

Philanthropy: A natural consequence of economic inequality or mainly a means for exercising power?

This paper seeks to discuss the main reasons for philanthropy. Therefore it puts a special focus on philanthropic commitment of American billionaires. The first part adds a historical nuance by taking a closer look at what some call the first “big three” philanthropists: Rockefeller, Ford and Carnegie. It is followed by an examination of the underlying mindset to get a better grasp of the issue. The second part casts light on the modern concept of philanthrocapitalism and presents four ideological approaches to modern philanthropy. Those four are consumer, corporate, celebrity and billionaire philanthropy. While the first three can principally be seen as an answer to inequality, the fourth one requires a closer look. In order to do so, the third part investigates how today’s super-rich benefactors exercise power by investing in huge foundations. The aim of the paper is to discuss whether philanthropy is mainly a concept to confront of inequality or a means for the wealthy to pursue their own interests.