

Measuring the money, not the mouths

Greg Melleuish reviews

Who really cares: America's charity divide

by Arthur C. Brooks
(Basic Books,
2006, 256 pages)

Who are more likely to be more compassionate when it comes to giving money and doing things for other people: conservatives who believe in cutting taxes and reducing welfare or liberals (in the American sense) who want to increase taxes and welfare?

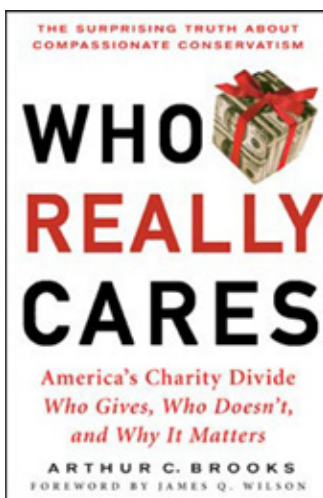
Well, it certainly isn't liberals who, according to Arthur C. Brooks' new study, *Who Really Cares*, are much happier spending other peoples' money than donating their own.

Brooks has analysed the data about giving in America and the results are not at all what he initially expected. He initially believed, like many academics, that conservatives were cold and lacking in compassion, while liberals were, in terms of their giving, liberal.

Instead he discovered that 'conservatives are, on average, more personally charitable than liberals'. This does not mean that all conservatives are more charitable than all liberals or that all conservatives are charitable. Seventy-five million Americans, or about a quarter of the population, never give money to charity; some of them are conservatives.

However, on average, if one en-

Greg Melleuish is an Associate Professor and Head of the School of History and Politics at the University of Wollongong. In February 2007 he was a Visiting Fellow at the Institute of Public Affairs.



counters a conservative, not only will he or she be more likely to give to charity, but he or she will also be more likely to give more than a comparable liberal. Moreover, donors to charity are more likely to volunteer to give their time, their blood, are more likely to give money informally to family and friends, and are also more likely to be tolerant and sympathetic than non-givers.

For the most part, givers do not give for the selfish reason of wanting to receive a tax deduction; some 96 per cent of volunteers give because they 'felt compassion toward other people'. At the same time, members of the working poor are more likely to give money to charity than a member of the middle classes.

What Brooks presents is a picture of givers who are compassionate, generous and more likely to be of the Right than the Left. Why should this be so?

The simple answer is that it is not political orientation that matters in looking for those who are likely to give to charity. As he puts it, there are four forces primarily responsible for making people charitable: 'religion, scepticism about the government in economic life, strong families, and personal entrepreneurship'.

It is simply that the people who have these characteristics are also more likely to be conservative in their political orientation.

Giving to charity is a practice that is taught by parents to their children and is an expression of a particular culture. Religious people give more because of the traditions of giving within the major world religions; poor people are good givers because they have a much greater likelihood of being members of a church that tithes. And, it should be pointed out, people from a religious background give more to both religious and secular charities, as well as being more generous with their time.

It is when those cultural traditions break down in the modern world—when families disintegrate and individuals adopt a more secular approach and when they move onto welfare—that the practice of giving declines. Instead, these secular individuals begin to look to the state rather than themselves as the source of charity.

It should come as no surprise to learn that Europeans are much less charitable than Americans, both in terms of giving money and volunteering. Europeans are not only less likely to go to church and profess a religious faith, they are also more likely to be hostile to religion. They are also more likely to suffer from unstable family conditions, as is shown by their low birth rate, and more likely to believe that it is the government's job to redistribute income.

Brooks does not discuss Australia, which from our point of view is a pity. Nevertheless, his general arguments probably apply just as much to Australia as they do to America and Europe.

The Left tends not to believe in charity but in what it calls 'justice'. By justice it seems to mean that the task of looking after one's neighbour should

be taken away from individuals and placed in the hands of the state. This often means that individuals of a leftish persuasion are not personally very charitable—in fact, they have an aversion to helping other people except in the special case of offering them advice about how the government should do more. They replace actions, and money, with words.

A world in which ‘justice’ had completely replaced charity would be a cold and heartless place composed of uncaring individuals dependent on the state.

That is not to say that we could have a tolerable world that relied entirely on charity; human beings are not angels.

Nevertheless, as Brooks argues, there is a lot to be said for a community that maximises the charitable potential of its members. Charitable people seek opportunity rather than forced equality, and the act of charitable giving has a positive impact on their personal development. People who give are more likely to be personally happy, to enjoy good health and to involve themselves in political activity.

Essentially what Brooks is arguing is that charitable giving, both in monetary terms and volunteering, is a life-enhancing activity that reinforces, and is reinforced by, other forms of activity such as family life and religious belief. These activities are central to any society that wants to maintain a healthy, well-functioning democracy.

Brooks argues that we should be looking at ways to maintain and increase charity. He advocates that parents provide a role model for their children both by giving and by ensuring that they understand that giving is their personal responsibility, not that of the government. Children, he argues, are more likely to learn charity in a religious environment.

Brooks also wants the state and its bureaucracy not to provide disincentives for giving and volunteering. The

new obsession with such things as risk management and occupational health and safety often discourage people from giving their time.

What emerges from this study is that a vibrant democratic society is one in which people willingly give in order to help others. People give because they see giving as the flip-side of achieving. In other words, the stereotypical picture painted by the Left of entrepreneurs

and business people as a collection of gradgrinds could not be further from the truth. The really miserable and sour members of modern society are those on the Left who are too mean to give, but who spend much of their time arguing why the state should spend other peoples’ money.

IPA

Flannery of the Overflow

William York

I HAD written him a letter which I had, for want of better Knowledge, sent to where I met him on the Murray, years ago, He was boating when I knew him, so I sent the letter to him, Just on spec, addressed as follows, ‘Flannery, of The Overflow’.

And an SMS came directed from a source quite unexpected,
(And I think it was dictated from a river bank or bar)
‘Twas the Prime Minister who wrote it, and verbatim I will quote it:
Flannery’s gone all atmospheric, and I don’t know where we are.’

With Australia Day flattery, visions come to me of Flannery
Gone a-driving ‘down to Canberra’ where the politicians go;
With the journalists and stringers, Flannery pointing with his fingers,
draws a future of disasters none of us will live to know.

And the Greens come out to meet him, and their kindly voices greet him
While the politicians ponder an election to be won,
And he sees the vision horrid of our country turning florid,
With a baking sun, a rising sea and little being done.

Gazing up at Kirribilli, I wonder will the ‘Silly
Season’ finish with a whimper or a bang
Will we all start getting warm, or is this the perfect storm,
Orchestrated by Al Gore and echoed by the noisy local gang.

It seems to me Prime Minister that there is something here quite sinister
In the push to get our economics in a great big melting pot.
With the present calls for action, you will need to find some traction
For ideas that cool the hot heads so we don’t destroy our lot.

William York is a failed financial journalist.