

Thematic Research Network: Foundations in the Longue Durée. Ways to an intercultural analysis

Introduction

Endowments play a central role in social cohesion, in orientation to the common good and the preservation of cultural heritage. The common good and cultural heritage must not be equated with social integration, but must also be viewed in terms of tension and conflict, and not only in the Western European context of our time. However, corresponding models are almost exclusively oriented to this context.

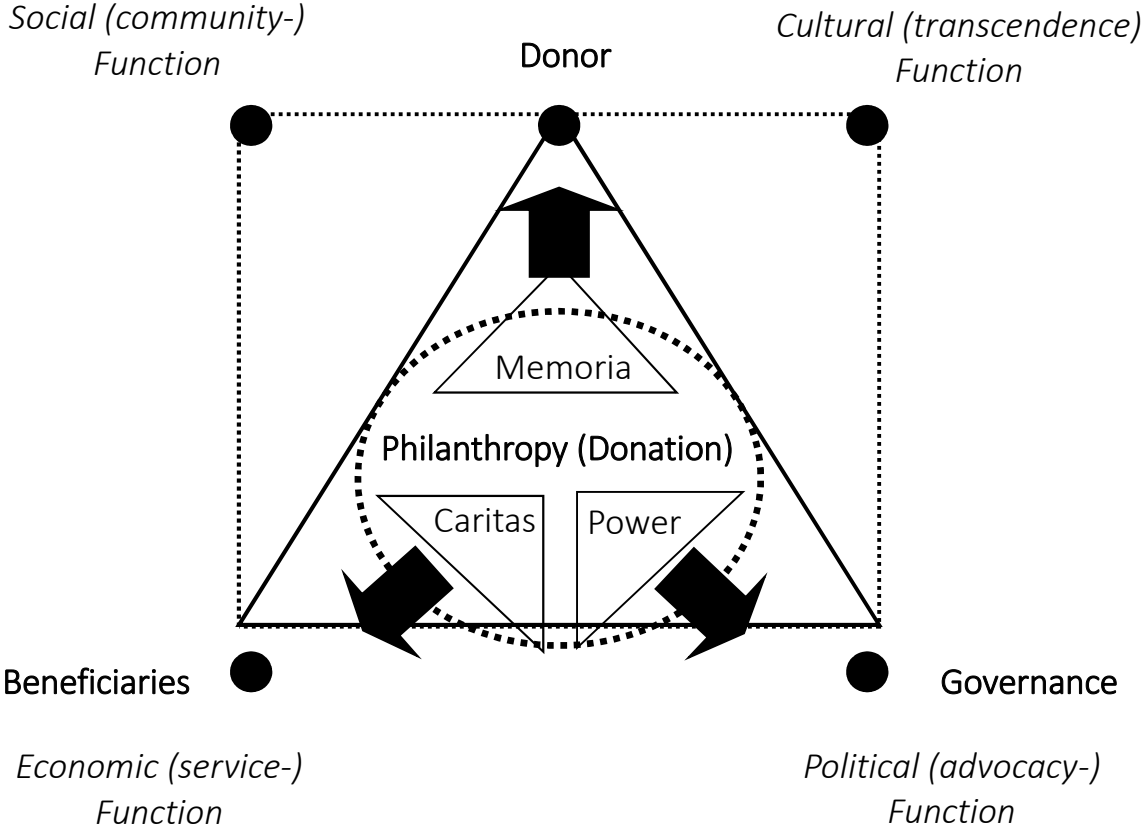
Through interdisciplinary cooperation of the three humanities faculties at the University of Heidelberg – the Faculties of Modern Languages and Literature, Philosophy and Theology –with the Faculty of Behavioural and Cultural Studies, the project aims to develop the foundations for a diachronically and cross-culturally sustainable theory of philanthropy by combining social science modelling with perspectives from outside Western Europe from the fields of antiquity, regional studies, and religious studies. Based on this preliminary work, a larger research project is to be prepared for further elaboration and empirical foundation with the participation of further disciplines. The Centre for Social Investment and Innovation (CSI) forms the social science component of the network and joins forces with cultural studies expertise from Egyptology, Islamic Studies, and Theology to pave the exploratory way for the first three years of the project.

Objective, State of Research, Conceptual Basics

Donating can be understood as an act of gift. But donating can also be understood as an act of securing the memory of the founder, of collective remembrance (Halbwachs 1985) or of pursuing other immaterial interests. Donating also represents an economic transaction. After all, endowment is tied into the relationship to power and thus also acquires political meaning. Different theoretical approaches correspond to these different perspectives of analysis: in terms of gift theory, endowment is defined as an action that is characterized by reciprocity in a social science sense (Mauss 1925; Adloff and Mau 2005). From an economic point of view, endowments provide a capital or economic good (modern often capital, historical usually land) to generate long-term income for the purpose of a foundation or other endowed institution like a university. From the perspective of religious studies,

philanthropy, as it was developed for the three monotheistic religions, transcends individual lives of its donors, which is again of foremost interest (see Borgolte 2017b, but also Reich 2018). In political theory, the reference point is governance and rule, when philanthropy is generally regarded as autonomous (modern: civil society) action beyond the dynamics of ruling power or state distribution. Modern foundation theories in particular emphasize the innovative power of foundations to cope with social problems, the contributions of foundations to the pluralistic diversity of development or problem-solving options, and a number of other roles of foundations, although these considerations are often made only from a cultural context. Pre-modern relations of power are in turn characterized by the close connection between religion and power, which foundations help to shape as social action.

This three-dimensional analytical perspective can be illustrated by the following diagram:



Graphic: based on Then and Kehl 2012, 66.

While the economic dimension of philanthropy (donation of capital goods or land) and the dimension of power or governance appear to be directly relevant, the community-building or institutional function of philanthropy should not be underestimated (Adloff 2010). Which

value systems are expressed or strengthened by philanthropy and which legitimizing functions are fulfilled? These questions must be linked to the transcendence reference already mentioned and address the cultural and social functions of philanthropy as illustrated in the above diagram.

These basic conceptual considerations have been developed from a theoretical understanding of modern European (or North American) societies and at the same time are founded in a European historical perspective. In the present project, an attempt will be made to put this theoretical framework to the test through perspectives on ancient and non-European cultures that have not yet been taken into account, and to expand it into a comprehensive theory of philanthropy in a comparative and historical perspective of the *Longue Durée* (Weber 1922). To this end, the first step is to consciously place philanthropy not in an occidental perspective, but in an Egyptian and Islamic perspective in relation to the understanding of philanthropy in modern, social science-analysing, but also historical perspectives of Christian societies. In the next step, other regions (South Asia, East Asia) and religions (Judaism, Buddhism, Indian religions) are to be included, which have not been sufficiently and equally considered in the individual disciplines up to now due to very different research statuses.

An approach that forms such a theory and works primarily from several cultural studies perspectives is contrasted by the comparative historical research work of Michael Borgolte et al (2014, 2015, 2017a). The planned project will deal with the findings he made with regard to the medieval millennium and deepen the interdisciplinary approach with its claim to form theory and compare civilisations. Borgolte's extensive work on Christian, Jewish and Islamic foundations will serve as a historiographical and comparative reference point for a social-theoretical conception of philanthropy in the Weberian sense as an object of philanthropic activity, social integration and governance related to the common good.

Research Questions

The central research questions are: How does philanthropy contribute to the common good of a society? Does this also represent a contribution to social integration or social cohesion? Under which social, cultural, economic and manorial conditions can philanthropy exist as a prototypical form of charitable action, and to what extent can particularistic or self-interested goals actually be pursued under the guise of charitable action? Which cross-

cultural phenomena can be analysed in relation to philanthropy and, if necessary, lead to the development of a transcultural theory of philanthropy?

Dimensions of Analysis

The Thematic Research Network aims to promote explorative research that takes steps towards a comprehensive, cross-cultural theory of philanthropy. In doing so, it combines approaches from ancient studies (Egyptology), Islamic studies, theology and interdisciplinary social sciences (with a special focus on institutional theory perspectives) with the intention of later expanding to include additional disciplinary and theoretical perspectives. The dimensions of analysis formulated below are formulated to date from a theoretical perspective based on “Western” empirical research and require intercultural, comparative examination, i.e. they should be “de-Westernised” by the overall project.

The following dimensions of analysis should be taken into account when working on the sub-projects and the subsequent theory formation:

Analysis dimension (1): “Social conditions of philanthropy”

- What is the social profile of philanthropists in different societies?
- Is philanthropy a mechanism of social integration or identity demarcation?
- What form of socialisation is promoted by philanthropy?

Analysis dimension (2): “Cultural conditions of philanthropy”

- What role do religious affiliations and classifications play in endowing and giving?
- What role do religious arguments or formulations play in the design of the foundation act?
- What is the relationship between endowment and death and inheritance?
- What is the connection between endowment and the creation or development of a collective memory?

Analysis dimension (3): “Economic conditions of endowment”

- What or how much is donated?
- In what institutional form is the donation made?
- What is the time horizon for establishing foundations (longevity or eternity)?
- For whose benefit is the foundation established (beneficiaries, donors themselves, community or state)?

Dimension of analysis (4): "Governing conditions of endowment"

- What is the relationship between donating and the tax system?
- Is philanthropy a means of circumventing existing legislation or an approach of legal creativity?
- What is the relationship between donors?
- How is philanthropy connected with the exercise of power and change of power?

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