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Conclusion

Between 1870 and 1912, philanthropic organizations in the charity market proliferated and competition intensified. Novelty rubbed shoulders with familiarity in the perpetual reinvention of fundraising practices. The charity entrepreneur became the driving force, both within particular organizations and within the wider sector, of rolling innovation. This was most apparent in the ways that charity entrepreneurs transformed their communication strategies in the period concerned. Although advertising, marketing and public relations as we know them were in their relative infancy in the late nineteenth century, charities large and small were no less quick than commercial enterprises to recognize that, properly applied, these techniques could help reach and persuade new consumers, or in other words, increase the social depth of their donor markets. In terms of promotion and publicity alone, charities in late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century Britain became unmistakably entrepreneurial.

This was further reflected in how charity entrepreneurs negotiated the fact that the motives of potential donors might not always chime precisely with Christian understandings of the virtue and necessity of charity. Altruism was never out of the picture, and society remained overwhelmingly Christian in outlook; many of the new voluntary charities that emerged in this period were founded in response to a perceived spiritual poverty as much as a material one. They could hardly therefore ignore the escalation of what some Christian commentators regarded as dread consumerism and secular leisure pursuits. Yet rather than rail uselessly against these developments, realist charity entrepreneurs co-opted them as part of their fundraising strategies. Charities did not merely compete with each other for the patronage of donors, but with other, myriad temptations and demands on individuals' disposable income. The social capital accrued by a charity donation remained a strong selling point for charities, but it was joined by conscious efforts to sell tangible items, some tokenistic, some more practical, others experiential and some what we would today term 'ethical'.

The pragmatism of charities' adopting and adapting consumerism had a counterpoint when it came to their use of branding. The communication of brand values, and the consequent development of what scholars now term a 'brand personality' that binds brand and consumer together and breeds loyalty, came relatively naturally to organizations with religious roots whose whole *metier* was the advancement of a particular set of values and ideals. What sellers of soap and beer had to work at, sellers of compassion could do with relative ease. And if accommodations with mass consumption were a sometimes uncomfortable but necessary fit for many charities, branding was a largely uncontroversial process which could build on existing senses of Christian identity and entailed finding only the most effective expression of an organization's individual 'personality'. Moreover, in a context where the charitable market was regularly penetrated by plausible shysters and assailed by some commentators as too difficult to navigate for well-intentioned donors, branding and unofficial trademarking was a weapon that legitimate charities could use to establish their bona fides.

It was not the only such weapon. Indeed, regulation of the charity market as a whole largely fell to charities themselves. By promoting a supposedly correct way of operating a charitable enterprise, groups like the Charity Organisation Society (COS) and the League of Help, with the support of media outlets like *Truth*, pushed those who did not conform to the margins of the market. To fail to bring together a committee of oversight regularly, to not publish annual accounts or to neglect to have them properly audited were gradually established as suspect choices that marked a charity out as potentially fraudulent and certainly unworthy of donor support. This model became so widely accepted that even those who were sometimes accused of failing to live up to it themselves could, like Lee Jones of Liverpool's League of Welldoers, apply its standards against local rivals. That these standards were borrowed from the cutting edge of the business world is self-evident. Much like accountants sometimes speak of an 'optimal amount of fraud', the charitable market needed to define and identify fraud in order to define and identify legitimacy. It was also a process that, intentionally or not, favoured larger charities who could afford the requisite machinery of accountability over smaller ones who often could not. Although the COS decried charities that, in its view, tried to do too much, it ironically created circumstances where for many charities bigger was better.

For all the innovation in the charity market, the charity entrepreneur could draw on an arsenal of older modes of fundraising, from the charity bazaar to the charity ball. Likewise, not all charity entrepreneurs were newcomers to the philanthropic market. The persistence of aristocratic and elite networks

of fundraising highlights how the old and new could coexist within the same organization. While aristocrats continued to bestow credibility and celebrity on more democratic good causes, elites also continued to organize and initiate for causes they deemed sufficiently worthy. These networks, like Stafford House Committee, provided a kind of bridge between innovation in the market and the philanthropic do-gooding of old. However anachronistic they may have seemed to the Booths and Barnardos of the world, these networks engaged in the modernizing sensibilities of charity innovation, not least, in practices associated with self-regulation and accountability. This may have been born of necessity rather than choice but, given most of these players also acted as significant figures in venture capitalism, they could draw on a wealth of business and financial acumen not only to drive their initiatives forward and lend them credence as professional outfits. Nevertheless, the contradictions between an older paternalism and modernizing charity entrepreneurship were writ large when elite networks exploited 'humanitarian aid' to develop more explicitly capitalistic development in imperial contexts.

Models of growth in the charity sector were varied, and reflected a similar variety of expansion in the business world. Remarkably few charitable enterprises that endured for any significant length of time failed to grow in some form or other. Some charities diversified their target beneficiaries within a relatively limited geographical space, and some rolled out their services regionally and nationally; some, of course, did both. The growth strategy in many such cases was a variation on the 'multiples' model then taking hold in the retail sector, where the central office retained control of operations. For others, a kind of prototype franchising was the engine of growth. This, again, varied in how it rolled out. Some, like the Spectacle Mission and the Gordon Boys' Homes, were a kind of 'business box' franchise that allowed local operators to buy a charity format off the shelf and run it according to the originator's plan; others, such as the RSPCA and NSPCC, involved the payment of a fee in return for use of a national brand and certain centralized administrative services while still allowing local innovation. Looser still was the Mansion House Fund brand, which local civic committees could buy into or not on an ad hoc basis, depending on their enthusiasm for the particular cause. The remarkable sums of money raised by the latter during the fifty years covered by this book suggests the robustness of this kind of franchise, and certainly puts the lie to any notion that franchising is a great new frontier in the charity world of the twenty-first century.

At the heart of the charity market, then, was competition. Historians who have used the records of charitable institutions have long noted the vicissitudes

of income flow, and the waning influence of this or that charity. All charities complained at one stage or another that competition was getting tougher. All in turn noted in their minutes the need to develop new techniques, seek supplementary income streams or upgrades to their fundraising. What these jeremiads signalled was a profound shift towards a much more layered and complex fundraising environment which required constant inventiveness and opportunity hunting. It is this competitive ethos, this book argues, that made change not only legitimate but unending and necessary. Fundraising innovations defined new objects of charities just as much as they refined ways of bringing attention to them.

The never-ending uncontrolled efflorescence of new charitable activities was and remains a mystery to those who attempted to understand them purely from a social and political angle. Culturally these fundraising activities defined loose forms of membership through consumption or participation in activities, many of which might be conducted within the locality by individuals whose sense of social responsibility or imagining of society might have been fragmentary or demotic. This explains why, total war notwithstanding, the charitable sector survived even the first interventions of the state during the Great War,¹ or, at a later stage, the growth of a holistic welfare state. The provisions of the welfare state opened up new avenues for charities to develop complementary, sometimes subsidiary, roles for themselves. Underpinned by what Donileen Loseke called the ‘discursive production of morality’, including the depiction of intervention and ‘clients’ in positive terms, ‘charity’ proved resilient to the rise and fall of welfare state ideologies.²

The regulatory framework developed during the Great War, which attempted for the first time to give some order to the charitable marketplace, focused on specific wartime causes: it enlisted existing fundraising initiatives and controlled what might have become a shockingly fraudulent marketplace. War efforts had entailed the restriction of charitable work in the past, most notably during the Zulu war or the Boer wars. By 1914 the preparation for war took into account new organizations such as the St John Ambulance or the British Red Cross and their fundraising as part of a mobilization plan of all paramedical facilities.³ Some of the grandees whose families had previously led the charitable sector in more politically controversial fundraising efforts diverted some of their money and social kudos towards war preparations. The charitable market was obviously transformed profoundly by the war experience but only to revive in the interwar and in the postwar eras. Since the 1940s the entrepreneurial charity world has invested the streets of Britain with ‘charity shops’ set up by new charities like

Oxfam, Help the Aged and a multitude of other causes.⁴ To a much greater extent than in most other parts of the world, this charity shopping experience has grown and gradually occupied the vacant spaces on the British high street. They are the new charity bazaars breathing life into dying marketplaces. Regulatory attempts since the war have blossomed, yet they have not managed to either regulate the wildest funding schemes or subdue their potential for social challenge.

In a self-contradictory manner, Conservative governments since the 1980s have been bent on regulating a charity market which they desire and fear in equal measure. Ideologically, some of the 1980s politicians were looking backwards to an imagined Victorian social order. Arguably it took the Thatcherite turn against the welfare state to make some social historians focus afresh on the charitable sector with a correspondingly positive outlook.⁵ In the 1990s the sudden emergence of post-socialist nations in Eastern Europe begged the question of what made liberal society vital and vibrant by contrast with authoritarian and statist polities of the Soviet era. This renewed discussion around the concept of 'civil society', that is, one in which the number of voluntary organizations would stand as the best proxy for free associative life, intellectual debates and the emergence of a democratic sphere. These debates borrowed from the German philosopher Jürgen Habermas but also engaged with the Victorian tradition of liberal thinking which, from John Stuart Mill to the COS,⁶ defined a 'good' society as one in which redistribution would spring from compassion and voluntary giving. In political terms, the Victorian template of liberal society could be reclaimed. The conservative turn to 'Victorian values' was not a turn to the more objectionable notions of 'morality' or separate spheres, but an appeal to roll back the state to enable civil society to thrive once again.⁷ The 'Big Society' agenda of Conservative Prime Minister David Cameron in the late 2000s returned to this model,⁸ seeking to replace the bureaucratic state with innovative society, centralized government with self-rule and welfare handouts with charitable engagement.⁹ Never had an idealized notion of Victorian charity been so clearly imprinted on the political consciousness, although New Labour leaders in the 1990s also drew some inspiration from the Victorian era when they sought to foster social entrepreneurship and innovative social voluntary practices.¹⁰

In these political contexts, where neo-liberal arguments for the state's retreat from welfare appear to be winning, it is tempting for the third sector to, consciously or not, return to first principles of the voluntary charity sector that emerged when liberal capitalism was in the ascendant. Indeed, it cannot entirely be a coincidence that many of the quasi-business practices, models and ideas that we describe in this book as driving that first mass wave of collecting

charities are now often spoken of, in modified and supposedly modernized form, as solutions to the roll-back of welfarism and consequent increased demands on the charity sector. But while the two periods are analogous, in other ways, the world of late-Victorian and Edwardian charities could not differ more from the one we currently inhabit. In the intervening century, through grant giving and other incentives, the state became, and remains, a fundraiser for charities, many of which become, in turn, subcontractors.¹¹ This enmeshing of state and charities would have been challenging to the COS and the Fabians. The liberals of yesteryear would have been even more concerned at recent political efforts to curtail charitable lobbying.¹²

Perhaps, then, the lesson of this investigation into the late-Victorian and Edwardian charity market is that fundraising was always a form of lobbying which challenged complacency. Major social reform campaigners such as the Salvation Army staffers would not have conceived of their work otherwise. The tendency to hubris of a dynamic charitable marketplace is precisely what made it so disquieting to Victorians and, today, to politicians. Current anxieties about aggressive fundraising led to new legislation in 2016, all intent on curbing ‘excess’ in the wake of politically embarrassing charity frauds. In words reminiscent of COS literature, the head of the charity commission, a now much more powerful if still quite small organization could declare: ‘The new law [2016] is part of a package of fundraising reforms introduced last year to strengthen fundraising practice and regulation. We know that many in the sector are working hard to support these changes, and to review their own fundraising practices so that public trust can be restored.’¹³ Victorian critics, *Truth* among them, also resented the relentless pursuit of funding. They too bemoaned the nagging it generated to their conscience. Trust was tested, as was political tolerance. The two remain deeply entangled. Charity fundraising campaigns constantly cast new light on the most blatant consequences of social inequality and framed them as moral outrage. Arguably some of that fundraising sentimentalized and did not propose radical social change in a manner that members of the trade unions or Labour party might have approved, but even that claim could be counterbalanced by the numerous cases where charities spoke harshly to power.

The gagging legislation enacted to prevent ‘political’ lobbying from the charitable and humanitarian sector drew some of its legitimacy from a false sense of the separation of charity and politics in some long lost Victorian golden age. Relentless press campaigns from the conservative press against ‘charity scandals’ barely hide their prime intent to keep such social critique in its place. Selective conservative readings of the past saw a silent world of obedience and a subdued

charitable sector. For worshippers of the market in its most idealized form, they ignored just how vocal, cacophonous and volatile marketplaces were. To survive in that noise the charity entrepreneurs of the late Victorian and Edwardian era embraced the idea of innovation in fundraising while fundraising reshaped their social aims. Now, in an era of unprecedented wealth inequality, most of the controversies of this bygone marketplace remain as relevant as ever.