

---

Emma Saunders-Hastings: *Private Virtues, Public Vices: Philanthropy and Democratic Equality*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2022. Pp. 252.)

doi:10.1017/S0034670523000578

The first decades of the twenty-first century have arrived with a global recession followed by a global pandemic—spreading economic hardship, death and disease, and enormous disruptions to livelihoods for billions of people. Despite these global crises, the economic position and wealth of the richest people on the planet have had few setbacks. According to the annual *Forbes* list of the world's billionaires, the number of billionaires has more than quintupled since 2000. While not every billionaire is a philanthropist—and most philanthropists are not billionaires—the present reality of wealth inequality enables a small number of individuals to wield enormous power with their riches. In this context, Emma Saunders-Hastings' *Private Virtues, Public Vices: Philanthropy and Democratic Inequality* offers an essential perspective—applying democratic and egalitarian principles to assess the political significance of philanthropy. This book examines an extremely provocative question for our time: Is philanthropy democratic?

Saunders-Hastings begins with the task of defining philanthropy as “voluntary contributions of private resources for broadly public purposes and for which the giver does not receive payment” (2). This definition of philanthropy is inclusive, allowing her work to speak to a wide range of contexts—from institutional giving through established foundations to routine charitable giving by ordinary citizens. She acknowledges that there are many benefit-focused arguments for philanthropy—for example, donors providing support when government is unjustly neglecting specific populations or needs, or when government capacity or competence is limited. Philanthropy can also create opportunities to try untested new ideas or programs. Nonetheless, Saunders-Hastings argues that these potential benefits of philanthropy do not justify broad latitude for funders, because philanthropic spending also has widespread political effects. She then unpacks the special treatment or forms of deference offered to philanthropy in various social and institutional contexts—including privileged tax status, norms favoring charitable spending over consumption, and the assumed civic benefits of giving. This section also displays her method, which considers philanthropy in terms of relational egalitarian ideals—in other words, how does giving shape social relations and what are the democratic implications of these social and political relationships?

When Saunders-Hastings examines different forms of deference to philanthropy, she does so with the lens of democratic theory, raising critical observations that highlight gaps between idealized notions of philanthropy and undemocratic practical implications in social contexts. For example, Alexis de Tocqueville's work presents associational activity as foundational for democracy, and by extension, John Stuart Mill included philanthropy

as a key component of the civic sector. However, as Saunders-Hastings observes, “Such arguments may have difficulty justifying the tax subsidies of philanthropy in their most prevalent form, where people who give their money are eligible to claim deductions, but there is no comparable mechanism to subsidize or incentivize time spent volunteering” (39). As Saunders-Hastings reminds us throughout her book, even if there are justifications for philanthropy, we must consider these justifications alongside “competing values: liberal, egalitarian, and democratic” (40).

Saunders-Hastings takes up these values in subsequent chapters that examine equality and philanthropy, plutocratic philanthropy, paternalism, ordinary donors, and international philanthropy. In the chapter on plutocrats, Saunders-Hastings argues that we must look beyond narrow conceptions of political corruption as influence or even routine campaign contributions by wealthy individuals. She points out that influence through philanthropic giving often does not register as direct political influence, because the “wealthy do not need to corrupt a political process when they are able to bypass it altogether” (77). She draws upon examples of philanthropic contributions to K–12 education to show how funders influenced public-policy decisions involving schools simply by tying acceptance of grant dollars to specific policies and initiatives.

Her relational perspective is most fully on display in the chapter on paternalism, which focuses on the relationships between the givers and the recipients of philanthropy in light of their relative standing in a social and political context. According to Saunders-Hastings, “paternalistic models of philanthropy fail to show respect for people and can in the process exacerbate objectionable inequalities of social standing” (94). Paternalism is often viewed narrowly—as coercive behavior that regulates the actions of others. Saunders-Hastings effectively shows that paternalism does not necessarily involve coercion: “Exercising power over someone can instead involve shaping her choices, manipulating her incentives, or exploiting one’s own superior bargaining position” (104). This array of relational activities more fully captures the ways that givers exercise power over recipients of philanthropy. Saunders-Hastings argues that these forms of paternalism are more troubling and heightened when the giver is a very wealthy funder because of the power differential between the funder and recipient, which often intersects with differences in race/ethnicity and social class. In the conclusion of the book, Saunders-Hastings returns to paternalism, emphasizing that philanthropy is not simply a private matter. It can have far-reaching public consequences that foster political inequality. The paternalism that can arise from philanthropic activity threatens egalitarian relations between members of a democratic political community, and these relations “require protection and norms against private paternalism” (170).

While the book is strong in its breadth—efficiently engaging with a wide range of contexts and topics related to philanthropy—I would have liked to see Saunders-Hastings consider new ideas for institutional guard rails for

philanthropy in a democracy and devote more attention to the present-day context of philanthropy. Saunders-Hastings shows how existing limitations on philanthropic influence are quite inadequate for protecting democratic values. She suggests minimizing paternalism in giving, but this seems to rely on the willingness of individual and institutional donors to curtail giving, as well as the recipients to refuse paternalistic donor gifts. As Saunders-Hastings notes, even small donors can behave paternalistically. Yet donors are afforded wide latitude and autonomy in our present context. An entire profession—known as “development”—exists to curate donors for nonprofit institutions and win them over as long-term patrons. Universities, hospitals, religious institutions, and much of the sprawling nonprofit sector are fueled by large doses of paternalistic giving. Saunders-Hastings raises troubling questions, but unfortunately, it is difficult to discern a path forward once we consider the practical implications of her argument. Challenging the norms of paternalism among donors is a tall order in societies that widely cultivate and celebrate philanthropic giving. The practical implications are even more alarming once we consider rising wealth inequality, both in the United States and globally, which widens the gulf between donors and recipients.

Perhaps, even though Saunders-Hastings does not offer us a neat and tidy path forward, it is these troubling implications that underscore the importance of this book. *Private Virtues, Public Vices* is essential reading for navigating our present-day collision course between widespread economic inequality and democratic governance.

—Sarah Reckhow

*Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan, USA*



David A. Eisenberg: *Nietzsche and Tocqueville on the Democratization of Humanity*. (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2022. Pp. 324.)

doi:10.1017/S0034670523000566

Self-knowledge in a democratic age requires a study of Tocqueville and Nietzsche. Few other thinkers can better illuminate the promise and perils of modern democratic life. Owing to the precarious position liberal democracy finds itself in, this book is timely—and yet, it is fundamentally untimely, because its author challenges the reigning values of contemporary society. The contrarian nature of this book will prevent it from garnering universal acclaim in the academy. This failure, however, may be what makes it a success in the eyes of a few. Many will be compelled to disagree with parts of Eisenberg’s book (myself included), but one cannot help but admire his