



Welcome to the November 2024 newsletter!

Hey there philanthropoids,

I hope you're all doing well, despite the fact that I think it is fair to say it hasn't been the easiest month in which to remain optimistic about the state of the world at times...

The last few weeks have obviously been fairly seismic from a political point of view (especially if you are reading this in the US). I know that many people in the world of philanthropy and civil society are wondering with some trepidation what the next few years will hold, and thinking about what they can do to help protect vital rights, speak up for marginalised communities, and keep pushing forward on critical shared challenges like the climate crisis. I don't suppose it is going to be easy, but we need to hang on in there now more than ever.

I say "we", of course, but it is at times like this that working at an odd meta-level in the philanthropy ecosystem (as I do) can make you feel uncomfortably removed; you wonder whether you shouldn't be spending less time talking about philanthropy and more time working alongside those who are actually *doing* it. However, on the basis that you've got to recognise your own strengths, and that there is value in knowledge curation (even if it can at times feel dangerously close to self-indulgence), I'm going to assume that continuing to provide these

slightly askance newsletter updates on philanthropy is a valid way to contribute. (And at least it gives me something to tell myself as I lie awake at 3am).

If you celebrate Thanksgiving, then I hope you have had a good holiday season. And, more importantly, I hope you have a good Giving Tuesday! I decided to get this newsletter out ahead of that (as I've already got too much to write up for this month), but I'm sure we will have further news in the next edition.

Right: let's newsletter.

Rhodri

PHILANTHROPY IN THE NEWS

Vive La Resistance? The nonprofit response to Trump's Re-election

The confirmation of Donald Trump's re-election as US President was greeted with dismay by many US nonprofits, who fear that his aggressive right-wing populism will once again bring huge challenges for organisations that work in areas such as gender, migration and climate – as it did during his first term. [The New York Times reported that many nonprofits that had positioned themselves as part of the “resistance” to Trump between 2016 and 2020 were quick to do so again in the wake of his election.](#)



However, they may face new challenges this time around, with a more conservative judiciary in place in the US and a (potentially) better-functioning political infrastructure around Trump that is able to follow through more effectively on his campaign promises. It may also be harder to enthuse donors about funding a “nonprofit resistance” this time round, the NYT suggests, having seen their efforts first time round fail to prevent the current situation. (Although the real counterfactual, of course, is to consider how much worse things might have been if all of those nonprofit groups *hadn't* done so much work to oppose Trump's policies when he was last in power).

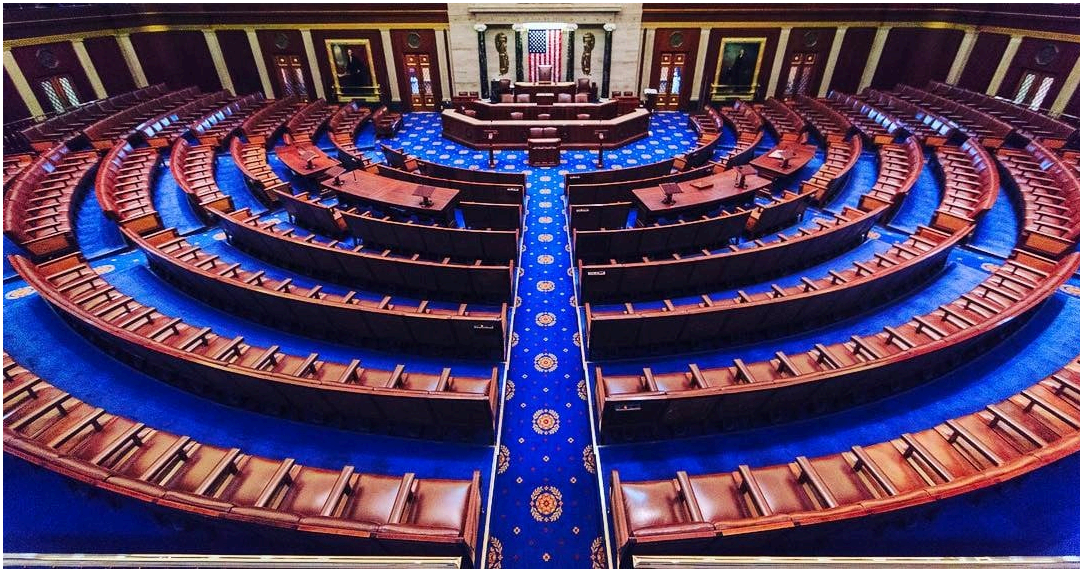
Not everyone believes that it is such a good idea for nonprofits or foundations to see themselves as an active resistance to Trump in any case. Some have voiced concerns that in doing so they risk crossing a line into partisan politics that could undermine their legitimacy in the eyes of the public. (Whilst also playing into the hands of Trump and others who already accuse nonprofits – and foundations in particular – of having strong progressive, left-wing biases). We shouldn't pretend, of course, that the spheres of politics and civil society are entirely distinct and separate, because they never have been. To some extent philanthropy is an *inherently* political act, as it involves making a statement through your gifts or your actions about what you think is of value in society and what you think is currently not right in the world.

Furthermore, plenty of philanthropy is (and has been for hundreds of years) directed towards funding campaigning and advocacy work that is explicitly aimed at influencing the direction of policy and legislation. And in the US, where the existence of the 501(c)(4) structure allows for the creation of nonprofit organisations that are much more overtly political, the lines between philanthropy and politics are even more blurred. However (in theory at least) nonprofits still need to avoid being actively party political or partisan, and some clearly feel as though positioning themselves as a “Trump Resistance” during his second term may tip them over this line.

In [another article this month for the *Chronicle of Philanthropy's* “Commons” section](#), Daniel Stid argues that a more effective strategy for foundations that are concerned by Trump’s re-election would be to focus on fostering genuine pluralism in civil society through their funding, as a counter to the polarisation and division that is threatening to making US politics untenable. Whether this is feasible in the face of what looks set to be some fairly deliberate attacks on foundations and nonprofits by Trump and those around him (notably his Vice President JD Vance, who we noted in the newsletter a few months ago has form for foundation-bashing) remains to be seen, but the US nonprofit sector undoubtedly has some big challenges and difficult choices ahead.

Kill(er) Bill Vol 1: challenging times for US civil society organisations?

If civil society organisations in the US had any doubts about the challenges they may face under the incoming Trump administration, this month brought an unwelcome and deeply worrying dose of reality for them, in the shape of a [new bill just passed in the House of Representatives which could give Trump’s government the power to strip nonprofits of their tax-exempt status if they are deemed to be “terrorist-supporting organisations”](#).



The bill, HR9495 (properly known the “Stop Terror-Financing and Tax Penalties on American Hostages Act”, but renamed by those opposing it as the “Nonprofit Killer Bill”) repeats language used in an earlier bill (HR6408), which was [also passed in the House of Representatives back in April](#), but which subsequently stalled in the Democrat-controlled Senate. HR9495 also has yet to pass in the Senate, but with control soon to shift to the Republicans, the worry is that it will have no such problems getting through.

Both HR9495 and its predecessor have been primarily framed around the issue of Israel-Gaza; as a way of clamping down on organisations that are seen to be pro-Palestinian. This will undoubtedly prove to be the case, and that is a concern for many. The wider fear, however, is that the powers granted in the Bill could be used to accuse pretty much any nonprofit that is in opposition to the Trump government (particularly if it works in a contentious cause area) to be labelled a “terrorist-supporting organisation” and stripped of its tax exempt status. Some defenders of the new Bill claim that this is an overblown fear, and that the powers it grants are only a slight strengthening of those already granted by previous legislation. However, [as the law scholar Ellen P April pointed out in a forensic comparison earlier this year of the proposed HR6408 Bill \(the precursor to the current one\) and the existing Section 501\(p\)](#), one major difference is that the power to designate an organisation as “terrorist-supporting” now sits with the Secretary of the Treasury alone, rather than requiring consultation among multiple

departments, which potentially makes it far easier for politicised witch-hunts to be launched.

Interestingly the [law scholar Darryll K Jones has argued recently that fears over the new Bill might be slightly misplaced](#) - not because Trump is not going to seek to constrain civil society (which he almost certainly will do), but because (Jones argues) the powers that are already available in existing legislation are far more nebulous and draconian than most people think, so having them clarified may actually be an improvement. (Even if it is a shock to the system for many to see them written down).

I wouldn't pretend to know anywhere near enough about US nonprofit law to have a strong opinion on this (although I would recommend checking out recent conversation on BlueSky started by Prof [Brian Mittendorf](#), who is always one of my go-to sources on US nonprofit tax issues) . All that I can say is that when we have seen this kind of anti-civil society legislation in other parts of the world (Russia, India, Hungary etc), even when the actual impact in terms of the law being enforced is not as bad as feared, the wider chilling effect it has on the ability of civil society organisations to speak out and challenge government (as they absolutely should do in any healthy democracy) is a huge problem. And the vagueness of the definitions in the US Bill is almost certainly not an accident either: a certain element of "strategic vagueness" in order to keep everyone guessing is a key part of Repressing Civil Society 101 all around the world.

Nonprofits in the US are definitely concerned, as [the recent joint statement from the Council on Foundations, Independent Sector, National Council of Nonprofits, and United Philanthropy Forum makes clear](#). And other people who have been tracking the 'closing space for civil society' around the world are worried too: seeing this as an alarming extension of the phenomenon to the world's major philanthropy market. ([Rebecca Hanshaw and Barry Knight have written a good piece for Alliance to this effect](#)). It's also worth saying that I spoke to a colleague in India just this week about what is happening and their view – from the perspective of a country that has recent experience of laws being introduced that are designed to repress civil society – is that

there is definitely a lot of reason for civil society organisations in the US (and, indeed, the rest of us elsewhere) to be concerned.

Ed Banned Band Aid

A 40th anniversary remake of Band Aid's Christmas 'classic' "Do They Know it's Christmas", which combines vocals from different versions of the song recorded over the years, [has sparked controversy after it was reported that Ed Sheeran is "unhappy" with his vocals being used.](#)

Sheeran claims that his consent was not sought, but that if it had been he would have "politely declined" because [his "understanding of the narrative" around the song had changed](#) in the ten years since he took part in Band Aid in 2014.



[Image by Harald Krichel, CC BY-SA 3.0](#)

The song has long been a source of controversy, with critics claiming that it presents an outmoded view of Africa and African people, and that the model of charity it typifies is one that is guilty of “white saviourism”. [NPR’s Goats and Soda section had a good article this month reporting the views of people from Kenya about the song](#), which were mixed, but many of them expressed reservations about the portrayal of African people as objects of pity and recipients of charity. An article in *The Conversation* by Colin Alexander also [traces the history of some of these criticisms](#) and makes a wider argument that Band Aid had a significant

impact on the way in which we think about charity and about the solution to society's problems. (This article is worth reading if for no other reason than they managed to get a written response from Bob Geldof, who doesn't seem to be that enthusiastic about critiques of Band Aid judging from his use of the immortal pay-off line "colonial tropes, my arse"...)

The debate over BandAid and white saviourism doesn't exist in a vacuum, of course, so it is inevitable that it will spill over into wider culture war debates and that for everyone willing to criticise the song there will be someone equally ready to die on a hill to defend it against "cancellation by the woke mind brigade", even if in reality they don't even like it (because let's be honest: it's no "Last Christmas" by Wham, is it?) Tony Hadley, lead singer of 80s pop titans Spandau Ballet (who, in fairness, has some skin in the game here, because he was on the original Band Aid single) offered his view that [Ed Sheeran should just "shut up"](#). Other commentators have offered slightly more detailed and nuanced criticisms: such as [Danny Finkelstein in the Times](#) (£), who argues that criticism of Band Aid is misguided for suggesting that anyone involved genuinely thinks that a charity single is a replacement for addressing the structural issues which cause famine and epidemics (which Bob Geldof definitely doesn't think; but has yet to be confirmed about Tony Hadley...). Finkelstein also argues that the danger of these sorts of criticisms is that they might put people off giving in support of charitable efforts for fear of being seen as contributing to the problem, when these charitable efforts are still necessary and vital to address immediate need (even if they aren't part of the long-term solution). The challenge of achieving a balance between dealing with symptoms and addressing their underlying causes is, of course, not unique to Band Aid – in fact, it is one of the core tensions that shapes a large part of philanthropy. Which means that it is important that we debate it as a society when stories like this come to the fore, but we also shouldn't expect that the question can be settled one way or the other.

The other thing to note is that whilst the debate over Band Aid might seem a bit stale and circular, as we have been having it for decades now, there may be much more modern versions of the same problem that we should be aware of (and concerned about). The fact that people like

YouTube star and philanthropist MrBeast may well be bringing white saviour celebrity philanthropy to a whole new generation (as <ahem> discussed in [my journal article all about him...](#)), suggests that aren't done talking about this yet by any stretch of the imagination.

“A Pattern of Behaviour”: the grubby tale of the Captain Tom Foundation

The sorry saga of the Captain Tom Foundation came to a conclusion this month with the publication of a long-awaited, and highly critical, report into the charity by the Charity Commission.



[Image by David Dixon, CC BY-SA 2.0](#)

For anyone reading this who is unfamiliar with the background (or for anyone in the UK who has been encased in carbonite, Han Solo-style, for the last 5 years), Captain Tom Moore was a British Army veteran who, in 2020 during the first UK Covid lockdown, decided to walk 100 lengths of his garden to celebrate his forthcoming 100th birthday and to raise money for NHS Charities Together. His efforts over 24 days captured the

public imagination and went ultra-viral, and by the time of his birthday he had raised over £32 million pounds from more than 1.5 million donors. He was subsequently given a number of awards, including a Knighthood and the BBC Sports Personality of the Year Helen Rollason Award., before unfortunately passing away from Covid in 2021. After his death, his family set up a charitable trust, The Captain Tom Foundation - which is where the problems that led to this month's news started.

In June 2022, the Charity Commission announced that it was launching an inquiry into the foundation established in the name of Captain Sir Tom Moore (as above), citing concerns about financial mismanagement and inappropriate commercial relationships between the organisation and a business owned by his family (who also ran the foundation). Subsequent media investigations highlighted multiple occasions on which Hannah Ingram-Moore (Captain Tom's daughter) and her husband Colin appeared to have used their links with the charity for their own personal gain, including [keeping for themselves more than £800,000 of profits from three books written by Captain Tom](#), and using a planning application in the foundation's name as the basis for building a spa pool at their family home (which was [demolished earlier this year](#) on the orders of the Local Authority as it did not conform to the original, approved plans).

The Ingram-Moores had already been disqualified by the Charity Commission from being charity trustees back in July 2024, but the final report issued this month is still a shocking reminder of the "pattern of behaviour" that the couple displayed in using their charity to benefit themselves. The fact that they were only in a position to do this thanks to a good deed that their father did at a time when the nation was pretty desperate for optimism, and they were willing to exploit this so cynically, has clearly angered many. And, as the Charity Commission points out, those who donated to Captain Tom's original fundraising efforts and whose money ended up in the Captain Tom Foundation "would understandably feel misled".

The particulars of this story are pretty sordid, and the whole thing just leaves a fairly unpleasant taste in the mouth, but hopefully the Charity Commission's findings can help to draw a line under it. The wider question is what impact, if any, it might have on the charity sector more

broadly. The concern whenever charity scandals of this kind hit the news is that it will undermine public trust and confidence in charities, leading people to become cynical (or more cynical than they already are in some cases!) and to stop giving. But as both [Ian MacQuillin in *Third Sector*](#) and [John Tribe in the *Conversation*](#) both argue, that may not be the case here as it is not a story about an unfortunate member of the public being treated poorly by a charity (as was the case with [the story of the 92 year old volunteer fundraiser Olive Cooke](#), who took her own life in 2015 after – it was wrongly claimed - being overwhelmed by fundraising requests from charities, thus sparking a huge backlash against fundraising), but rather a story about someone taking advantage of a charity. Furthermore, the story of the Captain Tom Foundation can in many ways be seen as a story about the success of the UK's system of charity law and regulation: wrongdoing was identified fairly quickly, action was taken, and the guilty parties have now been subjected to public censure and criticism. So, one could argue that the upshot is that the Charity Commission actually seems to be doing its job fairly well (albeit many - including the Commission itself – would probably argue that it could do with greater powers and resources to do that job even better).

Dominic Grieve's philanthropy brainwave

The new Chancellor of Oxford University was chosen this month (I realise many of you may have next to no interest in this, but stick with me for a moment). One of the candidates (who [lost out eventually to the former UK PM William Hague](#)) was the former Tory MP Dominic Grieve. What matters for the purposes of this newsletter is that as part of his pitch, Grieve, argued that Oxford and Cambridge (and other big unis) should “become more like US colleges” and “tap into philanthropy to build their own endowments”.



A statement that I think it is worth analysing, if only to appreciate the rich variety of ways in which it is wrong.

Firstly, it implies that institutions like Oxford and Cambridge aren't already trying to attract philanthropy. But they definitely are, and often quite successfully. Yes, there's room for more, but enough more to enable a total paradigm shift? I'm sceptical (and, I would suggest so should you be). There's also the point the whilst Oxford and its constituent colleges don't necessarily have vast endowments in the way that Harvard, Stanford or Yale do, some of these colleges have been around for long enough to accrue some pretty significant holdings of illiquid assets. (I know, for instance, that when I was an undergrad in Oxford an oft-heard claim was that you could walk all the way from St John's College in Oxford to St John's College in Cambridge without ever leaving land that was not owned by one or other of the two colleges). Granted, these assets are distributed extremely unevenly between different colleges, and some of them really don't have much of anything; but for those that do have assets, would it be possible to realise some to fund a cash endowment?

A wider point is that given the parlous state of public funding and the economic backdrop of recent years, the list of fields in which people feel tempted to propose philanthropy as a miracle cure is already quite big (e.g. theatre, local govt, international development). This is a dangerous way to view philanthropy at the best of times if you ask me - and this certainly isn't the best of times, so the demands on philanthropy (the actual ones, let alone the hypothetical ones) are already potentially untenable.

And even if there was, in theory, a sufficient supply of philanthropy to fill the gaps in higher education funding (as well as every gap is being called on to fill), this wouldn't just happen by magic. It would require a hefty investment in fundraising capabilities, relationship building and so on. Which, again, is something a lot of Oxbridge colleges have already done, so suggesting is as if it is something no-one has thought of before just seems a bit silly.

I also think it's dangerous to assume that philanthropy ever functions neatly as a mechanism that can be accurately directed towards particular policy aims. You might want to boost philanthropy so that it results in the growth of endowments for Oxbridge colleges, but is this what donors want? Or do they want to fund other aspects of universities, such as capital projects or student access projects? Or do they just want to fund totally different cause areas? You can certainly try to direct them, but unless you happen to be a professional cat-herder, you are likely to find it difficult.

It feels like there is a timescale mismatch here too: getting more philanthropy into UK universities might well be a good thing (I certainly know plenty that would like it!), but it isn't going to happen at the pace required to address the acute financial challenges many Higher Education institutions are facing, so it is better seen as a medium to long-term ambition rather than a short-term solution.

So those are some reasons why Dominic Grieve was wrong. But as I say, he didn't get elected in the end anyway, so this is really just me getting things off my chest.

WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO

This is the section where I update you on what we have been doing at Why Philanthropy Matters over the last month or so

BBC Radio 4 Free Thinking

Almost certainly my most exciting bit of work news this month was this I appeared on BBC Radio 4's Free Thinking programme, discussing "Gifts and Gratitude" with 3 other guests and presenter Shahidha Bari. Thanks to some complicated and hastily put in place childcare arrangements, I was able to head down to London to record the show live on November 29th at 9pm, and you can now get it as a podcast via BBC Sounds or other podcast providers. The conversation took in the work of Marcel Mauss, mutual aid, whether Band Aid is guilty of white saviourism and what we should make of MrBeast. I also received a potato as a gift. No, really.



Arts & Ideas

Gifts and Gratitude



Find it on BBC Sounds

The Philanthropisms podcast:

On the Philanthropisms podcast this month I was joined by Milos Maricic and Giuseppe Ugazio, co-editors of the new Routledge Handbook of Artificial Intelligence and Philanthropy, to talk about the current state of the intersection between philanthropy and AI. I was also joined by Scott Greenhalgh, Chair of Social and Sustainable Capital, to talk about social investment and impact investing.



Philanthropisms

Milos Maricic & Giuseppe Ugazio:
Philanthropy and AI



Philanthropisms · Episode

Scott Greenhalgh: Social Investment
& Impact Investing



Listen to the episode with Milos & Giuseppe

Listen to the episode with Scott

Philanthropy Australia UK Study Tour

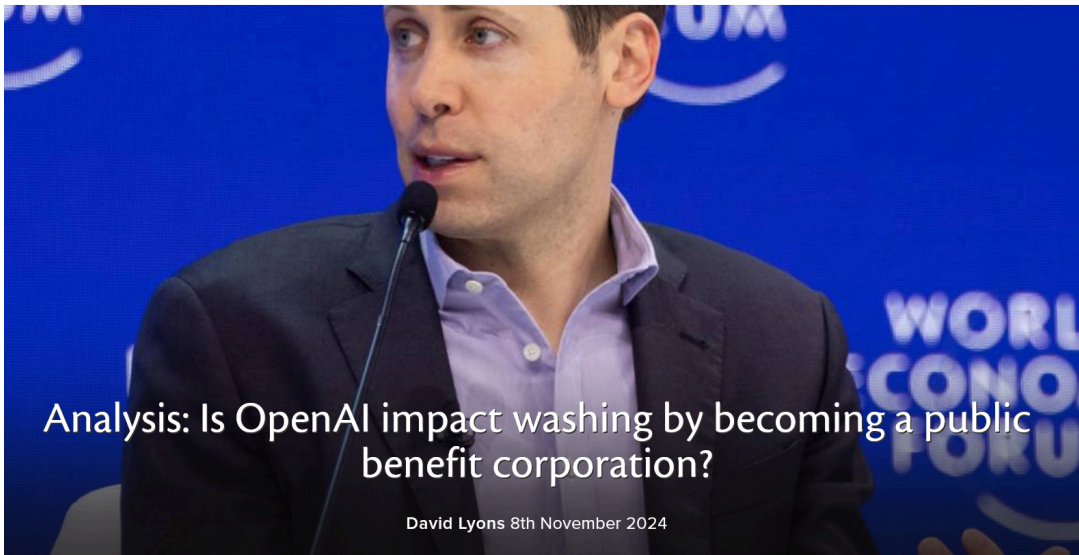
I had a great time this month going down to London to meet people from the Australian philanthropy sector, who were taking part in a UK study tour organised by Philanthropy Australia. I offered some framing thoughts about philanthropy from a UK perspective to start things off,

and was able to stick around and join everyone for dinner (which was really nice, as it gave more of a chance to chat to people, and I'm often having to rush off and catch trains!)



Pioneers Post article on OpenAI

I was quoted this month in *Pioneers Post* offering a few thoughts on OpenAI's reported plans to transition from its nonprofit legal form and become a public benefit corporation. (And if you want the longer version of my thoughts, [you can check out this WPM article on the same topic](#)).



[Read the article](#)

Civil Society article on crypto giving

I was also quoted in a new story in *Civil Society* expressing a suitably balanced mixture of optimism and concern about the announcement that UK fundraising platform JustGiving is to start accept cryptocurrency donations (via a partnership with The Giving Block).



[Read the article](#)

Stanford PACS AI talk write up

There was a nice write-up by Stanford Pacs of the various guest lectures done as part of their recent Executive Philanthropy Program, including a talk on AI and the future of philanthropy from yours truly.

[Read the article](#)

UPCOMING EVENTS

The future of philanthropic due diligence: Navigating **new standards and technology** in 2025

Live webinar on 5 December 2024 | 16:00 GMT | 11:00 EST



Jessica Denny
Head of Comms & Marketing
Xapien



Rhodri Davies
Founder
Why Philanthropy Matters

On 5th December, IO will be joining Jessica Denny from Xapien for a webinar to discuss due diligence in philanthropy, and how new tech might affect it.

[Sign up for free here](#)



Charity Conference

23-24 January 2025
Virtual event

On 24th January next year, I will be taking part in an online session on "Reframing Overheads" for the ICAEW Charity Conference.

[Sign up here](#)

OTHER GOOD STUFF

This is the bit where I share other philanthropy-related things I have come across this month that might not quite count as news but are definitely worth checking out.

The Philosophy of Philanthropy:

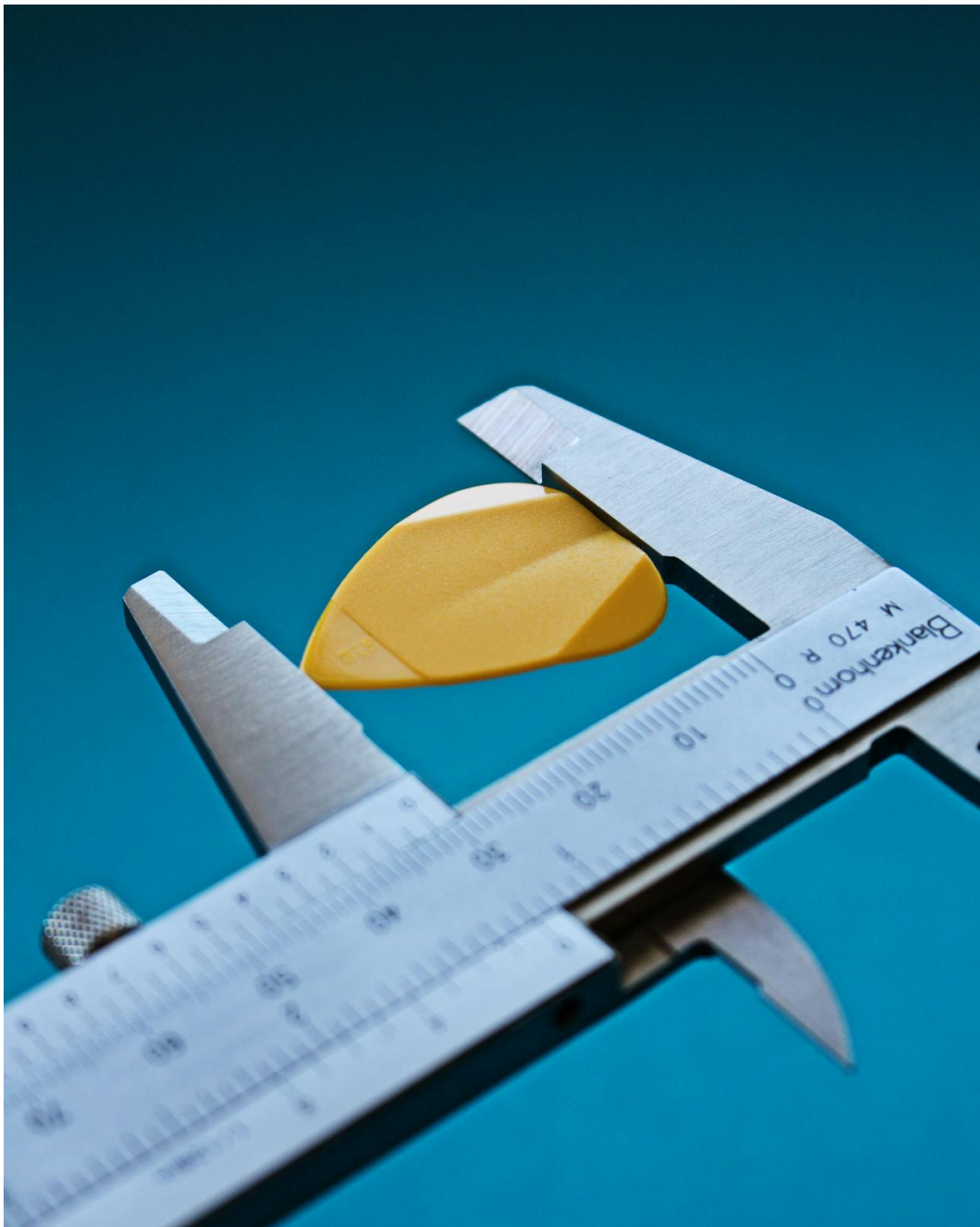
Exciting times for philanthropy nerds this month (a club of which I am clearly a paid-up member, if not the club secretary at this point...), with the publication of [a new entry on philanthropy in the prestigious Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy](#). The SEP is a great free resource that I have made copious use of many times over the years, and is a brilliant starting point for understanding philosophical issues and finding further reading. The new entry on philanthropy, co-authored by Ted Lechterman, Emma Saunders-Hastings and Rob Reich is no exception, and gives a really good overview of some of the key themes and questions that philosophers have considered when it comes to giving and altruism, as well as an excellent bibliography for anyone who wants to dig deeper. (Reminder that if you want my own idiosyncratic take, there's a whole Philanthropisms podcast episode on "[The Philosophy of Philanthropy](#)" that you can check out, and you can also hear me [talk to Emma Saunders-Hastings about her book "Private Virtues, Public Vices"](#) on another episode).



[Read the SEP entry](#)

Philanthropy by the Numbers:

While we're on the subject of former Philanthropisms podcast guests, Stanford's Aaron Horvath - [who came on the podcast back in September 2023](#) - had a [great article published this month in *The Hedgehog Review*](#). (A magazine published by the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture at the University of Virginia, which I had not come across before, but which I liked so much that I have subsequently subscribed!) The article is on similar topics to those I discussed with Aaron when we spoke: the limits of measurement, and why a relentless demand for metrics might be damaging when it comes to certain aspects of civil society. This is a debate that has grown and grown in recent years (though as I have said before, and Aaron argues much more eloquently, it is not in the slightest bit new); and this is a great formulation of the critical argument against over-emphasis on measurement so do check it out. (NB: there is a paywall for this one unfortunately).

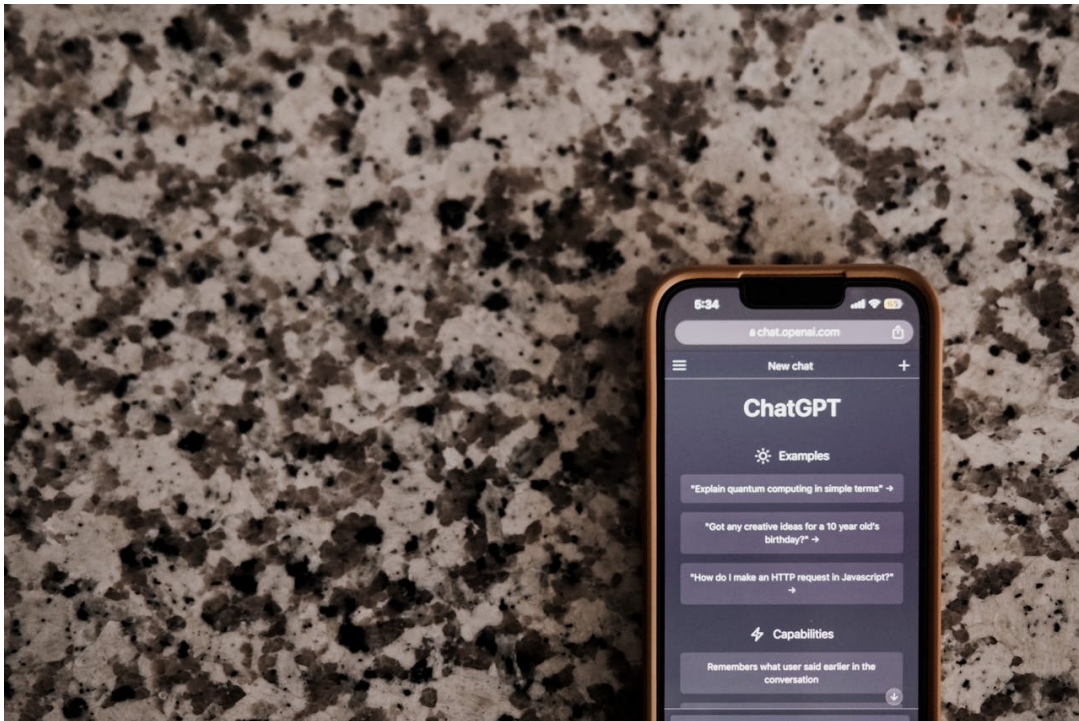


[Read the article \(\\$\)](#)

IRC's use of AI:

The *Independent* carried an good piece this month from the ever-excellent *Associated Press* philanthropy desk (specifically Thalia Beaty in this case), detailing the way that [the International Rescue Committee is experimenting with AI to improve the reach and effectiveness of its work](#). The main focus of the IRC's use of AI so far seems to be harnessing Natural Language Processing capabilities to overcome

language barriers, in the form of chatbots and social media tools that make it easier for people to get information about their rights and the support they can access. The thing I liked about this article was that it managed to be very balanced: highlighting the positive potential of this work, but also identifying various potential challenges such as the risk of chatbots providing incorrect or outdated information, the dangers of data breaches that expose sensitive information on activists or marginalised communities, and the challenge of ensuring that tools like this are not simply imposed on communities in the global south, but rather designed and implemented with their involvement.



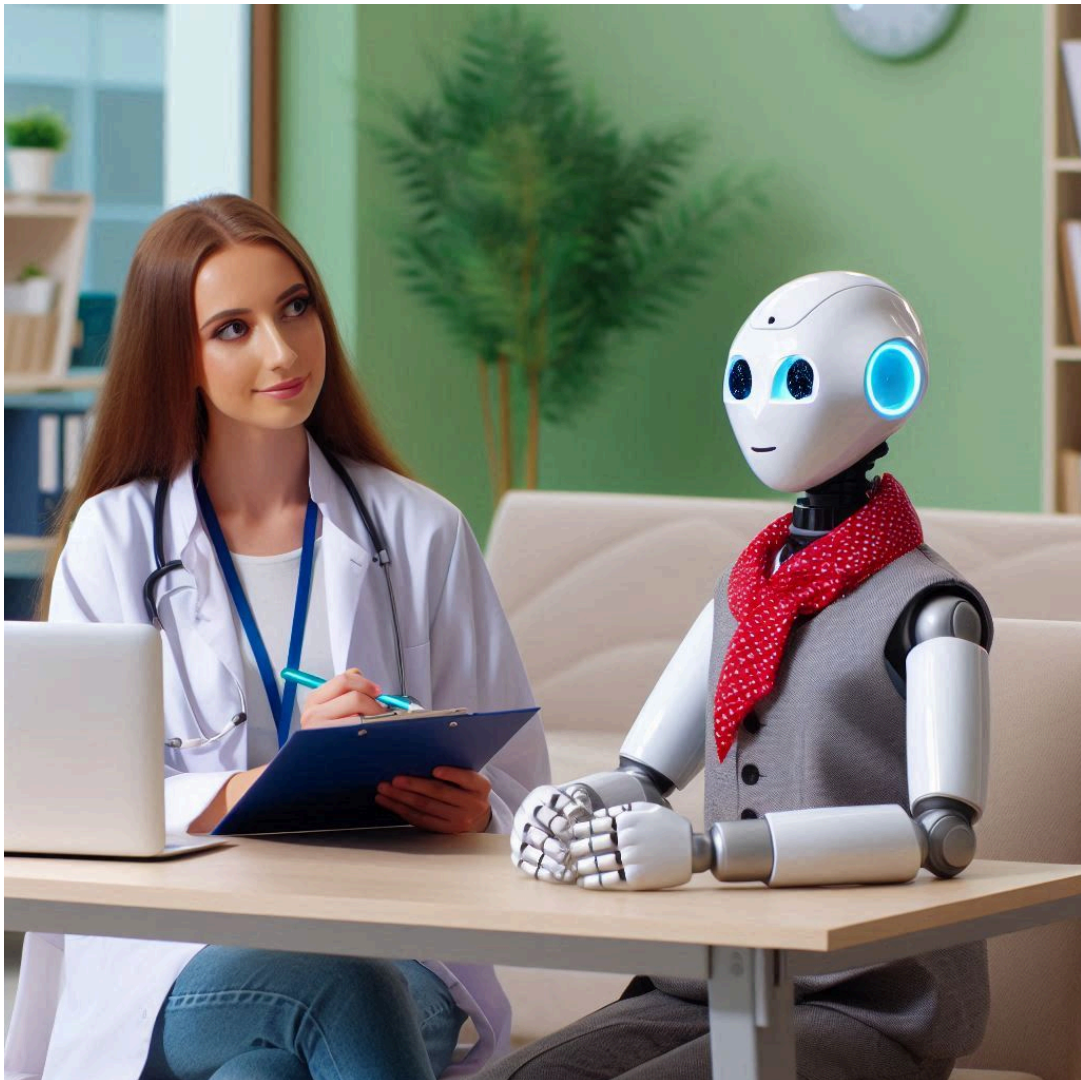
[Read the article](#)

Simulated agents for social research:

On the theme of AI, I suggested in the recent talk I gave for Stanford PACS that one of the big impacts of AI on philanthropy in future might be the ability to model and test interventions through simulations and the creation of "digital twins", instead of necessarily having to try them out in the real world. (As they already do for things like protein folding).

We are obviously still a long way off being able to do that for complex social issues (and there are good arguments why we might never want

to do it), but I was really interested to see this month [a new paper detailing recent experiments in creating generative AI agents that can respond to surveys as a way of testing behaviours and attitudes](#). There's plenty about this that makes me very wary, but I think it's definitely a field for philanthropy people to keep a close eye on (for better or worse!)



(Image created using Microsoft Copilot)

[Read the paper](#)

Most & Least Charitable US States:

[An article on WalletHub this month offered a list of US states by how charitable they are](#). The list gives separate measures of charitable giving and volunteering/service, as well as a combined ranking. Top of the

combined list is Wyoming (closely followed by Utah and Minnesota), with the bottom place being taken by New Mexico. As ever with these kinds of lists some might well raise an eyebrow at elements of the methodology (is “Google searches for ‘charitable donations’” actually a useful metric?), but choices always have to be made about what data sources and measures to use, and the authors have clearly shown their workings so they are not trying to hide anything. And besides, everyone loves a list, don’t they?



[Read the article](#)

Donor Advised funds and non-cash assets:

There was a really [interesting article in the *Conversation* this month from Brian Mittendorf](#) (who gets the rare accolade of two mentions in a single edition of the newsletter), outlining the findings of a forthcoming study which shows that Donor Advised Funds receive a much higher proportion of donations in the form of non-cash assets (such as shares, real estate or cryptocurrency) than traditional charities do. In many ways this is not surprising – a lot of DAF providers actively market these funds on the basis that they make it easier to give these sorts of assets whilst still being able to support a wide range of nonprofits. There are at

least two concerns, however: the first is the well-established one that DAFs (in the US, at least) are good at bringing money in but far less good at giving it out again, so there is a “warehousing” effect whereby money which could be supporting the work of operational nonprofits is instead sitting in DAFs. The other point made in the article is that donations of non-cash assets are often far more tax-efficient than cash gifts, because the donor does not have to pay any capital gains tax on assets that may have appreciated significantly in value AND can get a tax deduction equivalent to the Fair Market Value of the assets at the time of donation too. As a result, DAFs have a disproportionately large effect on reducing tax revenues compared to other forms of nonprofit. Which is not necessarily improper, but is likely to be further grist to the mill for those who are already critical of these structures.



[Read the article](#)

The Stone Soup Theory of Wealth:

There was [an enjoyable blog this month from the economics writer Brett Scott, taking aim at what he calls the “Great Man Theory of Wealth”](#). This plays on the idea of the “Great Man Theory of History”, first made famous by Thomas Carlyle, (who argued that “the history of the world is but the biography of great men”) to identify a view of wealth which

“assumes that extreme riches are the result of inspired work that the person undertakes”, rather than being the product of a complex mixture of luck, skill and benefitting from favourable societal conditions that make wealth creation possible. Scott proposes instead a “stone soup theory of wealth”, in which wealth creation is seen as something that only happens through collective effort (even if not everyone benefits). The name refers to a famous old folk tale in which a hungry group of travellers arrive in a village carrying an empty cooking pot. At first they cannot convince the villagers to share any food with them, so they put some stones and water in a pot and start boiling them. The villagers become curious and ask them what they are doing, to which the travellers reply that they are making “stone soup”, which is delicious, but that they are missing just one ingredient. Keen to try this soup, the villagers each, in turn, agree to share one ingredient, and eventually the travellers have enough to make the delicious soup they promised.

Scott argues that the idea of individual “self-made” wealth should be seen as a form of stone soup: something that is in reality only possible thanks to the hidden contributions of a wide range of people. Which is, of course not a new point, and in fact reminded me of comments I have read from various philanthropists over the years who are quick to acknowledge the debt they owe to others and the element of luck that got them where they are. One of my favourite examples comes from Warren Buffett, who said many years ago:

“My wealth has come from a combination of living in America, some lucky genes and compound interest. Both my children and I won what I call the ovarian lottery. (For starters, the odds against my 1930 birth taking place in the US were at least 30 to 1. My being male and white also removed huge obstacles that a majority of Americans then faced). My luck was accentuated by my living in a market system that sometimes produces distorted results, though overall it serves our country well. I’ve worked in an economy that rewards someone who saves the lives of others on the battlefield with a medal, rewards a great teacher with thank-you notes from parents, but rewards those who can detect the mispricing of securities with sums reaching into the billions. In short, fate’s distribution of long straws is wildly capricious.”



[Read the blog](#)

What if you can't afford to give to charity?

Vox recently carried a really interesting response from one of their Senior Reporters, Sigal Samuel, to a query from a reader [asking whether it was morally OK, as someone on a low income and government assistance themselves, not to give to charity](#). The basic conclusion of Samuel's article (which draws on a wide range of touchpoints including Kant's moral imperative, Islamic teachings on Zakat and traditions of mutual aid) is that it is OK not to give money if you cannot afford to, but to remember at the same time that philanthropy is not just about money, and that giving your time and energy can sometimes be an alternative, and just as valuable. (Although she also acknowledges the risk that giving up time for unpaid voluntary work is not always easy for those on low incomes, so there is a danger of it becoming the preserve

of those who already have sufficient resources). I thought it was a really thoughtful piece, and definitely worth checking out.



[Read the article](#)

Earning to give:

Sticking with Vox, I was really interested to see a piece from Kelly Piper (who has covered EA from a broadly sympathetic perspective for a number of years now) [arguing that we should resurrect the EA idea of “Earning to Give”](#). As she notes in the piece, this aspect of EA was particularly badly tarnished by the implosion of disgraced crypto-billionaire Sam Bankman-Fried, since many saw a perverted interpretation of earning to give as a central element of his downfall, as it arguably allowed him to justify his own unethical (and eventually fraudulent) actions on the grounds that he was simply maximising the amount of money he could earn in order to give it away. Whether this is actually a fair interpretation of the situation or not is still a highly contested point, but the basic narrative has certainly gained a lot of traction. A lot of people were also critical of the earn to give idea well before SBF’s involvement, arguing that it epitomises everything that is wrong about EA as a fundamentally conservative ideology that justifies

the status quo and proposes only solutions that seek to optimise impact within existing systems, rather than entertaining the idea that more fundamental reform to those systems may be required.

The thing I quite like and respect about Piper's article (even if I don't necessarily agree with her) is that she leans into these criticisms, arguing that it is fine if EA bolsters the existing system of capitalism because that is a good system:

"I also like earning to give for its unabashed friendliness to capitalism, which is a rare quality on the do-gooder left. I believe that the last century has made the world much, much better for the vast majority of people, and while targeted scientific innovation is a huge part of the story, another huge part of the story is the astounding success of market economies. Why did the world get better? Mostly through people doing valuable stuff, often for selfish and pecuniary reasons."



[Read the article](#)

Flirt-lanthropy?

An article in PsyPost reported on [a new study which found that \(heterosexual\) people were more likely to act altruistically in an online game when they were paired with a member of the opposite sex](#). In the study, participants were asked to play the World Food Programme's Free Rice game, and researchers found that they were inclined to be more generous when they were paired from the start with a partner whose username clearly identified them as of the opposite sex. Explaining the findings, one of the academics involved said:

"When people are primed to think that they are interacting with an attractive potential romantic partner, they are more likely to behave in a way that is helpful to that individual...This is even the case when they interact online, with no prospect of meeting that person. This shows how powerful the motivation is to display altruistic behavior to others, as this is an important trait we all look for in long-term partners."

What this could mean in practice for fundraisers, I don't know. Maybe that they should try, if at all possible, to design situations in which they are asking people for money in front of attractive potential partners? It strikes me there might be some ethical questions to address first though...



(Image created using Microsoft Copilot)

[Read the article](#)

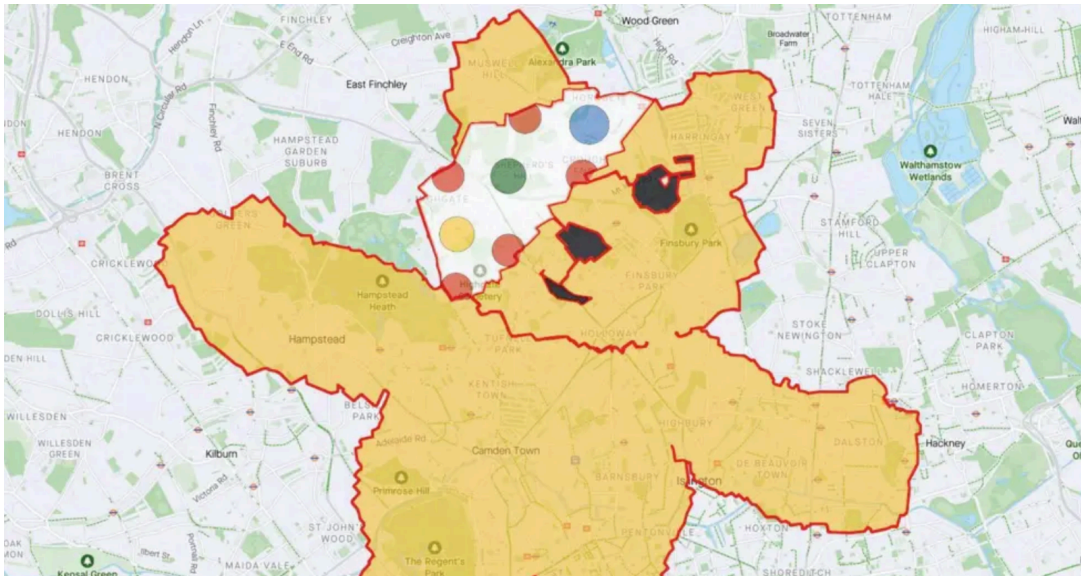
AND FINALLY: Grin and Bear It

As any parent in the UK who had to scramble to find spotty clothing to send their child to school in will know all too well, this month saw the annual BBC Children in Need fundraising day. (And shout out to BBCCiN's Fozia Irfan, who I know will be reading this!) This gave rise to my favourite charity story of recent weeks, with news that a group of cyclists took part in a fundraising ride around London, in which they [cycled a route that had been meticulously planned out to create a picture of BBCCiN mascot Pudsey Bear](#) on the geospatial mapping exercise app Strava.

If you are tempted to ask why, then I would offer you a paraphrase of the mountaineer Sir George Mallory's response when asked why he

wanted to climb Everest: "Because it's bear".

Sorry. I'll get my coat



[Read the article](#)

Right, I have definitely tested your patience enough at this point, so I will bid you adieu and see you next time. My aim is to get another edition out before Christmas, so keep an eye out for that!

Best,

Rhodri



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