

Philanthropy as an Essentially Contested Concept

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Published online: 13 September 2011

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Abstract Drawing upon W.B. Gallie's framework, which identified seven characteristics of essentially contested concepts, the paper unpacks and examines the variety of approaches to the conceptualisation of philanthropy. In this way, it explores how philanthropy is an essentially contested concept. I argue that greater scholarly attention to the essentially contested nature of the concept of philanthropy is salient to avoiding problems of conceptual ambiguity and miscommunication. What is more, recognition of the essentially contested nature of the concept of philanthropy is fundamental to ensuring that issues of conceptualisation do not hinder either progress in the theoretical development of the field or the resonance of studies of philanthropy beyond the academy.

Résumé Se fondant sur le cadre d'étude de W.B. Gallie, qui a identifié sept caractéristiques de concepts essentiellement contestés, l'article expose et examine la variété des approches relatives à la conceptualisation de la philanthropie. Il explore ainsi comment la philanthropie est un concept essentiellement contesté. Mon argument est qu'une plus grande attention de la recherche sur la nature essentiellement contestée du concept de philanthropie s'impose afin d'éviter les problèmes d'ambiguïté conceptuelle et d'incompréhension. En outre, la reconnaissance de la nature essentiellement contestée du concept de philanthropie est fondamentale pour garantir que les questions de conceptualisation ne viennent pas compromettre le progrès du développement théorique de la discipline ou la résonance des études sur la philanthropie au-delà de l'université.

Zusammenfassung Beruhend auf dem von W. B. Gallie formulierten Rahmenwerk, das sieben Merkmale wesentlich umstrittener Begriffe bestimmt, werden in

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dem Beitrag die verschiedenen Ansätze zur Konzeptualisierung der Philanthropie dargestellt und untersucht. Auf diese Weise wird erforscht, inwiefern es sich bei der Philanthropie um einen wesentlich umstrittenen Begriff handelt. Ich bin der Ansicht, dass größere wissenschaftliche Aufmerksamkeit auf den wesentlich umstrittenen Charakter des Philanthropiekonzepts gelenkt werden muss, um Probleme begrifflicher Ambiguität sowie Kommunikationsprobleme zu vermeiden. Darüber hinaus ist es wichtig, den wesentlich umstrittenen Charakter des Philanthropiekonzepts zu erkennen, um so zu gewährleisten, dass die Probleme einer Konzeptualisierung nicht den Fortschritt in der theoretischen Entwicklung des Bereichs oder die Resonanz der Philanthropiestudien über die Hochschulen hinaus behindern.

Resumen Haciendo uso del marco de W.B. Gallie, que identificó siete características de conceptos esencialmente discutibles, el documento desvela y examina la variedad de enfoques ante la conceptualización de la filantropía. De este modo, explora cómo la filantropía es un concepto esencialmente discutible. Yo argumento que la mayor atención académica a la naturaleza esencialmente discutible del concepto de filantropía es significativa para evitar problemas de ambigüedad conceptual y mala comunicación. Además, el reconocimiento de la naturaleza esencialmente discutible del concepto de filantropía es fundamental para garantizar que las cuestiones de conceptualización no entorpezcan ni el progreso en el desarrollo teórico del campo ni la resonancia de los estudios de filantropía más allá de la academia.

Keywords W.B. Gallie · Philanthropy · Essentially contested concept

Introduction

Different scholars approach the definition of philanthropy in different ways and disagree about the significant defining features of philanthropy (Van Til 1990; Sulek 2010a). The meaning of philanthropy has also evolved and altered in different ways over time, within and across different contexts (Ilchman et al. 1998). These features of the concept of philanthropy enhance the risk of it being rendered confused and ambiguous.¹ ‘Philanthropy’ is a term that is used interchangeably with other terms such as ‘charity’, ‘benevolence’, ‘giving’, ‘donating’, ‘voluntary sector’, ‘non-profit organisation’ and ‘NGO’ often without adequate regard to the need to be clear about what is meant by each of these terms (Adam 2004b, p. 4). The implications of how we approach conceptualisation and, indeed, the importance of clarity and conscious thinking in relation to concepts have received some attention from scholars. For instance, Muukkonen (2009) considers how our understanding of concepts such as ‘philanthropy’ and ‘third or voluntary sector’ and how we articulate the nature of the

¹ A concept is rendered confused if the same term is used to refer to fundamentally different ideas (Collier et al. 2006, p. 219). Sartori (1984, pp. 22–28) argues that a concept is ambiguous if the meaning is confused and the referent is undenotative or vague. Ambiguity occurs when different meanings become entangled, and it is unclear in a particular context which meaning is intended.

relationships between them affects the ‘framing’ of the study of these phenomena. Srivastava and Oh (2010, p. 470) underline the epistemological dilemma encountered in the study of philanthropy in the Global South, specifically: ‘does the definition and practice of philanthropy in a northern context hold in a developing one?’ Scholars engaged in the study of philanthropy in Asia and Latin America have posed similar questions (Lyons and Hasan 2002, p. 111; Thompson and Landim 1998).

Payton (1987) and Van Til (1990, pp. 23–24 citing Payton) assert that philanthropy is an essentially contested concept. Gallie (1956, p. 169) defines essentially contested concepts as those which ‘inevitably involve endless disputes about their proper uses on the part of their users’. He also proffered seven defining criteria of essentially contested concepts (see below) and discussed examples including democracy, social justice and art. Although Payton does not discuss these criteria specifically, he argues that philanthropy is ‘an idea that is bent and distorted by attempts to contain within it a diversity of human phenomena that resist generalisation and categorisation’. He also suggests that the essential contestability of the concept of philanthropy is reflected in normative debate about the purpose(s) of philanthropy; the nature of the motivations encapsulated by the concept of philanthropy and fundamental (ideological) disagreement about how ‘philanthropy’ should be manifested (op. cit., pp. 1–2).² Similarly, Van Til (1990, pp. 23–24) argues that the variety of ways in which the concept of philanthropy is articulated and employed leads scholars ‘in profoundly different directions’ not only regarding the meaning, but also the value and purposes attributed to philanthropy. As an essentially contested concept, Payton argues that philanthropy is ‘a slippery idea which none of us can seize firmly and claim exclusive rights to’ (1987, p. 10).

In this paper, building upon the assertions made by Payton and Van Til, I explore how philanthropy is an essentially contested concept. In this regard, I posit that any claim regarding the essentially contested nature of the concept of philanthropy needs to be more carefully situated within the context of the seven criteria outlined by Gallie (for example, Okoye 2009; Waldron 2002; Collier et al. 2006). Specifically, Gallie’s approach is drawn upon as a framework, rather than as a hypothesis that is, as ‘an analytic framework—i.e. a set of interrelated criteria that serve to illuminate important problems in understanding and analysing concepts’ (Collier et al. 2006, p. 215). I argue that recognition of the essentially contested nature of the concept is paramount as it underlines the need for conscious thinking by scholars in the definition and treatment of core concepts. This is salient to theory building in academic scholarship, but also to the resonance and clarity which our arguments have within and, indeed outside the academy. The timeliness of drawing attention to issues and problems of conceptualisation is underlined by the prominence of debates about the role of theory in the development of the field of non-profit and philanthropy studies (Donmoyer 2009; see also Katz 1999; Dobkin Hall 1999). Regardless of whether one seeks to prioritise the development of the

² Payton refers to ‘the self interest question’, that is, whether ‘philanthropy’ can serve as ‘a means to other ends, to spin off collateral benefits?’ Debates about how it is manifested centre around fundamental (ideological) disagreement about whether philanthropy is a force for challenging or complementing government and business (1987, p. 2).

‘intellectual resource base’ or to ensure that studies of philanthropy are responsive and reflective of the needs of practitioners (core tensions in this debate), attention to the core concepts which give substance and focus to any analysis is crucial.

The article is divided into three substantive parts. First, the seven characteristics of essentially contested concepts are outlined and discussed. In the second section of the paper, Gallie’s approach serves as a framework for the explication and analysis of the multi-dimensional features of the concept of philanthropy. This section is underpinned by an extensive review of the literature.³ It should be noted that Gallie’s framework is not invoked here as an avocation of conceptual relativism (Gray 1977). The aim is not to be prescriptive about how philanthropy *should* be defined. Gallie’s framework sits within approaches to concept analysis, which focus on unpacking conceptual structures of meaning and examining diversity in the definition of concepts. These approaches help us to understand different facets of a concept beyond defining criteria alone and to appreciate particular usages of a concept by different scholars and in different fields of study (Collier and Adcock 1999, pp. 539–540; Collier and Levitsky 1997; Freedman 1996; Pitkin 1967). Finally, I discuss how by increasing awareness of the essentially contested nature of the concept of philanthropy the potential for conceptual confusion and ambiguity is mediated. The third section of the paper is also informed by the analysis of pragmatic strategies at the disposal of scholars to negotiate the contestability of concepts in order to ensure that theoretical progress is not hindered and that problems of miscommunication are avoided.

³ A search of articles containing ‘philanthropy’ in the title was carried out using the ISI Web of Science (Web of Knowledge). The search was refined to the General Category ‘Social Sciences’; Language ‘English’ and Document Type ‘Article’. I excluded a number of subject areas in what may broadly be referred to as health care sciences. This search returned 253 results. A review of the titles, abstracts and, where the focus was still not wholly clear, the body of articles led me to exclude (a) articles on corporate philanthropy and (b) historical articles, which provide an account and analysis of ‘philanthropy’ at a particular point in time or over a particular period of time. The former raises a number of pertinent and provocative issues in relation to the meaning of philanthropy, specifically linked to the relationship between philanthropy and business, which I do not have the space to do justice to here. Similarly, although important attempts have been made to provide longitudinal analyses of the concept of philanthropy, there is much more to be done in this area (Sulek 2010a, b; Morris 2004; Ilchman et al. 1998). I also eliminated conference papers, which were returned by the search in order to keep my focus on a review of substantial, peer-reviewed articles. The search returned 76 articles of this genre. Within these parameters, the search also returned 50 articles from publications which feature one or more of opinion pieces, commentary, profiles and classify themselves as journal/magazine/newspaper. I have only cited one of these references to be of relevance within the paper (Porter and Kramer 1999). This search of the ISI Web of Knowledge was complemented by a further (if sometimes repetitious) search and review of the three main journals: *Voluntas: International Journal of Nonprofit and Voluntary Organisations* (48 ‘Original Papers’ returned from general search using the term ‘philanthropy’); *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* (66 results returned using search term ‘philanthropy’ in the title (42 excluding book reviews; 36 results using search term ‘philanthropy’ in key words, which revealed three additional sources not returned in the first search) and *Nonprofit Management and Leadership* (13 results from a search of articles with ‘philanthropy’ in the title, including 4 research reports but excluding book reviews. A similar search in ‘keywords’ did not reveal any results). In each case, the parameters for the search were January 1980–May 2011. The sources reviewed were also bolstered by the perusal of references of interest referred to in articles reviewed and other sources gathered by the author in the course of her broader research in this area. Following Gerring (2001, p. 73), as the focus was on garnering insights into ‘general usage patterns’ and patterns of articulation and meaning, rather than ‘precise fluctuations’, any further coding exercise was felt to be unnecessary.

Essentially Contested Concepts

Gallie (1956, pp. 171–172, 180) identified the following criteria as defining features of an essentially contested concept: (1) it must be *appraisive*, that is representative of ‘some kind of valued achievement’; (2) its structure must be of ‘an internally complex character’; (3) related to this, the concept lends itself to being described in a variety of different ways (it is ‘initially variously describable’); (4) the concept is ‘open’ in character which means that it can be modified in accordance with ‘changing circumstances’; (5) there is mutual recognition amongst scholars that the way in which they employ the concept is likely to be contested by other users of the concept; (6) the concept is ‘derived from an original exemplar whose authority is acknowledged by all the contestant users of the concept’; (7) the nature of the ‘continuous competition’ amongst scholars is such that it ‘enables the original exemplar’s achievement to be sustained and/or developed in optimum fashion’. Each of these criteria has been the subject of critique and debate.

Appraisiveness

Freeden (1996) and Connolly (1974) suggest that the act of describing a concept is inherent to its appraisive nature. To this end, Connolly (1974, p 23) underlines the importance of description in *characterising* (not just naming) a concept and how ‘to describe is to characterise a situation from the vantage point of certain interests, purposes or standards’. Judgements about the appraisive quality of a concept are underpinned, indeed, informed by value judgements about what makes that concept an achievement to be valued: it is a ‘multi-layered’ process (Okoye 2009, p. 617). What is more, Freeden (1996, p. 56) argues that essentially contested concepts may represent ‘disapproved and denigrated phenomena’ as much as they may be, in Gallie’s words, valued achievements (for example, on CSR, see Okoye 2009, pp. 619–620). Similarly, Boas and Gans-Morse (2009, p. 154) assert that there are ‘multiple levels of contestation’, one of which pertains to the ‘normative valence’ of a concept. Assessing the appraisive nature of a concept is made all the more difficult by the differing theoretical or analytical perspectives, which inform a scholar’s thinking about a concept and lead to different assessments of its appraisiveness (Baldwin 1997, pp. 10–11).

Internal Complexity and Diverse Describability

The second and third of Gallie’s criteria are connected. The internal complexity of a concept means that it lends itself to being described in a range of different ways (Collier et al. 2006, p. 216). Different scholars may award different levels of importance to particular features of a concept. Discussion around these criteria has variously focused on how the complexity of a concept can be reduced, for example, via the favouring of certain meanings over others (Swanton 1985) or through ‘practical closure’ (Care 1973) and decontestation (Freeden 1996) (see below, and for an overview of key arguments in relation to these criteria, see Collier et al. 2006, pp. 216–217). A salient issue in assessing the internal complexity of a concept is to

be clear that the variety of features remains part of the same concept (it is a cluster concept) and that the concept has not become over-aggregated, that is, made up of features which bear very tenuous links to one another (Collier et al. 2006, p. 217). Taking the concept of ‘politics’ as an example, Connolly (1974, p. 14) argues that a cluster concept has two principal characteristics: (1) it is internally complex, one to which a combined, though most likely variable, set of criteria apply and (2) these criteria are by themselves ‘complex and open’ but the meaning of a concept can only be understood with reference to ‘its complex connections with a host of other concepts to which it is related’. Cluster concepts are at the heart of conceptual disputes when the following situation occurs:

We often find that various people jointly employing such a cluster concept weight the importance of shared criteria differently; they might also interpret the meaning of particular criteria jointly in subtly different ways; and some persons might find it advantageous to add new criteria to, or drop old criteria from, the established list, while other groups object to such moves. When one or more of these conditions prevail we have the makings of a conceptual dispute (ibid.).

The addition and deduction of criteria from the definition of a concept affects the intension and extension of the concept, a source of contestability which was not considered by Gallie (see Freedon 1996, p. 56; Boas and Gans Morse 2009, p. 154; Sartori 1970).

Open Character

According to Gallie (1956, p. 172), the ‘open’ character of the concept means that it can be altered as circumstances dictate. For instance, in order to ensure analytic equivalence in the comparison of transitions to democracy at the end of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the concept must be adapted to reflect the norms or standards attributed to ‘democracy’ for each historical period (Berins-Collier 1999, cited in Collier et al. 2006, p. 224). Scholars have long grappled with questions of equivalence over time and space. However, Care (1973, p. 14) suggests that in ‘real life’, that is, in a variety of contexts, ‘*practical closure*’ can be attained. Discussion about the *nature* of the institutional form or social practices in which we participate are parked, at least temporarily, in favour of a focus on us posing and addressing for ourselves some fundamental questions about the ‘character of our institutions and practices...’ (ibid.). However, it is worth noting that this is not to suggest that concepts are no less essentially contestable in ‘real life’. In a similar vein, Freedon (1996) suggests that concepts may be decontested.⁴

⁴ Ideologies, according to Freedon, represent ‘groupings of decontested political concepts’ (p. 82). Decontestation occurs in that an ideology may achieve a particular or steady meaning in the realm of political action because of the emphasis which is placed on making firm decisions rather than on-going debate about ideology per se (Freedon 1996, pp. 76–77). Perhaps, crucial to this is the following characterisation Freedon (1996, p. 50) makes about ideologies: ‘[I]deologies treat political concepts not merely as signified but as referents. Far from engaging in abstract thought exercises, they refer also to observable facts and concrete social practices in the external world.’

Aggressive and Defensive Use of Concept

The importance of this criterion in the broader application of Gallie's approach is called into question. Indeed, Collier et al. (2006, p. 219) suggest that scholars need not regard this criterion as salient in their efforts to apply Gallie's framework to their analysis of concepts. The core issue for debate concerns how explicit the 'aggressive and defensive' use of a concept can be expected to be. According to Freedman (1996, p. 60), there is the potential for a concept to be *essentially contestable* regardless of whether it is explicitly contested. Indeed, he asserts that scholars do not always position their interpretation of a concept in direct contest to other scholars' interpretations. However, other scholars such as Grafstein (1988) underline that rivalry in relation to the use of certain concepts is a categorical feature of some debates.

Role of the Exemplar

Collier et al. (2006, pp. 219–220) argue that the notion of 'exemplar' can be interpreted in a narrow and broad way. In the narrow sense, as outlined above, Gallie (1956, p. 180) suggests that contested concepts have an exemplar whose 'authority is acknowledged by all the contestant users'. For example, in debates about how to enhance the participatory nature of democracy, Athenian democracy may serve as an exemplar (op. cit., p. 225). For some scholars, this is anathema to Gallie's assertions about the contestability of concepts as it suggests an inherent non-contested core (Freedman 1996). Moreover, Waldron (2002, p. 158) suggests that 'reference back to the achievement of an exemplar may be too narrow an account of what gives unity to a contested concept'. In relation to the rule of law, he questions whether there is an exemplar at all, but rather a core problem which pertains to age-old efforts to address the question of 'how can we make law rule?' (ibid.). In his discussion of the concept of democracy, Gallie (1956, p. 186) also appears to envisage a broader interpretation of the exemplar as 'a long tradition (perhaps a number of historically independent but sufficiently similar traditions) of demands, aspirations, revolts, and reforms of a common anti-egalitarian character'. Similarly, according to Collier et al. (2006, p. 220), in relation to the concept of power, Lukes (1974) identifies a number of 'paradigmatic' examples of power that make up the concept's core (see also Swanton 1985, p. 818).

Continuous Competition

This particular aspect of an essentially contested concept is linked with the previous feature, reciprocal (if 'aggressive' and 'defensive') recognition of different uses of a concept. The nature of the competition envisaged is between scholars advocating for their interpretation of a concept. Again, it is the case that, on the one hand, Gallie suggests that the development of the quality of arguments about concepts will bring scholars closer to agreeing the original exemplar (understood in the narrow sense). On the other hand, in a broader sense, Gallie (1956, p. 189) also asserts that even if it may not be possible to identify a 'general principle' that allows us to reach a

consensus regarding the ‘best use’ of a concept, ‘it may yet be possible to explain or show the rationality of a given individual’s continued use (or in the more dramatic of conversion, his change of use) of the concept in question’ (Collier et al. 2006, p. 221). The merits of the type of progressive competition envisaged by Gallie are also questioned in terms of whether the quality of arguments advanced really does improve as debates about concepts grow (Freeden 1996, p. 60; Swanton 1985, p. 815). To be sure, the absence of conscious thinking in the articulation of concepts enhances the risk of conceptual ambiguity, which can hinder progress in the field of study. However, as stated at the outset, it is the contention of this paper that recognition of philanthropy as an essentially contested concept is of fundamental importance to avoiding conceptual confusion. It offers a framework for conceptual explication and analysis, which has the potential to encourage more conscious thinking relating to concepts and, hence, progressive competition amongst scholars. Drawing upon Gallie’s framework and in particular taking account of the range of commentaries and critiques discussed above, the paper proceeds to explore how philanthropy is an essentially contested concept. In the following section, the paper then considers how strategies that scholars use to deal with the contestability of other concepts such as democracy can be drawn upon by scholars of philanthropy. In this way, the paper considers how the essentially contested nature of the concept can enable rather than hinder theoretically driven progress and foster meaningful conversations about the nature of philanthropy between scholars and practitioners, as well as amongst practitioners themselves.

Exploring Philanthropy as an Essentially Contested Concept

Appraisive Nature of Philanthropy

In the literal sense, philanthropy is an appraisive concept: the Greek meaning of *philanthropia* being the ‘love of humankind’ (Miller 2006, p. 51, author’s italics). As Sulek (2010a, pp. 194–195) discusses, Sir Francis Bacon, drawing on ancient Greek philosophers’ conception of virtue, puts forward an interpretation of philanthropy which equated it with ‘goodness’ and ‘the [habit of the] affecting of the weal of men’. This inherently positive appraisal of philanthropy continues to influence some scholars’ thinking on philanthropy. From the perspective of social relations theory (Ostrander and Schervish 1990), Schervish (1998, p. 600) argues that the concept of philanthropy embodies ‘a social relation revolving around the moral virtue of *caritas* (love for others in their true needs) [author’s italics]’. Moreover, he argues that philanthropy is distinguished from the worlds of business and politics, which can also claim in different ways to serve the public good, by ‘the kind of signal or moral claim that mobilises and governs the matching of resources to needs’ (ibid.).

Robert Payton articulates philanthropy as ‘voluntary action for the public good’. As such, his understanding of philanthropy encompasses ‘voluntary giving, voluntary service and voluntary association’: rooted in normative values of compassion and community. Thus, in response to the question, Payton (1988, p. 37) poses: ‘what are the practices and values that we may justly call philanthropic?’,

normative notions of compassion and community are crucial.⁵ Similarly, Payton and Moody (2008, p. 35) proffer ‘an affirmative concept of philanthropy’ as ‘voluntary action that advances a vision of the public good’. Similar to Schervish, the nature of the ‘voluntary action’ envisaged is rooted in ‘moral action’, which seeks to improve the lives of other human beings (ibid.). To this end, it can be argued that the concept of philanthropy is an example of a concept, which is not ‘*merely* appraisive’ (Freeden 1996, p. 56, author’s emphasis). Rather, it is one that also has ‘descriptive aspects’, which designate (or characterise) acts of giving, service or association between two or more parties as ‘philanthropic’ and awards them an evaluative connotation. What is more, conceptualisations of philanthropy may refer to ‘brute facts’ but, as Freeden argues, ‘empirically describable and observable’ features of a concept ‘may *in addition* be conceived of as desirable and thus become values’ [author’s emphasis] (ibid.). For example, Salamon (1992) defines philanthropy as ‘the private giving of time or valuables for public purposes’ and designates philanthropy to be ‘one form of income of private non-profit organisations’ (ibid., p. 10; for a similar characterisation of philanthropy, see Schuyt 2010, p. 777). Such matter-of-fact characterisations of philanthropy have acquired an evaluative bent in policy discourses, which encourage and promote philanthropic activity as described above in policy areas and, particularly, as a form of ‘income’ to support non-profit organisations. For example, the promotion of philanthropy is a core part of the British government’s Big Society initiative (Cabinet Office 2010). Further evidence of positive connotations attached to the concept of philanthropy can be found; for example, in the extent to which acts of giving, service and association are celebrated via public awards.

However, the concept of philanthropy also has a contested normative valence. For example, in terms of ‘speech acts’ that is, the types of connotations it has assumed, it is used as a term of praise and one which is denigrated (Skinner 1988, cited in Boas and Gans-Morse 2009, p. 154; Freeden 1996, p. 56). The ‘goodness’ and ‘compassion’ inherent to philanthropy also evoke disapproval, signifying ‘do gooderism’ and ‘patronage’, respectively. For example, this has long been the sense in which philanthropy has been regarded in the United Kingdom (see Wright 2001, p. 400; Breeze 2005; Davis Smith 1995, p. 16). Indeed, these associations persist in critiques of the role of philanthropy in modern British society (see Kisby 2010). The concept of philanthropy bears similar negative connotations in Russia (Lindenmeyer 1998; Dinnello 1998, pp. 122–129) and Latin America (Thompson and Landim 1998).

Finally, in addition to social relations theory, other theoretical frameworks also posit different views about the contribution philanthropy makes to civil society, which, in turn, affect whether it is judged to be of an evaluative nature. On the one hand, *pluralist* views of philanthropy characterise philanthropic activity as a source and leader of innovation, champion of a range of social problems and issues; supporter of multiple perspectives on how these problems should be addressed, and

⁵ He views charity as the ‘prudent sister’ of philanthropy (1988, p. 32). Whilst ‘compassion’ has ‘an emotional quality’ rooted in individuals lending assistance to those in need, ‘community’ is based on ‘mutuality and sharing’ though more rationally built on ‘organisation, planning, prudence and calculation’ (ibid., p. 44).

engaged in complementing the government by acting in ‘unpopular’ or difficult areas, often over the long term (O’Connell 1988; Ylvisaker 1987, cited in Nagai et al. 1994, pp. 59–60).⁶ On the other hand, from a radical structuralist perspective that draws on a Gramscian perspective of civil society, philanthropy, as expressed through foundations in particular, represents social forces of hegemony and control (Arnove 1980; Roelefs 2003). Building on this perspective, some scholars argue that the need for philanthropy signifies systemic failures in modern societies: The value of philanthropy is negated by the fact that its roots lie in a system that allows for, indeed, encourages the vast accumulation of wealth by a minority of individuals (Nickel and Eikenberry 2010, pp. 273–274). By contrast, other scholars argue that it is precisely these origins and, more recently, the incorporation of tools and approaches, which have been successful in the market to philanthropy which enhance the value of philanthropy (Acs and Phillips 2002; Ealy 2005). In the context of these debates, value judgements regarding the free market and its relationship with philanthropy inform and shape assessments of the evaluative nature of philanthropy.

Internal Complexity and Diverse Describability

The internal complexity of the concept of philanthropy is underpinned by the interplay and inter-mixing of criteria by scholars, which means that philanthropy can be described in a variety of ways. The concept of philanthropy is a cluster concept, which has given rise to three areas of dispute.⁷ The first area of dispute pertains to how the meaning of philanthropy is bound up with its relationship to other concepts. Second, there are differences of opinion regarding the importance and meaning of certain criteria. Finally, the multi-dimensional nature of the concept enhances its internal complexity and describability as scholars invoke different strategies to specify or rather add defining criteria.

Relationship to Other Concepts As discussed earlier, cluster concepts are characterised by criteria, which are ‘complex and open’ and the meaning of a concept is linked with its relationship to other concepts. For instance, the ‘public good’ is a contested concept (Mansbridge 1987) but the concept of philanthropy cannot be understood without reference to its connection with this concept or the related concept of ‘public purposes’. As discussed in the previous section, what the public good *is* (descriptive aspects) and how it *should* be served (normative aspects) are inherent to the contestability of the concept of philanthropy and most

⁶ Though often perceived as a perspective which has developed out of a particularly *American* view of state–market–civil society nexus, the indications are that foundations in some other countries, notably in Europe, also identify with positive pluralist perspectives of their roles which are similar to their American counterparts, even though they operate in environments where the state–market–civil society relationship has developed in different ways (Anheier and Daly 2007; de Borms 2005).

⁷ Harrow (2010, p. 123) refers to philanthropy as a ‘clustered concept’, that is, one which is ‘capable of being multiply defined by multiple stakeholders, so that parallel understandings of its nature and purpose coexist in research’.

particularly, the contested normative valence of philanthropy (see Payton and Moody 2008, p. 156; see also, Goldfarb 2011).

Differences in the Weighting and Meaning of Defining Criteria The different priority or weighting given by scholars to particular criteria is likely to lead to different meanings of the concept of philanthropy. There may also be ‘subtly’ different interpretations of the meaning of particular criteria (Connolly 1974, p. 14). Providing a thorough analysis of how the concept of philanthropy has been defined, Sulek (2010a, p. 203) argues that there is ‘fundamental disagreement’ regarding:

- Whether philanthropy is voluntary, or whether it is compelled by factors such as moral restraints, social obligations and the like
- Whether philanthropy serves a public purpose, a public good, a charitable need, or simply a communicated want or desire
- Whether philanthropy is an intent to achieve a particular aim, is the actual attainment of that aim, or is just simply a private act of giving.

A number of scholars underline the voluntary character of philanthropy that is central to Robert Payton’s definition of philanthropy (Pharoah 2009, p. 12; Ilchman et al. 1998, p. x). However, it is contested by Schervish (1998, p. 600) who posits that the moral sense of virtue which is, in his view, inherent to philanthropy may be compelling rather than voluntary, that is, shaped by an array of factors from religious beliefs to peer pressure. Related to the second area of dispute identified by Sulek, scholars differ as to whether ‘charitable need’ or charity should be articulated as a separate concept. From some perspectives, there is a case to be made for what is effectively the disaggregation of philanthropy. For example, Gross (2003, p. 31) argues that whilst ‘charity’ implies compassionate, person to person giving, ‘philanthropy’ connotes rational and institutionalised giving, which seeks to achieve grand objectives in society. Whilst not disputing this particular interpretation of charity, Ostrower (1995, p. 40) argues that philanthropy is a broad concept, which ‘includes charity, but also encompasses the wider range of private giving for public purposes’ (see also Bremner 1988, cited in Van Til 1990, p. 22). Addressing charitable need (or rather, attempts to do so) also appears salient to Van Til’s definition of philanthropy as ‘the voluntary giving and receiving of time and money aimed (however, imperfectly) towards the needs of charity and the interests of all in a better quality of life’ (1990, p. 34).

It is important to note that these expressions of choice regarding particular criteria not only represent disagreements about ordering but these choices have implications for the intension and extension of the concept of philanthropy (Sartori 1970). According to Freedman (1996, p. 57), these choices may be influenced by analytic judgement and/or cultural preferences. For example, the dispute about the relationship between charity and philanthropy is broadly rooted in the open nature of the concept of philanthropy and more specifically its evolution in the United States. Thus, it is one which has less resonance in other countries, and the need to consider a distinction between ‘charity’ and ‘philanthropy’ appears less relevant to analyses, which focus on other contexts (for example, Arapogolou 2004). The analytic judgements and/or cultural preferences which inform choices about criteria

and hence the intension and extension of a concept enhance the ‘inescapable indeterminacy’ of the range of criteria that are drawn upon to define and characterise the concept of philanthropy (op. cit.).

Finally, Sulek’s suggestion that scholars disagree about the extent to which philanthropy is ‘simply a private act of giving’ belies the extent to which the *form* the private act of giving takes is also subject to diverse interpretations, which give different meanings to philanthropy. Adloff (2009, p. 1187) identifies three features of ‘philanthropic action’:

[There are] three aspects of philanthropic action ...: voluntary engagement (giving one’s time and creativity), charitable giving (donating money or other resources to charitable organisations), and the establishment of philanthropic foundations (the creation of institutions of permanent giving).

Sulek (2010a, p. 203) suggests that the synonymy of philanthropy with ‘charitable donations’ is ‘generally taken as a given’ by the majority of those engaged in the study of philanthropy.⁸ However, the concept of philanthropy has also been defined with reference to the foundation form alone (Harrow 2011, p. 2). To the lament of some commentators (Winner 1978, cited in Van Til 1990, p. 32), philanthropy is also associated with wealthy individuals. Indeed, in the United Kingdom, particularly in the twentieth century, ‘philanthropy’ has become ‘more synonymous with charitable foundations and trusts and being a philanthropist synonymous with the largesse of rich individual donors’ (Anheier and Leat 2002). The extent to which philanthropy should be associated with a ‘sector’ is also the subject of debate (Van Til 1988; Ostrander et al. 1987; Lohmann 1992). In fact, Peter Frumkin argues that there is substantial ‘diversity and confusion’ regarding the range of philanthropic actors which make up the field (Frumkin 2006, pp. 26–27). He suggests that the list of actors who engage in philanthropy ranges from individuals who make donations to charities in their local area; to wealthy donors who seek to make a long-lasting impact on society, to big foundations, corporate foundations, community foundations and the range of vehicles that have become prominent in recent years to facilitate philanthropy from informal giving circles to donor-advised funds (ibid.). These recent developments, part of what is often referred to as the ‘new philanthropy’, have added a further dimension to the debate about the form of philanthropy. The ‘new philanthropy’ has, in part, been characterised by the development of new vehicles for, and approaches to, philanthropy (Cobb 2002, p. 125). In this sense, the internal complexity of the concept of philanthropy is inter-linked with the evolution of the concept, which, in turn, leads to further interpretations of the form private giving takes. For example, John et al. (2007, p. 9) characterise philanthropy as:

[The] provision of finance to an organisation for predominantly social benefit. This does not preclude any number of financial instruments such as grants, returnable grants, loans or equity where the primary purpose is creating social value not personal gain. In cases where the philanthropic capital is preserved

⁸ He refers specifically here to how this interpretation of philanthropy is evident in Salamon’s (1992) definition of philanthropy.

or a financial return is made, these are secondary consequences. The primary test is motivation for giving (or lending) which is congruent with the Greek or Latin origins of the word philanthropy (love of mankind).⁹

Multi-Dimensionality Other scholars convey diverse interpretations of the form(s) of philanthropy through the specification of particular dimensions of philanthropy in their definitions. These definitions draw attention to the multi-dimensional nature of the concept, which further enhances the internal complexity and diverse descriptibility of the concept of philanthropy. In this regard, it is important to distinguish between the specification of dimensions of philanthropy, which involve the articulation of subtypes of philanthropy and the précising of dimensions of philanthropy.¹⁰ Typical of cluster concepts, both approaches to specification involve the addition of criteria. However, subtypes of philanthropy involve efforts to differentiate between different dimensions of philanthropy, which pertain, for example, to actors, locations and purposes of philanthropy such as ‘elite philanthropy’ (Ostrower 1995), ‘grassroots or community philanthropy’ (Eikenberry 2006) and ‘social justice philanthropy’ (NCRP 2003) respectively.

Précising means that scholars exhibit preferences for the addition of new criteria to the range of existing criteria that are variously used to articulate the concept of philanthropy. Examples of such definitions include the following: ‘marketised philanthropy’ (Wirgau et al. 2010; Nickel and Eikenberry 2009), ‘catalytic philanthropy’ (Kramer 2010), ‘strategic philanthropy’ and ‘venture philanthropy’ (Porter and Kramer 1999; Letts et al. 1997; Moody 2008). However, the use of the prefix, similar to the articulation of subtypes of philanthropy, is misleading. Unlike subtypes of philanthropy, the aim is to do more than convey an understanding of particular dimensions of philanthropy. Each of these forms of philanthropy embodies a particular approach to engaging in philanthropy, which also seeks to give it a very specific meaning. An emphasis on précising definitions can be linked with the open nature of the concept as it may occur in response to the need to adapt the concept to a particular, or new context, or set of circumstances. This may, in turn, result in the complete modification of the concept; it may alter the ‘definitional point of departure’ and lead to the ‘unsettling of the semantic field’ (Collier and Levitsky 1997, p. 445). For instance, Cobb (2002, p. 125) argues that developments in approaches to, and methods for, philanthropy in recent decades have led some individuals and institutions to look at philanthropy ‘through a different lens and with a changed set of priorities’ (see also Moody 2008). However, Katz (2005) argues that

⁹ This particular characterisation also suggests that operationalisation of the concept of philanthropy is fundamental to its identification, see Gerring (2001, pp. 43–48).

¹⁰ See Baldwin (1997, p. 23) for similar patterns in the treatment of the concept of security. The specification of particular dimensions of philanthropy has much in common with trends in the articulation of subtypes and the ‘précising’ of definitions among scholars of democracy. In the simplest sense, précising involves the addition of defining properties and seeks to ensure that concepts can be adapted to new contexts. Classical subtypes are ‘full instances of the root definition’. This does not imply that the author’s root definition is the ‘correct’ definition of the concept but rather that, for that scholar, it is the ‘point of departure’ for defining the subtype (Collier and Levitsky 1997, pp. 435, 442–445). As a measure of the potential for conceptual confusion, scholars are not always explicit about the root concept from which the subtype is derived. This is often implicit in the articulation of subtypes.

there is a lack of ‘consistency in the denotation of the new *catchwords* of foundation philanthropy’ and that it is difficult to draw ‘firm boundaries’ between strategic philanthropy, venture philanthropy and effective philanthropy (my emphasis). There are two issues here. First, the recognition of philanthropy as an essentially contested concept, but more specifically, as a cluster concept, provides a framework for explicating and analysing the different strategies scholars use to precise attributes of philanthropy. Second, however, it also serves to draw attention to the need for scholars to be very conscious about how they conceptualise—and seek to re-conceptualise—philanthropy. It is important to ensure that there are ‘analytic gains’ to be had which outweigh the semantic unsettling of the field, particularly in the case of re-conceptualisation (Collier and Levitsky 1997, p. 445).

Open Character

The concept of philanthropy has been modified in accordance with the evolution of societies, economies and politics (particularly, the role of the state). There is a rich historical literature which documents and critically analyses the development of philanthropy over time in different countries, complemented by the chronological mapping of the evolution of the concept of philanthropy (Sulek 2010a, b). Whilst much of this work is focused on the United States, our understanding of the evolution of philanthropy in other countries worldwide has been enhanced in recent years (Adam 2004a; Sanborn and Portocarrero 2006; Lyons and Hasan 2002). Historians are leading the way in considering how the open character of the concept of philanthropy poses particular challenges in relation to the establishment of ‘analytic equivalence’ in efforts to compare across time and space (Ilchman et al. 1998; Morris 2004; Adam 2004b). At the heart of debates relating to openness, there are also concerns about the resonance of the concept of philanthropy, within and, indeed, outside the academy (Miller 2006, p. 52; Donmoyer 2009). The scholarly dispute regarding the synonymy of the concepts of charity and philanthropy is illustrative of how scholars deal with the open nature of the concept. As discussed above, two key strategies are apparent: disaggregation (Gross 2003) and modification (for example, Ostrower 1995). Peter Frumkin’s argument that both charity and philanthropy carved out separate ‘niches’ which remain prevalent today suggests that a form of practical closure has been achieved (Frumkin 2006, pp. 4–5; see also Karl 1997, p. 217; Care 1973). However, the extent of the debate which the meaning of philanthropy and charity generated amongst academics, lawmakers and policymakers in the latter half of the twentieth century in the United States should not be underplayed (Dobkin Hall 1999, p. 526).

As discussed in the previous sections, the concept of philanthropy continues to evolve: its meaning is shaped, indeed modified, by prevalent theories, discourses and practices. Central to discourses surrounding the ‘new’ philanthropy is whether the individuals, methods and approaches that have emerged in recent years represent the ‘transformation’ of philanthropy (for example, Wagner 2002; Katz 2005). Scholars deal with this in three principal ways. First, the suggestion that existing conceptualisations of philanthropy, despite their variety, cannot capture this phenomenon is evident in the coining of a new term, *philanthrocapitalism* to

capture certain aspects of it. Specifically, this term denotes the application by individuals of skills, tools and practices from business to their philanthropy (Bishop and Green 2008). According to Edwards (2009, p. 35), philanthrocapitalism is about ‘the use of business and the market to *transform* philanthropy and foreign aid’ [my emphasis]. However, he also argues that it is a contested term, which is variously used to refer to (1) some of the more well-known foundations to emerge in recent years (‘like Gates, Google, Omidyar and Skoll’); (2) social enterprise and examples of ‘innovation’; and (3) a ‘movement’ embodied in approaches such as corporate social responsibility (CSR) where the emphasis is on using business and the market to tackle social problems. Ultimately, the coining of the neologism reflects the open nature of the concept as it represents the modification, or rather, the complete adaptation of the concept to encompass the circumstances of philanthropy in the late twentieth/early twenty-first century. To paraphrase Collier and Levitsky (1997, p. 445), the coining of the neologism has altered the ‘definitional point of departure’ for the concept of philanthropy and unsettled the semantic field. There may be a case for the disaggregation of the concept of philanthropy, but it would be something of an over-statement to suggest that one has been made. Rather, the term philanthrocapitalism draws attention to novel ways of engaging in philanthropy, which have affected its meaning. However, given the clustered nature of the concept of philanthropy, it also serves to draw attention to the need for scholars to further explore the connections between philanthropy and concepts such as CSR and social enterprise (for example, Matten and Moon 2004; Nicholls 2010). This is an important task as there is always a danger with the coining of neologisms that they may precipitate ambiguity and confusion, particularly if they constantly proliferate in the face of the application of the concept in unforeseen contexts and circumstances (see Collier and Levitsky 1997, pp. 450–451).

Second, in a subtle though not always conscientious recognition of the open nature of the concept, scholars recognise that ‘traditional’ and ‘new’ conceptions of philanthropy will continue to exist alongside one another (Wagner 2002, p. 352). This is also epitomised in the specification of new approaches to philanthropy as part of efforts to précise the conceptualisation of philanthropy. This does not mark the end of the debate about ‘old’ and ‘new’ philanthropy. Rather, as Connolly (1974, p. 13) argues, the characteristics of a cluster concept serve as the ‘space’ within which ‘contests’ about the articulation of a concept originate and, arguably, develop. Finally, there is a trend that is akin to decontestation (Freeden 1996) or practical closure (Care 1973) in practice. Wagner (2002, p. 345) quotes one venture philanthropist who articulates a distinction between ‘transactive philanthropy’ and ‘investment philanthropy’: Each of which gives a particular meaning to philanthropy and informs his approach to philanthropy in practice. Moreover, Wood and Hagerman (2010) demonstrate that ‘traditional’ foundations are experimenting with tools associated with philanthrocapitalism such as mission investment as a matter of pragmatism and ‘a natural extension of philanthropic goals’, rather than as an expression of fundamental ideological change (ibid., p. 267). In this way, these actors and institutions characterise their practices as ‘philanthropic’ as a matter of practical course but stop short of considering how the character of their actions alters the nature of ‘philanthropy’ itself.

Aggressive and Defensive Use of Concept

It would be something of an over-statement to suggest that scholars widely defend their use of particular definitions of philanthropy aggressively. However, the debate about whether philanthropy incorporates charity suggests that there is an acute awareness amongst different commentators about diverse interpretations of philanthropy (Frumkin 2006). More specifically, there is evidence of authors taking account of other interpretations of philanthropy in setting out their own definition (Schervish 1998; Miller 2006). For example, Acs and Phillips (2002) state that they refrain from defining philanthropy ‘since there are competing interpretations’, proffering a ‘description’ instead. Van Til (1990) arrives at his definition of philanthropy following a thorough survey and analysis of the conceptual field. Wright (2001) argues that British commentators often struggle with the choice of what terminology to use. Until recently, studies of philanthropy have predominantly been studies of American philanthropy. However, as interest in the study of philanthropy proliferates in Europe and beyond (Carrington 2009)¹¹, reciprocal recognition of diverse interpretations of the concept of philanthropy is likely to become more important if problems of miscommunication are to be avoided.

Exemplar

To what extent does the concept of philanthropy claim authority from an original exemplar? Historical or chronological accounts of the evolution of the concept of philanthropy, such as that provided by Sulek (2010a), suggest that scholars may look to Sir Francis Bacon’s seventeenth century interpretation of the term, specifically, its characterisation as (the habit of) ‘goodness’, in order to pinpoint an original exemplar. His work marks a first effort in modern English to give a meaning to philanthropy which, as discussed in relation to the appraisive quality of philanthropy, still has resonance today (ibid., p. 195). However, as Miller (2006) argues, ‘philanthropy’ is used to denote ‘a wide range of activities that differ greatly as to motives’. It is also the case that as the meaning of the concept of philanthropy is not aligned to any one particular ‘vision’ or interpretation, ‘controversy inevitably follows to which activities truly qualify as philanthropic’ (ibid., p. 58).

The broader understanding of the nature of the exemplar which is believed to be prevalent in Gallie’s framework is also pertinent to the concept of philanthropy. To this end, the concept of philanthropy has much in common with the concept of the rule of law as a number of fundamental questions are at its core (Waldron 2002, p. 158). Unlike the rule of law, these questions are not seeking a solution, but further understanding of: how philanthropy is manifested (form); by whom is philanthropy practiced?; related to this, what motives are characteristic of philanthropy?; and what purposes does philanthropy serve? In the broad sense, these basic questions serve as exemplars for the concept of philanthropy. Similar to the concept of democracy, the relevance of broader interpretations of Gallie’s thinking on this

¹¹ See <http://www.asianphilanthropyforum.org/articles-on-asia-pacific.html> on the rise of philanthropy in the Asian–Pacific region.

issue is evident in how, particularly in recent years, specific forms, activities and behaviours approximate ‘paradigmatic examples’ for the diffusion of philanthropy globally. The analysis of processes of institutional transfer in relation to institutional forms of philanthropy such as community foundations as well as of the international influence of philanthropic institutions is drawing attention to the extent to which and, indeed, how, philanthropic forms, activities and behaviours in one context serve as exemplars for other contexts to emulate (Vogel 2006; Daly 2008; Stone 2010).

Continuous Competition: Toward Progressive Competition

This paper has attempted to show how the recognition of the concept of philanthropy as an essentially contested concept acts as a framework for understanding particular usages of the concept and, indeed, alterations to the concept. Consistent in the broadest sense with the nature of the ‘competition’ that Gallie envisaged, the framework permits the explanation or demonstration of the rationale behind a particular usage of the concept and/or alterations to a concept (Gallie 1956, p. 189; Collier et al. 2006, pp. 220–221). However, whilst such understanding facilitates and explains continuous competition, this does not necessarily mean that such competition is progressive, that is, conducive toward the substantive theoretical development and resonance of the field of study. In effect, it is also necessary to consider specific types of strategies that scholars can draw upon in order to ensure that the contestability of the concept of philanthropy does not obstruct the theoretical development (and resonance) of the field (see Johnson 2003; Kaplan 1964, p. 53). In the next section, I proceed to discuss how an approach rooted in ‘pragmatism’ offers one way of ensuring that the nature of (conceptual) competition amongst scholars is progressive rather than simply continuous.

Discussion

The substantive debates to which the concept gives rise underline that it is important to establish and make the case for philanthropy to be recognised as an essentially contested concept. It serves as a frame of reference for scholars (and practitioners), negotiating the analysis and usage of the concept of philanthropy. This is essential to encouraging conscious thinking regarding concepts and mediating the types of concerns that scholars have expressed about conceptual ambiguity and travelling in relation to the concept of philanthropy (Adam 2004b; Srivastava and Oh 2010).

The discussion of the appraisive quality of the concept of philanthropy suggests that some attention to normative concerns (however disputed) is salient to a full understanding of the concept of philanthropy. Whilst Paul Schervish, for instance, imbues the concept of philanthropy with appraisiveness, it is also clear that the concept is not merely appraisive. Moreover, the contested normative valence of the concept of philanthropy is also evident. Recognition of these features of the concept will go some way to addressing concerns that the ‘idealistic association’ between the term and Bacon’s definition of philanthropy along with ancient Greek

philosophers' conception of 'virtue' has led to the concept being subject to less critical scrutiny than other concepts in some fields of study (Srivastava and Oh 2010, p. 461). In analysing the appraisive quality of philanthropy, one is reminded of William Connolly's argument that description involves characterisation from the perspective of particular 'interests, purposes or standards' (1974, p. 23). The characterisation of philanthropy is informed by the value attributed to particular actions, behaviour and purposes.

The concept of philanthropy is also rendered contestable by virtue of its internal complexity and related to this, its diverse describability, but also significantly due to its clustered nature. The conceptual disputes to which the clustered character of philanthropy gives rise are linked to the relationship between the concept of philanthropy and other concepts; choices regarding particular criteria; the meaning of individual criteria; and the specification of dimensions of philanthropy, which involve the addition of new defining properties. As the analysis above suggests, the concept is rendered complex rather than confused as these disputes arise from factors such as analytic judgements, cultural preferences and attempts to ensure that the concept remains resonant, which is a product of its open character. The indeterminacy of the criteria that can be drawn upon to define philanthropy is enhanced by the open character of the concept of philanthropy.

Recognition of the open character of the concept of philanthropy is about acknowledging the importance that scholars attach to ensuring that the concept embodies what is current and relevant, that is, that the concept of philanthropy is resonant. Recognition of the open character of the concept in conjunction with its internal complexity and diverse describability is also important as it provides for an understanding of the types of strategies scholars invoke to address these issues. Using Gallie's framework, a strong case can be made for the more conscious recognition and explication of these strategies. In the broadest sense, this is important to enabling us to address the core questions that serve as exemplars in a way that will advance the theoretical development of the field and allow our arguments to have clarity beyond the academy. The invocation of particular strategies will serve to mark the nature of the 'competition' or, simply, the differences amongst scholars regarding the conceptualisation of philanthropy as progressive rather than simply as continuous.

In this penultimate section of the paper, I wish to suggest that a pragmatic course of action lies in the argument that scholars should pay greater attention to how they justify the types of choices they make regarding the definition and treatment of a concept. For instance, David Collier and Robert Adcock argue:

While recognising that usage is shaped and constrained by the broader understanding of a concept's meaning, we hold that specific methodological choices are often best understood and justified in light of the theoretical framework, analytic goals and context of research involved in any particular study. As theory, goals and context evolve, choices about concepts may likewise evolve (Collier and Adcock 1999, p. 539).

The choices scholars make regarding the definition and treatment of concepts may be informed by the nature of the phenomenon under investigation ('analytic

concerns'), the nature and/or number of empirical cases being examined and normative concerns too (op. cit., pp. 550–557). As the earlier discussion regarding the internal complexity and open character of the concept of philanthropy suggests, scholars are already making these types of choices but the recognition of philanthropy as an essentially contested concept brings these choices to the fore. As such, it has the potential to encourage scholars to be clear about why they define 'philanthropy' in a particular way. Finally, it is also worth stating that recognition of the contested nature of the concept of philanthropy is fundamental to its resonance outside of the academy too. For example, Nickel and Eikenberry (2009, p. 984) argue that discussion about the meaning of philanthropy is salient as without this: 'it [philanthropy] is not political and therefore is not a viable means toward democratic social change'. Recognition of the essential contestability of the concept of philanthropy outside the academy, and, as outlined in this paper, the very specific characteristics that this entails are important too. It has the potential to heighten awareness amongst practitioners of how the way in which they practice philanthropy alters the very nature of philanthropy itself. As noted at the outset of the paper, some scholars fear that the intellectual development of the field will make the study of philanthropy less responsive to the needs of practitioners (see Donmoyer 2009). However, the recognition of the essential contestability of the concept of philanthropy has the potential to encourage meaningful conversations between the academy and practitioners, amongst academics and amongst practitioners about the meaning and nature of philanthropy as it continues to evolve in the twenty-first century.

Conclusion

This paper has shown that the concept of philanthropy is an essentially contested concept. However, the over-riding aim has not been to 'prove' that philanthropy meets all of the seven characteristics of essentially contested concepts proffered by Gallie. Rather, Gallie's seven criteria have been drawn upon as a framework within which the multi-faceted nature of the concept of philanthropy can be explicated and analysed. It also illustrates the configurations of the structure of meaning, which underpin the concept of philanthropy. Thus, although each of the criteria and their pertinence to the concept of philanthropy are discussed separately, the discussion as a whole underlines the inter-dependence of each of the criteria in shaping our overall understanding of philanthropy as an essentially contested concept. As the field develops, the task for scholars is to ensure that philanthropy remains contestable and does not become confused. This is no easy task given the susceptibility of philanthropy to change in the light of social, economic and political circumstances. However, it is a task that is essential for progress in the analysis and understanding of philanthropy. Recognition of the concept of philanthropy as an essentially contested concept situates the concept within the tradition of concept analysis that underlines scholarly pragmatism in the articulation and use of concepts. At the very least, this ensures conscious thinking in the definition and treatment of concepts as well as a focus on the rationale or justification for particular

conceptual choices. At its most important, it ensures that theory building develops in a coherent way and that the study of philanthropy remains resonant outside the academy.

Acknowledgments I would like to thank Professor Irene Hardill and the three anonymous reviewers for their comments.

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