Why Philanthropy Matters

Welcome to the Summer 2024 Roundup!

Hello philanthropoids!

I hope you all had a good break over the summer – I certainly managed to (in between a fair amount of school holiday childcare juggling), so I actually feel quite refreshed and reinvigorated for the first time in a while. I am, admittedly, only four days into being back at work, so things might well change – but for now I am going to enjoy this feeling…

This newsletter, as ever, is a chance to catch up on all the philanthropy-related news and views you might have missed over the last month or so, as well as a chance to find out what we have been working on at Why Philanthropy Matters in recent weeks (short answer: not a lot, apart from writing) and what we have coming up in the near future (which, it turns out, is quite a lot - although more on that in due course…)

There has been plenty going on the wider world of philanthropy too, so let's dilly-dally no further and instead dive straight into the shimmering pool of recent philanthro-content for an invigorating thought-swim.

Or something like that.

Best,

Rhodri

PHILANTHROPY IN THE NEWS

Opening the (French) Gates?

I don't know about you, but I have been thoroughly enjoying hearing more from Melinda French Gates since her divorce from husband Bill, and her exit from their jointly-run foundation earlier this year. Her evidently increased willingness to speak her mind means that in the last few months we have heard more from her than ever before on her views about the state of philanthropy, as well as more detail on how her own approach and priorities might differ from those that she previously shared with her husband. (And perhaps even a sense of the places where she might have felt constrained or frustrated at times).

(Image by UK Department for International Development, CC BY-SA 2.0)

Back in August the *New York Times* magazine carried a big interview with French Gates in which she talked about why she is putting a focus on women and girls at the heart of her philanthropy – something she struggled with to an extent previously due to scepticism or resistance from others around her. (As she recounts in the article, she found many times that "until they have daughters or someone in their family that really hits these barriers, [men] often are not convincible"). She also renews the case that she has made elsewhere that philanthropists who want to make a fundamental difference to issues of systemic injustice and inequality cannot shy away from getting involved in politics.

But even more interesting (and certainly much more entertaining) are the candid opinions she gives of other wealthy people's giving – particularly when she rather cuttingly pushes back on a question about the philanthropy of tech bros like Elon Musk, Peter Thiel and Jack Dorsey by denying the premise, on the grounds "they have not been very philanthropic yet". Given that French Gates was presumably not on any of those men's Christmas card lists anyway (and Musk couldn't get much more objectionable in his misogynistic attacks on her than he already has been), there was probably little to be lost in calling them out; but kudos to her for doing it.

Tax Bill?

To maintain my reputation for impeccable balance (except perhaps when it comes to Elon Musk…), I also enjoyed an interview in the *Independent* with Melinda French Gates's former husband Bill this month; which he gave as part of the promotion for his forthcoming Netflix documentary series "What's Next? The Future with Bill Gates", in which he explores various scientific and technological innovations that he believes could shape a more positive future for humanity.

It wasn't so much what Gates had to say about tech for good that caught my eye though - rather it was a couple of other comments he made in the course of the interview. Firstly this, on taxation:

"I'm a huge believer in the estate tax [the American equivalent of the UK's inheritance tax] and more progressive taxation… I don't think we should generally generationally let families whose great grandfather, through luck and skill, accumulated a lot of wealth, have the economic or political power that comes with that…. If I designed the tax system, I would be tens of billion dollars poorer than I am… tax system could be more progressive without damaging significantly the incentive to do fantastic things."

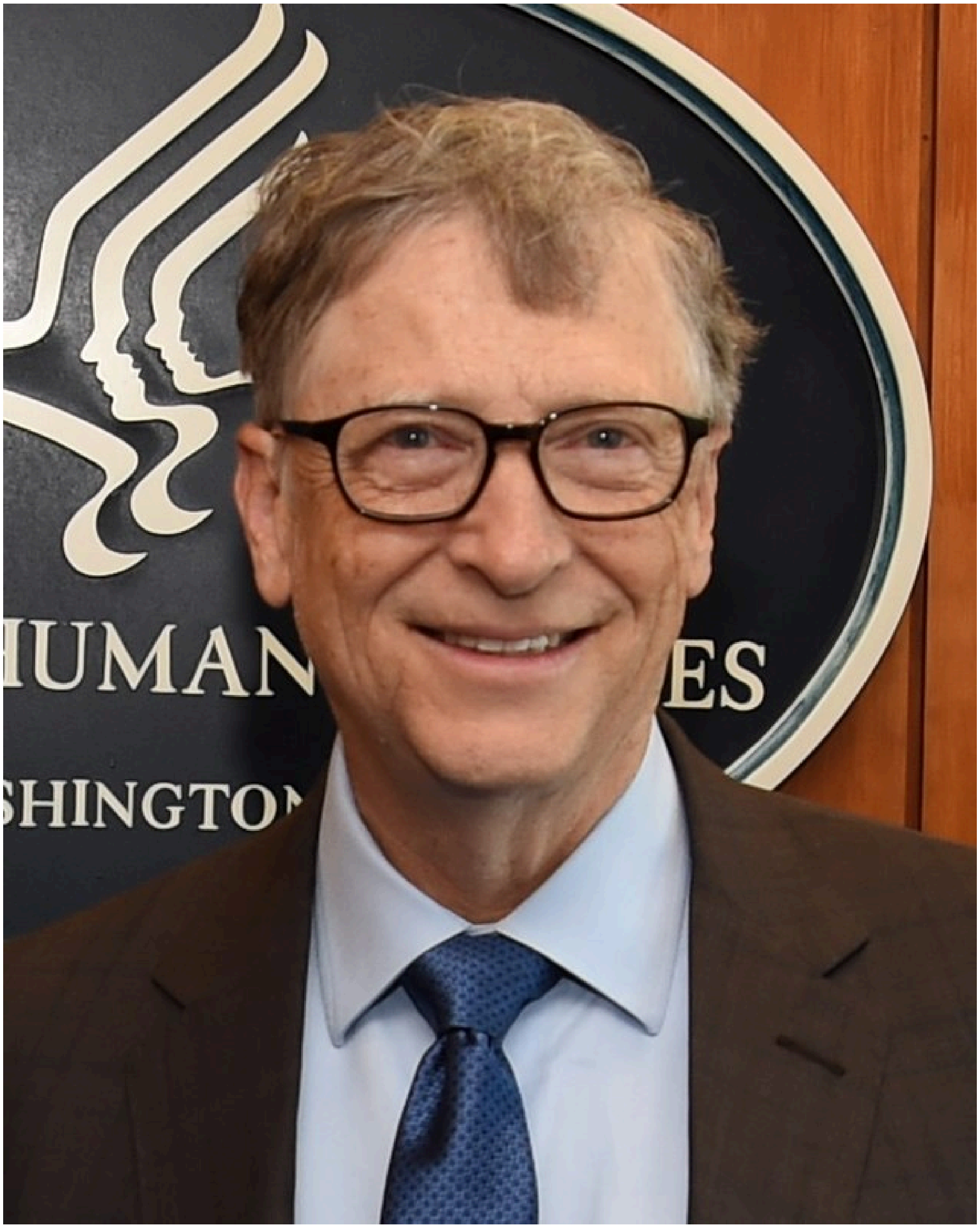


Image by Gage Skidmore, CC BY-SA 2.0

This is definitely in line with things Gates has said before, but I don't know that I have heard it put this explicitly. It also reminded me of Andrew Carnegie's strong views about the desirability of taxes on inherited wealth in his famous essay "The Gospel of Wealth", where he says:

"The growing disposition to tax more and more heavily large estates left at death is a cheering indication of the growth of a salutary change in public opinion. Men who continue hoarding great sums all their lives, the proper

use of which for public ends would work good to the community, should be made to feel that the community, in the form of the state, cannot thus be deprived of its proper share. By taxing estates heavily at death the state marks its condemnation of the selfish millionaire's unworthy life. It is desirable that nations should go much further in this direction."

One of the other comments from Gates that caught my eye was this, on the value of his philanthropy and considering the hypothetical counterfactual of a world in which it didn't exist:

"If I hadn't been part of the personal computer revolution, it would have happened," he points out. "Would it have happened a year later or something? Who knows? But not super delayed, whereas when it comes to malaria, malnutrition, women's contraceptives, sadly, it's a strange comment on the world, I don't think even a decade later those things would necessarily have happened. It's hard to do the 'what if', but if you run the world with me and without me, and you subtract the two, the philanthropy is a much more significant thing in terms of making things that are equity-oriented happen dramatically sooner than they would have otherwise."

This might seem a bit hubristic to some, but in many ways it is one of the fundamental questions that every philanthropist needs to consider: namely , 'would the world have be any worse if I had never been in it?' In Gates's case, I would say that the sheer scale of his giving gives him at the very least the right to pose this as a question. And even for those who accept the various criticisms made of Gates's approach to business and to philanthropy (some of which are valid; others of which are overblown to my mind), it is still useful to pose the counterfactual question: would things have been better if Gates had never started giving in the first place? There are certainly people who would argue this, but you need to take a pretty hard line to do so.

The other comments from Gates that I found interesting in this interview were reiterating the fact that philanthropy should not be seen as a substitute for government (a point he has made before, but this is a useful formulation):

"Gates says he tries to promote philanthropy to the ultra-rich, but he acknowledges that's not a long-term fix. "The big work still has to be done by government," he says. "Philanthropy is not a substitute for government. Making sure everybody's educated, has food, has shelter – it's the government who's going to create that safety net.""

Valuing the Process

Sticking with big donors for a moment, albeit one of a very different kind, the *New Yorker* had a really interesting long read about Marlene Englehorn, the Austrian heiress and tax campaigner who recently ran an experiment in which she recruited a randomly-selected panel of 50 Austrian citizens to decide how to give away 25 million Euro of her inheritance.

(Image by Martin Kraft, CC BY-SA 4.0)

There was certainly some stuff in the article about the history of the BASF chemical company from where her fortune derives that I wasn't aware of before. (And which, I think it is safe to say, adds an interesting tainted money angle to the whole story…) But the bit of the article that really stood out for me was where Englehorn was quoted as saying:

"If I wanted to redistribute twenty-five million perfectly, like a re-granter"—a type of philanthropy in which one large grant is used to finance lots of smaller ones—"I would have just chosen a re-granter," she said. "But I didn't. I wanted discussion."

As regular readers might remember, I was lucky enough to have a tangential bit of involvement in a similar (albeit much smaller scale) experiment in using a citizen panel to give away money in Liverpool last year. (If you want to find out more, then check out this podcast conversation with the donor behind that project, David Clarke). And one thing that really struck me about that experience is that if you are going to go down a highly participatory route (particularly one involving randomly-selected participants), then you really have to value the process rather than just the outcome (as there are usually easier and lower cost ways of getting the latter). Or maybe it is just that you need to see the process *as* an outcome? Either way, it seems to me that the choice of this kind of model is at least as much about what we can learn from the model itself and what it does for participants, as it is about where the money ends up going.

On Top of the World?

August saw the launch of CAF's annual World Giving Index, which measures the current state of generosity around the world by using Gallup World Poll data to track levels of participation in three key behaviours (donating money, formal volunteering and helping a stranger). The big headline (in UK coverage, at least) is that the UK has dropped out of the top 20 most generous countries for only the second time in the report's history, which was obviously taken by some as yet more evidence of the relentless decline of a once-proud nation etc etc.

(SOURCE: CAF World Giving Index 2024)

To some extent these findings might well be confirmation that the potential decline in UK giving that has been noted elsewhere (including many times in this newsletter) is a genuine phenomenon, and one that we should be concerned about; but the UK's slide down the rankings also needs to be understood of a significant rise in reported generosity in other countries around the world. One of the interesting things about the WGI (which I worked on for many years when I was at CAF) is that because its measures go beyond financial amounts its rankings have always looked a bit different to those that you would expect if you just measured "which countries give the most". At first, when I worked on the WGI, we often put quite a lot of effort into trying to understand certain results that seemed to us quite 'surprising' or 'anomalous' (why did Myanmar and Thailand do so well on giving money for instance? Because the practice of *sangha dana*, or giving to support monasteries, is a key part of the Theravadha Buddhism that is the dominant religion in those countries. And why did Uzbekistan used to top the volunteering rankings? Turns out it was because they still had a practice of *subbotnik*, or mandatory “volunteering” every month, which was left over from the Soviet period).

Nowadays, however, these kinds of results look less like anomalies, and more like reflections of a broader understanding of generosity that is more global in nature. So the fact that Indonesia comes top of the World Giving Index, followed by Kenya and Singapore is not necessarily a surprise (in fact, in the case of Indonesia it *really* isn’t a surprise since the country has topped the rankings for the past 7 years); but it can tell us something about how people in those countries perceive their involvement in behaviours that reflect their own particular cultures of generosity. And even more interesting than who has come top, to my mind, is often which countries have risen the furthest; and this year is no different, with China, Morocco and Greece all recording significant increases in various aspects of giving. The fascinating bit then is to try and see what is behind these headlines: why is generosity in these countries on the rise? (And conversely, why in some other places is it seemingly on the wane?)

NB: If you want more on understanding global generosity, check out our recent Philanthropisms podcast episode with Pamala Wiepking.)

A Bit of Advice, Please…

Pro Bono Economics (PBE) put out a report in August based on survey research by the polling company Opinium with more than 1,000 wealthy individuals (who each had at least £100,000 of investible assets), which found that more than half of those surveyed (56%) thought that they could be giving more to charity. And more than a quarter (28%) of those with £500K or more of investable assets said that they could be giving twice what they currently do.

(Image created using Microsoft Copilot with the prompt "draw a cartoon of Scrooge McDuck sitting on a throne on top of a pile of gold coins, wearing a top hat with a Union Jack on it, while a woman in a suit talks to him about charity". Say what you like about the ethics of AI and the potential looming legal battles over IP etc - this is undeniably quite impressive. It does of course raise the question "why?", but that is more a matter for my therapist).

So the potential for getting more philanthropy in the UK looks pretty clear. But whilst it is definitely useful to have new figures to quantify this, the basic fact is one that many of us have known for a long time (indeed some of us have churned at more than a few long policy papers on the topic in our time...) The challenge comes in knowing what to do about it: how do we drive philanthropic giving up to the levels we think it could be at? In part it is likely to require some pretty fundamental cultural shifts among wealthy people, but those are *hard* to come up with workable policy formulations for, so PBE have (quite sensibly) focused on more practical and immediate suggestions.

In particular, they highlight the potential role of wealth advisers in driving giving by offering philanthropy advice. An FT article from August reported that other PBE research had found that there might be a significant growth opportunity here, as whilst there are roughly 230,000 people under 35 with net assets exceeding £100,000 in the UK, around 110,000 of those may not even be in contact with a financial or wealth adviser. Of course, many of those people may already be giving, and of those who aren't already giving, not all would start giving simply because they were getting advice – but it seems safe to assume that if advisers were at the very least in a position to raise the idea of philanthropy to their clients, it would probably prompt at least some of them to give when they otherwise might not have (or to give more than they might have chosen to without having taken advice).

Coincidentally, separate research from Remember A Charity which came out over the summer also highlighted the importance of advisers, and argued that they could play a key role in driving the growth of legacy gifts.

Everyone, it seems, broadly agrees that getting advisers on board will be a vital part of boosting UK philanthropy. So it will be interesting to see what momentum can be built behind establishing new norms when it comes to offering philanthropy advice.

It's Not All Academic

There was a good piece from Andrew Jack in the *Financial Times*, looking at the way in which the Israel/Gaza situation – and particularly the reactions of students and staff towards it - has affected the nature of relationships between wealthy alumni donors in the US and universities that they fund.


THE LIBRARY OF COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY

The article highlights the fact that whilst some donors have chosen to withdraw their funding as a public show of dissatisfaction with the stance that universities have taken, others have chosen to lean into their relationships with the institutions they fund. In some cases this is intended as a show of support and solidarity with their grantees, but in other cases it seems to be driven more by a desire to exert greater influence. As various experts quoted in the article point out, this represents a worrying shift away from the established norm of donors accepting principles of academic freedom, and towards a growing number of them now seeing themselves as more akin to “activist shareholders” – with their donations giving them the right to weigh in on everything from senior management hiring decisions through to the rights and wrongs of individual academics being allowed to express views on contentious issues.

Beastly Behaviour

Regular readers will know that, for a 42 year old man, I like to talk about MrBeast (aka Jimmy Donaldson) a surprising amount. This is all entirely driven by professional curiosity, of course: I can’t stand his videos, but I find his whole approach to philanthropy (and the many, many questions it raises) so weirdly compelling that thinking and writing about it has become a bit like picking at a scab.

Image by Steven Kahn, CC BY 4.0

So I couldn't let it pass without comment that this has been, I think it is fair to say, Not A Good Couple Of Months for MrBeast. Firstly the New York Times reported that multiple people involved in the filming of his new Amazon TV series "Beast Games" (a sort of real-life *Squid Game*, which was supposed to mark Donaldson's evolution from YouTube star to TV personality) have claimed that the production was dangerously poorly-organised; with inadequate medical provision and participants being left without food or water for hours on end.

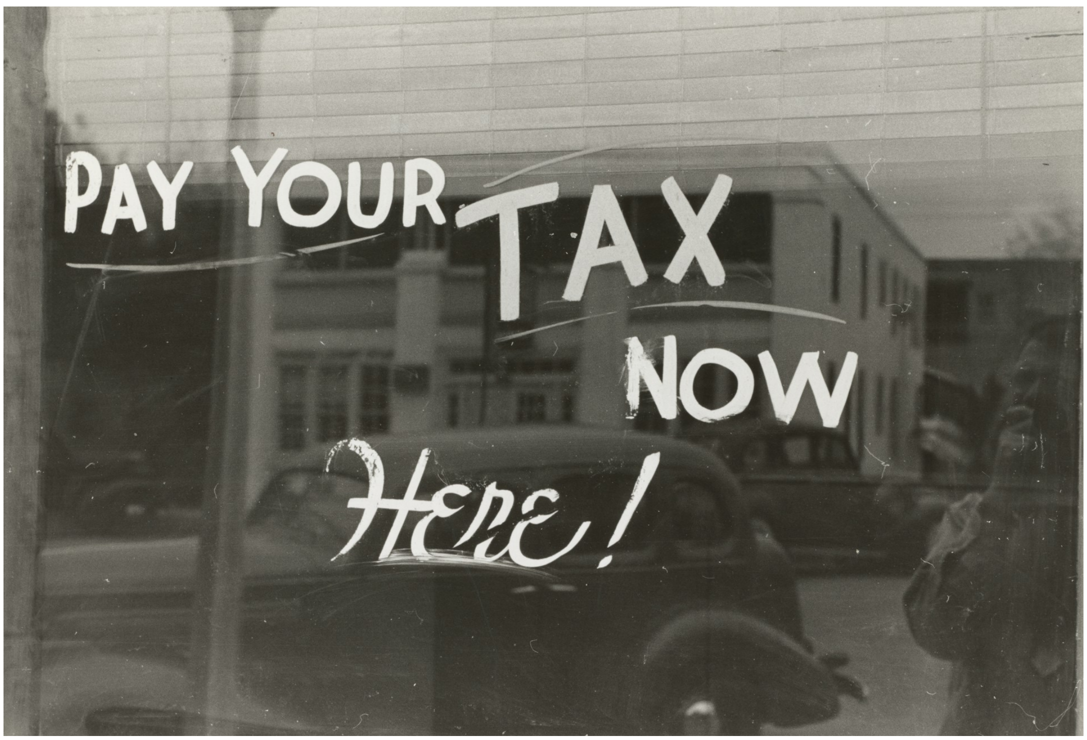
It then emerged (as I found out in the gaming magazine *Polygon*) that one of MrBeast's long-time collaborators and employees, a woman named Ava Kris Tyson, had sent inappropriate messages and lewd comments to a 13 year old fan eight years ago. Tyson issued an apology, but was swiftly dropped from the Beast brand and Donaldson issued a statement condemning her behaviour and promising to conduct a full investigation.

You might ask what this has to do with philanthropy. Well, as I wrote in the article I did for the Journal of Philanthropy and Marketing about MrBeast earlier this year, his influence as a philanthropist when it comes both to children and young people, and to other social media influencer, is such that we need to scrutinize him carefully and make sure that we are able to put his giving into the appropriate wider context. Incidents like these, when added to existing concerns about past homophobic statements and reports of a toxic work environment at his companies, may begin to suggest that we should have reservations about MrBeast as the face of philanthropy for a new generation. (And that's before we even get to criticisms of *how* he goes about doing his giving…)

And to add further weight to the point I just made about MrBeast's influence, I would definitely recommend reading a fascinating article from *Rest of World* this month, which explores a recent growth in social media personalities in Nigeria who are replicating various aspects of his "stunt philanthropy" approach. Like "India's MrBeast" Harsha Sai (who we have mentioned in this newsletter before), these MrBeast wannabes raise many of the same ethical and moral questions with their approach to giving that he does, but with the added challenge that they are often doing so in contexts where the risks of exploitation are particularly acute and without many of the safeguards that come with high-cost productions like those MrBeast churns out. (Although if those reports about "Beast Games" are true, then perhaps we should assume that the safeguards are all that great in the original version of Beast Philanthropy either…?)

A Taxing Affair?

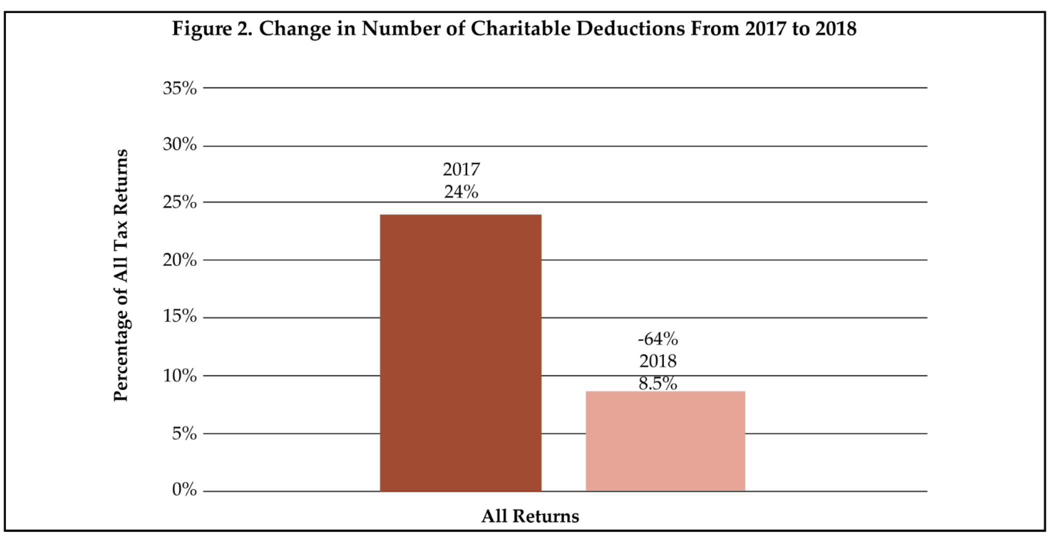
It was reported in various places over the summer, including the *Chronicle of Philanthropy*, that new research from economists at the Lilly Family School of Philanthropy at IUPUI suggests that changes to the tax treatment of donations made in the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act in 2017 (under the presidency of Donald Trump) may have led to US nonprofits losing around *$20 billion* in donations. What is more, the researchers calculate that as much as $16 billion of that figure represents a permanent loss that will be felt year-on-year, and not just a one-off anomaly.



The actual mechanics of what is going on here are slightly complicated (and admittedly of quite niche interest). But since I assume that my readers are a complicated and niche bunch, here's a very broad summary. In the US, tax relief on donations come in the form of a straightforward deduction: you simply record the total value of your eligible donations for the year and then take this away from your gross income (along with all sorts of other deductions) to get the figure for your taxable income. So unlike the UK, where the Gift Aid system allows donors to redirect tax they have already paid directly to a charity, in the

US system the tax benefit goes to the donor (and is assumed, therefore, to provide some kind of incentive).

As critics have long pointed out, there are at least two major problems with the US charitable deduction. The first is that unlike credit-based systems (of the kind they have in France or Canada) where donors get relief in the form of a payment that they can use towards their tax bill, there is an "upside-down effect" in the US system, because the value of the relief increases as your tax rate goes up. As a result, those paying higher rates of tax get more benefit from deducting their donations (which some see as unjust). The other major problem with the system, which is particularly relevant to this story, is that in reality the vast majority of people *don't actually take the charitable deduction*. This is because there has long been an alternative in the form of a generalised "standard deduction" that people can take, which allows them to deduct a set figure instead of calculating the exact amount of their deductions for a whole range of things (including charitable donations). For many people, this is a lot easier – particularly if they aren't already doing a fully itemised tax return (which tends to be the case primarily for those with mortgage interest payments, so the charitable deduction has always been strongly correlated with home ownership and higher incomes).

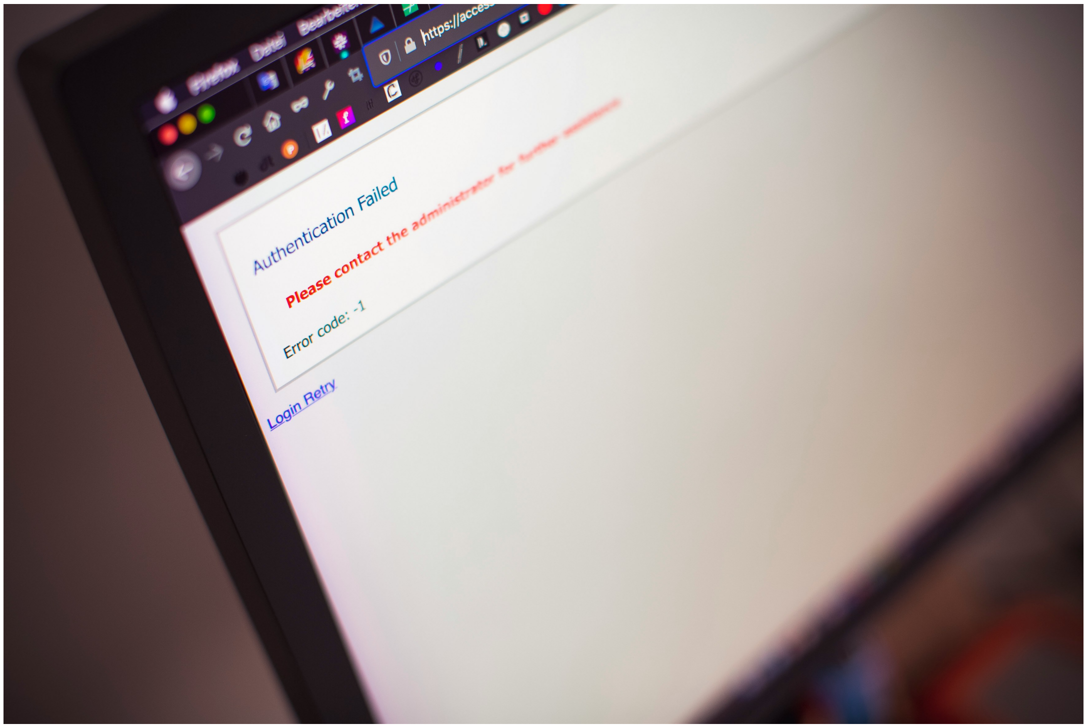


SOURCE: Andreoni, J., & Durnford, J. (2019). Effects of the TCJA on Itemization Status and Charitable Deduction. *Tax notes*.

Right, that brings us back to our story, since one of the big changes in the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act was to double the size of the standard deduction. As you can probably work out from what has already been said, many thought that the effect of this would be to further reduce the number of people choosing to use the charitable deduction (since the bar above which it is worth doing so is now significantly higher). Early research seemed to confirm these fears – a 2019 paper by Andreoni and Durnford, for instance, found that the percentage of tax returns on which people chose to use the charitable deduction plummeted from 24% in 2017 (which is obviously not exactly high already) down to only 8.5% in 2018. And the new research from the Lilly Family School adds further evidence that this reduction in usage of the charitable deduction has led to a real (and substantial) drop in the total value of donations going to US nonprofits. Which just goes to show that whilst tax is certainly not the primary driver for philanthropic giving in the vast majority of cases, it does often have an effect on the amounts given; and changes to the tax system, in particular, often bring with them the risk of unintended consequences.

Computer Says No

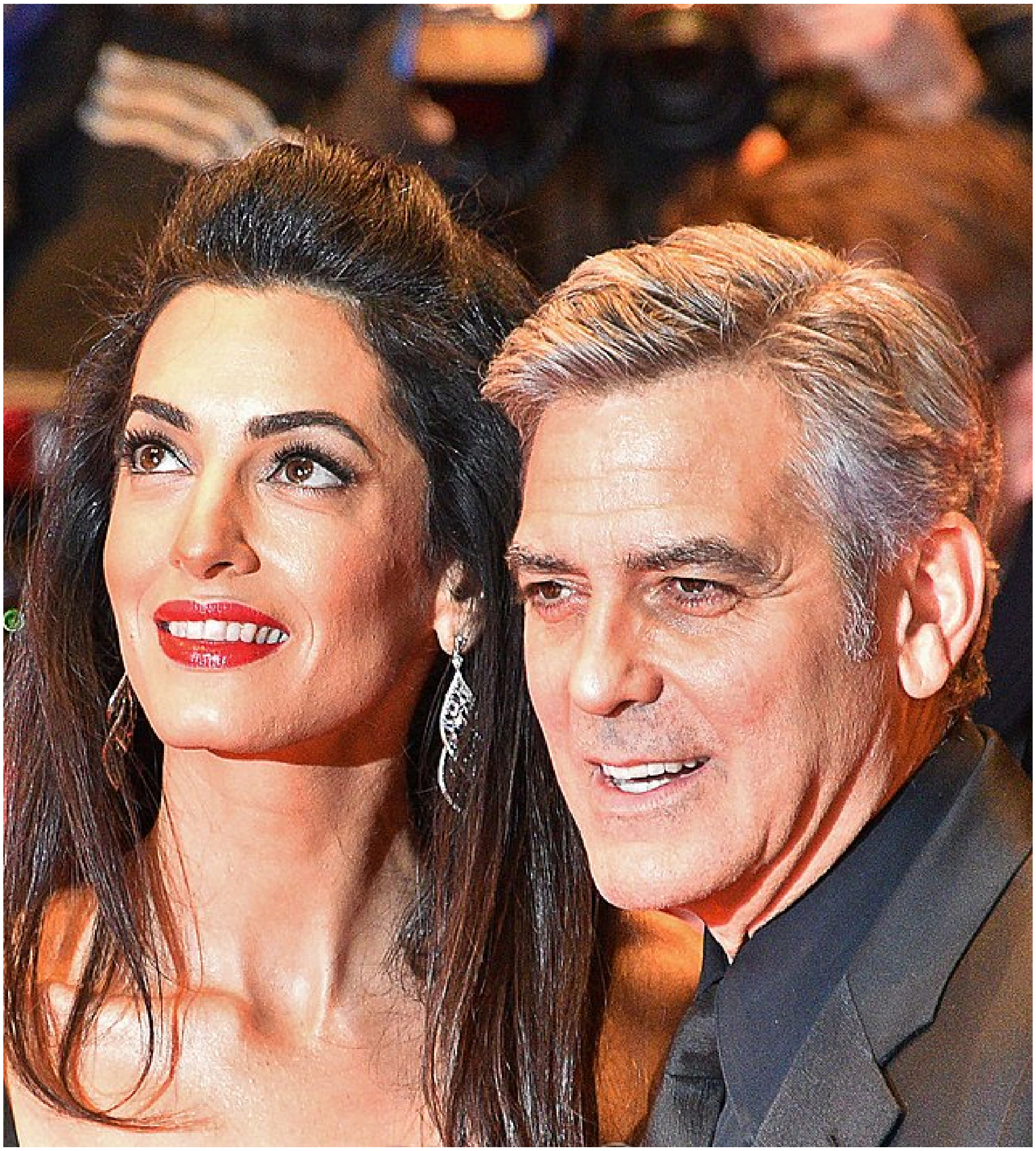
A small story in *Civil Society* about the UK Holocaust education charity Yad Vashem nearly having their bank account closed caught my eye this month. The issue of civil society organisations struggling to get bank accounts, or being "de-banked" from their existing provision, is not itself a new one – unfortunately it has been going on for a fairly long time now, causing major challenges for many organisations that are perceived (for whatever reason) to be "high risk" by financial provider. What was particularly noteworthy about this story to me was that the charity's chair appeared (at least in part) to blame the use of algorithms.



Now, admittedly it is not totally clear whether the complaint about an "algorithm-based standard form of a letter" is merely rhetorical, or whether it reflects genuine concerns about the way in which the decision to threaten the charity with closure of its account was made. However, even if algorithms were not in fact to blame in this case, I think this is a salutary reminder that they *are* widely used in financial services for all kinds of things, and I strongly suspect that one of the hidden negative impacts of AI on charities that we will all become increasingly aware of in coming years is the way in which algorithmic systems affect the ability of CSOs to access necessary financial products and infrastructure. Humans are of course, already more than capable of making bad decisions on this front already, but the real risk is that when the decisions are automated and outsourced it becomes far harder to find out why they were taken and to appeal against them (as was successfully done in the case of Yad Vashem) – leaving some charities in a potential Kafkaesque technological nightmare.

George Clooney: "Undesirable"?

We have highlighted many times in this newsletter examples of the "closing space for civil society" – the global trend for governments to impose laws and policies that curb the freedoms that are vital to the successful functioning of a healthy civil society (freedom of speech, freedom of association, freedom to protest etc). Russia, perhaps unsurprisingly, has been particularly bad on this front, with the government under Vladimir Putin taking an extremely hard line against international NGOs that it deems to be interfering in Russian affairs – in many cases branding them “Foreign Agents” that are then proscribed by law from operating.



In many ways, then, the news this month that yet another Western NGO had been deemed as a Foreign Agent by the Russian government was not very surprising. But what made this story particularly eye-catching was that the organization in question was the Clooney Foundation for Justice, founded by human rights lawyer Amal Clooney and her husband, Hollywood dreamboat George. Which essentially means that Russia has now declared that "George Clooney is Undesirable", and if that doesn't highlight the absurdity of a policy, I don't know what does.

(Joking aside, the decision to ban the Clooney's foundation reflects the fact that it has been doing work to investigate war crimes in Ukraine. I'm assuming that the foundation wasn't particularly operating in Russia anyway, so this has probably made little substantive difference to them, but it clearly shows that they are doing work that has rattled the Russian government).

New-School Fundraising?

Like many parents of children going back to school in September (or, in my eldest's case, moving up to secondary school), I am well aware of the growing trend for schools to ask for additional "voluntary contributions" for all sorts of things, so I was interested to read a piece in the *Guardian* highlighting a recent survey from the Association of School and College Leaders which shows just how widespread this practice has become. The article notes concerns from some experts that this is putting unfair pressure on parents – especially those on lower incomes who may not be able to afford additional donations but feel compelled to do so, and also that it may be exacerbating existing inequalities between schools, since those in affluent areas may find it easier to raise donations that those in less affluent areas. (I am aware that US readers may at this point be somewhat surprise to learn that this is all newsworthy, since school fundraising of this kind – and accompanying concerns about inequality – have been around for a long time there from what I understand; but cut us some slack, as this is all still fairly new here in the UK!)

The other question that looms behind this story is what impact this kind of fundraising by schools may have on the ability of willingness of parents to give to other causes. Will they see it as separate, and continue to give to charities in the same way? Or will they see it all as coming from the "same pot", and therefore reduce donations elsewhere? (And do schools have something of an unfair advantage here as well, since they have a captive audience of people to fundraise from who may feel that they "owe" something as a result of their children attending the school?)

WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO

This is the section where I normally update you on what we have been doing at Why Philanthropy Matters over the last month or so, but in all honestly I really don't very much to report this month as I have either been on holiday with my family (which was very nice, thanks) or getting my head down on some writing projects.

There are just a couple of things it is worth telling you about:

On the Philanthropisms podcast

The podcast returned this month after a bit of break over the summer, and to kick things off I thought I would take a deep dive into the world of foundations, looking at what they are, how they evolved historically, and why they seem to generate so much debate. Over the coming weeks we will have plenty more great interviews with guests, as well as some more thematic explorations of key topics in philanthropy

Philanthropisms

Philanthropic Foundations: history, role and controversy

DonorSearch "Philanthropy Mastermind" series

The day after I put this newsletter out (Tuesday 10th), I will be appearing as a guest on a live webinar with Jay Frost from DonorSearch (who is over in the UK doing a series of special episodes). It's at 4pm UK time (11am Eastern Time), so do sign up if you are interested.

Sign up for the webinar

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.

Changing your mind about volunteering and individual effort:

One of the most interesting things I read in recent weeks was a piece in *Vox* by Rachel Cohen, one of their policy correspondents, detailing how she had changed her mind about the value and importance of individual acts of giving and volunteering. As she says in the article, she is part of a generation that in some ways has been taught to "think only about structural change and disregard more immediate help", so had been fairly dismissive of traditional or small-scale approaches to social action in the past – believing instead that we should put all of our efforts into political activity and social movements that aim for fundamental change.

But, Cohen notes, this view of the world may have come at a cost, as it left her (and other young people like her) feeling isolated and lacking in agency. To address this (after some slightly fruitless searches for volunteering opportunities), she joined a local giving circle and has been getting increasingly involved with charities. She documents this journey, along with some musings on the decline in volunteerism in the US, whether accompanying declines in faith have played a part in this, and what it means for the general wellbeing of society.

At one point she says:

In a way, it can feel safe to distrust the value of individual action. Being wary of philanthropy and charitable groups that promise to better the world resonates with the skepticism I've been trained to have, professionally and culturally. It also allows me to avoid making sacrifices; there's no real vulnerability or bets required.

But as time goes on, and as I think about the family I might one day raise, I'm coming to appreciate the value of letting go and taking gambles on hope, as long as they point generally in the moral direction I want to go."

Which I found really interesting, as it echoes other things I have read (and my own thoughts, increasingly) about the necessity of combining a systemic, "strategic" view of giving with an appreciation of the inherent vale of much less overtly targeted acts of generosity. Definitely a highly recommended read.

Read the Vox article

The "Netflix of Corporate Volunteering":

There was an interesting piece in the FT about the employee volunteering app OnHand, which pitches itself as "the Netflix of Volunteering" – offering a platform which allows the staff of participating companies to browse local volunteering opportunities, including "microvolunteering" opportunities such as donating cans of food to a food bank collection.

The article acknowledges that these kinds of tools may be effective at getting more people giving and volunteering, by giving them the same sort of choices and recommendations that they get when looking for other kinds of content and services. But it also warns (quite rightly, in my view) that "the ease of such initiatives can be problematic: while businesses are often looking for fun, friction-free opportunities for staff, this does not always match up with the needs of charities."

Read the FT article

Blurred lines between corporate and individual philanthropy in Asia:

There was an interesting piece in *Fortune* highlighting some that I have noticed myself before (although not necessarily had the evidence to back up), which is that in the fast-growing world of elite philanthropy in Asia, the lines between individual and corporate philanthropy are often distinctly blurred. This may to some extent reflect a higher prevalence of family-run companies (where the distinction between the company's giving and that of the family is not always that clear), but it may also (as the article suggest) reflect more fundamental cultural differences in attitudes and approach when it comes to philanthropy. Either way, it is important to note these kinds of trends as they can help to disabuse us of any naïve assumptions that as philanthropy grows and develops in new centres of power in Asia and Africa, it will necessarily reflect the models and norms of the US or the UK.

Read the Fortune article

Women and Philanthropy:

Also in *Fortune* was a good comment piece from Sara Lomelin of Philanthropy Together (and former Philanthropisms podcast guest, no less), on the continued emergence of women as major philanthropists, and the impact this is having on elite philanthropy as a whole. Lomelin notes that a growing number of female elite donors are following the path of Mackenzie Scott and Melinda French Gates, and choosing to adopt approaches that emphasise trust and focus on giving core support to grantees. And at more modest levels of giving, a growing proportion of female donors is helping to drive the adoption of more collective approaches to philanthropy (which research consistently shows women are more drawn towards.

Read the article

Feminist Philanthropy:

One step beyond considering the role of women in philanthropy is the idea of taking a feminist approach to philanthropy and what this might mean for the field as a whole, and Ms Magazine has just launched a really interesting new collection of articles and essays on precisely this topic, including "Why a Feminist Approach to Philanthropy Is Synonymous With Effectiveness" and "Feminist Philanthropy Can Do More to Save Democracy—Here's How."

Check out the articles

Philanthropy and the failings of finance:

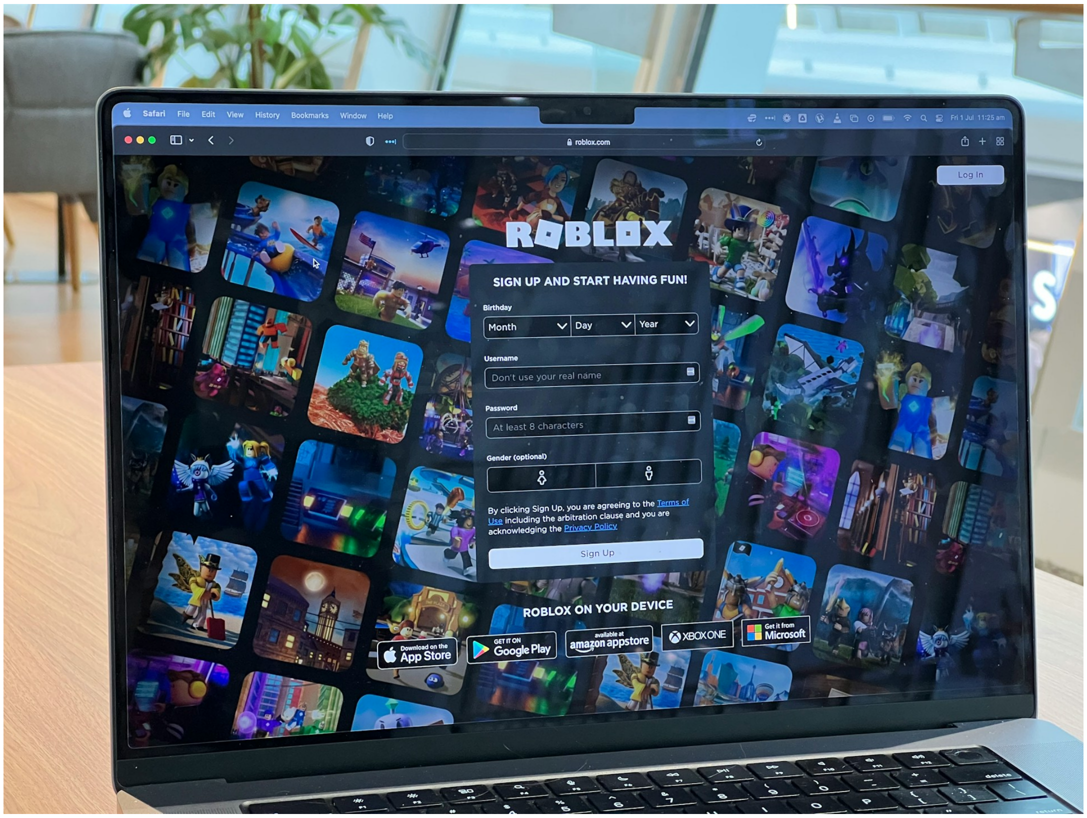
The *London Review of Books* (which I proudly and nerdily subscribe to) has a really interesting piece in its latest issue by John Lanchester, which is ostensibly a review of two new books about the world of finance, but as with most LRB reviews functions more as a broader (and in this case, fairly polemical) article about the current state of global finance. I mention this, because in the course of touching on the differing careers of two big figures in the world of hedge funds (Ray Dalio and Jim Simons), Lanchester makes quite a lot of their differing approaches to philanthropy as well, which makes for interesting reading. (I think it is safe to say that he prefers Simons out of the two…)

Read the piece (£)

Roblox for Good:

The *Associated Press* reported that [Comic Relief US is following up on its experiment of a year or so ago of using the online gaming platform Roblox to create its own multiverse]() with the aim of driving fundraising and engagement with a new audience of children and young people (which we first reported on in the [April 2023 edition of the newsletter]()). That first iteration was deemed a success, so the charity is expanding on it – bringing in a new partner in the form of kids TV giant Nickelodeon and getting celebrities (including former Doctor Who David Tennant) to voice new characters. Participants will be able to play a scavenger game in which proceeds from in-game purchases go to charity, and there will also be a big metaverse concert featuring musical acts including Imagine Dragons.

It is, indeed, a Brave New World. (And for more thoughts on the Metaverse and philanthropy, [check out this previous WPM article](#)).



Read the article

Crypto philanthropy:

Those who have known me for a while will know that I used to be quite interested in blockchain and cryptophilanthropy. That interest has definitely waned in recent years (for reasons detailed in [this podcast episode)](#), but a [blog post from The Giving Block on "the faces of cryptophilanthropy"](#) caught my eye this month, as one of the big questions has always been "who are the people actually giving crypto?", so it is useful to get more of a sense of who some of them might be. (Apart from Pine and the Pineapple Fund, which was often the sole example given to justify claims about the growth of cryptophilanthropy a few years back).

Read the blog

Celebrity philanthropy in China

If, like me, you are constantly trying to push the boundaries of your own pop cultural horizons, then you may well enjoy a recent piece in *Borgen* on celebrity philanthropy in China. I was, for instance, entirely unaware of the existence of TFBoys before now, but I feel good knowing that I could casually drop mention of them and their charitable endeavours into conversation at any point from now on. You have been warned.

Read the article

AND FINALLY: Isn’t Charity Funny? (Or is it?)

Last but not least, I thought I would draw people’s attention to the fact that there is a new comedy series on Radio 4 set in the world of charity fundraising. *Do Gooders* revolves around the lives of a group of employees of the fictional Alzheimers Alliance (part of me really wishes I had been in the meeting where they tried to come up with a credible-sounding name that hadn’t already been taken by a real organisation…), and pokes fun at various aspects of the charity world.

It is clearly written by someone who has experience of working in charities, and it stars some really good people (Frank Skinner, Faye Ripley, Anna Magliano etc). However, I feel like I can only give it a guarded recommendation because I have a slightly pathological aversion to this particular type of Radio 4 comedy, so I’m not necessarily the right person to judge its merits fairly. At the very least, though, I am glad that it got made (even if I never actually listen to it…)

Listen to the series

Well there we go then. That was What Philanthropy Did Last Summer, 2024 edition. I hope you enjoyed it, and we will be back before you even know it with the September edition of the newsletter.

Bye!

Rhodri

Why Philanthropy Matters