providentially delivered calamity could instantly strip a family of their fortune, argued against a censorious attitude toward the poor (though the view that poverty could be traced to the moral failings of the poor did become increasingly prevalent by the eighteenth century). Those in need could still be regarded as members of a single organic community, deserving of loving kindness and personal ministration. Traditional notions of 'charity' thus designated both the unmediated act of giving and the spirit of love—of *caritas*—that animated it. These two understandings were, in fact, inseparable. The mundane charity

---

[6] Robert A. Gross, "Giving in America: From Charity to Philanthropy," in *Charity, Philanthropy, and Civility in American History*, eds. Lawrence J. Friedman and Mark D. McGarvie (Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 32; William Patten quoted in Conrad Edick Wright, *The Transformation of Charity in Postrevolutionary New England* (Boston: Northeastern University Press, 1992), 118; Charles Chauncey quoted in Kenneth L. Kusmer, *Down & Out, On the Road: The Homeless in American History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 20.

that men and women exhibited toward each other ultimately reflected the divine love for all creation. As the German theologian Ernest Troeltsch explained this traditional view, "The aim of charity was not the healing of social wrongs, nor the endeavor to remove poverty, but the revelation and the awakening of the spirit of love, of that love, which Christ imparts and which He makes known to us the attitude of God Himself."[7]

If charity took God's love as its model, it was a love without limits, extending to all mankind, and in this sense, it anticipated the expansive dictates of philanthropy. Ideally, then, charity honored the two biblical charges on which Christian ethics rested: to love the stranger and to love one's neighbor. In practice, however, as historian Conrad Edick Wright has demonstrated, early Americans often circumscribed the scope of their charity by acknowledging their limited resources and institutional capacities. Without disowning the imperative of universal love, they could justify directing their own charitable efforts to those nearest and most familiar to them; for if each tended to his or her own, collectively, all could serve and be served. Indeed, most understood their moral responsibilities in terms of their proximate relationships—as fathers and mothers, brothers and sisters, friends and neighbors.

This inclination toward benevolent parochialism was also bolstered by the early American adaptation of the English Poor Laws, established by Parliament in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries, which made the parish the locus of poor relief and settlement a defining criteria of eligibility. In an American context, the Puritan ideal of the covenanted community was reflected in the responsibility of the locality—the town in New England and the parish or county elsewhere—to care for its own. It also demarcated the bounds of moral responsibility. At first, this meant physically "warning out" of town those who could not claim residence within it. But by the eighteenth century, the banishment was largely symbolic, conducted by legally disowning any responsibility to care for dependent vagrants.[8]

For some time, then, the centripetal and centrifugal forces governing attitudes toward the administration of charity existed in a state of equilibrium. The proliferation of benevolent institutions at the turn of the nineteenth century disrupted this balance. The rapid rise of organized charity—Wright notes that from a little more than fifty at the time of the Revolution, New England could boast as many as two thousand charitable institutions by 1820—allowed individuals to pool their resources and to amplify their influence. "By the end of the eighteenth century," he notes, "organization had made it possible for Samaritans to extend their charity nearly to the limits of their imagination." Flourishing trans-Atlantic networks linked these associations in a web of humanitarian fervor. Historians have frequently designated this moment as the one marking a transition from charity to philanthropy in the United States, when individual acts of personal generosity became increasingly formalized and mediated by associational forms.

It is in fact at this point that 'philanthropy' first came into common usage in much of the United States. The term was often invoked to describe the expansive ambitions

---

[7] Christine Leigh Heyrman, "A Model of Christian Charity: The Rich and Poor in New England, 1630-1730," PhD diss., Yale University, 1977, 11; Troeltsch quoted in David Wagner, *What's Love Got To Do With It: A Critical Look at American Charity* (New York: The New Press, 2000), 78.

[8] Wright, *Transformation of Charity*, 19, 23-24; Gross, "Giving in America," 33; Kusmer, *Down & Out*, 20; Amanda B. Moniz, "The American Revolution and the Origins of Humanitarianism," 61, 213, manuscript in author's possession; Kusmer, *Down & Out*, 20; Heyrman, "Model of Christian Charity," 109-110.

invested in these new organizations. "Remember…our benevolence is not confined. It is philanthropy," one Boston orator exhorted listeners in 1783. By taking on those meanings, 'philanthropy' divested 'charity' of some of its association with an all-encompassing universal love—and even, perhaps, saddled the term with a hint of confinement. At this moment, even if it was not stated explicitly, philanthropy's oppositional relationship to charity began to germinate in American soil.[9]

II. The Birth of Philanthropy, Charity's Antagonist

Of course, the term 'philanthropy' itself came freighted with its own powerful associations that primed it for that opposition. The term's origins lie in the fifth century, B.C.E. It first makes its appearance as *philanthrôpía*—a Greek word formed from the combination of *phileô*, meaning friendship, and *anthrôpos*, referring to the whole of humankind—in *Prometheus Bound*, the tragedy attributed to the dramatist Aeschylus; the term describes the transgressive (at least from the perspective of the gods) act of loving mankind that brought on Prometheus' awful punishment. By the third century, B.C.E., *philanthrôpía* had taken on additional meanings, describing civic virtue as well as gifts made by private citizens toward the public good.[10]

The term 'philanthropy,' as it is now understood, was late to enter the English language; an earlier usage, emerging in the fourteenth century, was limited to the description of plants whose seeds stuck easily to humans. Francis Bacon first used the word in something like its modern sense in a 1612 essay, but by the end of the century, the term was still frequently invoked with the addendum that no word existed in the English language to communicate the idea coined by the Greeks. Yet even if the term had not yet gained a wide currency, the conditions for its diffusion—and for its differentiation from charity—were laid down in those years of the early modern period with the secularization of welfare provision throughout much of Europe. In England, for example, by the sixteenth century the traditional forms of charity--provided largely by institutions of the church--proved wholly inadequate to address the social upheavals brought on by the plague, warfare and dislocations of the preceding century. Into this void stepped a newly assertive mercantile elite that considered poverty outside a sacramental prism as a social problem amenable to rational control. In the study of this transformation, scholars have rooted the development of modern philanthropy in the infirmities of the pre-modern charitable tradition. As Wilbur Jordan notes in his masterful *Philanthropy in England* (1959), the Tudor merchants who began to regard their giving as a "necessary aspect of public policy rather than as a requirement of Christian morality"—in other words, who forged a modern conception of philanthropy—"scorned and discarded alms, the

---

[9] According to Conrad Wright, the Freemasons, for whom the expansive universality of their movement was a central tenet, were some of the first Americans to popularize the term 'philanthropy.' Wright, *Transformation of Charity*, 5, 116 (quote), 119, 120-121; Gross, "Giving in America," 30.

[10] Marty Sulek has identified the first usage of *philanthropy* as a noun (and to refer to a human) in Plato's *Euthyphro*, in which Socrates uses the term to describe his own compulsion to teach all who will listen. Marty Sulek, "On the Classic Meaning of Philanthropy," *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 39, no. 3 (June 2010), 385-408 (Euthyphro cites on page 391).

mechanism of medieval charity, since they were profoundly persuaded that casual, undisciplined charity was as ineffective as it was wasteful."[11]

It was not, however, until the dawning of the Enlightenment that 'philanthropy' took its place among a constellation of terms—'universal benevolence, 'love of humanity,' *bienfaisance* and 'friend of mankind,' most prominent among them—that signaled a newly amplified and expansive commitment to relieve the suffering of *all* mankind. These ideals fueled a robust debate over the proper scope of moral responsibility and the relationship between universal and particularist love. The champions of philanthropy and universal benevolence combated the atomistic theories and egotistical hedonism promoted by theorists like Thomas Hobbes and Bernard Mandeville; men were not governed by the goad of a nasty and brutish self-interest, they insisted, but were endowed with a powerful moral sense that could overrun the bounds of consanguinity and transcend purely local attachments. Philanthropy's expansiveness did not merely take in the suffering stranger; it also expressed an allegiance to a cosmopolitan culture of reform in which the bonds of humanity superseded the ties of nationality. As an ideal, philanthropy could bridge head and heart: it became the hallmark of the Enlightenment 'man of feeling,' while suggesting the application of rationality toward the betterment of mankind.

Enlightenment thought proved less hospitable to the ethic of traditional charity; much as in the late nineteenth century, as philanthropy prospered as an ideal, charity came under sustained attack. "From about the middle of the eighteenth century," writes a historian of eighteenth-century France, "the question of how best to organise the relief of poverty on the ruins of existing forms of charity had become a matter of public remark and open polemic." The disciples of the nascent field of political economy often dismissed charity as inefficient and indiscriminate; charity stemmed from the emotional and spiritual needs of the donor as opposed to those of society, was removed from the rational realm of exchange, and contravened the laws of nature that mandated that man work for his bread. There was certainly a repressive element behind many of these attacks. But a more radical strain also ran through political economy, one that borrowed from Enlightenment ideas regarding the perfectibility of man and that also regarded charity critically. It did not merely seek to curtail charity, but the need for charity itself, hoping to bring about a world without poverty through bold programs of political and administrative action. As an ideal, only philanthropy, and not charity, was large enough to contain these ambitions.[12]

---

[11] Marty Sulek, "On the Modern Meaning of Philanthropy," *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly*, 39, no. 2 (April 2010), 193-212; W. K. Jordan, *Philanthropy in England 1480-1660* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1959), 149, 18-19.

[12] It should be noted, however, that the meanings attached to the nomenclature was still quite fluid. William Goodwin, the British philosopher who was one of the boldest champions of universal benevolence, opposed that ideal to the spirit of "philanthropy," which he considered "a rather unreflecting feeling than a rational principle." Evan Radcliffe, ""Revolutionary Writing, Moral Philosophy, and Universal Benevolence in the Eighteenth Century," *Journal of the History of Ideas* 54, no. 2 (April 1993), 221-240 (Goodwin quote on p. 231); Sulek, "On the Modern Meaning of Philanthropy," 197; Thomas J. Schlereth, *The Cosmopolitan Ideal in Enlightenment Thought* (Notre Dame: The University of Notre Dame Press, 1977) 90-93; Colin Jones, *Charity and bienfaisance: The Treatment of the Poor in the Montpellier Region 1740-1815* (Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 131; Gareth Stedman Jones: *An End to Poverty?: A Historical Debate* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 29.

Through its Enlightenment boosters, philanthropy carried with it the hint of secularism—and often of anti-clericalism. This linkage was solidified through the term's association with the fervor of the French Revolution. For early Jacobins '*philanthropy*' (along with its kin, the Enlightenment neologism '*bienfaisance*') served as a standing rebuke to the practice of traditional charity, which during the *ancien régime* had been administered almost entirely by the institutions of the Church. In the early years of the Revolution, as the wealthy inhabitants who had been the source of many of those donations fled the country and as the Republic confiscated Church property, charitable giving declined precipitously. Many revolutionaries did not regard this as an especially unfortunate occurrence. For the nobleman François Rochefoucauld-Liancourt, the driving force behind the Revolutionary Assembly's policies toward the poor (including a prohibition against begging), all citizens had a *right* to subsistence. Since poverty was a byproduct of social forces beyond the control of the individual, the needy should not be forced to rely on the compassion—and the condescension—of the wealthy or on the unreliable ministrations of clerics. Rather, relief should be guaranteed by the state as a manifestation of social solidarity. For this reason, one historian notes, Liancourt considered the word 'charity' itself to be "offensive."[13]

Across the Channel, as partisans rose up to defend or defame the French Revolution, what had been a rather ethereal debate among British moral philosophers transformed into a contentious intellectual melee on matters of the utmost political import. The critics of universal benevolence had long argued that it would lead to an erosion of more parochial affections—the love of home and of neighbors and nation. It threatened, for this reason, to subvert human nature itself. "[W]hen any dazzling phantoms of universal philanthropy have seized our attention," declared the British schoolmaster and writer Rev. Samuel Parr, "the objects that formerly engaged it shrink and fade. All considerations of kindred, friends, and countrymen, drop from the mind." In fact, its gauzy high-sounding principles veiled a sort of misanthropy, a malignancy toward men as they actually were. The bloody record of the Revolution—the stories of children turning on their parents, of zealous citizens murdering former friends—only confirmed these fears. Philanthropy, it seemed, led directly to the guillotine. As Edmund Burke declared, the belief in universal benevolence found its natural culmination in the "homicide philanthropy of France."

For Burke and other conservatives, counter-revolutionary vigilance required a renewed defense of charity, its modesty now standing in starker relief to Jacobin pretensions. Burke praised charity as a "direct and obligatory duty upon all Christians" and warned that any notion that society was capable of eradicating poverty, all soap-bubble schemes that encouraged the poor to look beyond "Patience, labour, sobriety, frugality, and religion," were a "fraud." In 1798, the *Anti-Jacobin*, a British publication founded in reaction to the French Revolution, published a poem on France's "New Morality." It compared "charity," embodied by a figure "who dries/ The Orphan's tears, and wipes the Widow's eyes," with "*French* Philanthropy—whose boundless mind/

---

[13] William B. Cohen, "The European Comparison," in *Charity, Philanthropy, and Civility*, 396-397; Alan Forrest, *The French Revolution and the Poor* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), 14-15, 17-18, 38; Jones, *Charity and bienfaisance*, 2-3.

Glows with the general love of all mankind" and "beneath whose baneful sway/ Each patriot passion sinks, and dies away."[14]

As the revolutionary tumult crossed the Atlantic, "French Philanthropy" came under attack from another anti-Jacobin vanguard, white refugees of the Haitian Revolution. In 1791, the large slave population of the French colony of Saint-Domingue rose up against the island's plantation elite, a large number of whom made their way to the United States. They brought with them accounts of their antagonists' fiendish brutality and reports of a society turned upside-down, and lay a considerable share of the blame for their unfortunate fate at the feet of French and British abolition. Such "false philanthropy," they insisted, had encouraged the slave uprising and had given license to tyranny and anarchy. Their tragedy had tainted for them the very idea of philanthropy. When in 1809, refugees gathered to celebrate a Philadelphia merchant who had helped more than two thousand white colonists escape Saint-Domingue, one refugee showered him with praise, celebrating him as a "Champion of Humanity," but pointedly refused to classify his actions as 'philanthropy.' That term, he explained, had become "unnaturally perverted by the pretended friends of humanity, who in France, aimed [at] the destruction of the whites, under the veil of an affected pity for the negroes of the Colonies."

For the next half century, in much of the American South, that taint endured; "philanthropy" became suspect through its association with abolitionism. It was a malevolent force, foreign-born and false-faced, that dissolved the intimate attachments between master and slave and undermined social order, while ignoring the squalor and degradation at the feet of the philanthropist himself. At best, it was an undisciplined, sentimental impulse that made mischief by interfering with relations its devotees did not understand. At its worst, it was a hypocritical gesture that insulated the "man of feeling" from an acknowledgement of his complicity in human degradation that could be found on his own doorstep. And so southern journals frequently claimed that the condition of slaves in the south—"where but a few professions of philanthropy are made," but where masters took a paternal interest in the care of their human property—was far superior to the condition of free blacks in the North. Ultimately, the "pretended philanthropy" of the North was merely "a cloak to conceal baser and more sordid motives": jealousy and antipathy to southern institutions and prosperity.[15]

III. <u>American Philanthropy and the Origins of the Scientific Charity Movement</u>

---

[14] Parr quoted in Radcliffe, "Revolutionary Writing," 238; Burke quoted in Radcliffe, "Revolutionary Writing," 234 and in Jones, *End to Poverty?*, 88; *Poetry of the Anti-Jacobin* (London: W. Bulmer and Co., 1801), 237.

[15] Proslavery partisans had also attacked the notions of "disinterested benevolence" promoted by the New England theologian Jonathan Edward, and the "spirit of censoriousness, of denunciation, of coarse authoritative dealing" those notions encouraged, with fueling abolition. They also often traced the roots of Northern philanthropy to the censoriousness and fanaticism at the heart of Puritanism. Kenneth Minkema and Harry Stout, "The Edwardsean Tradition and the Antislavery Debate, 1740-1865," *Journal of American History* 92, no. 1 (June 2005), 65. Ashli White, *Encountering Revolution: Haiti and the Making of the Early Republic* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 78-86 (quote on p. 85); Larry E. Tise, *Proslavery: A History of the Defense of Slavery in America, 1701-1840* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1987), 93; "Free Negroes in the Northern United States," *De Bow's Review* vol. 28 (May 1860), 573; "The Edinburgh Review and the Southern States," *De Bow's Review* vol. 10 (May 1851), 519.

Of course, in regions of the United States more hospitable to abolitionism, philanthropy's association with the antislavery cause only bolstered its status. And if a hint of secular utopianism still clung to the ideal—encouraged, for instance, by the frequent invocation of the term by Masons to describe their program of an expansive world-wide commitment to reform—by the early nineteenth century, in the North, this was counter-balanced by the deeply religious millennial enthusiasm that the term also inspired.

Indeed, for many Americans, the proliferation of benevolent organizations provided convincing proof that God's earthly kingdom was at hand. This growth of organized and institutional benevolence hastened the split between charity and philanthropy in several ways. The emerging fiduciary organizations formalized, and in many respects de-personalized, what had been informal and personal relationships between givers and receivers. Now beneficiary and benefactor were more frequently tied together through monetary contributions made to mediating institutions. This development encouraged the notion that those with the most to give bore an especially weighty charitable burden, which in turn prepared the way for a definition of "philanthropy" that affixed particularly on the substantial benefactions of the wealthy. If, at the end of the eighteenth century, the most renown 'philanthropist' was John Howard, the British reformer celebrated for ministering to prisoners, by the end of the next century, that title would belong to John D. Rockefeller or Andrew Carnegie, men hardly considered saintly by their peers but who happened to have a lot of money to give away.[16]

In the first half of the nineteenth century, the suspicions directed by a number of leading reformers toward prevailing charitable practice widened the divide between charity and philanthropy even further. In part, such concerns stemmed from a surge in demand; in cities and towns throughout the nation, levels of poverty grew significantly, swelled by a series of economic panics, by masses of new and often impoverished immigrants, and by the dislocations of a nascent industrial economy. The emergence of sprawling, heterogeneous metropolises and increasingly mobile populations began to buckle the foundations of neighborly solicitude; by 1854, for instance, sixty-five percent of those who received public relief from Massachusetts towns could not claim legal settlement. As the poor became less familiar to their fellow Americans, they became more menacing. The providential understanding of poverty that had insulated them from the censure of their neighbors began to wear away; "respectable" Americans increasingly came to regard most poverty as a stigmatizing condition, the consequence of moral failure and not of God's inscrutable will. And so the repressive strain that had long fed American attitudes toward the poor grew more prominent during these decades—workhouses sprouted up throughout the nation, in which the "idle poor" could be coerced into labor and trained in the virtues of industriousness, and cities and states passed harsh vagrancy laws that criminalized begging.[17]

For those who came to regard the poor as an inherently suspect class, charitable efforts served primarily as instruments of social control. True charity began with the act of distinguishing the worthy poor—largely women, the elderly, and children—from the

---

[16] Wright, *Transformation of Charity*, 176; Heyrman, "Model of Christian Charity," 73-87.
[17] Kusmer, *Down & Out*, 24, 25; Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1978), 67-107.

unworthy, abled-bodied poor, who required moral reformation. Conflating these categories would only encourage pauperism, the demeaning, unnatural dependence on material relief, a malady that slowly began to eclipse poverty as the most lavishly denounced social ill. The spread of a moralistic understanding of poverty placed a particular onus on potential givers, for if the condition of the poor could be traced to an insufficient work ethic, undisciplined charity risked deepening that moral debility.

In many of the larger northern cities, where charitable societies had proliferated, reformers hatched plans to rationalize and regularize the administration of private relief. Many of these campaigns involved dividing cities into smaller districts over which a voluntary overseer presided, who could visit the poor in their homes, monitor their behavior and impart moral guidance, allowing the poor to overcome the vices and deficiencies that had led to their dependency. The most influential society to embrace these principles was the New York Association for Improving the Condition of the Poor (NY AICP), established in 1843 by a number of the city's prominent businessmen. The Association was founded, they explained in an 1848 report, as a response to the "false and dangerous methods" of charity that prevailed in the city and that promoted "mendacity, vagrancy, and able-bodied pauperism." The association would provide relief to the needy from AICP coffers; its central aim, however, was not to "alleviate wretchedness but to reform character." Its paid agents visited the homes of the poor in the hope of effecting moral regeneration; material uplift, they assumed, would follow.[18]

Such programs registered the early stirrings of the scientific charity movement. Yet in the antebellum years, the movement was still in its infancy and could make only modest inroads against the informal and unsystematic modes of giving—the soup kitchens and church-based relief societies—that continued to appeal to large swaths of the population. The fear of pauperism clung predominantly to *public* relief, with voluntarist charity often promoted as the Christian, and quintessential American, alternative. What's more, in 1860, over eighty percent of Americans still lived in rural areas and small towns, where poverty could be considered a manageable affliction that local communities could address with their own resources. Not till the decades after the Civil War did the effort to eradicate "indiscriminate charity" peak as a fervent and fully national movement. As one reformer explained to an 1888 New York charity conference, for much of the nation's history, its relative prosperity had meant that Americans could simply rely on their penchant for unthinking generosity; charity had simply "taken care of itself." But the influx of immigrants—eleven million newcomers arrived on American shores in the last three decades of the century—had exposed the limitations, and even the perils, of that tradition. (He might have also mentioned the dislocations brought on by military demobilization, another economic recession, and rampant post-war industrializing). In the coming years, he warned, "the problem of charity" would become one of the more pressing social issues.[19]

---

[18] John Alexander, *Render Them Submissive: Responses to Poverty in Philadelphia, 1760-1800* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1980), 131; M.J Heale, "From City Fathers to Social Critics: Humanitarianism and Government in New York, 1790-1860," *Journal of American History* 63 (June 1976), 38; Benjamin J. Klebaner, "Poverty and its Relief in American Thought, 1815-61," *Social Service Review* 38, no. 4 (December 1964), 393; Boyer, *Urban* Masses, 86-94 (AICP quote on page 90); Kusmer, *Down & Out* (AICP quote), 28.

[19] The split between charity and philanthropy was also manifest in the antagonism between the Christian Commission and the Sanitary Commission, two agencies that sought to address the public health and

The speaker was not alone in warning of the "problem of charity," a telling phrase that appeared with increasing frequency in the final decades of the century in the discourse of social reformers. It is especially significant that the widespread "problematizing" of charity occurred at the moment when the fortunes that fed the first wave of modern *philanthropy* were accumulating. It is the convergence of these two developments that constituted the last great wedge, driving charity and philanthropy to their farthest poles.

The philanthropic outpouring of the Gilded Age was unprecedented. The scale of the wealth accumulated by a handful of industrial titans in the years after the Civil War dwarfed the piles of previous generations. These millionaires became an object of fascination for a popular press newly obsessed with "celebrity," as did their enormous gifts; newspapers tallied the sums given by the nation's major benefactors on their front-pages like the baseball box scores of local teams. But the size of those fortunes, and the publicity and scrutiny they attracted, made maintaining a commitment to the close, personal management of philanthropic giving increasingly difficult for most benefactors. The wealthy were flooded with requests for funds and hounded by supplicants; Andrew Carnegie, for instance, received between 400 and 500 requests a day, and nearly twice that amount when one of his large benefactions appeared in the headlines.

No giver experienced these burdens more acutely than did John D. Rockefeller, who had committed himself to the responsible stewardship of wealth at an early age and who took pride in personally reviewing every solicitation of his largesse. But as the letters began to pile up in his parlor—his philanthropic adviser, the Baptist minister Frederick Gates, counted fifty thousand "begging letters" that flooded his office in a one-month period—Rockefeller accepted that he would have to relinquish some of his philanthropic responsibility. His sanity seemed to demand it. As Gates recounted, Rockefeller "was constantly hunted, stalked, and hounded like a wild animal" and was nearly driven to the brink of a mental breakdown by the onslaught. Given such pressures, Gates impressed upon Rockefeller that he must give up the practice of "retail giving" and instead take up a "wholesale" approach, letting other institutions mediate the philanthropic exchange. He would ultimately convince Rockefeller that the scale of his fortune was such that it would crush him and his family "like an avalanche" if he did not "distribute it faster than it grows." To this end Gates suggested that Rockefeller turn over the administration of his wealth to a foundation, to be managed by a team of able and astute managers. Such an institution allowed Rockefeller's fortune to be directed toward grand ambitions, as expressed in the phrase that graced the foundation's charter: "the promotion of the well-being of mankind." Philanthropy increasingly came to be associated with these expansive ends and in the process, moved farther away from small-

---

material relief of soldiers during the Civil War. The former approached its mission largely through the immediate relief of suffering, while the latter emphasized the need for efficiency. See, for instance, Jeanie Attie, *Patriotic Toil: Northern Women and the American Civil War* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998); Lori Ginzberg, *Women and the Work of Benevolence: Morality, Politics and Class in the Nineteenth-Century United States* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), chap. 5. Kusmer, *Down & Out*, 33; *Sixth Annual Report of the Central Council of the Charity Organization Society of the City of New York* (New York: [COS] Central Office, 1888), 35.

scale, proximate encounters with distress, from retail giving, which became the exclusive purview of charity.[20]

And so, both in theory and in practice, the new vocation of modern philanthropy required an active distancing from the traditional practice of charity. In that act of dissociation, Gilded Age benefactors joined a broader assault, emanating from all along the socio-economic spectrum. On the right, proponents of social Darwinist theory promoted the idea that charity would encourage the survival of the unfit; as the high priest of laissez-faire, Yale's William Graham Sumner, declared, free men must be left to deal with the consequences of their actions, and by interfering with such "justice," charity often proved itself "the next most pernicious thing to vice." On the left, as historian Peter Mandler has explained, throughout the western world, the development of a more assertive working-class culture that celebrated the independent bread-winning male encouraged an increased "hostil[ity] to old-fashioned charity." Workers who had once been willing to accept private relief could now turn to labor-supported welfare organizations or to state guaranteed provisions and thus found it easier to reject private benevolence as demeaning to their manhood. "Their former instrumentalism yielded to a haughty disdain," writes Mandler. Workers increasingly expressed this hostility through the slogan, "Justice and not Charity"—though it should be noted that, for many, the latter term encompassed the indignity of a Carnegie library as well as the alms of a stranger. Each proved a diversion—sometimes an intentional one—from the structural reforms to economic arrangements necessary to give workers' their due. In fact, the disdain for charity was one of the few planks on which labor could find common ground with capitol. Referring to John D. Rockefeller's reputation as a supporter of scientific philanthropy, one socialist publication expressed its solidarity with the Standard Oil magnate, bestowing on him the title of "Comrade." "We want justice, not charity," announced an article in the *Chicago Daily Socialist*. "So say we, and so say John D."[21]

There was, in fact, a pronounced congruity between the ascendant scientific charity movement and the burgeoning fortunes of the Gilded Age. The movement received funding from many of the nation's industrial and financial elite—J.P. Morgan and John D. Rockefeller, most prominently—who often borrowed from scientific charity

---

[20] Joseph Frazier Wall, *Andrew Carnegie* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1970), 881, 824-825; Charles L. Ponce de Leon, *Self-Exposure: Human-Interest Journalism and the Emergence of Celebrity in America, 1890-1940* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Frederick Taylor Gates, *Chapters in My Life* (New York: The Free Press, 1977), 161 (quote), 163-164; Fosdick, *The Story of the Rockefeller Foundation* (1952; repr., New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1989), 3.

[21] Yet the convergence of the rhetoric of scientific philanthropy and of socialist redistribution was by no means exact; one of the leading critics of Carnegie's "Gospel of Wealth," for instance, dismissed Carnegie's philanthropy as "charity" seeking to do the work of justice, because it did not address the fundamental unequal distribution of wealth. William Jewett Tucker, "The Gospel of Wealth," *Andover Review* 15, no. 90 (June 1891), 645. William Graham Sumner, *What Social Classes Owe to Each Other* (New York: Harper & Bros., 1883), 156, 35; Peter Mandler, "Poverty and Charity in the Nineteenth-Century Metropolis: An Introduction," in Mandler, ed. *The Uses of Charity: The Poor on Relief in the Nineteenth-Century Metropolis* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1990), 25; James Ross Turner, *Organized Labor, Critic of Philanthropy, 1880-1915* (Master's Thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1961), 28; Robert C. Miller, *Labor and Philanthropy 1885-1917* (Master's Thesis, University of Wisconsin, 1962); *Chicago Daily Socialist* quoted in *Mexico City Herald*, December 18, 1908, clipping in Box 10, Scrapbooks (series M), Record Group 1 John D. Rockefeller Papers, Rockefeller Family Archives, Rockefeller Archive Center [RAC], Tarrytown, New York.

discourse in defining their commitment to philanthropy against small-scale, parochial charity. For their part, many scientific charity reformers subscribed to an early variant of philanthro-capitalism, insisting that the organization and systemization that had galvanized American industry should be applied to charitable agencies. They combined this veneration of the language and logic of the corporate boardroom with a faith that the problems of poverty could be addressed through the rigors of scientific inquiry. If the efficiency that guided successful businessmen and the systematic thought that governed the laboratory were applied to the administration of charity, the fundamental causes of poverty might be uprooted and poverty (and thus the need for charity itself) could be abolished. The ultimate aim of scientific charity reformers, the movement's partisans often joked, was to put themselves out of business.[22]

What gave the scientific charity movement its biggest boost was the depression of 1873, a financial cataclysm that ushered in five years of economic hard times and two decades of treacherously unstable business cycles. By some estimates, one in six employable men could not find work; demand for public and private relief, which had been rising steadily over the previous decades, skyrocketed. From out of this crisis emerged one of the era's most recognizable—and most often maligned—figures: the tramp. Out-of-work vagrants, many of them Civil War veterans, made use of the newly laid rail-road lines and traveled from town to town, begging—and occasionally stealing—for their sustenance. Spreading out across the country, passing through big cities and small towns, tramps guaranteed that charity became a *national* problem. Many Americans began to imagine tramping, and the aggressive begging that it seemed to encourage, as a direct threat to the work ethic, and the "tramp menace" converged in their minds with the social unrest promoted by various itinerant industrial armies and militant labor leaders. In their anxious imaginings, the outstretched hand became the clenched fist.[23]

These fears fed into broader apprehensions that the public and private relief offered in response to the economic panic had created a class of permanently dependent citizens. Struggling to make sense of the scale of economic distress, some observers blamed it on the nation's "superfluity of benevolence," in the words of Boston minister Edward Everett Hale. The proliferation of paupers and tramps, he explained, was fostered "by the reckless generosity and hospitality of the people." Hale's widely shared belief provided the soil for the growth of the leading institutional manifestation of the scientific charity movement in the post-bellum years, charity organization societies (COS). As the COS's first historian, Frank Dekker Watson, later noted, the movement owed its origins "not so much to the fact that people were poor as to the fact that others were charitable."[24]

IV. Not Alms But A Friend: The Rise of the Charity Organization Society

---

[22] Roy Lubove, *The Professional Altruist: The Emergence of Social Work as a Career 1880-1930* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), 6-7; D.O. Kellogg, "Reformation of Charity," *Atlantic Monthly* 57, no. 342 (April 1886), 454.

[23] Kusmer, *Down & Out*, 38-48.

[24] Edward Everett Hale, "Report on Tramps," *Proceedings of the Conference of Charities, held in connection with the General Meeting of the American Social Science Association. At Saratoga, September 1877* (Boston: A. Williams & Co., 1877), 104; Frank Dekker Watson, *The Charity Organization Movement in the United State: Study in American Philanthropy* (New York: Macmillan, 1922), 215.

A group of British reformers had established the first COS in London in 1868 as an effort to address the social distance that had developed between the East End poor and the wealthier residents of the West End. In 1877, convinced that more than half of Buffalo's private charity and public relief was being wasted on the unworthy, and that the spread of pauperism threatened to establish perilous social cleavages between the city's classes, Episcopal minister S. Humphreys Gurteen established the first city-wide charity organization society in the Untied States. Two years later, Philadelphia formed one of its own, which quickly became the largest relief society in the city and the largest COS in the nation. By the mid 1890s, there were more than a hundred similar societies clustered in the larger cities of the Eastern seaboard and the Great Lakes region, and a number in the smaller towns of the Midwest, West Coast, and Southern states as well. If the first generation of scientific charity societies represented relatively isolated urban experiments, turn-of-the-century COS's were participants in a robust, national movement, joined together through a number of journals and conferences, a faith in the urgency of the work at hand, and a commitment to four key principles: the investigation of charity applicants; the registration of charity recipients; the facilitation of cooperation amongst charitable societies; and the promotion of friendly visiting of the poor.[25]

Underlying these principles was another, more fundamental one: a belief in the inadequacy, and even the malignancy, of much traditional charitable giving. This conviction ultimately pushed the COS movement in both repressive and progressive directions. In both cases, the refusal to give alms, despite the significant emotional compensations the act offered, was worn as a badge of honor, a mark of advanced moral standing. In fact, American proponents of charity organization distinguished their activism from that of their British predecessors and earlier American relief societies by the zealotry of their repudiations of alms. The Buffalo Charity Organization Society, for instance, prohibited the society from disbursing relief from its own funds in its constitution and placed imposing signs on the stone piers flanking the entrance to its main office, announcing, "No Relief Given Here." And while COSs offered services such as loan societies, day nurseries and employment bureaus, in their first decade of operation most societies placed particular emphasis on efforts to eliminate redundant giving, weed out the undeserving applicants for relief and expose impostures. In cities around the nation, COSs sponsored "mendicancy squads," working closely with police departments (and sometimes employing the police as their paid agents), to expose charitable frauds and to round up vagrants and beggars for arrest. Many charity organization societies also offered wood yards where work tests were applied, in order to ensure that relief recipients were truly in need and imbued with a sufficiently robust work ethic.

Antebellum scientific charity organizations had featured similar programs, but what made COS's approach novel was their commitment to justifying them, and

[25] Charles D. Kellogg, "Charity Organization in the United States," *Proceedings of the National Conference of Charities and Correction* (Boston: Press of Geo. H. Ellis, 1893), 61; Brent Ruswick, Almost Worthy: The Poor, Paupers, and the Science of Charity in America, 1877-1917 (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 18-19; Verl Lewis, "Stephen Humphreys Gurteen and the American Origins of Charity Organization," *Social Service Review* 40, no. 2 (June 1966), 190-201; "Debate on Charity Organization," *Proceedings of the Eighth Annual Conference of Charities and Correction* (Boston: A. Williams and Company, 1881), 138; Watson, *Charity Organization Movement*, 218; Lubove, *Professional Altruist*, 5.

promoting the critical attitude toward charitable giving, to the general public. At every opportunity, their partisans denounced the dangers of indiscriminate giving, and more so than in a previous generation, made almsgiving deeply unfashionable among wide swaths of the middle and professional classes. In a 1882 report, the head of an established scientific charity organization in Boston, founded in the early 1850s, attributed a general "awakening of the public mind" against indiscriminate giving to the recently created COS in the city. He added, somewhat resentfully, that his own association had been waging a similar campaign for three decades but had failed to generate much public interest. They had perhaps been less savvy about publicity, he conceded, articulating their principles "chiefly through…Annual Reports," which, he conceded, "a very small part of the public ever read."[26]

The COS movement embraced this educative mission as central to their identity. Unlike other charitable associations, they did not present themselves as relief dispensing agencies; they did not claim to increase a community's charitable resources but to provide a mechanism for ensuring that existing resources were utilized efficiently. When prospective donors interrogated Josephine Shaw Lowell, one of the founders of the New York COS, about how much of their contributions to the society would actually reach the poor, she would proudly reply, "Not one cent!" Another leading COS official boasted that all of the society's funding went toward "red tape." Most COSs featured a central office, where staff compiled a registry of all those who had received aid from other charitable agencies or private individuals, a list of all those who had been exposed as frauds, and reams of intelligence gleaned from investigations performed by COS agents of relief applicants, all of which citizens could consult before making a decision to give. More often than not, these consultations resulted in the determination that material assistance was unwarranted.[27]

Some COS officials no doubt took a sort of constabulary pleasure in these punitive measures. For many other COS advocates, however, the attacks on irresponsible almsgiving primarily served as a means of directing benevolent energy toward more constructive channels: personal ministration to the poor. This rechanneling was captured by the movement's motto: "Not Alms But a Friend." The movement's most vital agents were a corps of "friendly visitors" who sought to provide moral guidance, emotional support and practical instruction to the poor. They also conducted investigations for other charitable agencies to determine the moral worthiness of potential recipients and collected information on families that had already received support to determine the effectiveness of the aid granted—and whether it should continue. They then brought this intelligence back to a local district office, where a volunteer committee, assisted by a staff of paid agents, would make the final decision regarding the continuation or termination of relief.[28]

---

[26] Kusmer, *Down & Out*, 82; Watson, *Charity Organization Movement*, 314; *Thirty-First Annual Report of the Boston Provident Association, October 1882* (Boston: Nathan Sawyer & Sons, 1882), 10.

[27] Lowell quoted in Robert Bremner, *Discovery of Poverty in the United States* (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1992 [1956]), 52; Charles Kellogg, "Charity Organization as an Educating Force," *Charities Review* 2:1 (November 1892), 19; Stephen Pimpare, *The New Victorians: Poverty, Politics, and Propaganda in Two Gilded Ages* (New York: New Press, 2004), 49.

[28] Lubove, *Professional Altruist*, 12; Josephine Shaw Lowell, "Charity Organization," *Lend a Hand* 3, no. 2 (February 1888), 81, 85; Marvin E. Gettleman, "Charity and Social Classes in the United States, 1876-1900," *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 22, no. 2 (April 1963), 317.

The reasons behind the emphasis on friendly visiting were manifold, reflecting the varying ideologies collected within the movement itself. For some, the celebration of personal contact served as a corrective to an overreliance on progressive legislation. As one COS official commented, an individual could not be lifted out of poverty with a "social derrick," and thus, "the only value of organization is to intensify and wisely direct" individual effort. The personalized attention that COS advocated was also held up in opposition to the systems of supposedly cold and impersonal public relief that the movement steadfastly opposed. Friendly visiting also clearly assuaged fears of class conflict. The movement's champions were not at all shy about framing charity organization societies as institutions of a besieged urban middle-class. Far from bringing rich and poor together, they maintained, almsgiving tended to stoke suspicions and resentments between the classes. Disciplining charitable practice, declared one COS leader, could make "the social chasm between the rich and poor…a smiling valley fit for habitation"—without threatening to close that gap through radical economic redistribution.[29]

In fact, much of COS ideology seemed to stem from an urban middle-class nostalgia for village life, a yearning for a time when daily personal contact with familiar neighbors bolstered social hierarchies and when benefactor and beneficiary were knit together through bonds of sympathy and gratitude. Friendly visiting would in essence break down a city into smaller, more manageable units where such relations could be re-established, so that the "natural charity" of friends and neighbors could replace the "artificial charity" of strangers. As one New York charity official noted approvingly in 1884, an agency dedicated to the principles of scientific charity was simply an "artifice…to restore the natural relations of men to their fellows, of which life in a city has robbed them."[30]

Leaders of charity organization societies often explained that their efforts were not primarily aimed to reform the poor but to rehabilitate the charitable relation. And so for all the viciousness of their attacks on indiscriminate giving, they did not share the contempt of some theorists for the ideal of charity itself. On the contrary, their campaign was animated by their veneration of that ideal, and their sense that it had been debased by the indignities of urban life. When at a 1907 meeting, the New York COS debated whether to scrap the word 'charity' from the organization's title, Mary Richmond, one of the movement's leading theorists, insisted that it be retained. The ideal, she acknowledged, had been tarnished by an association with material relief. But "bringing that word back to its original meaning"—of loving-kindness and personal service—"is just as good a single task as we can undertake." A devotion to that original meaning required attention not merely to the objective consequences of a gift, but also to the subjective state, the emotional and spiritual conditions, that attended it (though, it should be said, that COS officials rarely gave much thought to how it felt to be on the receiving end of COS assistance). Charity organization societies were certainly preaching a

---

[29] E.C. Bolles, "Would Personal Influence Diminish Pauperism," *Charities Review* 2:8 (June 1893), 410-411; George Buzelle, "Charity Organization in Cities," *Charities Review* 2, no. 1 (November 1892), 6.
[30] Charles S. Fairchild, "Objects of Charity Organization," *Proceedings of the National Conference of Charities and Correction at the Eleventh Annual Session* (Boston: Press of Geo. H. Ellis, 1885), 66.

rationalized giving, but they also heralded the instrumentality of *caritas*. If they were championing a "New Charity," it had inherited much from the old.[31]

Of course, the friendly visitor was a figure rife with contradictions, at once a friend and an inquisitor. The visitor embodied the tensions than ran through the charity organization movement more generally, which sought to balance a dedication to personal service with the charge to rationalize undisciplined private giving. Much of the historiography on the movement has interpreted these contradictions as a form of hypocrisy and assumed that they stemmed from an essentially reactionary mission. In engaging the COS, many scholars have focused on the movement's participation in the campaign to ban public relief, which resulted in several major cities, among them New York and Philadelphia, ending the practice. These battles were understood as the forerunners of the efforts to reform—and ultimately to slash—welfare disbursements to poor mothers a century later; many historians had little sympathy for welfare reform and interpreted the COS through the prism of their disfavor.[32]

Historians have done a service in highlighting the COS's repressive strain and in doing so have echoed the critiques offered up by the movement's many contemporaneous adversaries, who succeeded in inscribing the callous, inquisitorial charity official, devoted to "organized charity, scrimped and iced, in the name of a cautious, statistical Christ," as a particularly noxious stock character in the popular imagination. COS's own records are full of accounts of officials demonstrating a shocking disregard for the dignity of the poor: imposing middle-class standards of rectitude and decency and punishing aid applicants when they perceived these to be disregarded (as in the case of one Connecticut woman who had her aid denied because she was "too flashily dressed"); shamelessly intruding on the private lives of aid applicants; insisting on absolute deference to the authority of the visitor. And yet reducing the entire movement to these failings does not do it justice. Indeed, the most recent scholarship on the movement has tended to paint a more nuanced picture, one that has shown how it contained both repressive and progressive strains. For one, as historian Brent Ruswick has demonstrated, there was a decided split between the movement's rank-in-file and the leaders of smaller, more provincial societies, which tended to maintain an emphasis on the elimination of pauperism and the prevention of charitable fraud, and the movement's elite, clustered in the nation's largest cities, who delivered the addresses at the major conferences and who composed the journal articles and textbooks that defined scientific charity doctrine, and who slowly began to challenge some of the movement's foundational premises.[33]

The progressive strain they cultivated had lay dormant for much of the COS's first decade in the United States, though it could be detected in the movement's interest, from its earliest days, in the promotion of community-based institutions that might stave off pauperism: day nurseries and loan societies, for instance (and even further back, in the focus cast by the forerunner of the movement, the AICP, on the environmental precipitants of individual moral debasement). If the economic recession of the 1870s stoked the growth of COSs in the United States, the depression that began in 1893 and

---

[31] "Twenty-five Years and After," *Charities and the Commons* XIX no. 9 (November 30, 1907), 1142-1144.

[32] For an example of the explicit comparison of the two campaigns, see Pimpare, *New Victorians*.

[33] Ruswick, *Almost Worthy*, 179; David Wagner, *What's Love Got to DO With It? A Critical Look at American Charity* (New York: New Press, 2000), 62-63.

that lasted for the next half-decade triggered this progressive reorientation. At the depression's peak, unemployment rates exceeded thirty percent in many industries. An especially severe winter in much of the North exacerbated the crisis. The scale and scope of the distress eroded the moralistic and individualistic understanding of poverty that had provided the foundation for much COS thought. The scenes of respectable middle-class citizens, shame-facedly huddling in bread-lines, broke down any clear division between the worthy and unworthy poor and forced charity workers to confront the structural and environmental causes of poverty. As Edward Devine, the general secretary of the New York COS, announced in 1906, the "dominant note of modern philanthropy" was a commitment to overthrowing "*those particular causes of dependence and intolerable living conditions which are beyond the control of the individuals whom they injure*." And so charity organization societies, especially those in major cities, began to take the lead in what came to be called campaigns of "preventative philanthropy": for instance, investigations into unsanitary housing conditions by the New York COS that helped secure the New York Tenement House Law of 1901, the society's campaign against tuberculosis that focused on the "social" basis of the disease, and the Baltimore COS's collaboration with labor organizations to pass child labor, factory inspection, and compulsory education legislation in Maryland.[34]

The COS's progressive strain constituted an alternative response to the recognition of the limits of almsgiving; it represented an effort not to reform charitable efforts that failed to touch the root causes of poverty but to transcend the need for charity entirely. One of the COS's first historians, Frank Dekker Watson, summed up this duality nicely when he wrote: "In one sense, the end and aim of all charity is no charity; in another, the end and aim of all charity is more charity." Working for more charity and no more charity: this became the charity organization movement's dual, somewhat contradictory, mandate.[35]

Indeed, the COS movement struggled to incorporate within the same organization the imperatives that animated both charity and philanthropy. In its earliest years, this struggle took a particular form: grappling with the quandary of how to address oneself to the temporary and immediate relief of poverty as well as to the permanent abolition of pauperism. The two charges were uneasily intertwined in the pages of the movement's journals, and the challenge of alternating between them preoccupied the minds of nearly all COS leaders. This was most certainly the case with Edward Everett Hale, one of the movement's elder statesmen, a Boston minister who yearned for a return to the days when the city was more like an overgrown village while also publishing a journal detailing the latest advancements in scientific charity thought. During an 1884 lecture, Hale seemed to register the strain of balancing the pursuit of more charity and no more charity. He proposed wearing distinct costumes when discussing the attempts to attack

---

[34] Boyer, *Urban Masses*, 93; Edward Devine, "The Dominant Note of Modern Philanthropy," *Proceedings of the NCCC* (n.p.: Fred. J. Heer, [1906]), 3 (italics in original); Watson, *Charity Organization Movement*, 217; Ruswick, "Almost Progressive," 8; Dawn Greeley, "Beyond Benevolence: Gender, Class and the Development of Scientific Charity in New York City, 1882-1935" (PhD diss., State University of New York-Buffalo, 1995), 371-5; Elizabeth N. Agnew, *From Charity to Social Work: Mary E. Richmond and the Creation of an American Profession* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2004), 106.

[35] Watson, *Charity Organization Movement*, 504.

the ills of poverty and the danger of pauperism; on another occasion, he suggested that charitable societies alternate weeks of addressing each topic.[36]

Yet the COS movement had from its inception fueled much of its fervor through the interplay of such polarities. The movement defined itself, for instance, through the contending ideals of masculinity and femininity and of the volunteer and the professional; each bringing to light and offsetting the inadequacies and shortcomings of the other. Buffalo's Rev. Gurteen had insisted that all the members of the district committees of the city's COS be men, "for this is especially a man's work." And COS rhetoric singled out women as most susceptible to indiscriminate and sentimental giving. Yet COS leaders also suggested that their natures equipped women especially well for friendly visiting and individualized engagement with the poor and worried that the rationalization of giving that charity organization societies encouraged might sap their reserves of feminine sympathy. The operation of a COS could tap the supposed virtues of each gender—and the critiques that each offered the other. At the same time, COS leaders relied on the contributions of both paid (and eventually professionalized) agents as well as volunteers, emphasizing both the dangers of leaving charity work to the undisciplined, untrained and unthinking, while also regarding their corps of volunteers as an "investment" against the charge of professional and bureaucratic callousness. As Harvard moral philosopher Francis Peabody explained in an influential 1893 speech on the "Problem of Charity," the challenge facing organized charity was to combine "soft-heartedness" with "hard-headedness."[37]

That challenge became even more profound after the reorientation of COS attitudes in the 1890s, when it involved balancing the relief of immediate needs with "preventative" philanthropy. Perhaps no one grappled with this predicament more assiduously than Mary Richmond, who held prominent COS positions in Baltimore and Philadelphia (and at the Russell Sage Foundation), and who pioneered the social diagnostics that would define the early years of professional social work. As her biographer notes, Richmond sought "to balance modern social scientific method, professional expertise, and legislative reform with nineteenth century ideals of personal influence, citizen participation, and individual moral reform." She urged her fellow charity workers to take up this "safe middle ground," but, in more candid moments, also acknowledged that it could prove a treacherous terrain, situated between the hostile territory of traditionalists and progressives. In fact, she joked that by the turn of the century charity organization adherents were suffering the indignities of "middle age;" their 'new charity," which had once pushed aside an older charitable tradition that had privileged almsgiving, was now rebuffed by the advocates of a "newer charity" that focused on securing structural reforms.[38]

Richmond's "middle ground" was bounded on one side by her belief that individual character often lay at the center of the problems of poverty and on the other by an appreciation of social interdependence and the power of the environment over

---

[36] E.E. Hale, "The Abolition of Pauperism," *Lend a Hand* 13, no. 1 (July 1894), 21; [Hale], "Work of Prevention," *Lend a Hand* 2, no. 2 (February 1887), 65.

[37] Gurteen quoted in Watson, *Charity Organization Movement*, 181; "The Volunteer as Investment," quoted in Greeley, "Beyond Benevolence," 473; Francis Peabody, "The Problem of Charity," *Charities Review* 3, no. 1 (November 1893), 7.

[38] Agnew, *From Charity to Social Work*, 7; Richmond quoted in Lubove, *Professional Altruist*, 11; Mary Richmond, "Criticism and Reform in Charity," *Charities Review* 5, no. 4 (February 1896), 169, 170.

individuals. Cultivating the "middle ground" required combining a commitment to individualized casework with an engagement with the offerings of social science, an appreciation of the import of legislative reform with a dismissal of the sweeping programs of reformist "wholesalers." The "middle ground" also demanded an ability to see the folly of the "common mistake" endorsed by many reformers who assumed that the temporary relief of suffering and its ultimate eradication were competing, mutually exclusive ends. "Never was there a more mischievous social fallacy!" Richmond declared in her 1908 *The Good Neighbor in the Modern City*. "Prevention and cure must go hand in hand." At a conference a few years later, she expressed exasperation with the type of ardent reformer who insisted that an hour spent writing a letter to a senator lobbying for progressive legislation would do more good than days spent in "retail" service, tending to the immediate needs of the poor. After all, she argued, those who had come in personal contact with the suffering of the poor were "ten time as likely" to write that letter in the first place. It was possible, in other words, for the same person to seek more charity, and no more charity, without undue strain.[39]

Richmond believed that the "good neighbor" could dedicate his or her career to both charity and philanthropy, that there need not be an absolute occupational partition between the two. And yet, ultimately, it did prove difficult for the COS movement to commit itself to both individualized and social understandings of reform and to both retail and wholesale work; and by the second decade of the twentieth century, it had split down its seams. In the final decades of the century, charity organization societies began to sponsor their own preparatory schools, which ultimately became the nation's first schools of professional social work. As the drive to professionalize swept through the field, volunteer visitors became increasingly marginalized within the movement; it was the specialized expertise of the social worker, and not "friendliness," that defined his or her service. And after flirting for the previous decade with more environmental structural reforms, social workers' commitment to casework returned to a more "individual, dispositional orientation." In fact, in the new century, many of the civic functions and reform causes that had incubated within COSs matured and developed separate and self-sustaining organizational apparatuses; housing reform and public health initiatives gained their own partisans and forums for deliberation and advocacy. Even one of the movement's founders, Josephine Shaw Lowell, grew disillusioned with charity work and by the turn of the century had began to focus her energies on labor issues. As she explained to her sister—seemingly affirming the dichotomy that Mary Richmond had rejected—she would "leave the broken down paupers to others," for "[i]t is better to save them before they go under, than to spend your life fishing them out when they're half drowned and taking care of them afterwards!"[40]

---

[39] David C. Hammack, "A Center of Intelligence for the Charity Organization Movement: The Foundation's Early Years," in David Hammack and Stanton Wheeler, *Social Science in the Making: Essays on the Russell Sage Foundation, 1907-1972* (New York: Russell Sage Foundation, 1994), 20; Agnew, *From Charity to Social Work*, 3, 7, 129; Richmond on "wholesalers" quoted in Lubove, *Professional Altruist*, 41; Mary Richmond, *The Good Neighbor in the Modern City* (Philadelphia: J.B. Lippincott, 1907), 17; Mary E. Richmond, "The Inter-Relation of Social Movements," *Proceedings of the NCCC* (Fort Wayne: Anchor Printing Co., [1910]), 216.

[40] Agnew, *From Charity to Social Work*, 163 (quote), 207; Lubove, *Professional Altruist*, 19-20; Josephine Shaw Lowell to Mollie [Mrs. Henry S. Russell], April 7, 1889, and Lowell to Annie [Mrs. Robert Gould Shaw], May 19, 1889, in *The Philanthropic Work of Josephine Shaw Lowell*, ed. William Rhinelander

V. The Catholic Critique of Charity

   If the charity organization movement's campaign to expose the dangers of charitable giving encouraged some to abandon the vocation of charity entirely, it also provoked a counter-mobilization in charity's defense. The urban penny press, for instance, played upon the public's suspicion of the scientific charity establishment to champion the prerogatives of small givers, sponsoring charitable campaigns with the guarantee that all the money given would go directly to those in need, without any effort to investigate the "worthiness" of recipients. In 1894, the Bread Fund of the *New York World*, for instance, gave away one and a quarter millions loaves, an effort that it championed as snipping away the "red tape" of the city's scientific charity agencies. Scientific charity also found itself under attack from particular precincts within the religious community. In 1888, B.F. De Costa, a rector of New York's Episcopalian Church of St. John the Evangelist and a leading labor activist, launched a public campaign against the city's COS, championing a libel case on behalf of a "decayed gentlemen" who had been labeled a "professional beggar" by the organization and added to a cautionary list shared with the city's other relief agencies. De Costa insisted upon a "right to beg," which was "as sacred as the right to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness." "No human statute can destroy that right," he wrote, "any more than it can take from us the right to pray."[41]
   It is not surprising that De Costa ultimately converted to Catholicism, for Catholics launched the most impassioned defense of traditional charity—and were also singled out by COS leaders for promoting "indiscriminate giving" and for substituting the emotional needs of the benefactor for the public good. In countless sermons and public addresses, Catholic leaders used these attacks to craft a sustained apologia for charity and for corporeal acts of mercy more generally. In doing so, they staked out a pole on the antithesis that scientific charity had developed, distinguishing Catholic 'charity' from non-Catholic 'philanthropy' or 'humanitarianism.' They stressed Catholics' reluctance to regard the poor through the lens of political economy, as derelict citizens whose poverty could be attributed to their own moral failings. Instead, they claimed to view poverty through a supernatural and sacramental prism and to look upon the indigent as representatives of Christ, to whom Catholics owed a special obligation. Their giving was, in different regards, both more materially-minded and more spiritually focused than that encouraged by the scientific charity movement. They sought to relieve immediate suffering—to feed the hungry and clothe the naked—without seeking to abolish the scourge of poverty more generally; but they also sought to provide spiritual consolation in the face of that suffering and regarded the spiritual good done to the giver through the act of giving as the defining characteristic of the act. Consequently, they worried less about the problems of indiscriminate charity or the specter of pauperism and more about the spiritual damage done to the giver by hard-heartedness or the erosion of

---

Stewart (New York: Macmillan Company, 1911), 357, 358; Watson, *Charity Organization Movement*, 125, 408, 504, 531.

[41] Kusmer, *Down & Out*, 81-82; B.F. De Costa, "The Right to Beg: In its Relation to Charity Organization," quoted in *The Argus* (March 30, 1889), Box 156, Community Service Society Papers, Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Columbia University, New York.

sympathy by the forces of centralization and bureaucratization. As one Catholic charity worker conceded, it was entirely possible that "the [friendly] visitor's sympathy may be wasted on the unworthy." But unlike "scientific philanthropists," Catholics believed in "giv[ing] the poor the benefit of every reasonable doubt."[42]

In counterpoising Catholic charity with worldly philanthropy, turn-of-the-century American Catholics were echoing the Church's rebukes to the challenges to its legitimacy made during the French Revolution and counter-Reformation polemics before that. In the years before the Civil War, that split had been buttressed by an iconoclastic Catholic convert, Orestes Brownson, who in several militant essays detailed the failings of philanthropy and situated them within an American context. These writings rang with the convert's zeal, for in Brownson's early years he had been not only a religious free-thinker but also a leading proponent of radical humanitarian utopianism. Born in 1803 in Vermont at a time of heady religious enthusiasm, young Brownson dabbled in nearly all the varieties of Yankee religiosity: moving from the orthodox Calvinism of Presbyterianism to subsequent engagements with Universalism, freethinking rationalism, Unitarianism and Transcendentalism. In his early adulthood, he fell under the influence of Continental theorists such as Benjamin Constant and Saint-Simon and began to espouse a "religion of humanity" that would bring about a just and egalitarian society. Yet a number of political disappointments led him to despair of the radical promise of democracy and of the humanitarian project more generally. Recognizing the need for a transcendent authority, an objective moral foundation beyond the subjectivities of human sentiment, he drifted toward Catholicism and finally converted in 1844.[43]

Brownson renounced the prodigal humanitarianism of his earlier years, employing his newly acquired arsenal of Catholic doctrine. He rejected reformist schemes not grounded in supernatural motives that sought the "progress of man or society *by virtue of a purely human principle*." This terrestrial principle he termed 'philanthropy,' which he defined as the love of mankind and which he rebuked for ignoring man's ultimate dependence on God's continuous creative power. He contrasted philanthropy to charity, which he defined as the love of God, and of man through God. Brownson considered charity the result of a submission to duty and recognition of an objective law. He classified philanthropy, on the other hand, as a capricious human sentiment, the result of an essentially selfish effort to gratify the affections. In this respect philanthropy could be considered an outward expression of Protestantism's fundamental flaw, its support for a right to private judgment that located religion almost entirely in an emotional realm of individual subjectivity. Ironically, Brownson's critique of humanitarianism mirrored the Protestant critique of Catholic charity and indiscriminate giving more broadly; whereas Protestants emphasized that Catholics gave in order to benefit their own spiritual welfare,

---

[42] L.J. Lindon, "Out-door relief as Administered by Church Societies," *St. Vincent de Paul Quarterly* 4, no. 1 (Feb. 1899), 22-23.

[43] For details on Brownson's biography, see Gregory S. Butler, *In Search of the American Spirit: The Political Thought of Orestes Brownson* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1992); and Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., *A Pilgrim's Progress: Orestes A. Brownson* (Boston: Little Brown and Co., 1939).

Brownson understood non-Catholic giving to be rooted in an effort to satisfy emotional, sentimental and fundamentally secular needs.[44]

Brownson added utilitarian reasons to the theological justifications for privileging charity over philanthropy. Since philanthropy relied on the love of man, a "mere sentiment" that derived from an urge to satisfy subjective desires, it would fail exactly when it was needed the most—when the philanthropic project became distasteful, when the object of philanthropy seemed most unworthy and unredeemable, and when the philanthropist was forced to operate out of the public eye. Brownson also attacked philanthropy's assumption that material deprivation was the greatest evil one could suffer. Brownson worried that in making poverty shameful humanitarians made it harder for men and women to tolerate difficulties that they once bore honorably in a more "robust and manly age." The compulsion of philanthropists to abolish poverty in pursuit of the perfection of Man reflected a secret antipathy for men as they actually were, he believed. Charity, on the other hand, "takes men in the concrete as she finds them, does the work nearest at hand and most pressing to be done."[45]

Such modesty was necessary to counteract the despotic inclinations of philanthropy. If left unchecked, philanthropy, "the love of all men in general, and of no one in particular," led to gross violations of individual dignity. In its denial of human particularity in a rush to champion humanity, it embodied the spirit of the French Revolution, as interpreted by Brownson: "Stranger, embrace me as your brother, or I will kill you." Charity, on the other hand, because of the value it placed on the individual, could not accept a means inconsistent with its ends, or sacrifice a man for mankind. Such an analysis presaged the Catholic resistance to scientific charity support for eugenics (which Catholics often associated with an endorsement of birth control and abortion), as well as Catholics' discomfort with the movement's embrace of varieties of Social Darwinism.[46]

Unsurprisingly, postbellum advances in social reform did not impress Brownson. He applauded the defeat of the feudalistic Southern slaveholders, who ignored "the rights of society founded on the solidarity of the race, and [attempted] to make all rights and powers personal." Yet he regarded the northern abolitionists as subject to the opposite malady, a willingness to trample on individual rights and "territorial circumspections" on behalf of the "vague generality" of "humanity." Brownson predicted that, if unchecked, the philanthropy of the northern humanitarians, exercised through a strong central government, would lead to Negro suffrage, the equality of the sexes, the abolition of private property, and ultimately, to a nihilistic denial of all human distinctions. After the war, Brownson placed the burden of defending the nation from the menace of humanitarianism on American Catholics, who could best appreciate the difference between Christian charity and secular philanthropy. In the final years of his life,

---

[44] [Brownson], "Charity and Philanthropy," *Catholic World* 4, no. 22 (Jan. 1867), 434, 435, 436; Orestes Brownson, "Labor and Association," in *The Works of Orestes A. Brownson*, ed. Henry F. Brownson, (Detroit: Thorndike Nourse, 1884), 10:60; Brownson, "Beecherism and its Tendencies," in *Works*, 3:463.
[45] Brownson, "Labor and Association," 60-61; Brownson, "Charity and Philanthropy," 440, 439, 444; Brownson, "Sick Calls," in *Works*, 10:595; Butler, *In Search of the American Spirit*, 139.
[46] [Brownson], "Charity and Philanthropy," 436; Brownson, "Beecherism," 483.

Brownson continued to fine-tune the modern apology for charity that would be taken up in the following decades by Catholic critics of scientific charity.[47]

In the first decades after the war, the Catholic critique of philanthropy was fueled largely by fears of Protestant proselytizing. The apology for charity inspired Catholics to establish their own, parallel systems of benevolence, lest Catholics be "drawn in and swallowed by the insatiable vortex of misguided philanthropy," which they often assumed was simply a ruse to steer vulnerable Catholics away from institutions that could sustain their faith. By the turn of the century, though many Catholics continued to associate Protestant private benevolence with evangelical fervor, they also began to view it within the context of the scientific charity movement, and its clinical, materialist and ultimately *secular* approach to poverty.[48]

In fact, charity organization societies had made a commitment to secularism—or more specifically, a rejection of denominational particularism—a point of pride and a mark that distinguished them from their British peers. There was even, from its earliest days, a subtle strain of anti-clericism that undergirded the movement. S. Humphreys Gurteen, the Buffalo clergyman who founded the first citywide charity organization society in the United States in 1877, pointedly excluded clergy from sitting on the society's governing council. The "golden rule" of American COSs, Gurteen declared, was "the complete severance of charitable relief…from all questions of religion, politics, and nationality," which would allow men and women to unite around the "warm humanitarianism" of organized charity. COS leaders assumed that sectarian competition led to fraud and charitable waste—Gurteen spooked the public with an urban ghost story of a woman who had her children baptized by three different churches in as many weeks in order to curry favor with the various denominational relief societies. The next generation of COS leaders followed Gurteen's lead, insisting that religious beliefs should be considered as peripheral to the administration of charity as they were in the practice of law or medicine.[49]

For Catholics, the effort to remove the "theological taint"—as one Boston reformer dubbed it—from charitable work seemed to deny its very essence. As a Louisville judge instructed an audience of Catholic charity workers in 1904, "My friends, understand every virtue is essentially denominational, every virtue is essentially Catholic." He was not alone in making such a claim. By resisting COS "humanitarianism," Catholic leaders made common cause with the heads of many denominational colleges and universities around the nation, who were accusing Rockefeller and Carnegie philanthropies of subverting the local, religious identities of institutions that accepted their funds. The Carnegie Foundation, for instance, would only extend its program to pension professors to educational institutions that lacked a denominational identity, which led a number of schools to excise such affiliations from their charters. The Rockefeller funded General Education Board favored large

---

[47] Orestes Brownson, *The American Republic* (1865; repr., Wilmington: ISI Books, 2002), 224, 225, 230, 236, 231, 229, 239.

[48] Rev. Heorge Haskins quoted in Susan S. Walton, *To Preserve the Faith: Catholic Charities in Boston, 1870-1930* (New York: Garland, 1993), 1-2.

[49] Verl Lewis, "Stephen Humphreys Gurteen and the American Origins of Charity Organization," *Social Service Review* 40:2 (June 1966), 197-198.

universities over smaller, denominational ones, refused in some occasions to support schools that included theological instruction, and supported school reformers in New York City who engaged in a long-running feud with Catholic-aligned school officials. These struggles established clear battle lines between philanthropy and charity; on one side stood the forces of scientific philanthropy and scientific charity, united not just by the fact that many of the major funders of the first also supported the second, but also by a shared commitment to principles of bureaucratic centralized control and—as their detractors claimed—a hostility to the particular, the local, and the parochial. And against these forces stood the defenders of traditional charity.[50]

The American Catholic hierarchy policed these battle lines zealously. They appreciated that a defensive stand on behalf of traditional charity helped to draw together a Church that threatened to fracture along ethnic lines. Mobilizing against the aggressions of philanthropy could bolster the efforts of traditionalists to parry the modernist challenge within the Church. Charity, in these campaigns, held an essentially conservative cast. Catholics frequently stressed the providential nature of poverty and suffering that taught resignation and humility to the poor and provided the wealthy with an opportunity to exercise sympathy and generosity. "It is not wise to seek the total abolition of poverty," counseled Boston Vicar-General William Byrne in an 1880 speech. "The poor are the occasion of countless blessings to the rich, and he must be callous indeed that does not realize that fact." These admonitions were frequently communicated by invoking Christ's remark, "The poor you always have with you." Poverty bore a providential purpose: it engendered charity and was necessary for the sanctification of the giver.[51]

This emphasis on the spiritual benefits of giving also allowed Catholics to distinguish themselves from their Protestant peers, whom they accused of relying too heavily on a handful of rich benefactors. As a leader of a lay Catholic charitable association in Rhode Island announced, "It would be a violation of both the letter and spirit of the Rules to allow our Carnegies to supply the means, and permit the sacrifices and devotion of comparatively poor men to be supplanted." By acclaiming the philanthropy of the millionaire, they suggested, Protestants had lost the value of the widow's mite. (Of course, these celebrations of the egalitarian nature of charity work made a virtue of necessity, since there were relatively few Catholic millionaires threatening to monopolize the blessings of giving). Catholics also held up their cultivation of active small-scale givers to protest the reliance of non-Catholic philanthropy on endowments; as one charity appeal for a Catholic protectory from 1890 announced, "Every penny raised will go towards the work which it should be given to, not to drawing large sums of interest."[52]

---

[50] Judge Matthew O'Doherty, "Charity *Versus* Philanthropy—An Appeal to Young Men," *St. Vincent de Paul Quarterly* 10, no. 2 (May 1905), 178. The leading opponent of Carnegie and Rockefeller educational philanthropy, Methodist Episcopal Bishop Warren Candler, applauded Catholic colleges for their ability to eschew such "dangerous donations" through the "sacrifice" of their teachers, religious who worked for little or no pay. See Bishop Warren A. Candler, *Dangerous Donations and Degrading Doles, or A Vast Scheme for Capturing the Colleges and Universities of the Country* (Atlanta: n.p., 1909).

[51] "What is Charity?" *Boston Pilot*, November 27, 1880.

[52] John Keily, "Some Conference Problems and their Remedies," *SVPQ* 8, no. 3 (Nov. 1903), 286; Charles J. O'Connor, "The Society and the Laity," *SVPQ* 7, no. 4 (Nov. 1902), 292; charity appeal quoted in Mary J. Oates, *The Catholic Philanthropic Tradition in America* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995),

A focus on the spiritual benefits that traditional charity offered to the giver did not preclude an elaboration of charity's more worldly purposes. In fact, in the final decades of the century, the American Catholic hierarchy increasingly stressed the political benefits of charity. Charity's individualist orientations could counter the socialistic encroachments of the state and bolster the prerogatives of private property. Personal ministration to the poor would stave off social unrest and counter the attraction of socialism, succeeding where philanthropy had failed. The latter, an essentially materialist ideal, led the poor to despise their own poverty and exacerbated their social discontents. Catholics, on the other hand, taught the poor to bear their burdens with resignation and assured them that they would be rewarded for their sufferings, if borne meekly, in the life to come. As Archbishop Patrick Ryan declared in 1884, "Christian kindness to the poor…and the inculcation of patience in poverty, after the example of Our Lord, are the best securities against the communism and anarchy that seem to threaten society."[53]

Here, then, Catholic charity was aligned with the maintenance of the social order. And yet, as large swaths of the political and professional establishment came to accept a revised scientific charity gospel, and as the links between that movement and the corporate and capitalist consolidation of the period became firmer, the challenge Catholic charity posed to the legitimacy of the scientific charity movement suggested more subversive potentialities. In the same 1880 address noted above, for instance, Vicar-General Byrne responded unfavorably to the establishment of the Boston charity organization, the Associated Charities. On the one hand, Byrne lamented the tendency he detected within the scientific charity movement "to class poverty among the evils that ought to be eradicated from society" and praised the spiritual blessings the poor granted to the rich. Yet Byrne also warned that the obsession with pauperism blinded social reformers to greater evils. "[I]t is highly probable that an avaricious love of riches, and an undue accumulation of the same in the hands of a few, have produced more mischief in one generation than all the poverty, vicious and otherwise, that the world has ever seen." Similarly, in a 1906 "Apology for Charity" address, Archbishop of St. Louis, John Glennon insisted on the failure of philanthropy to satisfy the public or to "stay…the social revolution." In calling for a return to Christian charity, Glennon rebuked philanthropists: "You meet in palaces to discuss our needs; we need your palaces, not your sympathy." Neither Glennon nor Byrne offered support for a program of radical economic reform and certainly did not consider troubling the foundations of private property. But both of their defenses of Catholic charity associated "philanthropy"— whether in the form of scientific charity or of large bequests from rich donors—with the interests of the wealthy, and, implicitly, with those forces that produced poverty in the first place. They held out charity as a compensating force, one that promoted the material and spiritual interests of the poor.[54]

---

133. For the frequently articulated claim that the Catholic poor gave more proportionately than Protestants, see "The Charities of New York," *Catholic World* 8, no. 44 (Nov. 1868), 279.

[53] Judge Matt O'Doherty, "Catholic Ideals in Charity," *Proceedings of the First National Conference of Catholic Charities* (Washington, DC: National Capital Press, [1911]) 45; Aaron Abell, *American Catholicism and Social Action: A Search for Social Justice, 1865-1950* (Garden City, NY: Hanover Books, 1960), 469.

[54] "What is Charity?" *Boston Pilot*; Rev. John Glennon, "An Apology for Charity," *SVPQ* 11, no. 3 (August 1906), 191-194. Glennon gave his address in Carnegie Hall, with little note of the irony.

Similarly, Catholic charity apologists frequently explained secular philanthropists' efforts to abolish poverty as stemming from their contempt for the poor. According to one Catholic author, the attempts by "modern beneficence" to eliminate poverty often began with the effort to banish actual poor people from one's own estate. They sought to puncture the pretensions of scientific charity reformers as disinterested professionals, insisting that these often masked a drive for worldly advancement. And they dismissed many of the movement's bureaucratic innovations as mechanisms that distanced giver from receiver and that encouraged a fundamental hostility between the two. Catholic charity, on the other hand, called for an immediate encounter with suffering, ensured the preservation of the dignity of the poor, and cultivated the sympathies of the giver. And, what's more, it was more cost effective; in claims that anticipated current-day preoccupations with overhead expenses, the defenders of Catholic charity also highlighted the fact that the selfless service provided by lay volunteers and women religious guaranteed low administrative costs, compared with the high expenses associated with organized charity.[55]

VI. Catholic Charity's Partial Reconciliation with Philanthropy

In all these ways, Catholics mounted a sustained assault against modern philanthropy. Yet by the final decade of the century a partial reconciliation had been initiated by some of the most ardent defenders of Catholic charity. This involved both a recognition of the need to expand the individualistic orientation of charity work in order to address broader societal conditions and a willingness to incorporate some of the tenets of scientific charity into Catholic giving. These adjustments did not require repudiating the distinctiveness of the Catholic approach to giving. Nor did they necessarily dull the Catholic critique of philanthropy. They did, however, acknowledge the legitimacy of some of philanthropy's claims as well.

One early push toward reform came from the increasing participation of Catholics in the American labor movement, especially in the Knights of Labor, and in the appreciation of certain key figures within the ecclesiastical hierarchy that the Church risked alienating large numbers of Catholics if it was perceived to stand in opposition to labor's cause. Catholics reformers received a boost with Pope Leo's issuance in 1891 of *Rerum novarum*, the encyclical on the condition of labor. The encyclical placed the Church firmly against the dogmas of laissez-faire, recognized many of the poor's grievances as essentially just, and countenanced the need for some state intervention in order to address them.[56]

The reconciliation between Catholic charity and philanthropy was also facilitated by the leaders of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul (SSVP), a parish-based organization for Catholic laymen, dedicated to visiting the poor in their homes. First established in Paris in 1833 and in the United States a little more than a decade later, by the turn of the

---

[55] "True and False Charity," *The Metropolitan* 1, no. 1 (February 1853), 30.

[56] Aaron Abell, "The Reception of Leo XIII's Labor Encyclical in America, 1891-1919," *The Review of Politics* 7, no. 4 (October 1945), 467; Joseph M. McShane, *"Sufficiently Radical": Catholicism, Progressivism, and the Bishops' Program of 1919* (Washington, DC: The Catholic University of America Press, 1986), 30, 46; Mel Piehl, *Breaking Bread: The Catholic Worker and the Origin of Catholic Radicalism in America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1982), 35-36.

century, the Society could boast more than 6,000 American members. In its early years, the SSVP concerned itself as much with combating the threat of proselytizing conducted under the cover of Protestant benevolence as with remedying the problems of poverty. But by the turn of the century, the Vincentians had become the chief mediators between the agencies of scientific charity and the broader Catholic community. They shared an overlapping set of principles regarding poverty and its remedies. Both Vincentians and the advocates of scientific charity stressed the unmediated encounter between friendly visitors and the poor and insisted that charity work look beyond the material benefit of the dependent individual. Scientific charity reformers, however, placed more emphasis on moral improvement while Vincentians focused on spiritual counsel and were not nearly as critical of almsgiving. In several cities, SSVP's cooperated with charity organization societies—and a formal endorsement of a policy of cooperation was issued at the 1895 national SSVP convention with much fanfare. Some societies even began to warn of the dangers of "mere alms-giving" in encouraging paupers.

In September 1910 leading Vincentians and Catholic social reformers convened the first National Conference of Catholic Charities at Catholic University in Washington. The Conference soon became the center of the effort to reconcile modern scientific charity methods with traditional Catholic practice. The Conference's statement of purpose wed the two with little intimation of a tension fundamental between them: "The National Conference…aims to preserve the organic spiritual character of Catholic Charity. It aims to seek out and understand causes of dependency. It aims to take advantage of the ripest wisdom in relief and preventative work to which persons have anywhere attained, and to serve as a bond of union for the unnumbered organizations in the United States which are doing the work of Charity. It further aims to be the attorney for the poor in modern society, to present their point of view and to direct them unto the days when social justice may secure to them their rights."[57]

In the years that followed, a commitment to social justice and a recognition of the need to pursue preventative reform led Catholic reformers to a revised conception of some of the leading tenets of Catholic giving. An editorial in the first issue of the *Catholic Charities Review*, the publication of the National Conference, urged a moratorium on the dictum "The poor you always have with you," arguing that it promoted "bad logic, bad social philosophy, bad exegesis, and bad apologetics." Instead, the journal supported a program of aggressive social reform, including workmen's compensation laws, unemployment insurance, minimum wages, and regulations against child labor and shoddy tenement housing. Catholic charity reformers, such as the Catholic University sociologist and priest William Kerby, also conceded the need to incorporate systemization and professionalization into Catholic relief efforts. Catholics now inhabited "the era of scientific charity," Thomas Dwight, a leading Boston

---

[57] Daniel McColgan, *A Century of Charity: The First One Hundred Years of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in the United States* (Milwaukee: Bruce Publishing Co., 1951), 1:36, 38, 46, 2:295-296; Dorothy Brown and Elizabeth McKeown, *The Poor Belong To Us: Catholic Charities and American Welfare* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1997), 62; William Kerby, "Problems in Charity," *Catholic World* 91, no. 546 (September 1910), 795; "Summarized Report of the General Convention of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul," *SVPQ* 1, no. 1 (Nov. 1895), 24; McColgan, A Century of Charity 2:219; Deborah Skok, "Organizing Almsgiving: Scientific Charity and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul in Chicago, 1871-1918," *US Catholic Historian* 16 (Fall 1998), 28; statement of purpose quoted in Marvin L. Krier Mich, *Catholic Social Teaching and Movement* (Mystic, Conn.: Twenty-Third Publications, 1998), 334.

Vincentian, announced as early as 1902. This new dispensation would require "well thought-out instead of emotional charity," and the blending of "method" and "fervor." In fact, by 1916, even the Boston *Pilot*, which had vigorously opposed the charity organization movement in its early days, invoked the COS motto, "Not alms, but a friend."[58]

And yet Catholic reformers sought to achieve a reconciliation between charity and philanthropy without dissolving the distinction between the two. When John Ryan, a Minnesota-born priest at the forefront of efforts to forge a modern Catholic social conscience, was casting about for a journal to serve as the mouthpiece for his reform efforts, William Kerby initially suggested that he take the helm of the *St. Vincent de Paul Quarterly*. Ryan thought the journal's scope too limited; his interest extended well beyond the proper administration of charity. And so he took a position at the newly created *Catholic Charities Review*; the first issue featured significant treatment of "social questions": advocating for a workmen's compensation law, a federal eight-hour day, and a federal law prohibiting child labor.[59]

Yet if Ryan's reform commitments suggested a Christian ethic that encompassed more than charity, he never relinquished charity as the root of that ethic. It was true, Ryan conceded in a 1909 essay, that charity was no substitute for justice in remedying "industrial abuses." And yet, he insisted, "any solution of the social problem based solely on conceptions of justice, and not wrought out and continued in the spirit of charity, would be cold, lifeless, and in all probability of short duration." True charity, he suggested, born out of loving-kindness to those in need, would in fact lead to an embrace of just reforms. Such a pronouncement was consistent with Ryan's more general project of maintaining the distinctiveness of Catholic giving by adapting traditional sources of spiritual and moral authority to modern social and economic conditions, as with his promotion of a living wage. That effort preserved the foundations for the oppositional Catholic charity apologia, even as it demonstrated the compatibility of both charity and philanthropy. Ryan's mentor William Kerby agreed. Even as he chipped away at the resistance of some Catholic charity workers to learn from the program of non-Catholic philanthropy, he also made sure that such openness was rooted in a fidelity "to our philosophy, to our doctrine, to our supernatural motive and inspiration." Indeed, a self-conscious commitment to Christian charity as opposed to secular philanthropy became all the more important as the fixed point defining Catholic giving once Catholics became more receptive to the offerings of the scientific charity movement. The impersonality of philanthropy—or of the cognate commitment to "justice"—made Catholic charity an even more vital corrective.[60]

---

[58] Thomas E. Woods, *The Church Confronts Modernity: Catholic Intellectuals and the Progressive Era* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), 78; Thomas Dwight, "The Trials and Needs of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul," *SVPQ* 7, no. 2 (May 1902), 101; Thomas Dwight, "The Work of the Society," *SVPQ* 11, no. 4 (Nov. 1906), 327; Oates, *Catholic Philanthropic Tradition*, 75.

[59] Patrick Bernard Lavey, "William J. Kerby, John A. Ryan, and the Awakening of the Twentieth-Century American Catholic Social Conscience, 1899-1919," PhD diss., University of Illinois, 1986, 22; "Social Questions," *The Catholic Charities Review* 1, no. 1 (January 1917), 11-14.

[60] John A. Ryan, "The Church and the Workingman," *Catholic World* 89, no. 534 (September 1909), 780; William Kerby, "Problems in Charity," *Catholic World* 91, no. 546 (September 1910), 794; Brown and McKeown, *Poor Belong to Us*, 63-64.

Vincentians too continued to mount an apology for charity even as they moved into a more conciliatory relationship with the institutions of philanthropy. For instance, they had always distinguished their charity from the relief work of their non-Catholic peers through their commitment to preserving the privacy of the poor, and so Society conferences often refused to release their reports to local newspapers or to participate in citywide registration bureaus, which would require them to hand over the names of those assisted to centralized clearing-houses. Indeed, even while they endorsed cooperation, Vincentians maintained an implicit, and sometimes explicit, class-based challenge to Protestant notions of stewardship and genteel *noblesse oblige* that undergirded the ideals of philanthropy. Although the leaders of the SSVP sometimes lamented the lack of wealthier Catholics participating in the Society, they more often highlighted the particularly middle-class identity of their givers; they were not so far removed, in the basic experiences of their lives, from those to whom their charitable efforts were directed. Edmund Butler, a leading New York Vincentian, presented the most explicit articulation of this vindication in a 1902 address, in which he expressed doubts that the most effective charity workers would be found within "the so-called leisure class." Among the wealthy, "[t]here is the lack of knowledge concerning the conditions, trials and requirements of those they would help," Butler declared. Vincentians, even those favorable to COSs, often complained about the impractical, ill-conceived schemes hatched within the scientific charity bureaucracy that betrayed a lack of familiarity with the realities of poverty. Instead, Butler suggested turning to those "who are or have been actively and successfully engaged in other enterprises," like Vincentians, "whose labors among the poor begin after a day of toil."

The class-based defense of the Society established its members as men of sound judgment and easy sympathy and lodged a not-so-subtle critique against certain high-handed tendencies within the scientific charity movement. When one leading Vincentian warned the Society's members to approach the poor without "pharisaical condemnation" or "sentimental gush," he equated the self-righteousness of COS moralizing with the worst sins of indiscriminate giving. The critique was also a validation of small-scale voluntarism; Vincentians did not expect payment for the services they rendered to the poor and so their charity would not be warped by the pressures of financial consideration. Nor would their parish-based societies succumb to the lures of centralization.[61]

Thomas Mulry, a New York businessman and the nation's most prominent Vincentian at the turn of the century, personified this policy of measured conciliation toward non-Catholic organizations. Relatively early in his career, he reached out to the New York COS for help in steering Catholic children toward Catholic charitable

---

[61] Edmund Butler, "The Family," *SVPQ* 7, no. 2 (May 1902), 90; Timothy Dwight, "Pauperism: The Evil and the Remedy," in Box 6, Ring Scrapbook, Thomas F. Ring Papers, John J. Burns Library, Boston College, Chestnut Hill, MA. The irony of the fact that social work was a profession increasingly open to working-class women was not lost on Vincentians. The leaders of the all-male society regarded the feminization of mainstream charity as a measure of its degradation. They understood the phenomenon less as a manifestation of maternalism than as a consequence of materialism: Protestant men had become so enthralled with commercial and professional opportunities that they no longer made time for charity work, abdicating their benevolent responsibilities to women. In Vincentian thought, the professionalization, secularization, and feminization of charity work were related, and lamentable, developments. Walton, *To Preserve the Faith*, 93; John P. Judge, "The Spiritual Life in the Society," *SVPQ* 17, no. 3 (August 1912), 197-198.

institutions. By 1891, he had joined a COS district committee and just a few years later rose to the position of chairman. Over time, his engagement with the scientific charity movement grew more profound; it reached its culmination in 1908, when he served as the first Catholic president of the National Conference of Charities and Correction. Mulry was such a zealous advocate of cooperation between the Society and scientific charity agencies that he became known, with more than a hint of derision among some Vincentians, as "the Protestant member of the St. Vincent de Paul Society." He even assisted the New York COS in establishing its School of Philanthropy, which would become the nation's first school of social work.[62]

Perhaps most significantly, he warned his fellow Catholics against an overzealous embrace of the charity-philanthropy dichotomy. Before a New York state charity conference, he declared that "the man who is so wedded to his own opinions, or to his own methods in charity work, as to look upon all others as useless and unworthy of consideration," would have little value in such a gathering. Mulry faced up to the prominence of this sort of absolutism in many Catholic charitable leaders. Strikingly, given the Catholic insistence on the spiritual underpinnings of charity—in which Mulry firmly believed—he explained the rigidity by pointing out that "charitable work appeals strongly to the religious feelings, and thus attracts into the ranks people of strong religious convictions who bring with them their prejudices and find it impossible to work harmoniously with people of different views." Catholics and non-Catholics alike must discipline those prejudices. As he announced in 1909, a quarter century of charity work had taught him an important lesson: "there is good in every system,—and defects also."[63]

That final addendum is telling. For if Mulry urged Catholics to see the good in non-Catholic philanthropy, and to learn from it, he also did not relinquish the commitment to wielding charity *critically*, as a means to highlight philanthropy's defects as well. Mulry insisted that Catholics must lead the way in preserving the religious basis of charity, a benevolence whose end was not the abolition of poverty but the spiritual reconciliation of the poor and the sanctification of the giver, because non-Catholics had so clearly succumbed to the forces of secularism and materialism. In the process, he lamented, "Well-meaning men and women are to-day sowing the seed of bitterness and discontent in the hearts of the poor." In fact, he seemed to regard collaboration as a means by which Catholics could "exert a large influence in modifying radical ideas," resisting the secularization of charity work. He also thought Catholic influence could cut some of the coldness and condescension that plagued non-Catholic benevolence. The spectacle of Catholic charity had performed a valuable service for the scientific charity movement, Mulry argued in an 1898 speech, later published in the flagship journal of the scientific charity movement. He listed the exceptional features of Catholic giving that he believed were most edifying: "No paid agents, no class distinction, no petty social differences, all working gratuitously for God's poor." These were, of course, many of the terms of the traditional, and essentially oppositional, Catholic charity apologetic, dressed up in more conciliatory garb. Indeed, that final phrase, "God's poor," positioned Mulry

---

[62] McColgan, *A Century of Charity*, 2:372; J.W. Helmes, *Thomas M. Mulry: A Volunteer's Contribution to Social Work* (Washington, DC: Catholic University of America, 1938), 33-35, 69-71; John F. Fenlon, "Grappling with our Charity Problem," *The Ecclesiastic Review* 52, no. 3 (March 1915), 265.

[63] "President Mulry's Address to the Conference," SVDPQ 9, no. 1 (February 1904), 33; Mulry, "The Care of Dependent and Neglected Children," *SVPQ* 7, no. 1 (February 1902), 47; Helmes, *Mulry*, 95.

perilously close to the margins of the scientific charity consensus, suggesting the permanence and providential nature of poverty.[64]

VII. The Charity-Philanthropy Divide in the Twenty-First Century

In the century that followed, the power of Catholic charity as an oppositional ethic countering secular philanthropy waxed and waned. The influence of the Society of St. Vincent de Paul diminished in the opening decades of the twentieth century, and with it, the prominence of lay benevolence within the Church (although the religious orders still maintained a powerful witness). The voluntarist challenge to the professionalization of charity was also attenuated by diocesan consolidation into charity bureaus, largely completed by the 1920s. These bureaus, though, did not necessarily relinquish claims to the distinctiveness of Catholic charity. The professional social workers who staffed them were trained in a "religious case work" method, approaching the family and personal problems of those they served with a firm foundation in Catholic doctrine and with a special regard for their clients' spiritual welfare. Even as they borrowed techniques and ideas from the scientific charity movement and its progeny in professional social work—becoming more practiced, for instance, in the investigation of applicants before providing relief—Catholic social workers were called on by the ecclesiastic leadership to serve as "apologists for a Catholic social outlook." Over the course of the century, as Catholic Charities USA grew to became the largest system of private social provision in the nation, that commitment to maintaining a distinctive understanding of Catholic charity came under increasing strain.[65]

With the development of a more robust welfare state, Catholic leaders often took it upon themselves to guarantee that public relief did not overwhelm the preserves of private charity. Over time, the particular attitudes toward broader social concerns invoked through a defense of charity took on a range of meanings. The Catholic Worker movement, for instance, burnished charity's radical lineaments. In her early years, Dorothy Day, the founder of the movement, harbored the suspicions of charity common among the Village radicals with whom she first broke bread. "[O]ur hearts burned with the desire for justice and were revolted at the idea of doled-out charity. The word charity had become something to gag over," she recalled in her autobiography. But through her conversion to Catholicism, her encounter with Peter Maurin, and her embrace of the doctrine of personalism he championed, Day came to appreciate the "true meaning of the word."[66]

Corporeal works of mercy lay at the heart of the Catholic Worker movement. Through the establishment of Houses of Hospitality in the 1930s in cities throughout the nation, its members demonstrated a commitment to a radical understanding of charity premised on the assumption of voluntary poverty and a willingness to be with the poor in the midst of their deprivation. The poor were treated as "ambassadors of God" who

---

[64] Thomas Mulry, "A Century of Catholic Charity in New York," SVDPQ 13, no. 2 (May 1908), 127; Thomas Mulry, "Catholic Co-Operation in Charity," *Charities Reviews* 8:8 (October 1898), 385.

[65] Brown and McKeown, *Poor Belong to Us*, 1, 61, 75-78 [quote on 76].

[66] Brown and McKeown, *Poor Belong to Us*, 181; Day quoted in Keith Morton and John Saltmarsh, "Addams, Day, and Dewey: The Emergence of Community Service in American Culture," *Michigan Journal of Community Service Learning* 4, no. 1 (1997), 142.

brought with them the opportunity to perform the blessed act of charity, an understanding that shattered categories of 'deserving' and 'undeserving' and the hierarchies that separated giver from beneficiary. Day distinguished her commitment to personalism from her dedication as a Village radical to "telescopic philanthropy" (borrowing a phrase Dickens' used to describe a character in *Bleak House*), an imperative "full of concerns for people everywhere" that tended to overlook the suffering nearer at hand. This work offered an alternative to bureaucratic, professionalized social service provision, whether provided by the state or private agencies; it also posed a fundamental challenge to the capitalist, consumerist order. "Nobody would be poor," remarked Maurin, "if everybody tried to be poorer."[67]

Day's and Maurin's promotion of a radical understanding of charity placed the virtue at the prophetic margins of liberal society. Subsequent leaders of Catholic social reform, many of who gained important early experience or inspiration in the Catholic Worker movement, were often more willing to foster an accommodation with America's liberal, capitalist order. They, in turn, exhibited a range of approaches to the Catholic charitable tradition. A cluster of Catholic activists gravitated toward the cause of industrial unionism with its long-running antipathy toward charity as an affront to mutualism and workers' dignity. Though they did not disregard the importance of works of mercy, their focus was largely on labor legislation and regulation. Catholic reformers increasingly came to embrace the state as an administrator of relief, although they often insisted that the practice adhere as closely as possible to the principles of subsidiarity. This orientation suggested an ambivalent relation to charity. On the one hand, the Catholic insistence on a natural right to relief could be invoked to demand an extension of the welfare state beyond contributory programs. Yet that extension could also be pursued in contrast to charitable aid; when one speaker championed mothers' pensions at the 1918 National Conference of Catholic Charities, he did so by claiming their promotion was "a matter of justice more than a matter of charity." Ultimately, many American Catholic reformers developed a delicate balance between an understanding of charity's necessity and of charity's limits. Michael Harrington, for instance, who served as an editor of the *Catholic Worker* and whose *The Other America* helped spark the War on Poverty, combined a commitment to personalism with an acceptance of an enlarged welfare state. "Those who criticize the impersonality of the welfare state and call for a return to the virtues of personal charity," he wrote, "have located a very real problem—and proposed an impossible solution."[68]

American Catholic reformers' turn to justice reflected a broader development within Catholic social ethics, initiated a century before with Leo XIII's *Rerum Novarum*. The Leonine attempt to reconcile charity and justice (often in terms of the claims of the individual and of the state) by bolstering the latter's status was affirmed in the ensuing decades by Pius XII ("Charity is not enough, for in the first place there must be justice"), and reached its culmination in the papacy of Paul VI. With its emphasis on the legacy of

---

[67] Dorothy Day also suggested that many of the sources of philanthropy derived from the oppression of the poor and so were irredeemably tainted. Mark and Louise Zwick, *The Catholic Worker Movement: Intellectual and Spiritual Origins* (New York: Paulist Press, 2005), 34-39, 147-148; Robert Coles, *Dorothy Day: A Radical Devotion* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley Publishing, 1987), 14, 155-156 (Day quote); Piehl, *Breaking Bread*, 70, 97, 99-104 (Maurin quote on 102).

[68] Brown and McKeown, *Poor Belong to Us*, 120, 170, 179; Michael Harrington, *The Other America* (1962; New York: Touchstone, 1997), 119.

colonialism and the widening gap between the rich and poor, Paul's first social encyclical, *Populorum Progressio* (1967), firmly tipped the balance toward justice.[69]

Catholic Charities USA fully assimilated, and even amplified, these shifts in social ethics; as a centennial history of the institution, subtitled "100 Years at the Intersection of Charity and Justice," notes, "The continuity of a tradition of providing quality care through delivery of social service now shared the agenda with the more recent emphasis on structural problems in the society." This more expansive mission was affirmed through the publication in 1972 of *Toward a Renewed Catholic Charities Movement*, the product of a three-year self-examination by Catholic Charities. The Cadre Study, as it became known, was heavily influenced by liberation theology and its commitment to social justice and placed a strong emphasis on political advocacy for social change. Catholic Charities, it insisted, "must stop wishing to resolve the poverty, the misery of the oppressed by individual acts of charity alone."[70]

For some traditionalists, these developments represented a betrayal and a radical discontinuity with past traditions of giving. Until the 1960s, "Catholic charitable institutions…did exemplary work," lamented the writer Brian C. Anderson in an article on "How Catholic Charities Lost its Soul." But then Catholic Charities moved away from an emphasis on "'just' charity" and instead became "one of the nation's most powerful advocates for outworn welfare-state ideas, especially the idea that social and economic forces over which the individual has no control…are the reason for poverty." Anderson cited the remarks of Marvin Olasky, the noted conservative champion of voluntarism, dismissing Catholic Charities' spurious renewal: "This isn't charity at all. When you take away dollars that you could spend helping people and spend them on lobbying, you're robbing the poor to give to the lobbyist." These critics came close to committing Mary Richmond's "mischievous social fallacy," pitting charity and justice as irreconcilable antagonists. Yet they were correct in intuiting a diminution of the Catholic charity apologia in a reorientation of Catholic social ethics toward considerations of justice. The challenge charity posed to philanthropy had been blunted, since philanthropy could claim certain affinities with—and perhaps ask certain indulgences of—a commitment to justice, that the virtue of charity did not offer as readily.[71]

In the last decade, however, that challenge has once again been unsheathed. Two recent papal pronouncements have encouraged, and reflect, that development. In 2005,

---

[69] In his 1931 encyclical, *Quadragesimo Anno*, Pius XI developed the idea of "social charity" as distinct from the traditional practice of charity. As Marvin Mich explains, "social charity" has "structural and institutional dimensions. It meant putting policies and structures in place that help to achieve the harmony and 'oneness' that may not be achieved through fighting for justice…The pope's motivation in coining the phrase 'social charity' was to keep love, *caritas*, as the central moral virtue in Catholic social teaching, but not let it be reduced to almsgiving." Mich, *Catholic Social Teaching*, 80-81. Roberto de Mattei, "Justice and Charity," *The Catholic Thing*, July 16, 2009, accessed at http://www.thecatholicthing.org/content/view/1913/2/; Pius XII quoted in Robert Calderisi, "Radical Pope, Traditional Values," *New York Times*, December 29, 2013; Mich, *Catholic Social* Teaching, 154-165.

[70] Rev. J. Bryan Hehir, "Theology, Social Teaching, and Catholic Charities: Three Moments in a History," in *Catholic Charities USA: 100 Years at the Intersection of Charity and Justice*, ed. J. Bryan Hehir (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2010), 39-40 (quote); Cadre Study quoted in Rev. Msgr. Robert J. Vitillo, "Putting Justice and Charity into Action: Empowerment for God's People," in *Catholic Charities USA*, 127.

[71] Brian C. Anderson, "How Catholic Charities Lost its Soul," *City Journal* 10, no. 1 (Winter 2000), 28, 30-31.

Pope Benedict XVI issued his first encyclical, *Deus caritas est* ("God is love"). It took as its key theme the interplay between God's love for man, man's love for God, and man's love for his fellow neighbor, expressed through the practice of Christian charity. The encyclical bore many of the marks of the apologia for charity that proliferated at the turn of the last century. Benedict defined charity as "first of all the simple response to immediate needs and specific situations: feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, caring for and healing the sick, visiting those in prison, etc. [31]." And it was, he instructed, as intrinsic to the life of the Church as was the ministry of the sacraments and the preaching of the Gospel. It was also a virtue under siege, stalked, since the nineteenth century, by the acolytes of "justice." Charity, they insisted, and almsgiving especially, were means of soothing the conscience of the giver, of allowing him or her to shirk the responsibility to build a social order in which charity was no longer needed. Benedict, to his credit, did not reject these animadversions out of hand. There was "some truth to this argument," he allowed [26].[72]

Yet this truth, he stated, must yield to a larger truth, one at the heart of his encyclical: that if charity can be abused and employed to undermine justice, in its truest form it is the *source* of justice, for it is rooted in God's love. "Love—*caritas*—will always prove necessary, even in the most just society…Whoever wants to eliminate love is preparing to eliminate man as such. There will always be suffering which cries out for consolation and help….There will always be situations of material need where help in the form of concrete love of neighbour is indispensable [28]."[73]

Benedict lays the over-valuing of justice against charity at the feet of Marxism and the modern welfare state (he does not indict his papal predecessors). But he noted too the challenge posed by philanthropy. In their dreams of abolishing suffering from the world, both statism and philanthropy run the risk of sustaining a metastasizing bureaucracy. Both could foster a materialism that neglects the spiritual care of the needy. Both tended to regard those they sought to help as abstractions. Both often forgot that "human beings always need something more than technically proper care. They need humanity. They need heartfelt concern [31]."

Benedict offered a gentle yet unyielding critique of philanthropy. He recognized the good that has been accomplished by secular schemes of humanitarian uplift and did not deny the importance of technical competency. But he also insisted on the limits of all such "ideologies aimed at improving the world" outside the embrace of the Church. "Practical activity will always be insufficient, unless it visibly expresses a love for man, a love nourished by an encounter with Christ [34]." Only a gift endowed with such love can cultivate humility in the giver and protect the dignity of the recipient. And here, toward the encyclical's conclusion, we can detect echoes of the sterner rebuke of philanthropy that marked earlier charity apologetics. Benedict subtly moves from a consideration of philanthropy's (and justice's) insufficiency to the dangers lurking in the immensity of its ambitions when confronted with the "immensity of others' needs": a

---

[72] "Encyclical letter *Deus Caritas Est* of the Supreme Pontiff Benedict XVI to the Bishops[,] Priests and Deacons[,] Men and Women Religious[,] and all the Lay Faithful on Christian Love," accessed at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20051225_deus-caritas-est_en.html.
[73] See Charles M. Murphy, "Charity, not Justice, As Constitutive of the Church's Mission," *Theological Studies* 68, no. 2 (June 2007), 281-282.

resigned acceptance of human misery or an "arrogant contempt for man [36]" when those ambitions are inevitably thwarted. Like the "State which would provide everything," Benedict ultimately indicts philanthropy for its tendency to neglect "the very thing which the suffering person—every person—needs: namely, loving personal concern [28]."[74]

Benedict's close pairing of philanthropy with the incapacities of the welfare state lent his apologia for charity a conservative cast. But he was not blind to the capacity of charity to shake the socio-economic order as well. Charity, he urged in his 2009 social encyclical *Caritas in veritate* must be "the principle not only of micro-relationships (with friends, with family members or within small groups) but also of macro-relationships (social, economic and political ones) [2]." It illuminated the limits of the profit motive and of the free market to promote human development [38].[75] In his own defense of charity, Benedict's successor, Francis, has expanded upon this line, and in doing so, has highlighted charity's more radical potentialities. Through his own personal example—stories abound of the Pope sneaking out of the Vatican at night to attend to the city's homeless—Francis has called for a church that is "bruised, hurting and dirty because it has been out on the streets [49]." He has placed the immediate engagement with suffering at the heart of his papacy, yet has tied these personal ministrations to a broader critique of the "new tyranny [56]" represented by unfettered capitalism. Charity in his early apostolic exhortation, *Evangelii Guadium*, stands in opposition not to an overweening state but to an "economy of exclusion and inequality [53]." And it is the "deified market" that serves as the prime agent of dehumanization for Francis, and thus the main threat that charity must confront.[76]

Some commentators have sought to place these pronouncements within the context of stark, traditional dichotomies. As Stephen Schneck, director of Catholic University's Institute for Policy Research & Catholic Studies, told the *National Catholic Reporter*, "Pope Francis is….saying private charity, however wonderful and holy it is, can never be enough. He's saying that the poor also need justice….He's saying that private charity by itself can never provide that justice given the moral deficiency of economic and social systems governed only by heartless invisible hands." Yet Francis does not play charity sharply against justice; instead, he seems to suggest their inter-penetrability. Like Benedict, he recognizes the limits of an impoverished understanding

---

[74] George Weigel, "The Blessings of Charity: A Papal Challenge to Conventional Wisdom," *Philanthropy* (March 2006), available at http://www.philanthropyroundtable.org/topic/excellence_in_ philanthropy/the_blessings_of_charity; Sergio Beladrinelli, "Charity and Philanthropy," in *The Way of Love: Reflections on Pope Benedict SVI's Encyclical* Deus Caritas Est, eds. Livio Melina and Carl A. Anderson (San Francisco, Ignatius Press, 2006), 317-329. See also Pope Benedict XVI, "Charity Exceeds Philanthropy by 'Showing' Christ," address to the Participants at the Meeting Promoted by the Pontifical Council 'Cor Unum," January 23, 2006, available at http://www.catholicculture.org/culture/library/view.cfm?recnum=6769.

[75] Encyclical Letter *Caritas in Veritate* of the Supreme Pontiff Benedict XVI to the Bishops[,] Priests and Deacons[,] Men and Women Religious[,] the Lay Faithful and All People of Good Will[,] of Integral Human Development in Charity and Truth, accessed at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/encyclicals/documents/hf_ben-xvi_enc_20090629_caritas-in-veritate_en.html.

[76] Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium of the Holy Father Francis to the Bishops, Clergy, Consecrated Persons and the Lay Faithful on the Proclamation of the Gospel in Today's World, accessed at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/apost_exhortations/documents/papa-francesco_esortazione-ap_20131124_evangelii-gaudium_en.html#_ftn175.

of charity—what he terms "charity à la carte," "an accumulation of small personal gestures to individuals in need [180]"—while also maintaining charity's priority in its relation with justice. But even more than Benedict, Francis frames that relation as a partnership. In his writings, Jesus' call "to touch human misery, to touch the suffering flesh of others [270]" affirms and amplifies the call to extirpate the root of that suffering. And so, he declares, Christian life "means working to eliminate the structural causes of poverty and to promote the integral development of the poor, as well as small daily acts of solidarity in meeting the real needs which we encounter [188]," without posing an antagonism between the two charges.[77]

Nor has he promoted a strict opposition between charity and philanthropy (although he has not frequently invoked that latter term). In *Evangelii Guadium*, he rooted the right to private property in the service of the public good; "solidarity," he declared, "must be lived as the decision to restore to the poor what belongs to them [189]." In a message delivered to the participants of the World Economic Forum at Davos, Francis affirmed the power of private wealth to develop the "decisions, mechanisms and processes directed to a better distribution of wealth." His remarks to Davos were interpreted as a response to criticism that his apostolic exhortation discounted the contributions of philanthropy. Francis made clear that he did not seek to dampen philanthropy's ambition but to heighten its sense of original sin, its own implication in social and economic inequality. Charity could both sharpen philanthropy's drive to correct those inequities while also ensuring that it took the "integral promotion of the poor" as its foundation and was not reduced to "a simple welfare mentality."[78]

These papal pronouncements point to the power of charity as an ideal in contemporary moral discourse as well as to its ideological indeterminacy. Charity now can be invoked to challenge the welfare state, the ambitions of mega-philanthropy, or the torpor afflicting any stagnant bureaucracy. It can call on philanthropy or government to increase spending on social service, stimulate grass-roots advocacy on the needy's behalf or inspire acts of human kindness. Charity can teach humility or stoke ambition. If the drive to end charity could unite radicals and reactionaries, so too can the calls for more charity.

In all these forms, charity can provide the most potent challenge to the contemporary discipline of philanthropy—each correcting and improving the other. Such an intervention would be especially helpful in our present moment, when philanthropy's dominance—as an ideal if not necessarily as a practice—has widened the gulf between the two. Recent finance and tech gains have inflated the resources of the nation's wealthiest citizens, while propelling them further away from the presence of the poor that their benefactions might assist. Their giving patterns reflect this distance. According to one study, only five of the largest 300 gifts made in 2010 "went to organizations that deliver services to people in communities." And, as the writer Ken Stern has noted, of the

---

[77] Michael Sean Winters, "Libertarians become vocal critics of Evangelii Gaudium," *National Catholic Reporter*, January 30, 2014, accessed at http://ncronline.org/news/politics/libertarians-become-vocal-critics-exhortation.

[78] Message of Pope Francis to the Executive Chairman of the World Economic Forum on the Occasion of the Annual Meeting at Davos-Klosters, accessed at http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/francesco/messages/ pont-messages/2014/documents/papa-francesco_20140117_messaggio-wef-davos_en.html.

50 largest individual gifts to public charities in 2012, "Not a single one of them went to a social-service organization or to a charity that principally serves the poor and the dispossessed." A 2007 study conducted by the Indiana University Center on Philanthropy and Google has demonstrated that the wealthier a giver, the less likely he or she is to donate to charities directed toward meeting the basic needs of the poor. The ascendency of philanthro-capitalism, the belief that philanthropy should harness the power of the market, has deepened the divide between charity and philanthropy. Each of those conjoined terms has its own critique of charitable giving—as an unimaginative emollient or as a violation of the market—and in combination, they fuel an indifference to, and at times even a contempt for, efforts to relieve immediate suffering. A new generation of social entrepreneurs seems to have little regard for the more modest offerings of charitable aid. "For a generation coming of age amid the Arab Spring and Occupy movement," one analyst explained, "there is a growing sense that we must harness philanthropy for more than just traditional charity if we are to ensure a sustainable world for our future and that of our own young children."[79]

Yet there are also some subtle intimations of forces bridging the charity-philanthropy divide, bringing the two into a more productive, if still watchful, relationship. The domineering spread of "venture philanthropy" and philanthro-capitalism has roused some philanthropic leaders to defend the legitimacy of "old philanthropy," not just by reminding its impatient critics that foundations of the past also sought to address root causes, but that they were also more responsive to grant requests from charities on the ground. As then-Ford Foundation president Susan Berresford declared in 2007, she had become "very worried that a lot of people are disparaging the charity end of our field."[80]

Another development is the growing popularity of unconditional cash transfers as anti-poverty programs; here, the material practice, if not necessarily the spiritual commitment, of almsgiving is wedded to the scientific rigor and technological competence demanded by modern philanthropy.[81] Nonprofits throughout the nation, struggling with tightened budgets and declining government support, are increasingly

---

[79] This impatience with charity was also reflected in the development of alternative, more radically democratic philanthropic institutions, such as the Haymarket Fund, whose presiding philosophy is "Change, Not Charity." Susan Ostrander, *Money for Change: Social Movement Philanthropy at Haymarket People's Fund* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1995). Rob Reich, "Philanthropy and Caring for the Needs of Strangers," Social Research 80, no. 2 (Summer 2013), 522; Kristin Seefeldt and John Graham, *America's Poor and the Great Recession* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013), 48; Ken Stern, "Why the Rich Don't Give to Charity," *Atlantic.com*, March 20, 2013, accessed at http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2013/04/why-the-rich-dont-give/309254/; Russ Juskalian, "Was Carnegie Right About Philanthropy," *Newyorker.com*, February 10, 2014, accessed at http://www.newyorker.com/online/blogs/currency/2014/02/philanthropy-50-zuckerberg-carnegie-inequality.html; Pablo Eisenberg, "The Rich are getting richer, but they still don't do enough for the poor," *Chronicle of Philanthropy*, 26, no. 3 (November 21, 2013), 31; Robert Reich, "What 'charity' could really mean, *Christian Science Monitor*, December 16, 2013; James Franklin, "Global 'next gen' trends," *@lliance Magazine* (December 2013), accessed at http://www.alliancemagazine.org/node/4390.

[80] Berresford quoted in Todd Cohen, "History Lesson for Philanthropy," *Philanthropy Journal*, February 8, 2007, accessed at http://www.philanthropyjournal.org/archive/127528.

[81] Christopher Blattman, "Let Them Eat Cash," *New York Times*, June 29, 2014; Roger Bregman, "Free Money Might be the best way to end poverty," *Washington Post*, December 29, 2013.

engaging in both direct social service provision and advocacy work, pushing for structural reforms even as they address immediate needs. More significant has been the latest "rediscovery of poverty" in the wake of the recent recession. Even as overall charitable giving declined during the Great Recession, food banks around the nation experienced surges in giving. Research by Douglas Holz-Eakin and Cameron Smith has found that in 2009 and 2010, foundations "directed a greater proportion of their grants to areas with high levels of unemployment and high levels of mortgage delinquency rates." In certain cities where the politics of income inequality has been especially vexing, a corps of philanthropist has taken up the issue; in San Francisco, for instance, a handful of tech industry leaders have pushed their fellow moguls to support often-neglected antipoverty programs in the Bay Area.[82]

Perhaps there is no better illustration of the possibility of bridging the domains of charity and philanthropy than the career path of Patty Stonesifer. In April 2013, Stonesifer took on the position of CEO of Martha's Table, a food pantry and family-services nonprofit in Washington, DC. What made the move noteworthy was that Stonesifer had previously served as the CEO of the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the largest philanthropy in the world. "Having Stonesifer come run a small local charity," quipped the *Washington Post*, "is like General Electric business titan Jack Welch showing up to manage the corner appliance store."[83]

But as Stonesifer explained her reasons for seeking the job, the transition came to seem less a rupture and more a return to roots. Growing up in Indianapolis in a large Catholic family, she imbibed a strong commitment to charitable work from her parents; her father had been an active member of his local Society of St. Vincent de Paul, which named the food pantry where he volunteered after him. Stonesifer, meanwhile, had grown to know of Martha's Table's works from her own time at the Gates Foundation's DC office, where she could watch its vans give out hot food to the homeless that congregated in a nearby city park. Those scenes stirred memories of her youthful social service and

---

[82] Lisa Ranghelli, *Leveraging Limited Dollars: How Grantmakers Achieve Tangible Results by Funding Policy and Community Engagement* (Washington, DC: National Committee for Responsive Philanthropy, 2012), 5; Joe Garofoli, "Marc Benioff Challenges Bay Area's Tech Leaders to Give More," *SFGate.com*, March 7, 2014, accessed at http://www.sfgate.com/politics/joegarofoli/article/Marc-Benioff-challenges-Bay-Area-s-tech-leaders-5296188.php. Rob Reich and Christopher Wimer, "Has the Great Recession Made Americans Stingier?," *Pathways* (Fall 2011), 5-6 (quote on Holz-Eakin and Smith research on 5). See, also the case of William Conway, the CEO and co-founder of the investment company the Carlyle Group. Conway, a deeply committed Catholic, had long given significant sums to traditional charities and social service organizations. But he had grown dissatisfied with "stopgap" giveaways and began to seek out a "big idea" that could direct his giving toward a "more permanent solution" to the persistent problems of poverty. In September 2011, in the midst of the recession, he announced that he would give away half of his fortune, some $1 billion, toward an ambition program of job creation. He spent months soliciting ideas and talking to experts. Ultimately, however, he gave up the idea of arriving at a single "big idea" and instead embraced a multi-pronged approach that aimed to bolster the safety net for the most vulnerable while providing a final boost for those on the cusp of self-sufficiency. The initial tranche of his philanthropy included $30 million in tuition assistance, scholarships and job training programs at nursing schools in the DC region and $25 million to support social service nonprofits in the area, including $10 million to Catholic Charities. Robert McCartney, "How Bill Conway's $1 billion in gifts will directly help the poor," *Washington Post*, October 11, 2012; Robert McCartney, "The $1 billion question: How can we create jobs?," *Washington Post*, September 25, 2011.

[83] *Washington Post*, January 29, 2013.

nourished the conviction that she belonged, as she declared to an interviewer, on "the front lines."[84]

That decision could be interpreted as a subtle slap at the pretensions of philanthropy. Her declaration that she felt the need to move "beyond white papers and PowerPoint presentations and get my boots dirty," conjures up the sterile isolation of foundation boardrooms. The publicity surrounding her hiring at Martha's Table at times seemed to reaffirm the strict charity-philanthropy polarity, with the coverage picking up hints of the traditional Catholic charity apologetic. "Instead of continuing to do what I call the 'benevolent bureaucrat' role, where I could be at a foundation giving funds or running a large institution with lots of front-line leaders as part of the team," she told the *Chronicle of Philanthropy*, "I wanted to come close to the heart of the problem." One could detect in the remark the insinuation that philanthropy had installed itself at the more comfortable, and less vital, margins.[85]

But it would be a mistake to regard Stonesifer's story entirely in those terms. She was not disowning her work with the Gates Foundation or her commitment to philanthropy, even as she recognized the way in which charity offered certain challenges to both. When an interviewer asked her what she had learned from Bill Gates, she quickly responded that he had taught her to "think big." And it was a lesson she would take with her to Martha's Table. "So here, instead of simply figuring out how to move from providing 60,000 meals a month to 66,000, I want to think about how to end child hunger in D.C." If charity had posed a corrective to philanthropy, here was philanthropy answering back with one of its own: don't think small.[86]

In other words, the path Stonesifer has taken testifies to a truth also borne out by the early history of modern American philanthropy: that it is possible to seek more charity and the end of charity with equal vigor; that there is virtue in thinking big *and* in thinking small; that the imperatives of charity and philanthropy can both guide a single institution; that there is ample space for each in the human heart.

---

[84] "For One-Time Tech Exec, Leading D.C. Charity is No Small Job," npr.com, August 7, 2013, accessed at http://www.npr.org/2013/08/07/209499334/for-one-time-tech-exec-leading-d-c-charity-is-no-small-job; Maureen Dowd, "She's Getting Her Boots Dirty," *New York Times*, June 2, 2013.

[85] Dowd, "She's Getting Her Boots Dirty;" Caroline Bermudez, "From Gates Foundation Head to Leader of Food Pantry," *Chronicle of Philanthropy* 26, no. 6 (February 14, 2013), 26.

[86] Dowd, "She's Getting Her Boots Dirty."