

Philanthropy, Celebrity and Incoherence

Jonathan Marshall

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Aid, and celebrity philanthropy in particular, is often criticized as if such help was always a simple matter of it defending, or governing, those structures of power and order which produce the need for philanthropy in the first place (Eikenberry 2006; Kapoor 2013).

This argument should not be downplayed; however it might not be the only line to the story. Criticism of celebrity philanthropy might equally stem from a desire for tidiness and order in the world that does not acknowledge the complexities of the situation, of human motivation, of the difficulties of virtue, or of unintended effects, and itself does little to fix the situation. Indeed demands for order and for divisions into good and evil may also lead to significant problems in dealing with the difficulty, magnitude and ‘horror’ of the troubles facing the world.

This chapter explores ‘incoherence’ as a response which, if stayed with, has the potential to produce an opening which may allow us to deal with overwhelming mess, chaos, divergence and despair, and to build empathy without foreclosing those possibilities into premature order, certainty or condemnation. The term ‘incoherence’ is used to refer to disorder of speech, disorder of argument, and disorder of intent and results, that is, to a general lack of congruence and coherence. The argument proceeds by looking at the relationships between help, exchange and empathy, moving into a brief history of ‘help’ (primarily in the UK) and finally exploring an interview with Angelina Jolie – film star, Goodwill

Ambassador for the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), and Special Envoy to the current High Commissioner of the UNHCR. I argue that incoherencies are inevitable and often useful if not dismissed, and emulation of celebrity may be preferable to attempted compulsion or control.

Help, exchange and empathy

Help always involves a potential inequity of exchange, an incoherence which can produce tensions. When the helper helps, the suffering helped receives and may never be able to make equal return. This is the prime dynamic of ‘charity’, where the giving directly invokes deference, praise, status, or a sense of virtue received by the giver, in exchange for their charitable gift. As the well known anthropological theory of the ‘gift’ implies, such inequality contributes to maintaining power and status differentials while simultaneously allowing the forging of bonds (Cheal 1988; Mauss 1969). Inequality also disrupts communication, as the receiver can no longer completely tell their truth without risking loss of the exchange and is likely to resent, or attempt to manipulate, the giver.

Not all forms of gifting are the same and, as an initial proposal, we may be able to distinguish the following types of help/exchange:

‘*kindness*’, gifts of help without ties;

‘*charity*’, usually, but not always, semi-random gifts of help which imply or demand recognition of status differential by the helped. Charity builds up both separation and bonds;

‘*meritorious charity*’, the main official function of charity is spiritual benefit to the giver;

‘*charity of compulsion*’, in which people are restrained or forced to labour for charity – the obligation expected from charity is violent and formalized;

‘*philanthropy*’, organized ‘kindness’ or ‘charity’ usually involving visible or public gifts of money to an organization which raises, publicizes,

administers and allocates the funds. Any help received can be distanced from the givers;

'demand obligation', in which the helped have a socially recognized ability to demand recognition from those with more; and

'impersonal welfare', in which people have a recognized right to certain types of aid, usually from an impersonal source such as the State.

Some of this help may primarily be aimed at 'social control' and some at maintaining 'community'. However, maintaining community almost always involves some attempt to maintain order and control, and attempts at social control are often aimed at maintaining an ideal of community; hence an ambiguity, or incoherence, in the functions and consequences of help is always possible. Incoherence is further emphasized, as we cannot completely predict the consequences of all acts of help, and so what is intended to help community or to maintain control may have unintended, disorganizing or beneficial effects which differ with a person's social position. This lack of precise control is a feature of all acts in complex interactive systems, and is magnified by the possibility of human reflection upon the consequences of acts and the acts of others (Prigogine 1996; Soros 2011). Similarly, demand obligation or impersonal welfare lowers the status differential built into unequal exchange, diminishes obligation, and allows the possibility that the receiver can criticize the giver and their gifts. However it can also demotivate the givers. The givers may start to feel put upon as relationships become onerous or tenuous, and there is little reward or acknowledgement. We cannot make a simple division of all acts of help into 'good' and 'bad' so as to salve our conscience, or the consciousness of our privilege.

As well as involving exchange, help also involves a degree of empathy or fellow feeling; a feeling that something should be done to help. Humans generally seem to be more compassionate towards those they know, identify with, or classify themselves as similar to (Berreby 2006; Marshall 2006). While empathy is a 'natural' feature of human life, it has to be built, as do other human capabilities like language. Empathy towards people outside a person's immediate

acquaintance, especially towards those a person may have reason to dismiss or condemn, is not guaranteed. What is classified as like 'us' can be extended by membership of empires, religions, appearances of intimacy, or making other people seem to have similar features to us and be part of our wider group. Similarities appear weaker the more distant, opposed or inferior the other groups and cultures are classified as being (Turner et al. 1987). With 'foreign aid', as there are few personal relationships, empathy has to become almost impersonal. This sets up another incoherence. Empathy, in being extended where there are few personal contacts, can override the significant differences (which would make the person not one of us) through fictional similarity, and in so doing almost guarantee misunderstanding and lack of precision in the help provided. Again, while impersonal welfare makes help more equitable (and less prone to 'charity begins at home') it further diminishes the status accrued from putting those being helped into debt or obligation, so rendering the impulse less rewarding and less easy to motivate.

In the information society people are also continually asked to be compassionate towards people they don't know and don't identify with, empathy is stretched and resistances arise (Höijer 2004). What is known as 'compassion fatigue' may prevail when the scale of the problems begin to dawn upon us ('no matter what we do it will never end'), there is little self-identification between the sources of charity and those who receive the charity, and little local payoff for giving.

One solution for this problem may be emulation. Societies often have exemplars and 'culture heroes' whose (often fictionalized) lives show people how to live: Kings and Queens, founders of Empire, heroes of the Republic, revolutionaries, founding fathers, soldiers, saints, composers, poets, and so on (Cubitt and Warren 2000). One way of building empathy or benevolence and compassion, especially over classificatory distance, is by putting forward exemplars of such acts, so that people may come to emulate them in a socially reinforced manner. This requires 'celebrity'; namely that the exemplars be publicized, well known and admired. Emulation is a major feature in all help, including celebrity philanthropy.

In summary, the connection between help, gifting and obligation makes help problematic. Receiving a gift implies obligation, inferiority or dependence on the part of the receiver and hence can undermine accurate communication, and set up inequalities and the preservation of what maintains the inequality. Conflict can arise between help as maintaining order and help as maintaining community, or between serving one's self and serving community. Building empathy can delete the recognition of important differences, and while impersonal giving can be freeing for the recipient, it can also delete motivation from the giver, and new motivation, such as emulation, is needed. These incoherencies shape the paradoxical dynamics of helping, and are common throughout history, with motivation being built from spiritual reward, compulsion, gaining a sense of control, or through emulation.

A short history of incoherent help

Donna Andrew (1989) suggests that 'pre-modern' charity in Britain was primarily meritorious, focusing on the religious benefits to the donor more than on the help given to the recipient. Giving was an act of devotion that compensated for sin and demonstrated faith (Andrew 1989: 197). It was promoted 'that thereby they might render the deity propitious to them', with the poor praying for their benefactors in return (Burn 1764: 3). Tales of saints, and the strength of their relics, acted as exemplars of Christian charity and its rewards. Charity was also given from the tithes compulsorily paid to the local Bishop (Burn 1764: 2-5). Such charity was not separated from obligation and deference, and might be considered self-oriented as it benefited the giver socially and spiritually. While it may have produced communal bonds, it did not produce the fixed communal order that the dominant classes desired, with charity supposedly being abused by wandering vagabonds (Burn 1764: 5).

Over time, meritorious charity both clashed and combined with acts of Parliament which attempted to make local authorities responsible for their indigent, punish

wandering beggars, scholars or folk healers, and set up workhouses, with the apparent intention of making being unable to support oneself or one's family as unpleasant and punitive as possible; empathy was to be broken. A vagrant would be stripped and publicly whipped 'till his body be bloody' (Burn 1764: 27). Meritorious charity given to such people could result in heavy fines (Burn 1764: 17-20, 57), making kindness guilty and covert and threatening the community order and bonding it was supposed to defend (see Lord Hale in Burn 1764: 137). Vagabonds could also be enslaved and, from Charles II onwards, enslaved and transported to overseas plantations (Burn 1764: 32). Houses of correction were established for able-bodied poor: 'there to be straightly kept, as well in diet as in work, and also punished from time to time' (Burn 1764: 82). This charity of compulsion is clearly intended as social control. However, these laws also failed to keep people bound to their community, as self-sufficiency was broken, there was little work available and the local 'poor taxes' resented or misappropriated – there was an incentive to expel the poor. People continued to flood into the cities from the country, providing the cheap semi-starving labour that helped capitalism begin (Marx 1954: 671–701). The larger the city the less obvious the vagabond; impersonality became freedom of a sort. Charity of compulsion attempted to forcibly preserve social 'order' in the face of its ongoing failure.

With a growing recognition of this failure during the eighteenth century, older communal forms of charity were supplemented by organized private charities aimed at resolving or suppressing social problems (the two actions are hard to distinguish). These efforts aimed at 'reforming immorality', changing the workforce into docile workers and improving the wealth of the nation. In '1650 London had few if any privately organized and financed charitable institutions, by 1800 it had dozens' (Andrew 1989: 1). Writing in the eighteenth century, Richard Burn (1764: 129) states, that the 'ancient laws' were 'to prevent enormities; the present laws are to encourage industry. Anciently, the *maintenance* of the poor was principally intended; their *employment*, at present, merits equally our regard'.

While Michel Foucault (2003: 242–63) appears to emphasize that in France these

concerns over the quality of national populations ('biopolitics') originated with the State, Andrew's focus (1989) suggests these changes, in the UK, began in private philanthropy. Civic-minded merchants formed the 'joint stock or "associated" charity' that raised money for founding hospitals, orphanages, and educational facilities, which provided work training for impoverished youth, 'penitent Magdalens' and criminals (Andrew 1989: 49, 122–27). These facilities resembled workhouses and prisons. The philanthropies targeted wealthy donors through charity balls and bazaars, charity sermons and dinners, and benefits at theatres and operas (Andrew 1989: 80–5). Philanthropy was entangled with both entertainment and imposition of social order from the beginning. It intertwined charity with displays of wealth and generosity before other wealthy people who emulated each other in competition of gifting. The 'worthiness' of such causes was shown, not so much by their effects on the recipients, but by transparent management and accounting practices (money was not to be wasted), and by ensuring that the recipients were seen as 'deserving' rather than 'undeserving' of assistance (Andrew 1989: 83–5). Presumably the cause's 'worth' also relied on it not upsetting those who sponsored it. This is always a problem for help; it will usually aim at pleasing its giver's sense of order, which may not be the sense of order possessed by the helped.

However, in organized philanthropy, donors do not receive personal genuflection from the receivers of gifts of help; the receivers may not even know who the donors are, other than their generalized 'betters'. Charity becomes more impersonal. As an unintended and incoherent consequence, this growth in impersonality could have made the ability of the working class to demand help in hard times as a right, rather than a discipline, not be heard as completely unreasonable, during the struggles for what came to be called the Welfare State in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The virtuous condescension of the visiting donor, faced with a less connected underclass able to make demands, began to appear uneasy and ineffective (Siegel 2012).

These philanthropic organizations were primarily devoted to local or national

philanthropy. As Elaine Jeffreys argues in Chapter 1 of this book, celebrity came into internationalized philanthropy as a necessary part of its growth. Missionaries, such as Dr. Livingstone (1813–1873), became exemplars of help in the nineteenth century. This again emphasizes the paradoxical nature of help: the imperialistic forces which might trivialize, or even destroy ‘foreign’ self-sufficiency are also those that bring the issues to the fore.

Celebrities provided a focus, and bridge with which to build empathy. The first modern, truly international, celebrity philanthropist might be Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965), the German theologian, missionary, doctor, philosopher and music theorist, who set up a hospital in Lambaréné in Africa. People such as Schweitzer gave up considerable wealth and success in order to help others in fairly dangerous conditions. They risked anger from establishment forces that considered the people they worked with to be mere brutes, or in need of violent governing, and later risked anger from those who thought they treated the locals patronizingly, or who thought they had no business protesting against war (Picht 1964: 22). This was also the case with people like General Booth (1829–1912), who founded the Salvation Army, and who, like Friedrich Engels (1820–1895) (see 1972), the friend of Karl Marx, Henry Mayhew (1812–1887) (see 1968–83), the journalist and publisher, and the largely anonymous factory inspectors, drew middle class attention to the desperate lives of the British working and proletarian classes under nineteenth century capitalism. While these reformers may have been incoherent because they were largely unsympathetic to cultural values other than those of their own group and were often heavy handed and repressive in their proposals for reform, they also attempted to draw ‘injustices’ to wider attention, and engendered change. Their cross-cultural incoherence was an opening.

Later in the nineteenth century celebrity capitalists such as Andrew Carnegie spent vast amounts of money on philanthropy. With Carnegie (who set out to be someone for other rich people to emulate via his ‘gospel of wealth’), it is debateable how much of that money was seen by the poor as opposed to the relatively well off, as he was certain that those ‘worthy of assistance, except in

rare cases, seldom require assistance' (1889: no page). His philanthropy automatically classified most of the poor as unworthy of help or of being questioned as to their needs. However, such wealthy donors, by the scale of their acts, again inculcate impersonal welfare. They cannot give personally to everyone they benefit, and hence cannot expect a submissive, or obligated, response to them personally from individual receivers of charity. They help build up the idea of public works and public rights to assistance, irrespective of moral approbation, and praise of the giver. Hence they, indirectly, undermine some of the power and control aspects of charity. At least Carnegie's gifts did not directly demand whipping or imprisoning the poor.

Max Weber suggested that a distinctive notion of early protestant capitalism was the breaking of human relationships. The protestant

divided from the eternally damned remainder of humanity by a more impassable and in its invisibility more terrifying gulf, than separated the monk of the Middle Ages from the rest of the world about him, a gulf which penetrated all social relations with its sharp brutality. This consciousness of divine grace of the elect and holy was accompanied by an attitude toward the sin of one's neighbour, not of sympathetic understanding based on consciousness of one's own weakness, but of hatred and contempt for him as an enemy of God bearing the signs of eternal damnation. (Weber 1930: 121)

Poverty and misfortune became evidence of sin and association with sin risked salvation (Weber 1930: 163, 177; Tawney 1938: 262). Lack of spending on enjoyment or the support of others allowed the accumulation of capital rather than mandating the distribution of excess wealth amongst kin and community. This accumulation then became the practice by which virtue was measured. Impersonal philanthropy attacks (from within) this notion that the collection of capital is the absolute aspiration of virtuous capitalists and to be pursued at all costs. Such philanthropy has the potential of its incoherence to break the breakage that Weber points to, even while it is attempting to support the order that its wealth grows out

of.

In the twentieth century, the hard fought for welfare state was seen by left wing critics (who refused to acknowledge incoherence as anything other than bad) to be a mode of control, acting on behalf of dominant groups, turning out docile rather than revolutionary workers and not immediately ending inequality, or the system in which hardship arose (Harris 1961; Miliband 1982). With this approach, it was hard to defend the welfare state against neoliberals who argued that State representation was inherently oppressive and inefficient, and should be abandoned with support going to successful people, to let the 'trickle down' effect, hard work and charity remedy all. An acceptance of incoherence may have benefitted left wing politics.

Summarizing this brief history, there appears to have been a set of overlapping stages in the social organization of formal acts of help in the UK at least. The first stage is *meritorious charity*, where giving primarily functions as an act of devotion or building relationships. This fails to stop movement of people and generates a *charity of compulsion* aimed at controlling and punishing the poor and curtailing empathy. Faced with the failure of compulsion, there comes a more private and perhaps gentler *philanthropy* that attempts to persuade wealthy people to give to organizations which then 'manage' supervised recipients, with the primary aim of quelling vice or social unrest and generating docile labourers. This leads into a more impersonal giving, which naturalizes *impersonal welfare* based on class demand, and mutual obligation as fellow nationals, to cushion misfortune. During the fight for impersonal welfare in the nineteenth century, international help grows, along with colonialism, as both missionary charity and philanthropy. International aid serves both as a mode of control *and* as a mode of extension of empathy, through exemplary figures.

In the late twentieth century, under neoliberal ordering regimes, a tendency arises to return to charities of control and discipline: 'work for the dole'; time periods on payment; constant purges of people on welfare; extensions of working life; 'green

armies'; and so on. The idea that poorer citizens should be able to demand help is no longer relevant to contemporary States, as the wealthy and the poor separate again and 'downwards' empathy is broken. Neoliberal policies are generally accompanied by an argument that private charity is more flexible, transparent, effective and reliable than government based charity as is, supposedly, all non-government activity. It is claimed that NGOs can distribute resources more effectively than national governments (Zunz 2012: 286). In keeping with neoliberal ideology, this assumes that wealth and the powers it allocates should not face interference by the government, or by the people that government supposedly represents.

We might expect private funds to take up these claims as part of a rhetorical strategy to justify and prolong their existence. On the other hand, NGOs may not act completely coherently with neoliberal theory. As Olivier Zunz (2102: 5) suggests, there is an ongoing political struggle over the governance of help and its functions. Some strands of contemporary philanthropy, say Oxfam and other 'aid' organizations, seem focused on the question of 'what kind of philanthropy is valued by those receiving it?' These strands are more prone to treat those benefiting as fellow humans with rights and opinions which are worth paying attention to. They recognize 'demand obligation' where the privileged have an obligation to listen and give to the demands of those being helped or gifted. This requires the humanization of those receiving, and the recognition that they belong in the community. Thus we cannot say because an organization may fit in with neoliberal ideology it necessarily serves that ideology coherently.

Celebrity may even play a role in the escape from neoliberalism within neoliberalism. Successful 'helping' organizations, in particular those who are helping people who are classified as 'different', may need to cultivate an 'artificial' empathy and humanitarian concern. They may need to build a following by allowing *some* givers to make attempts at gaining status or legitimacy through visibly helping, and hence becoming exemplars of help. In the information society, living well-known exemplars may be able to make direct

appeals to their audience and establish 'virtual' relationships which extend the possibilities of personal contact, empathy and discussion. However, as such processes are rarely coherent, these exemplars, and 'gifting properly' may then become foci of competitive exchange or gift denigration ('your gifts are not good enough, not as good as ones "we" *might* make'), in a political contest for power, which can further distract from offering actual help.

Celebrities play on our sense of relationship with them, but we don't have a relationship with them, neither do most of us have a relationship with those people we might be required to help. So the celebrity in going to the field and having experiences provides a possible transitional object, a fiction which allows the formation of an apparent connection to people not just to facts. By engaging with unspeakable events, celebrities can set up being generous and giving help to outsiders (often radically different outsiders), as an exemplar of modelable behaviour, even if the unspeakability is too soon resolved. People may want to be like them and help (or donate) without being personally involved themselves, thus generating impersonal welfare, which helps free the helped of indebtedness and promotes the ability to demand obligation from the givers.

As untrained people these celebrities may offer escape from the assurance of neoliberalism, celebrity capitalists or bourgeois revolutionaries, through some suspension of articulateness and foreclosure of certainties, as we shall see when Angelina Jolie displays awkwardness around her obligation to others, her privilege and the help she gives, or can give. What Jolie establishes, deliberately or otherwise, is a sense of relationship between viewers and helped, based in difference and incomprehension. This messy classificatory relationship, however inadequate or fictional, may be better than none. It allows and cultivates empathy, while being open to more responsiveness than relations of charity, deference or compulsion.

Celebrity incoherence

In 2006 Angelina Jolie gave an interview about her experiences with refugees, which is almost a locus classicus for critics of celebrity philanthropy (Cooper 2006; see Nickel 2012).

It is a long interview, and I want to focus on her lacunae and stumblings; the points in which ease of language use breaks down, without seeing these as irrelevant. They are the moments we might hear something being built, or build something ourselves. She is being interviewed on CNN by Anderson Cooper, who has also visited refugees. Cooper starts awkwardly.

COOPER: At a certain point, it's – some people need to block it out. I mean, how do you – you go repeatedly and you see this repeatedly. And that – I mean, takes a toll. How do you get to a place where you can function in that environment?

JOLIE: It does, but, I mean – and you know this – it's that you get – I am so inspired by these people. And they are the greatest strength.

So, it's not – you have that memory. You have that moment – I have had it – where, even just today, I was, you know, breast-feeding, and tired, and thinking, God, I really don't know how I'm going to get myself together to be thinking for this interview.

But you think, Jesus, the things these people go through. I owe it to all of them to get myself together, to stop whining about being tired, and get there and get focused, and, because God, it's the least I can do, with what they live with and what they can – you know, they pull themselves out of the most horrible despair. And they're able to smile and get on with it and survive. And, so, you don't – it's that same thing. You don't – you don't think, poor me, what I have seen. You just think, like, Jesus, thank God I – I'm not experiencing it [...].

And it was kind of just this area of people who had been – who had had their limbs cut off from the violence. And it was an amputee camp. And it was probably to this day the worst camp I have ever seen.

And I knew I was changing as a person. I was learning so much about life. And I was – so, in some ways, it was the best moment of my life, because it... [...] changed me for the better. And I was never going to be never going to be – going to want for more in my life or be... [...]

And then, suddenly, you see these people who are really fighting something, who are really surviving, who have so much pain and loss and things that you have no idea. (Cooper 2006)

Both Jolie and the interviewer, clearly don't know what to say. In Cooper's words 'And then you come back, and especially in this world that you live in, it's got to be such a strange – it's got to be surreal'. Is that not the point here? That there is no easy conception of this, of what has been witnessed? That 'we', Jolie and *most* of the audience, do not have daily experience of camps of war amputees, or of human endurance at the limits, or of war trauma. That we complain and 'whinge' about tiredness, when other people carry on with suffering and lives we *cannot* imagine realistically. And how dare we express that tiredness? And then, she clearly does not want to risk patronizing these people; they get on with life in the midst of the inconceivable 'they're able to smile and get on with it and survive.' We may also note the intrusions of God at these points as an expressive marker, as conception, expression and identification break down, but are maintained. Jolie, despite her later claims to youthful troubles, has no pain to share with them equally; nothing to share other than through classifying herself as human and opening empathy. But how do we as viewers/readers empathize in such a situation? Again how dare we? How does anyone not make the attempt incoherently, without breakage of smooth talk? The breaks allow something to happen. This is not all foreclosed in neat categories; the audience has to

participate to make the broken speech meaningful. By listening and making it out, if attentive, they become involved.

Jolie sketches how she got into this, through reading a book from the UN:

And it said almost 20 million people are displaced. And it showed pictures of Rwanda and pictures of all these – and I was kind of – and I was just shocked.

I thought, how is that possible, that I have known nothing about this, and I'm 20-something years old, and there are this many people displaced in the world?

So, I knew it was something that had to be discussed, and wasn't being discussed. (Cooper 2006)

Her ignorance excuses the audience's ignorance, but she knows something 'must' be done and points to the lack of discourse, the silence; the lack of action. Analysts of celebrity philanthropy, and even the aid workers, journalists or politicians, have not crashed through this silence which is perhaps a cultivated protective shield to shelter us from the storm of suffering we know is present and to allow us to break empathy. Indeed, over the last fifteen years in Australia aid-workers, advocates and journalists have not crashed through the political cultivation of self-righteousness about refugees, as self-righteousness is a defence against the suffering which is so much easier to speak (McKenzie and Hasmath 2013; Toohey 2014). Hatred is directed against an imagined and *resolved* other who are made meaningful in that hatred. Empathy, in these circumstances of distance, is indirect and largely gained through relating to the reactions of exemplary others who have made an empathetic leap into difference.

Cooper (2006) attempts the classifications of empathy, making commonality: 'But, in fact, they – I mean, they are everyone. We all could be refugees at one point or another in our lives.' But this is threatening too. Cooper discusses his own

feelings after being in Somalia:

COOPER: And then I felt like I was going through phases, the more wars I would go to, of anger, and then confusion...

JOLIE: Yes.

COOPER: ... and then outrage, and then sort of resignation, then sort of an open feeling that allows me to continue doing it. But do...

JOLIE: Yes.

COOPER: Do you go through those phases?

JOLIE: I did. Yes. I don't know which phase I'm in now. (Cooper 2006)

Again we are faced with incoherence, confusion and feeling. Hopefully the audience could be building a feeling of some of this complexity as well; some of this anguish, which cannot be compared with the anguish of the suffering, but is a reaching towards it, and the impossibility and possibility of help. It exemplifies the confusion: we know and we don't really know. We don't know how to react when it is so big. We might oscillate between concern and retreat, outrage and resignation. We don't know which phase we are in now. Jolie says how she felt she could save the world, but 'And then I was – and then I did feel helpless and just angry' (Cooper 2006). Just as we can; and realistically too. What *do* we do? There is very little that is inflated or over-optimistic here; resigned but exemplifying not giving up, still striving, not stopping at the point of 'what do we do?'

Cooper and Jolie are not certain, this we can see and perhaps feel ourselves. They talk about legislation in Washington, how the bill was passed, and yet it was not funded, so it meant nothing. This too may tell the audience something about politics and the ways that 'help' actually works in neoliberal capitalism. It might provoke some action whether protest or kindness. There is no reward being offered here for empathy, except feeling the enormity along with Jolie and Cooper, building an empathy with otherness, recognizing both that otherness and the humanity, and coming to possibly think about the unthinkable, unfeeling and

unactable rather than stay avoiding it.

The conversation moves to the then situation in Dafur. Jolie says:

I hear people talking about Darfur on the news now. And they're talking about, what are we going to do? And they're starting to discuss solutions. And you're starting – the solutions that you heard field officers begging to be addressed three years ago, you know?

And you just, God, feel like, you know, how many times are we going to let these things go on this long? Or when are we going to finally be united internationally to be able to handle these things immediately and... (Cooper 2006)

So it is not her that provides the solutions, but those people on the ground who have been ignored. Again we are dealing with horror and silence. Political silence, the silence originating in power, and some sign of indignation at this state of affairs, perhaps felt in the audience too as we react along with the two of them.

The interview continues, but we shall stop here, in the hope that something has been intimated of the constructive force of staying with this incoherence. Complexity of reaction, expression and a sense of being overwhelmed (all real) are being built up as the interviewer and the interviewee grapple with fundamental issues, without (yet) foreclosing into simple solutions or too complex solutions. Hopefully the audience is lured into feeling empathy and the desire to help as well, despite the complexity, and then take some action – neither Cooper nor Jolie can compel. The incoherence and gaps, allow the audience to do its own sensemaking, or make its own empathy, and not just accept or reject the meanings being made for it by analysts.

Patricia Nickel in her article *Philanthromentality* (2012: 165) hacks into the interview, first pointing to incongruities in Cooper's remark about using 'the very picture of Hollywood glamour' to talk about refugees. This ignores the point that

we, as audience, may not expect film celebrities to be concerned, real, or anything other than trivial. This could be an incoherence which acts to bridge our lack of concern: if she can feel and act, then why not me? It is a move which might draw people in. Nickel (2012: 174) criticizes Jolie for focusing on herself and the 'best moment' in her life. She claims this manifests what development theorist Ilan Kapoor calls "narcissistic samaritanism"... an "act of self-glorification and gratification" (Nickel 2012: 174), perhaps missing again the reasons and hesitations around that moment of shock, empathy and opening, which takes Jolie out of her established life, however temporarily, and perhaps allows us to go with her, if only imaginably. Can many people be pure and act without any self-interest or any forced compulsion?

Nickel (2012: 175, 179) also argues that the interview justifies Jolie's wealth and privilege; while that is there that is not the whole story. The interview witnesses rather than justifies. The wealth allows the travel and direct involvement. We know she could be wealthy and do nothing and remain silent; that is not impossible. But it also allows the audience to be involved without feeling they have to rush to Dafur themselves, as they don't share that wealth, and they probably would not be welcome. They don't have to give everything they own; it opens them to do what they can, to the extent they can.

Nickel (2012: 175) also berates the attempt not to patronize the helped; 'those who suffer are celebrated by Jolie, as they were by Carnegie... for their willingness to help themselves, to "smile and get on with it and survive", their toughness, vibrancy and readiness to live'. Does this criticism imply that the only people who deserve help are those who are crushed and unable to live, who are completely and pleasingly abject? Presumably not. The celebrity is caught, they are either said to show no respect or it is said that the respect shown is belittling, without the critic ever considering the difficulty of showing respect or comprehension across cultures, or the differences in sophistication between celebrity analyses. Jolie says of people in the Congo: 'All the people, and they're so different. And they're passionate. And they're tough. And they're vibrant. And

ready to live' (Cooper 2006). The idea that people can be strong and still need help, contradicts common American ideas of the worthless or whining poor (as seen in Carnegie). It helps build empathy in its prime audience; it may help build respect.

Jolie is also accused of not opposing the regime. It is true she is not a revolutionary, but she is also not without criticism of political process, the ignoring of aid workers, or the silence in the media and general discussion. Is it better *not* to point out as Cooper (2006) does that 'When the donations don't get there, the food aid gets cut', in the hope that we can agitate for donations not to be cut while waiting for the revolution to occur? Jolie, herself, has been politically active, not only in promoting the bill mentioned earlier, but focusing on 'unaccompanied minors' who arrive in the U.S. and 'basically find themselves in the legal system without representation'. This is a political situation, as was the charity of compulsion 'solution', of locking them up, that she was opposing. Is the implication that it might be better to do nothing than to protest as Jolie does? Jolie is also blamed for choosing 'whose suffering she will observe and draw attention to as an aesthetic source of emotion and satisfaction in her own life' (Nickel 2012: 175), as if there was not always a choice of who was to be heard or helped, and as if such deciding did not affect our lives. At least some are being heard, and some involvement might begin. While Jolie may not be held account by elections, she is subject to criticism by media, the Right, the Left and academics. Her failings are not hidden; they are more public than those of most organizations.

Such criticism of celebrity encounters with suffering and pain in the world ignores the possibility that such encounters are difficult, or that the celebrity could both be disturbed (or overwhelmed) by what they see, and possibly transformed by it (in wanting to help somehow), and this might cause them problems in maintaining their position or life. Is it the case that Jolie's life is more comfortable because of her actions? Some celebrities may be playing games for publicity; they may also be genuinely torn by experiential comparisons between their wealth and fortune, and the poverty of others. A kinder approach may lead us to notice Jolie's

incoherence as a real response centred on her inability to phrase what she feels, her sense of obligation, the inadequacy of what she can do without wanting to put people down, and the sense that she might want people (including the helped) to participate, rather than have her tell them what to do. Those attentive to her incoherence may also empathize with her, and through her with the people she has seen, and may move to act. Nickel's approach, although making many telling points, removes complexity through a rush to condemn. Even when Nickel (2012) presents transcripts of the interview, she does not touch on what was not sayable; the incoherence is ignored, the pauses, the self-questionings are all downplayed, so as to get to the fact that we were talking about Jolie rather than the people of Sierra Leone – as if Jolie could talk as a person of Sierra Leone, or as if the capitalist media would give such a person a lengthy interview. Again this is not saying that some celebrities, or others, may not avoid the pain of incoherence and rush into quick solutions and quick condemnations. It is saying the incoherence is important and may lead people somewhere if they can stay with it and not foreclose.

Conclusion

This paper has argued that more emphasis on the paradoxical and incoherent nature of help in general, and celebrity philanthropy in particular, would be useful to understanding how attempts to help work in practice. Philanthropy and help are always going to be foci of dispute. They attempt to build both order and help. Either they aim at changing things, assuming they understand the situation perfectly and know exactly what to do, and thus produce unexpected results which may or may not benefit those being helped; or they work towards improving order in which case they can be said to help maintain the conditions which produce the need for help, unless again unforeseen effects intrude, which is not improbable as the brief history given earlier implies.

Modes of help are often not either entirely good or bad, but both simultaneously. They can be both noble and self-undermining, or complex and awkward.

Recognizing the awkwardness could clearly allow us to acknowledge the difficulties presented by celebrity philanthropists as well as recognize the possible openings they might engender, and the need we might have for them.

The mess of Angelina Jolie's interviews shows a real response to the immensity and inconceivability of the problems, as do her flounderings and relations back to herself, in her search for meaning (Cooper 2006). The pauses presented by incoherence might even allow us to think, and to imagine a relation between people and experience, or generate some kind of bond felt in us which respects the incompatibilities and inconceivabilities between people. This could be deeply necessary given that most of us do not have a 'real' or experiential relation to the problems of the peoples being discussed, or even to the presence of those problems. Such incoherence before the immensity of disorder and hardship, perhaps allows the fiction of relationship, empathy and understanding to be seen as complex, or fraught, rather than being taken as real and understood. Trying to build coherence and certainty in this disorder might lead even more to overriding local conditions with oppressive goodness and the demands of charity of compulsion.

The incoherence and the contradictions laid bare by Jolie point to possibilities of complex relationship and gifting without expecting obligation, and should not be ignored. They could mark the paradoxes and contradictions of help, and perhaps of empathy, and lead us into a space of contemplation, action and dialogue, with the knowledge of inadequacy before us, and not removed by compulsive certainty. In this situation, incoherence is a valid mode of response, not just an indicator of triviality.

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