



Welcome to the Winter 2023/24 Newsletter!

Hello philanthropoids!

It's definitely too late to wish you a Happy New Year, so I shall confine myself to hoping that 2024 has got off to a good start for all of you. I am certainly enjoying getting to grips with various plans and projects so far; although I can't quite escape a creeping suspicion that I have taken on so many things that sooner or later I am going to spread myself as thinly as a layer of graphene....

On which note, the eagle-eyed amongst you will have noticed that there has been a longer gap than usual since the last newsletter. I will freely admit that this is because I pretty much literally ran out of steam towards the end of last year, so rather than try to crank out a newsletter whilst operating solely on fumes I thought I would do a combined "Winter newsletter" to cover December and January.

So below you will find the usual updates and insights on what has caught my eye in the philanthro-sphere over the last 2 months (which it turns out is a LOT), as well as some highlights of what we've been doing at WPM and what we have in store for the coming months.

I'm very much looking forward to a year of lots of thinking, writing, podcasting and getting out and about speaking to people. If any of that also interests you, then do feel free to drop me a line

(rhodri@whyphilanthropymatters.com), as I'm definitely keen to push WPM to the next level this year by working with as many people as possible who share the same interests and goals.

Right, let's get on with the newsletter.

Best,

Rhodri

PHILANTHROPY IN THE NEWS

A Malign Influence(r)

Regular readers will know that the rise of social media influencer philanthropy is a topic I am particularly fascinated by. I suggested in my 2024 predictions for the Philanthropisms podcast that this might be the year that the focus on influencer philanthropy expands beyond MrBeast and his model of turning acts of philanthropy into viral video content (which I have written about on WPM before), and starts to take notice of the sometimes murky world of influencers using philanthropy in other ways. I was therefore simultaneously intellectually validated and somewhat physically nauseous to [read a recent piece in UnHerd examining the way in which controversial manosphere influencer Andrew Tate is using claims about his philanthropic activity](#) to counter criticism in the wake of charges of sexual exploitation, rape and involvement in organised crime.



(I realised fairly quickly that I couldn't hack looking at a photo of Andrew Tate the whole time I was putting this newsletter together, so instead I prompted Dall-E to create an image of "a smirking baby with a full nappy wearing sunglasses and sitting on a motorcycle" instead, and I think we can all agree that this does the job admirably).

The article makes for a fairly grimy read, and unsurprisingly Tate's philanthropic claims don't seem to stand up to a great deal of scrutiny. However, even if this represents an extreme example (because Tate is so patently an awful person), his attempts to use the "good glow of charity" (to borrow the title of [Jon Dean's excellent book on the symbolic power of giving](#)) offers a stark reminder about some of the broader potential challenges of dealing with tainted sources of donations and deliberate efforts at reputation laundering in an age of social media celebrity philanthropy. (And if you want a warning from history about what can happen when famous people are able to use the good glow of charity to cover their misdeeds, I would also recommend reading the excellent and sobering paper from Jon Dean about [the charity of notorious British celebrity sexual predator Jimmy Savile](#)).

Government Getting Giving Going?

There have been some interesting examples in the last couple of months of governments launching new reports or policy initiatives designed to boost philanthropy. In Australia, the government's Productivity Commission published [a hefty draft of their report on philanthropy](#) following nearly a year of taking submissions and engaging with the nonprofit sector. The report makes some interesting recommendations, including [an overhaul of the existing charitable deduction system](#) and the establishment of a new philanthropic funding body owned and controlled by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The response so far (from what I have seen) has been pretty positive, although Philanthropy Australia (the main infrastructure body for philanthropy in - you guessed it - Australia) was slightly cautious in its enthusiasm and suggested that [there is still plenty more to be done above and beyond the Commission's recommendations](#). (Although having worked for a long time as a philanthropy policy wonk I can testify that "cautiously welcoming" whilst suggesting there is "more to do" is pretty much the classic response to any government policy proposals to boost philanthropy...)



Meanwhile, in Ireland, December saw the launch of the country's first [National Philanthropy Policy](#), designed to increase understanding of giving and to forge better links between government and the philanthropic sector. (I'll claim a personal interest in this one, as I was

very tangentially involved in the early stages of the policy's development thanks to moderating an event on philanthropy back in 2021 that was organised by Philanthropy Ireland and brought together philanthropy practitioners and government officials (including Minister of State for Community Development, Integration and Charities, Joe O'Brien, who has very much been one of the driving forces behind this initiative from what I am aware).

And then one that I know far less about, but definitely caught my eye, was the story that the Nigerian government, under the relatively new President Bola Tinubu, has [just announced the creation of a new National Philanthropic Office](#) to help coordinate efforts to engage the private sector and donors in supporting charities and nonprofits in the country. As I say, I don't know much about this right now, but I am definitely keen to find out more!

State & Philanthropy in the UK

The UK may not have any specific big policy initiative on philanthropy right now, but as [an article in the FT reported](#), philanthropy is definitely on the agenda of politicians here and also very much part of the plans of the Charity Commission for England & Wales under the leadership of Orlando Fraser. That might be even more the case after the launch of a new report on philanthropy, [Giving Back Better](#), from influential centre-right think tank Onward.

I'm writing this hot off the press from watching the online feed of the launch event, so I may well try to formulate some more considered thoughts in due course, but my immediate sense was of somewhat mixed feelings. It is certainly good to see philanthropy getting proper engagement from policymakers and government, but as a relatively gnarled UK philanthropy wonk I also couldn't help being struck by a slight feeling of déjà vu and a nagging sense that the set of levers available to develop giving in a meaningful way - and thus the set of policy ideas that gets put forward - still seems fairly limited. (My disappointment on this front is of course tied up with the fact that a large portion of my career was spent trying to formulate and promote

exactly these kinds of policy ideas so, for me, being reminded that they haven't actually happened slightly has the air of a personal midlife crisis rather than an abstract theoretical debate. Which might explain my reaction...)

The question I keep coming back to is "are there more radical/transformational ideas that could result in fundamental changes to the UK's culture of philanthropy? And if so, what are they?" Sadly I never came up with the answer to this question during my policy career, so it's unlikely I will somehow pull them out of the bag in this newsletter.



At the same time it is important that we keep trying. For one thing, the existential nature of the ongoing challenges facing many charities was starkly brought home this month by the news that [the members club and homelessness charity The House of St Barnabas in London's Soho](#)

[district is to close with immediate effect](#). The organisation said in a statement explaining the decision that its business model had become unsustainable in the current economic climate, and that it was no longer possible to see a way forward. This is just the latest in an increasingly long line of high profile closure of charities and infrastructure organisations over the last few years, and I very much fear that it is highly unlikely to be the last. So there is a real need for more support of all kinds for civil society right now, including philanthropic funding.

Of course, given the political context in the UK right now – with a general election expected later this year, and polls suggesting that Labour is set for a significant victory as things stand – charities and civil society organisations are likely to be at least as interested in Labour’s vision and plans as they are in those of the incumbent government. So far, clear signs of Labour’s policy ambitions when it comes to philanthropy and civil society have been fairly thin on the ground, but this month there was finally a chance to hear from Labour Leader Sir Keir Starmer about the party’s vision for civil society, as [he spoke at a “Labour and Civil Society Summit” organised by Pro Bono Economics](#). Perhaps unsurprisingly, this was still pitched more at the level of broad ambitions than concrete policy actions; and a fair amount of it was framed primarily as criticism of the Conservative party’s attitude to civil society in the time it has been in power, and then promising that “Labour wouldn’t do that”. However, there was definitely plenty of substantive stuff to take from the speech as well: the idea of a “society of service” in which the state and charities work in partnership to meet welfare needs hints at a move away from the commissioning and procurement model that has dominated in recent decades, and perhaps back to something closer to the original vision of how state and voluntary sector should work together that William Beveridge outlined in his 1948 book *Voluntary Action*.

There was also a compelling segment of Keir Starmer’s speech in which he took aim at the way in which culture war narratives have been used to demonise long-standing charitable institutions such as the RNLI and the National Trust. (For my money, the most effective line of the whole speech was the bit where he accused the Tories of “undertaking a kind of weird McCarthyism, trying to find woke agendas in the very civic

institutions they once regarded with respect”, and noted that “it comes to something when the Tories are at war with the National Trust”. Which I suspect might genuinely hurt for some Conservative voters who are not happy with the party’s desire to perpetuate culture war narratives...)

I would imagine we will start to hear more in coming months about Labour’s approach to engaging with civil society, but this was certainly an interesting early glimpse.

T’aint ex-Sacklerly a problem...

The *Times* reported recently that a relatively wide range of UK charities are continuing to take money from the Sackler Trust, the British charitable foundation linked to the Sackler family; whose role in creating and perpetuating the US opioid epidemic has seen them become poster children for the notion of “tainted donations” in recent years. The article notes that the Sackler Trust had deliberately not named any of the organisations that it had given grants to, as it did not want to “expose the recipients to serious prejudice and impair the furtherance of their charitable activities”.



[Image by Geographer on Wikimedia Commons](#), CC BY-SA 3.0

Given that many high-profile organisations have come out and publicly refused to take any more Sackler money, should we see the decision by these other organisations to secretly accept the Sackler pound as straightforward moral turpitude? Or is it a bit more complicated than that? For one thing, there is a valid argument that there might be more of a defensible case for accepting tainted donations when they are given anonymously - as they have been here - since it is far less clear that a donor can claim a reputational benefit in this case. (Although we should also bear in mind that whilst the Sacklers are not *publicly* stating who they have given to, they might still be doing so within their own circles and thereby still gaining reputational benefit that way, so it is potentially complicated).

For another thing, as we covered in [our last newsletter](#), the mood music around tainted donations in the UK has shifted recently in light of comments made by Charity Commission Chair Orlando Fraser, and it has been made clear that the bar for taking a decision to refuse or return donations is a high one. Given this, even though the decision not to take Sackler money would seem to be one of the more clear-cut ones, as there is already a significant public consensus that they are bad (and that taking their cash is thus not OK), organisations might still struggle with knowing what they are expected to do. And if that is true for Sackler money, it suggests that the decisions when it comes to cases in which there is far more grey area and uncertainty are going to be a real challenge to navigate.

Turns out Effective Altruism is still newsworthy...

If you have been following news about the Effective Altruism movement over the last year, you might feel as though there isn't really much room for any more comment pieces asking "can EA survive the downfall of Sam Bankman-Fried?" However, I'm willing to make an honourable exception for [a recent article by Martin Sandbu in the FT](#), which gave a good overview of the development of EA and why it has attracted criticism. (There isn't anything particularly new in the piece, but it is well

written and pulls all the various threads together in a very digestible way).



There was also an interesting (if rather hagiographic) [profile in the *Daily Telegraph* of a big EA-adjacent figure: Natalie Cargill, the founder of Longview Philanthropy](#). A lot of what she had to say in the article about effectiveness is very much directly from the EA hymn sheet, but she also touched on some interesting thoughts about the value of philanthropy in funding long-term change and taking risks (and cites some nice historical examples of when donors have done exactly that). Her emphasis on getting wealthy people to commit to giving ten per cent of their wealth (which I have always thought is one of the most admirable aspects of some forms of EA) is also pretty hard to argue with, even if I don't necessarily agree entirely with her (or with EA in general) about how that money should be deployed.

Israel-Palestine situation causing tensions for nonprofits & donors

There were a number of stories recently highlighting the significant challenges that the situation in Israel and Palestine continues to pose for philanthropy and for nonprofits.

There have been tensions within some organisations over their approach to the situation. *Devex* reported, for instance, that a [significant number of staff of the World Food Programme are deeply at odds with the organisation's Executive Director, Cindy McCain, over her perceived pro-Israel bias.](#)



There have also been ongoing tensions between donors and organisations that they fund, particularly universities, over what those donors view as unacceptable pro-Palestinian stances or a failure to deal with antisemitic behaviour. *Axios* reported that the [University of Pennsylvania had lost a \\$100m donation](#) from one donor following outrage at University President Liz Magill's statements in her appearance before a Congressional committee. The *FT* also took [a deep dive into the controversy surrounding these congressional hearings](#) and highlighted a number of other examples of major Wall St donors coming into confrontation with universities they have funded over the situation in Israel-Palestine. I very much suspect this is something that will continue to rumble on into this year.

The Economist's take on philanthropy trends

A [big feature in the first edition of *The Economist* of 2024](#) took a look at what they see as some of the big trends in philanthropy: including a shift towards trust-based models of giving, and far greater urgency about deploying money. A lot of this will already be familiar to anyone who follows what is happening in philanthropy (as presumably you do if you have chosen to subscribe to this newsletter!) However, *The Economist* will undoubtedly be able to bring it all to a much wider mainstream audience through its readership, which will have a reinforcing effect on the trends themselves. (Because often the more that people are told that something is a thing, the more that that thing actually becomes a thing. If you get my meaning).



It is also particularly noteworthy, to my mind, that it is *The Economist* waxing lyrical about “no strings attached” approaches to giving, given that (as the article itself notes) it was not that long ago that the magazine was the spiritual home of the ideals of philanthrocapitalism – with its focus on strategy, rigorous metrics and “investment-like approaches”. As a result, this feels like a particularly potent symbol

of how narratives about philanthropy have shifted over the last 10-15 years.

Philanthropy? It's, like, Totally Random...

Finally, in terms of our news round-up, there was a fascinating story this month about the [Austro-German heiress Marlene Englehorn, and her plans to recruit 50 randomly-selected citizens to help her decide how to give away 25 million euros of her inherited money](#). Englehorn is the descendant of Friedrich Englehorn, the founder of the chemical company BASF (a name which anyone who spent the 80s and 90s recording cassette mixtapes or videoing late-night films of the TV will probably recognise immediately), and she inherited a large fortune when her grandmother, Traudl Englehorn-Vechiatto, died in 2022.



[Image by XRay 4000 on Flickr, CC BY 2.0](#)

There are two really interesting things about this story IMHO. One is that it is another example of the way in which some wealthy donors are increasingly contextualising their giving with regard to taxation. Marlene Englehorn has expressed her intention to give the majority of her wealth away for some time, but that ambition has been further stoked by her anger at the fact that Austria does not even impose inheritance tax. She

therefore sees her philanthropy as a voluntary alternative to paying tax – not in the sense that she thinks this is a desirable state of affairs (given that she is also involved in the Patriotic Millionaires movement and campaigning for wealth taxes, I am very much presuming that she doesn't), but simply in the pragmatic sense that none of the money would be getting redistributed otherwise.

The second, and even more interesting thing about this story is the method that Marlene Englehorn is using to distribute her money: setting up a new entity called the Good Council for Redistribution, which will bring together 50 randomly-selected Austrian citizens (plus some subs) to decide how the money should be given out. This is clearly linked to her views about taxation, as it seems like an attempt to replicate the democratic nature of public spending decisions (albeit using direct, rather than representative, democracy). I was particularly struck by this because (as regular readers might know) I was a bit involved in a project in Liverpool last year called [Wealth Shared](#) which did something very similar (although on a smaller scale – 12 randomly selected people from a single postcode got to decide how £100K was given away). A report detailing some of the insights from that experience is actually coming out on 29th Jan, so if you are interested I would definitely recommend checking that out.

WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO

Here's a little update on what we have been up to at WPM over the last month.

2024 Predictions

One of things I have done at the end of every year for the last few years is to pull together some ideas of what the year ahead might hold for philanthropy and civil society. Even if making predictions is a generally a

massive hostage to fortune, I find that this is a good way of joining the dots between important trends and tuning into some of the weak signals that might be able to tell us what to expect next. This year I managed to do that not only in podcast form (see below), but in written form too – so if you fancy some thoughts on 2024 then do check out this WPM article.



[Read the article](#)

On the Philanthropisms podcast

As mentioned above, I also put out some thoughts on the year ahead for philanthropy and civil society in the form of a podcast. *Two podcasts*, in fact, as by the time I had finished jabbering away into my laptop I realised that I had run even longer than normal so it made sense to split the episode into 2 parts. The **first part covers philanthropy and giving trends** (as well as a bit on the wider political and economic context), whilst the **second part focuses on technology**.

After a short break for the Christmas holidays, the podcast returned in January with a great conversation with **Mozilla's Senior Vice President of Global Programmes, J. Bob Alotta**, about what is happening right now at the intersection of philanthropy and AI. We then had the **fourth in our series in partnership with ERNOP**, in which I spoke to another

handful of academics whose work has featured in the ERNOP Research Note series.



2024 Predictions for Philanthropy & Civil Society – Part 1

[Listen](#)



2024 Predictions for Philanthropy & Civil Society – Part 2

[Listen](#)



J. Bob Alotta: AI, Philanthropy & Civil Society

[Listen](#)



ERNOP: Connecting Philanthropy Academia & Practice #4

[Listen](#)

Podcast guest appearance

I also managed to find time to squeeze in a guest appearance on someone else's podcast this month - joining host Clare Mills and fellow guest Zoe Amar on the Charity Finance Group podcast to talk about the impact of generative AI on charities.



[Listen to the podcast](#)

Upcoming events

I've got various events coming up in the next month that some of you may be interested in (or already attending; in which case see you there!)

On **Monday 29th January** I'm giving a closing Keynote at the CIOF Researchers in Fundraising conference.

On **Wednesday 7th February** I am part of a great event at Bayes Business School to launch Fozia Irfan's new paper "Transforming Philanthropy" (which I have had a sneak peak at, and can confirm is excellent...) I think the event itself is already sold out unfortunately, but I would imagine some of you are already going anyway, and hopefully there will also be a write up at some point.

Then on Thursday 8th February (at 5pm UK time) I'm taking part in an online "In conversation" event organised by the Canadian philanthropy advisory firm Karma & Cents, where I will be discussing some of the ideas in my book *What is Philanthropy For?* (This one i think you can still sign up for!)

[Sign up for the event](#)

OTHER GOOD STUFF

Tainted donations:

I came across a fascinating paper this month which explores the attitudes of fundraising professionals the public (in the US) towards donations that come from tainted sources. There are lots of interesting findings in it. E.g.:

- That whilst at least half of fundraisers had been faced with tainted donations, only a third of organisations included in the sample had explicit policies for dealing with them.
- That people in general seem more concerned about cases in which the actual money being donated has been made in ways that are ethically problematic than they are about gifts from donors who happen to be problematic in other ways.
- That people are not necessarily inclined to look more favourably on a tainted donation if it is done anonymously (and they will probably look less favourably on it later if the donation does subsequently come to light).

And one that I found really interesting is that the public seems to hold universities and cultural institutions to higher standards in terms of not accepting tainted donations than it does service delivery charities - which made me wonder, is this because there is more of a sense that the "bad money" is clearly being put to good uses in the latter case? Or

because the risk of reputation laundering seems lower? The paper doesn't speculate, but there is definitely lots of food for thought and starting points for further research in it, so I would very much recommend reading!

[Read the paper](#)

Rebecca Solnit on "slow change":

I always enjoy Rebecca Solnit's writing, and I particularly liked a piece I came across this month in which [she argues that it is important to accept that fundamental societal change can sometimes seem slow](#) (even when taking a longer view often reminds us of how far we have come in a short space of time).

It all felt very relevant to current debates about incrementalism vs radicalism in philanthropy:

"Describing the slowness of change is often confused with acceptance of the status quo. It's really the opposite: an argument that the status quo must be changed, and it will take steadfast commitment to see the job through. It's not accepting defeat; it's accepting the terms of possible victory. Distance runners pace themselves; activists and movements often need to do the same, and to learn from the timelines of earlier campaigns to change the world that have succeeded."

[Read the article](#)

Mark Malloch Brown on "heretical philanthropy":

Another thing I really enjoyed this month was [a powerful case for philanthropy \(and particularly those who run philanthropic institutions\) to become "more heretical"](#) and challenge the status quo, from Open Society Foundations President (and former Deputy Secretary General of the UN) Mark Malloch-Brown, writing in *Foreign Affairs*.

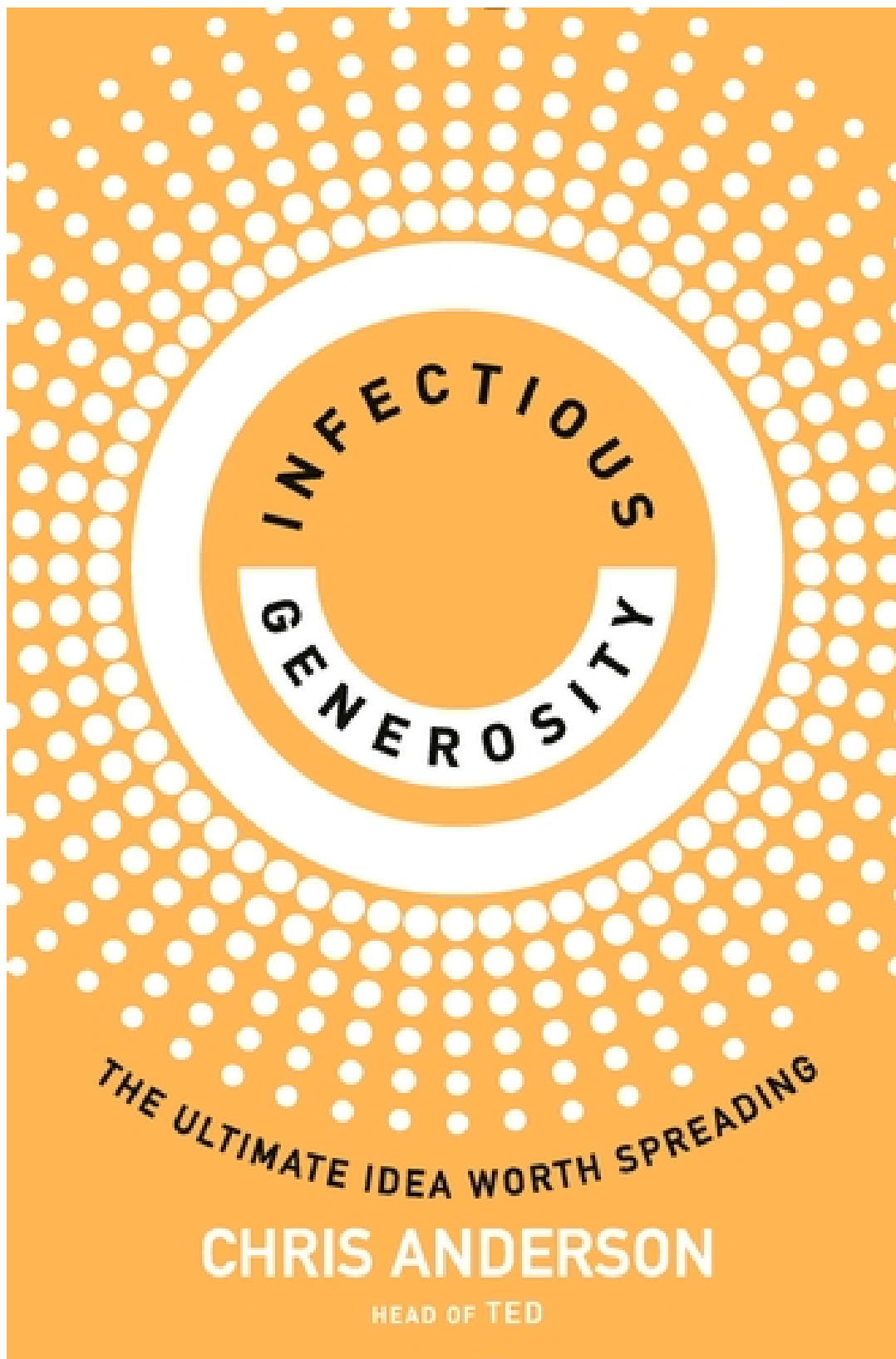
[Read the article](#)

Infectious Generosity:

Just as I was putting the finishing touches to this edition of the newsletter, I spotted an intriguing-looking new book that has just come out. In "Infectious Generosity" (according to what I have read), Chris Anderson (the head of TED) argues for a view of philanthropy that takes a renewed focus on the fundamental human drive towards acts of kindness as its basis.

This sounds like it might be a really interesting addition to the current debates over whether philanthropy has become too much of a top-down, elite, "strategic" endeavour, at the cost of human connection, so I am very much looking forward to reading it.

The other fascinating thing on the book's website is that they have apparently created an AI interface to help answer people's questions and give them advice and guidance on how to go about giving in line with the book's ideas. I have been saying for quite a while (to pretty much anyone who will listen, and some who won't...) that we are on the cusp of an age in which philanthropic choices start to become shaped by algorithmic-determined information and recommendations, so I am particularly interested to explore this and see how it develops.



[Check out the book website](#)

Blueprint and Buzzwords:

One of the highlights of December for many philanthropoids is the publication of [Stanford PACS scholar Lucy Bernholz's annual Blueprint](#), as well as her list of predicted buzzwords for the year ahead- which [this year includes "data lake" and "doom loop"](#).



[Read the report](#)

Philanthropy Trends for 2024

If you're in the market for philanthropy predictions, it's definitely also worth checking out the ["11 trends in philanthropy for 2024" report from the Dorothy A. Johnson Center for Philanthropy at Grand Valley State University](#). It's slightly US-focussed, but there is some interesting stuff in it on AI, Gen Z philanthropy and influencer philanthropy that definitely has lots of wider resonance.



[Read the report](#)

Larry Kramer interview

It's also worth checking out the [interview in *Fortune* with outgoing William and Flora Hewlett Foundation CEO Larry Kramer](#) (who is shortly taking up a post as President and Vice Chancellor of the London School of Economics and Political Science here in the UK), in which he touches on some of the things he has learned whilst running one of the world's biggest foundations, as well as his views on the importance of pluralism for democracy (a topic which, regular readers will be aware, became very divisive in the philanthropy world last year).

[Read the interview](#)

Novo Nordisk:

Speaking of the world's biggest foundations, there was an [illuminating piece in the FT about the world's *actual* biggest foundation - the Novo Nordisk Foundation](#) - detailing some of its historical background and where its extraordinary wealth has come from. Given that this foundation is bigger than giants like the Gates Foundation or the Wellcome Trust, but is still not at all well-known outside Scandinavia, this kind of additional context is very helpful IMHO!

[Read the article](#)

AND FINALLY: Still having a ball...?

Amidst all the talk of philanthropy shifting power, reforming etc , if you want some reassurance that at least some of it still involves people in fancy clothes attending swanky events then you should definitely take a look at [this series of profiles in the FT of "the queens of NYC philanthropy"](#). In fairness, the article does argue that things have moved on from the lavish black tie mega-fundraising events of yesteryear - though whether the interpretation of "toned down" that these people

might understand is the same one you or I might apply perhaps remains to be seen...

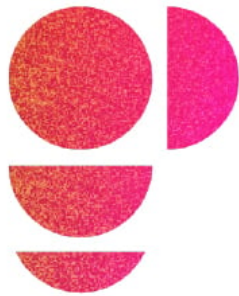


[Image by Ori2uru, CC BY 2.0 license](#)

[Read the article](#)

Well, hopefully we are all caught up now. I'll be back before you know it at the end of Feb with some more dispatches from the philanthro-sphere, but until then keep well.

Rhodri



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