

## 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*