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Book Review

By **Rebecca Stiles**

New Philanthropy and Social Justice: Debating the Conceptual and Policy Discourse.

Edited by Behrooz Morvaridi. Bristol, UK: Policy Press at the University of Bristol / Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015, 176 pp. ISBN: 1447316983

Behrooz Morvaridi's edited volume, *New Philanthropy and Social Justice: Debating the Conceptual and Policy Discourse*, is a valuable addition to Policy Press' book series "Contemporary Issues in Social Policy: Challenges for Change." By addressing the issues associated with social justice and today's "new philanthropy"—the increasing involvement in philanthropy of corporations and foundations started by wealthy individuals—Morvaridi's edited volume provides invaluable critical and philosophical grounding to the debates on philanthropy, contributing meaningful dialogue regarding the challenges and potential of philanthropy for social transformation. The book is a critical look at the new philanthropy as part of the neoliberal strategy to fill in for state responsibility as social expenditure wanes, critiquing the notion that capitalists are better than traditional actors at doing philanthropic work. The essential argument of the essays that make up the book is that the migration of business principles into the non-profit sector, via claims that "what works for the market will work for social justice," is fundamentally flawed and inimical to the goals of meaningful social change.

Consisting of eleven essays, Morvaridi's volume is divided into three thematic sections. Part One, the "New Philanthropy and Social Transformation," includes four essays that set up the historical and philosophical framework for the debate. Hugh Cunningham's piece argues that "the welfare states of Europe in the second half of the 20th Century were the price capitalism paid for political survival" and that "philanthropy is the price that now needs to be paid to justify neoliberalism" (p. 38). This provides an illuminating perspective as it highlights the paradox of philanthropy as a necessary by-product of neoliberalism, casting capitalism as both cause and cure. The results of this paradox, as Michael Edward writes in the book's second essay, is that "philanthropy is losing whatever transformational potential it possessed" (p. 33) as its "definitions of the public good are appropriated by private interests" (p. 39). Philanthropy conducted via the mechanisms of capitalism, these introductory essays collectively argue, are the wrong tools to address social injustices, which are their by-product. Indeed, as Tom Parr emphasizes in Part One's final essay, our moral obligation to injustice is "not only to mitigate its harmful effects, but to tackle its underlying causes" (p. 68).

Part Two, “Philanthrocapitalism and the Process of Commodification,” consists of two chapters and takes a practical view of market mechanisms’ impact on specific issues. For example, George Holmes strongly questions the place of markets in providing or managing public goods. In particular, he questions whether or not some things, like biodiversity, should ever be commodified, while pointing out that others, like social justice issues, simply are not commodifiable, making them incompatible with a capitalist system based on commodities. The inseparability of so-called “philanthropic ‘giving’ and capitalistic accumulations” that is associated with philanthrocapitalism has, Sally Brooks argues, detrimentally “steered the debate away from socioeconomic concerns and towards technical ones,” while recasting the aid recipient as a “consumer” (p. 102). The long-term outcome of this paradigm shift towards philanthrocapitalism, Brooks argues, is, in the end, unlikely to be “win-win.” This section of the volume provides keen insights into the practical incompatibilities of capitalism with philanthropy and is extremely valuable to the debate. The section, however, would have been strengthened by the addition of another article to further develop the implications for philanthropy today.

Part Three, “Philanthropy and Social Protection,” the final and most comprehensive section of the book, consists of five empirical chapters that problematize the new philanthropy’s notion that “private aid is more likely to go to the people who really need it” (p. 9). While disparate in tone and tack, these final essays are united in arguing that the mechanisms of capitalism and the goals of philanthropy are fundamentally at odds because the “invisible hand” reinforces existing power relations by “neglecting structural causes of injustice” (p. 11). John Mohan’s concern for the rise of “charity deserts,” for instance, reinforces the criticism that the new philanthropy neglects the structural causes of social injustice by mainly targeting the most economically viable locations instead of the most needful ones. Showing the tendency of philanthrocapitalists to choose causes based on the likelihood of a measurable return over those causes that represent the most pressing needs provides a morally powerful condemnation.

Overall, the book provides a coherent and persuasive case for the limitations of the new philanthropy in pursuing social justice. Providing a variety of contexts and examples (philanthropy and biodiversity, pro-poor agro biotechnology, social policy, civil society, British foundations, social justice issues in the global South, and charity deserts), the book argues convincingly that if market ideals really worked, there would not be large and growing disparities between the rich and the poor, not only globally, but also within the western “developed” countries. As Parr argues, the global economy unduly harms the global poor and therefore, according to libertarian principles, the beneficiaries of that economy are duty-bound to compensate them. But paradoxically, doing so through philanthrocapitalism, the book suggests, is akin to trying to heal the patient with the same poison that made them sick to begin with. While compelling, the book’s broader argument is, on the other hand, rather shortsighted. Indeed, an argument could be made that parallel to the development of the capitalist economic model has been the rise of the western world’s democracies. While one could argue that this capitalist path to democratization has not necessarily equaled broader social justice, liberal democracies have also seen the expansion of civil society, which has led to many social transformations such as the legal protection of minority rights or universal primary education.

There is thus, from another reading, a lack of balance in this volume as it generally neglects to address the possible benefits of the new philanthropy: redistributing wealth to society in the spirit of social welfare. The authors argue that the new philanthropy, with its unabashed focus on economic prosperity, is fundamentally at odds with the morally desirable goal of social justice. This does not, however, mean that there have not been benefits to the new philanthropy or that there is no evidence of bettered lives as a result of it simply because it has not explicitly supported systemic social change. A more balanced approach here would have been

worthwhile for a fuller understanding of the role of contemporary forms of philanthropy. There is certainly a case to be made that the new philanthropy has not been as widely or as quickly transformative as is idealized, but then a similar critique can be made of traditional philanthropy, which has its own history of inefficiencies and even failure. From another perspective, then, it could be argued that the new philanthropy is a good start, and one that could be enabling for local civil societies to seek their own social justice. In the end, while the arguments in Morvaridi's edited collection are squarely aimed against the new philanthropy of corporations and the rich, the essay's authors end up using essentially the same criticisms that have typically been aimed at philanthropy: that it is condescending and patriarchal, that it is superficial, that its efforts fail to go where it is most needed, that it doesn't engage local actors, and that it perpetuates the extant power structure.

Despite the book's overwhelmingly critical view of the new philanthropy, the volume still provides a strong philosophical backbone to the debate by firmly planting philanthropy in the fertile soil of the Kantian moral philosophy of social justice. The book powerfully demonstrates the full-circle movement from historical private philanthropy, through to public charity and government involvement in social welfare, and back again to the modern rise in private philanthropy from the wealthy and corporations. In doing so, it points to one of the most promising developments in support of social justice: more horizontal forms of philanthropy. The poor, as a percentage of income, have always been more generous than the rich, probably because they have a shared experience and understanding of their plight. Perhaps the best argument against philanthrocapitalism, or any vertical philanthropy, is simply that "old-fashioned" localized charity may, in the end, be a more effective strategy for addressing social justice issues. We might again be at a time of history where that is possible and desirable. After all, social transformation is much more likely in local hands, as opposed to waiting for money to generate from the "invisible hand."

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