

Global (Dis)Order
international policy programme

Philanthropy and global (dis)order

Dan O'Connor, UK National Commission for UNESCO

'Big Philanthropy is definitionally a plutocratic voice in our democracy, an exercise of power by the wealthy that is unaccountable, non-transparent, donor-directed, perpetual, and tax-subsidised. ... [B]ig philanthropy is an exercise of power, and in a democracy, any form of concentrated power deserves scrutiny, not gratitude.'¹

Abstract

This paper discusses critiques of the place of so-called 'big philanthropy' within the global order. Giant private charitable foundations such as Gates, Wellcome, NovoNordisk Fonden and others, play an increasingly influential role in domains such as global health, food security, scientific research, education, arts and social programmes. This influence has brought with it critiques from both the left and right of the political spectrum, who argue that big philanthropy's influence is not only undemocratic, but that it can exacerbate the problems it seeks to address. Responses to these critiques have focused on philanthropy's capability for risk taking and long term thinking – qualities often lacking elsewhere in the global order. Philanthropies who wish to maintain their influence within the global order may have to lean more strongly into these capabilities, and to become more accountable not only for how they make their money, but for how they take their spending decisions, too.

Introduction: big philanthropy

This discussion paper is a response to an emerging critical literature on 'big philanthropy', neatly reflected by the above quote from political scientist Rob Reich. The global order – particularly the fields of public health and scientific research but also education, civil society, and the arts – is increasingly characterised by the remarkable influence of massive, multibillion-dollar philanthropic foundations, including the Gates Foundation, Novo Nordisk Fonden (NNF), Wellcome, Tata Trusts, the Open Society Foundation (OSF), the Chan-Zuckerberg Foundation, the Howard Hughes Medical Institute (HHMI), the Children's Investment Fund Foundation, and many others.²

The growth of this so-called big philanthropy has been accompanied by increasing criticism of the influence such organisations wield, a criticism that has come as much from civil society sources such as journalists and politicians as it has from academics interested in the operation of power and influence. As big philanthropy has sought to have more impact and influence (that is, as it has spent more and more money), so has it drawn more attention, not all of it positive. Critics of big philanthropy argue that its influence has been derived not from the usual sources of legitimacy in the international order – i.e. nation-states and the more-or-less democratic global system which brokers cooperation between them – but from the all-but-unregulated deployment of billions of dollars of private capital in the public sphere. There have of course always been 'non-state' actors, namely corporations and non-governmental organisations (NGOs), but these are highly regulated by that same global system. Big philanthropy, on the other hand, tends not to fit easily into our traditional ways of understanding who has a 'seat at the table'. As such, they can be seen to disrupt our notions of legitimacy, accountability, and power within the global order.

1 Quoted in Madrigal, C.A., (June 27, 2018) "Against Big Philanthropy", The Atlantic, <https://www.theatlantic.com/technology/archive/2018/06/against-philanthropy/563834/>

2 A useful ranking of big philanthropies by financial size can be found at Aroo Labs, 'World's 100 Largest Foundations List' (last updated, March 2024), <https://www.aroolab.org/en/worlds-100-largest-philanthropic-foundations-list/>

This paper is aimed at those who work with big philanthropies (grant recipients, delivery partners, and policymakers) and those within philanthropies who seek to engage with criticism of their role within, and impact on, the global order. The paper is in three parts: **Part 1** discusses the critiques of big philanthropy, identifying key themes present in academic, political, and civil society engagements with philanthropies' seeming disruption of the global order. **Part 2** discusses arguments for big philanthropy's potential good and the actions it could take to justify its place in the global order. **Part 3** compares and contrasts philanthropy with other disruptions to the global order such as artificial intelligence (AI) and cryptocurrency, and uses those comparisons to generate recommendations for how philanthropy can work better within a weakening global order.

Part one: big problems with big philanthropy (and Bill Gates)

As a leading philanthropy consultancy notes, the past decade or so has seen 'shifting attitudes toward philanthropy, intense debates about power and effectiveness and difficult operating environments' (Berman, Karibi-Whyte, & Tarasov, 2019:4). Far from the 'gratitude' towards charitable giving of which Reich is so sceptical, responses to big philanthropy have been increasingly negative. Perhaps reflecting the way in which a single figure is more amenable to discursive focus than a generic concept, much of this negative attention has focused on Bill Gates and his foundation. The Gates Foundation has been widely criticised for centring too much power in one person's hands and for relying on simplistic, technocratic, top-down, market-based solutions to culturally complex social problems (Global Justice Now 2016). International organisations and national governments have also come under fire for allowing the Gates Foundation to have too much influence over their operations. The Gates Foundation, for example, is regularly one of the top two or three contributors to the World Health Organisation's (WHO) budget (second only to the US in 2023–24 (Lu & Kuo 2025), leading to accusations that it is the Foundation's interests driving WHO priorities rather than those of member states (Crawford 2021). The Gates Foundation's influence in global public health is widely recognised, both as a force for good and as a potentially chilling factor in academic and policy discourse (Twohey & Kulish 2020). Highly questionable conspiracy theories about the influence of the Gates Foundation's influence over the global order abound, especially on social media (Ha, Graham, & Grey 2022), but there is also no doubt that the Foundation has been the recipient of remarkable preferential treatment by grateful national governments, for example being granted (albeit temporarily) diplomatic immunity by Kenya (Caldero 2024).

But Gates is hardly the only philanthropy under fire. Whether it is campaigns against Wellcome's investments in fossil fuels (Legraien 2022), concerns about conflicts of interest and power dynamics at NNF (Rigby & Flick 2025), or disquiet about the Walton Family Foundation's influence over education policy within some American states (Superville 2015), few if any of the big philanthropies have been free of negative news stories and press coverage. These news stories highlight a sense that big philanthropy, while putatively seeking to do good, does so in ways that call into question the legitimacy of its influence within the global order. In particular, critics note that rather than affected publics, it is often these philanthropies, through the exercise of their ever-changing strategic priorities, which effectively get to decide which social problems get addressed, when, and in which places.

In particular, critics note that rather than affected publics, it is often these philanthropies, through the exercise of their ever-changing strategic priorities, which effectively get to decide which social problems get addressed, when, and in which places.

In the academy, systematic critiques of big philanthropy have largely come from sociology and political science, notably the pioneering work of sociologists Linsey McGooney (2015) and Sophie Harman (2016) and political scientist Reich (2018). The broadly progressive/liberal stance which can be said to characterise these academic critiques of big philanthropy is even more pronounced within civil society critiques, which are associated with campaigning journalists such as Anand Giridharadas (2020, 2021) and Tim Schwab (2021, 2023, 2024). Yet it is not just on the left that big philanthropy encounters scepticism. It has also been taken to task by more conservative and even far-right voices such as Viktor Orbán, the prime minister of Hungary (Walker 2018), and JD Vance, the vice-president of the United States (Bowerman 2024). Although Vance's critiques have been seen as part of a wider attempt by the presidential administration of Donald Trump 'to target a broad swath of philanthropic organizations based on their ideological views or their efforts to hold the administration accountable' (Berkowitz, 2025), they nevertheless echo progressive/liberal critiques in their (presumably sincerely held) identification of philanthropies as unaccountable or illegitimate players in the global order. Even further beyond these political axes, big philanthropy has not escaped broader trends of declining trust in institutions, shading even into conspiracy theories around vaccines, pandemics, and control of the global order (Siraki & Mohammad 2023).

While these critiques of big philanthropy come from very different political perspectives (and in the case of conspiracy theories, places of delusion), they are notably characterised by two concerns: that big philanthropy has too much power, and that big philanthropy is at best ineffective and at worst actively harmful. The first concern can be described as the 'democracy critique', which argues that big philanthropy is incompatible with democratic norms and accountability within the global order. The second can be described as the 'system critique', which argues that far from ameliorating the global problems they profess to tackle, philanthropies often cause and even benefit from them.

The democracy critique can be broken down into four parts:

1. **Philanthropy tends to concentrate power in a few people's hands.** Schwab argues that 'Bill Gates is not simply giving away money, he's buying influence. He uses charitable donations to put his hands on the levers of public policy, shaping how we medicate, educate, and feed the world. ... The problem is he's helping the world in the only way he knows how – by taking control' (Schwab 2023). As before, here Gates is a useful placeholder not just for other billionaire philanthropists but for big philanthropies which wield similar influence but lack living donors. Harman goes even further, arguing that Gates's 'charismatic authority and wealth' forestalls any criticism of the power he wields (Harman 2016: 350). For Harman, that very lack of contestation is a key problem with philanthropy's claims to legitimacy in the global order, leading us to the second point:
2. **Philanthropy lacks transparency and accountability.** Oversight and regulation of philanthropy is remarkably light-touch. Bill Gates, Jeff Bezos, George Soros, et al. answer to no one when it comes to making decisions about how to spend their philanthropic billions, but neither in practice do those big philanthropies without living donors, such as Wellcome, HHMI, and the NNF. As the philosopher Theodore Lechterman argues in his book *The Tyranny of Generosity*, philanthropy effectively privatizes what should be democratic responsibilities, giving private individuals or small unelected boards and executive staff an outsized say in the otherwise public spheres of health, education, labour, housing, communications, arts, food, and more (Lechterman 2021).

3. **Philanthropy is publicly subsidised.** As Reich (2018) argues in *Just Giving*, in a liberal-democratic political system, billionaires do have the freedom to give their money wherever they choose, but this does not mean that the state (i.e. the taxpayer) should subsidise that freedom. This argument is in response to the unavoidable financial and fiduciary facts of big philanthropy: massive private wealth is transferred into very lightly-taxed private foundations, which then accrue further lightly-taxed billions in investment dollars. As Schwab puts it of the Gates Foundation, 'Some years the foundation generates more income from its investments than it gives away in charity' (Schwab 2023). Philanthropists are then free to spend this money in the public sphere however they see fit, leading one reviewer of McGooney to beg the question: 'is the public value of private philanthropy greater than the value of the foregone tax revenue?' (Payne 2015).
4. **Philanthropy has opportunity costs.** The answer to this last question may well be a resounding 'yes!', but that does not answer the fundamental question of why big philanthropies get to decide which social problems get solved, how, and when. It also does not answer the question of the opportunity costs. There is no doubt that the Gates Foundation's funding of the WHO's malaria programmes has saved lives, but there is also no doubt that such donations mean that the WHO's tax-funded operational attention has been directed away from other equally important issues. When the Walton Foundation and the Chan Zuckerberg Foundation donate millions to promote particular forms of selective education in the United States, what alternatives are they crowding out?

In terms of disruptions to the global order, the democracy critique of big philanthropy manifests on both the left and the right of political discourse, resulting in the unusual phenomenon of progressive critiques of the Gates Foundation's work on seed diversity in Africa (Malkan 2024; Ro 2024) being based on similar principles as nationalist conservative critiques of the OSF's work in Hungary (Flamm 2022; Mikaelian 2024). In both cases, and indeed across the board, the democratic critique views big philanthropy in its current state as at best incompatible with and at worst a threat to the democratic foundations of global order.

The second critique of big philanthropy, the system critique, argues that far from addressing social problems, big philanthropies are often both the cause and perpetuation of those problems. This critique argues that there is a fundamental conflict between the source of big philanthropy's wealth and the claims big philanthropy makes of its social value:

1. Philanthropic resources are the product of our current economic and financial system. Big philanthropy makes its money from the system of global capital, either through endowed investments (as in the case of organisations such as Gates, Wellcome, and HHMI) or through close financial connections to large corporations (as in the case of NNF). As noted in the democracy critique, these philanthropies then put a lot of this money into private, highly tax-efficient foundations.
2. Philanthropic resources tend to seek to address social problems, such as inequalities or poor health outcomes. This impulse is of course admirable and laudable, but ...
3. The social problems that philanthropy seeks to address tend to be caused by our current financial and economic systems. As Darren Walker, president of the Ford Foundation, argues in his book *From Generosity to Justice* (Walker, 2023), the political and economic systems that allow philanthropies to prosper are the same as those that cause the pervasive inequity they seek to solve. Big philanthropies have frequently been accused of investing directly in socially irresponsible companies (Piller 2018) and even of investing in organisations directly opposed to their own charitable programmes, such as when Wellcome was criticised for continuing to benefit from investments in fossil fuels even as it

Philanthropic foundations, dependent as they are on the system, tend not to disrupt it.

launched funding programmes addressing the impacts of climate change³. It is important to note that this critique goes beyond specific investments in socially irresponsible products. This is not merely about the inconsistencies of such actions, but that ultimately...

4. Philanthropic foundations, dependent as they are on the system, tend not to disrupt it. This is perhaps the most radical part of the system critique: the approaches philanthropies take to solving social problems inevitably fail to address the underlying systemic or structural issues because that would undermine the source of philanthropies' wealth. As Payne put it in his review of McGooney's *No Such Thing as a Free Gift*, 'far from addressing the unequal power structures that have created a massive global imbalance in wealth and resources, [philanthropy] entrenches ... the very economic and technological relationships that reinforce the dependency of developing countries on the United States and Europe' (Payne 2015).

According to this critique, big philanthropy is hopelessly conflicted: on the one hand, it claims social value through addressing key social problems, but by deriving much if not all of its own financial value from an unequal global system, it is inextricably part of the causes of those problems. Indeed, as sociologists Luna Gluckman and Louise Russel-Prywata conclude from their study of the network connections between big philanthropies, '(it) appears to facilitate and help elites retain their advantaged positions by legitimising the system producing the inequalities they benefit from in the first place' (Gluckman & Russel-Prywata 2022: 13). Unlike the democracy critique, which views big philanthropy as in need of 'reordering' within the global system, the system critique paints big philanthropy as a prime example of the inequities and iniquities which characterise the global order.

Part two: Justifying big philanthropy

Progressive critiques of big philanthropy's shortcomings tend to reach for the same remedies that the broadly liberal left would prescribe for any other disruptive actor within the global order, namely: more regulation, stricter oversight, fewer tax breaks, better incentives. Right-wing and nationalist critiques look to the same remedies but in a more aggressive, even more punitive fashion (tellingly, as in the case of Hungary and OSF, they have also actually enacted these remedies). Both approaches would seem to hold out little hope that big philanthropy can be expected or trusted to reorder itself. However, among commentators, a potential justification is emerging, – if not of big philanthropy's current actions, then of its potential for good in the global order. The defence revolves around three ways in which big philanthropy can act, absent punitive regulation, to justify its place in the global order. The first two have been most convincingly outlined by Reich (2018):

1. **Philanthropies can be experimental.** Reich suggests that one way big philanthropy can justify itself is to double down on what he calls "'discovery," an experimentalist approach to finding and assessing long-term-horizon innovation' in public policy and investment that may not be possible for public bodies (limited by short-term electoral and tax concerns) or shunned by private corporations (limited by their bottom lines) (Reich 2018: 19). As Hilary Pearson, former president of Philanthropic Foundations Canada, puts it: 'One of the great public benefits of thoughtful philanthropy is its ability to take leaps, to fund what is risky or has unknown outcomes' (Pearson 2022). Some foundations have

3 Wellcome has since divested from these industries, or is in the process of doing so.

taken this directly to heart, announcing that they will 'take on risks and tough challenges –especially when others aren't' and that 'taking no risks today means taking incalculable risks for the future' (Wellcome and the Allianz Foundation, respectively⁴. Others, like the Chen-Yet Sen Foundation are explicitly embracing 'moonshot philanthropy' an approach which encourages philanthropies to take the risks others cannot and in doing so "seeks to 'privatise failure and socialise success... ensuring the fruits of success are shared by all'" (Breeze & Chen 2022).

2. **Philanthropies can think long term.** Reich further suggests that philanthropies are well positioned not only to take risks, but to think long term in ways that presentist governments and corporations cannot or will not: 'foundations, free of both marketplace or electoral accountability regimes... with a protected endowment designed to exist across generations, even in perpetuity, are perhaps uniquely situated to engage in the sort of high-risk, long run policy innovation and experimentation that is healthy in a democratic society and that addresses the interests of future generations' (Reich, 2016). This long-term thinking is indeed present in the way some foundations position themselves within civil society. The RAG-Stiftung, a German foundation, describes itself as financing 'perpetual obligations' relating to the environmental impacts of mining. In doing so, RAG-Stiftung explicitly positions itself as reducing 'the burden on the public sector' in the future.⁵ The Rockefeller Foundation has set the 'Foresights and Futures Initiative' described as 'one of the most ambitious experiments in long-term thinking in the global philanthropic sector' (Roohi 2025).

These two arguments are grounded in what we might call the characteristic capabilities of philanthropies. The very lack of oversight and tax burden that enables them to act so freely, Reich argues, enables them to experiment and to think long term in ways that more time-constrained and regulated organisations such as public bodies and corporations cannot or will not. This capabilities approach (to borrow from Martha Nussbaum (Nussbaum, 2011) in effect asks philanthropies not simply to use their powers for good (as they would all claim to already do) but to use their powers to do good in ways only organisations with those particular powers can. Rather than act like traditional players in the global order, this potential justification of big philanthropy asks them to take on the roles and responsibilities that those traditional players cannot.

The third part of the defence of big philanthropy looks less to its characteristic capabilities and more to an action it must take to engender public confidence and trust:

3. **Philanthropies should account for themselves.** If big philanthropy's place in the global order is justified by its capacity to do good, then that justification is sustained, so the argument goes, only so long as philanthropies are transparent about and accountable for their actions (Allen, George & Theron 2024)⁶ critical literature on big philanthropy, the philanthropic sector itself has produced numerous frameworks and guidelines on transparency and accountability. Common to all of these frameworks is the belief that philanthropies (big and small) can be more transparent about their goals, how they make their money, and how they make their funding decisions, and that in setting their strategies they can be more inclusive of the people who have the most experience of the problems

4 Wellcome corporate website, 'Our Beliefs and Values', <https://wellcome.org/jobs/our-beliefs-and-values> (accessed July 2024); Allianz Foundation corporate website, '#Risktaker', '#Risktaker', <https://allianzfoundation.org/risktakers> (accessed July 2024)

5 RAG-Stiftung corporate website, homepage: <https://www.rag-stiftung.de/en/> (accessed July 2024).

6 As the philanthropy sector has grown in power and influence, it has been accompanied by the growth of a subsector of specialist advisors and consultants. For example, see Rockefeller Philanthropy Advisors, *The Philanthropy Framework* (2020): <https://www.rockpa.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/The-Philanthropy-Framework-1.pdf>

philanthropy would profess to solve.

It is notable that this third defence of big philanthropy is not different substantively than the 'good governance' arguments made about both corporations and public bodies operating in the global order (and the regional, national, and local orders, too). As with the democracy critique of big philanthropy, this part of the justification is in effect an attempt to reorder big philanthropies, making them recognisable as responsible players within the rules of the global order.

Part three: addressing money, power, and difference

Big philanthropy can be usefully compared to some of the other 'disordered' phenomena explored elsewhere in this collection, such as AI and cryptocurrencies. Crypto, for example, is a technology which potentially bypasses nation-state-based (in reality, US-based) financial systems to enable all-but-unregulated financial transactions between individuals and organisations. This is not dissimilar to the way in which philanthropy bypasses nation-state-based regulatory systems to intervene in the public sphere. AI is said to have disruptive potential not only because of the scale and speed at which it can perform computing tasks but also because of its lack of transparency and accountability. Again, this is akin to philanthropy's capability to act in ways other organisations cannot as well as the perceived lack of accountability and transparency that is an effect of that capability.

Much of the concern about the disruptive capabilities of AI, crypto, and other technologies comes not from the phenomena themselves but from a sense that the institutions and orders they are disrupting (labour markets, financial systems, etc.) are not sufficiently resilient to or prepared for change. This weakness is arguably also a characteristic of the global institutional contexts in which big philanthropy currently operates. Multilateral organisations, the global aid system, global health research, among others are marked simultaneously by a decline in support from so-called 'Western' nations (for example, the US pulling out of UNESCO, the WHO, etc.; European nations sacrificing aid budgets to fund increased defence expenditure) and the increased influence of non-democratic, even authoritarian states such as China, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia. The challenge to philanthropy in this context is how it can play the beneficent role it seeks to play in the global order without exploiting or even worsening the weaknesses of that order for its own ends. Is there a way for philanthropy to exploit its capabilities for the public good without further compounding the challenges faced by global institutions?

In this conflicted context, and with both the critiques and defences of philanthropy in mind, I recommend three areas in which further work can be done by philanthropies and their interlocutors: power – addressing the democratic deficit in philanthropic operations; money – addressing the sources of philanthropic finances; and difference – favouring philanthropic action that cannot or will not be taken by public or corporate actors. Taken together, a concerted focus on these areas as outlined briefly below may enable philanthropies and those who work with them to make use of philanthropy's unique capabilities in ways that do not further undermine global institutions and norms.

1. **Power:** Addressing the democratic deficits at the heart of philanthropic action requires two things: i) the acknowledgement by philanthropies that they hold unusual levels of power (economic and political) which they can deploy with an unusual lack of oversight or

The challenge to philanthropy in this context is how it can play the beneficent role it seeks to play in the global order without exploiting or even worsening the weaknesses of that order for its own ends.

accountability; and ii) a willingness on the part of philanthropies to radically devolve that power away from their boardrooms and executives and towards their delivery partners and grantees (Saunders-Hastings 2018). This should include both high-level 'strategic' decision-making (about big-picture questions regarding philanthropies' focus on particular strategic issues) as well as more 'tactical' day-to-day decisions about how philanthropic money is spent. To be fair, many philanthropies already promote 'co-creation' and substantive engagement with their partners – this needs accelerating and normalising across the sector. Giving up power is an unusual thing for any organisation to do, but it is an essential component to philanthropy's healthy participation in the global order.

2. **Money:** Addressing the source of their power – bluntly, where the money comes from – is uncomfortable for philanthropies. Most invest their endowments in global capital markets (stocks, equities, property, etc.) and while most have some red lines about investments (typically tobacco, arms, and, increasingly, fossil fuels), many argue that any further restrictions on investment would limit their ability to address social problems. Of course, as the system critique goes, global capital markets play a large role in causing those problems. Even more so than relinquishing power, philanthropies choosing to restrict their money-making opportunities could be viewed by boardrooms and executives as a dereliction of their duty to maximise their ability to do good. Yet some philanthropies – for example, the Ford Foundation in the US and the Vivensa Foundation in the UK – have found innovative ways to make 'mission-focused' investments, making money for good causes while also minimally seeking to do no harm (those red lines) and maximally seeking to do good (e.g. investing in renewable energies and social enterprises). Philanthropies should be expected to understand the wider economic system in which they operate and see their money not simply as a lovely 'gift' from a founder or beneficiary but as intimately tied up in the global order they wish to ameliorate.
3. **Difference:** Finally, philanthropies above all want to have impact, and they should seek to do so in ways that fully exploit their differences from state and corporate actors: namely, their capabilities of risk-taking, experimentation, and long-termism as identified by Reich (2018). If they do not, then it is quite legitimate for states and others to question the freedoms from oversight and taxation that enable those capabilities to begin with. If philanthropies are simply replicating the priorities and (crucially) the operating processes of states or corporations (i.e. focusing on short-term efficiencies and easily quantifiable balance-sheet-like metrics), then they arguably deserve to be treated like states or corporations and regulated accordingly. It is thus in the interests of philanthropies and their partners to work together to promote long-term thinking and responsible risk-taking. This is not to say that there are not short-term, tractable issues with which philanthropies can and should be involved. Rather, it is to argue that when philanthropy acts, it should do so in a way that enables its beneficiaries to be free of the constraints that come with state or corporate action.

It is thus in the interests of philanthropies and their partners to work together to promote long-term thinking and responsible risk-taking.

Each of these three areas – power, money, and difference – is key to philanthropy's ability to operate sustainably in a weakening global order. Much of it seems counter-intuitive: to have impact, philanthropy should surrender its power and restrict its ability to raise funds. But it is only in doing so that philanthropy, whether working at the global scale or more locally, can be a responsible actor within that global order. Where others such as states and corporations are either abandoning or exploiting (dis)order, a reflexive and self-aware philanthropic sector could find ways to do real social good without earning the critiques that have dogged it up until now.

References

- Allen, L.F., George, A., & Theron, C., (2024), 'Reimagining funder accountability', *Stanford Social Innovation Review*, 22(2), 5–7. <https://doi.org/10.48558/38SQ-QK84>
- Berkowitz, M., (2025), 'How the Trump Administration could target non-profits – and how to protect yours', 8 January. <https://www.philanthropy.com/opinion/trump-attacks-nonprofits/>
- Berman, M.A., Karibi-Whyte R.& Tarasov O. (2019), 'The philanthropy framework" a publication of Rockerfeller Philanthropy Advisors', <https://www.rockpa.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/The-Philanthropy-Framework-1.pdf>
- Bowermaster, D., (2024), 'How JD Vance's rise could challenge big philanthropy', *Forbes*, 17 July. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/davidbowermaster/2024/07/17/the-rise-of-jd-vance-could-be-problematic-for-big-philanthropy/>
- Breeze, B. & Chen, C. (2022), 'Moonshot Philanthropy: achieving responsive social change by privatising failure and socialising success', 7 September. <https://www.jbs.cam.ac.uk/2022/moonshot-philanthropy/>
- Caldero, R., (2024), 'Gates Foundation's diplomatic shield in Kenya: a troubling precedent', *Rio Times*, 1 November. <https://www.riotimesonline.com/gates-foundations-diplomatic-shield-in-kenya-a-troubling-precedent/>
- Crawford, J. (2021), 'Does the Gates Foundation have too much influence at the WHO?', 10 May, *SWI*. <https://www.swissinfo.ch/eng/politics/does-bill-gates-have-too-much-influence-in-the-who/46570526>
- Flamm, L. (2022), 'Stability versus foreign influence: Hungary and the open society foundations', *Hungarian Conservative*, 30 August. <https://www.hungarianconservative.com/articles/politics/stability-versus-foreign-influence-hungary-and-the-open-society-foundations>.
- Gluckman, L., & Russel-Prywata, L., (2022), 'Why Philanthropy is no substitute for taxation: a case study of plutocratic philanthropy in the UK', *LSE Public Policy Review*, 2:4, <https://ppr.lse.ac.uk/articles/10.31389/lseppr.68>
- Giridharadas, A. (2020), *Winners Take All: The Elite Charade of Changing the World* (London: Penguin).
- Giridharadas, A., (2021), 'Warren Buffet and the myth of the good billionaire', *New York Times*, 13 June. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/06/13/opinion/warren-buffett-billionaire-taxes.html>
- Global Justice Now, (2016), 'Gated Development – is the Gates Foundation always a force for good?', 20 January. <https://www.globaljustice.org.uk/resource/gated-development-gates-foundation-always-force-good/>
- Ha, L., Graham, T., & Grey J. (2022), 'Where conspiracy theories flourish: A study of YouTube comments and Bill Gates conspiracy theories', *Harvard Kennedy School (HKS) Misinformation Review*, 5 October. <https://misinforeview.hks.harvard.edu/article/where-conspiracy-theories-flourish-a-study-of-youtube-comments-and-bill-gates-conspiracy-theories/> : <https://doi.org/10.37016/mr-2020-107>
- Harman, S. (2016), 'The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation and legitimacy in global health governance', *Global Governance: A Review of Multilateralism and International Organizations*, 22(3): 349-368.

Lechterman, T.M. (2021), *The Tyranny of Generosity: Why Philanthropy Corrupts Our Politics and How We Can Fix It* (Oxford: Oxford University Press).

Legraien, L., (2022), 'Wellcome sells its shares in BP and Shell but not for climate reasons', *Civil Society*, 21 July. <https://www.civilsociety.co.uk/news/wellcome-sells-its-shares-in-bp-and-shell.html>

Lu, M. & Kuo, A., (2025), 'Visualised: who funds the WHO?', *Visual Capitalist*, 24 January. <https://www.visualcapitalist.com/visualized-who-funds-the-world-health-organization/>

Malkan, S. (2024), 'Critiques of Gates Foundation's agricultural interventions in Africa', *US Right to Know*, 4 September. <https://usrtk.org/bill-gates/critiques-of-gates-foundation/>

McGooney, L. (2015), *No Such Thing as a Free Gift: The Gates Foundation and the Price of Philanthropy* (London: Verso).

Mikaelian, V. (2024), 'Big Government vs Philanthropy', 7 December. <https://philanthropy.org/big-government-vs-philanthropy/>

Nussbaum, M. (2013), *Creating Capabilities: The Human Development Approach* (Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press).

Payne, S., (2015) review of McGooney, L. (2015), 15 December. <https://philanthropynewsdigest.org/features/book-reviews/no-such-thing-as-a-free-gift>

Pearson, H. (2002), 'The hard question of accountability', 27 July. <https://hpearson.ca/the-hard-question-of-accountability%E2%80%9C/>

Piller, C. (2018), 'Private research funders court controversy with billions in secretive investments', *Science*, 6 December. <https://www.science.org/content/article/private-research-funders-court-controversy-billions-secretive-investments>

Reich, R (2016), 'Repugnant to the very idea of democracy? On the role of foundations' – Paper to the Berkeley Political Theory Workshop, https://www.law.berkeley.edu/wp-content/uploads/2016/01/Repugnant-to-the-Whole-Idea-of-Democracy_On-the-Role-of-Foundations-in-Democratic-Societies..pdf

Reich, R. (2018), *Just Giving: Why Philanthropy is Failing Democracy and How it Can Do Better* (Princeton University Press).

Rigby, J., & Flick, M. (2025), 'How a Novo Nordisk Foundation-funded project sparked ultra-processed food fight', *Reuters*, March 13. <https://www.reuters.com/business/healthcare-pharmaceuticals/how-novo-nordisk-foundation-funded-project-sparked-ultra-processed-food-fight-2025-03-12/>

Ro, C. (2024), 'Why African groups want reparations from the Gates Foundation', *Forbes*, 2 September. <https://www.forbes.com/sites/christinero/2024/09/02/why-african-groups-want-reparations-from-the-gates-foundation/>

Roohi, E. (2025), 'Inside Rockefeller Philanthropy advisors' bet on making philanthropy future-intentional', *Alliance Magazine*, 12 December. <https://www.alliancemagazine.org/blog/inside-rockefeller-philanthropy-advisors-bet-on-making-philanthropy-future-intentional/>

Saunders-Hastings, E. (2018), 'Plutocratic philanthropy', *The Journal of Politics*, 80(1). <https://doi.org/10.1086/694103>

Schwab, T. (2021), 'How Wellcome's opaque fossil fuel investments harm its global health mission', *British Medical Journal*, 373 (1202) <https://doi.org/10.1136/bmj.n1202>. As noted above, Wellcome has since divested from these industries.

Schwab, T. (2023), 'Is there such thing as a good billionaire?', *Next Big Idea Club*, 27 November. <https://nextbigideclub.com/magazine/thing-good-billionaire-bookbite/46595/>.

Schwab, T. (2024), *The Bill Gates Problem: Reckoning with the Myth of the Good Billionaire* (London: Penguin).

Siraki, A.T. & Mohammad, M.H. (2023), 'Bill Gates and the 'new normal' COVID-19 conspiracy theories: 'it's a new thing' or nothing new under the sun?', *Journal for Cultural Research*, 27(2): 136–153. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14797585.2023.2207129>

Superville, D.R. (2015), 'Report Criticises Walton Foundation Funding Methods for Charter Schools', *Education Week*, 25 June. <https://www.edweek.org/policy-politics/report-criticizes-walton-foundation-funding-methods-for-charter-schools/2015/06>

Twohey, M. & Kulish, N. (2020), 'Bill Gates, the Virus, and the Quest to Vaccinate the World', *New York Times*, 23 November. <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/11/23/world/bill-gates-vaccine-coronavirus.html>

Walker, D., (2023), *From Generosity to Justice: A New Gospel of Wealth* (Washington DC: Disruption Books).

Walker, S. (2018), "'Dark day for freedom": Soros-affiliated university quits Hungary', *The Guardian*, 3 December. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/dec/03/dark-day-freedom-george-soros-affiliated-central-european-university-quits-hungary>

The Global (Dis)Order international policy programme is a joint initiative of the British Academy and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace to generate fresh insights and creative thinking for the awareness of and uptake by policymakers and practitioners. Today's international system is in flux and fragmenting, with the need to navigate competing power aspirations and nodes of order. The programme focuses on understanding the history, current nature, and potential future trajectories of global orders, aiming to examine the diverse and often contested understandings of orders and disorders.

About the British Academy

The British Academy is the UK's national academy for the humanities and social sciences. We mobilise these disciplines to understand the world and shape a brighter future. From artificial intelligence to climate change, from building prosperity to improving wellbeing - today's complex challenges can only be resolved by deepening our insight into people, cultures and societies. We invest in researchers and projects across the UK and overseas, engaging the public with fresh thinking and debates, and bring together scholars, government, business and civil society to influence policy for the benefit of everyone.

About the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

The Carnegie Endowment for International Peace generates strategic ideas and independent analysis, supports diplomacy, and trains the next generation of scholar-practitioners to help countries and institutions take on the most difficult global problems and advance peace. In addition to its offices in Washington, DC and California, Carnegie has established global centers in Asia, Beirut, Berlin, Brussels, and New Delhi. As a uniquely global think tank, Carnegie leverages its network of over 170 experts to better understand the threats and opportunities affecting global security and well-being, and to prepare the next generation of foreign policy leaders through training and mentorship.

The British Academy
10-11 Carlton House Terrace
London SW1Y 5AH

Registered charity no. 233176

thebritishacademy.ac.uk

Published February 2026

© The British Academy and Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. This is an open access publication licensed under a Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivs 4.0 Unported License

doi.org/10.5871/global-disorder/9780856727344