

Biodiversity for Billionaires: Capitalism, Conservation and the Role of Philanthropy in Saving/Selling Nature

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ABSTRACT

This article examines the role of philanthropy in conservation as a way of exploring how and why conservation might be becoming more neoliberal. It describes how conservation philanthropy supports capitalism both discursively and in more practical ways. Philanthropy is examined in terms of the two forces considered to be driving the neoliberalization of conservation — the need for capitalism to find new ways of making money, and the desire of conservationists to engage with capitalism as the best way of getting things done. It demonstrates how philanthropy can speak to both of these logics simultaneously, particularly through emerging ideas of philanthrocapitalism, which may be enhancing the neoliberalization of both philanthropy and conservation.

INTRODUCTION

Analyses of the way in which biodiversity conservation is neoliberalizing have paid little attention to philanthropy and philanthropists. This is a surprising omission, given that both conservation and philanthropy are about efforts to improve the world, and both are considered to be getting more neoliberal, with notable synergies between them (Edwards, 2008; Igoe and Brockington, 2007; Igoe et al., 2010; Sawaya, 2008; Vogel, 2006). Furthermore, philanthropy is likely to be a greater force in future years, as a golden era for capitalism over recent decades leads into a gilded era for philanthropy, and as the post-war boom generation die and bequeath their wealth. The wealth of US-based foundations doubled between 1993 and 2008, due to growing numbers of people with large estates leaving bequests, and more aggressive and professional fundraising practices (Bishop and Green, 2008; Raddon, 2008). Philanthropy is becoming more globalized, as grant giving increasingly crosses international borders (Rogers, 2011; Vogel, 2006). Capitalism and philanthropy are intrinsically linked, both financially and

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through mutually produced discourses, and the already fuzzy boundary between the two is dissolving further with the growing influence of the ideas and practices of philanthrocapitalism, which advocates an increased role for capitalist actors, techniques and market forces in philanthropy. Conservation philanthropy is not separate from this. The purpose of this paper is to explore some of the ways in which philanthropy has contributed to the neoliberalization of conservation, examining how it brings capitalism and conservation together, and how it allows conservation to support capitalism by giving it legitimacy and new market opportunities. It explores how the neoliberalization of philanthropy may be furthering the neoliberalization of conservation.

Philanthropy is interesting not just because it is a neglected area of analysis, but because it tells us something about the processes by which conservation may be neoliberalizing. The article begins by defining philanthropy and neoliberal conservation, and how each is linked to the logics of capitalism. It then explores how conservation philanthropy provides legitimizing and discursive support for capitalism and its relationship with the environment, before turning to the more direct support it can provide. A subsequent discussion of the idea of philanthrocapitalism leads into examples of where this might be seen in conservation. The article concludes by discussing the implications of these arguments for the question of how and why conservation has become more neoliberal.

DEFINING PHILANTHROPY AND NEOLIBERAL CONSERVATION

The term philanthropy, deriving from the Greek for 'love of humanity', was coined in the seventeenth century, associated with enlightenment thinking, later explored by Adam Smith (1759) in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Yet it was industrial capitalism in the USA during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries which came to define philanthropy and its place in society (Acs et al., 2007; Gross 2003; Vogel, 2006). During this time, industrialists such as Andrew Carnegie argued that the profits of capitalism should be redirected to social goals, stewarded by the wealthy, to create large-scale change to solve the problems within society which other parts of capitalism had yet to reach (Gross, 2003; Sawaya, 2008; Vogel, 2006). Whilst there has been considerable heterogeneity between philanthropists and writers on philanthropy, nevertheless there is a consistent idea running from Adam Smith through Carnegie and Rockefeller to Warren Buffet which argues that those who gain most from enterprise should steward this wealth for the greater benefit of humanity.

The role of the market is in part to contribute to civil society, operating largely outside of the state. In the Anglo-Saxon tradition, philanthropy has distinct religious and cultural roots from charity (Gross, 2003); the latter is grounded in Catholic ideas of the relief of suffering at an individual level,

whereas the former combines Protestant and Puritan ideas of work ethics, individual agency and moral obligations with liberal political ideals, and aims to create situations where such relief is no longer necessary. Whilst in charity, the source of wealth is incidental, there is a clear idea in philanthropy that doing well through enterprise and the market creates a moral obligation to use this for the greater good. There may be a feedback loop between enterprise and philanthropy, where successful entrepreneurs fund causes (e.g. universities) which create further enterprise and therefore further philanthropy (Acs et al., 2007). Attitudes towards philanthropy may be a good barometer of the relationship between society and capitalism, an indicator of what is considered appropriate and fair dealings (Sawaya, 2008). The philanthropic foundation, a means for people to pool their funds into organizations with clearly defined social goals, constitutions and bureaucracies, has been highly influential in defining what constitutes philanthropy, epitomizing the idea of using the benefits of enterprise for the long-term, large-scale transformation of society (Gross, 2003).

This definition of philanthropy is narrow. It excludes ideas about the love of humanity and transforming society that emerge from outside the last few centuries of Anglo-Saxon capitalist culture. It focuses on how the wealthy redistribute their income, ignoring low and middle-income earners, and identifies with formal gifts of money rather than informal gifts of time, effort or expertise. Here philanthropy is an activity confined to the relatively rich. With regard to corporate philanthropy, it excludes those bits of corporate social responsibility that come before profit is made (on sourcing, wages etc.) and includes only actions to distribute profits with the aim of changing society for the better. Whilst this definition is not shared by everyone — Ramutsindela et al. (2011: 5) define philanthropy more broadly as ‘voluntary action for the public good’, encompassing any kind of civil society action — such narrowness is justifiable, as it reflects the current dominant understandings of what is meant by philanthropy (Gross, 2003; Sawaya, 2008; Vogel, 2006). The spotlight on the spending of the wealthy is appropriate, as it focuses on the benefits of enterprise, which accrue most to those who own or control them. Philanthropists are by definition profitable corporations or rich individuals, and tend to be white, male and western, although otherwise heterogeneous (Rogers, 2011).

Neoliberal conservation is an even more indefinite, heterogeneous concept, simultaneously a set of practices and an ideology, which play out in unique ways in individual contexts (Castree, 2008). Nevertheless, a number of generalizations have been drawn about how conservation is neoliberalizing. Firstly, the role of the state as a driver of conservation has been rolled back, diminished and replaced by NGOs, whose role in running protected areas, formulating policy and other conservation activities is increasing — although the state is also intervening to regulate and facilitate markets in some areas (Castree, 2008; Igoe and Brockington, 2007). Secondly, conservation is increasingly turning to market mechanisms to find ways of

preserving biodiversity, of “selling nature to save it”, such as through payments for ecosystem services, bio-prospecting or ecotourism (Igoe and Brockington, 2007; McAfee, 1999). Endangered biodiversity has been repackaged as images, symbols and spectacles to facilitate this (Brockington and Scholfield, 2010b; Igoe, 2010). Thirdly, since the 1980s but accelerating since 2000, leading conservation NGOs have developed closer relationships with corporations, working with them, copying their methods in areas such as marketing, taking their donations and generally developing more positive attitudes towards their activities (Holmes, 2011; MacDonald, 2010, 2011). NGOs have become more like businesses in their structure, strategies and discourses. Conservation has been compatible with capitalism since its inception, but it has never before been so enthusiastic about the potential for capitalist solutions to conservation problems (Brockington and Duffy, 2010). Philanthropy contributes to each of these three features of neoliberal conservation. It supports state rollback, by providing alternative sources of money and expertise for solving society’s problems. Indeed, states often encourage philanthropists to take over state functions. Yet as is shown below, it speaks best to issues of selling nature to save it, and the close links between conservation organizations and corporations.

Two distinct logics have been identified for this neoliberalization process. Firstly, neoliberal conservation has been considered as part of capitalism’s never-ending expansion, a new frontier where capital can be created (Brockington and Duffy, 2010; Castree, 2008; Igoe et al., 2010). Conservation has neoliberalized because capitalism has viewed it as a new opportunity and market. Scholars have tended not to see neoliberal conservation as an attempt within capitalism to avoid what O’Connor (1988) calls the second contradiction of capital, where production undermines the material conditions upon which it depends through resource depletion or excess pollution. Rather, it is about new ways to make money. Secondly, other studies suggest that conservation organizations have turned to the capitalist actors and strategies which dominate the world today because doing so is seen as the best way to get things done (Corson, 2010; Holmes, 2011; MacDonald, 2010, 2011; Spierenberg and Wels, 2010). Conservationists have chosen neoliberal strategies because, in a neoliberal world, they are considered the most effective way of conserving biodiversity. Whilst these two trends often overlap, they are nevertheless different. Such a distinction is rarely problematized, and the links between them rarely explored. Analysing philanthropy offers an opportunity to do this, by tracing how discourses, practices and influence flow from donor to cause, and the implications for both capitalism and conservation. As the following sections demonstrate, philanthropy is simultaneously linked to the logics of capitalist expansion and to the promotion of capitalist solutions as the best way of getting things done, particularly through philanthrocapitalism — a new philosophy of philanthropy. This essay will demonstrate that these two logics are intertwined and feed off one another, and may be getting closer.

PHILANTHROPY, CONSERVATION AND THE LEGITIMIZATION OF CAPITALISM

Philanthropy's contribution to capitalism is often analysed in terms of how it legitimizes the activities and relationships involved in capitalism. Philanthropy's discursive contribution is at least as important as its financial impact. Whilst the total value of donations is impressive in absolute terms, it is less so when compared with state spending or with the overall wealth of the rich, and therefore the potential philanthropic funds available. Bishop and Green (2008), who are extremely positive about philanthropy's potential, note that only 11 per cent of the super-rich are involved in philanthropy. The idea that philanthropy produces dominant ideas in society which sustain capitalism by supporting and influencing civil society organizations can be traced back to Gramsci (1971). While under Hegelian notions of liberal systems, civil society acts as a foil to the state and market, preventing either from becoming overly dominant, these visions see civil society and the philanthropy which supports it as a key part of the market's dominance (Lipschutz, 2005; Vogel, 2006). Conservation philanthropy facilitates capitalism's expansion. Philanthropy does not just produce dominant ideas about the relationships between civil society, market and the state within one society, but as philanthropy becomes increasingly internationalized and as foundations become important actors in global politics and society then these ideas become globalized (Vogel, 2006).

This cultural dominance works in two ways. Firstly, the act of giving to good causes gives capitalism and capitalist actors a generally positive sheen which may distract from the negative consequences of capitalism, or make them seem justifiable. Philanthropy makes certain ideas, such as the distribution of wealth, entrepreneurship, and the obligations of the rich, seem not just acceptable, but a normal state of affairs. Secondly, philanthropists are presumed to choose causes which reflect their own personal interests, experiences and ideologies rather than wider visions of societal needs — their giving reflects 'private visions of the public good' (Raddon, 2008: 38). As philanthropists are presumed to be successful capitalists, these are presumed to be capitalist friendly visions. Combined, these two factors ensure that philanthropy makes capitalism look good, while its negative effects are ignored, and as such facilitates its continuation and expansion by reducing opposition and asserting a hegemonic vision of capitalism as a positive force (Brockington and Scholfield, 2010b; Edwards, 2008; Igoe et al., 2010; Nickel and Eikenberry, 2009; Raddon, 2008; Sklair, 2000; Sawaya, 2008; Vogel, 2006; Žižek, 2009).

As part of the process of legitimizing capitalism and facilitating its continuation and expansion, philanthropy is presumed to favour certain forms of environmentalism which are friendly to capitalism, or at least not directly threatening to it (Brockington and Scholfield, 2010a; Corson, 2010; Delfin and Tang, 2007; Edwards, 2008; MacDonald, 2010; Sklair, 2000;

Spierenberg and Wels, 2010). Delfin and Tang's (2007) analysis of environmental grants by Californian philanthropic foundations found that they disproportionately favoured mainstream environmental issues, shying away from controversial topics such as toxic waste campaigns. Guthman (2008) shows that foundations' tendency to propose broad areas of work which they are prepared to fund, to which NGOs respond with proposals, allows them to set the overall agenda in environmentalism towards less radical forms. Sklair (2000) argues that during the 1990s corporations and corporate actors, partly through their involvement in the administration of environmental NGOs (see below), successfully defined sustainable development in a particular way which depoliticizes it and emphasizes thin regulation, markets and consumerism as solutions rather than problems. Sklair considers this definition to be hegemonic, so that dominant environmentalist ideas are conducive to capitalism, rather than threatening.

Biodiversity conservation is ideally suited to be friendly to capitalism: it poses fewer tricky questions about how capitalism operates than other environmental movements such as environmental justice; it has a long history of friendly engagement with capitalism; and it offers useful, powerful and instantly recognizable symbols of environmentalism such as cute endangered animals, which can readily be deployed for discursive or money-making purposes (Anderson and Leal, 1997; Brockington and Duffy, 2010; Igoe, 2010). As the examples explored below show, conservationists in turn may frame biodiversity issues in ways which facilitate philanthropy, by positioning them as merely needing philanthropy, rather than more structural political and economic changes, to be resolved. We could expect philanthropy to favour biodiversity conservation over other environmental issues, and to do so in a way which is not threatening to the interests of capitalism or the philanthropists themselves.

Fortwangler's (2007) study of conservation philanthropy in the US Virgin Islands National Park on the island of St John is particularly illustrative. Here, as in many US national parks, the park authorities are underfunded by the federal government and rely on a local NGO, the Friends of the Virgin Islands National Park, to provide a significant proportion of funds for general running costs, specific projects and infrastructure investments. The Friends organization works closely with the park, and is widely seen as influencing park policy, particularly which projects get funded. Yet rather than being composed of native St Johnians, it is dominated by outsiders from the US mainland who have second homes on the island, or who have interests in the tourism and real estate industries, and is financed by their philanthropy.

The Friends' influence goes beyond their clout as a major financial donor, to whom the park authorities have close links and to whom they turn for funding; Fortwangler found that some leaders of the NGO were well connected to important politicians and bureaucrats in Washington, and used these connections to lobby for particular policies and projects in the park (Fortwangler, 2007: 524). Many locals resent the Friends group, accusing

them of using this influence to suit their own cultural and economic interests, rather than that of the wider community. Firstly, they are accused of imposing their own view of nature which ignores local Afro-Caribbean cultural histories and ideas of nature (*ibid.*: 516). Secondly, locals accuse the Friends of hypocrisy, as they claim to protect the park's environment, yet they never criticize the tourism and real estate industries which are most destructive of the park, and to which they have strong links. The Friends support conservation measures which are harmful to local people's livelihoods, such as bans on fishing near reefs, but are silent on the apparently greater damage caused to the same reefs from tourism, yachting and real estate activities. These industries benefit greatly from the park, and they are keen to develop close links with it to increase profits (*ibid.*: 526). Whilst the philanthropists here believe that they are doing the right thing, it is a narrow vision of the public good confined to a small group of powerful people, a vision which reflects their biases and supports their interests. It is also a vision of environmental philanthropy which supports the capitalist interest of certain industries. It is important to note that this is not a universally hegemonic vision. The Friends were able to create a version of the problems of the park and their solutions which suited them in crucial places — the National Parks Service directorate and in Washington. Local people were able to demystify and critique this vision, but they were relatively powerless, unable to assert their own counter-narrative about the park and philanthropy. This shows that the hegemony argument is complex and nuanced, that the images and ideas produced by philanthropy can be interpreted differently in different places, and that they are relevant only in certain arenas.

Žižek (2008) takes the argument of philanthropy providing legitimacy for capitalism further, arguing that it is not just supportive of capitalism, but a fundamental necessity for its expansion. He sees philanthropy as fundamentally hypocritical and contradictory, arguing that philanthropists spend half their time solving problems through their good causes that the other half of their activities — their businesses — create. Here philanthropy, which purports to save the world, is based on wealth generated by capitalist activity which destroys the world. Žižek further argues that philanthropy allows capital to be re-circulated into the purchase of things beyond materialism, such as health and education. This is fundamental to capitalism's continuation because it prevents a build-up of resentment which would inevitably lead to moves to undermine it, such as socialism or war. This argument overstates the power and potential of philanthropy. Although the amounts of money involved and the prominence of images of philanthropy are impressive, it represents but a small part of the activities and spending of the wealthy. Philanthropy is just one way in which the rich maintain their dominance. For example, in the US Virgin Islands case, the tourist and real estate actors also used their political connections and economic domination to create a situation favourable to their interests; philanthropy was insufficient on its own (Fortwangler, 2007).

PHILANTHROPY AND CONSERVATION AS DIRECT SUPPORT FOR CAPITALISM

As well as supporting capitalism discursively, philanthropy can provide much more practical support to capitalist actors, presenting new ways to make money and expand their businesses. The great industrial philanthropists of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries used their own philanthropy to directly support their business interests (Sawaya, 2008), and supporting conservation has been a useful way for capitalists to expand their businesses. Philanthropy and conservation here are part of capitalist expansions, providing new arenas for making money.

This idea is reflected in land trusts and easements. In these legal structures and agreements, which emerged in the US during the 1950s but are spreading worldwide, landowners either donate part of their property to be managed for conservation by an NGO, or retain it but conserve it themselves by committing to refrain from certain kinds of land uses and developments in perpetuity (Logan and Wekerle, 2008). This trend represents a change in who is considered responsible for conserving biodiversity, with less responsibility for the state and more for private individuals and civil society. In particular, it emphasizes the role of individuals who own large amounts of land which can form part of trusts and easements, which is a small and privileged group. Philanthropy here is facilitating neoliberal state rollback.

Emphasizing the financial value of land and carefully calculating the putative losses from not harming the environment, easements and trusts represent a clearly neoliberal conservation strategy of developing new ways of financially valuing nature and using market mechanisms to conserve (Morris, 2008). In return for their philanthropic grants of land or promises not to do harm, the putative loss to owners is offset through direct cash compensation or tax benefits, particularly on property and capital gains tax. Philanthropy here can be a rational business decision, and is explicitly marketed as such by governments promoting easements and trusts to landowners (Logan and Wekerle, 2008). The tax benefits are sometimes greater than the land value (Morris, 2008). Not only do landowners gain from their donation through compensation and tax benefits, but as Duncan and Duncan's (2004) detailed study of landscape and property in a very wealthy county of New York state demonstrates, the benefits extend further. Easements can be used strategically by landowners to preserve valued characteristics of their property and increase their value. The world's biggest conservation NGO, The Nature Conservancy, came to prominence and grew spectacularly through their pioneering use of land easements, but this strategy generated considerable controversy in 2004 when it was revealed that senior staff of The Nature Conservancy had used land easements to boost the value of their own homes (Ottaway and Stephens, 2003). Conservation philanthropy can be a useful way of making money.

Philanthropists using easements and land trusts are able to define what constitutes conservation and philanthropy, as well as the meanings, values and physical appearance of landscapes, through the conditions of their gift and frequently through their involvement in NGOs entrusted with managing the land (Duncan and Duncan, 2004; Logan and Wekerle, 2008). As with Fortwangler's study, this will reflect the interests and biases of the philanthropists and their idea of the public good, which may not be shared by other people. Duncan and Duncan (2004) refer to how these and other measures have created material and metaphorical 'landscapes of privilege' which suit the cultural and financial interests of rich residents to the exclusion of others.

Conservation philanthropy can support money making in other ways. Capitalists get involved in civil society, particularly joining boards of organizations, in order to meet other businesspeople, extending their networks and furthering their businesses (Porter and Kramer, 2002; Sklair, 2000). Conservation NGOs may be a very useful tool for doing this — in the last few decades businesspeople have come to dominate boards of large conservation NGOs, and now make up approximately two-thirds to three-quarters of membership (Holmes, 2011). Many of these directors also donate substantially to the organization. As well as networking potential, such involvement may allow businesspeople to define conservation in ways which are not just friendly to capitalism generally but their companies in particular. WWF-US was criticized for not joining other environmental NGOs (including other branches of WWF) in protests against a large aluminium smelter in Iceland, at a time when the president of WWF-US also sat on the board of the smelting company (Rothkopf, 2008).

The work of Ramutsindela (2009) and Spierenberg and Wels (2010) on the philanthropy of Anton Rupert neatly demonstrates the business potential of such networks. A very successful South African entrepreneur from the 1950s until his death in 2006, Rupert founded various conservation NGOs in South Africa, including the Southern African Nature Foundation (the South African affiliate of WWF International, later renamed WWF-South Africa) and the Peace Parks Foundation, and funded them extensively. He was a skilled networker, and his ability to build contacts was central to both his business and conservation successes. Rupert's business and conservation networks were closely integrated to the point that they became indistinguishable — the same people were involved, and conservation meetings would be used to push business interests and vice versa (Ramutsindela, 2009; Spierenberg and Wels, 2010). Under Rupert's leadership, the Southern African Nature Foundation promoted conservation philanthropy as good for business, and became the most successful environmental NGO in South Africa because of the sponsorship and other benefits which came from having the closest links to business (Ramutsindela, 2009). In 1968, alongside his close friend Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands, he created the 1001 club as a fundraiser for WWF International, in which the 1001 individuals or corporations who

donated the US\$ 10,000 membership fee were given access to exclusive fundraising dinners and parties where they could meet other businesspeople and royalty. The club was particularly popular with South African businesspeople as it gave them excellent opportunities to bypass apartheid era sanctions and network internationally to expand their businesses (Spierenberg and Wels, 2010). Rupert would later create the Club 21 to support the Peace Parks Foundation, with membership costing US\$ 1 million, which offered similar business networking opportunities (*ibid.*).

Although the integration of philanthropists and their business interests into conservation NGOs clearly gives opportunities for making more money, the trend is about more than this. Conservation organizations have pursued philanthropists and their business interests for the benefits they bring, and to help them fulfil their goals of protecting biodiversity. This is reflected in the involvement of philanthropists in the board of Conservation International (CI), one of the largest conservation NGOs, which has seen spectacular growth since its creation in 1987. CI has pursued a strategy of developing ever closer social links to potential donors and high-profile supporters. From initial contacts at fundraising events or through small donations, these individuals are subsequently taken on private luxury trips to sites where CI is working, using the in-house luxury travel firm created partly for this purpose, and ultimately invited to join the board of directors (Holmes, 2011; MacDonald, 2008). In one well-known example, the IT entrepreneur and philanthropist Gordon Moore donated US\$ 100 to CI, but on recognizing the name, CI contacted Moore and courted him, which led to Moore joining the board. His foundation later gave CI grants totalling US\$ 282 million. Other philanthropists who have been courted by CI and who have joined the board include the heirs to Wal-Mart and the Johnson and Johnson pharmaceutical firm (Holmes, 2011; MacDonald, 2008). These close connections increase donations and strengthen links to businesses and philanthropic foundations; they make sense as the best way to get more money and influence, to do more conservation.

As well as board memberships for businesspeople/philanthropists, NGOs have set up other structures to engage more closely with businesses, and these closer connections have occurred concurrently with shifts towards more positive views of businesses within NGOs (MacDonald, 2011). It is unclear whether the close links have changed attitudes, or whether attitudes changed so that close links could be fostered, for the political and financial benefits that this brings. Conservation, like philanthropy, has long had a history of fitting in with dominant trends in society as a way of achieving success — both altered their practices and discourses to better fit with colonialism's structures and ideologies (Lambert and Lester, 2004; MacDonald, 2011; Ramutsindela, 2009). Given that neoliberal capitalism is the dominant force in today's society, it would not be surprising if both were to adjust their strategies to better fit with it in order to succeed. The ever-closer engagement between businesspeople, philanthropists and conservation NGOs represents

a trend which speaks to both reasons behind the neoliberalization of conservation: capitalism engaging with conservation to make more money, and conservation engaging with capitalism to do more conservation.

THE NEW PHILANTHROPY AND CLOSER LINKS BETWEEN CAPITALISM AND CONSERVATION

The relationship between capitalism, conservation and philanthropy may be changing, as new ideas about what philanthropy is and how it should be practised come to the fore. This trend, referred to by critics and opponents alike as philanthrocapitalism, represents the extension and deepening of links between capitalism and philanthropy, and a growing confidence in arguing that they should be drawn even closer (Bishop and Green, 2008; Edwards, 2008; Nickel and Eikenberry, 2010; Scott et al., 2011). Its emergence has been linked to a new generation of philanthropists who have become rich at a relatively young age from IT and finance (e.g. Bill Gates of Microsoft, Jeff Skoll of eBay, hedge fund billionaire Arpad Busson), and who use the skills and attitudes that led to success in these industries to shape their giving (Bishop and Green, 2008; Edwards, 2008; Moody, 2008). Philanthrocapitalists are part of a trans-national elite; they have more in common with the super-rich from other countries than with their own countrymen (Rogers, 2011; Rothkopf, 2008; Sklair, 2000). Philanthrocapitalism, distinct from previous ideas about philanthropy in its enthusiasm for market solutions and actors, is relatively recent and has yet to be subjected to much academic enquiry (Edwards, 2008, 2011; Rogers, 2011).

Philanthrocapitalism has two key features. Firstly, it argues that successful capitalists are ideal philanthropists, that they are better at doing good than government or NGO officials because the same skills, attitudes, entrepreneurship, connections and drive which made them successful business-people will also make them successful philanthropists (Bishop and Green, 2008; Edwards, 2008; Moody, 2008; Scott et al., 2011). Philanthrocapitalism brings ideas and language from business and re-applies them to philanthropy. For example, the ideas of Silicon Valley venture capitalism, in which funders would invest in, nurture and closely mentor a number of small IT companies in the hope that one would grow to become successful and pay off the high-risk initial investment, is re-imagined as venture philanthropy, where the philanthropist takes a small organization, provides it with funding and guidance, gives it clearly defined quantitative targets, and attempts to grow its impact and effectiveness (Edwards, 2008; Moody, 2008). Just as important as their financial contribution, philanthropists also contribute their connections, brand image, knowledge of the business world and other factors (Bishop and Green, 2008; Schervish, 2003).

Secondly, philanthrocapitalism argues that incorporating capitalist strategies, such as markets and the profit motive, makes for better philanthropy. For

example, for-profit micro-credit is considered superior to its not-for-profit equivalent, as including a profit motive would lead to more investment, efficiency and innovation — the potential to make money from doing good will attract interest from the private sector (Bishop and Green, 2008). Advocates of philanthrocapitalism are explicit that the boundaries between civil society and the market should be blurred to the point where a distinction is meaningless (Bishop and Green, 2008; Schervish, 2003).

Philanthrocapitalism is criticized as over-hyped, overly focused on technical fixes rather than structural causes of problems, and on quantitative, short term measures of success rather than a more complex notion of progress (Bosworth, 2001; Edwards, 2008, 2011; Rogers, 2011). Yet it does have an impact that belies the small proportion of philanthropy considered to be philanthrocapitalism (Moody, 2008). Bill Clinton wrote the forward to the main text advocating it (Bishop and Green, 2008); sessions discussing it are organized at the Davos World Economic Forum; its ideas underpin high-profile initiatives such as the One Laptop Per Child project and the various philanthropy consultancies founded by investment bankers to help donors leverage philanthropic investments for maximum returns; and its principles and techniques form part of MBA courses. Founder of eBay, Jeff Skoll, endowed the Skoll Centre for Social Entrepreneurship at the Said Business School, University of Oxford, to create an academic centre of excellence for this new type of philanthropy (*ibid.*).

Philanthrocapitalism's discursive impact is more important than its financial impact. Critics argue that the ability of philanthrocapitalists to shape agendas, particularly in the global South (e.g. the Gates fund's influence on education and health policy), is disproportionate to their financial contribution; their wealth makes philanthrocapitalists unsackable and relatively unaccountable even when their strategies are shown to fail; and they may not have been subject to much media critique because of their adeptness at branding and ties with media outlets (Bosworth, 2011; Edwards, 2011; Rogers, 2011). Philanthrocapitalism does not necessarily represent a radically new idea. Rather, it advocates the extension of market logics, discourses, techniques and motives further into philanthropy, and even if it has not yet been analysed in such theoretical terms, it should be considered a neoliberalization of philanthropy. It supports capitalism not just because it provides new ways of making profit from market-based versions of civil society, but because it portrays capitalism as the solution to society's problems explicitly and enthusiastically, and distracts from the structures which may underpin them (Edwards, 2008; Lipschutz, 2005).

These twin ideas of philanthropists strongly bringing their business practices into their philanthropy, and market mechanisms as the best way to do philanthropy, are reflected in the discourse and practice of some conservation activity. Firstly, some conservation NGOs take the business strategies of successful businesses and explicitly translate them directly into conservation philanthropy. The Wildlife Conservation Network (WCN), an NGO based

in Los Altos, in California's Silicon Valley, founded by IT entrepreneurs and executives from companies such as Cisco Systems and Yahoo, explicitly takes the approach of Silicon Valley venture capitalism and applies it to conservation philanthropy. Like venture capitalists who fund and guide companies but do not develop products themselves, the WCN does not undertake direct conservation work, but serves as funder and mentor for more applied conservation organizations. Its tagline reads 'the spirit of innovation in conservation', and its mission statement declares its intention to support 'conservationists who demonstrate the spirit of entrepreneurship in launching innovative projects to protect endangered species'.¹ Conservation entrepreneurs are described as: 'Like their counterparts in business, successful conservation entrepreneurs are creative, action-oriented and dare to try different strategies. Their passion and commitment to wildlife preservation compels them to undertake conservation projects in areas the mainstream considers too risky, too arduous, or too formidable . . . [who] maximise the value of every dollar invested in conservation' (ibid.).

A key part of WCN's activities include networking events, such as their annual expo, where attendees can hear the conservationists funded by WCN talk about their work, and the annual garden party, where tickets costing US\$ 1,000 allows guests to mingle with famous conservationists such as Cynthia Moss, Iain Douglas-Hamilton and Jane Goodall. Such events play on notions of celebrity conservation (Brockington, 2009), but they are also examples of Silicon Valley business techniques applied to conservation. The WCN sees these events as opportunities for the conservationists whom they fund to network with one another, exchange ideas and access resources and expertise which belies the small size of their individual organizations, just as Silicon Valley venture capitalists encourage the small companies they fund to interact and pool expertise. Secondly, they provide an opportunity for small conservation organizations to meet potential funders who can help them grow and conserve more, just like small IT start-ups looking for investors to help them become the next big thing. WCN sees itself as a facilitator of this process; its website states: 'WCN uses a fundraising model based on the relationships that have evolved among high-tech entrepreneurs, investors and venture capital (VC) firms. We act as a very efficient VC — identifying high-potential conservation entrepreneurs and projects, ensuring due diligence is completed up-front, providing ongoing advisory services, and forging alliances between donor-"investors" and conservation entrepreneurs' (ibid.). The WCN model follows the philanthrocapitalist idea that successful capitalists can use their business techniques for more successful philanthropy.

Secondly, following the philanthrocapitalist perspective that profit motives make for better philanthropy, some NGOs clearly see their role as making conservation pay for itself (Brockington and Scholfield, 2010b). The work of the African Parks Network (APN), formerly the African Parks

1. www.wildlifeconservationnetwork.org (accessed 19 July 2011).

Foundation, is illustrative. It was partly founded and initially funded by the Dutch retail and chemicals billionaire and philanthropist Paul Fentener van Vlissingen in 2000, with additional funding and involvement from other noted conservation philanthropists; Prince Bernhard of the Netherlands (contributing more than US\$ 1 million) and the Walton family, heirs to the Wal-Mart fortune (contributing US\$ 5 million).² APN very explicitly use markets for conservation: its tagline reads ‘a business approach to the management of protected areas’. Describing how the foundation emerged, APN’s website tells how the founders ‘were all too familiar with the inadequacies and inefficiencies associated with the traditional approach to park management and anticipated the benefits of a more commercial approach with parks being run on business principles’ (ibid.). APN proposes a new and necessary approach which combines ‘world class conservation practice with business expertise’ (ibid.). Its principal strategy is to enter agreements with governments about protected area management, whereby responsibility for funding, managing and running a protected area is devolved entirely to APN, although the area and its wildlife remain legally property of the state. Currently there are agreements for seven parks (ibid.). APN aims to make each park financially self-sustaining, usually through high-end luxury ecotourism and hunting concessions, placing making money alongside conservation goals as management priorities (Büscher and Whande, 2007). This strategy of private–public partnership raises difficult questions about the sovereignty of these areas, who they belong to, and for what purpose (ibid.). APN has also been accused of complicity in evictions and exclusions of indigenous people from Nech Sar National Park in Ethiopia (Adams and Hutton, 2007; Dowie, 2008), and opposition from human rights NGOs led to APN’s withdrawal from the area. Nevertheless, the APN is a growing influence — it is the ninth biggest conservation NGO in Africa in terms of annual expenditure (Brockington and Scholfield, 2010a). Its work clearly follows the philanthrocapitalist idea that philanthropy is done best when it is based on market principles and run as a business for profit.

Another prominent form of market-based philanthropy is cause-related marketing and other forms of consumptive philanthropy, where the consumption of certain goods is linked to a philanthropic donation (Nickel and Eikenberry, 2009; Wirgau et al., 2010). For example, the McDonalds burger chain recently introduced the Endangered Species Happy Meal in conjunction with Conservation International, each containing a small plush soft toy of one of the featured endangered species, and linking to an interactive website to educate and inform children about conservation. McDonalds in return donated a sum of money to conservation (Igoe, 2010). As Nickel and Eikenberry (2009) and Wirgau et al. (2010) demonstrate, cause-related marketing projects implicitly, and often explicitly, view the market as a more powerful force than traditional charitable or political means in solving the

2. www.african-parks.org (accessed 19 July 2011).

world's problems, and consider corporations as the best managers of philanthropy. Would-be conservationists need only consume products to save species, a distant, passive and non-political act, rather than engage in more active politics. Žižek (2009: 35) sees this as part of 'cultural capitalism', whereby capitalism produces goods whose consumption is claimed to bring deeper purpose and meaning to life, to do good and make capitalism responsible, with the effect of reducing discontent with capitalism and allowing its continuation.

Within conservation philanthrocapitalism, performance and representation are important in circulating certain images and discourses which promote market solutions to environmental problems, and distract from environmental critiques of capitalism. Recent scholarship has examined the role of celebrity in such processes, and philanthropists are part of this (Brockington, 2009; Prudham, 2009). Here the environmental philanthropy of the British entrepreneur Richard Branson is illustrative. In an announcement shepherded by Bill Clinton and which generated headline news worldwide, he donated US\$ 1.6 billion to combat global warming, particularly through biofuels and green technology. Prudham (2009) argues that this event, which combined celebrity, entrepreneurship and philanthropy, reflects Branson's macho, daring celebrity persona, a brand image entwined with that of his Virgin conglomerate. It distracts from the environmental impact of the airline he owns, as well as promoting capitalist solutions to environmental problems more generally. Similarly, his announcement that he would populate two Caribbean islands that he owns with endangered Madagascan lemurs generated similar quantities of positive publicity, despite subsequent and vehement criticism of the project's merits from local conservationists and lemur experts (*The Guardian*, 2011). The coverage barely mentioned that the islands are also scheduled to become luxury eco-resorts, presumably with lemurs as a star attraction. Here philanthropy is simultaneously a direct market opportunity and a useful marketing exercise, with wider implications for how the relationship between environmental problems and capitalism is viewed. The importance of spectacle and image may have important biodiversity consequences as only some species and places have the requisite qualities to be turned into marketable commodities. Lemurs are famously charismatic animals; the projects supported by the Wildlife Conservation Network work only with mammals, and charismatic ones at that (e.g. elephant, lion); and the African Parks Network works only in sites that have the geographical and biodiversity features to allow profitable ecotourism. It might be less easy to apply philanthrocapitalist conservation to species which do not make good media images or ecotourism attractions.

The ideas of philanthrocapitalism are reflected in the discourse and strategies of conservation organizations, and represent a further neoliberalization of conservation philanthropy. The examples discussed above show the further incursion of discourse, practices and actors from business into conservation. Market mechanisms are seen as the best way to tackle everything

in conservation. They bring capitalism and philanthropy even closer — as with the examples discussed earlier, they support capitalism by providing an opportunity to make money and by providing discursive support — but they take things a step further by openly arguing that philanthropy, and conservation philanthropy, must become indistinguishable from business.

Distinguishing between the business and altruistic motives of philanthrocapitalists is difficult, and considered irrelevant even by advocates of philanthrocapitalism (Bishop and Green, 2008). This strengthens philanthropy's discursive support for capitalism — as Bosworth (2011: 387) argues, traditional philanthropy contained a 'tacit admission that giving back . . . was a compensation for the collateral injustices produced by the system', but philanthrocapitalism 'demands a conversion to that same system's philosophy. Only if we submit to their ideological authority . . . will their funds be forthcoming'. Philanthrocapitalist conservation is an extension of other trends in neoliberal conservation because it is much more explicit in arguing that conservation become like a business. The two dimensions of philanthrocapitalism — philanthropy works best when it is done for a profit, and when it imports techniques from business — neatly map onto the two forces considered to drive neoliberal conservation — capitalism is attracted to it because it can make profit, and conservationists adopt capitalist strategies, motives and structures as the best way to get things done in a capitalist world.

CONCLUSION

This contribution has taken the neglected issue of philanthropy in neoliberal conservation, and explored its contribution to conservation's neoliberalization, particularly questions of the forces driving this change. It has shown that philanthropy is contributing to the turn towards market mechanisms and discourses in conservation, and the closer links between conservation and business, and has demonstrated how this can support capitalism both discursively and in providing new profit opportunities.

Two areas of future research stand out from this. Firstly, although philanthropy is an important conduit by which capitalism and conservation can influence one another, the precise means by which philanthropy creates, transforms and mobilizes money, political resources, images and discourses and turns them into conservation practices are unclear, and there is a need for more empirical case studies which investigate this process. Within this, discourses and spectacles are particularly important — as discussed above, philanthropy may have more impact by affecting these than through its financial resources. Research might ask how certain images and discourses are produced, circulated, valorized and turned into commodities. With the rise of philanthrocapitalism, empirical examples which trace how the language and practices of business are translated into conservation philanthropy

would be useful for understanding how conservation is neoliberalizing. Such research would ask how this translation happens, what kinds of discourses it produces, and how it changes conservation policies and practices.

Secondly, there is a need to map out neoliberal conservation philanthropy, to identify the places and biomes in which it is happening and where it is absent. This can be directly related to the logics of neoliberalism and capitalism — the desire to do conservation through market mechanisms and the profit motive make certain places more desirable than others, particularly those with structures to encourage conservation enterprise (e.g. clear property rights, a rolled-back state) and those which contain nature which is more amenable to being transformed into a commodity (e.g. species which are particularly attractive to tourists). It might be expected that neoliberal conservation philanthropy has its own geography, tending to cluster in certain places and around certain issues. Combined, these research arenas would demonstrate the processes by which conservation is becoming neoliberalized, and the role of philanthropy within this.

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