

## FOREWORD

It is with great pleasure that I introduce this third issue of *Philanthropia*. Its contents play a major role in realizing the journal's mission of advancing "the understanding of philanthropy and civil society from the perspective of the humanities and normative theory."

The ability to grasp the deep complexity of philanthropy as a relational activity rooted in culture, history, ethics, philosophy, politics, and human nature, indeed in all aspects of the human condition can be realized only to the extent that the humanities and normative theory are incorporated into its study. Nearly every culture and religion says "give", none leave it at that. There are preferred gifts, recipients, and even givers and, in many instances, varying nuances of the "poison in the gift."<sup>1</sup>

This issue—featuring, among other contributions, selected papers from the "Philanthropy and Human Flourishing Conference" held at *Philanthropia's* host institution, LCC International University—offers a compelling illustration of that breadth and complexity.

In Peter Minowitz's review of Laurence Lampert's Beijing Lectures we are invited to reflect on the extent to which the teaching and indeed, the entire intellectual enterprise can be seen as philanthropic acts, as gifts to the wider culture. In this we see echoes of Socrates' claim at his trial that his life had been dedicated to providing the "greatest good" to the Athenians by persuading "every man among you that he must look to himself, and seek virtue and wisdom . . ."<sup>2</sup>

The issue's remaining contributions well illustrate the importance of the humanities' role in philanthropic studies. Afshan Paarlberg's research note on comparative studies highlights the varying cultural, historical and political constructions of philanthropy and its value. Similarly, Peter Mentzel's article on Adam Smith demonstrates that much can be gained both from reflections on human nature and the questions of personhood. Who or what is this person who gives, or doesn't, and who or what is the person who receives? How do they understand themselves and the other?

Tommy H. Davidsson's essay, "*Competing Visions of the Fullness of Life: Celebrity Culture, Pentecostalism, and the Question of Human Flourishing*," adds an important contemporary dimension by examining how modern cultural and religious forces lay claim to visions of a life well lived, thereby revealing how competing ideals of flourishing shape philanthropic motivations and moral aspirations.

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1 Gloria Goodwin Raheja, *The Poison in the Gift: Ritual, Prestation, and the Dominant Caste in a North Indian Village* (University of Chicago Press, 1988); Marcel Mauss, *The Gift: Forms and Functions of Exchange in Archaic Societies* (The Free Press, 1954).

2 Plato. *The Apology*. [35e].

While culture, religion, and politics among other things may construct our lived reality, the variations are immense. What is a person? How ought a person be? How do we understand how and why individual's value the goods they value? Why is one individual committed to preventing cruelty to animals and another to funding college scholarships? What passions, sentiments, interests, or duties drive us in particular individual and collective directions?

These issues are important because they, more than any other forms of analysis, can help us grapple with the issue of human flourishing. Preeminently this is due to the fact that any understanding of flourishing must be rooted in some clarity regarding the nature of being human, of what we need, want, and of what we are. Deeper and more reflective understandings of philanthropy as a preeminent place of human interaction and relationality, as well as a place where people strive to realize their visions of the good life can help us realize that clarity. It is to that end that this journal strives to help us begin to grasp.

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