virtues & vocations

HIGHER EDUCATION FOR HUMAN FLOURISHING

Fall 2024

Generosity

Editor-In-Chief
Suzanne Shanahan

Managing Editor
Erin Collazo Miller

Editor
Robert Weston Siscoe

Design
Karen Sheets de Gracia

Cover artwork: "Harmony" by Samuel Prophask Asamoah

Virtues & Vocations is published by the Center for Social Concerns at the University of Notre Dame. The Center for Social Concerns is an interdisciplinary institute responding to the complex demands of justice through a combination of justice education and research for the common good. Virtues & Vocations is a national forum, funded by the Kern Family Foundation, for scholars and practitioners across disciplines to consider how best to cultivate character in pre-professional and professional education.

Contact Us
Virtues & Vocations
Geddes Hall Building
Notre Dame, IN 46556 USA

virtuesvocations.org

ISSNs: 2835-2998 (print); 2835-298X (electronic)

Printed in the United States of America by Apollo Printing.

Fall 2024

Generosity

virtues & vocations

HIGHER EDUCATION FOR HUMAN FLOURISHING

Fall 2024 **Generosity**

HARMONY SAMUEL PROPHASK ASAMOAH

"This work accentuates the need for society's members to always live in peace and tranquillity. Communal peace is dependent on the acceptance of others and their views. Government and those in leadership must listen to the voice and suggestions of all and sundry in the society to foster harmonious communal living." —*Samuel Prophask Asamoah*

Virtues & Vocations: Higher Education for Human Flourishing is an open invitation to a conversation, a community, and a set of contested aspirations for both how we ought to live together in this world and how higher education might serve those aspirations. It is a product of an initiative with the same name, Virtues & Vocations, sponsored by the Kern Family Foundation and hosted by the Center for Social Concerns at the University of Notre Dame. The initiative—comprised of a set of publications and convenings, both virtual and in person—seeks to foster a community of thought and practice to integrate questions of character, meaning, and purpose into the fabric of higher education. The telos of this community is human flourishing.

SUZANNE SHANAHAN, EDITOR

Welcome

I spent most of June in Dublin. My first academic job was in Ireland—almost 30 years ago in the Sociology faculty at University College Dublin. I stayed only two years. But my family has since then visited Dublin at least a couple of times each year. It is a second home of sorts. It feels wonderfully familiar.

This is where I first read the essays that appear in this issue of the Virtues & Vocations magazine on generosity. They helped me understand something that has long alluded me.

A big part of that familiarity that we love in coming to Dublin is seeing people we know: friends, colleagues, business owners. Some of those familiar faces are also part of a significant homeless population who have been unhoused for these same three decades. As a family we know their names, we know their stories, we know where they are perched in the city. We expect to see them in certain spots around town. My husband, Bill, is what the rest of us

ARTWORK BY CHRISTOPHER NOXON

would consider "oddly close" to these individuals. Bill always takes time to talk and catch up, always provides some money—and often substantial sums. He has on occasion provided things like the raincoat off his back or shoes off his feet. People rarely ever ask, but Bill gives nonetheless. They share more than familiarity, but perhaps less than friendship.

Bill's behavior no longer surprises his family, even if the impetus for it is still not fully understood. We marvel at his consistency. We are perplexed by the extent he'll go to always make sure he has some cash on hand to offer. We also find it funny because he is otherwise quite frugal; some would even say cheap. Bill struggles himself to explain it. Is it a form of social responsibility? It is guilt around his own privilege? It is the fact he was born in Ireland? Is it about his faith? He demonstrates the same generosity with the unhoused population in South Bend. Bill is, then, consistent. But still Bill has no particular commitment to, or even profound interest in, the challenge of homelessness, nor does he entertain more systemic interventions. In some sense it is as if their housing status really doesn't matter. This is just what Bill does.

This context is how I come to my thinking about the virtue of generosity and this next issue of *Virtues & Vocations: Higher Education for Human Flourishing*. For many years I did not consider my husband's behavior as a form of generosity, but these essays helped me understand his instinctual empathy and compassion that doesn't differentiate. He does not think the funds actually change anything for the individual beyond the moment of the giving. It is the same way of being that prompted him to invite the cashier he just met at Target to our daughter's birthday party simply because he thought they'd enjoy it. It is not theorized, it is not part of a larger politics, it is untied to his Catholic faith. It is not even some personal, well-honed retort to the effective altruism against which he often rails. It is emotive and embodied. Bill's generosity is perhaps best described in the language Jack Bell eloquently employs when he invokes Artistole: "Aristotle wrote that the generous person knows what to give at the right time to the right people. When the right opportunity comes, he parts with what he has, regardless of whether he knows or loves the recipient."

While these essays all share elements of what I see in Bill's particular behavior, their variety and distinctiveness also illuminate the breadth and depth of what we mean when we invoke the term generosity. The engineers, farmers, historians, philosophers, physicians, and theologians here clearly bring different scholarly traditions to the question of generosity, but they are each also distinctively shaped by personal experiences of encounter and community.

We see explorations of generosity focused more directly on the student experience in the essays by Joshua Brake and Sarah Schnitker, and a look at broad global challenges such as hunger and inequality from the essays by Jack Bell and Dirk Philipsen. Melissa Fitzpatrick reminds us of the challenges of living radical love without self-love and care. Abraham Nussbaum helps us see that *how* we are generous matters as much as the generosity itself.

In the interlude we offer an interview about generosity with Fr. Greg Boyle of Homeboy Industries, who reflects on more than 30 years of transformative work in community, which has been based on a notion of kinship and radical love for anyone—whomever they are, wherever they are from, whatever they have done. We also share an essay from Associate Professor of Studio Art at Notre Dame, Fr. Martin Lam Nguyen. Fr. Martin's work is about the art of seeing: physically, visually, and existentially, as a discipline and practice. In his essay, he reflects on the freedom unconditional love can afford. He reminds us that a life of generosity is the opposite of a life of calculation. Fr. Martin works with the incarcerated, teaching art to men at the Westville Correctional Facility in Indiana, enabling them too to be free.

In this issue, we chose art with an eye to abundance, reflecting a way of seeing and being that propels generosity. The art reminds us that generosity takes many shapes, but is inextricably linked to flourishing.

I hope this issue prompts you to reflect on the generous people in your own life, and provides as much insight and wonder as it offered me. V&V

Suzanne Shanahan is the
Leo and Arlene Hawk Executive Director,
Center for Social Concerns, University of Notre Dame.

ARTWORK BY SAMUEL PROPHASK ASAMOAH

PART I

Abundant Virtue

"Unconditional generosity is a tall order for finite beings, despite the fact that it is perhaps one of the most noble ideals we can set for ourselves."

MELISSA FITZPATRICK

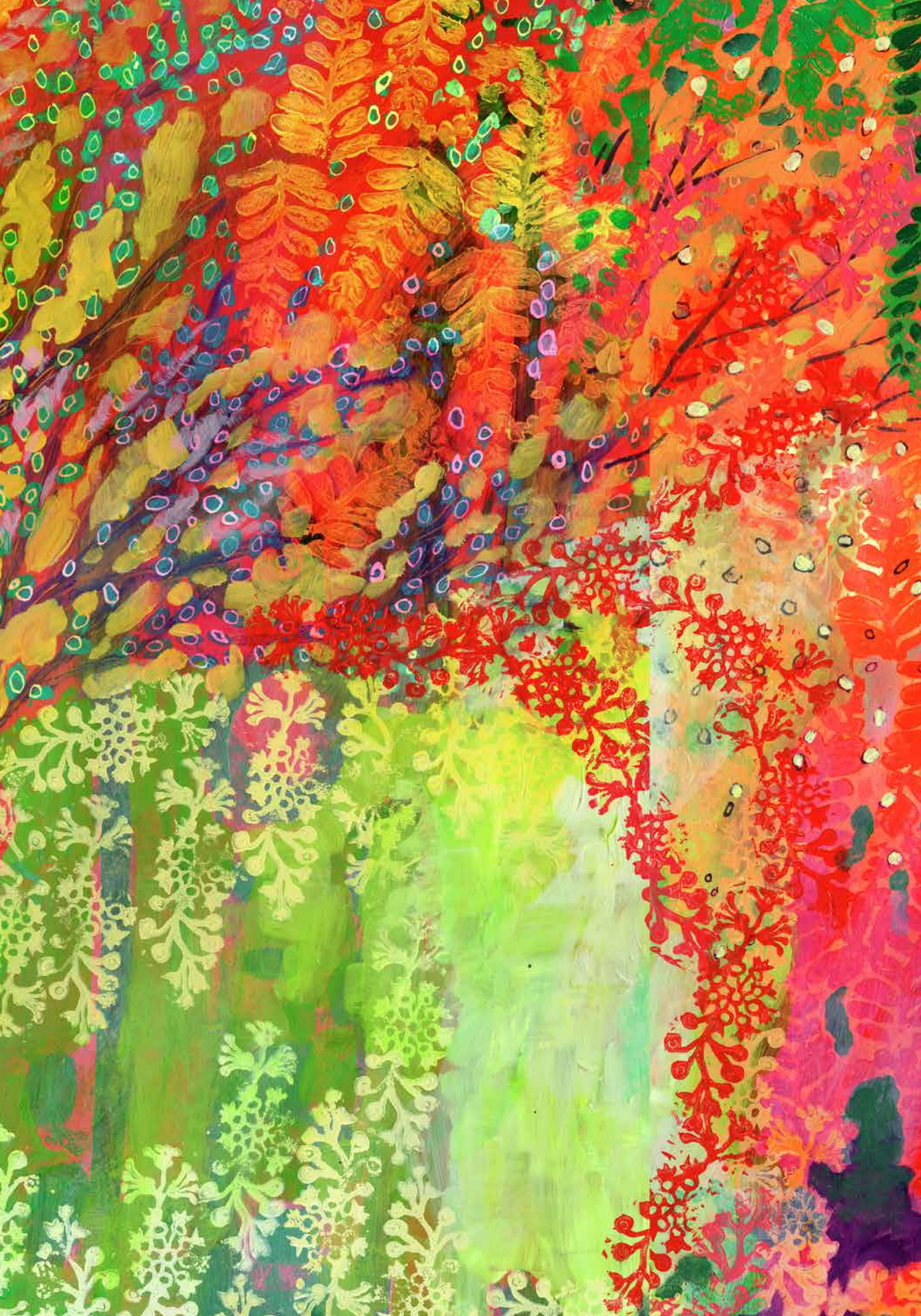
LAURIE L. PATTON

Generosity in Everyday Academic Life

Notes on First Principles

The following thoughts are notes toward a hermeneutic of generosity in everyday institutional life in higher education. I first consider the two specific ways in which, in twenty-first-century academic life, we literally cannot see or name generosity. I then move to how religious traditions, with their deep-rooted ideas about generosity, embed this disposition in their educational institutions. A discussion of the role of religious traditions in promoting generosity in education is not just necessary, but enlightening. It can guide us in rebuilding our current institutional lives and deserves more philosophical reflection.

ARTWORK BY JENNIFER LOMMERS



THE NEED FOR IMAGINATION

I recently met two friends whom I consider generous. They are accomplished senior academics who freely give their time, talent, and even treasure to their students, colleagues, and the people who attend their public lectures. In their written and spoken words, they are charitable and fair-minded toward other scholars, teachers, and students, including their critics.

In our meeting, I asked my colleagues about their most recent grants. They were able to answer almost immediately. Most scholars can name a travel grant, a book subvention, or research funding that will allow them months, and sometimes even years, of sabbatical writing and thinking. However, when I asked if they considered the grants generous, they said no. Most grants can barely fund a sabbatical salary, and only scholars at the most well-endowed institutions can have their grant money supplemented to make up their usual salary.

This scenario illustrates how we have lost our human (and humane) capacity to imagine generosity in the academy. The very idea of a grant is a form of trust; it derives from the Latin *credere*, "to entrust," through the old French *creanter*, "to guarantee," and related *granter* "to consent to support."[1] Moreover, grants involve humans' collective deliberation—and subsequent giving—to other humans. However, in contemporary academic life, they are primarily understood as a bureaucratic transaction of inadequate support. Such transactions have recipients who use the wealth to advance individual or collective research, which in turn enhances the institution's prestige. Grants are viewed as part of the financial and prestige economy, not human ones.

In addition to losing a sense of the human gift involved in the financial life of the academy, there is a second way we have lost this imagination for generosity. When I asked my colleagues to consider their most recent moment of generosity towards someone else or the most recent moment of someone else's generosity toward them, they had a hard time thinking of one. This is not because those moments didn't exist. Knowing my colleagues, I guessed that such moments of magnanimity probably existed in abundance. Instead, my friends did not have the habit of thinking about institutional life in these terms.

Very few of us in the academy have this habit. That is in part because generosity involves human expectations of what is enough. The Cambridge Dictionary defines generosity as "a willingness to give help or support, especially more than is usual or expected." Generosity involves social, cultural, and political ideas of what should

be the case and how much should be a usual part of the regular business of academic life.

But in 2024, the regular business of the academy will be hotly contested. Educational institutions are often considered, at best, rule-governed but unpleasant necessities. At worst, they are perceived as neo-liberal corporatized spaces of inevitable oppression. This understanding of institutions of higher education also crosses political boundaries. Such tropes are most often used by the left and far left to criticize wages that have not kept up with inflation or classroom practices that stifle minority students' access to genuinely authentic learning experiences. But I have also heard the tropes used by conservatives. Minus the neo-liberal moniker, the phrasing is used as a way of criticizing the establishment bureaucracy (equally corporate, just understood as originating from the left), which forces DEI orthodoxies on professors who would prefer to be left alone to exercise their freedom of speech and academic inquiry in the classroom.

Institutions of higher education are caught in the middle of this ideological polarization, and those who work in them struggle to perceive generosity or acknowledge it in others, much less than themselves. My colleagues didn't know how to think about what was "enough" or "usual," and so they were at a loss as to how to determine what was "going above and beyond." They didn't imagine themselves exceeding the usual limit because they didn't know it.

Examples abound of this kind of indeterminacy. As a college president, I regularly argue with trustees about spending for wages, asking for more. I also try to

Generosity is perceived as a deeply personal virtue involving personal motives and a person's spiritual state. It is not understood as the product of careful thinking by humans working within a system. But I want to ask a challenging question about this twenty-first-century condition: what if, in our collective institutional deliberations in higher education, we could discuss with generous motives and arrive at generous conclusions?

persuade them to spend slightly more than they are comfortable with to push our institutional vision and support our faculty and staff in other ways. I argue with them about ensuring our highly valuable benefits package is retained. We usually come to some compromise—not enough for me and too much for them. However, while I wish they saw things the way I did, I also know that every single one of the members of the board of trustees is deeply philanthropic—as generous with their time, talent, and treasure as the colleagues whose story opened this article are. I recognize their generosity, and it is my obligation to do so. That is one side of the equation.

The other side of the equation is the inevitable perception that no matter our collective decisions, those decisions are rarely seen as generous. This state of affairs is partly because the decisions can amount to less than people want or expect. However, I think there is also a deeper reason for this perception. Decisions made by people who follow a system are rarely seen or described as generous. According to the logic of the twenty-first-century academy, a bureaucratic system, by its very nature, cannot be gracious.

As an educational leader, I recently experienced a powerful example of this. When COVID hit hardest, we had the means to keep everyone employed, keep everyone's benefits, and furlough no one. I and many others at my institution and in the community understood this as an act of institutional generosity. Most other businesses and academic establishments were not doing this. The decision cost us about sixty million dollars over two years. But others complained that we were following ruthless and inhumane corporate logic because we kept wages flat. As we were coming out of COVID, when we gave only 7% raises but not 20% to keep pace with inflation, people complained that we were, as an institution, stingy and uncaring. They felt this was the case even though they acknowledged that 7% was still one of the highest raises in the state and amongst our academic peers. In the larger context of COVID and its aftermath, many felt our care for our people was greater than most institutions. However, for others, it could have been far greater. We literally could not see our way to a common definition of generosity. And

we lacked the vocabulary and collective will to find it.

This COVID experience taught me that, according to most contemporary definitions of charity, individuals can be generous, but educational institutions cannot. Generosity is perceived as a deeply personal virtue involving personal motives and a person's spiritual state. It is not understood as the product of careful thinking by humans working within a system. But I want to ask a challenging question about this twenty-first-century condition: what if, in our collective institutional deliberations in higher education, we could discuss with generous motives and arrive at generous conclusions?

RELIGIOUS SYSTEMS AS RESOURCES

Over the course of my career as a scholar of religion, I have learned that there are such conceptual connections between generosity and educational systems during several moments in human history. In the history of religious institutions, charity and education have been bound by each other. Founders of such educational systems are remembered for their generosity and become figures in exchanging educational goods. Educational systems, as well as educators themselves, are understood as means of developing spiritual merit and, therefore, valuable objects of generosity. Moreover, teachers and teaching are considered a sacred gift of the self.

INSTITUTIONS

A cursory examination of some examples from the traditions commonly known as world religions may suffice as preliminary notes. In the Jewish tradition, giving to a scholar or offering support to a Beit Midrash, or house of learning, has been considered one of the highest forms of giving. Ancient Jewish laws allow a person to give no more than 1/5th of their income to charity, but if one wants to give to a scholar, one can provide more than 1/5th.

In ancient India, *danam*, or giving in general, was a name for a sacrificial offering as well as a gift to a person in need. It was also a term for giving to a public project, such as a temple or water works, that would benefit all. The ancient *gurukul* system of teachers and students depended on reciprocal gift giving: the

From their earliest moments, educational systems within different spiritual traditions depended on generosity and integrated it conceptually into the very idea of an institution.

student brought gifts of water and fuel to be accepted into the teacher's home. The teacher, in turn, gave the gifts of hospitality, wisdom, and knowledge. This ancient system provided an alternative to the idea of *danam* as strictly a sacrificial transaction with the gods.

Relatedly, in Buddhism, giving was understood as a fundamental Buddhist practice, and when connected to the critical dispositions of morality, concentration, and insight, it furthered the practitioner's path to enlightenment. Giving to the *sangha*, or Buddhist monastic community, with pure intention and in the appropriate way is still one of the central ways to earn spiritual merit in traditional Buddhist communities. From its beginning, the *sangha* has been

understood as an educational institution, a community of learners working toward enlightenment. Indeed, the highest form of charity is not giving a material gift, but when monks teach the dharma or Buddha's teaching, on the path to enlightenment.

From the fourth century onward, Christian monasteries were known as seats of learning and prayer, and their regular activities included the education of townspeople in addition to scholarly study within their community. During the medieval period, many wealthy aristocrats gave copiously to monasteries for their souls to be saved. They also donated because the institutions as seats of learning had become economic engines for entire communities. The first European universities developed from these Roman Catholic monastic schools. The earliest groups of students and faculty, gathering in the eleventh and twelfth centuries in Bologna and Paris, added Greek and Roman knowledge, as well as mathematics, logic, and other forerunners of contemporary scientific method, to their curricula.

In the tenth century, two women from the Muslim community sponsored al-Qarawiyyin, an institution of higher learning in Fez, Morocco, one of the oldest continually operating universities in the world. According to its origin legend, it was established by the generosity of Fatima, the daughter of a wealthy merchant, who

felt that creating a mosque with an educational program attached was the best thing to do with the inheritance from her father. Most mosques had a *madrasa*, or seat of learning, in addition to their religious activities. Madrasas sponsored *halaqas*, or circles of teaching and learning, where grammar and legal reasoning were part of the curriculum. These circles of teaching were part of why a mosque was valuable to a community and a frequent recipient of charity. Giving to a mosque was a way to purify one's wealth.

From their earliest moments, educational systems within different spiritual traditions depended on generosity and

integrated it conceptually into the very idea of an institution. Giving was differently configured depending on the worldviews of the traditions, including the specifics of spiritual merit and the afterlife. Whatever the worldviews, however, educational institutions still carried with them the memory of their creation and continuity by actual humans. Both donors and recipients had a human face.

TEACHERS

This idea of institutions with a human face brings us to our second form of religion as a conceptual resource. As mentioned above, we are missing the vocabulary of generosity in everyday institutional life. (Recall my colleague's inability to tell stories of generosity from their own careers, even though plenty existed.) From their earliest foundational texts, however, religious traditions have such vocabulary in the form of reverence for the teacher and the teacher's generosity. Stories and precepts abound in religious traditions about how teachers share abundantly.

In Judaism, reverence for a teacher is central. The Talmud (Talmud Yerushalmi, Hagigah 1:7) teaches that the true guardians of a community are teachers, and the sayings of the fathers, Pirkei Avot 4.12 argues that one should "revere your teachers as you would heaven." Abraham Joshua Heschel also wrote, "What we need, more than anything else, isn't textbooks but rather text people. It is the personality of the teacher which is the text that students read—the text that they'll never forget."[2] A Jewish prayer exists specifically for teachers at the end of the period of study.[3]

In the Hindu tradition, Guru Purnima is a Hindu holiday on which people honor the guru, or teacher, with gifts as an act of remembrance for all the knowledge the guru has shared. Offerings are made to living teachers as well as to those who have passed away, and, according to one commentator, the idea of such remembrance is to "awaken our own generosity to share knowledge with others and to support those who seek and impart wisdom."

From its inception, Buddhist tradition has offered the dharma teaching for free. This is an essential principle of monastic and lay life that still operates today. One monk writes how important it is that "amid contemporary Western culture, our teachers are continuing the ancient Buddhist monastic tradition of freely offering the teachings.[4] Danam is for the upkeep of the institution that supports the teaching, but the teaching itself should always be an act of generosity.

In the Christian New Testament, teaching is essential to the discipleship of Jesus. As Jesus puts it in Matthew 30, his followers must teach everything he has told them. Moreover, teaching in concrete form, from one human being to another, is essential to Paul's ideas of the early church and

In many world religions, the spiritual grounding of education, both in its institutional and individual forms, is the idea that *education itself is an act of generosity.*

its formation. Paul puts it in Colossians 3:16 to the early Christian followers: "Let the word of Christ dwell in your richly, teaching and admonishing one another."

The power of the individual teacher has also been central to foundational texts within Islam. In the Surah al Baqarah of the Qur'an itself, the prophet is compared to a teacher who shares purifying wisdom. Hazrat Ali also has a famous saying, "If a person teaches me one single word, he has made me his servant for a lifetime." In another Hadith (Al Bukhari 8.3), Uthman Ibn Affan attributes the Prophet with the saying, "The best of you is he who learns the Qur'an and teaches it." Contemporary madrasa teachers frequently refer to teaching as *makarim*, a form of good conduct that draws someone closer to the attributes of God, including the qualities of "kindness, generosity, knowledge, and forgiveness."[5]

These cursory perspectives on religious traditions show something important about the transformational power of the individual teacher in quotidian life. Everyday teaching is an act of sharing oneself that brings one closer to a spiritual goal, whether it is the acquisition of divine attributes or spiritual enlightenment. Teaching is not only transactional labor for an institution whose very structure is perceived to be self-serving.

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS AND QUESTIONS

In many world religions, the spiritual grounding of education, both in its institutional and individual forms, is the idea that *education itself is an act of generosity*. Such an idea is almost impossible to imagine in

the contemporary academy. But if we took it seriously, several important corollaries might follow. We might recover a language, a vocabulary, for talking about our own lives and those of others with a view toward magnanimity—the above and beyond-ness of education as an act of sharing. Second, could we rethink our systems so that they become humanized again—not only in our educational practices but also in the idea of an educational system itself? Could faculty, staff, and students view collective deliberations about financial policy as part of the generosity of individual decision-makers and policymakers, not just the perpetuation of a self-interested system? Finally, could we reimagine rewards for teaching in terms of gratitude, not the performative or obsequious kind, but the one that places indebtedness for the sharing of self at the center of the discourse? V&V

NOTES

1. Oxford English Dictionary, "Grant," oed.com/dictionary/grant_v?tab=etymology.

2. Abraham Joshua Heschel, "The Spirit of Jewish Education," *Jewish Education* (Fall 1953): 9–20.

3. CLAL, "Honoring a Teacher at the End of the Year," Ritualwell, ritualwell.org/ritual/honoring-teacher-end-year.

4. Insight Meditation Society, "Dana (Generosity)," dharma.org/retreats/retreat-center/dana-generosity.

5. Syahraini Tambak, Firdaus, Musaddad Harahap, Desi Sukenti, Muhammad Zaylani & Al-Ishlah, "Islamic Professional Madrasa Teachers and Makarim Syari'ah," in Teaching: A Phenomenological Approach in *Jurnal Pendidikan* 15, no. 4 (December 2023): 4343.

6. AL-ISHLAH: *Jurnal Pendidikan*, journal.staihubbulwathan.id/index.php/alishlah.

Laurie L. Patton is the 17th president of Middlebury College, and the first woman to lead the institution in its over 200 year history. Before coming to Middlebury, she was the Dean of Duke University's Trinity College of Arts and Sciences as well as the Robert F. Durden Professor of Religion. Her scholarly interests are in the interpretation of early Indian ritual and narrative, comparative mythology, literary theory in the study of religion, and women and Hinduism in contemporary India. She is the author or editor of 10 books and more than 60 articles and has translated the classical Sanskrit text *The Bhagavad Gita*.

SARAH A. SCHNITKER

The Virtues of Giving and Receiving

Generosity, Gratitude, and Transcendent Indebtedness

As a college student (and perhaps even more so as a PhD student), I relished a gathering that included free food. I was far from alone in this sentiment, and I was not nearly as zealous as some of my peers who would come to free-food events with Ziploc bags and cargo pants to maximize the opportunity. In most cases, we knew the food was intended to gain our attention, but we still appreciated the sustenance. In other cases, we would feel deeply grateful when people fed us knowing our attention was not dependent on the proverbial carrot (in actuality, a pizza) or when they fed us with a home-cooked meal.

ARTWORK BY CHARLOTTE WENSLEY

As a student, I could not always reciprocate the generosity. However, I knew that when I was a faculty member with more resources, I would pay forward such hospitality to my students, continuing the cycle of gratitude and generosity essential for building a moral community.

Yet, things are changing. This past semester, I was in a conversation with leaders of Christian Study Centers and Institutes of Catholic Thought about ways they might cultivate gratitude and generosity in students. These para-academic organizations are focused on revitalizing Christian higher education in response to the increasing secularization of US elite colleges and universities by coming alongside non-religiously affiliated institutions to provide opportunities for students and faculty to integrate faith and knowledge. They engage university members with the Christian intellectual tradition by providing intellectual fellowship and hospitality.[1] Given their focus on hospitality, they are a promising context for cultivating gratitude and generosity, as members of their communities tend to both give and receive. We were discussing science-informed strategies for cultivating these virtues when one of the leaders raised a new concern being voiced by students. The students expressed ambivalence—and some even fully objected—to the home-cooked meals that were served weekly. Though already committed to the faith tradition, the students were concerned that the food might be weaponized to control or influence them. And they felt this way about all offerings of free food. They were uncomfortable with receiving something for which they did not work,

In an era of disconnection, we must find ways to help students reconnect with other people and the transcendent. One of the best ways to build social connections is through the experience of gratitude in response to generosity.

could not pay, or could not immediately repay.

At first, I was surprised by this sentiment, which is so different from when I was a student, but as I considered the situation as a psychologist, I became alarmed. The US is facing an epidemic of loneliness unparalleled in our country's history—enough for the Surgeon General to publish a public health advisory.[2] This crisis of (dis)connection extends to the spiritual realm, with students reporting lower and lower levels of religious affiliation and connection.[3] There is no doubt that these increases in loneliness[4] and spiritual/religious struggles[5] have contributed to the alarming spike in symptoms of mental illness in adolescents and emerging adults as well as increased suicidal thoughts and behaviors.[6]

In an era of disconnection, we must find ways to help students reconnect with other people and the transcendent. One of the best ways to build social connections is through the experience of gratitude in response to generosity. Yet—the students were trying to avoid the very gratitude experiences critical for their flourishing! How can we understand what is happening here, and what might be done to remedy the situation?

GRATITUDE AND GENEROSITY: AN UPWARD CYCLE TO BUILD RELATIONAL FLOURISHING

Scientific research supports the myriad benefits of practicing gratitude and generosity. Although individual health and wellness benefits are most often touted in the popular media, the real power of gratitude in response to generosity is its ability to cultivate moral communities. University of North Carolina psychologist Sara Algoe proposes that gratitude helps people find potential relationship partners, binds people to each other, and reminds us of the people who care for us.[7] Other studies show that when people feel grateful, they are more likely to help others[8]—even strangers who have not directly benefitted them.[9] When we receive generous gifts from others, we feel grateful and indebted to our moral community, which motivates us to act generously. Gratitude and generosity are the bedrock of forming communities where people are bonded together in positive relationships.

This upward cycle of generosity activating gratitude, which activates further generosity plays out in how people relate to God as well. Numerous faith traditions

present gratitude in response to good gifts from the deity as a primary motivation for moral behaviors. In Christianity, Aquinas maintains believers have an ethical obligation to feel grateful and indebted to God as creator and savior. Because humans can never pay back God for the grace bestowed, they respond by worshipping God, loving others, and obeying God's commands.

TWO TYPES OF INDEBTEDNESS

Given all these benefits of gratitude and generosity for building community and faith, why are students today showing such aversion to receiving benefits from others that would activate gratitude? Research on indebtedness is illuminating.

Whereas gratitude is often experienced positively—you get that warm fuzzy feeling when you feel grateful, the indebtedness that can accompany gratitude is aversive to some people. When gift-giving within social relationships is construed in a transactional manner representative of a market economy, receiving a gift can feel burdensome. The students who didn't like free food might feel burdened with a debt that they have to repay as soon as possible, or it will compound to a greater debt with time—like their student loans. This transactional way of thinking about human relationships is not new to students, but cultural forces have likely magnified its salience. The liturgies of daily life, including the consumeristic patterns of higher education and online interactions where social worth might be quantified in likes or followers, shape students to think of relationships and themselves as commodities within a market economy. It is unsurprising, then, that incurring debts as recipients of generosity would strike students as undesirable.

However, there is another way of thinking about relationships in communities that changes the experiences of indebtedness. Jenae Nelson, a former postdoctoral researcher in my lab who is now an Assistant Professor at Brigham Young University, proposed a distinct form of indebtedness that is experienced positively and builds relationships: transcendent indebtedness.[10] In contrast to experiences of transactional indebtedness whereby people feel they *have to* repay benefits, transcendent indebtedness operates within interdependent relationships whereby people feel that they *want to* repay or pay forward what was given to them. With transcendent indebtedness, people see the opportunities to receive as ways to build a bond of interdependence and care.

Scientific evidence shows experiences of transcendent indebtedness can build social connections.[11] Rather than seeing social interactions in terms of a commodity

mindset, a transcendent framing suggests that people are co-creating a relationship or community that is an end in and of itself and has value apart from meeting the needs of the individuals involved. The New Testament teachings on the church as the body of Christ illustrate this principle well. Christians are not taught to trade services in the body of Christ (e.g., the hand does not say I'll cut up food in exchange for locomotion from the foot); instead, the point of being part of the church is to build a collective entity that is the presence of Christ in the world. Christians mutually give and receive with each other because they have received immeasurable grace from God.

MODELING A MORAL COMMUNITY TO FOSTER TRANSCENDENCE

As our students experience increasing levels of loneliness, one promising path for cultivating connection and flourishing is to help them embrace relationships marked by generosity and gratitude that activate transcendent—not transactional—indebtedness. But how can educators activate a transcendent framework for relationships instead of a transactional one? How should the leaders of Christian study centers or institutes for Catholic thought respond to student objections to a free meal?

We need to move beyond asking our students and ourselves *what* we are grateful *for* toward asking ourselves who we are grateful *to* if we want to cultivate gratitude in a way that also orients people to feel morally connected to others.

There are no easy answers as the cultural forces pushing humans to think of each other in transactional terms are strong. One approach is to create communities that are modeled after gift economies, which are pre-currency models of exchange whereby gifts circulate from one member of the group to another until they eventually return to the original giver.[12] A fascinating example of how a gift economy might be created in modern times is the 7 Cups online community (7cups.com), where people can receive social support and care from trained listeners. Rather than relying on a transactional model of mental health support whereby customers pay for therapeutic services, the community trains lay individuals to provide supportive listening to those in need. People often come to the online community seeking out supportive listening for themselves, and then they will

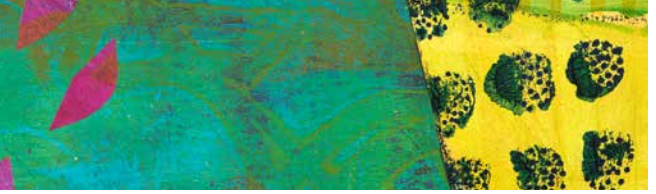
volunteer as trained listeners to contribute back to the community. Because money is not exchanged, there is a sense of genuine connection within the community. The indebtedness evoked when a 7 Cups member is listened to is transcendent—a sense of wanting to pay back to the larger community rather than having to pay off a debt to the volunteer who listened. This online community stands in stark contrast to most online spaces where the user is the product sold to advertisers; on 7 Cups, time and attention are gifts to give and receive rather than buy and sell. As educators, we might ask ourselves whether the communities we foster resemble the gift economy of 7 Cups or the transactional marketplace of commodities.

CULTIVATING GRATITUDE, TRANSCENDENT INDEBTEDNESS, AND GENEROSITY

In addition to evaluating the ways our communities are structured that might influence whether they foster transactional versus transcendent views of relationships, educators can also provide opportunities for students to develop the virtues of gratitude, transcendent indebtedness, and generosity. Gratitude might be more easily caught than taught, so educators should start by modeling these virtues in their own interactions with students and peers. However, there are a variety of scientifically vetted activities for building gratitude and transcendent indebtedness, which can then activate generosity.

Pop culture and the self-help industry are replete with instructions to keep a gratitude journal; this can be good advice but with a *major caveat*. Recent research out of my lab found that practicing gratitude non-relationally (i.e., listing *things* for which I am grateful) in contrast to relationally (i.e., writing about how I am thankful *to a person*) elicited equal levels of felt gratitude but diverging levels of empathy and transcendent indebtedness.[13] The participants who wrote only the things for which they were grateful showed decreases in empathy and transcendent indebtedness during the weeks they wrote the gratitude list! We need to move beyond asking our students and ourselves *what* we are grateful *for* toward asking ourselves *who* we are grateful *to* if we want to cultivate gratitude in a way that also orients people to feel morally connected to others. Even in instances with no immediately apparent person to thank (e.g., a beautiful sunset), people may express gratitude to God or some other spiritual entity, which fosters a sense of connection.

And these connections are critical. As death by suicide is the 3rd leading cause of death among 15–24-year-olds in the US,[14] we might even say the survival of our students



depends upon increasing connection. Even if our students are uncomfortable with the rhythms of giving and receiving in relationships, we should not abandon these practices. As educators, we can envisage relationships in a transcendent framework for our students to foster the virtuous practice of gratitude, transcendent indebtedness, and generosity—the essential ingredients to building and maintaining social connections and combatting loneliness. So, keep the free food coming. V&V

NOTES

1. Theodore F. Cockle, et al. "Christian Higher Education at Secular Universities: A Multiple-Case Study of Christian Study Centers and Institutes for Catholic Thought," *Christian Higher Education* (2024): 1–23.

2. US Surgeon General. "Our Epidemic of Loneliness and Isolation," *The US Surgeon General's Advisory on the Healing Effects of Social Connection and Community 2023* (2023).

3. Jeffrey M. Jones. "Church Attendance Has Declined in Most US Religious Groups," Gallup (2024).

4. Farhana Mann, et al. "Loneliness and the Onset of New Mental Health Problems in the General Population," *Social Psychiatry and Psychiatric Epidemiology* 57.11 (2022): 2161–2178.

5. Margaret F. Bockrath, et al. "Religious and Spiritual Struggles and their Links to Psychological Adjustment: A Meta-Analysis of Longitudinal Studies," *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 14.3 (2022): 283.

6. Heather McClelland, et al. "Loneliness As a Predictor of Suicidal Ideation and Behaviour: A Systematic Review and Meta-Analysis of Prospective Studies," *Journal of Affective Disorders* 274 (2020): 880–896.

7. Sara B. Algoe. "Find, Remind, and Bind: The Functions of Gratitude in Everyday Relationships," *Social and Personality Psychology Compass* 6.6 (2012): 455–469.

8. Lawrence K. Ma, Richard J. Tunney, and Eamonn Ferguson. "Does Gratitude Enhance Prosociality? A Meta-Analytic Review," *Psychological Bulletin* 143.6 (2017): 601.

9. Monica Y. Bartlett, and David DeSteno. "Gratitude and Prosocial Behavior: Helping When It Costs You," *Psychological Science* 17.4 (2006): 319–325.

10. Jenae M. Nelson, Sam A. Hardy, and Philip Watkins. "Transcendent Indebtedness to God: A New Construct in the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality," *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 15.1 (2023): 105.

11. Jenae M. Nelson, et al. "Returning Thanks to God and Others: Prosocial Consequences of Transcendent Indebtedness," *The Journal of Positive Psychology* 19.1 (2024): 121–135.

12. Marcel Mauss. *The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies* (W.W. Norton & Co., 2000.)

13. Jenae M. Nelson, et al. "More than Grateful: Comparing Gratitude Lists and Letters on Transcendent Indebtedness, Empathy, and Prosociality," manuscript submitted for publication. Department of Psychology and Neuroscience, Baylor University. (2023)

14. National Institute of Mental Health, "Suicide," February 2024, nimh.nih.gov/health/statistics/suicide.

Sarah A. Schnitker is Professor of Psychology and Neuroscience at Baylor University and Director of the Baylor Research in Growth and Human Thriving Center (BRIGHTS) Center. She has published over 100 peer-reviewed journal articles and runs the Science of Virtues Lab.

PATRICIA SNELL HERZOG

Generosity Traditions

People often say you should study what you love, and **I do.** I love to be inspired by people, and I love the ways that social science research can move beyond merely naming problems in need of solving to helping us learn from the best of our social surroundings to make improvements. In more than two decades immersed in research, I have gained wisdom by learning from the traditions people embrace to motivate and sustain their calls to be generous. While these teachings are numerous, I will limit myself here to focusing on two sets: generosity in faith traditions and in habit-forming traditions.

ARTWORK BY CHRISTI BELCOURT

GENEROSITY IN FAITH TRADITIONS

In surveying, interviewing, and observing people from all walks of life, across nearly every age, race, education level, occupation, and religiosity, one of the great takeaways has been that generosity is rooted within all major faith traditions. Across the globe, people raised within the contours of Judaism, Islam, Protestant Christianity, and Catholicism have all encountered religious teachings about the spiritual value of giving to benefit others. While I am no theological scholar, here are tidbits I have gathered over the years regarding calls to be generous in faith traditions.

JEWISH WISDOM

Beginning with generosity in Judaism, *tzedakah* (צְדָקָה ṣədāqā) is a righteous obligation to restore justice in the world. Giving is part of this obligation. Yet, this call also includes an obligation to care for those in need and to act justly. The Torah legislates that Jews must give 10 percent of their earnings to the poor, yet the Talmud calls Jewish people to give at least 10 percent of their earnings to *tzedakah*. In "Fundraising as *Tzedakah*," Reuven Kimelman describes that raising funds is integral to sustaining Jewish communities, with the desire to support Jewish concerns growing alongside a raised consciousness regarding the importance of Jewish identity. He stated: "*Tzedakah* may not save us, but it makes us worth saving."[1] Giving to Jewish federations is one example of faith-inspired generosity in Jewish traditions.[2] In terms of the practice of enacting a call to be generous and to give in ways that embody *tzedakah*, Jewish traditions offer an exquisite idea formulated as the giving ladder.

THE GIVING LADDER

The eight rungs of the giving ladder are credited to Maimonides, a Jewish scholar in the 12th century. Each rung up on the ladder represents a higher degree of virtue.[3] Starting with the lowest rung and working up the ladder, the rungs are:

1. **Giving begrudgingly.** When a person is unwilling in their giving it can make the recipient feel disgraced or embarrassed by receiving a begrudged gift.
2. **Giving inadequately but cheerfully.** Giving too little is better than giving unwillingly, as at least a person is giving gladly and with a smile.
3. **Giving only after being asked.** Giving adequately and cheerfully is better than giving too little, yet the act of having to be asked first diminishes the potential of the gift.
4. **Giving before being asked.** Giving before being asked elevates the virtuosity because it is inspired without

needing a solicitation to prompt the gift.

5. **Giving to unknown recipients.** Not knowing the identity of the recipient lessens their shame. It is said that sages used to tie coins to their robes and throw them over their backs so that the poor could pick it up without feeling ashamed.
6. **Giving anonymously.** The giver knows who the recipient is, but the recipient does not know who the benefactor is. It is said that sages used to walk around and secretly put coins in the doors of the poor, so they did not know who was responsible for charity.
7. **Giving when neither the donor nor the recipient is aware of the other's identity.** This is like the "anonymous fund" in the Holy Temple in Jerusalem. By giving and profiting in secret, a *mitzvah* (good deed) is performed solely for the sake of Heaven.
8. **Giving money, a loan, time, or whatever else it takes to enable an individual to be self-reliant.** Entering into a partnership benefits both the giver and receiver on equal footing and fosters a respectful relationship that is dignifying.

MUSLIM WISDOM

In Islam, *karam* (مرﻛﻟا) means generosity, *zakat* (ةاﻛز) is a requirement to give, while *sadqah* (ﻓﻗﺻ) is optional voluntary philanthropy.[4] The Qur'an underscores the value of "gifting to God a beautiful loan" and also advises that "to give charity publicly is good, but to give to the poor privately is better."[5] This wisdom shares commonalities with the giving ladder rungs in calling people not only to give, but to do so in ways that restore dignity. In *hadith* (ﺙﻳﺩﺣ), it is recounted that Allah is generous and loves generosity and that people who are generous are closer to Allah, eternal paradise, and those around them.[6] As a religious guidebook of sorts, the *sunnah* (ﻥﻧﺳ) describes inspirations for living gained from the prophet Muhammad, and it states that: "the Prophet was the most generous of all people."[7] With this wisdom, Muslims draw inspiration for many acts of

generosity in everyday life. One example is how Quranic wisdom can support the activities of micro-finance institutions, in that a philosophy of poverty alleviation rooted in Islamic teachings supports the need for subsidies or contributions given charitably to underwrite industry that is not yet self-sustaining or profitable.[8] Monetary *waqf* (فـقـوـلـا) benevolent funds or charitable endowments, are faith-inspired investments in relief to help the poor.

CHRISTIAN WISDOM

Turning to Protestant Christianity, Bible verses such as 1 Corinthians 12–14 can inspire generosity through attention to "spiritual gifts" that are embodied in diverse ways.[9] This same text in Catholicism is called "spirit for the common good" and described in this way: "*For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body*."[10] The faith-inspired wisdom continues in inviting people to consider their wealth nothing if it does not feed the hungry and clothe the poor. The parallels across faith traditions continue as St. John Paul II calls upon the embodiment in the prophets to state: "It is Jesus who stirs in you the desire to do something great with our lives, the will to follow an ideal, the refusal to allow yourselves to be grounded down by mediocrity, the courage to commit yourselves humbly and patiently to improving society, making the world more human and fraternal."[11]

The Catechism, a summary of principles that interpret Catholic faith in daily life, states that: "charity is the greatest social commandment" and "inspires a life of self-giving."[12] This call to blend charity in justice within a life of generosity is further explained within the context of differences among people. Age, physical abilities, intellectual or moral aptitudes, wealth—these differences call people to an obligation to "practice generosity, kindness, and sharing of goods" to "foster the mutual enrichment of cultures." The Catechism goes on to describe socio-economic problems as only being resolvable by help across "all the forms of solidarity: solidarity among the poor among themselves, between rich and poor, of workers among themselves,

between employers and employees in a business, solidarity among nations and peoples, international solidarity." This is what is needed to support dignity of human persons.

In each their own way, these faith traditions all support the call to be generous. Their wisdom inspires the heroic acts of everyday people. Though it remains important to acknowledge their distinctions, it is also awe-inspiring how much commonality can be found across each of these faiths. Traditions to be generous unite differences and bind people together within a call that inspires us to be more than we are individually and to give to one in another in ways that support the betterment of humanity.

HABIT-FORMING PRACTICES

A second source of wisdom I have learned from more than two decades spent listening to people through social science research is the importance of habit-forming traditions. Beyond calls to be generous inspired from faith traditions, people who enact generosity within their daily lives point to the need to form habits. It is one thing to want to give to others, and it is another to actually do it. Talking with people across the life course, one takeaway is that people never describe becoming incredibly generous later in life after having spent their life waiting until that "miraculous someday" arrives. Rather, generosity appears to be best actualized within habits that are gradually increased and honed over time. While it can be tempting as a young college student to think that someday one will have more time, or as a young parent spending to support kids that someday one will have more money, I have learned from generous people that someday is now.

Generous actions can be small, but they are best not put off; rather, they can be built into the structure of how one lives their life. A habit to give an hour of time in one stage of life builds the foundation

In each their own way, these faith traditions all support the call to be generous. Their wisdom inspires the heroic acts of everyday people.

Generosity appears to be best actualized within habits that are gradually increased and honed over time.

for giving hours of time later. Much like we cannot pick up a set of barbells and instantaneously pump 100 pounds of iron without prior warmups, generous actions need to be built one layer of muscle tissue at a time. They are strengthened through regular activity and a discipline of commitment that builds them into the very fabric of our bodily essence. Muscle memory is said to be a movement pattern that our brains encode and remember in a way that becomes automatic and without concerted attention. If you have ever had the experience of driving on autopilot and showing up at your home when you meant to go to the store, then you have experienced the power of muscle memory. Generous people have taught me that giving can be built into muscle memory.

For these reasons, I have moved from flowing along with the typical American culture, which disdains anything smelling like limits to individual choice, to understanding the value of teaching and modeling generosity. Funny that we do not have a problem teaching young children to memorize their ABCs or quizzing grade-school children repeatedly to ingrain spelling conventions and math facts. Yet, when it comes to matters of the heart, it rubs against the grain to routinize giving or financial spending discipline. However, common sense is as they say, neither sensical nor common, and research repeatedly shows that the best way young people learn to give is by being told it is good to do and then having it patterned into their routines as we do with everything else that matters. "Don't point," we say, "it is not polite," and "say please and thank you," we tell children. In all the little in-between moments, we are comfortable passing on to kids the wisdom of other cultural norms. When it comes to teaching generosity, it is not different. First we need to pattern it in, and later an emerging young adult can be

more reflective about why, how, and other personal choices in the life they build.

FAITH MOTIVATES, HABIT SUSTAINS

Scanning across faith traditions, each of the world religions contains calls to be generous and wisdom about why giving matters. Faith traditions motivate giving. Pairing those insights with social science data, motivations are necessary but not sufficient for actions. Habits are needed to enact calls to be generous into regular patterns of behavior. Faith motivates and habit sustains. As educators, parents, friends, and concerned citizens, we can help form habits of generosity. Let's build it into our muscle memory, personally and communally. V&V

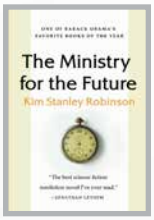
NOTES

1. Reuven Kimelman, "Fundraising as *Tzedakah*." Fisher-Bernstein Institute for Jewish Philanthropy and Leadership, Brandeis University (2010): 6.
2. Lee Meyerhoff Hendler, Alicia Schuyler Oberman, and Douglas Bitoni Stewart. "Connected to Give: Faith Communities," Findings from the National Study of American Jewish Giving, *Jewish Jumpstart* (2013): 3, issuelab.org/resource/connected-to-give-faith-communities.html.
3. Mishneh Torah, Laws of Charity, 10:7–14. Based on *Yad, Matanot Ani'im* X 1–14; Shamash and Donin, Hayim. *To Be a Jew: A Guide to Jewish Observance in Contemporary Life*. NY: Basic Books, 1991.
4. Muslim Philanthropy Initiative, 2024.
5. Q64:17; Q2:271.
6. Al-Suyuti, I, 60; Sunan al-Tirmidhī 1961.
7. Book 61, Hadith 63.
8. Ahmad Kaleem, and Saima Ahmed. "The Quran and Poverty Alleviation." *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 39, no. 3 (2010): 409–28.
9. The Holy Bible, King James Version, 1 Corinthians 12–14.
10. The Holy Bible, Revised Standard Version, Catholic Edition, 1 Corinthians 12–14.
11. St. John Paul II at World Youth Day in 2005, as quoted in "It Is Jesus You Seek," *Diocesan*, October 21, 2016.
12. Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC), 2nd edition, US Catholic Conference, 2000 [1889]; [1936]; [1937]; [1941]; [1947].

Patricia Snell Herzog is Melvin Simon Chair and Associate Professor in the Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy. As a sociologist engaged in the interdisciplinary study of philanthropy, Herzog is intrigued by the social contexts of generosity, including socialization to give in religious communities, as youth within families, and among voluntary associations. She has authored and co-authored numerous articles and books, including *The Science of Generosity: Manifestations, Causes, and Consequences* with Palgrave Macmillan and *American Generosity: Who Gives and Why* with Oxford University Press.

Good Reads

We asked our authors to recommend a book they had read over the past couple of years. Here is what they said:



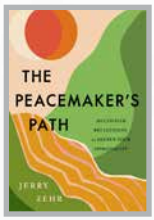
The Ministry for the Future

BY KIM STANLEY ROBINSON

As a work of climate science fiction, the book gives us a (sometimes comedic and sometimes devastating) glimpse, in real-time, of the not so distant climate dystopia we are heading toward through the unique vantage points of humans and processes all over the world, while also giving us a glimpse of what human ingenuity-as-hope can and should look like in the face of catastrophe. *The Ministry for the Future* manages to provide a difficult, delicate, and vital balance between doomism and hopeism about climate change. —MELISSA FITZPATRICK

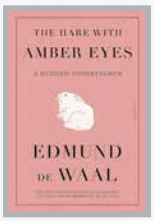
The Peacemaker's Path

Multifaith Reflections to Deepen Your Spirituality



BY JERRY ZEHR

A 40-day quest to find spiritual inspirations across major religious traditions, this book serves as a daily guide into life's greatest wisdoms. My personal favorite is Day 25: Generosity, and I also appreciate the Review and Reflection epilogue for explaining the context in which Muslim community members needed inclusive support. —PATRICIA SNELL HERZOG



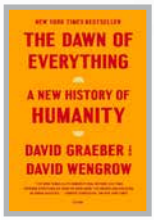
The Hare with Amber Eyes

A Hidden Inheritance

BY EDMUND DE WAAL

I have always loved the tracing of objects. De Waal masterfully, and movingly, traces his inheritance of this collection of Japanese miniature carvings. In doing so he gives us an equally extraordinary family history. The prose is lucid and the history both magical and heartbreaking. —LAURIE L. PATTON

The Dawn of Everything
A New History of Humanity



BY DAVID GRAEBER AND DAVID WENGROW

This book opens up a fireworks of human possibilities. Not only does it show how and why the story of development and progress is in dire need of re-thinking. Above all, it demonstrates the amazingly wide-ranging canvas of human creations, and the fact that modern civilization may well be characterized, first and foremost, by a radically limited set of options. Learning from the first 98 percent of human history, it turns out, is well worth it. —DIRK PHILIPSEN

Patience with God
The Story of Zacchaeus Continuing in Us

BY TOMÁŠ HALÍK

In *Patience with God,* Templeton Prize winner Tomáš Halík examines the many ways patience is essential for spiritual life in pluralistic societies. Addressing both the necessity for people to have patience with God as they confront the hiddenness of spiritual knowledge and to have patience with other people who have different views on who or what God is (or is not), Halík implores individuals and societies to embrace patience in the face of spiritual uncertainty. His history as an underground priest in Soviet East Germany brings credibility to his call for patience. —SARAH A. SCHNITKER

The Wager

BY DAVID GRANN

I just finished reading *The Wager* for the second time, and I loved it just as much as when it first came out. It would be hard to say it has much to offer about generosity—maybe that the utter absence of generosity leads to bad things. But I am recommending it because 7 people from different parts of my life have sent it to me over the past year suggesting I'd love it. I certainly didn't need a copy, but it made clear that they see me and know me well enough to share the perfect book—that felt especially generous. —SUZANNE SHANAHAN

MELISSA FITZPATRICK

Generosity, Hospitality & the Good

I would bet that many of us who have dealt with severe emotional or physical pain have been fortunate enough to understand the healing quality of generosity. Generosity in the form of an attentive caregiver, ready and willing to effectively tend to whatever turn our ailment takes; generosity in the form of gracious ears, radically open to listening to what troubles us; generosity in the form of carefully crafted remedies that someone, who has already benefitted from them, is eager to pay forward; and of course, generosity in the form of the gift of ostensibly unlimited time and space from someone who is able to find us in our pain and help us feel seen, cared for, and loved.

ARTWORK BY TRACY VERDUGO

I recently injured my back for the first time in my life—it was debilitating at a level I have never experienced before. I was humbled, to say the least, and after describing the injury to a dear friend of mine (who also happens to be my neighbor), within minutes, she was at my front door with every back pain-related remedy you could possibly imagine (and a homemade oatmilk latte to boot). The generous gesture alone eased my nervous system and alleviated, ever so slightly, the pain that was plaguing me. How extraordinary. And what seemed to give her generosity its alleviating quality was the immediate, *uncalculated* tune of her giving. Above all, her unconditional willingness to host my pain—her willingness to both hear and see me in my vulnerability and assure me that I was not alone in my discomfort. This is generosity as an unconditional gift, as radical hospitality, as absolute goodness.

My fiancé walked by a café near our apartment and noticed that there was an unhoused gentleman sitting at a bench in the entry way. When a family walked past him to enter the café, the man quickly hung his head down in what appeared to be an attempt to disappear, in shame, from the public eye. When my fiancé told me about this, I realized that I knew the man he was talking about; a man who regularly sweeps the sidewalks and picks up trash by the beach. He is particularly respectful and kind, regularly wishing those who are willing to make eye contact with him a wonderful day. We started talking about what we could or should do to help him, what we could give him. Should we put together a care pack and bring it to him? Or should we ask him what he needed and then buy it for him? Should we just give him whatever cash we had on hand? Or take out money for him? Should we start by simply asking him what his name is, so that he could feel seen as a part of our community?

Mulling over these questions, we then asked (as two philosophers) the difficult, moral question of at what point the giving ought to stop. Is it at $20 or $200? Is it at regularly feeding him? Giving him blankets and a better tent? Is it inviting him in for something to eat or drink? Letting him take a shower? Then we felt a bit ashamed of ourselves, recognizing that the generous impulse we had was slowly being leveled

by conditions. What is the appropriate amount to give a stranger? At what point do you stop giving? Should you ever stop giving?

I will never forget the day that the gentleman asked me if I happened to have a cigarette, assuming I did not have one—and he was correct. When I walked away, I regretted not asking him for his name or striking up a more substantial conversation, so I decided to run into our apartment, grab the cash we had on hand, and give it to him. When I handed him the money, he asked me my name, smiled sincerely, and thanked me, repeating my name multiple times to make sure he remembered it. I finally asked him for his name, too. Larry. And a deep warmth filled my heart from the simple yet profound exchange.

What is generosity? And what does it mean to be generous?

Generosity, hearkening back to Aristotle, is the moral virtue that is the "mean" or middle path between stinginess or frugality and wastefulness or extravagance, meaning there is a calculated measure on precisely how much one should give, given the circumstances. It should not be an exorbitant amount, but it should also not be nothing. The specific quantity is contingent on the context; given the resources one has and the needs of the other, there is an appropriate amount (of time, love, care, money, hosting, etc.) that one should give. This conditional calculus is helpful at a practical level, providing a means of answering the pesky question of how much we should give and when we should stop giving. But there is also something about this way of thinking about generosity that is a bit unsettling and seems to miss a dimension of the profound healing quality that unconditional generosity provides not only to the one in the need, but also in

Generosity, hearkening back to Aristotle, is the moral virtue that is the "mean" or middle path between stinginess or frugality and wastefulness or extravagance, meaning there is a calculated measure on precisely how much one should give, given the circumstances.

one who is doing the giving. The beautiful, therapeutic, and awe-inspiring quality that accompanies both giving and receiving an utter outpouring of care, expecting nothing in return.

Though he uses the term rather infrequently, one of the great thinkers on generosity is 20th-century philosopher

If generosity toward another involves giving to the other, welcoming the other, listening to the other, then it seems that generosity toward oneself would involve giving to oneself, welcoming oneself, listening to oneself: perhaps above all, loving oneself.

Emmanuel Levinas. Levinas's philosophical project seeks to invert our understanding of who we most essentially are, from beings who impose our will upon the world to beings who, first and foremost, respond and are responsible for what it beyond ourselves. This is, as he describes it, the *original goodness of creation*: being-for-the-other(s), refusing to approach the other with empty hands. For Levinas, the "moral law" is not a principle that one ought to obey or some form of calculated altruism but is instead the ontological understanding that I am the other(s) when I myself most fully am: we are all co-constituted by each other. One might think of the Bantu word, *ubuntu*, as the perfect expression of this. Signifying 'humanity', *ubuntu* encapsulates the idea that "I am because we are" or "I am because you are."

One of my favorite quotes from Levinas is that "the good is not presented to freedom; it has chosen me before I have chosen it. No one is good voluntarily."[1] This means that the good is not a choice, but something that has already seized me. It grounds my existence. I am always and already called to host the others, wholly responsible for them.

Levinas also describes the good as the *extraordinary forgetting of death*. What he means by this is that embodying goodness involves somewhat imprudently losing all sense of concern for ourselves (that is, our perpetual drive toward our own self-preservation or self-care) in an unconditional concern for the other. Of course, "death" need not be taken literally here. It rather refers to the divestment or letting go of the ego: letting go of "me" and my never-ending list of things to do. It is the readiness to completely sacrifice oneself for the other, as host, unreservedly welcoming

the other—the widow, the orphan, the stranger, and the poor—as guest. Levinas also describes this letting go of the ego as God's announcement to Abraham: *here I am*. As Levinas puts it, "to respond with responsibility: *me*, that is, *here I am for the others*."[2] Responsibility is listening, in hospitality, to the other in need. This radical generosity—the most profound form of hospitality—is an outpouring of love, providing shelter, food, and care for the others. It involves taking the (actual and metaphorical) bread out of one's mouth for the other to eat. By Levinas's account, we are most fully who we are meant to be when we unconditionally give. We are most fully who we are meant to be when we are embodying the generosity of God, hosting all of creation.

To return to Aristotle's more conditional account of generosity, it is hard to deny that Levinas's notion of unconditional giving, despite being a remarkably admirable ideal, also seems somewhat problematic. In wholly neglecting concern for ourselves for the sake of the other, do we not run the risk of self-depletion? Do we not also need to be hosted to be able to properly host? Do we not need to exercise a sort of self-generosity to be able to properly give to others? Which comes first? Self-generosity or generosity for the other(s)? What is it that equips us to be able to host the other without depleting ourselves entirely?

These are difficult questions because what it means to give to others is often far less elusive than what it means to give to ourselves—that is, to properly *host* ourselves. For my dear friend to be able to instantly supply me with all of the remedies I could possibly imagine for my back, she of course needed to have them in the first place. When I thanked her for her generosity, she admitted that she has all of these remedies because she is attuned to a very important form of self-care: a refusal to deprive oneself of comfort, rest, or even leisure when one is overcome by intense emotional or physical agony.

What is *self*-generosity?

If generosity toward another involves giving to the other, welcoming the other, listening to the other, then it seems that generosity toward oneself would involve giving to oneself, welcoming oneself, listening to oneself: perhaps above all, loving oneself. Self-generosity would seem

Unconditional generosity is a tall order for finite beings, despite the fact that it is perhaps one of the most noble ideals we can set for ourselves.

to be a form of self-care, informing the type of care one would give, in generosity, to the others. As Aristotle would put it, to have friends of the good, we need to first be good friends with ourselves, as our relationship with ourselves is ultimately that which defines our relationships with others.[3] Aristotle is clear that loving and taking care of oneself is a vital condition for loving and taking care of others, though he clarifies that what he means by self-love is of course not narcissistic self-interest,[4] but rather a deep love of the good within oneself—that is, a love of embodying the good-as-happiness, being *eudaimon*, unified with the divine within ourselves.

Self-generosity does not get as much airtime as generosity toward others, and this might be symptomatic of our cultural *milieu* (at least in the United States) which tends to commend constant productivity and hard work, and in fact tends to look down upon *dolce far niete*: that is, sweet idleness, doing absolutely nothing, restoring the soul. Who has time for that? *Dolce far niete* is, perhaps above all, the practice of exercising generosity toward oneself: giving oneself a break, welcoming oneself to rest, to enjoy, sheltering oneself from pain, nurturing oneself as a tired sojourner—hosting oneself as a cherished guest.

One of my favorite things to teach in business ethics is the vital importance of taking moments and (ideally) full days of rest. Yale psychologist, Laurie Santos, stresses that "time affluence"—having ample time and space to be with and tend to yourself in the present—is an essential feature of happiness.[5] This type of time is utterly non-productive, deliberately removing yourself from the scarcity mindset's *painful* constant need to produce and consume. Time affluence involves listening to yourself and loving yourself in the now, depicting self-generosity in the sense of giving ourselves precious time and space to simply be—and to receive *from ourselves*. Meeting ourselves in our vulnerability and loving ourselves there, the way a good host would do when we need shelter from whatever storm we find ourselves trapped in.

A Two-Pronged Approach

It seems that generosity, grounded in an ethics of radical hospitality, has two prongs, and that one prong may in fact

ground the other. There is self-generosity (the way we give to ourselves) and there is generosity toward others (the way we give to those around us). Unconditional generosity is a tall order for finite beings, despite the fact that it is perhaps one of the most noble ideals we can set for ourselves. Unconditional giving always has an expiration date—a point at which one is depleted, unable to (properly) host anymore. To safeguard ourselves from depletion and the risk of having no more to give, it is vital to exercise generosity toward ourselves, a practice that will in turn ensure there is a generous host for the guests who will no doubt find their way to our door.

Levinas is, I think, correct in his claim that the good is being-for-the-others. But "I am because we are" works both ways. I am a vital piece of the communal puzzle—a piece that needs to be whole for the community to be what it is. The others depend on me, and I depend on them, and to be a person that others depend on, I need to be able to not only give, but also to receive. It seems that the best hosts are those who deeply

understand just how important it is to receive not only from others, but from oneself, and that this helps us refine and actualize the delicate balance between the extraordinarily unconditional and practically applicable form of generosity—both of which are vital to living a good life. V&V

NOTES

1. Emmanuel Levinas, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence*, translated by Alphonso Lingis (Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania: Duquesne University Press, 2011), 11.
2. Ibid, 185.
3. Aristotle (1999), *Nicomachean Ethics*, edited by Martin Ostwald (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall), 1166a1.
4. Ibid, 1066a20.
5. See Laurie Santos, "Happiness Lessons of the Ancients: The Day of Rest," pushkin.fm/podcasts/the-happiness-lab-with-dr-laurie-santos/happiness-lessons-of-the-ancients-the-day-of-rest. (April 12, 2021); and "7 Ways to be Happier, according to Yale Professor on Well-Being," youtube.com/watch?v=e9UVAafNvm4 (January 3, 2020).

Melissa Fitzpatrick is an Assistant Professor of Management in the College of Business Administration at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles. Her work in normative ethics focuses on the intersection of post-Kantian Continental philosophy and contemporary virtue ethics, arguing for the significance of "self-disruption" in ethical development. She is the co-author of *Radical Hospitality: From Thought to Action* (Fordham University Press, 2021).

DIRK PHILIPSEN

Why?

On our Failures of Imagination to Accomplish Dignity for All

It's a fool's errand even to attempt to keep up with all the profound changes in the world these days. Yet one thing seems almost undeniable: both dangers and opportunities have reached unprecedented levels. Paying attention engenders both despair and hope.

The signposts of despair are quite familiar—war, conflict, escalating inequality, climate change, species extinction, dysfunctional governance systems. Less familiar, but equally pervasive, are signs of hope and promise: acts of tremendous kindness and generosity, technologies that make possible a regenerating ecosystem, peaceful co-existence within economies focused on wellbeing rather than wealth accumulation, innovative concepts of organizing shared resources or helping people escape debt and dependence.

Here we are—facing existential threats at a time of unmatched collective potential. This, to me, raises a fundamental question: with all the wealth and expertise generated worldwide,

ARTWORK BY MICHELLE LOUIS

Replacing greed and short-term thinking with generosity and a focus on the longer-term common good is imperative for our collective survival.

why can't we, as a global community, manage to provide every human being with a life of dignity? A life where basic needs are met, and people feel respected, safe, and supported. A life of mutual generosity, free from the constant worry of securing sustenance, shelter, and safety. A life that fosters strong family and community bonds, and offers a sense of belonging. And, crucially, a life that's sustainable, and doesn't ruin the ecosystem our collective lives depend on.

The greatest tragedy might well be this: we collectively don't lack resources, but vision. At this point, it seems hard to deny that there is enough to allow everyone a dignified existence on the planet, yet our political systems are stuck in a rut, unable to imagine a better future. Not only are our leaders failing to deliver on the promises of progress, but they're also barreling ahead with policies that put our very survival at risk.

To give but one prominent example: while politically informed citizens around the world worry, with good reason, about the rise of nationalist right-wing ideologies, there is almost no conversation about the fact that, from left to right, virtually all political groups and parties continue to promote what may well be the most dangerous of all ideologies: the idea of infinite exponential economic growth. On a most obvious level, the consequences of climate change won't discriminate between the wealthy and the poor for long; a ravaged and burning planet won't spare those with privilege—their mansions on the hill will only survive a few agonizing moments longer. Thinking that we can exponentially grow forever, or even that this is somehow desirable, is a catastrophic

failure of imagination, and it's putting the entire human experiment in jeopardy.

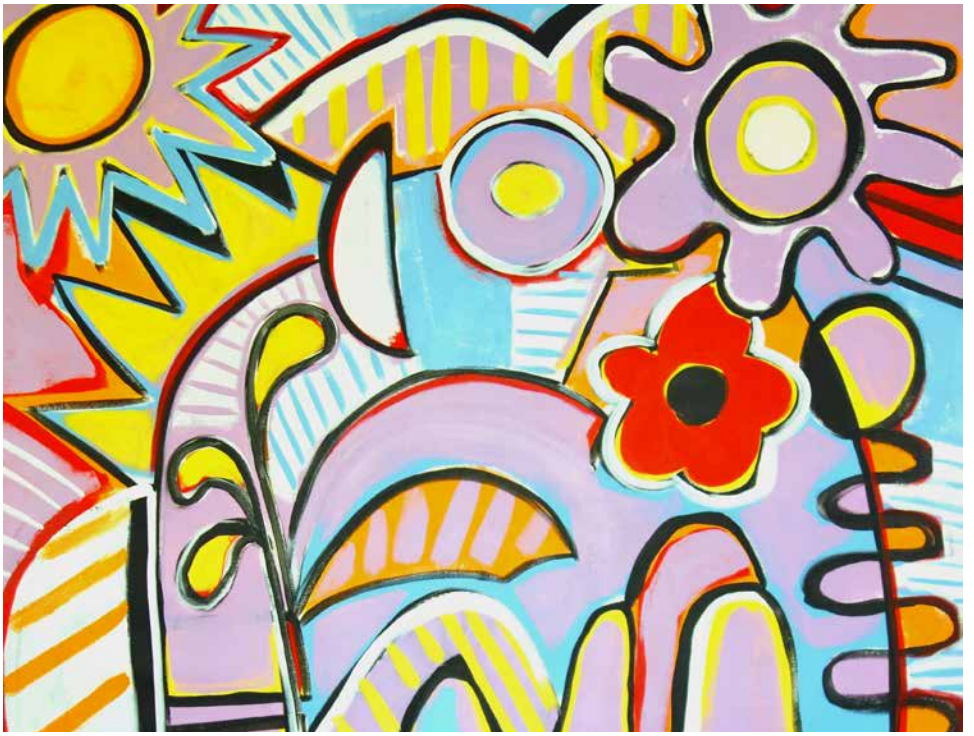
For thousands of years, visionaries from artists to philosophers to reformers have imagined a future where every individual can thrive and reach their full potential, unhindered by circumstance or background. Today, this vision is no longer a distant dream; it's a pressing imperative. But it's not something we can achieve by solely championing individual rights, much less is it a vision that can be accomplished through endless growth.

Instead, we must acknowledge that individual wellbeing is inextricably linked to collective wellbeing, to the greater good. We depend on each other. As human beings and members of diverse communities we thus don't just have rights, but also responsibilities—to each other, to our families and communities, and to the world at large. Indeed, replacing greed and short-term thinking with generosity and a focus on the longer-term common good is imperative for our collective survival.

In large part, the structures we build make us who we are, and what we can do. If one lives in a typical modern city built around the needs of cars, not people, for instance, advocating for the rights of pedestrians or cyclists won't save you from being run over and killed nor from having to own a car yourself, any more than it protects children from respiratory ailments or the loneliness of a cul-de-sac. Worldwide, it has become almost impossible to escape the grid, highlighting the urgent need to interrogate and reimagine the systems that shape our lives.

And yet, we collectively continue to pile up amazing accomplishments—social and technological breakthroughs previously deemed unimaginable. We explore space and the deep seas and the nucleotides of the human body; we have more than enough to feed and house and educate every human on earth; we have more access to knowledge in our pockets than rulers had in their entire empires. Pretty amazing, all this.

Given such achievements, it's astonishing that humans haven't realized universal dignity. Visionaries like Adam Smith, Mahatma Gandhi, John Maynard Keynes, and Vandana Shiva all wrote that a state of abundance and dignity for all was within grasp, driven by human innovation and ingenuity. Yet, here we are, still grappling with poverty, precarity, and conflict. The



disconnect between their hopeful visions and our harsh reality is jarring.

Why?

Our planet is as beautiful as it is rich in bounty and diversity. It originated some 4.54 billion years ago. Translated into a year, as Carl Sagan brilliantly showed, we've lived on earth for less than a full hour of its existence. It took us less than a minute to alter or destroy much of it. This reality—what some call climate crisis or ecological collapse and the academics among us have named the Anthropocene or the Capitalocene—is not so much a threat to the planet as it is a threat to human existence.

Young people in the 1970s stated this in founding Earth Day, just as members of Generation Z repeatedly invoke Indigenous thinkers today: we do not own this planet; rather, we are products of it. Inescapably, we are intertwined with it. We rely on it for all the essentials—food, water, sustenance. We are not mere inhabitants; we reshape its intricate web. Within us lie echoes of

the universe's inception, shared microbial companionships with every living entity gracing our shared home, and a genetic kinship that binds us not only to one another but also to creatures as diverse as fruit flies and bonobos, our nearest biological relatives.

As humans, we've long believed we're exceptional, but the truth is, we're not the only ones who feel, think, plan, or wield tools. What sets us apart, however, is the astonishing duality of our nature. On one hand, we've created an incredible diversity of beauty and creativity - in art, music and literature, but also in culture and technology. On the other hand, we've unleashed unprecedented destruction—ravaging the planet, exploiting resources, and inflicting suffering on a massive scale, particularly over the last five centuries.

But the debate over human nature—are we inherently violent and selfish or cooperative and loving?—obscures a more fundamental question: who benefits from these debates? The emphasis on selfishness and violence can justify authoritarianism and exploitation, while the emphasis on cooperation and kindness can empower collective action and democracy. But what if the real question isn't about our alleged nature, but about our political choices? Who or what sets the rules of governance? Can we, as philosophers throughout the ages have asked, govern ourselves? Is generosity, perhaps, not just an individual choice, but something we can bake into the DNA of modern societies?

By shifting the focus from our supposed nature to our political choices, we can begin to challenge the systems of power that shape our world. The key to unlocking our potential for self-governance lies in recognizing that our capacity for collective decision-making is not fixed, but depends on the systems and structures we build. By securing a life of dignity for everyone, we can create institutions and cultures that incentivize cooperation, generosity, and collective decision-making. Rather than a question of human nature, it is a question of what kind of society we want to build - and how we can build it together.

The historical record offers a rich tapestry of tools and insights, woven from the threads of courageous resistance and visionary thinking. From Siddhartha Gautama's radical renunciation of the caste system's oppressive hierarchies,

By securing a life of dignity for everyone, we can create institutions and cultures that incentivize cooperation, generosity, and collective decision-making.

to Martin Luther's bold challenge to the church's monopoly on divine authority, to Adam Smith's advocacy for the market's liberating potential over the stifling rule of monarchs and nobility, to Chief Pontiac's defiant rejection of European colonizers' claims to Indigenous lands, to Thomas Paine's clarion call for the people's ultimate political authority, to Mary Wollstonecraft's fierce insistence on women's autonomy and self-determination, to Karl Marx's passionate belief in workers' rightful ownership of wealth, to Greta Thunberg's urgent call for leaders to abandon the fairytales of eternal economic growth and confront the stark realities of our planetary crisis—the struggle over the shape and direction of societal progress revolves around a single, pivotal question: who should wield control over our destinies?

This question has echoed through the ages, a persistent refrain of resistance and rebellion, of vision and transformation. It is a question that challenges the status quo, that disrupts the comfortable certainties of power and privilege, that demands we confront the injustices and inequalities that have long been embedded in our societies. And it is a question that invites us to imagine a different future, one in which the control over our destinies is wrested from the grasp of presumed human nature and the incapacitating logic of profit maximization. What if societal progress was determined by the collective wisdom and creativity of all?

Throughout history, individuals have asserted vast privileges, often using grand designations like emperor, king, or lord, sometimes titles in more pedestrian clothing like president or chairman—or simply "men." But this isn't just a story of power-hungry individuals seizing control. To legitimize their authority, they needed a solid foundation—one that could be used to coerce others if necessary.

And that foundation was built on exclusive claims to land and wealth, often acquired through conquest, war, or outright theft. The formalization of this plunder into law, and its validation as private property, is a defining feature of both eastern and western civilizations. Meanwhile, those without access to wealth and land have struggled to make ends meet, relying on others for work and income, and often denied political power and basic rights.

The more the privileged few tightened their grip on ownership and control, the louder the question echoed among the many: why should resources be hoarded by a select few when they could be shared by all? Why should a dignified life be a privilege reserved for the powerful when it could be a fundamental human right? The Luddites, indigenous communities, labor advocates, and social justice champions have all challenged the castle's rule, demanding a world where access to resources, dignity, and a decent life is a basic human entitlement, not a privilege reserved for those born into wealth or power.

And yet, despite the courage and conviction of those who dared to challenge the status quo, movements and uprisings aimed at dismantling the castle system have been met with brutal force or coerced compromise. From the peasant uprisings in Europe between the 14th and 16th centuries to the Arab Spring of the early 2010s, countless movements have been forced to settle for a corner in the very castles they sought to overthrow, with revolutionaries often becoming the new lackeys, perpetuating the same structures they initially sought to dismantle.

The rare exceptions, such as the Russian and Chinese Revolutions, have shown us that even when the castles are seized, the new rulers often maintain the same oppressive systems, merely replacing the previous elite. The quest for a robust framework ensuring fundamental dignity for all remains an elusive dream for humanitarians worldwide. In most cases, the castles still stand, and the powerful few continue to reign.

It's no wonder, then, that the dominant voices in today's political discourse dismiss the idea of a world without entrenched power structures as naïve or dangerously idealistic. The most potent tool of power lies in constraining the imagination of those it governs, as the cultural historian Saidiya Hartman so aptly put it: "So much of the work of oppression is policing the imagination."

Still: what is most remarkable, despite all defeats and setbacks, is that the central intent of liberation movements has remained the same for centuries: to dismantle the reign of the castles so that everyday commoners can thrive alongside their neighbors. Not just claim a room in the castle but get rid of the idea of castles.

Not just get a sliver of the stolen loot but stop the theft. Not just settle for a vote on the board but open the doors for self-governance.

The vast majority of people worldwide hold values of fairness, peace, and generosity that their governments systematically disregard or suppress. This disconnect is evident everywhere. Most people approve of inequality in the range of 1 to 5, but live in stark realities that often exceed 1 to 5,000. From Turkey to Peru, and from the United States to South Africa, people are united in their demands for climate action, accessible education, labor rights, and dignity for all. They fight for body autonomy, reproductive rights, and peace. But despite these efforts, governing institutions continue to fail the people they claim to serve, perpetuating inequality, assaulting fundamental freedoms, and sacrificing them on the altar of megalomania, territorial expansion, and economic growth.

Whether they be capitalists, communists, militarists, democrats, or autocrats, they have failed to represent the people they are supposed to serve. This chasm between the values of the many and the actions of the few is a millennia-old indictment of those who hold power. It's also a stark reminder that the many have yet to find a

way to safeguard their values and accomplishments against the few who seek to undermine them.

But it's also a testament to the resilience and determination of citizens worldwide, who continue to organize for a livable future, and who refuse to be silenced. Their unwavering commitment to the ideas of basic fairness is a beacon of hope, illuminating the path toward a world where universal dignity—a culture defined by generosity, not greed—may someday be recognized not just as a dream, but the best, and, indeed, only realistic path forward.

Wellbeing and generosity aren't just about providing a safety net for those left behind; it's about ensuring everyone has a fair chance.

Wellbeing and generosity aren't just about providing a safety net for those left behind; it's about ensuring everyone has a fair chance. It's not about handouts, but about handoffs—providing all humans a solid foundation for success, from one generation to the next. By addressing the causes of inequality, we can create a world where everyone has the chance to flourish and develop their potential, not just survive.

The notion that such an idea may appear difficult to grasp, even fantastical, speaks more to the ideological policing of our present world than to any insurmountable practical hurdles in bringing it to fruition. V&V

Dirk Philipsen is an economic historian and political economist at the Sanford School of Public Policy at Duke University and the Department of History at Duke. He also serves as Senior Fellow at Duke's Kenan Institute for Ethics and is director of both the Regenerative Futures Lab and the Build a Better World Focus program. His work and teaching are focused on underlying structural requirements for the wellbeing of people and the planet. His latest book, published in 2015 by Princeton University Press, is *The Little Big Number—How GDP Came to Rule the World, And What to Do About It*. For an overview of his current work, please see "Economics for the People" at aeon.co.

INTERLUDE

Generous Eyes, Radical Love

"To be generous is to give from one's poverty, not from surplus."

FR. MARTIN LAM NGUYEN, CSC

Our publication focuses on higher education, with an emphasis on how the formative work of education translates into the professions. As an initiative of Notre Dame's Center for Social Concerns, though, we believe these questions are inseparable from broader issues of justice and the common good. If these discussions of generosity do not ring true outside the well-endowed walls of the ivory tower and privileged professions, then they are not true. With that in mind, we are pleased to offer two stories of generosity from places most of us would rather not see—streets marked by gang violence and the inside of a prison cell. In our interview with Fr. Greg Boyle and a reflection by Fr. Martin Lam Nguyen, CSC, we are challenged to be generous beyond expectation, with eyes that see the profound dignity of every person, hearts committed to mutual belonging, and lives that embody radical love.

ARTWORK BY SAMUEL PROPHASK ASAMOAH

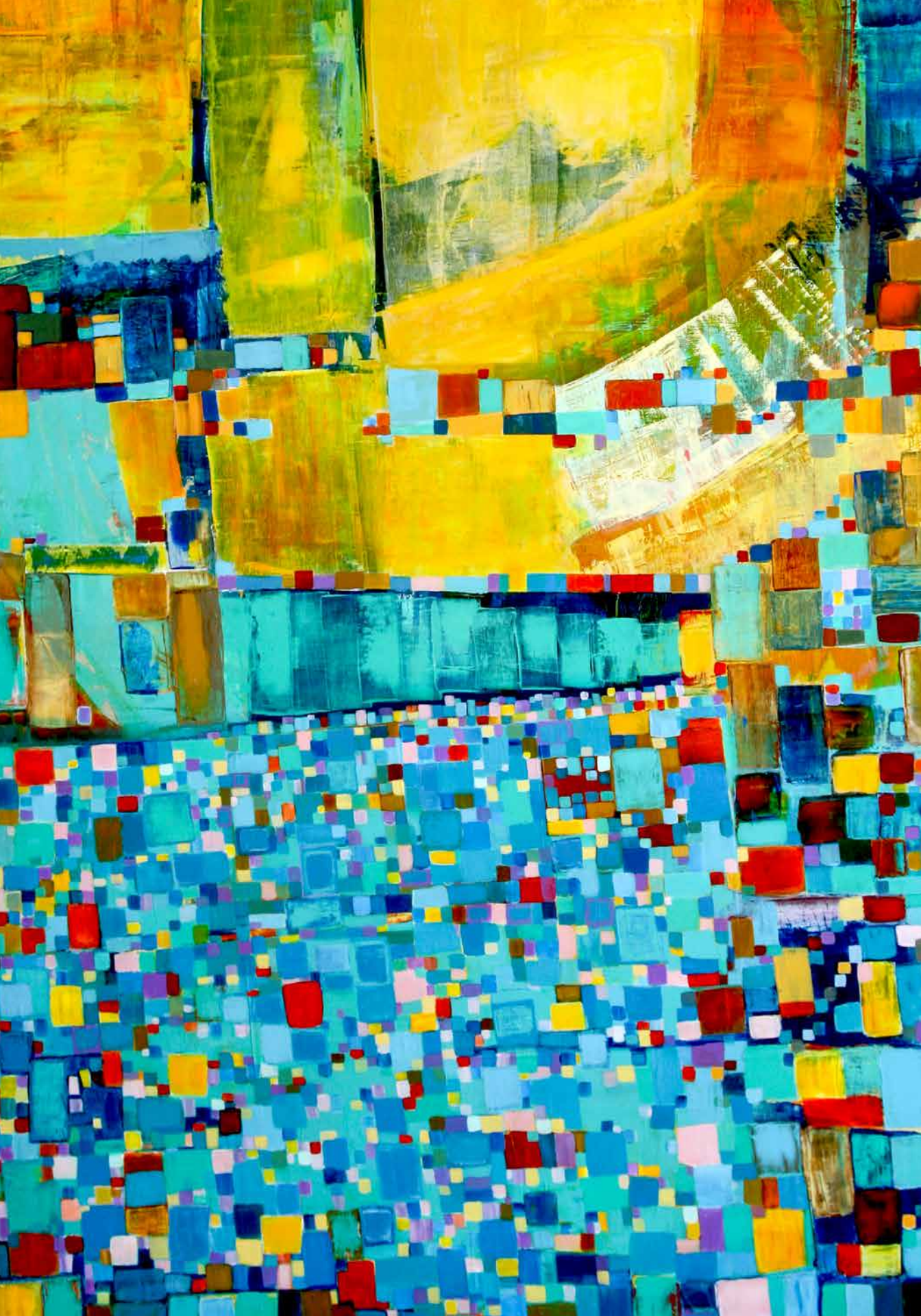
INTERVIEW

Seeing the Good

An Interview with Fr. Greg Boyle

Greg Boyle's 2010 bestselling book, *Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion*, has been an inspiration to our work at the Center for Social Concerns. In the book, Boyle writes, "our common human hospitality longs to find room for those who are left out." For Boyle, this hospitality looks like radical kinship, based on unconditional love, in which people are welcomed into relationship, needs are met as they arise, and the circle of compassion grows as voices on the margins are heard and embraced. At Homeboy Industries, the largest gang-intervention, rehabilitation, and re-entry program in the world, what some might call entrepreneurship is less

ARTWORK BY JIM APROBERTS



about programming and more about responsiveness driven by love—which has resulted in schools, job creation, mental health counseling, tattoo removal, and countless other interventions. At the heart of all these interventions is a community grounded in radical love and belonging. Father G is known for telling stories, and his life is, indeed, a storied existence—not a strategic plan, but an embodied response to believing the ultimate reality is one of love, and that we flourish when our lives and relationships reflect the abundance of that love to others.

We sat down with Fr. Boyle to discuss his work over almost 4 decades, and how his generous vision of human goodness and dignity continues to have implications for social change. He spoke to us online from his office at Homeboy Industries, with a steady stream of knocks on the door and people vying for his attention. Although this interview has been edited for length and clarity, we wanted to note the original transcripts were full of the starts, stops, interruptions, and distractions, which are the lived reality of practicing radical hospitality.

Suzanne Shanahan: Thank you for taking time to be with us.

You were born and raised in Los Angeles, and you have spent most of your adult life ministering there. But when you first became a priest, you lived in Bolivia for a season. Can you tell us a little about that time and how it shaped you?

Greg Boyle: Sure. Thank you for having me.

Almost 40 years ago, when I was first ordained, Bolivia was the poorest country in the Western hemisphere, was poorer than Haiti at that time, and had a lot of political strife and endless strikes. My time in Bolivia kind of turned me inside out in terms of the poor and finding myself evangelized by the poor, being led to understand the gospel in a particular way, by way of folks who were really poor at the time.

SS: I imagine this experience of solidarity with the poor—both the relationships with particular people and the experience of broken systems—provided a foundation for the work at Delores Mission, the poorest parish in the Los Angeles archdiocese. How did you experience that transition?

GB: Well, I was supposed to go to Santa Clara to campus ministry and I begged my provincial to let me go to Delores Mission. I'd been there right after I was ordained, for two summers, and I knew the place. And then one of the pastors decided to go back to Mexico, so I would fly back almost every weekend to help with masses. That intensified and solidified my desire to be

there. So I said, "Can't I go here instead of Santa Clara?" He was actually happy to send me there.

SS: When you moved to Dolores Mission there were a lot of gang-related concerns in Los Angeles. How did you get started in the work that became Homeboy?

GB: We just started to respond to what was in front of us, and what was in front of us were gang members—junior high age gang members who had been get kicked out from their schools. No one wanted them, so they were wreaking havoc in the middle of the day. I said, "what if I found a school that would take you?" And they all said, "yes, I would go." And then I couldn't find a school that would take them. So we started a school. That was the first thing.

And then they said, "if only we had jobs." And so we tried to find felony friendly employers. And we started maintenance crews, landscaping crews, a crew to build our childcare center—all made up of members of the 8 rival gangs. And then we started Homeboy Bakery right after the unrest in the early nineties. So, we eventually changed our name to Homeboy Industries. It all evolved, and still it's evolving. But I was also burying so many kids during that period.

SS: I know all this work has been written about elsewhere, and that what you're

sharing is a small summary of decades of gang rehabilitation, job training, running businesses, and providing the practical services people need to leave gangs, such as tattoo removal and mental healthcare. There were starts and stops, a bakery fire, and even community resistance in the early days. And, as you said, you were conducting funerals for youth killed by gang violence regularly. Many people might see the problem as overwhelming and give up. But you didn't.

GB: You know, in those days, frankly, we had 8 gangs at war, and I did a lot of things I'd never do again—like shuttle diplomacy and peace treaties and truces and cease fires. I'd never do that stuff again, because it's born of a bad analysis. There was definitely violence, but there was no conflict, and you can only have peace treaties if there's an actual conflict. But I learned early on that in the end the gang problems were really about something else. So you want to address the something else.

I could see goodness in everybody. It was never qualified in anybody. It was just there. And then you start to recognize other things. Oh, this is despair that presents as violence, and this or this is mental

I could see goodness in everybody. It was never qualified in anybody. It was just there.

illness that presents that way, or this is trauma and the accumulation of complex trauma. I never saw it as "this guy's a good guy, and this guy's a bad guy." Probation officers were saying those things. They were saying, "Don't even bother with that guy. He's really pure evil." And I knew right away that wasn't true, just because my experience was telling me otherwise.

SS: That reminds me of how you have described kinship, as a circle of compassion where "we stand with the demonized so the demonizing will stop" and all souls feel their worth. It's a beautiful idea that has become embodied over the years in the community you have built. That gift you possess of seeing the dignity and worth of each person, of seeing the goodness even when there are actions that are not good, seems central to the work.

GB: Oh, yeah. This was started during the decade of death. 1988 to 1998 was just intense. We had a thousand gang related homicides in '92. That's changed, certainly, and the numbers have been cut significantly. I think everyone, even law enforcement, would attribute a lot of the change and mentality as coming from Homeboy.

SS: So if you think about the start of Homeboy almost four decades ago, and you look at where the community is today, are the challenges in the community different than they were when you started this work in Dolores Mission?

GB: Today, the violence is obviously not as intense as it was as it was during the decade of death. But another thing that has changed is that the country is in the grip of a mental health crisis. And it was exacerbated by COVID, and then it kind of landed in a solidifying moment. But if you're talking about health or mental health, you know you're really talking about healing trauma. And you're also talking about infusing hope in folks for whom hope is foreign. And you're also talking about mental health services in a really concrete,

specific way. Those are the things that address gang violence today, and young people are gravitating in that direction.

SS: How is Homeboy trying to address mental health questions?

GB: It's never limited to 50 minutes with the therapist. We do that, but it's more holistic. It's a therapeutic community. It's a wraparound experience. It's "everybody holds a piece" and "everybody's delivering a dose." We're not limited in who are the suppliers of care in the delivery system. They're bombarded with it. And even if they wander away or relapse or go to jail again, they all come back because they've had this palpable dose of cherishing and tenderness and acknowledgement, and they feel seen. And because that's really compelling, they come back.

SS: Which is in many ways the same thing you have been doing all along—living a radical ethic of hospitality and care that sees deeper than the immediate circumstances and loves unconditionally. This has certainly produced change in Los Angeles, and I hear you have a new book coming out that applies these ideas more broadly to the current moment in America.

GB: Yes. It's called *Cherished Belonging: The Healing Power of Love in Divided Times*. It's kind of a different book than my others in as much as it's trying to comment on the times in which we are living. There really is a mental health crisis, but people think when you say mental health it's somehow diagnostic—it's about schizophrenia or bipolar disorder. So sometimes it's better to just talk about health.

Healthy people are holy people and holy people are healthy people, and I don't think there's any way around that. I mean, I was watching Ken Burns' really excellent commencement address that he gave at Brandeis, and it's really quite good, but at one point he talks about these binary choices, you know the virtuous or the vulgar. And I thought, "Well, who do you think the vulgar people are?" That's kind of important. If you think vulgar people are just bad, well, that's kind of the end of the discussion. I think it indicates that we're not even trying if we just say, "well, these people are bad, and they don't belong to us." But nobody vulgar is healthy. So how do we help people? How do we walk them to health?

None of us are well until all of us are. And in all of us, there is a certain degree of not being well, and our growth in health will end in the graveyard. It's a way of keeping us from declaring people really, really bad.

SS: So if what you're saying is, it's not about good people and bad people or even good behavior and bad behavior. It's about wellness and unwellness. Then

the question is how do you create a well, healthy population?

GB: Anybody who walks through these doors has the wellness enough to be able to walk through the doors, but they're really wounded. So how do you heal the wound? We've traditionally punished the wound, which is why our prisons are overflowing. But what if we were to say, that requires health, not denunciation. If you believe people aren't good, and if people don't belong to us, you can denounce them. But here we embrace two principles: Everybody's unshakably good, and there are no exceptions, and we belong to each other, no exceptions.

> None of us are well until all of us are. And in all of us, there is a certain degree of not being well, and our growth in health will end in the graveyard.

SS: What do you think it would it look like, more broadly, if we could embrace those principles?

GB: Recently I shared those two principles at an LA Times festival of books to a packed auditorium, and then I said, "Now do I think if we as a society embrace those two principles, do I think all our vexing, complex social dilemmas would disappear?" And then I said, "Yes, I do." And the whole auditorium burst into laughter, and I was kind of startled. When it subsided, I said, "Yes, I do." And I do, because I think it's precisely the thing that

ends conversation. So when a Republican Congressman says, "What can I do about this mass shooting in Nashville? There's nothing we can do. How do you legislate against evil?" Well, that's the sound of somebody giving up. Because if you think it's about evil, then obviously you have to throw up your hands. But if you think it's about health, and perhaps even people having access to guns who aren't well, then suddenly you can roll up your sleeves, hey? There's something we can actually do.

SS: And in all this good but difficult and long work, what sustains you?

GB: Well, you know, if I can be attentive to the folks who are here—and it's hard to do, because it's a lot of pulling and tugging and pay attention to me—But even so, if I can be attentive and if I can practice being able to cherish with every breath I take—Otherwise you're not anchored in the present moment, and then it won't work—But as long as I can do that, it's always eternally replenishing. V&V

> But here we embrace two principles: Everybody's unshakably good, and there are no exceptions, and we belong to each other, no exceptions.

Fr. Greg Boyle is a Jesuit priest and the founder and director of Homeboy Industries, the world's largest gang intervention and rehabilitation program.

FR. MARTIN LAM NGUYEN, CSC

Generous Love from the Depths

Last February, I was in Nha Trang, Vietnam, a quick stop during my two-week travels in the country. Not too far away is Cam Ranh Bay, a strategic naval base during the Vietnam War. The bursting nightlife of the modern Nha Trang is a far cry from its days of war and the aftermath struggle of the state sanctioned economy. My hotel was not too far from the beautiful Catholic stone cathedral built by the French missionaries. I could hear its bell tolls late into the night and early morning. I thought of the late Francis Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan, who was declared Venerable in 2017 by Pope Francis and was Bishop of this diocese from 1967 to 1975. He was an exemplar of generous love in the midst of poverty and suffering.

ARTWORK BY JIM APROBERTS

Bishop Thuan arrived at this cathedral as a young thirty-nine-year-old bishop, full of energy and aspirations, seemingly untouched by his own family's tragedies. His uncle Ngo Dinh Diem, the first president of South Vietnam, along with two other uncles, were killed in a coup d'état in 1963. The Vietnam War was quickly drawing to its end, with heavy casualties and enormous destruction broadcast daily around the world.

In April 1975, Thuan was made Coadjutor Archbishop of Saigon two weeks before the fall of the city. His appointment was met immediately by the new government's angry denunciation, and protested by some prominent Catholic priests and lay people. In August 1975, he was arrested and brought back to Nha Trang to begin his life changing journey as a prisoner for the next 13 years.

In March 1976, Bishop Thuan was languishing in a dark cell not too far from a church of his former diocese. There were three layers of walls from his cell to the fresh air outside. Lights were kept on for days, then darkness followed. White fungi grew on his sleeping mat. In thick humidity, he had to lie down on the floor with his nose at the doorframe, gasping for air. In isolation, the bishop's physical and mental conditions had deteriorated. He could hardly pray. Then one night in great turmoil and confusion, he received a voice telling him: "Why tortured in distress? You still have so much in your heart to give to others. You must love them!"

From that time on, Thuan learned to live in a harsh prison like a free man. The guards at first ignored his greetings and smile. But he kept loving these men from his heart. Eventually, he made friends with them by teaching them languages and Gregorian chants. He cooked for them and told them stories of different cultures where he had visited. They helped him carve a wooden cross and made a necklace out of electric wires which he later wore in his exiled days working in the Vatican. Some officers revealed to him that they were assigned to spy on him. Some even left the Communist party and were baptized.

One can only give what one has. How could Thuan give so generously while he himself had no freedom, no rights, no possessions, and no future?

The story of this bishop in prison reminds me of Jesus' observation of the poor widow giving two small coins at the temple treasury. He told his disciples: "This poor widow put in more than all the other contributors to the treasury. For they have all contributed from their surplus wealth, but she, from her poverty, has contributed all she had, her whole livelihood" (Mark 12:43–44). To be generous is to give from one's poverty, not from surplus.

Writing on poverty, I must acknowledge that though I have experienced some hardships in life, I have quite a lot. Therefore, I am writing from a safe distance, always tempted by the tendency to romanticize.

Jesus chose to be poor. He chose to be human. He did not idealize poverty in itself as a concept; he encountered real people in the full complexity of human life.

The poor would not wish poverty on any other human beings, because poverty can be very painful and humiliating. People

In order to move from being poor to giving all, one must first hear an inner voice of grace.

in poverty sometimes think only of food because they are too hungry. They can be overwhelmed and consumed by hunger, thirst, pain, fear, or distress. Jesus, and he alone, "sees" poverty as it is, in its gravity and depth, and he transforms the reality in his choice to become human. At the center of this reality is Jesus' "kenosis," or self-emptying. Jesus' kenosis points to a new way of being: a heart that is stripped of security and possessions could nonetheless become boldly and freely open to God and others.

In order to move from being poor to giving all, one must first hear an inner voice of grace. "Hail Mary, full of grace! The Lord is with you!" (Luke 1:28). This greeting from the archangel Gabriel to Mary is a familiar voice of this sort. The soul stands

open in the light of grace. In that moment, one is defined not by what one possesses but rather by how one is possessed by God. And Mary said: "My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord . . . from this day all generations will call me blessed." In this manner, the poor widow put in "all she had." And Francis Xavier Nguyen Van Thuan set out to love his guards, one at a time, without exception.

One day a guard asked Bishop Thuan: "When you are released, will you send your people to kill us?" — "No, no, I do not revenge. I really love you. We have been together here for so long; you know I am truthful in telling you that I love you." — "But why do you love us and forgive us?" — "I must love you, even if you were to kill me. Because if I don't, I don't deserve to be called Christian."

A life of generosity is the opposite of a life of calculation. With calculation, we act out of fear and distrust. More often than not, this life of calculation takes place in surplus rather than need. Possession and security require protection and locks. They spur the need for competition and comparison. Moving from calculation to the beauty of the present moment includes not only attending to the task at hand, the person in front of us, but to our true dependency. After an anointing Mass, a friend of mine told his family and friends of the moment the doctor told him he had

late-stage lung cancer. "The sky was falling on me. Time stopped. My mind went blank. I didn't know what to tell my wife, who was waiting in the car." But in the moment of his poverty, he was compelled to look for God.

Bishop Thuan discovered he could still love from a dark cell. One dark night, he was handcuffed with a Buddhist former congressman of the South Vietnamese government, along with 1,500 other prisoners, and walked down into the hulk of a coal ship docked in the Saigon River. Noon the next day, the ship took them to Hai Phong, a port city in North Vietnam. They were then led out to another prison camp 30 miles from Ha Noi. For years nobody heard anything about this priest; memorial Masses were offered for him. His generous life was like a grain of wheat in the ground.

We wouldn't know anything about the generous poor widow in the crowded temple area had Jesus looked at the poor as we often do. Why did he notice her? Did she remind him of Mary, his own widowed mother in Nazareth? We don't know. Certainly, we should thank Jesus for recognizing this moment of generosity for us. And I am thankful for the opportunity my trip to Vietnam afforded to remind me of Bishop Thuan's faithful suffering. May we all hear an inner voice of grace, opening the door to a generous, expansive life marked by love. V&V

A life of generosity is the opposite of a life of calculation. With calculation, we act out of fear and distrust. More often than not, this life of calculation takes place in surplus rather than need. Possession and security require protection and locks.

Fr. Martin Lam Nguyen, CSC was born in Vietnam and immigrated to the United States in 1979. He is a priest of the Congregation of Holy Cross. He joined the Department of Art, Art History and Design of the University of Notre Dame in 1995. Fr. Nguyen creates large scale works in drawing and various painting media. His works are site-specific installations, designed to provide a contemplative space for viewers to review the practice of "looking."

ARTWORK BY SAMUEL PROPHASK ASAMOAH

PART II

Abundant Vocation

"Modern forms of giving tend to distort the virtue of generosity by decoupling the act of giving from the social context that makes giving make moral sense."

JACK BELL

JACK BELL

Generosity & Scarcity

Field Notes from a Farmer

In a recent book, two historians, Fredrik Albritton Jonsson and Carl Wennerlind, trace the emergence of the concept of scarcity in modern theories of economic growth. According to these theories, it's part of human nature to want to customize our needs and wants endlessly. When the basic needs of food, clothing, and shelter are met, we move on to other needs and wants. Left unchecked, human desire is infinite—"absolutely *insatiable*," William Stanley Jevons, one of the early pioneers of this movement,

ARTWORK BY ANNA BLATMAN

wrote.[1] However, rather than being a moral vice in need of virtuous correction, insatiable desire was thought to be "the great spring of human action" in economic development.[2] A revolution in the theory of exchange value followed. Insatiability meant that "subjective valuation," not labor, is the final determinant of a commodity's value on the market. "Value depends entirely upon utility," Jevons wrote, and not the workers' labor that was poured into the commodity before it was made available to the marketplace.[3]

If human desire is insatiable, everything in the world is potentially desirable by human beings. And if everything is desirable, then the earth's resources should be treated as scarce. Jonsson and Wennerlind call this concept of scarcity "neoliberal scarcity." What's striking about it is that, instead of treating scarcity as a temporary condition that results from greed, resource mismanagement, or blunder, scarcity is extended to every existing resource on the planet. Even what I own and do not wish to consume is scarce, because it represents something I could sell or trade on the open market. According to Léon Walras, another early proponent of neoliberal scarcity, the condition of possession without consumption assures me of a "double advantage" as an economic agent.[4] Not only am I assured of a stock of resources I might need in the future; that stock represents an "unwanted remainder" that might be useful in procuring things that, in the future, I decide that I need.[5] Thus, "no portion [of our wealth] could be given up without causing a sacrifice of want-satisfaction."[6]

At first blush, neoliberal scarcity makes life resemble Hobbes's description of human beings in a state of nature: "a war of all against all." However, the architects of neoliberal scarcity, many of whom are past winners of the Nobel Prize in economics, argued precisely the opposite. If consumers and firms acted in their best interest, which invariably meant their own private interest, society would be organized optimally around the happiness of all. Human desire might be insatiable, but with the ministrations of science and technology, the resources of the natural world might be extended indefinitely into the future. Human society might even be able to transcend its organic and biological limits.

For the architects of neoliberal scarcity, Jonsson and Wennerlind write, "nature was an infinite treasure, the fruits of which could be continuously harvested as long as people kept cultivating their imagination and promoted the advancement of scientific knowledge. With a never-ending series of improvements in knowledge, all environmental obstacles of economic growth would be transcended, and the economy could continue to grow, *ad infinitum*."[7]

For several decades, this prophecy seemed to come true. In the second half of the twentieth century, proponents of neoliberal scarcity helped foment a burst of unprecedented economic growth around the world. In 1970, one half of the global population lived in extreme poverty. Today, that figure is one tenth.[8] In the same time span, the global economy has grown twenty-six times bigger. Cheap fossil fuels have enabled societies around the globe to industrialize.

At the center of this growth story lies a key innovation in industrial agriculture. Synthetic fertilizers enabled farmers to increase crop yields 30 to 50 percent per year. In response, populations, cities, and life spans exploded. Some estimates suggest that the global population would never have reached beyond 3.5 billion without it. "Put another way," Jonsson and Wennerlind write, "to produce the agricultural output levels achieved by the year 2000 would have required four times as much land."[9]

And yet, if scientists and ecologists are correct, nature has proven to be anything but an "infinite treasure." There is a deadly irony that runs through the last fifty years of the growth story. The same economic patterns that brought prosperity and a better life to billions of people suddenly threatens to topple the biosphere of the entire planet. The literature on anthropogenic climate change is vast and complex; I wish only to highlight the reality that climate change has pushed industrial agricultural systems, the backbone of economic growth and globalization, beyond the breaking point. Rising CO2 levels have made staple crops like corn, wheat, and soy produce less food. (Studies suggest that it

Modern forms of giving tend to distort the virtue of generosity by decoupling the act of giving from the social context that makes giving make moral sense.

is also less nutritious.)[10] In regions that are essential to feeding the global population, crop yields are expected to decline rapidly in the coming years. Scientists at NASA predict that globally, by 2030, maize (corn) yields will fall by 24%. Wheat will fall by 17%.[11] The cumulative effect of such losses will be catastrophic.

To feed more people, we need more cropland. But studies suggest that land clearance already contributes anywhere from 12 to 20% of all global greenhouse gas emissions year to year. At the same time, cropland conversion has triggered huge losses in biodiversity. Biologists say we are living through a sixth mass extinction event. One in three species on earth is currently in danger of being lost forever. We are only now beginning to reckon with the human consequences of such loss. In the words of one paper published recently in *The Lancet*, one of the most important academic medical journals in the world,

the COVID-19 pandemic was "intimately linked" with the decline in global biodiversity.[12]

Conversations about environmental justice often assume that human beings should come to terms with what they owe the natural world for the decades of global prosperity that we've enjoyed. But do we really know how to measure ecological debt? And if we could know, are we sure we could pay it back? As a species, our debts are incalculable, lost to time and to an extinction crisis whose end is nowhere in sight. Perhaps it's pure hubris to suppose that we can tabulate nature's due. Maybe the virtue of generosity, not justice, offers a more sensible framework for thinking about how to approach our relationship with a world that human prosperity has ravaged. Creation, both human and non-human, teeters on the brink. Shouldn't we respond with everything we have and try to reverse course?

Aristotle wrote that the generous person knows what to give at the right time to the right people. When the right opportunity comes, he parts with what he has, regardless of whether he knows or loves the recipient. Aquinas calls this virtue *liberalitas*; it means to be free, or loose, with one's money. But the virtue also requires good judgment (Aquinas says generosity "belongs" to prudence), a knack for when to part with a portion of your wealth and when not to. It doesn't matter whether you have large sums to give. What matters is that, when the right occasion presents itself, you part with an amount that marries what you have with the size of the need.

Modern forms of giving tend to distort the virtue of generosity by decoupling the act of giving from the social context

But do we really know how to measure ecological debt? And if we could know, are we sure we could pay it back? As a species, our debts are incalculable, lost to time and to an extinction crisis whose end is nowhere in sight. Perhaps it's pure hubris to suppose that we can tabulate nature's due. Maybe the virtue of generosity, not justice, offers a more sensible framework for thinking about how to approach our relationship with a world that human prosperity has ravaged.

Perhaps we need new social forms to allow the virtue of generosity to flourish again. But we also need the old ones—churches, intentional communities, monasteries—to show us that another way is possible.

that makes giving make moral sense. For example, it's estimated that one trillion dollars are held by private, non-profit foundations in the US. Most of the wealth of these institutions was donated to them, at least originally. By donating wealth to private foundations, many of which they retain control over, wealthy people reap enormous breaks in income tax, estate tax, gift tax, and capital gains tax. When ordinary people give, it tends to be seen as an expression of value. So-and-so cares about the environment; therefore, they donate a portion of their wealth in order to promote conservation, the fight against climate change, or the development of clean energy.

However, it's not obvious what any of these gifts has to do with virtue. If I materially benefit from giving my money away, then I'm just conducting business, not being generous. For the virtue to work correctly, I can't love what I own or desire to get more of it. And I can't expect to be able to control how the money gets used. That's why Aristotle thought it was impossible for the generous person to remain rich. Generosity requires you to relinquish control of your money to other people. It's easier, Aristotle says, for the wasteful person to become generous than it is for the rich. The wasteful person is already used to giving away what he has. Once he experiences poverty or old age, his giving usually becomes more responsible. Even then, it's extremely difficult for him to become rich.

"Liberality," Aquinas wrote, "arises from a person being affected in a certain way towards money, such that he desires it not nor loves it."[13] In other words, generosity bubbles up naturally from a state of emotional detachment from one's possessions. As long as our desire for possessions is insatiable, we will never be generous.

Achieving this state of detachment is no mean feat. Augustine once said that "what we do not have can be refused, like food. To renounce what we already own, is like amputating parts of one's own body."[14]

It takes an extraordinary level of self-mastery to sever the emotional bonds to your wealth. It probably can't be done without a community of people around you to help you do it. I am reminded of what Peter Maurin, one of the founders of the Catholic Worker Movement, once said: that the point of living in community with others was to make it easier for everyone to be good. Perhaps we need new social forms to allow the virtue of generosity to flourish again. But we also need the old ones—churches, intentional communities, monasteries—to show us that another way is possible.

But what does this understanding of generosity have to do with natural world? And how could it help us in our effort to repair it? Aristotle and Aquinas both thought that generosity took wealth, and wealth alone, as its object. When we are generous with things that aren't money, we are still valuing those things for the monetary value they hold. However, as early Christian thinkers like Augustine observed, the Latin word for money, *pecunia*, comes from *pecus* or *pecora*, which means flocks of sheep (or goats). Money is a modern, unnatural convenience, they thought; it has the effect of distorting the real value of people and of nature. This etymology runs parallel to the history of the word *generosity*. Generosity comes from *generositas*. In the Middle Ages, if you had *generositas,* it meant you belonged to the nobility. In a feudal society, gift giving enabled nobility to solidify and strengthen bonds across social groups. But the word *generositas* comes from the Latin *genus* or *genera*, which means natural "kind" or "kinds (of things)."

Curiously, both etymologies gesture to the objects that money eventually was supposed to stand for, not the money or the act of giving away money. The words point backwards to a world not yet dominated by the logic of scarcity and monetization. I want to ask: could they also point us forward? Marx spoke of the mystical character of the modern commodity. The monetary value of objects, when they are bought and sold on the marketplace, bears no straightforward relationship to the nature of the objects themselves. Placing things for sale on the market and assigning them an exchange value obscures their real value. In a similar vein, Karl Polanyi argued that to extend the commodity form to land makes land a fictitious commodity. Land is nothing if not creation, in all its splendor, intricacy, and beauty that we have so terribly marred. To view it as a scarce resource is to see only a small, shriveled fragment of what it really is or could be. It

To move beyond a world dominated by the logic of scarcity and the insatiability of desire, we desperately need new ways of conceiving the relationship between nature and the economy.

also denies us the possibility of a relationship with it.

If most of us choose to be generous to the natural world, we will likely do so by donating to a cause that is backed by a not-for-profit institution. These institutions support necessary work. But allow me a moment to implore those who are bodily able to be generous with their hands and their feet. You are a creature with a body that came from the earth. Learn to care for the earth you live on. Find out who lived there before you did. Plant native trees in your yard; tend a garden; learn to care for it without herbicides, pesticides, and synthetic fertilizers. If virtue really is its own reward, so too is generosity to nature. Even if you never farm professionally, keep at it and your life will begin to take an earthly, tactile shape that no other vocation can replicate.

On the farm, my relationship to living organisms toggles between the perspectives of land stewardship and finance. How do I care for this place and the multitude of creatures who live here: the microscopic and the macroscopic ones; the human and non-human, the wild and domesticated? But also: how will I make money? In an ideal world, these two spheres of responsibility overlap as much as possible. In refusing to treat the land as a bundle of scarce resources to be lorded over, I still must find a way to turn a profit. It's not an exaggeration to say that the future of sustainable and regenerative agriculture banks on this hope.

In the real world, though, most daily chores don't generate money in any direct way. I am not a particularly gifted business person. Most often, money enters my mind like an afterthought. I have run out of grass for these cows and I need to sell some; there are more lambs than I can count, and I am afraid they will breed back and make even more lambs; or the bumper crop of broccoli will soon bolt and no longer be edible; or—worst of all—I have an unexpected bill coming due, and I need to liquidate an asset.

Such moments are frequently painful. But more often than not, the pain comes from severing the relationship I have with the animals and plants I have spent years of my life caring for. It's painful to part with

them not because they are an extension of my wealth or my "financial security," but because I have cared for them through (sometimes) countless acts of daily attention and care.

To move beyond a world dominated by the logic of scarcity and the insatiability of desire, we desperately need new ways of conceiving the relationship between nature and the economy. How are we to do that without our boots on the ground? V&V

NOTES

1. Carl Wennerlind and Fredrik Albritton Jonsson, *Scarcity: A History from the Origins of Capitalism to the Climate Crisis* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2023), 183.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., 184.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid, 199.
8. My figures come from the recent review essay: Idrees Kahloon, "The World Keeps Getting Richer. Some People Are Worried," *The New Yorker,* May 27, 2024, newyorker.com/magazine/2024/06/03/growth-a-history-and-a-reckoning-daniel-susskind-book-review.
9. *Scarcity*, 176.
10. Samuel S. Myers, et al., "Rising CO2 Threatens Human Nutrition," *Nature* 501 (7503) (2014): 139–42; doi.org/10.1038/nature13179.
11. Jonas Jagermyer, et al., "Climate Impacts on Global Agriculture Emerge Earlier in New Generation of Climate and Crop Models," *Nature Food* 2 (2021): 873–885; doi.org/10.1038/s43016-021-00400-y.
12. Odette K. Lawler, et al., "The COVID-19 Pandemic Is Intricately Linked to Biodiversity Loss and Ecosystem Health," *The Lancet* 5 (11) (2021): thelancet.com/journals/lanplh/article/PIIS2542-5196(21)00258-8/fulltext; doi.org/10.1016/S2542-5196(21)00258-8.
13. *Summa Theologica* (Notre Dame, IN: Ave Maria Press, 1948), IIa–IIae, q. 117, a. 5, ad 3, p. 1678.
14. Quoted in Peter Brown, *Through the Eye of a Needle: Wealth, the Fall of Rome, and the Making of Christianity in the West, 350–550 AD* (Princeton University Press, 2012), 184.

Jack Bell farms and writes in the Carolina Piedmont. He has taught English literature at Duke, Wake Forest, and the University of Richmond. You may find more of his writing at bellfarm.substack.com.

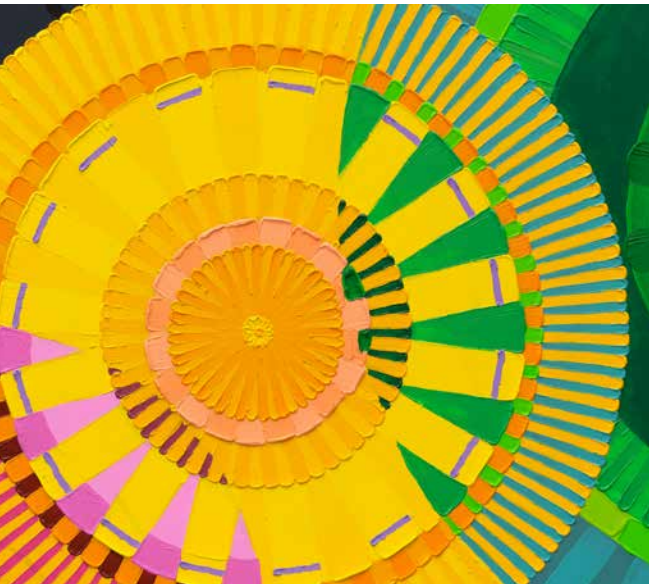
ARTWORK BY JUNE EDMONDS

Good Engineering

JOSHUA BRAKE

Experience and Extend

When I arrived in Longview, Texas to attend LeTourneau University in the fall of 2010, I had only the faintest notions of what I wanted to do with my life. As a kid, I loved to work with my hands and build things. Coupled with a budding love for math and science, I began a journey to explore engineering.



I still remember that first semester. The Advanced Placement courses I had taken in high school enabled me to jump right into the gateway course for the electrical engineering concentration: Electric Circuits I. Circuits I was no picnic, in large part due to the man who had developed and taught the class for the last forty years, Dr. Bill Graff. Bill somehow held together the personas of the quintessential grandpa and the professor with ruthlessly high expectations for his students. Bill famously had a t-shirt with "I fight grade inflation!" emblazoned on the front.

Circuits felt like drinking from a firehose. We quickly learned that the "pop quizzes" on the first few days of class would stop surprising us. It was more shocking to not come into class to meet a quiz in the first few minutes. As I labored through Circuits that semester, I developed a love for the course. Solving the problems was fun, and I loved the way that the theory was reinforced with the hands-on lab exercises we would do each week, building and testing circuits on breadboards.

What I didn't realize at the time was that Electric Circuits would be the start not only of my craft as an engineer, but as an educator as well. At the end of the semester, one of my friends recommended me as a Supplemental Instructor (SI) for the course the next semester. SIs helped support students in the class by offering recitations and study sessions a few times a week, reinforcing topics from lecture and offering space for students to ask questions in a more relaxed environment.

But the best part of being an SI for circuits was getting to apprentice with Dr. Graff. After a few semesters as the SI for circuits, I began to recognize some common problems faced by students when moving from theory to practice. In response, I compiled a small booklet of problem-solving approaches to help students develop a more intuitive approach to the problems they encountered. I showed it to Bill and he loved it, offering to connect me with his contacts at McGraw-Hill to explore potential routes to have it published. Bill

saw something in me. He took the time to see me and consider how he might help encourage me to continue pursuing an area where he saw potential. He shared his network with me, enabling me to self-publish my little booklet through McGraw-Hill and add an ISBN-coded book to my resume.

As much as I learned from Bill in class, the most significant ways I benefited from knowing Bill were relational and not academic. His example and influence taught me what it looks like to develop the lasting impact that I desired for my own career. And his generosity was a key part.

My experiences with Bill convinced me that we often lose sight of the power of simple, consistent acts of generosity. I am willing to bet that if you ask anyone about their most meaningful educational experience, they will almost invariably respond not with a particular skill they learned, place they went, or project they worked on, but with a relationship. Most of the time, that relationship was formational because a teacher, coach, mentor, or family member gave them their time and attention. Even more importantly, that person likely gave them something they didn't deserve, seeing something in them and going above and beyond to pour into them.

Generosity is at the heart of those formational experiences. As I reflect on the person I want to be, I can't help but see the influence of the generosity of others on the shape of my development as a person. Almost every significant inflection point in my life has been downstream of generous relationships: parents who provided for my physical and emotional needs as a child, teachers who helped cultivate in me a love for learning, professors who gave me their time and attention as I continued to hone my craft, and mentors who shared their networks with me.

The deep impact of the generosity that I've experienced created the desire to extend that same generosity to others. I certainly want to help my students build the skills and character that will help them to access fulfilling vocations. But I also want them

to understand that a fulfilling career is not something you can earn or deserve. Rather, it is something that you hold with an open hand, even as you strive to pursue excellence to the best of your ability.

Unfortunately, the orientation of much of our culture is built on the often-unstated assumption that relationships are fundamentally transactional. We are always running cost-benefit analyses in our heads and trying to figure out if the return on what we give will be worth it. This transactional view of the world reinforces the idea that our accomplishments have been earned by our own efforts. This blinds us to the many ways in which our achievements have been significantly influenced by the generosity of others who have extended their own resources on our behalf.

Hard work matters. And yet, if we want to maximize our impact on the world, we need to focus beyond what we do. In a world increasingly focused on transactional relationships where we are seeking our own good, we desperately need a renewed vision of the ways we have been the recipients of the generosity of others. Then, in response to the generosity we have experienced, we can see our own resources as a gift that is not for ourselves, but rather as one to be shared generously with the people around us.

As I continued my studies at LeTourneau and began to consider graduate school, I was at yet another juncture in my career trajectory. Generosity once again played a pivotal role. I had excelled at LeTourneau, but getting into a top-tier graduate school is never a slam dunk, especially when you're coming from a place that people might mistake for a French cooking school.

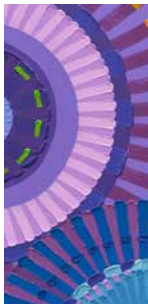
I sent in all my grad school applications and the waiting process began. After submitting them, I reached out to some potential future advisors. After a promising phone interview, I noticed that this same professor had a talk at the optics conference in San Francisco where I was presenting my undergraduate research. I emailed to ask whether I could grab coffee

with him. He emailed me back and volunteered to do one better, offering to fly me down to Caltech for a day to visit with his group. I was ecstatic.

It rained the day I visited Caltech, ironically enough, for what felt like the last time during my five-year tenure there. Despite the rain, I had a great day, getting to experience first-hand the place that would be my academic home for the next five years. I got to meet the professor who would be my PhD advisor and spend time with the members of his research group, many of whom would be formative pieces of my graduate school experience. All of this was enabled by an act of generosity; time and attention out of a busy schedule to give a kid from a small college in East Texas that he had never heard of a chance.

These experiences of generosity shape the influence I want to have on my students. Recognizing the role that generosity has played in my life breaks down any misconceptions about my accomplishments as the direct product of my own merit. Generosity requires that we loosen our grip on a meritocratic view of our world—the idea that the places we've gotten in our lives and careers are the result of our own efforts alone. Our lives are deeply shaped by the opportunities and resources that others have provided to us. And yet, we so easily forget this.

Generosity requires that we loosen our grip on a meritocratic view of our world—the idea that the places we've gotten in our lives and careers are the result of our own efforts alone.



Recognizing the generosity of others also has another effect. It encourages us to consider how we might extend generosity to others. Extending generosity doesn't happen by accident. The ability to see and respond to opportunities for generosity requires intentional preparation.

One of my favorite examples of this concept in practice is in the story of the famous New York City restaurant, Eleven Madison Park. The story, told in restaurateur Will Guidara's book *Unreasonable Hospitality*, follows Guidara's quest to create the world's greatest restaurant. The core of his thesis is that exceptional food is not enough. What matters most is the experience.

The feats that Will and his staff pulled off are unbelievable—from creating a fake beach experience in the restaurant for guests who had their trip to the oceanside

scuttled to buying sleds for a family from Spain experiencing their first snow while they were visiting the city. Will's obsession with curating the customer experience at Eleven Madison Park was the fuel that propelled it to the top of the restaurant world. At its root, Eleven Madison Park's success was built on a culture of generosity. While these experiences require financial resources, the money was not what made them happen. Instead, the impact of these experiences was birthed out of generosity—starting with the gift of the attention necessary to see another person and followed by the material resources to create something magical.

As I think about extending generosity to those I interact with, I've learned a few things from my own experiences and from the stories of others like Will Guidara. The first thing is that generosity is downstream of intentional preparation. While generous actions may be spontaneous, they require forethought and resources. These resources take time to build, and require that we intentionally create margin in our days so that we can exercise generosity when the moment presents itself.

In my life, I want to maintain a margin in order to create opportunities for generosity. Whether that is time on my calendar or dollars in my bank account, I want to intentionally earmark resources for me to give generously. Without specifically allocating these resources as supplies for

generosity, they will naturally be devoted elsewhere.

The second reflection is that authentic generosity requires attention. As we interact with the people around us, we can only demonstrate generosity if we are paying attention—hearing and seeing them and specifically looking for opportunities to be generous. The most generous gifts are given without being requested. To be generous with our resources, we need to be looking to see how they might best be given to those around us.

Unfortunately, cultivating margin and attention is swimming upstream against the currents of our culture. In a world where we've built our technology to monetize and capture as much of our time, money, and attention as possible, building the capacity to unlock our potential for generosity is increasingly difficult. With the continuing march of technologies like generative artificial intelligence, we are likely to continue to move toward increasingly transactional relationships.

The good news is that there are more opportunities than ever for generous action to have an influence. My goal, and I hope yours, is to use my experiences of generosity as a catalyst to help me extend that generosity to others. Experiencing and extending generosity, more than almost anything else that I teach my students in the classroom, is what I believe will lead them to a life of flourishing. V&V

Joshua Brake is an assistant professor of engineering at Harvey Mudd College. Before joining the faculty at Harvey Mudd, he completed a PhD and MS in Electrical Engineering at the California Institute of Technology and an MS and BS in Engineering with an Electrical Concentration at LeTourneau University. In addition to his teaching, he directs the Harvey Mudd College Biophotonics Lab where he and a group of undergraduate researchers are developing new optical tools for plant biology and neuroscience. More of Josh's thoughts on technology, education, and human flourishing can be found in his weekly Substack newsletter, *The Absent-Minded Professor* (joshbrake.substack.com).

ABRAHAM NUSSBAUM

The Two Josh Problem

My two worlds collided, on the corner of Colfax and Monaco, when the Two Joshes met each other last Saturday at the True Value. Back of the store, one flight up, stairs to the left, a ramp to the right, and into an alternative apprenticeship.

The first Josh was on duty, his soft locs draping either side of his face as he accepted deflated tires from the fair-weather folks who take the bikes out of their garage each spring only to find wheels no longer rolling. The sunny day customers look surprised to find a full repair bicycle shop wedged into the attic of a century-old hardware store. At the top of the stairs, they look right to see the service bay, where a bespectacled middle-aged man moves between four bicycle stands with obscure metal tools in his hands. He gently pulls on aged brakes and chains. He forcefully pushes on frames and cranks. Recoiling from the forces, the visitors usually look away to the left. They see a row of new bicycles, shining from the Pledge rubbed into their frames, under the track lights. They wonder if it might be easier to

ARTWORK BY RICHARD FRIEND

purchase a new bike. They catch a price tag and look around again, finding, standing before them, a short young man with open arms.

Josh takes the wheel. He listens to their story, whether it is about a sudden loss of pressure or a slow leak of air, while inspecting the wheel. He unscrews the valve, unseats the tire, inspects the rim for damage. He advises a new tube or a new tire or new sealant and offers to install each while the visitor waits. Some walk out over the price. Most accept the fee. Either way, the encounter is over within ten minutes. Josh changes tires quickly, charges people what he said he would charge them, and they pay what they agreed upon. They are ready to ride, with sunny day to spare, unless Brad puts down his tools and walks over from the service bay.

If Brad gets involved, the repairs will prove more complicated and more improvisatory. Brad rarely takes the wheel. He rolls the whole bike up the ramp into the service bay, mounts it in a stand, and powers the wheels forward by the cranks. A brake rubs against a rim. A rusted chain protests over stiff joints. Brad hears the problems. Without words, he starts solving them, aiming to put the bike back on the road within the hour. Only the truly ailing bikes spend the night in the shop.

My bikes take the treatment every couple of weeks. I wheel up one of our family's bikes to Josh. Once Brad gets interested, I borrow one of his stands and work on a bike until I reach my limits. Then Josh tries. Brad checks our work, never allowing an error to stand. The visit usually turns into an afternoon. Instead of replacing a single cable, we realign the rear derailleur hanger, true the wheels, and wax the chain. Brad teaches new skills freely, never lecturing, never chiding, like a generous teacher.

The other Josh got the Brad treatment last month, nine months after I prescribed a trip to the True Value. Josh is a young doctor, an intern physician who relocated half-way across the country to train in my own specialty. We met on the first day of his orientation. Dr. Josh told me he liked bicycles but had not been riding because his Surly whined when he shifted gears. I gave him directions to the other Josh. He said he would visit the True Value.

A few months later, we worked together in the hospital. In between seeing patients, I

asked after his ride. Dr. Josh said his bike was still laid-up because he was too busy to take it to Josh.

The first year of residency is too busy. Graduating medical students often relocate across the country, then move every month between different clinical services, even different hospitals. In each setting, they can work up to eighty hours a week caring for dozens of patients suffering from any of hundreds of illnesses. The year changes a young physician as they become the kind of person who asks personal questions, conducts probing examinations, and performs invasive procedures.

Attending physicians like me supervise interns, correcting their questions, examinations, and procedures. *Start the conversation slowly instead of abruptly. Order this test instead of the one a computer suggested.* As we do so, supervising physicians orient a resident physician to the rules and cultures of the hospital: when to wake and sleep, eat and fast, work and study.

Many intern physicians find the work more deforming than formative, experiencing their extended hours in the hospital as ceaseless chores rather than constructive clinical encounters. Resident physicians report high rates of an alphabet's worth of problems beginning with anxiety, burnout, cynicism, and depression.

The name of the hospital for many interns is *factory*.

The name of the hospital used to be *generosity*. The public hospital began life as a guesthouse for all the ill, developed in the fourth century by Basil of Caesarea. Basil built his hospital, along with a hospice and poorhouse, on the outskirts of town to welcome travelers. In his lifetime, the healing complex was called the Basileiad.

At his funeral, the Basileiad was hailed as a "new city," the very place "where disease is regarded in a religious light, and disaster

Many intern physicians find the work more deforming than formative, experiencing their extended hours in the hospital as ceaseless chores rather than constructive clinical encounters. Resident physicians report high rates of an alphabet's worth of problems beginning with anxiety, burnout, cynicism, and depression.

is thought a blessing, and sympathy is put to the test."

Psychiatrists, like me and Dr. Josh, put our sympathy to test at a contemporary Basileiad, a safety-net hospital. Within our hospital, three units are dedicated to the care of persons with mental illness, an implicit continuation of another pioneer of generosity. In the 14th century, Joan-Gilabert Jofré, a Spanish priest, founded the first psychiatric hospital in western society. The Hospital of the Innocents sheltered people with serious mental illness because then, as now, they were often marginalized from society.

The shape of the public hospital, from Basil to Jofré and beyond, embodied a community's desire to share its gifts with the indigent ill without obligation. The services of the public hospital were largely free, not offerings in expectation that acclaim or wealth would accrue to its giver. The practitioner in the public hospital learned the right way to give their skill away. In Aristotle's formulation, when you give too much away, you are wasteful. Give too little away, and you are covetous. Give the right amount away, and you are generous.

The services in today's hospitals are often more technically advanced than those offered by Basil and Jofré, but often simultaneously wasteful and covetous. It is our problem: some hospitals are still animated by generosity, but many others

charge the highest prices the market will bear. They offer services which are the most remunerative. They sue patients who cannot pay their bills. They limit their community benefit. The result is a country which spends, per capita, twice as much on health care as other high-income countries but has the lowest life expectancy. A covetous system where one in every four dollars Americans spend on healthcare is wasted.

To practice medicine in today's hospitals, a physician must find the mean of generosity, and pass it along to the next generation as we await a time when generosity will once again animate our hospitals, as it did in the hospitals founded by Basil and Jofré.

Today's hospitals are often unfavorably compared to repair shops: physicians are paid to do things to you, to upsell you on an invasive treatment, and to treat you as a body to be fixed. Plenty of bike shops also miss the mean of generosity, preferring to upsell you to a new bicycle instead of repairing your current ride or encouraging you to throw away an older bicycle. Like bad physicians, those kinds of shops engage each bicycle as a machine whose every repair must be measured against the possibility of the trash bin out back. The good bike shops attend to the people who bring their bikes.

The best bicycle shops remind us what a teaching hospital can be. Brad and Josh are better at transmitting Basil and Jofré's virtues than many teaching physicians. In their company, a bicycle repair can be watched, understood, and taught. An education can be given away. If you walk up the stairs.

Dr. Josh finally came to the True Value last Saturday. He came, dressed for a sunny-day ride, in short sleeves and cut-offs. On his left, was a young woman, dressed just as casually. On his right, he wheeled a cob-webbed Surly up the ramp. When Josh met them, Dr. Josh asked for help swapping out his tires. Josh began his inspection. Dr. Josh inquired about how much it would cost to have his shifting fixed as well. At the latter request, Josh sent them over to Brad in the service bay.

I saw them from behind the first stand. I was working on a frame that a sunny-day cyclist had brought in with a flat tire. When Josh told them the cost for fixing the tire, they asked to throw the entire bike away. The frame was a quarter-century old, but handmade out of titanium, so no worse for the passage of time. Brad could not bear to trash the frame, so he acetoned the logos off. I sanded its surface down to the bare metal. Together, we chased its threads, installed a new bottom bracket

and headset, and prepared it for another quarter-century of riding.

Dr. Josh saw me cabling the brakes.

"Dr. Nussbaum? You're here?"

We looked at each other, neither of us in our hospital uniforms. I was in a ballcap, faded blue shorts, color-checked shirt. A look my daughters tells me makes me look more Calico Critter than teaching physician.

I mounted Dr. Josh's Surly in a stand. I invited Dr. Josh to watch Brad's examination.

While Dr. Josh explained the shifting problems to Brad, his wife Hannah asked about the wheels. She wanted to set up new tires filled with sealant instead of inner tubes. She worried it would be too complex. I asked if I could pass along some tricks I learned from Brad and Josh.

Hannah nodded. We spent fifteen minutes taking off the old tires, cleaning the rim tape, mounting the new tires and filling them with sealant while Dr. Josh got the Brad experience. A definitive diagnosis. Three possible treatments, each affordable. Dr. Josh's face brightened; his shoulders relaxed. With Brad's counsel, he understood what he could do about his bicycle's problems.

As he mulled over the solutions, Josh interrupted. His grandmother and her friend were visiting the shop to say hello. We fist-bumped to avoid greasy handshakes. In exchange, we got stories of Josh's childhood. We heard how Brad hired Josh for his first job, was teaching him ever more-complicated repairs, and how he swore off Coca-Cola after Brad showed him how soda could strip rust from old parts. Then the older women talked about the public hospital where Dr. Josh and I work. They reminisced about receiving good care at a fair price, but lamented the costs were never posted as clearly as the sign above Brad's service bay.

After they left, Dr. Josh pulled me aside.

"I see why you come. You learn. You fix things. People thank you. Why can't the hospital be like this?"

We commiserated about how hospital teaching was typically the dispatch of efficiency instead of the communication of love for our craft. He asked if we could meet outside the hospital some time and chat about how the hospital could be more like the True Value. I agreed.

The problem Dr. Josh and I could fix at the True Value was the repair of his bicycle. The problem we began to fix that day is why it was easier for me to have a

teaching relationship with Dr. Josh in a bicycle shop than a teaching hospital.

In the hospital, I have long shared a quote with trainees. In a letter, Simone Weil wrote that attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity. I tell young physicians that this is especially true in my specialty. In psychiatry, we have no cures. This can be a curse since we cannot lift illness entirely off someone. This can be an opportunity because we can always attend to each other generously.

These days, I tell every young doctor to visit the True Value. Get an education in generosity like I did. Chat with Josh and Brad too. Accept their invitation back to the service bay.

Perhaps they will find, as I did, that invitations to the bay became offers of bicycles discarded by sunny-day riders. You can take a discarded a bicycle, a perfect little machine, and get it rolling again. Once I asked Brad if he ever thought to sell those discarded bikes. He shook his head, muttered something about how he could not charge for what he had received for free because it was a step towards becoming a chop shop. Then he returned to his stand, to another bicycle, and to generously teaching me and every Josh who walked up the stairs. M&V

In a letter, Simone Weil wrote that attention is the rarest and purest form of generosity. I tell young physicians that this is especially true in my specialty. In psychiatry, we have no cures. This can be a curse since we cannot lift illness entirely off someone. This can be an opportunity because we can always attend to each other generously.

Abraham Nussbaum, MD, is a physician, writer, and cyclist in Denver, Colorado. His most recent book, *Progress Notes: One Year in the Future of Medicine*, was published with Johns Hopkins University Press in the summer of 2024.

SNEHA MANTRI

Generous Medicine

It's just after five at the end of a busy clinic day; I'm finishing my clinic notes and mentally preparing for the "Resistance and Social Justice" seminar I'll be teaching in an hour to a group of interprofessional students. And then comes a knock on my door. A patient has arrived for their follow-up appointment on the wrong day. They've driven for hours, across state lines, to get here. They just need a prescription renewal. Can I just see them quickly before I leave? It's not an uncommon scenario, especially in a subspecialty practice like mine. Some would advocate setting boundaries to avoid burnout—it's after hours, there's no appointment in the computer system, the "10-min prescription renewal" is likely to turn into a full 30-minute visit and then I'll be late to my seminar.

ARTWORK BY H.M. SAFFER, II

Professional boundaries are important, of course, but a strict boundaries approach fails to recognize the persistent moral injury that comes from turning away a person in need, from failing to be generous with my time and expertise.

A parable from the epic *Mahabharat* illustrates the way generosity—giving without any expectation of return—has the power to be transformative for both the giver and the receiver. Fishing for a compliment, the warrior prince Arjun asks Krishna, a mortal representation of the god Vishnu, whether Arjun or his rival Karna is the more generous man. In answer, Krishna tells them each to distribute a huge vault of gold among the villagers. Arjun calls the villagers to come forward with containers, and for an entire day, he shovels gold into their baskets and buckets. Exhausted by the effort, Arjun goes to sleep feeling proud of himself for having accomplished the task and enriched the village. The next morning, however, he awakens to find the vault (being magical) has doubled in size. What's more, word has gotten out, and the villagers are back for yet more gold. Between the limitless vault and the limitless need, the distribution of resources will consume all of Arjun's time and energy.

By contrast, Karna looks at the vault, looks at the line of villagers, and simply says, "This gold is yours. Take as you see fit." Unlike Arjun, Karna sees the vault of gold not as a symbol of his own largesse, but rather as something that belongs to the people, and thus the distribution of wealth belongs not with the ruling class but with the people themselves. Where does this response come from? One possibility is that Karna is himself *of the people*, albeit in a roundabout way. He was abandoned at birth by his unwed mother and adopted by a charioteer, an act of generosity that both shapes the young warrior's character and subjects him to class-based ridicule at the hands of the nobly born Arjun. The irony, if I may issue a spoiler for a 3000-year-old story, is that Karna is actually Arjun's older half-brother; when Karna learns this fact, he refuses to claim his birthright at the head of the Pandava clan, saying that his adoptive parents are his true parents because they loved him when he was at his most vulnerable.

The parallels between this tale and modern healthcare practice are illuminating. As a neurologist specializing in Parkinson's disease (PD), I know that there are far more people with PD than I or my colleagues can possibly hope to treat. Nearly one million people are living with PD in North America, with only around 700 movement disorders physicians trained to treat them. Like Arjun, we take each patient individually, dispensing knowledge and medication, and yet we know that there will always be more patients to treat. In fact, only a small fraction of people with PD receive care from a movement disorders specialist, and predictably, those with fewer resources, or who live in rural communities or in underserved urban areas, are far less likely to access high-quality care and far *more* likely to develop serious complications of the disease.

What's needed is a Karna approach to healthcare. Rather than addressing problems piecemeal, we need to restructure the way we think about health and disease. Empowering people with PD—or any chronic illness—to define research and funding priorities will be critical to stemming the rising tide of PD in the coming decades. Better education for all healthcare workers about the needs of people with PD, combined with better interprofessional collaboration, will help expand workforce capacity. And community partnerships—with senior centers, with retirement communities, with barbershops and nail salons—will bring care to the spaces where it's most needed. Take my wrong-day patient, for instance. Empowering a pharmacist to issue a short-term refill of a chronic medication, empowering patients to advocate for cross-state telehealth benefits, empowering community centers to create or join group visits—any of these would have prevented a long car trip for the patient and a difficult end-of-day decision for me.

Rather than addressing problems piecemeal, we need to restructure the way we think about health and disease.

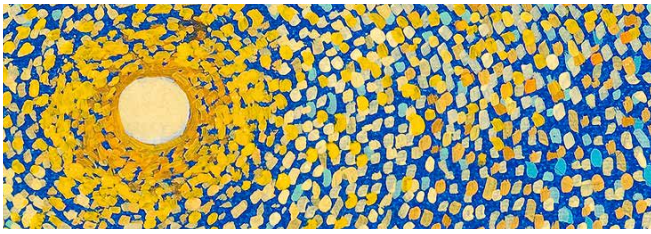
In the last several years, we have made some headway on generosity in medical care. The 2024 National Plan to End Parkinson's Disease, a bipartisan, bicameral Act of Congress, directs the Department of Health and Human Services (HHS) to allocate resources specifically toward PD prevention and treatment. In particular, the Act instructs HHS to create a federal advisory council comprising not only PD researchers and clinicians, but also people living with PD and their care partners. This recognition of the importance of lived experience as a form of expertise has tremendous impact in terms of setting research and funding priorities in the coming decade. As an example, the 2011 National Alzheimer's Project Act (NAPA), on which the National Plan to End Parkinson's Disease was modeled, incorporates

patients and care partners into the federal advisory council. NAPA has allocated almost $3 billion in federal funding toward Alzheimer's research, prevention, and treatment, leading to far better integration of basic science (genetics, biomarkers, disease mechanisms) into pragmatic outcomes (quality of life, caregiver burden, disease complications). This generosity—not just funding but also the millions of patients and families volunteering for clinical trials—has fueled breakthrough treatments for Alzheimer's. I dream of similar success for the National Plan to End Parkinson's Disease.

Another form of generosity requires us to rethink care delivery models. Interprofessional education and collaboration (IPEC) have become far more common in healthcare settings than even a decade ago. In my own work as Medical Director of the Parkinson's Foundation Center of Excellence at Duke, I am fortunate to lead a team of highly skilled and passionate clinicians, ranging from physicians and nurses to rehabilitation therapists to social workers and chaplains. We call ourselves THRIVE-PD: Transforming Health and Resilience through Interdisciplinary Visits and Engagement. By coming together once a week to see patients in an interdisciplinary "round robin" clinic, the THRIVE team provides better care than we could individually. I require each learner working with me to follow one patient through the THRIVE-PD clinic; more often than not, it's the first time they've been able to witness a physical therapy balance test, or a clinical speech/swallow evaluation, or a social work needs assessment. In recognition of the importance of collaborative practice, educational accrediting bodies have begun to include IPEC competencies into assessment of learners and institutions. My own institution runs IPEC sessions focused on inpatient and emergency department care; my mission is to bring an IPEC lens into outpatient care for people with complex conditions like PD.

The area where I hope we grow in the coming decade is community-based care. The traditional model of care requires

Academic medicine needs to become *generous* with our time and resources, if we are truly to make a difference for the community we profess to serve.



patients to travel *to* the clinic or medical center. For people with mobility or cognitive challenges, this can be a Herculean ordeal by itself; for people who have been devalued by healthcare (e.g. those living on the margins of society or who belong to racial, ethnic, or gender minority groups), the ask is impossible. Better academic-community partnerships can bring health promotion clinics to spaces where people already gather. Blood pressure screenings at ballgames, awareness events at gyms and malls—these are only the tip of the iceberg of what could be a truly community-integrated model of care. Imagine the benefits of receiving primary preventative care as part of a substance use recovery program, or a stroke prevention roadshow that travels to churches and county fairs. In other words, academic medicine needs to become *generous* with our time and resources, if we are truly to make a difference for the community we profess to serve.

The Karna approach may prove critical for the system, but it can also be an especially powerful way to promote the flourishing of individual doctors. In my own career, I've had several moments when generosity has transformed the entire shape of my story. During my masters' program in narrative medicine, I was mentored by Dr. Rita Charon, who continues to be a sponsor and friend over a decade later. When I interviewed at Duke for a movement disorders faculty position and proposed the creation of a narrative medicine program, the chair of neurology Dr. Richard O'Brien agreed without hesitation, saying "If this is what drives you, we will make it happen"—and backed that promise with protected time until I could obtain external and internal funding for what has become the Armstrong Humanities Scholars Program, a four-year longitudinal track for medical students interested in health humanities as a force for social justice and structural change in healthcare.

Most remarkable of all, a few months ago I was selected by the Josiah Macy Jr. Foundation as one of five Faculty Scholars in the 2024 cohort. The recognition and funding that accompanies the Faculty Scholars Program will allow me to refocus my time and effort for the next two years on expanding the Armstrong Humanities Scholars Program to interprofessional programs across the health system campus. But more than that, the generosity of the Macy Foundation, and Duke's Purpose Project before it, has been transformative at a time when I wasn't sure my values had a place in the modern academic medical center, which can feel increasingly corporatized and sterile. At the Kickoff and Annual Meeting this June, I was astounded and heartened to be in a room with physicians and nurses doing innovative work around moral formation and structural change in health professions education. I

was inspired by the work of the cohorts that came before me and excited to see how my own cohort will develop and grow alongside each other in the next two years.

I was astounded and heartened to be in a room with physicians and nurses doing innovative work around moral formation and structural change in health professions education.

The Macy Faculty Scholars Program will also round out my second decade in academic medicine, as I've grown from student to resident and fellow, and now faculty. The world is superficially different than it was in 2007 when I set foot in Columbia University's College of Physicians and Surgeons, but the fundamental values of healthcare—to take care of persons and populations—haven't changed. When people feel valued not just for their efficiency and productivity, but for their unique contribution and connection with others, they regain the capacity to be generous. And generosity need not be only financial. Generosity can be verbal—specific compliments or public praise that uplifts another person. Generosity can be creative—home-baked goods or handmade objects are universally popular. Generosity can be attentional—being fully present with another human being.

As I approach that 20-year anniversary, I hope to see more generosity across our campus and clinics. Generosity towards our patients, who need a different sort of care than our traditional fee-for-service model can provide. Generosity towards our learners, through whose wide-eyed wonder we can learn to see anew. Generosity towards our colleagues, who provide more care to our patients and each other than gets documented or billed. And lastly, generosity towards ourselves, as we work together to reimagine what healthcare should look like in the next quarter-century and beyond. V&V

Sneha Mantri, MD, MS, is an associate professor of neurology and a movement disorders specialist at Duke University School of Medicine, with a clinical practice focused on the care of people with Parkinson disease (PWP) and other movement disorders. In 2020, Dr. Mantri was appointed Director of Medical Humanities at the Trent Center for Bioethics, Humanities, and History of Medicine, leading a team of clinician scholars in understanding moral injury and structural inequities in medicine.

CHRISTOPHER WONG MICHAELSON

The *Generosity* of Work Worth Loving

DO WHAT YOU LOVE?

Contrary to what a Google search may tell you, Confucius probably never said, "Do what you love, and you'll never work a day in your life." Rather, the Confucian work values that my Chinese grandfather passed down to his descendants might be more accurately summarized in the statement, "Do work that's worth loving every day of your life."

To be fair, Confucius probably never said that, either. However, it stands up to scrutiny in a way that the contemporary preoccupation with loving your work does not. Getting paid for your passion is often easier said than done, especially in archetypal calling-driven professions like healthcare and the performing arts. Even if you are fortunate enough to find a paid position, doing what you love for money has the potential to make it feel like work, cheapening the experience of doing it for its own sake. Those who work for love are susceptible to self-exploitation in the form of overwork as well as

ARTWORK BY VLADO VESSELINOV

exploitation by employers who feel justified underpaying them. Moreover, if everyone worked at what they wished to, who would clean the toilets, sweep the streets, and do other work that may be unpleasant yet essential to societal functioning?

Over the course of his working life, my grandfather experienced great success and abject failure at work without ever having the luxury to choose work he loved. In our new book, *Is Your Work Worth It? How to Think About Meaningful Work*,[1] my coauthor Jennifer Tosti-Kharas and I open chapter one with his story, which began when he was born to subsistence farmers in the Chinese countryside. He left home as an adolescent to go to school and worked to pay for room and board as a newspaper calligrapher, one of the traditional scholar's three perfections that he would continue to practice into adulthood. From school, the surest path to social mobility for a peasant was to join the military, where he rose to the rank of general in the Chinese Nationalist Army. Just as he was approaching the pinnacle of his professional success, he suffered a series of losses: his first two children, his first wife—and then, when the Nationalists were defeated by the Chinese Communist Army—his country, his social status, and his wealth. He started over in his adopted country of Brazil, supporting his second wife and eight surviving children as the co-owner of a laundry business. After he and his partner had a falling out, he went on to fail many more times as a businessman until his children took care of him in retirement.

His ostensibly Confucian philosophy of work was that the best work generously shared knowledge and skills to improve others' lives and the worst work was

self-aggrandizing and self-interested. When he proclaimed that government service and other helping professions were the most noble and business among the least, I suspect he was not only channeling his Confucian studies, but also his own experience. He successfully steered two of his sons toward medicine, where they not only looked after the health of their parents, but countless other patients as well. And he pragmatically disregarded Confucian gender norms to see three of his daughters (including my own mother) into education, where they would go on to teach, among other things, Mandarin to Americans, English to Brazilians, and painting to Taiwanese. His children who succeeded in business built lasting relationships with colleagues and customers, challenging his low opinion of business that may have been shaped by unscrupulous competition and economic desperation. Even in retirement, his work included calligraphy, the daily discipline of the martial art *taijiquan*, and advice to his descendants to do work worth loving whether or not they loved to do it every day.

THE GENEROSITY OF WORK

What makes work worth loving? And is it true that some work, such as the helping professions, is more generous? The original impetus for our book was research with my co-author on how work was depicted in memorials of 9/11 victims. Most scholarship that studies the meaning of work in our lives does so from the perspective of the worker[2]. One of the novel contributions of our 9/11 research was that we studied the meaning of work from the perspective of close relations—family members, friends, and co-workers whose accounts were then interpreted by journalists who wrote "Portraits of Grief" for the *New York Times*. Perhaps it is predictable that there were many stories that lovingly and hopefully depicted victims who died doing work they loved or died with co-workers with whom they loved to work. Moreover, it may not be surprising that a majority of the stories we studied suggested that work was not the most important domain of life for people who loved their evenings and weekends with family and friends. However, we also found that there were more reasons that victims' work may have been worth loving than that they loved their work.

Our research on 9/11 victims applied a work orientation typology originating in the sociological work of Robert Bellah and colleagues[3] and developed in organizational psychology by Amy Wrzesniewski and colleagues[4]. We found work as a "calling" was disproportionately represented in comparison to "jobs" (for material gain) and "careers" (for advancement up a hierarchy). First responders were often remembered

for their fidelity to a higher calling, as in the portrait of Dennis Mojica.[5] His fiancée said of firefighting, "It was his dream, it was his life, it was his first love . . . I admired him even more because he knew what he was here for in this life. He really knew." In contrast, we may stereotypically think of financiers as working for money rather than love, but that was not how Christopher Ciarfardini[6] was remembered. His brother described him as "one of those typical Wall Street guys who worked 18-hour days and loved it. . . . It wasn't just a job to him; it was his identity." Was this a sign that one lesson we can learn from the 9/11 tragedy, in which the vast majority of victims died working, is that we should do what we love at work? We think the answer is more complicated than that. Even among first responders and financiers who were remembered as loving their work, we saw some equivocation. Mr. Mojica's fiancée also remembers how he was "always trying to extend [his time off from work] one more hour, one more day," and Mr. Ciarfardini and his friends "began living out a game called 'Who Retires First?'"

Seeing work through the eyes of those who love us and who have a sense of the sacrifices we make for our work may open our own eyes to what makes our work worth loving—whether or not we love doing it every day. We found that what made victims' work worth loving from the perspective of their loved ones was rarely about their financial success and professional status and often about their generosity. For example, Margaret Conner,[7] the receptionist at bond trading firm Cantor Fitzgerald, did not rank high on the hierarchy in an office full of millionaires. However, she was the first face that most people would see upon arriving at work and, "For many young women at the office, she was a relationship therapist." This theme of generosity could be found in the portraits of many people who worked in modest positions to provide financial support for their families, including Inna Basina,[8] who fled religious persecution in Russia and worked nights while getting a degree in accounting. Her husband said, "Everything for America was for family and son, not because she liked accounting." The generosity among first responders to make the ultimate sacrifice to save others' lives is awe-inspiring, as are stories of civilians who gave everything for others. They included computer programmer Abe Zelmanowitz,[9] who refused to leave the side of his quadriplegic colleague and friend Edward Beyea as they waited in vain to be rescued.

Seeing work through the eyes of those who love us and who have a sense of the sacrifices we make for our work may open our own eyes to what makes our work worth loving—whether or not we love doing it every day.

The idea that work has the potential to be one of our most generous contributions to the world runs counter not only to the "do what you love" narrative that positions work as something we do primarily for ourselves; it also challenges the "never work a day in your life" narrative that suggests that we should avoid work if we can—and if we can't avoid it then it is something for which we need compensation. We found in research we conducted about victims of COVID-19,[10] using an approach similar to our 9/11 study, that caring for others can be a "labor of love," as in the story of Bibi Romeiza John,[11] a home health aide. Her job extended generosity toward others, but was not well-paid and sometimes demanded around-the-clock work. But such demanding work can take a toll. Lorna Breen,[12] a physician in a New York City hospital who also supervised other healthcare workers during the first wave of coronavirus infections, was

working harder than she ever had until she contracted the virus herself. She never fully recovered, taking her own life out of a sense of helplessness after returning to work so depleted of energy as the cases kept coming. As a society, we learned during the COVID pandemic that essential workers were often overworked and undervalued.

Stories such as Breen's urge us to ask why the helping professions that my grandfather put at the top of his Confucian hierarchy of work are too often closer to the bottom of the hierarchy of pay. On one hand, to give generously through our work can be its own reward, worth loving for its own sake. On the other hand, this work can be difficult and costly—as we saw with first responders and healthcare workers in our research. As a society, we ought to find ways to value generous work more generously in return.

VALUING THE GENEROSITY OF WORK

Sometimes I wonder what my grandfather would have thought about my work as a philosopher and writer about work. The last time I saw him we had dinner at his apartment when I was in a post-PhD, pre-professor period of my career, working as a New York City management consultant on a business trip to São Paulo—an assignment I sought specifically so that I could travel to Brazil. During those years before and after 9/11, I worked harder and made more money relative to my experience than I do now. Though I cannot say that I always loved it at the time, I can say with the benefit of hindsight that working in that time, place, and profession—with my grandfather's perspective on work always challenging me to reflect upon my work and that of others—made it possible for me to do what I love for work today.

One question it has led me to consider is which work of my grandfather's was worth loving the most? Was it the work he did in the first part of his working life to rise from poverty to a high position serving his country? Or was it his failures as a businessman to stave off bankruptcy long enough to raise eight children in a new country? Or was it the work he did after he retired from conventional working life as a grandfather, calligrapher, and source of Confucian wisdom? Perhaps work worth loving takes different shapes even in a single life. We might practice generosity through the helping professions or through working to support a family or by creating beauty through art. Ultimately, as we saw in our research, so it is in our lives—the greatest measure of our work might not be how we feel about it, but how those we love define it when they tell our story. V&V

NOTES

1. Christopher Wong Michaelson and Jennifer Tosti-Kharas, *Is Your Work Worth It? How to Think About Meaningful Work* (New York: Hachette/PublicAffairs, 2024).

2. Jennifer Tosti-Kharas and Christopher Michaelson, "To Mean is to be Perceived: Studying the Meaning of Work Through the Eyes of Others," *Academy of Management Perspectives* 35, no. 3 (2021): 503–516.

3. Robert N. Bellah, Richard Madsen, William M. Sullivan, Ann Swidler, and Steven M. Tipton, *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life* (New York: Harper & Row, 1985).

4. Amy Wrzesniewksi, Clark McCauley, Paul Rozin, and Barry Schwartz, "Jobs, Careers, and Callings: People's Relations to Their Work," *Journal of Research in Personality* 31, no. 1 (1997): 21–33.

5. Jan Hoffman, Julie V. Iovine, Tina Kelley, and N.R. Kleinfeld, "A Dream Accomplished," in "A Nation Challenged: Portraits of Grief: The Victims," *New York Times*, January 27, 2002, nytimes.com/2002/01/27/nyregion/nation-challenged-portraits-grief-victims-runner-snow-father-beach-firefighter.html.

6. Daniel J. Wakin, Elissa Gootman, Sara Rimer, and Andy Newman, "A Blind Love for His Job," in "A Nation Challenged: Portraits of Grief: The Victims," *New York Times*, December 18, 2001, nytimes.com/2001/12/18/nyregion/nation-challenged-portraits-grief-victims-joke-teller-with-repertory-raconteur.html.

7. Adam Clymer, Barnaby J. Feder, Jan Hoffman, and Dena Kleiman, "Sailing Toward Renewal," in "A Nation Challenged: Portraits of Grief: The Victims," *New York Times*, November 23, 2001, nytimes.com/2001/11/23/nyregion/nation-challenged-portraits-grief-victims-104th-floor-two-towers-boyfriend.html.

8. Glenn Collins, Steven Greenhouse, Tina Kelley, Jennifer 8. Lee, and Tamar Lewin, "A Second Life of Freedom," in "A Nation Challenged: Portraits of Grief: The Victims, *"New York Times*, November 13, 2001, nytimes.com/2001/11/13/nyregion/nation-challenged-portraits-grief-victims-pride-friend-s-daughter-trade-show.html.

9. Celeste Bohlen, Michael Brick, Robin Finn, Dena Kleiman, N.R. Kleinfeld, Terry Pristin, Sara Rimer, Dinitia Smith, and Debra West, "A Friend to the End," in "A Nation Challenged: Portraits of Grief: The Victims," *New York Times*, December 5, 2001, nytimes.com/2001/12/05/nyregion/nation-challenged-portraits-grief-victims-firefighter-artist-mother-who-never.html.

10. Christopher Wong Michaelson and Jennifer Tosti-Kharas, *The Meaning and Purpose of Work: An Interdisciplinary Framework for Considering What Work is For* (London: Routledge, 2025).

11. "Bibi Romeiza John, Home Health Aide in Queens, Dies at 48," in "Those We've Lost," *New York Times*, May 12, 2021, nytimes.com/2021/05/12/obituaries/romeiza-john-dead-coronavirus.html.

12. Corina Knoll, Ali Watkins, and Michael Rothfeld, "'I Couldn't Do Anything': The Virus and an E.R. Doctor's Suicide," *New York Times*, July 11, 2020, nytimes.com/2020/07/11/nyregion/lorna-breen-suicide-coronavirus.html.

Christopher Wong Michaelson the author of *Is Your Work Worth It? How to Think About Meaningful Work* (New York: Public Affairs, 2024) and *The Meaning and Purpose of Work* (London: Routledge, 2025), both with Jennifer Tosti-Kharas. Christopher is a philosopher with 25 years of experience advising business leaders pursuing meaning and providing work with a purpose. He is the Opus Distinguished Professor and Academic Director of the Melrose and The Toro Company Center for Principled Leadership at the University of St. Thomas and on the Business and Society faculty at NYU's Stern School of Business. Christopher lives in Minneapolis with his wife, three kids, and two dogs.

Good Reads

We asked our authors to recommend a book they had read over the past couple of years. Here is what they said:

Soil
The Story of a Black Mother's Garden

BY CAMILLE DUNGY

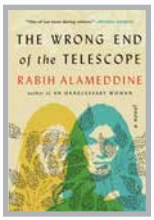
"My life demands a radically domestic ecological thought": so Camille Dungy writes in her new memoir, *Soil: The Story of a Black Mother's Garden*. Soil documents Dungy's attempt to convert her family's monocultured, water-craving lawn into a diverse landscape that mimics the ecology of the Colorado foothills, where Dungy lives. —JACK BELL

There's Always This Year
On Basketball and Ascension

BY HANIF ADBURRAQIB

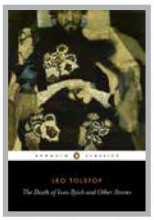
Never have I ever: texted old friends about a new book and had half of them reply that they were already reading it. Later that day, I received a copy in the afternoon mail of the same book, a piercing reflection on home and sport, that my best friend had mailed me a week earlier. For a certain kind of person, apparently all my high school friends, this is the book to find independently and read together. —ABRAHAM NUSSBAUM

The Wrong End of the Telescope



BY RABIH ALAMEDDINE

This book is an exploration of identity, community, and finding one's purpose, through the perspective of a Lebanese-American trans woman ophthalmologist volunteering at a Syrian refugee camp. By turns elegiac and satirical, *Telescope* challenges the reader to move past the overly simplistic narratives we create about "the Other " and come to an understanding of our shared humanity in times of crisis. —SNEHA MANTRI



The Death of Ivan Ilych

BY LEO TOLSTOY

Leo Tolstoy's *The Death of Ivan Ilych* is a study of death and dying that is arguably the most perfect story about life and living by the celebrated author of *War and Peace* and *Anna Karenina*. The tragicomic story of a working professional whose materialism and vanity are all too familiar, it invites us to consider what it means to live a life that is "most simple and most ordinary and therefore most terrible." —CHRISTOPHER WONG MICHAELSON

Wonderful Fool

BY SHUSAKU ENDO

Wonderful often doesn't go with Fool especially in the non-Christian "mudswamp" Japan. Here Endo presents both his struggle and conviction which could be ours as well. (We are probably more familiar with his first novel, *Silence*). —FR. MARTIN LAM NGUYEN, CSC

Alternative to Futility

BY ELTON TRUEBLOOD

In this brief but dense book, Trueblood casts a bold vision for the formation of a redemptive society, urging us to join in the bold and hope-filled quest to renew all things. It is a message we need as desperately today as when he originally wrote it in 1948.

—JOSHUA BRAKE

A Generous Way of Being

SOUNDBITES FROM PAST VIRTUES & VOCATIONS CONVENINGS

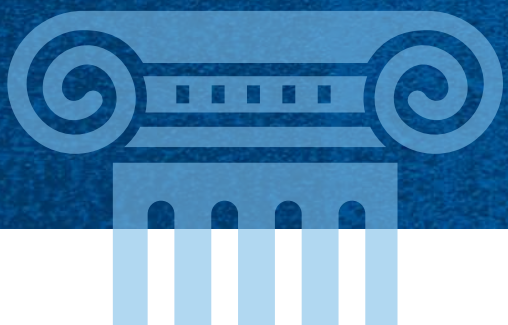
"Moral formation is about three basic things: helping people restrain their selfishness, helping people find a purpose in life—so they have something to shoot for, and teaching people how to treat each other with kindness and consideration."

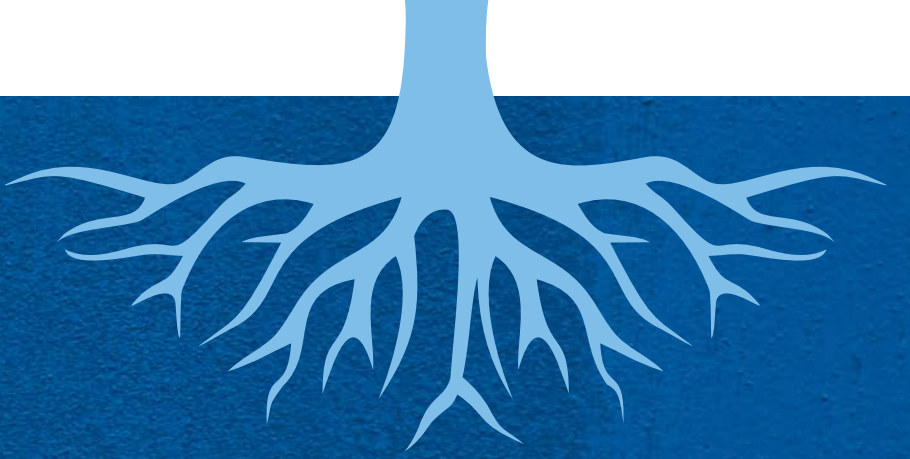
David Brooks
author & commentator

"I'm hopeful about the transcendence of the human spirit. There's a lot to be discouraged about these days. I understand that. I try to live free of the polls—the political polls that say this and that quite unreliably, I believe—and stay much closer to my experience of the folks I know well, what's going on in my own neighborhood, in my own community, where I see people doing life, giving things and contributing to life in all kinds of ways."

Parker Palmer
author & educator

Recordings of past convenings and information about future conversations—both virtual and in person—can be found at **virtuesvocations.org**.





"Everybody wants to think that it matters that they were here on this earth. So, what did they accomplish? What did they contribute? Who did they love?"

Clayton Spencer
former president of Bates College

"This is how I explain collective values to my child: Carbon atoms are the same in both graphite and diamonds and it is just the bonds between them that make them different. It's the bonds between us that determine our strength, whether we will fracture or whether we can withstand pressure. It's not us as individuals, we're all just individual atoms. It's only when we arrange ourselves in a way that protects each other that we can really shine."

Rana Awdish, MD
author & physician

"It's not hard to be good. It's not hard to do the right thing. And what we're talking about is not rocket science. It's sort of Christianity 101. It's helping the person in need. It's helping someone across the street. It's just acts of kindness, and when you do it enough you become conditioned to do it, it becomes character. And all of the sudden it's not small acts of kindness—though they persist, you never get away from that—but you're thinking of big change and scaled transformation."

John Silvanus Wilson
author & former president of Morehouse College

ROSS GAY

Sorrow Is Not My Name

—after Gwendolyn Brooks

No matter the pull toward brink. No
matter the florid, deep sleep awaits.
There is a time for everything. Look,
just this morning a vulture
nodded his red, grizzled head at me,
and I looked at him, admiring
the sickle of his beak.
Then the wind kicked up, and,
after arranging that good suit of feathers
he up and took off.
Just like that. And to boot,
there are, on this planet alone, something like two
million naturally occurring sweet things,
some with names so generous as to kick
the steel from my knees: agave, persimmon,
stick ball, the purple okra I bought for two bucks
at the market. Think of that. The long night,
the skeleton in the mirror, the man behind me
on the bus taking notes, yeah, yeah.
But look; my niece is running through a field
calling my name. My neighbor sings like an angel
and at the end of my block is a basketball court.
I remember. My color's green. I'm spring.

—for Walter Aikens

ARTWORK BY SIMONA VOJTĚŠKOVÁ

Art credits

COVER ARTIST: SAMUEL PROPHASK ASAMOAH prophask.com

FRONT/BACK COVER: **Harmony** ©2019, acrylic on canvas

PAGE 8: **New Hope** ©2017, acrylic on canvas

PAGE 58: **Repository of History** ©2018, acrylic on canvas

PAGE 74: **Living in Unity** ©2019, acrylic on canvas

Samuel Prophask Asamoah is a Ghanian artist who is passionate about colors. He works in diverse media with a cotton canvas as his preferred working surface. He also uses found objects such as plastics and newspapers to address environmental and sustainability issues. His works bear traces of Ghanaian cultural elements as well as elements from other cultures around the globe to advocate for intercultural unity. He says, "everything on earth is interconnected, and humans are part of that equation." He believes in justness, sincerity, authenticity, as well as dynamism, and tries to portray these elements, as well as the merger of cultures, in his art.

JIM APROBERTS jimaproberts.com | facebook.com/jimaprobertsart

PAGE 60: **Looking for Light** ©2020, acrylic on canvas

PAGE 68: **Sunlight** ©2023, acrylic on canvas

Jim apRoberts works as a visual artist on California's Central Coast. His paintings are colorful, thoughtful, emotive depictions of nature, atmospheric environments and more. He feels that the viewing experience is engaging when the paintings he creates are open ended and allow viewers to fill in meaning. Jim's paintings reflect his respect for nature, as well as his life experiences. Jim believes that "a painting has to have ideas brewing in it, just as a story needs a plot." He works with a variety of themes and often times paints in series, zigzagging back and forth from one series to another. He likes to say, "I know when a painting is complete, yet I rarely complete a series."

CHRISTI BELCOURT christibelcourt.ca

PAGE 31: **Reverence for Life** ©2016, acrylic on canvas

Christi Belcourt (*apihtâwikosisâniskwêw / mânitow sâkahikanihk*), based in Ontario, Canada, is a Metis visual artist, designer, community organizer, environmentalist, social justice advocate, and avid land-based arts and Indigenous-language learner. Like generations of Indigenous artists before her, she celebrates the beauty of natural world while exploring nature's symbolic properties. Her work can found in museums including the National Gallery of Canada, the Art Gallery of Ontario and the Minneapolis Institute of Art. She has received numerous awards, including being named Aboriginal Arts Laureate for 2014 by the Ontario Arts Council.

ANNA BLATMAN annablatman.com | artistlane.com.au/artist/anna-blatman

PAGE 77: **Belgrave** ©2016, acrylic on canvas

PAGE 80: **Loire Valley** ©2016, acrylic on canvas

PAGE 82: **Agapanthas** ©2016, acrylic on canvas

PAGE 84: **Valley** ©2016, acrylic on canvas

Anna Blatman, based in Victoria, Australia, says of her work: "Being in my garden inspires me, the panoply of beautiful Australian flora—and the light playing off them, this essense translates directly into the textural nature of my paintings—layering tone on tone, to resemble the grandeur of life."

JUNE EDMONDS juneedmonds.com

PAGE 86: **Monarch Over Indigo** ©2022, acrylic on canvas. *Courtesy Luis De Jesus Los Angeles.*

PAGE 92: **Beyond** ©2024, acrylic on canvas. *Collection of Gail and George Knox, La Jolla, CA. Courtesy of Luis De Jesus Los Angeles.*

Los Angeles artist June Edmonds' Energy Circle paintings draw on various cultural and art historical references to sacred geometries. The vesica piscis is a symbol formed by the intersection of two circles with the same radius and has been associated with creation and the passage from the spiritual world to the physical. Adinkra are symbols originating in West Africa (her family's roots are Ghanaian) that represent concepts or aphorisms. Adinkran concentric circles symbolize the "Greatest Power."

RICHARD FRIEND etsy.com/shop/richardfriend

PAGE 95: **Oscar's Tale** ©2022, acrylic on paper

PAGE 98: **St. Margaret's Bay, Kent** ©2021, acrylic on paper

Richard Friend, based in Sandwich, England, creates densely layered and delicate story-like paintings on paper using acrylic, ink, pastel and gouache. Influenced by the smugglers and scarecrows of his childhood, his paintings are a reflection on his preoccupation with the dark mystery of both the countryside and the seaside.

JENNIFER LOMMERS jenniferlommers.com | jennifer-lommers.pixels.com

PAGE 11: **Immersed in Summer** ©2019, acrylic on wood

PAGE 19: **Following My Roots** ©2019, acrylic on canvas

Born and raised in the Pacific Northwest, Jennifer began her love of the outdoors at a young age—camping and hiking every summer while bird watching and drawing and painting animals at every opportunity. After briefly following her love of animals (and science and math) into college, it was there she re-kindled her love of art and earned a BFA in painting. While she drifted away from art after graduation, she finally came back to painting and eventually decided to pursue an art career full-time in 2006. Jennifer now happily lives and works in Corvallis, Oregon.

MICHELLE LOUIS michellelouis.com

PAGE 49: **Just Listen** ©2021, acrylic on canvas

PAGE 52: **Sunjoy** ©2019, acrylic on canvas

PAGE 56: **Solstice Earth** ©2022, acrylic on canvas

Artist and naturalist Michelle Louis has paintings in private, corporate, and public collections worldwide. Trained in studio art, landscape architecture, and graphic design, she's a full-time artist near Madison, Wisconsin. Her studio extends to her yard, where she nurtures an edible landscape. About her work, she says, "I'm curious about how the land inspires awe, how we feel it deep in our bones, how to express that connection, and what we can learn from it. My process-focused work explores balance, connection, and pattern in the natural world."

CHRISTOPHER NOXON christophernoxonart.com

PAGE 4: **July Is Bursting** ©2023, acrylic on canvas

Christopher Noxon paints and writes in Ojai, California, and prefers verbs over nouns. Author-illustrator of *Good Trouble: Lessons from the Civil Rights Playbook,* he also illustrated Daniel Sokatch's *Can We Talk About Israel? A Guide for the Curious, Confused and Conflicted*. As a journalist, he has contributed to *The New Yorker, Details, The New York Times Magazine, Los Angeles Magazine,* and *Salon*. His paintings have been shown at Sullivan Goss gallery in Santa Barbara, the Santa Paula Art Museum, and Gallery 825 in Los Angeles.

H.M. SAFFER, II hmsaffer.com

PAGE 102: **Golden Boulevard II** ©2020, oil on canvas

PAGE 106: **Provence Poppies** ©2023, oil on canvas

H.M. Saffer, II has led an illustrious, multi-disciplinary artistic career. Highlights include: performing with Jacques Brel; owning restaurants in Paris and Ibiza; co-writing the hit song "Look What They Done To My Song, Ma," recorded by Ray Charles; painting a mural in Warner Brothers' Madison Ave. headquarters; and studying brush painting under Japanese masters. He currently lives and works in upstate New York.

TRACY VERDUGO tracyverdugo.com

PAGE 40: **Let All the Good Things Flow** ©2020, acrylic/collage/mixed media on paper

When Tracy is not hanging out with her family in a small village on the shores of Jervis Bay, Australia, or in her studio in their backyard, you may find her painting beside thermal pools on an Italian island with an eager group of students, or sitting in a circle on St. Pete Beach, Florida, listening intently as women share their stories of creative longing. She has held 18 solo exhibitions and her works are held in collections in Australia and internationally. She offers courses on her website and runs creative workshops for artists of all levels.

VLADO VESSELINOV facebook.com/popartgallery | zatista.com/artist/vlado-vesselinov

PAGE 111: **City Windows** ©2022, oil on canvas

PAGE 112: **Cargo Traffic** ©2021, acrylic and oil on canvas

PAGE 114: **Shipping (Rescue Operation)** ©2021, acrylic and oil on canvas

Vlado Vesselinov is a Bulgarian painter who has been influenced by a personal love of comics and a later interest in the Pop Art movement. Having developed his own authorial and unique drawing technique, Vesselinov uses what he sees as "too much" paint, an approach that allows for rich physical relief and texture within his works. His paintings are imbued with color and spirit in an attempt to bring a sense of humanity and optimism into our grey, messy, material world.

SIMONA VOJTĚŠKOVÁ simonavojteskova.cz

PAGE 123: **Make Me Happy** ©2023, acrylic on canvas

PAGE 128: **Serendipity** ©2023, acrylic on canvas

Simona works out of her studio in Velké Pavlovice, South Moravia, Czech Republic. Her paintings combine art brut, abstract expressionism and naive art. Together with her husband, she also creates minimalist concrete wall art under the Litone brand, available at litone.cz.

CHARLOTTE WENSLEY charlottewensley.com.au

PAGE 22: **The Village Fete** ©2023, mixed media on paper

Charlotte Wensley is based in Queensland, Australia. Her abstract paintings unfold through curiosity, inquiry and a liminal approach to mixed media work. Collage, printmaking, painting and drawing are integral parts of her working process, and each painting is a unique fusion of different materials and techniques. She balances the accidental and the unexpected with decision-making and response, drawing on her knowledge and understanding of shape, color and technique to resolve each piece.

ARTWORK BY SIMONA VOJTĚŠKOVÁ


CENTER FOR
SOCIAL
CONCERNS