A new kind of philanthropist is emerging in the 21st century. They show little interest in the old philanthropic model - attending galas and endowing their alma mater.
Today, relatively young technology billionaires are creating a new paradigm of philanthropy, one that arguably sets a new standard of ethical practice in the non-profit sector.

Their purpose is to use their influence to push the boundaries of science and technology for the creation of social benefit. In a growing trend, in 2014, more than US$5 billion was donated by wealthy technologists for this purpose.

A cynic might say it is about lining their own pockets, yet there is ample evidence to suggest they are motivated by a kind of win-win altruism. These are men and women who think global and want to leave a legacy.

Who are we talking about? It is a long list indeed, with names like Gordon Moore (Intel), Bill Gates (Microsoft), Mark Zuckerberg & Priscilla Chan, Sean Parker (Facebook), Paul Allen (Microsoft) and Michael Dell, to mention a few.

**Shortfalls in government funding**

One factor in the rise of the new philanthropy is that government spending on science in the US has been dropping in recent times. Research institutes are closing, projects being put on hold or abandoned for want of funding. Increasingly, science philanthropy is stepping up to address the shortfall.

It is not surprising that wealthy technologists would want to invest in pushing the boundaries of science. Technology is, after all, applied science. Without the research, technological progress slows to a crawl.

As a result, we are seeing the priorities of science being influenced less by government policy and academia, and more by the priorities of the philanthropic giver. After all, who pays the piper calls the tune. It is a trend giving rise to some disquiet in the science establishment. With pressure on government budgets from other priorities, the trend towards the outsourcing of science funding is likely to continue.

**The Gates Foundation**

Even the wealthiest of governments would be hard pressed to match the funding of some of the larger new “venture philanthropists”.

With assets of around US$44 billion, the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation is a prime example of the new philanthropy. To date it has spent roughly US$10 billion on a range of programs in developing countries to improve health care, provide education and reduce poverty. It has funded efforts to control infectious diseases, malaria, tuberculosis and sexually transmitted diseases. It also funds family planning, basic health care, nutrition and sanitation.
It would be difficult to criticise such efforts, though it will not stop some from claiming they are only giving back what they had no right to take in the first place. Being a philanthropist today can be a thankless business.

**Is there a dark side?**

Silicon Valley billionaire and philanthropist Peter Thiel incurred the wrath of his peers by strongly supporting Donald Trump, donating money and making speeches for his election. Thiel has since been named a member of the President-elect’s transition team, indicating that he is not just a supporter but a trusted friend.

What does Thiel expect in return? Time will tell, but it is likely he will be most valuable serving as a mediator between a Trump White House and the largely left-wing Silicon Valley establishment to implement a new policy agenda. Not an easy job.

**The new philanthropy is diversifying**

It is a measure of the hyper-partisan nature of politics today that would call participation in the political process a bad thing. It’s actually a good thing. We need more intelligent, capable people with technology skills to enter a field that has been brought into disrepute in recent times. Have you noticed how few politicians really understand technology?
Billionaire philanthropists, beyond Bill Gates

Paul Allen
Co-founder of Microsoft
Allen has given over $2 billion to charities during his lifetime, founding the Paul G. Allen Family Foundation to administer his giving. He has given most significantly to brain research – founding the Allen Institute of Brain Science in 2003 – but also donates to wildlife and marine conservation, education, artificial intelligence research and ending Ebola.

Marc Andreessen
Co-founder of tech venture capital firm Andreessen Horowitz
Andreessen, co-founder of Netscape and backer of many successful Silicon Valley products, is the co-founder of the venture capital firm Andreessen Horowitz, which donates half of all of its income to charity. Andreessen has donated significantly to causes local to the Bay Area (where his businesses operate), focusing on underprivileged children, homeless shelters and support services for children with special needs.

Marc Benioff
Founder, chairman and CEO of Salesforce
Benioff has donated a cumulative $250 million to UCSF Children’s Hospital and Oakland Children’s Hospital (now both named Benioff Children’s Hospital in honour of his donations) since 2010. Like Andreessen, his donations have largely been locally focussed, but Salesforce has also donated $100 million in grants to social entrepreneurs and nonprofit organisations.

Jeff Bezos
Founder and CEO of Amazon
Bezos and his wife donated $2.5 million personally to a same-sex marriage referendum in Washington (state) in July 2012. His personal venture capital firm – Bezos Expeditions – has donated to museums and research facilities focused on innovation and brain research, as well as a 10,000 year clock and the retrieval of Apollo 11 rockets from the bottom of the ocean. In addition, the Bezos Family Foundation is an education charity run by Bezos’ parents that is funded by donated Amazon stock.

Steve Ballmer
CEO of Microsoft (2000-14) and owner of the LA Clippers
Like many other billionaire philanthropists, Ballmer’s giving is largely driven by his wife. The couple have donated tens of millions to children’s...
welfare charities. Ballmer has also donated significantly to universities - funding both facilities and scholarship programs for low-income students, as well as social work specific programs. 10% of his $2 billion purchase of the Clippers also went to starting a new charity.

David Bohnett
GeoCities and Baroda Ventures founder
After Bohnett personally made $300 million following GeoCities’ IPO and subsequent sale to Yahoo in 1999, he founded the David Bohnett Foundation, which focuses on social activism in the areas of LGBTI causes (over $20 million in donations), AIDS services and research, voting registration and voter rights, animal rights and his local area.

Sergey Brin
Co-founder of Google and president of Alphabet Inc
Brin started the Brin Wojcicki Foundation with his now ex-wife Anne Wojcicki in 2004, and in 2013 it reported over $1 billion in assets. The foundation has donated at least $160 million to Parkinson’s research, contributed to the establishment of the Breakthrough Prize for scientific projects (with an annual $21 million prize pool), supported the Wikimedia foundation and donated to Bay Area charities that fight poverty.

Larry Ellison
Co-founder and former CEO of Oracle
Following successful surgery on his elbow after a bicycle crash in 1992, Ellison donated $5 million to start the Lawrence J. Ellison Musculo-Skeletal Research Center. He has continued to donate to medical causes, including his own Ellison Medical Foundation which supports research into ageing. He has also donated to animal and wildlife causes and claims that 95% of his wealth will eventually be donated.

Michael Dell
Founder, CEO and chairman of Dell Technologies
Dell and his wife created the Michael & Susan Dell Foundation in 1999, which focuses on health and educational opportunities for underprivileged children. The foundation makes more than $100 million in grants annually, under three main programs: urban education, childhood health and family economic stability.