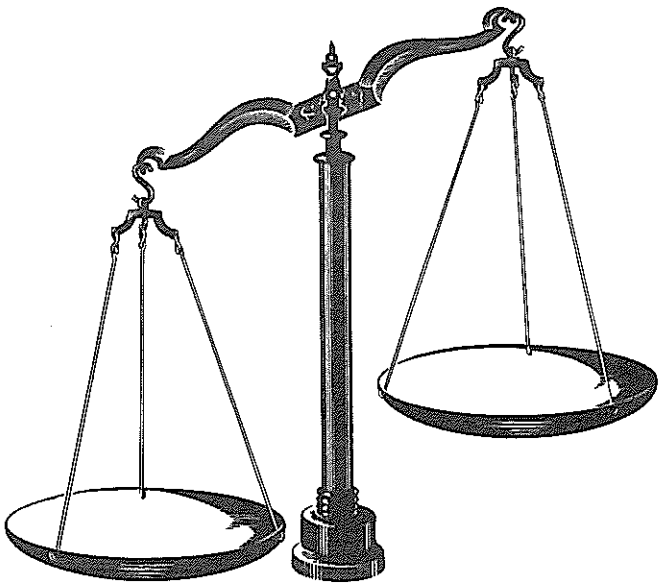
CHARITY
VERSUS
JUSTICE

BY
JOHN A. GRIFFIN



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Dr. John A. Griffin served as Executive Director of the Southern Education Foundation from 1965 until his retirement in 1978. He was one of the founders of the Southeastern Council of Foundations, serving as chairman in 1977-78. The statement reproduced here is taken from his address to the Council made at the Council's annual meeting Held in New Orleans in October, 1978.

January, 1979

I wish to speak about charity as compared with justice.

The South has gone through some enormous changes in the last two decades. No longer are we a sleepy, colonial section of the Nation where charitable activities were carefully prescribed by a restrictive culture and therefore more easily administered; the South has seen vast changes that make for a much more sophisticated social and economic structure in which philanthropic judgments will be more and more difficult to make. The South, like the entire so-called Sunbelt, is moving toward the forefront of American life. We are in a game where we are playing for keeps. Some of the provincial styles of yesterday will be increasingly out of fashion.

How well can philanthropy respond to the challenges of this rapidly changing region and to the demands of our society in general? The study made by Dr. Charles Rooks for the Southeastern Council of Foundations provides very useful background information as we consider this question.[1]

The Rooks data show that southeastern foundations in the year 1974 distributed within the South grants totalling $107 million. Most of these funds were spent in three fields: education was the largest recipient with 38.2 percent; the health field was second with 33.8 percent; welfare was third with 14.5 percent. Thus these three areas received 86.5 percent of all funds.

The remaining funds went to four other categories; arts and humanities received 5.5 percent; religion 5 percent; technology and science 2.5 percent; and international programs and others less than 1 percent.

Charles S. Rooks, *Foundation Philanthropy in the Southeast.* (Published by the Southeastern Council of Foundations, 134 Peachtree Street, Atlanta, Georgia).

The education money went mostly to higher education, largely to private institutions and largely to general support.

The health money was spent on education of health professionals, public health and rehabilitation, and hospitals. Mental health, alcohol and drug abuse received less than one percent, as did medical research.

On the other hand, the welfare grants, 14.5 percent of the total, were distributed through several sub-categories fairly evenly—child welfare, youth agencies, recreation, community funds. To be noted is that funds for the aging and the handicapped were almost at the very bottom of the funds categorized under welfare.

Particularly to be noted in this region where Blacks make up 12 to 35 percent of the population of each state was the fact that the category of human rights and minority affairs received grants that were one-fifth of one percent. The total of all grants going to minorities, including grants to education, was 2 percent (this was for 1974; in another year the data might well have included some of the substantial grants being made to Black colleges).

Mr. Robert W. Woodruff, the Atlanta philanthropist whose foundation and those associated with it have distributed a quarter of a billion dollars in the last forty years, is quoted as saying that he has found that it is easier to make money than it is to give it away.

For all of us in this profession, if it can be called a profession, Mr. Woodruff has pointed to the critical questions. How wisely, how painstakingly carefully, how sensitively are we distributing the funds of our foundations—or more properly, the foundations that we work for.

The data which I have just cited suggest that some of the giving of the southeastern foundations has gone to very obvious, very conventional recipients. It is not easy to make a judgment, of course, as to whether

or not our grants went the way they did because they were fully justified or because there was insufficient study and investigation of needs. Certainly it is easier to give to the safe, historically sound recipients. I was told a few days ago about how a certain bank officer goes about distributing funds from a charitable trust handled by his bank. I hope the story is apocryphal, but it says that the officer first determines how much can be distributed, then spreads on his desk all the requests that have been received, and proceeds to give something to every petitioner.

I do not wish to discount the importance of philanthropic grants for the purpose of conserving worthy institutions. Robert Goheen, formerly chairman of the Council of Foundations and now Ambassador to India, has spoken well on this question. Commenting on the view of those who have argued that foundations should be change agents and forces for innovation, Goheen said:

> *Quite honestly, a lot of that rhetoric seemed poppycock to me... There are after all essential values, life-sustaining relationships, and institutions rendering valuable service to be upheld against erosion and perversion no less than there are also grievous deficiencies in our society and the need to work at their alleviation and correction. Nor does it seem quite right to suggest, as some reformers do, that our established institutions, whether private or governmental, are somehow incorrigibly ossified, possessing neither social conscience nor creative promise.*

Nonetheless, Goheen adds that it cannot be emphasized too often that the stewardship with which foundations are charged is improperly exercised when it is carried out casually, along some line of least resistance, with a minimum of exploration and deliberate choice.

Goheen believes that the one absolute for foundation grant-making is that it must consciously and conscientiously be public spirited if it is to justify itself. In his view there is no "right" formula to guide foundation policy between such polarities as, on the one hand, innovation and on the other conservation; on the one hand, prevention and on the other, palliation.

He also mentions other polarities, such as development aid as compared to relief, helping to empower compared to providing expertise, project aid or general support, being an initiator or being responsive.

It is my impression that we have tended toward the more conservative of these differential approaches. Although I agree with Goheen's emphasis on the fact that foundations consciously and conscientiously should be public spirited, that they must be accountable, and certainly flexible, I do not believe that it is poppycock to urge foundations to be more innovative, to give more attention and support to catalysts, pioneers, and change agents.

As an example of our conservative approach to philanthropy, I point to the fact that the social revolution which has taken place in the South since 1954 has gone forward with little support and encouragement from the southern foundation community, certainly little direct support.

Black people, joined by some concerned whites, commenced in the heat of Mississippi, Alabama, and Georgia a movement that not only brought a revolution in civil rights but also generated other movements, such as opposition to the war in Vietnam and efforts to challenge the ravaging of the environment, movements to build new community organizations, to fight for the rights of children, prisoners, mental patients, and also the movement which helped to give women a new vision of themselves. Leslie Dunbar, the southerner who has headed the Field Foundation, believes that the impulses born by the civil rights struggle also stirred

to action Hispanics and Indians and even stimulated the deeper resolve of the people of southern Africa.

As this profoundly important struggle went on in the South, we did a little—but not much. Not to chide ourselves do I speak of this. But I do believe that we might well remind ourselves of these opportunities lost as we think of our responsibilities in relation to the vast changes taking place in our own region and the world beyond. Surely it would be a tragic mistake to miss the boat again.

As we consider the imperatives arising from the social and economic changes in our region and in the world beyond, I believe there should be changes in how we conduct our business in foundation offices as well as how and where we allocate our resources.

Concerning in-house changes, it is clear that we should respond affirmatively to the pressures to broaden the composition of our governing boards. It is time for more minorities, more women, for more youth. Our decision-making processes ought to be opened up, and we should find ways, as the Babcock Foundation has recently done and as the Bush Foundation in Florida is undertaking to do, to provide opportunities for those groups who have not understood the ways of philanthropy to know more about foundations so that they may communicate with us.

But I am more concerned with the substantive questions: What ideas, what new undertakings, what institutions and agencies are we going to support tomorrow?

As Goheen says, foundations must be consciously and conscientiously public spirited, but such consciousness should contemplate not only conserving the best of what we have but also sharpening the cutting edges for that world of tomorrow.

The Congress has just provided foundations with a small windfall; the four percent tax on our income has been cut in half. We

have two percent of our funds that we can budget now but could not budget last year. What about allocating this fractional percentage to grants responding to needs that have not been on our dockets in the past, to some programs that are unconventional and more nearly related to social change?

Philanthropy is usually equated with charity, but in the hierarchy of social values I believe that justice outranks charity. Justice addresses the enabling process, the achieving of entitlement. It is equity.

The world out there, the developing world and the world of the dispossessed here at home, suggests that as thoughtful persons we should be concerned increasingly not only with charity but also with justice. Our obligation well may be the encouraging of programs and policies that seek justice. Without justice and the economic and political changes that it requires there may be no other way to make our society right, no other way, in Leslie Dunbar's words, "to build a society within which all men and women, and their children too, can find decent and dignified lives."


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