

something different from what everyone else is doing because the foundations see duplication as a waste of money. Not only that, but also they are not block grants like conservative foundations get; the recipients do not have full freedom to decide how to spend the money. And it is certainly not appropriate to use it for career development or infrastructure building or hiring intellectuals to think about long-term as well as short-term or interrelated policies. The emphasis is on providing direct services to the people who need the services: grassroots funding, not infrastructure creation. This is, for the most part, how progressive foundations work. And because of that, the organizations they fund have to have a very narrow focus. They have to have projects, not just areas they work on. Activists and advocates are overworked and underpaid, and they do not have time or energy to think about how they should be linking up with other people. They mainly do not have the time or training to think about framing their issues. The system forces a narrow focus—and with it, isolation.

You ask, “Why is it like this?” There is a reason. There is a deep reason, and it is a reason you should think about. In the right’s hierarchy of moral values, the top value is preserving and defending the moral system itself. If that is your main goal, what do you do? You build infrastructure. You buy up media in advance. You plan ahead. You do things like give fellowships to right-wing law students to get them through law school if they join the Federalist Society. And you get them nice jobs after that. If you want to extend your worldview, it is very smart to make sure that over the long haul you have the people and the resources that you need.

On the left, the highest value is helping individuals who need help. So if you are a foundation or you are setting up a foundation, what makes you a good person? You help as many people as you can. And the more public budgets get cut, the more people there are who need help. So you spread the money around to the grassroots organizations, and therefore you do not have any money left for infrastructure or talent development, and certainly not for intellectuals. Do not waste a penny in duplicating efforts, because you have to help more and more people. How do you show that you are a good, moral person or foundation? By listing all the people you help; the more the better.