

ABSTRACT

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Replacing charity, anticipating the welfare State

A conceptual genealogy of philanthropy in France since the Age of Enlightenment

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Abstract:

Philanthropy has been described as an essentially contested concept (Daly, 2011; Gallie, 1955), with diverse and competing interpretations over time and across contexts. It is only recently that scholars have sought to unpack the different layers of meaning in order to have a complete understanding of the term philanthropy (Payton & Moody, 2008; Sulek, 2010). While several scholars acknowledge that philanthropy is a universal endeavor, the vast majority of philanthropic studies have been published in the United States (Acs & Phillips, 2002). Another shortcoming of much contemporary research on philanthropy is its lack of historical embeddedness, except for the work of qualified historians (Friedman & McGarvie, 2003; Zunz, 2011). Simplistic, linear histories or a-historical studies place major limits on our knowledge of philanthropy. In the present research, we use a conceptual genealogy approach (Foucault, 1971; Palonen, 2002) to study the history of philanthropy in France since its inception in the Age of Enlightenment. Conceptual genealogy is a historical sociology of concept formation, a particular kind of history that focuses on words in their sites (Somers, 1995) and how agents construct and change meanings systems that evolve through time. To do so, we rely on primary sources like dictionaries, encyclopedias, literary texts, and pamphlets produced in France over the 18th, 19th and 20th centuries, as well as secondary sources such as the work historians and other analysts (Cohen, 2004; Duprat, 1993). By studying how the concept of philanthropy formed, evolved, and was disputed among different social groups in a country long considered as hostile to philanthropy, we

shed light on the performative nature of concepts on cognitive frames and activities that are still valid in the present .

Our results focus on key historical moments and shows that philanthropy went from a liberal, secularized critique of Catholic charity to a social movement of reformist elites vying for social progress, paving the way for and being partially replaced by the welfare State (Rose & Miller, 1992). Through our historical analysis of the concept of philanthropy in France, we show that the popular opposition between private giving and public welfare , often understood as substitutes, does not hold (Loseke, 1997). From the French Revolution to recent fiscal incentives, philanthropy has been alternately controlled and encouraged by the State, sometimes both at once.

Most important references:

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