



# Why Philanthropy Matters

## Welcome to the Summer 2025 newsletter

Hey there philanthropoids,

I hope everyone is well and has managed to get a bit of rest and respite over the summer. I certainly had a decent break – with some great bits of genuine holiday in amongst the sections where I showered my kids with benign neglect as I attempted to get some work done. (Are they reading? Watching *Friends* on an endless loop? Exploring the Dark Web whilst eating Biscoff paste straight out of a jar? Who knows! The important thing is that currently they are leaving me alone).

I mostly used the slowing down of events and emails over the summer to get some desperately-needed writing done, but you will be relieved to hear that I also did plenty of procrastinating, so I was able to keep tabs on all the interesting bits of philanthropy news and gossip. You're welcome.

I wanted to get this newsletter out right at the start of September, before my slightly daunting array of deadlines and work kicks in (and probably makes me crave another holiday), but I slightly missed my window so we are already into week 2. Whoops. Anyhow, it is here now and packed full of news and insights from over the summer. (Indeed, some might say a little TOO packed, given the length of it...)

So, let's see what you might have missed over the last couple of months, shall we?

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# PHILANTHROPY IN THE NEWS

## Greenwich Mean Time?: CAF World Giving Report shows British giving down

The [CAF World Giving Report 2025 \(nee the World Giving Index\)](#) was published back at the end of July, prompting the usual annual slew of news stories around the world that can be broadly divided into the categories of “Yay, our country was high up the list – aren’t we great?” and “Boo, our country was low down the list – why are we so awful?”



This year the UK was very firmly in the latter camp, since one of the big headlines from the report was that we are now down in 64<sup>th</sup> place (out of 101) in terms of overall generosity. Which, I'm not going to lie, doesn't sound great, does it? Whether this is a reflection of the long-term decline in giving that we've been hearing about for a good few years now (including in this newsletter, to be fair); or it is more to do with

other countries overtaking us on the broader measures of generosity the World Giving Report uses (giving money, formal volunteering and helping a stranger, which are categories determined by the Gallup World Poll on which the report is based); or it is something else entirely, I'm not sure.

It is interesting that CAF itself has chosen to put a fairly positive spin on things, by emphasising that the results demonstrate the fact that generosity is not dependent on a country's economic wealth, or even its political security; since some of the countries that came highest are ones that have relatively low GDPs or have suffered through conflict. This point about less well-off countries being proportionately more generous echoes the widely-cited fact that individuals with lower incomes tend to give far more (proportionately) than rich people. And this is an idea with a long history: the idea of the "widow's mite" (i.e. a small amount given by someone who cannot afford it, and which therefore represents a more meaningful sacrifice) is well established in Christian teaching, and can be traced back to the Bible. It is also the subject of one of my favourite historical philanthropy quotes of all time, from the writer and journalist Jack London (in [his short story \*Confession\*](#), first published in 1907):

*"Oh, you charity-mongers! Go to the poor and learn, for the poor alone are the charitable. They neither give nor withhold from their excess. They have no excess. They give, and they withhold never, from what they need for themselves, and very often from what they cruelly need for themselves. A bone to the dog is not charity. Charity is the bone shared with the dog when you are just as hungry as the dog."*

Whilst I wouldn't go as far as London in rhetorical terms, it is hard to disagree with his basic point that the evident sacrifice makes giving by those with very little feel more admirable in many ways. I guess the interesting question (to me, at least) is what conclusion we should draw from findings like those in the World Giving Report, and what we should do at a policy level, particularly in places like the UK. Is the point that we should embrace a broader definition of generosity, and get away from a fixation on monetary amounts when it comes to measuring giving? Or is it that we should actually focus *more* on monetary giving, on the basis that there is clearly scope to boost overall levels significantly if we could

just find a way of getting wealthier people to give at the same proportionate levels as their poorer counterparts? I have definitely heard both arguments being put forward at various times (and this is something I plan to come back to in the not-too-distant future in a blog/podcast on policies for promoting philanthropy).

## **Civil Disobedience: The criminalisation of Palestine Action**

Alongside potentially declining levels of giving, another area in which the UK doesn't appear to be doing quite so tippety-toppity right now is in the recognition and protection of basic civil society freedoms. This has been true for a while now – in 2023 [Civicus's annual global index of civil society freedoms downgraded the UK from "narrowed" to "obstructed"](#) – and whilst many might have hoped that the election of a new government in 2024 would mark a change in policy direction and rhetoric, this doesn't seem to have been the case. In fact, if anything, it seems as though Labour has decided to double down on the authoritarian approach taken by their Tory predecessors when it comes to dealing with protest and the right to assembly.

Image credit: [Leicester Gazette, CC BY-NC-ND 2.0](#)

Over the summer, the focal point for controversy on this issue has been the government's decision to [criminalise the campaign group Palestine Action under anti-terrorism legislation](#). This has met with widespread condemnation: the UN Human Rights Commissioner Volker Türk, for instance said that the government's decision to ban Palestine Action was an ["impermissible restriction" of people's rights to freedom of expression and assembly and was "at odds with the UK's obligations under international human rights law"](#). There was also an angry reaction from UK citizens, who have accused the government of ["gross overreach"](#), and have taken part in [a wave of protests around the country over the summer](#) to demonstrate their defiance of the ban. As many commentators have noted, it is particularly awkward for the government that these protests have not been violent and driven by people who can be easily portrayed as troublemakers, but rather have been [largely peaceful and attracted a particularly high proportion of](#)

[elderly and retired people](#) (many of whom are quite probably Labour voters, or at least were). This has not, however, stopped the police arresting many of these people – including some high profile figures such as the climate campaigner Jonathan Porrit (a longtime former adviser to King Charles), who subsequently gave a damning interview to the *New Statesman* outlining [his view that Labour had now become more authoritarian than the Conservatives](#). Other famous figures also came out in defiance of the government, including the Irish author Sally Rooney, who used [an article in the Irish Times](#) to declare her intention to donate royalties from her books to support Palestine Action (a move, as she points out, that would [technically make her guilty of a terror offence in the UK](#)).

There are obviously multiple layers to this story: one of which is the underlying issue of what is going on in Gaza right now, which remains contentious; although international opinion does finally seem to be shifting towards the need to recognize the severity of what is happening and take coordinated action of some kind. But even putting aside this underlying issue, the decision to delegitimize and criminalise a campaign group of this kind through the use of terror legislation should set off alarm bells for anyone who believes in the importance of a free and independent civil society as part of a healthy democracy. You might not happen to agree with Palestine Action's cause, or with the approach they have sometimes taken of engaging in acts of deliberate criminal damage to property, but does that mean you should accept the idea that they are a terrorist organization?

Now, perhaps the UK government is privy to intelligence that we are not aware of which demonstrably proves that Palestine Action has overstepped a mark somewhere and strayed into activities that can justifiably be deemed as terrorism. If so, however, they have not shared this information with the public. And the idea that we just have to take their word for it is deeply troubling to me, as it is precisely this sort of power for governments to wield arbitrary accusations – either of “terrorism” or “foreign influence” – that has already played such a big part in restricting the space for civil society in many other countries around the world.



Some might also believe that it isn't necessary to offer any further proof, on the grounds that Palestine Action's existing actions are enough to delegitimize them. But this would be a dangerous road to go down in my opinion. Granted, pretty much nobody loves direct action when it inconveniences their own lives; and it is noticeable that many organizations that previously relied on these kinds of tactics, such as Extinction Rebellion and Just Stop Oil, have moved away from them in recent years (often citing a belief that they are ultimately ineffective because they alienate the public). However, just because not many people like something, does that mean it should be criminalized? I would argue that allowing space for legitimate acts of public disorder that stop short of criminality is a vital component of maintaining the ability of civil society to express dissent and offer challenge. Obviously if all civil society organizations used these tactics all the time it would get very annoying (and probably highly ineffective); however the reality is that they are only ever likely to be adopted by a small handful of the most radical groups, and it is these groups that have often proved critical throughout history in catalysing social change (even if the majority of organisations end up using far less combative means). So, for me, the freedom of organisations and individuals to choose to adopt direct action tactics (even if they are annoying and provably ineffective) remains vital. In some cases, of course, people and organisations go beyond civil disobedience into acts of overt criminality (as the government claims is the case with Palestine Action) – but if this is the case, then surely they can be arrested and prosecuted under existing laws designed to protect property etc., rather than seeking to wield anti-terrorism power against them, which seems incredibly heavy-handed.

This feels like one of those moments where the very concept of civil society is being litigated. The question for all of us is whether we think it is more important to maintain freedoms of speech, association and protest – in the knowledge that these freedoms will be available to groups that we dislike and disagree with, as well as those we support; and that it may occasionally lead to actions that inconvenience or anger us – or whether we think it is better to give the government further powers to curb the actions of those who operate at the radical edges of civil society, even if this opens up the risk of those powers being wielded

in ways we disagree with in future. I'm going to nail my colours to the mast on this one as being firmly in the former camp, as I know from studying the history of civil society over many years that freedoms tend to be very hard won, but far more easily lost, so we should be extremely wary about giving them away voluntarily.

## Steve Shirley RIP

There was sad news this month, with [the death of pioneering UK tech entrepreneur Dame Stephanie "Steve" Shirley](#). (Although "sad" doesn't necessarily seem like quite the right word when talking about someone who lived to 91 and gave quite so many reasons to celebrate her life).

Image credit: [Maximilian Schönherr, CC BY-SA 4.0](#)

She was born in Germany in 1933 but came to the UK in 1935 (aged just 5 years old) as part of the Kindertransport operation that saw 10,000 mostly Jewish child refugees rescued from Nazi-controlled territories in the lead-up to the Second World War and relocated to Britain. She [went on to found her own software development and sales company, Freelance Programmers](#), which was years ahead of its time in offering flexible working conditions to make it possible for women to combine a career with childcare responsibilities. She consistently battled enormous sexism (hence her decision to use her nickname, "Steve", professionally, as this proved helpful in disguising the fact that she was a woman long enough to get a foot in the door for business meetings).

Steve Shirley was also one of the UK's most notable and high profile philanthropists for many years – not only giving millions to a range of causes (including autism research, which she had personal experience of as the parent of an autistic child), but also being willing to talk about her giving at a time when that was still very much not the done thing in this country. (TBH it isn't like all rich people are sitting about chit-chatting about their philanthropy even now, but things are light years better than they were). Her foundation, The Shirley Foundation, spent out the last of its funds in 2018 and she subsequently [donated all of the](#)

[organisation's records to the newly founded UK Philanthropy Archive](#) (housed at the University of Kent, where I work part time).

I never got to meet Steve Shirley unfortunately, but I know many people who did, and all speak incredibly highly of her, so I have no doubt she will be long remembered as one of the major figures of late 20<sup>th</sup>/early 21<sup>st</sup> century philanthropy here in the UK. RIP.

## **Aberdeen Angers: the abrupt end of the Financial Fairness Trust**

One story that narrowly missed making it into the June newsletter, but which I wanted to make sure to pick up on, concerned the shock news that [the CEO and entire trustee board of the well-respected charity the Aberdeen Financial Fairness Trust \(FFT\) – which is known for funding research into improving the financial security of low to middle income groups - had been fired without any prior warning by its parent organisation, financial services firm Aberdeen Group.](#)

Image credit: [m01229 on Flickr, CC BY-SA 2.0](#)

It is hard to know from the outside exactly what has gone on here; although the one thing we can say for certain is that whatever the underlying reason for Aberdeen's decision, they have gone about dealing with the situation in an extremely crappy way that is likely to win them few friends. As to what those underlying reasons might be, we can perhaps make a few educated guesses based on some of the quotes and comment that have followed this news.

One of [the FFT's now former trustees was quoted in the \*Financial Times\*](#), for instance, as saying that the letter she had received notifying her of her sacking made reference to the Aberdeen Group's desire to take a "different direction" that will involve funding "direct recipients". This suggests that this might simply be the latest example of a funder grappling with the longstanding (and sometimes overplayed TBH) tension between funding "downstream" services which directly address the symptoms of the problems facing individuals, versus funding "upstream" research or advocacy that is designed to address the



underlying causes of those problems. If that is the case, then do Aberdeen Group have every right to take this decision? (Even if the way they have gone about handling it remains extremely shoddy). In some ways the answer is yes, since supporting direct services *is* a perfectly valid thing for funders to do. However, there are a couple of other questions we should be asking.

The first is what is behind Aberdeen Group's belief that a pivot towards funding direct services is the best thing for them to do. Is it a reflection of concern about the scale and urgency of need in society right now? It is certainly possible to make a case for this, since there clearly are some extremely pressing needs that could be usefully addressed through direct charitable services. But then again, that is pretty much always true: there is always more than enough need to soak up all the available philanthropic funding in the form of direct services. The problem, of course, is that if everyone takes this approach then no-one is able to turn any attention to the underlying causes of the problems whose symptoms they are addressing; so those problems only ever get dealt with rather than solved.

It is worth noting, too, that the decision to shift Aberdeen Financial Fairness Trust's strategy towards direct service provision is not taking place in a vacuum. There is an obvious opportunity cost, since there are plenty of funders supporting direct services to address poverty and inequality, but FFT was (until now) one of the few actually supporting upstream research and advocacy work in this area, so their change of strategy will be felt as a significant loss by many organisation in this sector.

There may be other factors behind Aberdeen Group's decision which signal further cause for concern. Some, [like the political commentator Polly Toynbee](#), have argued that it is reflective of a wider reactionary shift in the corporate world, which has already seen many companies abandon commitments to DEI and erase language that suggests any sympathy with social justice causes from their public communications. There is an interesting question here: is this shift happening because these companies feel emboldened (by the actions of the Trump administration in the US and the rise of right-wing populism elsewhere) to do what they wanted to do anyway? (i.e. stop pretending to care

about issues like racial justice and inequality) Or would they actually prefer to keep focussing on these issues, but feel under pressure to stop talking about them for fear of reprisals or criticism? In practical terms it probably doesn't make much difference, but it would be useful to know on case-by-case basis whether a company is taking retrograde steps in its philanthropic funding (or its wider social and environmental responsibility activities) because it has objectionable values or whether it is just guilty of moral cowardice.

## **CZ Come, CZ Go: Chan-Zuckerberg's shift of focus**

While we are on the subject of corporate-linked philanthropic funders abandoning previous commitments to DEI and social justice, there was [an interesting piece in the New York Times in July taking a look at recent changes of strategy and approach at the Chan Zuckerberg Initiative \(CZI\)](#), the philanthropic vehicle of Meta founder Mark Zuckerberg and his wife, Priscilla Chan. It had already been reported earlier in the year that the organisation had decided to “de-emphasise” DEI in its external and internal communications, although at the time CZI still claimed that it was going to maintain its focus on social justice issues alongside its funding for scientific research. The NYT article reports, however, that the organisation has since been quietly winding down its work in areas that might be seen as broadly progressive - such as housing or education for low-income students – and is now focussing almost exclusively on scientific research.

Image credit: [TechCrunch, CC BY 2.0](#)

Again, as in the case of Aberdeen Group, the actual choice being made by CZI is not in itself unreasonable. Focussing on scientific research is perfectly legitimate: this kind of work definitely needs funding, and Zuckerberg certainly wouldn't be the first tech billionaire to concentrate his efforts on this area (which is, in many ways, an obvious cultural fit). And if this is what he had been doing from the outset (a bit like Jim Simons, for instance), then we probably wouldn't be raising any eyebrows about it. But that is not what has happened here. CZI has

made a decision to scientific research *instead of* social justice and equity-focussed work, when it initially placed both on a par, so we have to ask why.

There are a number of potential explanations, which accord varying degrees of benefit of the doubt to CZI. It is possible, for instance, that Chan and Zuckerberg have simply concluded that funding scientific research is a more effective use of their money. The NYT article certainly suggests that this is part of the story, as it reports that: “The changes were driven by a sense from Mr. Zuckerberg and Dr. Chan that their science funding was working while their spending in areas like education and politics was not”. The question then is why the couple feel that their science funding is “working”, and their more social justice focussed funding is not. Is it because they aren’t doing the latter as well, or because it is just inherently more difficult? If so, then the answer would seem to be to try harder and experiment with different approaches rather than just give up. Or is it that the way in which CZI has chosen to measure impact means that scientific research, with its more obvious outputs and progress markers, scores well whilst policy and research work aimed at addressing the underlying causes of social issues, which tends to be more nebulous and less clear-cut, is far harder to assess? If so, then some would argue that this is a case of the tail wagging the dog, and that CZI should think about changing its approach to measurement rather than changing its approach to funding.

It may well be that these kinds of internal factors have played a part in CZI’s decision, but we clearly can’t ignore the external political environment as well. The reality is that the mood music when it comes to progressive issues such as social justice and equity has changed dramatically in recent times, and many companies and wealthy individuals have changed their language and activities in response (as we already noted in the Aberdeen Group story above). In the case of Mark Zuckerberg the shift has been particularly dramatic, as in a short space of time he has restyled himself from a broadly liberal, Democrat-aligned opponent of Donald Trump to a right wing, anti-woke espousing champion of muscular libertarian capitalism. Now, as with Aberdeen Group, there is a question about who the true Mark Zuckerberg really is, and whether this new disavowal of DEI and social justice is him taking

the opportunity of a changed cultural climate to show his true colours, or whether he is simply choosing the path of realpolitik (or, if you prefer, moral cowardice) and recalibrating to the new status quo. Again, whether or not this makes any practical difference in the short term I don't know, but it will certainly become relevant if the political winds shift again in the future.

## **DAF To The Future: GoFundMe reinvents the CAF Account?**

It was reported back at the end of June that the [crowdfunding platform GoFundMe has announced plans to enter the DAF market](#) (sort of), with the launch of a new Giving Fund product. This is explicitly aimed at everyday donors, so unlike most traditional DAFs there will be no minimum balances or management fees.

This is definitely an interesting development, although as someone who worked at the Charities Aid Foundation for more than a decade, my initial thought was “wait... have GoFundMe just reinvented the CAF Account...?” I guess the big difference is that GoFundMe has the existing digital infrastructure to make this happen at scale quite easily; and even more importantly it already has a huge variety of projects and organisations looking for funding on its platform. This is crucial, as one of the biggest challenges with things like DAFs or charitable giving accounts – which are essentially supply-side solutions – is to work out how you connect that supply effectively with demand, so that the money makes its way out again to the charities and nonprofits that actually need it. Otherwise, you end up with another version of the “warehousing” or “bottlenecking” problem that has led to widespread criticism of DAFs in recent years, because so much money seems to be sitting idle in them rather than going out in the form of grants. (Of course, there is also a whole issue here about the perverse incentives for commercial DAF providers to retain maximum assets under management which might lead them to be less keen on encouraging DAF holders to give money away, but that is a can of worms for another day...)

## Blunted Pledge? The Giving Pledge 15 years on

[There was a really interesting piece in \*Inside Philanthropy\* over the summer](#), highlighting the findings of a [fairly damning new report from the progressive think tank the Institute for Policy Studies](#) assessing the impact of the Giving Pledge after 15 years.

The report looks at how the ambitions of the Pledge, which was established in 2010 by Bill Gates and his then wife Melinda, together with Warren, track against the available measurable results. And the picture is not a particularly rosy one. A core tenet of the Giving Pledge is the promise to give away at least half of your wealth before you die, yet the IPS found that of the 22 GP signatories who had so far died, only 8 had actually managed to achieve this. The report also raises concerns that many of the living signatories don't seem to be doing an awful lot about making good on their pledges, or in some cases are giving but in ways that clearly aren't in the original spirit of the Giving Pledge (e.g. making large donations into their own DAFs, but only minimal onward donations).

It isn't all bad news, however, as the report does acknowledge that there are some GP signatories who are modelling best practice by giving away in a systematic and large-scale way (e.g. MacKenzie Scott, John and Laura Arnold, Marc Benioff). However, the question remains whether more stringent measurement and accountability mechanisms need to be built into the Giving Pledge so that living up to its core promises becomes a minimum requirement rather than a nice surprise.

## Giving A Lie: the tale of Matthew Pietras

Last, but very much not least, for the news section of this newsletter is [a remarkable \(and ultimately fairly tragic\) tale of fraud in the world of elite New York arts philanthropy](#). The story concern Matthew Pietras, who died earlier this year at the age of 40.



He was known as a major donor to institutions including the Frick Collection and the Metropolitan Opera, but it has been revealed that the gifts he gave came almost entirely from money that he stole from his employers (primarily Greg Soros, the son of billionaire financier and philanthropist George Soros, and Courtney Sale Ross, the widow of Time Warner founder Steven Ross). Pietras appears to have used the money he stole to fund a lavish lifestyle and a pretty dramatic barrage of plastic surgery, as well as the many generous donations he made (to the extent that his name is even engraved on the wall as a major supporter of the Frick).

After the story first came to light, [\*Inside Philanthropy\* ran a comment piece from Jane Boon](#), who had been a friend and associate of Pietras, recounting her experience of watching his web of lies collapse dramatically in the last few months of his life. How much of this is a convenient revision after the event with the benefit of hindsight I don't know, but it is fascinating to hear some first-person perspective on this story. I have no doubt more will come to light over time, and that eventually you will be able to watch a TV adaptation of the Matthew Pietras story. (Particularly given the evident similarities to the story of the elite socialite fraudster Anna Delvey, which was made into the successful Netflix series *Inventing Anna* in 2022). But for now, this just remains an eye-opening cautionary tale, particularly for anyone who works in the world of HNW fundraising.

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## WHAT WE'VE BEEN UP TO

Hmm, that news section ran pretty long, didn't it? Guess that's what happens when I externalize my inner monologue for the first time after 6 weeks off... Luckily, however this "what we've been up to" section can be kept quite short this time, as I have (by design) done very little since the last newsletter apart from go on holiday and keep my head down in an effort to write.

The main thing to flag up is that I have a new book out! It is called “Rich Expectations: Why Rich People Give” and it is co-authored with Beth Breeze and Theresa Lloyd.

BUY THE BOOK

The book draws on insights from surveys and in-depth interviews with wealthy UK donors and explores the ways in which expectations shape approaches and attitudes to giving. Including:

- Expectations about the role philanthropy should play in society.
- Expectations about why and how rich people should give.
- Expectations that donors and the charities they support have about each other.

You will undoubtedly be hearing a lot more from me about the book over the coming months, but for now if you fancy getting hold of a copy you can do so here: <https://www.dsc.org.uk/publication/rich-expectations-why-rich-people-give/>

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## OTHER GOOD STUFF

This is the bit where I share other philanthropy-related things I have come across this summer that might not quite count as news but are definitely worth checking out. Strap in, cos there's quite a lot of them...

### **New Ford Foundation President:**

It was announced back at the start of July that [the current Dean of Yale Law School, Heather Gerken, is to become the new President of the Ford Foundation](#). I don't in all honesty know a huge amount about her (which I don't say as a mark of pride, but to acknowledge the limitations of my

own knowledge) – however, it does strike me that appointing someone with a strong background and expertise in constitutional law at this moment in time sends a fairly clear message about the Ford Foundation’s intention to rise to the challenges posed by the second Trump administration’s attacks on the legitimacy of philanthropy. And for any of you reading this outside of the US who are thinking “why is this relevant to me?” I would argue that the Ford Foundation is sufficiently big and influential that it can’t help but shape the wider landscape of philanthropy in the US (and by extension the world, since what happens in US philanthropy still tends to echo everywhere else; added to which the Ford Foundation funds in lots of other countries too). It is also true that their outgoing President, Darren Walker, has left behind some particularly big shoes to fill, as he has been a major figure in global philanthropy for a good while now; so what comes next should be of interest to pretty much anyone reading this newsletter.

Image credit: [Ford School of Public Policy, University of Michigan](#), [CC BY 3.0](#)

[Read more](#)

### **Barbara Kingsolver on philanthropy in Appalachia:**

I really enjoyed [a conversation with the multi award-winning novelist Barbara Kingsolver](#) on the *Chronicle of Philanthropy*’s “The Commons in Conversation” podcast” earlier in the summer, talking about the urban-rural divide in America and her experiences of starting a drug rehabilitation nonprofit in her home region of Appalachia. (There is also [an accompanying summary article](#)). I haven’t read many of Kingsolver’s books, but I did read and very much enjoy her Pulitzer-prize winning “Demon Copperback”- a powerful reworking of Charles Dickens’s “David Copperfield” set in Appalachia against the backdrop of the opioid epidemic- so to hear her talk so incisively about her approach to giving was really interesting.

Image Credit: [Terry Ballard](#), [CC BY 2.0](#)

Read the COP article and listen to the podcast

## Substantial Growth in Charity Adoption of AI:

The [latest Charity Digital Skills report](#) – the annual snapshot of UK charities engagement with technology – came out in July, and found that there had been substantial growth in the use of AI, with over three quarters of organizations in the survey now saying they had used AI tools (up from 61% last year). The number of organisations with an explicit AI policy had also tripled from the previous year, with 48% of respondents saying they had one (compared to 16% in 2024). It is also interesting to see that charities do seem to be giving up on X (formerly Twitter), with over half of the organisations in this year's survey (51%) reporting that they had either entirely left the platform or reduced their usage of it. (Which is not surprising given that – as anyone who has taken a peek back at X in recent times will know – it is now an absolute midden heap, which is both joyless and useless).

Read the article

Read the report

## Philanthropy in a “third gilded age”

These days I don't tend to read much content about philanthropy that comes out of the wealth management or private banking industry, just because a lot of it too sales-y to be of much interest to me. (Also, in fairness, I have been doing this stuff for 20 years now, so the likelihood of me having heard it all before is pretty high at this point...) However, I did come across [a piece from Pictet Wealth Management](#) over the summer that managed to pierce even my jaded carapace and which I think is worth reading. The piece outlines some of the trends they see amongst their clients: including an increasing focus on emerging global risks such as biodiversity loss, climate change and misinformation. It also has some interesting tidbits about next gen wealth inheritors and family philanthropy, including the observation that “philanthropy is increasingly viewed not just as giving but as a tool to maintain family

cohesion... This dynamic is especially prominent in Asia, where many young adults start by working in family foundations to learn skills and values before joining the business.” I thought this was really interesting, as it echoed some of what we found in the research with UK donors for our new book *Rich Expectations: Why Rich People Give* ([available now](#), as mentioned above!)

[Read the blog](#)

### **A Physician on the dangers of 'performative philanthropy':**

It is always interesting to me to hear considered perspectives on philanthropy from people outside the bubble of the philanthropy sector, so I was interested to come across a piece this summer [written by a physician, outlining his views on the harms that can be done by “performative philanthropy” in healthcare](#) – including misuse of limited resources, a focus on short-term fixes and the opportunity cost of failing to address genuine healthcare challenges. Salutary stuff.

[Read the article](#)

### **Andrew Purkis on the self-dissolution of the Lankelly Chase Foundation:**

Andrew Purkis is someone whose thoughts on UK charity and civil society are always worth paying attention to, and the [piece he wrote for Civil Society back in July exploring and evaluating the Lankelly Chase Foundation's decision to dismantle itself](#), 2 years on from the original announcement in 2023, was no exception. It is a fair and even-handed article, which takes seriously the concerns about ‘colonial capitalism’ that were behind Lankelly Chase’s decision’ whilst at the same time raising questions about whether self-dissolution is the right course of action (and, indeed, whether it makes sense under charitable law). Definitely worth a read.



[Read the article](#)

## **Merseyside Grantmaker transferring £25m and closing:**

A crucial aspect of the Lankelly Chase story is that rather than trying to get rid of all of its endowed assets by giving them away in the form of grants, it intends to transfer a substantial volume of them over to other organisations that it believes have greater legitimacy and are better placed to distribute them in a justice-focussed way. I was interested, therefore, [to see a story over the summer about \*another\* foundation that has announced plans to transfer its assets and close down](#). The foundation in question is the Pilkington Charities Fund – a grantmaker that was established in 1964 by the founders of the Pilkington Glass company- which is winding up and handing its remains £25m of endowed assets over to the Community Foundation for Lancashire and Merseyside.

There is no suggestion that the Pilkington Charities Fund's decision is motivated by any of the sort of concerns about the fundamental nature of philanthropy that have driven the Lankelly Chase Foundation; it seems to be a much more pragmatic matter of not wanting to run the fund as an independent charity any longer (with all the admin and governance that entails), and instead moving the money under the umbrella of a community foundation (where it can still be run as a standalone fund). There are almost certainly many more trusts and foundations out there like the Pilkington Charities Fun; ones that were set up as standalone organisations because that was assumed to be the best (or only)) option at a certain point in time, but which if they were being considered now might well take a different form (such as a Donor Advised Fund) instead. It will be interesting to keep a watch whether any of them think about transferring their assets in this way in coming years.

[Read the Civil Society article](#)

## A bit of Manchester-based Philanthropy History:

Sticking with my home region of North-West England for a minute, I spotted [a great bit of Manchester-based philanthropy history over the summer, courtesy of Manchester University](#). The story concerned Enriqueta Rylands, the widow of the well-known Victorian industrialist, and the crucial role she played in the creation of the library that bears his name. I found this fascinating, as I know the John Rylands Library well, but had no idea that it was actually conceived and built in his name by Enriqueta after his death.

She sounds like a pretty remarkable person all round: she came from Cuba and was actually Ryland's second wife, and she became the first woman to be granted the Freedom of the City of Manchester, among many other things.

I also thought this story was a useful reminder that:

- 1) There are many, many great stories about the history of philanthropy still to be told (even to a diehard philanthropy nerd like me).
- 2) The role of female philanthropists tends to be particularly hidden (either because they wanted to keep their activities hidden, or because the archival material has a chauvinistic bias).
- 3) Some of the best examples of great historical philanthropy are by women who use their inherited wealth to do much bolder things than the men who originally had the wealth ever would have done. (See e.g. Angela Burdett-Coutts, Margaret Olivia Sage, Edith Rosenwald Stern etc). I'm not claiming that was definitely the case here, as John Rylands may well have done something similar if he had lived longer - but equally it's true that he hadn't up until that point...

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

[Read the article](#)

## A Foursome of Interesting Academic articles:

I came across a bunch of interesting academic articles this summer that deserve a wider audience IMHO, so I thought I would do a little round-up for you good folk here.

***Historicizing Nonprofit Studies:*** First up is a paper that is about as firmly in my wheelhouse as it is possible to be – it's by Peter Weber and Gregory Witkowski, and it is all about [the value of historical knowledge and historical research approaches to the study of nonprofits](#). The paper identifies and categorises some of the key aspects of this value and argues that nonprofit studies as a field would benefit from more emphasis on history.

***Charitable giving in wartime Ukraine:*** The second piece of research is in the form of an article from the Center for Economic Policy Research, [looking at data on giving to Come Back Alive, "Ukraine's largest provider of lethal aid"](#). The researchers found that mentions of military activity in the media had a clear effect on increasing donations, with news about casualties having the strongest effect. They infer from this that there are relevant policy implications for countries involved in needing to raise finances during wartime, as they suggest that "under conditions of high salience, transparent governance, and immediate need, private giving can become a meaningful complement to state capacity". This is really interesting to me, not least in how it challenges us to think about where we are willing to draw the boundaries of philanthropy (I find the concept of "lethal aid" pretty uncomfortable for instance, but if those giving to Ukraine are motivated by a genuine desire to provide support, and it turns out that purchasing military supplies is the most effective way of meeting the needs of the people of Ukraine, then should we see it as "philanthropy"? Or is the fact that it involves harm enough to disqualify it, and force us to think of it as something else?)

***Retributive Philanthropy:*** Speaking of the motivations for giving, I also really enjoyed [a paper on the phenomenon of "retributive philanthropy"](#) (which is also written up as an article [here](#)) – i.e. giving that is driven not by a positive desire to support a cause so much as by a negative desire to harm another cause that stands in opposition to it, or to send a signal about the donor's antipathy. (The starting point for the paper is the example of the reproductive rights organisation Planned Parenthood, which in 2016 saw a 40-fold increase in donations in the months

following the presidential election – many of them given in the name of Vice President Mike Pence, who was an outspoken opponent of abortion and birth control). The paper looks at a number of different examples of retributive philanthropy, using interviews and data analysis to determine trends and insights, and suggests practical lessons for nonprofits in terms of how they could frame their work to appeal to donors driven by retributive goals. (Which again raises some interesting questions about the boundaries of philanthropy: should we appeal to negative motivations, for instance, even if this is demonstrably effective in driving donations, if there is a risk that this comes at the cost of further polarisation and division?)

***Using AI to simulate human subjects in social science research:*** The final piece of research I want to flag up is not directly about philanthropy or civil society, but I would argue that it has clear and significant relevance for anyone interested in these topics. It concerns [the growing use of AI to simulate human subjects in academic research](#) (i.e. rather than go through the tiresome business of getting lots of actual humans to respond to a research survey, why not just get an LLM to simulate a range of responses of the kind that humans *would* give?!) The researchers suggest that this may be problematic, as the LLMs “often give less varied, biased, or sycophantic answers; and they don’t generalize well to new settings”. In many ways this seems entirely unsurprising to me – LLMs are designed to abstract patterns from large sets of existing data and then generate probabilistically-likely strings of output characters based on whatever you input, so of course they aren’t going to produce novel results or adapt well to new contexts. The relevance to civil society and philanthropy is that social science research already plays a big part in informing and shaping the approaches that many organisations take to addressing challenges, so if social science researchers start becoming over-reliant on AI tools that produce less accurate insights, that will be a real problem.

[Read the paper on historicising nonprofit studies](#)

Read the article on giving to Ukraine

Read the paper on retributive giving

Read the paper on AI in social science research

## AND FINALLY...

It's nearly the end of the newsletter- we made it! But before we finish, I just have for you a quick trio of slightly lighter stories in our traditional local news-style "And Finally" segment. Regular readers will know that I am a massive sucker for anything that manages to combine pop culture and philanthropy, and all three of these tick that box.

First up is an article on the *AIPT Comics* website on why "Superman is Punk Rock Altruism", arguing that the lesson of James Gunn's recent reboot of the Superman franchise – which has moved away from the 'grittiness' of recent interpretations, and back towards the idea of the caped crusader as the world's number one do-gooder, with added pet dog – is that "in a world obsessed with fame and profit... the most rebellious thing you can do is help others without asking for anything in return." I'm 100% here for this kind of analysis.

Image credit: [Thomas Brueckner](#), [CC BY 2.0](#)

Next up is another story about K-Pop and philanthropy from *Borgen* magazine. Regular readers will know that I am, by osmosis from my kids, quite tapped into the world of K-Pop (to the extent that I went to see BlackPink in Wembley Stadium over the summer. Oh yes- in your area). So I was interested to [read a bit about the charitable deeds of new K Pop superstars Stray Kids](#). Now I just need someone to write an in-depth exploration of motifs of altruism in *KPop Demon Hunters*, and the circle will be complete. (Or maybe I should just do it myself...?)



And finally, in the “and finally section”, was a really interesting story I saw back at the start of the summer about [PLUS1](#) - a fund which works with music stars (as well as comedians and others) to enable them to give \$1 from every ticket sale, which is then distributed to nonprofits. (I particularly enjoyed the fact that the founder is a former member of Arcade Fire).

As the article highlights, [the fund set up by Sabrina Carpenter has just become the fastest to hit \\$1 million](#). This reminded me of something that struck me when I took my daughter to see Tate McRae in Manchester. Was it quite how badly I stuck out as a middle-aged man who was at best ambivalent about the music? Well, there was that, yes; but what I actually noticed was all the prominent info about nonprofits supported by her tour (in this case The Global Fund for Women and The Trevor Project). Given how astronomically expensive it is to go to these kinds of big tour shows these days, I was glad in that instance to know that at least some of the profits are helping to do good in the world. (And my philanthro-nerd brain was also very curious about what kind of influence it has on her audience, and whether it drives further giving or engagement of any kind?)

[Read the Superman article](#)

[Read the Stray Kids article](#)

[Read the Sabrina Carpenter fund article](#)

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Right, that's actually the end now. Plenty of words there, I think we can all agree; hopefully some of them are good ones. I will be back with another update (ideally much shorter than this!) at the end of September.

Best,

Rhodri



**Why  
Philanthropy  
Matters**

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