
INTRODUCTION

To those of you reading *Conversations on Philanthropy* for the first time, welcome! And welcome back to readers of our inaugural volume, issued in the Fall of 2004. In Volume I we sought to revisit the conceptual foundations of contemporary philanthropy by reexamining the frameworks of modern economic and political thought in which philanthropic institutions of the twentieth century were situated. We sought not to discard the philanthropic institutions of the last century but to look at them more critically as a way of loosening their hold over the choices gift-givers might make in the future.

The lack of clarity about the proper role of philanthropy in a free society was represented in Volume I by the cover image of a flame. This image evoked the early philanthropic venture attributed by Aeschylus to Prometheus, who out of love for mankind impiously stole fire from the gods. (It is worth noting that Prometheus makes his second appearance in *Conversations on Philanthropy* in this issue, coming into the conversation here in Amy A. Kass's comment on Richard Gunderman's essay.)

In the present volume, we continue our effort to look at the familiar more closely, but as our cover art indicates, our authors in Volume II are reexamining philanthropy from a more organic perspective, casting an eye forward to how new philanthropic possibilities may be unfolding and how the best of these possibilities might be cultivated to provide new paradigms for philanthropic participation.

In "Creating a Culture of Gift," Frederick Turner asks how philanthropy might best be understood and celebrated as a distinct and yet integral component of a complex, evolving social organism. From Turner's vantage point, modern philanthropy takes its place at the evolutionary front of the human practice of gift-giving. From this position, however, we can see at least two possible futures. Philanthropy might now proceed either trapped by an ethos of duty in a culture of imposed redistribution, or it might be unleashed to foster the expansion of human freedom by an ethos of gratitude embedded in a culture where it coexists in mutual benefit with other dimensions of a robust, humane economy.

Turner is a polymath, and his breadth shines through as concepts as seemingly divergent as the intergenerational transfer of wealth, complexity theory, potlatch, technological revolution, and "strange attractors" make

appearances in his essay. Where Turner unites these themes is in his poetic contribution to the effort to create a culture of gift entitled, “Brine: An Erythraean Journal.” Here the poet speaks of moving from the world of ideas networked and mediated by silicon-based technology into the “bloodred living stream” of life in modern-day Eritrea, where scientists, philanthropists, historians, soldiers, engineers, World Bankers, poor African children, and poets converge to harness carbon from the air and transform it into an abundant Eden of life-giving flora and fauna.

Turner paints in words a philanthropic vision that calls us to “open our eyes” to see not only the poverty of those who might become the recipients of our philanthropy but also to understand their history, to lean heavily upon their local knowledge, and to partake of their culture as we help them recreate it.

Opening our eyes to see not only the needs of philanthropy’s recipients but also to expand the mind’s eye to a longer horizon is also a theme of Richard Gunderman’s essay, “Giving and Human Excellence.” Gunderman proposes a new paradigm of liberal philanthropy that will transcend older, less complete frameworks for giving. These older frameworks include “charitable philanthropy,” rooted in the longstanding tradition of alms-giving to alleviate immediate needs, and “scientific philanthropy,” the model that emerged a century ago as progressive social reformers sought to address the “root causes” of systemic social problems as a way of leveraging philanthropic resources for more long-term solutions.

Gunderman’s paradigm of liberal philanthropy investigates the possibility of finding a sort of synthesis of the older models. “If philanthropy is to succeed on the grandest and most important scale,” Gunderman writes, “it must aim not to put itself out of business by eliminating need, but to enhance awareness of the importance of sharing by highlighting the capacity to give.”

The business of liberal philanthropy, then, is to “transform receivers into givers.” Only by liberating the human aspiration to be generous—hence the name liberal for Gunderman’s paradigm—can philanthropy truly elevate people out of the shame of unfortunate conditions and restore to them their essential dignity as human beings capable of attaining the excellence of liberality.

As Turner’s Eritrean entrepreneurs surely discover with their sleeves rolled up while drilling a new well, Gunderman observes that “real communities are nurtured not when people receive gifts from a common donor, but when people unite together to pursue some objective beyond self-enrichment.”

We have taken the liberty in this volume, as we did in the first, of inviting several commentators to engage with our feature essays and help launch our readers into the first steps of a conversation about the ideas presented.

Tyler Cowen, Herbert London, and Richard Gabriel seem equally intrigued by and yet in disagreement with one another about the implications of Turner's effort to think about the role of the arts in cultivating a broader role for philanthropy in our culture. Cowen celebrates the economics of the arts in America and interprets the size and scope of cultural philanthropy as a function of our embrace of competitive market processes. London, to the contrary, denies that the application of market forces to culture will necessarily produce salutary results. Although he doesn't use the terms, London's theme harkens back to older distinctions between "high" and "low" culture, and he urges us to remember that freedom in giving does not always translate into programs that truly enhance human freedom and dignity.

London thus awaits the arrival of more poets like Turner, who have not succumbed to postmodernist relativism and are willing to embrace artistic, cultural, and moral standards. Gabriel, however, cautions that the imposition of extraneous demands on art, even ones imposed by artists themselves, undermines art, for real art "is not entirely within the conscious control of the artist," as Gabriel puts it. Hence, to call for artists to forsake the leadership of the muses to participate in a contrived celebration of the culture of gift would be to distort the artistic process. For Gabriel, such a call would also deprive the philanthropist of the true gift the artist can provide—a model of one who practices his art solely because he can do no other and who creates art that has a future life only if its future recipients grant it authority. Like true artists, the truest philanthropists may be those who give "the gift of the fruits of their talents even though to do so makes no rational or economic sense." Just as the artist works under a form of compulsion, Gabriel says, the philanthropist who would make of giving an art may likewise find in giving a "strangeness and othermindedness" that fosters a positive compulsion toward benevolence.

Steven Grosby, Amy A. Kass, and Jennifer Roback Morse pick up the theme provided by Gunderman and invite us to consider its implications deeply. Grosby applauds Gunderman's effort to bring an anthropological approach to philanthropy by considering what it means to be human and then using this to identify the proper ends of philanthropy. Grosby urges caution, however, in equating the ends of liberal democracy—including the fostering

of habits of individual initiative, civic engagement, and personal responsibility—with the broader, perhaps Platonic, idea of human excellence. Grosby proposes that Gunderman’s paradigm is most useful in thinking pragmatically, perhaps in Aristotelian fashion, about the means and ends of philanthropy in the context of that same liberal democracy.

Amy A. Kass suggests that while we take a closer look at the possibility that each of us can be a giver, we must not lose focus on the implication that a world of givers requires a world of recipients. For Kass, gratitude is the other side of the coin of generosity; in other words, the correlative of giving is not sharing but the capacity to receive. This is a timely reminder for those of us living in a society where we celebrate and aspire to be counted among the rich and famous but have lost the abilities to acknowledge our own dependence and neediness and to receive others’ gifts with a gracious attitude. Kass tells a delightful story of Odysseus and Nausikaa, who mutually honor one another as giver and receiver, modeling a philanthropic exchange in which both parties depart having grown in their dignity as human beings.

Jennifer Roback Morse takes us deeper into this theme of mutuality and the need we have as a community to come to better terms with the inescapable condition that we will always have the needy with us. Morse’s anthropology reinstates the family at the center of human culture and explains this centrality by the fact that humans are born utterly dependent, requiring an institution of natural volunteerism to ensure their survival and thriving. Morse laments the accomplishment of the modern women’s movement in persuading women in the name of autonomy that their roles in the household economy are less valuable than paid labor in the workforce. The movement en masse of women out of the workplace of the home and into the commercial workplace not only distorted our view of the oldest human institution but also transformed the American practice of philanthropy, which until late last century was heavily oriented around the volunteer labor of women in and for their families and communities.

Like Gabriel, Morse champions a culture in which there is a role for literal amateurs, those who work for love. Such a culture must be cultivated, of course, and as Michael Oakeshott has reminded us, such cultivation requires continual re-creation.

“The work of protection,” writes Oakeshott in his 1939 essay “The Claims of Politics,” “is never of primary importance; and when, in times of political

crisis, it appears to be so, that is merely because in the absence or poverty of creative activity, protection has usurped the place of recreation.”

Taken together, the conversations begun in this volume call us to think about philanthropy as an institution of cultural creation and re-creation. Deepening our understanding requires us to explore more carefully the relationships between love and duty, between philanthropy and commerce, between gratitude and generosity, between giver and receiver, and ultimately to think anew about the very meaning of freedom and what it means to be a free society. We hope that you will find ways to introduce and continue these discussions in your own communities. Please let us hear where the conversations take you!

— Lenore T. Ealy
Series Editor