PRIVATE PHILANTHROPY AND THE ALIMENTA PROGRAMS
IN IMPERIAL ROME

A Thesis
submitted to the Faculty of
The School of Continuing Studies
and of
The Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
Master of Arts in Liberal Studies

By

Genevieve I. McCann, B.B.A.

Georgetown University
Washington, D.C.
December, 2012
PRIVATE PHILANTHROPY AND THE ALIMENTA PROGRAMS
IN IMPERIAL ROME

Genevieve I. McCann, B.B.A.
MALS Mentor: Rudolph Hock, Ph.D.

ABSTRACT

In ancient imperial Rome, wealthy upper class citizens followed the emperor’s lead of establishing philanthropic *alimenta* programs. The *alimenta* programs provided children with financial stipends for food, clothing, and general living expenses. They required a great amount of financial capital to establish, so much that it is difficult to believe the only gains philanthropists received included the gratitude of *alimenta* recipients and the self-satisfaction resulting from practicing philanthropy. In contrast, modern philanthropists also receive income tax benefits for their donations that in turn benefit their finances. This paper argues that ancient *alimenta* philanthropists also received a form of financial return on their philanthropic endeavors.

The paper begins with an overview of contemporary theories of philanthropy to set up a framework for the paper. Next, it delves into the ancient world of philanthropy and familiarizes the reader with ancient opinions on the importance of philanthropy. The motives of major private philanthropists of the ancient and contemporary eras are compared through an analysis of the philanthropies practiced by Herodes Atticus of the ancient world and Bill Gates of contemporary society. Then, the *alimenta* system and how it functioned in the public and private philanthropic sectors is introduced and its role in the ancient philanthropic world analyzed. This information along with historical data
and contemporary and ancient theories of philosophy is applied to the private citizens who funded ancient *alimenta* programs to assert that they were driven not only by a desire to assist others, but also for economic gains.

The honor and reputation the philanthropists received from their actions allowed them to survive in a society where rich men could only honorably trade in favors, rather than in money. Therefore, their philanthropic work was vital for their personal financial survival: it was the honorable reputation obtained through philanthropy that allowed a member of the upper class to obtain an economic favor from another in exchange for the promise of the favor’s future return. Without an honorable reputation, a member of the ancient wealthy upper class would need to purchase services. This action would be considered by other members of their social class as base and dishonorable, resulting in the fall from one’s high social class.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to acknowledge and thank my dearest family and friends, especially my parents, who have been an unwavering source of strength and support throughout not only my graduate school career but also my entire life.
CONTENTS

ABSTRACT ii

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS iv

INTRODUCTION 1

CHAPTER 1. CONTEMPORARY THEORIES OF PHILANTHROPY 3

CHAPTER 2. ANCIENT PHILOSOPHIES REGARDING PHILANTHROPY 18

CHAPTER 3. HERODES ATTICUS AND BILL GATES 38

CHAPTER 4. MOTIVES OF ANCIENT PHILANTHROPISTS OF THE ALIMENTA PROGRAMS 57

CONCLUSION 78

BIBLIOGRAPHY 80
INTRODUCTION

During the late first century CE, the Roman emperor Nerva (96-98 CE) initiated a program, known as *alimenta*, to provide annual monetary aid to benefit the children of various communities throughout Italy and the Roman Empire. The emperor Trajan further developed the *alimenta* program, and it continued until the early third century CE when fiscal difficulties may have made it increasingly difficult to support the large amount of capital initially required to finance the loans. Soon after the start of the government program, wealthy private individuals took to establishing and funding their own *alimenta* programs. *Alimenta* benefitted the government for several evident reasons; perhaps most importantly by promoting birth rates and thereby helping to ensure a steady supply of citizens to continue the Roman Empire’s position of strength in the Mediterranean world. However, the benefits private citizens obtained from instituting and funding their own *alimenta* programs are not quite as clear. One possible benefit was the resulting favor curried with the Roman emperor and with the citizens of the private individual’s town. It would seem, however, that simple praise and gratitude, however lavish, would not be ample reward for the truly vast sums of money being supplied by these private, wealthy individuals.

In comparison, contemporary American private philanthropists also benefit from their charitable contributions by reaping “soft” rewards such as an increased sense of self worth and the gratitude of the recipients. However, in the contemporary United States philanthropists also receive financially quantitative advantages including and not limited to federal tax benefits and commercial gains resulting from the marketing publicity their
philanthropic practices generate. As in the modern era, the ancient world contained extremely wealthy individuals who became famous for their widespread philanthropic endeavors. One of the most famous of these ancient philanthropists was Herodes Atticus, a wealthy Athenian living during the second century CE. The scale of his philanthropic works can be compared to one of the chief philanthropists of the modern day, Bill Gates. This paper will use contemporary theories of philanthropy and historical data to analyze the motives and benefits associated with the philanthropic work of both Atticus and Gates. Then, the motives and benefits of ancient private citizens who established *alimenta* programs will be compared with those of Atticus and Gates. Finally, the thesis will assert that ancient private philanthropists of the *alimenta* programs, like modern private philanthropists, received fiscal and economic benefits from their philanthropic work rather than simply receiving praise, gratitude, and a sense of moral self-worth.
CHAPTER 1

CONTEMPORARY THEORIES OF PHILANTHROPY

Scholars have difficulty agreeing on just one universal definition of philanthropy.¹ Some scholars believe it is actually impossible to develop a universal definition, and some also hold the opinion that a vague definition of the term is both inevitable and desirable.² The word itself is derived from Greek and means “love of mankind.”³ However, this literal definition does not seem adequate to describe the many different facets of contemporary philanthropy.⁴ Certain scholars insist that philanthropy must be associated with the actions taken towards the benefit of others, rather than simply a positive, but passive, admiration for other human beings.⁵ Others believe philanthropy is embodied by both a beneficent attitude as well as actions taken to benefit others, whether those actions include the transfer of funds or the giving of personal time.⁶ For these scholars, philanthropy cannot truly exist when either attitude or action is absent.⁷ Debate also exists between exactly which type of actions constitute philanthropy. Is

² Ibid.
³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid., 20.
⁵ Ibid.
⁶ Ibid., 21.
⁷ Ibid.
philanthropy only the donation of funds on a large scale for the benefit of the community, or are small-scale donations to the local needy population included? While a universally accepted definition of philanthropy does not exist, one popular definition has been put forth by Robert L. Payton: “Philanthropy includes voluntary giving, voluntary service, and voluntary association, primarily for the benefit of others; it is also the ‘prudent sister’ of charity, since they have been intertwined throughout most of the past 3500 years of western civilization.” In contemporary society, the term “charity” has come to refer to the relief of the poor and needy. In contrast, the term “philanthropy” is recognized as being broadly concerned with the benefit of all members of a community. Therefore, philanthropy focuses on such topics as protecting the environment, improving education, promoting the arts, and preventing disease while charity includes food, clothing, and monetary donations with the purpose of uplifting specifically the needy classes. For the purposes of this paper, these are the definitions of charity and philanthropy that will be used.

The practice of charity and philanthropy has a long and rich history in western civilization. One of the earliest pieces of evidence that remains extant is recorded in The Egyptian Book of the Dead and dates from about 4000 BCE. The work records praise for

---

8 Ibid.
9 Ibid., 3-4.
10 Ibid., 4.
11 Ibid.
12 Ibid.
those who give water and food to people who need it.\textsuperscript{13} The history of the Hebrews practicing charity dates back to at least the same time period as the Egyptians.\textsuperscript{14} The Old Testament records the origin of the practice of tithing with Jacob promising to give away a tenth of everything that God had granted him.\textsuperscript{15} For the Hebrews, the importance of giving was tied to helping the poor.\textsuperscript{16} In contrast, for ancient Greeks and Romans the importance of giving was focused more on the benefit of the general good, rather than the benefit of the poor.\textsuperscript{17} This practice of philanthropic giving was seldom motivated by pity and was not generally focused on the poor population.\textsuperscript{18} The mindset towards philanthropy changed with the advent of Christianity.\textsuperscript{19} The size of the giver’s sacrifice determined the gift’s value; and the spirit of the giver became more important than the physical size of the gift.\textsuperscript{20} In Christianity beneficence was a practice that would help to provide the giver with interior joy, peace, and mercy.\textsuperscript{21} It was also felt that virtue and

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 4-5.
\textsuperscript{15} Ibid., 5.
\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
poverty existed hand in hand, especially if it was coupled with a pious vocation.\textsuperscript{22} Therefore, the Catholic Church took on a responsibility to dispense alms and charity.\textsuperscript{23}

With the start of the Reformation, charity and philanthropy moved away from the realm of religion and into the realm of the government.\textsuperscript{24} The Protestant religion held a sterner view towards the poor than the Catholic religion, especially in John Calvin’s interpretation.\textsuperscript{25} Poverty became a sign of the exclusion from the elect, rather than simply the lack of material means.\textsuperscript{26} Before long, this developed into a view that the poor could justly be blamed for their own poverty.\textsuperscript{27} It was during this atmosphere of suspicion of the poor and decentralization of religious authority that the government of England began to develop institutions dedicated to the relief of the poor population.\textsuperscript{28} In 1601, the Elizabethan “Poor Laws” enacted the practice of outright taxation of the population for the purpose of gathering funds to help relieve the poor.\textsuperscript{29} This marked the first time a government took responsibility for charitable activities.\textsuperscript{30}

\begin{verbatim}
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{24} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{25} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{26} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid., 5-6.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 6.
\end{verbatim}
The practice of philanthropy in America dates to the earliest years of the colonies.\textsuperscript{31} While the colonies were heavily influenced by English practices of philanthropy, communities in this new world existed before formal governments were established.\textsuperscript{32} Therefore, basic social services were provided by private volunteer collaborations rather than by the government.\textsuperscript{33} This practice profoundly shaped the framework of American society.\textsuperscript{34} In most contemporary countries, the government funds the major institutions that benefit society.\textsuperscript{35} However, in the contemporary United States many of these institutions such as hospitals, libraries, museums, universities, and welfare agencies are funded and managed by volunteers.\textsuperscript{36} As a result, currently private charity and philanthropy in the United States are now viewed as a traditional and important aspect of society.\textsuperscript{37}

Since the practice of philanthropy is very important in American culture, it follows that many citizens in the United States engage in some form of philanthropy.\textsuperscript{38} In fact the highest portion of philanthropic funds comes from the donations of individuals,

\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{35} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{36} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 4.
\textsuperscript{38} Ibid., 7.
rather than from corporations or foundations.\textsuperscript{39} The motives for private citizens to participate in philanthropy are widely varied. For some American philanthropists their chief motive focuses on the notion of \textit{noblesse oblige}, or the idea that the wealthy should spend at least a portion of their money to assist the poor.\textsuperscript{40} \textit{Noblesse oblige} is often viewed as a family expectation that is inherited along with wealth.\textsuperscript{41} For example, a wealthy businessman may contribute to various philanthropic endeavors throughout his lifetime, and expect his children to continue the practice of philanthropy when they inherit. Taken from this perspective, some scholars believe \textit{noblesse oblige} is connected mostly to membership of a particular social status, rather than to the pull of moral obligation.\textsuperscript{42} In this perspective, donors engage in philanthropy simply because it is viewed as being expected from a member of a family that has practiced it for years.\textsuperscript{43} The donor is not being motivated by a desire to increase the common good.\textsuperscript{44} However, this perspective may not always be the case. Many people, including those who are wealthy, believe the practice of philanthropy is truly a moral obligation. Therefore it is important to ensure not only that the poor are raised from their unfortunate positions, but

\textsuperscript{39} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{40} Ibid., 84.
\textsuperscript{41} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{42} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.
also that the general population benefits from philanthropy as well. The wealthy often engage in charitable and philanthropic activities to accomplish these goals.

Philanthropy and charity are not solely practiced by the extremely wealthy. Americans of all income levels give to charitable and philanthropic causes. Many different organizations and ideals influence Americans’ decisions to participate in philanthropy.45 One of the most frequently cited influences, however, are Americans’ religious communities.46 Organized religion in general influences philanthropy by promoting philanthropic values.47 Religious sermons and activities tend to increase awareness that one should act selflessly, which therefore naturally influences selfless actions.48 According to one study, participation in church activities generally influences both the amount of time that people volunteer as well as the amount of money people donate.49 The causes these congregation members choose to support are often not necessarily related to the church.50 It has been shown that if a person spends time participating in church activities there is a higher chance that person will support a philanthropic cause such as the United Way, a soup kitchen, or a health organization.51

46 Ibid.
47 Ibid.
48 Ibid., 102.
49 Ibid., 100-101.
50 Ibid., 100.
51 Ibid., 100-101.
As a part of disseminating selfless values, a religious institution often advertises volunteer and philanthropic opportunities for congregation participation. Through their church communities, philanthropists are not only able to learn about causes to help, but also specific ways to provide aid.

Private citizens are not the only participants in American philanthropy. A considerable portion of American companies practice philanthropy and charitable giving as well. The motives for companies to participate in philanthropy may stem from the love for mankind, but some companies may have other motives as well. The practice of corporate philanthropy and charity may also be fueled by economic self-interest. “Dual-agenda” giving refers to the practice of funding philanthropic organizations with objectives that match a corporation’s objectives. For example, a company looking to attract an upscale customer base that patronizes the performing arts may decide to focus its philanthropic efforts on a ballet company, a symphony orchestra, or any other type of performing arts organization. By doing this, the company hopes to market itself to new

52 Ibid., 102.
53 Ibid.
54 Ibid., 46.
55 Ibid.
56 Ibid., 47.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid.
customers and therefore increase profits.\textsuperscript{59} Under this dual-agenda approach, corporate philanthropy is becoming viewed by some as an essential part of doing business.\textsuperscript{60}

Another reason for corporate giving concerns the company’s reputation.\textsuperscript{61} It has been shown that potential customers tend to hold a company in higher regard if the company’s level of giving is high as well.\textsuperscript{62} This is true even for companies that had previously violated anti-trust laws.\textsuperscript{63} Under this notion, philanthropy helps a company to smooth over any hard feelings left over from prior offences.\textsuperscript{64}

A major motive for the practice of contemporary philanthropy in America is the financial benefit the philanthropist or company receives through income tax exemptions.\textsuperscript{65} In the history of philanthropy, tax incentives are a modern invention: there is no direct comparison in the ancient world.\textsuperscript{66} In the United States exemptions came into existence in 1917, soon after Congress initiated a federal income tax.\textsuperscript{67} Before this,

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{59} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 59.
\item \textsuperscript{61} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{62} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{63} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{64} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{66} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{67} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
government protected the freedom for citizens to make donations, but did not have specific programs intended to incentivize donations.\textsuperscript{68} Many other modern countries have some form of similar incentives.\textsuperscript{69} These income tax exemptions are available to all categories of philanthropists: the wealthy classes, the general population, and companies.\textsuperscript{70} While there are a few who argue that tax exemptions for philanthropic and charitable giving are unnecessary and should be abolished, there are generally several major justifications for the practice. The most basic justification follows the reasoning that since philanthropic giving decreases the wealth of the giver, then it should be tax deductible.\textsuperscript{71} Another justification realizes the existence of tax exemptions results in an increase of the practice of philanthropy.\textsuperscript{72} Most citizens broadly support exemption rules, and a significant portion of the population utilizes them as well.\textsuperscript{73} The money is generated efficiently as well. Studies have shown that for every one dollar of taxes that are uncollected due to the exemption rule, more than one dollar in philanthropic or charitable funds is generated.\textsuperscript{74} Further, proponents of tax exemptions maintain that the practice results in the smallest level of government influence over the funds’ expenditure.

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{69} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{70} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{71} Van Til, \textit{Critical Issues}, 9.
\textsuperscript{72} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{73} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid.
Philanthropists are able to donate their money to whichever private cause they choose, and the money will be directly used based on the private foundation’s needs.\textsuperscript{75} At the end of the day, however, one of the main reasons for individuals and companies to practice of philanthropy is emotional.\textsuperscript{76} These emotional reasons can be both altruistic and egocentric.\textsuperscript{77} Altruistic philanthropy refers to the act of giving resources without any concern or expectation that the giver will receive any sort of benefit.\textsuperscript{78} The act is completed purely out of the concern of benefitting others.\textsuperscript{79} An example of this type of philanthropy could include donations given to victims of natural disasters.\textsuperscript{80} The donations are given to end suffering, and the giver gains no form of reward.\textsuperscript{81} On the opposite end of the spectrum are egocentric reasons, which manifest themselves in a variety of different forms.\textsuperscript{82} One form may be called the “warm glow effect”.\textsuperscript{83} In essence, this effect refers to the internal good feeling a person experiences.

\textsuperscript{75} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{76} Illingworth, \textit{Giving Well}, 67.

\textsuperscript{77} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{78} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{79} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{81} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{82} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{83} Ibid.
when helping others. This feeling may be derived purely from the donor’s own self-satisfaction, or it may originate from the approval given to the philanthropist by an audience witnessing the good deed. This praise received from others, or the internal praise the donor gives himself, drives philanthropic giving. As an example, many donors choose to allow their philanthropy to be publicized, allowing others to acknowledge and approve of their work. Alternately, philanthropy may be practiced to avoid the disapproval of others. As discussed above, studies have shown that some people engage in *noblesse oblige* philanthropy to avoid the disapproval of the people in their social circles. People may also donate to avoid their own self-contempt for not giving. Most importantly however, even with these egoistic reasons for engaging in philanthropy, the benefactors must believe their actions are truly helping others. Without this belief, the warm glow effect cannot occur, for the philanthropist would not give any weight to his or her own donation.

---

84 Ibid.
85 Ibid., 73.
86 Ibid.
87 Ibid., 74.
88 Ibid.
89 Ibid.
90 Ibid.
91 Ibid., 78.
92 Ibid.
In the United States, many public needs and services are taken care of by the government and funded by citizens’ taxes. In this modern society, it is viewed to be both appropriate and just that the government should use taxes to advance the general well being of its citizens. However, there are some who believe that charity and philanthropy should come solely from the state, and not at all from private citizens. Those who support this view argue that monetary resources for government charity and philanthropy would come from the taxes paid by all citizens, rather than by the relatively few wealthy citizens. By doing this, charity and philanthropy will reach a broader spectrum of needs rather than simply focusing on the causes that wealthy citizens choose to support. Also, public services allow the government to assist citizens when private charity or philanthropy either cannot help or are not aware that help is needed. However, practicing philanthropy in this way does not always lead to a higher level of charitable and philanthropic giving. For example, the United States gives foreign aid at a rate of only 22 cents for every $100 of gross national income, while the United


94 Ibid.


96 Ibid.

97 Ibid.


Kingdom gives about twice that amount.\textsuperscript{100} Furthermore, decisions on where to send this foreign aid are often based on dual-agenda giving.\textsuperscript{101} Currently Iraq receives the most foreign aid by far, and less than 5 cents of every $100 of national income is sent to the poorest nations.\textsuperscript{102} The practice of private philanthropy in addition to government resources helps to increase the financial level of giving, as well as broaden the placement of funds.\textsuperscript{103} This is prevalent in the United States, where citizens give more money to international charities and philanthropies per person than any other country.\textsuperscript{104} Another benefit of private philanthropy is the ability of private citizens to support causes that might be politically risky for the government to support, such as pro-life or pro-choice abortion agendas.\textsuperscript{105} Private philanthropy is able to provide services and support that the government does not, and is sometimes even able to provide them quicker than the government.\textsuperscript{106} Lastly, and perhaps one of strongest reasons supporting private philanthropy as a supplement to government aid, is the freedom of the giver to provide aid directly to the recipient rather than pushing the money through what might be a

\textsuperscript{100} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{102} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{103} Ibid., 18-19.
\textsuperscript{104} Ibid., 18.
\textsuperscript{105} Ibid., 19.
corrupt or wasteful government system.\textsuperscript{107} Instead, private donors can become involved directly with charities.\textsuperscript{108} Givers often become involved not only through donations of money but in donations of personal time and interest as well.\textsuperscript{109} The benefactor may even become a spokesperson, a volunteer, and an advocate as well as a financial supporter.\textsuperscript{110}

In conclusion, the practice of philanthropy and charity has a long history. People and corporations are influenced to participate in philanthropy for a variety of different reasons. The primary reasons for practicing philanthropy and charity are emotional. Individuals are driven by pity for those in need, and also seek to obtain self-satisfaction by helping others. However, all types of modern philanthropists also benefit financially from tax incentives offered by governments. Corporations and individuals may also have a dual agenda when practicing philanthropy, and search for ways to give that in turn benefit their own interests and business. While the primary reasons for philanthropy and charity are emotional, many have financial reasons for giving as well.

\textsuperscript{107} Illingworth, \textit{Giving Well}, 18.

\textsuperscript{108} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{109} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{110} Ibid.
CHAPTER 2

ANCIENT PHILOSOPHIES REGARDING PHILANTHROPY

As with societies and cultures, the practice of philanthropy evolves over time. The priorities and thought-processes of modern philanthropists are not necessarily similar to those who have gone before them. This chapter will discuss the attitudes and philosophies of classical philanthropists towards philanthropy and charity. It will also assert that wealthy citizens in the classical age participated in philanthropy in order to uphold their positive reputations, and the existence of these positive reputations directly resulted in the philanthropists’ financial and economic gain.

Our knowledge of the practice of philanthropy in ancient Rome is limited almost entirely to the actions of the very wealthy, upper-class population.¹ There is almost no evidence in existence regarding the philanthropic and charitable practices of the middle-class or poor citizens of antiquity.² As in modern America, ancient Roman society relied on private philanthropy to play a major part in providing services to the masses.³ This similarity may be partly due to both countries being relatively young and without established government systems in place to provide all required services.⁴ Instead, wealthy citizens in antiquity organized and funded education, public festivals, roads, and

---


² Ibid.


⁴ Ibid.
The tradition of wealthy classes in ancient society using their private funds to finance public needs is known as euergetism, and was prevalent in ancient Rome and Greece. The social pressure on a wealthy man to contribute in ancient society was great. If the wealthy did not fulfill their expected level of generosity they could be prosecuted in the law courts. This would definitely result in dishonor and perhaps even the confiscation of their property. One of the most important results of euergetism in the ancient world was the maintenance of a man’s reputation; a man used his wealth to gain favor with the masses by publicizing his generosity and virtue. Plutarch affirms: “The masses hate a rich man who does not share his property more than a poor man who steals public property.”

According to most of the evidence referencing gifts, favors, or benefits bestowed in the ancient world, it is certain that the giver expected to receive some sort of similar return from the recipient. Keep in mind that societies exist even today where

---

5 Ibid.

6 Kathryn Lomas and Tim Cornell, eds., Bread and Circuses: Euergetism and Municipal Patronage in Roman Italy (London: Routledge, 2003), 1.

7 Hands, Charities and Social Aid, 40.

8 Ibid., 52.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid., 42.

11 Ibid., 41; citing Plutarch, Mor. 821 F.

12 Ibid., 26.
exchanging gifts is an act of expressing and proposing friendship, and the failure to provide a return gift is in essence a rejection of that friendship.\textsuperscript{13} Similarly, in ancient Rome members of the upper class conducted business through a series of favors made between so-called “friends.”\textsuperscript{14} Rather than seeking the services of a banker or lawyer, a wealthy citizen would instead look to another wealthy “friend” for a loan or representation in the law courts.\textsuperscript{15} Likewise, it may be expected that this wealthy citizen would provide assistance relating to his own area of expertise whenever his “friend” may need it in the future.\textsuperscript{16} For members of the wealthy classes exchanging money for services was seen as degrading: it implied that one was in need of money to make a living, and therefore was not truly a man of the upper classes.\textsuperscript{17} Even worse, the exchange of money for services implied that one party was an “employee” of the other, a status that no wealthy man was willing to accept.\textsuperscript{18} Instead, the person conferring the benefit expected a reciprocal service would be made in the future.\textsuperscript{19} If not completed, persons owing favors were in danger of losing both their “friends” and their reputations.\textsuperscript{20}

\textsuperscript{13} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{14} Ibid., 33.

\textsuperscript{15} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{17} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 34.

\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
Since a member of the wealthy class could not honorably pay for services monetarily, the loss of friends and reputation would be devastating for maintaining an upper-class way of life. Cicero shows how seriously this custom was taken when he asks rhetorically, “Whose wealth can be or ever has been of such proportions that it can stand without the services of friends?” Due to the strict custom of exchanges between friends, there were not many ways a wealthy man could spend his money outright. Not many options for investment were available except through the purchase of land, and the availability of land was limited. Even most luxury goods were not available for purchase with money. Instead, the wealthy focused on investing their money into friendships, since one of the most secure ways to obtain a return on money was by using it for favors that would eventually be returned.

Benefits, favors, and gifts were not only exchanged between wealthy members of the community, but also between members of unequal social and economic groups. In Rome, the wealthy and the poor established mutually beneficial patron-client relationships which were considered to be binding obligations, and could last between

---

21 Ibid.

22 Ibid.; citing Cicero, Pro Planc. 81.

23 Ibid.

24 Ibid.

25 Ibid.

26 Ibid.

27 Ibid., 35.
families for generations. As part of their role, the wealthy patrons supplied financial and legal help to the poorer clients. Often, this included a daily gift of food or money known as *sportula*. In return for financial assistance, often the poorer client provided “honor” by maintaining their social and political allegiance and publicizing the donor’s positive reputation. For the wealthy man, the maintenance of his reputation was important for at least two reasons. First, when running for political office his reputation among the “everyman” voters would have been crucial to secure votes. Second, and most importantly, it would seem evident that a wealthy man’s honorable reputation would allow him to obtain favors from other wealthy men with only his promise of a return favor as collateral. His reputation, therefore, would allow him to interact with other members of his social class successfully, and live within the style to which he was accustomed. Wealthy citizens provided financial assistance to people poorer than themselves, those poor people in turn upheld the wealthy citizen’s reputation, and the wealthy citizen was able to leverage his good reputation into economic and financial benefits by obtaining favors from his upper class colleagues. Seen from this point of view, patron-client relationships held by the upper classes were truly investments into their future wealth.

---


29 Hands, *Charities and Social Aid*, 35.

30 Ibid., 34.
Detailed evidence of ancient philanthropy exists precisely due to the fact that donors sought to publicize their honorable reputation in exchange for their euergetic actions. One way to accomplish this was to donate money to a specific cause which would, more often than not, result in a stone or bronze memorial giving the donor public recognition for their generosity. It was not uncommon for a donor to even give specific instructions on the nature of these monuments. One particular donor stated:

I wish to confer my gracious gift... on the stated conditions, which are to be published upon three marble stones; of these, one should be erected in the temple of the Caesars, close by the gates, and one in the gymnasium, so that to citizens and non-citizens alike at Gytheion my philanthropic and kindly act may be evident and well known.

Many of these monuments still exist today and those whose names are inscribed upon them have thus succeeded in being remembered thousands of years after their lifetimes.

Since ancient donors expected at least some form of a return from their philanthropic work, it followed that they did not often seek out the truly destitute who would not have the means to return a favor. The Greek and Latin words often translated as “the poor” rarely indicate the truly destitute or those in poverty. The terms really apply to the vast majority of the population who did not benefit from the income of

31 Ibid., 49.
32 Ibid.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid., 49-50; citing IG V, I, 1208.
35 Ibid., 62.
36 Ibid.
a large estate and therefore did not have the leisurely life of a gentleman. In other words, “the poor” in the ancient Greek and Latin languages referred mostly to the *demos* or *populus*: the general working man. Most of these men would have small plots of land that they would work themselves alongside perhaps one or two laborers or slaves. Aristophanes distinguishes between Poverty and Beggary saying, “it is the beggar’s life to live possessed of nothing, but the poor man’s life to live frugally and by applying himself to work, with nothing to spare indeed, but not really in want.” The wealthy class even often idealized the small farmer. Many viewed the upper classes to be in a position to abuse their wealth through the vices of luxurious living, while the so-called poverty of the farmer made him immune to such vices and placed him in position to maintain an honest and virtuous living. Beggars, on the other hand, were looked down upon because their state of unemployment was seen as a result of laziness, rather than a position that resulted from a lack of work opportunities. Therefore, giving to a beggar was discouraged since the ancients thought it would only perpetuate the beggar’s

---

37 Ibid.

38 Ibid., 62-63.

39 Ibid., 62.


41 Ibid., 63.

42 Ibid.

43 Ibid., 65.
laziness. Plutarch recounts a Spartan saying to a beggar: “But if I gave to you, you would proceed to beg all the more; it was the man who gave to you in the first place who made you idle and so is responsible for your disgraceful state.” Likewise Plautus advises, “To give to a beggar is to do him an ill service.” Instead of giving to beggars, the attitude in the ancient world focused on giving to those who deserved it based on their character, rather than those who were only in need financially. Seneca counsels that one should give to the “good,” the “most deserving,” or those who are “capable of being made good.” He states: “It is a mistake if anyone thinks that it is an easy thing to give. . . To certain people I shall not give, even though there is a need, because there will still be a need, even if I do give.” Instead, members of the upper classes sought out people who had less money than themselves, but who, most importantly, contributed to society in ways the upper class valued and therefore had honor of their own. So, Cicero advises to keep in mind a person’s, “sympathetic and co-operative attitude towards our (the

44 Ibid.
45 Ibid.; citing Plutarch, Moral. 235 A.
46 Ibid.; citing Plautus, Trin. 339.
47 Ibid., 74.
50 Ibid.
benefactor’s) way of life, and the contribution which he has already made to our well-being.”

Despite the societal norm, many Roman philosophers expounded the virtue of conferring a gift without expecting a return. Cicero echoes Aristotle when he states, “if we are truly liberal and beneficent we do not make a profitable business of doing good.” Seneca repeats the sentiment a century later saying, “He who has given in order to receive back has not given” and even states that sometimes, “the very person who is being helped is to be kept in the dark.” Nevertheless, gifts from the upper class were focused towards members of society who were able to make a return gift, and expected to do so, even though the reciprocation could not with good manners be explicitly requested. Demosthenes states that those who bestow gifts should not remind the recipients of it, while the recipients should make a return gift without needing to be reminded.

Due to the expectations from ancient society that the wealthy should donate money, and that they would receive a form of public commendation or return for their giving, it is difficult to determine the degree to which donors felt a genuine charitable

---


52 Ibid., 30.


55 Ibid., 30-31.

56 Ibid., 32; citing Demosthenes, *de cor.* 269.
regard for those that received their contributions.\textsuperscript{57} Some scholars argue that small donations are the closest classical philanthropists came to performing truly altruistic acts.\textsuperscript{58} Included in these small acts were the \textit{aria Bouzygeiai}, or curses that would befall a man who failed to give water to the thirsty, food to the hungry, directions to a lost traveler, burial for the dead, and other such services to those in need of them.\textsuperscript{59} Reciprocation for these types of acts was not expected, despite the fact that the completion of them would greatly affect the recipient, although the giver would probably understand that in the future he might be in need of one or more of these types of services and he would then not be in a position to return the favor as well.\textsuperscript{60} Wealthy Romans may have started giving to the poor without expectation of an equal return as early as the first century CE.\textsuperscript{61} Starting with the reign of the emperor Tiberius, the poor had no major part in elections.\textsuperscript{62} The poor could not be expected to repay favors with votes as they had in the past, and had little else to offer in terms of material benefits.\textsuperscript{63}

It follows to wonder what level of pity the wealthy class had for the very poor members of society. In Greek drama, pity felt by the wealthy class is reserved not for the

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 42-43.
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 46.
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 46-47.
\textsuperscript{61} Ibid., 47.
\textsuperscript{62} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{63} Ibid.
truly poor but for members of the wealthy class who have fallen from their prosperous position.\textsuperscript{64} The feeling stemmed from the knowledge that the wealthy may find themselves in the same situation in the future.\textsuperscript{65} In Sophocles’s play, \textit{Ajax}, Odysseus reflects upon Ajax’s downfall saying, “I pity him, for I see his lot as mine no less than his.”\textsuperscript{66} The philosopher Anaximenes stated: “the wealthy are not accustomed to pity the unfortunate in the same way as do the poor. It is fear for themselves that engenders their pity for the misfortunes of others.”\textsuperscript{67} Demosthenes asserts that the wealthy man should feel pity for all members of the general masses, for he may need their pity if his position ever falls: “. . . in the case of a man who shows moderation and decent feeling \textit{philanthropia} and pity for the masses, it is right that he should receive the same treatment from all, should he ever be in need or peril.”\textsuperscript{68} Many in the ancient world felt that pity and \textit{philanthropia} were feelings to be experienced on a \textit{quid-pro-quo} basis.\textsuperscript{69} Demosthenes expounds: “Nobody is entitled to meet with pity who does not display pity, not with sympathetic consideration who does not show such consideration.”\textsuperscript{70} Likewise

\begin{footnotes}
\item[64] Ibid., 78.
\item[65] Ibid., 78-79.
\item[66] Ibid., 79; citing Sophocles, \textit{Ajax}, 121ff.
\item[67] Ibid., 81; citing Anaximenes, Stobaeus, \textit{Concerning the reproach of poverty}, 21.
\item[68] Ibid., 79; citing Demosthenes, \textit{in Meid}. 184, cf. 99, 101.
\item[69] Ibid., 79-80.
\item[70] Ibid., 80; citing Demosthenes, \textit{in Meid}. 184, cf. 99, 101.
\end{footnotes}
Thucydides’s Cleon affirms: “Pity is appropriately given on an exchange basis to men of like character, and not to those who are not going to show pity in return.”71 With this definition in mind, the Stoics renounced pity as a selfish emotion that did not correspond with their philosophy of serving others altruistically.72 Stoic principles upheld that generosity should not be motivated by pity.73 Cicero explains: “Are we not able to be generous without pity? Surely we can, for our obligation is not to take upon ourselves bitterness and pain for the sake of others; it is simply, where possible, to relieve others of their pain.”74 This Stoic philosophy promoted the movement towards helping people for the sake of helping people, rather than for a return.75 By the late first century CE, the Latin term humanitas developed into an idea that expressed human sympathy for those who were weak and helpless.76 It has been argued that Romans developed the feelings of humanitas because of their dealings with many different types of people as the empire grew.77 Humanitas allowed the Romans to recognize the common worth of different

71 Ibid.; citing Thucydides, III, 40, 3.
72 Ibid., 81.
73 Ibid., 82.
74 Ibid.; citing Cicero, Tusc. IV, 26.
75 Ibid., 84.
76 Ibid., 87.
77 Ibid.
peoples, which allowed them to justify grouping everyone into a common Roman citizenship.78

The most popular items given away on a large scale in the classical world were corn, oil, and cash.79 There is evidence of a very large number of such philanthropic gifts.80 A philanthropist may choose to make a distribution during his lifetime, at the time of his death, or both.81 Distributions also might recur over time or be distributed only once.82 However, these charitable gifts of corn, oil, and cash were not specifically given only to the poorest class of society, and the destitute did not receive a larger portion of the distribution as a special consideration.83 Instead, those who were considered “worthy of honor” received the largest proportions of the distribution.84 If the amount to be distributed was large enough, the poorest class of society may have been treated equally with those of higher classes.85 This seems to be especially true when the gift being provided celebrated a religious occasion.86 However, when the amount to be  

78 Ibid.
79 Ibid., 89.
80 Ibid.
81 Ibid.
82 Ibid.
83 Ibid.
84 Ibid., 91.
85 Ibid., 89.
86 Ibid.
distributed was of a lesser scale the money was more likely to go to the town counselors or to the philanthropist’s social peers.\(^87\) This was particularly the case for gifts that were social in nature, but those that were religious in nature were not excluded.\(^88\) In a sample of 58 Roman inscriptions, town counselors are always included as recipients, and are usually given the highest proportion.\(^89\) The next most affluent social class consisted of members of the priesthood of Augustus, known as the \textit{Augustales}, and they received the second highest proportion in 44 inscriptions.\(^90\) The common people usually receive about 3 to 5 times less than these higher classes, and in some extreme instances the ratio is 50 to 1.\(^91\) If any children or wives are included, it is usually those that are members of the higher classes.\(^92\)

Reasoning suggests that members of the wealthy class would not be interested in receiving donations simply because they would already have plenty of their own cash and therefore would have been able to afford to purchase their own corn, oil, and whatever other gifts might be distributed.\(^93\) Still, when gifts were distributed, it was not only the

\(^{87}\) Ibid., 91. \\
\(^{88}\) Ibid. \\
\(^{89}\) Ibid. \\
\(^{90}\) Ibid. \\
\(^{91}\) Ibid. \\
\(^{92}\) Ibid., 91-92. \\
\(^{93}\) Ibid., 93.
poor classes who came out to receive them. In the ancient world, the majority of citizens could not afford to ignore even a small distribution. Evidence exists that even members of the wealthy classes were more than willing to receive distributions, even though they might have been very small compared to the recipient’s overall wealth. In Rome, increase in population resulted in the need for very large quantities of corn to feed it. The traditional *sportulae* provided by wealthy patrons became inadequate, and the government instituted a program using the profits of the empire to provide corn to citizens on a monthly basis. In this way, the state itself acted as the wealthy patron, with all its citizens as clients, and the corn dole as the traditional *sportula*. The corn was not free, but it was fixed at a low price so that all classes could afford it. The wealthy felt they were entitled to partake because the program was supplemented with public funds. When L. Piso, a major opponent of the law that established the dole in 123 BCE, was seen at the distribution he is said to have stated, “I would prefer that you were not of a mind to divide my property among the citizens individually, but seeing that you are dividing it, then I shall ask for my share.” While it was not L. Piso’s personal property

94 Ibid.

95 Ibid., 94.

96 Ibid.

97 Ibid., 101.

98 Ibid.

99 Ibid.

that was being distributed, he felt that he had a share in the public funds just as any other citizen would.\textsuperscript{101} Similarly, Cassius Dio writes that though they were financially able to provide the corn themselves, Roman slave owners manumitted their slaves so that they would be eligible when the corn dole became free in 58 BCE.\textsuperscript{102} As freedmen these former slaves still served their former owners, however their former owners were now no longer responsible for the freedmen’s food supply.\textsuperscript{103}

Through his euergetic works, the Roman emperor could be seen as, and often played the role of, the ultimate and most generous patron to his citizen clients.\textsuperscript{104} The amount of generosity practiced by an emperor even helped to establish his reputation as a successful and good emperor.\textsuperscript{105} Emperors often engaged in large-scale projects, funded from their own pockets, for the benefit the citizen body as a whole. One of the emperors most active in euergetism was Augustus, who established the Roman Empire and reigned from 27 BCE to 14 CE. He documented all his honors and achievements in \textit{Res Gestae Divi Augusti} (“The Achievements of the Divine Augustus”). The account describes the many projects he sponsored to benefit the entire public, as well as the many gifts of largesse he distributed. Not only was the amount of money given away an

\textsuperscript{101} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{102} Ibid., 94; citing Cassius Dio XXXIX, 24.

\textsuperscript{103} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{104} Ferrero, \textit{Ancient Rome and Modern America}, 26.

\textsuperscript{105} Lomas and Cornell, \textit{Bread and Circuses}, 99.
accomplishment according to Augustus, but the amount of people who received it was as well. Among listing the many instances when he gave gifts of money Augustus boasts:

"These largesses of mine never reached fewer than 250,000 persons. In the eighteenth year of my tribunician power [5 BCE] and my twelfth consulship I gave 240 sesterces apiece to 320,000 members of the urban plebs . . . In my thirteenth consulship [2 BCE] I gave 60 denarii apiece to the plebs who were then in receipt of public grain; they comprised of more than 200,000 persons." 106

Along with gifts of money, Augustus funded many public types works including building and restoring public temples, meeting houses, forums, roads, and aqueducts all for the use and direct benefit of all citizens. He also provided entertainment and gladiatorial shows for the public to enjoy at his own expense. The amount of money he spent from his own pocket for the benefit of Rome’s citizens is truly so great it cannot be counted. 107

Augustus, the emperors that succeeded him, and the wealthy citizens that followed his example fulfilled their roles as patrons on a grand scale through practicing euergetism. 108

Still, doles of food and other forms of largesse were generally not necessarily given out with the particularly needy in mind. 109 The most detailed evidence of a public dole comes from an inscription from the Greek city of Samos. 110 Among the many detailed directions put in place for obtaining and distributing the corn, nowhere is it

---


107 Brunt and Moore, Res Gestae, 37.

108 Ferraro, Ancient Rome and Modern America, 26-27.

109 Hands, Charities and Social Aid, 94.

110 Ibid., 95.
stated that only those citizens who truly need the food should be the ones to receive it.111

The inscription also does not state that families with many children should receive a larger helping.112 Instead, the directions emphasize equality in the distribution: “Let them measure out all the corn that has been bought individually to the citizens in residence by chiliastys (subdivisions of the tribes) giving to each a ration of two measures a month free.”113

It would seem from the evidence above that distributions by private philanthropists were not given because of a benefactor’s philanthropic and charitable spirit.114 However, if there had not been at least some charitable feeling on the part of the donator, the lower classes would have been excluded completely.115 In fact, inscriptions show that a donor was more likely to give multiple distributions of gifts in the economically depressed areas of central and southern Italy than in the more prosperous north.116 This may be taken as evidence that the upper classes did feel a certain inclination to share their wealth with people of need.117 Through the virtues of pietas and humanitas, the wealthy members of a town or city may have felt a responsibility to care

111 Ibid., 95-96.
112 Ibid., 96.
113 Ibid.; citing Bolkestein, 259ff.
114 Ibid., 92.
115 Ibid.
116 Ibid.
117 Ibid.
for the less fortunate members of their community.\textsuperscript{118} Also, although distributions were not specifically meant only for the poor classes, it must not be ignored that they still benefitted this class of people immensely.\textsuperscript{119} Without doles only the wealthy would have been able to afford the high price of corn during shortages, and the poor would have been left with nothing at all.\textsuperscript{120}

In conclusion, euergetism, the practice of wealthy citizens of antiquity using their private funds for public benefit, can be seen as an extension of the established patron-client relationship. The emperor Augustus, and many emperors following him, fulfilled their roles as the ultimate and most generous patron of the entire Empire through funding public philanthropic works. Wealthy private citizens followed the emperor’s example, and participated in euergetism benefitting their hometowns. However, private classical philanthropists focused their efforts almost entirely on classes of people who were able to offer some form of benefit in return for the charity or philanthropy received. Most often this return came in the form of honors and public thanks bestowed upon the donor, which resulted in the maintenance of the donor’s good reputation. The existence of a good reputation was economically indispensible to members of the upper class since they were able to do business based on the promise of returning a “favor” in the future. Because of the need to maintain their reputation, classical philanthropists did not donate to the absolute poorest members of society. Their lack of work was viewed as laziness, which

\textsuperscript{118} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{119} Ibid., 97.

\textsuperscript{120} Ibid.
did not incite pity for their cause. Even mass donations of corn, oil, and cash were not focused on the poorest populations, but rather on those who were deemed worthy of receiving a gift. Still, the poorest class benefitted at least somewhat when gifts of largesse were distributed to the entire population. Despite the desire by classical philanthropists to gain recognition and benefits for their actions, their philanthropic spirit must be acknowledged. Without its existence, the poorest classes would not have received any form of benefit at all from the wealthy.
CHAPTER 3
HERODES ATTICUS AND BILL GATES

Though philanthropists are influenced by the society and culture they live in, all philanthropists are still driven by their own personal motivations. The reason one donor may participate in philanthropy may be completely different from another. This chapter will compare the motives of two famous philanthropists: Herodes from the time of the Roman Empire and Bill Gates from the contemporary era.

Herodes Atticus was one of the most famous philanthropists of the ancient world, and some even say of all time.1 A native of Athens, he lived during the time of the “Good Emperors” in the second century CE and undertook numerous large-scale projects for the benefit not only of Athens but also of many other Greek cities including Delphi, Eleusis, and Olympia.2 In Lives of the Sophists, the ancient historian Philostratus describes the generosity of Herodes and his family and lists an account of some of Herodes’s projects.3 Philostratus explains that Herodes received both his immense fortune and his belief in the importance of philanthropic endeavors from his parents.4 Herodes’s father, Atticus, was a large-scale philanthropist in his own right.5 As an


2 Lewis and Reinhold, Roman Civilization II, 262.

3 Ibid.

4 Ibid.

5 Ibid.
example, Philostratus cites an instance when Atticus willingly offered his own money for a large architectural project.\textsuperscript{6} Herodes had noticed the city of Troy was lacking a proper water supply, and petitioned the emperor Hadrian to fund the construction of a proper water system.\textsuperscript{7} The Emperor agreed, provided 3,000,000 drachmas for the project, and appointed Herodes to manage the project.\textsuperscript{8} When the cost of the project unexpectedly exceeded the budget by 4,000,000 extra drachmas, Hadrian told Atticus of his displeasure.\textsuperscript{9} Atticus responded that he would contribute the funds out of his own fortune saying, “Do not, O Emperor, allow yourself to be irritated over such trifles. The amount spent in excess of 3,000,000 I am presenting to my son, and my son will present to the city.”\textsuperscript{10} Upon his death Atticus also charitably left each citizen of Athens 100 drachmas annually.\textsuperscript{11} Philostratus presents Atticus as a man who altruistically practices both philanthropy and charity without concern for his own wealth or reputation.\textsuperscript{12}

Herodes inherited his father’s penchant for philanthropy.\textsuperscript{13} Philostratus praises

\begin{itemize}
  \item[6] Ibid.
  \item[7] Ibid.
  \item[8] Ibid.
  \item[9] Ibid.
  \item[10] Ibid.
  \item[11] Ibid., 262-263.
  \item[12] Ibid.
  \item[13] Ibid., 262.
\end{itemize}
Herodes stating, “No man used his wealth to better purpose.”

Philostratus’s many examples of Herodes’s philanthropy show him focusing on architectural projects that benefited entire communities, rather than only benefitting individuals or certain classes of society. While he was archon of Athens, and in charge of the Panhellenic festival, he built a stadium out of white marble for the festivities. Philostratus describes the beauty of this stadium, calling it, “. . . a monument beyond all other marvels, for there is no theater that can rival it.” He also praises the theater that Herodes built in Athens in memory of his wife and says that this theater along with the aforementioned marble stadium, “. . . are such as exist nowhere else in the Roman Empire.” Along with multiple theaters and stadiums, Herodes commissioned projects that increased the quality of life of various communities. He sponsored the aqueduct for the city of Olympia and swimming pools to heal the sick at Thermopylae. He also revitalized the decaying town of Oricum in Epirus by sending a new colony of citizens to inhabit it, and provided Canusium in Italy with a new system of water supply. Herodes’s philanthropies

---

14 Ibid.
15 Ibid., 263.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid.
extended far beyond his native city of Athens, and included a broad range of projects benefitting communities in multiple ways.\(^\text{22}\)

While Herodes lavished an immense fortune on various cities throughout his lifetime, as was customary he did receive quite high levels of honor and reputation as a result of his philanthropic expenses.\(^\text{23}\) When Herodes transformed the stadium at Delphi in the same manner as the stadium at Athens, Delphi set up statues of Herodes and his wife Regilla in gratitude.\(^\text{24}\) Herodes decided to build the aqueduct and nymphaeum at Olympia after the city had honored him with praise for his oratorical skills and his wife with the office of priestess of Demeter Chamyne.\(^\text{25}\) The nymphaeum was a dramatic structure, and was decorated with a row of statues representing members of both the imperial family and the families of Herodes and Regilla.\(^\text{26}\) By erecting a structure that represented both families together, Herodes was able to blatantly proclaim his status as a close friend of the most powerful family in Rome.\(^\text{27}\) After Regilla’s death, Herodes erected a shrine in her native Italy to honor the goddess Demeter, the late empress

\(^\text{22}\) Ibid.


\(^\text{24}\) Rutledge, “Herodes the Great,”103.

\(^\text{25}\) Ibid., 104.

\(^\text{26}\) Ibid.

\(^\text{27}\) Ibid.
Faustina the Elder, and Regilla.\textsuperscript{28} By equating his wife with an immortal goddess and a
deified empress, Herodes again asserted his status as an extremely prominent citizen of
Rome.\textsuperscript{29} Herodes engaged in several activities other than philanthropy, and as a wealthy
citizen was very well connected with other prominent members of Roman society.\textsuperscript{30} As a
direct result of all of his endeavors, Herodes was called \textit{amicus} by the emperor Hadrian,
served as consul of Rome under the emperor Antoninus Pius, and was the advisor of
emperor Marcus Aurelius.\textsuperscript{31} These positions would have increased his reputation
considerably, which would have resulted in Herodes’s strong ability to exchange favors
with other members of the upper class. The extreme strength his reputation achieved is
seen in how he was remembered. The city of Corinth describes him in tribute as,
“Herodes Atticus, the great.”\textsuperscript{32} His epitaph reads: “Herodes of Marathon, son of Atticus.
This sepulcher has his remains, the world his fame.”\textsuperscript{33}

Herodes’s devotion to architectural philanthropy could also be seen as an
obsession to establish a permanent legacy, rather than an altruistic desire to perform
benevolent actions.\textsuperscript{34} While functioning water supply systems offered extreme

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid., 107.
\textsuperscript{29} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{30} Ibid., 97.
\textsuperscript{31} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{32} Ibid., 108.
\textsuperscript{33} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 107.
improvements in the quality of life for people living in ancient cities, Herodes seemed to be focused mainly on building grandiose monuments that would be attributed to him for centuries. If he had been mostly concerned with the welfare of the populace, he may have spent less money on the grandeur of the structures he sponsored and instead focused mainly on building modest and practical projects. It could also be expected that on occasion he would have even bestowed largess to the citizens of the towns he sponsored. On the occasion of his father’s death, Herodes blatantly showed that he was not interested in giving his money away solely for the benefit of others. As stated above, when Atticus died he left provision in his will that each citizen of Athens would receive one mina every year. Since Atticus’s wife had her own fortune, their heirs would still have been left very wealthy. Nevertheless, Herodes saw the loss of a fortune’s worth of funds. In an attempt to lessen the cost he secured a compromise in which each citizen would receive 5 minas immediately in exchange for forgoing the remaining annuity. As the Athenians each came to collect their inheritances, Herodes

36 Lewis and Reinhold, Roman Civilization II, 259.
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
40 Ibid.
41 Ibid.
called in all the old loans that his father had supplied to their ancestors.\textsuperscript{42} As a result, most citizens were left without any inheritance at all from Atticus.\textsuperscript{43} Herodes succeeded in retaining his father’s money, but the Athenians’ anger at his perceived trick lasted for the next forty years.\textsuperscript{44} This example shows that while Herodes used his money for structures that could be utilized by all citizens of a town, he was not interested in practicing philanthropy for reasons that would not also benefit either his reputation or his pocketbook.\textsuperscript{45} He was not chiefly driven by either altruistic emotion to help the poor, or egocentric desires to achieve the personal satisfaction of helping others. There were no income tax credits for practicing philanthropy in ancient Rome, so Herodes’s finances would not have benefitted from this modern type of philanthropic motivation.\textsuperscript{46} He seems to have been driven almost completely by a dual-agenda that focused on marketing his personal reputation and wealth so that he would benefit economically and civilizations would be in awe of both during his own lifetime and for many generations to come.\textsuperscript{47} Herodes even admits to seeking immortal fame in a conversation with his friend

\textsuperscript{42} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{43} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{45} Ibid., 108.

\textsuperscript{46} Illingworth, \textit{Giving Well}, 177.

\textsuperscript{47} Rutledge, “Herodes the Great,” 107-108.
Ctesidemus recounted by Philostratus. Upon admitting his desire to undertake a project that would create a canal through the Isthmus of Corinth Herodes states, “For a long time I have been striving to bequeath to men that come after me some proof of an ambition that reveals me for the man I am, and I consider that I have not yet attained to this reputation.” When Ctesidemus tries to reassure him by reminding him of the great deeds he has accomplished and the speeches he has given Herodes counters:

All this that you speak of must decay and yield to the hand of time, and others will plunder my speeches and criticize now this, now that. But the cutting of the Isthmus is a deathless achievement and more than one would credit to human powers, for in my opinion to cleave through the Isthmus calls for Poseidon rather than a mere man.

He never did complete this project, ironically out of fear that he would be accused of having too much ambition.

In comparison to Herodes one of the most highly celebrated philanthropists currently living is Bill Gates, the founder of the Microsoft Corporation. Rather than inheriting his wealth, Gates is a self-made billionaire. Born in 1955, his father was a

---


49 Ibid.

50 Ibid.

51 Ibid.


successful attorney and his mother was a schoolteacher.\textsuperscript{54} Bill met fellow student Paul Allen while attending Harvard University.\textsuperscript{55} After Bill dropped out of Harvard, he and Allen developed the first computer program designed specifically for a personal home computer, and then founded Microsoft in 1975.\textsuperscript{56} Microsoft proceeded to revolutionize the use of computers by making them accessible to the average household; and as a result Gates became one of the wealthiest men in the world.\textsuperscript{57} Since then he has chosen to give away almost $30 billion, about 35\% of his wealth.\textsuperscript{58} Like Herodes, it was Gates’s parents who taught him to value philanthropy.\textsuperscript{59} On the night before Gates’s wedding to Melinda French in 1994, his mother wrote the couple a letter stressing the opportunities and responsibilities that come with the couple’s extreme wealth.\textsuperscript{60} The letter ended with the phrase: “From those to whom much is given, much is expected.”\textsuperscript{61} Over the next three years, Bill and Melinda Gates formed two separate foundations dedicated to philanthropic activity.\textsuperscript{62} In the year 2000, they merged the two into one to create the Bill & Melinda

\textsuperscript{54} Solomon, \textit{Tech Billionaires}, 16.

\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 15.

\textsuperscript{58} Illingworth, \textit{Giving Well}, 5, 19.

\textsuperscript{59} Solomon, \textit{Tech Billionaires}, 17.

\textsuperscript{60} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{61} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{62} Ibid.
Gates Foundation. With $30 billion in assets donated by the Gateses, it is the world’s largest private philanthropic foundation. In addition Warren E. Buffett, the CEO of Berkshire Hathaway, Inc., announced in June 2006 that over a period of years he would contribute about $31 billion to the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. By doing so he will more than double the foundation’s annual funding.

The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation focuses its philanthropic efforts on the main causes of social problems. In particular the foundation works largely on healthcare in developing nations. While reading an article years ago, Bill Gates was shocked by the statistic that half a million children in the developing world die every year from severe diarrhea caused by rotavirus. Gates wondered why he had never even heard of a disease that kills so many children. He then learned that millions of children in developing nations die from diseases that have been either completely or virtually eliminated in the United States. He had assumed that if vaccines and medicines that

63 Ibid.
64 Illingworth, Giving Well, 14; Solomon, Tech Billionaires, 5,17.
65 Illingworth, Giving Well, 14; Solomon, Tech Billionaires, 15.
66 Solomon, Tech Billionaires, 15.
67 Ibid.
68 Ibid.
69 Illingworth, Giving Well, 13.
70 Ibid.
71 Ibid.
could save lives existed then governments would have mobilized to bring the treatments to those who needed them.72 Saddened by the realization that this was not the case, Gates stated that he and Melinda “couldn’t escape the brutal conclusion that – in our world today – some lives are seen as worth saving and others are not.”73 As a result one of the Gates Foundation’s major agendas is its Global Health Program.74 The program focuses on promoting the health of citizens in developing countries through six concentrations: infectious diseases, HIV/AIDS, tuberculosis, reproductive health, global health strategies, and global health technologies.75 Viewing its mission as a long-term process, the program has provided billions of dollars in grants for research that leads to preventing, treating, and curing diseases in areas of the world neglected by pharmaceutical companies and scientists.76 Specifically the foundation supports researchers who are developing effective vaccines and medicines that are inexpensive to produce, easy to distribute, and simple to use.77 The purpose is to provide affordable medicinal care to be able to treat the maximum number of people.78 Along with the Global Health Program

72 Ibid.
73 Ibid.
75 Ibid.
76 Ibid., 23.
77 Ibid., 24.
78 Ibid.
the Gates Foundation has a United States Program and a Global Development Program. The United States Program focuses on improving public high schools throughout the country by breaking large schools into smaller ones as well as by changing their curriculum and structure. The Global Development Program stemmed out of the recognition that providing healthcare in developing countries did not completely satisfy the problems in these areas: there was also a need to improve the everyday life of citizens. Therefore this branch of the foundation was created to help provide financial services for the poor so that they can support themselves with a sustainable livelihood, gain access to clean water and safe food, and be able to obtain a good education.

While it was accepted in classical society for philanthropists increase their reputation by practicing philanthropy, modern philanthropists are in danger of being accused of practicing philanthropy simply to seek positive publicity. Despite the extensive philanthropic work the Gates Foundation has completed, Bill and Melinda Gates have received criticism questioning their motives for creating their foundation. In May of 1998 the United States government filed a suit alleging that Microsoft had operated in a manner that stifled industry competition. A federal district court judge

79 Ibid., 22.
80 Ibid.
81 Ibid., 25.
82 Ibid.
83 Ibid., 18.
84 Ibid.
agreed and ruled that the company had violated the Sherman Antitrust Act by engaging in monopolization.\textsuperscript{85} Bill Gates, reputed to be a brilliant but ruthless businessman, has since been criticized that his foundation is a scheme to benefit his personal and corporate image.\textsuperscript{86} It is pure speculation as to whether or not this may have been at least partly true when the foundation was created.\textsuperscript{87} However, the enormous amount of money and time Gates has dedicated to the foundation coupled with the amount of good that has been accomplished over the past decade as a result currently leave few in suspicion of Gates’s motives.\textsuperscript{88}

Despite the work Gates has done through his foundation, some wonder if he might not be able to give away much more.\textsuperscript{89} While Gates has donated over $30 billion, he still heads the Forbes list of richest Americans with a fortune of $53 billion.\textsuperscript{90} He lives in a 66,000 square foot home in Seattle worth $100 million and pays $1 million in property taxes every year.\textsuperscript{91} In 1994 Gates paid $30.8 million to acquire the Leicester Codex: the only handwritten book by Leonardo Da Vinci in private hands.\textsuperscript{92} Some believe that

\textsuperscript{85} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{87} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{88} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{89} Illingworth, \textit{Giving Well}, 19.
\textsuperscript{90} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{91} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{92} Ibid.
Gates would be in a position to engage in even more philanthropy if he lived more simply.\textsuperscript{93} Still, compared to other members of the Forbes list Gates has given away a much larger percentage of his wealth.\textsuperscript{94} For example, the fifth-richest American according to the list is Gates’s former colleague and Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen.\textsuperscript{95} He has given away $800 million, or about 5%, of his $16 billion fortune.\textsuperscript{96} While $800 million worth of philanthropic efforts is certainly very admirable, Gates has far exceeded this benchmark by giving away about $30 billion, or 35% of his fortune.\textsuperscript{97}

It seems more likely that one of the main motivations behind Bill Gates establishing a foundation might be for the income tax benefits available.\textsuperscript{98} In the United States, both donors and private foundations receive preferential treatment in regards to taxation.\textsuperscript{99} One common way to receive an immediate deduction on an individual’s state and federal income taxes is to donate money to a charitable or philanthropic institution.\textsuperscript{100} A charitable tax deduction reduces the level of personal income available for taxation,

\textsuperscript{93} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{94} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{95} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{96} Ibid., 19-20.
\textsuperscript{97} Ibid., 20.
\textsuperscript{98} Solomon, \textit{Tech Billionaires}, 18.
\textsuperscript{99} Ibid.
effectively reducing the amount of taxes that must be paid. Private foundations are not required to pay income tax on investment returns from assets. Interest and dividends acquired from a foundation’s investments may be immediately reinvested without taxation. This tax-free compound interest leads to a highly expedited growth of assets, which is a tremendous advantage when compared to an individual or corporation that would be required to pay income taxes on all of its investment returns. In addition, an individual may gift publicly traded stock to a private foundation to the benefit of both the individual and the foundation. An individual that has held a publicly traded stock for at least one year and gifts the stock to a private foundation may deduct the stock’s fair market value from their income tax return. The foundation may then sell the stock and keep the entire value without paying capital gains or income tax on the amount acquired. Finally, up to 100 percent of a donor’s assets may be given to a foundation without incurring either estate or gift taxes. In light of these multiple tax benefits, creating a foundation and contributing to it every year is the best way for an individual to

102 Ibid., 24.
103 Ibid.
104 Ibid.
105 Ibid.
106 Ibid.
107 Ibid.
108 Ibid., 27.
maximize both the amount of money that is given to charity and the amount that is kept in personal accounts. The added benefit of being the creator as well as the donor of a private foundation is the ability to decide how the finances of the foundation will be utilized, essentially allowing the donor to maintain control of money that used to make up part of personal finances. Furthermore, creating and being active in the management of a private foundation during one’s lifetime establishes a pattern of philanthropic behavior. When the creator retires or passes away, the successors will know how to guide the actions of the foundation in a way that the creator would have wished.

It would seem as though Bill Gates has realized all of the above advantages and is currently utilizing them. By creating a private foundation, Gates is able to engage in philanthropy not only by donating funds, but also by actively deciding how those funds are appropriated. Both his personal funds and the funds that he has given to his foundation benefit from United States tax advantages. They are able to grow at a higher rate of return, which creates the optimum amount ultimately available for use by the foundation. Bill Gates has said that he plans to leave his children only about 1 percent of his fortune when he passes away. He therefore has established an institution to which he will most likely contribute the majority of his wealth when he dies. The funds will not

---

109 Ibid., 29.
110 Ibid., 30.
111 Ibid., 56.
112 Ibid.
113 Ibid., 46.
be subject to estate taxes, and because Gates has played a very active role in the operations of his foundation, the administrators will have a very good sense of how he would have wanted the foundation’s actions to continue when he is no longer able to direct the foundation himself. Gates plays such an active role in his foundation, and the foundation engages in such large philanthropic endeavors, that it does not seem fair to state that Gates created his foundation for the sole purpose of income tax benefits. However, Gates certainly does seem to be using the available tax benefits to the foundation’s advantage by maximizing the amount of money available for philanthropic endeavors.

The primary reason Bill Gates engages in philanthropy seems to be mostly for altruistic purposes. Gates is motivated to increase the quality of human lives, rather than to benefit himself. Bill Gates has said:

But humanity’s greatest advances are not in its discoveries – but in how those discoveries are applied to reduce inequity. Whether through democracy, strong public education, quality health care, or broad economic opportunity – reducing inequity is the highest human achievement.\footnote{Solomon, Tech Billionaires, 22.}

Gates does not outwardly seem to expect public thanks or any form of repayment from those that are beneficiaries of the foundation’s resources. However, while he has not stated so publicly, it may be highly likely that he personally achieves a level of self-satisfaction from his philanthropic efforts. If Gates honestly did not receive any form of self-satisfaction from his philanthropic work, there is a strong possibility that he would not be so dedicated to it. The amount of personal energy he dedicates to his foundation
and the level of importance he places on its work are testament to the high amount of fulfillment Gates personally receives from participating in philanthropy. This warm-glow effect may stem from the knowledge that his personal efforts have saved the lives of countless human beings, and also from the thanks that is given to him willingly by the recipients of his foundation’s efforts. Gates does not seem to take a dual-agenda approach to philanthropy. It does not seem that he is seeking to use tax benefits to increase his fortune for the benefit of his personal spending. With Gates only planning to leave a nominal amount of his fortune to his children, any tax benefits Gates receives during his lifetime will ultimately be mostly to the advantage of his foundation and the people it serves. Gates has also placed provision on his foundation to spend its assets within fifty years of his and Melinda’s deaths.\footnote{Ibid., 21.} By doing so it would seem that the purpose of his foundation is not for the Gates name to be remembered over centuries, like Andrew Carnegie or John D. Rockefeller whose foundations are still active long after their deaths, or even like Herodes Atticus who sought eternal remembrance.\footnote{Silk and Lintott, \textit{Creating a Private Foundation}, 54-55; Rutledge, “Herodes the Great,” 108.} Gates is also not a religious man, so he is not motivated by the possibility that his charitable efforts on earth will reward him in heaven.\footnote{Illingworth, \textit{Giving Well}, 16.} In the absence of a dual-agenda reason for philanthropy, most of Gates’s actions point to altruistic and egocentric reasons for creating a foundation. Gates legitimately seems to desire to help the less fortunate
worldwide, and the warm glow side effect that is created for Gates personally drives him to continue philanthropy.

While Herodes Atticus and Bill Gates engaged in different types of philanthropic projects, their ventures benefitted not only the people who directly received them but also the philanthropists themselves. By focusing on grand architectural projects, Herodes succeeded in establishing a positive reputation during his lifetime as well as a permanent legacy after his death. His honor and reputation probably served to increase his economic wealth through his ability to exchange favors with wealthy friends. Gates receives personal satisfaction from the philanthropic work he accomplishes or he would not be so involved and dedicated to his organization. Without a doubt, however, his finances and ultimately his foundation’s finances also benefit greatly as a direct result of income tax deductions. The primary beneficiaries of the philanthropic work are, of course, the people it directly impacts whether they are the citizens of ancient towns or poor communities in modern times. However, in both of these ancient and modern examples the secondary beneficiary is without doubt the philanthropist’s financial and economic position.
CHAPTER 4
MOTIVES OF ANCIENT PHILANTHROPISTS OF THE ALIMENTA PROGRAMS

The ancient Roman Imperial *alimenta* program provided a source for the children of needy citizens to receive a financial stipend from public funds.¹ This stipend added to the household budget and helped to provide food and other necessities for the child and, by extension, for his or her family as well.² To fund each individual town’s *alimenta* program, the emperor granted agricultural loans to the citizen-farmers of the town and then placed the interest from these loans into a special fund to be distributed by magistrates to a predetermined number of needy children in that town.³ Devised by the emperor Nerva and implemented fully by his successor Trajan, the *alimenta* program continued for almost 200 years.⁴ During this time, private wealthy citizens funded their own *alimenta* programs as well to benefit their local towns.⁵ This chapter will explore the benefits and possible disadvantages the program brought to all parties involved: the emperor and private benefactors, the farmers, and the children; as well as discuss the reasons for the *alimenta* program’s eventual expiration. The chapter will also dispute Greg Woolf’s claim that *alimenta* finances were not distributed among poor children.

¹ Lewis and Reinhold, *Roman Civilization II*, 255.
⁴ Ibid., 255.
⁵ Ibid., 259.
The motives of *alimenta* philanthropists will be analyzed, and the argument made that they benefitted economically from their beneficence.

The ancient evidence still remaining regarding the *alimenta* programs is brief. There are almost no details provided in literary writings, so inscriptions provide most of the information. Of these inscriptions, the most informative are two bronze tables dating from the reign of Trajan and listing details of the loans. One table is from the town of Veleia and the other from Ligures Baebiani. The longer of these two inscriptions, the Table of Veleia, not only lists the amount of each loan and which farms undertook these loans; but also details the number of children who benefitted from the distributions along with their civil status, gender, and amount of money distributed to them each year. For reference, the table reads:

> Liens on properties to the amount of 1,044,000 sesterces, so that through the indulgence of the best and greatest princeps, the Emperor Caesar Nerva TRAJAN Augustus Germanicus Dacicus, boys and girls may receive support [as follows]: legitimate boys, 245 in number, at 16 sesterces each [per month], equals 47,040 sesterces; legitimate girls, 34 in number, at 12 sesterces each [per month], equals 4,896 sesterces; illegitimate boy, 1, 144 sesterces [per year]; illegitimate girl, 1, 120 sesterces [per year]; total, 52, 200 sesterces, which equals 5 percent interest on the aforementioned principal.

---


7 Ibid.

8 Ibid.

9 Ibid.

10 Ibid., 124-125.

11 Lewis and Reinhold, *Roman Civilization II*, 256; citing *Corpus Inscriptionum Latinarum*, XI, 1,147.
Apart from the tables of Veleia and Ligures Baebiani, there is another bronze tablet from Ferentinum decreeing the title of patron to a magistrate who had established an *alimenta* program in the town.\(^\text{12}\) Lastly, there are inscriptions from 42 other Italian towns simply mentioning the existence of a *quaestor alimentorum*, or magistrate of the *alimenta*.\(^\text{13}\) With such a small sample of evidence, it is important to keep in mind that there is no guarantee the conclusions derived from the existing evidence will be true for all *alimenta* programs, as they may have been organized differently in various parts of Italy and the provinces.\(^\text{14}\)

One of the main benefits of *alimenta* schemes from the government’s point of view was to encourage an increase in the birth rate.\(^\text{15}\) A population increase, or at the very least the continued maintenance of population numbers, would considerably help to ensure both the existence and success of the Roman Empire.\(^\text{16}\) The Roman emperor needed to guarantee not only the continuous availability of soldiers for the army, but also citizens to support society’s entire infrastructure: farmers, bakers, merchants, teachers, et cetera.\(^\text{17}\) The *alimenta* program provided the opportunity to help ensure the continued

---

\(^{12}\) Duncan-Jones, “Purpose and Organisation,” 125; citing *CIL*, VI, 1492.

\(^{13}\) Ibid., 126.

\(^{14}\) Ibid.

\(^{15}\) Ibid., 127.

\(^{16}\) Ibid.

\(^{17}\) Ashley, “‘Alimenta’ of Nerva,” 8.
existence of the Roman Empire from the most basic level: by purely promoting the proliferation of the Roman people.\textsuperscript{18}

The second major benefit the emperor received from promoting the \textit{alimenta} program was the enhancement of the honor and reputation both of his regime and his personal self.\textsuperscript{19} As the ultimate patron of the Empire, an emperor who funds a government program to help needy children would be seen as benevolent and generous.\textsuperscript{20} Starting in the middle of the second century CE, evidence of this can be seen from inscriptions the beneficiaries of the \textit{alimenta} program erected to thank the emperor for his generosity.\textsuperscript{21} For example, in 162 CE the beneficiaries of the \textit{alimenta} program in the town of Ficulea dedicated an inscription in thanks “to the best and most indulgent emperor.”\textsuperscript{22} The emperors themselves likewise took the opportunity to advertise their own generosity by dedicating coins that commemorated the \textit{alimenta} programs.\textsuperscript{23} Three different types of these coins survive from Trajan’s regime.\textsuperscript{24} One shows a goddess

\begin{footnotes}
\textsuperscript{18} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{19} Ibid., 6.
\textsuperscript{20} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{21} Ibid., 9.
\textsuperscript{22} Ibid; Citing \textit{CIL}, XI, 6002: “Optimo et indulgentissimo principi.” Translation into English mine.
\textsuperscript{23} Ibid., 6.
\end{footnotes}
(interpreted as either the goddess Italia or the goddess Abundantia) holding a cornucopia in one hand and handing corn to a child who is holding a roll of bread. The second shows the emperor Trajan seated in the curule chair and distributing bread to children or to a child that the goddess is holding. The third is a standing man in a toga distributing bread to children. In all three variants of the coin, the letters “ALIM ITAL” appear below the image. These coins encouraged the citizens’ high regard for their emperor by relaying the message: because he provides food for the children of Italy the powerful emperor was also thoughtful and benevolent. Some emperors after Trajan set up alimentary schemes in memory of prominent imperial women. Antoninus Pius established a fund in the memory of his wife, Empress Faustina. This fund specifically benefitted girls, and recipients of this aliment program were known as Puellae Faustinianae. Likewise, the emperor Alexander Severus enrolled a group of children into the alimenta program in honor of his mother Mammaea. By connecting this

\[\begin{align*}
25 \text{ Ibid.} \\
26 \text{ Ibid.} \\
27 \text{ Ibid.} \\
28 \text{ Ibid.} \\
29 \text{ Ibid., 223-224.} \\
30 \text{ Ashley, “‘Alimenta’ of Nerva,” 9.} \\
31 \text{ Ibid.} \\
32 \text{ Ibid.} \\
33 \text{ Ibid., 10.}
\end{align*}\]
charitable program with the names of women in the imperial household, the emperors emphasized the philanthropic rather than the political purpose of the grants.\textsuperscript{34} The emperor’s hope most likely was to increase his popularity with the masses in an attempt to increase his political, and therefore his economic, power.

The main benefits for funders of a private \textit{alimenta} programs also would have also been an increase in honor and reputation, and the fulfillment of their roles as patrons to the towns. Pliny the Younger set up his own private \textit{alimenta} fund during his lifetime to benefit freeborn boys and girls of his town.\textsuperscript{35} In exchange for this and all of Pliny’s other philanthropic endeavors, an inscription detailing his achievements was placed by his hometown on the baths he funded.\textsuperscript{36} The inscription states: “In his lifetime he also gave 500,000 sesterces for the support of the boys and girls of the lower class.”\textsuperscript{37} By supporting the children of the lower classes, Pliny the Younger certainly would have been seen by others as being highly reputable. He would gain the social and political support of the parents of the children his \textit{alimenta} program benefitted. His reputation as an honorable man would increase, and his peers within his social class would desire to exchange favors with him and count him among their “friends.” Pliny the Younger’s good reputation, helped by his philanthropy, would ensure his ability to maintain his

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{35} Lewis and Reinhold, \textit{Roman Civilization II}, 270.

\textsuperscript{36} Ibid., 269.

\textsuperscript{37} Ibid., 270; citing \textit{CIL}, V, 5,262.
wealthy lifestyle through exchanging economic and financial favors with his wealthy friends.

It is difficult to pinpoint exactly the type of motive the emperors and private philanthropists had for participating in *alimenta*. It seems that both sought to present the reason for their *alimenta* philanthropy as altruistic, when in actuality they were benefitting economically, so it may be considered that they had dual-agenda motives for giving. It is entirely possible, however, that the *alimenta* philanthropists truly participated in the program out of their compassion for children of the lower classes, and benefitted economically even though it was not their intention. They also may have had egocentric reasons for participating: feeling personal satisfaction from their good deed. Evidence from the time period does not relay specific motives of these kinds. However, whether it was their intention or not, the honor and reputation of *alimenta* philanthropists certainly benefitted from their support of these programs; and it is highly likely that this increase in reputation resulted in an increase in the philanthropists’ abilities to exchange financial and economic favors with their peers.

Many historians view the *alimenta* program as a method that benefitted farmers by providing loans at a low interest rate. Some historians even hold the view that this was the primary purpose for the *alimenta* program. Indeed, the amount of the loans was limited to a very small fraction of the worth of the farm. Generally loans were restricted

---

38 Duncan-Jones, “Purpose and Organisation,” 127.

39 Ibid.

40 Ibid., 124.
to about 8% of the total value of the land, with interest on the loan to be paid at the rate of 5% per year. With this low debt to equity ratio, theoretically it would be easy for farmers to repay the loans with interest in a timely manner. The program would benefit the farmers by providing cheap financing, and the loans would be a low-risk investment opportunity for the imperial government. The influx of funds into the account designated for beneficiaries of the alimenta program would be practically guaranteed. Duncan-Jones is quick to point out, however, that during this time period investing money in land was a typical method of financing a perpetual foundation. In the mind of an emperor or private philanthropist, the benefit of a low-interest loan would have been weighted more towards guaranteeing the interest would be paid so that it could be forwarded to needy children, rather than attempting to provide principal at an economic rate of interest. Still, the added benefit of farmers being able to obtain a loan at a low interest rate, even though it is a small loan, cannot be denied.

While alimentary loans were available at low interest rates, evidence suggests, in the case of the imperial alimenta program, taking on these loans was not necessarily

---

41 Ibid.

42 Lewis and Reinhold, Roman Civilization II, 255.

43 Ibid., 256.

44 Ibid.

45 Duncan-Jones, “Purpose and Organisation,” 128.

46 Ibid.
Pliny the Younger indicates in one of his letters that an estate with a perpetual interest payment against it had the effect of decreasing the value of the estate by a figure higher than the charge itself. Potential buyers of the estate would be discouraged by the obligation to pay the loan principal with interest in times of poor harvest, and therefore the market-value of the estate would decrease. With this in mind, alimentary loans would not have been desirable by farmers if they could be at all avoided. However, if not enough landowners chose to take on a loan, then the government would be faced with the problem of not having enough income generated for the alimenta distribution.

The table of Veleia shows the imperial loans were very small in relation to the size of the estates, only about 8%. It would have been more common for the time period to require a lower rate of security for a loan. Augustus and Tiberius had been willing to lend money at a rate up to 50% of the value of the land put up as collateral. If this had been the case with the alimentary loans, the scheme would have been able to be

47 Ibid., 135.
48 Ibid., 129; citing VII, 18.
49 Ibid., 130.
50 Ibid., 129.
51 Ibid., 136.
52 Ibid., 138.
53 Ibid., 136.
54 Ibid.; citing Suetonius, Aug. 41; Tacitus, Ann. VI, 17.
run at the same level, but with much fewer participants.\textsuperscript{55} This could seemingly be preferable, however as Duncan-Jones explains, “The much higher security demanded here suggests the confidence of finding enough takers that would only be given by compulsory powers of farming out loans in the regions concerned.”\textsuperscript{56} In addition, only large farms participated in the program: the table of Veleia lists no estates worth less than 50,000 sesterces, with most of the estates listed at over 100,000 sesterces.\textsuperscript{57} This evidence seems to indicate a possibility the government attempted to spread the loans as widely as possible to the citizens who were most able to afford them to reduce the financial hardship associated with a compulsory loan.\textsuperscript{58} It also continues to support the theory that the main purpose of the \textit{alimenta} program was the philanthropic support of needy children, rather than the benefit of supplying low-interest loans to landowners.\textsuperscript{59} \textit{Alimenta} was a philanthropic regime, but if its foundation was prompted by a decline in population numbers, then the government may have seen it as an urgent situation requiring the imposition of loans on those citizens who were able to bear them.\textsuperscript{60} While the government took steps to reduce the hardship of repaying these compulsory loans as

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{55} Ibid.
\end{flushleft}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{56} Ibid.
\end{flushleft}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 124, 129.
\end{flushleft}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{58} Ibid., 137, 142.
\end{flushleft}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{59} Ibid., 137.
\end{flushleft}

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{60} Ibid., 136.
\end{flushleft}
much as possible, the decrease in market value of the land as a result of these loans probably meant that the loans were unattractive to landowners.61

Peter Garnsey refutes the idea that the alimenta loans were compulsory in his article, “Trajan’s Alimenta: Some Problems.”62 Regarding Duncan-Jones’s point that the amount of security required to obtain a loan was too high for any landowners to accept, Garnsey brings up several points. First, there was a shortage of money during the time of Tiberius as creditors called in loans but then held onto the money they received.63 Tacitus speaks of Tiberius helping to save the economy by initiating interest-free, three-year loans at 50% of the value of the property put up for collateral.64 As for Augustus, Suetonius states that he gave loans on 2-fold security because of his great generosity.65 It may be that Trajan’s requirement for collateral based at 12.5 times the loan was not significantly higher than the normal rate, but rather the rates that Augustus and Tiberius required were significantly lower.66 Even if Trajan’s collateral rates were higher than normal, the true reasoning behind this would be to ensure the landowner would be able to

61 Ibid., 137.
63 Garnsey, “Trajan’s Alimenta,” 378.
64 Ibid.; citing Tacitus, Ann. 6,17.
65 Ibid.; citing Suetonius, Aug. 41.
66 Ibid.
easily pay back the interest.\textsuperscript{67} Trajan was not willing to allow the chance his \textit{alimenta} project would be ruined by defaulting landowners.\textsuperscript{68} Secondly, Garnsey argues that farmers would have used the extra capital towards projects that would increase the value of the farms, far outweighing any devaluation of the land’s market value that would come with an unattractive interest payment.\textsuperscript{69} Thirdly, Trajan would not have had difficulty finding landowners to voluntarily participate in the \textit{alimenta} system.\textsuperscript{70} The participants in the alimentary loans were some of the most prominent and wealthy citizens in the area.\textsuperscript{71} As such, it was traditional for these citizens to fulfill their roles as patrons by supporting their towns and cities through financial contributions.\textsuperscript{72} Since the loans were so small in comparison to the value of the land, it is doubtful much of a loss or hardship would be associated with them.\textsuperscript{73} A fair amount of volunteers from the wealthy social class would have come forward to obtain loans in the spirit of \textit{noblesse oblige}.\textsuperscript{74} Lastly, a letter written by Trajan to Pliny gives us an idea of Trajan’s attitude towards compulsory

\textsuperscript{67} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{68} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{69} Ibid., 379.

\textsuperscript{70} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{71} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{72} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{73} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{74} Ibid.
loans. In a previous letter from Pliny to Trajan, Pliny suggests implementing a compulsory loan (not in reference to alimentary loans) in the province of Bithynia. Trajan replies strongly, “To force the unwilling to accept loans that may be useless to them is not consistent with the justice of my reign.” Duncan-Jones suggests that perhaps there was a population crisis in the peninsula of Italy that was so critical as to convince Trajan to change his opinion regarding compulsory loans. Garnsey seriously doubts this claim, and suggests that this would be highly unlikely. As seen here, whether the loans were compulsory or voluntary is a highly debated point. If they were compulsory, they could have been seen as a deficit by landowners. If the loans were voluntary, they would have offered the wealthy landowners the opportunity to participate in the emperor’s philanthropic program and therefore fulfill their social obligations. Either way, the main benefit for the landowners was the availability of extra capital at a

75 Ibid., 380.
76 Ibid.
78 Ibid., 137.
80 Duncan-Jones, “Purpose and Organisation,” 130.
81 Garnsey, “Trajan’s Alimenta,” 379.
low interest rate, and with a high guarantee that the principal could be easily paid back with interest.\textsuperscript{82}

The primary people that profited from the alimenta program were, of course, the children themselves. There is very little evidence that relates the number of children who were part of the program from its inception to its end.\textsuperscript{83} Only the Table of Veleia gives any hard numbers, and this table is truly only a snapshot of one town at one particular time period.\textsuperscript{84} As has been seen by inscriptions across Italy, the alimenta program existed on some level in many different towns probably for as long as 200 years.\textsuperscript{85} Girls were included in the program along with boys, as is seen from inscriptions, coins, and literary references.\textsuperscript{86} This is logical, if the primary benefit of the program was to increase the birthrate: encouraging both boys and girls to live to maturity to beget their own children.\textsuperscript{87} The Table of Veleia shows that 245 legitimate boys and only 34 legitimate girls were enrolled in the alimenta.\textsuperscript{88} This inequity is most likely due to the higher allowance allowed to boys than to girls.\textsuperscript{89} It may be that each family was only allowed to

\begin{itemize}
  \item[82] Duncan-Jones, “Purpose and Organisation,” 127.
  \item[83] Ashley, “‘Alimenta’ of Nerva,” 12.
  \item[84] Ibid.
  \item[85] Ibid., 8-10.
  \item[86] Ibid., 13.
  \item[87] Ibid.
  \item[88] Lewis and Reinhold, Roman Civilization II, 256.
  \item[89] Duncan-Jones, “Purpose and Organisation,” 131.
\end{itemize}
enroll one of their children in the program, and therefore any family with a boy chose to enroll him to obtain the higher allowance. If this is true, it is not given that the town of Veleia only contained 34 legitimate girls. Ulpian states that Hadrian decreed boys should receive grants until they turn 18, and girls until they turn 14. In this time frame and within these ages, countless boys and girls would have received assistance over the course of the program.

In his article, “Food, Poverty, and Patronage: The Significance of the Epigraphy of the Roman Alimentary Schemes in Early Imperial Italy,” Greg Woolf disputes the idea that alimentary monies were distributed to poor children. Instead he makes the claim that they were distributed either to children from families of relatively high social status, or to a sampling of randomly selected citizens of various economic status. Woolf points out that only one ancient passage references *alimenta* as being designated specifically for poor children. An anonymous writer known to scholars as Pseudo-Aurelius Victor states Nerva “ordered that girls and boys born of needy (egestosis) parents in the towns (oppida) of Italy should be fed at public expense.” That passage dates after the year 395

90 Ibid.

91 Ibid.

92 Ashley, “‘Alimenta’ of Nerva,” 8-9; citing Digest, xxxiv.


94 Ibid., 204-208.

95 Ibid., 204.

96 Ibid.; citing Epitome de Caesaribus, 12.4
CE, well past the end of all alimenta programs.97 Since the writer lived well after the reign of Nerva, Woolf deems his information uncertain.98 Also, Woolf points out that if alimenta was given to the poorest children in the town, then they could not have afforded to sponsor inscriptions thanking the emperor.99 Woolf concedes that the exact cost of an inscription is not known, but he logically argues that any amount would have been too much for the truly poorest citizens.100 Furthermore, the life expectancy among the poorest classes was probably very low, and yet the inscription from Asisium states that the children received their allowance with the consent of their parents. If the money had gone to the poorest children, Woolf argues that logically it would have gone mostly to orphans.101 Woolf also reiterates that customarily the poor were rarely singled out to receive gifts of money or food.102 Rather, it was usually high-status citizens that received the most of any largesse distributed.103 As an example, Woolf cites that the grain distributions at Rome were given mostly to high-status individuals.104 In fact, to be included among the lists of those eligible for the corn-dole was such an honor that some

97 Ibid.
98 Ibid.
99 Ibid., 206.
100 Ibid., 206-207.
101 Ibid., 207.
102 Ibid., 210.
103 Ibid., 210-211.
104 Ibid., 214.
recipients even chose to advertise this distinction on their tombstones.\textsuperscript{105} By comparing the \textit{alimenta} program to the corn-dole, both of which were focused around providing food to citizens, Woolf concludes that the \textit{alimenta} program may have been distributed primarily to members of high-status, or more probably a mixture of high and middle-class citizens.\textsuperscript{106}

The difficulty with Woolf’s argument is that, while both the corn-dole at Rome and the \textit{alimenta} program are focused on providing food to the citizens and displaying the emperor’s munificence, Woolf does not acknowledge a core difference between the two programs. The corn-dole, unlike \textit{alimenta}, was truly a program of largesse. Grain was handed out to citizens at a cost that only the emperor and the government incurred, and the money was sourced from most citizens’ taxes. However, the money that was distributed to the children in the \textit{alimenta} programs came more directly from the wealthy landowners themselves. The emperor provided the principal currency for the loans, but the children were paid out of the interest that the landowners paid back to the emperor. As seen above, the Table of Veleia lists that most farms participating in the program were worth over 100,000 sesterces, with none worth less than 50,000 sesterces. This value certainly would have placed the landowner in a top or upper-middle economic and social status. Therefore, if the \textit{alimenta} distributions were given to children of middle to high economic status, there seems to be a very high chance the landowners would have been subsidizing their own children. It seems hard to believe that Trajan, or any private

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{105} Ibid., 215.
\item \textsuperscript{106} Ibid., 211.
\end{itemize}
*alimenta* benefactor for that matter, would have used so many financial and human resources to set up a program for children who were not in need of the money. It is even more difficult to believe that the emperors would have been able to convince (or even force) landowners to take on loans that would simply shuffle money from their own pockets, to the town magistrates, and back into their own pockets again. Furthermore, the concept circulated widely during this time showing the emperor as the ultimate generous and benevolent patron seems more in accord with an emperor who provides assistance to those who need it, rather than simply making the rich more well off by providing money to rear their children. As seen previously, private philanthropists also obtained great honor and reputation by benefitting people in lower social classes than themselves. It may be true that the *alimenta* likely was intended for children who had living parents who would look after them, rather than being intended for the care of truly destitute orphans.\(^{107}\) If it had been intended for orphans, some form of financing would have been required for certain institutions such as orphanages and caretakers.\(^{108}\) The Table of Veleia, however, promises nothing other than grants of money, clearly intended towards a food allowance. Furthermore, the table specifies assistance to over 200 freeborn boys living in Veleia. For such a minor town, it is highly unlikely that it would have had a population large enough to include so many freeborn orphan boys.\(^{109}\) While Woolf may be correct that the *alimenta* money was not distributed truly to the most destitute of

\(^{107}\) Duncan-Jones, “Purpose and Organisation,” 130.

\(^{108}\) Ibid.

\(^{109}\) Ibid.
children, it does seem fully logical that it would have been intended for, and distributed to, children of lower economic status.

One difficulty with the alimenta program was that its initial up-front cost was tremendously greater than that of a simple annual gift of funds to the children.\textsuperscript{110} The entire amount of the principal of the loans needed to be available for distribution to landowners at the start of the program.\textsuperscript{111} If the loans were lent at a 5% interest rate, then the imperial treasury or private philanthropist needed to provide an amount 20 times greater than the sum needed for distribution each year.\textsuperscript{112} Whereas if children were simply given a stipend outright (with no loans involved to finance the operation), the total amount of money would be taken out of the benefactor’s available funds year by year and at a much slower rate.\textsuperscript{113} The advantage of the system of loans was in the self-containment of the program.\textsuperscript{114} By tying the source of the stipends to a program that was self-contained, the alimentary children were protected from the possibility that their stipend would be suspended in years when the benefactor ran a deficit.\textsuperscript{115}

\textsuperscript{110} Ibid., 128.

\textsuperscript{111} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{112} Ibid., 126.

\textsuperscript{113} Ibid., 128.

\textsuperscript{114} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{115} Ibid.
After the time of the emperor Diocletian (284-305 CE), no indications remain that *alimenta* was in still in effect.116 Ancient sources tell us almost nothing about the causes of its decline.117 The one exception is Capitolinus, who states in a passage dating in 193 CE, “Pertinax, with hardened heart, cancelled nine years’ arrears *ex instituto Traiani*.118 There are several reasons why the programs might have ended around this time.119 It may have become common that the money failed to reach its intended recipient.120 The emperor or private philanthropist may have withheld alimentary payments and diverted the money to relieve his own financial burdens.121 Likewise, town magistrates may have seen greater need for the money elsewhere and absorbed it into the general revenues of the town.122 From another point of view, the agricultural depression that followed instances of the plague during this time period may have resulted in many farmers being unable to meet payment obligations.123 Heavy inflation in the third century also may have lead to the payments losing most of their value.124 If this had been the case, it seems

---

116 Ashley, “‘Alimenta’ of Nerva,” 15.
117 Ibid., 16.
119 Ibid.
120 Ibid.
121 Ibid.
122 Ibid.
123 Ibid.
124 Duncan-Jones, “Purpose and Organisation,” 144.
likely that the emperor or private benefactor, due to financial difficulties, may have not been able to put up the heavy amount of capital needed to re-establish the loans at a higher interest rate.\textsuperscript{125}

In conclusion, imperial and private alimenta programs, while philanthropic in nature, benefitted not only the children who received cash payments to help purchase food but also benefitted the emperors and private philanthropists who sponsored the programs, as well as the landowners who partook in the loans. The emperors who sponsored alimenta programs fulfilled their roles as the most benevolent and generous patrons throughout the empire. The private benefactors increased their honor and reputation, and acted within their roles of patrons of their hometowns. Though it is difficult to decipher whether philanthropists participated in alimenta programs altruistically or not, it is highly likely that all philanthropists involved benefitted economically by using their reputation to exchange economic favors with other members of their social class. The landowners, whether forced to undertake the loans or not, were able to obtain extra capital to invest in their farms at a very low rate. In keeping with the spirit of the philanthropic nature of the program, it was highly likely that the money generated by the program went to poor children, rather than middle or upper class children. Finally, the program probably declined for several reasons, but mostly due to the difficulty of the emperor producing enough principal currency to provide the loans in times of financial difficulty.

\textsuperscript{125} Ibid.
CONCLUSION

In the tradition of ancient Greece and Rome, wealthy citizens participated in euergetism, or the practice of funding public works with their own private funds. This practice can be seen as an extension of Rome’s patron-client relationship, in which wealthy patrons provided financial support to their poorer clients, who then provided political support, honor, and reputation in return. The emperor was often seen as the most prominent patron of the country, and none fulfilled this role on quite so grand a scale as the Emperor Augustus. When the emperors Nerva and Trajan instituted and developed the alimenta program, private citizens followed and established alimenta programs in their own hometowns across Italy. As a result of their euergetism, ancient alimenta philanthropists benefitted from their philanthropic actions financially and economically. Engaging in philanthropy resulted in an increase in honor and reputation, which would have allowed these members of the wealthy class to more easily trade favors between their peers for services that members of modern society would expect to purchase. The people that benefitted from philanthropy bestowed honor and reputation in the form of praise, honorary titles, stone monuments and inscriptions, and social alliances. The alimenta donors themselves may have sought to assist the poor altruistically, that is, simply for the purpose of benefitting those less fortunate than themselves. Likewise, an alimenta benefactor may have been mostly seeking egocentric self-satisfaction and pride in their philanthropic accomplishments. Evidence supporting these motives is not abundant, though it may be reasoned that ancient philanthropists with altruistic motives similar to those of Bill Gates would have existed. The high societal
expectation for an ancient wealthy man to practice philanthropy and charity, combined with a society that valued the exchange of one gift for another, may mean that more ancient philanthropists operated similar to Herodes and had dual-agenda motives for giving. Whether it was their main purpose or not, the reputations of ancient *alimenta* philanthropists would have benefitted from their actions, and therefore their economic prospects would benefit as well. What is indisputable, however, are the immense benefits gained by the recipients of the *alimenta* programs, as well as by society in general, as a result of ancient philanthropy.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


