Effective or expedient: Market devices and philanthropic techniques

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Advocates of philanthropy often frame its worth through efficacy. Critical voices counter such narratives by exposing the social construction of these ideas by hegemonic forces. But they do not interrogate concepts of efficacy through close attention to the process of doing philanthropy. To address this gap, this article engages with philanthropy through the anthropology of techniques. Based on three months of participant observation among high-net-worth donors and organizations that work with them in the City of London, I argue that attention to expedience (here referring to maximizing funding rather than effects) invigorates critical reflection on "effective philanthropy." Furthermore, I suggest that my ethnographically informed distinction between expedience and efficacy provides me with a new way to engage with philanthropists: demonstrating the relevance of anthropological theory to their practices and concerns rather than simply criticizing them.

Keywords Philanthropy; Technique; Chaîne opératoire; Devices; Expedience; Efficacy

A polarized and polarizing debate has developed around contemporary philanthropy (Moran and Stone 2016). Critics deplore the "sanctification of the super-rich" (McGoey and Thiel 2018). They identify philanthropy as a hegemonic neoliberal force that eliminates the possibility of dissent by co-opting potential critics through funding (Eikenberry and Mirabella 2018; McGoey 2015). Advocates of philanthropy argue for the need to engage with wealthy individuals because of their capacity to do transformative good through market-based ideas oriented toward "solutions" (Adelman 2009; Bishop and Green 2008). Both sides assume that philanthropy is effective (for good or bad) without examining it as a process of action. Few accounts move beyond representations made by philanthropists in interviews or representations made about them using discourse or secondary quantitative analysis. By attending to observable events and instances of philanthropy in situ, ethnographers have observed the intersection of real-life practice with claims for efficacy, such as "philanthrocapitalism" and "performance philanthropy" (Scherz 2014; Sklair 2017). Erica Bornstein (2009) suggests anthropologists resist measuring or evaluating the effects of philanthropy and instead focus on different logics of the gift through observations in diverse settings. Among philanthropists in the City of London (a geographical area that is the symbolic and practical financial center of the United Kingdom), this requires addressing efficacy, not to evaluate but to understand the conditions of philanthropy.

Recent scholarship shows that claims for the novelty of contemporary philanthropic ideas are unfounded (Edwards 2008) but also identifies real distinctions in recent philanthropic practice. For example, both Pierre Omidyar, founder of eBay, and Mark Zuckerberg, founder of Facebook, have established for-profit organizations for philanthropy (McGoey and Thiel 2018). These limited liability companies are subject to less state scrutiny than foundations that are publicly monitored nonprofit organizations that make grants for charitable purposes (Singer and Isaac 2015). Critics have identified a risk of "self-dealing." Zuckerberg, for example, is able to give money

to himself and any organization (commercial or otherwise) in which he has an interest. Additionally, he can do so anonymously. Meanwhile, charitable foundations increasingly make tax-deductible grants to for-profit entities, and other new structures make the critical work of unmasking "self-dealing" increasingly difficult (McGoey and Thiel 2018). Although critics have mobilized conceptual insights from social and political sciences to problematize philanthropy, the complexity of these processes has hindered detailed attention to what philanthropists actually do in them. Therefore a more modest aim of tracing the mechanics of philanthropy is important. Ethnographic questions remain about how philanthropy works.

This article contributes to the understanding of philanthropy and wealth by decentering inquiry into efficacy from the heart of the debate; that concerns whether (market-based) approaches are effective and how their focus on wealth creation and technological solutions contributes to the problems they claim to solve (Eikenberry and Mirabella 2018; McGoey and Thiel 2018). Instead, I pursue mundane questions about philanthropy as a technique with standardized operations and oriented through the use of financial devices. I propose a distinction between efficacy and expedience as an ethnographic insight that contributes to anthropological knowledge about philanthropy.

I eschew an a priori definition of efficacy to demonstrate its meaning ethnographically. However, in general, by efficacy, I understand the ends assumed of philanthropy: positive effects on intended beneficiaries. By expedience, I mean maximizing philanthropic funding and focusing on the means of philanthropy. I do not suggest that *all* philanthropy is mere expedience but instead argue that the distinction illuminates the variety of philanthropic practice and as such could be a meaningful critique for some philanthropists as well as anthropologists. This is informed by a decade of work for philanthropists and impact investors as a paid advisor. Although I have no personal or family wealth, shared understanding and mutual connections through my previous experiences were integral to my fieldwork because they helped me build trust and rapport. This background also guides my analytical approach. While I previously worked for and with some of my interlocutors professionally, I do not aim to speak on behalf of philanthropists, or only about them, but to them, anthropologically. Therefore this article is not grounded in approaches to international development that have fruitfully exposed flawed representations of efficacy by agencies and charities that measure the wrong things to inflate the success of their "solutions" to poverty (Elyachar 2006; Escobar 1991). Similar approaches have yielded insights for those interested in philanthropic actors' use of certain metrics as low-hanging fruit (McGoey and Thiel 2018, 123) and the interpretative flexibility of seemingly objective tools, such as randomized control trials (RCTs) (Donovan 2018), that serve to augment the power of philanthropists. My approach is different. I do not deconstruct my interlocutors' claims but attempt to think critically through their actions.

I begin by introducing my engagement with financial devices and the anthropology of techniques. I then discuss the importance of efficacy to my interlocutors and its link to the use of particular financial devices. The main body of this article concerns philanthropic devices that I show are often principally concerned with expedience, one in the form of investment, the second with emotional and social drivers "to give." By focusing on operational sequences, I argue for a distinction between efficacy and expedience. Reflection on interlocutors who use different devices then helps me discuss expedience as an analytical category and an original critique with meaning for philanthropists and anthropologists.

Financial devices, philanthropic techniques

Building on science and technology studies (STS), which has shown the work of sociotechnical devices in mainstream finance (Callon 1998; Mackenzie 2006), attention to devices has been extended to help understand the circulation of ideas and capital in new forms of social finance (Barman 2016; Tripathy 2017). Like other forms of finance, with which it intersects in various ways, philanthropy is constituted by diverse sociotechnical

devices, including charity law, financial practices, and moral values. Devices can be understood as implicit and explicit strategies to define and arrange social relations, material artifacts, and/or forms of knowledge into a distinct entity through what they do (Singleton and Law 2013). To follow and represent this, I turn to the anthropology of techniques (Lemonnier 1992), which influenced the development of STS.[1] This is not a metaphorical leap because minute descriptions of techniques help me to move beyond labeling devices to describing how they work and what they do. Attention to these actions reveals calculations about what counts as "effective" for those doing philanthropy (Coupaye 2013, 94).

Transcribing the steps in the process of how something is made and what it does builds understanding of what it is. The *chaîne opératoire* (operational sequence) was developed by André Leroi-Gourhan (1993) as a method for observing, describing, and recording technical processes. It is a graphical representation of activity that can be understood as "technical" because it involves repeated sequences of heterogeneous actions to do, make, or use things, whether artifacts, rituals, or subjects (Warnier 2009). Some are fixed and some are not. Francesca Bray (2019, 102) suggests the operational sequence:

> provides a clear framework for feeding in information about the inputs and outputs, material, intellectual, social or ritual, specified at each stage. It is an organizing device developed specifically for mapping technical assemblages in motion.

Operational sequences offer graphical representation of philanthropic processes and illustrate their "internal logic" by describing what they do rather than making claims about the intentions of different actors.

They draw attentions to patterns and allow for comparison between related techniques that employ and contribute to a variety of devices. It is therefore also an analytical tool "that makes it possible to reveal the conditions of production … and, through these, the interweaving of social and technical elements" (Galliot 2015, 103). This addresses the gap in knowledge about philanthropic processes.

Methodology

My approach was useful because I had to switch from observant participant to participant observer during my fieldwork. Recording the minutiae of familiar processes helped to make them "strange" and therefore enabled anthropological analysis with its own criteria for ethics, evidence, and relevance.

This article is based on three months of participant observation across several sites in London. I was able to conduct participant observation at three types of registered charitable organizations that I explain below: a donor-advised fund (equivalent to near full-time over eight weeks), a giving circle (through joining its membership and attendance at three evening events), and at two foundations (each equivalent to one day a week throughout my research). I focus on these three forms of philanthropic devices, as they seemed the most prevalent and important among my interlocutors and from my broader knowledge of the industry, although others exist. I conducted semistructured interviews, multiple times where possible, with nine philanthropy professionals and twenty-six philanthropists who could be categorized following standard industry definitions as high net worth (with at least $1 million in investable assets) and ultra-high net worth (with a minimum $30 million in investable assets).

I focused on wealthier individuals within my interviews and engaged a broader variety of donors in my participant observation. Most worked in finance, in management consultancy, and in law within London or were connected to it through the provision of "wealth management services" of one type or another. In general, my interlocutors came to the different organizations I discuss through work in or use of these services. They ranged in age from their thirties to their eighties and did not share elite establishment networks often signified by the

colloquialism of an "old school tie." Nor was formal involvement in philanthropy the norm for all of their social or professional peer groups.

Efficacy and giving vehicles

Philanthropic exceptionalism, "the belief that what private donors do is necessarily good and that what official donors [government agencies] do is necessarily inefficient and bureaucratic" (Green 2014, 2), is common among donors of many hues and tied to the idea that philanthropy is somehow more effective than other actors through its efficiency and lack of bureaucracy. However, my interlocutors struggled to explain efficacy when asked directly about it. None discussed the performance of any donation they had made with reference to metrics of any kind. Instead, although ideas like "efficacy," "strategy," and "impact" were almost ubiquitous in descriptions of their philanthropy, I was never offered a clear example or analysis (quantitative or otherwise) of these ideas in operation.

One told me that the most effective project he had ever funded was a beekeeping initiative among smallholder farmers in the Ethiopian Highlands. However, it required the hives to be transported seasonally in lorries to lower and warmer ground or the bees would die. He later confided that it was his interest in beekeeping that made the project so significant for him rather than any measurable effects. This prompted him to mention it when I began our interview by asking about efficacy. Another told me about a "market-based" approach to increasing farmers' incomes in East Africa (of which I was skeptical, because the product it aimed to create was unknown among its intended target market and beneficiaries). He funded the project despite my concerns, telling me, "That's the sort of thing I like: it's sustainable" (interview, July 2015).

My purpose here is not to judge particular individuals but to show that efficacy is not routinely well defined or calculated by my interlocutors, although it is often referred to. Instead, *the way in which donors give* enacts efficacy. Different interlocutors and publicly available materials refer to a range of devices through which they explain how philanthropy is effective, impactful, strategic, and efficient (Eikenberry and Breeze 2018, 20). The archetypal contrast is with a handout to a homeless person on the street or donation to an appeal of a major charity. Simon[2] explained,

> When I was early in my career I set up direct debits to a number of organizations I cared about. I started getting invited to events by some of those organizations. We bought a minibus for [a] local school I think. But as I had more money to donate I wanted to get more strategic, so I set up [a donor-advised fund] to be more efficient, or more thoughtful. … I wanted to be more proactive about my giving. (interview, March 2015)

The key for Simon was the device that he used. Like others, he called this a "giving vehicle." These individuals had wealth managers (for investments), private client solicitors (for inheritance and other tax matters), and a range of other service providers who all talked about philanthropy as an important part of their identity because it is prestigious and helps to "steward" wealth (Marcus 1992; Sklair 2017). Leading wealth managers and philanthropy advisors published guides that emphasized the importance of individual donors and their choices, the role of "strategy" to achieve intended effects, and evaluation to establish the extent to which they had been achieved and could be better pursued in future (Mackenzie 2008; UBS 2014). Donors did not follow these prescriptions closely. Instead, they informed a general approach, relying on a "giving vehicle." Another donor explained,

> If you want to be proactive, not just responsive, and if you want to have an impact then you need to become more structured in your giving. The way you give is important to doing as much good as you can. (interview, April 2015)

Almost all interlocutors pointed to the use of a giving vehicle when I asked them how they were effective. One explicitly told me that "establishing a foundation was the most effective way to give. It provided a structure, and meant I could get directly involved" (interview, May 2015), rather than simply making donations to other

organizations. Effectiveness and strategy were operationalized through the giving vehicle rather than through the work of any operating charity to which donors gave. Robert, a retired executive of a multinational corporation, was planning a project to tackle the underlying issues that limit "effective support to local organizations" (interview, April 2015). Although he had his own favorite causes and ideas of why they are effective, he decided not to focus on any particular geography, cause, or type of intervention. Instead, he concentrated on the role of the right giving vehicle to promote giving to effective local organizations in general. Robert's expertise and interest lie in the brokering approach, identifying a gap in information and how to fill it: "it's what I did in my career. This is what I know."

The importance of the approach is further illustrated by a counterexample. Carlos, a senior investment banker, had grown up in one of the emerging markets that he subsequently made a fortune investing in. During his childhood, poverty was always visible, although he did not personally experience it. He knew specific people who worked where he had grown up on alleviating poverty and gave to them, for the sake of friendship rather than efficacy. He considered this an obligation to those "left behind," although these childhood and family friends were at the apex of local elites. Carlos considered donations through his City networks "part of what you do" at his level of wealth and industry position, also bringing social capital (Barman 2007), although there were strict legal constraints on commercial gain. When I delved in further, he revealed that, although he gave large amounts, he considered himself a "checkbook" donor and therefore denied being effective (or strategic) in his giving. This was because of how he gave, rather than any evaluation of the results of his philanthropy. Carlos did not have a "giving vehicle" of his own, although he made large contributions to others. For those who did not have them, as much as for peers who did, giving vehicles themselves indexed efficacy.

The Giving Fund

Donor-advised funds, popularly known as DAFs, have become enormously popular giving vehicles, particularly in the United States. With roots in the community foundation movement of the 1930s, DAFs were legally codified following U.S. tax reform for charitable giving in 1969 (Berman 2015). The total funds in DAFs in the United States doubled from $40 billion to $80 billion between 2010 and 2018 (*Economist* 2017). Major mutual funds, such as Fidelity, Schwab, and Vanguard, have driven this growth since their involvement in the market began around 2000. The largest charitable organization in the United States is now a DAF provider (Fidelity Charitable). Despite this, there has been limited academic attention to DAFs (Barman 2008, 42; Berman 2015). In the United Kingdom, the growth of DAFs has been slower, but it is a multi billion-pound industry, and one of the top ten charities in the United Kingdom is a DAF provider.

A DAF is legally part of a charity, and a donor makes an irrevocable donation to a DAF provider that is legally the same as the donation they make to any charity. However, a DAF is substantively different in that the DAF provider holds on to this money. It can only be "spent" by being passed on to charitable organizations, for charitable purposes. The key feature of a DAF is that this is "donor advised," and therefore a donor can "bank" a charitable donation while retaining control of it for future dispersal for charitable purposes. Those who place enough money in a DAF, typically more than £10,000, can also invest that money, so that the fund grows, although no personal profit is permitted. DAFs are often framed as charitable foundations with the administration outsourced. Although the money they direct is no longer officially theirs, and they are subject to the policies and procedures of DAF providers, donors who use DAFs essentially control the money as if it were still their own on the condition that it is reserved for future public benefit and not their own private gain. DAFs offer strategic philanthropy conveniently, through deferral.

The Giving Fund (TGF) is a DAF provider that works with hundreds of donors. At the time of my research, TGF employed ten client-facing account managers on its private client team, who managed these DAFs. They provided increasingly sophisticated investment options according to the wealth of clients and advice on donations to anyone

willing to pay a consultancy fee, provided by two private client advisors. The overwhelming interest from clients was in the access to investment options, while a handful of clients paid for advice on donations. Staff came from varied backgrounds. At senior levels, private client banking experience was key. Lower levels included those who had worked in banking and other financial services roles. I knew of only one account manager who had worked for a "normal" charity before, and that was in major donor fund-raising. None had any experience of grant making or of the operational work of charities.

I was able to shadow three of the account managers working with larger DAFs, who I call James, Jane, and Peter. Most of their work was done on the phone. Because they sat together in an open-plan office, and I was granted a desk nearby, I was able to observe this aspect of their work. One of the most obvious things was that they never made any recommendations or voiced opinions on their clients' donations, other than noting the sizes of the donations. Occasionally, if the cause had been in the news, such as a natural disaster, they might refer obliquely to the scope of the need. They never voiced an opinion about any organization nor ever encouraged any donor to donate. James would occasionally comment to me that he had certain donors who never made any donations and that he didn't know why they bothered with a DAF, and Peter once made a comment to similar effect, that he felt his client was "missing out on the fun" by focusing on investing their DAF but never making a single donation. They seemed far more active and outspoken when it came to raising issues about the management of funds. James once told a client, "I thought you should know that you have more than £100,000 in cash. You *really* should think about whether you want to invest it" (fieldnotes, June 2015). His tone and emphasis reiterated the message. He would never talk to a client about donating in the same tone. Each of my interlocutors warned clients if money went uninvested, without questioning those who left invested money accumulating for many years without donating. Jane felt, for many clients, that this was the point: they wanted to build up funds to make donations later, often when retired and not focused on accumulating wealth.

Some media sources have expressed concerns that DAFs could be used for tax evasion or to obscure illegal income. TGF's sophisticated due diligence on its donors makes illegal activity seem unlikely. Neither do I argue that TGF cannot be an effective device for philanthropists, but what that efficacy often signifies is convenience for donors. They make donations but retain control over them in order to disburse them later. This is entirely separate from any effects on beneficiaries. This has led to criticism that DAFs are "bad for society" and allow those who use them to divert tax revenues into these giving vehicles without disbursing those funds for public benefit (Cullman and Madoff 2016). Donors have an average payout rate of just 7.2% of funds under management and are not obliged to disburse funds. But neither are UK foundations. Rather than singling out DAFs, comparison with other giving vehicles explores how these criticisms map onto philanthropic techniques more broadly.

The Giving Group

I learned of The Giving Group (TGG) through TGF because a number of donors belonged to both and because Peter and Jane both attended TGG events to meet prospective new clients. TGG is a giving circle. Donors come together in giving circles to give away money. Members have some say in who is supported, and support is given to multiple organizations or projects (Eikenberry 2009; Eikenberry and Breeze 2015). The archetypal giving circle is a group of friends who pool resources to donate. However, many giving circles are more formal, some offering mentoring and brokerage through professional staff (Eikenberry and Breeze 2015). Eikenberry and Bearman (2009) found that participating in giving circles in the United States seems to influence members to identify more as "strategic," although the sums involved can seem small considering the wealth of participants. Eikenberry and Breeze (2018) found more than eighty giving circles in the United Kingdom and Ireland of varying levels of sophistication.

TGG is well known in London and open to new members as well as guests. It is run by a small professional staff. Core to TGG are "live crowdfunding events" during which members (who subscribe annually) and guests (who pay to enter and include charity trustees as well as wealthy finance professionals accompanying their friends) meet at a venue donated for the purpose by a TGG member in a senior position, typically a private bank's or law firm's office or an exclusive venue, such as a private art gallery, for presentations from preselected charities. I observed that men and women attend in approximately equal numbers. Most people arrive directly from work, and there are no rules of entry, because attendees know how they should behave. Most wear business attire, although some dress more formally, but events are not meant to be ostentatious. Drinks and canapés are served before and after the main purpose of the evening, during which everyone sits together in lecture-style seating. Each charity has six minutes (strictly timed) to present its case, followed by six minutes of questions from the audience. This happens for every organization in turn. After this, they are asked to leave the room, and "bidding" begins. Philanthropists pledge donations, publicly, in the style of an auction. There are two rounds of "bidding" for the charities in turn, and the aim is to raise £6,000 for each. I attended two TGG events and attempted to understand how the organization works through interviews with attendees and staff, as well as my own observations.

Central to TGG's model is the way of finding organizations to support. Charities cannot apply to TGG staff. Instead, TGG suggest that one of their supporters attend an event to the normal cost of £20. If, following this, they feel their organization could raise money, they work through several stages. First, a supporter (who might be a patron or trustee but cannot be a salaried staff member) must join TGG. After paying the annual subscription (of £150), they must also contribute at least £150 to other unconnected charities at TGG events. Only at this point can they sponsor the application of their charity. They help the organization to submit an application that goes before a "selection committee" of members. If their charity is chosen, the sponsor must also commit the first £250 to them as a bona fide (statement of good faith) and offer a statement of support on the evening. Almost 10% (£570) of the target amount for the charity has already been donated by their sponsor, largely to other organizations, before donating begins. This is efficient for the sponsor (who will expect to raise ten times that amount for their charity) and for TGG, which raises money through those looking to fund-raise from it subsequently.

I do not suggest that TGG membership is overly restrictive or those who join merely utilitarian. Many members sponsor multiple charities and donate to many more. Individuals who were "just watching" typically made at least one pledge at the suggested minimum of £50. During the first event I attended, two men told me they were trustees who had come to "scope out" a "cash cow" (fieldnotes, June 2015). Each gave more than £300. The compère built rapport by repeating donors' names and personally endorsing donations: "Thanks, Ben, for your donation." Cheers from other attendees made donating a moving act.

One organization featured was devoted to helping fathers in South London read to their children. They worked with men for whom this might otherwise have been difficult, for a variety of reasons (including literacy and working away from home). One of the central figures at TGG made an early, substantial donation, reflecting as he did that his father died at a young age and so had never read to him. He invited others to reflect aloud on what they had been read by their own fathers. Many did. I thought fondly of being read *Danny the Champion of the World* and *The Three Musketeers* by my dad. Although I did not share this with the group, I gave twice what I had intended (£100) and found the episode and my being part of it genuinely moving.

During the first event I attended, one donor offered to donate several hundred pounds to match subsequent pledges. This is a common feature at TGG. He invited other donors to join him and, in doing so, secured double the funding that they themselves offered (to a certain limit). This might seem inconsequential in a room full of people who gather to donate money, but in personally engaging in "matching" during my second visit, I realized its attraction to donors. I decided to offer £400 in match funds at the close of pledging for the least successful organization that I had witnessed. I felt sure there would have been no further donations if I had not spoken up, because "final pledges" had been called and not answered. My offer of £400 in match funds was immediately met

by the compère saying "we can't let that go, we've never left matching unused" (fieldnotes, May 2015) and donating £100 himself. My donation elicited £400 in donations from others. I felt that this was effective because I instigated an increase in funding. This made it efficient and is a point of contrast with TGF, which defers the transfer of money to operating charities. However, any effects on beneficiaries was entirely bracketed off from the efficacy I perceived, which was about money. This requires further detailed analysis.

To better compare TGF and TGG, I drew multiple step-by-step transcriptions of the operational sequences of making gifts through each device. A selection is shown in Figure 1. Contrast and comparison between sequences reveal what is fixed and what is not within philanthropy and the "logic" of the technique, which is not apparent only from the intentions of actors, although they are one aspect to consider. To analyze these processes systematically, I drew on categorization of five components of technical systems: matter, energy, objects, actions, and specialist knowledge (Lemonnier 1992, 5–6). I found that by focusing on specialist knowledge, and by making a distinction between two forms of specialist knowledge, I was able to engage with the problem of efficacy through a comparison of different gifts within TGF and TGG.

Each account in Figure 1 uses two colors to distinguish between two forms of specialist knowledge required for philanthropy. One concerns the maximization of funding and is depicted in red. The other concerns charitable effects and is depicted in blue. A simple scan of the colors in the operational sequences shows that knowledge about funding (red) and knowledge about effects (blue) are segregated by philanthropic techniques. Knowledge needed to maximize funding, such as investment decisions and due diligence in the two DAF accounts and pledging sessions within TGG, can be considered part of "strategic operations," necessary and relatively fixed in order for the technique to succeed (Lemonnier 1992, 21).

The successful operation of TGF depends on investment decisions, and TGG relies on emotional and social drivers of donations during pledging sessions. This might lead me to claim that these philanthropic devices are concerned only with the means and not the ends of their acts. This would echo Catherine Trundle's (2012, 215–16) critique of volunteers at a soup kitchen in Rome whose focus is on enforcing the punitive rules of their charitable organization because of the impossible complexity of the intended ends of their charitable endeavor and therefore punish those they claimed to help. Emulating such a move might expose claims for the efficacy of TGF and TGG as convenient tools for wealthy individuals, a desire to "do philanthropy effectively" but with no concern for its effects. However, such analysis does not account for the importance of specialist knowledge about the ends of philanthropy (represented in blue). This is a feature of all four sequences, although with more variability than funding knowledge. In Peter's account, there is no donation to an operating charity, for example. In the account of TGG, any follow-up contact regarding the use of donations was entirely optional for donors. This does not mean such knowledge should be considered unimportant but that it would be better understood as part of "technological choices," where a degree of flexibility is introduced within the sequence (Lemonnier 1992, 17–18). I illustrate how this works in the fourth operational sequence in Figure 1, depicting the TGG selection panel. During this meeting, a group of three volunteers from the TGG membership (including me) and two staff members assessed eight applicants for four places at an upcoming event.

The panel involved a brief telephone presentation (of one minute) and time for questions (of up to five minutes). A scoring table was used by panel participants individually for all applicants. The personal preference of the panelists was important to success (25% of the total weighting). The guidance around this criterion asked two things: "Do you like it?" and "Would you fund it?" The framework elicited an emotional response to each organization as a rationale for inclusion. Although there was a section for "how do you plan to assess the impact of your work," interest in efficacy was far less obvious than engagement with need. Far longer in every case I saw was "what problems is the project addressing?" Harri Englund (2012, 294) suggests that, for liberal cosmopolitans, "the poor appear undifferentiated in their misery." The representation of need with TGG is similar to this aggregation of "the poor"
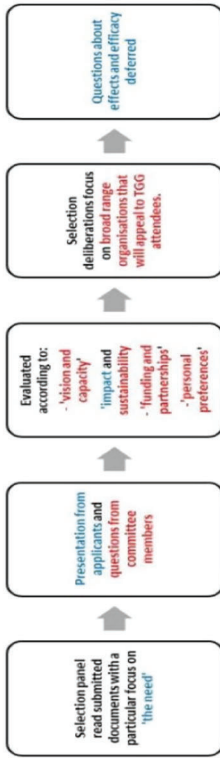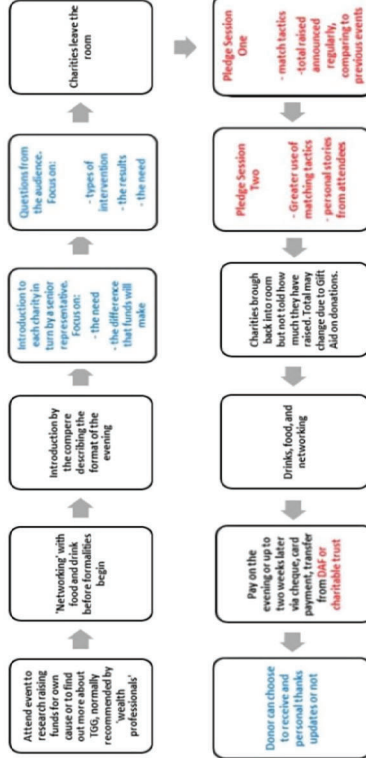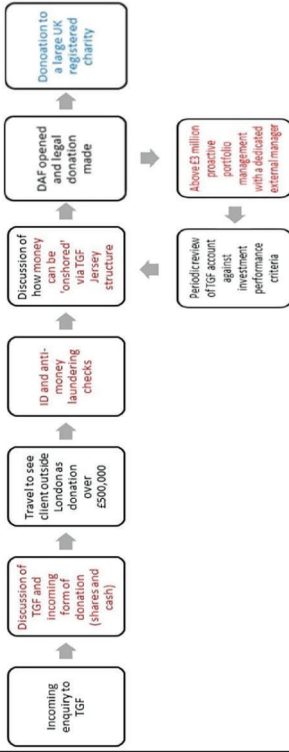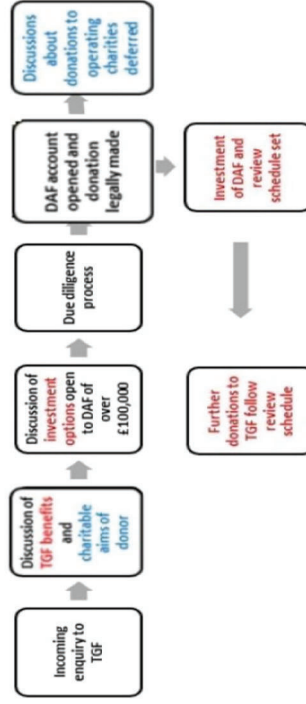
Figure 1 Operational sequences of gifts made through TGF and TGG.

but allows for categorization by nongovernmental organizations. The need represented was accounted for in three different ways (beneficiary group, need addressed, geography).

During discussions of the selection panel, it became clear that organizations were selected according to such categories. The chair of the panel, a former trustee of the organization, was clear that it was not possible to choose two organizations working with children and young people in education at the same location. A variety of needs was required for the full range of attendees to "connect with" and to "get something" from a TGG event. TGG staff, and the chair of the panel, explained, "It's not necessarily about picking the best organizations" (fieldnotes, July 2015). When I questioned the approach of one of the applications, they told me, "This type of thing goes down well." This is not the "social production of indifference" through bureaucracy (Herzfeld 1992) but a method to maximize likely funding totals while deferring concern with effects to individual donors through as wide a range of charities as possible.

Neither TGF nor TGG "concretize[s] compassion" in the way Ilana Feldman (2011) suggests that CARE International does, through claims about future effects of a donation. Attention to operational sequences shows that it is important that they do the reverse. Any claim or knowledge about effects is deferred to "technological choices" by donors and specific to given donations. In the TGG selection panel, members can follow how they feel in recommending organizations but must prioritize connecting with other donors over a concern with potential effectiveness. Subsequently, TGG donors can choose to receive more information from those they support and therefore further a relationship, while philanthropists who use TGF are free to give to any (charitable) organization or none at all. TGF and TGG can be convenient and expedient for donors, because they defer any claims about effects on beneficiaries through "technological choices," while offering efficiency through the maximization of funding as "strategic operations." This does not negate claims for efficacy but suggests the need to distinguish between expedience, the maximization of funds, and efficacy, as well as their effects on intended beneficiaries.

Efficacy beyond expedience

Importantly, I do not propose ethnographic insight as the arbiter of "how things really are." My fieldwork did not extend to the assumed beneficiaries of my interlocutors, although many are among the stereotypical subjects of anthropology. Such a critique would itself be an expedient exercise in trumpeting anthropological knowledge without contributing to it myself. It would not help me engage with philanthropy in the making, which is characterized by diverse ideas about what is effective. Exposing ignorance of diversity is an anthropological shibboleth, as illustrated in Englund's critique of cosmopolitans who view the poor as undifferentiated in their misery. But critics of philanthropists risk depicting the rich as undifferentiated in their acceptance of their own efficacy. This is not the case. I also conducted participant observation with philanthropists who had their own foundations, a third type of giving vehicle. The public profile of these individuals and their organizations, and my commitment to their anonymity, means that I offer few contextual details on these figures. Nonetheless, their cases are important.

Joanne was one of the wealthiest donors in my research, with a PhD from a world-leading university and a net worth in the hundreds of millions. She explained her interest in efficacy through examples of failures, not successes. She shared a progress report from one funded organization to illustrate why "efficacy" mattered to her. In its six-hundred-word introduction, "failure" is mentioned six times. It states, "We want and need to fail more in order to succeed." This failure is a result of "trials" (mentioned six times) and "pilots" (mentioned three times). It is necessary for "innovation" (variants mentioned four times). It will hopefully lead to success, but that is not guaranteed. For Joanne, thinking about efficacy is "bold" (the second word in the introduction) and certainly not mere expedience. The distinctions she made inform my own argument that a distinction between expedience and efficacy is necessary

to account for the potential for diversity among philanthropists and the comparability of different techniques for philanthropy.

In philanthropy, efficacy must ultimately be about effects on beneficiaries, while expedience is about the administration of funds. This does not mean that Joanne neglects attention to the means of philanthropy. She told me that she switched the fund manager who invested her foundation's endowment due to the better networking she could receive through a new provider, but more importantly because their management fees were lower (fieldnotes, July 2015). Critics seem surprised that the superrich have engaged with Anand Giridharadas's (2018) critique of the "fake change" of elite philanthropy. This connotes the tokenistic changes that powerful people can tolerate that do not really address underlying problems. This surprise is because many have failed to see that wealthy elites themselves are skeptical of claims about promised rewards or effects of money by those who want it from them (for philanthropic or other ventures).

Some wealthy people actually want to engage with critiques about what wealth is for and achieves. Joanne offered the example of RCTs. They are a well-known symbol of "effective philanthropy," but in fact, even their biggest advocates accept that they show a miniscule number of interventions open to philanthropists who really want to maximize the effect of their giving (Bouguen et al. 2018). Nobel Prize winner Esther Duflo says that of seven hundred RCT projects being undertaken by the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL), the organization she cofounded that champions the RCT methodology, only nine showed significant impact through scale-up or policy influence (Duflo 2016, 31).[3] They exposed donor favorites, including microfinance and smokeless stoves as ineffective (Duflo 2016, 32). Joanne grappled with the need to use such methods to determine effectiveness anyway. This is not common. One monitoring and evaluation professional was more typical when he told me in dismay that the funder of his foundation, which made annual grants in the millions, did not understand or care about the impact of his donations and was visibly bored by discussions about how to evaluate them (interview, May 2015). Many philanthropists are satisfied with claims made to them of their efficacy without scrutinizing evidence of effects on those they claim to help. The distinction between efficacy and expedience offers a critique of this and a more accurate representation of the diversity of philanthropic practice.

Thinking through philanthropic techniques

The distinction between efficacy and expedience that I have proposed in this article is not one made by my interlocutors but one that speaks to (some of) their interests through an anthropology of philanthropy. I have sidestepped contemporary debates about the "sanctification of the superrich" and evaluation of the efficacy of market-based thinking within philanthropy (McGoey and Thiel 2018) and pursued a more mundane enquiry into how philanthropy happens. This facilitates fresh critical attention to claims made for it. I showed first that "efficacy" is an important concept frequently used by philanthropists and intermediaries but typically without rigor. I secondly showed that what seems to be the focus of the giving vehicles that index efficacy can be understood as expedience: the maximization of philanthropic funding and valorization of the means of philanthropy while bracketing off analysis of effects on assumed beneficiaries. This is achieved in different ways that comparably show that expedience should not be understood as motivating individual philanthropists but as an analysis enabled by attention to devices and techniques. Finally, I suggested that some philanthropists should be interested in the critical distinction between efficacy and expedience.

I also made a case for attention to devices and techniques through the insight provided by operational sequences within the study of wealth and philanthropy. This affords a way of breaking down claims made for, by, and against powerful actors to critically reappraise them without relying on supposition about their intentions. It can illuminate the micropolitics of complex global processes and assemblages (Bray 2019). This is urgent work given the increasing influence of "magnanimous" elites in public life and policy (Eikenberry

and Mirabella 2018). From Zuckerberg and Gates to more circumspect (and smaller) donors, the majority of philanthropic activity (rather than ideas) remains unexplored. Thinking through financial devices and analysis made possible through operational sequences enables insightful comparison of seemingly different organizations and impulses, as well as productive contrast of processes often lumped in together as "philanthrocapitalism," through what they do. For example, impact investing is sometimes grouped with philanthropy through generic claims about their shared faith in market-based mechanisms or distinguished because one is a gift and the other an investment. More precision might contribute to a taxonomy of philanthrocapitalism and related practices.

Recent work on green finance shows that "risk" is used in the green bond market to make environmental concerns legible to finance practitioners through financial devices. The green bond market thus extends market logic (Tripathy 2017) by aligning means and ends to compel investors. The same cannot be said of efficacy in the case of philanthropy. Operational sequences show that philanthropy relies on techniques that keep means and ends distinct. This enables some philanthropists, and those raising funds from them, to claim that the maximization of funds through various means is effective. The distinction between efficacy and expedience, inspired by Joanne and made possible by attention to operational sequences, furthers recent influential critique that a lot of "effective philanthropy" is "milquetoast" (Giridharadas 2018). This quasi-insider's perspective takes the intentions of philanthropy seriously but shows that the causal link between philanthropy and any effects claimed for it cannot be assumed. It is a challenge to philanthropists and their critics.

For anthropologists, I see an opportunity to move beyond expedience by speaking to interlocutors' concerns and not just about them. This will require minute attention to diverse actors and varied practice. Operational sequences could become an invaluable tool for precise critique of plutocracy.

Acknowledgments

Notes

1   I push the boundaries of exponents' conception of "the technical" to make the case for the broader applicability of their insights.

2   The names of all interlocutors, including individuals and organizations, are anonymized, actively where necessary to preserve confidentiality.

3   This includes school-based deworming, subsidized rice in Indonesia, teaching innovations in India, conditional community block grants in Indonesia, chlorine dispensers for safe water in East Africa, free insecticidal bed nets, and police skills training.

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