Philanthropy in Toni Morrison's Oeuvre

Philanthropy in Toni Morrison's Oeuvre:

"What Good is Good?"

By

Rico Hollmach

Cambridge
Scholars
Publishing

Philanthropy in Toni Morrison's Oeuvre: "What Good is Good?"

By Rico Hollmach

This book first published 2018

Cambridge Scholars Publishing

Lady Stephenson Library, Newcastle upon Tyne, NE6 2PA, UK

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

ISBN (10): 1-5275-1604-0
ISBN (13): 978-1-5275-1604-5

TABLE OF CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

> When the Founding Fathers (and Mothers) declared independence on July 4, 1776, they essentially formed a country dependent on philanthropy. Without a monarchy or state religion to provide schools, hospitals, orphanages, work houses, libraries, houses of worship, and other kinds of services, it took individual people and their commitment to more than themselves to have a supportive society. Philanthropy was and is critical to be able to offer both the basic things that everyone needs (food, clothing, shelter, and care) and also those things which make us a meaningful culture, which includes the arts, services providing safety, organization, and a social fabric. (Dietlin n. pag.)

With these words Lisa Dietlin sums up the immense importance of philanthropy to the United States. At least from the genesis of the American republic, philanthropy has been a culturally formative power–it has shaped and determined American society in the last two and a half centuries, it has made a decisive impact on notions such as American democracy, and it has influenced the United States´ auto- as well as heterostereotype.[1]

Throughout America´s history leading public actors have stressed the philanthropic spirit of the nation. President John F. Kennedy, for instance, claimed, "Philanthropy, charity, giving voluntarily and freely ... call it what you like, but it is truly a jewel of an American tradition" (National Philanthropic Trust n. pag.). Recent statistics about philanthropic giving of time and/or money further underline this phenomenon´s outstanding role: According to Robert Payton and Michael Moody, eighty-nine percent of U.S. households donated money in 2000 while forty-four percent of U.S. citizens volunteered in the same year. Annually, approximately two percent of the United States´ GDP amounts to giving and the total amount of money spent on philanthropic purposes estimated some $260 billion in

[1] In most European countries, by contrast, philanthropy has not exerted a comparable influence on society. Largely perceived as an answer to a lack of state-sponsored welfare, Europeans tend to equate the United States´ philanthropic tradition as a response to an apparent governmental failure to provide for the needy: Christian Wernicke, for instance, holds, "Amerikas Sozialstaat ist seit jeher schwach, und die Lücken, die er lässt, stopfen die großen Spender" (3).

2005 (plus an estimated worth of voluntary work equal to the total amount of dollars donated to philanthropic causes) (16-19). From these data Payton and Moody conclude, "philanthropy is in the midst of a growth spurt" (7) in America and the incredible number of almost two million philanthropic institutions in the United States supports their assumption (18).[2] Hence, Payton proudly declares, "the philanthropic tradition is the best thing we [Americans] can say about ourselves" ("The Philanthropic Dialogue" 134).

While philanthropy has indeed shaped the notion of Americanness and continues to wield influence over the nation´s self-perception, it is also important to discuss its downsides: No small number of critics maintains, "philanthropy is a rich man´s game" (Payton and Moody 50). The skeptics identify dangers that appear to be inextricably related to American philanthropy such as elitism, cultural hegemony, the imposition of certain values, and the neglect of the recipients´ needs. Especially in capitalist societies, philanthropy has been seen as an odd outgrowth of exploitation, a mere sedative that treats symptoms rather than root causes since it is part and parcel of a system that created these problems in the first place. "Critics of Western democratic capitalism," explains Alfred Castle, "see private philanthropy as one of the many ideological means by which the capitalist class maintains its privileged status" (100/101). As capitalism in disguise, then, sometimes philanthropy not only seems to create what it allegedly attempts to correct (e.g., poverty), but also appears to solidify certain social and structural imbalances. Commenting on this puzzling situation, Martin Luther King, Jr. once presciently cautioned, "Philanthropy is commendable, but it must not cause the philanthropist to overlook the circumstances of economic injustice which make philanthropy necessary" (24). Others, in turn, have argued that every dollar spent on philanthropic causes is a dollar wasted. The transcendentalists Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau, for instance, rejected the emerging practice of organizational philanthropy in the nineteenth century. Emerson exclaimed, "I tell thee, thou foolish philanthropist, that I grudge the dollar, the dime, the cent I give to such men as do not belong to me and to whom I do not belong" ("Self-Reliance" 154). Despite their severe criticism of relief societies and other private initiatives allegedly designed for the public good, Emerson and Thoreau did not reject the idea of philanthropy

[2] Most recent statistics indicate that even the economic recession in 2008 has only entailed a temporary decline in philanthropic giving: Both the total amount of dollars donated and the percentage of giving in terms of the United States´ GDP have recovered to a level fairly similar to figures in 2007 (*Giving USA 2015* 38/47).

altogether. Instead, in pointing out certain Christian ideals and in distancing philanthropic acts from money, they forwarded a belief in a more 'ancient' or traditional practice of philanthropy. As a democratic bottom-up process, this particular form of philanthropy would eventually reform each individual and, in the long run, contribute to change on a societal level. Hence, American philanthropy surfaces as an ambiguous figure–a phenomenon that describes the United States´ best and worst characteristics simultaneously.

Philanthropy´s immense significance for the U.S. finds expression in the summer 2015 issue of *Lapham´s Quarterly*. Dedicated entirely to this phenomenon, the volume approaches philanthropy through a great variety of sources that enlarge the audience´s grasp of this concept substantially. Focusing on American philanthropy in its preamble, Lewis Lapham perceives an apparent discrepancy: While today´s perception of that term is strongly affected by foundations, large-scale financial funding, and the near apotheosis of generous patrons, there seems to be a deeper, almost hidden meaning. Dwelling on its reliance on Christianity and its strong connection to American democracy, Lapham critically assesses philanthrocapitalism, a term recently coined to describe the alleged need of the non-profit sector to become more effective in its distribution of funds, to develop more efficient means of investing their capital, and to become closer in nature to the for-profit market ultimately (Bishop n. pag.). [3] Instead, Lapham describes a uniquely *American* philanthropy: "philanthropy inherent in democracy as conceived by Paine, attested by Tocqueville, practiced by Whitman," states he, "is the care of other human beings, virtue 'considered useful,' almost never gloriously promoted" (23). As a culturally formative power, philanthropy is absolutely central to any consideration of the United States–it determines people´s understanding of notions such as American identity, American democracy, and Americanness.

[3] Undoubtedly, the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation–with an endowment of over $44 billion the largest that ever existed–is the very embodiment of philanthrocapitalism: Conducting their philanthropic engagement like a traditional business investment, their foundation´s mission is to tackle health problems, hunger, and child mortality on a global scale. Due to the sheer size of their foundation, the Gateses have also extended their sphere of influence–a process that has not only earned them gratitude, but also turned them into objects of suspicion. In a recent article, Lorenz Wagner dubs the Gateses the "United States of Money" (n. pag.): With their incredible fortune as door opener, they have entered world politics; without being democratically legitimated, they operate as if they were heads of state.

'What Good Is Good?' Philanthropy in Toni Morrison´s Oeuvre will claim that philanthropy´s prominent place within an American context finds an echo in American literature–and especially so in fiction by so-called minorities as the traditional recipients of philanthropy. Here, the ambivalence of this concept becomes apparent: Engaging critically and creatively with American philanthropy, minority literati are able to express criticism of this uniquely American form, to transcend its narrow limits, and to eventually arrive at a revised understanding of this term.

Since her oeuvre is extremely productive for a discussion of philanthropy, I focus on Toni Morrison´s novels in my interpretation. As an African American author, Morrison belongs to a racial minority in America on whose history American philanthropy has left an unmistakable mark: Black America´s experience with generous patrons, foundations, and philanthropic money narrates the ambivalent story of American philanthropy. In her historical fiction, she discusses slavery, racism, and segregation on the one hand. Her novels, on the other hand, also show an intense interest in the fight for the abolition of slavery, for civil rights, and for equality among the races.[4] More important, however, is that philanthropy is a central issue in most of her novels. My book shall therefore take a twofold approach to this phenomenon in her works: Firstly, I discuss philanthropy as a motif in her oeuvre. This part places emphasis on Morrison´s reconceptualization of this term and asks in how far African American ideas and concepts can alter and add to the notion of American philanthropy. Secondly, I analyze her novels themselves as philanthropic acts. Assuming that knowledge is the philanthropic gift that her works have to offer their audience, certain narrative means that actually secure a stable communication between sender, text, and receiver and thereby guarantee a transmission of the gift of knowledge come under scrutiny. Hence, *'What Good Is Good?'* aims to make a meaningful contribution to cultural and literary studies, which expands the field of investigation and includes historical, philosophical, and sociological research. The subsequent chapters attempt to understand the United States as a three-sector society with an exceptionally influential non-profit sector.

[4] Next to her literary engagement with America, Morrison has also established herself as an outspoken social critic and requested intellectual. In her numerous essays, interviews, and speeches she criticizes the social conditions in the United States and attacks the nation´s complacency from her African American perspective. In 2012, President Barack Obama awarded her with the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the highest civilian award of the United States, as a sign of gratitude for her contribution to the discourse on the nation´s state and development.

With the introduction of the issue of philanthropy to Morrison studies, most importantly, innovative readings of her novels will become possible.

In order to address philanthropy´s various facets in Morrison´s works, I employ a different understanding of this concept. Perceiving philanthropy as a defining force throughout U.S. history, the following notion deviates significantly from the traditional definition: Instead of placing emphasis on the stereotypical rich, almost exclusively white, mostly male philanthropist; instead of looking at large-scale funding by philanthropic foundations that, most often, bear the names of these generous patrons; and instead of perceiving money as the ultimate philanthropic gift, I attempt to broaden the scope of American philanthropy in my discussion. Defining philanthropy closer to the etymological origin of 'love of humankind,' I use this term to refer to a wide variety of interpersonal relations that are shaped and characterized by this phenomenon: The care of a community for the poor and needy among them is philanthropy; a mother that selflessly provides for her family is spurred by philanthropic principles.[5] What the following chapters also claim is that a broad definition of philanthropy is far more appropriate than its narrow counterpart–especially so in an American context: Since giving and helping are believed to be quintessentially American characteristics and receiving and being helped are certainly not, the traditional take on philanthropy effectively denies large proportions of the U.S. nation access to one crucial indicator and determining factor of Americanness. Accepting a more inclusive, a broader definition of the term ultimately implies a considerable change in understanding of American philanthropy. In this process, Morrison´s oeuvre helps to illuminate philanthropy´s role within the United States from an African American perspective and to arrive at a revaluation of this concept.

In her eleven novels, Morrison has addressed diverse historical eras in American history and has broadened her audience´s understanding of the nation–she has probed the United State´s self-perception and questioned what it means to be American. From the pre-colonial, pre-racist utopia of *A Mercy* to the haunting legacy of slavery in *Beloved* to more recent backgrounds in *Love* and *God Help the Child*, her historical fiction has attempted to add to and partially revise the American grand narrative. Casting light on the largely neglected black experience and giving voice to the formerly silenced and oppressed, she provides her readers with many different and at times contradictory standpoints. Being "a writer in the last

[5] Philanthropy is a compound word derived from the Greek words *philia* (affectionate love) and *anthropos* (human being). For a more precise definition of the concept philanthropy see chapter one.

quarter of the twentieth century, […] a writer who is black and a woman," she states that her "job becomes […] to rip that veil drawn over 'proceedings too terrible to relate'" ("The Site of Memory" 70). Additionally, Morrison has frequently drawn from African folklore as well as religion, the Bible, Greek mythology, and European fairy tales for inspiration. Consequently, her work has elicited a plethora of critical responses by critics of various academic backgrounds and, to date, uncountable monographs as well as essays have been published on the vast canvas of her novels. With regards to philanthropy in her oeuvre, however, literary criticism remains largely silent.[6] This, in turn, does not mean that this phenomenon is not of any importance to her works; in fact, philanthropy is in close proximity to at least two pervasive issues in her oeuvre. Firstly, it ties in with Morrison´s preoccupation with different forms of love, and, secondly, it overlaps with her novel´s treatment of good and evil as inseparably related concepts.

Translating to the literal 'love of humankind,' philanthropy fits into the novelist´s oeuvre-wide concern with love in its various facets: In *Beloved*, *A Mercy*, and *God Help the Child*, the strong, if ambivalent, force of maternal love is discussed; *The Bluest Eye*, *Song of Solomon*, and *Home* focus on family relationships that are characterized by love or the lack thereof; love and affection among friends is at the center of *Sula* and the eponymous novel *Love*, while *Tar Baby* focuses on romantic love and its tragic aspects. With its emphasis on a set of striking dualities, most prominently the brutal violence of Ruby´s men against the women at the Convent, *Paradise* bespeaks the opposite of love–hatred. And the end of *Jazz*, finally, sees an intimate relationship between text and reader that borders on romantic love. Evidently, love is a multi-faceted and highly complex issue in her novels. Distinguishing between the different levels of love in Morrison´s fiction, Katherine Bassard states, "in her artistic vision, eros (sexual love) and agape (divine, self-sacrificial love) are either mobilized or disallowed by the presence or absence of the philos (brotherly, community love), a mediating category" (122). The love of

[6] The neglect of philanthropy in Morrison´s novels can be traced to a larger trend in literary studies: Except for a few scattered book-length studies on that issue in nineteenth-century fiction, philanthropy has attracted hardly any scholarly interest. The relative silence of literary studies about philanthropy is all the more striking when that phenomenon´s central role for the United States´ self-image and its utmost importance for the understanding of this nation are taken into account. Time and again, then, researchers (in virtually all academic fields except cultural studies) and activists in philanthropic institutions have dwelled on philanthropy´s significance for the U.S.

humankind, then, is of central importance in her novels: While this at times ambivalent force is a fundamental power in interpersonal relationships among her novels´ characters, it is also a guiding principle of her fiction at large that shapes the interaction of author, text, and audience.

In her fictional as well as non-fictional works, as Davíd Carrasco remarks, Morrison has "unmasked the lethal lie of the myth of American innocence" (n. pag.). Her novels and social criticism expose racism and its firm grip on society throughout American history. Slavery and its legacy are constant backdrops in most of her works and her African American protagonists encounter the consequences of racial discrimination in language, law, interpersonal relationships, and concepts of beauty. In her essays, interviews, and speeches, Morrison points out that American literature is polluted by racist attitudes. Unmasking the representation of the black 'Other' as a haunting Africanist presence in works by white American authors, she shows that the definition of American identity as free and white is based on the existence of its exact antitheses:

> Africanism is the vehicle by which the American self knows itself as not enslaved, but free; not repulsive, but desirable; not helpless, but licensed and powerful; not history-less, but historical; not damned, but innocent; not a blind accident of evolution, but a progressive fulfillment of destiny. (*Playing in the Dark* 52)

While brutality, depravity, and violent hatred are certainly major forces in her fiction (e.g., rape, murder, and violence against the weak and defenseless), her works also engage critically and creatively with the dichotomy of good and evil. Blurring the boundaries between both categories, her novels play with their readers´ expectations. I argue that this ambivalent and challenging attitude surfaces clearly in her treatment of American philanthropy: Portraying this phenomenon as an equally contradictory concept, Morrison disrupts binary oppositions and provokes her audience.

In her 2012 Ingersoll Lecture Morrison dwells on the very nature of goodness and defines this term as "the acquisition of self-knowledge" (n. pag.). Questioning this concept´s origin, she asks: "What good is good?" (ibid.) and narrows down her focus to altruism. As the literal concern for the other, altruism is a motivation to do good as well as an impetus to engage in philanthropic activities. The myriad of scholarship on this concept provides her with three different theories. First, she claims, "altruism is not an instinctive act of selflessness" (ibid.). As something that is taught and learned, that is inspired by certain religious, moral, and ethical codes, she considers altruism a part of social learning. Secondly,

she states that it may also take the form of self-interest in disguise resembling "narcissism, ego enhancement, [and] even a mental disorder" (ibid.). In taking a detour to natural sciences, lastly, Morrison finds "some of the most thought-provoking theories [in] scholarship […] seeking evidence of an embedded gene automatically firing to enable the sacrifice of oneself for the benefit of others" (ibid.). Accordingly, she conceives of pure altruism as an innate human quality as she asks: "Is there a good gene along with the selfish gene" (ibid.)? What links these three kinds of altruistic behavior is that they produce language and that through this language her characters–and, by extrapolation, her readers–may learn something vital.[7]

Further, she maintains that goodness functions on all three of the above mentioned levels in her works: As part of social learning, it is a feature in *A Mercy* in the minor character of the priest who teaches slaves to read and write and helps them despite the danger of punishment; as narcissism or mental disorder it manifests itself in the character of Soaphead Church in Morrison´s debut novel *The Bluest Eye*. In its "most common and representative" (ibid.) form–as an innate human trait–, however, it surfaces in more than one character and in more than one novel. *Sula* sees a mother who deliberately chooses to lose her leg in order to provide for her family, who kills her son to protect him from himself, and who jumps out of the window to rescue her daughter from fire. In *A Mercy*, Florens´ mother saves her daughter from imminent danger of the slave system, while the last pages of that novel come closest to Morrison´s understanding of altruism. The healing of a strayed community member through the hands of Lotus´ women and the Money siblings´ physical as well as mental recovery in *Home*, finally, testify to Morrison´s preoccupation with acts of

[7] Almost unavoidably, her focus on goodness leads her to a consideration of its antithesis in the Ingersoll Lecture. Probing the place of evil in culture, Morrison detects a literal "obsession with evil" (n. pag.) in contemporary literature. She states: "Evil has a blockbuster audience–goodness lurks backstage. Evil has a vivid speech and goodness bites its tongue" (ibid.). Morrison finds the reason for the apparent central importance of evil in twentieth-century literature in the historical context of this century–most prominently, of course, in the two World Wars and the Holocaust that have made a deep and lasting impact on mankind. She concludes that acts of goodness "are treated with irony at best or they are sort of covered with suspicion or fruitlessness at worst" and that "Many of [twentieth-century literary heavyweights] are masters at exposing the frailty, the pointlessness, and the comedy of goodness" (ibid.). Notions such as weakness, pity, and apology, it appears to her, always accompany representations of goodness in contemporary literature.

human goodness.[8] While goodness is a defining power in her novels, good and bad often cannot be easily differentiated in her works. Even though Morrison claims that she has "never been interested in or impressed by evil" (ibid.), her oeuvre avoids a Manichaean differentiation and her characters cannot readily be divided along the simplistic line of good and evil: In *Sula*, for instance, Eva Peace highlights the indifference between Nel and Sula and thereby puts emphasis on the inseparability of good and bad, of innocence and guilt (*S* 168).

In her oeuvre, then, Morrison´s concern with goodness (and its opposite evil) is highly productive. As a means of personal development for her fictional characters as well as a critical lens for the moral undercurrents in her novels, acts of goodness reach to the core of her works. By extrapolation, she argues that they can lead to a development within the reader and within society in the Ingersoll Lecture: "Acts of goodness, however casual or deliberate or misapplied […] produce language. But even when not articulated, […] such acts must have a strong impact on the novel´s structure and on its meaning," states Morrison, "Expressions of goodness are never trivial in my work, are never incidental in my writing. In fact, I want them to have life-changing properties and to illuminate decisively the moral questions embedded in the narrative" (n. pag.). Just like goodness is a productive, if ambivalent, force in her fiction, so Morrison engages creatively with the concept of American philanthropy in her novels. For one thing, the indeterminacy of the categories of good and evil comes to surface in her treatment of this phenomenon as a motif in her works. For another thing, her oeuvre can be seen as philanthropic act in itself since certain learning processes are triggered by her novels both on a level immanent and non-immanent in the texts proper–indeed, her works seem to have 'life-changing properties.'[9]

It is exactly this highly complex and remarkably diverse context that gave rise to my examination of philanthropy in Morrison´s novels. The interesting discrepancies between this concept´s vital role in the United States as well as its ambivalent perception on the one hand and the striking imbalance between the utmost importance of that phenomenon for

[8] The list of acts of goodness that Morrison has begun to compile in her Ingersoll Lecture could easily be expanded: Valerian Streets financial support of Jadine´s education in *Tar Baby*, for instance, may be perceived as part of his social learning as member of the upper class; goodness in the guise of narcissism can be seen in the character of Dr. Scott in *Home*, and another example of the purest form of goodness can be found in the character of Baby Suggs in *Beloved*.

[9] Coincidentally, I will discuss some of the examples that Morrison cites as acts of goodness under the heading philanthropy in the following interpretation, too.

American society as well as cultural studies´ relative neglect of that issue on the other hand provide enough room for a controversial and deep discussion. The main body of *'What Good Is Good?'* is divided into two parts: While chapter one will lay the theoretical framework for my interpretation, chapters two and three will offer different readings of Morrison´s novels.

I intend "Toward an Understanding of American Philanthropy" (chapter one) to develop this book´s underlying definition of philanthropy. Discussing America´s philanthropic tradition, I aim to trace this phenomenon´s role throughout U.S. history. Additionally, I examine philanthropy´s (non-) place within literary studies critically.

Following this step, my discussion will concentrate on the depiction of philanthropy in Morrison´s fiction. In conducting close readings of her works, I adopt a dual approach to that issue: While the first analytical chapter discusses philanthropy as a motif in Morrison´s novels, the second one shifts emphasis to a consideration of her literature as philanthropy.

"'A House Divided'–Toni Morrison´s Journey from House to Home" (chapter two) focuses on one of the most pervasive metaphors for America and a potent symbol of philanthropy: the house. Throughout this chapter, I argue that an in-depth analysis of houses in Morrison´s novels allows for certain conclusions about philanthropy: Traditionally, both the American house and American philanthropy are structured hierarchically with a strong, most often white, father figure as its literal head of house. I also claim that philanthropy has often been employed as a means to uphold the neat façade of the nation-house. Morrison´s journey from house to home, then, resembles a reconsideration of the United States (as a place that is and is not home to many), and of philanthropy (as a phenomenon that can cause social cohesion and social stratification). While she attempts to change the understanding of both issues, Morrison, however, does not reject the idea of the house or of philanthropy. Hence, her concept of home and her different take on philanthropy have to be perceived as ideals.

In "'It Was/This Is Not a Story to Pass On'–Readerly Figures in Toni Morrison´s Oeuvre" (chapter three), I finally conduct a reader-response reading of Morrison´s works that discusses her fiction as philanthropy. Foregrounding the communicative situation of her novels, I put emphasis on the receiving end of the fictional interaction between author/narrator, text, and reader/narratee. With a focus on her literature´s impact on its audience, certain readerly figures are at the center of this analysis. As didactic tools, I interpret them as mediators between the fictional as well as extrafictional realm. Facilitating communication between the parties involved, these characters and/or narrators go through a developmental

process parallel to the audience and thereby guide the readers. Ultimately, I argue that readerly figures are employed as a means to pass on the gift of knowledge in Morrison´s novels.

While *'What Good Is Good?'* claims that one can find a certain didactic impetus in most of her novels and that her works have indeed something to offer for their readership, I do not think of Morrison as a moralist. I also do not want to 'reduce' her work to its aesthetic qualities, its poetic language, and its unique style of narration: Despite her powerful use of the English language, there is nothing ornamental or artificial about her art. Valerie Smith therefore claims that Morrison´s fictional as well as non-fictional writing carefully and successfully negotiates between the seemingly irreconcilable opposite of aesthetics and ethics: "Her adroit use of language notwithstanding, at their core, all of her novels provide astute analyses of cultural and historical processes," she argues. "Likewise, their critical insightfulness notwithstanding, Morrison´s essays and articles make powerful use of narrative and imagery. One never forgets that she is a novelist writing analytic prose or social and cultural critic writing fiction" (3). Hence, her approach to philanthropy fits squarely into her novels´ politics: Probing deeply and relentlessly into one of the United States´ key characteristic, she is able to formulate a critique of the American society from the outside; employing her fiction to philanthropic ends, however, she may also bring about a reconceptualization of notions such as Americanness and humanity from the inside.

CHAPTER ONE

TOWARD AN UNDERSTANDING OF AMERICAN PHILANTHROPY

Jon Van Til considers philanthropy an "essentially contested concept" (23). Researchers in many different academic fields–among them history, economy, business administration, sociology, political sciences, and philosophy–disagree about and, at times, passionately argue over this term and its related notions. Consequently, the broad scholarly literature on philanthropy shows a certain vagueness concerning the definition, usage, and reception of its research topic. And especially within an American context, students will find a myriad of diverse understandings of philanthropy. The different stances in the literature on this phenomenon are largely based on the diametrically opposed connotations that are attached to this concept (e.g., goodness vs. 'do-gooderism'), a general disagreement about its contribution to U.S. society (e.g., motor of social reform vs. means of cultural imperialism), and the special role as well as development of philanthropy in U.S. history (Daly 543-545).

To think of philanthropy as an essentially contested concept, however, does *not* mean to confuse or obscure its meaning. Rather, scholars have to avoid these pitfalls and critically engage with philanthropy´s inherent (and creative) ambivalence–in this sense, any discussion of the notion in academia as well as outside should be stimulated, not confined. Accordingly, the scope of the following chapter is to describe my underlying understanding and usage of this term. In the subsequent subchapters, I trace the historical development of this concept in American history and sketch the role of philanthropy in literature as well as literary and cultural studies.

'The Great American Game': America's Philanthropic Tradition

Throughout U.S. history, "Americans have regarded themselves as an unusually philanthropic people" (Bremner 1). The United States has

claimed a long tradition of benevolent and charitable endeavors–from the civilizing effect of the early settlers on the untamed 'wilderness' of the New World to the philanthropic spirit of the American Revolution to more recent engagements of the U.S. Government and American foundations abroad. For one thing, this may be explained by the historically strong Protestant influence and importance of religion in America. The American Revolution, for example, employed a heavily religiously charged rhetoric and fervent Christians managed large parts of nineteenth-century reform movements. Even today´s secular philanthropic foundations adhere to Christianity´s missionary impulses and oftentimes present their arguments in a quasi-biblical tone. Moreover, philanthropy and American democracy are closely intertwined and have induced a special 'American Creed' where the responsibility of the individual for the community is accentuated. The advent of professionalized, 'scientific' philanthropy and the emergence of large-scale foundations around the turn of the twentieth century may also be seen as further justifications for an American self-understanding that is firmly rooted in philanthropy. Whereas the state claims authority over the general welfare of its citizens in most Western nations, the so-called 'third sector' has gained an exceptional position of power within the United States, catering to the needs of the underprivileged. Without doubt, therefore, philanthropy is a culturally formative power in the U.S.

The historically evolved significance of philanthropy in the United States has lent verisimilitude to the hypothesis of so-called American exceptionalism: "because American philanthropy is so pervasive and fundamental," Maurice Gurin and Van Til explain, "it is unique in the world" (3). Thus, Robert Bremner´s *American Philanthropy*–one of the most widely read studies on this phenomenon in the United States–, includes lengthy discussions of Benjamin Franklin and Benjamin Rush´s benevolent deeds in order to underline the Founding Fathers´ philanthropic zeal as well as an examination of Alexis de Tocqueville´s principle of 'voluntary associations' as *the* fundamental component of American democracy. Bremner boldly maintained, "giving is the great American game" (1). American philanthropy seems inseparable from American identity formation since "it draws on values that Americans claim for themselves […]: a commitment to profit-making but also to social justice; a respect for individual freedom and a strong sense of community" (Zunz 298). Indeed, an understanding of philanthropy is paramount to gaining insights into U.S. society´s workings, into the nation´s self-image, and into understandings of 'Americanness.' Consequently, in their tellingly named study *Understanding Philanthropy* Payton and Moody assert: "The point

is that if you don´t understand how the United States works as a three-sector-society, as a society heavily reliant on philanthropic action in the third sector, you don´t understand the United States" (2008: 13).

It is, however, equally important to put emphasis on the instrumentalization–or even exploitation–of philanthropy in the United Sates. Throughout American history, this concept has been employed as a means to specific ends, among them, for instance, not only the accentuation and forging of a distinctively American identity in the wake of the Revolution, but also the justification and reinterpretation of the inherently inhumane stance toward certain minorities (e.g., Native Americans and African Americans) as deeply benevolent commitments to their well-being. To say the least, throughout U.S. history various actors have always attempted to consciously depict philanthropy as a central and exceptional American character trait. Scholars thus find themselves in the uneasy terrain of mythology as they have to carefully negotiate between 'the mythos' and 'the kernel of truth' surrounding this phenomenon.

In order to arrive at this book´s understanding of philanthropy, I shall now provide a definition of philanthropy, give a historical overview of its development in American history, and discuss the perception of this concept as well as its impact on U.S. society.

'Definitions Belong to the Definers'

According to Gurin and Van Til, a "generally accepted comprehensive definition [of philanthropy] does not exist" (3). This concept´s meaning and scope are debatable and a wide range of possible interpretations opens up, which locates philanthropy somewhere between the binary opposites of a broad, inclusive and a narrow, exclusive definition. As a result, the term has been used to designate a meaning close to the etymological Greek origin of 'love of humankind.' This interpretation allows for a variety of different forms of personal, direct help that are aimed at alleviating the plight of the poor and the needy. It is therefore closely related to the Christian practice of charity. In more recent times, however, philanthropy has predominantly been used to denote what is now known as the 'third sector'–describing efforts by non-governmental organizations which "focu[s] beyond the immediate condition of people to root causes of human problems and systematic reform" (ibid. 4). This rather impersonal type is strongly associated with large-scale financial funding by non-governmental institutions such as the Carnegie, Rockefeller, or Ford foundations. Before I actually delineate this book´s underlying definition

of philanthropy, I will briefly discuss some of the most influential understandings of this term.

The debate about a proper definition within American academia is largely based on a more or less careful differentiation between the related terms of charity and philanthropy–a development that Shioban Daly, for example, traces back to "the open nature of the concept of philanthropy and more specifically its evolution in the United States" (545). In an older study, Payton, for instance, argued that the difference between these two ideas is based on disparate impetuses (religious vs. secular), is characterized by opposing relationships between the parties involved (direct vs. distanced), is rooted in their divergent goals (treating symptoms vs. finding cures), and is explained by the fact that philanthropy may be seen as a more recent development of the earlier concept of charity. He therefore concluded,

> The religious tradition–the charitable–is founded on altruism; the secular tradition–the philanthropic–is founded in what Aristotle called prudence and what we would call enlightened self-interest. The culture of Israel gave us charity; classical civilization gave us philanthropy. (Payton "Values" 27)

Parallel to Payton´s early definition, his colleague Robert Gross locates charity in the beginning of the New World, whereas he perceives philanthropy as a more current trend in U.S. history that has had its beginnings in the early Republic. Even though Gross holds that the former is deeply influenced by Puritan beliefs and the latter shaped by worldly forces such as economics, he nevertheless contends that these "two strains form the story of giving in America" (31). The common understanding of this concept has changed considerably since the rise of institutional philanthropy in the late nineteenth century. The benevolent gift is generally equated with money and the prototypical benefactor is seen as what has recently been coined 'philanthrocapitalist.' Thus, "The most visible form of philanthropy is that of major gifts of money and other resources," says Michael O´Neill, who further explains, "Gifts that are large, have some social distance between giver and receiver, and are intended to have significant and long-lasting effects are more likely to be called philanthropic" (141).[10]

[10] However, statistics underline the importance of the individual: Four out of five dollars donated to philanthropic causes in America are given by private citizens, their willingness to spend time on voluntary work is equally substantial, and more basic, spontaneous, and less institutionalized efforts to help cannot even be quantitatively expressed as statistical data.

In contrast to the above-mentioned researchers, who distinguish charity from philanthropy primarily in order to sharpen the profile of benevolent foundations, others have defined this phenomenon in a less exclusive way. In a more recent study, Payton and Moody have apparently felt the need to revise the Payton´s older understanding. They now state that academics "must think of philanthropy as encompassing both the spontaneous, individual acts of kindness and the planned, organized efforts that ensure acts of kindness are not ineffective or short-lived" (2008: 20). Even if they do differentiate between formal and informal philanthropy, it is important to note that, next to corporate giving, large-scale foundations, and the like, Payton and Moody subsume the "pervasive, character-shaping good works that are immediate, direct, or personal–the domain of traditional benevolence, love of neighbor, civility, and tolerance, the 'ordinary virtues' if you will" (ibid.) under the umbrella term philanthropy. Likewise, Van Til defines this idea "as a pervasive behavioral force" (32) of humankind that shapes and determines the ways we relate to each other.

The diametrically opposed perceptions of this phenomenon underline the fact that "definitions belon[g] to the definers" (*Beloved* 225)–the teaching of Toni Morrison´s cruel slaveholder´s reminds both the Sweet Home slaves in *Beloved* as well as the researcher in the field of philanthropy of underlying politics and ideologies that always affect our understandings of the world. The different perspectives on philanthropy also highlight the inexactness of that term, which, according to Gurin and Van Til, is a "vagueness [that] is inevitable, even desirable" (3) for critics and that offers them creative elbowroom.

In the following, I employ a rather broad sense of the term philanthropy in order to describe a multitude of interactions. I discuss philanthropy as a multi-layered and complex social relation that describes *inter*- as well as *intra*racial relationships, which are shaped and determined by this phenomenon. Additionally, I conceive of philanthropy as a powerful and socially discernible marker of 'Americanness.' Time and again this concept has been used to refer to allegedly unique ur-American characteristics and it has provided ample justification for the belief in the idea of American exceptionalism. The apparent need to make a clear-cut differentiation between *Christian* charity (i.e., interpersonal giving by ordinary people) on the one hand and *American* philanthropy (i.e., foundational giving initiated by extraordinary men) on the other seems to be a trend exclusive to the United States, which has lent additional verisimilitude to this line of thought. Since philanthropy is intimately linked to representations of American identity, it would, however, be counterproductive to limit the scope of this term to large-scale financial

funding, because this somewhat simplistic understanding would then gloss over the United State´s heterogeneous society and perpetuate white male hegemony. Ultimately, the American grand narrative, which heavily relies on philanthropy, would still be a story *of* and *by* the prototypical WASP[11] authority. As a result, a narrow focus would effectively deny large parts of U.S. society–namely the traditional benefactors of philanthropy (e.g., women and racial minorities)–access to this crucial indicator of Americanness.[12] A more inclusive definition, then, that looks at, for example, voluntarism as well as direct help in the form of knowledge, crucial goods, and assistance will eventually lead to a reshaping of the traditional understanding of this important part of America: "By expanding the concept of philanthropy beyond large cash donations, [ultimately,] practitioners and researchers allow the philanthropic histories of traditionally marginalized groups such as African Americans to be included in the general discourse" (Center on Philanthropy 2).

In its approach to philanthropy, *'What Good Is Good?'* attempts to take an intermediate position between the extreme standpoints and explores this concept´s limitations and possibilities. Such a multi-faceted and at times contradictory method will eventually yield a deeper insight into the complexities of this phenomenon and is used as a frame of reference for the later interpretation of its function in the novels by Toni Morrison. Since I apply a rather broad definition of this term–close to the etymological meaning 'love of humankind'–in my book, a wide array of possible philanthropic gifts opens up: Money, as the most obvious, is accompanied by time, food, and help of any sort. Accordingly, the concept of philanthropy is not restricted to the so-called 'third sector'–the Ford, Carnegie, and Rockefeller type–with its aim of eradicating social ills by reforming the society. Instead, I extend the scope and include interpersonal as well as foundational or institutionalized efforts under this umbrella term. Hence, I interpret philanthropy as a pervasive and fundamental force throughout U.S. history that has made a significant impact on race relations, definitions of American identity, and understandings of U.S. society.

[11] WASP is an acronym for 'White Anglo-Saxon Protestant,' a group of people believed to be in control of large parts of U.S. government, society, and finance.

[12] I perceive Payton´s shift away from his narrow interpretation of philanthropy in his older studies toward a more inclusive understanding in his more recent ones as a case in point here.

Christianity, Democracy, and Capitalism: Philanthropy's Historical Development in the United States

The interconnectedness of and intimate relationship between Christian faith and philanthropy has been interpreted as a unique American characteristic of giving. In the course of U.S. history, Robert Wuthnow contends, "religion and giving have been closely linked; indeed, the identity of the latter could seldom be sharply distinguished from the former" (1990: 3). Religion has provided potential sponsors with motivational role models, most prominently the parable of the Good Samaritan (Lk. 10:25-37), and educated them in Christian charity.[13] According to the Bible, giving is one of the three acts of righteousness that should be practiced by every Christian in order to live a life that is pleasing to God (Mt. 6:1). Seen as a social responsibility and obligation for every believer (e.g., Rom. 12:9-13 and 16), it will eventually spread the gospel (2 Cor. 9:12-13). The Bible, furthermore, also provides answers to how one should give:

> Give generously to [your brother] and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the LORD your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put your hand to. There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your brothers and toward the poor and needy in your land. (Deut. 15:10-11, original emphasis)

The alleged piety of the American people has had a considerable impact on the practice of philanthropy. Helping one´s fellow men as well as 'the poor and needy' has consequently been seen as an American duty. America´s genesis, for instance, saw an upsurge of strongly religiously motivated as well as justified endeavors and most colonizers were imbued with a philanthropic spirit: "Almost every effort of colonization had, or claimed to have, a philanthropic motivation," asserted Bremner, "there were natives to be converted to Christianity, poor men to be provided with land and work, and a wilderness to be supplied with the institutions of civilization" (7). The cultivation of the supposedly virgin New World–the bringing of culture, Christianity, and civilization–has been inextricably intertwined with philanthropy. This interconnectedness can best be

[13] Moreover, the church has made available crucial institutional structures: It has offered its members meeting facilities, brought people together in concerted efforts, informed them about people´s needs, and administered as well as distributed their help.

observed in the writings of two of the most prominent men of colonial America: John Winthrop (1578-1649) and Cotton Mather (1663-1728).

Winthrop´s famous sermon "A Model of Christian Charity" (delivered in 1630 either aboard the *Arabella* en route from England to Massachusetts Bay Colony or before the crossing) can be interpreted as an effective strategy to secure cohesion among the settlers in times of impending hardship. [14] Therefore, the Puritan leader inculcated them with the Christian ideal of charity and instilled a sense of chosenness into his fellows: God´s providence for the settlers and their colony will only be fulfilled if each and every one of them adheres to the principles of reciprocity, mutuality, and communalism.

First, Winthrop defended the supposedly God-given hierarchical order of humankind stating, "in all times some must be rich, some poor, some high and eminent in power and dignity, others mean and in subjection" ("A Model" 1). Most notably, this underlines the dependence of ordinary people on their superiors–the Puritan leader thereby attempted to secure his own leading position as well as to retain the allegiance of the designated settlers. This social stratification, however, does not cause frictions between the colonizers since all men are bound together by bonds of "brotherly affection" ("A Model" 9)–reciprocity and mutuality appear to be the guiding principles of a successful colonial enterprise: "This sensibleness and sympathy of each other´s conditions will necessarily infuse into each part a native desire and endeavor to strengthen, defend, preserve, and comfort the other" ("A Model" 6). Consequently, charity, giving, and neighborly love are core characteristics that Winthrop dwells on at length: He, for example, highlights biblical role models such as Jesus Christ and the apostles to underline the long philanthropic tradition in the Christian church. In analogy to the concept of the church as one body in Christ (e.g., 1 Cor. 12:12-26), the governor of the Colony then evoked powerful body imagery in order to bring about a sense of unity and solidarity among his followers. Their individual future and very well-being are intimately bound to the community´s. The 'ligaments' of this communal body are the core characteristics of reciprocity, charity, and mutual aid that Winthrop had established in the beginning of his speech.[15] Finally, he described the settlers as God´s chosen people by drawing parallels to the Israelites, highlighting their access to divine truth, and

[14] Even though Winthrop´s "A Model" is written as a sermon and reminds the reader of someone preaching to an audience, it is important to note that the author himself was a layperson and businessmen rather than a member of the clergy.

[15] Interestingly, Winthrop´s body imagery strongly recalls America´s later motto *e pluribus unum*–'out of many one' (Schweitzer 449).

claiming God´s favor for the colonizers. The Puritan settlers, Winthrop stated, have "entered into Covenant" ("A Model" 9) with God–they supposedly have the divine consent to build a truly Christian community based on the above-mentioned principles of charity and mutuality. If the settlers abide by the underlying rules of this 'contract' with God, He will secure the colonies´ prominent position in the world: "For we must consider that we shall be as a *City upon a Hill*, the eyes of all people are upon us" ("A Model" 10, emphasis added).

Winthrop´s allegory of the American colonies as 'a City upon a Hill'–directly quoted from Jesus´ Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:14)–"has been alternatively praised but more often blamed as exhibit A of American exceptionalism, a tradition that proudly or arrogantly makes this country the 'hub of the universe" (Holland 73). "A Model" vividly reveals the intimate relationship of the seemingly irreconcilable ideas of philanthropy, the literal 'love of *all* humankind', and American exceptionalism, the firm belief in the superiority of only a *small* proportion of humankind. Matthew Holland even claims that Winthrop´s sermon "appears to have provided the blueprints for two cities upon one hill" (83): The first is deeply rooted in optimism, communalism, benevolent reciprocity, sympathy, and empathy; harshness, judgmentalism, paranoia, and a Manichaean outlook on the world characterize the second. Winthrop's speech can therefore be considered an ur-text of American literature. Even before its publication in the nineteenth century, this work had circulated widely among Americans and "A Model" has continued to exert influence over political leaders of the United States: Presidents John F. Kennedy, Lyndon B. Johnson, Ronald Reagan, William Clinton, and both Bushes (ibid. 74) as well as current President Barack Obama have employed parts of Winthrop´s speech–especially, of course, his trope of America as 'a City upon a Hill.' Its author, then, becomes "at once a significant founding father of some of America´s best and worst impulses" (ibid. 2), since he 'preached' the twin-gospel of empathy, communalism, and philanthropy on the one hand and intolerance, exclusion, and exceptionalism on the other.

John Winthrop´s ideas of philanthropy seem to have greatly influenced Cotton Mather, Puritan minister and author of over four hundred books. In Mather´s widely received historical genealogy of the genesis of America, *Magnalia Christi Americana* (1702), the governor of the Massachusetts Bay Colony is referred to as "New-English Nehemiah" (*Magnalia* 111), a biblical character who is renowned for being a man of religious commitment, rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem, and thereby restoring faith (see the Old Testament book of Nehemiah), and a whole chapter is devoted to him. The differences between these to famous Puritan men,

however, become apparent when Mather´s *Bonifacius, Or Essays to Do Good* (1710) is subjected to close scrutiny: Whereas his forerunner understood charity primarily as the rich man´s duty and saw the need of a strong central power and leadership in order to reform society, Mather placed his hopes in Christian individuals of every rank and their voluntary associations. Hence, Kathleen McCarthy reads *Bonifacius* as an almost didactic "clarion call for social activism" (15)–philanthropy, in Mather´s view, was a bottom-up concerted action directed at the common good.

In the preface to this work, the Puritan minister strongly emphasized the central importance of 'doing good' to each man: "'A good man is a common good;' and, 'none but a good man is really a living man;' and, 'the more good any man does, the more he really lives'" (*Bonifacius* 38). In order to live a fulfilled and righteous life, the practice of philanthropy appears to be integral. Directly addressing his readers, he demanded their unhesitating commitment to this cause: "Sirs! An unfainting resolution to do good, and an unwearied well-doing, is that which is now urged upon you" (*Bonifacius* 45). Firmly rooted in the Puritan belief in the inherent wickedness of the world and its institutions as well as in the innate depravity of human nature, Mather tried to provoke a change in his audience–he literally attempted to convert his readers to a life of strict Puritan discipline and piety that finds one of its foremost expressions in philanthropy.

In terms which are decidedly less gloomy, the minister then moved on to describe the rewards of doing good: According to his view, philanthropy is "an invaluable honour," "an incomparable pleasure," "a most suitable business," and "a most precious privilege" (*Bonifacius* 53). Moreover, Mather stated that philanthropy constitutes recompense in itself since it is "a thing that enriches you, and that you are favoured of God, when he does employ you to do good" (*Bonifacius* 54). Parallel to Winthrop, a sense of chosenness seems to accompany Mather´s notion of doing good. Other than the famous governor, however, the Puritan minister developed a more democratic idea of philanthropy: Highlighting the power of each individual, he stated, "'Plain men, dwelling in tents'–persons of a very ordinary rank may, by their eminent piety, prove persons of extraordinary usefulness" (*Bonifacius* 70) and showed that combined efforts may eradicate certain social ills. In analogy to direct interpersonal help, Mather extended philanthropy´s reach from help within everyone´s family right up to associations of men that address more complex societal problems. The form of help followed one simple imperative: "Render them all the assistance which their necessities may require" (*Bonifacius* 101). It is important to note that–next to direct help in the form of

assistance, advice, or money–Mather strongly encouraged a more sustainable influence to be exerted on the receiver. Therefore, future philanthropists ought to provide what would nowadays be called 'capacity building.' Among his goals, employment of the poor ranks as the most important one: Mather polemically said, "set them [the needy] to work, and keep them to work" (*Bonifacius* 103). Other means of Mather´s philanthropic capacity building were spiritual guidance, necessary correction, and, most importantly, education. In this respect, his approach resembles more modern forms of social reform and work.

Roberta Knickerbocker therefore argues that Cotton Mather "made a significant contribution to the institution of American philanthropy" (313) and that his *Bonifacius* reminds the reader of the strong relationship of philanthropy and religion on the one hand and the close proximity of philanthropy and democracy on the other. She interprets these essays as a literal "'how to' manual for all people desiring to incorporate more philanthropic activities into their daily lives" (ibid. 313/314). As guidelines for a 'useful' life in the service of the public good, *Bonifacius* has had a lasting impact on the founding father Benjamin Franklin[16] and seems to have foreshadowed Alexis de Tocqueville's notion of 'voluntary associations' as core characteristic of American democracy.

Decades after Winthrop and Mather, the founding of the United States was characterized by a rhetoric that attempted to justify and promote the revolutionary cause by charging the thought of 'America' with a quasi-spiritual tone. Especially in opposition to the Old World–most explicitly Great Britain, of course–the American colonies gained ever new dimensions that highlighted the inherently philanthropic promises of the New World, most prominently democracy–the rule of the people. On the eve of the Revolutionary War, Thomas Paine, for instance, published his immensely influential and successful pamphlet "Common Sense" (1776), which polemically called the American people to an immediate independence from Britain and thereby earned him the epitaph 'Father of the American Revolution.' In this work, the political activist did not tire in underlining the heightened role of America with its supposedly utopian or even redemptive effect on the history of the world. "The Sun never shined on a cause of greater worth" ("Common Sense" 84), Paine stated and continued by describing the colonies as "the asylum for the persecuted lovers of civil and religious liberty from *every part* of Europe" ("Common

[16] Franklin, for example, founded the Junto–according to him "a club for mutual improvement" (57)–in 1727 in Philadelphia and planned on writing an instructional book by the working title *The Art of Virtue*, which by his own admission "would have shown the means and manner of obtaining virtue" (82).

Sense" 87, his emphasis). He even drew an analogy between the American cause and the biblical Flood–the prototypical cleansing of humanity and consequent rebirth free from sin:

> We have it in our power to begin the world over again. A situation, similar to the present, hath not happened since the days of Noah until now. The birthday of a new world is at hand, and a race of men, perhaps as numerous as all Europe contains, are to receive their portion of freedom from the events of a few months. ("Common Sense" 118/119)

Following this spirit, the idea of philanthropy has been written irrevocably into the founding documents of the U.S. during the American Revolution and has ever since contributed to the mythic aura surrounding this era and its protagonists. The Declaration of Independence (1776) and the Constitution of the United States (1787), according to the "Message from the Director" of the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services "the two most important, and enduring documents in [U.S.] history" (n. pag.), are animated with a philanthropic spirit. The Declaration's best-known phrase, for example, reads, "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all Men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness" (*Declaration* 1). The inherently philanthropic principles of equality among humankind and promises of 'Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness' have attracted people from all over the world to the United States and still stand as the most visible beacon of America´s values: President Abraham Lincoln, for instance, called the Declaration and its dictum of liberty to all an "'apple of gold'" ("Fragment" 169). Its premises have later been enshrined in the silver frame of the Constitution–the famous two documents are consequently seen as promise and fulfillment as the Declaration becomes the proverbial golden apple on the silver tray of the Constitution. The preamble of the latter document frames the most basic duties of the supreme law of the land, namely to "form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity" (*Declaration* 9). It is only with the so-called Bill of Rights–the first ten amendments to the Constitution, which were adopted in 1789–and especially the First Amendment, however, that the fundamental personal liberties such as freedom of religion, speech, press, and assembly have been granted the American people. The ideological principals of the American Revolution, which are deeply rooted in the interplay of religion, democracy, and philanthropy, therefore, "formed an American Creed that held that every

citizen had an implicit right to create organizations, lobby for change, and participate in political and economic developments through the voluntary sphere" (McCarthy 202). Philanthropy did not only shape and determine American democracy; it is also deeply implemented in the United States´ founding documents and consequently in almost any notion of American (self-) understanding.

With regards to their lofty principles, however, the Declaration´s and the Constitution´s standpoint toward the 'peculiar institution' of American slavery–the ultimate antithesis to their philanthropic values–acquires an almost schizophrenic dimension: Paradoxically, the funding documents promised 'Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness' and held that 'all Men are created equal,' while, at the same time, they perpetuated the system of institutionalized bondage by inserting the Three-Fifths Clause, by postponing the end of the slave trade to the year 1808, and by including the Fugitive Slave Clause.[17] The Founding Fathers also played a dubious role: While decrying their enslavement by the hands of King George III, most of them were slave owners themselves. The renowned Thomas Jefferson–leading author of the Declaration, third president of the United States, and wealthy slave owner–exemplifies best these obvious contradictions. On the one hand, Jefferson openly and vociferously condemned slavery throughout his political career: He, for example, called the 'peculiar institution' an "abominable crime" (60), regarded it as a degradation to both master as well as slave, and time and again welcomed the abolition of this institution and efforts by societies formed to bring about this end. On the other hand, he failed to live up to his own principles: A large landowner and member of the so-called Virginia planter aristocracy, Jefferson grew increasingly rich on slave labor and slave trade. Like most of his peers, he supported the gradual abolition of slavery, fostered strong racist beliefs concerning African Americans in general, and was in favor of colonization of freed slaves in either the West Indies or Africa (Magnis 491-509).[18] This is why Houston Baker concludes, "Slavery was written into the American Constitution" (4)–the founding documents´ and their framers´ philanthropic spirit is strongly contested by their attitude toward slavery and their openly racist mindset.

Commenting on this puzzling situation, Toni Morrison remarks that this era´s specific "climate reflected not only the Age of Enlightenment

[17] It was only after the Civil War that the Thirteenth and Fourteenth Amendments overruled the Fugitive Slave and the Three-Fifths Clause, respectively.

[18] Additionally, scholars continue to debate whether or not Jefferson had a sexual relationship and several children with his slave Sally Hemings–thus exercising the widespread *droit du seigneur* during American slavery.