

## 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one-and-all access to both previously published letterpress editions of primary and secondary sources, as well as unpublished primary sources.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*

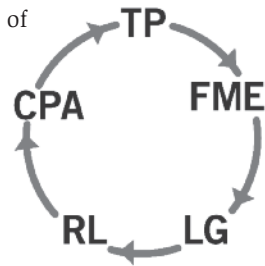
In 2010, Deirdre McCloskey published *Bourgeois Dignity*, remarkable for her erudite repudiation of all previous theories about how we arrived at the modern commercial world. McCloskey developed the thesis that modernity rejected hierarchy, the assignment to some people of more dignity (and privilege) 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.<sup>1</sup> 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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<sup>1</sup> 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[!]<sup>1</sup>—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.

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**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.

ISBN 978-0-69114-709-3

*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](http://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,<sup>1</sup> 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.<sup>2</sup> 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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<sup>1</sup> [www.epidemicofhealth.org](http://www.epidemicofhealth.org); this movement is determined to identify, amplify, archive and demonstrate what is working in the world to support vitality.

<sup>2</sup> 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.”<sup>1</sup> *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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<sup>1</sup> 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.”<sup>1</sup>

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”.

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







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