



Emerging Questions on Liberality and Social Thought

CONVERSATIONS

ON PHILANTHROPY

Volume VIII
Philanthropic Reflections
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CONVERSATIONS ON PHILANTHROPY

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CONVERSATIONS ON PHILANTHROPY

Emerging Questions on
Liberalism and Social Thought

Volume VIII
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Aims and Scope

Conversations on Philanthropy: Emerging Questions on Liberality and Social Thought aim is to promote inquiry and reflection on the importance of liberality—in the dual sense of generosity and of the character befitting free individuals—for the flourishing of local communities, political societies, and humanity in general. As such we seek to open new perspectives on the roles, theories, and practices of philanthropic activities ranging from charitable giving, the actions of eleemosynary organizations, trusts, foundations, voluntary associations, and fraternal societies to volunteerism, mutual aid, social entrepreneurship and other forms of social action with beneficent intention (whether or not also combined with commercial and/or political purposes). To facilitate conversations among traditional academic disciplines, *Conversations on Philanthropy* will include papers from a number of fields, including history, political science, economics, sociology, anthropology, philosophy, philanthropic studies, religious studies, belles lettres, law, and the physical sciences, as well as from philanthropic practitioners. Published comments on feature essays are a means of providing a transparent peer-review process to enhance interdisciplinary understanding.

Editorial Correspondence

Conversations on Philanthropy typically features “Conversations” (a lead article with several comments) or “Symposia” (several essays on a single topic with or without commentary). Miscellaneous items, including essays, poetry, book reviews and commentaries may also be published. Material published in *Conversations on Philanthropy* is typically solicited by the Editors. Authors who would like to submit material for consideration should first submit a brief abstract to Lenore T. Ealy, Ph.D., 1415 Ironwood Dr., Carmel, IN 46033; E-mail: editor@conversationsonphilanthropy.org. For detailed instructions concerning the submission of manuscripts, please contact the Editor.

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INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2010 the contributing editors of *Conversations on Philanthropy* convened to mark the tenth anniversary of the Project for New Philanthropy Studies and to set a course for the journal for the next decade. To focus our discussions, we asked participants to reflect on where we had been and to identify the critical challenges, opportunities, and needed developments philanthropy will face in the years ahead. This, our eighth annual volume, thus sits in the reader's hand as a still point in a turning world, drawing light from the past and reflecting it toward the future. The light goes forth, we hope, not unchanged by the minds it encounters, both the authors' and yours, the reader's.

With our current symposium, *Philanthropic Reflections*, we invite you to pause and reflect deeply with us on philanthropy and its role in the society in which we live. Our philanthropic organizations, including our private foundations, public charities, and formal and informal associations, arise from a variety of motivations: the sharp pain of sympathy, the compassionate impulse to charity, the enjoyment of pursuing a shared goal with friends, the desire to give back to one's community out of one's success, and the vision of a better world. Far from a single flower of pure altruism, philanthropy turns out to be a garden where interest and disinterest walk together—giving takes us out of ourselves with the result that we often come to discover something new about ourselves (see *Conversations*, Volume VI).

In thinking about how we define a concept that is as elusive as quicksilver, we rehearsed all the usual formulations before experiencing a collective *aha!* at a formulation that resonates with but also elevates the etymology of the word: *Philanthropy*, suggested George McCully, *is the love of what it means to be human*.

Thus the practice of philanthropy invites as its very starting point a contemplation of both the most mundane needs and the highest aspirations of human persons. This contemplation calls us to reconcile the pluralism of the human body, mind, and spirit while attending to the contexts in which people move and breathe and have their being. This reconciliation commends as best that philanthropy which seeks to realize and expand the material, moral, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual capacities of people and does not isolate

one dimension at the expense of the others. We might say that successful philanthropy hinges upon a sort of *methodological individualism*, a recognition that all human action is the action of individual persons and that the meaning(s) of any beneficent action is ascribed to it by individuals, whether by donors, by recipients, by witnesses, by theorists and scholars, or by secondhand dealers in moral or social criticism.

We must not stop there, however, for philanthropy is also a space in which people come together to make meaning. Our philanthropic organizations and associations are collations of time, talent, and treasure around the understandings and dreams that people come to share. These meanings are not reified as in a contract of mutual benefit but instead evolve in an iterative process of learning how, first, to do no harm, and then about what sort of help might be genuinely helpful, all the while opening and holding open the possibility that today's recipient might become tomorrow's giver and vice versa. Certainly there is a role for contracts and other formal tools of accountability in philanthropy, but exact performance is an expectation that we should hold more lightly. The generativity of a gift is most likely to be incalculable, and fulfillment of the intent of the donor and the expectation of the recipient is a transformational potential and subjective moment in every philanthropic relationship.

The essays in this collection, all authored by contributing editors to the journal, offer reflections that illuminate what it means to undertake this learning process. Rob Garnett orients us with a reflection on the origins of *Conversations on Philanthropy* in the vision of Richard Cornuelle. The founder of and senior advisor to The Project for New Philanthropy Studies, out of which discussions this journal emerged, Cornuelle was for more than fifty years one of the most ardent and articulate believers in the importance of the "independent sector" in American life. Cornuelle was also at times a lone voice in the wilderness, challenging scholars and "social entrepreneurs" (though the term came later) to better understand how philanthropy and voluntary social cooperation promote human flourishing in ways distinct from both the welfare state and the market. Sadly, Cornuelle passed away on April 26, 2011, at the age of 84. He will be missed.

Garnett's Cornuellean reflection is both timely and trenchant at this turning point in the life of our project. Garnett contemplates the future of this

journal as a venue for “cosmopolitan dialogue” to examine anew the workings of commerce and community as spheres of voluntary cooperation and to reassess the relationship between them. It is a compelling vision that we hope has strong roots in our earlier volumes.

Likewise drawing upon the conversations that have gone before to look forward, Jack Sommer confronts the paradox of giving for posterity’s sake, explores the problems of moral hazard, and introduces the writings of Garrett Hardin (*The Limits of Altruism*), Ayn Rand (*The Virtue of Selfishness*), and Tibor Machan (*Generosity: Virtue in a Civil Society*) to our conversations. He poses several questions that we should take up in time.

Fred Turner looks imaginatively into both the nature of persons and the needs of the future and proposes that one of the critical jobs for philanthropy in the coming decades will be less to coordinate charitable delivery of material goods than to help coordinate the flow and utilization of informational goods. As we become increasingly awash in raw information, Turner suggests, philanthropy will increasingly need to offer tools that assist people in discerning knowledge from data and create reflective spaces (in conversation, prose, and poetry) where meaning can be made and wisdom arise.

Gus diZerega’s essay offers an inflection point, turning us to questions of broader political and social theory. Echoing the importance of the communications revolution, he notes that we are living in a period of vast and rapid change across all our familiar institutions. We must ponder whether humanity’s increasing capacity to reduce space and time in communications and trade may be diminishing the urgency of our religious quest to transcend these limits on the human condition. Churches and synagogues have long been cornerstones of America’s charitable landscape, and we must consider how philanthropy will change as the sociological roles of faith communities change. DiZerega hopes that new and more robust forms of association will emerge to engage more and more people in the philanthropic processes of democratic cooperation.

Our final three essays similarly address institutional challenges that are already upon us, and their authors avoid any hubris about the capacity of technology to solve either of the problems that Garnett, with Cornuelle, discerns in the socioeconomic models that have dominated since the New Deal: “citizens’ inflated expectations of the modern welfare state and their

parallel faith in the commercial economy's machinelike ability to deliver adequate resources and opportunities to all" (3).

In examining the many issues at stake in the ongoing debate over foundation payout rules, Charles Hamilton makes a case for reconsidering the prevalent mood that seems to favor limiting the lifespan of foundations. Whether out of donors' concerns about the difficulties of preserving donor intent in perpetuity, or in response to the hungry appetites of policymakers and activists who would weigh the needs of the present more heavily than those of the future, or merely in imitation of unfortunate trends on Wall Street, foundation boards seem subject to increasing pressure to shorten their time horizons. Hamilton offers a needed reflection on the role of philanthropic foundations in promoting the health of civil society: "*New foundations and other philanthropic formations constantly help to renew civil society, and that is a good thing. At the same time, foundations that have long histories, existing cultures, experience, working capital, and human capital are immensely valuable as well. As enduring institutions, foundations can be significant, independent organizations within civil society*" (36).

Steve Ealy delves more deeply into the meaning of civil society itself by examining Michael Edwards' recent writings on the subject. Ealy shows how Edwards strives to give civil society a more substantive pre-constitutional moral core heavily influenced by the equality movement. Ealy asks us to consider whether this move is compatible with our original constitutional settlement, which largely established procedural channels for the rule of law and left a broad scope of freedom for people voluntarily to coordinate a diverse array of activities primarily through the institutions of civil and commercial society. The question ultimately at stake is how those engaging in philanthropy should see it in relation to political deliberation, a question that currently divides what we might call "progressive philanthropy" and "classical liberal philanthropy."

As the bookend for our symposium, Heather Wood Ion returns us to Cornuellean themes, examining the problems that arose as philanthropy became more institutionalized, professionalized, and centralized in the twentieth century. What we broadly construe as philanthropy in this journal encompasses not only the private foundations but also the vast landscape of nonprofit organizations and voluntary associations and the even wider vista of informal beneficence and mutual aid. The philanthropic enterprise is in

fact, as Ion describes it, a “complex, adaptive, and dynamic” landscape of social learning (48). The ingredients most needed to promote human flourishing are a restored confidence in our own agency and a social connectedness through which we build better lives together. Civility, requiring both a centered self and a self that can encounter others with mutual benefit, is the medium in which a healthy civil society takes root and social learning positively accelerates.

A final note: The cover art for this volume is the generous gift of Tom Munnecke, whose Uplift Academy has been a source of inspiration to many and an occasional partner in our own convening of conversations. Tom took this photo in October 2011 on the shores of the Pacific Ocean at Torrey Pines, California. He notes that there are three kinds of light in the image: “the direct sunlight on the moon in the crescent, the reflected light from the earth on the rest of the moon’s circle, and the bioluminescence.” Bioluminescence is the production and emission of light from a living organism. It’s a striking metaphor for our reflections on man himself, moved by an indwelling spark, gifted with the philanthropic use of Promethean fire, and at his best, tending both that spark and that flame such that they illuminate and warm with their beauty but never tender outright conflagration.

—*Lenore T. Ealy*
Editor

SYMPOSIUM

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CULTIVATING CONVERSATIONS

Robert F. Garnett, Jr.

Conversations on Philanthropy is a Cornuellean legacy. As a catholic forum for reflection on the ends and means of voluntary cooperation, it advances Richard Cornuelle's vision of a free and humane society. Dick's celebrated gifts as a writer flowed from his generosity as a listener. He stirred readers' minds by giving them (and his subject matter) his full attention and respect. He believed in the transformative liberality of conversation and bore witness to his faith through generous support for the Critical Review Foundation, the Fund for the Study of Spontaneous Orders, and the dialogical enterprise from which *Conversations* emerged: The Project for New Philanthropy Studies.¹

I reflect here briefly on a bright potential trajectory for *Conversations*, through the lens of Dick Cornuelle's first journal project, *Critical Review*, whose unexpected growth in the wake of the Cold War offers an instructive model. Historical events may prove auspicious for *Conversations* as well. As the mission and scope of welfare states everywhere become objects of intense public scrutiny in the years ahead, serious discussion of civil society alternatives will be in high demand. In this historic moment, *Conversations* could become a leading forum on the role of philanthropy and voluntary association in American life, much as *Critical Review* flourished as an outlet for broad-spectrum libertarian and liberal debate in the late 1980s and early '90s. By leveraging the multiple networks of its contributors and retaining its signature commitment to open inquiry, *Conversations* is well-poised for a similar expansion of its audiences and contents.

Commerce and community:

Separate spheres or heterogeneous catallaxy?

One vehicle for promoting conversations that transcend conventional disciplinary, ideological, and academic/nonacademic boundaries would be the much-debated relationship between capitalism and civil society. The enduring

¹ Editor's Note: The Fund for the Study of Spontaneous Orders and The Project for New Philanthropy Studies are now merging as The Philanthropic Enterprise, a new entity that will continue to explore both historical dimensions and emerging questions in classical liberal social thought.

vigor of these debates is yet another Cornuellean legacy. In *Reclaiming the American Dream* and elsewhere, Cornuelle argued that the classical liberal case for capitalism was incomplete without a serious analysis and ethic of community (1993 [1965], 1991, 1992). By the late 1950s, Cornuelle had become troubled by what he perceived to be “a screw loose” in libertarian social thought. The loose screw, in his view, was a categorical commitment to individual liberty (individual property rights in particular) over all other humane values, notwithstanding the plights of citizens who face undue economic, health, or educational problems and lack the means to address them. He could no longer abide the “haunting, morally intolerable midnight choices between liberty and community” (1993 [1965], 175) that seemed to follow from Mandevillian, commerce-only visions of voluntary cooperation.

Cornuelle’s thinking on these matters was more prescient than he knew. Writing several decades later, James Buchanan detected a comparable loose screw in the social theory of Friedrich Hayek: “To secure freedom from the collective . . . was, properly, the predominant objective for the post-Marxist classical liberal. It is not surprising that the rejection of collectivism . . . should have involved a complementary neglect of . . . the communitarian elements in a well-functioning social order informed by liberal value norms” (2005, 78).

Indeed, Cornuelle’s critique pointed to a lacuna in modern economic theory at large. Economics, since its emergence as a separate discipline in the late nineteenth century, has been marked by a perennial “Adam Smith Problem”—not the old self-interest vs. sympathy hobbyhorse but the segregation of personal and impersonal methods of cooperation. Economists have normalized the notion that market and community (impersonal *Gesellschaft* vs. face-to-face, ethically imbued *Gemeinschaft*) exist as separate spheres, an idea ostensibly corroborated by Smith’s treatment of these two worlds in the *Wealth of Nations* (1976b [1776]) and *Theory of Moral Sentiments* (1976a [1759]), respectively. This notion became deeply entrenched after World War II as economists championed Progressive images of the market economy as a machinelike system supplemented by corrective government policies (Leonard 2009).

As thinkers inside and outside the academy continue to interrogate these thought structures and their underlying assumptions, the fundamental question remains: “One order or two?” Are commerce and community best understood as complementary yet separate spheres of voluntary cooperation, or as symbiotic aspects of a single catallaxy?

Cornuelle's *Reclaiming the American Dream* delivers a compelling case for a separate-spheres approach. His vision of U.S. commercial society highlights two systems of voluntary cooperation: the commercial sector and the "independent sector," the latter defined as a pluralistic array of noncommercial institutions that "takes a thousand forms and works in a million ways" and "functions at any moment when a person or group acts directly to serve others" (1993 [1965], 38). Cornuelle's rendering of these two sectors is careful and nuanced. Yet he posits a distinct human propensity—the desire for profit or the desire to serve others—as the driving force of each sector. He wants classical liberals to reclaim the Tocquevillian-liberal American Dream by embracing this broad humanism and reasserting the existence, efficacy, and importance of the independent sector as a self-organizing cosmos irreducibly distinct from the market economy.

Cornuelle's expansive vision of the private sector—market economy + civil society—remains a refreshing alternative to the market-vs.-government tropes that have dominated U.S. political discourse since the 1930s. At the same time, his dual-system theory struggled to find a way beyond a principal pillar of the Progressive edifice, namely *the narrow view of commerce as an amoral engine securing social cooperation by wholly impersonal means (wherein tender sentiments of sympathy, solidarity, and benevolence play no necessary role)*. This was precisely the loose screw Cornuelle discerned in mainline U.S. libertarianism circa 1960, and which inspired him to argue that the independent sector had been drained of energy and responsibility (Ealy and Ealy 2006) by two false promises: citizens' inflated expectations of the modern welfare state and their parallel faith in the commercial economy's machinelike ability to deliver adequate resources and opportunities to all.

So even as Cornuelle extolled the scope and virtues of the independent sector, the force of his argument in the 1965 book was undercut by his unwitting retention of a narrowly conceived economy, a problem he grappled with in *De-Managing America* (1975), *Healing America* (1983), and through the various scholarly projects he helped to launch after the fall of the Iron Curtain. Progressive conceptions of the nanny state and the "nanny economy" continue to inhibit the growth of our civic and moral imaginations. Social rules and academic theories still teach us that our ethical duties to local and distant neighbors in modern commercial society can be fully discharged through tax payments and commercial self-seeking. Though Cornuelle had studied economics with Ludwig von Mises

(leaving New York University before completing his Ph.D.), he was for most of his career what we would now call a “social entrepreneur,” and he came to lament these mal-fitted screws in the civil religion of postwar America.

A Heterogeneous Network of Voluntary Cooperation

Encouragingly, leading economists, social scientists, and philosophers over the past two decades have turned away from the narrow motives, behaviors, and institutional structures that once arguably defined economic science. Most of these emerging works offer ‘integrative’ resolutions to the *Gesellschaft/Gemeinschaft* schism, theorizing human cooperation as a synthetic mix of commercial and communal elements. Within my own discipline of economics, these works emanate from ideologically diverse circles, including Austrian, feminist, evolutionary, experimental, postcolonial, and neo-Aristotelian traditions of thought (e.g., Bruni 2008, Chamlee-Wright 2010, Danby 2002, Folbre 2001, Gintis et al. 2005, Gui and Sugden 2005, Kolm 2008, McCloskey 2006, Nelson 2006, Smith 1998, Storr and Chamlee-Wright 2010, and van Staveren 2001). By rethinking basic categories such as rationality, identity, reciprocity, cooperation, beneficence, justice, commerce, community, and economy, these new-generation economists are recasting Adam Smith’s Great Society of Mankind as a commercial society—a heterogeneous network of voluntary cooperation through which individuals secure “the cooperation and assistance of great multitudes” (Smith 1976b [1776], 26).

To my mind, these integrative approaches represent an extension and advance of Dick Cornuelle’s vision of a free and humane society. They overcome the personal/impersonal dichotomy by exploring the plurality of motives, norms, and rules that shape human action and facilitate social learning, and the varied institutional forms through which voluntary cooperation occurs. They also deliver a more complete deconstruction of Progressive economic theory (in its many guises, from Stiglerian laissez faire to Samuelsonian interventionism) by rendering absurd the notion that social cooperation on any scale could ever be effected by “prudence only” agents or “commerce only” institutions.

There remain, of course, many serious arguments in favor of treating commerce and community as separate spheres—such as Michael Edwards’s forceful critiques of “philanthrocapitalism” (2010), Peter Boettke and David Prychitko’s skepticism regarding the possibility of effective calculation and plan coordination in noncommercial orders (2004), Kenneth Boulding’s theory of the “grants economy” (1973), and Cornuelle’s own *Reclaiming* (1993 [1965]). Moreover, despite the

growing numbers of economists, philosophers, sociologists, political theorists, evolutionary biologists, and others actively addressing these questions, their research communities function mostly as islands, held apart by the autarky of disciplinary and ideological-cum-paradigmatic tribalism—a stalemate Deirdre McCloskey aptly describes as “intellectual specialization without trade” (2000, 158). The existence of such well-reasoned yet chronically balkanized arguments and counterarguments suggests a golden opportunity for *Conversations on Philanthropy* to assert itself as a space for vigorous, cosmopolitan dialogue about ideas that matter. By cultivating its comparative advantages in the intellectual marketplace, *Conversations* could become a journal in which an array of antagonistic yet complementary lines of thought could effectively listen and speak to one another.

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THE PARADOX OF POSTERITY: QUESTIONS FOR HERE AND NOW

Jack Sommer

In this essay I reflect on some ideas that have emerged over the years in this journal and some of its associated colloquia. These reflections concern four main thoughts: why one acts philanthropically; posterity versus the present in the calculation of giving; issues of moral hazard raised by Hardin, Rand, Machan and Kass, among others; and the myth of “sustainability.” I begin with an observation from the surroundings of my study which may act as a metaphorical bonding agent for the reflections that follow.

Kissidougou

Kissidougou, as I call her, reclines on the corner of my desk, where she now keeps receipts from Walmart, Texaco, and my latest golf outing from disassembling themselves into my other papers. She has been with me, although not always so visibly displayed, since I acquired her in Basse Casamance (Senegal) more than four decades ago from an antiques peddler.

Carved from stone, dark and mute, she would sit in contemplative attitude if she could, but she was not made to sit. Rather, she was created to lay at rest, a gift or supplication to the Omnipotent Spirit whose benefaction would make fertile the fields from which the community would be nourished. How many years she lay in the West African soil I don't know, nor do I know whether this offering to the Almighty was moved by fear for the next harvest or devotion to posterity. Some possibilities come to mind.

To carve an effigy from stone involves some cost, at least more than a wood carving or a straw or fabric confection. Therefore, its offering is sufficiently important not to have been the act of shifting cultivators who moved their huts from year to year. Instead, she was the product of a village community whose radiating *tranches* of fields, while subject to a regular orbital rotation, were nevertheless a part of the community for generations. Hope attended her presence

in the fields of this section that food would be yielded in the present and again in a generation when the cultivator's clockwise movement would cycle round. Kissidougou had sisters placed around the compass of the village.

But what was the temporal horizon of the villagers for the putative powers of Kissidougou? Was it eternity? A generation or two? Or just "going forward," to use the indescribably deceptive and intentionally vague term of our day that feigns foreknowledge but fears conjecture? We cannot know for sure, but even though an indefinite "always" may have accompanied village prayers as Kissidougou was laid to rest the real issue was the generational struggle to survive the punishing meteorologic uncertainty of the Intertropical Convergence Zone and the precipitation it might or might not deliver to the crops.

Hindsight affords us something that foresight could not give the villagers: the facts. Broadly speaking, and in a material sense, Kissidougou was a failure as an insurance policy. People have persisted in the region, but they have not prospered. Unspeakable atrocities have been committed as the slave trade came and went and as fields have been drenched in the blood of child-soldiers in wars fought over minerals unknown as resources at the "birth" of Kissidougou. The effigy is now displaced in time and space, alienated to a different world where strangers wonder about her meaning.

Questions well up from this narrative that relate to how future generations might best be aided by our actions. What does "benefited" mean? And on whose terms? One must honestly ask who actually cares how far into the future our philanthropic acts should be projected.

Conversations

The bounteous tableau of readings and conversations on philanthropy provided over the past few years by the Project for New Philanthropy Studies has been a treasure of ideas that challenge my quite general ignorance. A review of my notes of past meetings has rewarded me with the memory of participants' insightful remarks and written words.

Stephen Grosby's elaboration of Greek myth (2010, *passim*) captured beautifully our understanding that philanthropy cannot be coerced. Richard Gunderman's deeply spiritual observation that the selfish misuse of "treasure, time, and talent betrays our calling as human beings" and annuls our "role as stewards of the divine legacy" (2010, 4) provides its own thoughtful challenge, to

which I will return. Along with Gunderman, Dick Cornuelle, Heather Ion and Fred Turner have warned that true philanthropy involves knowing what not to do, and they are not the only ones concerned with the impact of the unintended consequences of good works. These are but a few of the important contributions to our thought; to go further with this reverie would be easy but essentially interminable, so I narrow my focus to a few comments about the Boulding sessions of 2007 (*Conversations on Philanthropy, IV*) to provide background to my later remarks.

Our discussions of Boulding's observations on philanthropy, introduced by Lenore Ealy (2007, v-ix) exposed a profound question of Time and how the future might be shaped through philanthropy. Ealy quotes Boulding, that "making sacrifices for a distant posterity is clearly the purest form of a grants economy that can be imagined, for there can be no vestige of exchange in it" (viii). Both Garnett and Gunderman elucidated Boulding's arguments, particularly with respect to economic postulates, but what I may have missed is how Boulding could hold that "When we make a true gift, it is because we identify ourselves with the recipient" (Garnett 2007, 18) and have that square with his previously quoted statement. How can one identify with recipients yet to be, especially those of a "distant posterity," without admitting an egoistic vision of the future and a self-satisfying instinct that whispers "exchange," or worse, "moral greed"? I resist the temptation to quote Shelley quoting Ozymandias.

Those of us influenced by the radical subjectivism of economists such as Shackle, Hayek, and Wiseman and physical scientists like Prigogine who are concerned with chaotic dynamic systems and emergent orders must agree that the future is created from the interplay of contending conjectures, chance, and the material that makes up the universe—but it is unknown until it happens. Unknown, too, are those who will populate the future and, within them, their capacity to use their endowment for purposes that are not inimical to our gift. Reflecting on Boulding, if the "purest" gift is given to the unknown and unknowable without interest in its use, that is whimsical at best, whereas the "truest" gift, in his view, requires projection of one's self into those who are yet to be—which clearly establishes a contradiction in his philanthropic thought. In truth, actual identification with a real recipient requires contemplation, and unapologetic self-interest in the use of one's gift reveals a greater act of love than does theoretical disinterest.

Other Voices

These questions arouse my thoughts, particularly when I consider some thinkers whose contributions have not yet been explored in *Conversations* but which we might consider with profit. I cannot do justice here to Garrett Hardin's, *The Limits of Altruism: An Ecologist's View of Survival* (1977) or his many and varied related writings, although I have challenged some of them elsewhere (Sommer 1982). I will try to summarize Ayn Rand's pithy remarks in *The Virtue of Selfishness* (1961) in which she presents her unapologetic view of the authentic origins of the philanthropic urge. And, I think Tibor Machan's exposition on *Generosity: Virtue in Civil Society* (1998) is a valuable addition to our considerations.

Garrett Hardin's neo-Malthusian outlook may have colored the policy positions he advocated, but that does not diminish the tough questions he asks in *The Limits to Altruism* (1977) nor in his elaboration of the tragedy of the commons narrative for which he is duly famous. In *Limits* Hardin gets right to the point when he asks, "Are the egoistic and altruistic positions no more than waterproof hypotheses" (therefore invincible to scientific refutation)? He illustrates his point as follows: "If I am a clever egoist I can profit by encouraging you to be altruistic. I will be happy to be an "other" for you to serve. But I won't tell you this because, you, as a doctrinaire altruist, may be unwilling to encourage egoists. So as a selfish, Machiavellian egoist it is against my interest to let you in on my secret. For me to reveal the egoist's secret would be to act altruistically" (2).

And he goes on to ask, "Must an egoist, then, be forever silent about his motives? Worse: must he be a hypocrite and praise altruism? Among all who praise altruism how am I to distinguish truth-tellers from hypocrites" (2)?

In our current time this might be termed the "Warren Buffett Conundrum."

Although he admits to *kin altruism*, or *reciprocal altruism* when one gives up one's life for another (Hardin 1977, 12), I think Paul Schervish's comment on Grosby describing this act as "self-identification" is a term of art that would have been acceptable to Hardin, perhaps preferred (2009, 33-44). Yet, when confronted with questions of posterity, Hardin asserts that "only in wealthy countries, and then only through institutions can posterity be served," whatever that means (1977, 80-81). He recognizes the fabricated nature of this "altruism" but believes that a special, privileged authority is required to get from here to posterity. I can agree with him that "The problem of posterity is rich in puzzles!" (83), but his solution for getting there avoids the question of where "there" is or why we would

sacrifice the here-and-now for the indeterminate “then,” not to mention who should be ceded this “‘privileged authority.’”

Hardin is consistent in developing his rational-choice arguments through examples and metaphors. He extends his egoist/altruist discussion by identifying the problem of a “double-bind” in human action, and in support of his general solution to the commons issue, that is, “mutual coercion, mutually agreed upon,” in *Exploring New Ethics for Survival: The Voyage of the Spaceship Beagle*:

If we ask a man who is exploiting a commons to desist “in the name of conscience,” what are we saying to him? What does he hear—not only at the moment but also in the wee small hours of the night when, half asleep, he remembers not merely the words we used but also the nonverbal communication we gave him unawares? Sooner or later, consciously or subconsciously, he senses that he has received two communications, and they are contradictory: 1. (Intended communication) “If you don’t do as we ask we will openly condemn you for not acting like a responsible citizen.” 2. (The unintended communication) “If you do behave as we ask, we will secretly condemn you for a schlemiel, a sucker, a sap, who can be shamed into standing aside while the rest of us exploit the commons” (Hardin 1973 [1968] 130-131).

How shall we respond?

His 1974 article “Living on a Lifeboat” poses a question that challenges the limits of reciprocal altruism. He posits a lifeboat filled to capacity, surrounded by drowning people (I abbreviate his nicely constructed words): we may act following the Christian ideal of “being one’s brother’s keeper” or the Marxist ideal of “each according to his needs,” in either case admitting our needy brothers, swamping the lifeboat, and delivering complete social justice and complete catastrophe. Or we can admit no one. The latter solution is abhorrent to many, who claim it is unjust or feel guilty about their good luck to be aboard. If these individuals of conscience respond to the invitation to get out and give their place to others who, by definition, do not share their level of altruism, the lifeboat “purifies itself of guilt” (263).

Hardin applies this troubling metaphor to the immigration issue, commenting, “It is pleasanter to talk about other matters, leaving immigration policy to wallow in the cross-currents of special interests that take no account of the good of the whole—or the interests of posterity” (273).

“Posterity” again! What can this mean other than a kind of weak

“sustainability” argument that impels the question, “To what end, in whose eyes, and what shall be foregone?”

In *The Virtue of Selfishness* (1961) Rand states that the moral purpose of life is to achieve one’s own happiness, which she insists does not mean with indifference to others. Simply said, one should not subordinate one’s life to the welfare of others and acts of generosity should be the exception, not a moral duty. She writes this in the context of emergencies, and she urges, much as Gunderman, Cornuelle, Ion, and Turner do above, and I quite separately (Sommer 1986)—us to weigh our philanthropy carefully before taking a moral leap. Although Hardin did not comment on selfishness per se, he did present the same conundrum as Rand. Rand insists that “selfishness” is simply concern with one’s own interests—with no moral freight on board (1961, vii). On altruism she writes: “The ethics of altruism has created the image of the brute, as its answer, in order to make men accept two inhuman tenets: (a) that any concern with one’s own interests is evil, regardless of what these interests might be, and (b) that the brute’s activities are *in fact* to one’s own interest (which altruism enjoins man to renounce for the sake of his neighbors)” (vii).

Rand goes on to state that this version of the “double-bind” we have already encountered promotes: “[Hence the] appalling immorality, the chronic injustice, the grotesque double standards, the insoluble conflicts and contradictions that have characterized human relationships and human societies throughout history, under all the variants of the altruist ethics” (viii).

One can hear the echo of these remarks in Hardin, and one can imagine Rand writhing over Boulding’s urging to sacrifice for posterity. Indeed, for Rand, “‘Sacrifice’ is the surrender of a greater value for the sake of a lesser one or of a nonvalue. Thus, altruism gauges a man’s virtue by the degree to which he surrenders, renounces or betrays his values...” (44).

Machan’s book *Generosity: Virtue in a Civil Society* (1998) accords with the Randian perspective that one’s purpose in life is to be as happy as one can be (x). Like Grosby’s comments cited above, Machan emphatically rejects the idea that philanthropy can be coerced, asserting that “the welfare state unabashedly perverts the idea of right to private property and thus stands as an obstacle to...kindness and generosity” (x). Rand would approve; Hardin might demur.

Machan regards generosity as a “benevolent virtue,” writing: “Generosity, as the Greeks saw, is not tantamount to altruism, which means putting others first. To be generous means to extend goodwill toward others because one’s happiness

is thereby enhanced because one lives a fully human life if, among other things, one lives generously” (1998, x).

Further, Machan makes the following distinction between generosity and charity, both of which concern the here and now: “Generosity involves spontaneously doing good things—giving gifts, providing help or advice, showing tolerance or special consideration—for others, who may or may not be in trouble. The acts are spontaneous in that they flow from one’s character, not from calculation or even deliberation....Charity, in contrast, is benevolence arising from a sense of duty...that is morally prescribed” (1998, 1-2).

Among past colloquium readings, Leon Kass’s chapter in Amy Kass’s book *The Perfect Gift* most closely reflects some of the ideas of these three authors. As he writes, “Rightly understood, philanthropic deeds are not self-sacrificing but self-affirming and self-fulfilling, and a society that is generous beyond what is strictly owed must be counted amongst humanity’s finest achievements” (2002, 273).

Posterity and “Sustainability”

My grandmother’s admonition, “waste not, want not,” is ever with me, perhaps obsessively so. It is trivial in the sense of being uncomplicated, not because it lacks *gravitas*. If this is the meaning of “sustainability,” it is hard to disagree. However, in our day this word has taken on epic connotations and an increasing burden of religiosity. Whereas Grandmother admonished “use,” the apostles of sustainability shout “Preservation!” Earth, in their vernacular, becomes a giant restoration project to meet their predilections and the supposed desires of future generations.

In fact, the chief momentum of the sustainability movement is derived from environmentalists whose modern preservationist roots reach back through German Romanticism into antiquity, as Alston Chase (1995) has shown. Worship of nature, and the promotion of a “land ethic” *a la* author Aldo Leopold earlier (1949) and the movie *Avatar* recently, expresses a rejection of the human “use” of the earth, especially by “conscienceless capitalists,” on the false predicate of finite resources. The “precautionary principle,” an elaborate version of another old admonition, “look before you leap,” has been written into statutes effectively, one thinks, to forestall the forces of Schumpeterian creative destruction, forces that have demonstrably created resources (or freed them from less to more desirable purposes) rather than destroyed them.

I raise this point because it too illustrates the question of posterity and the unspoken assumption that the future should be no worse than the present, a belief held so fervently by some that the creative acts of others must also be held in check—for example, genetic modification of organisms, even though the present condition of humanity may be improved by their adoption. Much of Kissidougou’s Africa today serves as an abject example of environmentalist malefactors blocking the planting of highly productive genetically modified crops and thereby performing a kind of human sacrifice to an unknown future. Perhaps I read too much into this and what we witness is merely a concern of “sustainability hustlers” to secure their own estate in the present while using a gossamer of intergenerational equity as cover. In his book *A Poverty of Reason* Beckerman comments on this point: “It is typical of the intellectual confusion in the environmentalist movement that many of its more extreme activists attack the wicked capitalists and imperialists and related globalization while simultaneously pressuring governments to implement policies that can only impoverish developing countries—simply in order to pander to the prejudices of well-meaning but ill-informed people in the rich countries or to the “power-seeking” agendas of bureaucrats” (2002, 47).

Despite a genuinely useful review of the entire sustainability movement and issues of intergenerational equity that it raises, Beckerman fails to address the possibility of rejection of contemporary values by future generations. Previous generations who fell under the spell of the Malthusian myth and forewent the use of resources explicitly to give them to the future—for example, Jevons’s urgings in the nineteenth century to stockpile Britain’s coal lest future generations freeze—denied their productive use, and the value of the resource disappeared as it was replaced by more efficient energy resources.

Thirty years ago I wrote an article, “Resource Depletion in the Orwellian Decade” (1980), the principal point of which was to dispel the myth of finite energy and the attendant rage to regulate energy production so that future generations would not be left out in the cold. It is common knowledge that energy resources have increased since then as creative entrepreneurship and scientific discovery have combined to make finitude a highly elastic concept. Gunderman captures this thought in his 2007 *Conversations on Philanthropy* article: “Raw materials’ we trample underfoot may take on great value when catalyzed by human imagination” (40-41).

This positive understanding of the resource-creating potential of individuals is at the core of the radical subjectivist position and admits to the unpredictability of what is to come, both in terms of what will be created and the individuals who will do the creating. What is understood is that the widespread adoption of an “evil myth” of finiteness and attendant legislation to forestall creative acts does limit our capacity to act philanthropically in the present, and if one actually prefers to project beyond three generations to a myth of posterity, I join Beckerman in recommending an insight from Jeremy Bentham: “Individual interests are the only real interests....Can it be conceived that there are men so absurd as to...prefer the man who is not, to him who is; to torment the living under presence of promoting the happiness of those who are not born, and who may never be born” (Beckerman 2002, 63)?

I am enriched by Richard Gunderman’s comments on myths: “Myths not only fill the memory but inspire the imagination, making us aware of new possibilities.” Or, “They [myths] powerfully shape our sense of the way the world unfolds in time and space, providing intuitions that shape everything we think, say, and do” (2010).

Recognizing the truth of his comment that “myths are the lifeblood of philanthropy,” it is as important to dispel evil myths as it is to honor those that are not. Among these must be the evil myth that the future can be “‘planned’” by any individual, philanthropist, or tyrant, rather than evolved by all. The paradox of posterity for the philanthropists among us is in the carefully considered choice of our dimension of action in time and space. For my part I shall recognize without gloss that my philanthropy fulfills an egoistic goal of self-satisfaction. I choose the ‘palpable present’ (three generations), or “‘here-and-now’”, with the conviction that I might expand the possible creative paths for real people. I eschew Time of the far future as the destination for my gifts in humble recognition of what I cannot know of their receipt.

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THE FUTURE OF PHILANTHROPY:

BRAIN NEEDS

Frederick Turner

The perennial question of philanthropy is: What do people need? And to look into the future, we must ask: What will people need?

As the wealth of the world increases exponentially (at around 5 percent per annum, doubling every fifteen years), and as transportation and communications improve, creating more opportunities for the wealth to spread, poverty will consist rather of a lack of informational goods than of the material needs of the human animal. Already the traditional pattern of fat, rich people and thin, poor people has reversed in many countries, and increased life expectancy is often more dependent upon what we wisely do not consume than on what we unwisely do consume.

The New Poverty

The deprivation of basic human physical needs today is and should be, of course, a scandal in the world, and the world press reports it when it occurs. There are huge political and even economic incentives—to say nothing of moral imperatives—that already drive immediate and massive public and private responses to such problems, as witness Hurricane Katrina, the tsunamis, and Haiti. There is no reason to believe that such efforts will cease or that they will not be made much more effective by further work on public-private cooperation, the use of electronic media, computer modeling, etc.

But as this trend continues, we can expect that the greatest hunger and need will not be for food, shelter, and clothing but for information, especially for the higher forms of information. Information comes in a hierarchy: data, knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. Poverty will be starvation of these kinds of goods, especially the higher kinds. Most crippling will be deprivation of the psychological technologies by which a certain mysterious internal feedback process is created—that which enables the human brain to ascend the ladder of informational goods and accumulate the critical mass of information at each rung that is required to ascend to the next.

In a crude sense, initiating that lifelong feedback process in the young brain is the purpose of education. But much education does the opposite, blocking the process rather than opening it up. If the process is stymied, either by lack of education or by bad education, a human being experiences the blockage (correctly) as a restraint upon his agency, his power of action and his freedom, and the trapped feeling that results leads in turn to rage. Instead of remaining inchoate and unbearably indefinable, that rage often takes the shape of an ideology that demonizes those he feels and knows are not constrained as he is, blaming them (usually incorrectly) for his predicament and interpreting the situation as the result of a conspiracy.

One consequence of this pathology, especially when telecommunications make it impossible for people to remain isolated with others no less handicapped than themselves, has been the phenomenon of pogroms against those groups and cultures that foster the onset of the learning feedback process—ethnic groups such as the Jews, Chinese, Ibos, Tutsis, and Armenians, or against socio-economic groups such as the professional classes or the urban, property-owning bourgeoisie. There is even a sort of traditional caricature of such groups, nicely imaged in the dwarves of Wagner's *Nibelungs* or the Ferengi in the *Star Trek* series, with hunched little bodies, bulging craniums, long, grasping hands, and crafty, hooded eyes.

New Philanthropy, New Media

Starvation of informational goods, and lack of access to the autocatalytic process by which data condenses into knowledge, understanding, and wisdom, and in which information leads to the acquisition of more information, is not only grievous but deadly. As the world becomes wealthier in material goods, this other starvation will become more acute. So we can expect that the priorities of philanthropy will shift in the next hundred years, and that in the next ten years the dialog within philanthropy will turn to preparation for this shift. In other words, if philanthropy is basically gift-giving, the truly welcome gifts are going to be of information, especially in its higher forms of real knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. Huge volumes of raw data such as pour out of the media and the Internet may do more harm than good when falling upon unprepared minds and unaccompanied by the sorting devices—aesthetic taste, knowledge of probabilities, basic science, logic, historical context, competing theories, the basic myths and stories of humankind, etc.—that turn data into knowledge and knowledge into understanding.

So how are these gifts going to be made available to those who need them? Obviously there are tried and true philanthropic projects that already respond to this question. Many were proposed by Rockefeller himself in the nineteenth century—the endowing of universities, libraries, and laboratories, for instance. And Rockefeller was only following the ancient practice of kings, lords, and bishops, with adjustments for a democratic regime. More recently we have seen the emergence of the open-source movement, the cooperative and unpaid service of those who created Linux, the building of the internet with its millions of free content sites, the establishment of Wikipedia, various medical information sites, and Steven Wolfram’s computational engine. The blogosphere is largely not-for-profit. And though such hugely valuable sources as Google maps, Ngram, Amazon’s bibliographical services, and online news are paid for by advertising, there is an unmistakable element of idealism in their creators, a gift of creative imagination at least, that is philanthropic in part. Indeed, one might well argue that such mixed motives—profit and benefit—may in practice yield the best results in human terms. The two motives can by their mutual criticism—the test of practicability and popularity on one side and insistence on the long-term good of all stakeholders on the other—keep an enterprise alive and innovative.

Another kind of informational good is the service provided by the social media, in which the information supplied is not the expertise of specialists or the inherited wisdom of the ages, but the thoughts and observations of our contemporaries. Again, profit is definitely a motive—the makers of Facebook and Twitter have become rich. But here too there was a strong element of visionary public benefaction in the creation and especially in the use of these sites. And as Tahrir Square and the current democratic revolution all over the Muslim world have shown, this kind of brain food may in the short run be the most potent of all. It is no coincidence that the leading voice in the Egyptian revolution, Goniim Yuslim, worked for Google and communicated on Facebook.

Certainly there are threats and dangers in the new media. Al Qaeda can disseminate itself as well as Bartleby, Science Online, or Catholic Charities. But such problems as do exist in the provision of the informational goods that the world is increasingly going to need are not primarily in the populist private media but in the ivory tower that should be the final court of appeal. Postmodern “Theory”—mostly a mixture of Deconstruction with outworn post-Freudian and Marxian speculations—has decisively undermined the ancient values of the traditional liberal arts (beauty, truth, and goodness) and thus made it very difficult

to meet the legitimate demands of students for a genuine education in understanding and wisdom. It is tempting to imagine letting the ivory tower collapse under its own weight—let other institutions take over the task of disseminating the arts, humanities and social sciences, and let corporate and private organizations take over scientific and technological research (with appropriate government contracts and prizes if special investigations and technical projects are demanded by the public). But the free academy does do certain things extremely well, especially those that take the long view and the grand conspectus, that carefully test knowledge by competitive scholarship and experiment. Google is a dangerous tool to put into the hands of a young person, without some professional and competitive check on the facts, logic, sources, ethics and aesthetic integrity of its offerings. The academy needs reform, not dissolution. How might that reform be envisaged, and what role might philanthropy play in helping it along?

As the universities turned into specialist multiversities, the Dewey Decimal System fragmented the libraries into microdisciplines, and much of the electronic media turned into a chaos of incommensurate private obsessions and special interest groups. As a result, the mechanisms by which data is turned into knowledge and thence to understanding and wisdom became paradoxically harder to acquire, masked by the torrent of raw information. Debate retreated from being a contest of wisdom into being one of understanding; then from being a struggle to understand to being a parade of rival masses of knowledge; and finally, a memory test of who can spew out the most data. What is needed, then, is a renewed initiative in finding ways to spark the integrative and evaluative process that leads back to wisdom—not just for elites but also for the common people of the world.

Some philanthropic gifts, well conceived, did create institutions that tried to reverse the trend toward the decomposition of understanding into knowledge, knowledge into data. The University of Chicago's Great Books movement was one. The Liberty Fund, with its special task of turning understanding into wisdom, was another. The Philanthropic Enterprise is itself a glowing example of informational gift-giving targeted at generating the feedback system by which we ascend the informational ladder.

Poetry as Information-Integrative Gift

One example of the problems and opportunities offered by the ladder-climbing project is the history of poetry. Poetry probably began as a ritual element, part of the higher gift-exchange of ancient and primitive peoples. As

such it was an integrative informational gift, designed to generate a self-maintaining process of understanding the world, appreciating nature and humanity, and aspiring to wisdom. Later, in the hands of professional storytellers, such as Homer, Vyasa, and Kakuichi, poetry became part of a semi-formal gift-exchange system—poets could expect gifts and even a pension from their aristocratic clients. Later still, poetry became a gift again—poets such as Horace, Catullus, Sidney, and Donne circulated their poems privately in manuscript copies. With commercial printing and copyright laws came a time when poets like such as Longfellow and Tennyson could once again make a living from poetry. But as printing costs went down and the prestige of poets went up, the supply of poetry became enormous and the task of sorting the good from the bad and mediocre became overwhelming. Meanwhile, poetry abandoned its integrative and evaluative role because it no longer felt obliged, because of ideological modernist doctrines, to be connected either with a real market or a real function as a teacher of society. It forgot the ancient psychological technologies of rhyme, meter, narrative suspense, and genre.

Now, however, poetry is recovering its role as an information-integrative gift, partly through the existence of well-edited and well-curated websites that maintain poetic quality, and the ancient craft of poetry, involving meter, rhyme, trope, narrative, and logical and rhetorical structure, is making a recovery. Print periodicals such as *Trinacria*, *Light*, and *The Northwest Review* have helped revive the true pleasures and uses of poetry. Performance poetry is becoming quite popular among younger people, and a sense of the responsibility of the gift-giver to the people has returned.

Poetry has been significant as an informational gift, or to be exact, a gift of the technique of refining lower forms of information into higher ones. It has performed this role best in times when it had either wise patrons or a vital combination of market and gift support (including the self-patronage of poets themselves). Human beings do like to give their creativity to others, and the richest forms of creativity are those that help us ascend the informational ladder. I expect the debate in the philanthropic community will be increasingly over how to foster this kind of creativity; and poetry, being a very old and effective shaper of informational goods, can serve as a good space for thought-experiment.

The largest form of poetry is the epic, which for the culture that creates and sustains it acts as a royal road from data, through knowledge and understanding, to wisdom. Almost every one of the world's major cultures has at least one epic

poem, often extremely ancient and still well-known in its outlines to the general population—the *Odyssey*, the *Popol Vuh*, *Sundiata*, the book of Exodus, the *Heike*, the *Mahabharata*. Even now epic themes and motifs abound in the popular media, ill-understood but mutely loved by the public. If I—admitting to every possible kind of bias, artistic, scholarly, and spiritual—were to choose the most cost-effective intervention that a great philanthropist could make in the field of informational gift-giving, it would be to found a technologically savvy university organized around the explication, in the context of modern science and future action, of the great epic poems from all over the world.

THE WEB AND INDIVIDUAL PHILANTHROPIC EMPOWERMENT

Gus diZerega

One of today's most important philanthropic issues is the need to empower hundreds of millions of non-wealthy members of society to make more focused and effective contributions to American life. Historically philanthropy has been regarded as primarily a responsibility of the well-to-do, with most other charities originating in the churches, and thus it has largely been addressed in terms of private (donor intent) or religious values. Modern circumstances, however, encourage a different perspective.

Philanthropy deals with values that donors believe would benefit society but will not be adequately expressed within traditional private institutions rooted in business relationships. Such values differ from consumer goods because market demand is not a measure of their desirability. Values such as these have been called "public values" and as such have often been considered a proper goal for political provision. Political provision has not been the sole way to provide such public values, however, especially in the United States, where philanthropy has traditionally been civil society's alternative to providing public values through government.

Churches' Influence Declining

Although much of American philanthropy has had roots in religious practice, changes are transpiring in American society that will impact long-range philanthropic trends. For some time church attendance has been declining. Regular church attendance probably numbers approximately 20 to 25 percent of the population, and oft-cited higher figures that do not match up with other data are still substantially less than a majority (Robinson 2007). Nor has the current recession led to an increase in attendance (Pew Forum 2009). Churches have traditionally been the major vehicle for community philanthropy at the popular level, perhaps because they diminish organizing costs, provide a context encouraging people to enlarge their sense of ethical concerns, and increase a sense

of a concrete community of effort. If churches no longer bring large number of people together in a context encouraging voluntary philanthropy, what might be the alternative? Is a turn to government the only answer?

I am assuming, based on substantial experience, that even if church structures continue to decline in social influence, American citizens will remain open to arguing for and effectively seeking to realize public values outside of governmental channels. The habits of association have become deeply ingrained. Nevertheless, effective organization will require the development of new means of collaboration that are easy to use. Organizing costs for new philanthropic enterprises can be high, as scattered populations of interest seek to find one another and then act together to achieve common goals. If they do not find effective nongovernmental means, would-be social entrepreneurs and community activists are likely to seek to realize these values within government, as has often been the case.

But there is a problem. Government efforts to provide philanthropic public values have a substantial history of being appropriated by private interests, entangled by bureaucratic power, constrained by a refusal to consider new findings, and plagued by simple corruption, while serving as sources for resentment by people forced to pay for values they do not share. But despite the many weaknesses in reliance on government provision, government has traditionally possessed one powerful strength: by creating a centralized point for decision-making, it lowers transaction costs in cases where people sharing similar priorities are scattered and disorganized.

Technology Providing Solutions

Fortunately, important contemporary developments are redrawing the lines between the public values government is best at providing and those that can be achieved better within civil society. The Internet has greatly reduced the cost for citizens to communicate easily with one another. The development of the World Wide Web has already enabled many people to more easily find causes they want to support and to fine-tune their giving. I used the Web to donate to musicians in New Orleans after Katrina and to Paul Farmer's "Partners in Health" after the Haitian earthquake. When different groups seek my support for broadly similar activities, I use Charity Navigator to help ensure my dollars are well-utilized. I could not have done any of this before the advent of the Internet. Instead, I would have had to donate to large umbrella organizations and trusted them to reflect my

priorities. Exposés of United Way salary scandals have demonstrated, however, that such trust in these large charities is not always warranted. In addition, I have used my own blog, now on Beliefnet (<http://blog.beliefnet.com/apagansblog/>), to inform my readers of sources for effective giving.

Through their online donations, people of modest means have enriched giving particularly at the community level, and the internet has provided a tool by which people can reach others with common interests without relying on traditional NGOs or corporations. In short, particularly with enforced net neutrality, the web has become one of the most important developments in our time for enhancing the growth of networks within civil society. It enriches philanthropic possibilities immensely by dramatically lowering organizing costs.

As the web continues to develop, there will be increasing opportunities for people to create and fund activities that we have often looked toward government to accomplish. If many of these tasks can be performed by civil society, they will be accomplished with less divisiveness and often greater effectiveness as well.

In the following sections I outline two very different examples of the kinds of cooperation the web makes possible.

Improving Parks through Web Communication

Government has been reasonably effective at setting aside and protecting public lands valued by millions of people. It has been far less competent at managing them. This observation holds for both state and national parks. Poorly funded when times are good, they are starved and closed when times are bad. Although public parks remain very popular, their popularity does not always give them political leverage: few political races are won or lost based on a candidate's treatment of parks. Thus the government-based model of park management turns out to be mediocre at best.

Fortunately, a far more finely tuned interaction between people and nature is now possible. The rapid increase in land trusts and their frequent cooperation with state parks suggests a different institutional framework for these important public values. Land trusts provide some, but not all, of the amenities that parks provide, but they provide superior administration. The web makes it possible for democratic public trusts to be easily organized for administering parks. Interested citizen members can oversee developments in particular parks, communicate with one another, and monitor the performance of park administrators. Such land

trusts can also help overcome temporary financial difficulties through the creation of endowments.

Something close to this already exists in Great Britain, with the National Trust of England, Wales, and Northern Ireland, but in the vast territory of the United States a far more finely tuned membership would be necessary to provide good oversight. The web makes this kind of relatively small-scale oversight by a scattered population economical and efficient.

Creating Community Bulletin Boards

Sonoma and Marin Counties in California have what we call the WACCO List (<http://www.waccobb.net/forums/index.php>). WACCO provides a means by which anyone can easily find others with goods or services to sell or give away, offer classes, discuss local issues, or do anything else someone might think of to cooperate with others in the area. It makes it possible to find similarly interested individuals even when they number only a small part of a community of hundreds of thousands. And it is used. In a sense it is a clearinghouse for cooperative projects within these two counties.

Such community bulletin boards exist in other computer-savvy parts of the United States and are growing in number. If every county and large city had such lists, the social network of cooperative relations would be powerfully strengthened. Citizens would have the opportunity to engage in or observe more-focused discussions of local issues, with an immediacy and openness impossible for newspapers and traditional print media. Questions are asked, and knowledgeable readers offer answers. Regular users develop a community of trust, increasing the ease with which a population can respond to new crises or opportunities. For example, organizing a benefit for people who had lost their home in a fire, which I oversaw some years ago, would be much easier. A community's capacity for self-governance would be far stronger.

A New Era of Voluntary Association

The web makes it possible for widely scattered but committed people of modest means to cooperate with one another in providing values they believe to be good for society as a whole but which are inadequately provided at present. People who have good ideas for improving life in their communities have sometimes been slow to act because organizing costs have been prohibitively high

compared to the resources each individual is able to contribute. This is why in many cases social entrepreneurs and community groups seek political funding despite its drawbacks. But as the internet has reduced the distance among people, it has lowered the costs of organizing, with the result that we could be on the leading edge of a new era of vibrant voluntary association.

The web is essentially as radical a change from what went before it as the printing press, radio, and television were in their time. These media transformed their societies. The web differs from those older media in at least one very important respect: it provides access to everyone. I need not own a printing press, radio station, or television studio—or convince someone who does—in order to publish my views or communicate with people I do not know personally. By eliminating this kind of middle man, the web empowers average citizens as no media innovation has before. Philanthropy in the broadest sense will be the beneficiary.

As a general principle, it may be that an effective philanthropic network on the Web could replace a wide range of political provisions of public values. Particularly well-suited for such provision are those values of which many approve but which relatively few actively use and some will not use at all. Philanthropy has many exciting growth opportunities in this area, and a challenge for philanthropy in the coming decade will be to promote the widest possible access to computing tools, technologies, and techniques of association that can be used to magnify and realize public values.

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PAYOUT REDUX¹

Charles H. Hamilton

In the next decade we need more thoughtful discussion—and a deeper understanding—of the issues and implications surrounding foundation payout decisions. For instance, two questions about foundation practice should be discussed by donors prior to establishing a foundation, and thereafter they should be regularly revisited by boards. Based on the mission and the intended strategy of a foundation: (1) is the intent that the foundation exist in perpetuity or spend out over x number of years? and (2) what is the best desired spending rate to meet the mission and the longevity desired?

Sadly, both questions get more attention from policy wonks and advocates than from donors and boards. Most data shows that about three-quarters of foundations are formed to exist in perpetuity and operate that way by default. Most foundations don't have a formal spending policy and simply give away the 5 percent minimum required by the federal government. Based on predilection, mission, and strategy, foundations may decide that spending out or perpetuity is the correction decision. They may decide a 5 percent payout is where they should be, or 7 percent, or 10 percent. In any of those cases, those decisions are fine, and should be made by the donors and boards. I have no specific preference or standing regarding them.

However, my experience has been that many foundations that do give more than the 5 percent don't understand the implications for (a) their assets, (b) their ability to exist in perpetuity, and (c) the foundation's combined philanthropic value over time. These implications are not well understood, to the potential detriment of particular foundations and to the philanthropic sector as a whole, for I believe that there are important values to enduring institutions in civil society which are not given sufficient voice.

We are still affected by the dramatic economic downturn in 2008 and the lingering volatility and malaise of financial markets. Foundation assets fell a record 17.2 percent in 2008 and have started to rebound since 2009. Interestingly, the Foundation Center originally estimated in April 2010 that foundation giving in 2009 had declined 8.4 percent from 2008. This was later revised when final figures

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for 2009 came in; actual giving for 2009 was down just 2.1 percent. The small decrease no doubt reflects the impact of lag and smoothing, as many foundations tend to base spending on three or five-year averages. Administrative cutbacks were also an influence. Most important, it appears that foundation percentage draws on their endowments dramatically increased. As the Foundation Center reported, “the 8.1% ratio of 2009 giving to 2008 assets—a rough proxy for foundation payout—was the highest level recorded by the Foundation Center since 1985” (Foundation Center 2011, 11).

Some have—perhaps overly dramatically—described recent strains on both the financial system and the foundation world as resulting in a “new normal.” Perhaps it is more accurate to say that the last few years have been a reset button for how we should think about longevity, payout, and spending. Whatever our views on these matters, donors and boards as well as foundation watchers and policy analysts should be less complacent about these issues and think more carefully about what foundations are doing and why. Interestingly, on these topics “left” and “right” are not on clearly delineated opposite sides. One would hope that this will encourage a candid discussion. Perhaps it is now a good time to revisit questions of longevity and payout through the lens of payout: a sort of **payout redux**.

Payout and the “New Traditional” View

Before the recent economic crash, much was being made, once again, of raising payout rates for foundations. Some commentators advocated individual foundations adopt such an increase voluntarily; others wanted an increase mandated. There tends to be a bias among “philanthropoids” and in policy circles for spending policies that would accomplish spend-out over time. It has become the reigning viewpoint—it is actually the “traditional” view right now. For instance, philanthropic adviser and teacher Richard Marker noted, “I view myself as neutral either way on the question of spend-down or perpetuity. Yet readers of my book tell me that they perceive a leaning toward long-term/perpetuity. Some of that, I suspect, is because the current fashion is to downplay the value of perpetuity in favor of spend-down” (2010).

When the National Center for Responsive Philanthropy released *Criteria for Philanthropy at its Best*, in 2009, it was a strong voice in that “new traditional” direction: “warehousing of tax-exempt dollars does not serve the public interest; it shortchanges the social benefit of philanthropy” (Jagpal 2009, 99). Other publications favored increasing the 5 percent minimum annual payout required of

foundations because it “reaffirms some of the basic principles of effective grantmaking, such as mission clarity, focus and impact” (Waleson 2007, 32). It does no such thing of course: payout does not determine mission, effectiveness, or social benefit. Calling for higher payout requirements seems more related to other agendas, the unquestioned conceit that giving now is always better than giving later, or a failure to understand the role of saving during good times.

Some outsiders and policy people may emphasize the advantages of spending out because they fear the independence of foundations, don’t trust staff and boards to do the perfect thing, or want to get the money out of foundation coffers now. For foundation staff and boards, spending out may be in their self-interest, because it increases their “giving power.” Some board members, foundation staff, and donors favor spending out because they believe only they can make the best decisions; they hate the idea of passing control to others. Or they are flummoxed by how to negotiate the generational transfer of intent and governance. Spending more funds on particular issues now may indeed result in greater immediate impact. For many of the problems foundations address, however, spending more now may be a temporal illusion—the philanthropic version of the shortsighted, short-term thinking that plagues American corporations in search of short-term profit.

There are, of course, less attractive reasons for perpetuity as well. It is, for instance, the unthinking, default position for far too many foundations and donors. Sometimes a false belief in donor immortality and the urge for control from the grave are at play. In any case, all motivations, good and bad, should be discussed before deciding whether spending out or a longer lifespan will best serve a foundation’s mission and effectiveness.

Is There a “Proper” Payout Rate?

Most of the past empirical research clusters around a 5 percent payout as the likely maximum that allows foundations the choice to be enduring institutions, taking into consideration market cycles, administrative expenses, excise taxes, and inflation. (A topic for further discussion is how the giving and asset allocation of an endowment should be congruent, how investment strategy must follow from a giving strategy, and then how it should be managed according to appropriate risk and reward parameters.) We need updated time series data on appropriate payout rates that take into account a much longer period. Given the recent recession and continuing volatility of financial markets, this new research would surely reaffirm the previous studies done, for instance, by Cambridge Associates for the Council

of Michigan Foundations (2000) or the studies done by DeMarche Associates for the Council on Foundations (three studies were done: 1990, 1995, and 1999). For example, J.P. Morgan Asset Management recently published a report that used the firm's forward capital market assumptions to estimate a sustainable payout level. Their conclusion was that a fairly aggressive asset allocation of 80 percent equity and 20 percent bonds would only "support a spending rate of approximately 4% without damaging the long-term real value of the portfolio" (2011, 5).

It seems pretty clear that *if* there is to be a mandated payout rate, 5 percent is very close to a minimum rate allowing potential endowment (and grantmaking) growth for those crisis times, special needs, or opportunities that always occur and need a response. The Foundation Center's revision of the decline of giving in 2009 from 8.4 percent to 2.1 percent shows that the 5 percent rate works. It allowed asset growth in good times, so that an increased payout in bad times could smooth giving to the organizations and causes foundations care about when it is especially necessary. A rate above 5 percent will likely erode the endowment over time and result in the foundation spending out.

Thus, as a matter of public policy any mandated payout rate should allow wide choice of the goals, strategies, and lifespan decisions donors and boards can make to meet mission. Then the "private policy" decisions that individual donors and boards make for their foundation can be based on their values, missions, and strategies, whether that is a payout rate of 5 percent or greater. Several intrepid researchers have even suggested that "nothing other than the elimination [of] any and all mandated payout rates" will "clearly encourage foundations to adopt a payout rate that strategically links mission and payout decisions within foundations" (Deep and Frumkin 2001). The mere suggestion of no mandated payout rate caused arrhythmia among policy wonks and foundation watchers. It was such a radical policy thought that the idea was quickly put back into the bottle. Although politically unpalatable, it may well be that this is the most sensible prescription.

Understanding the Implications of Payout Decisions on Grantmaking Dollars

In any case, foundations should understand the implications of their payout decisions. A chosen or mandated payout rate in excess of 5 percent greatly increases the probability that a foundation will eventually run out of money and close. That is because annual returns have to cover not only payout but also

noncharitable expenses, inflation, and excise taxes. Even a 10 percent annual return (which is not the long-term average of the market or of most portfolios) would likely result in a flat endowment at best.

There is an even more important—indeed stunning—implication of such decisions. One can calculate, over a set period of time, the combination of (1) the annual total of a foundation’s cumulative grantmaking adjusted for inflation and (2) the foundation’s remaining assets in the endowment. The sum of that spending and those assets is the dollar value that a foundation represents over time. Not surprisingly, a lower spending rate can very often result in a *higher* total foundation dollar value of those two elements over a period of time: a larger combined philanthropic value, as it were. This is because a higher payout reduces the size of the endowment by eliminating market growth and the power of compound interest. The actual total dollars paid out over a period of years can actually be reduced by a higher payout because the endowment size erodes—for example, 5 percent of a \$100 million endowment is more than 7 percent of a \$70 million endowment.

The potential costs of higher payouts became clear to me years ago through two examples. I was told the story of a foundation in the 1970s that heeded President Nixon’s call for private charity to do more. It increased its grantmaking payout rate significantly over ten years or so. That is a fine decision to make. However, there was a cost involved. It took the foundation decades to recover its endowment and rebuild its grantmaking budget. Another foundation, one for which I worked, was regularly paying out over 7 percent in the early 1990s. That, too, is a perfectly fine choice for a board to make, but I thought they should understand what their decision meant. I ran a simple analysis of spending over time at both the current 7 percent payout rate and the 5 percent minimum. The report clearly showed that the higher payout resulted in an erosion of the endowment, and over about a fifteen-year period, less total money was given to grantees because the lower asset base in the endowment resulted in a lower annual-dollar grantmaking budget even at the higher percentage. If the foundation had actually kept payout at 5 percent, the growing endowment would have allowed the foundation to distribute more in total.

Admittedly, there are times when a grant made now is more important and valuable than amounts given later. That assessment must be made within the larger context of philanthropic goals and mission. In this last example, however, as a result of that analysis, the foundation’s board brought its annual spending down to the 5 percent range as a better way to meet its goals and mission.

Unintended Consequences of Higher Payout

Whatever the payout rate, attention to unintended consequences is also crucial. Two examples will suffice.

It has been suggested that any endowment loss and any foundation closures as a result of higher payout will be offset by the creation of new foundations. Perhaps. The increases in foundation formation even in recent years suggest that foundation formation will likely remain robust (as a result of the intergenerational transfer of wealth to heirs and philanthropy that baby boomers are now implementing, as well as the success of efforts such as the Giving Pledge). However, a higher payout rate that effectively forces foundations to spend-out over time will very likely significantly decrease the attractiveness of foundation formation to donors for whom perpetuity and family legacy are important. Other alternatives will become proportionately more attractive—such as current consumption, private investment, larger legacies for children and favorite charities, or other philanthropic vehicles. That could further decimate the growth and role of foundations as independent, creative, and enduring institutions of civil society.

Others have urged an indirect approach to increase payout: eliminating foundation administrative expenses from the 5 percent minimum (currently, administrative expenses related to charitable activity can be included in the 5 percent calculation). This is an ironic and self-defeating idea. Foundations are finally beginning to understand that the administrative expenses of grantees are often quite integral to their grantees' organizational health and program effectiveness. That is also the case for foundations. Eliminating administrative expenses from qualifying distributions will decrease the amount spent on due diligence, public policy, advocacy, assessment, communication, and technical assistance by, in effect, increasing their cost in comparison to grants.

Does Increasing Payout Improve Results?

One can understand and appreciate the call for greater payout, because it derives in part from a desire to get more funds into the hands of nonprofit organizations for their programs, clients, and causes. (A topic for further investigation is the many ways philanthropic giving should be greater, can be greater, and can be much more effective.) There may be self-interest in these calls, since nonprofits want access to more funds too. In all of these calls for increased payout, however, there is an unspoken assumption that simply giving out more money will increase results and impact. This assumption provides the calls for greater payout a moral patina that is rather misleading.

There is simply no relationship between greater payout, more grantmaking dollars flowing out, and greater philanthropic and nonprofit impact. Two anecdotes may illustrate this. First, about seven years ago I had the strange experience of hearing, unbidden, the same story from either executive directors or senior program officers of five significant New York City foundations. Each person complained that there were simply “not enough good organizations and programs” to fund. I would add that I occasionally faced the same quandary. There are times when meeting the budgeted 5 percent payout meant that less effective organizations were funded. Second, when the recessions of 1990, 2001, and 2008 started to show up in reduced budgets for many foundations, many executive directors and program officers saw in this an opportunity to cull their grantee list of those organizations they considered less effective.

There is no question that not finding enough good organizations is partially the fault of the foundations too. Foundations sometimes have extremely narrow missions; they may have theories of change or agendas that narrow the list of potential grantees. And foundations are certainly partially to blame for not helping nonprofits become effective organizations, because of ways they restrict their funding or the ways they can ignore or interfere with nonprofit management. (These points also deserve their own article.) The point remains: the call for greater payout and thus greater amounts of money out the door and to nonprofits does nothing to increase social benefit in and of itself. It may even lead to support of a layer of less effective organizations and programs which can be socially detrimental and certainly not the best use of funds.

What is a Foundation to Do?

None of this, though, means that 5 percent is the proper ceiling for all foundations! What is a sensible foundation to do? It depends, and that is the beauty of a diverse and independent philanthropic sector. As a general rule, I would suggest that foundations simply make sure they meet the 5 percent minimum but otherwise ignore it. Thoughtful consideration of mission and strategy should determine whether more than 5 percent is a proper payout. Very sophisticated considerations of asset allocation, risk and diversification, etc. become important in ensuring that a foundation’s assets are appropriately invested. Certainly foundations should have an Investment Policy Statement (only about 69 percent do) and a formal Spending Policy (only about 42 percent do)

which they revisit regularly. (These percentages come from the 2011 *Foundation Operations and Management Report*, published by the Association for Small Foundations. Since the report focuses on smaller foundations, the percentages are probably a bit higher for the entire population of private foundations.)

Most foundations report that they intend to be enduring institutions, so maintaining fiduciary care and being concerned about future impact are important. In good times, endowments may grow, leading some to raise the “warehousing of wealth” alarm. But we might reframe the issue with the following questions. Aren’t foundations simply being fiscally prudent by saving for a rainy day? Aren’t foundations providing social benefit and protecting their missions by growing endowments that will allow greater funding during economic downturns? Don’t growing endowments provide more chances to make innovative and big bets when opportunities arise?

Assuming that asset growth is a permanent state (as many who advocate increasing the payout rate seem to do) means ignoring the risks and reality of market cycles. Over time, markets go up, but they also go down, wreaking havoc on endowments and the nonprofit sector in general (see the 1970s, 1987, 2002, and 2008). The 1973 recession, for example, resulted in the Ford Foundation losing a third of its value, \$1 billion, resulting in nearly 50 percent cuts in staff and grants. If foundations are careful about their assets (and asset growth), they can respond to those inevitable rainy days, crises, or unique opportunities without jeopardizing the foundation’s future, its mission, or their grantees’ programs.

This appears to have been the case with 2009 giving as reported above (Foundation Center 2011). Foundations could dip into their endowments for short periods without bringing their own existence into question or decimating their ability to respond to grantees in the future, *if* their earlier payout rates allowed them to “save” and build their endowments. There can thus be important social benefits to foundation thrift, and conversely, there can be real social costs to higher payouts (mandated or chosen) beyond the impact on a particular foundation’s longevity, mission, and grantees, as a result of lower grantmaking in subsequent years or spending out.

A minimum rate of 5 percent seems to make sense and allows for the kind of diversity and choices of lifespan, mission, and strategy that make philanthropy a vibrant part of civil society. I would feel a tad better about that sentence if I really believed most foundations were deliberate in their decision-making about payout,

spending, and perpetuity. We need more careful discussion, openness, and questioning about these issues, without a lot of politically imbued or self-interested baggage. We need donors and foundation staff and boards to question both the default decisions about paying out at 5 percent and the simplistic calls for greater payout in and of itself. At the end of the day, though, I trust the imperfect results of open discussion, publicity, and the press—as well as the often maddening diversity among thousands of foundations—more than tinkering with a one-size-fits-all mandated rate and basing that tinkering on all sorts of agendas from both the left and right while ignoring the unfortunate unintended consequences embedded in them.

The Importance of Enduring Institutions

In an “exit interview” published in *The Chronicle of Philanthropy* before she left the Ford Foundation, Susan Berresford talked passionately about the importance of long-term institutions: “Our society values enduring institutions. . . . We treasure them because they express and reinforce our values” (Wilhelm 2007). Strong, diverse, and long-lasting institutions are a vital part of a sustained civil society. New foundations and other philanthropic formations constantly help to renew civil society, and that is a good thing. At the same time, foundations that have long histories, existing cultures, experience, working capital, and human capital are immensely valuable as well. As enduring institutions, foundations can be significant, independent organizations within civil society. They are “countervailing” institutions, to use a phrase now out of fashion. They can reveal and respond to failures of both government and market. They can stand separate from governmental, corporate/commercial, and other special interests. Both centuries of history and events in recent decades—in the United States and internationally—should remind us just how important enduring and independent institutions can be to society. If one is going to talk about the “public good,” surely having long-lived foundations should be one such public good.

I wrote “should be” because one of the challenges for us is how to ensure that long-lived foundations don’t become calcified dinosaur bones. How can they remain an independent voice? How can they remain vital, be renewed, and use their history, knowledge, and cultures to enrich civil society and the causes for which they care? These broad questions and the very history of philanthropy deserve a great deal more discussion than they generally receive in the field and in the boardroom.

We need foundations with long-lasting commitments to issues that require long-term attention. All too often the short-term belief that we can, for instance, eliminate poverty or cure cancer in ten years is supremely presumptuous and wasteful. Indeed, there are some “technical” issues or projects that can be addressed by foundations fairly easily and directly. But very few troubling social issues can be so easily solved in a lifetime. Although that is certainly due in part to foundation ineffectiveness, many problems philanthropy seeks to address are immensely complex, some must be addressed over many generations, and some tragically, may be part of the human condition. Foundations represent not only a workshop for immediate passion and innovation, as many have remarked; they also represent the financial, temporal, and human capital needed to address issues with a longer-term perspective.

Discussing the social value of having enduring, sustainable and independent philanthropic institutions should be an explicit part of what individual donors and foundation boards think about, though I am sure they rarely do think that way. Perhaps, when one looks at mission, impact, payout, and longevity, one value to include is a foundation’s role as an enduring, vital, and independent institution; as a long-term, committed philanthropic citizen; and as a countervailing power within the complex workings of modern civil society. Having regular discussions about mission and effectiveness in that larger social context would, no doubt, be fruitful.

Assuming perpetuity and a simple 5 percent payout rate as the default, or presuming that larger payouts and spending out is the better choice, are both mistakes. Either spending out or enduring can be a legitimate strategy if it helps meet a particular foundation’s mission and is the choice of the donor and/or board. Setting a payout rate, then, is properly, I believe, a complex “private policy” decision. It is not best to subject it to a single “public policy” prescription as many advocates have promoted in the past. Doing so not only restricts the diversity, and wide choice of the goals, strategies, and lifespan decisions donors and boards should have, but it also ignores many important implications and unintended consequences of a higher rate.

It is hoped that this article will help serve as a reset button to start thinking more broadly and deeply about payout, longevity, spending, and the value of enduring, independent institutions in civil society.

NOTES

¹ This article is a greatly revised version of a blog contribution to Smart Assets (April 9, 2010), while the author was a senior fellow at Philanthropy New York. It was subsequently presented at the Conversations on Philanthropy Colloquium on July 8-11, 2010.

The views expressed in this article reflect those only of the author.

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CIVIL SOCIETY AND PHILANTHROPY

Steven D. Ealy

A crucial problem confronting the world of philanthropy over the next decade will be a clarification of its self-understanding as a social and cultural actor. As Rebecca Solnit rightly reminds us, “What you believe shapes how you act” (2009, 2). Are philanthropic institutions a part of the private, non-governmental sector and thus an element in a vital civil society, or are they a part of the governmental-institutional sector? The quasi-governmental role played by the Red Cross as gatekeeper and certifier and the increasing involvement of nonprofits in seeking government funding and advocacy of legislative approaches to solving problems give rise to this question. In a 2010 essay in *The Chronicle of Philanthropy* Michael Edwards argued that “grant makers are among the forces hastening erosion of civil society” (29). Edwards’s brief essay reflects the confusion now surrounding both the notion of civil society and the nature of philanthropic activity.

On the one hand, Edwards seems to believe that civil society is a space of great freedom, spontaneity and creativity. In a passage that almost sounds as if it could have been written by Friedrich Hayek, Edwards claims that “the empowerment of ordinary people has no predetermined ends, and that makes civil society messy, unpredictable, and uncontrollable—and sometimes dangerously subversive, a characteristic that few foundations are brave enough to support” (2010, 29).

On the other hand, elsewhere in this same article Edwards states that civil society consists of “the places where different views are negotiated to produce a consensus on the big issues of the day” (29). He considers such consensus important because it can provide the basis for the passage of legislation, such as the G.I. Bill in 1944 or the Health Care and Education Reconciliation Act of 2010 (Obama’s health care plan). This description makes it sound as if civil society, rather than being “messy, unpredictable, and uncontrollable,” is merely one mechanism in the policy articulation and mobilization process characteristic of contemporary American decision-making. To the extent that it is simply a cog in the policy process, civil society will in fact be all too mild, predictable and manageable.

Defining Civil Society

A look at Edwards' more comprehensive treatment of this concept in his book *Civil Society* (2004) may help clarify this apparent tension in his thought. Edwards rightly notes that in contemporary American politics "civil society" is advocated by individuals and groups on both the right and left as the key to resolving the nation's current political crisis, which suggests that it is a concept of somewhat ambiguous meaning and implications.¹ In an effort to bring some order to this unruly concept, Edwards identifies three different schools of thought regarding "civil society" that have currency at present. In my judgment, the coexistence of these different schools invoking the same concept helps explain why so many of those extolling civil society seem to be talking past each other.

First is the "neo-Tocquevillian" view that sees civil society as associational life. In this model, civil society is "a *part* of society distinct from states and markets, formed for the purposes of advancing common interests and facilitating collective action. . . . [C]ivil society in this sense contains all associations and networks between the family and the state, except firms" (Edwards 2004, vii, 18-36).

The second theoretical approach is normative in orientation, seeing civil society "as the realm of service rather than self-interest, and a breeding ground for the 'habits of the heart'—attitudes and values like cooperation, trust, tolerance, and non-violence." From this perspective, civil society "means a *type* of society that is motivated by a different way of being and living in the world, or a different rationality, identified as 'civil'" (2004, viii, 37-53).

Edwards describes the third approach as one that "sees civil society as an arena for public deliberation, rational dialogue and the exercise of 'active citizenship' in pursuit of the common interest—in other words, as the 'public sphere'" (2004, viii). Although Edwards claims that elements of these three models can be combined, it becomes clear as his argument unfolds that the third model, "Civil Society as the Public Sphere," is preeminent for his purposes (54-71). This can be seen almost immediately in his detailed discussion of this perspective, where he argues, "In its role as the 'public sphere', civil society becomes the arena for argument and deliberation as well as for association and institutional collaboration" (55). Note that here Edwards identifies "public sphere civil society" as *the* arena for argument, not merely *an* arena.

In Edwards' account, civil society as public sphere leads to "dialogic politics," and "dialogic politics offer a route—and perhaps the only route—to reach a

legitimate normative consensus around a plurality of interests and positions assuming certain conditions are met” (2004, 59). Just what are the conditions that need to be met so that “dialogic politics” can lead to this “legitimate normative consensus”? Before I attempt to answer that question, let me emphasize strongly the following point: from Edwards’ perspective, the conditions necessary for politics to work are *pre-political moral standards*. That is, these conditions are not subject to political debate, decision, and compromise but are the foundations necessary for all legitimate politics.

According to Edwards, “These qualifying conditions are crucial, because they establish a boundary within which conversations must take place if they are to qualify as democratic, and therefore effective in *generating the outcomes the public sphere is supposed to produce*” (2004, 57; my emphasis). Rather than being an arena in which spontaneous and creative action might occur, civil society as public sphere now appears to be a set of procedures designed to lead to predetermined and acceptable results. This is not just a casual misstatement on Edwards’ part but instead seems to be at the heart of his position. In a comment on critical theory, which is part of his general discussion of the public sphere, Edwards claims that “unless [the ethics and structures of these discourses] are carefully ordered there is no possibility that the public sphere can work as theory predicts” (58).

Among the pre-political moral standards that allow dialogic politics to work are “equality of voice and access, in particular, and a minimum of censorship so that relevant information is available to all” (Edwards 2004, 59). Additionally, “inclusive and objective public deliberation is feasible only through channels that are not completely captured by states or markets” (58). Also, “diffusion of power . . . is essential to democratic debate and the exercise of accountability of citizens” (61). Finally, “pervasive inequalities . . . threaten the very foundation of the democratic public sphere” (69). Again I must emphasize that these appear to be pre-political moral foundations for dialogic politics, not an agenda for political debate and decision. This means that satisfaction of all of these criteria is necessary before political discussion per se can begin, in Edwards’ view.

Civil Society and the State

For many, one of the strengths of the notion of civil society is its recognition of the inevitable pluralities of man’s social existence. As Edwards himself writes, “civil society is the land of difference, the place where we find meaning in our

lives as people of different faiths, races, interests, perspectives and agendas” (2004, 61). But as the above discussion suggests, Edwards maintains that there are severe limits to how far these and other differences can be tolerated if our goal is to establish the conditions necessary for dialogic politics to be successful. Indeed, according to Edwards, “the governance of complex societies and the preservation of peaceful coexistence require that some of these particularities are surrendered to the common interest, in the form of rules, law, norms and other agreements that cut across the views of different communities, and to which all citizens subscribe” (61-62).

This inevitably leads to a focus on state power, because “the application of these rules is ultimately the task of government and other institutions of the state” (Edwards 2004, 62). This does not mean that civil society has no role to play in enforcement, however. It does so in two ways, according to Edwards: civil society “plays a role in both legitimating government intervention and imposing its own informal settlements through voluntary codes of conduct and other self-organizing principles” (62).²

At times, Edwards suggests, public sphere civil society itself might be the instigator of the turn toward state action to eliminate unwanted diversity. He asks, “Is the preservation of civil society as a protected zone of pluralism a more important objective than enforcing universal standards in a society that is civil?” Edwards answers this question with a resounding no: “The public sphere must decide the answer to this question, in court if necessary . . .” (2004, 84).³

To summarize Edwards’ position, then, civil society as public sphere requires major structural and procedural changes in society to eliminate inequality and at least some elements of diversity before a legitimate dialogic politics can even begin. I will simply note that for some people these questions may appear to be the very matters that should be subject to political debate. For Edwards, however, these are not political issues at all but are the pre-political conditions necessary for politics to conduct its business. Edwards nods toward spontaneity and messiness, but ultimately he seems to come down on the side of predictability, uniformity, and political correctness (see 2004, 68-69).

There is much at stake in how we draw the orders of civil society and polity. In contrast to Edwards, the Scottish Enlightenment author Adam Ferguson captured the truly unpredictable and spontaneous dimension of civil society when he argued that “nations stumble on establishments, which are indeed the result of human action, but not the execution of any human design” (1995, 119). This powerful image has influenced both Michael Oakeshott and Friedrich Hayek in

their understanding of the nature and operation of complex societies, and both suggest that the limits of human design are still in full operation in modernity.

I began by quoting Edwards's endorsement of the subversive nature of civil society. I believe that civil society is subversive, but that Edwards does not really understand the nature of this aspect of civil society. Civil society is subversive of any central authority that attempts to control the actions of men. Ferguson captured this dynamic:

Men, in general, are sufficiently disposed to occupy themselves in forming projects and schemes: but he who would scheme and project for others, will find an opponent in every person who is disposed to scheme for himself. Like the winds, that come we know not whence, and blow whithersoever they list, the forms of society are derived from an obscure and distant origin; they arise, long before the date of philosophy, from the instincts, not from the speculations, of men. The [crowd] of mankind, are directed in their establishments and measures, by the circumstances in which they are placed; and seldom are turned from their way, to follow the plan of any single projector (1995, 119).⁴

Civil Society and Philanthropy

It is here that the nature of civil society and philanthropy intersect, with implications for human action. The original act of philanthropy as recorded by the Greeks was Prometheus giving the fire of Zeus to men. As Steven Grosby makes clear (2010, 14-16 and 20-22), Prometheus acted in direct opposition to the stated will of Zeus and therefore his story, even as myth, may “serve as a polemic against tyranny” (20). I want to radicalize Grosby's discussion and suggest that at its core philanthropic action involves opposition to all centralized authority, from which it must remain aloof if it is to pursue its goal of loving mankind.

Before concluding, I will raise two points that are worth further consideration but are beyond the scope of this essay. One of the implications of this philanthropic opposition to centralized authority, paradoxically, is that large philanthropic organizations are, at a very deep level, in conflict with themselves. One of the ways in which this manifests itself is the internal battle between programmatic and institutional concerns—do individual foundations remain true to their stated mission, or do they engage in institutional expansion and entrenchment in the pursuit of power? In passing, we might also ask whether our nation's tax laws are wiser than foundations. The law mandates that tax-exempt

philanthropic institutions refrain from political activity, but many today seem to be increasingly guided by narrow policy concerns or the pursuit of government funding opportunities.

In arguing that philanthropy and civil society should not be understood in narrow political terms I am not arguing that philanthropy and civil society have no importance for politics in a broader sense. In fact, I would argue that a robust civil society (which includes robust philanthropic activity) is necessary for a healthy polity. While not arguing directly about the nature of civil society, *The Federalist Papers* can assist us in understanding the relationship between political concerns and the broader society. In *Federalist* 10, Publius argues that factions are organized groups that work against the “permanent and aggregate interests of the community.” In two papers, *Federalist* 63 and 71, Publius speaks about the “deliberate sense of the community,” and in two other papers (12, 22) he writes of “the genius of the people”—the equivalent of “national character.” This “genius of the people” is elsewhere characterized by Publius as a “vigilant and manly spirit. . . which nourishes freedom, and in return is nourished by it” (*Federalist* 57).

One function of the political system is to provide security for its citizens, and this involves protecting those “permanent and aggregate interests of the community.” The “deliberate sense of the community,” rather than light and transient emotions, should guide the political system and should reflect the deepest beliefs of the people. Publius believed that those beliefs revolved around freedom, understood in both a collective (freedom from external domination and internal oppression) and an individual sense.

To the extent that the American character still manifests the “vigilant and manly spirit which nourishes freedom,” as it did in the 1830s when Tocqueville traveled the country and documented our robust associational and public (non-political) life, we remain a people that looks to private initiative rather than government programs for the solutions of many of the problems we confront. And a key component of private (which does not mean merely individual) action will be philanthropic activities guided by competing approaches to achieving the “great society” and competing visions of exactly what that society would look like.

F. A. Hayek does not, as many liberals do, make the standard argument against government action that takes as its starting point the Actonian caution that “power tends to corrupt, and absolute power corrupts absolutely.” It is not power per se with which Hayek is concerned but coercion, especially the coercion of the state (1960, 133-147). Hayek argues that we can distinguish between government

provision of services and coercion (222-224), thus acknowledging a legitimate sphere for government beyond the minimal watchman state (253-394). What does concern Hayek about government provision of services is the possibility that the government will lay claim to a monopoly provision of some services and therefore prohibit private action in those areas. The great danger of this approach in the long run is the loss of creativity, for as Hayek argued throughout his career, no single mind can capture all the dimensions of a complex society and bring them into a predictable and routinized whole (29-30).

This is why a robust civil society is crucial for the long-term well-being of civilization—it is in the messy, free, and un-coerced interplay of individuals and institutions that new knowledge is discovered, new approaches to social life explored, and personal and social progress achieved. Philanthropy, as part of the sphere of civil society understood as non-governmental voluntary action, will mirror the diversity and complexity of interests and approaches that characterize a great society—the “extended republic” of *Federalist* 51. The challenge of “loving mankind” is, after all, an invitation to creative engagement and experimentation, not a call to lockstep uniformity or political correctness.

NOTES

- ¹ Edwards’ discussion in *Civil Society* is transnational and transcultural, which complicates the issue even more. Perhaps the effort to define this concept in a way that would fit all social and political circumstances—which requires a movement from the historical and particular to the generic and abstract—robs the concept of any real value as a political or social (as opposed to a scientific or theoretical) term. I will ignore the transnational dimension of Edwards’ discussion here.
- ² Thus civil society as public sphere provides the “mechanisms . . . to negotiate the formal and informal rules of the social game” (Edwards 2004, 62).
- ³ Edwards refers to *Roberts v. United States Jaycees*, 468 U. S. 609 (1984), in which the U.S. Supreme Court held that the Jaycees could not bar female membership.
- ⁴ I also commend Adam Smith’s discussion of the differences between the “man of public spirit [who] is prompted . . . by humanity and benevolence” and the “man of system” who “seems to imagine that he can arrange the different members of a great society with as much ease as the hand arranges the different pieces upon a chess board” (1982, 233-234).

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SOCIAL LEARNING, CIVILITY, AND COMPLEX SOCIETIES¹

Heather Wood Ion

As technological change makes society increasingly complex and erodes traditional relationships, philanthropy must change to meet the demands of the new social environment. Top-down efforts by large organizations and a predisposition toward government action bring short-term results at best. What is most needed is a renewal of a widespread sense of shared responsibility, which is best fulfilled through independent, voluntary action at the level closest to the individuals needing help. As the spontaneous responses to disasters in recent years show, such a sense can indeed be sustained and is a powerful force for good.

In 1983, Richard Cornuelle wrote in *Healing America*, “The Healing of America will require a sustained, systematic expansion of the independent sector deep into the domain now considered the territory of government. That, in turn, will depend on rehabilitating the idea, abandoned in the thirties, of concerted action, national in scope but outside government, to provide stability and security. Our sense of national community apart from the state must somehow be restored” (173).

Ten years later, Cornuelle wrote in the Afterword to the new edition of *Reclaiming the American Dream*, “But the principal obstacle to a revival of independent action is simply its ruined condition” (1993).

Almost two decades later, there are more than 1.5 million nonprofit organizations registered in the United States. In 2009 more than 63.4 million Americans volunteered 8.1 billion hours of service worth approximately \$169 billion dollars (Independent Sector undated). The proliferation of organizations supposedly dedicated to actions serving the needs of others would appear to conflict with Cornuelle’s assertion regarding the ruined condition of this aspect of America. But do the numbers indicate a true “revival of independent action”? To what extent are the principles of mutual aid so important to Cornuelle evident in this independent sector today? How have the changes to the economy brought about by information technology and virtual networks been reflected in this

sector? Why, given these numbers, did we hear, in the light of the disasters in Japan, that the selflessness and belief in the common good so evident in Japanese survivors is utterly lacking here in the United States? What is the social efficacy of these entities and the hours given? How do we learn from these interactions, and what do we learn? Do we see signs of revival?

Spirit of Voluntarism

It is important that we understand that associational activity and the dedication of those 63.4 million volunteers serving others are not cohesive and are not readily defined by any standard definition of philanthropy. This is an area of our lives which is complex, adaptive, and dynamic, never the same to an analyst as it is to the volunteer or the recipient of services. Mutual aid in this country has been profoundly pragmatic, in some ways anathema to both the professionalization and institutionalization we have seen in philanthropy in recent decades. To me, the critical question is not how we are to define this sector, but rather, what do we learn and how do we learn while we act and live within these complexities of helping and being helped? Social learning is defined as observing the behaviors of others and modifying our own behavior in consequence. However, recent understanding of child-directed education expands that definition to acknowledge that the learning which takes place in groups—that is, shared curiosity—changes, accelerates, and deepens learning for all participants.

When referencing voluntary associations, the most common illustration is the bucket brigade or a barn raising. Those may seem quaint, yet every spring we do see volunteers tossing sandbags to help build barriers against floods, and every Thanksgiving those who feed the homeless are overwhelmed by volunteers who wish to help. Think of communities which pooled resources to hire a teacher for their children, and compare that with the home school movement today. It may seem old-fashioned that communities came together to feed threshing crews, well drillers, and firemen, but we still feed firemen, and we still donate our resources to provide for others, be they in New Orleans or Japan. Volunteer associations which have longevity achieve it through constant adaptation to changing needs—the Visiting Nurses in Missouri have become school nurses delivering preventive care after school districts cut school nurses from the budget; gleaners across the nation not only supply themselves with food gleaned from fields and distribution centers but also feed the homeless and women in shelters; and community

kitchens have become training centers for cooks (Egger 2002). The energy that begins an effort of mutual aid is entrepreneurial in nature: a new way to address a need is seen, people are recruited to participate, and the work begins.

Institutionalization, Professionalization

However, many associations that began with a noble desire to help, become unhelpful over time. They become dedicated to their own survival rather than to serving the need they first identified. As both institutionalization and professionalization have increased, two attitudes in particular have worked against what Cornuelle and others hoped would become a movement toward greater civic responsibility. One is the assumption that the measures and standards of business can be applied to all forms of human activity. The second is that in competing for “talent” the nonprofit world must seek the same kinds of managers and leaders as do private companies, and that only this kind of talent has value. The latter view adopts a condescension and dismissal of volunteers most frequently expressed in phrases such as, “Volunteers are unreliable; unless someone is paid they will not do the job.” This attitude is astounding, given that all entrepreneurs were essentially volunteer in service of their own passion for a number of years, and further, that most of the enduring institutions of democracy have been created and sustained by volunteers. Some of the greatest successes of American society—such as peaceful transitions of power, the testing of the polio vaccine, the provision of free information through libraries—have been organized and conducted by volunteers. Recently, after Hurricane Katrina, we all witnessed the effectiveness of local volunteer efforts to provide immediate relief and long-term restoration against all the odds, while actions by governments and large foundations were plagued by delays and failures.

Much of the research into and discussion of the voluntary sector, the independent sector, and the nonprofit world has focused on the relationship between government and the sector. Various U.S. presidents have advocated volunteer activities, but publicity campaigns such as “a thousand points of light” seem to evolve to a default discussion of financial relationships. It is argued that since nonprofit entities seek grants from government (and from philanthropy which imitates government) this sector has become an extension of the public sector. Cornuelle wanted the sector to *compete* with government for responsibility for social services, but current research would argue that there can be no such competition because of the scale of the need for services and because the

nonprofit sector may have become dependent on government (Cornuelle 1993). Peter Drucker maintained that participation in the social sector would help restore civic responsibility in ways not possible through government, employment, or private enterprise (1999). If we think of volunteer activities as learning activities, we quickly understand that this takes place in groups, preferably small groups, not in interactions appeasing grant priorities.

As local social service organizations compete for grants, their own activities are in large part determined by the funding priorities and evaluation strategies of granting entities. Not only does this make real collaboration and prevention of duplication within a locality difficult, it also means that a local social service agency is subject to the frustrations of an entrepreneur starting a business: both become dependent on changing whims and exit strategies of those providing the funding. As the priorities change, often with political winds, efforts become increasingly superficial and artificial—if a granting agency wants to see local partnerships, the grant-seeking entity cobbles together for the purposes of the application just such partnerships, without any intent to learn or work together after the money is received.

Similarly, although much innovation is taking place in faith-based services, these organizations compete with each other for a shared or “captive” donor base, again limiting the potential for collaboration and social learning. Furthermore, because the priorities of the granting agencies are established for their own self-interest, rarely are specific and pragmatic local needs viewed as important as these funding source priorities. Even worse, the local entity may become dependent on these sources and, in consequence, no longer capable of fully serving or being directly relevant to its own locality (Ellerman 2007). Even the professionalization of the sector addresses the priorities of external funders, so that, say, a home health agency whose clients are primarily Hmong and Spanish speakers sets as its hiring criteria an MBA in health care administration because that is the funders’ qualification, yet it does not look for those who speak the languages of the clients served. Finally, because it is now assumed that voluntary associations must at least make themselves over in the image of a business in order to appear competitive and/or successful, there is a grave reluctance to close or sunset such an association. Now such closure means failure. In the past, such closure might have indicated that a need had been met successfully.

The language of competition and the vocabulary of combat dominate policy and analysis of this sector. We have wars and task forces on poverty, cancer, etc., and we use the metrics of domination and control to judge outcomes. One consequence is that programs and projects become self-protective and closed, rather than open and

expansive. During the period of the \$206 billion “tobacco windfall” of funds for local health initiatives, states and municipalities across the nation found that it was almost impossible to (a) **convene** nonprofits to set priorities regarding spending (passionate people who had almost identical missions of service simply did not want to be in the same rooms with each other), and (b) agree on the **balance** between spending for short-term needs (including paying off municipal debt) versus long-term infrastructure which would prevent those needs from arising (such as training programs to create skilled workers among the unemployed) (Tragakiss 2009). Even though the tobacco tax agreement was in perpetuity, it was very hard for both politicians and nonprofit leaders to see beyond the current quarterly or grant cycle timeframe in order to plan the use of allocated funds for the future. The cultural attitudes of both competition and immediacy sabotaged the potential long-term benefit.

In a collaborative space, by contrast, all constituents see direct value in participating in the association. Value is not associated with place as in a hierarchy, or with function as in, for example, hospital care. Value is associated with the availability of resources and learning, so that the more participants there are in the collaboration, the greater its value. This means that expansion is positive and anticipates improvement, not a threat to performance, rewards, or capacity. These are lessons we need in our pluralist society.

As we look at the social fields of individuals and groups, we can see that markets have no single socio-cultural frontier and that the transmission and expansion of knowledge constantly change any frontiers or boundaries of those social fields. When our social fields become self-protective, we limit our learning; we close ourselves off. We have only to look to the academic world to see a mirror of this specialization, lack of communication, and consequent isolation. Just as in academic specialties, the self-interest of a service organization designed to address a specific need becomes a property to be defended and bounded fiercely. How, then, can we hope to connect our desires to serve others with shared responsibility?

Shared Learning

Complicating the current situation of the sector is the expansion of intellectual property law to include methods, procedures, and techniques as forms of property (Fisher undated; Hyde 2010). Social service entities become even less willing to collaborate and share what they do and what they know in order to establish best practices if their methods and practices can be “owned.” It is far easier to forget the mission of your organization if you are busy defending its property and if its

ideas have become commodities for grant-seeking markets.² The reasons this is important for our discussion include the conflict between what we have viewed as “public interest” or “the commons”; the dedication of talent to defense rather than delivery; and the destruction of collaborative knowledge-building in this climate. In a philosophic sense, we have moved an enormous distance from the mentor and apprenticeship models which transmitted mores as well as skills and kept our multigenerational communities creative.

Many of our volunteer associations and mutual aid efforts in the past did serve to sustain mentorship within communities by both teaching and giving opportunities for practicing effective ways of addressing the challenges of experience. Shared learning contributed to the continuity and sustainability of social groups. What was shared was directly relevant to the way of life, available resources, needs, and endurance of the group over time. Learning was functional: what was learned was to be practiced; otherwise the skill or wisdom would be lost. In traditional communities, the homesteading environments of the North American West, or refugee camps across the world, skills were taught through apprenticeships, and it was acknowledged that it took time to acquire real expertise. Sugata Mitra has shown in his child-driven education experiments how very quickly and profoundly children can teach themselves and change their worlds (2010). His conclusion is that education is a self-organizing system and learning is an emergent phenomenon. I would extend that view to say that when mutual aid is self-organizing, we will also see learning emerge.

Although most learning in a traditional or cohesive community was informal and lifelong, it was also purposive. Parents and elders, often within ritual contexts, purposefully taught children skills and precepts of behavior. These were and are considered necessary lessons in becoming an adult or a functioning member of society (Kedrayate undated; Stoller 2004). A community is a group of people who, though diverse, are interdependent, bound together by mutual responsibilities arising out of a common history or common purpose which they have not simply chosen to be a part of but which they are responsible for sustaining over time. When we hear the admiration for the Japanese sense of obligation to the common good being shown in the weeks after the earthquake, we must remember that this is taught consistently and repeatedly throughout Japanese schools and in the Japanese family. It is not a behavior which has arisen spontaneously in the face of adversity.

Paucity of Social Connections

One of the most challenging social issues in American society is disaster preparedness. We know from sad experience that neither the agencies of government nor private enterprise will arrive in time to save us, our property, or the communities we cherish when disaster happens. The lessons learned are also obvious and readily available to anyone, anywhere. However, the issue is that so far, recruitment to preparedness has largely failed. We are not willing to emerge from our private worlds and definitions of safety to the civic world of shared responsibility, even on our own behalf. Why?

Thanks to our garage door openers, many of us rarely need to step foot in common space. Thanks to our screened realities, many of us neither participate in nor are aware of the school projects of our neighbors' children, let alone whose supplemental oxygen will stop if we have a power failure in the neighborhood. The former door-to-door activities, including in many areas of the country events such as Halloween and the sale of Girl Scout cookies, have been stopped or deflected to space more "secure" than our neighborhoods. These are reflective of the choices we are making to live in terms of fear and suspicion rather than of curiosity and exploration. When major media networks broadcast constantly about "the terrorist next door," we become less likely to borrow a lawnmower or even a cup of sugar.

The market today does not build connection to a commons, for our needs as consumers can now be fulfilled either across the Internet or in a mall unrelated to our homes and neighbors and to which we drive alone. Our economic lives increasingly do not require us to be engaged with real people in real time. Many of us used to find community and a sense of shared meaning and learning at our places of work. This too is changing as increasing numbers of us work in isolation. Furthermore, we are expected to achieve in competition, not in collaboration, even though in fact no achievement has ever been accomplished in isolation from the contributions of others.

Sometimes we forget, in our contemporary arrogance, that our technologies do not determine our intelligence any more than our communities are mere projections of our separate selves. We define ourselves through relationships, and we live not only in various contexts and environments but in systems which we co-create and must endure as well as explore.

Nicholas Christakis and James Fowler have shown us how profoundly our connections shape us and how our social networks can have intelligence, memory, and the ability to self-replicate (2011). These are not the Facebook and Twitter networks designed by entrepreneurs; these are the social networks we create as

we live our lives. Christakis and Fowler show in rich complexity that our social networks are public goods and their purpose is to transmit what benefits us all.

This brings us back to the concept of mutual aid and the issue of civic responsibility. In the past year we have heard that virtual networks have brought about the fall of dictators. In 2008 we saw the use of messaging to mobilize and fundraise for political purposes in unprecedented numbers. We watched Susan Boyle rise from invisibility to global recognition in a matter of days, and we cheered for her. Most of us are grateful for the vast resources now available through the Internet, which has been described as the greatest learning tool the world has known (Lewis et al. 2010, 1-19). On the other hand, we have seen the pictures of children texting one another while sitting within reach of each other, and we have despaired of the drivers who nearly run us down as they talk on their cell phones or text something while driving. The immediate has taken over.³ What the virtual world makes possible acquires our constant attention, and companies now compete for “eyeballs.”

How, then, do we connect the world of virtual interactions to our need for a generative community which takes responsibility for the shaping of meaning and of the governance of our lives? Can we revitalize our voluntary associations with our new tools and technologies in ways which better serve to construct coherence in this complex society? What would it take to ignite our desires to take collaborative action together in order to heal America?

Reclaiming Our Sense of Shared Purpose

Slowly, with new media and readily available communication, we are beginning to understand how the whole of humanity is greater than the sum of its parts (Christakis and Fowler 2011). If we aspire in our own lives to live in a self-organizing system which affirms our capacities, our connections, our self-reliance, and our opportunities, then we must overcome our current culture of fear. We have the tools to better understand how all that we do influences and is influenced by others, but we must embrace the complexity in which our lives are embedded.

Social learning does take place despite our isolation and fear. Whenever we observe others and then imitate what we have seen, or apply what we understand, we learn. Similarly, when we strive to achieve a shared purpose with others, each member contributes to the actions taken and the skills applied. As Mitra has shown with children, four or five individuals, encouraged by one another, will accelerate the learning of each one (2010). In our neighborhoods, workplaces, and churches this is happening all the time. Most importantly, as we value each others' stories, we

are learning the lessons from experience and imagining a way forward, or a shared hope. The structure of the independent sector may be fraught with problems, but the human substance of the sector is constantly working to change lives.

There are no separate sectors. Sometimes what is labeled individual is in fact part of someone else's business plan; sometimes what we view as government is merely a memory; sometimes what seems to be a market is in fact a fair where participants are celebrating the coherence, not the contracts, of their lives. We cannot overcome our sense of private isolation and public despair without becoming explorers of new possibility. Voluntary associations give us that potential; the assets and roots of our wisdom already exist, and we will discover them in mutual effort or not at all. We need not compete with governments to reclaim our own sense of agency: governments leave enough undone and unexplored so there is plenty of opportunity for transforming our lives. Our own sense of agency can become a bulwark against both dependence upon and intrusion from governance.

We have learned the lessons from Katrina, from our immigrant ancestors, and from the unhelpful help of institutionalized goodwill: we must start small, in our own neighborhoods, workplaces, churches, sports teams, and the like. The impact of our energy has to be evident around us: taking what we learn in building better lives for those we care about and live with, we will be able to build better lives through the expanding empathy we discover. Effective mutual aid and voluntary association are not dedicated toward centers of power and policy, and most of us have realized that top-down efforts have short-term results. Healing takes the tincture of time, and it also requires a vocabulary of hope. Our complex world has been built by optimists and adventurers who embraced the paradox and ambiguity of knowing that what would emerge from shared effort would be something mysterious, unknown, and immeasurably fascinating. It is our responsibility to seek out the margins and boundaries of our assumptions regarding what is possible, until we glimpse, like a promised land, the emergent whole.

NOTES

- ¹ Prepared for the 36th Annual Conference of The Association of Private Enterprise Education, Nassau, Bahamas, April 10-12, 2011.
- ² Lewis Hyde is especially eloquent about how readily we use our shared cultural property to explore what it means to be human and how much is lost when the public voices are privatized. See the chapter "The Common Self Now," p. 187.

³ See the works of MIT sociologist Sherry Turkle on what screened realities are doing to the social and emotional development and literacy of current adolescents. Also see Twenge 2009.

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REVIEWS

The Wisdom of Generosity: A Reader in American Philanthropy

By William J. Jackson, ed.

Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2008.

ISBN 978-1602580596

The Perfect Gift: The Philanthropic Imagination in Poetry and Prose

By Amy A. Kass, ed.

Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2002.

ISBN 978-0253215420

Giving Well, Doing Good: Readings for Thoughtful Philanthropists

By Amy A. Kass, ed.

Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University Press, 2008.

ISBN 978-0253219558

Reviewed by George M. Curtis, III

The American history of printed primary sources has been rich and varied. Starting in the nineteenth century with the growing interest in preserving America's memory of its Revolution and Constitution making, documentary editors in the early republic began what would become a notable part of American record-keeping as editors assembled lasting collections meant for the public. This practice during the twentieth century began to concentrate more and more on publishing primary sources for academic and scholarly uses rather than for a general audience. The advent of the Internet has altered the publication template yet again, now offering one-and-all access to both previously published letterpress editions of primary and secondary sources, as well as unpublished primary sources. One of the consequences of this, of course, has been the diminishment of letterpress publications of primary sources in American history that follow a chronological narrative or a specific historical subject. The intention of virtually all of these publications had been to help the reader to acquire a better "first-hand" understanding, one that was not colored by the intermediate voice of any historian's narrative interpretation. In an age when we are awash in document, the services of skilled anthologists may be more important than ever.

We should thus welcome the appearance in the last few years of three distinctive volumes dedicated to a consideration of the history and the many

meanings of philanthropy: three volumes dedicated to the exploration of an idea that has been a centerpiece in the drama of human history and a distinctive feature of American life since the colonial beginnings. The editors of these volumes clearly have taken delight in selecting with some considerable care those sources which illustrate the depth and diversity of the multitude of ideas that illuminate the essential meanings of philanthropy. The result is to open to the reader of these volumes a world of creative commentary, inexhaustible in its reach and richness. Any reader who opens these volumes with some notion that they may find a shortcut to a clear understanding of the meaning of philanthropy will be disabused of such an assumption after but a few selections. This was not an unpleasant discovery by this reviewer.

Sometimes when people are confronted with collections such as these, they may opt to breeze along through them, selecting this and that as they go. These editors, each with distinctive purposes that shape their selection of documents, offer collections that have the magnetic effect of beseeching readers not to do that, their effect even trumping Kass's permission "to pick and choose." Instead the unspoken counsel of these sources commends an *in seriatim* procession so as to permit these documents, each special in its own way, to sink in, one at a time, in order. Both of these editors endorse a deeper engagement, one that calls for time and focused attention. As a consequence, the primary sources that these editor/conductors offer become a vast, richly-variegated oratorio of ideas and perspectives from many, many voices from many, many places over many, many years.

With such prodigious and ambitious undertakings as these, the place of the editor looms large. Selection and organizing, of course, are crucial elements insofar as when taken together these elements of editing become a substantive dimension of the stories that these editors elect to present. The window into the character of the editors' intentions is framed by the introductions they offer to the book and to the documents they select. (The tables of contents showing the selections themselves, the heart of the works, are available for the curious on the respective Amazon.com sales pages.)

Several themes emerge common to all three volumes. First, and perhaps most significant, is the emphasis that both Kass and Jackson place upon selecting sources that illuminate the differences between what is often identified as a philanthropic act and, on the other hand, a life given to the quest of becoming philanthropic. From Aristotle, Jesus Christ, Maimonides, and others forward, there has been a clear notice that being philanthropic, being generous, and acting

with gratitude were matters of character—a way of life governed by a reflective intention to seek good means to achieve good ends. Lives such as these might well find a multitude of different expressions, even lives of beggars as Stephen Vincent Benet offered in his story, “The Bishop’s Beggar,” a story that might have pleased Maimonides (Kass 2002, 378-394). Many of the stories and poems such as this focus on immaterial transfers, those that often take both time and consideration for specific others. The material gifts that launch foundations, for instance, are sometimes single, intentional, well-considered acts, a once-in-a-lifetime offering.

Second, as a matter of course, both editors, in selecting documents, distinguish between those who admonish and those who offer narrative, both traditions of ancient origin offering different perspectives. Admonishment has roots deep in the human quest to encourage generosity and gratitude. Here the distinctions between those admonishments that are understood to have been divinely-inspired contrast with those that issue from a man-centered ambition to influence or control behavior through exhortation that on occasion serves as pretext for the exercise of force. Personal narratives expressed in poetry and prose offer exemplars, offering readers the liberty of free choice, a glimpse into the potentials and the responsibilities of freedom. Present in both admonishment and in narrative has been the question of moral imperatives, giving voice to the human ambition not only to self-development but also to provide an encouraging way for others to what it means to be fully human. Readers will find resonance with these narratives according to their own viewpoints and temperaments.

Third, both Kass and Jackson exhibit respect, not only for those documents they have chosen, but also for their readers. These volumes become offerings, gifts in themselves, philanthropic in nature, reflecting the reaching out of the editors, in a manner that George McCully, citing Aeschylus, suggested was a reflection of “mankind-loving character” (Kass 2008, 423). The editors stress, however, that these selections do not stand on their own, ample fodder for the autodidact. Instead they require a substantive augmentation that grows out of public discussion for Kass and from what Jackson views as service learning.

In his editorial design, Jackson is the more immediately personal of the two. The introductory essay is openly and charmingly autobiographical. “I had to go far from home to learn about community service and to rediscover the generous heart of my native land.” Thus in his first sentences does Jackson offer the fingerpost for his collection. Like Kass, Jackson believes that his collection is a

“means to reflect on . . . American generosity in thought and deed” (xxiii). Later he will add a didactic note, implying that Americans are obligated to learn more about the history of their traditions of generosity, adding that it is his wish “to contribute to the process in which charitable giving and the study of philanthropy becomes more self-aware” (xxxii). To accomplish his mission, Jackson has spent years travelling widely in space and time in order to search out the documents. He has dipped into countless libraries, ventured to many different places to observe many different people celebrating many distinctively different acts of generosity, participated in community fundraisers, and witnessed those distinctive moments when people reacted to emergencies and responded to people in extremis. Out of this wide experience in history and geography, Jackson has constructed a hall of mirrors for American generosity, which he suggests emerges from a global “wisdom tradition” that points not so much to American exceptionalism as it does to an indwelling, more universal, inspirational questing, one that has, in turn, inspired expressions of distinctive generosity in the United States.

Having evoked a welter of different “voices,” Jackson adds a most arresting editorial template for his selections: “And I like fractal images—geometric shapes in which the parts reflect the whole shape of a large complex image on smaller scales. Such structures allow us to consider a topic with many aspects and nuances and their interrelationships. This book is thus a mosaic of pieces organized in related clusters by time periods and themes.” As an historian, Jackson describes his editorial role with such phrases as “stage manager,” “composer of a collage,” and an amplifier of “this unlikely chorus of discordant concord” (xxvi-xxvii). It is important to recognize that Jackson sees himself as more than an historian, however. To that craft he adds two other lenses: “enduring symbolic ideas of spiritual wisdom” and “depth psychology” to inform and shape his understanding of the history of American generosity (xxix).

In turning to the two volumes edited by Amy Kass, the reader enters a different world of reflection, a world in which the editor intentionally seeks to encourage readers to engage in conversation with the sources and with one another. Each volume came into being after extensive conversations with different gatherings of people organized around a consideration of documents that would become a part of the volumes. This careful gestation finds expression in the distinctive head notes. Here Kass does more than introduce the selections. In each head note she inserts suggestive questions with the intention that they will “make for more active and discerning reading” (2002, 7). Left unsaid is the

chance that some readers will disagree with the aptness of a particular question, the upshot being the likely silent substitute of other questions, the engagement Kass sought thus sustained albeit redirected.

The precise historical context is not a main concern for Kass. Rather, she seeks in each volume to examine the elements that she considers elementary in giving shape to the quest that she advertises in the subtitles for each volume. The subtitle of her first volume, *The Philanthropic Imagination in Poetry and Prose*, might be viewed by some as counterintuitive. That is, until the reader soon arrives at that point in the introduction when Kass claims “that we are all, in the root sense of the term, philanthropists. . . . [sharing] the disposition to promote the happiness and well-being of one’s fellows” (2002, 3). Thus it is that the readings are gathered in such a fashion to elaborate and probe this central contention. Consequently in this volume the majority of documents are the stories of individuals, real and imaged, living in a special time and a special place. Each of the five parts has about ten entries. The first four sections are (I) “Why Should I Give?”; (II) “How Should I Give?”; (III) “To Whom or For What Should I Give?”; and (IV) “What Should I Give?” (vii-ix).

Only in the final section, (V) “Can Giving Be Taught?”, does Kass allow the preponderance of voices to become didactic. By this time, however, the reader is well prepared for the advices, having ventured this far in the company of Kass and so many powerful stories and poems. At this point the reader has acquired a new and better understanding of the philanthropic “disposition” in large measure because the path to this understanding has led through the immediacy of the varied moral challenges to people in specific places and times. The cumulative power of these voices, now the new property of the reader, has the capacity to become transformative, which, of course, is just what the editor might hope.

This claim gains standing thanks to the Hermes metaphor that Kass uses to begin the collection. Here Hermes becomes a divine messenger, one appearing suddenly, without warning, with news of gifts which were sometimes good and sometimes bad. Kass fashions this so as to apply it to every person, grand or small, each being endowed with the capacity to choose the right path with whatever gifts they may come to possess. Nature and nurture combine in this forming of the philanthropic imagination, one that attaches to all and that depends upon the individual to nourish and exercise regardless of the physical surroundings.

This is also just what Kass hopes for in the second volume. And yet, as this anthology can be understood to complement the first volume, it is a collection that

stands clearly on its own, one distinctive in its purposes, something shown clearly in the subtitle, *Readings for Thoughtful Philanthropists*. Not only is the collection of documents substantially different, but also the intended audience is more specialized—individuals in the business of philanthropy. This affects the mood of the book. Quite unlike the first volume, many of the documents in the second, while not arranged to follow a chronology, reveal the burden of the American history of philanthropy. And yet this volume is informed by the first—just enough of the selections are the same—to suggest that from the beginning “thoughtful philanthropists,” no matter how engaged they may have become in the trenches of organized philanthropy, carry the same moral obligation to sustain the principled trust responsibility that emerges from the first Kass collection. Thus do these two books achieve a cumulative effect on the reader.

In the introduction to the second volume, Kass ventures into an overview of the American history of organized philanthropy, just enough to illustrate the remarkable growth in the number of foundations and the extraordinary size of several, spawning in due course the dubious offspring—the professional foundation philanthropist. Coupled with the historical narrative of expanding governmental welfare provisions, the geography of twentieth-century philanthropy took on new characteristics as the larger foundations and the federal government, often in some sort of legal and political partnership, emphasized national programs which tended, among other things, to diminish American traditions of the place and the purposes of philanthropy. These convergences became even more problematic as the post-Enlightenment embrace of social engineering found new and powerful voices in the state and in the top reaches of the large foundations. By the end of the century this combination of police power, money, and behavioral advocacy had created a new world, one that Kass acknowledges as she organizes the six sections of this volume. This recognition, carefully offered, separates this collection from the others under review, giving a certain moral and intellectual urgency to the sources, suggesting that time has become a major factor to consider when addressing the urgent problems pressing on thoughtful philanthropists. As one reaches the end of this collection it will have become clear that there are now new and complex dimensions of responsibility facing any who would become active participants in this troubled and increasingly contentious world. *Caveat emptor* indeed.

Kass continued the editorial approach in this volume with the same success as she had earlier. The readings are organized in six sections: (I) “Goals and Intentions” (with the question: “What should today’s philanthropy aim to do?”); (II) “Gifts,

Donors, Recipients; Grants, Grantors, Grantees” (with the questions: “What is the meaning of a grant or a gift?” and “What sorts of relationships and obligations does a grant/gift imply for givers and receivers?”); (III) “Bequests and Legacies” (with the questions: “What is the relationship between a bequest and a legacy?”; “What should guide those who give and those who receive bequests?”; and “How should we prepare the next generation?”); (IV) “Effectiveness” (with the questions: “What is required for effective philanthropy?” and “How should we judge philanthropy’s effectiveness?”); (V) “Accountability” (with the questions: “For what should philanthropy be responsible?”; “To whom should philanthropy be responsible?”; and “How should we educate for responsibility?”); and, finally, (VI) “Philanthropic Leadership” (with the question: “What should we expect of philanthropic leaders?”) (2008, vii-xii). Between four and twelve sources accompany each of these questions, sources both ancient and modern embracing both admonishment and narrative (for example: Fyodor Dostoevsky, “The Grand Inquisitor”). In addition these questions reveal editorial themes that are further explored in the head notes for each source.

Permit me to conclude this review with a personal end note. I am not a philanthropist. On the contrary, having spent most of my working life as an American historian teaching in colleges and universities; as a documentary editor; and briefly as a program officer for Liberty Fund, I have been the beneficiary of philanthropy. I have found these three volumes wonderfully moving, inviting me to think and wonder about the many probing questions posed by these editors. It was not long before I noticed that I was not reading with an eye to offering an academic review, for these volumes occupied such a special place. Both Jackson and Kass begin with the important assumption that the quest for generosity and for gratitude contributes in major ways to defining what it means to be fully human. The two volumes that Kass edited stand alone, but they team up as well with the Jackson collection, becoming cumulative. Taken together these three volumes, given the power generated by the focused editorial purpose, become transformative. In the final analysis, it matters not what perspective or what experience the reader might bring to these collections, for these documents become remarkably compelling to the citizen, the scholar, and the donor alike. If these many sources serve as an inquiry into the many meanings of philanthropy, reading them soon takes the reader into inquiries about the moral life in all of its distinctive expressions over many years in many different places and situations. These sources, then, offer a guidepost—a template for the better appreciation of the American past and of the immediate world around us. These collections thus

illuminate the power of constructive humility in the historical development of the exceptionalism of American citizenship as well as the transnational capacity of people to recognize and act on their common humanity.

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Bourgeois Dignity: Why Economics Can't Explain the Modern World

By Deirdre McCloskey

Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010.

ISBN 978-0226556741

Human Dignity

By George Kateb

Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2011.

ISBN 978-0674048379

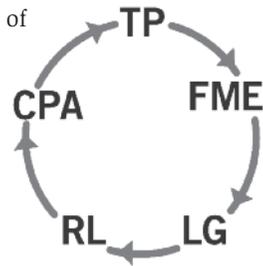
Both reviewed by Nicholas Capaldi

In 2010, Deirdre McCloskey published *Bourgeois Dignity*, remarkable for her erudite repudiation of all previous theories about how we arrived at the modern commercial world. McCloskey developed the thesis that modernity rejected hierarchy, the assignment to some people of more dignity (and privilege) than others, and that this recognition of the dignity of the bourgeois (what I would call a culture of personal autonomy) has led not only to the spectacular economic prosperity we see around us but that it liberated people, and that liberation is reflected in an expanding conception of human dignity. It's a great book.

In 2011, George Kateb published a book entitled *Human Dignity*, which is also remarkable in several respects, but takes its departure from a wholly different narrative of political economy. First, the difference in title from McCloskey's book is significant because Kateb is both appealing to a more generic conception of humanity instead of a particular historical version, and because he is appealing to a larger collective whole. As we shall see, this will have important implications for his conclusions. Second, despite his vast erudition, Kateb manages to avoid mentioning or citing any economist except Marx. Third, Kateb's book reflects every flaw that McCloskey warns us about with regard to why so many intellectuals despise modern commercial cultures.

Rather than merely counterpointing Kateb against McCloskey, I shall briefly summarize my own account and defense of modern commercial societies, which is compatible with McCloskey’s, and then describe Kateb’s opposition to it.

Social, economic, and political development in the post-Renaissance world has largely evolved along a trajectory which we may deem the *Lockean/Liberty Narrative*. This narrative traces historical and philosophical development from the Technological Project (TP) of the Enlightenment through the development of Free Market Economics (FME), Limited Government (LG), and Rule of Law (RL) and the emergence of a Culture of Personal Autonomy (CPA), all of which together amplify and modify the Technological Project. This trajectory is not linear but forms a positive feedback loop:



It will help to further describe the key components of this development.

The Technological Project (TP)

The Lockean Liberty narrative perceives that a major philosophical transition has occurred from a world in which nature (understood as having a kind of biological teleology) was considered dominant and the role of human beings was to conform to that nature, to a world in which human beings were considered to have the power to transform nature to human needs (viz. Bacon, Descartes, Locke). This effort to master nature and harness it to human betterment is the Technological Project.

Free Market Economics (FME)

Economics emerges as a key discipline in the early modern era because (a) the Technological Project offers the prospect of unlimited growth, (b) free market economies turn out to be the most effective way of carrying out the Technological Project (viz. Adam Smith), and (c) because economics moves out of the household and becomes a matter of national policy (viz. *The Wealth of Nations*).

Limited Government (LG)

The free market turned out to flourish best in a political context of limited government. Limited Government (LG) means (a) that governments do not plan or run economies because this violates the freedom of the market, (b) that governments serve the market by providing the conditions that maximize the

freedom of the markets (protect property rights and provide for contractual dispute resolution), and (c) that governments are limited in order to maximize individual freedom and creativity. Limited Government is best exemplified in a Republic with a constitution, not in a democracy (see e.g., James Madison in *Federalist #10*). Ultimately, the only way to limit government is through the Rule of Law.

Rule of Law (RL)

Rule of Law is exemplified in a legal system (a) that establishes the rules of the game without determining the outcome, maximizing both market and personal freedom (viz. Hayek), (b) that is not subject to political whim or wind, and (c) presupposes a political system which is a civil association (viz. Oakeshott), that is, has no purpose other than to serve the purposes of the individuals who compose it.

Culture of Personal Autonomy (CPA)

These economic, political, and legal institutions are not self-sustaining but require a particular kind of culture. All of the foregoing requires a culture that promotes personal autonomy (as articulated by Kant, Hegel, Mill, etc.). The Technological Project in turn becomes an expression of personal freedom and responsibility, and thereby closes the circle. The modern commercial republic transforms the Technological Project from a mere instrumental concern with human comfort, convenience and mastery over nature and instantiates a new substantive conception of individual human freedom and dignity. This is the spiritual quest of modernity, informed by Christian history but finding its apotheosis in the Kantian vision of perpetual peace that is achieved when all nations become commercial republics.

Since the days of the Enlightenment, however, there has been a counter-narrative of modern historical development which we may call the *Rousseau-Marx Equality Narrative*. In this narrative, the modern commercial republic does not eventuate in perpetual peace but perpetual class warfare. Here, the Technological Project and its concomitant industrial development is bad, not only because it despoils nature but because it leads to all modern ills, foremost of which is a growing income gap between rich and poor and thus a growing social inequality. Marx would ultimately amend Rousseau's pessimism, admitting the benefits of technology and industry and finding the source of modern ills in the political organization of the commercial republic (especially in Free Market Economics and Rule of Law), but the anti-industrial aspect of Rousseau's thought survives in the

form of modern environmental extremism.

In the Equality Narrative, free markets eventually fail and require frequent government intervention, if not control; limited government is always seen as favoring special interests and needs to be replaced by a kind of democratic egalitarianism that points in the direction of a collective general will; law must ultimately serve an egalitarian political agenda; and the autonomous individual is rejected in favor of a view in which persons are once again to be shaped, but now in conformity to the general will as a stand-in for nature.

Modern political discourse has largely taken shape around these two competing narratives of political economy. While it is clear what public policies are most compatible with the Lockean Liberty Narrative, it is not at all clear what positive vision, if any, animates the Rousseauian Equality Narrative. Other than the moral critique subordinating freedom to nature expressed as general will, proponents of the Rousseau narrative disagree on exactly how to transform the present political system and what the precise structure of the alternative society will look like. What identifies someone as an adherent of the Rousseauian Equality Narrative are (a) expressions of being in an adversarial relation (of varying degrees) to whatever they take the present system to be, (b) a moral critique of modern freedom, and (c) the advocacy of social, political, and/or economic restructuring. In most cases, however, proponents of egalitarian society fail to provide an explicit and substantive account of how such a society will function. They are voices of grievance (and hope) without an explicit plan.

With these two narratives in mind, we can now ask where Kateb fits into all of this. I think it is fair to say that Kateb despises modern commercial societies but does not want to surrender the privileges and perks of an endowed professorship at Princeton. To that end, he embraces the Rousseau narrative up to the point that it threatens his private preserve. Kateb lauds Rousseau for articulating “one of the greatest philosophical anthropologies” (135); but is not willing to pursue Rousseau’s logic all the way.

Kateb rejects the Technological Project in favor of an environmentalist conception of nature. He begins by establishing the new general will, in which the grand collective end is “the human species in relation to other species and to nature as a whole” (ix). On Oakeshott’s terms, this turns political society from a civil association which establishes a sphere for citizens to pursue a diversity of ends to an enterprise association in which citizens are expected to align their ends with overriding collective ends. In Kateb’s scheme, this social transformation

entails two obligations: first, “to become even more devotedly the steward of nature” and, second, “[a]tonement for what human beings have done to it” (x).

What exactly have we done to nature in Kateb’s view? Specifically, we have “exploited nature for human purposes and hence to ravage nature and ultimately make the earth uninhabitable for many species including humanity” (4). The need to atone means that we must “save endangered animal and plant species from extinction, when possible” (116). At some deep level Kateb sees our wonder of nature as sacred. He is sympathetic to Heidegger’s conception of a “stewardship of nature” (114). Kateb stops short, however, of making nature into the general will. Nature does not have a teleology, nor is the human species as a whole a collective agent (126). It is confusing as to where this leaves us with regard to public policy, with issues, for example, such as the size of the human population. Kateb recognizes that no policy implications follow from the worship of nature.

From these first premises, Kateb’s rejection of the free market economy is unsurprising. He is pessimistic about capitalism; not merely as an economic system but at the deepest psychological levels, finding that the affinity for capitalism emerges from “the foreign policy elite and the mentality of those who lead large business firms or aspire to do so.” Kateb indulges in a psychological characterization of the capitalist personality:

The collective self of the imperialist elite begins in ambition . . . it appears pathologically insatiable for as much control as possible of the affairs of the world, while the capitalist self dispersed among many firms appears pathologically insatiable for profits the endless pursuit of power or wealth eventually becomes a game with its own rules and logic that require that it be played without regard to the effects on people who endure the consequences the game, felt as a special kind of exalted game, runs on the motive of wanting to win or not wanting to lose; and no inwardly generated constraint can set a limit on such a motive . . . (193).

Kateb rejects limited government “because in an oligarchic or capitalist system the rich and their allies are so dominant as to make such rights as free speech...into weapons useful to fortify the oppression of the subordinate classes” (2). He does not advocate absolute natural rights grounded in either religion or metaphysics, but he does advocate human rights that turn out to be morally instrumental. “[T]he right of life can be the basis to circumscribe the rights of property, so as to help many stay alive and in conditions that are not miserable...”(52).

Kateb's position has expansive policy implications that lack a definite limiting standard in either law or nature. He can assert that the use of the atomic bomb on Japan was reprehensible, that the use of water boarding is a form of torture, and that torture is never permissible even to prevent a greater evil (185-86). On the other hand, he can concede that "undertaking a sustained international policy of costly amelioration is not morally compulsory" (184). Kateb seems aware of the threats of democracy and carrying egalitarianism too far, but he offers no standard to judge what constitutes "too far." Kateb is against almost all wars, but he does not specify when they are justified. Kateb does endorse a notion of the rule of law (left undefined) exemplified in responsible judicial power. But, on the other hand, he offers no clear limiting device on the exercise of either responsibility or power; he praises former Justice William Brennan for rejecting capital punishment for reasons that reflect not legal precedent but the larger metaphysical/moral agenda about human dignity. On the third hand, Kateb remains ambivalent about abortion.

This brings us finally to the subject of Kateb's book, human dignity. Kateb endorses individual dignity as long as it is consistent with the survival of species and the preservation of nature. Philosophically, to his credit, he rejects scientific reductive accounts of humanity and he even recognizes that in some sense we have free will, and therefore part of us is non-material. Moreover, he is against "paternalistically assisted self-development" (111). On the other hand, he thinks it is wrong to "blame many of the poor for their own condition by either condemning their vices or their adherence to stupid beliefs..." (57). Kateb thinks that bringing such moral judgment to bear on the poor (as opposed to the interrogator of terrorists perhaps?), is a way that we rationalize our refusal to help or help enough.

Here, of course, we come to a question that might inform our philanthropic judgment, and we should ask whether Kateb offers us any help in our philanthropic endeavors. In the final analysis, unfortunately, there is little that helps us better understand how to amplify the dignity of individual human persons. Clearly, Kateb has no sympathy for the notion of bourgeois dignity or for modern commercial societies that have generated the vast wealth that has not only dramatically raised the standard of living in modern societies but that also fuels modern philanthropy. Kateb knows what he is against, but in my opinion he has created a caricature of modern commerce and the capitalist mentality. Kateb wants all of the privileges of free societies but without the economic freedom. He

is not an apologist for a political ideology; he does not appeal to any cultural tradition; he does not appeal to any religious frame of reference. His final appeal is to a metaphysical conception of nature, and the appeal seems to serve the purpose of dampening the enthusiasm for the Technological Project and markets. There is no content-rich positive alternative vision, only a stick with which to beat the world of bourgeois dignity. The reader who wishes to understand how the modern world became so prosperous and how this prosperity has elevated our discourse about human dignity would be better advised to turn to the work of Deirdre McCloskey.

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Adam Smith: An Enlightened Life

By **Nicholas Phillipson**

New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010.

ISBN 978-0300169270

Reviewed by James R. Otteson

Adam Smith is one of the most beloved, most hated, most cited, and least read figures in the pantheon of great Western thinkers. His ideas have helped transform political and economic policy throughout much of the world, and they are credited by many for the unprecedented growth in wealth and prosperity the West has seen in the over two centuries since his death. They are also blamed by many for inequalities in wealth that have arisen since Smith's time. But consider that since 1800 the world's population has increased six-fold, and yet, despite this enormous increase, real income per person has increased approximately *sixteen*-fold.¹ That is a truly amazing achievement. Yet that increased prosperity would seem due principally to the complex of institutions we now call "capitalism." For the only thing that changed between two hundred years ago and the previous hundred thousand years of human history was the introduction and embrace of "capitalist" institutions—political, economic, and cultural. And Adam Smith stands as one of the founders of these institutions.

Smith is thus a vitally important figure in human history. So who, then, *is* this Adam Smith? What were his momentous ideas? How could a socially awkward eighteenth-century Scottish philosopher have wrought such tremendous effect on the world? Nicholas Phillipson's *Adam Smith* is an excellent place to start in answering these questions. Indeed, Phillipson's engaging, even compelling, story manages to do what some might have thought impossible: telling an interesting story about an economist.

Yet Adam Smith was much more than what we today think of as an economist. He was a "moral philosopher" who spent his scholarly life trying to understand the principles that animate *all* human behavior, including both human morality in his 1759 *Theory of Moral Sentiments* and economic in his 1776 *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations*. Smith came to articulate a conception of human social institutions that was grounded on observation and on a plausible picture of human psychology, and in so doing he also delineated a methodology for research about human society that would set the agenda for new and future disciplines of the "social sciences."

Phillipson reconstructs Smith's achievement by locating the key principles of human behavior and social science that Smith discovered in all his extant writings, including of course his two great books, and also by explaining both what Smith takes and how he departs from other important figures like Francis Hutcheson and David Hume. Phillipson's Smith emerges as an empirically-oriented social scientist, a brilliant mind trying to understand what the institutions are that lead to human happiness and prosperity, who yet also has the generosity of soul to be sincerely committed to using his discoveries to help remove obstacles to the well-being of the common man. Smith's development of a spontaneous-order conception of human social institutions derived from a method of investigation that came to be known as the Scottish Historical School, which involved taking human beings as they are and the world as it is, not as they might be in a fictionalized state, and looking for observable patterns in their behavior. Once these patterns have been observed, the moral philosopher can make rational recommendations about how to enhance the possibilities of prosperous life. That is, or should be, the goal of social science, and we can see from Phillipson that Smith is one of its great founding fathers.

Phillipson's book is therefore quite welcome. Yet perhaps one might raise a handful of gentle criticisms.

One relates to the thorny issue of the so-called is/ought problem. That

problem concerns the logical fallacy of deriving normative (“ought”) statements from descriptive (“is”) statements. It was Smith’s friend David Hume who articulated this common fallacy in his *Treatise of Human Nature*, remarking that he noticed the frequency with which moralists would go from describing this or that state of affairs in the world to immediately concluding that this or that ought to be done about it. Hume pointed out that such a transition constitutes a logical fallacy because no set of factual statements (even if true) by itself implies any moral injunction. One can describe all the factual details of a murder, for example, without thereby determining any specific moral conclusions to draw from it.

Smith seems to have a foot in both the normative and the descriptive camps in both of his books. For example, in Phillipson’s account, Smith offers in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* the “impartial spectator” both as a heuristic device that people in fact employ to help them guide and regulate their behavior, and as a representative of true morality that people *ought* to follow. This raises a question of how we should understand Smith’s project in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*. Is he a moral psychologist describing his empirical findings about the phenomenon of human moral judgment making, or a moralist making recommendations about how people ought to behave? It seems he is arguably both: how, then, do the two go together? Similarly, in *The Wealth of Nations*, when Smith declares that “it is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest,” that sounds like a descriptive statement (and, some have said, a rather cynical one at that)—to which one might retort, “Perhaps that is how we often *do* behave, but we *should* not!” One more example: Smith discovers and describes the mechanisms of a spontaneous-order model for understanding human social institutions, but he also seems to positively recommend the decentralized, spontaneously created orders as against centrally planned and designed orders. A discussion from Phillipson of how Smith got from the descriptive to the normative in cases like these would thus have been instructive.

One might also wish Phillipson had given more than merely cursory attention to the question of how to reconcile Smith’s arguments for free trade—indeed, his, in Smith’s own words, “very violent attack” on “the whole commercial system of Great Britain” (247)—with Smith’s vigorous, exacting, and even punctilious fulfillment of his duties as the Commissioner of Customs for the last decade of his life. How can one square the fact that Smith argued for the abolition of tariffs, quotas, and other impediments to trade on the empirical grounds that doing so

would increase human prosperity, with the fact that, when given the opportunity, he applied and exacted them with great enthusiasm?

One also wonders how we should understand Smith's endorsement of free trade and limited government, and indeed his, in Phillipson's words, "pervasive" "doubts about the competence of modern governments" (232) in light of the rather long list of duties that Smith in various places suggested were the sovereign's—including some public education and even entertaining "publick diversions" (234). In *The Wealth of Nations* Smith articulated three duties of government: protecting citizens from foreign invasion, protecting citizens from invasion from other citizens, and "certain publick works" (WN IV.9.51). These public works were those "which it can never be for the interest of any individual, or small number of individuals, to erect and maintain; because the profit could never repay the expence to any individual or small number of individuals, though it may frequently do much more than repay it to a great society" (ibid.). How long a list is that, exactly? Smith suggests that it might include roads, canals, and the above-mentioned public grammar schools and "publick diversions," but his criteria for selecting suitable public works might open the door far wider. If Phillipson is correct, however (as he surely is), that Smith has fundamental doubts about the competency of government, why would Smith allow even these few public works? Why would he not indeed have come to the opposite conclusion—that, because they are so important to the public, they must therefore not be left to the tender mercies of incompetent government?

Phillipson rightly argues that Smith was not a utopian theorist, but was instead a realist who looked to history (even if sometimes "conjectural history"), to observation, and to what Smith somewhat fancifully called "experiment" to inform his positions. Phillipson claims that "Smith left utopian theorizing to the final pages" of *The Wealth of Nations* (235), where Smith described the problems associated with public debt, especially as Britain's was increasing due to expenses associated with its attempt to maintain its empire in America. But what exactly is "utopian" about Smith's concerns here? If anything, it would seem that, especially given the problems Western governments (American included) are facing with their huge and growing public debts right now, Smith's discussion could not be more timely or germane to actual, on-the-ground reality.

Let me close with an important and even enlightening lesson from Phillipson's treatment. He writes near the end of his book that *The Wealth of*

Nations “is the greatest and most enduring monument to the intellectual culture of the Scottish Enlightenment” (237). Phillipson shows that the story of the Scottish Enlightenment parallels and reflects the story of Smith himself; indeed, the story of the Scottish Enlightenment is, in a deep sense, the story of Smith. Given how profoundly our own world has, in turn, been shaped by ideas that came out of the Scottish Enlightenment, we can say that Smith’s story is also the story of us. Phillipson’s book provides a coherent picture of the complex life of Smith and his integration into the astonishing period of learning and advancement of human knowledge that marked the Scottish Enlightenment. But it is not only for the advancement of knowledge that we have to thank Smith and the Scottish Enlightenment. The tremendous increases in material well-being that Smithian institutions have enabled—and, one might add, the vast increase in philanthropic capacity and opportunity created by this increasing prosperity—has blessed millions of human beings with relief from the nasty, poor, brutish, and short status quo ante of human history. By reminding us of this important history and of Smith’s central place in it, Phillipson’s book not only provides us an illuminating and surprisingly timely window onto our own place in the world today but also an inspiration to protect and extend the fragile but precious Smithian institutions that have played no small role in the development of modern civilization.

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¹ See Deirdre McCloskey. *Bourgeois Dignity*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010), Chapter 6.



Not for Profit: Why Democracy Needs the Humanities (The Public Square)

By Martha Nussbaum

Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010.

ISBN 978-0691140643

Reviewed by Frederick Turner

How could a devoted teacher of the humanities like this reviewer not like a book that is a ringing defense of the humanities in a world of educational “accountability”?

But alas, sometimes the best-intentioned friends can do as much harm as honest enemies. Martha Nussbaum sets out to diagnose and treat a demonstrable ailment in the institutions of the academic humanities: no argument there: “The humanities and the arts are being cut away, in both primary/secondary and college/university education, in virtually every nation of the world.”

Though Nussbaum concentrates on the U.S. and India in her analysis of the problem, with some glances at Europe and elsewhere, her conclusions about the facts are accurate. Indeed, her description of the rather horrifying criteria used by the most recent Labor government in Britain to qualify an educational program for financial support, with its chilling reductiveness and sneeringly leveling class resentment, is a very useful object lesson in what could happen in America if we do not find a better basis of understanding for the humanities and arts.

It is where Nussbaum theorizes the causes and reasons for the crisis in the humanities that her logic and evidence begin to go astray. Her basic premise is that the decline of the humanities and the elevation of such fields as business and engineering, result from a shortsighted lust for economic profit. “Seen by policy-makers as useless frills, at a time when nations must cut away all useless things in order to stay competitive in the global market, [the humanities and the arts] are rapidly losing their place in curricula, and also in the minds and hearts of parents and children.”

Nussbaum is by no means a neomarxist hater of capitalism or deconstructionist scourge of Europhallogocentric epistemes, but she has been around the humanistic academy for long enough to miss the logical flaw in her argument. She asserts this causal sequence: global markets compel policy-makers to cut humanistic education budgets, and so parents and children lose their faith in the arts and humanities. Nussbaum may have been led astray by a false analogy between American and Indian government policy concerns, but even so it should be obvious that in the American case at least the causal sequence was exactly the opposite. That is, in the last few decades the arts and humanities disciplines, though at first well-funded, prestigious, and provided with a large stream of educated personnel, steadily forfeited the trust and affection of students at all levels, fatally alienated their parents, nurtured paranoid visions of a society that is relatively and historically decent, open, and democratic, and smeared the proudest achievements of its culture.

Any arts and humanities professor who has survived the political correctness purges of the seventies, eighties, and nineties can give you a long list of gifted

graduate students whose idealistic visions of teaching literature or conducting philosophical inquiry or studying beauty and craft were gradually besmirched and lost. They either went into fields where truth, not political correctness, was the goal or indeed settled for a money-making life that could give them time to study what they loved as independent scholars or artists. Brilliant enthusiastic schoolteachers found themselves in the work-to-rule union shop of a totally unmeritocratic public school system, their aspirations to a humane inclusive appreciation of the great achievements of humankind condemned as classist, sexist, or racist.

Nussbaum is a great enthusiast for Socrates, arguing for the Socratic method. But if any single philosophical position has dominated the humanistic academy in the last few decades, it is that of the sophists who were his mortal enemies. If the public got tired of its sophism, who can blame them for their unconscious adherence to Socrates' own devotion to truth, beauty, and goodness?

Only slowly and reluctantly did universities, and the alumni, federal, state and local organizations that supported them, recognize that their core disciplines had somehow betrayed their trust, and that humanities classes were dwindling in enrollment and becoming a financial drag on the other disciplines. Could taxpayers and patrons be expected to support whole departments devoted to "Theory" which amounted to a sustained assault on their deepest values? Meanwhile the popular media and the new electronic university of Google, Wikipedia, Bartleby, the Blogosphere and Amazon were becoming bountiful sources of great texts, imagery, music, argument, information, and fellow-enthusiasts: shepherdless, alas, and prone to error and falsification, but at least free and unpoliced by political correctness. We could get epic in summer blockbuster movies, rituals of flesh and spirit in rock concerts, classic drama in local theater productions, history in civil war reenactments and TV documentary series, philosophy in TED talks and a host of literate and intelligent blogs—and we could talk back.

"Accountability" is, as Nussbaum says, a disastrous and misconceived answer to the problem, an answer coming from the right wing here and from the left wing in England and Europe. But what other handle could the public get on the *trahison des clercs*? It was not the responsibility of governments or even trustee boards to correct the maniac logic and skewed facts of lockstep radical humanities departments, and academic freedom rightly forbade it. It is for the humanities and

the arts to set their own houses in order by reasoned debate and persuasion, and meantime accept the response of the public in terms of lack of support and disfavor as an important chastening reminder of their mission, and a penance for having betrayed it.

For—and here of course Nussbaum is right—it is a vital and essential mission. The humanities and the arts are the memory and the imagination of a culture. Without them the best a society can do is perfect its technology to the point that it becomes so competitively cheap that it can no longer make a living by it. Increasingly the world is paying more and more for the products of what I call, slightly ironically, the charm industries: tourism, entertainment, adventure, religion, sport, fashion, fiction, film, computer games, cosmetics, cuisine, personal service, gardening, art, history, movies, ritual, psychotherapy, politics, and the eternal soap opera of relationships. As with anything that demands skill, experience, and a tradition, these industries need experts, devotees, coaches, storytellers, archivists. There is a huge role for the humanities: it is up to us to rediscover it.

By the way, despite my adverse diagnosis of the troubles of my profession, I personally have high hopes for it. The new generation of professors contains many splendid, imaginative, and idealistic teachers, and many veteran humanists, scholars, and maestros have survived the firestorm. There are immensely promising initiatives in which the old divides between the sciences, the humanities and the arts are being transcended: neuroscience, anthropology, and human evolutionary science now offer a new foundation for the humanities; computers offer a wealth of opportunities for the artist and the scholar. Already I see signs in my own institution and others of an enthusiastic return to the literary classics of many nations and cultures and to the huge cultural heritage of the common human past, now recognized as reaching far beyond Europe. Students seem to me to be better prepared in many ways; texting has made them at least rough-and-ready communicators, the Internet has educated them in an extraordinary variety of hobbyistic topics and fields, and the best of them are remarkably free and imaginative thinkers.

Part of Nussbaum's problem is her terminology itself. "Profit" has become in the mouths of the academy a gross, despicable and even evil word. But this may be a perversion: substitute its exact synonym, "benefit," and the absurdity of Nussbaum's basic assertion becomes clear. Is it really so terrible a thing to be benefit-seeking? Is the benefit-motive so bad? Even benefiteering? Of course the

words *are* different in implication: but it is hard to avoid concluding that the difference is that *I* seek benefit, while *he* seeks profit. In the sense of the Prophet's words "what doth it profit a man to gain the whole world if he lose his own soul?" If the arts and humanities have become profitless, it is up to them to change. Beauty, truth, and goodness are higher values than monetary wealth, but they are partly and properly exchangeable with it; and sometimes the exchange rate is rather encouragingly advantageous to the arts and humanities, as when a van Gogh sells for 26 million dollars at Sotheby's or a student puts himself in hock for twenty years to get a PhD in literature. The public is willing to pay, but it wants truth, beauty, and goodness, not Theory.

The conclusion that one might draw from Nussbaum's informative presentation of the facts, if stripped of her interpretation, is that perhaps the ideal of state education has partly failed, having become hostage to various rent-seekers and ideologues. The failure is perhaps inevitable, given the need for a democracy to eschew favoring any value system, indeed even any value that some citizen would regard as an infringement of his freedom. And now that truth itself has been declared by the deconstructionists to be just another patriarchal ideology, even the dissemination of truth cannot be made the goal of public education.

Nussbaum's arguments for the benefits of humanities education boil down to the values of "critical thinking," "diversity," and "empathy"; but the examples she gives of them are essentially as ways to undermine traditional conservative values. It is all very well to cite American social stratification as the evil that indeed it is, but in the last hundred years the carnage resulting from new innovative humanistic secular ideologies—that were based on critical thinking about traditional values—has dwarfed, by at least one order of magnitude, the murder committed by traditionalists in defense of their values. Critical thinking can go both ways. Likewise, "diversity" is a two-edged sword, used adroitly now by evolution deniers and holocaust deniers to undermine conventional science and history. And, as Nussbaum herself rather brilliantly points out, empathy is a vital skill not only for the philanthropist but for the torturer. Critical thinking, diversity, and empathy cannot compete with truth, beauty, and goodness in the marketplace; they are less sure defenses of freedom, and they do no less harm.

If Nussbaum followed her own logic, she would perhaps have found another answer than the demand she makes of government to fund by force and taxes a set of academic institutions that have lost the trust of the public. She herself, toward the end of the book, lavishly praises the private individuals and institutions whose

patronage has made the pursuit of the humanities and arts still feasible in private or semi-private academies. She is especially kind to the donors of her own institution, the University of Chicago. Perhaps the answer, then, for those who truly love the ancient missions of the arts and humanities, is in the private sector: what new Rockefellers will step forth to endow the liberal arts universities of the future?

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Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do

By **Michael J. Sandel**

New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2009.

ISBN 978-0374532505

Reviewed by Dwight R. Lee

I enjoyed and learned from Sandel's book, which is a far different thing than agreeing with many of the conclusions that he reaches. I read this book because I anticipated he would consider aspects of morality and markets that I have been writing about and do so in a way that would challenge my conclusions. I was not disappointed in this expectation. His challenge was clear enough, serious enough, and unconvincing enough to add to my own reservoir of arguments, few of which I have the space to elaborate here.

Sandel begins his book by considering the negative public reaction to suppliers increasing the prices of goods needed by victims of a natural disaster, and to the bonuses paid to senior executives by banks which received government bailouts during the recent Great Recession. These, of course, are two very different situations; one showing how markets work to allocate goods efficiently in the absence of government controls, and the other how problems created largely by government attempts to promote particular economic outcomes can, and often do, create economic distortions that are then used to justify additional government distortions in the economy. Making this distinction, however, is not Sandel's concern. He is interested in justice, and in the three ways of thinking about justice

in the distribution of goods—welfare, freedom, and virtue. After presenting these and other examples as moral dilemmas, Sandel argues that “moral reflection is not a solitary pursuit but a public endeavor” (28) which prompts “us to articulate and justify our moral and political convictions, not only among family and friends but also in the demanding company of our fellow citizens” (29).

In the next three chapters titled “Utilitarianism,” “Libertarianism,” and “Markets and Morals” we learn that Sandel is not enthusiastic about the first two philosophical positions and is skeptical of the morality of markets. He sees the libertarian and utilitarian cases for markets as flawed, although giving the impression here that he is only presenting, rather than endorsing these criticisms. It becomes clear from Sandel’s examples and the emphasis given those arguments, however, that Sandel is convinced “that market choices are not as free as they seem” (75) and “that certain goods and social practices are corrupted or degraded if bought and sold for money” (75). Sandel is clearly partial to the view that freedom is more a function of wealth than of the absence of arbitrary restrictions imposed by force. For example, when discussing objections to the volunteer army he states “[i]f poverty and economic disadvantage are widespread, the choice to enlist may simply reflect the lack of alternatives....The volunteer army may not be as voluntary as it seems” (82).

Furthermore, Sandel argues, some things shouldn’t be treated as commodities. “[M]ilitary service, like jury duty, is a civic responsibility; it expresses, and deepens, democratic citizenship. From this point of view, turning military service into a commodity—a task we hire other people to perform—corrupts the civic ideals that should govern it” (86). The “exemption from shared sacrifice comes at the price of eroding political accountability” (86). This is one of several places in the book where Sandel’s discussion would have been improved, and balanced, by the insights provided by public choice economics. Public choice analysis suggests that the volunteer army, which requires potential recruits be paid enough to willingly join the military, may actually increase political accountability, rather than erode it, by requiring politicians to consider the full value of recruits’ alternatives to military service, which they can largely ignore under conscription.

In the next four chapters Sandel does, I believe, a commendable job discussing the moral philosophy of Kant, Rawls and Aristotle in a straightforward way. It is clear that Sandel prefers Aristotle’s view of justice (or the good) to the views of Kant and Rawls. In Sandel’s words, “[f]or Kant and Rawls, theories of justice that

rest on a certain conception of the good life, whether religious or secular, are at odds with freedom” (216). For Aristotle, by contrast, a substantive conception of the good is possible and necessary. The good is “not about maximizing pleasure but about realizing our nature and developing our distinct human capacities” (216). Kant and Rawls reject this approach to the good “because it doesn’t seem to leave us much room to choose our good for ourselves” (218).

It is at this point that it becomes obvious that Sandel is a communitarian. According to Sandel, communitarians recognize a moral obligation individuals have to their communities that goes unrecognized in the liberal tradition that emphasizes individual rights. As he says, “[i]f the liberal account of obligation is right, the average citizen has no special obligations to his or her fellow citizens, beyond the universal, natural obligation not to commit injustice” (224). This, according to Sandel,

fails to account for the special responsibilities we have to one another as fellow citizens. More than this, it fails to capture those loyalties and responsibilities whose moral force consists partly in the fact that living by them is inseparable from understanding ourselves as the particular persons we are—as members of this family or nation or people; as bearers of that history; as citizens of this republic....These identities are not contingencies we should set aside when deliberating about morality and justice; they are part of who we are, and so rightly bear on our moral responsibilities (224).

Deliberating or reasoning together with our fellow citizens is an important part of the communitarian project and seen as the path to a robust and just society. As Sandel puts it, “[a] just society can’t be achieved simply by maximizing utility or by securing freedom of choice. To achieve a just society we have to reason together about the meaning of the good life, and to create a public culture hospitable to the disagreements that will inevitably arise” (261).

But there is a problem here that an academic (Sandel teaches at Harvard) should recognize. Academics have comparative advantages in deliberating and spending lots of time engaged in discussion and debate, which is surely seen as more important to them than to most citizens. Nevertheless, it’s hard to understand how a career academic could see much hope in creating a public culture hospitable to disagreements. In small and homogeneous groups (preferably smaller and more homogeneous than the Harvard faculty when Larry Summers was its president) it may be possible to get a reasonable level of agreement on the details

of controversial issues, such as what is acceptable to say in public about the cause of occupational differences between men and women, or how to work together to achieve the good life. In large and diverse communities, however, the best we can hope for is reaching agreement on the general rules of social interaction within an extended economic and political order. Given broad support for such a general set of rules, small groups of individuals who are reasonably homogeneous along various attributes and interests would certainly form communities of the type Sandel describes. Such groups would be bound together by a degree of personal loyalty to, and identification with, one another and their joint values. The rules of acceptable behavior within such groups would vary among groups and can be more informal than those applying to the interaction between members of the different groups making up the extended social order.

The family is the most obvious example of the type of community that Sandel finds attractive. Granted, the aspects of community Sandel, and other communitarians, are promoting apply to communities larger than individual families, albeit with some decline in the ability of personal loyalties to provide social cohesion as the group becomes larger. But the family unit is instructive because to thrive and prosper it clearly has to integrate into the larger social order in a way that is possible only through a large and extended network of impersonal interactions that depend on the formal rules of private property and voluntary exchange. These rules do require a significant level of agreement and even a sense of community among large numbers of people, but it is a very different type of agreement and a weaker sense of community than that which is the ideal of communitarians and possible only in smaller communities.

My comments here are not necessarily a criticism of the communitarian project. Developing institutions that foster a sense of community and that also promote tolerance for the diversity among sub-communities is to be applauded. My concern, however, is a tendency for people to want to substitute the morality embodied in the rules appropriate for small groups for the morality embodied in the rules necessary to the proper functioning of a vast economic order. The morality suitable for small groups is an emotionally appealing one, which I have referred to as magnanimous morality in other writings (or the morality of sharing and caring). The morality required by the larger economic order is the much less emotionally appealing morality of impersonal market exchange, which I have referred to as mundane morality in previous writings and which makes sharing without caring possible.

To the degree that we try to replace the mundane morality of the market with the magnanimous morality of small communities, the ability of people to coordinate their activities with multitudes of strangers around the world in mutually beneficial ways is eroded. Yet the tendency to expand magnanimous morality to the larger economy is supported by a widespread view that markets are morally flawed because, no matter how desirable the results of markets, they don't depend on the personal caring and sharing of small communities.

Sandel's discussion in his opening example of "price gouging" reflects the tendency to see markets as morally flawed because they don't rely on the morality of the small community. Consider his comment: "Greed is a vice.... More than a personal vice, it is at odds with civic virtue. In times of trouble, a good society pulls together. Rather than press for maximum advantage, people look out for one another. A society in which people exploit their neighbors for financial gain in time of crisis is not a good society" (7). This statement clearly has emotional appeal. But it ignores the important distinction between the rules of behavior appropriate to small groups and those appropriate to large groups. Anyone bringing food to a sick neighbor, or providing assistance to one whose house is damaged, would be rightly condemned if she demanded payment for her service. After a natural disaster, however, people need help obtaining the coordinated effort of a large number of geographically dispersed people, almost all of whom are complete strangers and can be considered neighbors in only the emptiest sense of that term. The help these victims need can be efficiently provided *only* in response to the information, cooperation and motivation generated by impersonal market exchanges. Upon serious reflection it is difficult to believe that the assistance natural disaster victims would lose if anti-price-gouging laws were enforced would be replaced by the magnanimous morality of their neighbors.

I readily concede that Sandel's case for relying more upon civic virtue and less on the "greed" (I prefer the term "self interest") of the market place will always be more popular than the effort of economists to qualify this case with a dose of economic realism. But I believe that there is far more civic virtue in a social order that recognizes that the rules, and morality, proper to small groups is not the same as those required by large groups than in one that doesn't.

Let me conclude by stating that anyone interested in the political, philosophical and economic foundations of a good society, whether they agree with my criticisms of Sandel's book or not, will profit from reading *Justice: What's the Right Thing to Do* and taking it seriously.

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Civil Society, Philanthropy, and the Fate of the Commons

By **Bruce R. Sievers**

Medford, MA: Tufts University Press, 2010.

ISBN 978-1-58465-895-5

Reviewed by George McCully

To fully appreciate the significance of this valuable book by one of our leading practitioner/scholars, one needs to understand its cultural context within the profession. Bruce Sievers has eminent credentials—trained in political science, former head of state Humanities Councils, then of the Walter and Elise Haas Fund of San Francisco (1983-2002), and currently at Stanford University’s Center on Civil Society. This broad background positions him well to bridge philanthropy’s two cultures—social-scientific and humanistic—in the current rapidly transforming period of paradigm-shift.

The dominant culture in the 20th century nonprofit profession was and still is that of the social sciences, which naturally focuses on groups and their behavior. Its conceptual framework is a societal ideal: “civil society” centered on the “third” or “independent” “sector,” loosely defined as what the other two sectors are not: “non-governmental organizations” and “nonprofit” institutions. It stands between the other two as “private initiatives for public good,” distinct from both government (public initiatives for public good) and business (private initiatives for private profit). Its scholars, as social scientists, focus on technical and procedural issues. They have relied heavily on IRS data concerning “nonprofits,” analyzed statistically. Attached to academic social science departments studying the first two sectors, they purport to provide technical assistance to nonprofit managers, most of whom also have social science training. This culture has rarely used, much less defined, “philanthropy” as a word or concept.

A second culture has begun to emerge, however, which has Classical humanistic roots, in the origins of *philanthropia* to refer to the “love of what it is to be human.” This humanistic understanding was revived in the Renaissance, flourished in the Enlightenment (especially in the American Revolution), barely survived the long demise of Classical education, and is now being rediscovered. The modern humanistic view accepts practical “philanthropy” as focusing on “private initiatives for public good,” but significantly adds, “focusing on quality of life”—i.e., values, for both benefactors and beneficiaries. It sees philanthropy as both public benefit and personal culture or life-style—as a form of continuing education, in which philanthropists identify their values and exercise them for public good in giving and volunteering. It focuses on individuals—donors, volunteers, and beneficiaries—and how philanthropy helps them to become more fully humane.

Philanthropy’s current paradigm-shift—a total transformation, forced by computerization and the Internet, globalization of the American economy, and consequent new demographics of wealth—is a third contextual factor for understanding this book. The Old Paradigm, which governed philanthropy in the last half of the 20th century, is being superseded by innovations that will eventually coalesce in an as-yet undefined New Paradigm for the twenty-first century. First identified as a paradigm-shift for philanthropy around the turn of the millennium, this transformation has steadily gained momentum and is now in full force, irreversibly powered by advancing technology. All is in flux, while ephemeral and lasting innovations sort themselves out. Whether this transformation will achieve a *balance* between the social-scientific and humanistic cultures is a significant issue.

Sievers’ leadership experience in all three contextual *milieux* gives his book special timeliness and interest—and a somewhat split personality. The orientation of the book seems inclined to address both humanistic and social-scientific issues, as Sievers’ “aim” is “to examine the fundamental question: How does society balance the public and private sides of modern life...to realize...individual freedom and... achieve collective aims” (Sievers 2010, xiii)? Ultimately the book tilts toward the social-scientific perspective, in his words: “to clarify the concept of civil society in a liberal democracy, to trace civil society’s historical development in the West, and to examine civil society’s role in addressing a primary challenge to the modern world—how to reconcile the

vast pluralism of individual interests and aspirations...with the pursuit of solutions to problems of public goods, which are vital to the future of humankind” (142). He defines the “civil society idea” as comprised of seven “key concepts”: four “organizational structures”—philanthropic institutions, legal institutions, private associations, and a system of free expression; and three “social norms”—commitments to the common good, to individual rights, and to tolerance. Subsequent historical and sociological chapters are organized around these concepts, including a prescriptive conclusion of “specific steps modern philanthropy can take to strengthen civil society” (xiv).

The book’s views on philanthropy, however, are Old Paradigm—not carefully defined, and submerged in civil society. The definition’s chapter has only one paragraph on the subject, citing several scholars’ vaguely summarized assertions that the two concepts are significantly connected. Chapter two provides a brief social-scientific survey of the history of philanthropy as the evolution of “institutional structures” allocating “private resources to...public needs,” from Classical times to the early modern period when foundations and private associations clearly emerged. The last chapter considers philanthropy to be what foundations do (130); and addresses suggestions for philanthropy as a problem-solving instrument to large-foundation grant makers. Individual donors (who supply 85% of the private dollars in philanthropy), are barely mentioned (122).

The most distinctive chapters, with the most enduring value, are historical—“The Emergence of Civil Society in the [17th century] Dutch Republic”; “The Enlightenment Legacy” (i.e., the “unresolved tension” between “private interests” and “public well-being”), emphasizing the Scottish Enlightenment; and “Civil Society in America,” dealing especially with Tocquevillean voluntary associations (not seen as philanthropy, though that is how they explicitly conceived themselves, especially in creating the United States—see *Federalist* #1). The evolution of the modern, impersonal, bureaucratic State from the medieval tradition of personal and dynastic government has been thoroughly studied; Sievers’ significant contribution is to focus on the simultaneous emergence of civil society, skillfully drawing upon a large body of recent scholarship.

The historical chapters prepare the central thesis of the last two chapters. “The question before us” is, “how will this balancing act [i.e., between private interests and ‘the common good’] play out in the twenty-first century” (106)?

Sievers contends that in the late 20th century “excessive privatization” (116) became dominant over civic spiritedness, undermining “the commons” and commitment to “the common good.” He accepts the arguments of Robert Bellah (*Habits of the Heart*), Robert Putnam (*Bowling Alone*), Jurgen Habermas (*The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*), William Galston, and Garrett Hardin, et al.

His proposed solution, based on his preceding historical narrative, is that “philanthropy [is] the primary resource that frees civil society from purely market-driven or governmentally dominated behavior... [and] support[s] civil society’s engagement with problems of the commons.” “Philanthropy’s historic blend of individualism, private resources, and concern for community betterment would seem to offer society’s most important asset for combining private and public purposes” (122). The key constituency for effecting this strategic initiative is, as in the Old Paradigm, “Practitioners of contemporary philanthropy, particularly those who serve as professionals and board members of large foundations.”

Unconventionally, Sievers sees several current fads as presenting serious technical and even epistemological problems impeding effective grant making: (1) Social-scientism[!]¹—i.e., linear, mechanistic, pseudo-scientific epistemology producing simplistic technical interventions. He prefers the use of *metis* (practical, local, experience-based judgment) over *episteme* and *techne* (calculated theoretical social engineering), owing to the “randomness, innumerable variables, ...absence of the conditions of controlled experimentation, and indeterminate time horizons” in real-life. (2) Public accountability in grant making, because it is politicizing. (3) Excessive emphasis on business-style metrics which are inadequate in producing public goods, and “not very good at solving complex social problems” (128).

He then makes specific recommendations based on his seven elements of civil society. Grant makers should strengthen commitment to common good and free expression, expand civic engagement (i.e., community involvement, voting, advocacy, voluntarism, and public debate), and build the infrastructure of civil society—new forms of social capital (citing Putnam), civic education, high-quality civic journalism—*independent of governments and business* (134-5).

The list is unexceptionable as far as it goes, but the analysis has two shortcomings. First, it seems oddly old-fashioned. A small number of large foundations no longer set an “agenda” for philanthropy. The word “Internet”

does not appear until the last seven pages, and then uncomfortably: “The potential and limits of the new media (the Internet, cell phones, iPods, and other means of electronic communication) for building and sustaining civil society are still unclear...but could create great leverage in the future development of mass communications with civic purpose” (137). He cites a 2004 study showing the “shift of the young away from political involvement” (139), with no mention of the 2008 Obama campaign. “The contemporary challenge facing major newspapers is a particularly stark example of the precarious state of the civic media...” (137). Noting “The hugely popular practices of blogging,” he says that “Internet-mediated communication shows great promise as a new form of civic engagement for the millennial generation” (139). What grant makers today will find these sentences informative?

The second shortcoming of the analysis is that personal philanthropy is underestimated. Individual donors are not seriously addressed either as a subject or as readers, notwithstanding that the new demographics of wealth have dramatically expanded and promoted philanthropy, making it not only chic (e.g. media coverage of celebrity-philanthropy, the Gates-Buffett Giving Pledge, et al.), but verging on a popular movement. The word “philanthropy” has entered the vernacular.

These shortcomings are Old Paradigm characteristics. The Internet and changed demographics of wealth are forces driving the paradigm-shift and the emergence of a New Paradigm. In this dynamic context, familiarity with Internet philanthropy, and an *au courant* humanistic understanding of personal philanthropy and its current dynamics, would strengthen the main argument: how philanthropy can strengthen civil society.

GEORGE MCCULLY *has had two careers: professing Renaissance history (1965-1983) and professional philanthropist (1983-present). He is founder/CEO of the Catalogue for Philanthropy, (1997-present), which is developing the Philanthropic Directory system (2011) in Massachusetts and nationwide; in 2008 he published Philanthropy Reconsidered.*

Marcel Mauss: A Biography**By Marcel Fournier (transl. by Jane Marie Todd)****Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005.****ISBN 978-0691117775***Reviewed by Laurent Dobuzinskis*

This is both a biography in the usual sense of the term and an intellectual biography. One learns, in other words, about Marcel Mauss the man and the thinker, and these two aspects are rather well-meshed (but more about this below). Mauss, who is best known for his short essay *The Gift*, was an armchair anthropologist—by that I mean that he never traveled to the American Northwest nor to the Pacific islands and never observed the customs of the indigenous peoples he wrote about; this has left him open to various criticisms. (This being said, Mauss did direct the field works of his numerous students who brought back useful data.) The originality and incisiveness of his ideas has earned him the respect of scholars in a number of disciplines. Fournier provides an apt summary of this essay and underscores its central theme, namely, that in pre-modern societies economic exchanges consist of “total services” affecting entire communities rather than among isolated individuals, and that these often have a religious dimension, such as the Polynesian belief in the *hau*, a spiritual power that “forces gifts to circulate, to be given and returned” (242). Mauss did not limit his attention to these arguably odd and disconcerting practices; he took pain to trace parallels with more western, and somewhat more individualized mores such as could be found in ancient Rome, and he thought about ways in which the spirit of the gift and the obligation of reciprocity could be rediscovered in modern times. But the value of this book, especially for readers who might not know more about Mauss than the fact he was the author of *The Gift*, is that it will help them to situate this essay in the context of a much larger and quite encyclopedic work.

Mauss was born in 1872 in the part of Lorraine that had not been annexed by the new German empire after the Franco-Prussian war of 1870. Hence he grew up in an atmosphere of intense patriotism which he shared. Patriotism, however, occasionally veered into anti-Semitism of which he suffered. The most evident manifestation of anti-Semitism in his youth was the infamous Dreyfus affair which prompted his political engagement on the side of the defenders of Captain Dreyfus. Mauss himself was a non-practicing Jew but his family was deeply religious, a fact that, as Fournier notes, played a part in his intellectual curiosity for the study of

comparative religion. A central fact in Mauss' life was that he was Emile Durkheim's nephew. His famous uncle influenced both his choice of a career and his own theoretical outlook. For years, Mauss also collaborated on the review *Année sociologique* which had been founded by Durkheim. Nevertheless, Mauss managed to carve his own domain within French social thought and to achieve a stature almost equal to that of his mentor. As he began to study religions in a more practical manner than his uncle by learning Sanskrit and other ancient languages, Mauss found another mentor in the person of the orientalist Sylvain Lévy who became "his second uncle" (302).

Mauss' career and his reputation in academic circles was already well established when World War I broke out. He volunteered (at the age of 42!) and spent several years at the front, acting as a translator and liaison officer assigned to the Australian troops. The inter-war years marked the apogee of his success. Not only did he continue to teach in the various schools with which he had been associated before the war, but he established the *Institut d'ethnologie* and in 1930 was appointed to the prestigious *Collège de France* (he had applied for a position at the *Collège* in 1909 but had been defeated by other scholars whose names today are completely forgotten). He was a brilliant teacher—Fournier writes that "people listened to Mauss as if he were Scheherazade" (280)—and influenced countless numbers of students who revered him. Outside of France, Mauss, whom Fournier describes as an Anglophile (295) was friends with several British anthropologists and made a few visits to Britain; he never went to the United States but corresponded with American scholars.

The German occupation of Paris (1940-1944) was a severe ordeal for Mauss. Perhaps thanks to the intervention of some of his former students who held influential positions in the Vichy regime, he managed to escape arrest and deportation but he lived in misery during these years. He was reinstated as professor emeritus in 1945 but the post-war years turned out to be for him a period of rapid intellectual decline, and he died in a state approaching senility in 1950.

Fournier is at his best in retracing the steps of Mauss' academic career and in describing the rivalries to which the complicated structures of the French academic world give rise against a background of often intense ideological conflicts. (Although the lines of cleavage have changed, much of this pattern of bureaucratic fragmentation and intellectual confrontation remains true even today.) His book also provides a lot of details about Mauss' rather paradoxical

political engagement. In some sense, he was a committed socialist, at least in terms of the time and energy he devoted to the cause, but he also was resolutely opposed to Marxist dogmatism and to economic determinism in general. He was also very skeptical about the Bolsheviks' chance of success in the economic sphere and critical of state planning. His favorite approach to social reform paralleled that of the cooperative movement which he tried to help on several occasions (incurring substantial financial cost). As Fournier notes,

His opposition to a purely economic interpretation of social relations led him to constitute what could be called "a complete science of cooperative relations between different ages and different peoples as well as between individual and families" (206).

The more disappointing aspect of this very readable and otherwise fascinating biography concerns the relative lack of critical engagement with Mauss' works. Although Fournier gives a fairly good sense of the overall directions in which Mauss pursued his multiple research interests (e.g., social theory, ethnology, comparative religions, politics), one is left wanting to know more about the specific ideas that he advanced. The essay on the gift is discussed at some length in a perceptive manner, but Fournier treats Mauss' other writings more superficially. What I miss in this book is a sense that Mauss continues to speak to our contemporary concerns. His message is, precisely, that the concerns of any age are always related in some ways to that of another age. There are no "primitive" societies: some of their essential features continue to inform, in veiled or transformed ways, our own practices. In fact one of the most intriguing aspects of Mauss' thought, which he developed in the years that followed the publication of *The Gift*, is that reciprocity and the bonds of exchange extend through time and involve inter-generational patterns. Social evolution works on beliefs and customs, transforming them as circumstances change but also, paradoxically, sustaining them through time. Individuals may not always experience this continuity in their discrete and seemingly unrelated choices but these choices are informed by norms that they inherit and pass on. This also accounts for Mauss' early interest in religion, a concept that, according to some at least, expresses a bond or connection (*ligare*) among human beings and between them and their god(s).

The English translation is only about half as long as the original French text which provides a little more depth but even in that text Fournier is more interested in the interplay between Mauss' life and times than in exploring Mauss' theories. It

must also be admitted that the prolific and rather eclectic nature of Mauss' writings almost defy efforts at discussing them in all their complexity. The book tells us much about Mauss' life, his political activities, the influence he had on his students, and so on. This cannot be done without commenting on the ideas that made Mauss so influential and respected, but readers interested in intellectual history will find the tidbits offered more tantalizing than satisfying. The absence of a complete bibliography of Mauss' works is also regrettable (there is one in the original French text). Mauss was not the author of a few well-known books; in fact, the only book he attempted to write, *On Prayer*, was left unfinished and what would have been its first installment was even withdrawn from the publisher by Mauss before it could be printed and distributed (however, an English translation is available today). He wrote instead a great many articles and essays of various length which were published in a variety of forms including articles in scholarly reviews, chapters in edited volumes (*mélanges*), prefaces, newspaper columns, and so on. It would have been useful to provide detailed references to all of them and to indicate which ones have been recently republished in French or translated into English. (On this point, it should be noted that Marcel Fournier is the editor of an 800-page compilation of Mauss' political writings that was published by Fayard in 1997.) All the same, readers of this journal should feel a debt of gratitude to the author for having "given" us a work that sheds much light on a thinker who is well-known but has remained so far, especially among English-speaking scholars, something of a mystery.

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Making Volunteers: Civic Life after Welfare's End

By Nina Eliasoph

Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2011.

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Reviewed by Ann C. Fitzgerald

My most vivid lesson on volunteering came from an African-American woman who ran an after-school program for disadvantaged youth in Washington, DC, where I considered volunteering. Her program gave children a safe haven from homes and

communities that were plagued by violence, drugs, and poverty. Speaking to an audience of potential volunteers made up mostly of white, middle-class professionals, she warned: “Don’t volunteer to help me unless you can make a real commitment. These kids have had enough disappointment in their lives.” Her frank comments stunned many in the audience but were borne out by experience with well-intentioned volunteers who appeared once or twice to help, only never to return.

In *Making Volunteers: Civic Life After Welfare’s End*, Nina Eliasoph calls these transient volunteers “plug-in volunteers” or “beloved aunties.” They are people who devote only a few hours a month to nonprofits yet seek rewarding, intimate experiences in return. Their limited time commitment, coupled with an unrealistic expectation that they will transform lives quickly, makes volunteering “unequivocally harmful” from the author’s perspective.

Eliasoph has identified a critical operational challenge for many civic organizations, but the title of her book is misleading because she explains neither how more committed volunteers are or could be made nor what she means by “welfare’s end” and its impact on civic life. In fact, the book’s index lists no references to welfare, government funding, or grants.

The book does, however, provide a sobering look at empowerment programs in America based on her experiences over five years volunteering at a nonprofit organization for disadvantaged youth. An empowerment program is a specific type of hybrid social-service organization with a broad and ambitious agenda. Through a mix of government, nonprofit, and private funds, it seeks to transform feelings of self and cure social ills by empowering participants in a variety of ways. Operating at the grassroots level in communities, these programs attempt to lessen inequality by blending heterogeneous groups, to foster good citizenship through civic engagement, and to celebrate diversity while honoring specific cultures.

On many levels, these programs do not live up to their lofty expectations. Eliasoph found that bringing together disadvantaged youth with their more privileged counterparts often exposed differences rather than forging bonds. At the same time, organizers had to contend with the challenge of motivation because the affluent students’ reasons for participation were not always altruistic; many sought merely to check off a high-school-volunteer requirement. On the other hand, many of the disadvantaged youth attended the programs not because they desired personal transformation but because they had nowhere else to go after school. The goals of teaching civic engagement skills to participants and celebrating diversity were similarly difficult to achieve. The empowerment

programs sought concrete projects for the students to do while eschewing controversy. Thus, it was easier to collect food for the poor than to contemplate or address the larger political issue: the source of poverty. Another reason for an absence of civic engagement was the structure of the programs, which required staff to secure government funds before students arrived to participate and provide input. Further, the goal of promoting multicultural diversity for its own sake accomplished little in terms of organizational objectives, but it did raise doubts and uncertainty. The young adults were at once expected to overlook differences while finding ways to celebrate and preserve individual cultural distinctions.

Eliasoph saves her harshest criticism for the adult volunteers. Since volunteer engagement was necessary to show government funders that the empowerment groups were grassroots activities, volunteers received lavish praise regardless of whether or not they were helpful. These adults seemed to approach volunteering on a transactional basis, as if to say, “I will give my time, but I expect to receive a meaningful experience in return.” With no expectations placed on them, volunteers gravitated to the youth they found it most rewarding to help. This meant that the difficult and isolated students—those who were most in need of adult interaction and mentorship—were regularly ignored.

Eliasoph’s solutions to these various challenges are at once vague and disheartening. Her fundamental argument is that empowerment programs need regular, stable funding, which translates into increased government support. Indeed, the book leaves the reader with the impression that these programs are underserved because welfare has “ended.” However, she never provides any statistics on the level of government funding that empowerment programs received either before or after welfare reform. Since spending on welfare programs today is 13 times greater, adjusted for inflation, than it was in 1964 according to the Heritage Foundation, it is difficult to sustain the argument that government funding of social programs has ceased. More significantly, Eliasoph seems to ignore the evidence of her own field notes that reveal the detrimental effects of this source of revenue. Government funding created bureaucratic reporting requirements, an emphasis on empty diversity, and the engagement of “plug-in volunteers.”

Instead of proposing an authentic and valuable role for volunteers, Eliasoph recommends eliminating them altogether. This is a surprising conclusion. According to the Corporation for National and Community Service, 62.8 million adults volunteered almost 8.1 billion hours to organizations in 2010. Twenty percent of those volunteers participated in tutoring or teaching projects that are found

commonly in empowerment programs. This is an enormous human resource, which appears to be under-appreciated and ill-managed. The problem with Eliasoph's volunteers was not that the bar was set too high, but that it was set too low. Volunteers were not trained or educated. They had no expectations placed on them and received no constructive criticism. Above all, they were allowed to persist in the false belief that their sporadic interaction was helping when it benefited neither them nor the disadvantaged youth who were the objects of their efforts.

A better approach to empowerment programs would be to do something Eliasoph's book does not: educate organizations on how to make volunteers by connecting volunteerism to a true understanding of philanthropy. Money alone will not help disadvantaged youth build the trust, relationships, self-image, and potential they need to flourish in civic life; neither will sporadic and insincere attempts by volunteers to interact with them. Only when we move beyond a transactional approach to philanthropy and recognize volunteering as a way to appreciate our shared humanity will both giver and receiver be transformed.

To her credit, Eliasoph acknowledges that developing these intimate bonds is a time-consuming endeavor. This may be a reason for empowerment programs to obtain funds from private, non-governmental sources to gain flexibility in their programming. If they are beholden to arbitrary government requirements for volunteer involvement, they are likely to focus more on counting the quantity of volunteers without assessing the quality of volunteers. Counting the wrong thing in the wrong way is likely to have negative consequences, resulting in programs that never seek or cultivate volunteers willing and able to forge true relationships.

There are no simple solutions to fostering civic spirit in needy communities, but empowerment programs, as currently structured and funded, do not seem to be bringing about the desired results. By the author's own admission, they "don't kill civic spirit, but they don't bring it to life either." Removing volunteers from the equation—presumably in favor of hiring more "professional" staff—seems like the surest way to drive a stake into the heart of a community that is already struggling to thrive. In such communities, people need to be more, rather than less, connected to the work of identifying and developing solutions to the problems around them.

We need to look deeper into such communities to find examples of what is working. The directness of the woman with the after-school program in Washington, DC, may be part of the answer. She ran her nonprofit on a shoestring budget but refused to take any government funding because it added too many restrictions. And although volunteers were essential to her operation, she did not

tolerate “beloved aunties” coming and going. She asked for a commitment from volunteers and participants. Those who accepted her challenge were enriched by new relationships and the discovery of what each had to offer as a fellow human being. We would benefit if community leaders such as these would write more books from which we could learn.

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Authentic Patriotism: Restoring America’s Founding Ideals through Selfless Action

By Stephen P. Kiernan

New York: St. Martin’s Press, 2010.

ISBN 0312379110

Reviewed by Claire Gaudiani

“Authentic patriots do not set out to change the world. They set out to solve a problem.” Meet some people who will make you deeply proud to be an American, whether you are a liberal progressive, a Tea Party member, or somewhere in between. Stephen Kiernan’s *Authentic Patriotism* focuses on the demands democratic republics make on their citizens. Optimism and patriotism have become loaded concepts in the past few years. That may be because the media focuses us on major politicians and celebrities. That leaves the rest of us to watch and listen, 24/7. We watch flat screens, whatever size. Kiernan snaps our sets off. He introduces regular people, citizens like Dr. Howard Freeman, Barry Scheck, and Majora Carter. Kiernan’s casts are doers, not watchers.

In a casual, engaging stroke, Kiernan floats the idea that citizens in a republic are supposed to be doers, not must watchers. Remember? Kiernan states his thesis halfway into oncologist-surgeon Freeman’s story.

The challenges that confront America today... have developed over the span of a generation, flourishing in peace as in war, worsening in good economic times and bad... You cannot build sustainable economic growth unless the benefits reach more than a fraction of the populace.

The problem, in its essence, is one of engagement. The American people are no longer fully engaged in the task of building a more

perfect union. Their involvement in improving the condition of the country has waned, one person at a time, until most of the population considers that mission somebody else's business.

Freeman traces his ancestry to the former slave—his great, great, grandfather, Walter. Walter had worked double shifts and hired himself out as a carpenter on the side to earn enough money to buy his freedom and that of his wife, Eliza and his five children. When he left the plantation for Washington, DC, an official asked Walter his last name. Walter replied, "I am a free man." Hence, my last name, Dr. Freeman reports. Freeman decided that his work at Harlem Hospital demanded that he reframe the treatment of breast cancer for his very indigent patients. His reorganization of prevention, diagnosis, and treatment was so successful in patient outcomes and in cost reduction that soon visitors from The Cleveland Clinic, Sloan Kettering and many other notable medical centers were coming to Harlem to learn Dr. Freeman's approach. Freeman's philosophy: "Each one of us is gifted...We each need to find our gift, whatever it may be, and we have to develop it so we can create a human benefit from within ourselves." Kiernan identifies Freeman as an authentic patriot, his highest honor.

The stories of the other patriots unroll in a leisurely way. Kiernan steps away from preaching and lets the stories of citizens convey his message. Jack McConnell is a very successful doctor who retired to Hilton Head, SC and opened a free clinic, staffed by retired volunteer doctors and nurses. Previously underserved patients now received care that changed their lives. Jack's story is a uniquely American story. He had to fight through the resistance of local medical professionals and insurance and licensing bureaucrats and then find available, affordable clinic space. Turns out that raising money was his easiest task.

Kiernan notes that "... the marketplace had been an obstacle to progress, but the forces of individual initiative had proved stronger." McConnell's words clarify the point: "If we had resources in place, we could provide much if not most of the service to the forty seven million that need it." "I wouldn't be surprised if we could provide three quarters of it." He goes on. "We have two hundred and fifty thousand retired physicians in this country. We have more than twice that many retired nurses. They are trained; they are seasoned. Every day that goes by, we are wasting their expertise." Kiernan lets the voices of Freeman and McConnell drown out the twit-babble that usually out-decibels everything. McConnell's story and the statistics on increased health care and reduced health care costs reaffirm the power of individual Americans.

System change duplicates itself in countless sectors and geographies all over the nation. The nation needs more change from individual citizens. You might ask, why do we seem to believe that only Congress and politicians can address the country's challenges; that only banks and corporations are credible forces? Kiernan muses on why but keeps reinforcing the idea that individual American citizens are and have always been the country's best assets.

Some people like Barry Scheck permit Kiernan to tell hair-raising stories of innocent people accused and convicted of horrible crimes, usually by eye witnesses. Scheck was one of the first attorneys to use DNA evidence to exonerate the innocent. Kiernan's journalist skills enable him to slide several compelling stories of missjudged people, mostly Black men, into his narrative on Scheck. Alan Newton and Marion Coakley walk through the text from their wrongly assigned prison cells right to the sides of men like John Adams and David Souter. All of them bear witness to the commitment to justice that is the heart of America. The major story that emerges is the great power of that justice. Even in the face of the ongoing dangers of capital punishment, and the continuing danger that Black men experience in police stations, courts, and at the hands of eyewitnesses, American justice fights to win out because individual citizens defend it. Skillfully, Kiernan celebrates the drive to equity and justice that perdures in America; yes, through institutions that preserve the rule of law, but importantly, through individuals willing to fight for justice when institutions fail.

Now if you are clucking that Freeman, Scheck, and McConnell are professional men with advanced education in law and medicine, with the equipment to be optimistic problem-solvers in America, give Kiernan a chance to continue. He introduces Majora Carter, born into serious poverty and now the champion entrepreneurial developer of Sustainable South Bronx. An amazing heroine in her own community, Carter arranges for education, jobs, environmental improvements, and both social and small business entrepreneurship for her fellow South Bronxsters.

Kiernan also tells an extensive set of stories about the power of individuals involved in organ donations in America. Kiernan introduces the humanity of the doctors, the staff, and the families involved in the giving and receiving of such generosity. The depth of personal generosity expressed in each case lit up a warm feeling of gratitude in me. Organ donors and their families and the professionals who surround them could save my child. Now I see why I should be a donor too.

The stories keep rolling. From every state in the Union, people at every age and income level seem to stand up briefly as authentic patriots making change—

making America. The voices call out: if it isn't perfect yet, get off the sofa and make your changes just like the eighth-grader from Waukee, Iowa did, as the Wall Street mogul and the thoughtful granddaughter did. Imagine sharing three hours a week to reinvigorate a sense of common purpose in America!

Kiernan closes with a straightforward, three-page appeal to patriotism. His sentences are short. His syntax simple:

But this independent spirit is not the only one. The American Idea is also about unity. It includes interconnectedness, the shared endeavor of making democracy work; the Founders were mindful of unity. They made it iconic by putting *E pluribus unum*, from many, one—on our currency. They began the Constitution with “We, the people.” The people have forgotten. Independence has foreshadowed unity. Common purpose has been usurped by isolation. License has displaced liberty. Government is not nimble. It is rarely inspiring. It is not responsive. It does not lead. We are all equal; everyone can make a difference; everyone is needed for the nation to thrive...

Kiernan's authentic patriots and Kiernan himself are not tangled up in economic or sociological blather. The errors of our collective past (even our persistent bowling alone) are less in his lens than how we can each create a solution to an American challenge or propagate one developed by a Jack McConnell or a Majora Carter or a Barry Scheck. Kiernan only wants each of us to recognize an urgent need and do something about it...not a novel idea, but one most Americans need to be reminded of. Read this book.

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Heart of Dryness: How the Last Bushmen Can Help Us Endure the Coming Age of Permanent Drought

By James G. Workman

New York: Walker Publishing Company, Inc., 2009.

ISBN 978-0-8027-1558-6

Reviewed by Heather Wood Ion

James Workman has achieved what few authors can: he has written a gripping story that engages the reader's moral passions and he has explored some of the most troubling economic and political problems facing our world without polemic or hyperbole. At the heart of *Heart of Dryness* is the challenge of *value*: how do we value water? How do we value natural resources which are not being renewed? Who knows how to live in a world of depleted and diminishing resources? What can we learn from them? What do we need to do now?

In the subtitle of the book, Workman refers to permanent drought. Several factors contribute to increasing aridity, defined as the lack of sufficient moisture to support vegetation. In addition to industrialized agricultural practices throughout the world and population pressures, infrastructures related to water are disintegrating worldwide, so that leakage and waste deplete increasingly demanded resources. Water tables are falling in North America, India and China as well as the Middle East. While technology makes it possible to pump from depths of 1000 feet, this is cost-prohibitive to farmers in many areas. Where costs for deep drilling can be incurred, however, deep drilling enables access to the nonreplenishable fossil aquifers such as the Ogallala aquifer in the United States and aquifers in the North China Plain and Saudi Arabia. Once these are depleted they cannot be replenished.

Workman reports in detail how much water is needed in the developed world for food production, sanitation, and lawns and how little of this water is reused or reclaimed. To better understand the importance of this book, here are some basic facts (from WHO/UNICEF, Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development):

884 million people worldwide do not have access to safe water.

2.6 billion people do not have access to sanitation.

1.5 million children die every year from diarrhea.

Agriculture accounts for 80% of the world's water consumption.

Per day, 200 million hours of women's time is spent collecting water for domestic use: this lost productivity is greater than the combined number of hours worked in a week by employees of Wal-Mart, United Parcel Service, McDonald's, IBM, and Target.

Over 50% of all water projects fail, less than 5% are visited by funders, less than 1% have any long-term monitoring (see also www.water.org for many different reports).

One pound of beef requires 5200 gallons of water to produce; midwestern American ranchers have pumped 13 trillion gallons of water from the Ogallala aquifer.

Cattle, which burp both methane and nitrous oxide during digestion, account for 18% of greenhouse gas production; more than all cars combined (see Workman, 86-87 and the fascinating notes on these pages).

As surface water disappears due to the increased demand and increasing evaporation, deep drilling adds insupportable costs to farming, and there is as yet no scientific understanding of the geologic effects of emptying deep aquifers.

What must happen as global aridity increases is that humans must adapt, and specifically must restrain their excess demand and excess waste of water and other resources. Aridity is not the same as global warming, and Workman provides fascinating comparisons and discussions about the complex interactions of depletion of aquifers, deforestation, and population pressures on water resources. The melting of the ice cap on Mount Kilimanjaro for instance is due to aridity consequent to deforestation, not due to global warming.

Workman takes as his protagonists the Bushmen of the Kalahari. The Bushmen, living always with arid conditions, as did the Australian Aborigine peoples, developed profoundly efficient ways of storing and reusing water. Workman's story is not a happy one, however, for central to the narrative is his description of the persecution of the Bushmen by the government of Botswana for the sake of diamonds and "modernization." Workman describes both the lives of the Bushmen and the actions of their persecutors with meticulous and evocative

detail. One of the most moving passages in the book is his description of the autopsy on the body of the matriarch of the band of Bushmen which showed that she had deprived herself of even the most minimal levels of fluid intake over years in order to supply the rest of the band. Yet despite this detail, Workman is not self-aggrandizing at any point in his role in this story, and discusses, with candor and charm, his assumptions and how they were challenged.

Workman explores the dilemmas of a resource which is priceless in use but worthless in exchange, and he well documents the attempts to make water a commodity in a priced environment in Chapter 16, "Haggling Over the Source of All Life." In recounting the human costs of those dilemmas, Workman gives the reader a thorough history of how governments worldwide have interacted with indigenous peoples. This is illuminative and disturbing as he shows the shortsightedness of corporations and governments matching both greed and waste. When a government (not necessarily democratic) or a corporation, decides to dispossess, confine, or eliminate indigenous peoples, the rationales provided range from statements about access to resources to the determination that all peoples must 'modernize' according to a policy. Not only do these arguments often lead to genocide, but they frequently support a biopiracy, a determination to remove for commercial gain exclusively benefitting the imposing authority, the natural resources of a region. As is clear in the case of Botswana and the Bushmen, the knowledge regarding husbanding of the local resources is not sought by the intruding authority.

The Bushmen of the Kalahari preserved the plants which stored water; passed the knowledge of water flow and plant life in the desert from generation to generation so that with natural variation in the environment, the population could adapt; and shared their environment with animals so that available water could support complexity. The government authority acted upon defined goals: diamond mining, ecotourism in game reserves, and modernization, each determined according to a specific snapshot in time. The consequence was, as with industrialized agriculture, an imposition of monoculture and an elimination of factors contributing to ecological balance over time.

One of the issues Workman raises but does not explore from the philanthropic perspective is the moral obligation to provide access to water to sustain life within the context of local knowledge and control of water resources. The Bushmen certainly live with a complex system of guardianship or governance of water (is this property?), but they do not seem to have a view that governance includes the

ability to deny life to others by denying access to water. The issues of the governance of water are themes in the work of Elinor Ostrom on common-pool resources. Although Workman does not cite Ostrom's work, her advocacy of self-management of common resources by a local community is resonant with his own argument. It is difficult, however, to see how an indigenous people with its own set of moral values regarding property can both interact with and oppose convincingly institutions and systems with greater coercive force and an entirely different set of values. There is no positive feedback loop, as Ostrom argues to be essential, between the Bushmen and the Botswana authorities, as there was none in Tibet, Australia or North America between the indigenous peoples, immigrant populations, and governments.

The Botswana government, and several others around the world Workman cites, acted as if governance was equal to control and that control included the right to coerce through withholding of access to life-giving resources. The violence recorded in this book is pervasive and indiscriminate and certainly constitutes a challenge to those who may think that authorities which exert powers of constraint do so by right of being a 'government.' Sometimes those authorities are corporations, like De Beers, which conduct themselves as the only recognized power in a region.

While Workman admires greatly the ability of the surviving Bushmen to withdraw into their desolate lands in protest against the destruction of wells and the restriction of access to water, the lessons to be drawn are not withdrawal, isolation, and invisibility. If we are to create an epidemic of health as Jonas Salk felt was within our capacities,¹ we must understand what constitutes and supports vitality among our diverse human family. The Bushmen could recall a time before they were constrained when their chosen lifestyle was supported by the game, the water, and the available plants. Their world made sense to them, it was coherent, they felt connected to all living things, and they were agents of their own destiny and hopeful for their children as the heirs and creators of their future.² As Workman explores the increasing political constraints upon their world, we can see how their vitality in every sense was drained away, and very few of them were able to withdraw and preserve the meaning of life in *their* culture. Even though we would not choose their way of life, we can see the challenges to our own vitality as we each struggle to maintain our integrity in a world defining success in terms of excess.

Complex interactions between policy decisions, such as Saddam Hussein's

draining of the Euphrates marshes, and regional water shortages have yet to be explored. Some issues, such as the disappearance of the Aral Sea remain mysterious. Under these same pressures peoples living in the southeastern states of the U.S. are already suing each other over control of rivers, while those in the southwest, dependent on the Colorado River, have reached a point of significant adversarial alarm. Workman's comparisons and historical chapters on waste and how water can be conserved are startling in detail. His notes throughout the book are every bit as intriguing as the main text.

Adaptation will require greater self-knowledge, greater local knowledge, acceptable and respectful means of conflict resolution, innovation, and above all, a long-term view of the ecology of our place in time. None of those are at present appealing, readily available, or regarded as achievements worthy of pursuit.

Will necessity be the mother of invention? Will our preference for (and government subsidies of) meat help eradicate diverse resources? Will affluent tourism encourage governments to support reserves which are designed for tourists, not for sustainability, at long-term costs to the animals, environment and humans?

These are but a few of the questions Workman raises and illustrates thoroughly in his book. Economists and political scientists as well as historians and development specialists need to read and reread this book and explore those questions. Those of us who are fascinated by the issues of altruism and human cooperation need to read the book as a cautionary tale against misguided intentions and false premises of what it means to be human.

Above all, this book is thoughtful and requires thought. We live in a time when everything, down to our own genes, is viewed as a commodity. This book provides a salutary confrontation with the consequences of policies made and market choices driven by such a perspective. We can and must meet increased aridity with agreement on our common dependence on our common store. We certainly must learn from the Bushmen to value local knowledge and skills about our environments, and to preserve the best of our traditions in support of a vital future.

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¹ www.epidemicofhealth.org; this movement is determined to identify, amplify, archive and demonstrate what is working in the world to support vitality.

² Gary Gunderson, *Leading Causes of Life* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2009).

**Gross National Happiness: Why Happiness Matters for America—
and How We Can Get More of It**

By Arthur C. Brooks

New York: Perseus/Basic Books, 2008.

ISBN 978-0-465-00278-8

Reviewed by Laurie Morrow

“If you’re happy and you know it, clap your hands!” goes the children’s song. According to Arthur C. Brooks, in his carefully researched *Gross National Happiness: Why Happiness Matters for America—and How We Can Get More of It*, those who are clapping are significantly more likely to be married rather than single, religious rather than secular, and conservative rather than liberal.

The Concept of Happiness

Happiness is a nebulous concept—so much so that at least one professor of clinical psychology considers happiness as a form of mental illness. In “A Proposal to Classify Happiness as a Psychiatric Disorder” in the *Journal of Medical Ethics*, Richard Bentall argues that “Happiness meets all reasonable criteria for a psychiatric disorder. It is statistically abnormal, consists of a discrete cluster of symptoms . . . and it is associated with various cognitive abnormalities, in particular, a lack of contact with reality.”¹ *The Onion* made a similar point satirically, with a TV news report about “Despondex,” a prescription “depressant” drug to be administered to the insufferably cheerful.

While most would reject Bentall’s assertion that the happy are mentally ill and need a dose of Despondex, clearly, happiness is subjective and difficult to describe. In *Gross National Happiness: Why Happiness Matters for America—and How We Can Get More of It*, Brooks defines happiness as it is experienced in America, and measures what makes us happy, who is happy, and how happy they are. Brooks considers the study of happiness a moral obligation that has consequences for the nation, for happy people “are more charitable than unhappy people, have better marriages, are better parents, act with greater integrity, and are better citizens” (16-17). Brooks investigates the relationship between happiness and political orientation, religion, marriage, parenthood, and charitable giving. Striving for objectivity, he uses data based on a wide array of methodologies and measures, including self-reporting checked against the perceptions of the subject’s acquaintances; measuring the involuntary electrical responses of the brain to positive and negative stimuli; and the presence or absence of the “Duchenne smile,”

an involuntary upper-cheek muscle movement that is a culturally transcendent indicator of genuine pleasure across human cultures. Rather than cherry-pick his data to support any presuppositions, the bowl of cherries Brooks offers us comes pits and all.

Happiness and Political Orientation

Brooks is charmingly candid about his own preconceptions about happiness and his surprise at some of the conclusions to which the data drove him. Reared in a liberal community, he assumed liberals would test happier than conservatives, as they were not subject to the constraints that characterize conservatism. To his surprise, the data demonstrated that conservatives consistently felt more free and happy than liberals, were far less likely to view themselves as worthless or as failures, had more stable marriages, and were more optimistic about the future. Conservatives are, in a word, happier than liberals.

Brooks suggests a number of explanations for this outcome. While conservatives and liberals consider freedom important to happiness, each defines freedom differently. Conservatives conceive of liberty as freedom from government restraint, particularly restraint related to faith and free speech. For liberals, genuine freedom is possible only when the government guarantees citizens food, shelter, education, and health care (87).

Conservatives and liberals, Brooks argues, have fundamental and irreconcilable differences in their assumptions about the individual's power to transform himself and his society. Conservatives have greater confidence in the individual's resilience and in his creative capacity to overcome life's obstacles. Liberals, however, see collective action as the only solution to serious social problems. Irrespective of whether liberals are correct strategically, in making people feel powerless and dependent, modern liberalism seems to make people less happy. Conservatism, however, asserts that each individual can exert at least some control over his life, and that a person can, through his own talent and tenacity, change himself and his world for the better.

Liberals want government to shield people from harm, and are willing to limit freedom to achieve this end. People may, and often do, make foolish, self-destructive choices. Yet, the more free people are to make those wise or foolish choices, the happier they are. Simply being able to make a choice affords us a sense of control over our lives, an essential component of happiness. Brooks illustrates this with an experiment conducted in a nursing home. On one floor, patients were allowed to select the plants in their living space, so long as they also accepted the responsibility to tend them; they

were also allowed to choose which would be “movie night.” Patients on another floor, who were equally happy and healthy at the outset of the experiment, were provided with plants and movies, with no responsibility demanded of them and no choice permitted. These seemingly minor differences had major consequences: the first group became more alert, active, and happy, and after eighteen months, died at half the rate than did those “freed” from choice and responsibility (89).

Happiness and Religion

If a sense of control and freedom are necessary to happiness, it might seem that absolute freedom would maximize happiness. Yet, it does not; unrestricted freedom is overwhelming, as it leaves one with no way to filter good from bad choices. Religion enhances happiness in part because it offers such a filter. Brooks’ study demonstrates that religious people are happier than secular people, and argues that public policy should encourage the practice of religion, for it benefits not only believers but the citizenry in general. Religious people donate four times more money to charity than secular people. They give more to charity (including nonreligious charities), and are far more likely to give blood or donate food. Households headed by conservatives, who tend to be more religious than liberals, give 30% more than households run by liberals, even when the conservative household had lower income.

Happiness and the Traditional Family

During the 1960s, it became fashionable to see marriage as a source of misery. Brooks reports that in 2004, however, 42% of married Americans said they were very happy, compared to 23% of never-married Americans, with married women slightly more likely (44%) to say they were very happy than married men (41%). Brooks reports that married people tend to be better off, more religious, and more conservative than unmarried people—characteristics he elsewhere shows increase happiness—and that when groups with similar circumstances are compared, married people are 18% more likely to be very happy.

Happiness and Parenthood

Brooks’ study led him to another conclusion that surprised him: that having children made people less, not more, happy. Women, according to Brooks, “enjoy almost everything more than child care” (67).

Curiously, Brooks’ results seem to mirror those gotten by advice columnist Ann Landers four decades ago, when she asked her readers, “If you had it to do over

again—would you have children?” Landers received over 10,000 responses, with 70% answering “No.” Landers’ results don’t validate Brooks’ observations, of course; she was the first to admit that her survey was an unscientific and inherently biased one, as unhappy parents were more likely to respond than happy parents.

Though Brooks’ investigation is far more statistically sound, his conclusion may be less definitive than he believes it to be, as his study may also have been unintentionally biased toward producing a negative result. The flaw lies in the definition of “child care” used in the studies upon which Brooks relies. Brooks’ otherwise meticulous methodology doesn’t define what either he or these studies includes in the activities involved in “child care,” a term that covers an awful lot of territory. As a mother myself, I freely concede that tending to a child’s needs involves considerable scut work, as anyone who’s wielded a *baby nasal aspirator* can attest. If “child care” consisted mainly of such stress-inducing janitorial activities, most women would prefer any other activity Brooks lists, and he could throw in fire-eating and chainsaw juggling without significantly skewing the results.

But caring for a child also includes much that parents consider highly pleasurable—nuzzling the baby’s hair after his bath, escorting your three-year-old daughter turned fairy princess from house to house on Halloween, watching your boy’s shy smile as he blows out the flickering birthday candles, drying the tears of a child with a skinned knee and comforting her till she laughs again.

The problem is, I think, that the term “child care” connotes the work-for-hire offered at a day-care center—something rather different from what the term “motherhood” suggests. One wonders whether the same results would have been produced, had that term, fallen sadly in disuse, been substituted for “child care.”

Given Brooks’ conclusion that child-rearing makes people less happy, one would expect he would advise those wishing to maximize their chances for happiness to avoid having children. Yet, Brooks (himself the father of three) does not do so. Deviating from his operational definition of happiness—a state in which the pluses of life generally outweigh the minuses—he argues that children confer meaning on life, producing thereby a higher kind of happiness, “the ‘moral quality of life,’ which Aristotle called *eudaemonia*”. Giving one’s child unconditional love “is itself a source of happiness,” Brooks asserts (69). “We should think of parenthood as a charitable act” (72).

Money and Happiness

Rich people, unsurprisingly, are typically happier than poor people, which is consistent with Brooks' finding regarding the importance of choice and control to one's happiness. Some believe human happiness would be enhanced, were greater economic equality produced through government-mandated wealth redistribution. Brooks believes that happiness comes from achievement, which a paycheck confirms. Even poor Americans are generally optimistic, for they believe they can improve their life through hard work. Brooks argues that government policies aiming to help the poor should focus not on achieving income equality but on increasing economic mobility for the poor by improving education, making labor markets more fluid, and encouraging investment and entrepreneurship.

One of Brooks' findings that surprised me is that most Americans like or love their jobs, irrespective of the work they do or the income they earn (157). People like to work; indeed, the happier people are, the more hours they put in at their jobs. Americans find emotional security not only in having jobs themselves, but in knowing jobs are available for others, which is why, in a down economic climate, even securely employed people feel less happy.

Regular employment helps make us happy in another way, for it enables us, as Brooks puts it, to "buy" happiness through charity. People who donate to charity are 43% happier than those who do not (177). Donors suffer less depression, lower stress hormone levels, and increased endorphin levels. Thus, physically as well as spiritually, charitable giving makes you feel good.

The Importance of Being Happy

Brooks draws conclusions that those in search of enhancing their own or others' happiness may want to consider: that while income is important, so is a genial family life; that employment enhances one's sense of accomplishment and content; that a positive attitude, a sense of humor, and religious faith help one transcend misfortune and achieve a sense of equanimity; that being charitable helps both donor and recipient. These may be simple truths, but they are not trivial ones.

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¹ Bentall, Richard P. 1992. "A Proposal to Classify Happiness as a Psychiatric Disorder." *Journal of Medical Ethics*, 18: 94-98.

The American Evolution**By Matt Harrison****Cerritos, CA: Prometheus Institute Press, 2009.****ISBN 978-0615282046***Reviewed by Max Borders*

The more biology and economics inform each other, the better. Cross-pollination of ideas from one discipline to the next can yield great insights and shed light on answers to questions once hidden by the intellectual silos.

The late naturalist Stephen Jay Gould wrote: “[Th]e theory of natural selection is a creative transfer to biology of Adam Smith’s basic argument for a rational economy: the balance and order of nature does not arise from a higher, external (divine) control, or from the existence of laws operating directly upon the whole, but from struggle among individuals for their own benefits.”¹

As it happens, Gould was a socialist. Whatever his politics, he recognized the intellectual intimacy between Smith’s “invisible hand” and Darwin’s natural selection.

Any time someone has made the effort to use evolution as a lens through which to see economics and society, I am eager to see the product. Examples of such efforts include:

In *Bionomics*, Michael Rothschild makes explicit use of biological evolution to shed light on business, economy and globalization. Rothschild insists that economies are like “ecosystems.”

In *Butterfly Economics*, Paul Ormerod exposes the folly of static economic models by appeal to biology, chaos theory and complex systems. Ormerod’s example ant colony behavior is pulled from the observations of biologists, but the implications for macroeconomists are clear.

In *The Biology of Business*, John Henry Clippenger III offers a set of evolutionary analogs to businesses and organizations.

In *The Rational Optimist*, Matt Ridley opens with an explanation of economic history as one of “ideas having sex.” The internal combustion engine plus the wagon yielded the horseless carriage (automobile). Mating ideas, according to Ridley, are the economy’s way of evolving.

In *Law, Legislation and Liberty*, F. A. Hayek offers his idea of *kosmos*, or emergent order, which he contrasts with planned order (*taxis*). *Kosmos* is not only an extension of Smith’s concept of the invisible hand, but an idea Hayek admits he borrowed from biology.

These works are hard acts to follow. So whenever someone sets out to follow them, I sit up and take notice. Indeed, when I was offered the opportunity to review someone's effort to draw connections between evolutionary biology and socio-economic change, I jumped at the chance.

The American Evolution by Matt Harrison promises to be another book in this tradition. The title's wordplay along with cover art featuring double-helices set certain expectations in my mind. But as I started to read, it became clear that this writer is not quite ready to join the constellation of stars bulleted above. That is not to say the book is devoid of value. It is to say the author was simply not ready to undertake such an effort.

Honestly, I empathize with Matt Harrison's desire to write a book in this vein. As a matter of fact, I have. In 2004, I labored for a year on a book with the working title *Complexity Politics*. Like Harrison, I wasn't ready either. So, my book sits on the hard drive of an old laptop. But *The American Evolution* has made its way to a vanity press as a signature product of The Prometheus Institute.

This may explain why reading *The American Evolution* is rather like stumbling on the blog of a bright, interesting young person. The blogger is clearly interested in a lot of things and is probably a voracious reader. He's using the blog to say *look at how much I know—or—check this out: I can relate any given nugget of Trivia back to Malthus or Marx.*

In the following example, Harrison is discussing inter-generational music criticism. "The pessimism of such old school music critics [of the Beatles], in my view, is strikingly akin to Malthusian pessimism, convincing itself that the presence of inferior options means the superior options will never arise."

Let's pass over the problem of pessimism "convincing itself" of anything. And let's be charitable to Harrison despite his having taken such liberties with language. Is Harrison's defense of the Beatles as musical geniuses really all that germane? It could be. But examples like this strike a dissonant chord to this reviewer's ear. When I read passages like that, I see a young man attempting to intellectualize his iPod collection in order to make Malthus a curmudgeon. (Or maybe it's to use Malthus to beat up on Beatles' critics). In the process of all this cross-cultural comparison, we lose the beauty and elegance of what could be an interesting theme: namely the evolutionary aspects of economy and culture.

Returning to my blog analogy, one finds strands of recurring themes on this blog, but none of the themes is strong enough to unite the blog as a corpus—much less a book with a cover and a table of contents. And yet that's just what it seems like Matt Harrison has done with *The American Evolution*. Any given subsection

might resemble a mildly interesting blog post in which all the grammar gaffs are forgivable. But the book does not cohere as a volume. It lacks a skeleton—either a narrative structure or the binding force of a single, compelling idea.

The other problem is that the book looks to be self-published. Even if the author could resolve the structural problems, *The American Evolution* needs an editor. I need an editor. You need an editor. All God’s children need an editor. If *The American Evolution* had an editor, he or she was probably just a friend tracking changes in Word. I don’t say this to be flip. I say this because the author—despite too many mistakes to enumerate—managed to get some really smart and well-known people to write a blurb.

I would be remiss if I failed to mention philanthropy. That is, after all, why you’re reading this publication. Author Matt Harrison is also the founder of the Prometheus Institute, a non-profit organization “dedicated to pioneering innovative technology which increases civic engagement in the United States, especially among the younger generations.” One of their products—the DIY Democracy mobile app—could go a long way towards realizing their mission statement. I have it on my iPhone.

But I fail to see how *American Evolution* is all that mission-focused. And yet it is a flagship product of the organization. At least I find it hard to see how extensive quotes from rapper Jay-Z’s lyrics—combined with references to obscure thinkers—suffice to catalyze civic engagement, even among the young.

The punch line to all of this is that everyone in the freedom movement should shoot for high standards of professionalism and quality in everything they do. Indeed, many liberty-oriented organizations out there would do well to look to the Prometheus Institute for guidance on branding. Wonks don’t usually do graphics well, much less marketing. And so often it shows.

Likewise, the liberty movement needs people who are really good at things like iPhone apps and branding to remain focused on those activities. That’s not to say that Matt Harrison will never be seasoned enough as a writer to produce a magnum opus. He’s clearly very bright. It is rather to say that we all have to wrestle with the eternal question of the Renaissance man: *How can I best apply my talents, move the needle for liberty and find happiness in meaningful work?*

The answer this way lies...

MAX BORDERS is a 2011-12 Robert Novak Fellow. He is writing a book on wealth creation and the rich-poor “gap”.

¹ Gould, Stephen Jay. 1980. *The Panda’s Thumb: More Reflections in Natural History*. New York: Norton.



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