

What does it mean to be a philanthropist nowadays? Is everything as innocent as it looks?

Document 1

How can you comfort a sad, scared billionaire? Call them a 'person of wealth'

Arwa Mahdawi, Tue 11 Apr 2023, *The Guardian*

You've heard of racism and sexism, but there's a horrifying new -ism we all need to be aware of: wealthism. The obscenely rich, you see, are an increasingly persecuted minority, vilified in modern society. Wealthism is so deeply entrenched, that without even knowing it, you're probably using anti-wealth language and making billionaires feel very sad indeed.

This public service announcement is brought to you by the *Wall Street Journal's* editorial board, which just published a **scathing** (= *cinglant*) piece about a *ProPublica* (= an independent journalism outlet) investigation into US supreme court justice Clarence Thomas's friendship with a Republican mega-donor and billionaire property developer called Harlan Crow.

In a deeply reported piece, *ProPublica* revealed that Thomas and his wife Virginia (a conservative activist who allegedly tried to overturn the 2020 election) have accepted luxury trips from Crow for more than two decades without disclosing them. And we're not talking a couple of nights in a Hilton here — we're talking private jets and superyachts. One vacation the supreme court justice was treated to what would have cost at least \$500,000 if he'd paid for it himself. Which, to reiterate, he didn't.

Why was the *Wall Street Journal* so shocked by this article? Were they worried about one of the most powerful people in the US, a man whose decisions can affect millions of people's lives, being potentially influenced by a billionaire with strong views and reportedly a disturbing amount of Nazi memorabilia? Nah, they were appalled by the incendiary use of wealth-adjacent adjectives by *ProPublica*.

"The piece is loaded with words and phrases intended to convey that this is all somehow **disreputable** (= *honteux*)," the editorial board wrote. "Superyacht"; 'luxury trips'; 'exclusive California all-male retreat'; 'sprawling ranch'; 'private chefs'; 'elegant accommodation'; 'opulent lodge'; 'lavishing the justice with gifts.' And more."

What, one wonders, would have been acceptable terminology? How exactly should one describe a "superyacht" or a "private chef" in reputable terms? *The Journal* did not provide any guidance on the matter. Luckily for us, however, some **aggrieved** (= *blesé*) billionaires have already stepped in to offer suggestions on how to be more compassionate towards **rapacious** (= *vorace*) capitalists. In 2019, ex-Starbucks CEO Howard Schultz told a *New York Times* columnist that "the **moniker** (= *surnom*) 'billionaire' now has become the catchphrase" and suggested it may be better to use expressions like "people of means" or "people of wealth".

Weirdly, those phrases didn't catch on and poor old Schultz, who is worth \$3.7bn, has been repeatedly subjected to the billionaire **slur** (= insult). Last month, while he was being questioned during a senate hearing about union-busting, Schultz had a meltdown after senator Bernie Sanders called him a "billionaire" one too many times. That word is "unfair," Schultz complained. "This moniker 'billionaire', let's get at that, OK?" he said. "I came from nothing ... Yes I have billions of dollars, I earned it." Take note: he's not just entitled to his billions, he's entitled to your respect!

Jay-Z, who is worth around \$2.5bn, has also taken umbrage at the language that is used to describe people of wealth. In a Twitter Spaces conversation last year, he seemed to call the word "capitalist" a slur **akin to** (= *semblable à*) the n-word. "They start inventing words like 'capitalist' and things like that," the rapper and businessman complained. "We **hustled** (= *se battre*), we fucking killed ourselves to get to this space and now it's like, 'eat the rich'." Ah, yes, "capitalist": a word famously invented by an angry tween on Twitter just a few years ago.

It's alarming to see the ways in which the ultra-rich are trying to **obfuscate** (= *obscurcir*) soaring inequality by reconfiguring how we talk about immense wealth. It's not enough that the ultra-rich are trying to take money out of our pockets, they're also trying to put words in our mouths.

What is wealthism?

Wealthism is a form of discrimination, the equivalent of racism, directed this time not against people of different ethnicities, but against people who own a lot of money.

What happened to Justice Clarence Thomas?

The US Supreme Court Justice was offered luxury trips by a Republican billionaire. This story was published by a nonprofit news organization, who described the trips in details. As a result, the Wall Street Journal's editorial board published an opinion piece saying they were shocked by this report. Explain *The Guardian's* attitude against the *Wall Street Journal*. What does this show about their political opinions?

The Guardian criticizes the way the WSJ dealt with this investigation. The British paper thinks they shouldn't have complained about the lexicon used but about the fact itself, which was akin to bribery. This goes to show the two papers' diverging political affiliations: the Guardian is a liberal, center-to-left-leaning publication, while the WSJ is more conservative and right-leaning.

What did Jay-Z say about the word "capitalist"?

Jay-Z also complained about the use of derogatory words against him and his fellow billionaires. He gave the example of capitalist, which *The Guardian* thinks can't be considered as a slur.

Document 2

It's official: billionaires aren't the brainboxes (= intellectuals) they like to believe

Arwa Mahdawi, Wed 10 May 2023, *The Guardian*

Money may be able to buy you happiness, but it can't buy you brains. A study published in January found that billionaires aren't any smarter than the rest of us – indeed, those in the top 1% of earners scored lower on cognitive ability tests than those who earned slightly less.

This is according to researchers who analysed data from 59,000 Swedish men, then tracked their lives for more than a decade. They found a strong connection between how smart someone was and how much they earned – until they reached a salary of 600,000 kronor (£46,700) a year. After that, factors such as luck, background and personality became more important.

"Along an important dimension of merit – cognitive ability – we find no evidence that those with top jobs that pay extraordinary **wages** (= salaries) are more deserving than those who earn only half those wages," the researchers noted.

Unless your primary hobby is licking billionaires' boots, I am sure none of this is particularly surprising. Indeed, you need only look at Elon Musk's Twitter feed to realise that being obscenely rich doesn't automatically equate to being incredibly intelligent.

Still, considering the soaring pay gap between CEOs and workers, studies such as this need to be shouted from the rooftops. The wage gap between CEOs and US workers jumped last year to 670 to one, up from 604 to one in 2020. To put that in more tangible terms, CEOs at US companies with some of the lowest-paid staff made an average of \$10.6m, while the median worker received just \$23,968.

The pay disparity isn't as **stark** (= flagrant) in the UK, but it's still bad. An analysis last year found that FTSE 350 chief executives were expected to collect 63 times the average median pay of workers at their companies, while 43 FTSE 350 bosses received more than 100 times their employees' average salary in 2020.

How can you justify this enormous wage gap? You can't. As studies such as this make clear, it's not meritocracy that is driving the wage gap; it's plain old **greed** (= *cupidité / gourmandise*).

What is the starting point of this article, what inspired the journalist?

Publication of a study about Swedish men to make a connection between their earnings and their intellectual capacities. This study showed that there was a link between the two, but to a certain point only.

What is meritocracy?

The holding of power by people selected according to merit / a ruling or influential class of educated or able people. Here, the interest of the definition was to wonder whether billionaires deserve their salaries, based on what they can do.

What is the example given by the journalist to prove her point?

Elon Musk, the richest man on the planet. She says that if you look at his social media posts, you easily understand that he is not the smartest man alive! This article is very critical of billionaires and their egotism.

How does the situation compare between the USA and the UK?

In the USA, wage inequalities are much deeper than in the UK, but still, quite a few British CEOs earn colossal amounts compared with their employees.

Document 3

Who wants to live for ever? Only billionaires like Jeff Bezos

Emma Beddington, Sun 8 Jan 2023, *The Guardian*

The anti-ageing industry is hotting up. Not the one advertising me **snail goo** (= *de la bave d'escargot*) and sheep placenta facials (the algorithms can't accept that I barely moisturise); the one exploring how elastic the limits of life are. A generic diabetes drug, metformin, apparently shows potential to slow ageing (researchers are hoping to secure funding for a large-scale trial). A "longevity diet" could hack cell ageing, but you'd better like your proteins "pesco-vegetarian-derived" and your fats "mostly from plant-based and pro-longevity sources". There's a definite buzz, but it's all in the early stages – as one researcher put it: "It's a great time to be a rich mouse."

Rich – that's key. We **relish** (= savourer) tales of absurd billionaire biohacks – **dodgy** (= douteux) supplements, cryochambers and fasts (= *des jeûnes*) so long I'd eat my own arm – as evidence that all their money can't buy them eternal life. But now we might have to be grateful for their mad **hubris** (= *vanité*): billionaire-funded private sector startups are apparently filling the gaps in longevity science, funding anti-ageing research too speculative for big pharma and too expensive for academia and government, with Jeff Bezos, Larry Page and Sergey Brin all getting involved.

But will this generate meaningful trickledown of any advances? We know how effective trickledown is in other areas. Mainly, I keep thinking how only billionaires have the luxury of believing great age is remotely desirable. Recent research found just 35% of "ordinary" people want to reach 100. There's no mystery: getting old at the pointy end of the climate catastrophe, as food and water supplies **falter** (= *fléchir*) and health and social care are dismantled is one thing; getting old on your private climate-controlled island as handmaidens count your macros and juice your nuts is quite another. Then there's the "health span" disparity: the wealthiest live nearly 10 disability-free years longer than the poorest.

We are in the UN's "decade of healthy ageing" and there are tons of innovative ideas out there around healthcare, community, city life and more that could make living longer appeal to more of us. But all that requires money. Let's hope the billionaires discover the secret to eternal life is paying a lot more tax.

Explain the underlined sentence. Don't forget any segment in it.

Governments are not interested in, or don't have the financial capacity to, investing in research on human life expectancy. As for the pharmaceutical industry, they think this research wouldn't be reliable enough for them to spend money on it. As a consequence, billionaires start their own companies to investigate the legendary fountain of youth.

Explain what "trickledown" means, and what the journalist thinks about it in this particular example.

Trickledown is a notion often employed in economics, which is that if you lower the taxes of the rich, they will spend more money and the beneficial effects will trickle down onto the poorer population. In this case, it would mean that the research funded by the rich on everlasting life would benefit the poor as well. However, the journalist disagrees with this idea: only the rich want to live longer, as their life in old age might be comfortable, but not poor people's life.

Comment on the last sentence of the text.

A critical view on billionaires and their concerns. What they should focus on is paying more taxes, to make society more equal.

Document 4

As a billionaire king is crowned, he urges us to do some charity work. Welcome to Britain

Frances Ryan, April 28, 2023, *The Guardian*

Don't have plans for the coronation bank holiday? Fear not. The king invites you to join the Big Help Out, a national day of **volunteering** (= *bénévolat*) designed to mark the new reign. [...] The Big Help Out will, according to the official website, "give everyone an opportunity to join in". [...]

Is one really shocked? A man whose car collection alone is estimated to be worth more than £6m asking the rest of us to celebrate his kingship by helping out at the local food bank feels, shall we say, a little "let them eat quiche".

Volunteering can be hugely rewarding, and many organisations are in desperate need of more help, but there may be better ways to promote the cause than an event that is literally about deference to hereditary privilege. People who are already working every hour just to put food on the table hardly need a billionaire to ask them to use their day off to do more. [...]

Charity, monarchy fans insist, is a longstanding personal interest of the royal family. **In the runup to** (= *à l'approche de*) the coronation, the Princess of Wales made a "previously unannounced" visit to Windsor's baby bank for deprived newborns. More than 850 community and charity representatives have been invited to the coronation to show the king's deep respect for their work and 400 young volunteers will also watch from St Margaret's church, Westminster Abbey.

Royals always seem to prefer ad hoc charity work to taxation, much like the boss of Amazon or the Victorians. The £1bn Duchy of Cornwall estate – previously inherited by Charles and recently passed on to Prince William – is not liable for either corporation tax or capital gains tax.

But don't worry, according to the duchy's website, under Charles's leadership, the estate's annual multimillion-pound revenue was used to fund his "public, private and charitable activities". [...]

For the little people, tax isn't a hobby – it funds the key services we all rely on. Indeed, the "crisis in volunteering" that the Big Help Out hopes to fill has largely been created by years of government cuts, all while the richest have hoarded and increased their wealth. [...]

There is apparently no money for Sure Start centres but you'll be **relieved** (= *soulagé*) to hear ministers have found £8m to offer every public body a free portrait of King Charles. Oliver Dowden, the new deputy prime minister and patriot in chief, says the portraits would bring the nation together. So would working hospitals.

The coronation itself is estimated to be costing the public purse anywhere from £50m to £100m. Charles's personal fortune is thought to be almost £2bn. [...]

In the coming days, there will be endless commentators ready to declare that the coronation makes them "proud to be British", while anyone who criticises any aspect of it will be accused of "hating their country". I have never quite understood the mindset that feels more pride in producing Prince Andrew than **the welfare state** (= *l'état providence*). At the very least, we should surely be allowed to ask some questions. Can a modern nation call itself democratic if it retains an unelected head of state? Is a growing reliance on charity a point of celebration or shame? As a diamond-encrusted crown is placed on the king's head, your packed local homeless **shelter** (= *abri*) is desperate for help. Don't you feel proud to be British?

What is the Big Help Out?

A day declared by King Charles, asking people to go out and volunteer in local charities on the day of his coronation (May 6), to bring people together. For example, people could go out to a food bank. The goal is to fill a "crisis in volunteering", a free labour shortage.

What does the journalist think about this idea?

She is shocked, all the more so as it comes from a man who is a billionaire. Besides, in a time of crisis, people are probably already doing enough to make ends meet. In addition, she thinks the government is responsible, through budget cuts, for the country needing so many charities.

Is her opinion unanimously shared?

She is aware that voicing dissent at the King's lavish coronation might be considered as unpatriotic. But still, she considers the behaviours around the monarchy to be preposterous at times.

Answer some of the questions in the end: Can a modern nation call itself democratic if it retains an unelected head of state? Is a growing reliance on charity a point of celebration or shame?

- **Homework : read all the articles in the dossier, and learn the words in bold types and their meaning.**