



The Ethics of Donating Money to Charitable Foundations

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Private foundations and non-profit groups are frequently involved in advocating for particular causes, ranging from cancer research to protecting the environment. Some of these foundations rely almost exclusively on charitable donations to carry out their promotional work. Potential donors seeking to support these causes face the challenge of exercising “due diligence,” so that their funds are properly utilized and not misdirected or otherwise targeted by the organization to support immoral projects.

An example of the need for this due diligence can be seen in the case of the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation, which promotes scientific research to cure type 1 diabetes. The ethical concern arises because this organization has gone on record in support of a highly unethical form of research, namely, human embryonic stem cell research. Similarly, we may need to consider whether it is appropriate to support the Susan G. Komen Foundation’s Race for a Cure, which seeks to promote breast cancer research and awareness. One of the rarely-discussed problems with the Komen Foundation’s activities is that some of the money they raise may be used to promote morally objectionable activities that run

counter to their mission of fighting breast cancer: some of Komen’s funds are made available to Planned Parenthood, the largest abortion provider in the U.S., even though abortion of a woman’s first pregnancy has been shown to correlate with an elevated incidence of breast cancer. More than 28 different studies over a period of 45 years have shown abortion to be a significant risk factor for breast cancer.

In fiscal year 2009, Komen affiliates contributed around \$730,000 to programs sponsored by Planned Parenthood, and in fiscal year 2010, they contributed about \$569,000. In January of 2012, the Susan G. Komen Foundation courageously decided that it would discontinue its financial support of Planned Parenthood. In the media firestorm that ensued, Komen experienced the backlash reserved for those who dare to cross the pro-abortion lobby. After little more than twenty-four hours, the Komen Foundation withered under the pressure, reversed itself, and assured the public it would continue to make funds available to Planned Parenthood. This backsliding solidified the beliefs of many donors that the Komen Foundation could not be trusted

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with their funds.

Komen's support for the abortion provider may stem from the fact that Komen's founder, Nancy Brinker, is a long-time promoter of Planned Parenthood, having served as an advisory board member for the organization's Texas affiliate. John Hammarley, a spokesman for Komen, indicated that about 20 of Komen's 122 affiliates are responsible for the money that goes to Planned Parenthood and has claimed that those funds are used only for breast cancer treatment, education, or screening programs that happen to be affiliated with the abortion group.

Planned Parenthood, however, is not licensed to provide screening beyond Level 1 breast examinations – the same exam that can be done by a woman in her shower, or in any clinic or physician's office. They do not even perform mammograms. Even if they did provide serious breast cancer screening, it would still remain a financial fact of life that an organization that receives money for Project A can divert other funds in its budget to Project B. Every dime that Komen provides to Planned Parenthood allows a different dime to be freed up for overhead, supplies, equipment and personnel to perform abortions.

When foundations have a generally sound list of activities, but promote an intrinsically immoral activity as well (e.g. abortion, human embryonic stem cell research, contraception, etc.), one must consider the serious matter of the fungibility of donated funds. If we engage in fundraising for such organizations, even if they assure us that specified funds will only be used for activities with an ethical profile, it can end up being little more than a shell game. In this sense, there is a real danger that our fundraising activities will not only engender scandal, but may even contribute to the perpetuation of grave evils like abortion and human embryonic stem cell research.

Our fundraising initiatives need to be carefully directed towards foundations and organizations without such connections to intrinsically immoral actions. Donors who are concerned about the use of funds by Komen may wish to consider alternative groups such as the National Breast Cancer Foundation, an organization that funds mammograms, or the Breast Cancer Prevention Institute, which offers information on avoidable risks including abortion. The Iacocca Family Foundation, to consider another example, promotes

cutting-edge diabetes research without supporting human embryonic stem cell research. Some smaller, local organizations may also have suitable profiles for us to be able to support their work unreservedly. A determined decision to redirect our fundraising energies can also have a powerful practical impact, serving to evangelize and provide witness, as organizations become aware of the reasons why such efforts are being channeled away from them.

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