
CONVERSATION 4

Creating a Culture of Gift

Frederick Turner

WITH COMMENTS BY

Herbert London

Richard P. Gabriel

Tyler Cowen

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CONTRIBUTORS

FREDERICK TURNER is the Founders Professor of Arts and Humanities at the University of Texas at Dallas. He is the author of sixteen books of poetry, criticism, and fiction, including *The New World: An Epic Poem*; *Rebirth of Value*; *Meditations on Beauty, Ecology, Religion and Education*; and *Tempest, Flute and Oz: Essays on the Future*.

HERBERT LONDON is president of Hudson Institute and John M. Olin Professor of Humanities at New York University. He is author of the recently published book *Decade of Denial* (Lexington Books).

RICHARD P. GABRIEL received a PhD in Computer Science from Stanford University in 1981, and an MFA in Poetry from Warren Wilson College in 1998. He has been a researcher at Stanford University, company president and Chief Technical Officer at Lucid, Inc., vice president of Development at ParcPlace-Digitalk, a management consultant for several startups and Sun Microsystems, and Consulting Professor of Computer Science at Stanford University. He currently is a Distinguished Engineer and principal investigator of a small research group at Sun Laboratories, researching the architecture, design, and implementation of extraordinarily large, self-sustaining systems as well as development techniques for building them. He is Sun's open source expert, advising the company on community-based strategies. He is also President of the Hillside Group, a nonprofit that nurtures the software patterns community by holding conferences, publishing books, and awarding scholarships.

TYLER COWEN is Holbert C. Harris Professor of Economics at George Mason University and General Director of the Mercatus Center. He writes daily for www.marginalrevolution.com and can be reached at tcowen@gmu.edu. He is currently writing a book on American arts policy.

CREATING A CULTURE OF GIFT

Frederick Turner

The Cultural Challenge of Philanthropy

In an important sense, human beings exist as actors in a drama or characters in a story. That play or story is generated in part by the cultural leaders and founders of their society, and in part by their own and others' constructions of their actions and motives in the context of the existing social scenario or in protest against it. As Shakespeare put it so much more simply and eloquently, "All the world's a stage,/ And all the men and women merely players."

We learn how to be good members of a lawful polity by means of detective stories, police dramas, and courtroom fiction, among other things. As members of a nation, we are shown the path of duty by war epics, heroic statuary, martial music, and the like. As property owners, businesspeople, and participants in markets, we are offered rather less inspiring models these days, because of the fading yet still charismatic afterglow of socialist idealism, with its distaste for the top-hatted rich. But the world of commerce still gives us uplifting dramas of imaginative and creative managers, successful artists, clever experts, canny buyers of antiques, technological entrepreneurs, and the like; and commercial advertising places us in imagined worlds of glamour, excitement, or prosperous serenity. As members of a natural ecological community we now have available a range of roles and models—the environmental crusader, the wise and frugal householder, the scientifically informed backpacker, the wise and gentle aborigine—and a grand tradition of nature poetry, landscape painting, and landscape architecture. As human souls we are offered the splendor and richness of the world's great religions in myth, ritual, hagiography, parable, mystical poetry, and sacred art and music.

Yet philanthropy seems to lack a representative cultural voice in the arts today. In the past, great donors might be depicted together with the Savior and his mother and the saints in altarpieces, and they would be credited explicitly in statuary, inscriptions, and the like. Charity galas and honorary

degrees still celebrate munificent givers in a modest sort of way. But the cultural range and drama of the life of charitable giving has always been narrow in comparison with that of martial heroism, law enforcement, sainthood, environmental virtue, and even industrial entrepreneurship; and today there is very little in the public culture that might lay out for a donor a narrative or pilgrimage or theatrical revelation or grand myth to guide his endeavors or reward her generosity. As for why this is so, I suspect some combination of the resentful economic envy that also limits the range of both highbrow and populist celebrations of business energy, with the unease we feel about being morally in debt to others, the discomfort at being victims of the potlatch. (Potlatch is the practice in many traditional societies in which the rich and powerful “big men,” by means of lavish and wasteful gift-giving ceremonies, confirm and extend their influence, morally dominate their less wealthy neighbors, and compete with other big men.) Even if the generosity of the rich has no intent to oppress and dominate, the temper of our times discourages us from humble thanks: one legacy of the socialist enthusiasm of the last 150 years, and its concomitant sense of entitlement, has been the near-elimination in intellectual circles of gratitude as a major virtue, and with it any motivation for celebrating the benefactor.

But to celebrate and guide the charitable sector we must first understand what it is, what it isn't, how it stands in relation to other aspects of the world we live in, and how it interacts with the various systems of government, marketplace, natural environment, and religion by which it is surrounded. This paper will first identify the critical juncture in philanthropy at which we presently find ourselves, drawing historical parallels to illustrate the dangers and opportunities that will be offered to us in the next few years. The paper will locate philanthropy in a typology of economies and draw conclusions about the need for balance among them and the special mandate of the philanthropic or voluntary gift economy. And it will suggest ways in which the artistic and literary culture can begin to celebrate and offer guidance to the philanthropic enterprise.

The Historical Moment

Estimates of the amount of wealth that will be inherited or given away in trusts and the like in the next few years range from 10 to 20 trillion dollars, riches that will be provided as gifts, riches not earned, not acquired by conquest, nor legislatively appropriated. The amount over the next 55 years is estimated to be between 41 and 136 trillion dollars. This is an almost inconceivable sum—around 17 thousand dollars for every man, woman, and child on the planet—and it will surely alter the world's economy profoundly, loosening the tie between effortful production and personal wealth that has been so important a feature of free-market capitalism.

Other periods of history testify to the benefits and also the great dangers of such large wealth transfers. In the last years of the Roman republic, for example, gigantic untaxed fortunes, gifts, and bequests to the Roman people and its army by the great magnates—such as Sulla, Marius, Lucullus, Pompey, Julius Caesar, Octavius, and Antony—were a crucial instrument of policy. The publication of a will before or after the donor's death could and often did alter the course of world history. The result was enormous wars, a flowering of cultural production, and an epochal change from republic to empire.

The Black Death in Europe, combined with a ripening of technological development and a warming of the climate, created another huge wealth transfer, ushering in the Renaissance, the Reformation, and more large-scale wars. More modestly, but perhaps in the long run just as momentously, the vast generational wealth transfers that occurred in Europe through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries provided almost every novel, opera, and drama of the period with the mainspring of its plot—the will or entail that frustrates or liberates the lovers. The accumulated capital of the Industrial Revolution fell into the hands of a section of society that had tired of the process of money-making, while being kept from the aspiring classes that would have been happy to put it to use. This wealth transfer was widely resented, to such an extent that the revolutions of the time were largely revolutions against the power of inheritance and the will of the bequeathers, and the result was the capture of most of that huge wealth by the nation-state through confiscatory inheritance taxes. Once it came under the control of the most ambitious, ruthless, or popular politicians, that vast pool of resources was then available to wage war—and was of course so used, with apocalyptic results. But much of that wealth also found its way into scientific and

technological investment, which, in combination with the low birthrate in the developed countries, has given us the gigantic windfall we now anticipate.

We might learn from history some valuable lessons about the risks of large wealth transfers. From the Romans we might find that giving it to the mob as bread and circuses results in civil strife, despotism, and decline. The Renaissance shows us that such transfers can corrupt religion and lead to savage religious wars. From the early modern period we discover that class resentment and the confiscation of gifts and bequests can have the paradoxical effect of empowering coercive government, which may decide that instead of improving the economic health of the people, it prefers to embark on industrialized slaughter and environmental destruction. Yet all three periods I have cited were also moments of grand human achievement and the birthplaces of major benefits for the human race. Wealth can disrupt in poorly understood ways the delicate balances in our political, religious, environmental, and spiritual systems; or it can be spread around so as to help all the parts of a society to flourish.

Economic Orders

Hence it is of crucial importance that we understand the various kinds of economic order we inhabit and that we discover the proper place of the gift economy, as I shall call it, among them. I shall use the term economy in its old, broad sense of “oeconomy,” a spelling that draws attention to its etymological connection to the Greek *oikos*, or household. An economy is a rule of house management, “house rules.” I distinguish five main economies in which we are involved as human beings (see table on pages 32 and 33): the political economy, the market economy, the gift economy, the environmental economy (usually called the ecology or ecosystem), and the divine economy or providential order. We shall focus upon the gift economy, but it is necessary to look briefly at the others in order to provide a proper context for it.

To this classification into five forms of economy it might be objected that the divine economy has been artificially separated from the gift economy. Philanthropy is regularly taken to include religious giving, and religious ethics in our society makes much of gift-giving. Indeed, in Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism, and Buddhism almsgiving is a very important feature. But alms in each of these religions evolved out of an earlier kind of economic

exchange, that of sacrifice. The only valid way we could communicate with the divine would be through sacrifice—ideally of one’s own life or that of one’s firstborn. These, after all, were our main debts to God or the gods. But the divine takes pity on us and commutes our debt to milder forms—animal sacrifice, circumcision, candle-burning, bread and wine, or the like; and then it further commutes those debts to internal self-discipline, service to others, and alms. In religion, alms are a means to a higher end—though in recent Christian theology the means themselves are elevated by the incarnation of Christ and the doctrine of the mystical body into an annex of the end. But the religious norm is that we are to give to others as a substitute for giving (back) to God. Many religions around the world do not greatly feature almsgiving, and they see the gift relationship as more between the Divine and ourselves than between ourselves and each other.

Thus religious gift-giving and service have a different source and spirit from the secular gift-giving of aristocratic largesse, artistic patronage, potlatch, Christmas presents, bequests, etc. It is not a way of winning solidarity, posterity and friendship, but a medium of communication with God. Modern secular donors give as a way of enlightening and educating themselves, of extending their goodwill beyond the personal sphere, of developing and expressing their own character, as a sort of work of art—as an expansion of the self into higher, less-selfish realms—rather than as an abnegation of self before the supreme generosity of God’s grace. Consequently, the benefits and dangers of such forms of giving are somewhat different.

Free and Coercive Economies

A cross-cutting distinction is also of great importance if we are to appreciate fully the appropriate contribution and possible danger of the gift economy. This is the distinction between imposed, forced, atomistic, one-way, bottom-up, deterministic forms of order, and emergent, self-organizing, global, systemic, top-down, free kinds of order. I am aware that many will find my use of the terms “top-down” and “bottom-up” counterintuitive here. If we put it in political terms, the point will become clear. Authoritarian or totalitarian regimes are thought to govern “top-down,” while democratic, free-market systems are described as working from the “grassroots,” bottom-up. What I would argue is that the institutions of civil society are in fact the “top” forms of order—and that they emerge spontaneously out of the

Table 1: TYPES OF ECONOMIES	EMERGENT, SELF-ORGANIZING
POLITICAL ECONOMY (GOVERNED BY CONSTITUTIONAL AND CRIMINAL LAW) (INSTRUMENT: FORCE)	Democratic institutions, voting, freedom of speech, Bill of Rights, etc. Goal: CIVIL FREEDOM Dangers: BUREAUCRACY, ENTITLEMENTS, LITIGIOUSNESS, RENT SEEKING, MORAL LICENSE, SPECIAL INTEREST LOBBIES, POLITICAL CORRECTNESS
MARKET ECONOMY (GOVERNED BY CONTRACT LAW) (INSTRUMENT: MONEY)	Free markets Goals: SOCIAL WELFARE THROUGH COMPETITION, INNOVATION, INDIVIDUAL ENTREPRENEURSHIP, REAL PRICING, WEALTH CREATION Danger: DESTRUCTION OF CULTURAL AND SOCIAL CAPITAL
GIFT ECONOMY (GOVERNED BY UNCODIFIED LAWS OF HUMAN RECIPROCITY; HAPHAZARD REGULATION BY TAX LAW) (INSTRUMENT: GIFTS)	Philanthropy, voluntary sector Goal: PROMOTION OF GOODNESS, TRUTH, AND BEAUTY Dangers: CORRUPTION OF PRIVATE RELATIONSHIPS, DISRUPTION OF PROFIT MOTIVE, POSSIBLE POLITICAL CHAOS
ENVIRONMENTAL ECONOMY (ECOLOGY) (GOVERNED BY LAWS OF NATURE) (INSTRUMENT: REPRODUCTIVE SURVIVAL)	Natural ecosystems and biomes, including simple human horticulture Goal: PLANETARY BIODIVERSITY Danger: CULTURAL AND TECHNOLOGICAL STAGNATION
DIVINE ECONOMY (GOVERNED BY MORAL LAW) (INSTRUMENT: CONSCIENCE)	Free religion Goals: SALVATION OF SOULS, PRIVATE AND PUBLIC MORALITY, RELIGIOUS VITALITY THROUGH COMPETITION Dangers: RELIGIOUS DISSENT, MORAL ANARCHY, CRANK CULTS, ETC.

IMPOSED, COERCED

Sovereignty, legislature, military, emergency powers, command economy, etc.

Goals: NATIONAL FREEDOM, SURVIVAL OF THE STATE, SOCIAL WELFARE THROUGH WEALTH REDISTRIBUTION, SOCIAL EQUALITY, SAFETY NET

Dangers: TOTALITARIANISM, WELFARE STATE PEONAGE, WAR

Management, internal capital markets, trade unions, business planning

Goal: CONFLICT AVOIDANCE THROUGH PREDICTABILITY, STABILITY, SOLIDARITY, STANDARDIZATION

Dangers: CORPORATION OR UNION APPROXIMATES COERCIVE STATE; RENT SEEKING, MONOPOLY, CARTELS, ECONOMIC STAGNATION

Potlatch; religious and customary rights, duties & entitlements conferred by generosity and inheritance

Goal: UNANIMITY THROUGH MORAL INDEBTEDNESS

Dangers: POWER-BUYING, CHARITY PEONAGE, BRIBERY, NEPOTISM, RESENTMENT OF PHILANTHROPIC AND LEGATOR MOTIVES

Industrial farming, landscape design, mining, civil engineering, fisheries, etc

Goal: CONTINUED EXISTENCE AND EXPANSION OF HUMAN ECONOMY

Danger: ENVIRONMENTAL DAMAGE

Theocracy, state religion

Goals: MOBILIZATION OF COLLECTIVE ENTHUSIASM, SUPPRESSION OF INTERNAL RELIGIOUS STRIFE

Dangers: INQUISITION, POGROMS, HUMAN SACRIFICE, JIHAD, SUICIDE BOMBERS, ETC.

cooperating and competing wills of free individuals (they are indeed “bottom-up” in this sense, but a free individual is a rather remarkably sophisticated achievement of nature, a relatively “top” phenomenon already). Totalitarian or authoritarian regimes are actually usurpations of the “top” role of individuals and civil institutions by the “bottom” agencies of force and coercion, usurpations that treat humans as animals or worse, as cells in a superorganism or molecules in a gas, and that either demolish or treat as mere tools the voluntary associations of church, market, civil association, and philanthropy. The kind of causal power that can effect such revolutions can only be exercised by reducing the complex, interdependent, voluntary, and mutually sensitive orders of civil society and the human psyche (the “top”) to interchangeable units in a mass (the “bottom”). Only recently have we developed understandings of the physical world that might make such distinctions intuitively clear; when the only available scientific vocabulary for talking about human beings came from the languages of classical mechanics, hydraulics, gas dynamics, thermodynamics, and the like, it was little wonder that we came up with such ideas as the Rousseauvian Popular Will, Millian utility, Freudian unconscious drives, Marxian masses, and the Nazi sense of race.

It is becoming evident that classical science from the Renaissance until a few decades ago, while increasingly excellent at discovering and explaining the coercive, “bottom-up” class of events in the universe, neglected or dismissed the free, “top-down” class, which was of equal or greater importance in understanding the universe. Science had developed methods for measuring and relating all the kinds of events that involved linear, causal relationships and explanations of wholes by means of the nature of the parts. That is, its method was reductive. But before the other class of events, science was relatively helpless.

To say this is not a criticism in itself. Science will and should always prefer reductive, bottom-up explanations, since this is part of the method that distinguishes it as science. We cannot be sure something has a higher-level cause until we have eliminated possible lower-level ones, and it is easier and more reliable to establish or disprove lower-level ones than higher-level ones. But the method should not dictate the findings of the method. The very fact that science divides itself into disciplines such as physics, chemistry, and biology, whose focus is on different levels of complexity, is eloquent testimony that higher-level systems cannot be adequately described in terms

of lower-level ones, and thus that systems, as well as the components of systems, can be causes. If physics, which deals with more fundamental entities than chemistry or biology, could do the work of chemistry and biology, there would be no need for those other two sciences. Science's glory is to establish top-down causality by assuming that all causality is bottom-up, and by signaling honestly when the assumption turns out to be invalid.

Historically, it was not until recent years that science has been able to exhaust enough of the bottom-up causes in the world that it could begin to look at systemic and top-down ones. But now scientific disciplines such as cosmological physics, global climatology, plate tectonics, evolutionary ecology, cognitive science, chaos and complexity theory, fetal development genetics, rational-expectation economics, neurochemistry, and the like are routinely investigating large global and systemic causes. And a new form of science is coming into shape.

A few definitions of key concepts in the new science may be useful.

Chaos theory is a body of understanding devoted to the tracing of hidden order within apparent disorder, and the discerning of disorder within apparent order. It includes such concepts as fractals, iteration, attractors, dynamical systems, nonlinearity, the emergence of new structures through feedback, the butterfly effect, self-organization, etc. Complexity theory is a body of understanding devoted to complex systems with many elements and/or nonlinear relations. Such concepts as emergence, dynamical systems, self-organization, etc, link it closely with chaos theory.

A dynamical system is one described by dynamics, the physical science of movement. Dynamics comes in two flavors: classical, dealing with the movements of matter in space, and thermodynamics, dealing with the differences that are made by factors such as heat, entropy, enthalpy, internal energy, phase states, and the statistical properties of pressure and temperature. The new science pays special attention to damped, driven, dynamical systems whose elements all affect one another without a clear priority or single causal source—systems that are everywhere in nature and seem to be responsible for most complex, interdependent systems and behaviors. Such concepts are now increasingly useful in fields such as sociology, economics, and political science (for example, in market behavior, voting, patterns of voluntary association, traffic flow, and so on).

A key concept in chaos theory, and in modern systems theory in general,

is iteration: the repeating of an operation or process, using the result of the previous repetition as its new input. Iteration need not produce a dull uniformity of product; it can generate unexpected new forms of order. Iterative—often called “nonlinear”—systems tend to have “strange attractors.”

The “attractor” of any dynamical system is the form that its various behaviors trace out in its “phase space”—an imaginary graphical space where the dimensional axes represent the various degrees of freedom of the system, such as its temperature, momentum, spatial extent, temporal limits, and speed. For instance, a swinging pendulum, gradually slowing through friction, traces out a simple spiral when its speed and location are singled out as the axes of its phase space. Obviously a phase space often requires more dimensions than the familiar three of regular space, making the whole hard to visualize; and thus phase spaces are usually carefully edited to show only the variables of interest to the observer, or those which make a significant difference to the object's behavior. One characteristic of such dynamical systems is the butterfly effect, the popular phrase denoting the possibility that, because of the sensitive dependence of complex, nonlinear systems on their initial conditions, the beating of a butterfly's wing in Brazil could trigger larger turbulences which would in turn escalate into a hurricane. Complex dynamical feedback systems in which all the elements are interacting demonstrate irregular behaviors that are often called chaotic. The phase space tracings of such chaotic behaviors can be beautiful, fractal forms, called “strange” attractors.

A fractal is an irregular geometrical shape that continues to reveal significant detail at any scale of magnification and cannot be represented by classical geometry. Fractals are said to be “self-similar”—that is, like coastlines, branching trees, river-tributary systems, or clouds, they show similar shapes at different scales, whether close up or far away. This property is also called “scaling symmetry” or “internal symmetry,” since this is a symmetry denoting invariance under changes of scale, rather than invariance under changes of rotation angle. Since such forms can have the odd property of filling up the space available to them with more and more detail—for example, a line densely kinking to fill up a plane, or a surface densely folding to fill up a three-dimensional space—they seem to defy the conventional absolute distinctions between one-dimensionality and two-dimensionality, two-dimensionality and three-dimensionality, and so on. Mathematicians have thus been able to classify fractals in terms of how densely they fill the

next dimension up, thus generating the concept of a fractal dimension. In addition to one-dimensional lines, two-dimensional sheets, and three-dimensional volumes, for instance, there might be forms like electrical discharges, cloudscares, corals, or bronchi that would have a fractal dimension of 1.85 or 2.37. In the words of Benoit Mandelbrot, their discoverer, such forms are: “. . . grainy, hydralike, in between, pimply, pocky, ramified, sea-weedy, strange, tangled, tortuous, wiggly, wispy, wrinkled.”

“Emergence” is the core concept of emergentism, the position that argues that new forms of being, such as life and mind, can come into existence by self-organizing natural processes which, crossing certain thresholds of size, complexity, etc, must dispose themselves into different kinds of entities displaying new “emergent” properties. As a simple example, the dry gas oxygen, when combined in sufficient quantities with the dry gas hydrogen, produces water, which displays the emergent property of wetness, with its specific characteristics of forming drops and a meniscus, clinging to surfaces, etc. One molecule of water is not wet; yet when enough are added together, wetness emerges. The emergentist position does not necessarily imply the conclusion that a creator is unnecessary. Rather, however, the creativity is immanent in the process of emergence itself; from a theological point of view, the exquisitely adapted forms of the world are best seen not so much as the products of an external designer, but instead as the lineaments of a divine metabolism.

The nineteenth-century concept of entropy has been reevaluated by the new science. Traditionally, entropy was seen as thermodynamic disorder, and it increased with time. In classical thermodynamics, the Second Law dictates that in a closed system work can be done only at the expense of generating waste heat, some of which cannot itself be used to do work. Thus a thermodynamic world with a finite endowment of free energy to do work is one which is running down or decaying toward an eventual heat-death. The increase of entropy takes place over time, and thus time and entropy provide definitions for each other, time's direction being set by the increase of entropy, and entropy being a phenomenon that increases over time. Information theory also contains a version of the concept of entropy, in which the generation of information must pay the cost of increasing informational disorder elsewhere; the two uses of the idea nicely coincide in the heating of a computer when it is doing calculations. However, contemporary information theorists are now pursuing concepts of computation in which

vanishingly small amounts of entropy are produced; and various researchers have pointed out that all such theory applies only to closed systems. Ilya Prigogine, for instance, has argued that in open systems, chance variations produced by nonlinear dynamical systems can reach far-from-equilibrium states that can reset the conditions of available work energy, precipitating emergent forms of self-organizing order.

Rational expectations, for instance, can turn a linear system into a nonlinear one by making the behavior of each participant in a system dependent upon its predictions of the state of the others. In such fields as animal group behavior, economics, sociology, law theory, and road traffic control, the expectations and predictive efforts of intelligent participants in a process such as a flock, a market, a society, a legal system, or a highway can confuse or frustrate any attempt to regulate or control it, or can generate new structures of general practice not given in the initial conditions. As a result, the proper role of an actor in such a system is not to try to control the system or join a majority coalition or achieve consensus, but to exercise one's own individual judgment, assess the needs of others, consult one's own values, look for opportunities, guess where sources of creativity and invention might lie, and humbly decide on what to do. The dynamics of free interaction will bring about the desired emergent solution—and if it does not, no other method will be any better. This injunction applies especially to philanthropic donors, who often abdicate their own better judgment in favor of being in solidarity with an imagined collective good.

Self-organization—the dynamics of free interaction—is the process in which a relatively stable system emerges through the interaction of all its elements with each other and with themselves. Such processes are common in the physical universe. The rolling boil of a pot of heated water is a good example of such a process; another is the Great Red Spot of Jupiter, a storm that has raged in the same form and at the same latitude for hundreds of years at least; a third is a living embryo, whose gestating cells specialize themselves through their mutual interaction to produce a functioning plant or animal. Societies and natural languages coalesce in similar fashion. There is evidence that the brain establishes coherent and retrievable memories in the same general way.

In short, science now recognizes certain circumstances in which there can, in fact, be a free lunch; but to get it we must abandon our expectations

of predictability and control. F. A. Hayek's brilliant description of pricing in a free economy is an example: the free lunch of a precise measure of need and utility is achieved only if control is relaxed and predictability partly abandoned. Michael Polanyi's theory of polycentricity is an elegant expression of the same idea in more general terms. Of course, things can still be forced to happen, at the cost of entropic decay; but now we have a better theory of how things can grow to be as we wish them without force and without loss. To go to war or to burn something for its energy is to force something to happen, at the expense of reducing some parts of the universe to smoke and ash. Sometimes those actions are necessary. But we will be better off in the long run by figuring out how to bring about our purposes through understanding and tinkering non-coercively with the creative processes in the universe.

Thus our table of economies distinguishes between the forced or coerced version and the free and self-organizing version of each one; and the reader will see that the results can be very different. In general, the free and self-organizing species of the political, market, gift, environmental, and divine economies are preferable. We have, as a society, renounced state religion altogether, and we have severely limited the coercive powers of the political economy. We have sought ways to combat business monopolies (such as Standard Oil and AT&T) and expose corporations (as in the Enron and Andersen affairs) to the free communication and scrutiny that characterize open markets. The problem is that those ways of regulation often involve the increase of state coercive power; our efforts at fine-tuning our system are always bedeviled by the likelihood that in opening up freedom in one economy, we are shutting it down in another. The environmental economy is a case in point. We value the natural, free interdependence of species in an ecosystem, but our efforts at protecting it can lead us to arrogations of power in the political sphere and impositions of coercion on the market. In turn, perhaps, we then run the danger of damaging our future political and financial abilities to nurture the environment and afford wise practices of husbandry. The imposed or coercive economy is always an evil, but it may be a necessary one; the Law is our system for mitigating the evil and effecting what is necessary by the minimum means. When our nation's very survival is threatened, we readily accept the need for otherwise evil, coercive measures such as war, intelligence secrecy, preventive detention, or quarantine.

The Role of the Gift Economy

Understanding the characteristic abuses of freedom in each of these economies can, perhaps, help us to correct them voluntarily before coercion is required to check them. This voluntary correction is an important aspect of culture. If we do not voluntarily correct our behavior, we may end up turning it over to distorting, coercive controls. For instance, the abuses of political freedom common in the 1960s counterculture arguably led to the abandonment of civility, etiquette, and the ideals of ladylike and gentlemanly behavior. The new frankness and discourtesy led to wounded feelings among women and minorities in business and education, which in turn led to the coercive attempt to curb bad behavior, which we know as Political Correctness—an attempt that has clearly limited our political freedom and imposed distorting restrictions upon the market and its ability to create the wealth that sustains us all. Likewise, we are still struggling with the medical and social effects of the abuses of sexual freedom in the same era, and are binding ourselves with legal restraints in the areas of family law and medical insurance that are harmful to our freedom. If we had better understood the dark side of political freedom, we might have avoided those problems; and it was and is the responsibility of our artists, storytellers, and wise thinkers to shed light on those dark areas and anticipate such abuses.

The distinction between the free and coercive versions of each economy is also crucial to our free cultural efforts to fine-tune our system. For instance, over the last two centuries or so there has been a chorus of dire cultural warnings about the corruptions and abuses of the market economy—amounting to cultural pressures that overthrew governments, created planned economies, and ended up killing over a hundred million human beings. If we had distinguished between the free market economy and the coercive market economy, many mistakes might have been avoided. We might have been able to see the Great Depression, for example, not as an argument against the market economy but as an argument against coercive, forced, imposed solutions in both politics and the market. Cultural leaders might have been able to warn business magnates about the dangers to their own interests posed by stock manipulation and monopoly, and to warn government of the risks that materialized in the Smoot-Hawley Act and other macroeconomic measures that turned a market drop into a world economic catastrophe. Instead, cultural leaders inveighed against business in general

and praised the planned economy of the Soviet Union. Present-day communitarians who mourn the loss of voluntary community may likewise be blaming the wrong flavor of our economies—wanting a sort of Weberian *Gemeinschaft* organized through WPA state fiat, when the kind of spontaneous gathering that is happening at Walmart or Starbucks may be the true “village pump” of our time. Advertising is a great villain among contemporary leftist cultural critics; however, perhaps the real solution is not coercive limitations of it but instead the marketization of freedom from advertising, or the free cultivation of sales resistance.

Most important of all, the analysis of our various economies and their unique systemic features can help us, paradoxically, understand their interdependence, the extent to which they are all sectors of a grand economy. If we are expert in one kind of economy, our professional perspective may make us blind to the claims of others, such that we become fanatical free marketeers or unrealistic religious crusaders or charity megalomaniacs or political junkies or Earth Firsters. Our sensitive appreciation of the systemic beauty and interdependence within one economy may cause us to bracket the others as easily manipulable, one-way causes, and thus make us lose sight of the even greater beauty of the intersystemic whole. Market economists, for example, often insufficiently appreciate the exquisite machinery of the U.S. Constitution that renders our nation’s politics nonlinear and creative; politicians who are well aware of the subtle feedbacks designed into our political system often think of the vast organism of the market as a simple domestic animal to be milked; environmentalists, so sensitive to ecological subtleties, often see both politics and the market as bad children who must be forced to take their medicine; theologians who are sophisticated about the delicate moral nuances of grace and redemption can be hopelessly naïve about political consent and market contracts.

In this contest of ignorances, the gift economy is uniquely disadvantaged: not only are all the other economies wretchedly oblivious of its intricate workings, it has no coherent body of theory (equivalent to Austrian economics, constitutional law, moral theology, or ecological science), and only a very small cultural footprint, as I have already pointed out, within which its details can be identified, explained, and put to creative work. The work of our present symposium is clearly to expand that footprint; and I believe one good place to start is to examine the gift economy’s ideal place in

an ecology of economies: What is its proper role with respect to the market, government, religion, and the ecosystem?

Here one small advantage accrues to the gift sector: its inhabitants are generally much better informed about the other economies than experts of other economies are of it. Great donors and philanthropic experts often have wide backgrounds in business, government, law, religion, and even natural science. Another significant advantage is that the gift sector at its best is doubly free: it can be emergent and self-organizing, as are our best models of business, government, horticulture, and religion; but it is also by definition based upon the free act of giving, rather than the constrained and constraining acts of contract-making or law enforcement (or the limits and sanctions of ecological diversity and habitat, or the justice of a judging God). Thus by virtue of its uncommittedness, the gift economy has the promise of being the most agile mediator and balancer of the other economies, of being the place where voluntariness can most freely intervene in their disputes or internal struggles, of constituting a sort of lubricant of grace and mercy to oil their narrower tolerances. But these roles have not been celebrated much in song and story—and they should be.

Another important initiative our symposium might take would be to distinguish coercive from non-coercive forms of giving. It might seem odd to speak of coercive giving, but societies such as New Guinea Melanesian horticulturalist and Northwest Native American fishing communities have shown us how generosity in the form of the potlatch can become a kind of tyranny and even degenerate into seemingly wanton destruction. Coerced giving, as with the U.S. welfare system before its 1990s reform, ended up creating a political peonage which was forced to follow its tribunes in government to keep the meager but addictive supply of free money coming in. Churches and mosques have at various times found their control of alms to be a source of power and a weapon in pursuing objectives that might otherwise have met with dissent. I have sometimes wondered, when contemplating the curious combination of magnificent public endowments with socioeconomic squalor in such cities as St. Louis and Cleveland—and even Washington!—whether those cities might not have been better off and freer for their people in the long run if the money that built the museums and symphonies had continued to circulate in the marketplace, seeding new industries and technologies. For many years the National Endowment for the Arts, as I have argued, helped to freeze the high culture of our country in a contrarian and outdated modernist paradigm under

the guise of promoting postmodernist experimentation; and it was abetted in this endeavor by private foundations such as the Ford, the Guggenheim, and the Rockefeller. Artists who wanted to explore other directions, such as classical form in poetry, drawing, fiction, drama, and music, were effectively stifled and censored in the name of “diversity” and “experiment.” Such reflections might lead us at least to closer study of how effectively liberating our gifts might be.

Even non-coercive giving might have subtle dangers. Artists and heirs, for example, have long complained about the burdens of patronage or inheritance. If the huge wealth transfers that are predicted for the coming decades should materialize, they may create equally huge systemic effects that we do not even imagine. Might the profit motive suffer? How could a society of rich heirs be persuaded to work? On the other hand, a theory of productive giving, together with instruments to effectuate it (such as philanthropic mutual funds or Morningstar-like rating systems or an equivalent of pricing) might produce massive undreamed-of benefits.

But unless there is a cultural excitement in the pursuit of such knowledge and such action, philanthropy will not attract bright minds and enthusiastic efforts. Philanthropy should be fueled by delight, pride, curiosity, and adventure, not by guilt, loneliness, fear of death, and duty. Here the work of our cultural producers, our storytellers and painters and historians and singers, is all-important.

The Contribution of Culture-Makers

What might be the major themes of an artistic and cultural movement devoted to the life of philanthropy? One theme might be the history of the evolution of gift-giving, and its relationship to our religious and spiritual history. Consider how Shakespeare’s searching analysis of the deep themes of English history endowed his country with a great mission, a direction, a wisdom about the possible, the dangerous, and the productive in national action.

An equivalent exploration of philanthropy might trace the origin of gifts in the generosity of both animals and humans to their offspring, celebrating the self-sacrifice of mammals for their young and citing the promises of Jehovah to Abraham and Jacob that they would become the fathers of a great people. The ethic of birthright that results, even if it involves such unsavory tricks as Jacob’s cheating of his elder brother Esau, constitutes a language that is rooted in our real biological drive to survive and reproduce. Without a primal language of such a kind, higher-order kinds of gifts could not be

described or explained, and might be meaningless. The emergence of a second language, one of justice and reciprocity, explained and rewarded in terms of the first language, now makes possible the revelation of a third ethical language, one of compassion and love, as we find in the Prophets and the New Testament. In modern times a fourth ethical language has begun to organize itself, one that recognizes the dangers to the recipient of unearned and unrequited gifts, the imposed passivity and disbarment from the human community of exchange that can result, and the moral danger to the predatory giver whose potlatch gives him huge moral power over the victims of his unrepayable generosity. The new, emergent ethical language is one of providing the recipient with the ability to reciprocate, valuing what the other has to trade, a love that grants dignity instead of demanding obligation.

Artist-historians might trace similar developments in other cultures, such as the Hindu and Buddhist, affording exotic locales for the narrative or depiction. Such art might explore the distinction between gift-giving among human beings, which needs to be a two-way process, and gift-giving between the Divine and human, which cannot but be one-sided and which is as much more mysterious than human giving as human giving is than commercial trade. Likewise, the gifts of nature in the form of landscapes and beautiful species, and our reciprocal activity of environmental restoration or wise landscape architecture and city design, might receive artistic attention as analogous to or subtly different from charitable giving. The moral heroes of this epic story, who help catalyze each fresh leap forward in our moral vocabulary, might begin to be recognized as generously as our military, scientific, entrepreneurial, or religious heroes, and thus serve as models for a new philanthropic class. And the evolution of gift in history might be paralleled by an analogous evolution in the psyche of a developing youth, in a bildungsroman or coming-of-age story like that of Hans Castorp in Thomas Mann's *The Magic Mountain*.

Another kind of story might focus on the opportunities and tragic dangers inherent in large-scale gift-giving. How might the marvelous mechanisms of pricing and profit that—as Hayek and other economists have shown—so exactly indicate the best paths of efficiency and need, be adopted into philanthropy? Are there scientific or technological discoveries that can help the market work in harmony with the gift? Could there be the equivalent of detective stories, in which an incorruptible investigator from the philanthropic equivalent of Morningstar, the equities rating agency, would unearth the mystery of some

failed or corrupted attempt to improve the lives of others? Could there be great fictions or artistic biographies of brilliant philanthropic entrepreneurs who have discovered or created some ingenious way of doing well by doing good? The artist-patron bond might be explored through searching and beautiful tragic or comic dramas, celebrating the nurturing power of the great collector as well as the creative power of the artist. Philanthropic victims of the State's brutal, coercive attempt to remove all rivals to its power might emerge as exemplars of behavior parallel to such religious martyrs as Thomas á Becket. Hubristic and tragic givers, such as Timon of Athens, might be given insightful depiction as warnings against the corruptions of generosity.

The Law itself, when it is effective in freeing people, can become the beneficiary of philanthropic intervention; and such intervention affords enormous opportunities for heroic narrative and poetic adventure. Consider the remarkable work of Hernando de Soto, who with the help of charitable contributions has organized an international team of lawyers to certify and entitle the legal rights of poor, Third World people to their own property, thus liberating its value as capital to support business enterprises, technological progress, responsible land husbandry, and the political franchise. Such work cries out for artistic celebration that would encourage a new generation of legal emancipators, freedom riders of productive market capitalism. And when the Law is inadequate for or harmful to poor people, philanthropic donors have stepped up to remedy the defect, as in American urban public education, where privately funded school voucher initiatives have sprung up around the country to defend the public from rent-seeking teachers' unions. Imagine movies that might bring to life the work of such crusaders, and do for them what Erin Brockovich did for the efforts of environmental idealists!

Gratitude might be revived in the new century as one of the chief virtues, its deep relationship with grace—not just an etymological one—being noted in poetry and narrative art. The derivation of the word mercy from the name of the god Mercury, who also gives his name to the market, merchants, and commerce, might spark an investigation of the deep links between money and gifts, the play between obligation and unconditional love. The “forgiveness” theme in Mozart, hinted at in *La Clemenza di Tito* and repeated in *The Marriage of Figaro*, *Così Fan Tutti*, and *The Magic Flute*, might find a twenty-first century reply. How might artists cope with the challenge of rehabilitating the unfashionable rituals of thanks and humble praise? How might the hated

feeling of shame be given its proper place as the defense of honor and the portal to the sweet paradise of humility? These are huge challenges for the artist—but artists enjoy huge challenges. And they all come out of the ancient practice of gift-giving.

A Philanthropic Poem

What follows here is a sort of prototype of the artistic/cultural work that this paper calls for. A poet had better put his creative effort where his mouth is! “Brine” tells the story of an extraordinary entrepreneur, Carl Hodges, who is both a benefactor and a successful businessman. Hodges was the leading scientist involved in the creation of Biosphere Two, which for all its flaws is the world’s premier ecological experimental laboratory. He has created a revolutionary new concept in both ecological and agricultural science: seawater agriculture. Using specially bred strains of halophytic (saltwater-loving) plants, and shrimp and fish-farming, he has turned vast stretches of desert seacoast in Sonora, Gujarat, Saudi Arabia, and Eritrea in the Horn of Africa into green, productive oases that feed the local populations, generate needed foreign exchange, and extract greenhouse gases from the atmosphere.

“Brine” is a poetic journal of my work with Hodges as a consultant with Seawater Farms Eritrea on the war-torn Red Sea coast. In the background is Eritrea’s tragic and heroic history, in which the tiny republic, outnumbered ten to one, threw off the tyrannical rule of Haile Mengistu, the “jackal” that succeeded Haile Selassie, the “Lion of Judah” who had successfully resisted Italian colonialization. “Eritrea” is the modern version of “Erythraea,” the ancient Latin name meaning “Red Sea.” The poem implicitly sets the philanthropic enterprise into its larger context, showing how Hodges’ extraordinary project fits into and might ameliorate a tragic political economy, how environmental and social philanthropy can go hand-in-hand with business enterprise and intelligent marketing—how the World Bank, for instance, can make itself useful by funding micro-investment loans—and how both business and the gift economy might help bring about a new surge in religious insight. In the symbolic background of the poem is the ancient Arthurian myth of the Holy Grail and the Fisher King, who holds the key to transforming the wasteland into a productive paradise. “Brine into bread, blood into poetry”: this is one poet’s celebration of a culture of gift.

BRINE

An Erythraean Journal

For Carl Hodges

5/7/01

So one more time I'm called on to abandon
This cyan bluescreen cybernetic dream,
This skylab of American abstraction,
And step into the bloodred living stream.

I'm going to a place that is an icon:
The Lion of Judah, that defeated Rome,
Was followed by the Torturer, the Jackal,
Who broke the hive and stole the honeycomb.

And heroes with the eyes of Theban princes
Drove out the Jackal, set the nation free,
And fought for thirty years in the desert
Against the driven slaves of tyranny.

And there's a plain where I must learn their music,
Littered with shattered tanks, the sands of God,
That was a battlefield as grim and grievous
As those of bloody Kursk and Stalingrad;

And I who was the counsel of the spacemen
Must meet the warriors on that barren shore
To turn the Red Sea green with love and poems
And help them find the peaceful form of war.

5/9/01-5/10/01

Again the limbo of the airport journey:
 The icon climbs towards, then flees the Pole.
 The wine, the airless air, the juice, the coffee,
 The spatial sign abstracted from the whole.

Like all my friends, my traveling companion
 Has turned into a strange and wise old man.
 A stranger wise old man waits at the airport—
 We're mad old monkeys in a caravan!—

A banquet in this steel hotel in Frankfurt,
 With tanks of shrimp, the poet, the scientists,
 The businessmen, the chic photographer,
 The cooks, the brilliant women, journalists.

Mounds of sweet shrimp sautéed with garlic,
 The pink fruit of the seas of Africa,
 Are carried in with rolls and chardonnay,
 Amazing the bright man from Lufthansa;

And later, like a dream, there comes the conclave
 Where the pierced King invites his paladins
 Into a service doubtfuller and purer
 Than any of the war-drenched disciplines.

5/10/01

Evening in Jeddah. Into the ancient story
 Where princes fly their falcons at the sun.
 We lose a thousand years of God and Allah
 And set down in the realms of Saladin.

So all we do must be a great translation
Between two times, between two worlds of soul:
Between the land and sea, between a nation
And its own yet-unconsecrated goal.

The lean Norwegian colonel tells us frankly
How Ethiopia could brush aside
His screen of Kenyan troops and take Asmara
But for its fear of Eritrean pride—

Another thirty years of war and chaos,
And Africa bleeding into the sea;
Unless we dream the sacred transformation:
Brine into bread, blood into poetry.

5/10/01

The airport in Asmara's like a picnic,
Everyone's hugging in the parking line;
The nation has a family resemblance,
Inward, fine-featured, dark, and aquiline.

French archeologists at Knossos marveled
To see the goddesses of Minos when
They found their tiny forms in terra-cotta:
"Mon Dieu," they said, "Elles sont parisiennes;"

Just so, these little Eritrean ladies
Have such a chic, such tailored elegance:
How in so poor a country can they manage
This studied, innocent insouciance?

And in the war they fought beside the menfolk;
One of the country's wry historians
Claims that their soldiership was rather better;
Better beware of these parisiennes.

5/11/01

Dawn in Asmara. As if born reincarnate
The world glows fresh in all its childish awe,
And you can smell again, the jacaranda
Smoke blue by fiery bougainvillea.

Forty-five years ago I wept and parted
From the bright coasts of tragic Africa;
Now the wheel turns, I am forgiven
For one more try at this incognita:

Down from the mountain to the sun-stunned plainland,
Exhausted hillocks of the old seafloor,
The hottest place on earth, earth's epidermis
Naked against the sun, an arid shore.

And this is where our white-hat Carlos Magnus,
Our Doctor Carl, has picked his paradise,
To grow in Hell a second vale of Eden,
Here in the birthplace of the human race.

5/12/01

Once I received a dream of terraforming,
Mars a new home for all our living kind:
Now the Red Sea pours through canals and channels
Into the world my heroes had designed;

First to the shrimp-ponds, turbid, dark, and yeasty,
Where a brown worker, water to his chest,
Can feel the clawed crustaceans brush his ankles
In a wild wealth of living interest.

(Spawned in the labs with crazy intricacy
By scientists from quake-torn Gujarat,
Sonora, Texas, Yale, and Eritrea,
Tweaking the sex by clock and thermostat);

Then to the lakes dimpled with pale tilapia,
Where ibises and weird flamingoes fly,
And water that would foul and glut the ocean
Becomes the food the fish are nourished by;

Then to vast fields of jadegreen salicornia,
Whose tips provide a mild asparagus,
Whose seed is pressed for oil, whose stem for fiber,
Whose roots sequester carbon, and will thus

Suck from the sea the gases of our burnings,
Ransoming us from the imprisoned sun,
And so redeem the oil-debt of Arabia,
Paying in soil for what our fires have done;

Then to the meres that stretch to the horizon,
Lakeland and marsh, seeded with mangrove trees,
Where eco-tourists soon will sail and wander
Among a myriad birds and honeybees;

Then to the aquifers, that are already
More saline than the native Red Sea brines,
Floating the fresh that flows down from the mountains
To help oases grow their green-shade shrines;

And cultured dragonflies eat the mosquitoes,
 And hives collect the honey from the bees,
 And mangrove-shoots are fed to goats and camels,
 To make a rare and much sought-after cheese;

And a cafe springs up by an acacia,
 Where farmworkers eat fiery omelettes,
 Mercury, market-god, cheerfully deigning
 To drink at Carl's seawater rivulets;

And we will draw the water to the village
 And get the World Bank to make micro-loans
 To seed a further round of breeding nature
 Into the realms of bikes and telephones,

So that these bright-eyed poorest of all peoples
 May see their children grow to join the world
 And feed the human race with their new stories,
 And the gold flower of history be unfurled.

5/13/01

We visit in the shanty-town, whose children
 Follow these strangers, grinning butterflies;
 Amateru, its name is; Carl renames it
 "Obre Ojos"—that is, "Open up your eyes."

(Two days later we find out from a Tigre
 The place had got its name during a gale;
 A captain got a glimpse of that low coastline
 And called out to the helmsman he should sail

South for the harbor where they might find shelter;
 The pilot could not see it; in surprise
 The captain chided him and in Tigrean
 Shouted "Amateru!": "Open your eyes!")

5/13/01

Meetings at the bar and in the office:
The saintly journalist and big shy Ross,
Who in their love for Africa sailed fearless
Down the blood rivers of her Erebus;

The genial governor who knows his people,
The Indian expert on the coastal birds,
The gentle landscaper, whose only language
Is maps and pictures, but who's drunk on words;

Beth the professional, the businesswoman,
Yet queenly in her bosom and her eye,
Samuel, the smiling one, and able Tesfom;
The tough Girl Friday; Allan and I:

All called together for this goodly service,
Lives offered this one chance at something grand,
As if the douze peers sat once more at table
And the sangraal promised a redeemed land.

But who's this quiet brown man whose eyes see through me,
Who makes me question all that I have done,
Who calls the airy poet back to history,
Who is this fine-boned Petros Solomon?:

He who commanded in this eastern desert
Against the Soviet tanks of Mengistu,
When in a series of flanking maneuvers
Solomon's swift battalions broke through;

And by a berm half-buried in the water
Lies a T-55, its turret blown,
That I saw yesterday, its metal rusting
To make a fertile stain where seeds are sown;

Now Petros is the minister of fisheries,
 And I the poet have become his friend,
 As if in the rich lakes of Eritrea
 The war of pen and sword comes to its end.

5/13/01

Later that night, after a long car-journey
 Through the dim fenlands cooling into dew,
 We come upon a scene of bright truck-headlights
 With many people where the pipe goes through;

It seems the pump got stuck and they have fixed it—
 It's like a party; girls and shirtsleeved boys;
 And there's a silence as they get it going
 And then the water's heavy gurgling noise

And then the rush as it renews the cycle
 And low cheers from the gathered multitude;
 One young dark giant lit up in the shadows,
 A sudden gesture, wet and semi-nude;

These are the new children of sad Africa,
 They will inherit what these times have made;
 And who are these for whom work is a pleasure,
 Labor a party, playtime, and parade?

When I was just a boy in old Rhodesia
 My greatest joy was finding a clay spring
 And digging dams and waterfalls and islands
 And setting paddle-wheels a-flickering;

And they and Carl have got the biggest playground
 That human beings ever yet have known;
 The loveliest, messiest complex of hydraulics,
 An ocean and a mud-box of their own.

5/14/01

Something is happening on this dun seabed.
The green brine pours like blood through trench and pipe.
It is the coming of the marvelous vineyard,
And the millennium is gold and ripe.

For through these Mars-canals flows endless money,
From the Red Sea and from the Indian
And the Antarctic and the Pacific oceans
And all the waters since the world began;

And it runs back through shellfish, leaf, and breastmilk
And aquifer and ancient mantle-flow,
And everywhere it goes it grows to spirit
Crystalling into plant and embryo,

And we contain it in our marks and dollars,
Nacfas and francs, yuan, and yen, and pounds,
And it pours on through fiber-optic channels
And dendrifies and buds as it compounds,

All thickened, as the primal soup was kindled,
By the prodigious engine of the sun,
The mine of fire that burns a billion ages,
Phoibos or Ra or Christ the bleeding Son,

Or Allah the All-merciful, or Krishna,
Or Jahweh burning still in Midian,
Or the soft jewel in the Buddha's forehead,
The gift the Jaguar gives to everyone.

5/14/01

At first the law of God was: Take the birthright.
 Then in the language that the first law made,
 The second law was justice in its balance,
 In wrath, revenge; in friendship, equal trade.

Then in the terms that justice had commanded
 The prophets spoke the third law into fact:
 Alms and abundant gifts unto your neighbor
 Would better show your justice in the act;

Now in this language comes the new commandment:
 Give not the mere gift but the gift of gift:
 Never impose an unrequited present,
 The spiritual form of pinching thrift;

The generosity is in the bargain,
 My valuing of what you have to trade:
 We are the animal whose whole fulfillment
 Lies in the other's use of what we've made.

Love in its first sketch is an act of conquest,
 A taking or a predatory giving out;
 An unresearched enforcement of our feeling,
 The greedy god-eating of the devout;

Love now is woven out of intricacy,
 The circulation of a mutual grace,
 A sedulous knowledge of the other's knowing,
 An understanding of the other's face;

Where I may only know the other's wishes
 Through what the other longs to give to me;
 And she in her delighted overflowing
 Nurtures the thing in me that makes me free.

The fresh Nile gave six thousand years of plenty,
The semen of the flood that fed the kine,
Flowing throughout the ovaries of the Delta:
Now the diluvian cordial is brine.

5/15/01

Petros, at our last supper, asked of Carlos
Who would succeed him as his chosen heir,
Who had the secret knowledge of the waters
To rescue Africa from its despair;

For enterprises of great hope had foundered
Once the white man had ceased to take the lead;
And in corruptions and obscure diseases
The gardens had succumbed to waste and weed;

What expert European would succeed him,
What wise American would run the farm?
Who would take on the master's fruitful vineyard
And keep the shepherd's sheep from taint and harm?

And Carl surprised us, pointed down the table
To Samuel, who sat there silently,
The young biologist from Asmara,
The African with the advanced degree;

Petros the warrior had led the forces
That set the Samuels of his nation free;
And they first, after Europe was defeated,
Saved Africans from African tyranny;

And Carl had simply thus reminded
All of that grave and merry company
How Africa would lead the world, not follow,
And black men would plant gardens of the sea.

5/16/01

Now flying home, the turning world beneath us,
Was it a dream, was it true wakefulness?
And can there be a new law in the making,
One where the greater does not rob the less?

Kurt the good journalist had said it plainly:
ABUNDANCE was the headline written here.
Below, the ocean glitters in its blueness,
A vast blue womb, a pregnant hemisphere.

I Joseph tell this dream to you, my pharaohs,
Of this the land of Axum, Saba, Kush:
God one day will be not the only giver,
Our grace will bless Him in a sudden rush;

The ocean will become a running river,
Drive the divine economy's prayer-wheel;
The wasteland will become a flowering garden
Where the King Fisher's ancient wound will heal.

COMMENT ON TURNER

Herbert London

Frederick Turner's extraordinary essay sets the stage for an assessment of charitable gifts. Turner offers various models and forms of charitable activity that draw from science, history, and economics. On the whole, this is a truly impressive achievement. While I am generally sympathetic to his arguments, there are specific areas in which I part company. Most notably, I am not persuaded that the economic free market applied to culture leads to a salutary result. Culture—circa 2005—has been degraded by a free market unconstrained by virtue. The storytellers and thinkers Turner makes reference to have been seduced by commercial and “democratic” impulses. As a consequence, the tales of cultural revival so necessary in our age do not exist and, at the moment, are not likely to be funded by the foundation world or charitable gifts.

Let me start with Professor Turner's reference to free and coercive economics. A democratic, free-market system elicits competing wills of free individuals, thus allowing civil society to flourish—or so it is argued by Turner. Yet it would appear that the free market applied to culture often has the opposite effect.

Alas, a cultural free market seems to operate under a Gresham's Law, with the bad driving the good out of circulation. Television fare, for example, is designed for the lowest common denominator. Instead of being uplifting, it attempts to reflect what is coarse and degrading—all, I should hasten to note, in the interest of “democratization.”

While Turner recognizes “the abandonment of civility, etiquette, and the ideals of ladylike and gentlemanly behavior,” he contends that the “new frankness” engendered by the counterculture led to political correctness which limits political freedom and creates distortions in the economic market. But what might be said is that political correctness is selectively coercive. It is true that a person may not criticize certain designated “protected” groups, such as blacks, Muslims, Hispanics, Africans, etc., but attacks on Catholics, evangelicals, orthodox Jews, and other such persons remain outside the coercive orbit.

Similarly, Turner suggests that it is the responsibility of artists, storytellers, and wise thinkers to enlighten the society by dispersing the dark

clouds that hover above the culture. Yet Turner seems to ignore the obvious fact that Norman Mailer, Paul Goodman, Charles Reich, Susan Sontag, Herbert Marcuse, Norman Brown, Jean Luc Godard, and Abraham Maslow, among countless others—artists, thinkers, and storytellers—were greatly responsible for creating the countercultural conditions he openly deplors. Yes, it may be the responsibility of storytellers and thinkers to restore civility, but the powerful existentialists who remain in their midst refuse to accept the organic ties to the past which are woven into civilization.

Turner notes that the unrestrained act of giving is a desirable model for human behavior. Surely there is much to be said for it. But the freedom he points to, while “self-organizing,” often has a baneful social influence. It is instructive, for example, that David Packard started a foundation devoted to population control, notwithstanding the fact that 44 percent of the world’s population is not in a replacement mode and by the year 2050 the global population may be in decline. Having the freedom to give also translates into the freedom to make bad selections, even harmful ones.

The benefactions of the Ford Foundation in the 1960s to promote decentralized schools actually increased racial tensions between white teachers and black community organizers in the Oceanhill-Brownsville section of Brooklyn. Clearly, reasonable postulates can have devastating practical effects.

Turner reveals that he is somewhat sensitive to this issue when he makes reference to “productive giving.” However, he overlooks the contemporary charitable temptation to give for narrowly specified results. The “Morningstar rating system” he calls for already exists. As I see it, a more productive type of foundational giving—open-ended contributions to talented individuals or promising institutions—is far too rare.

Surely Turner’s soaring imagination allows him to entertain the remarkable ways in which philanthropy can be married to heroic narratives and poetic adventure. The key to these narratives, however, is verisimilitude and truth-seeking notions. When Turner uses the film *Erin Brockovich* as an example of art that brings to life the work of environmental crusaders, he is using a phony story that masquerades as truth. Alas, that brings us to the caveat required when asking marginal storytellers to develop the narrative for a cultural resurrection. Erin Brockovich was not a crusader for environmental safety, but instead a self-seeking opportunist who exploited an issue for personal aggrandizement.

In what sensible way can lies inspire? Once the false frame is excoriated, the bare truth lies starkly as a reminder of the original deception. It is far better to set the record straight from the outset. If only there were a sufficiently large number of storytellers and thinkers who could engage the populace with ideas that uphold and reinforce rational judgment!

Maimonides understood that the highest form of giving is a partnership, “a helping hand” in which the expectation exists that the giver wants a relationship with the receiver and there are mutual expectations. The giver offers all that he can, and the receiver is expected to imbibe lessons that will make him a better (read: independent) person.

Turner asks, quite appropriately, “How might the hated feeling of shame be given its proper place as the defense of honor and the portal to the sweet paradise of humility?” This is surely a challenge for the contemporary artist, who as it happens, has not found an answer. Book titles such as *Making It and Advertisements for Myself* suggest a cultural quest of self-absorption. In fact, shame has already been interred, along with humility. The difference between fame and infamy is indistinguishable in a society where being a celebrity is what really counts.

How I long for the emergence of more poets like Frederick Turner! How I wish that our contemporary philanthropists were inspired by grand dreams of civic renewal! Perhaps my thoughts are too bleak. There surely are positive examples that can inspire. And yet, by any measure, they are too few. The good, the true, and the beautiful are consigned to a tiny chamber behind a hidden door with a sign that says Do Not Enter. For the typical cultural consumer, the klieg lights are on the meretricious, the sciolistic, and the degrading.

Philanthropy should recognize the challenge frontally before it hails the poetry. Our age produces technical wonders, not poetic visions. I yearn for the moment Turner describes when “The wasteland will become a flowering garden/Where the King Fisher’s ancient wound will heal.” I wait and I wait.

COMMENT ON TURNER

Richard P. Gabriel

burn the page
wrestle like two on fire
place your bets on the field smoke
aligning like luck
and your fortunes
what I love
I give away
✦ ✦ ✦

. . . come from the artists themselves. The artist's responsibility is to art—as the poet William Stafford said, a “reckless encounter with whatever comes along”—wherever that leads, rarely part of a master plan, and even more rarely a part of the exchange economy. We read of muses and inspiration, but what these terms mean is that art is not entirely within the conscious control of the artist.

Art is voice. Art is noticing outside context. Art stands out like a thing glimpsed from the corners of our eyes. We must never confuse the subject or meaning of art with the fact of art. Art is not the story but the telling, not the picture but the brush strokes, not the thing but the choice of the thing, not the craft but the use of it. Each piece of great art sponsors its own context, creates itself through its own voice and terms; each of the parts in a piece, be it a poem or a painting, takes on heightened significance, and each part, because it is in a spotlight, becomes a bit strange. When experiencing art, the receptive mind creates a context to hold it, and everything that could be called the “meaning” of art is the construction of this context. Such a mind apprehends immediately whether art has authority, authority being the glow of heightened language or color or light or brush strokes, authority being the defining mark of art, authority being what the muse gives in exchange for the interiority of great art. The bargain is clear and unfortunate: there can be no great art on demand—any great art comes at the cost of strangeness and othermindedness, and what we take as

great art on demand is merely the result of great craft and skill but without the depth of meaning of art, without its inherent isolation. No call, no desire, no need—when they come from outside—will or can move the artist to make art; calls for artistry externally constrained by topic or time produce, in most cases, doggerel or its equivalent. It is the rare occasional poem, the rare posed portrait, the rare commissioned biography, that is remembered as great art.

What Artists Can Teach Philanthropists

How will a potential philanthropist learn why gifts are worth giving, and how will the benefactor learn how to behave and how to give with grace? These questions turn on whether philanthropy, like any other form of gift, requires conscious decision making. Consider the artist.

Every night in just about every town, city, and village across the world, someone is practicing, writing, sculpting, painting, weaving, or creating new forms of art in response to impulses too personal or too universal to fathom. Each of these artists could choose to do something else—and for many, almost anything else would be easier to do and more fun. Some seek out criticism in order to improve. Seek it out. Some pay to receive the criticism.

The impetus to create art arises from whatever comes along, and for many the talent to create art is practiced and honed with no career or recompense in mind. An artist creates because he or she “has to”; writers write to “see how it comes out.” The urge to create is like the urge to reproduce or breathe; even if it was once planned and forced, then later nurtured, the creation of art is almost involuntary. The urge to create is akin to curiosity: the need to find out what the next line in a poem in progress might be is no different from the need to find out what is over the next rise, around the next bend, or beyond the great expanse.

What a Great Gift

Most artists work without benefactors or patrons; little or less is paid for their work; the work appears in small venues, in unread magazines, on unvisited websites, or disappears into drawers and trunks to be discovered, maybe, by children or grandchildren. We become confused, in fact, when greed is grafted onto art. Musicians—it is said—would stop making music if there were no possibility of great financial rewards for it; and if that happened, some people say, music would dry up. The argument stems from Johnson’s indolent comment, “No man but a blockhead ever wrote, except for money.” But if we

were to be deprived of every composition by professional composers and every note played by professional musicians—relying only on currently unnamed and unknown composers and players—we would enjoy a quality of music equal to what we are used to. The same goes for film, fiction, plays, art, and every other artistic endeavor. Because behind every professional producing art of any sort are hundreds or thousands or even more amateurs who are every bit as talented and skilled, and who produce art as fine as that devised by the paid professional.

In this, art enacts the true gift economy; art is a matter of giving gifts without the expectation of direct return. Often, the response to art is criticism and rejection, and the response of artists is to persist and improve. Craft may be for sale, but not art.

Each artist working alone at home with little chance of an audience is producing a gift that requires only a recipient to be fulfilled. This is the purest form of gift, and somehow we all know that the giver expects nothing in return; and we properly feel that nothing needs to be given in return for the artist's gift. We have learned that what art may cost in dollars is irrelevant to its meaning and status as art. When we read of an enormous sum paid for an Impressionist painting, we are not reading about art but instead about a market dictated by supply and demand.

The Philanthropist's Path

The philanthropist who needs to learn what it means to give and how to do it need only look to the artist. Most artists are poor except in talent and desire, and they give the gift of the fruits of their talent even though to do so makes no rational or economic sense. Artists create even when the possibility of being known is absent, because the urge to create is irresistible. It is a compulsion, and the compulsion to help should be the truest reason for philanthropy.

Instead of looking to artists to write the stories of philanthropy, philanthropists should look to artists as examples of how to live the gift culture. Instead of seeking out the highly paid composer, philanthropists should seek out the songwriter in the smoky bar; instead of seeking out royalty-rich novelists, they should seek out the story writer mortgaging her house to attend writers' workshops; instead of asking artists to fill out the cultural footprint of philanthropy, we should let the uncontrollable urge to create the art of great donors arise from among such donors or those around them—as it surely must, as it does wherever art is to be found.

COMMENT ON TURNER

Tyler Cowen

Does today's America have an appropriate mythology for The Gift? Do we offer the right stories about why gifts are so important? Frederick Turner raises some concerns in his provocative essay. As would befit my broader body of work on the arts (Cowen 1998, 2000, 2002), I am optimistic. Let us first look at some facts and then return to the mythology issue, noting of course that a mythology can be true as well as convenient.

American philanthropy brings culture and beauty into our lives. Take U.S. symphony orchestras. The details of estimates may vary, but according to one source, 33 percent of their income comes from private donations and 16 percent from endowments and related sources. Concert income generates 42 percent of their revenue, and direct government support provides only 6 percent of their income. For nonprofit arts institutions more generally, individual, corporate, and foundation donors make up about 45 percent of the budget. Twelve percent of their income comes from foundation grants, two and a half times more than what is provided by the National Endowment for the Arts and state arts councils combined (see Johnson 1997, 9; and Dowie 2001, 169).

Generous Society

Americans are by far the world's most generous donors to the arts. Total charitable giving to the arts from U.S. individuals, foundations, and corporations now stands at about \$10 billion per year. These donations come from private individuals (80 percent of the total), foundations (13 percent of the total), and corporations (7 percent of the total). In contrast, individual private philanthropy to the arts is virtually nonexistent in most European nations. If we look at individual donors, Americans give almost ten times more to nonprofits, per capita, than do their French counterparts (Weil 1991, 177; Report 1997, 12, 18; and Creative America 1997, 18; on the French comparison, see Archambault 1997, 208).

In addition, Americans' donations of time—equal in scope to 390,000 full-time volunteers—are at least twice as valuable as their dollar donations. As of

the early 1990s, the average donor of time had an annual income of over \$56,000, which would place the implicit dollar contribution of these time donations at over \$20 billion, with some estimates going as high as \$25 billion (see Wyszomirski 1999, 186; Cobb 1996., 13; and Report 1997, 14).

Even some European arts institutions, especially in Great Britain, find their leading private donors in the United States. In the mid-1980s, for example, J. Paul Getty donated \$62.5 million to the National Gallery in London, the largest donation the institution has received. The Tate has raised significant American funds as well. To capture such donations, many British nonprofits now have American affiliates with tax-exempt status in the United States (Vogel 2000).

American foundations are significant in their size and scope. In 1999, American foundations gave an estimated \$1.55 billion to the arts (see Cowen 2004). Looking back through American history, the Ford, Carnegie, and Mellon foundations, among others, have been instrumental in supporting a wide variety of high-culture enterprises, especially museums, orchestras, and libraries.

America's corporations are only slightly less important arts donors than are the nation's foundations. A 1995 study found that U.S. businesses gave \$875 million to the arts in the preceding year. Forty-seven percent of all U.S. businesses surveyed gave money to the arts, and American businesses devoted an average of 19 percent of their philanthropic budgets to the arts (Grimes 1995).

Multiple Mythologies

So what is the mythology that sustains this incredible and unprecedented burst of generosity? What is the ideology that glorifies The Gift?

The American secret is that we have no overarching mythology. Instead, our legal and institutional structures allow foundations, businesses, and individual donors to construct their own mythologies. Myths and stories then compete against each other in the broader marketplace of ideas.

Consider a typical arts institution, such as a museum. The museum will appeal to its donors on a variety of bases. Sometimes the museum will play up the overall importance of the arts for a liberal education, or for the public understanding of Western history. Other times the museum will stress the economic development of the community, and the ability of the museum to draw out-of-town tourists. Yet other times, the institution will position itself as a focal point for business and social contacts in the local community. In addition, particular exhibits will receive their own unique marketing to donors,

depending on the nature of the material. No one of these ideas is the mythology for The Gift; rather they all are.

The multiplicity of mythologies does not stop here. The United States has thousands of museums, which compete against each other in a broader market for philanthropic funds. Differing museums offer varying moods, images, and mythologies in their marketing campaigns. They promote and offer values of snobbiness, accessibility, friendliness, gratefulness to donors, relative aloofness, and so on. Museums also present mythologies through differing media. The methods of mythology presentation include direct mail, donor visits, donor retreats, museum events and fundraisers, donor plaques, naming opportunities, and phone calls to donors, to name just a few. A competitive process encourages use of the more effective mythologies and weeds out the losing mythologies.

Since people are so different from one another, give for so many different reasons, and give to so many different forms of creativity, we should not expect a dominant mythology to arise. And this discussion, of course, has considered only museums. The competitive ferment also includes orchestras, poetry magazines, grants to individual artists, libraries, and many other ways of funding human creativity. All of these contribute to the broader production of our gift mythologies.

So, can we squarely identify The American Gift Mythology? No. Are American gift mythologies alive and healthy? Yes. Why do American Gift Mythologies lead the world? Because we allow those mythologies to be shaped by private, voluntary, and competitive processes, firmly embedded within a wealthy capitalist economy and the rule of law.

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