

## ARTICLE

### **The Grassroots and the Gift:**

### **Moral Authority, American Philanthropy, and Activism in Education**

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**ABSTRACT:** Parental activism in education reform, while often portrayed as an exemplary manifestation of participatory democracy and grassroots action in response to entrenched corporate and bureaucratic interests, is in fact carefully cultivated and channeled through strategic networks of philanthropic funding and knowledge. This paper argues that these networks are characteristic of a contemporary form of neoliberal governance in which the philanthropic “gift” both obligates its recipients to participate in the ideological projects of the givers and obscures the incursion of market principles into education behind a veneer of progressive activism. Drawing on archival research as well as personal interviews with Seattle-based reform advocates, representatives of philanthropic organizations, and school administrators, the paper points to the need to critically evaluate the “roots” in grassroots movements and trace their connections to larger institutions and agendas.

**Keywords:** Philanthropy, neoliberal morality, education reform, parental activism, grassroots movements, Seattle

In this article we investigate the broad link between neoliberal governance, moral authority and philanthropy. Over the past decade most philanthropic foundations and charitable nonprofits in the United States have adopted the logic of economic sustainability and market rationality that has already permeated a majority of institutions in the country. The ‘new’ philanthropy, known variously as venture philanthropy or philanthrocapitalism, embraces business language and practices, especially the logic of return on investment, reliance on quantitative metrics for evaluation, and targeted, short-term projects.<sup>1</sup> Perhaps most importantly, foundations are now concerned, as well, with the inculcation of entrepreneurial grant recipients able and willing to act as self-regulating moral agents.

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<sup>1</sup> Bishop, M. and Green, M., *Philanthrocapitalism: How the Rich Can Save the World* (Bloomsbury Press, 2008); K. Saltman, *The Gift of Education: Public Education and Venture Philanthropy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

As many scholars have noted, this form of individual ‘responsibilization’ is a critical technique of neoliberal governance.<sup>2</sup> This responsibilization can occur at the institutional level, reconfiguring organizations to assume the socio-moral obligations formerly associated with centralized systems such as the state.<sup>3</sup> Responsibilization thus operates in a Janus-faced fashion in contemporary foundations, where the obligations of funding recruit both donors and recipients into a morality reframed within the rationality of capitalist markets—especially the emphasis on the values of entrepreneurialism.

Our argument here is that contemporary American philanthropy thus plays an important but little recognized role in the development of neoliberal ‘moral governance’ in the United States. Philanthropy aids in the creation of a competitive and wide-ranging market of moral instruments that diminish the leading role of governmental entities as the primary providers of care and welfare, while simultaneously recruiting individuals and non-state organizations into forms of neoliberal responsibilization. Through providing the funding to a range of political and cultural organizations focusing on the importance of metrics, competitiveness, and choice-making, philanthropic foundations encourage individual and institutional moral agency within a narrow field of market-oriented options. At the same time, philanthropic organizations’ emphasis on “doing good” in the arenas in which they intervene helps obscure the economization of social relations that characterizes the contemporary moment of neoliberal social governance.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, the process of grant-making itself introduces new forms of moral authority that reflect previous eras of *noblesse oblige* but set within the context of contemporary neoliberalism. Giving, in this scenario, produces authorities or experts out of new actors, including both donors and recipients, who are bound together through ties of moral reciprocity. An equally important corollary to this process is the delegitimized nature of state-based or other centralized systems and practitioners of authority such as teachers, university researchers, and unions. While donors and recipients grow in moral authority through the philanthropic transaction, these other players find their status sidelined or greatly reduced.

It is important to note that the mechanisms through which individuals and institutions are recruited as moral agents in neoliberal systems of governance are always contingent on history and geography. It is through genealogy and ethnography on specific sectors and in particular places that one can identify the moments and practices through which assumptions about moral authority and markets become common sense. Thus in our paper we briefly trace

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<sup>2</sup> Michel Foucault, “Governmentality,” in G. Burchell, C. Gordon, and P. Miller (eds), *The Foucault Effect: Studies in Governmentality* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991 [1978]); Nikolas Rose, *Inventing Our Selves: Psychology, Power, and Personhood* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998); Nikolas Rose, “The Death of the Social? Re-figuring the Territory of Government,” *Economy and Society*, vol. 25, no. 3 (1996), 327-356; M. Dean, *Governmentality: Power and Rule in Modern Society* (London: Sage Press, 1999); Thomas Lemke, “The Birth of Biopolitics’: Michel Foucault’s Lecture at the College de France on Neo-liberal Governmentality,” *Economy and Society* vol. 30, no. 2 (2001), 190-207.

<sup>3</sup> R. Shamir, “The Age of Responsibilization: on Market-Embedded Morality,” *Economy and Society*, vol. 37, no. 1 (2008), 1-19.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*,

the lineage of liberal thought on morality in capitalism, showing the trajectory that links capitalist markets, moral duty, and moral authority from Adam Smith to von Hayek. We demonstrate further that as economization advances both theoretically and practically, and the neoliberal logic of the market penetrates and implacably recodes all other social domains, philanthropy begins to play an increasingly powerful role in the moralization of markets.

Drawing on the case of parental activism in education, we seek to show how this form of so-called 'grassroots' activism reflects a form of moral agency that is emblematic of the larger trend towards individual responsabilization under neoliberal governance. To demonstrate this we examine different forms of such activism present in the Seattle metropolitan area on the basis of personal interviews with parental activists during 2011 as well as archival sources from the same time period. As we were living in the Seattle area during this time, we both experienced the phenomena we observed, albeit from different positions (one as a parent of children in the Seattle public schools, the other as a Ph.D student with ties to local education professionals). What is critical, but rarely diagnosed about this particular form of moral recruitment and action, however, is that it is often activated and enhanced by philanthropic funding. Foundations help to nudge individuals toward certain paths over others; this occurs in education, for example, in the promulgation of metrics-based assessment and market-oriented solutions tendered via the rhetoric of greater parental expertise and moral authority.

The activated behavior of the parents is enabled and encouraged discursively through the diversification of moral authority and its delegitimization vis-à-vis state controlled authority in education; it is made practically possible through, among other things, the grant funding of "authentic" moral agents (parents) and their causes, the funding of socio-cultural media outlets as rhetorical enablers, and by the funding of metric analysis conducted by reform-oriented institutions such as Education Research Advocacy Organizations (ERAOs). The moral authority of parents resides in their agency as actors working on behalf of their children to support market-based solutions to the 'problem' of public education. The ways in which this occurs, i.e., the mechanisms through which this moral authority takes hold, is particular to the context of education and educational reform in the United States, and also to the role philanthropy plays and has played historically in American society.

There's a wealth of scholarship on these types of phenomena as abstract processes, but much less on the actual workings of responsabilization *in situ*. What are the cultural, political and social mechanisms through which people are interpellated as entrepreneurial *and* moral, as moral authorities *because* they are entrepreneurial? How are these mechanisms influenced by the specific historical and geographical context in which they are occurring? And why are some forms of parental engagement in education granted moral authority through reciprocal giving from philanthropic organizations while other forms are ignored or marginalized? In this article we show some of the players and everyday practices and processes through which self-regulatory and horizontal forms of moral authority emerge and are legitimated in parental activism and educational reform in the United States.

## Moral authority and market philanthropy

As a technique of governance, responsabilization is therefore fundamentally premised on the construction of moral agency as the necessary ontological condition for ensuring an entrepreneurial disposition in the case of individuals and socio-moral authority in the case of institutions.<sup>5</sup>

A critical starting point in the analysis of contemporary market philanthropy is the question of moral authority. Contrary to assertions that neoliberalism lacks a moral foundation,<sup>6</sup> it rests on a longstanding ethos of competition and individual freedom that has deep moral roots, but whose *routes* have been constantly shifting for over two centuries. Drawing on Foucault's lectures<sup>7</sup> and briefly tracing this evolutionary and geographic trajectory from classical liberalism to the *laissez-faire* of the Manchester School, to ordoliberalism and neoliberalism, enables us to observe some of these critical transformations. In particular, it provides an historical lens through which to examine the current philanthropic interventions in the American education system.

One of the key figures in classical liberalism is Adam Smith, and his philosophical musings on morality can give us some insight into the prominent thinking of his day. In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, for example, it's possible to see the author's deep conviction that self-interest is moral and that the natural tendency of human beings towards empathy and harmony will enable this self-interest to remain in control and ultimately operate to the benefit of society. Smith's belief in the natural benefits and limits of self-interest were reflected in his liberal views of market exchange. In Smith's view, since human beings were naturally inclined to moral behavior, operating as if an 'impartial spectator' were observing and judging their actions, concerns about an excess of individual freedom or lack of concern for the needy were unfounded. A free individual operating on the basis of self-interest and a free market would behave to the benefit of all concerned, including or perhaps especially with respect to those in need of help. This sentiment is expressed most directly and classically in *The Wealth of Nations*:

But man has almost constant occasion for the help of his brethren, and it is in vain for him to expect it from their benevolence only. He will be more likely to prevail if he can interest their self-love in his favour, and show them that it is for their own advantage to do for him what he requires of them. Whoever offers to another a bargain of any kind, proposes to do this. Give me that which I want, and you shall have this which you want, is the meaning of every such offer; and it is in this manner that we obtain from one another the far greater

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid., 7.

<sup>6</sup> J. Stiglitz, "Moral Bankruptcy," *Mother Jones* (January/February 2010). Web.: <http://www.motherjones.com/politics/2010/01/joseph-stiglitz-wall-street-morals>. (Last accessed January 29, 2013).

<sup>7</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the College de France 1978-1979* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

part of those good offices which we stand in need of. It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest. We address ourselves, not to their humanity, but to their self-love, and never talk to them of our own necessities, but of their advantages.<sup>8</sup>

As with much of early liberal thought, this view relied on an abstracted social plane divorced from prior social and economic struggles or moral upheavals. Harmony would simply ‘win out’ over any antagonism and mistrust that might have been wrought over time, since it was perceived as a natural tendency and hence stronger and more resilient than ancient enmities. Shapiro writes of this type of a-historical and a-geographical thrust in Smith’s thinking: “In general, his [Smith’s] way of interpreting historical dynamics emphasized harmony and suppressed contention, and his way of treating space naturalized boundaries and suppressed the practices through which they are formed, policed, and resisted.”<sup>9</sup>

Yet, despite the seeming universalism of this abstracted, a-contextual way of thinking, classical liberal ideas were themselves taken up in unique ways in different times and places. Bruno Amable notes, for example, the divergent directions liberalism took in France and Scotland, and by English philosophers such as Bentham.<sup>10</sup> Clearly, despite the flattening rhetoric of a natural human tendency to harmony, as promoted by Smith, the actual practices and debates associated with late 18<sup>th</sup> and early 19<sup>th</sup> century liberal thought began to diverge quite significantly depending on geographical and historical context. For example, one particularly fraught variance in liberal thought of the day was between the “logic of individual rights”--foregrounded by the French--and the “principle of utility”--foregrounded by liberals such as Bentham.<sup>11</sup>

In the Benthamite conceptualization highlighting the importance of utility, the opportunities and authority for a liberal government to maximize utility opened up the possibilities for greater state interventions in social reform. Thus in this version of classical liberal thought, certain kinds of social-reformist interventions were more likely to be condoned. Possibly in response to this potential for a stronger state role, which remained anathema to many liberal theorists, an ensuing iteration of liberal theory reframed classical ideas of harmonious exchange in a far more antagonistic thematic: that of social Darwinism. In *The Birth of Biopolitics* Foucault illustrates how the ideas related to struggles inherent in nature and the survival of the fittest became absorbed into economic theory as the ethos and necessity of unadulterated competition.<sup>12</sup> While still relying on many of the fundamental impulses of 18<sup>th</sup> century *laissez-faire* governance, 19<sup>th</sup> century versions began to ground the principles of the market economy in antagonistic competition rather than harmonious exchange.

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<sup>8</sup> Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations* (Blacksburg: Thrifty books, 2009 [1776]), Book I, Chapter II, 19.

<sup>9</sup> M. Shapiro, *Reading ‘Adam Smith’: Desire, History, and Value* (London: Sage, 1993).

<sup>10</sup> B. Amable, “Morals and Politics in the Ideology of Neo-liberalism,” *Socio-Economic Review*, vol. 9 (2011), 3-30.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 8.

<sup>12</sup> Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 118-119.

For dominant elites in society, who wished to maintain the current social order, a social Darwinist understanding of liberalism had the distinct advantage of undermining efforts to help the less advantaged; these types of efforts were increasingly derided as negatively affecting the whole of society. In this way of thinking, since individual competition should be construed as part of a general law of nature, and survival of the fittest would lead ultimately to a better species (or population of men), then any attempt to interfere in this natural order could be linked with the general degradation of individuals and nations. A treatise by William Sumner, a prominent social Darwinist of that era, manifests these sentiments clearly:

We can take the rewards from those who have done better and give them to those who have done worse. We shall thus lessen the inequalities. We shall favor the survival of the unfittest, and we shall accomplish this by destroying liberty. Let it be understood that we cannot go outside of this alternative: liberty, inequality, survival of the fittest; not-liberty, equality, survival of the unfittest. The former carries society forward and favors all its best members; the latter carries society downwards and favors all its worst members.<sup>13</sup>

However, while diverging in focus from the naturally self-controlled harmony of exchange to an ethos of Darwinian competition, as Foucault points out, both of these logics of market competition still rested on the idea of *laissez-faire* as a *natural* moral order. Foucault argues that the primary break between these 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> century liberal visions and that of the 20<sup>th</sup> century *ordoliberal*s was in the notion of competition as something natural.<sup>14</sup> For this latter group there was nothing ‘naturally’ moral about these processes; indeed, it was considered imperative that key practices such as competition be actively inscribed *as* moral. In other words, rather than a hands-off appreciation for the natural workings of the market, competition, and indeed the practices of a market economy in general, had to be deliberately cultivated, managed, and encouraged.

Whether you define the market by exchange or by competition you are thinking of it as a sort of given of nature, something produced spontaneously which the state must respect precisely inasmuch as it is a natural datum. But, the ordoliberals say—this is naïve naturalism. For what in fact is competition? It is absolutely not a given of nature ... Pure competition must and can only be an objective, an object thus presupposing an indefinitely active policy. Competition is therefore an historical objective of governmental art and not a natural given that must be respected.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> W. Sumner, “The Challenge of Facts and Other Essays,” in A. Keller (ed.), *The Challenge of Facts and Other Essays* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1914).

<sup>14</sup> Ordoliberalism is a variant of liberal thought that emerged in Germany in the interwar period. Although not a ‘singular’ way of thinking, it is characterized by an acceptance of a positive role for the state in establishing and maintaining economic and social order within the framework of a socially embedded market or ‘enterprise’ system. See G. Schnyder, and M. Siems, “The Ordoliberal Variety of Neoliberalism,” in S. Konzelmann and M. Fovargue-Davies (eds.), *Banking Systems in the Crisis: The Faces of Liberal Capitalism* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 250-268.

<sup>15</sup> Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 120.

As Foucault observed, the fundamental break between the ordoliberal position and those that preceded it didn't occur in a vacuum. Rather, it resulted from numerous historical and geographical processes, which had exposed some of the failures and contradictions in early classical liberal thought and practice. These included, most prominently, the dual crises of the global depression and the rise of Hitler in the 1930s, as well as the Russian Revolution, and the monopolistic tendencies of 19<sup>th</sup> century industrial capitalism.<sup>16</sup> The change in focus of the ordoliberals inclined towards a far more activist interpretation of the necessity of new forms of "governmental art" as well as interpretive understandings of the historical functioning of economic systems and processes. Yet while the ordoliberals were intensely concerned with the historical and governmental production and management of the market, eschewing the "naïve naturalism" of their forbears, they clung tenaciously to the ethos of self-interested competition and responsibility. Indeed, perhaps because of the sense of moral crisis that had been engendered by the multiple 'failures' in liberal thought leading to the 1930s, both the emphasis on individual competition and on individual responsibility were perceived as critical moral touchstones in repairing the damage of the prior period and leading to the potential moral transformation of capitalism in the future.<sup>17</sup>

How then, could the ordoliberals imagine a well-governed economic world of strong individual competition and self-interest that was not naturally guided by harmonious tendencies of restraint and empathy? In reference to some of these viewpoints, Foucault notes the moral tone taken by thinkers at the Walter Lippmann colloquium, who advocated for a state that could manage this form of deeply entrepreneurial existence by "maintain(ing) itself above the different competing groups and enterprises."<sup>18</sup> For ordoliberals such as Ropke, governance from above needed to ensure "'a community which is not fragmented,'" guaranteeing cooperation and, in Foucault's words, supplying more "'warm' moral and cultural values" to temper the "'cold' mechanism of competition."<sup>19</sup> Thus while individual competition and responsibility remained fundamental principles of the market economy, and the economic model was extended out to social relations, such that the 'enterprise' itself was perceived as a model for the entire social field, many European ordoliberals nevertheless maintained a more interventionist vision of the role of the state in 'managing' this enterprise from above.<sup>20</sup>

In contrast with the European ordoliberal position on the importance of the state's role in the new enterprise culture, Foucault posits the American neoliberal tradition as more radically clear and unadulterated vis-à-vis the role of the state: it should not guide or direct morals

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<sup>16</sup> For a fuller discussion of the impact of these contradictions on liberal thought see the essays in P. Mirowski, and D. Plehwe (eds.), *The Road from Mont Pelerin: The Making of the Neoliberal Thought Collective* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 45-67; and Foucault, *Birth of Biopolitics*.

<sup>17</sup> B. Amable, "Morals and Politics"; F. Denord, "French Neoliberalism and its Divisions; From the Colloque Walter Lippman to the 5<sup>th</sup> Republic," in P. Mirowski, and D. Plehwe (eds.), *The Road from Mont Pelerin: The Making of the Neoliberal Thought Collective* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 45-67.

<sup>18</sup> Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 242-243.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>20</sup> R. Ptak, "Neoliberalism in Germany," in P. Mirowski, and D. Plehwe (eds.), *The Road from Mont Pelerin: The Making of the Neoliberal Thought Collective* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009), 98-138.

from above, but rather aid in the promotion of individual freedom, calculative forms of rational self-interest, and the development of moral authority on the basis of individual human capital.<sup>21</sup> The 'naturalized' American neoliberal, von Hayek, for example, believed that it was the state's role to enhance the possibilities for entrepreneurs to develop and succeed, including through the formation of clear procedural systems and rules, but not to de-concentrate economic power or intervene to stabilize the social order.<sup>22</sup> Enhancing entrepreneurial behavior was seen as a form of state investment in human capital perceived as necessary for the good of all. Indeed, not only was rational self-interest perceived as necessary for the positive moral development of society, it was actually set in opposition to egalitarian principles of justice or material equality. Von Hayek wrote, for example,

Equality of the general rules of law and conduct, however, is the only kind of equality conducive to liberty and the only equality which we can secure without destroying liberty. Not only has liberty nothing to do with any other sort of equality, but it is even bound to produce inequality in many respects ... Equality before the law and material equality are therefore not only different but are in conflict with each other.<sup>23</sup>

Milton Friedman shared von Hayek's antipathy towards any kind of moral link between freedom and material equality, or between material equality and justice. For him, freedom represented the higher moral order, one that could never be linked with an egalitarian impulse; indeed, the latter impulse, he felt, would ultimately destroy both the free individual and liberalism itself. He wrote,

The egalitarian ... will defend taking from some to give to others, not as a more effective means where the 'some' can achieve an objective they want to achieve, but on grounds of 'justice'. At this point, equality comes sharply into conflict with freedom; one must choose. One cannot be both an egalitarian, in this sense, and a liberal.<sup>24</sup>

Both thinkers thus believed strongly in a form of individual liberty set *against* a social reformist impulse. For many American neoliberals, the path forward out of the moral crises of the earlier part of the century should not involve centralized systems of redistribution or forms of 'giving' premised on the reallocation of resources based on need. Rather, in response to the crises they called for even greater individual freedom, a stronger ethos of competition, and the

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<sup>21</sup> Foucault, *The Birth of Biopolitics*, 243; Schnyder and Siems (*op. cit.*) have noted that a sharp distinction between European ordoliberalism and American neoliberalism is problematic as there was a strong and regular exchange of ideas and influences between proponents of the two groups. Nevertheless, Foucault's observations of the key differences with respect to the role of the state remain pertinent, despite the many points of agreement between the two positions.

<sup>22</sup> Schnyder, and Siems, "The Ordoliberal Variety," 250-268; A. Gamble, *Hayek: The Iron Cage of Liberty* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996).

<sup>23</sup> Friedrich Hayek, *The Essence of Hayek*, edited by C. Nishiyama and K. Leube (Stanford University: Hoover Institution Press, 1984), 332-333.

<sup>24</sup> Milton Friedman, *Capitalism and Freedom* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1962), 195.



application of market principles to more and more areas of human life. Thus it can be argued that in the American neoliberal vision of the post-war period, there developed an even more stringent emphasis on competition and responsibility as the basis of moral authority than in the European ordoliberal tradition.<sup>25</sup>

Foucault's genealogy reflects the evolution of liberalism, in which differing notions of markets and moral authority shift along a contingent and evolving continuum. Contemporary rationalities of morality in neoliberalism instrumentalize the agency of subjects by encouraging them to draw on their own capacities in order to govern themselves. This transfer of competence represents a genuine shifting of the spaces of political and moral sovereignty from the state to the individual. But as this history makes clear, the ways in which the general tenor *and* the specific formulations of moral authority and moral duty play out can vary considerably in time and place—reflecting the specific circumstances of geo-historical epochs as well as the theoretical and practical reactions to them.

Despite exhortations to individual responsibility many disadvantaged American parents in the early 21<sup>st</sup> century remain doubly burdened by responsibility for their own self-care as well as the care of their children and the institutions and communities that impact them. Part of this burden reflects the harshness of neoliberal austerity measures attacking state welfare and dismantling social protections for children and families under the Reagan, Bush, Clinton, and Bush II administrations.<sup>26</sup> While welfare to work ideologies of newly autonomous and liberated individuals proliferated during this time period, the actual effects of these anti-state, market-oriented policies on families were increasing economic polarization and family homelessness, and the slide into poverty of more and more children.<sup>27</sup>

This has led to the growth of a wide range of private institutions such as philanthropic foundations, which have begun to mediate the damage to public, community institutions caused by austerity, while simultaneously encouraging parents in the direction of market-

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<sup>25</sup> For example, the German ordoliberal Wilhelm Röpke wrote in 1950 of the limits of competition in the establishment of a functioning moral and economic order: “[W]e must stress most emphatically that we have no intention to demand more from competition than it can give. It is a means of establishing order and exercising control in the narrow sphere of a market economy based on the division of labor, but no principle on which a whole society can be built. From the sociological and moral point of view it is even dangerous because it tends more to dissolve than to unite.” Translated and quoted in Schnyder and Siems, “The Ordoliberal Variety of Neoliberalism”.

<sup>26</sup> J. Peck, *Workfare States* (NY: Guilford Press, 2001); D. King, and M. Wickham-Jones, “From Clinton to Blair: The Democratic (Party) Origins of Welfare to Work,” *The Political Quarterly*, vol. 70, no. 1 (1999), 62-74; J. Peck, and N. Theodore, “Exporting Workfare/Importing Welfare to Work: Exploring the Politics of Third Way Policy Transfer,” *Political Geography*, vol. 20, no. 4 (2001), 427-460; D. Harvey, *A Brief History of Neoliberalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005)

<sup>27</sup> B. Harrison, and B. Bluestone, *The Great U-Turn: Corporate Restructuring and the Polarizing of America* (NY: Basic Books, 1988); K. Chesney, “Family Homelessness: A Systemic Problem,” *Journal of Social Issues*, vol. 46, no. 4 (1990), 191-205; M. Mattingly, K. Johnson, and A. Schaefer, “More Poor Kids in More Poor Places: Children Increasingly Live Where Poverty Persists,” *Carsey Institute*, No. 38 (Issue Brief, University of New Hampshire, 2001). Web.:

<http://www.carseyinstitute.unh.edu/publications/IB-Mattingly-Persistent-Child-Poverty.pdf>.

based options and solutions. Rose writes of this form of recruitment, "it seems as if we are seeing the emergence of a range of rationalities and techniques that seek to govern without governing society, to govern through regulated choices made by discrete and autonomous actors in the context of their particular commitments to families and communities."<sup>28</sup>

But how and why do disadvantaged and middle class parents make market-oriented choices about their children and the public institutions they attend in an era of visible market failure and widespread and increasing social dispossession? A key technique in this process is the development of the figure(s) of moral authority. This 'figure' is the person or organization that allows and encourages individuals to make 'good' (i.e. well-governed) choices on the path to self-regulation and moral agency. The moral authority in any given situation provides a backstop or set of conditioning barriers to inappropriate positions or choices; he, she, or it, sets the terms of the debate, defining boundaries and providing pastoral advice that limits choice yet simultaneously makes it imperative to choose.

We argue that instead of *pushing* the move to competition and entrepreneurial visions of individual choice, philanthropic gifts in the United States create a *pull* into activist self and community-based care through the logic of moral authority and reciprocity at the heart of giving.<sup>29</sup> In the case of the billionaire funders and multi-billion dollar private foundations, this reciprocity is highly uneven, forging unequal relationships that permeate every aspect of the exchange. Yet it operates in a moral economy that appears softer and more caring than the cold procedural logic and ethos of pure competition as promoted by the Chicago School thinkers and implemented in some sectors of US society during the Reagan, Bush, Clinton and Bush II years. Foundations and their funding, in this context, become the figures of moral authority, both enabling and moralizing parental agency in the direction of greater market choice for their children and for their declining public institutions and communities.

This contemporary moral economy is one that has advanced in the context of the market failures of high neoliberalism in the United States. American philanthropy has developed historically in tandem with liberalism and modern capitalism, smoothing and often facilitating the processes of capital accumulation and imperialism both at home and overseas.<sup>30</sup> In the period of modern industrial capitalism, for example, wealthy titans such as Carnegie and Rockefeller sought to develop a specifically 'scientific' form of philanthropy that would be rational, secular, and based on authoritative knowledge derived from science;<sup>31</sup> they thus established and funded universities, libraries, research projects and educational and health programs, ul-

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<sup>28</sup> Rose, "The Death of the Social?", 328.

<sup>29</sup> For interesting discussions of the 'stakes of morality' and reciprocity in gift-giving see the essays in K. Browne and B. L. Milgram (eds.), *Economics and Morality: Anthropological Approaches* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009), 211-232.

<sup>30</sup> M. Carnoy, *Education as Cultural Imperialism* (New York: David McKay Company, 1974); R. Arno, *Philanthropy and Cultural Imperialism: The Foundations at Home and Abroad* (Boston: GK Hall, 1980); E. Berman, *The Influence of the Carnegie, Ford, and Rockefeller Foundations on American Foreign Policy: The Ideology of Philanthropy* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1983), 22-24.

<sup>31</sup> E. Lagemann, and J. de Forest, "What Might Andrew Carnegie Want to tell Bill Gates," in R. Bacchetti and T. Ehrlich (eds.), *Reconnecting Education and Foundations* (San Francisco: Wiley and Sons, 2007), 49-67.

timately hoping to maximize the development of human capital in ways beneficial to American capitalist progress at the time.<sup>32</sup> Similarly during the Cold War the larger foundations' overseas programs were of strategic importance in supporting US foreign policy; these included funding invested in European educational and cultural institutions in a form of "psychological warfare" against the spread of communist ideology.<sup>33</sup>

Following the period of neoliberal roll-back the social dislocations caused by domestic austerity programs led to economic pain for the poor and middle classes, as well as to multiple forms of resistance—most famously manifested in the anti-WTO demonstrations in Seattle in 1999. Both at home and worldwide, the philosophy of *laissez-faire* and the so-called Washington Consensus came under attack for the increasingly obvious failure of the free market to 'lift' those at the economic bottom, and to provide social services and welfare for the neediest families--formerly supplied by now deracinated state agencies.

It is in this context of the decline of the old D.C.-based Washington Consensus and the dawn of a new millennium of technology and finance-based private foundations that contemporary market philanthropy has arisen. Through the process of giving, the new billionaire philanthropists in the United States form a modern day aristocracy--one that is committed to the social care of the neediest, those who have been failed by the market but are no longer supported by the state. However, this social care is not directed or implemented via the institutions or values of state redistribution. Philanthropists manifest moral authority through helping others find freedom via individual choice and their own self-interested labor. Moreover, the contemporary gift economy operates to create more market choices, leading to greater overall market dominance—such as through the creation of charter schools<sup>34</sup> For contemporary neoliberal thinkers this type of synergy is considered a virtuous circle, beneficial for all. Bill Gates wrote in 2008:

Naturally, if companies are going to get more involved, they need to earn some kind of return. This is the heart of creative capitalism. It's not just about doing more corporate philanthropy or asking companies to be more virtuous. It's about giving them a real incentive to apply their expertise in new ways, making it possible to earn a return while serving the public who have been left out.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> A. Carnegie, *The Gospel of Wealth* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1962); E. Lagemann, *The Politics of Knowledge: The Carnegie Corporation, Philanthropy, and Public Policy* (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1989).

<sup>33</sup> O. Zunz, *Philanthropy in America: A History* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2012); I. Parmar, "American Foundations and the Development of International Knowledge Networks," *Global Networks*, vol. 2, no. 1 (2002), 13-30; R. Magat, *The Ford Foundation at Work: Philanthropic Choices, Methods, and Styles* (New York: Plenum Press, 1979).

<sup>34</sup> Charter schools in the United States are an alternative education system where a school receives public funding but operates privately. In many states, charter schools and charter management organizations operate on a for-profit basis.

<sup>35</sup> Bill Gates, "Creative Capitalism," *Time Magazine* (Thursday, July 31, 2008), 29-30.

Gifts constitute relational subjects of givers and receivers within a framework of neoliberal governance similar to older forms of *noblesse oblige*. Those who are patrician through wealth must show honorable behavior, and this includes responsibility to the disadvantaged. A naturalized authority is derived for those who assume this role. For example, as a result of philanthropists' positions as the head of their foundations, they are often viewed as experts in any number of areas, despite the lack of any real knowledge in the subject. A classic example in education is the very public role Bill Gates plays as an education authority, solely as a result of the large donations to education made by his private foundation.<sup>36</sup>

Additionally, an implied agreement or consent to this positioning is created through the moral framework of giving.<sup>37</sup> Among other things, in the contemporary neoliberal context, 'consent' to this exchange absolves the giver of an in-depth examination of how the wealth that went into the gift was acquired.<sup>38</sup> Additionally, at a more fundamental level, consent to giving and receiving, which frequently takes place at the institutional level through winning grants, also implies acceptance to an accountable social world based on individual competition and choice (which 'necessarily' produces winners and losers). Acceptance of the process of giving or philanthropic largesse in the current neoliberal moment thus simultaneously recruits subjects into a larger project of competition, and also positions them as specific types of activists for choice.

These processes of gift-giving and consent-making cannot, however, exist in a vacuum containing only the giver and the receiver. Most accounts of philanthrocapitalism, particularly in the field of education, emphasize the disproportionate political and economic influence of foundations, while downplaying or eliding the institutional infrastructures through which they disseminate their expertise and authority.<sup>39</sup> And yet a close attention to the processes of

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<sup>36</sup> Gates has spoken in numerous venues about education and what should be done to reform it, including at the National Governors Association, "National Education Summit on High Schools," February 26, 2005.

Web.:

<http://www.gatesfoundation.org/speeches-commentary/Pages/bill-gates-2005-national-education-summit.aspx>. Examples of this type of moral framework can also be found in the science literature. An article from 2007, entitled 'Noblesse Oblige' in the *Oncology Nursing Forum*, for example, indicates the multiple ways in which scientists and doctors assume the mantle of authority and specialized expertise through the discourse of *noblesse oblige*. As scientific experts take up the position of giving help to the poor, their less fortunate subjects are simultaneously constituted as *needing help*. But that needed help is reconstructed as the right to an entrepreneurialized self-help: a 'faux' right to choose the best course of action vis-à-vis their own health (cf. Rose, "The Death of the Social?"). This freedom to control one's body through proper choice-making is the same type of logic as can be seen in the push towards funding activist parents' 'rights' to finding the best school and the best teaching and learning style for their children.

<sup>37</sup> D. Rajack, "'I am the Conscience of the Company': Responsibility and the Gift in a Transnational Mining Corporation," in K. Browne and B. L. Milgram (eds.), *Economics and Morality: Anthropological Approaches* (Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009), 211-232; C. Werner, "Patriotism, Profits, and Waste: The Moral Dimensions of Low-level Radioactive Waste Disposal in Browne and Milgram (eds.), *Economics and Morality*, 143-166.

<sup>38</sup> C. Garsten, and T. Hernes, "Beyond CSR: Dilemmas and Paradoxes of Ethical Conduct in Transnational Organizations," in Browne and Milgram (eds.), *Economics and Morality*, 189-210.

<sup>39</sup> S. Ball, *Global Education, Inc. New Policy Networks and the Neo-Liberal Imaginary* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

recruitment to market-based school reform is vital to understanding how such reforms are endowed with moral authority. It is to these local infrastructures and the discourses that they enable that we now turn.

### Neoliberal Governmentality in Education

In many ways, tactics of contemporary education reform are premised upon a technique of government identified by Foucault as one of the most basic concerns of modern governments: the management of risky populations. Risk management has a particular genealogy as a technique of government reaching back to early biopolitical strategies to measure human life expectancy in actuarial terms,<sup>40</sup> as well as to more recent entrepreneurial attempts of cities to attain low levels of risk assessment from credit rating agencies in order to capture flows of global capital.<sup>41</sup> Within education, the definition and management of risk takes on forms that are typically not explicitly cast in such terms, but that nevertheless harken back both to biopolitical calculations of population management as well as more neoliberal concerns with attracting capital. To address this risk, moral authority, expertise, and knowledge flow from philanthropic organizations to families and parents in a manner identified by Foucault as a fundamental characteristic of governmentality: good government is drawn from, and modeled after, the morally laudable concern of fathers (and mothers) for their kin, while families are governed in a context that inculcates in them responsible, self-governing behavior.<sup>42</sup>

The idea of public education as a “risky” endeavor permeates American political culture. The 1983 report *A Nation at Risk*, while not explicitly advocating market-based school reform, codified and popularized the fear that American public education was failing to properly equip citizens to be economically competitive and culturally competent in an increasingly globalizing world<sup>43</sup> Indeed, much contemporary scholarship on governmentality in education analyzes pedagogical and governance practices as risk-management strategies. Whether manifested in methods of student evaluation<sup>44</sup> or teacher training,<sup>45</sup> such practices aim at identifying and mitigating potential risk by inculcating self-entrepreneurial behavior in gov-

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<sup>40</sup> D. Defert, ““Popular Life” and Insurance Technology,” in G. Burchell, C. Gordon, and P. Miller (eds.), *The Foucault Effect* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991).

<sup>41</sup> J. Hackworth, *The Neoliberal City: Governance, Ideology, and Development in American Urbanism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2007).

<sup>42</sup> Michel Foucault, “Governmentality,” in Burchell, Gordon, and Miller (eds.), *The Foucault Effect*.

<sup>43</sup> Interestingly, while multicultural education was emphasized in many advanced industrial democracies during the 1980s and early 90s, it has fallen into disfavor as international economic competitiveness has begun to dominate curricular concerns (see, e.g., K. Mitchell, “Educating the National Citizen in Neoliberal Times: From the Multicultural Self to the Strategic Cosmopolitan,” *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, vol. 28, no. 4 (2003), 387-403.)

<sup>44</sup> D. L. Carlson, “Producing Entrepreneurial Subjects: Neoliberal Rationalities and Portfolio Assessment,” in M. A. Peters, A. C. Besley, M. Olssen, S. Maurer, and S. Weber (eds.), *Governmentality Studies in Education* (Boston: Sense Publishers, 2009).

<sup>45</sup> J. Stickney, 2009. “Casting Teachers Into Education Reforms and Regimes of Inspection: Resistance to Normalization Through Self-governance,” in Peters, Besley, Olssen, Maurer, and Weber (eds.), *Governmentality Studies in Education*.

erned subjects. Such practices are endowed with moral authority by forecasting as looming over the horizon the consequences of not complying with such practices. For example, as Popkewitz points out, recent national-level reforms aimed at responsabilizing schools for student performance—such as the Bush-era No Child Left Behind (NCLB) and the Obama administration’s Race to the Top (RttP) initiative—imply the degenerate figure of the “no child” as the embodied failure of non-compliance to market reform.<sup>46</sup> In addition, the devolving logic of school reform programs assigns not only authority over their execution, but responsibility for their success or failure, to school districts, municipalities, and ultimately families and students.

Indeed, education, like many areas of social governance, has been reorganized over the past several decades by the devolution of responsibility from larger scales of government. This logic of cascading responsabilization lies at the heart of the “differently powerful” model of contemporary governance.<sup>47</sup> Rather than trying to integrate facets of public service into an overarching policy of social engineering, regimes of neoliberal governance operate by delineating discrete fields of service—such as education—and encouraging stakeholders to make their own opportunities for becoming involved. This form of involvement is one that simultaneously reduces government responsibility from the management of structural relations even as it privileges an active citizenship based on the desire of individual actors to maximize their potential. Cruikshank claims further that this “will to empower” has the effect of motivating individuals, families, and communities to act on their own behalf while aligning their sense of agency with neoliberal goals.<sup>48</sup>

The discourse of action-oriented empowerment has not remained purely abstract; indeed, it is manifested in multiple ways—from more negative definitions of freedom from regulation to more positive delineations of community pride in the pursuit of tackling a common problem. It is these latter manifestations that have most recently emerged in the arena of educational reform. Often they take the form of advocacy organizations purporting to represent the ‘grassroots’ of parents whose aspirations towards quality education for children are purportedly stonewalled by government regulation, recalcitrant teachers, and union blockages. The push for more competition and choice are seen as necessary for reducing the logjam of these regulative barriers, as well as being fairer to those who are mired in disastrous school districts, especially disadvantaged minority parents. In places where the public school system has produced very real failures, especially for communities of color, consent to market-based solutions takes on an ambiguous flavor as social justice and neoliberal principles intertwine amongst parents and advocacy organizations.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> T. Popkewitz, *Cosmopolitanism and the Age of School Reform: Science, Education, and Making Society by Making the Child* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

<sup>47</sup> J. Peck, “Neoliberalizing States: Thin Policies/Hard Outcomes,” *Progress in Human Geography*, vol. 25, no. 3 (2001), 445-455.

<sup>48</sup> B. Cruikshank, *The Will to Empower: Democratic Citizens and Other Subjects* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999).

<sup>49</sup> D. Cohen, and C. Lizotte, “Teaching Consent: Creating Education Markets in the United States,” *Environment and Planning A*. [Accepted pending final revisions]. Manuscript available from the authors by request.

A growing number of these organizations benefit from links with philanthropic foundations, from which they draw a majority of their funding, technical support, and policy expertise.<sup>50</sup> Together, this network of advocacy and funding organizations act as conduits through which advocacy, funding, and knowledge about the “right” way to educate children flows from elite knowledge-making networks to communities and individual sites where school reform projects are actually carried out.<sup>51</sup> This is accomplished by facilitating the appearance of a level playing field of opportunities for community-based action and innovation through the connections to philanthropic organizations, which judge grant proposals and disperse their aid ostensibly on the basis of merit. Especially given the geographic concentration of failing schools in places that are seen as “risky,” such as inner cities, there has been a disproportionate gathering of forces in particular places meant to distill large scale flows of expertise and financial resources into localized reform projects—backed by the legitimacy of consenting parents and other activists.

For an illustration of how the expertise and moral authority of self-styled experts heading philanthropic foundations flows through a complex network of intermediary organizations to meet up with a willing cadre of self-entrepreneurial parents, students, and other activists, one need look no further than two popular depictions of school reform: the 2010 documentary *Waiting for Superman*, and the fictional (but billed as being based on events “that are making headlines daily”) film, *Won't Back Down*, starring Hollywood A-list stars Viola Davis and Maggie Gyllenhaal. In the films, parents struggle against indifferent bureaucracies and self-interested teachers' unions in Harlem and Pittsburgh, respectively, to secure quality schooling for their children. In *Waiting*, the mechanism for circumventing these roadblocks is the Harlem Children's Zone, with its limited number of charter school seats being distributed via lottery in a climactic and emotional final scene. In *Won't Back Down* the protagonists make use of so-called “parent trigger” laws that allow parents to undertake radical transformation of public neighborhood schools by firing staff or turning the school over to a charter operator.

Both films focus heavily on the role of parents' entrepreneurial activism as the precipitating factor in bringing about the desired reforms. Behind the scenes, however, this apparently grassroots activism is heavily seeded and cultivated by philanthropic capital working through intermediary organizations. At the time *Superman* was being produced and the Harlem Children's Zone's high-stakes lottery was entering the American public's consciousness, a campaign called “Flooding the Zone” was funded and promoted by the Success Charter Network and the Democrats for Education Reform with the explicit purpose of creating greater parental support in Harlem for charter lotteries. These pro school choice organizations spent \$1.3 million on leaflets, mailings, ads, posters, and paid canvassing of the neighborhood between 2007-2009, just prior to and during the same period in which the documentary was be-

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<sup>50</sup> J. Scott, “The Politics of Venture Philanthropy in Charter School Policy and Advocacy,” *Educational Policy*, vol. 23, no. 1 (2009), 106-136.

<sup>51</sup> D. Ravitch, *The Death and Life of the Great American School System: How Testing and Choice are Undermining Education* (New York: Basic Books, 2010).



ing made.<sup>52</sup> They, in turn, drew funding from conservative foundations and non-profits such as the NewSchools Venture Fund.

Similarly, the real-life inspiration for *Won't Back Down* can be found in a "parent trigger" law passed by the California legislature in 2010. The law was initiated by a proposal from Ben Austin, a policy consultant for Green Dot Public Schools. Green Dot is a manager of charter schools in Los Angeles, and is heavily funded by several pro school choice foundations, including the Broad Foundation, the Walton Family Foundation, The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, and the NewSchools Venture Fund. Austin also formed the group, "Parent Revolution," (presumably a model for the movie's "Parent Trooper" group) which currently promotes the spread of parent trigger laws through all the states in the US. Parent Revolution is funded by an almost identical list of large private foundations.

In these and countless other examples of market-based school reform, a double movement of moral authority recalling Foucault's bidirectional continuities is apparent: activism on the ground draws support and inspiration from public figures, who dispense expert knowledge about the "right" way to educate. In the other direction, parental love and concern for their children's education and well-being constitutes the moral ground upon which intermediary organizations and their philanthropic backers claim legitimacy for their expertise in effective methods of education. Undergirding the whole apparatus is the promise of choice and self-determination as an escape from failing schools and the risky future they represent for young people. However, choice is distributed unequally along the continuum of parents to foundations. As Gulson and Webb point out, what market-based school reform movements (and the charter school movement in particular) accomplish politically is to conflate the opportunity for parents to *choose* educational alternatives with the ability to actually *produce* these alternatives.<sup>53</sup>

Again, however, philanthropy's power to produce a range of market-based alternatives is incomplete without the moral authority given to it by parental consent and public demand. The ways in which this consent and demand are generated are context-dependent and rely on local organizational infrastructures as well as pro-school choice discourses tailored to local political cultures. For philanthropic organizations' educational ambitions to be realized in place, they must assemble a coalition that can work effectively in that place. To examine this, we turn to the Seattle metropolitan region and Washington State, where the pace of market-based education reform has been halting, and the fault lines demarcating public opinion clearly visible.

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<sup>52</sup> B. Miner, "Ultimate Superpower: Supersized Dollars Drive 'Waiting for Superman' Agenda (NotWaiting-ForSuperman.org, October 20). Web.:

<http://www.notwaitingforsuperman.org/Articles/20101020-MinerUltimateSuperpower>. (Last accessed January 29, 2013).

<sup>53</sup> K. Gulson, and T. Webb, "'A Raw, Emotional Thing:' School Choice, Commodification, and the Racialized Branding of Afrocentricity in Toronto, Canada," *Educational Inquiry*, vol. 4, no. 1 (2013), 167 – 187.



### **Ethnographies of Education Funding and Activism in Washington State**

The constant drumbeat of public school failure in the US that was initiated during the Reagan administration had the effect of creating a sense of crisis and, therefore, a moral obligation on the part of all actors to intervene. In Washington State, the collective sense of crisis and moral obligation reached a peak in 2012. During the November elections, voters were considering a ballot measure – the fourth since 1996 – that would make it the 42<sup>nd</sup> state to allow the creation of charter schools. Looming over this choice were the state’s mediocre educational statistics: 37<sup>th</sup> in the country in high school completion rates,<sup>54</sup> and in the bottom third of all states in terms of baccalaureate degree production per capita.<sup>55</sup> Especially in the Seattle metro region, there was a collective sense of cognitive dissonance when grappling with the state’s educational outcomes on the one hand and the region’s reputation for innovation and technological acumen on the other.<sup>56</sup> Eventually Initiative 1240 narrowly passed with 50.69% of the vote,<sup>57</sup> and up to 40 charter schools over a five year period were authorized statewide.

The groundwork for I-1240’s success relied, in part, on the contributions of corporate philanthropies. Contributions to the pro-charter camp totaled \$11.4 million, of which three donors – Bill Gates, Alice Walton, and Paul Allen – contributed nearly 2/3 of the total.<sup>58</sup> Other perennial charter school supporters, including Eli Broad, Mike and Jackie Bezos (parents of Amazon.com founder Jeff Bezos), and Reed Hasting (founder of Netflix), contributed over \$100,000 each.<sup>59</sup> But it also rested on the careful cultivation of a culture of consent to the participation of private interests in public education. In Washington State and particularly the Seattle metro region this cultivation has been carried out through coalitions of advocacy and activist organizations that link parental aspirations to funders’ priorities. Over the past decade, the number of such education reform advocacy organizations (ERAOs) in education reform has exploded, producing multiple links between advocacy and funding organizations situated at local, national, and even international scales.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Partnership for Learning, “A+ Washington: A Way Forward for All Students,” (Partnership4Learning.org, 2012), Web.:

[http://www.partnership4learning.org/docs/reports/A\\_Plus\\_Washington.pdf](http://www.partnership4learning.org/docs/reports/A_Plus_Washington.pdf). (Last accessed: 25 September 2013).

<sup>55</sup> Washington Student Achievement Council. “How we Compare with Other States,” (wsac.wa.gov, 2012). Web.: <http://www.wsac.wa.gov/sites/default/files/KFChapterV.pdf>. (Last accessed, September 15, 2013).

<sup>56</sup> Various, “Editorial Board,” *Seattle Times* (13th October, 2012).

<sup>57</sup> Washington Secretary of State, “General Election Results,” (vote.wa.gov, 6th November, 2012). Web.: <http://vote.wa.gov/results/20121106/Initiative-Measure-No-1240-Concerns-creation-of-a-public-charter-school-system.html>. (Last accessed, 20 September 2013).

<sup>58</sup> Washington Public Disclosure Commission. n.d. *Election Totals*. Web.: <http://www.pdc.wa.gov>. Last accessed: 5 April 2013.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>60</sup> P. McGuinn, and A. Kelly, *Parent Power: Grass-Roots Activism and K-12 Education Reform* (American Enterprise Institute, 2012); for a critical perspective, see M. Fine, and S. Karp, “Review of Parent Power: Grass-Roots Activism and K-12 Education Reform,” *National Education Policy Center*, (6th September, 2012). Web.: <http://nepc.colorado.edu/thinktank/review-parent-power>.

However, not all coalitions are created equal. It is those coalitions that can most successfully tap into the moralizing discourses of urgency, obligation, individual responsibility, and self-care that draw most effectively on philanthropic capital. By doing so, they help ensure that choice-based reform policies will be selected and disseminated over other alternatives. In Seattle, stark differences can be seen between coalitions that cannot articulate a mutually binding moral contract between parents and funders and those that can. Several organizations that make up this connective tissue appear again and again over time in the educational reform arena. Two prominent advocacy organizations – the League of Education Voters (LEV) and Stand for Children – supported the I-1240 campaign with in-kind donations of office space and staff time.<sup>61</sup> LEV, in particular, is a perennial recipient of funding from pro-charter philanthropic organizations, especially the Gates Foundation, from which it has received over \$3 million since 2002.<sup>62</sup> Stand for Children operates at a national scale and deploys its expertise through regional offices, touting its ability to translate local activism into state and national political movements: “Stand for Children Washington is a membership organization working to **empower** parents, **elect** courageous leaders, and **advance** public education.”<sup>63</sup> Examining Stand for Children, as with many other ERAOs, provides clues to the type of “empowerment” that the organization is seeking to cultivate. Its partners include state-wide organizations pushing for market-based school reform measures, such as the Partnership for Learning, the education foundation of the business consortium Washington Roundtable. It is also linked to the Seattle-based organization Alliance for Education (AfE), which has drawn funding from many private foundations, most notably the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.<sup>64</sup>

One of the more successful Seattle-based organizations at articulating the moral authority continuity from parents to philanthropic experts, the AfE, formed in 1995, is composed of a board of directors drawn largely from the region’s business community. It acts primarily as a meeting point for public and private interests in Seattle-area education. The Alliance serves the Seattle district in managing private donations and making investments on the district’s behalf, acting, in its own words, “much like an accounting department, offering financial and donor management services that schools and other groups would otherwise not have available to them.”<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Washington Public Disclosure Commission

<sup>62</sup> Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. *Grants Database* (gatesfoundation.org, 2013). Web.: <http://www.gatesfoundation.org/How-We-Work/Quick-Links/Grants-Database>. (Last accessed, 24 September 2013).

<sup>63</sup> Stand for Children, “Mission, Vision, Values,” (stand.org, 2013), (emphasis in original). Web.: <http://stand.org/washington/about/mission-vision-values>. Last accessed: 6 February 2014.

<sup>64</sup> Although the Gates Foundation has a massive and global portfolio of funded projects, its presence in Seattle leads it to be intimately connected to various coalitions for social reform in Washington State. Of the \$6.2 billion spent by BMGF in the US between 1994 and 2011, more than \$3 billion was spent in Washington State alone. See <http://www.gatesfoundation.org/united-states/washingtonstate/Pages/washington-state.aspx>.

<sup>65</sup> “Educational Investments,” (alliance4ed.org). Web.: <http://www.alliance4ed.org/investments/fiscalservices.htm>.

The form of the Alliance's involvement with Seattle school reform has changed over time. Initially it was involved in collaborating with Seattle Public Schools (SPS) staff in the 1990s and early 2000s to help hook up phone lines and internet access, and to do things like implement a Gates Foundation-funded initiative to create small learning academies within struggling high schools. In 2009, however, it also moved to soliciting philanthropic funding in support of the district's strategic plan, *Excellence for All*.<sup>66</sup> The plan heavily prescribed a common curriculum for the district as well as a battery of testing mechanisms to evaluate student outcomes.

With its involvement in implementing *Excellence for All* the Alliance united parents, education advocacy organizations, and philanthropists in the common cause of raising money and reforming Seattle's public schools. By acting in its self-proscribed triple role as a "catalyst," "convener," and "conduit," the Alliance recruits local and extra-local actors and organizations into the politics of education reform across scales. At the same time, its adherence to market-based investment practices and ideologies as the foundation of educational reform normalizes principles of accountability, competition, and innovation as imported from the business sector. They note on their website:

The Alliance, an independent non-profit organization that builds community support for Seattle Public Schools, worked in close partnership with the school district to secure the grant funding. The Alliance will play a lead role in managing the funding, tracking, evaluating and communicating results, and engaging the community. Accountability—to students, to families and to the community—is a cornerstone of *Excellence for All*. Seattle Public Schools and the Alliance for Education are putting in place specific accountability measures to ensure that funding is directed as specified in grants.<sup>67</sup>

Organizations like the Alliance for Education legitimize the membership of business interests in the nonprofit organization by managing and directing philanthropic investments made to Seattle Public Schools. They draw funders into the community by helping to craft a more responsive and responsabilized school system, as well as engaging community groups and parents to become more actively involved as consumers of education services. This is done most frequently by positioning responsiveness to innovation as the moral stance of choice-seeking actors, set in contrast with the antagonistic posture of rigid unions, seen to be mired in outdated visions of egalitarianism and material equity. The iron fist of coercion to reform is carefully nestled within the velvet glove of consent. As AfE President and CEO Sara Morris said in an interview, "We exist to support and improve public schools in Seattle. And we do that through an effort in finding just the right balance between support and pressure."<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Authors' interview, 2011.

<sup>67</sup> Alliance for Education, *Press Release* (alliance4ed.org, 10th March, 2009). Web.: <http://www.alliance4ed.org/news/excellenceforall.htm>.

<sup>68</sup> A. Dornfeld, "Nonprofit Brings Support—and Pressure—to Seattle Schools," *KUOW News and Information* (kuow.org, 22nd January, 2013). Web.: <http://www.kuow.org/post/nonprofit-brings-support-and-pressure-seattle-schools>. (Last accessed, January 30, 2013).

Morris's main example of the right kind of pressure to apply to the district was in teacher contract negotiations. The organization strongly promotes business models of accountability and assessment, such as the use of students' standardized test scores in the teacher evaluation process—a shift that is consistently opposed by teachers and the teachers' union. Noting the effectiveness of her organization in applying pressure and winning concessions in Seattle, Morris said about the most recent round of contract negotiations in 2012, "The contract that was passed contains every element but one of the original platform that we advocated for."<sup>69</sup>

Morris went on to note her own managerial background at Amazon.com, and the lessons and values she learned there of an openness to constant innovation and experimentation. She lamented the lack of this in the educational world. "In the technology world, there is a real sense that is whatever is coming next is better. And I haven't found that to be the case, necessarily, in education. That same mentality does not necessarily exist."<sup>70</sup> In a following statement Morris suggested the need to open up the district to innovations such as were being pursued by charter school companies like Rocketship Education. The week after this interview, the Alliance for Education invited the CEO of Rocketship Education to a fundraising breakfast.<sup>71</sup>

An earlier example of this kind of pressure, and an example of the Alliance's ability to rapidly convene and dissolve coalitions of activists for the support of market-based reform measures, occurred in 2009 during negotiations between the Seattle Public Schools (SPS) and its teachers' union. In this case, another reform-oriented ad-hoc group called the Communities and Parents for Public Schools in Seattle (CPPS) was funded through a range of philanthropic sources channeled through the Alliance for Education. The CPPS appealed to then-Superintendent Maria Goodloe-Johnson to propose revising the teachers' contract. Their proposal, which directly challenged the position of the union, was to allow for "teacher effectiveness" to be included as a criterion for layoff decisions.<sup>72</sup> This push for effectiveness was considered by teachers to be a backdoor drive for greater flexibility in hiring and firing teachers and bringing in non-unionized or short-term workers.

In a subsequent round of negotiations, another short-term Seattle-area education advocacy group, Our Schools Coalition (OSC) was formed and also supported by the Alliance for Education. During the negotiation period, the OSC released a list of proposed changes to the contract between the SPS and the teachers' union, indicating "levels of support" collected by poll for each proposed measure. Respondent groups were broken into the categories of "teachers," "parents," and "taxpayers." "Taxpayers" were defined as "randomly selected voters within the Seattle Public School District who do not have children attending Seattle Public Schools."<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>71</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>72</sup> This proposal can be found at: <http://www.cppsofseattle.org/News/Aug09/07-28-09letter.html>

<sup>73</sup> "Comparison of Our Schools' 2010 Platform with Ratified CBA." Our Schools Coalition 2010. Web.: <http://www.ourschoolscoalition.org/resources>

Notably, three questions on the poll showed significant differences in support between the three categories of respondents, implying a gulf between teachers, on the one side, and parents and taxpayers on the other:

Question 5. Student academic growth should be used as a significant factor in teacher evaluations. **Polling shows 66% of taxpayers, 59% of parents and 21% of teachers agree.**

Question 6. Teacher performance, as opposed to seniority, should be a significant factor in staffing decisions, including placement, transfers and layoffs. **Polling shows 83% of taxpayers, 79% of parents and 40% of teachers agree.**

Question 7. Currently, the process to remove ineffective teachers can take 18 months or longer. Instead, the lowest performing teachers should be removed in less than 12 months. **Polling shows 82% of taxpayers, 82% of parents and 63% of teachers agree.**<sup>74</sup>

A clear message was intended to emerge from the published responses to these Alliance-funded poll questions. Teachers' interests in decisions of educational governance were shown to be disturbingly different from those of the other two primary constituent groups: parents and taxpayers. By supporting measures designed to enforce greater accountability and responsibility among teachers, parents who held high aspirations for their children's education were suggested to be synonymous with productive, taxpaying citizens. Their support for measures intended to subject teachers to greater scrutiny was cast as a contribution to the struggle against the obsolete bureaucracy of teachers' unions and school districts themselves. In addition, parents who did not share these views were implied to be uninterested in achieving a higher quality of education for their children. In effect, parents were boxed into a limited set of possibilities. By supporting teachers against business-derived measures for accountability and evaluation, they were positioned as not holding their children's self-care at heart and therefore cast as abject, non-choice-seeking individuals.

In contrast with the Alliance for Education is another reform-minded coalition in Seattle, but one whose goals for education reform do not orient parents, children, or schools toward market-friendly moves such as union-bashing, or market-based solutions such as charter schools. This coalition, known as the Alternative Schools Coalition (ASC), is a largely grassroots organization made up of parents who organized during the early 2000s to oppose the closure of some of Seattle district's "alternative schools." Alternative schools have long been a part of the public system, but they support parents who value a different type of education, often involving *less* standardized testing; they also take students who are 'different' and/or whose learning styles make it difficult for them to achieve in the traditional school system.

The alternative schools were originally established by charter with the school district in the 1970s, and have flexibility in their curriculum and teaching style similar to that accorded to charter schools and promoted by parents advocating for choice. Yet, education reform coalitions have shown no interest in supporting the alternative school system in Seattle, nor have

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<sup>74</sup> Ibid., All bolding is in original document as reproduced on the Our Schools Coalition website.

the major philanthropic organizations. The round of closures that the parents organized to oppose followed a previous spate of school closures, many of them in disadvantaged neighborhoods. In addition, the district began proposing curriculum alignment policies that would have effectively eliminated the alternative schools' ability to flexibly tailor their curriculum and teaching strategies to their student.<sup>75</sup>

In part, the impetus to organize and make the case for alternative schools arose out of a sense that the district did not recognize the contribution of alternative schools to the education of Seattle's children. The result of this organization was the production of a report in 2005 that documented the alternative schools' methods and outcomes in educating students who were not successful in traditional schooling. This was followed again in 2009 by another round of organizing by a new group of parents who learned from the "old guard" about the Coalition's dealings with the district. As described by one of the parents involved in these efforts, the turnover in both the Coalition's membership (whose children had graduated from Seattle Public Schools) and within the governance of the district led to "lost knowledge" about the purpose and nature of alternative schools, and led to a new round of struggle for recognition from the district and against proposed audits through careful efforts to document and describe the alternative schools' methods and outcomes.<sup>76</sup>

Despite these efforts of the Coalition to articulate the definition and mission of Seattle's alternative schools, the schools themselves remain conspicuous by their absence in Seattle Public Schools publications and PR materials. This is perhaps due to the emphasis that the parents involved in the effort to advocate for the alternative schools placed on the contrasts between the district's efforts to define educational outcomes based on testing and their own to set aside a sector of the public education system explicitly for the purpose of providing a place for students not served by this form of standardized testing in the public system:

Alice: It's a hard message, because their message at the time was, "every student can be served in a neighborhood school, *every* student. And we're like, you know, we're *not* for every student. I personally happen to believe that we [alternative school proponents] happen to better serve a majority than the current model, but much of our argument is like, "my kid can't sit still enough to go to Wedgwood [Elementary School]. And the individual attention, you know, my child needs to work at their own pace, that kind of thing. They [the district] just do not want to acknowledge that that can't happen in a traditional classroom. They want to pretend that all that can happen in a traditional classroom."<sup>77</sup>

This vision of an individualized, child-centric public education contrasts directly with the priorities set out in the district's strategic plan *Excellence for All* and its homogenizing principles of common curriculum and standardized testing for the Seattle school district. The ASC was committed to the idea of describing the activities of the alternative schools in terms of an educational process, while SPS – itself influenced by the metrics put in place by its own funders,

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<sup>75</sup> Authors' interview, 2011.

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid.*,

most notably the Gates Foundation, was focused almost entirely on educational outcomes as a metric for evaluating the efficacy of programs.<sup>78</sup>

In contrast to the robust support provided by philanthropic funding for outcome-based evaluation and the efforts of the Alliance for Education to propagate this metrics-oriented approach throughout the Seattle district, the process of evaluating the alternative schools was reworked from the ground up to capture the different learning processes taking place in them. The parent in charge of coordinating the process described the difficulty of undertaking this task, and the lack of resources available from outside groups to carry this work out:

We had these 80 quality indicators, and actually, my school, at one of our retreats, we went through an exercise where we broke up into groups, went through the indicators...and I said, "okay! What are we going to do about this?" They were compound questions, they weren't even questions, there was no scalability, that kind of stuff. And so I started trying to reach out to people to try and find out, "anybody else ever done this?" I started trying to look at national literature, I talked to every person I knew who had an education doctorate, tried to reach out to the [University of Washington] ... It's a process-based endeavor, that's what teachers *do*. And why we want to document that, because if you don't document that, you can't justify it and rationalize it and make it continue to exist.<sup>79</sup>

The lack of interest from philanthropy and the local, flag-ship university (itself often funded through Gates' and other philanthropy foundation grants) in the more nuanced approach taken by the Alternative Schools Coalition effectively ended its attempts to scale up and replicate its student-centered learning approach. Despite the mantra of greater parental choice and access to different types of schools, the alternative schools were conspicuously absent from the wider city and regional discussion about educational reform. In this and the other examples offered here, it is evident that philanthropy funding premised on the moral authority of parental expertise and choice as well as expert evaluation and assessment, was narrowly limited to specific kinds of well-governed and governable choices: those oriented to the rationalities of the market.

## Conclusion

In this paper we drew on the current transformations in public education to illustrate some of the complex ways that philanthropy is altering the terrain of neoliberal governmentality in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We examined the rationalities of giving as a new technology of government, in which subjects are constituted as active, competitive, and obligated to maintain a moral economy of care to themselves and to their children and community institutions. We were able to observe these rationalities as manifested in the particular context of Seattle through contact with parental activists in public education as well as our own embeddedness in that place. Contemporary, large-scale philanthropy forms new kinds of consent through the reciprocal nature of giving, imbricating givers and receivers within moral bonds of sharing and partici-

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<sup>78</sup> Ibid.,

<sup>79</sup> Ibid.,



pation and directing these actors towards market-based solutions. Moreover, participation in these networks implies consent to a social world based on individual competition, which necessarily produces winners and losers, including in grant-getting itself. Giving and accepting philanthropic gifts in the current neoliberal moment simultaneously pulls subjects into a project of choice and competition and also recruits them as experts and activists within a larger moral contract. As our research demonstrates, this phenomenon of making experts and activists of subjects through philanthropy is a process contingent on local infrastructures of financing and shaping these subjects. Therefore, ethnographic observation is crucial to determine how philanthropy is shaping institutions of social governance differently across space and time.

The current spirit of “cold” competition is part of a long history of liberal capitalism, but one that is now tempered by the “warmer” atmosphere of grassroots activism—a form of consent encouraged and facilitated by philanthropic dollars. In this sense, capitalist philosophy and practices in the contemporary era reflect both the continuation of neoliberal governance as theorized by figures such as von Hayek and Friedman, but also indicate new directions. The role of philanthropy in these new directions is a critical one, affecting not just education, as discussed here, but also global health, the environment, and other areas of public concern. As the market failures of high neoliberalism become increasingly evident and resistance mounts worldwide, philanthropy has risen to mediate and soften the harsher effects, recruiting subjects and institutions into a moral economy that works discursively through assumptions about moral care and agency but which looks, ultimately to the market for its answers.

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