

# Koch Foundation money spurs doubt in UA philosophy center

By John Warnock

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From 2008 to 2015, the state of Arizona was second to none. In cuts to funding for higher education, that is. Arizona's per-student cuts of 47 percent were twice as big as those in second-place Mississippi, the usual bottom dweller among states when it comes to support for education.

Happily, help came from the private sector, for the University of Arizona's Department of Philosophy, at least.

In 2011, the Charles Koch Foundation offered it \$1 million if they would found a Center for the Philosophy of Freedom.

The Philosophy Department at UA has a strong reputation, but this grant wasn't an honor. Since 2011, the Koch brothers have offered more than 200 institutions in at least 46 states some tens of millions of dollars. As far as I know, everyone took the money.

Some of the awards came with explicit strings. At Florida State, the Koch brothers wanted to approve the faculty. At George Mason, Koch brothers were put on the boards of programs they funded.

Any grant comes with strings, of course, even if not explicit. Grants from the Koch brothers are stringier than most.

Not because the Kochs support libertarian causes, but because they are ideologues.

Ideologues are committed to the triumph of what they already believe. They support the propagation of the faith, not following the truth where it leads.

When the first universities were founded in Europe in the 12th century, they were all about propagation of the faith, in this case the faith of the Church. These days, in most of the western world, anyway, we believe that faculty in universities should be committed to following the truth wherever it leads. If university faculty sometimes backslide into a mere propagation of faith,

they can be shamed. Ideologues are shamed, if shame is the right word, when it is found that they aren't sticking to the script.

Does this mean the work of UA's Freedom Center might be contaminated by ideology? Many universities offered earnest assurances that this would never happen. But let's do a thought experiment.

Let's say the philosophers in the Freedom Center came to embrace the view of the respected contemporary philosopher, Daniel Dennett. In the 2015 re-issue of his 1984 book on free will, "Elbow Room," Dennett wrote: "(Some) readily definable varieties of free will, (such as "libertarian freedom" or "agent causation") are incompatible with what we now know about how human beings control their behavior. They

don't, and can't, exist. ... (Some) philosophers still take them seriously, (but) they are of only historical interest, like mermaids and leprechauns."

If the philosophers at the UA's Freedom Center came to see this view as the right one, would the center still be able count on Koch support?

Are we wrong to harbor doubts?

But wait. The Center for the Philosophy of Freedom ("and responsibility," adds its mission statement) won't have to depend on the Kochs anymore. Arizona's taxpayers are now picking up the tab. In 2016, the same Legislature that from 2008 to 2015 led the nation in cuts to higher education, appropriated \$2.5 million specifically for the Freedom Center. As an ongoing appropriation.

There's more. In the higher education budget for 2017, the Legislature made a one-time appropriation of \$4,157,000 for capital improvements and operations at UA. Almost one quarter of this appropriation (\$1 million) was restricted to the use of the Freedom Center. The rest of the university got what was left.

The Freedom Center is safe and the philosophers there can now work freely. Surely no ideological danger now. We haven't elected any ideologues to represent us in Phoenix, have we?



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