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# **Values of Philanthropy**

*by*

*René Bekkers*

Keynote address  
ISTR Conference 2018  
July 12, 2018

Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam

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Dear colleagues, friends, and guests,

It is an honor to conclude this day of the ISTR Conference with a reflection on the values of philanthropy. The idea I will be exploring is that philanthropy tells us something about human nature. With this idea you can hear the philosopher in me speaking. In addition, you will hear a myth hunting sociologist speaking. Of course human nature is a concept that needs to be contextualized. It emerges in a cultural setting, susceptible to trends in society and indicative of changes to come. The thesis I will work with is that our practice of philanthropy tells us something about our values.

What are the values of philanthropy? What is the value of philanthropy for society, and for you personally? What are the virtues expressed in philanthropy? And what should they be? These are the questions I would like to address today.

Before we get to the truly philosophical and perhaps more interesting questions, let us deal with the numbers. We cannot talk about the values of philanthropy without some counting. The core business of the Center for Philanthropic Studies that I lead here in Amsterdam is counting. Yes, we are here for the numbers – we measure the value of philanthropy represented by foundations internationally, in the *City AM Charity Index*; we measure the value of philanthropy in Europe in *Giving Europe*, and we measure the value of philanthropy in the Netherlands in *Giving in the Netherlands*. The expertise we have accumulated in counting, the methodologies we have developed, the reliability and validity of the rules involved are the very reason we are housed at an academic institution.

Our research follows the research agenda I laid out five years ago (Bekkers, 2013a), when I presented the 3 level ABC model of philanthropy. Today I am giving it a new name: the Philanthropy Matrix – see table 1 below. The matrix is a three by three cross table that can help you conduct research on almost any phenomenon in the social sciences.

Table 1. The Philanthropy Matrix

	Antecedents	ABC Behaviors	Consequences
Levels			
Macro			
Meso			
Micro			

I will use this matrix to structure my talk today. The value of philanthropy is evident in all three of the columns. First I will discuss the value of the behavior of philanthropy in the middle column, and I will start out doing so in monetary terms. Next I will talk about the antecedents, and finally, about the consequences.

But first a few words about the three levels. The evidence base for policy decisions is most firm at the micro-level of individual citizens. Most of what we know about philanthropy comes from what respondents in surveys tell us about their contributions to nonprofit organizations

and from what students do with money they have received in experiments. The international frontiers of knowledge at the individual level are in register data and natural field experiments among large, random samples of the population. In the coming years we will expand our horizons at these frontiers.

Another frontier that is particular to Europe and especially visible in this country is at the meso-level of organizations. It is sad that we know next to nothing about the life cycle of foundations. How do nonprofit organizations grow and die? What are effective policies for endowed and grant making foundations? How do fundraising charities raise and spend money? These are very basic questions to which we lack good answers, primarily because we do not have the data to answer them. It is a crucial task in the years to come to improve the knowledge base at the meso-level of organizations.

In the past few years we have seen the emergence of the science of global philanthropy, at the macro level. While there are vast differences between countries in the extent to which the population engages in philanthropy (Bekkers, 2016a), the number of theories on differences between countries in philanthropy far exceeds the number of solid facts (Bekkers, 2016b). A few pieces of knowledge I will discuss with you today.

Also in this area the lack of good data is a major obstacle. There are difficult issues that we have to deal with in the measurement of philanthropy across societies. Not only do giving traditions differ between countries, also the terms and concepts that are used differ. Do people mean the same when they say 'giving' in different nations? Methodology is destiny in this case (Rooney, Steinberg & Schervish, 2004). To compare philanthropy across countries, we need equivalent measurements of philanthropy, tailored to national context. Even within countries, slightly different versions of questionnaires can result in rather different estimates, as we see when we compare long and short versions of survey questionnaires (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2006), especially for specific groups (Rooney et al., 2005). In addition to questionnaire effects, differences between datasets in the mode of data collection used (face-to-face interviews, telephone interviews, and online surveys), and differences in sampling frames and response rates can also result in wildly different estimates. I look forward to applying a new technique called mega-analysis (Global Trust Research Consortium, 2017) to deal with these issues.

## B: BEHAVIORS

### ***What counts as philanthropy?***

In line with the phrase ‘voluntary action for the public good’ coined by Payton (1988), I define philanthropy as a non-coerced transfer of resources to a collective enterprise through a formal organization. I use ‘non-coerced’ rather than ‘voluntary’ because volition is harder to prove than it is to disprove coercion. Taxes and fines are not philanthropy, but bribes and wedding gifts to charity could be.

The term ‘public good’ has a rather specific meaning in economics that excludes many enterprises that we would like to study. The benefits of philanthropy are not all public, they may also be private, or semi-public, as in a club good. So instead of public I use collective because this does serve the purpose of identifying a broad set of recipients, users, clients. Also labeling causes supported as a ‘good’ denies that what counts as ‘good’ may in fact be disputed. Enterprise still sounds good but not as unequivocally good as ‘good’.

Action is good but very broad, the essential characteristic that makes an action an act of philanthropy is the transfer of resources to a third party. In the age of nudging and defaults, inaction by not opting out can also result in gifts and other transfers of resources, such as post mortem organ donations.

You will find the word ‘for’ missing, because a definition should not include an empirical statement on causes. The Payton phrase identifies the public good as the goal of philanthropy – voluntary action *for* the public good. In my view, one of the key questions on philanthropy is to what extent the desire to benefit the public good is actually the motivation for philanthropy. And you can hear my suspicion in the background that often it is not. I will return to this later.

Philanthropy is a specific form of prosocial behavior, which is a broader class of phenomena that involve non-coerced transfers of resources to third parties. These third parties may be specific individuals rather than collective enterprises, as in the case of helping behavior. Also they may not necessarily involve organizations.

Philanthropy also occurs in non-monetary forms, when people spend time volunteering, donate blood, or their organs. It is difficult and perhaps even counterproductive to measure the value of these forms of philanthropy in monetary terms. Also I am sorry I cannot spend time today talking about plans for research on non-monetary forms of philanthropy, for instance with Sanquin, the blood collection agency in the Netherlands. But rest assured that I will continue to do research on them, based on a review of the literature (Piersma et al., 2017).

Impact investing, gifts to family foundations, and volunteering for nonprofit organizations are covered by the definition, because they involve non-coerced transfers of resources to collective enterprises through organizations. The organizations may be not-for-profit organizations, but

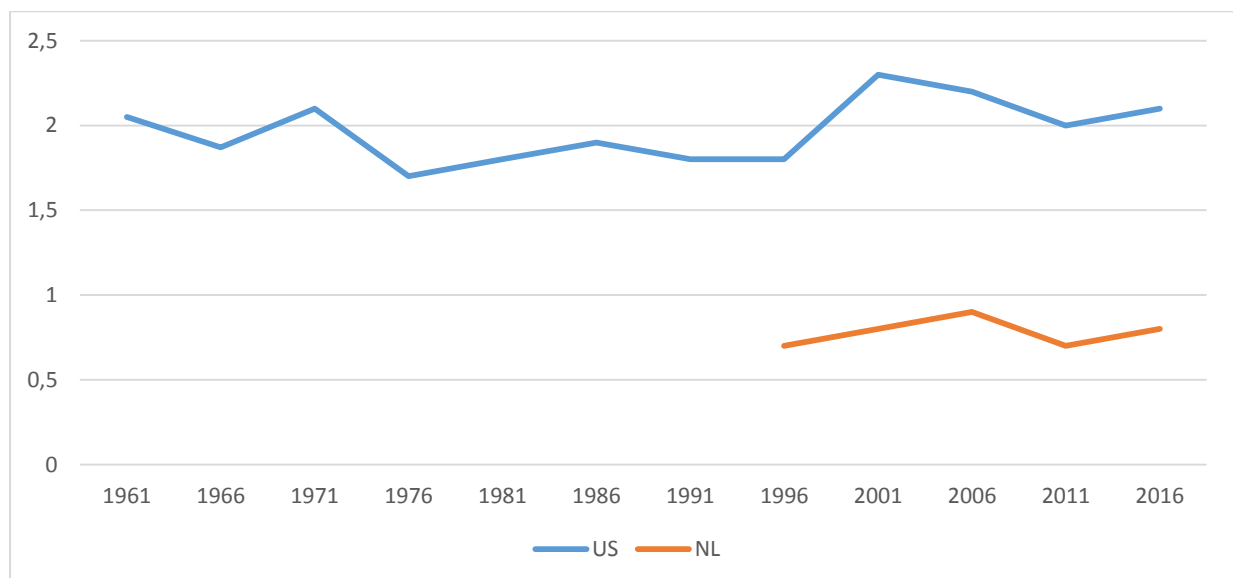
do not have to be. Whether ‘modern’ forms of philanthropy such as social investments and impact investments are substitutes or complements to traditional forms of giving in which no profit accrues to the giver and nonprofit organizations are the intermediary is an interesting question for future research (Osili et al., 2018).

### ***What is the economic value of philanthropy?***

As I learned in my undergraduate program in Sociology, the first task for scientists is to get the facts straight. So that is also our first task today: we first describe the facts on philanthropy. The question is: who gives what, where, when, and to which causes? That is not an easy task. In the Netherlands, we estimate the value of philanthropy to be about €5.7 billion. This is the most recent estimate for the year 2015 (Bekkers, Schuyt & Gouwenberg, 2017). It is based on the methodology of the Giving in the Netherlands study that my predecessor, Theo Schuyt, has developed. He adapted the methodology of Giving USA to the Dutch context. As we do not have the luxury of complete administrative data on public benefit organizations as in the USA, Giving in the Netherlands also includes primary data collection using surveys among households, foundations, and corporations. Also the study includes secondary data analysis of annual reports and administrative data.

Of course €5.7 billion is a lot of money. It is peanuts compared to the value of philanthropy in the US, which is estimated to be about €350 billion. To make a fairer comparison we divide the amounts by the value of the GDP. Then we get these numbers: the stubborn 2% for the US (Perry, 2013; also see List, 2011; Soskis, 2017) and 0.8% for the Netherlands (Bekkers, Schuyt & Gouwenberg, 2017). Please take a moment to think about why this is 2% in the US and 0.8% in the Netherlands. Keep that thought until we get to the antecedents column of the philanthropy matrix.

*Figure 1. Philanthropy as a proportion of GDP in the US and the Netherlands*



We are proud to have produced high quality data on philanthropy for the Netherlands. Since I joined the Center for Philanthropic Studies we have continued to improve the methodology.

We have converted the design from a repeated cross-section to a prospective panel study, which allows us to study changes over time not only at the aggregated level, but also within the same set of households. We changed the design for the survey in 2000-2001, at about the same time when our colleagues in the US – I appreciate that many of you are here today – created the Center on Philanthropy Panel Study (COPPS – currently known as PPS) in the Panel Study of Income Dynamics (PSID; Wilhelm, 2006). These developments were independent – I would meet the people responsible only later. To me this illustrates that when the time is ripe, a good idea originates at different places.

From the start of the GINPS in 2002, we included experiments with charitable giving (e.g., Bekkers, 2006a, 2007, 2015). In 2007, we started to collect survey data among the growing numbers of minority groups of citizens of non-Dutch descent (Carabain & Bekkers, 2011, 2012). Since 2009, we also collect survey data among high net worth households (Whillans, Dunn, Smeets, Bekkers, & Norton, 2017).

We validated self-reports and proxy-reports by respondents in households on the amounts donated by members of their households, and found them to be relatively reliable and accurate (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2011a). Even though we have made a lot of progress in the measurement of philanthropy, we can still do better. Comparing anonymized data from the Netherlands Internal Revenue Service on charitable deductions reported by tax payers in their income tax forms with their responses in the GINPS would help estimate the validity of the survey data. This exercise will also show to what extent (self-reported) donations are actually deducted. This is important because it may tell us why the charitable deduction in the Netherlands is not working optimally. One reason may be that smaller donations are less likely to be deducted. Another reason may be that major donors are not deducting their gifts. Both groups contain citizens who are not responsive to price changes. If tax forms were to be pre-filled by administrative records of donations received by registered charities, as in Denmark (Gillitzer & Ebbesen Skov, 2018), all donations would automatically be eligible for the deduction. Given the current problems with IT systems automation at the Netherlands tax office, however, it is unlikely that this system will be introduced soon.

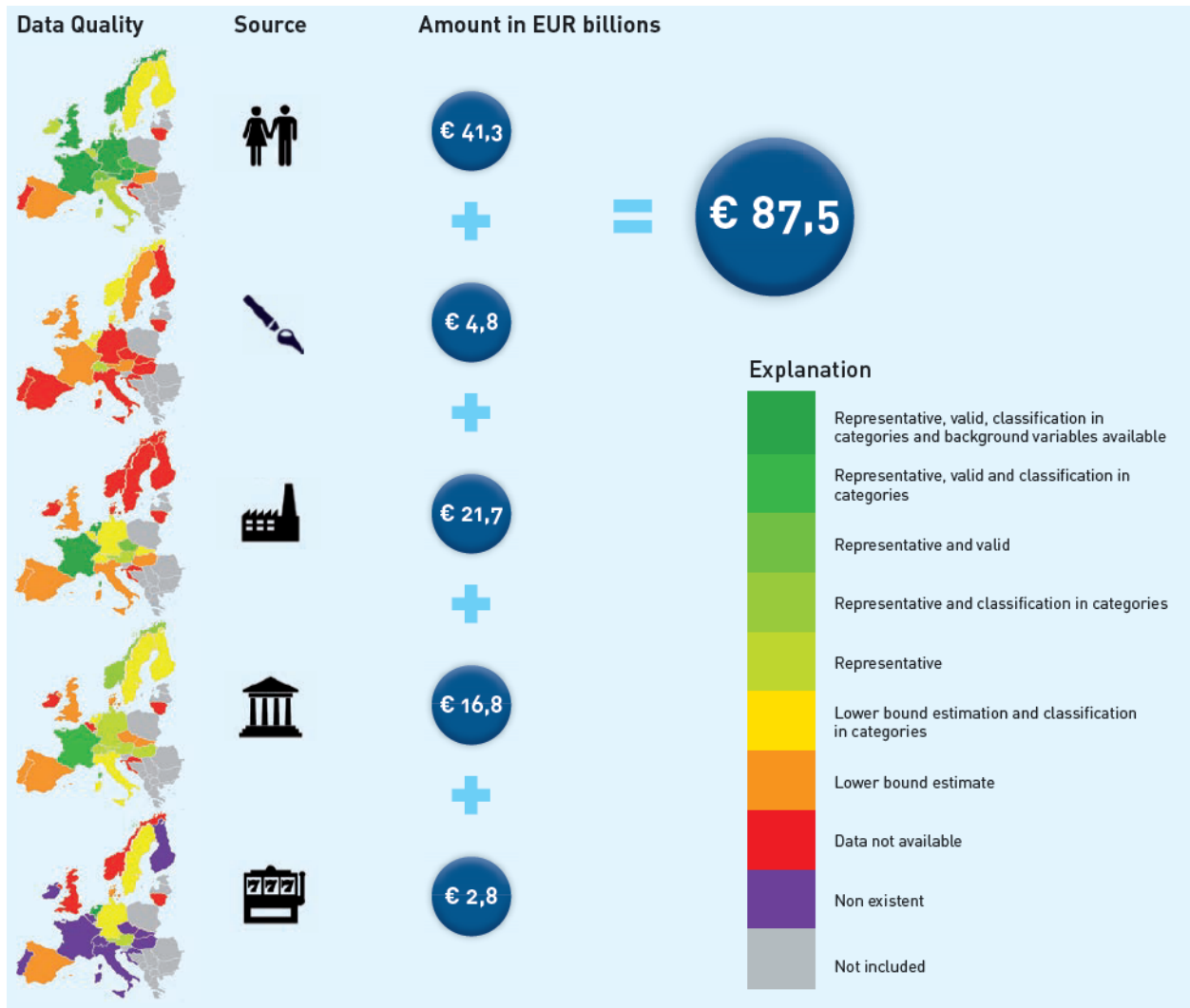
First we will have a look at other countries. Recently we tried to map what we know about philanthropy in Europe within the European Research Network on Philanthropy (ERNOP). The results are available on the ERNOP website ([www.ernop.eu](http://www.ernop.eu)) and in print (Hoolwerf & Schuyt, 2017). Figure 2 shows what we learned.

It turns out we are fortunate to know so much about philanthropy in the Netherlands and the US. There are few other countries in which we know so much about the value of philanthropy and its sources. We know for sure we are missing a lot of data on giving in most countries in Europe, so any estimate we present is incomplete. We still have a lot of work to do before we can really test statements about country differences. In the coming years, I hope we can carry out our plans to develop such knowledge at a global scale.



Some of you know that despite excellent evaluations the research plan “Global Giving” has not yet received the funding necessary to complete it. I am putting this on my ‘CV of failures’ and sharing this with you as a comfort. If your research proposal does not get the funding you applied for, or the paper you submitted gets rejected, keep the faith. Learn from failures, we all go through them. Improve your work, and try again. Patience, and persistence, will help you survive.

Figure 2. Giving in Europe, As Far as We Know

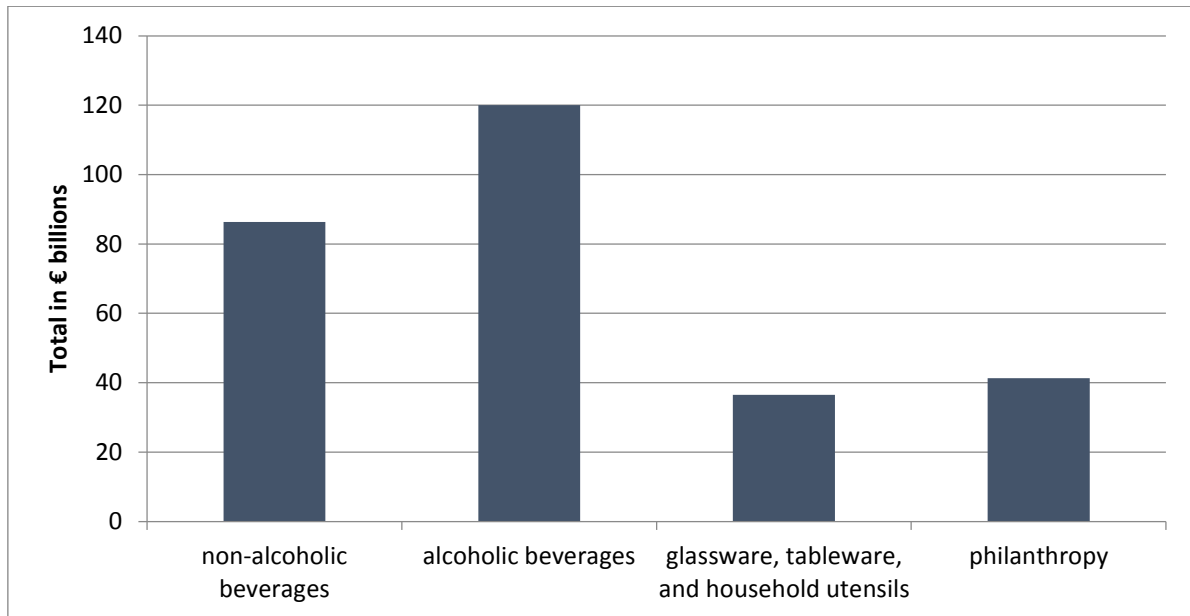


But currently, we have to ‘row the boat with the oars we have’, as we say in Dutch. The best data are available for giving by households. Given these shortcomings, here is how much the country experts estimate households in Europe give (see Figure 2). The total is € 41.3 billion.

Again, is this a lot, or not? We need a comparison, yardstick. How much do we spend on charity, compared to other expenditures? The official statistics on household consumption from Eurostat (see Figure 3) tell us that the €41.3 billion in philanthropy is about half of what we spend on non-alcoholic beverages (€86.4 billion) and about a third of what we spend on

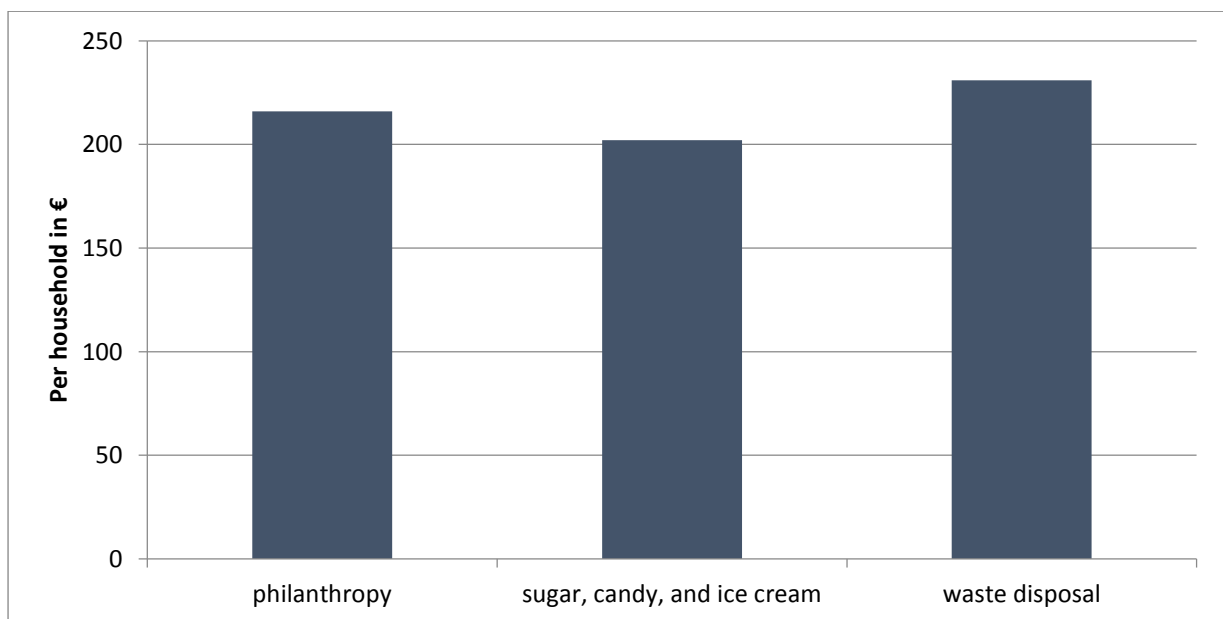
alcoholic beverages (€120 billion). The value of donations is close to the value of consumption in the category 'glassware, tableware, and household utensils' (€36.5 million).

Figure 3. Value of consumption by households in Europe. Sources: Eurostat, Giving Europe (Hoolwerf & Schuyt, 2017)



Statistics Netherlands provides us with even more detailed data on consumption by households (see Figure 4).

Figure 4. Value of consumption by households in the Netherlands. Sources: Statistics Netherlands, Giving in the Netherlands (Bekkers, Schuyt & Gouwenberg, 2017)



The €1.6 billion that households in the Netherlands donated in the form of money in 2015 (€216 per household) is roughly equal to the amount that households spent on sugar, candy and ice cream (€202 per household) and dumping trash (€231 per household). Somewhere in between ice cream, tea towels, and household trash. That's about the size of our sector. I have not yet met another professor in household utensil design, garbage collection studies or ice creamology, but at this university alone we have three professors studying philanthropy. So there must be something special in philanthropy that makes it worth studying.

### ***What is the value of philanthropy?***

So why are we interested in the numbers on philanthropy? Why do we even care to know? It is my thesis today that these numbers are not so interesting for their exact value. That is the day-to-day business of research. Behind these numbers is something else, which is the real value of philanthropy. Bear with me please.

To many, philanthropy is a uniquely human behavior. Philanthropy is planned behavior, not impulsive. Philanthropy is aimed at improving the welfare of those who are not physically present – often they are strangers, sometimes they are animals, and sometimes even abstract causes such as freedom of speech. Yes, I know giving is not necessarily planned, people also give on a whim. And yes, I know people are more likely to give to friends and family than to strangers and abstract causes. But the point is that planning, abstraction and imagination are the key characteristics that distinguish human giving from animals scratching each other's backs.

If we talk numbers, philanthropy is one, for the love of one mankind. Philanthropy is an integrating force, binding people, making society come together. It is this unity that connects philanthropy to the classic question on cohesion in sociology. We see the unity looking back in our biological evolution: we are all the offspring of common ancestors. We also see the unity in our future. Philanthropy reminds us of the common fate we have as a species. The fate we share as humans with all living creatures on this planet. Philanthropy is the promise of a better future.

## A: ANTECEDENTS

Let's move over to the first column of the Philanthropy Matrix, its antecedents, and revisit the uniquely human capacities hypothesis. Philanthropy relies on capacities that other species are believed not to have: higher level cognitive functions that allow us to think ahead, foresee the consequences of our actions for others, and reason through multiple chains of causes and effects.

These capacities are all potential antecedents of philanthropy, at the individual level. Experiments by Frans de Waal (2009), Felix Warneken and many others (e.g., Warneken & Tomasello, 2006) with other species such as chimpanzees, bonobos, magpies, and crows are relevant for this discussion. They demonstrate that other species can and do in fact respond to unfair distributions of resources. However, they do so primarily in circumstances that improve group welfare and not the welfare of strangers. Indeed it seems that some of the capacities that are thought to be uniquely human are indeed reasons why we have philanthropy and other species do not.

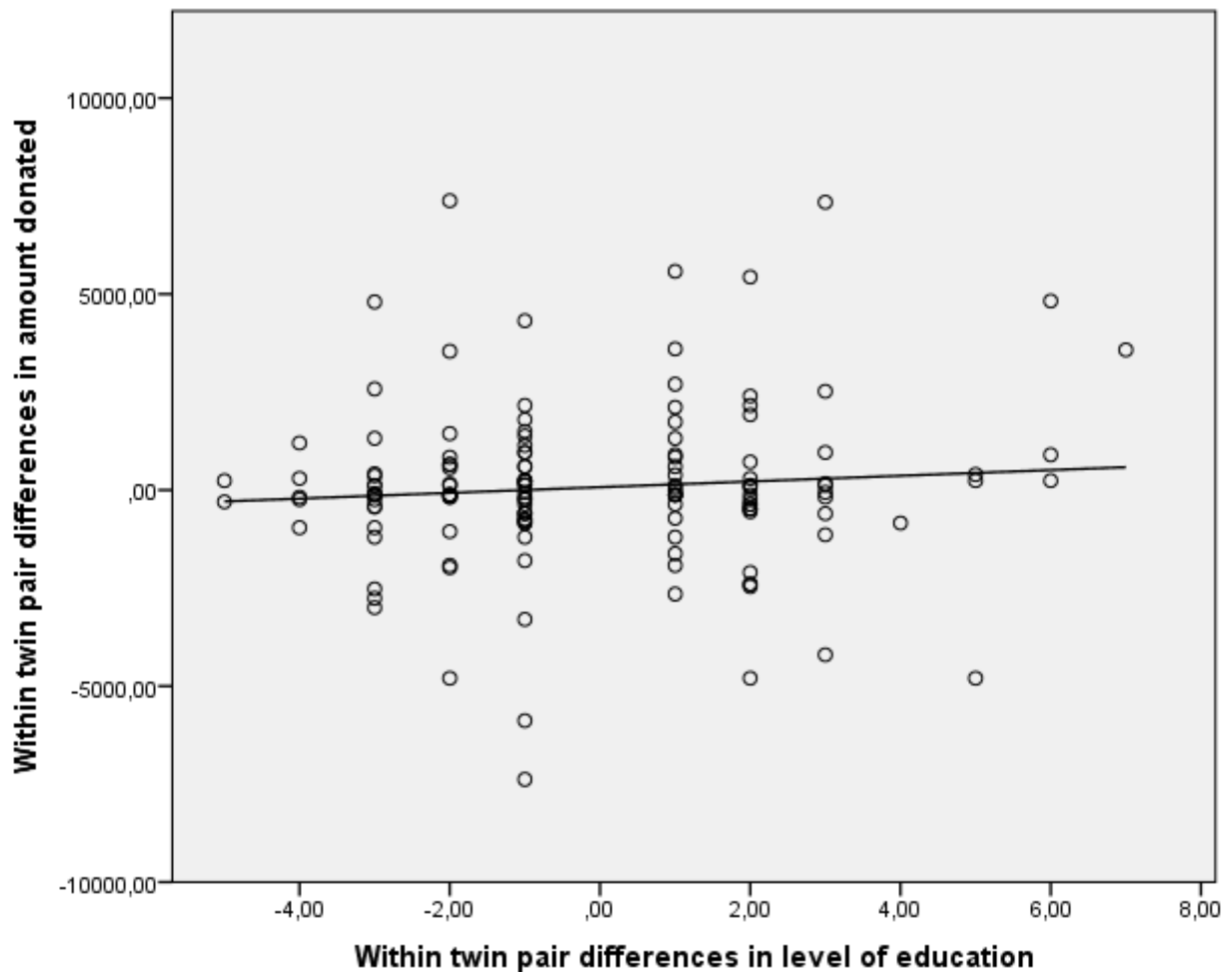
Within samples of humans research shows that some aspects of cognitive functioning are also related to charitable giving, but others do not. For instance, it is not the cognitive capacity to take the perspective of others who are less fortunate that is characteristic of people who engage in prosocial behavior. Individual differences in perspective taking are only weakly associated with charitable giving or volunteering, if at all (Bekkers, 2006b, 2010; Bekkers & Ottoni-Wilhelm, 2016). It is the emotional involvement with the misfortune of others, empathic concern, that correlates with helping behavior. In a series of papers with Mark Ottoni-Wilhelm we have shown that empathic concern gives rise to the moral principle of care that motivates people to help others (Wilhelm & Bekkers, 2010; Bekkers & Ottoni-Wilhelm, 2016). I think it is indicative of the ongoing crisis in psychology that an economist and sociologist were needed to demonstrate this.

Also it is not so much the mathematical ability demonstrated in knowing the correct answer to a number series quiz, but rather the verbal ability demonstrated in knowledge of difficult words (Bekkers, 2006b; 2010; Wiepking & James, 2013). This does not mean that teaching people difficult words will increase their giving. The vocabulary test is one measure of cognitive ability, which behavioral geneticists estimate to have a strong genetic component (Polderman et al., 2015).

Within a sample of pairs of identical twins in the US who participated in the Midlife in the United States (MIDUS) survey, Paul van Lange, Danielle Posthuma and I found that higher educated pairs give more than lower educated pairs. However, if we compare twins from the same pair with each other, the more educated twin does not give more than the less educated twin (Bekkers, Van Lange & Posthuma, 2017). The scatterplot in Figure 5 shows this. This finding is important because monozygotic twins are genetically identical at conception. The advantage that some twins share because an accident of nature gave them genes that make them do well in education also make them give more to charity. The experiences in their educational careers that make twins from the same pair different from each other do not make them give different amounts to charity.

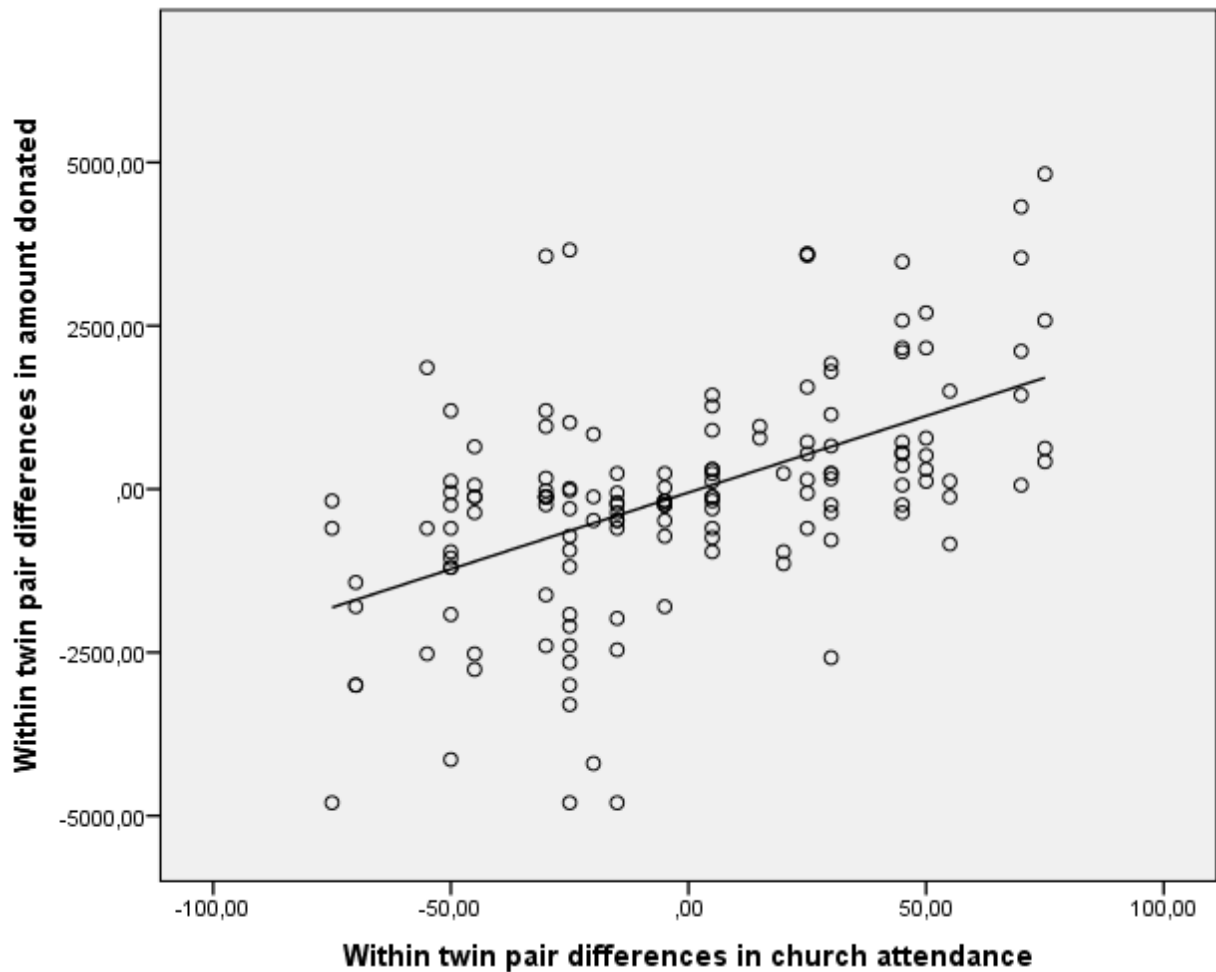
This suggests not only that the correlation between the level of education and generosity is due to genetic factors, but also that giving people more education does not increase their level of charity. This is consistent with the fact that generosity in the US in the past decades has been a flat 2%, while the proportion of higher education graduates increased.

Figure 5. Within twin pair differences in education and charitable giving (source: Bekkers, Posthuma & Van Lange, 2017)



While differences within monozygotic twin pairs in education were not related to differences in charitable giving, we did find that the more religious twin within a pair did give more than the less religious twin (see Figure 6). This suggests that the loss of religion reduces charitable giving, which is consistent with the declining level of generosity by households in the Netherlands (Bekkers, De Wit & Felix, 2018) as well as in the US (Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, 2017).

Figure 6. Within twin pair differences in church attendance and charitable giving (source: Bekkers, Posthuma & Van Lange, 2017)



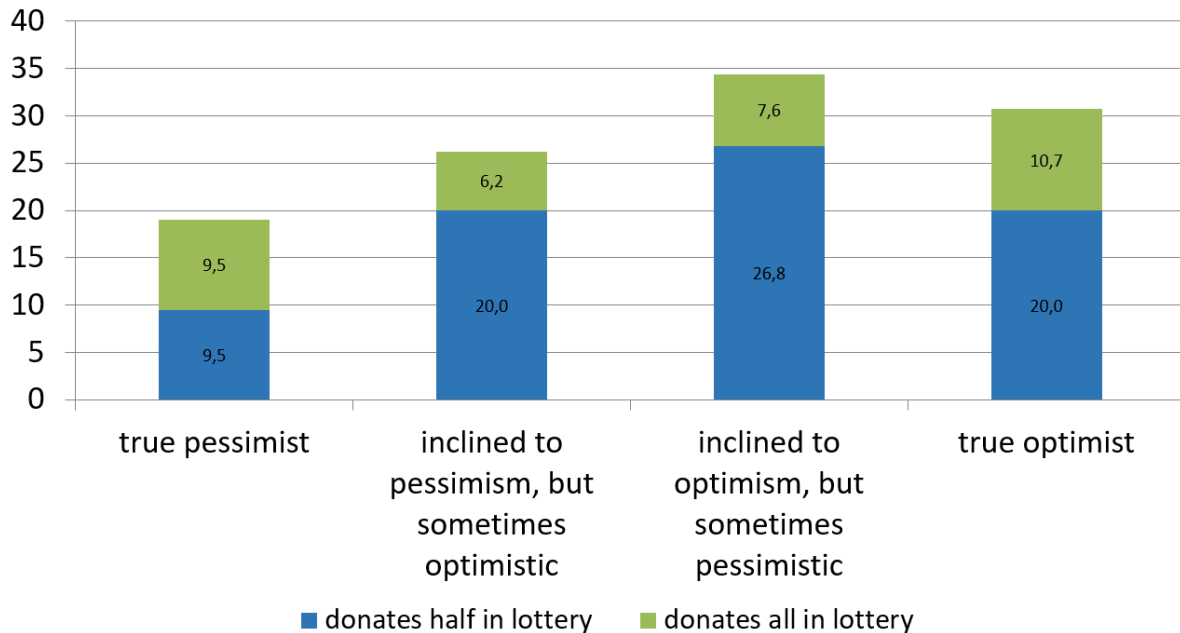
### ***What are the virtues of philanthropy?***

Philanthropy is ‘for the love of mankind’, as the etymology goes. Deep down, philanthropy is based on an unfettering optimism, the belief in the mission to achieve good things for all of us. It is no coincidence that philanthropists such as Bill Gates and Warren Buffett are optimists. Our own Giving in the Netherlands Panel Survey data also show that optimists give more. In one of our surveys we asked participants to describe themselves. After the survey was completed, we held a lottery for five prizes of €100 and gave participants the opportunity to keep the prize for themselves, split it in two, or give the prize entirely to a charity of their choice. The results show that optimists are more likely to donate their prize to charity (see Figure 7).

Yes, progress is possible: we have seen major achievements in global health, literacy, and economic development in a large number of countries. While global progress is evident in these indicators in non-western countries, social illnesses like poverty, segregation, racism and discrimination are still evident in modern societies. The level of economic mobility in the US or the UK has not increased and in the US the poor are actually doing worse these days than

30 years ago. Turning to the future: the advent of artificial intelligence, climate change, and migration create major challenges, on a global scale. They test our resilience as a species. Will we be able to cooperate and face these challenges?

Figure 7. Optimism and giving (source: Bekkers, Whillans, Smeets & Norton, 2018)



It is a small step from optimism to one of the unique characteristics of mankind that make us well-equipped to deal with global challenges: science. We need the brightest minds of scientists to invent solutions to these issues. But intelligence and innovation alone are not enough. We need productive collaboration of innovators with government and businesses to scale up innovations. The strategy of the European Commission is a step in the right direction. My colleagues Theo Schuyt and Barbara Gouwenberg have contributed to an expert group of actors from the philanthropic sector, the corporate sector and European government to develop financial instruments facilitating research and innovation.

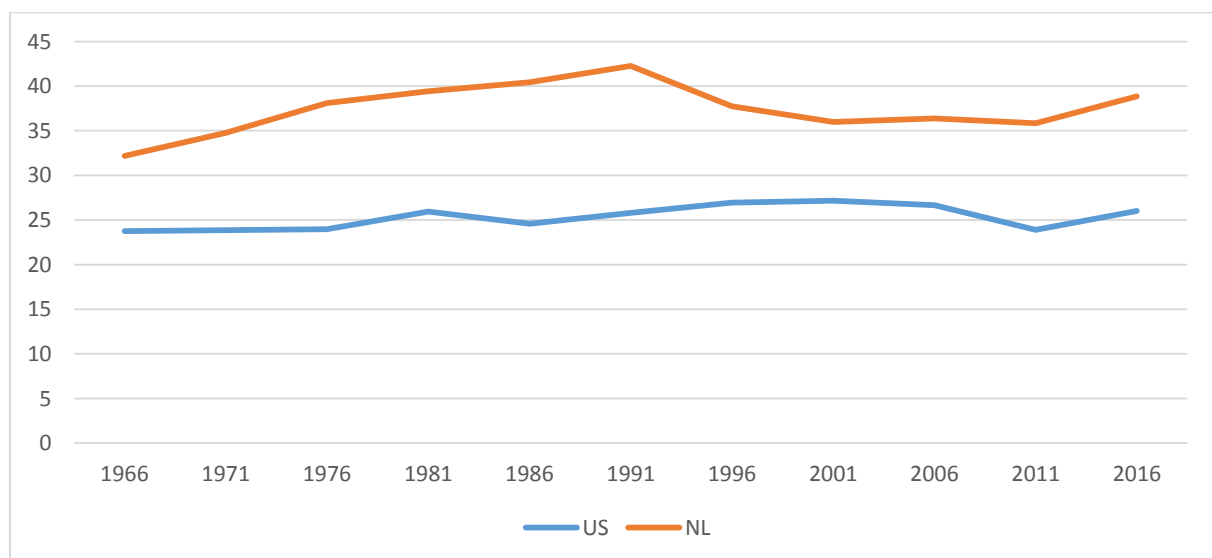
For the science of philanthropy I believe we will do a better job if we combine the best of all worlds if researchers from different disciplines put their minds together. This is a difficult path though. Even here at VU we have a disciplinary home base in the Department of Sociology, and it is difficult to organize collaboration across the boundaries of the School for Social Science, or as we say: the Faculty of Social Sciences. The economists I work with are not here in Amsterdam. In general researchers who are trying to work across boundaries face academic disincentives. If you want to make a career you will have to publish in disciplinary journals. Research on philanthropy, however, has moved to multi-disciplinary journals, which are not always recognized in tenure and promotion decisions. Despite the bureaucratic and academic difficulties inherent in multi- and interdisciplinary research, it is my vision that philanthropy should be precisely that.

### ***What does philanthropy tell us about our values?***

The state of philanthropy of a country tells us what people care about. The 'size of the pie', the proportion of household income donated to charity, and the way the cake is cut in various slices for the causes supported, reveal the preferences of a country's population. How much of a sacrifice are people in different countries making? What causes do they care about?

Remember the stubborn 2% for the US and the 0.8% for the Netherlands. You may think 'yeah, but in the Netherlands we pay a lot more in taxes'. Well, not so fast. Here is a graph showing the tax burden for citizens in the past 50 years (see Figure 8). As we all know this burden is unequally distributed, and it is no secret that those who know the loopholes pay much less. In any case, you see that Americans pay a lot less in taxes than citizens in the Netherlands. What is more, there is little change in the tax burden in the US. It is 25% on average throughout the past fifty years. We do see a little uptick in 1986 and an increase from the late eighties to 2001, and then a decline to 2011. This development is positively associated with the value of philanthropy, the correlation  $r = .34$ . In the Netherlands there is no association at all in the development of the tax burden and the value of philanthropy in the past 20 years ( $r = -.06$ ). If we ignore the variation over time for the moment and we just compare the average tax burden with the average value of philanthropy in the past decades, it is clear that Americans don't make up the difference in the tax burden by giving more (see Figure 9). Americans just contribute less to public welfare than the Dutch.

*Figure 8. Tax burden in percent of GDP in the US and the Netherlands (source: OECD)*



That doesn't mean that the US does not spend money on public welfare. In the past fifty years, the US has been able to increase government spending without increasing the tax burden (see Figure 10). In 2011, US government spending from other sources of income amounted to almost 20% of GDP. The increase in government spending, however, is completely unrelated to giving. Remember the stubborn 2%: the value of philanthropy did not become less because government spending went up. Just like you cannot explain change from a constant, you cannot explain a constant from change.



Figure 9. Contributions to public welfare in the form of taxes and philanthropy in percent of GDP in the US and the Netherlands (sources: OECD, Giving USA, Giving in the Netherlands)

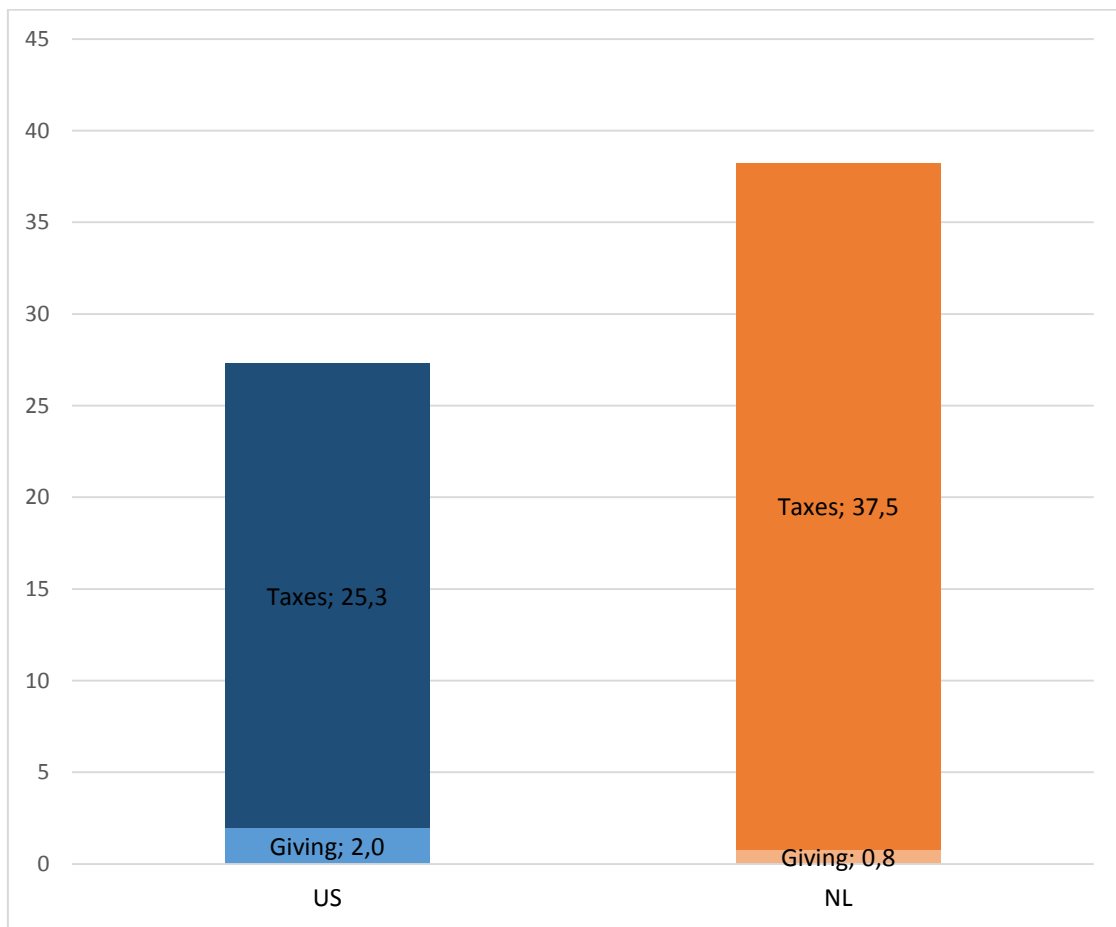
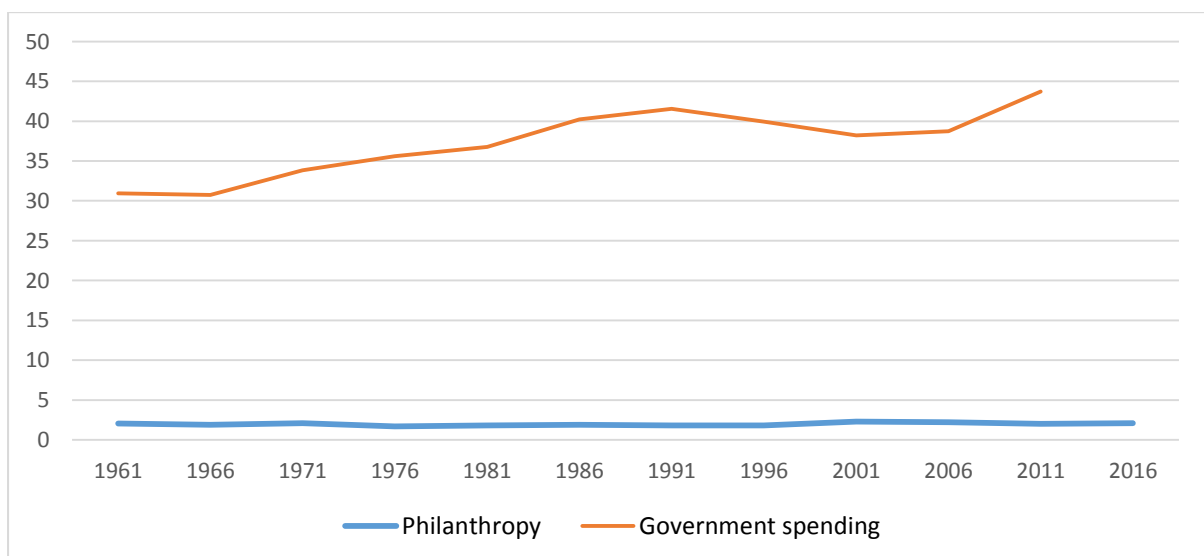


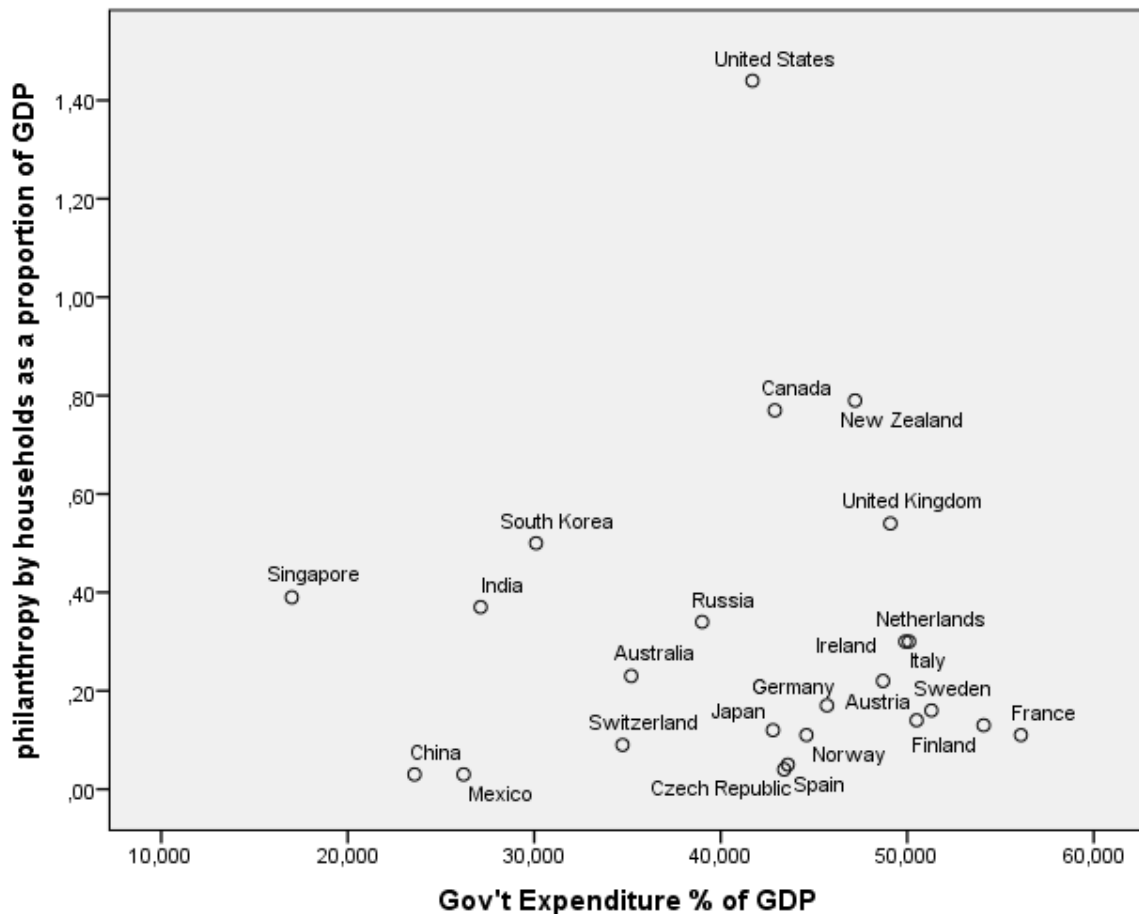
Figure 10. Government spending and philanthropy in percent of GDP in the US (source: IMF (Mauro, Romeu, Binder & Zaman, 2015), Giving USA)



Note: interest paid on debt is not included in the data on government spending

Figure 11 shows that also when we compare countries with each other, we do not see much of a relationship between government spending and philanthropy.

Figure 11. Government spending and philanthropy in percent of GDP for 23 countries (source: IMF, CAF, 2016)



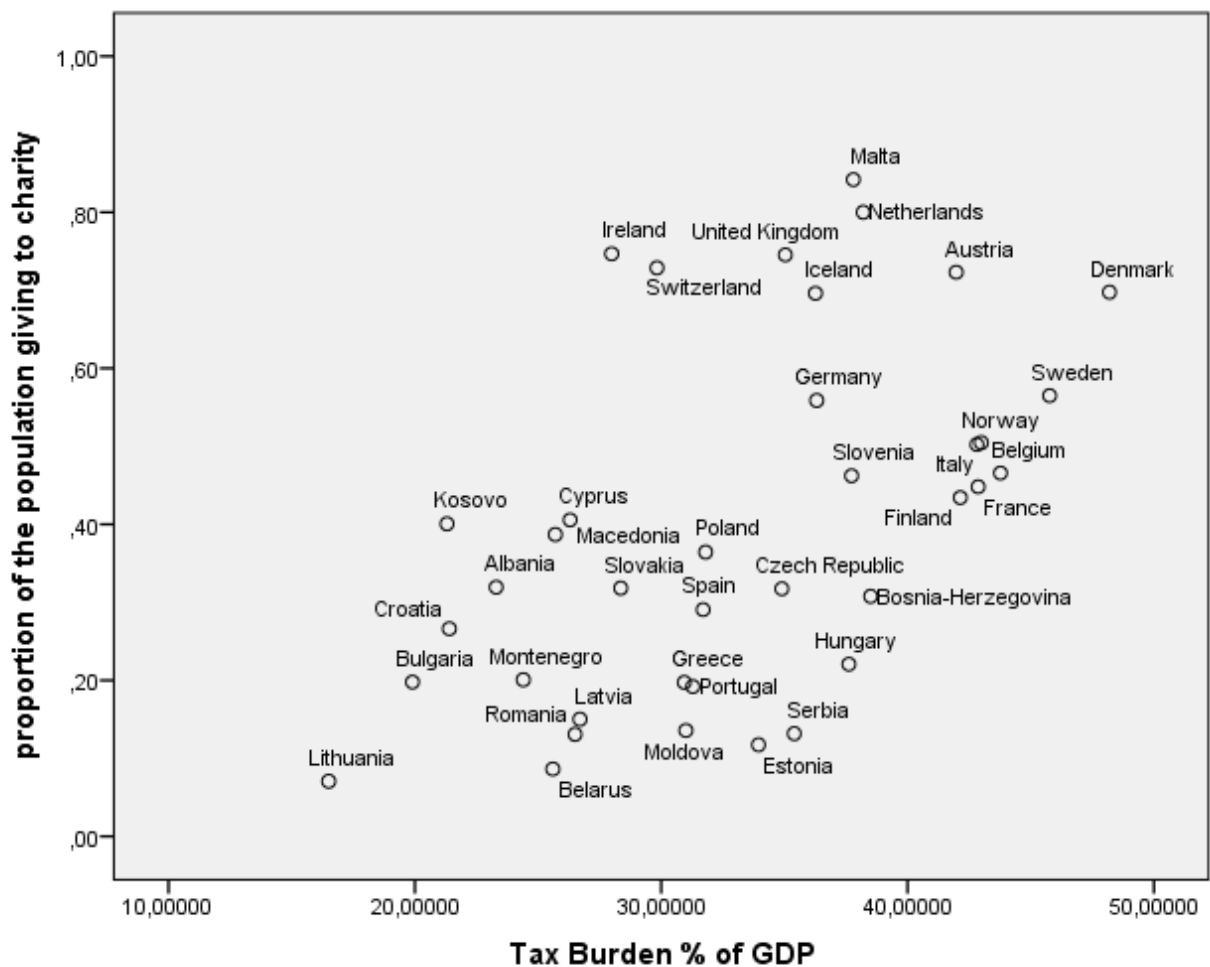
The data on philanthropy for 24 countries in this graph come from a report by the Charities Aid Foundation in the UK (CAF, 2016). These data are far from ideal, because they were gathered in different years (2010-2014), and using different methods. So for what it is worth: the correlation is zero ( $r = .00$ ). The United States is a clear outlier, but even when we exclude it, the correlation remains zero ( $r = -.01$ ). This clearly goes against the idea that government and philanthropy are substitutes.

Not only the data are far from ideal, also the analysis is probably biased. Correlations at the country level are typically much stronger than they are in an appropriate multi-level regression analysis (Bekkers, 2016a). This means the zero we see is probably really a zero. One myth gone, a few to go.

In the meantime, Pamala Wiepking and Femida Handy have harmonized micro-level survey data from a larger number of countries in the Individual International Philanthropy Database (IIPD; Wiepking & Handy, 2016). I look forward to working with them to conduct more sophisticated analyses testing ideas on why countries differ in philanthropy.

The more reliable evidence we already have is on the proportion that gives to charity in different countries from the Gallup World Poll. This is currently the only source of data on engagement in philanthropy in a sizeable number of countries around the globe, even though the poll includes only one question to measure charitable giving. The surprising finding is that countries in which citizens pay higher taxes have a higher proportion of the population engaging in charitable giving. The correlation for 141 countries is  $r = .28$ . Within Europe, the association is even stronger,  $r = .52$  (see Figure 12).

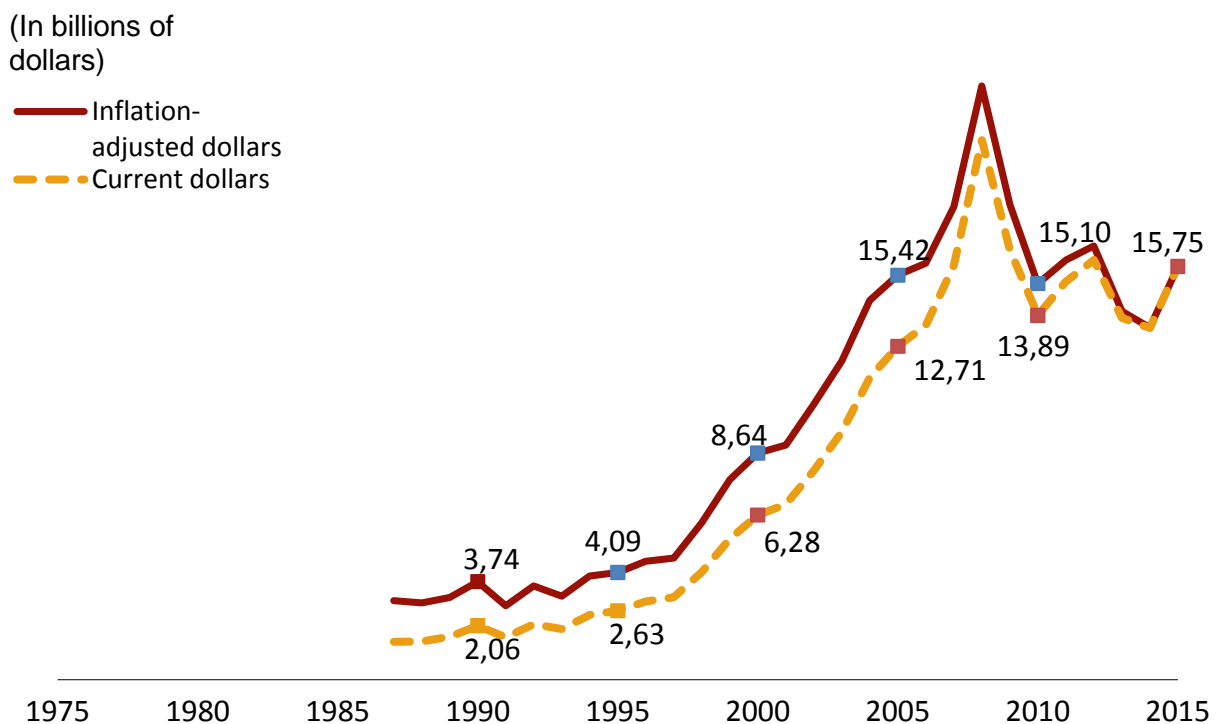
Figure 12. Government spending and philanthropy in percent of GDP for 38 countries in Europe (source: IMF, CAF, 2006)



As you can see, and as others have noted (Salamon, Sokolowski & Haddock, 2017) the facts do not support the political ideology that keeping the state small makes people care for each other. In contrast: countries in which citizens are contributing less to public welfare through taxes are less involved in charity. To me, this positive relationship does not imply causation. I don't see how paying taxes makes people more charitable, or vice versa. What it means is that the citizens of some countries are more prepared to give to charity and are also willing to pay more taxes.

Let's look in a bit more detail at the causes supported in the US and other countries. Until recently, over 95% of the amounts donated in the US stayed within the country. Countries with more extensive welfare states such as the Netherlands or Sweden see a lot more of the amounts donated leaving the country. As domestic needs are taken care of by well-functioning governments funded by taxes, people can afford to give to others. While the total value of philanthropy has not changed in the past decades, there have been changes in the causes that Americans support. In the US, charitable giving to international affairs has grown most strongly (see Figure 13).

Figure 13. Giving in the United States to international affairs, 1987-2015 (source: Giving USA, 2016)

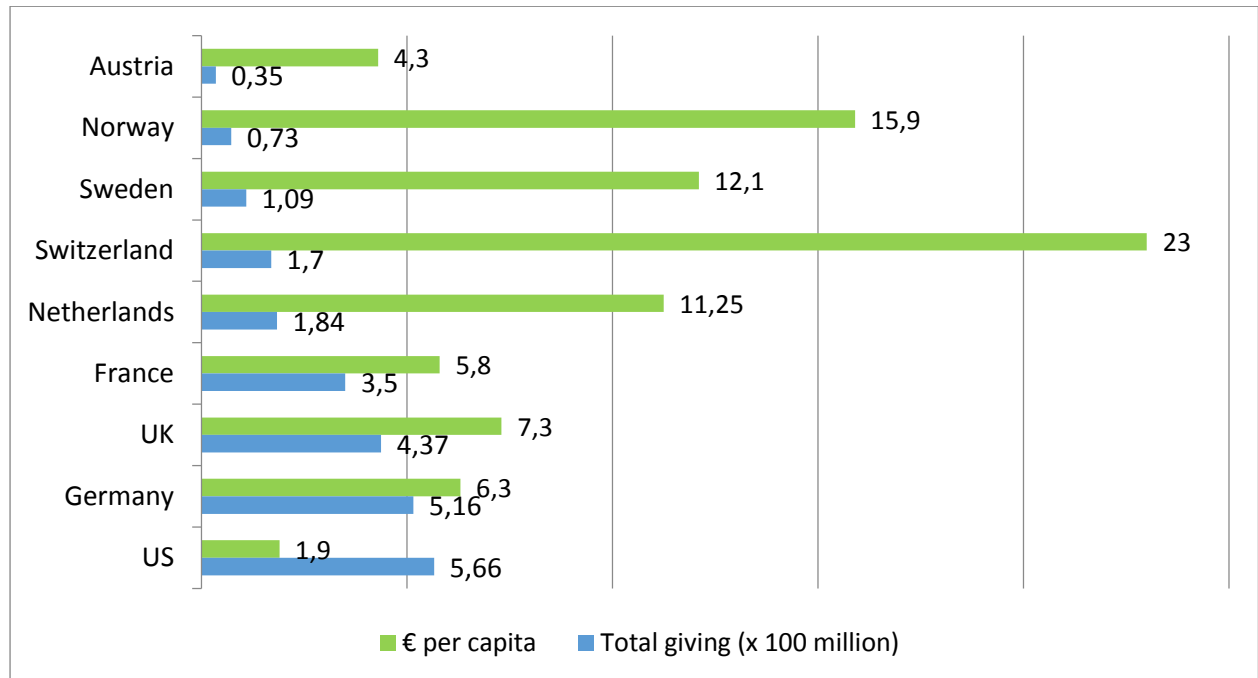


The Tsunami in South-East Asia at Christmas 2004 is a turning point in the history of philanthropy. Before the relief campaign many citizens in the US had not given to international development. Those who gave to the campaign were more likely to continue to give to international development in the years thereafter (Bekkers, Osili, Okten & Wiepkink, 2018).

Compared to the US, however, the Netherlands gave much more to Tsunami victims per capita. The difference is almost a factor 6: the Dutch gave a bit more than €11 per capita, Americans gave a bit less than €2. It is perhaps no surprise that the Dutch gave much more generously to the tsunami relief efforts. Our national history is filled with floods. The 1953 floods in the south west of the country led to a mass mobilization of citizens through nonprofit organizations, including student associations. In contrast to the US, however, the Tsunami campaign in the Netherlands did not change involvement of the Dutch with international relief and development.

The Netherlands is not the only country that gave generously to Tsunami victims (see Figure 14). In fact, citizens in Switzerland, Norway, and Sweden gave more per capita than the Dutch population.

Figure 14. Amounts donated to campaigns for Tsunami victims (source: ICFO)



A history of floods does not explain the top position for Switzerland, nor the high ranks of Norway and Sweden. A hypothesis that could explain their position, along with the high rank of the Netherlands and also why other countries rank lower, is the high level of government provision for citizens in these countries. The better the welfare state is for citizens, the more they can afford to give to international causes. In a cross-country study, De Wit, Neumayr, Handy & Wiepking (2018) showed that government contributions are indeed related to the causes to which people give. While the study is cross-sectional, and does not attempt to prove causality, the evidence is consistent with a spillover effect from national to international causes.

We can also see this spill-over effect when we look back in our national history. The Rijksmuseum, where we are welcome tomorrow evening for the closing reception, and many of the other museums and public buildings here in Amsterdam as well as in other cities, were founded and funded by philanthropists. After the second world war, the welfare state expanded greatly. Funding for education was nationalized, social security and universal health care were introduced. This allowed our national tradition of generosity to find other targets. The Netherlands became one of the hotbeds of the human rights and environmental movements. We alleviated our collective national guilt about colonial history by funding international development aid, not just through taxes, but also by giving to charities in this area.

### ***What makes people give?***

As empirical researchers, we not only describe differences in charitable giving between countries and individuals and historic trends. We also uncover the cognitions, emotions, justifications, and motivations that are conducive to acts of philanthropy. In our literature review, Pamala Wiepking and I described eight classes of influences on charitable giving (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2011b). These are not all charitable in nature. In fact, six out of eight mechanisms are clearly non-altruistic.

These are:

1. Solicitation: being asked to give;
2. Material costs and benefits: paying a lower price or getting something out of a gift;
3. Reputation: being seen and rewarded socially for giving;
4. Psychological costs and benefits: the joy of giving;
5. Values: aspiring ideals;
6. Efficacy: aspiring influence.

Two are altruistic:

1. Awareness of need: knowing about opportunities to give;
2. Altruism: concern for others.

Now take a moment to think about what may be stronger and what will be weaker influences on giving. What do you think moves people to give? I will return to this in a moment.

Before we get there, I would like to invite you to think about the circumstances that determine your own giving. Think about the last time you made a gift and think about the mechanisms. Try to be honest when you go over each of these motives. Were you asked to give? If so, would you have given if you had not been asked? Have you been promised any perks in return for your gift? Did someone see you give and how much you gave? Would you have given the same, or at all, if your gift had been completely anonymous? In what way were you thinking about yourself when you made the gift? Did it make you feel good? Would you have given if it had made you feel bad? Or did you give in order to avoid feeling bad about yourself? Did the gift align with your values, the things you care about most deeply? And did you study the proposed project that your gift supports? Was that project really the most effective solution to the problem at hand?

We are probably all donors here. As donors, we may think very differently about the things that influence our own giving behavior of others than we said would be influencing the giving behavior of others. However, these predictions about the motives for giving by others - or by oneself - are probably not very accurate as a description of what drives actual giving. This is what I would like to find out comparing survey responses to questions about the strength of influence of each of the eight mechanisms. We will evaluate beliefs about the giving behavior of others, self-reported motivations for one's own giving behavior, and their associations with self-reported and actual giving behavior.

We may be more accurate in our predictions when we are paid for performance, and perhaps even more so when the payment benefits charity. Even when predictions about motivations for the giving behavior of others are not very accurate, they are interesting for other reasons. I think they do reveal what we think about human nature and our personal morality. When we compare the predictions in our own rankings to the value people attach to virtues we obtain fascinating evidence.

Back to what motivates people to give. Do people give for altruistic or egoistic reasons? This is the opposition and the core question that motivate so much of our work. It is a heated debate with on the one hand people who believe in the human potential for altruism and on the other hand skeptics who see ulterior motives in everything. To a large extent we are dealing with a semantic and a methodological discussion here. It is semantic when altruism is defined negatively as everything that does not serve some self-interest, material, social, psychological or even symbolic. If we follow this path no good deed can ever be purely altruistic. There is always some potential self-benefit of a gift consciously made.

Even if we define altruism as voluntary action *for* the public good with an intentional “*for*”, meaning that it is *motivated by* the well-being of others, it is very difficult to prove giving is motivated by altruism. Acts of giving motivated by concern for others may also serve other purposes, such as improving the reputation of the donor or producing psychological benefits. The ‘warm glow’ may even come from knowing that the recipient of one’s gift is better off. The methodological discussion is how we can establish that a gift was made out of concern for the well-being of the recipient. Both economists and psychologists have designed experiments to do so (Ottoni-Wilhelm, 2017).

Economists have approached this question from a rational behavioral perspective. If the donor only cares about the recipient being better off, she should be indifferent to who makes the recipient better off, they argue. So any one’s gift is as good as the donor’s gift, and if others give more, the donor should reduce her gifts if she only cares about the well-being of the recipient.

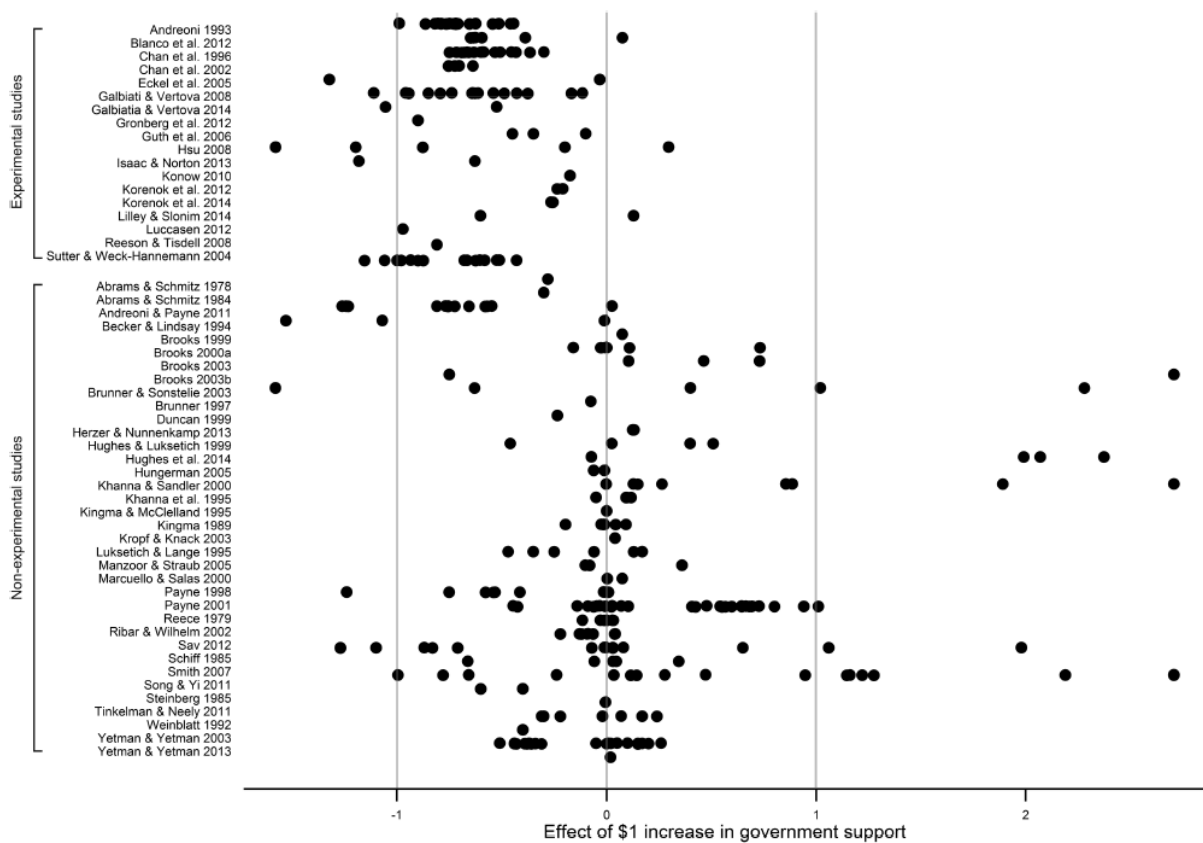
In the typical experiment, researchers draw students to the lab promising them they will earn \$5 for participating in an experiment. Then the students are split in two groups. Students in the control group are given an endowment of tokens which they can invest in a public good. In the treatment group, the experimenters simulate a tax by having students invest at least a minimum amount in the public good. As you would expect, the students in the treatment group contribute less than the students in the control group. But they do not give as much less as you would expect them to, if the tax were equally valuable to them as a voluntary contribution. To the economists who have conducted these experiments, the behavior of the students proves that they get some personal benefit out of giving. Otherwise they would have given exactly the amount of the tax less.

This is a very peculiar approach that makes all kinds of assumptions that are not often satisfied in practice. One difference between the experiments and the situation for donors in real life is that donations to charities are not contributions to public goods. For the public

good, a certain amount of tokens is needed, while in reality the need for contributions to charity is almost infinite. Poverty and injustice are not eliminated by a single contribution to Oxfam. Crowdfunding projects are more similar to public goods, by the way, because they require a specific amount for a finite need. Another difference is that participants in the experiments play with a windfall gain rather than earned money, which increases prosocial behavior in some experiments (Cherry, Frykblom & Shogren, 2002; Bekkers, 2015) but not in others (Thielmann, Heck & Hilbig, 2016). Finally, a difference between the economic experiments and real life giving situations is the population studied. Students may give more than other, more representative samples of the population, and react differently to taxes.

While we do not know exactly which of the characteristics of laboratory experiments make them different from real life situations – and there are many other differences than I mentioned (Levitt & List, 2007), their results are very different. Figure 15 shows this.

Figure 15. Estimates of crowding-out in previous research (source: De Wit & Bekkers, 2017)



The upper part of the figure displays the results of laboratory experiments, the bottom part displays the results of other designs, including analyses of survey and archival data. Each dot in the figure is an estimate of the ‘crowding-out’ effect, which should be -1 if donors are pure altruists. You see that the estimates in lab experiments are more negative than the results of other designs, but rarely in the range of -1. The average for experiments is -.64, for the other designs it is close to zero (.06). This result shows that on average, donors in real life situations do not respond much to changes in government contributions. Even if you take the



methodology used in economic laboratory experiments as a valid test of altruism, they suggest that altruism is ‘impure’.

These results are consistent with the evidence from previous research on philanthropy (Bekkers & Wiepking 2011b), which suggests that the mechanisms that have the strongest effects on charitable giving are egoistic. Precisely the two mechanisms that constitute altruistic motivation – awareness of need and concern for others – have rather weak effects on charitable giving in experiments. That doesn’t mean that altruism can never motivate philanthropy. Mark Ottoni-Wilhelm and colleagues (Ottoni-Wilhelm, Vesterlund & Xie, 2017) have shown that it is possible to create conditions in which students make gifts as the theory predicts altruistic donors would do. In line with the economic approach, they designed a very clever experiment. But the conditions in the experiment they conducted are just very uncommon in real life situations. When are people ever given \$50 to allocate to a single recipient of a charity or to themselves, along with information about the contributions of others to the same recipients? The approach to test theories about altruism in psychology is also peculiar, in a different way. It has not been used in research on charitable giving. I look forward to working with Mark and others to study theories on altruism in philanthropy in more realistic conditions and among more representative samples.

For fundraisers, the question I would like you to think about today is not: “How can I use these eight mechanisms in my business to attract more donations?” Sure, the eight mechanisms help you improve the effectiveness and efficiency of your fundraising. Popular science books (e.g. Mahmoud & Ross, 2018) and research summaries (Delargy & Sanders, 2018) help you translate the mechanisms into tricks that you can use in your fundraising campaigns.

On the side, I note that you should be careful to take the findings of previous research as ready-made recipes for success. When we reviewed the literature on philanthropy ten years ago (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2011b), we did not pay attention to the quality of previous research. We let readers form their own opinion about the value of the experiments we summarized. In retrospect, I think we have been too lenient. Knowing what we know now about the low level of reproducibility of experimental research in psychology (Open Science Collaboration, 2015), we should be more cautious in presenting results of previous research. The fact that a study was published does not mean it is true. It is a piece of evidence in a larger puzzle. So in the ‘10 years on’ update on the literature review we will be assessing the quality of the research design and scrutinize reported results for signs of tinkering. We are learning that published recipes often do not work out so well when other cooks try to replicate them.

Another side note is that even when the recipes are as good as promised and any cook can produce nice results with them, they may very well be part of a zero-sum game. Your win today may be another charity’s loss tomorrow – hence the stubborn 2%. It is difficult to evaluate the claim that a certain manipulation of donors increases the size of the pie. The trick may merely have shifted giving from one charity to the other, or from the future to the present. The evidence is accumulating that at least some of the manipulations can increase the size of the pie. This seems to be the case for tax

subsidies in the form of matches (Hungerman & Ottoni-Wilhelm, 2016), social information (Scharf, Smith & Ottoni-Wilhelm, 2017); and having a corporation or major donor sponsor fundraising costs (Gneezy, Keenan & Gneezy, 2014; see also Delargy & Sanders, 2018).

But that is not the issue I'd like to raise today. My question to you is: how does the way you raise funds affect the motivation of donors? You may find a trick that works, but how does it change donors in the long run? For instance, if you start covering fundraising costs by corporate sponsorships, which some experiments demonstrate to be a very effective way to entice donors to give more (Gneezy, Keenan & Gneezy, 2014), donors will expect you to have zero fundraising costs in the future. This is not a viable strategy in the long run.

Likewise, if you manipulate donors into giving by presenting the sad case of one particular child, rather than statistical evidence about the needs of a large group of people in need, donors may start giving at higher rates (Small & Loewenstein, 2003; Ritov & Kogut, 2017; but see Lesner & Rasmussen (2014) for a less positive result). Remember how empathic concern works: we identify more easily with the needs of one person than with the needs of a collective. "A single death is a tragedy, a million deaths is a statistic", Stalin allegedly said. The work of charities would be impossibly complex if each donation can only benefit one victim.

Does giving to your organization bring the benefits that donors expect? And are these the benefits that you actually want to give to donors? Particularly, I would like you to think about the values that you communicate. How do gifts contribute to the realization of a world more equal, fair, tolerant, loving, healthy, and sustainable?

There is virtually no research that has tested to what extent appeals to values and principles motivate charitable giving. Ten years ago, there was only correlational evidence on the relationship between values and philanthropy: in our literature review, we had found no experiments that manipulated values and hence affected giving (Bekkers & Wiepking, 2011b: p. 941). In recent years, a few experiments have been conducted seeking to strengthen prosocial values, for instance through subliminal priming (Andersson et al., 2017), visual images (Bekkers, Verkaik & Ottoni-Wilhelm, 2015), and verbal reminders (Bal Bó & Dal Bó, 2014; Brañas-Garza, 2007; Capraro et al., 2018). While some of these studies have been able to alter prosocial behavior, the effects have generally been weak or even absent, and none of these studies have demonstrated substantial effects on prosocial values. Because the decline in generosity by households seems related to the decline in prosocial values (Bekkers, De Wit & Felix, 2017) it also seems important to ask how prosocial values can be influenced. Even a small increase in prosocial values could have a long-lasting effect on generosity.

As a philanthropist, ask yourself first which values and virtues you would like to express in your giving. Next you could ask whether you are in fact doing so. Are you more boastful than modest? More audacious than risk-averse? More reactive than proactive? More often acting out of habit than out of strategy? Are you giving mostly based on convenience or on values?

### ***What does philanthropy tells us about human virtues?***

In addition to love and hope for mankind, and in addition to altruism and egoism, our patterns and acts of giving reveal many other values. Philanthropy is interesting because it tells us how good, hypocritical, trusting, suspicious, gullible, audacious, risk-averse, seizing excuses, driven by guilt, loyalty, and hope or fear we are.

In Christianity, charity is one of the seven virtues. Engagement in charity should protect one against temptation from its corresponding sin, greed. Yet it seems that precisely greed enables or encourages people to become wealthy, which enables them to give. But that does not mean that the rich are more generous. In contrast: the opposite is true. If we use the proportion of income of wealth that people donate as a yardstick for generosity, we find that the more wealthy people are, the less they give. The same is true if we look at income (Bekkers, De Wit & Wiepking, 2017).

Let's think about the source of wealth. It is somewhat strange to think about virtues only *after* people have become wealthy. The truly virtuous business man is one who becomes rich not by enslavement, tricks and robbery, but by responsible investments that enrich society. The value of philanthropy should also be discounted in some or other way by the damage that was done to make it happen. I remember very well that I was visiting Duke University in 2005. I was amazed by the philanthropy that funded it. But then I realized that the foundation of the campus was built on wealth earned with selling lung cancer to millions of people. The love of mankind should not only be evident in our spending decisions, but also in our investment decisions.

We look upon the wealthy with extra criticism when the source of their wealth is a destructive industry and they do not seem to care. If they decide to engage in philanthropy it better be good for the world, and not for private benefit. Hence the criticism that Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg met when launching the Chan-Zuckerberg Initiative. If there is a hint of self-interest we are extra suspicious. And programs that enhance dependability on the internet through the channel of Facebook or encourage patients to share data online are more than just a hint of self-interest. This also goes for the investment portfolios of public benefit organizations. For a philanthropist, the higher return on investment for 'traditional' portfolios should not be the default choice (Starita & Ogden, 2017). Similarly, investors that rely on public benefit status for their foundations should not avoid taxes.

### ***What virtues could we demonstrate in giving?***

In what way should we give? This is not an empirical but a moral question, for which I would like to call into the room a twelfth century rabbi from Spain, by the name of Maimonides, also known as Rambam. The text for which he is known in the field of philanthropic studies, known as 'Rambam's ladder', presents a brief lesson on giving. It is reprinted in the marvelous collection of essays that Michael Moody and Beth Breeze (2016) compiled in the *Philanthropy Reader*. I wrote about the ladder of Maimonides in my contribution "Why a Foundation?" to a volume in Dutch (Bekkers, 2016c). The current text is based on the thoughts expressed there.

The eight rungs of Rambam's ladder reflect moral stages in our giving.

Table 1. Rambam's Ladder of Charity

8. Give a gift loan or enter into a business partnership with the poor.
7. Give anonymously to an unknown recipient.
6. Giving anonymously to someone you know.
5. Giving publicly to an unknown recipient.
4. Giving before you are asked.
3. Giving after you are asked
2. Giving willingly, but inadequately.
1. Giving out of pity.

The lowest rung is giving to alleviate personal distress. Seeing people in need, you may give to make yourself feel better. This is a reluctant gift. The circumstances forced you to. Second comes giving too little. Third and a bit better but still much less than perfect is giving because you are asked to do so. The fourth is giving without embarrassing the recipient. Fifth is giving publicly to a stranger. This is less worthy than giving at the sixth rung, giving in silence, even if you give to a person you know. It is better to give in silence to a stranger. But the highest form of giving, at the eighth rung, is the giving that reduces the need for gifts: to promote self-reliance of the recipient.

Just to be clear: I did not present the ladder here to tell you how you should give. For any classical text it is good to be aware of the context in which it was created. In this case we are talking about a society in which there was no welfare state, and charity was very much necessary for the survival of many people in society, and directly based on social relationships and religious practice. In the Netherlands this is no longer the case.

So why am I bothering you with these religious teachings and all these normative ideas? It is not very common for empirical researchers like myself to discuss values and principles. And I confess that also for me it has been quite a leap, raised in a Popperian tradition of theory based hypothesis testing and piecemeal social engineering. The reason is that the ladder gives us a few principles to think about when we make decisions about the way we give. Thinking about these principles can make philanthropy more meaningful, a phrase I borrowed from Pamala Wiepking. We see three general principles at work in this ladder.

1. *Action*. The first principle is action. If you let your giving determine by the circumstances, by requests, or by the approval of others, you are a passive donor. I guess most of the time most of us are passive donors. In the Netherlands, we found that 85% of all gifts were made in response to requests (Bekkers, 2005).
2. *Respect*. The second principle is respect. If you embarrass the recipients of your gifts by exposing them as needy and keeping them in a position of dependence, you do not respect them.
3. *Anonymity*. The third principle is anonymity. Gifts are more worthy if others do not know about them. This principle is related to sacrifice.

These three general principles are the virtues underlying the ladder of charity.

Now I move on to the six other virtues in Christian theology, famously illustrated by the painting of Jheronimus Bosch, the most well-known citizen of the city of 's-Hertogenbosch (see Figure 16). I will not be telling you that you need to strive for these virtues, but I will suggest a question you could ask yourself as a foundation executive or philanthropist.

*Chastity or purity*, in contrast to lust. The work of philanthropy, by virtue of its being inspired by noble motives, receives special attention from the public for its image of being spotless and clean. Signs of impurity are extra damaging to charities and foundations. When nonprofits do not walk the talk, they suffer more severe consequences than for-profits (Greitemeyer & Sagioglou, 2018). The question you could ask yourself: *Are we doing enough to prevent abuse?*

Figure 16. *The Seven Deadly Sins and the Four Last Things*



*Temperance, restraint, or moderation*, in contrast to gluttony. This virtue is characteristic of many foundations. There is no spending requirement for foundations in the Netherlands. Combined with the lack of public data on foundations we don't know how much foundations

are actually spending on an annual basis. Most people do not set a giving target, such as the biblical tithe (10%) or the zakat (2.5%) in Islam. When we asked a sample of millionaires what they found an appropriate percentage, almost all mentioned a percentage of income that was higher than their actual gift level (Bekkers, 2013b, p.217). The question you could ask yourself: *Am I giving enough?*

*Diligence, industriousness, persistence*, in contrast to sloth. As the highest rung of Rambam's ladder reminds us: if a charitable mission is achieved, charity is no longer needed. So the questions that you could ask are: *Are my gifts working hard enough to solve the problem? Am I persistent enough? Are we actually having an impact and is it large enough?*

*Patience, or tolerating provocation*, in contrast to wrath. Attempts to solve social problems like poverty, injustice, and corruption and fights for human rights, animal rights, or sustainability benefit from patience. Social change is hard, wicked problems are complex, and the influence a single donation, program or foundation has in achieving mission is small. The question that you could ask is: *What is a realistic horizon for change?*

*Kindness* as an antidote to envy. Acts of kindness are intrinsically rewarding. People feel better about giving than about keeping, and they feel better about doing things for others than doing things for themselves. At the same time, we know that envy can very well motivate giving. The question you could ask is: *Is my giving motivated by kindness or envy?*

*Humility* against pride. We already saw the virtue of anonymity in Rambam's ladder: gifts should not be made with pride in public. Matthew 6:3 urges that the left hand should not know what the right hand is doing. However, like we just saw for envy, pride can be a very powerful motivation for giving. Why are the churches in Zeeland so large? Because of envy for the neighboring village and pride on one's own community. So there seems to be some usefulness in pride on one's achievements, and advertising them. *Is my giving motivated by humility or pride?*

In addition to the Christian virtues, there are two other virtues I would like to discuss: risk-taking and trust. Trust is a virtue, but gullibility is not (Yamagishi, Kikuchi & Kosugi, 1999; Yamagishi, 2001). Then again, asking for and measuring impact can also go too far.

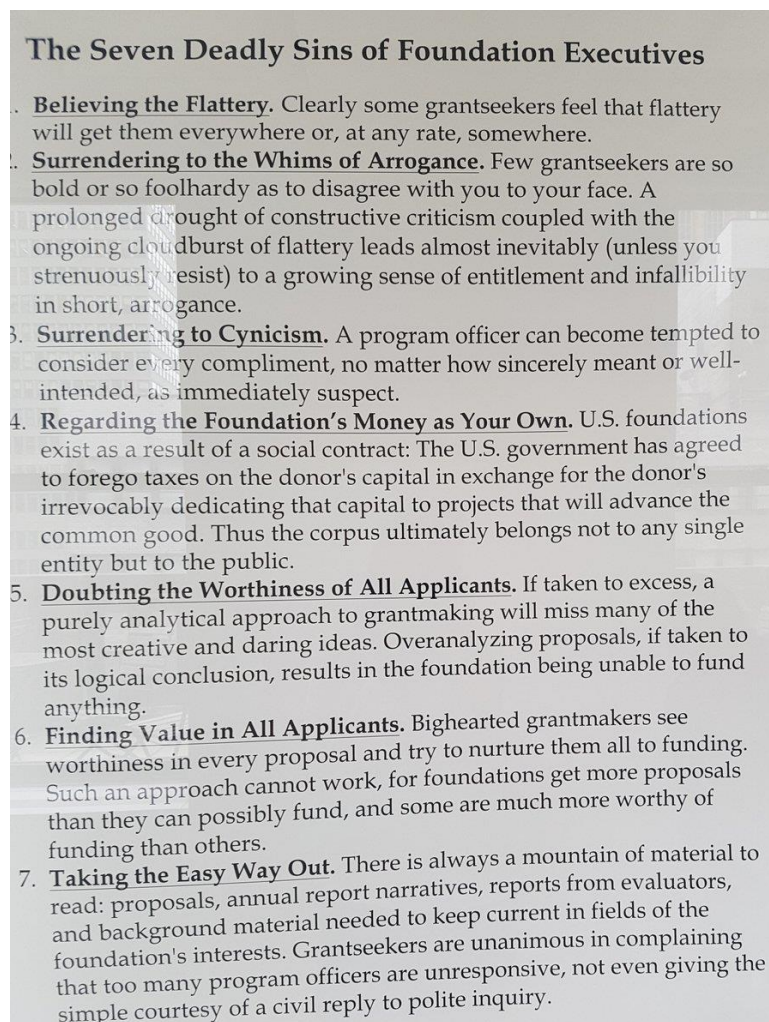
Industriously measuring the impact of our giving will backfire into safe-betting on low risk, low gain interventions. I have no data to prove this, but my intuition tells me that some foundations are too risk-averse. How are we ever going to discover new and effective interventions if there is no risk capital to try and test new radical ideas? I do not plead that charities should start betting in the postcode lottery with donated funds, but a little more adventurous programs could actually help them attract new generations of donors.

Further on the side: requiring demonstrated impact is not only a sign of commitment to effective philanthropy, but may also indicate risk-aversion and distrust, lead to mission drift and avoidance of funding 'difficult' projects and beneficiaries. It fits right into the SMART New Public Management style that we are sick of here at the

university. Asking professionals to demonstrate the impact of what they are doing by having them fill out forms and count numbers of successes lowers their autonomy and creativity. Checklist management is what kills the joy of our work, not just in academia but in all organizations. So if you are all about impact measurement I would politely ask that you ask yourself: is it efficient to ask the efficiency question?

The 'seven deadly sins of foundation executives' posted at the Ford Foundation (Irfan, 2018; see Figure 17) are a nice set of warnings that remind philanthropy professionals of excessive levels of virtues. For instance, patience is good, but too much patience means change is too little and too slow. Kindness is good, but not all causes are equally worthy and not all programs are equally effective.

Figure 17. *The Seven Deadly Sins of Foundation Executives*



## C: CONSEQUENCES

### *The value of philanthropy for society*

Now I am moving over to the C-column of the philanthropy matrix, the consequences of giving. Whatever the moral qualities of the act of giving for the giver may be, the value of the gift cannot be evaluated without thinking about its consequences. For some, this is where the real value of philanthropy is evident, in its effects on society. The consequences of giving are often tied to the word 'impact'.

The impact of philanthropy is typically evaluated at the level of programs. Foundations want to know whether the programs they support have the desired effects. Fundraising organizations want to demonstrate the impact of their programs because this may convince donors to give higher amounts (Verkaik, 2016). For donors, knowing that their gifts had more impact may enhance the pleasure of giving (Aknin et al., 2013).

We are only at the start of the science of program design. This is a very complex science, with many different actors and conditions all having an influence on the effectiveness of programs.

It is our job as academics to uncover how program initiators, funders, regulators, administrators and field workers affect the impact of programs, and which conditions are crucial. We have not come very far in this respect. In my view, this is because we have not invested in the science of program evaluation. This science cannot be monodisciplinary. It is not just multidisciplinary, it is transdisciplinary: it involves cooperation with societal stakeholders.

I won't have much time to go into the plans of the new research master program of the Faculty of Social Sciences I will be directing, so I will keep it brief. It is clear that the power of big data will revolutionize society as a whole, including the work of nonprofits. I look forward to working with nonprofits in leveraging the potential of big data, not only as a tool to measure the impact of their work, but also as a way to enhance that impact.

Randomized Control Trials (RCTs) provide a gold standard for the evaluation of the effects of interventions, especially if embedded in field settings. Much has been said already about the limitations of RCTs (Deaton & Cartwright, 2018). To these thoughts I would like to add that a collection of successful RCTs does not constitute an effective program. These interventions have to be calibrated and coordinated. The intervention is in many ways the wrong level of analysis. If we only evaluate the impact of interventions, we ignore intertemporal substitution and displacement effects. Intertemporal substitution occurs when the success of one intervention within a certain period of time comes at the expense of another program. And the reduction of undesirable outcomes within a certain geographic area of one intervention may lead to an increase in undesirable outcomes within another neighboring area. In addition, interventions may have unanticipated effects that were not considered relevant or even



possible when the evaluation was designed. In other words, we need a more holistic perspective on impact.

In the context of declining levels of giving by households, which we see in the Netherlands (Bekkers, De Wit & Felix, 2018) as well as in the US (Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, 2017), we need a science of philanthropy more than ever. It will be very difficult to reverse the trend. Then it is even more important to know how we can philanthropy more effective. The wellbeing of citizens and society as a whole depends on it.

One of the virtues in program evaluation is attention to unanticipated effects, especially to negative consequences. At the ISTR conference in Stockholm two years ago, Stan Katz urged us to speak truth to power (Katz, 2016). Here in the Netherlands we have great freedom for investigative journalists. They follow philanthropy quite critically. We are nowhere near US levels of influence of philanthropists and foundations on public policy. And unlike the US, the influence of philanthropy is not tied to big tech corporations but to family foundations. Yet the influence seems to be growing. And the Netherlands has the best conditions in the world for foundations, according to the Index for Philanthropic Freedom (Adelman, Barnett & Russell, 2015) and its successor, the Global Philanthropy Environment Index (Garcia, Osili & Kou, 2017). This freedom attracts business like the IKEA foundation, which I bet few of you knew is the biggest foundation in the Netherlands. In the coming years, it will be important to study the relationship between foundations, corporations, and government.

### ***Does philanthropy make people happy?***

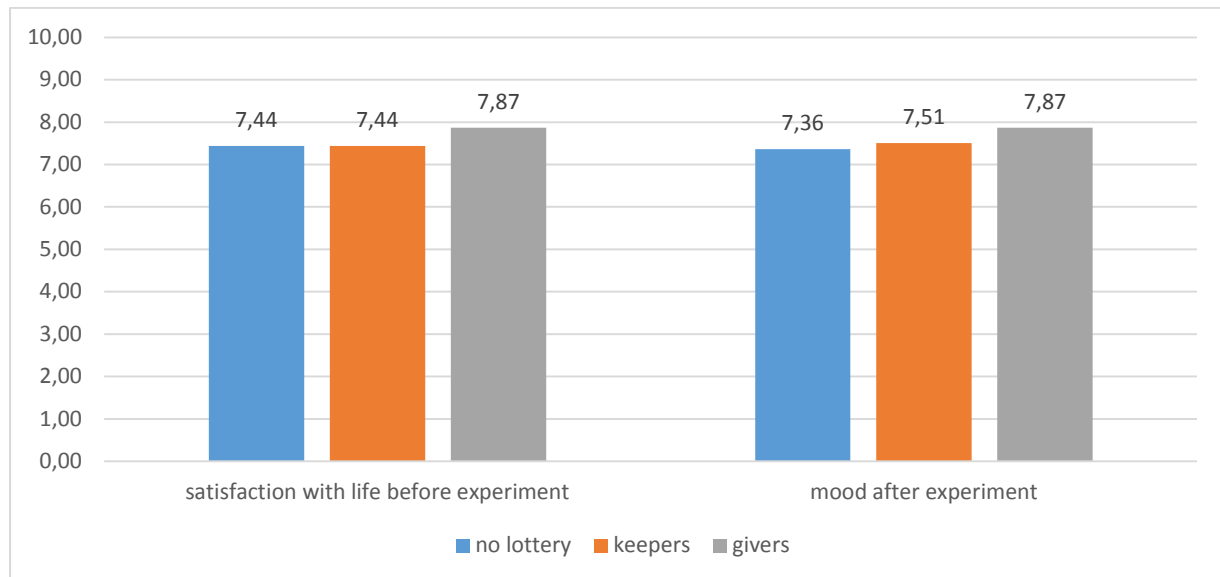
The consequences of philanthropy are visible not only at the individual level of citizens who are targeted in certain interventions, but can also be studied among philanthropists. Previous research shows that subjective wellbeing is positively associated with prosocial spending (Aknin et al., 2013): happier people are more likely to give to charity. A famous experiment showed that spending money on someone else brought more happiness to the participants than spending money on themselves (Dunn, Aknin & Norton, 2008). In previous research we have examined the impact of volunteering on work, social networks, health, and well-being (De Wit, Bekkers, Karamat Ali & Verkaik, 2015).

But what about charitable giving? Does giving to charity actually make us happy? How large is the warm glow of giving? These questions originate in the 'impure altruism' model of philanthropy. We sought to answer them in the experiment I mentioned earlier with the €100 prize lottery. Figure 18 displays the results.

First of all, we found that telling people they could win a €100 prize increased their happiness, measured with the question 'how are you feeling right now?' on a scale from 0 ('very bad') to 10 ('excellent'). Second, we found that those who chose to donate at least half of the €100 to a charity of their choice ('donors') were happier after the experiment than those who chose not to give ('non-donors'). Third, we found that this was entirely the result of pre-existing differences between donors and non-donors. We know this because we had the participants report the satisfaction with their lives in the survey, again on a 0-10 scale. We found that the donors in the experiment (those who chose to give away at least half of the prize money) were

already more satisfied with their lives than the keepers (who chose not to give). The givers gave their lives a 7,9 on average, the keepers a 7.4. The act of giving had no impact at all on their mood after the experiment. The givers still had a 7.9. This is the most important result of the experiment. Giving made the participants *not* more happy than they already were.

Figure 18. Satisfaction with life and mood after lottery prize experiment



So neither the shrink nor the patient in the cartoon are right. Giving did not make our participants happier, nor did the non-giving patient become less happy.



There are many possible reasons why the experiment did not show an effect of giving on the mood of participants. It could be a ceiling effect, the participants were already in a relatively good mood and there was not much room for further improvement. It could also be a result of playing with other people's money. We gave the participants a chance of winning €100, but that was not really their own money. It may be that the warm glow only occurs if you are giving out of your own pocket. But I would think: what more fun there is to be able give someone else's money to a charity of your choice. Finally, you may ask why we don't find a positive effect of charitable giving on mood while previous research showed a positive effect of

prosocial spending on happiness. Perhaps spending money on a specific other person is what brings about the warm glow, and not so much a gift to a charitable cause.

The most exciting possibility remains that charitable giving is simply not improving your mood, and the warm glow model is not correct. It certainly seems that way.

I look forward to testing these possibilities in future research. This is joint work with Ashley Whillans, Mike Norton, and Paul Smeets, from Harvard Business School and Maastricht University, respectively a psychologist, a professor of marketing, and an economist.

In addition to multi- and interdisciplinarity, a second characteristic of good research on philanthropy I would like to advocate today is rigor. A skeptical view of research presented as evidence is required if we want philanthropy to truly make a difference. A good philanthropist should not adopt a charitable view on the evidence. Instead, we should evaluate harshly. This avoids false positives, accepting something as true when in reality it is not. The result I have just shown you is another ‘null-finding’, a result that is less positive than you may expect. This is not common practice. We tend to accept findings that suggest our interventions work, even when maybe they don’t. If the evidence is positive in the most rigorous test you can think of, it is much less likely to be a false positive. As Tesselonians 5:22 reads: “Do not treat prophecies with contempt but test them all; hold on to what is good, reject every kind of evil.” Philanthropy should go out and try new things. It should weed out the bad and keep the good.

Now you may not like what you find if you are really trying to be a star in evaluation. You will probably conclude that most of the evidence you thought or others said was supporting an intervention is actually not good enough to be certain of it. In most cases you will find that if you do a better designed evaluation, the evidence will become less supporting. Rossi (1987) called this the “Stainless Steel Law of Evaluation”: “The better designed the impact assessment of a social program, the more likely is the resulting estimate of net impact to be zero.”

It is with this caveat in mind that I look forward to examining the impact of ‘A Broader Mind’, a program designed and implemented here at VU Amsterdam. I am proud to be working on this program with Govert Buijs, Marjolein Zweekhorst, and many others. We will invite students to engage in all kinds of prosocial activities, either as volunteers, as participants in extracurricular activities, or as students in Community Service Learning activities as part of their curriculum.

With ‘A Broader Mind’, VU is taking a risk. And the foundations that support this program also take a risk. It is by no means certain that the program will indeed foster the civic, social, and professional development of students.

We may very well find that across the board students do not become more civic-minded, that they do not improve their social skills, that their performance in other courses is not affected, or that their awareness of labor market opportunities is not improved. May I remind you that the recent evaluation (Stecher et al., 2018) of the Improving Teaching Effectiveness program, funded by the Gates Foundation with almost \$600 million, concluded that “the initiative did not achieve its goals”?

Of course we are trying to develop the program in such a way that it does. But social science is much harder than rocket science. We have more than just gravity and mass to deal with. There are many more variables in the equation that influence the development of students beyond the energy that we put in the rocket and the course that we planned for their journeys. We are very glad to be able to monitor the program in a scientific manner.

Even when we find no civic, social, student or professional development, we may discover differences across subgroups of students and varieties of assignments. This knowledge will help VU to fine-tune the introduction of CSL into the curriculum. In the extreme case where we find no meaningful effects at all, not even among specific subgroups of students or variants of the program, we can help other universities avoid investing in things that don't work.

On the side, I note that the standards we impose on the evaluation of social interventions are way beyond anything ever used in industry or politics. Compare the policy making process in government with interventions planned by development agencies. In a four year cycle, politicians agree on an agenda without evidence, have civil servants implement a policy, and – if we are lucky – an evaluation study is commissioned. Pay attention to who the evaluators are. We are not in the business of policy based evidence making.

In addition to what the facts are, there is the question of how we weigh them. What evidence counts on the scales of truth? There are technical questions, such as how we should calibrate our scales. But in weighing the evidence, there are more than just program objectives and outcomes. The goals that these outcomes serve reflect a mission, a set of ultimate objectives. Here the virtues I spoke about earlier come back in. If you are a foundation executive, a philanthropist or a program administrator, it will not hurt to take a moment to reflect on the virtues of your work.

Figure 19. Policy based evidence making



Slowly, a change of thinking is taking place, altering the criteria by which we evaluate human progress. Economic growth is no longer our holy grail. We talk about social progress now (Porter, Stern & Green, 2017), and measure how we are doing with respect to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs; Statistics Netherlands, 2018). These indices go beyond GDP and reflect broader notions of wellbeing. They are macro-indicators. It will take years, or perhaps decades even, to determine the impact of philanthropy on the progress in meeting these SDGs.

In the meantime, it seems a good start to evaluate the impact of philanthropy in terms of its effects on the well-being of citizens. What is the effect of the presence of more philanthropic actors and investments on the well-being of citizens? Do citizens in areas in which philanthropic activity increases become happier? Does it matter whether philanthropy takes over work that used to be government-funded, or self-initiates programs? In the next decade, it will become possible to answer these questions.

Using the well-being of citizens as a criterion is limited because hedonic happiness is not the only goal in life. The impact of nonprofit organizations may very well be in social innovation, which could take years to improve the lives of citizens. On the other hand, well-being is a broad enough criterion to capture not only the anticipated program effects, but also the unanticipated side-effects of philanthropy. So at the micro-level, charities and foundations should ask themselves: are we actually improving the lives of those we try to serve?

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To all readers: I invite you to get in touch about values of philanthropy through [r.bekkers@vu.nl](mailto:r.bekkers@vu.nl).

For more information see <https://renebekkers.wordpress.com/inaugural-lecture/>

or scan this code:



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