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## What Is Philanthropy For?

By Rhodri Davies

Does charitable giving still matter but need to change?

Philanthropy, the use of private assets for public good, has been much criticised in recent years. Do elite philanthropists wield too much power? Is big-money philanthropy unaccountable and therefore anti-democratic? And what about so-called “tainted donations” and “dark money” funding pseudo-philanthropic political projects? The COVID-19 pandemic has amplified many of these criticisms, leading some to conclude that philanthropy needs to be fundamentally reshaped if it is to play a positive role in our future.

Rhodri Davies, drawing on his deep knowledge of the past and present landscape of philanthropy, explains why it's important to ask what philanthropy is for because it has for centuries played a major role in shaping our world. Considering the alternatives, including charity, justice, taxation, the state, democracy and the market, he examines the pressing questions that philanthropy must tackle if it is to be equal to the challenges of the 21st century.

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### About the Author

**Rhodri Davies** is the founding Director of the think tank Philanthropy Matters, and a Pears Research Fellow at the Centre for Philanthropy, University of Kent. He is also the host of the Philanthropisms podcast. Until September 2021 he was Head of Policy at the Charities Aid Foundation (CAF), where he led Giving Thought, an in-house think tank focusing on philanthropy and civil society issues.

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