

The Philanthropy/Civil Society Paradox¹

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The principle of the republics of antiquity was to sacrifice private interests to the general good. In that sense one could say that they were *virtuous*. The principle of this one seems to be to make private interests harmonize with the general interest. A sort of refined and intelligent selfishness seems to be the pivot on which the whole machine turns. These people here do not trouble themselves to find out whether public virtue is good, but they do claim to prove that it is useful. If this latter point is true, as I think it is in part, this society can pass as enlightened but not virtuous. But up to what extent can the two principles of individual well-being and the general good in fact be merged? How far can a conscience, which one might say was based on reflection and calculation, master those political passions which are not yet born, but which certainly will be born? This is something which only the future will show.

Alexis de Tocqueville, Sing-Sing, 1831

In recent years, “civil society” has gained widespread appeal. Fareed Zakaria tells us that, “in the world of ideas, civil society is hot. It is almost impossible to read an article on foreign or domestic politics without coming across some mention of the concept.”² As with many such terms, however, much of its popularity is based on an elusiveness of meaning. Michael Walzer’s useful distinction between thick and thin descriptions applies well here: “Civil society”--like Walzer’s “justice,” “liberty,” and “truth”-- tends to be a thin description in its common use, i.e., one that operates at such a level of generality that it embraces multiple meanings while simultaneously conveying minimal content.³

¹ This essay is a substantially revised version of a paper published earlier under the title of: “Can Philanthropy Solve the Problems of Civil Society?” (Indiana University Center on Philanthropy, 1995).

² Fareed Zakaria, “Bigger than the Family and Smaller than the State: Are Voluntary Groups What Makes Countries Work?” in *New York Times Book Review*, August 13, 1995, p. 1.

³ Michael Walzer, *Thick and Thin: Moral Argument at Home and Abroad* (University of Notre Dame Press, 1994)

My purposes here are therefore threefold: first, to try to “thicken” the term civil society a bit by sketching its historical roots and conceptual structure, including the important part played by philanthropy in its evolution; second, based on this analysis, to describe a fundamental challenge to contemporary civil society—specifically the widening fault-line between its pluralistic and communal components; and third, to discuss philanthropy’s difficult task in addressing this challenge.

The Structure of Civil Society

As I have been recently working on a book on philanthropy and civil society—viewed from the perspective of political theory --I have been increasingly drawn into examination of the historical origins of civil society. Although the roots of civil society are ancient, it turns out that there was a highly dynamic period of development in the history of ideas in Europe—roughly in the 16th and 17th centuries—when seven elements (my argument seeks to make the case that they are the seven *essential* elements) converged in a small but remarkably robust country, the Dutch Republic, into what turned out to be the earliest modern expression of civil society. Four of these elements are institutional—structures representing the rule of law, independent voluntary associations, free expression, and organized philanthropy; and three are normative—societal value commitments to individual rights, toleration, and the common good.

One need only mention Grotius, Descartes, Spinoza, Bayle, Locke, and Mandeville to gain a sense of the intensity and excitement in the development of the new ideas that were transforming Europe in this period, an era that increasingly champions individual rights, toleration, and a new grounding of the law. It is also the time of an explosion of printing, private associations, new forms of philanthropy, and the spread of republican ideas about achieving common purposes through decentralized power structures. Of course, these transformative developments were not confined to the Dutch Republic, but

the Republic did serve as a kind of intellectual incubator for the emergence of what we have come to know as modern civil society.

It is important to note that the birth of civil society occurred at the same time that a new political force, the absolutist state, was becoming dominant throughout Europe. Indeed, many writers describe the rise of civil society as a response to absolutism. Civil society, as a defense of the newly emergent individual against the increasingly powerful state (and state-controlled church), placed new emphasis on individual rights, toleration of dissenting beliefs, free expression, and the proliferating private associations and philanthropies. Accompanying these developments was a new conception of *community*: Community was now seen as constituted through a social contract among separate self-seeking individuals who collectively pursue common ends within a system regulated by law.

Bernard de Mandeville's articulation of this new understanding of society expressed the widely accepted view: "the Execution of [laws] is facilitated by general Approbation, [so that] Multitudes may be kept in tolerable Concord among themselves."⁴ Although Mandeville's stark portrayal of the social order had many critics, both he and they shared a common view of society as composed of individuals who were in eternal competition for property, power, and recognition. For those striving to comprehend the new social forces of the era, the overriding challenge was to discover that nature of the social glue that held this fissiparous world together. Their answers were various, and the topic has remained a conundrum through the subsequent three centuries of development of civil society theory.

While it would take many more pages to describe this historical evolution (you have to

⁴ Bernard de Mandeville, *The Fable of the Bees: Or, Private Vices, Publick Benefits*, in the edition edited by F.B. Kaye (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1924), Vol. II, p. 300.

read the book), I will just state the conclusions of the argument here: that this emergent civil society, with its emphasis on individual rights, rule of law, pluralism, tolerance among diverse belief systems, and commitment to the commonweal, provided a platform for the evolution of liberal democracy. Inherent in the scheme was a delicate balance of public and private power—an eternally unresolved tension between the public and private poles of life. Without the institutions and norms of civil society, and its underlying polarity, there would be no democracy as we know it.⁵

If one examines the diverse views of contemporary civil society theorists through the framework of this historical overview, common patterns begin to emerge. The analytical perspectives of writers as varied as Ralf Dahrendorf, Adam Seligman, Charles Taylor, Ernest Gellner, Edward Shils, Michael Walzer, Bob Edwards, Lester Salamon, Robert Post, Jean Bethke Elshtain, Brian O’Connell, William Galston, John Keane, Sudipta Kaviraj, Sunil Khilnani, Fareed Zakaria, Kathleen McCarthy, Jean Cohen, and Andrew Arato consistently refer to some subset of the seven characteristics described above in their analyses of the constitution and role of civil society. Collectively, these writers articulate a family of concepts that provide the skeletal framework of civil society.

What does this framework mean for how we understand the forces shaping civil society today? Among other things, it suggests that normative elements are central to civil society’s definition, i.e., that the value commitments to individual rights, pursuit of the common good, and toleration are not incidental, but rather *essential*, to the structure of civil society. If this is true, important implications follow for our understanding of civil society and the contemporary forces acting upon it.

⁵ There is an interesting parallel here (and in fact many cross-cutting influences) in the development of republican and liberal thought over the same time period, the past three centuries. As Richard Dagger convincingly argues, the challenge was to synthesize the tradition of classical republicanism, with its emphasis on civic virtue, with the counterpoised tradition of individual rights that characterized political liberalism. The resulting “republican liberalism” allows a blending of civic commitment and rights that accommodates the polarities of social life. (*Civic Virtues: Right, Citizenship, and Republican Liberalism*, Oxford University Press, 1997). See also David Wootton, ed., *Republicanism, Liberty, and Commercial Society 1649-1776*, Stanford University Press, 1994.

One of the most important consequences, for the purposes of this essay, is that the “lifeworld” (a very descriptive phrase used by the German philosopher Juergen Habermas and others before him) that we inhabit when we are acting in civil society is very different from those of other spheres of social life: the economy or the state. Each of these worlds has its set of goals, expectations, norms, and incentives. In the economic world, we think and act as producers, consumers, and investors; in the political world, we play the roles of voters, lawmakers, and public administrators.

In the world of civil society, we become community members, volunteers, and civic actors. What particularly characterizes this world is pluralism, distinctive social values, and a creative tension between individual interests and the commons. It is the sphere in which privatized visions of the public good play out in interaction with one another to shape the social agenda. Participating in civil society involves the pursuit of a mixture of public and private goals, of social problem-solving and individual expression. A phrase that captures it particularly well, I think, is Bob Payton’s description (referring specifically to philanthropy) of “voluntary action for the public good.”

All of this is to say that participation in civil society represents not just a tool for solving social problems or a set of organizations (although it is those too), but rather *a way of engaging in the world*. This way of engaging carries with it a set of values, interests, behaviors, and even a language. This is why the diverse value commitments, processes, operating styles, and modes of participation of nonprofit organizations are central to their existence and not just incidental to some other over-arching goal to which they are “really” directed.

At the core of my argument, then, lies the unique character of civil society. Civil society

provides an alternative to the ways in which economic and political frameworks structure our world. It is a vital alternative, because it allows for a realm of free socially connected action in the public realm. But it is vulnerable to encroachment by both the state and the market. The success and power of either of those other spheres can begin to overwhelm the rather fragile construction of civil society. Habermas describes this as the “colonization of the life-world.” In western societies today in particular, the forces of marketization place increasing pressure on civil society to respond to social problems in a fragmented bottom-line driven way. This marketization process threatens to impose its own frame of reference, substituting the singular idea of return on investment for the rich pluralism of material, associative, aesthetic, and moral ends of civil society. This tilt toward the private dimension, reinforced by a growing emphasis on rights at the expense of civic obligation, threatens to destabilize civil society’s delicate balance between individualist and communal purposes.

Thus, we can look to elements within western civil society itself—market forces and the powerful individual rights tradition—as the primary source of a familiar institutional gridlock in which it becomes easy to obstruct actions for public purposes but extremely difficult to take positive steps forward to accomplish them.⁶ This gridlock does not result from a weakening of civil society organizations, which remain relatively healthy, but from rather an erosion of a set of beliefs, values, and social commitments—a civic ethos-- necessary for social cohesion. Without society-wide acceptance of the fairness and legitimacy of a legal system, for example, there cannot be willingness to abide by its outcomes; and without confidence in government’s ability to pursue policies on behalf of a common good, there is little inclination to support whatever is not deemed to be in the immediate self-interest of oneself or one’s group.

⁶ It has been frequently observed that opposite forces create another kind of gridlock in totalitarian systems: The absence of independent associational life and respect for individual rights creates eradicates the legitimacy and genuine commitment to the polity that regimes so desperately seek to create.

Tocqueville, with his usual prescience, foresaw exactly this dilemma. How would a society that turns on “a sort of refined and intelligent selfishness,” he wondered, achieve its goal of seeking to “make private interests harmonize with the general interest”?⁷ The difficulty is increased when the vehicle for social problem-solving is, in Tocqueville’s words, “a conscience . . . based on reflection and calculation,” what we might call a rational choice model. If he were alive today, he would certainly not be surprised to see the strains within the structure of civil society and their challenging implications for the health of democracy.

If this analysis is correct, the deterioration of a critical dimension of civil society may have serious consequences for the future of the liberal democratic state. While formal structures of democracy may remain intact, widespread public loss of commitment to the values upon which those structures rest suggests increasing immobility and longer term institutional paralysis. Yet neither the market nor the state has the capacity to address this erosion of civic values because of the constraints of their own. Can philanthropy fill this role?

The Rise of Instrumental Philanthropy

Before we can address this question, it is useful to take a brief look at the evolution of modern philanthropy and where it is today. Growing out of traditions dating from classical and medieval times, the American philanthropic impulse was incorporated into the fabric of the emergent Colonial culture. The American concept of philanthropy arose from the fusion of two historical currents: a strong tradition of religious charity that infused the spiritual life of the colonies and a history of patronage of social advancement that can be traced as far back as the Greek city-state.

⁷ Quoted in Olivier Zunz and Alan Kahan, ed., *The Tocqueville Reader: A Life in Letters and Politics* (Blackwell Publishing, 2002) from Tocqueville’s “American Notebooks,” p. 51.

These traditions of religious charity and social advancement blended in pre-Revolutionary America into a new phenomenon—voluntary giving for positive social purposes as a shared community value. By the time Alexis de Tocqueville visited the newly formed United States, the traditions of charitable giving and informal self-help associations has developed into what he described as a uniquely American mixture of organizational life. He marveled at the American proclivity to group together for common purposes:

Americans of all ages, all conditions, and all dispositions constantly form associations. . . . If it is proposed to inculcate some truth or to foster some feeling by the encouragement of great example, they form a society.⁸

As such associations proliferated, there arose efforts to organize and monitor this sphere of social activity. By the mid-19th century, the pre-Revolutionary charity societies had evolved into state charity commissions, and the social reformers began to direct their philanthropic efforts beyond the relief of the needy to address underlying causes of social problems. Ultimately, the Civil War era ushered in a historically new form of voluntary giving for positive social purposes. Robert Bremner notes:

When charity reformers and civic leaders of the post-Civil War generation spoke of the arrival of a new epoch in philanthropy, they had something more fundamental in mind than the quantity and variety of their countrymen's giving. . . . What they hailed was the development of a more scientific spirit and method in philanthropy. And it was the spread of this scientific approach, bringing reforms in public welfare and private charity, that impressed them as the great humanitarian achievement of their day.⁹

This approach represented an important shift in the way charitable giving came to be understood and practiced. Beginning a critical transformation of the idea of philanthropy, this conceptual shift moved from the traditional notion of giving by well-off individuals to those in need to a new notion of applying scientific principles to the advancement of society as a whole. The former orientation was closely tied to the origins of philanthropy

⁸ Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, Vol. II (1840), p. 106, (Knopf, 1945).

⁹ Rober H. Bremner, *American Philanthropy*, 2nd Edition, University of Chicago Press (Chicago:1988), p. 86

in religious charity and patronage by the wealthy, while the latter accompanied the emergence of a modern spirit of self-directed social change.

At the same time, another important conceptual change was taking place in American culture. During the last quarter of the 19th century and the beginning of the 20th, the Progressive Movement emerged as a powerful force shaping social consciousness. The spirit of the age became increasingly egalitarian, participatory, progress-oriented, and scientific—in short, a newly defined sense of democracy emerged.

The Progressive Movement combined faith in decentralized, popular decision-making with a commitment to public administration by experts. The resulting definition of democracy represented, as James Morone has pointed out, an odd mix of populism and science, in his words, the “Progressive oxymoron—direct democracy with scientific administration.”¹⁰ The dualistic Progressive agenda left a strong imprint on the emerging liberal democratic state, which has struggled ever since to reconcile interest-group politics with a social engineering approach to public policy.

It is not accidental that the concept of democracy, as well as the transformed notion of philanthropy, began to take on new meanings during the same period in American history. Previously, both words had typically been used pejoratively: “philanthropic” to describe well-intentioned but naïve and possibly misguided social do-goodism (as in Emerson’s dismissive reference to “foolish philanthropists”) and “democratic” to describe a social movement driven by lower class interests, merging at its extreme into mob-rule.¹¹

¹⁰ James Morone, *The Democratic Wish: Popular Participation and the Limits of Government* (Basic Books, 1990), p. 126

¹¹ There is a long history of the negative use of “democracy.” See, for example, David Wootten’s observation in *Divine Right and Democracy* (Penguin, 1986) that “Even in the late eighteenth century, the ‘age of the democratic revolution,’ hardly anyone was willing to describe themselves as a ‘democrat,’ a word which is generally accepted as pejorative.” (p. 39).

But by the late 19th century the senses of both philanthropy and democracy were undergoing change as part of a broader transformation of social consciousness. The newly positive connotations attached to both terms in the latter decades of the century contained a sense of social development and progress that presaged the emergence of mass democracies of the 20th century. In the spirit of the new egalitarianism, the well-being of the average citizen was no longer taken to be dependent on the largesse of the aristocracy or the charitable instincts of the well-to-do but rather supported by the creation of social structures through which self-help was the preferred vehicle of social change. And the recently demonstrated success of science and industry only reinforced the growing confidence in the idea of self-directed social advancement.

By the turn of the century this transformation in thinking had become widely accepted in the West. The combination of self-help and scientifically directed social change was taken to be the modern expression of the democratic spirit. Philanthropy could either help or hinder such change, depending on how it was applied. George Bernard Shaw's *Major Barbara* expresses how one component of this new philosophical attitude was identified with the turn-of-the-century intellectual climate. When Andrew Undershaft sets out to convince his daughter to leave the Salvation Army by demonstrating the superiority of a managed social system (never mind that it was a munitions factory) over the work of charitable organizations, he argues for the superiority of social engineering over traditional charity.

What is the role for philanthropy in this emergent world of egalitarian democratic change? In the view of "modern" thinkers, its primary purpose was to aid social advancement through assisting scientifically guided efforts at change. Thus, the newly formed foundation that began to appear at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th centuries embodied a spirit of social experimentation and demonstration, eschewing the notion of relieving immediate needs in favor of creating social blueprints and replicable

models for larger-scale improvement. The “scientific philanthropists” described by Bremner, Sealander, and others¹² championed both increased efficiency in the delivery of services and the improvement of society as a whole through the application of better social mechanisms to large-scale problems.

This approach was patterned on the newly demonstrated advances of 20th-century science and technology, and it reflected growing confidence in technical solutions to problems in all arenas of life. The logic is clear: Formulate a problem in terms of objectively defined criteria, establish measurable objectives, design a means to accomplish those objectives, and empirically assess the results. In other words, apply the logic of scientific advancement to the problems of society.

But the new paradigm of democratically steered and philanthropically assisted social engineering contained a set of assumptions that presented its own problems. This paradigm rests on the presupposition that the complexities of human existence can, for the purposes of solving social problems, be reduced to limited categories of behavioral outcomes. Like isolating disease sources in curing illnesses, the new social theory presumes that causes of such social ills as poverty, educational failure, and criminal behavior can be identified, attacked, and cured. Or, if they cannot be completely cured, at least they can be mitigated through the application of palliative measures.¹³

Thus, much of modern philanthropy can be characterized as technical intervention in systems—for example, systemic change in education or improving organizational

¹² Bremner, *American Philanthropy*; Judith Sealander, “Curing Evils at Their Source: The Arrival of Scientific Giving” in Lawrence Friedman and Mark McGarvie, ed., *Charity, Philanthropy, and Civility in American History* (Cambridge University Press, 2003); Robert Gross, “Giving in America: From Charity to Philanthropy” in *Charity, Philanthropy, and Civility in American History*; James Allen Smith, “The Evolving Role of American Foundations” in Charles Clotfelter and Thomas Ehrlich, ed., *Philanthropy and the Nonprofit Sector in a Changing America* (Indiana University Press, 1999); among many others.

¹³ The philosophical view that guides this form of philanthropy is closely tied to the conceptual origins of modern social science. Loosely derived from a positivist theory of natural science, this view was to be more explicitly reflected in such later 20th-century intellectual trends as behavioralism, systems analysis, scientific management theories, and ethical emotivism.

efficiency in health-care delivery. The aim of this intervention is to improve the operation of the system, increasing its efficiency or ability to attain objectively stated outcomes. In this approach philanthropy shares the stance of management consulting and indeed of most modern professions: Apply technical measures to clients' problems in a way that addresses objective needs without intervening in the realm of beliefs or values. The approach reflects the fix-it character of American social improvement—agnostic on values but committed to improved performance.

This instrumental stance runs into limits when philanthropy encounters fundamental human dilemmas in which beliefs and values are central. Just as tinkering with structure is unlikely to improve the results of an educational system without a change in students' attitudes toward the value of education, intensifying efforts on voter registration is unlikely to improve the quality of public decision-making without a change in public attitudes toward the value of citizenship. If philanthropy's vocabulary is limited primarily to instrumental terms, it cannot reach into issue realms that are inherently ethical or moral.¹⁴ This poses a dilemma when philanthropy seeks to address problems rooted in the disintegration of social values. The problems of civil society, reflecting weakened ethical and communal norms, pose just such a challenge to philanthropy.

Can philanthropy fill the gap?

From this description of the character of philanthropy and civil society, two fundamental consequences follow:

1) Civil society is delicately balanced between public and private poles of action, a

¹⁴ In *The Idea of a Social Science* (Routledge, Kegan, Paul, 1958), Peter Winch states the classical argument against the presumption by social science, attempting to follow the model of natural science, to exclude intentional (and thus moral) language from the definition of human action. Robert Jackall describes the deleterious effects on modern corporate managers of omitting moral categories from the worldview of "scientific management" in *Moral Mazes* (Oxford University Press, 1988).

balance that is essential to its function in liberal democracy. At any given time, however, the balance can be tipped in either the statist or privatized direction. In the current environment, there are strong forces at work in the West threatening to tilt it toward the “private” side. Philanthropy can potentially play an important role in maintaining the balance, but its own origins in the private sphere limit this corrective role.

2) Civil society is defined, in part, by a distinctive set of values. These values are vulnerable to erosion by other social forces, particularly scientism and depreciation of the public sphere in the West in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. Philanthropy has the potential to weigh in on behalf of the civic values, but it is inherently discouraged from doing so by its own structural limitations, particularly the instrumentalism that is a dominant theme of modern philanthropic practice.

Contemporary philanthropy, therefore, faces a conundrum. Because philanthropy performs an essential role in supporting civil society through advancing third-sector institutions (“society’s passing gear,” as the late Paul Ylvisaker once described it), we might reasonably look to it for possible solutions to the contemporary troubles of civil society. Among major social institutions, philanthropy has the greatest capacity and freedom to direct its considerable resources toward fundamental social deficiencies of the type that weaken civil society.

At the same time, it is very difficult for philanthropy, as currently practiced, to respond adequately. The reason for this is not hard to find. Since philanthropy is integrally connected to civil society through its origins and evolution, the forces that shape one tend to shape the other. Thus, the growing emphasis on private means, market solutions, and rights agendas in civil society that hinders achievement of its communal aspirations is exactly the same force that shapes philanthropic practice. Philanthropy’s current fascination with the appeal of “the business model”--bottom-lines, measurable

outcomes, and investment-like strategies--is just one indication of this trend.¹⁵

As noted above, the problem is complicated by the particular way in which modern philanthropy developed. Twentieth century philanthropy has largely taken the course of pragmatic social improvement, adopting an instrumental stance of social engineering and a commitment to rights-based individualism. While this approach can improve organizational operations and ameliorate specific social problems, it has great limitations in engaging the larger value framework within which those problems arise.

Yet it is precisely this value framework that presents the deepest problem for civil society. We are back to Tocqueville and his worry about reconciling the principles of “individual well-being and the general good” in the American experiment. While the organizations that populate civil society continue to thrive (indeed the dramatic growth in the number of nonprofits in the United States during the past several decades would suggest they are flourishing),¹⁶ it is rather the erosion of essential civic values—the steep decline in public trust, diminishing belief in the efficacy of civic action, increasing fractiousness of public debate, and weakening bonds of common civic identity—that poses the fundamental threat.¹⁷

Why then can't philanthropy simply take on these value deficiencies as part of its overall social agenda? The answer is that modern philanthropy shares its origins and development with civil society. In the movement away from the paternalism of pre-democratic societies and toward the mores of the neutral secular state, particularly a

¹⁵ I discuss this trend and its consequences in greater depth in “Philanthropy’s Blindspots,” a chapter in a forthcoming book, *Benefactors, a critique on contemporary American philanthropy* (Boston: The Philanthropic Initiative, 2004).

¹⁶ The explosion in numbers and revenues of the nonprofit sector during the past half century has been widely documented. Michael O’Neill, for example describes a 3000% growth in the size of the sector during this period, with corresponding growth in revenue and assets, in *Nonprofit Nation: A New Look at the Third America* (Jossey-Bass, 2002), p. 17.

¹⁷ Robert Putnam and many others have described a steep decline in “social capital” over the past several decades. See especially *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2000).

state that embraces the strong influences of market-based approaches to social policy of the late 20th century, philanthropy has adopted a stance promoting procedural values and outcome-oriented intervention. This has the positive effects of enhancing empowerment, consumer-responsiveness, pluralism, and focus on specific objective outcomes. At the same time, however, it gives tacit preference to an individualist/instrumentalist over a community-based model of values and social organization.

This model continues to influence the philanthropic enterprise as it does the larger social landscape. In doing so, it has become the source of a blindspot in philanthropy in the arena of civic values. Indeed, civic values rarely appear on the philanthropic horizon precisely because of the field's implicit commitment to individualist values and instrumentalism.¹⁸ Of course this stance does not prevent philanthropy from supporting and strengthening other important aspects of civil society consistent with the management model: the nonprofit institutional structure and individual rights. But without an equal emphasis on strengthening shared norms and civic obligation, philanthropy is rendered incapable of addressing some of the most critical problems of civil society.

How might philanthropy take on the civic values agenda without lapsing into traditional paternalism or the imposition of narrowly ideological views on grant recipients? Here philanthropy might take a cue from the resurgence of interest in the concept of citizenship among writers across the political spectrum throughout the world. According to Kymlicka and Norman, "there is growing fear that the civility and public-spiritedness of

¹⁸ A number of writers have discussed the potentially corrosive impact of marketization on civil society, among them Charles Lindblom, Ralf Dahrendorf, Robert Bellah, Jean Bethke Elstain, Fareed Zakaria, and E.J. Dionne. Most analysts see the relationship as ambiguous, because market values also reinforce the pluralism and voluntarism that are essential to civil society. I have also discussed this relationship in a lecture, "If Pigs Had Wings: The Appeals and Limits of Venture Philanthropy," delivered in the *Waldemar Nielsen Issues in Philanthropy Seminar Series*, Georgetown University, 2001. My focus here, however, is primarily on the instrumentalist rather than the individualist bias in contemporary philanthropy.

citizens in liberal democracies is in serious decline,” and they observe that this concern has been sparked by worldwide phenomena ranging from voter apathy to crises in multicultural and multiracial societies:

These events have made clear that the health and stability of a modern democracy depends, not only on the justice of its “basic structure” but also on the qualities and attitudes of its citizens: for example, their sense of identity and how they view potentially competing forms of national, regional, ethnic, or religious identities; their ability to tolerate and work together with others who are different from themselves; their desire to participate in the political process in order to promote the public good and hold political authorities accountable; their willingness to show restraint and exercise personal responsibility in their economic demands and in personal choices which affect their health and the environment.¹⁹

In light of a past over-emphasis on structures and institutions, they note that contemporary writers are focusing attention on two primary issues: civic virtues and citizenship identity.

By explicitly taking on such topics as civic virtue and citizenship identity, philanthropy could directly address issues that are at stake in the crisis of civil society. To do so, however, it would have to overcome the conceptual limitations of its individualist and instrumentalist stance. There are many granting areas where a civic values agenda would make a strong impact, most prominently education, but also community service, media projects, and civic participation components of a wide range of other third-sector activities. Civic education could encompass but also move considerably beyond existing voter registration and empowerment agendas to include issues of civic identity, the balance of rights and responsibilities, and commitment to principles of civil society.

Such a move would require foundations not only to change ordinary operating assumptions but also to address the limitations of a culture of increasing managerialism. Through the application of technical means to achieve specified results, managerialism

¹⁹ Will Kymlicka and Wayne Norman, “Return of the Citizen: A Survey of Recent Work on Citizenship Theory,” in *Ethics*, v. 104, n. 2 (January, 1994), pp. 353 and 360.

meets its limits in attempting to comprehend and address issues not amenable to technical solutions. Just as healthcare professionals have encountered the shortcomings of the medical model, philanthropic professionals are severely hampered by instrumentalism in their attempts to address complex social problems.

To move beyond the instrumentalist stance, foundations would have to extend beyond their commonly stated (and laudable) objectives of building models, leveraging resources, creating partnerships, supporting leadership, and even improving the quality of life, promoting distributive justice, expanding life opportunities, and protecting individual rights. They would have to add the goal of promoting the values of citizenship and civic obligation and to support activities directed toward strengthening the character and cohesiveness of civic life. The results of such funding would have to be judged as much in terms of the quality of public discourse it promoted as the objective measures of numbers reached and action steps taken. It would, in a word, incorporate the values of civil society into the business of philanthropy.