“The Moral Biography of Wealth: Philosophical Reflections on the Foundation of Philanthropy”

Paul G. Schervish
Published in
Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly
Volume 35, No. 3, pp. 477-492
September 2006
The Moral Biography of Wealth: Philosophical Reflections on the Foundation of Philanthropy

Paul G. Schervish  
Boston College  
Indiana University

Moral biography refers to the way all individuals conscientiously combine two elements in daily life: personal capacity and moral compass. Exploring the moral biography of wealth highlights the philosophical foundations of major gifts by major donors. First, the author provides several examples to elucidate his definition of moral biography. Second, he elaborates the elements of a moral biography. Third, he describes the characteristics that make one's moral biography a spiritual or religious biography. Fourth, he discusses the distinctive characteristics of a moral biography of wealth. Fifth, he suggests that implementing a process of discernment will enable development professionals to work more productively with donors. The author concludes by placing the notion of a moral biography of wealth in historical context and suggesting how advancement professionals can deepen their own moral biography by working to deepen the moral biography of their donors.

Keywords: wealth; philanthropy; fundraising; moral biography; theory; care

In this essay, I discuss the meaning of a moral biography of wealth in an effort to explore the philosophical and moral foundations of major gifts by major donors. Describing the intersection of capacity and moral purpose in the life of donors in general, and wealth holders in particular, will clarify what is at stake as individuals attend to the deeper purposes and prospects of their growing discretionary income and wealth. The current and future prospects of philanthropy are abundant. By understanding the meaning and practice of moral biography, donors and fundraisers alike will be equipped to forge an even more abundant allocation of wealth to philanthropy and in a more thoughtful and rewarding manner.

Note: I am grateful to the T. B. Murphy Foundation Charitable Trust, the John Templeton Foundation, and the Lilly Endowment, Inc., for supporting the research for and the writing of this article. I also wish to thank Todd Fitzgibbons and Albert Keith Whinston for their editorial assistance, the anonymous reviewers for their insightful comments and suggestions, and John J. Havens for the statistical estimates and calculations contained herein.

DOI: 10.1177/0899764006288287
© 2006 Association for Research on Nonprofit Organizations and Voluntary Action
The term moral biography refers to the way individuals from any economic or social position conscientiously combine two elements in daily life: personal capacity and moral compass or bearing.¹ Living a moral biography is something as simple as leading a good life and something as profound as following Aristotle’s teachings on choice and virtue. One specific version of a moral biography is that of wealth holders who are endowed with extraordinary material capacity and who must discern a path of character and aspiration commensurate to that extraordinary capacity and virtuous enough to counter tendencies to use that capacity carelessly or destructively. Understanding how wealth holders approach the ultimate meaning of life as a moral biography and their wealth as a tool for care of others, rather than as an impediment to care, will help fundraisers to work more closely and, ultimately, more productively with the donors they wish to bring into a collaborative relationship in the service of their institution’s mission.

In the first section, I provide several examples from literature and the contemporary scene to demonstrate my definition of moral biography as the confluence of capacity and moral bearings. In the second section, I elaborate the elements of a moral biography, which I derive from Aristotle and sociologists who write about the workings of human agency. In the third section, I describe the characteristics of consciousness that, when present, make one’s moral biography a spiritual or religious biography. In the fourth section, I locate the moral biography of an individual within the communal framework of the moral citizenship of care, which is the network of social relations revolving around meeting the true needs of others. In the fifth section, I discuss the aspects of capacity and moral direction that compose a moral biography of wealth. In the sixth section, I discuss how implementing a process of discernment will enable development professionals to work more deeply and productively with their donors and potential donors. In the conclusion, I place the issue of the moral biography of wealth in a larger historical context and encourage advancement professionals to deepen their own moral biography by working to deepen the moral biography of their donors.

MORAL BIOGRAPHY AS THE CONFLUENCE OF CAPACITY AND CHARACTER

At the outset, it is necessary to clarify the relation of a moral biography of the financially wealthy from that of other highly endowed individuals who can rightly be regarded as wealthy in realms other than that of financial capacity. Just as the notion of moral biography applies to all people and not just to wealth holders, so too the notion of moral biography of wealth applies to all people with substantial capacity and not just to people with material wealth. In addition to financial assets, people may possess such a substantially large pool of assets to be rendered wealthy in the realm of personal resources,
such as intellectual, artistic, psychological, and other personal skills. In addition, the pool of assets may exist in the realm of associational resources, such as networks of social connections, positions held in a firm, government, or church, as well as other types of social relations and posts that one can draw on to achieve an outcome. Each of these highly endowed individuals possesses sufficient wherewithal of one type or another to shape and not just live within the organizations and institutions of their day. For such well-endowed individuals, the common question is figuring out and living a moral biography that entails the responsibilities and rewards of great capacity and a socially consequential moral purpose. Although the article will offer insights to fundraisers and others into the moral biography of individuals who are wealthy in noneconomic terms, when I speak of the moral biogeography of wealth, I refer mainly to the moral biography of financial wealth.

Several examples from history and literature will help to clarify what I mean by a moral biography. The story of Moses as told in the Book of Exodus and of Luke Skywalker in Star Wars are the most detailed of these examples. Moses is born a powerless son of Hebrew slaves, yet soon becomes the adopted heir of the Pharaoh. He enjoys princely empowerment and anticipates ascendancy to the throne. But Moses gradually discovers his true bloodline, realizes that the power he wields lacks true moral compass, abdicates his right to succession, and flees to the mountains. There in the highlands, with no greater capacity than that of a stout shepherd and faithful spouse, he receives a new mandate from the Lord cloaked in the burning bush. Moses protests that he lacks the power to accomplish his mission and, besides, he stutters. The Lord promises Moses an arsenal of miraculous powers to face down the Pharaoh and says Aaron his brother will help him speak. And so it happens. Moses, imbued with the confluence of material capacity and moral purpose, breaks the resolve of the Pharaoh, parts the waters of the Red Sea, and, with moral direction becoming geographical bearing, leads his people through the desert from the clay towers of slavery to the land flowing with milk and honey. Nearing the final chapter of his gospel, Moses falters in trust and obedience, striking the rock for water twice rather than once as the Lord commanded. As punishment for this lapse in character, the Lord arrests Moses’ geographical progression at the outskirts of the Promised Land.

Because of its fairy-tale simplicity and cosmic overtones, Star Wars also exemplifies the fundamental components of a moral biography that we similarly find in the sagas of Superman, Spider-Man, Wonder Woman, The Lord of the Rings, and the like. Luke Skywalker, the hero of the earliest three films, enters the story as a dutiful orphan farm boy with no special capacity or world-shaping aspiration other than to help his aunt and uncle tend their farm on the desert planet Tatooine. But he soon becomes caught up in the galactic confrontation between the Old Republic, led by a diminishing cadre of Jedi Knights embodying the moral aspiration of the good side of “the Force,” and the Empire, led by former Jedi Darth Vader, who has
become aligned to the dark side. When Vader's troopers murder his guardians, Skywalker's familiar capacity and moral bearing are thrown into disarray, and he takes up a regime of Jedi training to assist the Republic. The more he becomes implicated in the interstellar struggle, the more Skywalker must turn to his Jedi mentors to obtain a more powerful capacity and a wiser purpose. At times, his budding powers exceed the strength of his character, imperiling himself and his companions. At other times, Skywalker's moral purpose outstrips his still-developing capacity, and he enters a fray unprepared. Eventually, Skywalker fully acquires a Jedi moral biography and, in a struggle unto death, rekindles Vader's nobler character.

The confluence of capacity and moral purpose is also the theme of Jesus' life. Each of the four Gospels tells how Jesus possessed both the physical power to work miracles and rise from the dead and the strength of character to resist temptations, teach and live the Sermon on the Mount, minister to his followers, and sacrifice his life. Homer's story of Odysseus returning home from the battle of Troy and Virgil's account of Aeneas establishing Rome both recount how well gods and mortals link physical and mental prowess with moral purpose and wisdom. For instance, Odysseus uses his wit to navigate the treacherous straits between Scylla and Charybdis and to avoid the seduction of the Sirens' melody. For his part, Aeneas must repeatedly recover his moral and geographic bearings to keep from dallying in Crete and being sidetracked in Carthage by his love affair with Dido.

Our contemporary world also offers examples. Mother Teresa's moral compass led her to muster the resources of companions and donors to care for those she called "the poorest of the poor." Closer to home, we hear presidential candidates recounting their lives as morality tales, telling how in the past they deployed public resources and personal skills in the service of moral purpose, and how in the future they will do so better than their opponents.

Despite the larger-than-life quality of many of the foregoing examples, they are, in the end, only heightened instances of how each of us applies resources in the service of a moral purpose—be that running a business, raising children with care, completing a college degree, buying a house, or making donations to charity. It should be noted that a moral biography is a way of life for all people, not just the financially or positionally well placed. There is, with careful examination, the ability to conclude that some purported moral biographies are in the view of others quite immoral biographies. Moreover, to say a biography is moral does not mean that all will conclude that it is moral in the sense of well-directed behavior. But every biography, including those we might evaluate as immoral, are in fact moral in the sociological sense suggested by Durkheim (e.g., 1992) in that they are normatively oriented in that they are directed not by impulse or instinct but by choices related to the array of beliefs, values, norms, and customs enforced by positive and negative social sanction.
THE ELEMENTS OF A MORAL BIOGRAPHY

In this section, I delve more deeply into the theory and concepts of moral biography, asking the reader to refer back to the previous examples, to their own experience, and to the biographies of their donors in order to capture the meaning of moral biography in its concrete expressions. My starting point for discussing the elements of a moral biography is Aristotle's philosophy of the good life. Figure 1 provides a diagram of Aristotle's thinking. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle reasons to the conclusion that the goal of life is happiness and that achieving happiness results from an ever deeper realization of the purpose of life. Happiness is what we today would call an inner apprehension that life is full and fulfilling. Such happiness is never finally achieved, because we experience an ever receding horizon of needs that pulls us away from unhappiness and toward deeper happiness. For Aristotle, we achieve greater happiness by exercising a wide array of virtues, but especially that of phronesis, or the virtue of making wise choices or judgments in practical affairs, as a way of properly exercising other virtues. As Aristotle says, "all virtues will be present together when the one virtue, practical judgment, is present." Practical judgment and the other virtues are always needed to "govern action." The array of virtues "makes one bring the end into action, and [practical judgment] makes one enact the things related to the end." As such, a moral biography is a life engaged in making wise choices or exercising practical judgment in line with the proximate and ultimate ends provided by virtues, especially that of wisdom, or sophia (2002, VI.13). Aristotle thus insists on the importance of three elements of the good life: the freedom to choose, the ends provided by virtue, and the exercise of wise judgments or practical wisdom (phronesis; see also VI.7) to pursue the ends. Freedom (see III.2, 3, 4) is the ability to decide with liberty among a range of alternatives what, at the minimum, is an aspect of freedom provided by wealth. Choice is the outcome of deliberation about things that could in fact be otherwise as a result of our actions. "We deliberate about things that are up to us and are matters of action." And so, choice is "the deliberate desire of things that are up to us, for having decided as a result of deliberating, we desire in accordance with our deliberation" (III.3). There can be no virtue without having the freedom for voluntary choice; there can be no true freedom without virtue, and there can be no good life, or moral biography, without the exercise of practical judgment to properly combine choice and virtue in daily life.

Figure 2 is my elaboration of what I have culled from Aristotle. It represents the fruit of some of my research and draws on the work of several social scientists whose work on agency I find valuable (e.g., Emirbayer & Mische, 1998; Giddens, 1984; Sewell, 1992). Starting at the top of the figure, a moral biography is the perpetual migration of a choosing agent from genesis to telos, from history to aspiration. Genesis is the starting condition within which we act. It refers to both the ultimate and more immediate origins of the world
and our personal life. Genesis is the set of metaphysical, social, and personal conditions within which agency transpires. It is the chosen and unchosen past that constitutes the given circumstances of our lives. These include the constraints, resources, knowledge, feelings, and values within which all our choices are made. These initial conditions do not decide our choices in the narrow sense of determinism. But they are what we have to work with, for example, a happy or homeless childhood, a prospering or failing business, a confident or hesitant personality, and so forth.

Teleosis is the destiny of outcomes toward which we aspire. It can be an intermediate goal situated within the context of an ultimate goal or it can be the ultimate goal of life. As the end we wish to achieve or the destiny we wish to shape, teleosis is related to the possibilities, aspirations, needs, desires, and interests we are drawn to achieve. For Aristotle, the ultimate end is participation in sophia (wisdom), which is learned by contemplation of ultimate reality, a contemplation that at its deepest, leads to a realization of our existence being seated within and destined toward participation in the community and ultimately to unity with wisdom as the ultimate arrangement of the cosmos. As the end, sophia and the happiness accruing to those partaking in it is not to be confused with phronesis (which is wise or practical judgments about properly aligning means to the end of sophia).

The choices we have made in the past naturally shape the conditions our agency has to work with at any time. In contrast, aspirations—although ultimately limited by the reality around us and by our ability to imagine and achieve alternatives—are the allies of freedom that invite us to transcend
and transform the conditions of the past and to apprehend and pursue our ultimate end. Genesis is about the conditions we receive, telesis is about the consequences we strive to create.

If genesis concerns what is in the past and telesis concerns what can be in the future, agency is about what we are doing in the present to close the gap between history and aspiration. Agency derives from the Latin agere, meaning to do or to act. Agency is the enactment of choice, both about weighty issues and everyday matters. It is carried out in the environment of conditions with which we are faced. But it is oriented toward transcending those conditions in the light of the needs, desires, and objectives that motivate our choices. As such, a moral biography is the sequence of acts of agency or wise choices we make in the context of where we have come from and where we want to go.

Moving down and through Figure 2, we come to the discussion of capacity and moral compass. Because I have already said a lot about this, I will be brief. I use a variety of terms to describe capacity and moral compass in order to capture other dimensions of the factors that animate agency. Each dimension of capacity listed in the left-hand box can be paired with any dimension of moral compass listed in the right-hand box, and vice versa. In addition to
speaking about a moral biography as the intersection of capacity and moral compass or empowerment and character, we can describe it as the crossroad of freedom and purpose, effectiveness and significance, energy and strength of character, capital and value, and material wherewithal and spiritual wherewithal. Identifying our own terms for the confluence of capacity and moral compass, both in general and in particular circumstances, is a path to self-knowledge and is itself an important act of moral agency.

SPIRITUAL BIOGRAPHY

Before leaving the topic of historical conditions and achievable aspirations, I want to discuss what makes a moral biography a spiritual biography. Thus far, I have not distinguished between the adjectives moral and spiritual. And although I do not want to make too much of the distinction, I have learned from my personal interviews with individuals from across the economic spectrum how readily and explicitly they speak about the spiritual dimension of their lives.

A spiritual biography exists when the capacity and moral compass of a moral biography derive more explicitly from one’s ultimate origin and seeks to advance one’s ultimate purpose. An ultimate purpose, explains Aristotle, is that self-determined end that people identify as their fundamental goal of life. It is that end, says Aristotle (2002, I.2.1, I.7), which through a successive sequence of testing turns out to be that purpose that serves no additional purpose. An important goal may be to obtain an education or buy a house. But in both cases, I can identify a deeper goal such as happiness that education and owning a house serve in turn. A simple further distinction is to define a religious biography as one that considers the ultimate genesis and telos of one’s life to be connected to what Rudolf Otto (1923) calls the numinous, a being or force to which we bow our head in a relationship of worship. Those who consider their ultimate end to be akin to Maslow’s notion of self-actualization or Heidegger’s participation in Being would be likely to define their moral biography as spiritual. Those whose ultimate end is to enter into the unity of love of God, love of neighbor, and love of self, as Aquinas puts it, would be likely to understand their moral biography as religious.

MORAL BIOGRAPHY AND THE MORAL CITIZENSHIP OF CARE

If a moral biography is the confluence in daily practice of capacity and moral compass, the next question concerns the content of a moral biography when it is being lived in relation to philanthropy and contributes to the generation of a voluntary network of mutual assistance that I call the moral citizenship of care.

For Aristotle, the essence of philanthropy is to be found in friendship love or philia, which, in turn is the basis for community. Philia is first encountered
in the family where family members learn to love others as they love themselves. Friends become "a sort of other selves" (2002, VIII.12). A person is "related to a friend as he is to himself (since the friend is another self)" (IX.4). The upshot is that "Every sort of friendship, then, is in a community." It extends beyond the family to companions, fellow citizens, and so forth, wherever the relationship is extended toward "something good and superior" (VIII.12). It is for this reason that I have now come to refer to philanthropy as strategic friendship, and strategic friendship as the foundation of what I call the moral citizenship of care.²

No moral biography exists in isolation. The capacities and purposes that get executed through wise judgments are developed in connection with others and affect the community. There is an organic link between what is personal and what is social and cultural. To the extent a moral biography is intentional in the realm of friendship and extends into philanthropy, it is conjoined to and constitutive of what I call a moral citizenship of care. A moral biography of wealth, of course, is insinuated in economic and political citizenship. The intersection of capacity and purpose occurs in the conduct of all practical affairs. When philanthropy is one of these practical affairs, the focus of the moral purpose and aspiration takes on a distinctive teleology. In commercial and political relations, the goal to achieve "something good and superior" may be actively present. But it is subordinated to market relations wherein the provision of goods and services to meet the needs of others occurs only to the extent others voice their needs through dollars for purchases in the commercial realm and campaign contributions and votes in the political realm.

In the philanthropic realm of strategic friendship and the moral citizenship of care, the telos of the moral biography is oriented directly to the well-being of the other as a friend (even at a distance). A friend, says Aristotle, is "someone who wishes for and does good things . . . for the sake of the other person, or who wants the friend to be and to live for the friend's own sake" (2002, XI.4). The moral vision that directs philanthropy is the recognition that "life is difficult for one who is alone," and that "a human being is meant for a city and is such a nature as to live with others" that "it is necessary for a happy person to have friends" because happiness is an activity that requires contact with others. The content of that contact is the mutual benefit of friendship, which when extended to broader horizons of kinship, time, and space, makes strangers into friends. "A friend, who is another self," says Aristotle, "supplies what someone is incapable of supplying by himself," and, conversely, "the excellent person will need people for him to benefit" (IX.9).

The moral compass of a moral biography, then, is one that is inherently communal and attends directly, rather than through the market, to the needs of others. Such a moral biography is the building block of the moral citizenship of care, that array of intersecting relationships of care by which individuals respond to the needs of others not through commercial or political markets but directly, because of the tie of philia, or friendship love, that one wishes to carry out effectively and strategically.
THE MORAL BIOGRAPHY OF WEALTH

Thus far, I have spoken about moral biography in general and its communal dimension of strategic friendship. I now want to discuss what is different about capacity and moral purpose in a moral biography of wealth. Put simply, the difference is that wealth holders enjoy a substantially elevated level of material capacity and must discern a commensurately consequential moral purpose. They have the capacity to produce, and not just enter into alternatives, and a moral compass of great expectations, aspirations, and responsibilities. To be clear, financial wealth was not the capacity that Moses or Skywalker mobilized, and financial wealth is not the only capacity that wealth holders muster in pursuing their purposes. Nevertheless, great wealth is a capacity that allows for great expectations and the realization of them. Consequently, wealth holders, when they so choose, are in their world-shaping ability more akin to the Moses of the Exodus than the Moses of the highlands, to Luke Skywalker the Jedi Knight than Skywalker the orphan farmhand.

The most telling implication of exploring the moral biography of wealth today is that there is a potential inner connection between the horizons of wealth and moral life. The growing material capacity that is creating more wealth holders is accompanied by new challenges and opportunities for character and character formation. In his 1930 essay, “The Economic Possibilities for Our Grandchildren,” John Maynard Keynes wrote about the growth in financial wealth and its implications for the growth in spiritual wealth. According to Keynes (1930/1933),

the economic problem [of scarcity] may be solved, or at least within sight of solution, within a hundred years. This means that the economic problem is not—if we look into the future—the permanent problem of the human race. (p. 366)

“I look forward,” he continues,

to the greatest change which has ever occurred in the material environment of life for human beings in the aggregate. . . . Indeed, it has already begun. The course of affairs will simply be that there will be ever larger and larger classes and groups of people from whom problems of economic necessity have been practically removed. (p. 372)

The consequence of lifting economic necessity will be that

for the first time since his creation man will be faced with his real, his permanent problem—how to use his freedom from pressing economic cares, how to occupy the leisure, which science and compound interest will have won for him, to live wisely and agreeably and well. (p. 367)
We can see that Keynes forecasts both an unprecedented material horizon and the cultural consequences that flow from it. The economic possibilities he charts become the foundation for new spiritual possibilities. I will discuss each in turn. But like Keynes, I will spend more time on the latter, for we are only at the dawn of the spiritual and cultural transformation Keynes envisioned, and so most wealth holders know more about the economic than the spiritual prospects of their wealth.

GROWTH IN CAPACITY

From 1950 through the third quarter of 2004, the annual real rate of growth in wealth has been 3.31%, despite that nine recessions occurred over this period. In 1985, when I first began my research on wealth and philanthropy, the big news was that the day had arrived when the United States had 1 million millionaires. Today there are more than 8 million households with a net worth of $1 million or more in today's dollars and more than 5 million households controlling for inflation since 1985. In the 2004 edition of the Forbes 400 richest Americans, 312 are billionaires, and it now takes a net worth of $675 million to make the list. My colleague, John Havens, calculates from the Federal Reserve Survey of Consumer Finances that of the 106.5 million households in the United States, 436,000 households had net worth of $10 million or more in 2001. Of these, about 7,000 households had net worth of $100 million or more, 16,500 households had net worth of $50 million to $100 million, and 412,100 had net worth of $10 million to $50 million. Even from 1998 through 2003—a period that included the recent recession, 9/11, the bursting of the technology bubble, and the general stock market decline—private wealth in the nation has still grown at a real average annual rate of 2.6%.

Other indicators of the burgeoning of wealth come from Havens and my wealth-transfer projections. We estimate that in 2002 dollars, an unprecedented $45 trillion to $150 trillion in wealth transfer just from estates of final decedents will occur over the next five decades and that this will produce between $7 trillion and $27 trillion in charitable bequests. In a separate projection for the same period, we estimate that lifetime giving will provide an additional $15 trillion to $28 trillion in charitable contributions. Taken together, charitable bequests and lifetime giving will range from $22 trillion to $55 trillion, with between 52% and 65% of this amount being contributed by households with $1 million or more in net worth. Given the 3.31% real annual rate of growth in wealth between 1950 and the third quarter of 2004, there is every reason to expect that the actual wealth transfer and amount of total charitable giving will be closer to the upper estimates (based on 4% annual real growth in wealth) than the lower ones (based on 2% real growth).
HYPERAGENCY

These national trends in growth in wealth and the ability to contribute substantial amounts to charity indicate that not only are there more wealth holders with greater net worth, but that a growing proportion of them have sufficiently solved their personal "economic problem" so as to make major gifts to charity. In regard to a moral biography of wealth, the foregoing statistics are important because they indicate the growing capacity of wealth holders to make choices. On every dimension of capacity listed in Figure 2, the possession of material wealth offers the opportunity for hyperagency. Wealth holders have a broader array of choices, alternatives, capital, energy, and effectiveness at their disposal. Such capacity provides wealth holders with the opportunity not only to be agents but what I call hyperagents (see Schervish, 1997; Schervish, Couttsoukas, & Lewis, 1994).

Hyperagency refers to the institution-building capacity of wealth holders. Most people spend their lives as agents living within the established workings of the organizational environments in which they find themselves. Hyperagents too spend a good part of their lives as agents in this sense. But when and where they desire to do so, they are capable of forming rather than just working within institutional settings. Although not all hyperagents are wealth holders, all wealth holders are hyperagents, at least in the material realm. They can apply their material resources to shape the tangible world.

Hyperagents, then, are world-building. Whereas most of us are agents who attempt to find the best place for ourselves within existing situations, hyperagents, when they choose, are founders of the institutional framework within which they and others will work. What takes a social, political, or philanthropic movement for agents to accomplish, hyperagents can accomplish relatively single-handedly. They can design their houses from the ground up, create the jobs and businesses within which they work, tailor-make their clothes and vacations, endow their children, and create new foundations, new philanthropic enterprises, and new directions for existing charities. When we speak about today's donors being entrepreneurial or venture philanthropists (see Schervish, O'Hernihi, & Havens, 2001), we are pointing to their capacity and disposition to shape and not just participate in the goals and accomplishments of the causes and charities they fund. Whereas most of us participate as supporters of charitable enterprises, wealth holders, when they choose to do so, are producers of them.

THE MORAL COMPASS OF WEALTH

Hyperagency is more than simply a world-building capacity. It is also a psychological orientation of moral compass. In regard to the telesis of aspiration, wealth holders harbor great expectations, view them as legitimate, and possess the confidence to achieve them. The question is how liberation from economic necessity changes the nature of wealth holders' great expectations.
In addition to charting emerging economic possibilities, Keynes (1930/1933) describes the transformation in moral compass that economic security will evoke. "When the accumulation of wealth is no longer of high social importance, there will be great changes in the code of morals," he predicts. "We shall be able to rid ourselves of the many pseudo-moral principles . . . by which we have exalted some of the most distasteful of human qualities into the position of the highest virtues" (p. 369).

Although Keynes (1930/1933) argues that a change in material environment will spawn a sea change in spiritual consciousness, he does not condemn as lacking moral compass those who continue to focus on generating wealth. For "the time for all this is not yet" (p. 372). Still, he does insist that great wealth offers opportunities for a broader and deeper horizon of aspirations and responsibilities. Until Moses received the capacity to defeat the Pharaoh, part the Red Sea, and provide manna from the skies, the aspiration to return to the land flowing with milk and honey was not a workable dream. Only with release from the pressing demands of slavery was there the freedom of time and resources for the Israelites "to live wisely and agreeably and well." So too for today's wealth holders. Although the greatest service of many will continue to be through business and investment, there is a new dimension of moral compass that Keynes says can transform the moral biography of wealth holders. This will occur when the accumulation of additional wealth ceases to be a primary objective for an individual and wealth becomes an instrument, a tool to accomplish other ends. It is Keynes's aspiration that

the love of money as a possession—as distinguished from the love of money as a means to the enjoyments and realities of life—will be recognized for what it is, a somewhat disgusting morbidity, one of those semi-criminal, semi-pathological propensities which one hands over with a shudder to the specialists in mental disease. (p. 369)

When individuals are in the accumulation phase of their life, making money, although seldom the ultimate end of life, is usually a high-priority intermediate end. When individuals reach a level of subjectively defined financial security, there is the potential for a shift in moral compass whereby the accumulation of wealth ceases to be an end and becomes more fully a means to achieve other ends. Such ends may be retirement, providing an inheritance, pursuing a hobby, or enjoying more leisure. But Keynes (1930/1933) suggests an additional prospect, namely, a change in "the nature of one's duty to one's neighbour. For it will remain reasonable to be economically purposive for others after it has ceased to be reasonable for oneself" (p. 372). The shift of wealth from an end to a means, then, is arguably the most significant transformation of capacity and character for individuals who have solved or are close to solving the economic problem.
DISCERNING A MORAL BIOGRAPHY

Because it is not easy to decipher the moral compass that will guide their great capacity so that it contributes to the moral citizenship of care, we hear much from wealth holders about the turmoil, worry, and dilemmas they face in regard to how their riches shape the moral biographies of themselves, their children, and those they affect in business and in philanthropy. Acquiring great wealth, it turns out, is the beginning, not the end, of a moral biography of wealth. As a result, there is a growing need for a process of conscientious self-reflection by which wealth holders discern how to complement the growth in their material quantity of choice with a commensurate growth in the spiritual quality of choice. Wealth holders who have achieved or are approaching financial security do not need to own more money but to discern the moral compass that will direct the deployment of their wealth to engage in the moral citizenship of care.

Of course, individuals and their families can carry out this process of clarification informally and without the assistance of others. But most wealth holders will benefit from engaging in what I call an extended archeological conversation with their trusted advisors, including development professionals. Such conversation follows the principle that archeology precedes architecture, that self-discovery comes before defining and implementing a financial or estate plan. In an archeological conversation, advisors and fundraisers serve as counselors in order to help wealth holders uncover the ideas, emotions, and activities that shaped their moral biography in the past and identify the moral bearings and purposes that they wish to advance now and into the future. It offers the opportunity to examine the major turning points in life, the people and circumstances that shaped them, the hurts and happinesses that ensued, and an agenda for the future. In an archeological conversation, wealth holders discern their capacities, clarify their moral purposes, and combine the two in a way that creates a moral biography of wealth for themselves, their children, and others for whom they care. When this process of discernment is carried out with no hidden agendas and with the purpose of helping wealth holders uncover their true aspirations, a deeper commitment to philanthropy invariably ensues.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this article, I have emphasized several themes. The dramatic growth in wealth has spawned unprecedented freedom, material choice, and capacity. It has also generated unique spiritual horizons of moral purpose for a growing number of wealth holders. As a result, the overriding question facing most wealth holders today is how to fulfill their need for making wiser choices to forge a deeper moral biography.

The distinctive trait of wealth holders in all eras is that they enjoy the fullest range of choice in determining and fulfilling who they want to become and what they want to do for themselves, their families, and the
world around them. Today, increasing numbers of individuals are approaching, achieving, or even exceeding their financial goals with respect to the provision for their material needs, and doing so at younger and younger ages. A level of affluence that heretofore was the province of a scattering of rulers, generals, merchants, industrialists, and financiers has come to characterize whole cultures. For the first time in history, the question of how to align broad material capacity of choice with spiritual capacity of character has been placed before so many of a nation’s people.

There is, of course, nothing in world-building hyperagency that requires virtue and wisdom. Today’s pharaohs of financial skullduggery and totalitarianism demonstrate that well enough. An expanded quantity of choice does not guarantee that there will be a finer quality of choice. But quantity of choice always prompts the question about the moral purpose of a moral biography that is released from economic constraint. Making free and wise choices about wealth allocation for the deeper purposes of life, especially for philanthropy, is now and will become ever increasingly the prominent feature of financial morality and personal fulfillment for high net worth individuals. My hope is that clarifying the meaning of a moral biography will help fundraisers to understand their donors better and to help their donors chart a path of greater happiness for themselves, their families, and others in the world about whom they care. For the primary need of wealth holders today is the noble need of every person, namely, to clarify and pursue their moral biography, especially the aspect of moral aspirations, in the quest for effectiveness and significance. Understanding the components of moral biography as capacity and moral compass, working with donors to freely and intelligently discern their capacity and moral compass, and offering opportunities that fulfill donors’ desire simultaneously to increase their own happiness and the happiness of others is the sterling new vocation and, indeed, moral biography of development and advancement professionals. Those who address philanthropy are always first addressing moral biography.

Notes

1. I use the terms moral compass, moral bearing, and moral direction interchangeably, along with the terms aspiration and character to emphasize the dimension of moral biography that charts, mobilizes, motivates, and provides direction to how individuals activate their capacities to achieve a goal.

2. See Schervish and Havens (2002) and Schervish (2005) for an elaboration of the notion of the moral citizenship of care.

References


A Conceptual Model of Government-Nonprofit Relations

Sungsook Cho
David F. Gillespie
Washington University in St. Louis

This article explores the dynamics for service delivery in the United States. We apply dynamic resource theory to explain the interdependence for human service delivery. The government and nonprofit system dynamics to dependencies for service delivery. They explain how government needs to rely on nonprofit service providers and how the balance of power for service delivery is changing over time. Elaboration, refinement, and development of the model is presented.

Keywords: government; human service; information processing

Nonprofit organizations have been added to the public, private, and political fields and have made significant contributions in promoting community development and improving citizens' well-being. Government agencies have developed collaborative relationships with nonprofits during the past several decades (Burke, 2001). At the same time, nonprofits have developed collaborative relationships with government agencies (Gibelman, 1998). As government agencies continue to

Note: We appreciate the expertise, insights, comments and suggestions offered by the anonymous reviewers. Constructive criticism helped us clarify and improve our ideas in the article. We would also like to thank our families for their support of our study and for their contributions to this version of this article.

DOI: 10.1177/0899764306289327
© 2006 Association for Research on Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Organizations.