

What Are the Kochs Getting from their Tea Party Investment?

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Jane Mayer has a [much-anticipated story](#) about the ‘Kochtopus’, the organizations that are funded by the Koch family.

A major theme in the article is Charles and David Koch’s intentions. Are they funding organizations purely out of economic self-interest? Mayer points out, for example, that the Kochs fund the Mercatus Center at George Mason University, and quotes Thomas McGarity, a law professor at the University of Texas as saying that Koch has been “constantly in trouble with the E.P.A., and Mercatus has constantly hammered on the agency.”

Earlier in the article, Mayer writes that the “Kochs are longtime libertarians who believe in...much less oversight of industry—especially environmental regulation.” The suggestion is that less stringent environmental regulations benefit Koch business interests. But Koch groups are not particularly opposed to environmental regulations – they’re simply against regulation, period.

Koch-funded think-tanks may advocate policies that happen to benefit Koch industries, but this is simply the by-product of a pro-business, free-market world-view. Regulations on, say ozone, affect all sorts of industries, and not just the Kochs’.

Further, as Mayer herself mentions briefly, there has been plenty of funding for causes unrelated to Koch business interests. Such initiatives include the Institute for Justice’s role in the groundbreaking [Kelo v. City of New London](#) case, the Cato Institute’s non-interventionist foreign policy school of thought, and the Mercatus Center’s [Enterprise Africa](#) program. (Full disclosure: I was formerly a beneficiary of a Koch Summer Fellowship, which funds students working in free-market think-tanks, which I might add is another venture not related to Koch business interests)

So how self-serving are Charles and David Koch? If you think about it, funding a plethora of free-market groups seems like an odd path to profit. If these organizations exist to serve the corporate interests of Koch Industries, why not replace them with a lobbying firm that would directly advocate on the niche issues that affect their businesses? Why bother educating students or organizing protests? The answer seems pretty clear to me: the Kochs genuinely care about the ideas, and genuinely believe that free-market methods are the path to prosperity.

And this is what Mayer gets right in her article, the concept that the Koch brothers have been the driving force behind the ideas, the phrases, and the organizational skills that now animate Tea Partiers. While the Koch brothers don’t share the frustration that drives the

anti-government protests that have sprung up since President Obama's election, they share a consensus on the solutions for digging out of today's economic problems.

But the Tea Partiers aren't controlled by Koch influences, just guided by them – try telling an activist that they're an agent of the Koch family! The Tea Party just can't be seriously controlled, only educated.

Mayer's piece is a valuable addition to the growing number of pieces on the Koch brothers' hand in contemporary politics. It's an indispensable read in terms of understanding how the Koch family funds ideas, even if the 'why' is a bit off.