
INTRODUCTION

In the fall of 2004, The Project for New Philanthropy Studies gathered an interdisciplinary group of thinkers for a colloquium to reconsider “Kenneth Boulding’s Image of the Integrative, Independent Sector.” Contributed by participants in that discussion, the papers included in the present volume of *Conversations on Philanthropy* testify to the complexity, originality, and continuing relevance of Boulding’s thought for our understanding of philanthropy. Each of our authors was inspired (or irritated) by a distinct dimension of Boulding’s writings on the topic of the grants economy, and thus this volume of *Conversations* is offered as a “symposium,” a banquet at which the reader may distinctly taste different libations on the menu, rather than as our usual “conversations” which seek to entice our readers to savor a more blended cocktail of considerations on the subject at hand.

In the lead essay, Gordon Lloyd presents the most critical view of Boulding’s work among our contributors, arguing that Boulding’s corpus leaves us with a neo-socialist paradigm that insufficiently prepares us to distinguish proper boundaries between coercive state action, market exchange, and benevolent grantmaking directed at human betterment. Lloyd’s critique turns on his claim that Boulding’s effort to ground an integrative project of human betterment in eiconics, his proposed new science of the sociology of knowledge that sought to dissolve the worn barriers between facts and values, is ultimately riddled with problems. Boulding’s boldness in applying then-emerging understandings of cybernetics and evolutionary principles into the realm of the social sciences intrigues. In Lloyd’s view, however, Boulding moves too quickly to embrace the emerging planetary image which he believed had the potential to catapult human society into a more love-based era of global image-making in which governments and philanthropists would alike become increasingly benevolent. Lloyd observes that Boulding’s optimism on this point may be based in his belief that the forces of market exchange had indeed been largely triumphant over the old threat-based models of the state.

These reflections urge us to consider whether, in fact, men have indeed transcended the corruptive seductions of power and whether a science of eiconics might need to consider more carefully whether John Calvin may have

had a deeper insight into human nature. In Book I, Chapter xi of his *Institutes of the Christian Religion*, Calvin observed “that the human mind is, so to speak, a perpetual forge of idols.” Boulding, by contrast, seems to hope that we might attain a release from the more troubling history of private human belief and action by better aligning ourselves with benevolent public images. Certainly such hopefulness about human nature has been persistent, especially in the current age, when we have a new view of Earth as seen from space. *Seed* magazine published a recent reprise on this theme, noting in Boulding-esque fashion, “For those who have already experienced it, the beauty of the planet has been an epiphany, eliciting deep concern for Earth’s health, a visceral understanding of human ‘oneness,’ and clarity about the interconnectedness of things. Unlike those of us here among the trees, they have seen the forest.”¹

Rob Garnett’s essay speaks to such hopeful possibilities, which seem still to resonate with many in our own day. Garnett appropriately takes us straight away into a consideration of the various views of human nature at work in the theories of modern economists. On Garnett’s account, Boulding sought to move away from the profit-maximizing view of man as *homo economicus* popularized especially by the Chicago economists influenced by George Stigler. The late Milton Friedman, of course, can be included in this school of thought, and practitioners in the field of corporate philanthropy have long struggled to overcome Friedman’s insistence that the business of business qua business is profit, not benevolence. Garnett suggests that Boulding, by contrast, sought to go beyond the Chicago school’s foundation of self-interest as the prime mover of humanity to embrace another dimension of Adam Smith’s insights about human nature. Boulding recognized Smith’s attention to human sympathy as an essential feature of human social psychology, and he argued, therefore, that there was room for students of human action to give serious consideration to the phenomena of human benevolence and grantmaking.

Like Lloyd, Garnett acknowledges problems with the dualism Boulding seems to pose between market exchange and philanthropic benevolence, but he makes an interesting and creative move in seeking to resolve this dualism by bringing to bear several emergent streams of thought, including the one represented by this journal and its contributors. Garnett suggests that a more

¹ http://www.seedmagazine.com/news/2007/01/our_expanded_view.php

robust conversation among those beginning to engage economics again as a moral science, many of whom are seeking to examine anew the legacy of Adam Smith, might actually lead to a new image of economics itself as a science of benefaction and of the economy as a “provisioning space in which economic cooperation and human betterment are effected via a plurality of commercial and noncommercial means.” Such a view would invite more philosophical and more empirical understandings of philanthropy as an important element in the overall creation of human goods and the satisfaction of human needs and desires, whether emerging from personal or social (public) values.

A broader space of the sort Garnett envisions for considering the shared philosophical dimensions of economics and philanthropy might help social scientists come to appreciate not only the aesthetic richness of reflections on human action offered by poets, novelists, historians, and ethicists but also discover that practitioners of the liberal arts as well as the hard sciences can be important interlocutors in helping us understand the science of human benefaction. Richard Gunderman, a medical doctor and philosopher, offers us here a consideration of the questions about our current image of philanthropy which can be answered to their fullest only as we encourage conversation among people from all walks of life. Gunderman considers how we think about the context of philanthropy, the resources available to it, the knowledge necessary to pursue it well, the challenge of giving in ways that generate more giving, and the leadership requisite not merely for efficient execution of grants themselves but for helping each of us better imagine ourselves in the role of giver.

Gunderman echoes Boulding’s call to consider how love itself moves our economy and our philanthropy, two halves of a robust human life that were united in the old Greek concept of the household (*oikonomos*) but are increasingly divorced in the era of the modern democratic polity grown dependent upon the administrative state. Philanthropy and economy alike, as means of human exchange and thus integration, have more to do with one another, and with love, than our public discourse and public policy seem now to allow.

Appended to these essays is a shorter note by Steven Ealy on a conceptual confusion that seems to underpin much of the confusion Boulding’s work seems to engender: Is taxation best considered a grant or an exchange? Ealy’s

essay argues for an exchange model of taxation as an important foundation for citizens to hold government responsible and responsive. His note thus brings us full circle to the challenge we face in examining human action by dividing it into rigidly distinguished analytical categories such as coercion, exchange, and benevolence.

As individual human actors we find that our motives and actions partake of all three of these forms, often simultaneously, requiring each of us to struggle with our conflicting drives and ends as we seek to understand and forge our own identities. In coming to act in our families and communities, in turn, our achievement of personal integrity becomes a key factor in helping us contribute effectively to shaping the broader communal and social values of the day. When we introduce the element of time into this expansion of our horizons and consider how we might begin to shape the future as well as the present, the complexity of human action presents new problems.

Boulding observed that “making sacrifices for a distant posterity is clearly the purest form of grants economy that can be imagined, for there can be no vestige of exchange in it.” He went on to suggest that the way we can value such intergenerational grants is to recognize that we form our identity by maintaining “some sort of community, however uncertain and discounted, not only with one’s own day, but with the whole human race as it stretches out through time and space” (*Economy of Love and Fear*, [Belmont CA: Wadsworth, 1973], 97). Giving, for Boulding, turns out to be “a sacrifice we may make in the interests of our identity, for our identity depends very largely on the community with which we identify.” In the end, Boulding does not resolve the challenges of human identity and identification within and among the communities in which we live and move, but the questions he poses can still help us grapple with these issues today in order to help us understand better how free individuals dwell responsibly in a world where coercion, exchange, and love are all operative.

For introducing me to the depth of Boulding’s work, I owe thanks to David Prychitko, who co-directed the 2004 colloquium with me and has taught me over the years much about the Austrian economists’ perspective on exchange, while being willing to join me in pursuing a richer understanding of philanthropy’s role in our culture. In reviewing the papers for this volume, David suggested that perhaps the highest form of philanthropic love, following

the insights of Josef Pieper, is providing others the opportunity to share and enjoy contemplative leisure. If the truest measure of a culture lies in what its people choose to do with their leisure time, David and the other participants in and readers of our conversations here exemplify, to me, culture at its best, when we can come together with mutual regard and seek to understand together how we arrive at the personal and societal values we hold.

Boulding once observed, “one of the most peculiar illusions of economists is the doctrine of what might be called the ‘Immaculate Conception’ of the indifference curve, that is, the doctrine that tastes are simply given and we cannot inquire into the process by which they are formed.” “This doctrine,” Boulding wrote, “is literally ‘for the birds,’ whose tastes are largely created for them by their genetic structures and can therefore be treated as a constant in the dynamics of bird societies.”² People, by contrast, dwell in realms of images that they both receive and make. Boulding, of course, was on to something when he urged us to understand better how our dwelling among images of ourselves and our society—and allowing those images to dwell in us—creates obligations for us to understand the very processes by which we receive and make them.

The cover art chosen for this volume is inspired by Boulding’s reference to the way human societies transcend our tendencies toward mere animal behavior. Like birds, humans yearn to soar free while continuing to flock together. We seek, it seems, to fly as individuals, testing our wings and the occasional good current, while moving generally in the direction our companions are also choosing. The images by which we together discern these directions and achieve some coordination during the flight remain important objects of our consideration.

—*Lenore T. Ealy*
Series Editor

² Kenneth Boulding, “Economics as a Moral Science,” Presidential Address to the American Economic Association, Chicago, December 1968, and published in the *American Economic Review*, March 1969.