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About the Journal

The mission of *Philanthropia* is to advance the understanding of philanthropy and civil society from the perspectives of the humanities and normative theory. Toward that end, we invite article submissions from disciplines such as History, Philosophy, Literary Studies, Religious Studies, Classical Studies, Theology, Linguistics, Anthropology, Ethics, Communications, Rhetoric, and Political Theory.

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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."[1]

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 . . .."[2]

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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Research article

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Charity's Visible Hand? Adam Smith's concept of Philanthropy [1]

Abstract

Most people associate Adam Smith with the concept of the "Invisible Hand" of market relations, or perhaps with the passage from The Wealth of Nations *remarking on the "self-interest" of the butcher, baker, and brewer as the source of our dinner. Those who only know Smith from such concepts might be surprised at the important—perhaps even crucial—role played in his overall sociology by the related concept of beneficence. Working with this concept, he develops a theory of charity. Though the word "philanthropy" occurs nowhere in Smith's massive oeuvre, "charity" appears frequently and is used in much the same way that we currently use the word "philanthropy." This paper will explore the relationship between these words as implied by Smith's writings. In the process, it will argue that Smith's understanding of charity is deeply imbricated with his concepts of beneficence and, yes, self-interest, and will examine how both of these work together within his vision of the importance of virtue in a good life.*

Key words: Charity, Adam Smith, Moral Sentiments, Philanthropy

"How selfish soever man may be supposed, there are evidently some principles in his nature, which interest him in the fortune of others, and render their happiness necessary to him, though he derives nothing from it except the pleasure of seeing it."[2] Thus begins Adam Smith's famous work *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (hereafter *TMS*). In the pages that follow, Smith explores how our "sentiments," essentially our Human Nature, influence (if not actually determine) how we act in the company of our fellow human beings. In this paper, I will draw on Smith's sentimental philosophy as a way of exploring his ideas about charity and, by extension, philanthropy. Smith does not explicate a detailed, systematic theory of charity, to say nothing of philanthropy (a word he never uses), and the material in *TMS* and elsewhere that bears on the subject of charity is extremely complicated. As one scholar writing on the subject put it:

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1 The author wishes to thank three anonymous reviewers, Dr. Douglas J. Den Uyl, Dr. Marty Sulek, and the participants at the Philanthropy and Human Flourishing conference held in May 2025 sponsored by the Institute for Philanthropy, LCC International University, Klaipeda, Lithuania for their comments, questions, and suggestions on an earlier draft of this paper. Any errors or omissions are my responsibility.

2 Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (hereafter *TMS)* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1984 [1759]), 9.

> "Smith's writings reveal a complex theory of charity which allows for both self-regarding and altruistic motives of donors, assigns a prominent role to recipient behavior as a determinant of charitable giving, and recognizes psychological, ethical, historical, social, as well as economic factors influencing the nature and level of charitable activity."[3]

While acknowledging the complexity of Smith's theory of charity, and the different "factors" involved in "charitable giving," this paper will argue that Smith indeed presents material for a coherent theory of charity based firmly on the centrality of our sentiments, especially the sentiment of benevolence.

This is a good place to explore in some detail the term "philanthropy," how it was understood in Smith's day, and how it relates to terms that Smith does use, such as "charity" and "benevolence." During Smith's day, the term philanthropy was understood (drawing on its Classical and Christian meanings) to mean "love of mankind." Indeed, Samuel Johnson's famous dictionary (published in 1755) defines philanthropy as: "love of mankind; good nature."[4] "Johnson's definition would set the standard for English usage of the term during the Enlightenment era, as something approximating a natural moral sentiment."[5] As noted above, Smith never uses the term "philanthropy," but, as we will see, he often refers to the "love of mankind," which he furthermore conceives of as a "natural moral sentiment," naming it "benevolence."

The link between "philanthropy," understood as a "love of mankind," and "charitable giving," emerged very soon after Smith's time, influenced by the deontological ethics of Emmanuel Kant (1724-1804), and by the middle of the nineteenth century, the older definition of philanthropy had been "almost entirely eclipsed by popular usage: either to describe a sociopolitical movement or to describe donating money to charitable institutions that embodied that movement."[6] Thus, we can see Smith's theory of "philanthropy" as investigated in this paper as a precursor to the philosophical evolution of the term to become almost synonymous with "charitable giving."

We can finish our introductory exploration of the background of Smith's approach to "philanthropy" by referencing the helpful taxonomy of philanthropic definitions as developed by Marty Sulek. Smith's understanding of philanthropy seems to draw on at least two of Sulek's categories. In particular, Smith seems to be drawing both on what Sulek describes as "Archaic" and "Ontological" approaches. The former "encompasses references to the literal meaning of philanthropy in ancient Greek as the love of mankind," while the latter approach seeks "to describe an innate desire, moral sentiment, psychological

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3 Thomas D. Birch, "An Analysis of Adam Smith's Theory of Charity and the Problem of the Poor," *Eastern Economic Journal,* Vol.24, No.1 (Winter, 1998, 25-41), 25.

4 Marty Sulek, "On the Modern Meaning of Philanthropy," *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly,* Vol. 39, No.2, April 2010, 193-207), 196.

5 Ibid. 197.

6 Ibid, 198.

predisposition, or other such aspect of human nature that impels people to want to help others."[7] Smith's frequent use of the term "love of mankind," (or variations thereof) clearly partake of the "Literal" description of philanthropy, while his understanding of this love is rooted firmly in his theory of natural moral sentiments, as we shall see.

Before pursuing this "ontological" approach to Smith's understanding of charity, it is worth noting that Adam Smith, despite the superficial acquaintance many people have with him through knowledge of his "Invisible Hand" and the importance he places on Self-Interest (of which more later), was intensely interested in the plight of the poor. At the dawn of the Industrial Revolution, when technological developments and their repercussions were demolishing the older socioeconomic order, Smith emerged as a vocal and discerning advocate for the immiserated urban and rural poor. During the eighteenth century, as indeed, through most of human history, poverty was regarded as in some sense normal, "Providence" or "God's Will" having ordained that some people would be rich and some poor. By the eighteenth century, to this attitude had been added a sense that the poor lived in poverty as a result of some moral or physical inferiorities. That is, the material poverty of the poor reflected some physical and, more importantly, moral impoverishment. Thus, the prevalent feeling about poverty was that it was the result of the moral turpitude, intemperance, and licentiousness of the poor themselves. Underlying Smith's investigation of charity and beneficence is his firm conviction that this is a faulty and deeply erroneous position. In the *Wealth of Nations* and elsewhere, he constantly works to debunk such attitudes and perceptions, arguing that the poor are, in general, no more immoral than their societal "betters." In particular, he is insistent that they actually work harder than people higher on the socio-economic ladder and have the same overall intellectual and moral capacities as well. As one Smith scholar summed up Smith's attitudes toward the poor, "In the context of the eighteenth century, then, Smith presents a remarkably dignified picture of the poor, a picture in which they make choices every bit as respectable as those of their social superiors – a picture, therefore, in which there really are no 'inferiors' and 'superiors' at all."[8]

So, having established Smith's interest in the problem of poverty, we can now turn to his views on charitable giving with an aim to construct a Smithian theory of philanthropy. To do this, it is probably best to start with a brief examination of his overall philosophical architecture.

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7 Marty Sulek, "On the Modern Meaning of Philanthropy," *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly,* Vol. 39, No.2, April 2010, 193-207), 204. Emphasis mine.
8 Samuel Fleischacker, *On Adam Smith's* Wealth of Nations*: A Philosophical Companion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004), 207.

Fellow-Feeling, Self-Interest, and Praise

While this is certainly not the place to present a detailed explication of Smith's thinking about Human Nature, much less an overview of his work on the subject in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*, a very brief review of some of his main points will be useful in our investigation of his attitudes toward charity.

Smith postulated a number of basic attributes to all humans. Among the most important of these, one is self-interest while another is what he calls "fellow feeling." Fellow-feeling plays a very important part in Smith's moral philosophy. "Our fellow-feeling for the misery of others, that it is by changing places in fancy with the sufferer, that we come either to conceive or to be affected by what he feels."[9] Thus, fellow-feeling is an innate part of human nature. It is worth emphasizing that fellow-feeling operates largely at the level of imagination. As one scholar observed, "Although fellow-feeling is often sparked by an instinctive emotional response, it develops more generally from an ability to imagine how one would feel *if* placed in another person's circumstances."[10]

But Smith observes that, while contemplating an act of generosity or charity, one's fellow-feeling frequently confronts another aspect of our nature, our self-interest. It should be emphasized in this context that self-interest is not a vice, it is simply part of our nature. For Smith, furthermore, "self-interest is the foundation not just of economic order, but, along with sympathy, for the moral order on which the larger economic order rests."[11] Smith goes on, however, to draw a sharp distinction between self-interest and *selfishness*. We will revisit this distinction later, but for the time being we might sum up the difference by noting that "self-interest is …consistent with justice and propriety. Selfishness, the desire to better oneself without regard to even the demands of justice, is not."[12]

According to Smith, we can achieve a balance between our self-interest and our fellow-feeling by cultivating what he calls our "self-command." As one scholar put it, "Moderating egoism, according to Smith, is self-command, the capacity to bend and moderate selfish desires through sensitivity to the feelings of others. Specifically, we wish to lead lives that are not only well-provisioned but to some degree admirable. And to be worthy of admiration, we must take a sincere interest in the welfare of others."[13] To put it perhaps more

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9 *TMS,* 10.

10 Birch, "Charity," 27. Emphasis in original.

11 Lauren Hall, "Self-Interest Rightly Understood," (https://www.adamsmithworks.org/documents/self-interest-rightly-understood) *Adam Smith Works.* October 1, 2018.

12 Ibid.

13 Richard Gunderman, "Smith and Aristotle on Owing and Giving," *Adam Smith Works* (https://www.adamsmithworks.org/documents/gunderman-smith-aristotle-owing-giving) April 10, 2024, 6.

directly, "self command is the ability to govern any type of passion, however, in terms of altruistic charitable behavior, it refers to the ability to control or moderate selfish desires."[14]

But how are we to know when our self-command has been successful in balancing our self interest and our fellow feeling? And perhaps more importantly why should we want to do this? As Smith himself asks: "When our passive feelings are almost always so sordid and so selfish, how comes it that our active principles should often be so generous and noble? When we are always so much more deeply affected by whatever concerns ourselves, than by whatever concerns other men; what is it which prompts the generous, upon all occasions, and the mean upon many, to sacrifice their own interests to the greater interest of others?" Smith answers a few lines later: "It is not the love of our neighbor, it is not the love of mankind, which upon many occasions prompts us to the practice of those divine virtues. It is a stronger love, a more powerful affection, which generally takes place upon such occasions; the love of what is honorable and noble, of the grandeur, and dignity, and superiority of our own characters."[15] This is a very important passage for our purposes. Note that Smith clearly states that "love of mankind," (i.e., philanthropy) is *not*, generally, the source of beneficent actions. Rather, these are rooted in the love of what is virtuous in ourselves. Of course, the "honorable and noble" aspects of our "own characters" seem likely to be tied somehow to the sentiment of benevolence, and thus linked in a round about way back to "the love of mankind." But Smith seems to want to draw a distinction here between them.

But this all poses yet another question: Why, exactly, does the love of the "honorable and noble" in our "own characters" have the power to bolster our powers of self-command to balance our fellow-feeling with our selfishness and thus to produce acts of beneficence and charitable generosity towards others?

Smith's answer is rooted in the psychological architecture he constructed elsewhere in *TMS*. Most importantly, as mentioned earlier, human beings want to be admirable. Or, in Smith's words, "Man naturally desires, not only to be loved, but to be lovely; or to be that thing which is the natural and proper object of love…He desires not only praise, but praise-worthiness; or to be that thing which, though it should be praised by nobody is, however, the natural and proper object of praise."[16] In other words, we love the "grandeur, superiority and dignity of our own characters" because these make us praise-worthy, especially since our acts of "loveliness" might be "praised by nobody".

But how do we know that our acts of beneficence, motivated out of selfless fellow-feeling, are praise-worthy? Here again, we have to rely on Smith's ideas about human psychology: "Nature seemingly has endowed him

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14 Birch, "Charity," 27.

15 *TMS,* 137.

16 *TMS,* 113-114.

[i.e., any human being] not only with a desire of being approved of, but a desire of being what ought to be approved of, or of being what he himself approves of in other men."[17] Hence, "praise" as such is not the object, that is to say, even if no other person actually praises us, we want our actions to be worthy of praise; we want to feel the "grandeur and dignity" of our characters. Importantly, Smith says little about the praise of other people in his discussion about self-interest, fellow feeling and self-command. Where, then, does our feeling of praise-worthiness ultimately come from? Smith tells us that the "natural misrepresentations of self-love can be corrected only by the eye of [the] impartial spectator."[18] Who, or what, is this?

Smith describes the impartial spectator this way: "We endeavor to examine our own conduct as we imagine any other fair and impartial spectator would examine it. If, upon placing ourselves in his situation, we thoroughly enter into all the passions and motives which influenced if we approve of it, by sympathy with the approbation of the supposed equitable judge. If otherwise, we enter into his disapprobation, and condemn it."[19]

It is crucially important here to emphasize that what we really want is not necessarily the praise of other people (though we generally want that too) but the praise of the impartial spectator. Smith spends considerable time developing this point, but one passage seems particularly clear in this regard: "If in this view [i.e., the view of the impartial spectator] [our action] pleases us, we are tolerably satisfied. We can be more indifferent about the applause, and, in some measure, despite the censure of the world; secure that, however misunderstood or misrepresented, we are the natural and proper objects of approbation."[20] In other words, not only is the praise of the impartial spectator superior to the praise of actual people, in some cases it can even trump their disapproval or indifference of an action. Similarly, we do not (or at least should not) value praise when it is given to us undeservedly or mistakenly. As Smith put it: "The most sincere praise can give little pleasure when it cannot be considered as some sort of proof of praise worthiness. It is by no means sufficient that, from ignorance or mistake, esteem and admiration should, in some way or other, be bestowed upon us."[21] Likewise, we should not praise other people when they do not deserve it or

17 *TMS,* 117.
18 *TMS,* 137.
19 *TMS,* 110.
20 *TMS,* 112.
21 *TMS*, 114.

when it is misplaced.[22]

Hence, we have now at least established that, according to Smith, what we want from the impartial spectator is praise. This is extremely important for Smith, who argues that what people want most of all is praise, not only from their fellow humans, but even more importantly from the impartial spectator. He puts this very forcefully when he states, "No action can properly be called virtuous, which is not accompanied with the sentiment of self-approbation."[23] Hence, we want to be praise-worthy, even if we are not actually praised. We want the praise of the impartial spectator, assuring us that we are virtuous.

This insight helps explain acts of generosity or charitable giving that are otherwise hard to account for. Anonymous gifts or bequests, for example, are difficult to explain if the goal of beneficence is praise from others, but easy if we consider it praise-worthy, and thus deserving of praise from the impartial spectator. With this observation we return to the opening quotation in this paper (and the first passage in *TMS*). One way, perhaps the only way, that we become praise-worthy, i.e.,"worthy of admiration", is by taking an interest in the "welfare of others."

One is here reminded of Smith's famous story of the "butcher, baker, and brewer" in the *Wealth of Nations*.[24] They have obvious material self-interests in providing our dinner. But these are only part, and perhaps only a small part, of their self-interestedness. In "moderating [their] egoism" they also have an interest, perhaps equal to or even greater than then material interest, in being praise-worthy in the eyes of the impartial spectator. Beneficent, charitable acts can induce praise from the recipients, but perhaps even more importantly they are *praise-worthy* in eyes of an "impartial spectator." Hence, charitable acts, while growing out of the natural human sentiment of benevolence, also are in our self-interest, insofar as they satisfy our need for adulation, even if it is "only" from our internal impartial spectator. As Smith noted in the opening of *TMS*, we get pleasure from seeing the happiness of others. Thus, fostering such happiness is not only altruistic but self-regarding. It is worth emphasizing here that our story of the tradesmen providing our dinner provides yet another important example of Smith's distinction between self-interest and selfishness.

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22 Interestingly, despite some superficial similarities, the impartial spectator does not seem to be the same thing as "conscience." Smith uses both terms, as well as a third related concept that he calls "the man within the breast," to describe some sort of internal mechanism of self-approbation or reproach, but they seem to be distinct things, rather than simply different terms for the same thing. For a fuller explication (with which I largely agree) of the relationship in *TMS* between conscience, the impartial spectator, and the man within the breast, see Douglas J. DenUyl, "Impartial Spectating and the Price Analogy," *Econ Journal Watch*, Vol. 13, No.2, (May 2016), 1-9.

23 *TMS,* 178.

24 Adam Smith. *An Inquiry into the Nature and Causes of the Wealth of Nations.* (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1976 [1776]), 27. "It is not from the benevolence of the butcher, the brewer, or the baker, that we expect our dinner, but from their regard to their own interest."

"The impartial spectator, impartial as he is, draws a sharp line between self-interest that is neutral in its effects on others and self-interest that harms others to benefit oneself.[25] As Smith himself put it: "To disturb his [our neighbor's] happiness merely because it stands in the way of our own, to take from him what is of real use to him merely because it may be of equal or of more use to us, or to indulge in this manner, at the expense of other people, the natural preference which every man has for his own happiness above that of other people, is what no impartial spectator can go along with."[26] Our butcher, baker, and brewer expressed their self-interest in a manner that was at least "neutral," and in any case certainly not selfish, according to Smith's view.

The Sentiments and Virtues

So far, we have a rudimentary theory of charity built around a balance of self-interest and fellow-feeling. This balance is moderated by our sense of self command, with a goal of being praise worthy.[27] Thus, in a fascinating way, Smith's theory of charity encompasses both altruistic and self-regarding aspects. That is, we carry out charitable acts both because of our innate fellow-feeling, and because doing so makes us feel praise-worthy in the eyes of the impartial spectator. So far so good, we might say. But only a little reflection raises a whole host of questions, perhaps the most obvious of which involves the foundations for these attributes of human nature. Smith, along with philosophers such as his teacher Frances Hutcheson (1694-1746), argued that, alongside our various passions and appetites, human beings also had certain innate feelings and attitudes, that he termed "sentiments," that lie behind our actions. Among these are the sentiments of resentment and benevolence. These are present in all normal people by virtue of their humanity. The sentiments influence our actions, for better or worse. That is, most sentiments can produce both virtuous and vicious behavior. For example, resentment can lead us to behave in hurtful and vengeful ways, but it is also at the root of the virtue of justice, without which (according to Smith) society would be impossible. Most of the sentiments lead to virtuous acts only if they are tempered somehow, as we shall see shortly. In this sense, the sentiment of benevolence is unusual. The virtue it tends to, beneficence (from which spring generous and charitable works), is not essential to societal functioning (according to Smith), but is necessary to a "happy society." As he puts it, "…though among the different members of the society there should be no mutual love and affection [i.e., no beneficence], the society, though less happy and agreeable, will not necessarily

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25 Hall, p.3

26 *TMS*, 82

27 Importantly, Smith's work on *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* was provoked, at least in part, by the popularity of Bernard Mandeville's *The Fable of the Bees (*1714), which argues that private *vices,* not virtues, are the source of public good.

be dissolved."[28] Indeed, "It [beneficence] is the ornament which embellishes, not the foundation which supports, the building".[29] Smith sums this relationship up thus: "Beneficence is, therefore, less essential to the existence of society than justice. Society may subsist, though not in the most comfortable state, without beneficence; but the prevalence of injustice must utterly destroy it."[30]

This difference between justice and beneficence has another interesting dimension. The virtue of justice, since it is crucial to the maintenance of society, can, indeed must, be enforced. "The violation of justice is injury: it does real and positive hurt to some particular persons."[31] Beneficence is a very different virtue. "Beneficence is always free, it cannot be extorted by force, the mere want of it exposes to no punishment; because the mere want of beneficence tends to do no real positive evil."[32] So, the virtue of beneficence cannot be compelled and is not, strictly speaking, necessary for the maintenance of society. Smith returns to this point in his Lectures on Jurisprudence, "As now men are only bound not to hurt one another and to act fairly and justly in their dealing, but are not compelled to any acts of benevolence, which are left intirely [sic] to his own good will."[33] Yet, as the opening of the *TMS* states, people in general are drawn to perform acts of beneficence because they derive "pleasure from seeing" them.

Thus, inspired by our fellow-feeling, acting on the virtue of beneficence, itself rooted in the sentiment of benevolence, leads us to acts of charitable generosity and thus leads the impartial spectator to praise us, thereby giving us pleasure. The entire happy process is made possible by our self-command keeping our self-interest moderated.

Justice, Duty, and other Problems

But, of course, this tidy explication of Smith's theory of charity raises a number of questions and challenges, some of which Smith himself seems to be aware. Perhaps one (or two depending on the way one counts them) is the challenge posed to his sentimental view of beneficence by the importance of justice and duty.

Some scholars have argued that Smith regarded charity not only as a product of the virtue of beneficence, but that of justice, thus making charity a

28 *TMS,* 86.
29 *TMS,* 86.
30 *TMS,* 86.
31 *TMS,* 79.
32 *TMS*, 78.
33 *Lectures on Jurisprudence,* Report of 1763, p.172). Also from the *Lectures:* "The law hinders the doing of injuries to others, but there can be no fixed laws for acts of benevolence." (Report of 1766, p.449)

duty.[34] And if charity is indeed derived from the virtue of justice, then it ought to be in some way enforceable, since, as Smith argues so forcefully, justice is essential to the functioning of society. Some scholars tie this into an argument for the public (i.e., State) provision of welfare.[35] Indeed, most of the scholarly work on Smith's approach to charity has focused largely on this interesting tension that is implied between the virtues of justice and beneficence. As we have discussed earlier, according to Smith, while the virtue of justice is crucial to the very maintenance of human society, beneficence is not. Throughout *TMS*, Smith stresses that beneficence is a very different virtue from justice. Yet, occasionally he seems to leave the door open for some sort of mixing of the two. In his discussion on Virtue, Smith comments on the category of *justitia attributrix* in the legal work of Hugo Grotius, saying that one sense of the word Justice "coincides with what some have called distributive justice…which consists in proper beneficence, in the becoming use of what is our own, and in the applying it to those purposes either of charity or generosity, to which it is most suitable, in our situation, that it should be applied."[36] This passage opens up some intriguing possibilities. Elsewhere in *TMS*, as we have seen, Smith stresses that beneficence is at the root of a "happy" society, whereas justice is essential for the existence of society itself. From this, it seems to follow that while justice can be coerced by authority, beneficence cannot (or should not). But, if a case can be made that beneficent charitable giving is somehow connected to justice, then it could conceivably be something enforceable, like other just actions.

Having said all this, it should be noted that Smith's comments on "distributive justice" and its relationship to beneficence are situated in the context of his review of different philosophers' (especially Plato's and Aristotle's) approaches to the virtues, including justice. Thus, it is not at all clear whether Smith himself actually ascribes to the view that "justice" entails a "positive" (e.g., it is just to give to charity), as opposed to a strictly "negative" (i.e., justice means not harming others) aspect. Earlier in the quoted passage, Smith himself notes that the way he has been using the term "justice" is in exactly this "negative" sense: "…in the sense we are said to do justice to our neighbor when we abstain from doing him any positive harm, and do not directly hurt him, either in his person, in his estate, or in his reputation." This

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34 As part of a general investigation of the relationship between justice and charity, Douglas J. Den Uyl observes, "…it would seem that we require some sort of distinction between justice and charity to help us separate what is owed from what may be freely given…" "The Right to Welfare and the Virtue of Charity," *Social Philosophy and Policy,* vol.10, no.1 (1993), 192-224. 202

35 For example, "[Smith] did not think that redirecting resources to help the poor was in principle beyond either the capacity or the rightful province of the state." Fleischaker, 226. "…a modern welfare-theoretic case for government intervention on behalf of the poor can be constructed from Smith's writings." Birch, "Charity," 38.

36 *TMS*, 269-270.

parsimonious definition of justice would seem to foreclose an interpretation whereby it would play a significant role in charitable giving.

The discussion of the place of justice in Smith's theory of charity is closely related to the role of duty in carrying out charitable or generous acts. In fact, as part of his comparative discussion of justice and beneficence, Smith hints that we may have a duty of beneficence. Concluding a discussion of gratitude, and how it is impossible to enforce, Smith nevertheless stresses that "of all the *duties of beneficence*, those which gratitude recommends to us approach nearest to what is called a perfect and complete obligation."[37] This seems to imply that beneficence implies certain duties. Duty is certainly important to Smith. Most of Part III of *TMS* is devoted to an investigation of duty. Yet, surprisingly little therein is to be found directly related to the virtue of beneficence or the sentiment of benevolence, and even less to generosity and charity. Interestingly, in fact, actions that appear generous or beneficent, which are in actuality motivated solely by a sense of duty, are somewhat disparaged by Smith. For example, he discusses the gratitude of someone (we might here recall the passage quoted above about gratitude being the most important of the duties of beneficence) who thanks his friend for help, but only out of a sense of duty. He also uses the example of a wife who, while "careful, officious, faithful, and sincere," and "deficient in none of those attentions which the sentiment of conjugal affection could have prompted her to perform" nevertheless acts out these beneficent qualities only out of a sense of duty. Smith makes it clear that such cases represent a kind of "second best." "Such a friend, and such a wife, are neither of them, undoubtedly, the very best of their kinds; and though both of them may have the most serious and earnest desire to fulfill every part of their duty, yet they will fail in many nice and delicate regards, they will miss many opportunities of obliging, which they could never have overlooked if they had possessed the sentiment [benevolence?] that is proper to their situation."[38]

Hence, it would seem that a sense of justice and an attention to duty might play some sort of role in Smith's theory of charity, though it also seems clear that this would be, at best, a kind of supporting one and not a major part. To put it another way, in trying to formulate a coherent approach to Smith's concept of charity, we can and should still rely primarily on his sentimental philosophy, especially his understanding of benevolence and beneficence.

Toward a Smithian Theory of Charity…and Philanthropy?

So far, we have sketched out the outlines for a theory of charity, relying heavily on Smith's sentimental moral philosophy and his rudimentary

37 *TMS*, 79. Emphasis mine.
38 *TMS*, 162.

reflections on human psychology. Smith sees the sentiment of benevolence as naturally present in all normal human beings. Benevolence moves us to act in beneficent ways, and we know when our beneficence is praise-worthy from the adulation we receive from our impartial spectators. So far, this account maps on closely to Smith's treatment of other virtuous actions. As noted above, when we act justly (or observe justice being done), we feel praise-worthy ourselves (or want to praise others for being just). And to the extent that justice has been achieved, that the parties involved have received their just deserts, we recognize success. But what sort of a virtue is beneficence? The impartial spectator will praise us when we have acted beneficently, and he will presumably praise us increasingly as we act increasingly beneficently. But is there a limit to this praise-worthiness? We know (or think we know) when justice has been done in a particular case. But how do we know if we have been sufficiently beneficent in a particular case? I might feel moved by the plight of sick children (my fellow-feeling for them), and my sentiment of benevolence might spur me to act beneficently and donate money; a virtuous action that the impartial spectator should praise me for. But how do I know how much to donate? Smith himself is not quite clear about this.

Similarly, Smith's theory of charity does not seem to give much guidance about the objects of our charity. How do we judge between different kinds of charitable acts? If I want to give $100 to a good cause, do I give it to the children's hospital? The local opera company? A poor homeless person? Smith is clear that justice should be proportional to the act.[39] That is, the impartial spectator will (or should) chasten us if our feelings of resentment provoke us to implement a punishment out of proportion to whatever harm has been committed. But how does the impartial spectator help us determine whether our beneficent act is proportional to the need?

Along similar lines, we might also confront the question of "deserving" and "undeserving" potential claimants to our beneficent charitable giving. For example, while it is surely praise-worthy to give money to a homeless person, will the impartial spectator praise us more if the homeless person is in her condition due to a horrible series of tragic accidents, or if she is a shiftless drug-addict. Does it make any difference? Similarly, is it more praise-worthy to give this person cash or, say, a coupon for a meal?

The implication seems to be that each person's impartial spectator will provide guidance on these questions. In so doing, it will surely be aided by another of Smith's virtues, prudence. While Smith himself does not involve prudence directly in the business of charity, he says something like this in

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39 "They [i.e. people in general] readily, therefore, sympathize with the natural resentment of the injured, and the offender becomes the object of their hatred and indignation…As the greater and more irreparable the evil that is done, the resentment of the sufferer runs naturally the higher, so does likewise the sympathetic indignation of the spectator…" *TMS*, 83-84.

the context of his general explication of the virtue of prudence:

> "But though the virtues of prudence, justice, and beneficence, may, upon different occasions, be recommended to us almost equally by two different principles; those of self-command are, upon most occasions, principally and almost entirely recommended to us by one; by the sense of propriety, by regard to the sentiments of the supposed impartial spectator."[40]

This quote seems to suggest that, while we act in such a way to be praise-worthy in the estimation of the impartial spectator, some element of that praise-worthiness is based on acting prudentially within the confines of propriety. Hence, for example, the impartial spectator will surely praise me for acting beneficently by, for example, giving money to a shelter for battered women. But what if I decide to empty my bank account and liquidate my property holdings to do so? The impartial spectator in this case might well consider what I am doing to be imprudent, even reckless. In this case, the otherwise praise-worthy act of donating to the shelter is mitigated by the endangerment of myself and my family.

We find an echo of this cautionary way of thinking about beneficence when Smith states: "The administration of the great system of the universe, however, the care of the universal happiness of all rational and sensible beings, is the business of God, and not of man. To man is allotted a much humbler department, but one much more suitable to the weakness of his powers, and to the narrowness of his comprehension; the care of his own happiness, of that of his family, his friends, his country."[41] The implication here is that before we worry about the "universal happiness" of mankind, we should first make sure that our own house is in order and that we have provided for ourselves, our family, and our friends.

Ultimately, since beneficence is a virtue that Smith states is "ornamental" to society and not necessary for its maintenance ("only" for its happiness), then one might say that *any* amount of charitable giving is enough. Smith might well have been quiet on the issue of how much or what kind of charitable contributions to make to a particular person or cause because this was, for him, more-or-less beside the point. He was more interested in figuring out *why* people are charitable and generous in the first place, when such actions are, on the face of it, counter to our self-love, which is so obviously manifest that it does not require any great philosophical explanation.

Finally, I want to end by coming back to Sulek's taxonomy of philanthropy and where Smith fits. At the outset of the paper, I suggested by Smith approach is "ontological" within the Sulekian framework. Further work on what an ontological approach to philanthropy entails might suggest further ways that Smith's theory of charity might be elucidated and developed.

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40 *TMS,* 262.
41 *TMS*, p.237

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Reasearch Article

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Competing Visions of the Fullness of Life: Celebrity Culture, Pentecostalism, and the Question of Human Flourishing

Abstract

For well over two millennia, scholars, philosophers, and ideologists have pursued the question as to what constitutes human flourishing. This paper examines two modern phenomena that make implicit claims to the fullness of life: celebrity culture and Pentecostalism. The study first examines recent scholarly attempts by positive psychologists, scholars of religion and spirituality, and contemporary Christian theologians to answer the question of human flourishing. Having analyzed the competing claims of celebrity culture and Pentecostalism, the paper critically evaluates the proposed perspectives and argues that both perspectives may benefit from a critical interaction with theories of human flourishing, but also how they may have an unwarranted (celebrity culture) or warranted (Pentecostalism) influence on human flourishing.

Keywords: Human Flourishing, Celebrity Culture, Pentecostalism, Full Gospel

Introduction

If there ever were a rhetorical question, this might be it: “Who wants to live a good life?” The answer is obviously “everybody.” Yet, as students of human flourishing have noticed since the days of Aristotle, the definition of the good life is elusive, resisting simple answers, and is based on subjective viewpoints.[1] A host of philosophies and religions have attempted to answer that all-important question, ranging from Greek philosophical schools and world religions to contemporary political and socio-economic ideologies. Despite being difficult to pinpoint, an increasing number of scholars argue that the general contours of the good life can be determined. Positive psychologist Martin Seligman argues that “the content” of human flourishing consists of “happiness, flow, meaning,

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1 Although containing slight variations in meaning, terms like “human flourishing,” “well-being,” and “fullness of life” will be used interchangeably throughout the paper.

love, gratitude, accomplishment, growth, [and] better relationships."[2] Miroslav Volf and his colleague Matthew Croasmun at Yale University contend that the good life can be narrowed down to a life that is (1) "led well (agency)," (2) "going well (circumstances)," and (3) "feels well (affective)."[3] Harvard professor Tyler VanderWeele is more specific and lists several "domains" around which there is an essential agreement regarding their importance for a flourishing life. He lists "happiness and life satisfaction," "mental and physical health," "meaning and purpose," "character and virtue," and "close social relationships" as essential components.[4]

In this paper, I will examine two modern phenomena that make competing claims about the fullness of life, namely contemporary celebrity culture and Pentecostalism. Pentecostalism and celebrity culture are global phenomena that impact millions of people, yet have largely been overlooked in discussions on human flourishing. That these two phenomena are brought into the conversation about human flourishing is therefore of great practical and theoretical importance. In fact, I will attempt to show that both are essentially philosophies of human flourishing. Even if they make radically different claims regarding the good life, they intersect in everyday life. The larger aim is to show that established theories of human flourishing can bring a necessary critique to both celebrity culture and Pentecostalism, but also that scholars of human flourishing must better recognize the pervasive influence of celebrity culture and the important contributions a "grace-based" theory of human flourishing, like Pentecostalism, can provide.[5]

The essay will first examine current academic discussions on human flourishing, with a special emphasis on human flourishing and Christian spirituality, which will serve as a theoretical basis for the rest of the paper. In the following section, I will give an account of modern celebrity culture and its vision of the good life. The discussion will particularly address its relationship to Western culture and its obsession with self-authentication. Next, I will present human flourishing from a Pentecostal perspective, noting its relation to the fivefold gospel. The discussion will describe a Pentecostal understanding of human flourishing as a divine infusion of life that brings holistic transformation. The description of a

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2 Martin E. P. Seligman, *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-Being* (New York, NY: Free Press, 2011), 8.

3 Miroslav Volf and Matthew Croasmun, *For the Life of the World: Theology That Makes a Difference* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Brazos Press, 2019), 13–14. See also Miroslav Volf, Matthew Croasmun, and Ryan McAnnally-Linz, "Meanings and Dimensions of Flourishing: A Programmatic Sketch," in *Religion and Human Flourishing* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2020), 10.

4 Tyler J. VanderWeele, "Spiritual Well-Being and Human Flourishing: Conceptual, Causal, and Policy Relations," in *Religion and Human Flourishing* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2020), 44.

5 The focus on Pentecostalism's "grace-based" approach to human flourishing is not to say that other Christian traditions are not "grace-based." However, Pentecostalism has been selected here because of its emphasis on holistic transformation.

Pentecostal understanding of flourishing will be juxtaposed with its increasing infatuation with celebrity culture, which poses a serious challenge to its original vision of the fullness of life. The paper will conclude with a discussion on how theories of human flourishing may critique celebrity culture and Pentecostalism, but also how they may have an unwarranted (celebrity culture) or warranted (Pentecostalism) influence on human flourishing.

Theories of Human Flourishing and Christian Spirituality

This section provides an overview of theories of human flourishing and Christian spirituality as described by positive psychologists, psychologists of religion and spirituality, and Christian theologians. The goal is not to offer an exhaustive account of every possible perspective on human flourishing but to advance a general framework from which a meaningful discussion on celebrity culture and Pentecostalism can be undertaken.

The discussion on human flourishing can be traced back to ancient Greece and its concept of *eudaimonia* (lit. "good demon"). In his *Nichomachean Ethics*, Aristotle made happiness the ultimate goal and purpose of humankind. Happiness for Aristotle was not a subjective feeling but was achieved through acquiring virtues such as "justice, piety, and courage," which were rationally lived out in the pursuit of the good life.[6] Patrick Wong gives a simple definition of Aristotle's perspective: "'[E]udaimonic happiness' is about lives lived and actions taken in pursuit of *eudaimonia*"[7] – a perspective of well-being promoted to this day as exemplified by Lawrence B. Solum: "human flourishing involves lives of rational and social activities that express the human excellences or virtues."[8]

Ed Diener, Richard E. Lucas, and Shigehiro Oishi have helpfully summed up the numerous theories of *subjective* well-being (theories focusing on individual well-being) from Aristotle to contemporary times in three general categories: "(1) need and goal satisfaction theories, (2) process or activity theories, and (3) genetic and personality predisposition theories."[9] They explain that the first category understands well-being in terms of "the reduction of tensions," such as Freud's and Maslow's needs models, whereas goal theories state that well-being is linked to the achievement of "an ideal state or accomplish[ment of] a valued aim."[10] Drawing on the research of E. T. Higgins, Diener, Lucas, and Oishi further note

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6 Patrick D. Wong, *Three Perspectives on Happiness, from Ancient to Modern: Aristotle, Adam Smith, and Martin E.P. Seligman* (Salve Regina University, 2020), 11–12.

7 Wong, 12.

8 Lawrence B. Solum, "Flourishing, Virtue, and Common Good Constitutionalism," *Harvard Journal of Law and Public Policy* 46, no. 3 (Fall 2023): 1174.

9 Other approaches to well-being are, for example, collective and eternal well-being. Ed Diener, Richard E. Lucas, and Shigehiro Oishi, "Subjective Well-Being: The Science of Happiness and Life Satisfaction," in *Handbook of Positive Psychology* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 66.

10 Diener, Lucas, and Oishi, 66.

that theorists in this camp also contend that "discrepancies from one's 'ideal self' and one's 'ought self' lead to the experiences of negative emotions."[11] As opposed to the first category, where well-being is achieved *after* certain conditions have been met, process or activity theories maintain that it is the "engagement in an activity itself [that] provides happiness."[12] These theories claim "that people are happiest when they are engaged in interesting activities that match their level of skill."[13] The third category, genetic and personality predisposition theories, proposes that well-being often exists regardless of personal accomplishments, immediate engagement, and favorable circumstances. These theories suggest that when "momentary and long-term subjective well-being" are considered, "there is a substantial genetic component to it; to some degree, people are born prone to be happy or unhappy."[14] For example, "extraversion" and "neuroticism" have explicitly been shown to affect well-being.[15]

Having outlined the general approaches to subjective well-being, we can now turn to specific arguments advanced by positive psychologists, psychologists of religion and spirituality, and Christian theologians, who reiterate these categories but complement them in important ways, especially regarding *spiritual* well-being – a category that is often neglected but important to a majority of the world's population.[16] The founder of positive psychology, Martin Seligman, argues similarly to Aristotle that well-being is more than "a happiology."[17] However, Seligman steers away from Aristotle's "monistic" preoccupation with happiness and includes it in a fivefold framework of well-being.[18] Seligman employs the acronym PERMA to sum up the elements of his fivefold framework: "Positive emotion," "Engagement," "Positive Relationships," "Meaning," and "Accomplishment."[19] He argues that each of these elements is measurable, contributes to well-being, and is desirable in its own right.[20] Moreover, his framework is multidimensional, going beyond a mere individualistic assessment of well-being to include both subjective and objective measurements.[21] According to Seligman, PERMA should not be viewed as a model that *defines* well-being but rather *contributes* to well-being for the simple reason that well-being is a human construct that cannot be defined

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11 Diener, Lucas, and Oishi, 66.
12 Diener, Lucas, and Oishi, 66.
13 Diener, Lucas, and Oishi, 66.
14 Diener, Lucas, and Oishi, 66–67.
15 Diener, Lucas, and Oishi, 67.
16 Tyler J. VanderWeele, Katelyn N. G. Long, and Michael J. Balboni, "Tradition-Specific Measures of Spiritual Well-Being," in *Measuring Well-Being Interdisciplinary Perspectives from the Social Sciences and the Humanities* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2021), 483.
17 Seligman, *Flourish: A Visionary New Understanding of Happiness and Well-Being*, 18.
18 Seligman, 20.
19 Seligman, 20–23.
20 Seligman, 19–20.
21 Seligman, 27.

scientifically.[22] Thus, the goal of positive psychology for Seligman is to "increase the amount of *flourishing* in your own life and on the planet [i.e., each element of his five-fold framework]."[23]

Scholars of psychology of religion and spirituality (R/S) are not as limited to a "scientific" approach to well-being as positive psychologists like Seligman. For instance, Steven L. Porter, Jason Baehr, Tenelle Porter, and Robert C. Roberts promote a "methodological pluralism" approach that acknowledges the value of philosophical and theological approaches.[24] Their "methodological pluralism" is similar to a critical realist position that affirms an ontological reality beyond the empirical, while also acknowledging insights from the empirical sciences. Thus, for these scholars, human flourishing is more than a fluid social construct without roots in a metaphysical reality. Despite the two approaches' divergent epistemological foundations, scholars of psychology of religion and spirituality argue that the two perspectives can be integrated because they have similar "aims," "foundations," and "emphases."[25] Edward B. Davies et al. note:

> The central aims of positive psychology are to advance scientific understanding of human strengths and flourishing and then use that understanding to benefit people, institutions, and societies [...]. Likewise, the main aims of the psychology of R/S are (a) to enhance scientific understanding of spirituality […] and religion […] and (b) use that understanding to benefit society and improve people's lives […].[26]

Having surveyed numerous empirical studies of the benefits of R/S practices, Van Cappellen, Zang, and Fredrickson also conclude: "Although not all mental health practitioners may feel comfortable engaging with their client's R/S beliefs, they may still want to consider engaging with their clients' R/S practices. These practices, especially if they are habitual, may provide vehicles for the experience of positive emotions that can, over time, enhance clients' mental health and resilience."[27] Furthermore, integrating the two approaches could mitigate the accusation against positive psychology for being too rational and insensitive to non-Western traditions: "Increased integration of these fields would

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22 Seligman, 19.

23 Seligman, 29.

24 Steven L. Porter et al., "On the Integration of Positive Psychology and the Psychology of Religion/Spirituality: Logical, Normative, and Methodological Questions," in *Handbook of Positive Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2023), 38–40.

25 Edward B. Davies et al., "Integrating Positive Psychology and the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality: Transcending Coexistence to Potentiate Coevolution," in *Handbook of Positive Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2023), 8–9.

26 Davies et al., 8.

27 Patty Van Cappellen, Ruixi Zhang, and Barbara L. Fredrickson, "The Scientific Study of Positive Emotions and Religion/Spirituality," in *Handbook of Positive Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2023), 324.

enable positive psychology to enhance its scientific understanding of how people from diverse cultures and traditions draw on R/S to nurture positive emotional and relational experiences, create and sustain a sense of meaning, cultivate and enhance their well-being, and cope with and grow from adversity."[28] Scholars of R/S acknowledge, however, that "personal and professional unfamiliarity with religion and spirituality," "skepticism toward and potential bias against religion and spirituality," and "skepticism toward and potential bias against positivity," can create barriers to such integration.[29] Yet, an increasing number of scholars maintain that "the material," "the relational," *and* "the transcendent dimensions" should all be considered in scientific discussions on human flourishing.[30]

Despite R/S's insistence on the importance of religion and spirituality for understanding human well-being, both from a positive and negative perspective,[31] their insights are predominantly from an etic viewpoint.[32] On the other hand, Christian scholars argue for the benefits of religion and spirituality, but they do so from an emic perspective. For instance, Miroslav Volf, Matthew Croasmun, and Ryan McAnnally-Linz agree with Seligman that human flourishing cannot be defined scientifically, because "[v]arious sciences can and should *inform* our reflection on the meaning of flourishing, but they cannot set its basic meaning."[33] They rather stress that defining "what ought to be" is a task for the humanities.[34] For Volf and Croasmun, human flourishing is the very *telos* for theology: "We believe the purpose of theology is to discern, articulate, and commend visions of flourishing life in light of God's self-revelation in Jesus Christ."[35] Their definition of the "flourishing life" then becomes "the good toward which humans are meant to strive. It names not so much any number of things we desire, but the ultimate goal of our striving along with the values that determine what is truly worth desiring."[36] Natalya A. Cherry shares this view, but stresses the relational aspect: "How does Christianity contribute to […] flourishing? Ideally, Christianity offers access to

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28 Davies et al., "Integrating Positive Psychology and the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality: Transcending Coexistence to Potentiate Coevolution," 10.

29 Davies et al., 11–12. See also, Juliette L. Ratchford, Mason S. Ming, and Sarah A. Schnitker, "Virtues in Positive Psychology and the Psychology of Religion and Spirituality," in *Handbook of Positive Psychology, Religion, and Spirituality* (Cham, Switzerland: Springer, 2023), 55.

30 Andrew Briggs and Michael J. Reiss, *Human Flourishing: Scientific Insight and Spiritual Wisdom in Uncertain Times*, First edition (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2021), 23–26.

31 Gabriele Prati, "Religion and Well-Being: What Is the Magnitude and the Practical Significance of the Relationship?," *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 16, no. 4 (November 2024): 367–77.

32 Although Edward Davies et al. argue for using quantitative, qualitative, and mixed methods, their methodologies are all etic. See, Edward B. Davis et al., "Using Qualitative and Mixed Methods to Study Relational Spirituality," *Psychology of Religion and Spirituality* 8, no. 2 (May 2016): 92–98.

33 Volf, Croasmun, and McAnnally-Linz, "Meanings and Dimensions of Flourishing: A Programmatic Sketch," 8.

34 Volf, Croasmun, and McAnnally-Linz, 7–8.

35 Volf and Croasmun, *For the Life of the World: Theology That Makes a Difference*, 11.

36 Volf and Croasmun, 12.

this inexhaustible source through intimate relationship to the divine, in the person and after the pattern of Jesus of Nazareth, exhibited in a faith working through love of neighbor as self, including (and especially) love of enemies."[37] Just like Volf, Croasmun, and Cherry, VanderWeele, Long, and Balboni explain that human flourishing within the Christian tradition correspond to a "form of communion with God" that extends into eternity and defines both temporal and spiritual well-being:

> Within the Christian tradition, the final end of the human person is often described as some form of communion with God […]. We might then define eternal flourishing, or perfect well-being […] as final and complete communion with God. Spiritual well-being, in this life […] might then be understood as a state in which one's life is, in all ways, oriented toward eternal flourishing or, arguably equivalently, as a state in which all aspects of a person's life are good with respect to his or her final end in God. Temporal well-being or temporal flourishing might then be understood as those aspects of human flourishing that pertain to the goods in this life, inclusive, for example, of happiness and life satisfaction, mental and physical health, meaning and purpose, character and virtue, and close social relationships […].[38]

Based on this definition of eternal and temporal well-being, VanderWeele, Long, and Balboni proceed to define six categories that can be applied across Christian traditions, including Orthodox, Catholic, and Protestant, and their numerous offshoots like "Lutheran, Presbyterian, Methodist, Baptist, and Pentecostal denominations, and perhaps even subdivisions within each of these denominations" to achieve spiritual well-being.[39] The six categories they propose are:

> *Beliefs*: I believe that through Jesus Christ's life, death, and resurrection, God brought salvation. *Practice*: I intentionally take time each day to practice prayer. *Service*: I use the gifts God has given me to support the Christian community. *Communion*: I have a meaningful relationship with God. *Character*: My calling to be a Christian guides my life's work. *Relationships*: I love my neighbor as myself [Italics mine].[40]

Having outlined the suggestions of positive psychologists, psychologists of religion and spirituality, and Christian theologians regarding human flourishing, we note that there is significant overlap in the suggestions. All of them stress the importance of material and subjective aspects of well-being, such as positive emotions, virtues, health, meaning, and achievements. Close relationships

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37 Natalya A. Cherry, *Believing into Christ: Relational Faith and Human Flourishing* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2021), 5.

38 VanderWeele, Long, and Balboni, "Tradition-Specific Measures of Spiritual Well-Being," 485–86.

39 VanderWeele, Long, and Balboni, 487.

40 VanderWeele, Long, and Balboni, 492.

are also viewed as an essential aspect of human flourishing. Although positive psychologists may struggle to see the value of religion and spirituality, even these aspects have gained greater acceptance in recent times. For professing Christians, temporal and eternal communion with God is the ultimate goal and essence of human flourishing, and divine communion should manifest itself in meaningful beliefs, practices, actions, character formation, and healthy relationships. Jonathan Rowson aptly summarizes a Christian understanding of human flourishing as a "bio-psycho-social-spiritual process."[41]

Although Christian theologians draw on secular theories of well-being, their conclusions should not be viewed as an uncritical adoption of secular perspectives with a Christian twist. Charles Hackney notes, for example, that positive psychologists, like Seligman, operate from an anthropological perspective incongruent with Christian doctrine. Seligman denies, for example, the doctrine of original sin, and people's evil actions are explained as "an innately good humanity is forced into evil by bad circumstances" […].[42] Hackney also observes, "Much of our current positive psychology implies a telos of human functioning grounded in individualism and subjective gratification. This subjective individualistic *telos* does not fit well with a Christian view of the human condition."[43] In fact, as VanderWeele, Long, and Balboni point out, "When temporal goods and the spiritual life come into conflict, the latter is to be given priority as it constitutes the person's orientation to his or her final end in God."[44] Thus, Christian theologians recognize the limitations of secular viewpoints on human flourishing without abandoning them entirely. This leads us to my next topic of investigation – celebrity culture, which impacts our world and enthrones "individualism and subjective gratification" as the ultimate goals of human flourishing.

Celebrity Culture and Human Flourishing

Celebrity culture is one of the great hallmarks of the twenty-first-century world. It is virtually impossible to escape the latest exploits or tragedies of renowned artists, athletes, scientists, politicians, and religious figures. Their stories are beamed into our lives through the ubiquitous nature of modern mass media. The influence of celebrity culture has not escaped the attention of social scientists, and the phenomenon is now scrutinized from multiple academic perspectives.[45] In the following discussion, I will summarize key concepts concerning celebrity

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41 Jonathan Rowson, "Status Viatoris and the Path Quality of Religion: Human Flourishing as a Sacred Process of Becoming," in *Religion and Human Flourishing* (Waco, Texas: Baylor University Press, 2020), 33–34.

42 Charles H. Hackney, *Positive Psychology in Christian Perspective: Foundations, Concepts, and Applications* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic, 2021), 40–43.

43 Hackney, 40–43.

44 VanderWeele, Long, and Balboni, "Tradition-Specific Measures of Spiritual Well-Being," 486.

45 Katarzyna Bronk, *Stardom: Discussions on Fame and Celebrity Culture* (Boston: Brill, 2020), vii.

culture, and especially how it is shaped by individualistic Western culture. Having outlined its theoretical framework, I will focus on how celebrity culture promotes a vision of human flourishing that challenges and is often in direct conflict with religious theories of well-being.[46]

The origin of contemporary celebrity culture is often associated with the explosion of mass media at the end of the twentieth century.[47] However, the roots of the phenomenon can be traced to antiquity,[48] but more specifically to the rapid societal changes in the West at the end of the eighteenth century as noted by Sharon Marcus: "Modern celebrity culture began not with Hollywood, nor with the Internet, but in the eighteenth century, when the modern meanings of the words 'celebrity' and 'star' first became widespread."[49] The immediate background to the rise of modern celebrity culture was the Enlightenment, which created a split between "the rational" (the empirical and the logical) and "the irrational" (the metaphysical) as well as a deep-seated skepticism of religion and dynastic authority. Individualism and democratic structures filled the vacuum that was left by priests and royal families. Scientists, artists, and entrepreneurs now joined the ranks of the privileged few, many of whom became household names or "celebrities." Celebrities thus became a substitute for the loss of the sacred, a humanistic "re-enchantment" of the modern age.[50] However, Sharon Marcus notes that celebrity culture would not have arisen without the simultaneous growth in literacy, the increase in leisure time, the invention of photography, and the Romanticism of the nineteenth century. These developments allowed newspapers to incorporate visual ads and promote the latest celebrity to an ever-increasing market.[51] P. David Marshall can therefore conclude that "The distinctive discursive quality of the celebrity is derived from its emergence from the twinned discourses of modernity: democracy and capitalism."[52]

Before addressing celebrity culture and its connection to human flourishing, it is also important to acknowledge the drastic turn toward an individualistic consumer culture after World War II, which Charles Taylor has

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46 The theoretical framework is based on insights from the following article: Tommy Davidsson and Truls Åkerlund, "'Elvis Has Entered the Building': Evaluating the Rise of Global Pentecostal Celebrity Culture," in *Pentecost, Pentecostalism, and the Making of World Christianity: Essays in Honor of Allan H. Anderson*, Theology and Mission in World Christianity (Leiden: Brill, forthcoming).

47 Pete Ward, *Celebrity Worship*, Religion, Media, and Culture Series (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2020), 42.

48 Aviad Kleinberg, "Are Saints Celebrities?: Some Medieval Christian Examples," *Cultural and Social History* 8, no. 3 (2011): 393–97.

49 Sharon Marcus, *The Drama of Celebrity* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2019), 3.

50 For an in-depth argument that modernity was not "disenchanted," see Joshua Landy and Saler Michael, *The Re-Enchantment of the World: Secular Magic in a Rational Age* (Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 2009).

51 Marcus, *The Drama of Celebrity*, 10–11.

52 P. David Marshall, *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture*, Second edition (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 4.

famously labelled as an "age of authenticity." Taylor understands the "age of authenticity" as a continuation of modernity but an even greater rejection of outside authorities in favor of oneself: "I mean the understanding of life which emerges with the Romantic expressivism of the late-eighteenth century, that each one of us has his/her own way of realizing our humanity, and that it is important to find and live out one's own, as against surrendering to conformity with a model imposed on us from outside, by society, or the previous generation, or religious or political authority."[53] Taylor explains here that rather than understanding oneself as part of a larger community, the individual becomes the project that has to be realized. Based on insights from Eva Illouz, Davidsson and Åkerlund observe that the "emphasis on the self [becomes] a *therapeutic* discourse, involving a division between the self and society and prompting us to create our individual identities, with desires to be recognized, categorized, and even controlled, all in the name of freedom."[54]

Celebrity culture thrives in a capitalistic and individualistic environment, but to understand how celebrity culture impacts human flourishing, it is crucial to first know its essential elements. Marshall notes that most studies of celebrity have focused on "the elevated individual."[55] These studies often enquire about what "traits" or personal circumstances caused the person to become a celebrity.[56] They also stress the negative side of celebrification, such as being objectified and victims of voyeurism. Other studies are not as preoccupied with the celebrities themselves but emphasize the structures that produce celebrities. Pete Ward, for example, emphasizes mediation: "A celebrity is […] a person who is mediated. Mediation describes the complex ways in which, through technology, media industries and social relationships, individuals are actively engaged in processes of production, representation and consumption."[57] This is not to say that Ward is focusing exclusively on mediatization. On the contrary, Ward argues that:

> Celebrity Worship is fundamentally about the self. […] Media processes generate an association between audiences and celebrities that are charged with an energy. This energy does not simply come from the processes of production and representation, it is also generated by the different ways in which individuals and groups choose to make sense of themselves in relation to celebrities.[58]

Ward's point here is that the audience is not an innocent bystander but the object and a direct contributor to celebrity culture. Chris Rojek observes that the

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53 Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2007), 475.

54 Davidsson and Åkerlund, "'Elvis Has Entered the Building': Evaluating the Rise of Global Pentecostal Celebrity Culture," forthcoming.

55 Marshall, *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture*, 4.

56 Marshall, 4.

57 Ward, *Celebrity Worship*, 1.

58 Ward, 5.

recent trend in celebrity studies is to view the phenomenon post-structurally, or as the interplay between the celebrity, the media producers (the structures), and the audience.[59] Sharon Marcus summarizes this perspective succinctly: "Celebrity culture is a drama involving three equally powerful groups: media producers, members of the public, and celebrities themselves. Media, star power, and public opinion alone cannot create celebrity, but their interactions can and do."[60]

Having established the historical origins and essential features of celebrity culture, we can now turn to its role in shaping modern society's understanding of human flourishing. Pete Ward uses the analogy of the gods and goddesses of ancient Greece and Rome to explain the contemporary phenomenon of celebrity culture. The analogy is not far-fetched since celebrities are commonly referred to as "gods," "goddesses," "divine," and "icons." However, celebrities are not real gods, but "sacred figures that reflect versions of our own selves, painted as divine."[61] Celebrities are individuals who are shaped by savvy media producers to become visual aids of our deepest desires, values, and longings to encourage material consumption that promises to fulfill these longings. Thus, celebrity culture promotes a vision of the flourishing life according to a consumerist culture, such as personal wealth, influence, purpose, reputation, and potential for shaping culture and society. Such a vision is in stark contrast to a religious understanding of flourishing that emphasizes virtues like humility and moderation, service for the greater good of the community, and eternal rewards rather than immediate personal gratification.

To sum up, celebrity culture is a modern phenomenon that arose during the eighteenth century but gained even greater traction after World War II. It feeds off the cultural turn toward the self and promotes a vision of the good life that is centered on immediate gratification in the present. Celebrity culture is not limited to the elite or the privileged few but is sustained by deep-seated values in Western society and effectively promoted by a savvy media industry. I now turn to a phenomenon that promotes a competing vision of the fullness of life – one that does not emanate from the self but from God Himself, yet which has been influenced by the pervasive presence of celebrity culture, namely Pentecostalism.

Pentecostalism and Human Flourishing

Walter Hollenweger is famous for claiming that Pentecostalism is best understood not in terms of creeds and rational explanations but by its "black roots," emphasizing, for example, orality, narrative theology, and witness.[62] A

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59 Chris Rojek, *Celebrity* (London: Reaktion Books, 2001), 43–45.

60 Marcus, *The Drama of Celebrity*, 3.

61 Pete Ward, *Gods Behaving Badly: Media, Religion, and Celebrity Culture* (Waco, TX.: Baylor University Press, 2011), 3–6.

62 Walter J. Hollenweger, *Pentecostalism: Origins and Developments Worldwide* (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, 1997), 18–19.

helpful window into a Pentecostal understanding of human flourishing can thus be found in its hymnodies or personal testimonies. Although numerous examples could be given here, Tom Anderson's testimony, printed in *The Apostolic Faith* in February 1907, serves as a good example:

> Beloved, I was saved about 17 months ago from a wretched life. When I called on God, He heard my prayer and saved me instantly. What convinced me of the reality in salvation, was the peace that came into my heart. The desire for opiates went out immediately, and I was cured of the drug habit. The Lord has also healed many others of the drug habit. And God has healed my body, after being afflicted over six and a half years. When all physicians failed, the Man Christ Jesus healed me. The devil had me bound hand and foot for years. Thinking myself wise, I became foolish. But, beloved, God sent His transforming power through the Blood of Jesus and burst all the shackles, and shook off the handcuffs of hell, and today I am a free man in Christ Jesus. Then He sanctified me wholly and gave me a clean heart. Then He baptized me with the Holy Ghost on Jan. 22, at Azusa Mission. Dear ones, all I live for is Christ. I sold out, body, soul, and spirit to Him. My desire is to point souls to the bleeding Lamb of Calvary that takes away the sin of the world. The Holy Ghost, the third person of the Trinity, speaks through me in the languages of the nations whenever He chooses. And He is now engaged in pulling the rope which rings the joybells of heaven in my heart. And there is a revival going on in my soul continually, and the choir is singing and praising God in the unknown tongues. The Holy Ghost is the leader and is well qualified. He came from the college in heaven. Beloved, it is no more I but Christ. To Him be all the glory.[63]

Anderson's passionate testimony describes all but one of the five theological themes that Pentecostals view as part of the "full gospel," namely, Jesus as Savior, Sanctifier, Healer, Baptizer in the Spirit, and Soon Coming King – only the Soon Coming King is missing.[64] He mentions being "saved," having received "a clean heart," being "cured of a drug habit," and having been "baptized with the Holy Ghost" with accompanying "tongues of the nations" (*xenolalia*). Pentecostals have spent large amounts of ink describing and defending each of the elements of the

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63 Tom Anderson, "Pentecostal Testimonies," *The Apostolic Faith (Los Angeles, CA)*, vol. 1 no. 6, February 1907, 8.

64 It is not surprising that the emphasis on the Soon Coming King is missing, since the theme does not involve a personal experience but an overall theological framework that integrates, interprets, and provides it with a missional focus. See Steven J. Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001), 58–121.

full gospel,[65] but in the zeal to defend the validity of the full gospel, a crucial aspect tends to be overlooked. Anderson's testimony is first and foremost an account of a transformed *life*. He talks about "peace" flooding his heart, being "free" from the bondage of Satan, being completely "sold out" for Christ, having the Spirit "ringing the joybells of heaven in his heart" leading to a continuous inner "revival," and to a new purpose in life, which is "to point souls to the bleeding Lamb of Calvary." His account is ultimately about human flourishing. Ulrik Josefsson's study of early Swedish Pentecostal spirituality confirms that human flourishing or "the abundant life" (John 10:10) was indeed their main focus:

> The Pentecostals did not regard their faith as a system of belief. Obviously there were decisive doctrines that one agreed upon, but the faith was much more than the doctrine. The Christian life was not understood as a mode of conduct. Obviously there were patterns of behavior that were both typical and normative, but the faith was much more than the behavior. Not even the ecstatic moments and the experiences were regarded as the essential core of the Christian life. Obviously there were experiences that were sought after and assumed, but the faith was more than the experiences. Instead one regarded the faith as a whole, a life. This life was not any kind, but a life in relationship with God through Jesus in the Holy Spirit, an abundant life.[66]

Since the Pentecost message was about human flourishing in this life as well as in the next, it shared no resemblance with docetic forms of spirituality that created a dichotomy between the spiritual and the material, and the eternal and the temporal. Pentecostal spirituality emphasized both the "already" and the "not yet." According to Pentecostals, the inbreaking of the Spirit into our everyday lives (the "already") transformed not only spiritual lives but physical lives as well. Pentecostals believed that the full gospel restored spiritual blessings that had been lost throughout church history, and these were spiritual, like salvation and sanctification, but also physical, like deliverance from diseases, addictions, and the effects of evil forces. Even a spiritual experience like the Baptism in the Holy Spirit had to be "evidenced," either by speaking in tongues or a life of love, demonstrating that the spiritual and the physical always went together. The experience of the full gospel was also perceived as a foretaste of the life to come (the "not yet"). Jesus was coming soon, which promised an even greater abundance of life than could

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65 One of the first, and most important academic contributions, regarding the full gospel is Donald W. Dayton's *Theological Roots of Pentecostalism* (Grand Rapids: BakerAcademic, 2011). Dayton does not address this key theme. A more recent theological examination is Wolfgang Vondey's *Pentecostal Theology: Living the Full gospel*, Systematic Pentecostal and Charismatic Theology (London, England: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2017). Vondey, on the other hand, underscores that *living* the full gospel is the heart of Pentecostalism.

66 Ulrik Josefsson, *Liv och över nog: Den tidiga pingströrelsens spiritualitet* (Skellefteå: Artos, 2005), 13–14. See also, Vondey, *Pentecostal Theology: Living the Full Gospel*, 12.

be experienced in "the already." The blessings of salvation, sanctification, healing, and Spirit baptism would reach their full measure in the "not yet." Although the blessings of the full gospel were received personally, Pentecostal spirituality was not individualistic. Andy Lord notes, "Pentecostal ecclesiology may have been influenced by evangelical individualism but has been strongly communal from the start because of its pneumatological orientation. The fellowship of the Spirit into which Pentecostals were integrated was seen as inclusive and crossing the social and racial lines that existed at the time [...], although these ideals were not always realised."[67] Frank Macchia also points out that, even if the experience of Spirit baptism was individually received, it was always in a communal context.[68] Thus, Pentecostalism offered warm and inclusive fellowships, albeit not always as healthy or inclusive as advertised.[69] It should also be noted here that early Pentecostals underlined the necessity of abstaining from the values and temptations of this world to continuously live the abundant life. A strict holiness code was placed on attendees, and "worldly" activities like sports, theatre, gambling, smoking, and dancing were vilified. Such activities did not produce the kind of character that squared with the hope of the Soon Coming King, and books with pithy titles like *Idag lek – i morgon tårar* (today play – tomorrow tears) were written by Pentecostal leaders like Lewi Pethrus (1884–1974) to warn of their dangers.

From this short description of Pentecostal flourishing in light of the full gospel, we can note that it was holistic. For Pentecostals, well-being was both physical and spiritual, and experienced in community. Healing from a destructive past, current sicknesses, and intimate fellowship with the Lord were all promised in the full gospel. Deep affections of joy and peace also followed in its wake. Pentecostals were also given a new purpose in life, which was to share the promises of the full gospel to a dying world. The purpose was enhanced by a belief in the sudden return of Christ that would usher in the Age of the "not yet" with all its blessings. Thus, Pentecostal flourishing manifests many of the key ingredients of human well-being as outlined above: meaning, purpose, health, affections, virtues, fellowship, spiritual vitality, and last, but not least, a strong vision of eternal flourishing. Its rejection of "worldly" joys might correctly be criticized as an unnecessary rejection of the material world, but the "guardrails" were set up so that the ultimate source of well-being, spiritual well-being, would not be jeopardized. Celebrity culture, with its goal to enhance one's influence, prestige, wealth, and power in this life, was therefore regarded as the very antithesis of a flourishing Pentecostal life.

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67 Andy Lord, "Ecclesiology: Spirit-Shaped Fellowships of Gospel Mission," in *The Routledge Handbook of Pentecostal Theology* (New York: Routledge, 2020), 291.

68 Frank D. Macchia, *The Spirit-Baptized Church: A Dogmatic Inquiry* (London: Bloomsbury T & T Clark, 2020), 11–58.

69 See for instance, Truls Åkerlund and Karl Inge Tangen, "Charismatic Cultures: Another Shadow Side Confessed," *Pneuma* 40, no. 1–2 (2018): 109–29.

The abovementioned explanation of Pentecostal flourishing could perhaps be applied to the movement's first years, but not anymore. Today's situation is significantly more complex and exhibits the influence of celebrity culture. Harvey Cox noticed in 1995 that a change was taking place in the Pentecostal movement:

> Today, at least in America, many Pentecostals have become terribly comfortable with "this world." They started out in a faith that brought hope to society's losers and rejects. Today, some of their most visible representatives have become ostentatiously rich, and some even preach a gospel of wealth. [...] Pentecostals also started out teaching that the signs and wonders that took place in their congregations were not some kind of spectacle but harbingers of God's new day. But today, some Pentecostal preachers seem so obsessed with the techniques of rapture that they have forgotten the original message.[70]

Cox describes here how celebrity culture has crept into the movement and influenced key leaders, taking them away from Pentecostalism's original message. The truth of the matter is that celebrity culture was part of the movement from the very beginning, although to a much smaller degree, and it is no longer merely a feature of American Pentecostalism but of global Pentecostalism.[71] This is not to say that the original Pentecostal vision of human flourishing no longer exists; it is just that it is more difficult to find in a world saturated with celebrity culture.

From the abovementioned discussion, we see that Pentecostalism is, in essence, a Christian tradition that promotes a holistic view of human flourishing. Its emphasis on the full gospel leads to a spirituality that does not separate the spiritual and the material and envisions a life of abundance that is experienced in community. As we will see further below, its understanding of the good life is "grace-based," but the abundant life can be jeopardized by engaging in worldly activities. Moreover, as Harvey Cox points out, the increasing presence of celebrity culture within Pentecostalism provides a serious challenge to its original vision of the good life.

Concluding Discussion

Based on our study so far, I would like to conclude by proposing that theories of human flourishing may bring a necessary critique of celebrity culture's and Pentecostalism's visions of human flourishing. At the same time, I want to point out that scholars of human flourishing ought to better consider celebrity culture's pervasive influence as well as the importance of "grace-based" theories of human flourishing, especially for Christian theorists. I will end with a brief suggestion of

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70 Harvey Cox, *Fire from Heaven: The Rise of Pentecostal Spirituality and the Reshaping of Religion in the Twenty-First Century* (Cambridge, Mass.: Da Capo Press, 1995), 16–17.

71 Davidsson and Åkerlund, "'Elvis Has Entered the Building': Evaluating the Rise of Global Pentecostal Celebrity Culture," forthcoming.

how Pentecostalism can deal with the increasing presence of celebrity culture in its midst. The discussion will be both actual and potential, as well as theoretical and practical. The discussion will thus include both positive and normative arguments.

Human Flourishing and Celebrity Culture

It would be inaccurate to claim that celebrity culture does not tick several boxes that could be perceived as a flourishing life. Wealth, influence, purpose, reputation, potential for shaping culture and society, and fan relationships are all aspects associated with a flourishing life. But what is missing? Celebrity culture revels in self-indulgence and rarely, if ever, emphasizes the importance of classical virtues like justice, temperance, prudence, and charity. Rojek observes that celebrity culture produces the opposite of a virtuous society: "people are becoming ruder in public, more concerned with acclaim than integrity, more preoccupied with self-esteem, and fixed upon narrow, selfish, emotional, and material wants than the realization of the public good."[72] In fact, as noted about "goal and need satisfaction theories," under which celebrity culture belongs, the constant mirroring between oneself and one's favorite celebrity is a recipe for disaster. Rojek highlights, for example, three "neurotic [and] obsessional disorders that derive from celebrity culture," such as "Celebrity Worship Syndrome," "Star Paranoia," and "Narcissistic Personality Disorder."[73] Life's unpredictabilities and disappointments also tend to mar vain hopes of fame and glory. Moreover, the fellowship created by fan clubs and associations does not place any normative ethical standard on participants beyond uncritical loyalty and adoration of the celebrity, and a minimal expectation of communal behavior. It can never become the inclusive and accepting environment that, for example, a *healthy* religious community can provide.[74] Celebrity culture is not even good for the celebrities themselves or their immediate family members, since they are forced to comply with the inauthentic image of themselves created by the media industry.[75] Rather than thriving, they can lose themselves in the process: "Like the sign, the celebrity represents something other than itself. The material reality of the celebrity sign—that is, the actual person who is at the core of the representation—disappears into a cultural formation of meaning."[76] From a Christian perspective, celebrity culture has no vision of flourishing beyond this life. Volf and Croasmun describe the futility of such a narrow vision: "When the means for life have become the ends of life, the dog has started chasing its tail. The resources we think we need to live the good life are competitive goods. It is not just that it is better to have more of them than to have less; we need to have

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72 Chris Rojek, *Fame Attack: The Inflation of Celebrity and Its Consequences* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012), 6.2012

73 Rojek, 4–5.

74 Ward, *Celebrity Worship*, 3–6.

75 Rojek, *Fame Attack: The Inflation of Celebrity and Its Consequences*, 123–27.123

76 Marshall, *Celebrity and Power: Fame in Contemporary Culture*, 56–57.

more of them than our competitors do: more wealth, better education, more fame, better looks, [. . .]."[77] VanderWeele also highlights the disparity between celebrity culture and a Christian understanding of flourishing: "Religious teachings can conflict with the desires for certain pleasures in certain contexts, can conflict with what are perceived to be [. . .] certain freedoms, and may be in tension with desires oriented principally toward the self rather than toward others and God. But, within a Christian understanding, when conflict arises, deference is to be given to spiritual well-being."[78] Thus, neither Christian theories of well-being, psychology of religion and spirituality, nor positive psychology regard Western society's narcissistic preoccupation with the self is a viable road to flourishing.

Although celebrity culture is not a viable road to flourishing, failure to recognize celebrity culture's ubiquitous impact could also have its consequences. Chris Rojek notes, for instance, "how the fads, fashions and preoccupations of celebrities [have entered] the popular lifeblood."[79] Celebrity culture is, therefore, not something that can easily be observed from a safe distance, but an essential part of our society. Recognizing that secular theories of well-being cannot scientifically define what a flourishing life "ought to" look like, as Seligman, Volf, and Croasmun correctly assert, it is fair to assume that the dominant paradigm of well-being will take the shape of the vision closest at hand and most effectively promoted by the media industry, namely, celebrity culture. Consequently, scholars who promote a *different* vision of the flourishing life must come to terms with the enormous uphill battle they are facing and construct creative and appealing substitutes. Although the individuals who have managed to promote a counter-narrative to contemporary celebrity culture are few and far between, the late Pope Francis (1936–2025) demonstrated through his life and actions what such a life could look like. His sincere faith, his outspoken rejection of wealth, prestige, and power, and his preference for the poor and the downtrodden, as well as his concern for the creation, exemplify what a flourishing life could look like that does not have the self as its ultimate goal.[80]

Human Flourishing and Pentecostalism

The most glaring difference between a Pentecostal view of human flourishing and most other theories of well-being, including some Christian approaches, is that it is "grace-based." According to Pentecostals, true holistic transformation only takes place when the Spirit infuses divine life. Such transformation can be sought in contemplative prayer, waiting, and intense supplication, but it is ultimately a

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77 Volf and Croasmun, *For the Life of the World: Theology That Makes a Difference*, 22.

78 VanderWeele, "Spiritual Well-Being and Human Flourishing: Conceptual, Causal, and Policy Relations," 47–48.

79 Rojek, *Fame Attack: The Inflation of Celebrity and Its Consequences*, viii–ix.

80 Francesca Ambrogetti and Sergio Rubin, *Pope Francis: Conversations with Jorge Bergoglio* (New York: New American Library, 2013).

divine gift of grace (charismata). VanderWeele, Long, and Balboni argue that "The presence and operation of God's grace might be thought of as a central component of spiritual well-being in this life [...], but it is not one that can be readily assessed by human capacities."[81] They are certainly correct in their assertion that grace-based theories cannot be scientifically verified. However, since they implicitly employ a critical realist view of reality, it is difficult to understand why their six categories for promoting spiritual well-being rely so heavily on individual effort and "measurable categories," particularly when a faith-based theory of well-being presupposes divine agency. If a general theory of spiritual well-being should be developed, it cannot merely be framed around the benefits of individual and corporate religious practices. It is precisely here that I believe Pentecostalism's "grace-based" and holistic theory of well-being can make its greatest contribution to *Christian* theories of well-being. The testimonies of Pentecostals witness to the fact that an abundant life (John 10:10) is available through a sovereign work of God through the Spirit, which radically transforms every aspect of human flourishing, including the temporal, the spiritual, and the hope of the eternal. The abundant life that Pentecostals point to is thus ontologically and relationally different than anything that can be found on earth. It also stresses the futility of trying to achieve this abundant life through personal means. Even cultivating classical virtues would not match this lofty goal. Moreover, it has the potential to overcome and reframe the two greatest obstacles to a flourishing life on earth, namely, sin and suffering. Consequently, Pentecostalism underlines the centrality of God as the ultimate agent and source of all true well-being, a fact that must not be overlooked by Christian theories of human flourishing.

However, secular and religious theories of well-being can teach Pentecostals the value of aesthetics and other pleasures of life, such as art, culture, education, sports, and relaxation.[82] Pentecostals can also learn to better appreciate "worldly" accomplishments like promotions, graduations, athletic achievements, and perhaps even retirement after a long life of service. General theories of well-being can therefore provide Pentecostals with a more balanced view of human flourishing, which has tended to overemphasize spiritual well-being at the expense of temporal flourishing. Even if Pentecostals have not been entirely absent from areas that promote greater political, socio-economic, and ecological justice,[83] a deeper understanding of human flourishing could also lead them to make important strides in these areas.

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81 VanderWeele, Long, and Balboni, "Tradition-Specific Measures of Spiritual Well-Being," 487.

82 See, for instance, the important work of Steven Felix-Jäger in regard to art and aesthetics: *Pentecostal Aesthetics: Theological Reflections in a Pentecostal Philosophy of Art and Aesthetics* (Boston: Brill, 2015).

83 Geoffrey W. Sutton and Martin W. Mittelstadt, "Loving God and Loving Others: Learning About Love from Psychological Science and Pentecostal Perspectives," *Journal of Psychology and Christianity* 31, no. 2 (2012): 159.

Celebrity Culture and Pentecostalism

As noted above, celebrity culture has had inroads into Pentecostalism since its inception. The simple reason for this is that Pentecostalism was never insulated from its surroundings. Leaders who exemplified the right "orthodoxy, (right praise/belief), orthopraxy (right practice) and orthopathy (right affections)" to use the terminology of Steven Land,[84] and actively exercised gifts of power like divine healing, prophecy, and word of knowledge, were "celebrified" in the movement even though their spirituality was supposed to be radically egalitarian.[85] Simon Coleman has noted that the situation is not significantly different today in the Faith Movement, and several of their leaders are treated as modern-day saints.[86] Studies from South America and Africa show that the celebrification of Pentecostal leaders is now a global reality.[87] One of the most constructive insights for Pentecostals to remedy this problem has, in my opinion, been advanced by Simon Chan, who writes:

> The challenge that Pentecostals in the twenty-first century face is twofold: How do they keep Pentecostal spiritual fervor alive without being bound to the past and ending up in a spiritual ghetto? Concurrently, how can they be open to the future without surrendering to the culture of this world? Pentecostals are facing the same twin challenges faced by older traditions: *ressourcement* (a return to the sources) and *aggiornamento* (bringing up to date), the two key processes behind Vatican II.[88]

According to Chan, Pentecostals must keep one eye on the past, so that they do not abandon their rich and unique spiritual heritage for a more acceptable form, but also keep another eye on the present, so that their spirituality does not become irrelevant. Chan thus claims that "What is needed is a better theology that makes better sense of the distinctively Pentecostal experience."[89] My suggestion here is that a more profound understanding of Pentecostalism as a vibrant spirituality of human flourishing, rather than a theological system to be defended, could not only bring *ressourcement* but also *aggiornamento* to a movement struggling with an increased presence of celebrity culture.

84 Land, *Pentecostal Spirituality: A Passion for the Kingdom*, 13.

85 Davidsson and Åkerlund, "'Elvis Has Entered the Building': Evaluating the Rise of Global Pentecostal Celebrity Culture," forthcoming.

86 Simon Coleman, "Transgressing the Self: Making Charismatic Saints," *Critical Inquiry* 35, no. 3 (Spring 2009): 417–39.

87 Cristina Rocha, "Global Religious Infrastructures: The Australian Megachurch Hillsong in Brazil," *Social Compass* 68, no. 2 (June 1, 2021): 245–57; Kelebogile T. Resane, "'Simon the Sorcerer Offered Them Money' (Acts 8:19): Some Pentecostals Have Gone Commercial Instead of Evangelical," in *The Use and Abuse of the Spirit in Pentecostalism: A South African Perspective* (London: Routledge, 2020), 93–113.

88 Simon Chan, *Pentecostal Ecclesiology: An Essay on the Development of Doctrine*, Journal of Pentecostal Theology; 38 (Blandford Forum, U.K.: Deo Pub., 2011), 1–2.

89 Chan, 4.

Pentecostalism has had little impact on celebrity culture. A few "super-celebrities" like Justin and Hailey Bieber and Denzel Washington have found their way into Pentecostalism.[90] Denzel Washington is quoted as saying, "it's not talked about in this town but that doesn't mean people in Hollywood don't believe."[91] However, religious faith might not be as undercover in Hollywood as Washington suggests. Celebrities like Tom Cruise, Madonna, and Mike Tyson are known for their belief in Scientology, Jewish Kabbalah mysticism, and Islam. Pete Ward notes, however, that celebrities are known for treating religion as most other things associated with celebrity culture: "The religious self is free to choose, to edit, and to combine, across religious traditions and non-religious sources."[92] Thus, religion just becomes another dish at the self-fulfilling buffet, and it is unlikely that Pentecostalism will be treated differently. This was not the case for celebrities who joined the despised rank of "holy rollers" in the past. When celebrities became Pentecostals in the early days, they often had to renounce all their worldly prestige and influence, and in extreme cases, undergo humiliating psychiatric evaluations to ensure that they had not lost their mind, as in the case of Danish actress Anna Larssen Bjørner.[93] Those days are long gone. For Pentecostalism to have a greater impact in today's world, and especially with the younger generation within its ranks, who is significantly exposed to contemporary celebrity culture, it must continuously and unashamedly testify, like Tom Anderson, that the question of human flourishing is answered in the experience of the full gospel, while not ignoring the important contributions that positive psychology, psychology of religion and spirituality, and other Christian theories of human flourishing can bring.

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90 Andrew Pulver, "'It Took a While, but I'm Here': Denzel Washington Is Baptised before His 70th Birthday," *The Guardian*, December 23, 2024, sec. Film, https://www.theguardian.com/film/2024/dec/23/denzel-washington-is-baptised-before-his-70th-birthday; Portia Berry-Kilby, "The Christian Faith of Justin and Hailey Bieber," Premier Christianity, accessed May 18, 2025, https://www.premierchristianity.com/opinion/the-christian-faith-of-justin-and-hailey-bieber/17313.article.

91 Pulver, "'It Took a While, but I'm Here.'"

92 Ward, *Celebrity Worship*, 92.

93 Nikolaj Christensen, "Anna Larssen Bjørner: A Drama of Institutionalization and Independence," in *Empowered Voices: Scandinavian Women in Early Pentecostalism* (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, an imprint of Wipf and Stock Publishers, 2024), 93–113.

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Research note

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Developing an International Philanthropy Dataset: Reflections from the 2025 Global Philanthropy Environment Index

Abstract

This research note reflects on the making of the 2025 Global Philanthropy Environment Index (GPEI), *an international index that assesses the enabling environment for philanthropy across 95 economies. Philanthropy is an umbrella concept that encompasses diverse meanings and traditions worldwide, and research on global philanthropy is often relative rather than absolute when comparing across differing legal, political, and social contexts. This reflection explores: 1) the challenges of undertaking comparative research 2) the process of developing an international philanthropy dataset, and 3) the practical benefits of comparative philanthropy data.*

Keywords: global philanthropy; community-engaged research; local expertise; international datasets

Introduction

Similar to food and music, philanthropy is a language that can build bridges between cultures and peoples. Philanthropy is an umbrella concept that encompasses diverse meanings, practices, and moral languages of generosity and giving worldwide. Expressions of philanthropy demonstrate closely held personal values that are shaped by long-standing traditions and current environments. And, the study of philanthropy helps to surface the multiplicity of meanings and build these bridges.

Nevertheless, the study of cross-cultural and global philanthropy is a complex endeavor. The word "philanthropy" does not translate consistently across languages and cultures; global North-South power dynamics permeate the research; and the application of findings benefits from local expertise. These issues raise several questions, including how to build research on philanthropy across different cultures and traditions while mitigating power dynamics. Indeed, these issues make it difficult, albeit not impossible, to engage in comparative research and build international datasets.

This research note[1] first describes the challenges associated with undertaking comparative research. Next, it details the process of developing the 2025 *Global Philanthropy Environment Index* (*GPEI*)[2] and efforts undertaken to address these issues. Finally, key research findings are shared from the 2025 *GPEI*, alongside use cases from research and practice.

Discussion

1. Challenges of Comparative Research

Philanthropy is diverse in meaning, motivation, and practice through space and time.

Its meanings and uses have varied over the centuries. For example, within Western traditions, the meaning and use of philanthropy transitioned from philosophical inquiries into human consciousness to expressions of the universal love of humankind.[3] In recent years, philanthropy has often been measured by acts of goodness.[4]

Nevertheless, modern academic studies on philanthropy reveal a lack of consensus regarding its purpose and nature.[5] For example, "voluntary action for the public good"[6] is a definition that emphasizes the voluntary nature and external expressions of philanthropy. On the one hand, this definition addresses earlier debates about motivations for giving and removes presumptions of pure altruism or egoism.[7] On the other hand, it does not adequately capture obligatory religious giving via zakat, tzedakah, and tithing. Nor does it capture restraint from bad actions as philanthropic, a partial definition which resonates

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1 The author is grateful to all experts who contributed to the development of the *GPEI*, the two anonymous reviewers for guidance on improving this article, and colleagues at the IU Lilly Family School of Philanthropy, including Hannah Vos and Drs. Una Osili, Dana Doan, and Xiaonan Kou.

2 The *GPEI* is a unique, international dataset, assessing the enabling environment for philanthropy. It is guided by a community-engaged approach, leaning on local expertise in the research design, collection, and dissemination processes. The 2025 *GPEI* is the 3rd edition of this *Index*, and it includes 95 countries and economies. Two prior editions were published in 2022 and 2018. 77 countries and economies have repeatedly participated in all three editions. This process of developing the 2025 *GPEI* dataset is described further herein.

3 Marty Sulek, "On the Modern Meaning of Philanthropy," *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 39, no. 2 (2010): 193-212, https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764009333052.

4 Shariq Siddiqui, "Muslim Philanthropy: Living Beyond a Western Definition," *Voluntary Sector Review* 13, no. 3 (2022): 338–54, https://doi.org/10.1332/204080521x16366613535698; Sulek, 193-212; Pamala Wiepking, "The Global Study of Philanthropic Behavior," *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 32 (2021): 194-203, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-020-00279-6.

5 Sulek, 193-212.

6 Robert Payton and Michael Moody, *Understanding Philanthropy: Its Meaning and Mission* (Indiana University Press, 2008).

7 Dwight Burlingame, "Altruism and Philanthropy: Definitional Issues" (Indiana University Center on Philanthropy, 1993).

with nearly half of the general American population.[8]

In public discourse, the term philanthropy is oft associated with the idea of being wealthy, famous, White, or male, and current studies measure philanthropy in narrow ways, thereby omitting local contexts where communities are generous but by different standards.[9] These connotations make the history of some people visible – typically those who are White, wealthy, elite, powerful, or exceptional.

Research on philanthropy is also responsive to gathered and available data. Thus, it often measures tangible outputs as a proxy for understanding philanthropy, such as monetary donations to nonprofit organizations. Critical perspectives suggest that the current philanthropic narrative is a "gross oversimplification of numerous, well-written, well-documented histories of the American nonprofit sector"[10] and invite a broader lens for uncovering invisible philanthropy and measuring "dark matter."[11] The study of global philanthropy simultaneously adds complexity and offers recourse for building a broader lens for what gets measured.

Diverse terms and meanings of philanthropy pose challenges in building an international dataset.

The varied terms to describe philanthropy are a major challenge when building an international dataset and employing a standard questionnaire. The term philanthropy does not readily translate across all languages or reflect cultural norms. These terminological and definitional tensions surfaced in several contexts.

For example, as several *GPEI* experts and readers point out, in the Arabic language, there is no direct translation for "philanthropy." Alternative terms include sadaqa, which refers to the non-obligatory giving of time, money, and positive gestures, or refraining from harmful actions. Sadaqa has its roots in Islamic religious tradition, emphasizing positive relationships and is associated with compassion, intentionality, and trust.

For further example, in Kenyan society, the Swahili term "harambee"—meaning "all pull together"—is better suited to describe everyday actions of

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8 Shariq Siddiqui, Rafeel Wasif, and Afshan Paarlberg, "Broadening the Definition of Philanthropy: Understanding U.S. Citizens' Embrace of Muslim Philanthropic Traditions," *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* (July 2025), https://doi.org/10.1177/08997640251348652.
9 Tyrone McKinley Freeman, *Madam C.J. Walker's Gospel of Giving: Black Women's Philanthropy During Jim Crow* (University of Illinois Press, 2020); Edgar Villanueva, *Decolonizing Wealth: Indigenous Wisdom to Heal Divides and Restore Balance* (Berrett-Koehler, 2021); Wiepking, 194-203.
10 Billie Sandberg, "Critical Perspectives on the History and Development of the Nonprofit Sector in the United States," in *The Nature of the Nonprofit Sector,* eds. J. Steven Ott and Lisa Dicke (Routledge, 2021), 27.
11 David Horton Smith, "The Rest of the Nonprofit Sector: Grassroots Associations as the Dark Matter Ignored in Prevailing 'Flat Earth' Maps of the Sector," *Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly* 26, no. 2 (1997): 114–31, https://doi.org/10.1177/0899764097262002.

helping others and advancing communities.[12] Philanthropy is a less recognized term, and it misses the cultural norms where people show up for others in times of need, when a relative passes away, or where harambee is the underlying spirit for new fundraising apps and platforms.[13] Similarly, in Ugandan society, philanthropy is better recognized as social connectedness through performing good actions and being present and engaged with the community in times of celebration and need.[14]

Despite these roadblocks, cooperative global research is crucial for surfacing and embracing these conversations, refining terms, and communicating the variations and value of philanthropy around the world. Often, qualitative inquiry is employed to ask how philanthropy is understood within and across traditions. Scholars like Weipking[15] argue that international research on philanthropy should be conducted collaboratively, ensuring that forthcoming research and data-driven policies and practices are based on a more authentic understanding of what philanthropy means globally. The 2025 *GPEI* embraces this challenge. Rather than prescribing a certain definition or form, it combines quantitative and qualitative inquiry to investigate the conditions for engaging in philanthropy while providing adequate space for experts to infuse their localized understandings and practices of philanthropy into the research.

2. Developing the Global Philanthropy Environment Index (GPEI)

The *GPEI* is a robust example of an international dataset on philanthropy. The *GPEI* adopts community-engagement principles in producing the research. Partnerships with country-level experts are integral to the research. Ultimately, this approach is aimed at better representing local contexts and the multiple meanings of philanthropy.

Community-engaged research emphasizes the importance of key stakeholders throughout the design, research, and dissemination.[16] Based on prior research, community-engaged research tends to fall on a spectrum, from more to less embedded approaches. The most embedded approaches offer continuous opportunities for deep, collaborative engagement, while the least

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12 Catherine Mwendwa and Nicanor Sabula, *The 2022 Global Philanthropy Environment Index Kenya* (2025).

13 Grace Maingi, "Philanthropy in Kenya: The Mobile-Money 'Harambee' Spirit," *PANL* (Nairobi), May 9, 2024, https://carleton.ca/panl/2024/philanthropy-in-kenya-the-mobile-money-harambee-spirit/#:~:text=One.

14 Dennis Kilama, *The 2025 Global Philanthropy Environment Index Uganda* (2025), https://hdl.handle.net/1805/48051.

15 Pamala Wiepking, "The Global Study of Philanthropic Behavior," *VOLUNTAS: International Journal of Voluntary and Nonprofit Organizations* 32 (2021): 194-203, https://doi.org/10.1007/s11266-020-00279-6.

16 Nina Wallerstein et al., "Power Dynamics in Community-Based Participatory Research: A Multiple–Case Study Analysis of Partnering Contexts, Histories, and Practices," *Health Education & Behavior* 46, no. 1 (2019): 19S–32S, https://doi.org/10.1177/1090198119852998.

embedded approaches offer infrequent opportunities for often shallow, one-directional forms of engagement. Community-engaged research also tends to focus on actionable questions that aim to influence policies and practices.[17]

When these philosophies are applied to a global research project like the *GPEI*, community engagement is navigated through collaboration with local and regional experts—experts who understand the histories, cultures, and languages that shape philanthropy in their communities. Thus, the *GPEI* is facilitated by the Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy (hereafter 'School'), and each stage of research and dissemination is deeply informed and guided by global partners. Key actors include the *GPEI* project team, country and economy experts, expert scorers, regional reviewers, and the Global Advisory Council. Their complementary tasks and involvement are outlined in Table 1.

Table 1: 2025 *GPEI* Actors

Actor	Role/Description
Project Team	Recruitment, quality control, feedback in comparison with desk research, coordination between all experts, formatting, publication, community-building
Country and Economy Experts	Complete questionnaire; respond to feedback from school, regional reviewer, and GAC; attend regional review meeting; final decisionmaker in accepting scores and narratives; authors of country reports; 1+ per country
Expert Scorers	Complete scores only questionnaire, for comparison against scores from country experts; new in 2025
Regional Reviewers	Receives all draft country reports, expert scorer feedback as an additional comparison point, host meeting with all countries in region, provide synchronous and asynchronous feedback; write a regional report based on trends and respond to feedback from the project team and GAC
Global Advisory Council (GAC)	Provide strategic guidance for steering the project and dissemination; review all *GPEI* scores and provide feedback; represent various countries and regions around the world

17 Wallerstein et al., 19S-32S.

Research production is outlined below in Figure 1. It involved six steps and spanned nearly 18 months from start to publication. It involved multiple layers of feedback and validation, gathered from various perspectives.

The 2025 *GPEI* retained the core elements of recruitment, data collection, and a multi-layer review process from the prior 2022 and 2018 editions. It also refined some earlier processes. Before recruitment for the 2025 *GPEI*, feedback sessions were held with prior experts and global partners. From these conversations, two areas were prioritized for improvement. First, seven new economies and one new region were added[18], to provide mapping of less represented areas around the world. Second, in-country expert scorers were introduced in pilot countries, to facilitate in-country validation.

As an initial step, between November 2023 and February 2024, country and regional experts were recruited from the 95 countries represented in the *Index*. Experts were recruited based on their extensive experience living and working in the field of philanthropy in their country of expertise. In some countries, like Ireland and Liechtenstein, recruitment was straightforward. The term "*philanthropy*" was more well-known, and country experts had participated in prior editions of the *Index*. Several countries were also added to the *Index* based on suggestions and outreach from local experts. For example, Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia were added to the *Index* because local experts recognized the absence of their countries in the *GPEI*. This gap restricted knowledge, understanding, and awareness of what philanthropy looks and feels like in the unique philanthropic landscape of the Baltics in the post-Soviet era. They further understood that their inclusion in an international dataset like the *GPEI* would help develop a baseline of philanthropy in the region, broaden their understanding of philanthropy, and offer a comparative lens to philanthropic environments around the world.

Recruitment in other countries proved more difficult, at times because the term "philanthropy" was less about collective action in its fuller sense but instead held a narrower meaning of exclusivity and wealth. In countries like Iran, publicly available data was more limited, meaning that country experts would need to find creative ways. Ultimately, the recruited experts had deep connections across the country and conducted confidential stakeholder interviews to ensure the reliability of scoring and responses. In-group identity, language fluency, and trust were key factors in gaining access to this original fieldwork.

In addition, the School recruited additional scorers in several countries. This pilot effort enabled further in-country validation from diverse professional and regional perspectives, rather than relying on a single country representative.

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18 The seven new countries and economies include: Bahrain, El Salvador, Latvia, Lithuania, Estonia, The Bahamas, and Uganda. The new region is the Baltics, comprising of Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia.

Some highly motivated experts, such as those in Kuwait, Jordan, and Bahrain, recruited their own teams to debate and discuss scores, providing further in-country validation for their responses. Expert recruitment and data collection spanned several months, and several one-on-one conversations were held between the School and prospective experts, to collaboratively determine the suitability of the prospective expert and project scope.

Once participation was confirmed, experts completed an 11-question, standardized instrument to measure the enabling environment for philanthropy and provide rigorous, comparative international data; the instrument had been validated in prior editions. This process took place between February and September 2024. Overall, the questionnaire was designed with broad language to capture diverse meanings and practices better. For example, in the survey, the term' philanthropic organization' (PO) refers to a form of non-market, non-state organization outside of the family that provides services for the public good. It includes the following: foundations, community-based organizations and village associations, professional associations, environmental groups, advocacy groups, cooperatives, charitable organizations, faith-based organizations, mutual entities, labor unions, societies, research institutes, online social-purpose portals, and other types of non-governmental organizations relevant to each country. While each type of organizational structure may not be applicable in every country, the categorical latitude allows for representation of philanthropic organizations in their different forms and structures.

Experts completed this standard questionnaire using a scale of 1-5 (lowest to highest) for scoring the factors that ease or restrict the enabling environment. Experts weighed in on the 1) regulatory, 2) political, 3) economic, 4) socio-cultural, 5) fiscal incentives, and 6) cross-border giving environments. In addition to quantitative scores, experts provided narrative evidence to justify each score. There were also optional questions asked of experts for additional insights, such as emerging trends for philanthropy and the role of philanthropy in response to climate change.

Figure 1: 2025 *GPEI* Community-Engaged Process

Source: Indiana University Lilly Family School of Philanthropy

Following data collection, the School compared each expert's response against internally conducted desk research. Furthermore, countries were also grouped together into 15 regions, and a regional review was held for each region. These regions include: Balkans, Baltics, Canada & United States, Caribbean, Central Asia & South Caucasus, Central & Eastern Europe, East Asia, Latin America, Middle East & North Africa, Northern Europe, Oceania, South & Southeastern Asia, Southern Europe, Sub-Saharan Africa, and Western Europe. While three regions chose to conduct asynchronous reviews due to scheduling and time zone conflicts[19], all other regional reviews were held virtually and facilitated by a regional expert who possessed deep knowledge and experience in philanthropy in the region. These meetings created space for dialogue across country borders, surfaced common themes, and overall generated excitement and ideas. In the sub-Saharan Africa review, for example, there was common agreement regarding the strong influence of election and political rhetoric in philanthropy. While the conversations in the Oceania regional review also touched on elections, other themes emerged, such as fundraising harmonization, aging populations, and intergenerational wealth transfers, signaling more developed and professionalized sectors. In each regional review, the conversations were lively, supported in-region networks, and surfaced similarities and differences in ways of describing, imagining, and promoting philanthropy.

Next, the global advisory council convened, reviewed scores, and raised questions where they recognized global anomalies and disparities. Using this feedback, several approaches were taken. In some countries, additional local peer review was solicited to gather more in-country feedback to share with country-level report author. In other cases, regional reviewers were invited to further weigh in on the scoring or narratives of a country. In all cases, country experts were provided with feedback on their initial draft; some feedback involved suggested score changes, while other requests were made for additional narrative justification. To ensure that country experts were respected for their deep knowledge and experience in the country and to mitigate power dynamics, country experts were given the final word on scores and updated narratives.

After all scores were finalized, the School aggregated the findings from each country and economy to produce a global report. On May 28, 2025, all 111 reports were publicly released[20], and the School hosted a celebration among *GPEI* contributors to uplift and recognize each partner for their work, and

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19 Asynchronous reviews were held for the following regions: Canada & United States, Middle East & North Africa, and Latin America.

20 Findings for each country are published as separate report through IU *Scholarworks*, for a total of 95 country-level reports. There are also 15 regional reports. The school aggregates these findings at a global level and shares global trends and themes in one global-level report. Combined, these reports total 111 reports.

to encourage dialogue across borders. One author exclaimed that she was so excited to meet and be in the same space as other participants from all around the world. Following the launch, feedback sessions have been held in various formats, including one-on-one, group, and survey formats, to gather insights into research barriers, critiques, and disparities.

3. Findings and Use Cases

At a global level, generosity remains rather universal. Based on the 2025 *GPEI* data, fourteen of fifteen regions have favorable socio-cultural conditions (score or 3.5+), where religion, helping attitudes, and deep-rooted cultural traditions are positive, and this condition has remained favorable and stable across all three *GPEI* editions (2015-2017, 2018-2020, 2021-2023). Even in the Latin American region, where the regional score is less favorable, there is extensive variation to consider and innovative solutions to overcome challenges. For example, in Mexico where corporate philanthropy is gaining importance, there is an opportunity to foster public trust through partnership and programming with businesses. And, in Brazil, there is an opportunity to build upon favorable political momentum to improve public narratives and understanding of philanthropy and giving. Additional detailed findings can be found in the 2025 *Global Philanthropy Environment Index* Global Report.

Looking ahead, climate change and professionalization are noted as key emerging trends for philanthropy in the majority of countries represented. Through a special spotlight in the global report, the perspectives of *GPEI* philanthropy experts were shared, regarding their perceptions of philanthropy's role and response to climate change. In aggregating the global findings and working with local experts to bring these into conversation among relevant stakeholders, comparative research from an international dataset is welcomed, providing the opportunity to make relevant comparisons and generate ideas from inspiration around the world.

In fact, since its release, comparative data from the 2025 *GPEI* have been useful in communicating trends, inspirations, and cautions among a variety of audiences. For example, the *GPEI* has been used in lunch and learn funder workshops, civil society research presentations, and policymaker educational programs. It has also generated regional dialogue among leaders, for example in Latin America and the Caribbean, looking for new ways to unlock philanthropic potential within local contexts. Further, it has been adopted in some classroom modules as comparative, case studies. Ultimately, comparative data from within the same research study allows for comparative conversations across research, policy, practice, and teaching.

Conclusion

Overall, this research note unpacks: 1) the challenges of undertaking comparative research, 2) the process of developing an international philanthropy dataset, and 3) preliminary 2025 *GPEI* findings and uses.

The 2025 *GPEI* uses a community-engaged process with emphasis on local expertise in developing and disseminating a global dataset on the enabling environment for philanthropy. This international dataset relies on partnerships with 173 experts from around the world—individuals with in-depth knowledge about the philanthropic landscape in their country or region, who often integrate the research into local practice and policy conversations. In a global project, community engagement requires strategies that mitigate power dynamics and are inclusive of diverse cultural, political, and societal norms. Community-engaged research offers rich data alongside a network of engaged and diverse stakeholders who are invested in using their co-created research to build public and government understanding of sectoral values.

A critical takeaway from the *GPEI* is that there are many different understandings and practices of philanthropy around the world. Elevating local expertise from across the globe onto global platforms provides an opportunity to engage in conversations around more inclusive terms and definitions, and to challenge existing power dynamics in this space. There are also varying levels of data availability, which underscores the need for local expertise to develop nimble and evolving approaches to gather information.

Further, there are questions about who decides what philanthropy means, what gets included, and how it is measured. These foundational questions have implications for knowledge produced and associated narratives. For example, in countries and cultures where informal and less professionalized ways of giving are dominant, does a research instrument provide space to capture these norms? By shifting the emphasis to who conducts the research—people on the ground with the expertise—the diversity of philanthropy can be better understood. Ultimately, when local experts are gathered, they bring these understandings to the global stage and help societies bridge the meaning and recognition of the diverse moral and socio-cultural dimensions of philanthropy worldwide.

About the Author

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Review essay

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Annotated Review Essay on Laurence Lampert's Beijing Lectures

Abstract

A detailed analysis of Laurence Lampert's Beijing Lectures on Leo Strauss, Plato, and Nietzsche (delivered in 2015) highlights how the book distills a lifetime of Lampert's scholarship (1941–2024) on the trio. His earlier works—imaginative, meticulous, and elegantly written though often lengthy—are here rendered in a more accessible form: tightly focused, architecturally clear, syntactically simple, and without footnotes. My review therefore provides citations and biographical details for the many sources Lampert draws on. Subtitled "Philosophy and Its Poetry," the lectures argue that all three thinkers depict great philosophers as moving from rigorous ontological inquiry to crafting political-theological teachings that harmonize with reality. Lampert relies on Strauss's recovery of the multilayered, sometimes secretive "art of writing" used by Plato and others to navigate their societies and advance future-oriented aims. Lampert also stresses the paths that Strauss, Nietzsche, and Plato's Socrates followed in developing both insights and rhetoric. While summarizing the chapters on each author, my review adds context, raises a few objections, and considers the book's implications for elevating readers and informing philanthropic efforts, especially in environmentalism.

Key Words: Laurence Lampert, Leo Strauss, Plato, Nietzsche, and philosophical philanthropy

"[W]ords and songs spring out of us by nature, generated by our fruitful soil" (194)

These lectures by Laurence Lampert (1941 – 2024) condense a lifetime of imaginative, innovative, and meticulous scholarship into roughly 200 pages (and fewer than 60,000 words). That scholarship, furthermore, is vastly easier to absorb than are the three authors—Plato, Nietzsche, and Leo Strauss—upon which it focuses. Everything Lampert writes, finally, stands out for its clarity, efficiency, and literary elegance.

There are six lectures of roughly equal length, delivered in 2015. The first two focus on Strauss, the next two on Plato, and the final pair on Nietzsche. These three authors were manifestly the main focus of Lampert's scholarship, and he wrote two or more dense and pathbreaking books about each of them. There is little in the lectures that he has not developed at length elsewhere—including two books that were published after 2015. The presentation here,

however, is very tightly focused, and much less scholarly: the syntax is simpler, and there is more "architecture" (summaries and anticipations), while there are fewer citations and no footnotes. The lectures also include more italics (all the italics below within quotations were present in the original).

To assist the well-trained students who attended the lectures at Renmin University in Beijing, Lampert distributed printed copies in advance (ix). Because the book rarely supplies citations and never provides bibliographic details for the works he quotes, I shall usually add them. To assist my readers, finally, I'll almost always use 'scare quotes' when I'm quoting passages Lampert has quoted.

As an interpreter, Lampert is heavily indebted to Strauss—who "rediscovered the philosophic art of writing and then wrote about it or disclosed it as no previous philosopher ever had" (xiv)—and Lampert consistently highlights that art. He even ties Straussian hermeneutics to Nietzsche and Plato in his subtitle, "Philosophy and Its Poetry."

Lampert quotes—and sympathizes with—Nietzsche's 1886 claim (in *BGE* §191)[1] that Plato was the philosopher who had "the greatest strength any philosopher has so far had at his disposal" (93). Lampert develops this thesis by explaining how Plato's dialogues bequeathed the poetry of a transcendent and unchanging "good" supported by a divine realm that enforces morality in the afterlife. He also explains how, between the lines, Plato conveyed the highly rational claim that "being" was essentially eros, a time-bound striving that links him to Nietzsche and the will to power. Lampert aligns with Nietzsche, "the philosopher of our time" (xiv), conveying huge reservations about the Christian civilization they both trace to Plato—and about the allegedly derivative "modern" enterprise to create heaven on earth with science and industry. Unlike all three sphinxes, however, Lampert here (as elsewhere) lays all his cards on the table, in effect trying to consign Christian otherworldliness and other "noble lies" to the dustbin of history. In attempting to honor Lampert, I too shall write bluntly.

Lampert starts with the most recent author because Strauss's "history of political philosophy" illuminates crucial subtleties in the other two. These subtleties include Plato's attempts to promote "ministerial poetry" (Strauss's phrase); the resemblance between the Nietzschean "will to power" and Platonic eros; and the way that Nietzsche moves from the fundamental ontology of that will to an affirmative vision of "eternal return," which can reorient Western civilization after the death of God. For Lampert, furthermore, Nietzsche's poetry, particularly its "love of the earth," can now be developed fruitfully in connection with environmentalism.

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1 For three of the books that the lectures examine, I shall use abbreviations. *BGE* = *Beyond Good and Evil*. *CM* = *The City and Man* by Leo Strauss (Chicago, IL: Rand McNally, 1964). *SPPP* = *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy* by Leo Strauss (University of Chicago Press, 1983). I'll be citing the first by section number, but I'll often omit the § symbol.

Lampert exalts Plato and Nietzsche, and describes himself (borrowing a phrase from Nietzsche) as being merely a "philosophic laborer" (xiv). That category manifestly includes me, and regarding all four of these authors my contributions could never match what Lampert did with the trio. While summarizing the lectures, however, I'll occasionally provide background information to assist *Philanthropia* readers from diverse occupations and disciplines. I'll also try to add value by highlighting the book's implications for philanthropy, by occasionally citing other writings where Lampert develops a pivotal topic at greater length—and by raising a few doubts about Lampert's project. He and Nietzsche portray Odysseus as a founder, but I'll merely offer suggestions, and I'll refrain from killing any suitors. I have elsewhere discussed most of Lampert's publications.[2]

The first two lectures focus on Strauss's 1938-39 letters to Jacob Klein, some poetic aspects illuminated by *The City and Man*, and his late chapter on *Beyond Good and Evil*.

LECTURE ONE:
Strauss Recovers the Tradition of Philosophic Poetry (3-32)

Jacob Klein was a lifelong friend of Strauss's who taught at St. John's College from 1938 until his death in 1978. With the letters to Klein, most of which have not been translated from German into English, Lampert might be more descriptive than analytical. The letters Lampert discusses excitedly convey Strauss's discoveries of "exotericism"—the infamous art of writing whereby past philosophers secreted certain important teachings "between the lines." In Lampert's deft formulation, such writing

> allows the philosopher to convey what he *thinks*—the esoteric part—through what he *says*—the exoteric part—without saying directly or simply putting into words what he thinks. It is an art of writing that is both a showing and a hiding: the artfulness of the showing consists in the shown leading to the not-shown, to the hidden. And the hidden is always what matters most—what *you*, if you're interested but only if you're interested, can find out on your own. And finding it out, you will treasure it all the more because you found it out on your own (xiii).

Although Strauss's first book, *Spinoza's Critique of Religion* (1928), described Maimonides (~1138 - 1204) as 'a believing Jew,' Strauss's 1/20/1938 letter to Klein asserted that he was instead 'a truly free mind' who was 'persuaded' that the world was eternal. As Lampert notes, Maimonides thus "rejected the Bible's view" and sided with philosophy (5). In a February letter,

2 In the interests of full "disclosure," I note that I exchanged a few brief emails with the author and provided a blurb for the *Beijing Lectures*. But Lampert and I never met or spoke.

Strauss was even bolder: Maimonides 'in his beliefs was *absolutely* no Jew.' This revelation, furthermore, is of 'considerable present-day significance' because, by proving it, 'the incompatibility in principle of philosophy and Judaism would be demonstrated to the eye' (6). Lampert doesn't pause to note the exaggeration: even if Maimonides proved to be a resolute atheist, there might be ways of harmonizing philosophy and Judaism.

Given Maimonides' status as a 'truly free' mind, Strauss adds that 'the crucial question for him . . . was whether the ideal lawgiver must be a prophet.' Lampert elsewhere celebrates Nietzsche's claim that "genuine" philosophers are "lawgivers and commanders" (*BGE* 211), not just knowers and enlighteners, and his lecture offers this powerful elaboration regarding Strauss's Maimonides:

> Judaism is a tradition of *law* and the Jewish lawgiver was Moses, the most important figure in the Jewish Bible. In Plato the *philosopher* is the ideal lawgiver. So the question as Strauss now saw it was this: Must the philosopher-lawgiver also be sent from God? That is, be seen as sent from God, present himself as sent from God? (5)

This poetic strand Strauss perceived in Maimonides—whom Lampert dubs "the greatest teacher of Judaism" (6)—also surfaces in what subsequent letters to Klein say about classical authors. In a November letter, for example, Strauss proclaims that Herodotus, Thucydides, and Xenophon 'are *no* historians—of course not—but authors of exoteric . . . writings.' Strauss went on to publish major studies of the last two, and his students (e.g., Seth Benardete) have tackled Herodotus. Lampert plausibly adds that Strauss's "greatest achievements" include "his recovery of Xenophon, the genuine Xenophon, the philosopher," whose Socrates does not differ "*fundamentally*" from Plato's (12). In the 2/16/39 letter, Strauss radically asserts that Xenophon was a superlative 'trickster' who had 'the courage to clothe himself as an idiot and go through the millennia that way' (13). Among the shocking teachings Strauss here perceived in both Xenophon and Socrates is that 'morality is purely exoteric' (13), and that *sôphrosunê* (traditionally translated as "moderation" or "temperance") is 'essentially self-control in the expression of opinions' (14).[3] From here, Lampert illuminates additional considerations that motivate exotericism:

> what the *philosopher*, the one who lives the theoretical life, comes to know can destroy the foundation of the society of which he is a part. . . . Exotericism protects society from philosophy and protects the philosopher from society (15).

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3 For a sample of the ingenuity with which Lampert's second Strauss book uncovered Strauss's ingenuity in interpreting Xenophon, see https://claremontreviewofbooks.com/digital/the-enduring-problem-of-leo-strauss/.

As the masthead of this journal notes, philanthropy is “voluntary action intended for the public good,” and it originated in Periclean Athens as a philosophical term “closely associated with the concept of *paideia*, understood as education and acculturation with the aim of attaining the virtues.” As interpreted by Lampert and Strauss, Nietzsche aligns with both Plato and Xenophon by impugning certain moral virtues that have been widely and deeply shared. As I'll elaborate below, however, Lampert presents his lifetime of assiduous scholarship as a tool for promoting the intertwined “public good” of the human race and of the planet it inhabits. Strauss, Lampert adds, “developed his own manner of exoteric writing.” Because his approach was “much more open than the traditional manners” and eventually “establish[ed] a tradition of reading *that would make the philosophers' esoteric* understanding more generally available” (18), Strauss too deserves credit for both *paideia* and philanthropy.

From a 10/10 letter to Klein that discusses Hesiod's *Theogony*, Lampert infers that, in Strauss's view, “gods who care about the human things” are “the inventions of wise poets like Hesiod.” Since Strauss then links Hesiod with Homer, Lampert proffers the provocative hypothesis that “wisdom is knowledge of nature and human nature, and knowledge of what a god is” (16).[4] It would be difficult to dispute Lampert's conclusion that Strauss, in these letters to Klein, was sketching “the very matters that will occupy him for his whole life” (16).

Lampert scrutinizes Strauss's art of writing in his second lecture, focusing on things Strauss did years later to illuminate some poetic strands of Plato and Nietzsche. In discussing the chapter on Plato's *Republic* in Strauss's 1964 book, *The City and Man*, Lampert highlights Strauss's well-known suggestion that the center of a transgressive text is likely to be more revealing than either the beginning or the ending (the latter two, being more conspicuous and easier to explore, will usually attract more attention from both the general public and an official censor). After a general discussion of Plato's approach to writing in the chapter's first 13 paragraphs, which conclude with a dash, Strauss's remaining 65 paragraphs scrutinize the *Republic*, a book still famous for its idealistic “city in speech” (369c). The central paragraph of this section, according to Lampert, “deals with the central” matter (20), the “musical” education the city's young “guardians” will receive, especially regarding the gods.[5] Lampert proceeds to scrutinize the two central sentences within the long central paragraph.

To ‘indicate the right kind’ of stories and songs, according to Strauss,

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4 Strauss wrote very little about Homer. Here (and elsewhere), Lampert credits Seth Benardete's 1997 book, *The Bow and the Lyre*, for demonstrating that “the founding *poet* of Greece is also its founding *philosopher*” (17).

5 This paragraph occupies pages 97-100 of *The City and Man*.

Socrates 'lays down two laws' for the gods;[6] Strauss adds that even the 'untrue' stories will be fed to 'the grown-up citizens of the good city,' not just to the children (21). The discussion here between Socrates and Adeimantus reflects 'the implicit premise that there are gods, or that there is a god and that they know what a god is' (*CM*, 98). Socrates begins to found the city in speech when responding to the long speeches with which brothers Glaucon and Adeimantus—picking up the ultra-cynical critique of justice that Thrasymachus had previously introduced—launched the second of the *Republic*'s ten books. Drawing on Adeimantus's speech, Lampert soundly infers that Plato is portraying him as "a young man who has begun to lose his confidence in the [Homeric] stories about the gods that he had absorbed as a child" (23). More specifically, Socrates is

> legislating what a god is for tortured Adeimantus, a young man who thinks he knows what a god is but is critical of the *actions* of the gods in the stories he was raised to believe and is tempted not to believe them or not to trust the gods. What Socrates does is alter or modify the gods Adeimantus thinks he knows in order to make them more moral, make them more worthy of Adeimantus's respect and honor (27-28).

Another key inference Lampert draws is that Adeimantus is neither a philosopher nor a "potential philosopher" (24).

Socrates makes his infamous pitch for philosopher kings, who emerge from the guardian class to rule the communist city absolutely, in the middle of the dialogue. At the center of his essay, Strauss thus shows "how Socrates the philosopher actually ruled: a philosopher rules by laying down new laws for the gods; a philosopher rules by ruling the view of the gods that will rule the minds of the young men" (27).[7] Plato's Socrates, consequently, leaves Homer and Hesiod behind. The last book of the *Republic*, which ends with the myth of Er, goes farther by making the gods "the moral judges of human behavior" and making the soul immortal, "living out its next life in reward and punishment for its actions in this life" (29). Much more controversially, Lampert adds that the "new teaching by Platonic philosophers" proved "*disastrous*" by "opening the way for Revelation or Christianity" (30). Strauss never published such a radical claim about Plato or Christianity, and this is probably one reason that Lampert describes himself as a Nietzschean and not a Straussian.

Near the end of the first lecture, Lampert highlights that the Strauss chapter later describes the above-sketched theological innovations by Socrates

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6 The two laws, I infer, are these: the god, being really good, does not inflict harms on us (*Republic,* 379b, 380c); the gods are unchanging and do not mislead us (382e - 383a).

7 Lampert also makes deft use of the Strauss paragraph that precedes the central one. In sketching how the *Republic* initially introduced philosophy, Strauss here noted that 'the highest art, the art directing all the other arts . . . will prove to be philosophy' (27, quoting *CM*, 97). The Greek term for art describes doing or making, not primarily the creative arts.

as "ministerial poetry" (*CM*, 136-37), and Lampert uses all this to explain his subtitle, "Philosophy and Its Poetry":

> *philosophy*, the drive to understand, comes to understand; and out of that understanding it generates or gives birth to a poetry that *ministers* to *its* interests while ministering as well to the larger civil community within which alone philosophy can prosper (31).

Regarding philanthropy, this could suggest a proverbial "win win." To benefit society, a philosopher presents edifying teachings that are ultimately grounded in rational and informed insights, but he or she also strives to protect society against the destructive actions those insights might precipitate.[8]

LECTURE TWO:
Strauss, Nietzsche and the Philosophic Poetry of the Future (35-64)

Lampert's second lecture explores philosophic poetry as illuminated by Strauss's chapter on *BGE* in *Studies in Platonic Political Philosophy*, his last book (published posthumously in 1983).[9] Drawing on three considerations—the title of the collection, the chapter's placement in the center (which makes it depart from the "roughly chronological" pattern that characterizes the other fourteen chapters), and the fact that it follows the "Jerusalem and Athens" chapter—Lampert plausibly suggests that, in Strauss's mind, Nietzsche "now occupies the central place, just after Jerusalem and Athens," in "the study of Platonic political philosophy" (36). Indeed, the chapter soon implies that *BGE* echoes Plato because of its 'graceful subtlety as regards form, as regards intention, as regards the art of silence' (36-37). Lampert then sketches a momentous conclusion that his remaining lectures will defend: Plato and Nietzsche both "platonize in the service of philosophy" (39). They nonetheless differ in important ways. For example, Nietzsche was an avowed atheist who attributed quasi-divine status to the rare "genuine" philosophers who found or transform cultures (*BGE* 211); he and Plato also confronted distinct "spiritual situation[s]" and differed regarding "what the times required" (39-40). To suggest that Strauss's Plato similarly exalted the cultural impact of certain philosophers (see the discussion above of Maimonides et al.), Lampert cites brief sections in the *SPPP* chapter. Lampert is certainly on solid ground when

8 For an authoritative recent discussion, see Arthur M. Melzer, *Philosophy Between the Lines: The Lost History of Esoteric Writing* (University of Chicago Press, 2014). For what might be Lampert's longest explanation of the relevant philanthropy, see *Nietzsche and Modern Times: A Study of Bacon and Descartes* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 126-41.

9 To supplement what the lecture illuminates in this chapter, interested readers can consult Lampert's 1996 book, *Leo Strauss and Nietzsche* (University of Chicago Press, 1996). It provides a 91-page commentary on Strauss's 17-page chapter, which is reproduced as an appendix.

he states that the chapter's "chief interest" is in Nietzsche's "theological-political program or his *philosophic poetry* in its aspect as religion" (41-42).

The lecture proceeds to note that, as presented by Strauss based on *BGE* 36—and affirmed by Lampert—the "*will to power* is Nietzsche's name for the being of beings, the nature of nature" (42). Lampert then quotes this memorable passage from Strauss: 'The will to power takes the place which the *eros*—the striving for "the good in itself"—occupies in Plato's thought' (43). According to Lampert, however, Strauss here was being coy, and Lampert will later argue that eros and the will to power are "close kin" (162).

BGE 36 presents a straightforward and attractively tentative argument on behalf of the will to power. "Assuming that our world of desires and passions is the only thing 'given' as real," Nietzsche begins, mightn't such a given suffice to "render the so-called mechanistic (and thus material) world comprehensible as well?" If the will *is* efficacious, Nietzsche continues, we must "attempt to hypothetically posit the causality of the will as the only type of causality there is." And since the "entire" human "life of drives" expresses the will to power, Nietzsche can plausibly—but hardly definitively—proceed to "designate *all* efficacious force as: *will to power*." The aphorism concludes powerfully by inferring that "[t]he world seen from inside, the world determined and described with respect to its 'intelligible character'—would be just this 'will to power' and nothing else."

In his next aphorism, Nietzsche surprisingly imagines that his "friends" will object that he is replacing God by the devil. Based on other passages in *BGE*, and with an assist from Strauss, Lampert offers this compelling explanation about "the free minds" that are Nietzsche's friends (the chapter is titled, "The Free Mind [*Geist*]"):

> they do not believe in God or the devil. But as modern free minds they no longer have a language that can state strongly enough just how *criminal* they find Nietzsche's conclusion. So they adopt the old language, the popular language, for a moment and use *its* extremes, God and devil, to express their shock at his crime (47).

The dead God, Lampert concludes, "still defines even for Nietzsche's free-minded friends *what a God is*" (48). Along the way, Lampert amplifies the anti-Christian implications in a manner that Strauss never did:

> if it's true that the totality of the world is will to power and nothing else, there is nothing beyond the world different from the world. Nietzsche's reasoning refutes a transcendent God. But the transcendent God of Christianity had condemned the world as the kingdom of darkness, as the place of the devil from which he would redeem us. So . . . *that* God, the refuted God, is the *devil*, the refuted devil (47).[10]

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10 Nietzsche launched *BGE* by claiming that Plato's dogmatic "invention of pure spirit and the Good in itself" was "the worst, the most prolonged, and the most dangerous of all errors," in part because it spawned "the Christian-ecclesiastical pressure of millennia."

Regarding the above-mentioned "theological-political program" that Strauss highlighted in *BGE*, Lampert quotes his striking claim (*SPPP*, 178) that '[t]he doctrine of the will to power—the whole doctrine of *Beyond Good and Evil*—is in a manner a vindication of God' (48). Adding that Strauss uses the vindication phrase four more times (49), he teases out an explanation from Strauss about how and why the atheist Nietzsche vindicates God. From *BGE* 150,[11] Strauss later suggests that a livable "world" for humans requires the divine, and Lampert amplifies this thesis by recounting the two Nietzsche citations that Strauss added (49). As Lampert later elaborates, that world would be "the cultural world as a place of meaning and significance" (53).

After the dramatic "vindication" passage, Strauss proceeds to discuss *BGE*'s chapter on religion. As both Lampert and Strauss emphasize, *BGE* 55 provides a stunning lamentation about the despair that God's death will bring to the human race: the sacrifice of "all comfort and hope, everything holy or healing, any faith in a hidden harmony or a future filled with justice and bliss." According to Strauss, however, Nietzsche aimed at extracting a "life-inspiring" truth from the "deadly" truth of God's death, since *BGE* 56 attractively sketches "the ideal belonging to the religion of the future" (*SPPP*, 180). That ideal is Nietzsche's famous doctrine of "eternal return": not just accepting "what was and what is," but wanting it "again *just as it was and is* through all eternity" (§56). Drawing on certain subtleties in Strauss's wording, Lampert then suggests that Nietzsche "did not *intend* to find a new ideal; instead, he found a new ideal as a consequence of his passion for the truth, as a consequence of his discovery that the world is will to power." Here again, according to Lampert, "philosophy led to philosophic poetry" (53).

Lampert proceeds to elaborate two points from Strauss: the great ambiguity in *circulus vitiosus deus*, the Latin phrase with which Nietzsche concludes §56, and the structural resemblances between §36-37 (where the will to power allegedly vindicated God) and §55-56. Lampert then offers a stunning inference: "eternal return is not a *vicious* circle but, on the contrary, the *virtuous* circle of life made eternal, made god in some sense." By making "the whole natural cycle of things" divine, eternal return provides "a non-theistic vindication of God" (54). Such "inner coherence," Lampert adds, is "the deepest *platonizing*" in Nietzsche and illuminates how he was a "*Platonic political philosopher*, a philosopher who succeeded in doing what Plato did":

> First comes the *esoteric insight* into the world reserved for the philosopher, wholly a matter for the intellect. Then comes *an exoteric teaching* for all, a teaching founded on the human

11 "Around the hero everything turns into tragedy; around the demigod everything turns into a satyr play; and around God everything turns into—what? Perhaps 'world'?" (*BGE* 150). Here, and in a few other places, I am quoting the 2002 Cambridge University Press translation by Judith Norman.

> passions that makes a mere totality into a world, a livable world for human communities (55).

Lampert returns to *BGE* 56 in his last lecture, "Nietzsche's Philosophic Poetry." He credits Strauss again, but also examines Nietzsche's daunting claim that the affirmer of eternal return is "insatiably shouting *da capo* not just to himself but to the whole play and performance" and to "the one who needs precisely this performance—and makes it necessary" because he repeatedly "needs himself—and makes himself necessary." This, Nietzsche concludes, would be the *circulus vitiosus deus*. And here is Lampert's final comment about it:

> The affirmation of the whole spectacle is ultimately the self-affirmation of the human spectator on the spectacle—the affirmation is an affirmation of the world because the world makes the philosopher possible, because the world generated a spectator who is a rational, self-conscious, knowing fragment of the knowable whole (179).

The world and nature, one may infer, deserve reverence and gratitude.[12]

Nature remains prominent in Lampert's next section on Strauss's Nietzsche, which focuses on morals and politics, though here he focuses on *BGE*'s later invocation of "the terrible basic text of *homo natura*"; Nietzsche strives to "translate humanity back into nature" (§230). According to Lampert, the distortion came from "thousands of years of moral thinking according to which humanity is in some way both subnatural and supernatural" (57). Lampert here highlights Strauss's emphasis on the "complementary man" that *BGE* mentions once but Strauss references five times. According to Lampert, Nietzsche is describing "*the philosopher* at this point in human history, the philosopher as thinker and actor" (57). *BGE* 207 characterizes the philosopher as the "sort of complementary person in which the *rest* of existence justifies itself." Much earlier, the book surprisingly celebrated Aristophanes as "that transfiguring complementary spirit for whose sake we can *forgive* the whole Greek world" (§28).

According to Strauss, the complementary man 'solves the highest, the most difficult problem.' The problem, at least for Strauss's Nietzsche, is that 'man is conquering nature and there are no assignable limits to that conquest.' People, moreover, have 'come to think of abolishing suffering and inequality'; Strauss cites §239 and §257 to document Nietzsche's view that 'suffering and inequality are the prerequisites of human greatness.' Lampert adds, channeling Nietzsche, that this campaign against suffering and inequality reflects "the modern, secular version of Christian virtue" (58). The greatest danger, finally, is that philosophy itself would die (58-59).

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12 For a more detailed discussion of *BGE* §55-56, see Lampert's 2001 commentary, *Nietzsche's Task: An Interpretation of* Beyond Good and Evil (Yale University Press), 114-23.

Lampert wisely emphasizes that the problem includes "the *technological conquest of nature*" (57). As Lampert says here, and will amplify later, the love and gratitude that would characterize someone who embraces eternal return would assign "limits to the conquest of nature, *beloved* nature." Nietzsche's philosophy, correspondingly, is "*the first comprehensive ecological philosophy*, the philosophy whose moral imperative is the one that Nietzsche's Zarathustra announced at his beginning: 'Be true to the earth!' or 'Be loyal to the earth!'" (60). In the final section of the second lecture, Lampert begins by asserting that "the founding of the modern world in Western Europe is the great event in philosophy and philosophy's poetry that still surrounds us" (62). He credits Strauss's *Thoughts on Machiavelli* for showing that Machiavelli was the "initial great founder," and identifies Bacon and Descartes as the two "philosophic followers" of Machiavelli whose "*exoteric* writings led to the establishment of the scientific and technological view of nature" (Lampert here mentions his 1993 book, *Nietzsche and Modern Times*, which discussed this pair in detail). With assistance from Montaigne, Hobbes, Spinoza, and additional modern authors who fought against "the kingdom of darkness," Christianity—"a ruling religion whose warring fanaticism in their time cost Europe the Renaissance"—was eventually tamed (62-63) as their "conscious secularization of the Christian dream gradually re-focused European dreaming on worldly rather than heavenly ends." Nietzsche, meanwhile, "embraced the *scientific* aspects of the modern revolution while modifying or assigning limits to its *technological* aspects" (63).

LECTURE THREE: Socrates' Philosophic Poetry (67-94)

When calling Plato "the absolute master" of exoteric writing in philosophy (67), Lampert signals a major debt to Strauss. As discussed above, he lauds Strauss for subtly hinting that Socrates in the *Republic*, responding to the looming death of the Homeric gods, was providing 'ministerial poetry' that legislated a new theology whereby the gods moralistically rewarded or punished people in the afterlife. In this lecture, Lampert adds a type of argument that clearly goes beyond Strauss. He will argue that Plato showed how Socrates "came to understand" both the "fundamental truths of being and knowing" (regarding nature as well as human nature) [67] and what it was "necessary for a philosopher to *do* in his time and place," i.e., as a teacher of a "theological-political view" or philosophic poetry (68). A fierce critic of "historicism," particularly its attempts to portray philosophers as being prisoners of some *Zeitgeist*, Strauss typically strives to work out an author's "teaching" without relying upon the "contexts" and biographical details that historians typically prioritize.

Like Strauss, however, Lampert highlights what Plato communicates directly (i.e., beyond the long and very complex speeches his dialogues present) by structural elements, including whether a dialogue is performed (like a play) or narrated/reported.[13] Only nine of the 35 dialogues are narrated, and Lampert will emphasize them. His first Plato lecture addresses three of the six dialogues that Socrates narrated: *Protagoras*, *Charmides*, and *Republic*.

Despite Strauss's extraordinary attention to detail, he left "some very important features of the dramatic dates either not observed or not commented on" (69). Regarding the *Republic*, indeed, Lampert thinks Strauss errs (on *CM*, 62) by denying that 'the time, i.e. the year,' of the conversation is 'made quite clear.' The narrator Socrates began by specifying "yesterday" as the time of the conversation, and Lampert (unlike Strauss) maintains that the dialogue also reveals the year (70). Socrates stated that he and Glaucon had just attended a goddess-honoring festival held "for the first time," and Thrasymachus later noted that the festival honored Bendis, a *foreign* divinity. According to Lampert, that was "a famous day, a momentous day" because "pious Athens" then did something "totally new in the experience of any Athenian alive at that time." Based on intense and rigorous sleuthing by his former student, Christopher Planeaux, Lampert says with "some certainty" that the conversation took place in June of 429 B.C.E. (71).[14] Drawing on what Thucydides recorded regarding the war with Sparta—and the hideous plague that began during the prior summer—Lampert says Plato set the dialogue "in a time of extreme Athenian crisis." Thucydides also suggested that Athens was then suffering from "the deepest possible spiritual crisis" (72).

Lampert develops the dating when he quotes the first sentence of Plato's *Charmides*. After 'some time away,' Socrates had the previous day returned to his usual haunts from the 'camp' in Potidaea, where the army had been for three years. That is vague, but he soon references a battle 'just before' he'd departed (153b).[15] According to Lampert, that references "the great Athenian defeat" (72) whose date "every Athenian who was interested" in the war would have known. Based on Planeaux, who draws partly on Thucydides,

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13 Lampert also follows Strauss in eschewing the "different sort of dating" that predominates among Plato specialists: "the time in Plato's life in which he supposedly *wrote* them." Because the latter is "always only a scholar's theory," we should instead direct our attention to "what is not a theory, the dates on which Plato set them" (69).

14 See Christopher Planeaux, "The Date of Bendis' Entry into Attica," *Classical Journal* 96, no. 2 (December-January 2000-2001): 165-92; and "Socrates, Bendis, and Cephalus: Does Plato's *Republic* Have an Historical Setting?" in George A. Dunn and Mango Telli, eds., *A New Politics for Philosophy: Perspectives on Plato, Nietzsche, and Strauss* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2022), 67-97. Lampert will also draw on Planeaux's article, "Socrates, Alcibiades, and Plato's *ta poteideatika*: Does the *Charmides* Have an Historical Setting?" *Mnemosyne* 52 (1999): 72-77.

15 To assist my readers, I'll generally add the Stephanus lines for Plato quotations, sometimes paired with page citations from Lampert's lecture.

the dialogue is set in late May, 429 (an inference currently accepted by conventional scholars).

Socrates adds that he came back different, having learned things from 'a doctor of Zalmoxis' (156d). Since the *Republic* was set a month later, readers are invited to consider that he then related some new things he had learned in Potidaea (73). To hypothesize about how Socrates' thinking had evolved, we can consult the *Protagoras*, which was apparently set around 434, before the war, a date that marks it as the earliest of the dated dialogues. Three other dialogues (*Symposium*, *Phaedo*, and *Parmenides*) are set later, but they include comments about a still younger Socrates. All three, furthermore, show a young Socrates at a "*turning point* in his philosophic life" (74). So he completed his "philosophic education" before 434, and the *Protagoras* shows his initial foray onto "the public stage" (75).

Socrates, roughly 36, here "arranges" a philosophical "contest" with the older Protagoras, a famous sophist and the "founder of the Greek enlightenment." In Lampert's subtle and potent interpretation, Socrates proceeds to restrain and redirect the sophist because he had been "*too outspoken*" and had thereby put "Greek wisdom, Greek philosophy, at risk" (75). Read carefully, indeed, the dialogue shows that Protagoras knows and even "respects" the "distinction between the exoteric and the esoteric." The other crucial point that Lampert perceives hinges on the presence of Alcibiades, a young man (not yet twenty) with staggering political potential. Lampert's Socrates does not "aim" to make Alcibiades a philosopher. He instead wants him to "maintain in Athens a public spirit friendly to philosophy" (76).

Turning back to the *Charmides*, Lampert notes the close attention it pays to Homer, "the founding poet of Greek civilization revered by all Greeks as the wisest and most authoritative of teachers and memorized by young men inclined to learning." Lampert endorses Benardete's argument that the true odyssey of Odysseus, who eventually returns to Ithaca as a masked beggar, was his "gradual" wisening via both philosophy and political philosophy (77). All four of the references in the *Charmides* to this epic are to "*recognition scenes.*" Returning to his above-sketched perspective on philosopher kings, Lampert brilliantly maintains that the *Charmides* Socrates is "*a new returning Odysseus*, a returning wise king, openly returning but returning hiddenly as a wise man with a political project through which he will rule." The new founding that Odysseus ultimately initiates is "a new *political order* that will not be dependent on a rare wise man like himself to rule it"; it instead seeks to promote "the *succession* of wise rule without wise rulers." And this in turn requires "a new *teaching on the gods*" (78).

Lampert develops these strands to suggest that Socrates in the *Charmides* attempts "a founding deed that is a *theological-political* program" (78). Socrates is introduced as a doctor possessing a drug that might cure Charmides' illness (155b). Socrates first mentions a healing leaf, but adds that certain

'*incantations*' are also necessary (155e). Socrates allegedly learned these (while away) from the above-mentioned doctor of Zalmoxis, a god who insists that 'beautiful speeches' must be included, and Socrates adds that Zalmoxin doctors 'even *immortalize* people' (156d). To amplify and further explain the importance of Zalmoxis, Lampert channels Herodotus, the obvious source, although Plato doesn't name him. In Lampert's summary, Herodotus showed that "the people who believe in Zalmoxis believe they are *immortal* and that their god is *the only God*." These people (the Getae), furthermore, are "*the most courageous and most just* of peoples, the only people to effectively resist the Persian invaders."[16] By teaching that "there is only one God and that the soul is immortal," Lampert concludes, the doctor "taught Socrates the teaching of the *Republic*" (79).[17] In the third lecture, Lampert's claim is less sweeping: via the Idea of the Good, Socrates "moves toward" the monotheism of Zalmoxis (90).

Regarding the *Charmides*, Lampert offers a final brilliant twist regarding the relatively long discussion between Socrates and Critias about moderation (80). Critias, it seems, had previously learned from Socrates "a view that would eventually turn him into a notorious Athenian criminal, a most immoderate sophist and tyrant in the Athenian civil war." Learning in the *Charmides* that he had corrupted Critias, Socrates had "another powerful reason for altering his teaching."

Socrates doesn't here convey the allegedly healing words. For that, we turn again to the *Republic* (81). Offering very clever analyses of the passages where Odysseus is mentioned or alluded to, Lampert develops the resemblance between Socrates and him as founders. Almost every reader is excited by the dialogue's final discussion of Odysseus, in the myth of Er. Once souls have completed a thousand-year cycle of reward or punishment, there is a lottery that determines choices for their next round of life on earth (memories of prior experiences are erased before the reincarnation begins). Although the soul of Odysseus 'by chance' received the last pick while Er was observing, things worked out splendidly: 'from memory of its former labors it had recovered from love of honor,' and it finally found a life (overlooked by the other souls), the 'life of a private man who minds his own business' (82). I had always assumed that, by choosing a life like Socrates', this soul chose a life that would center on learning rather than leading. I am now tempted, however, by Lampert's thesis that the reincarnated Odysseus would be minding "the business of philosophy and everything it entails to protect itself and advance itself" (82).

The above-mentioned long speeches by Glaucon and Adeimantus,

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16 Zalmoxis and the Getae are discussed in 4.93-96 of Herodotus's *Histories*. Lampert exaggerates in saying that the Getae "effectively" resisted the Persians (79); according to 4.93, they were hubristic and the Persians quickly enslaved them.

17 Lampert later reminds us that, on the same night that Socrates et al. were discussing and debating in the Piraeus, the Athenians were "themselves importing a foreign god, Bendis" (83).

which prompted Socrates to found "the city in speech" with them, clearly convey certain teachings of the Greek enlightenment (84). They were explicitly reviving the cynical moral perspectives that Thrasymachus had trumpeted in Book One. As Lampert observes, Thrasymachus is in effect a second-generation sophist who was "much less restrained or moderate" than Protagoras (85). As Strauss "showed beautifully," however, Socrates "makes a special effort to win Thrasymachus as his *friend*." Lampert adds he wasn't motivated by hatred in speaking harshly to Socrates in Book One. He was instead seeking "to gain an advantage over Socrates with the young men." Lampert's takeaway deserves an "A" for imagination:

> Socrates' strategic aim in the *Republic* is to persuade Thrasymachus that he can best serve his own advantage by adopting Socrates' strategy for philosophy. Speaking to the young men, his prospective customers and clients, as a friend of Socrates would entail that Thrasymachus *adopt a version* of Socrates' moderate strategy for philosophy.

Socrates, finally, hoped he would succeed better in reforming Glaucon and Adeimantus—Plato's older brothers—than he had with Alcibiades.

Lampert proceeds to summarize the three new "anti-Homeric teachings foreign to the Greek tradition" that might heal such young men. Regarding the soul, Socrates demoted the competitive and honor-craving *thymos* (spirit), also arguing that the soul was immortal and would be rewarded or punished in the afterlife (87-88). Second, he conveyed "a new teaching on *knowing and being*." Lampert adds, correctly, that Strauss was "almost outspoken" when mocking the obscurity in the theory of ideas. More importantly, Strauss allegedly demonstrated that "the doctrine is an exoteric teaching that can easily persuade non-philosophers who have been raised to believe in glorious gods like Nike and Dike, the gods of victory and justice." Lampert here builds cleverly on points he made regarding the *Republic*'s "ministerial poetry." Although Socrates' prime interlocutors had become skeptical of Homer's gods, their "learned skepticism . . . leaves them with a concept of what a god is that prepares them for Socrates' teaching on the ideas" (89). Lampert nonetheless asserts that the "ideas" can teach readers a lot about Socrates' "genuine insight into human perception and cognition, or sensing and understanding" (89). The third anti-Homeric teaching is the moralistic reform of Homer's gods, as Lampert's first lecture elaborated.

Lampert then offers compelling observations to accentuate Plato's ambitions in the *Republic*. On the day that "numberless" Athenians returned to Athens to report on the "all-night spectacle" that introduced the new goddess (Bendis), Socrates returned to convey what he had introduced "privately on the same night in the same place and now introduces to whoever wants to hear it in Athens" (recall the discussion above of "yesterday"). Because Socrates didn't direct his massive narration to any specific individual[s], Plato in effect has him

orating "to anyone and everyone." Lampert then provides another scintillating takeaway: although the introduction of Bendis did nothing that changed "the ultimate fate of Athens," Socrates' innovations ended up "changing the fate of philosophy in Athens and, ultimately, in changing the fate of Western civilization." As Nietzsche put it (in *The Birth of Tragedy*), Socrates was 'the one vortex and turning point of so-called world history' (91).

Lampert concludes the lecture by relating Nietzsche to Plato and Homer. He starts by noting the obvious point that Book Ten of the *Republic* assesses Homer more explicitly and completely (91) than Books Two and Three had done (they focused on Achilles' shortcomings as a role model for the guardians). As sketched above, Lampert innovates by highlighting similarities between Socrates and Odysseus. Odysseus ended up killing the 108 suitors of his wife (Penelope). As interpreted by Lampert, Odysseus attempted to "establish a new order politically and religiously." Despite the virtues of his son, Telemachus, he isn't as outstanding as his father, so the political "succession" Odysseus sought required "a more democratic order to be ruled by Telemachus and his associates like Eumaeus, the loyal pig farmer." Homer, Lampert adds, portrayed the suitors as "wicked," so that killing them will appear just, and Odysseus is here assisted by Athena (92). Socrates, correspondingly, learned from Homer that he must kill Homer—and make Homer "seem to deserve it." Homer had made Zeus responsible for human evil, and Homer was ignorant regarding the ideas and the soul's immortal destiny. Between the lines, however, Socrates "honors Homer as his own teacher" (cf. *Republic* 595b-c, 607a)—who actually "*taught* that he must be killed off by the coming wise man whoever he was, whenever he came, whatever he brought." And by "teaching new gods." Lampert asserts—even more persuasively—that Nietzsche in turn "made every effort to *kill off Plato.*" More controversially, Lampert adds that Nietzsche did so "with Plato's permission." Lampert maintains (here and elsewhere) that the teaching of the "exoteric" Plato "ultimately led to a cultural disaster" (93). After quoting the *BGE* preface praise of Plato as "the most beautiful growth of antiquity," Lampert effuses that the esoteric Plato is "immortal, living on forever in the underworld of the wise" (93-94), even though Plato "must" now be "supplanted by Nietzsche."

LECTURE FOUR:
Socrates Becomes Socrates (97-128)

The second Plato lecture briefly recapitulates Lampert's *How Socrates Became Socrates*, which hadn't yet been published. The three dialogues this lecture examines share a "formal similarity" as the only dialogues narrated/reported by someone other than Socrates (97). Plato thus invites readers to uncover the "logical sequence" that conveys Socrates' "progress in thought from the *Phaedo*, which includes discussion of a pioneering step taken by the very young Socrates, to the *Parmenides*, where he learns that his innovation was fatally flawed, to the

Symposium, where he conveys "the point of deepest insight that a philosopher can attain." Motivated readers, consequently, can figure out "how *Socrates became Socrates*"—the alleged 'vortex' of world history. Plato's "calculated presentation of the exoteric Socrates," in other words, is "intended to lead his most interested reader to the esoteric Socrates" (98). Plato, correspondingly, is "a master of artful writing who teaches in the way Socrates taught, that is, without saying everything."

Regarding the chronology here (though not with the three dialogues his first lecture examined), Lampert credits both Strauss and Benardete for noting the sequence. Going beyond them, however, he will be "linking in detail the three events that Plato arranged" (99). The contrasting account the *Apology* provides—in Socrates' "only public speech to all of Athens"—regarding the Socratic turn, Lampert plausibly maintains, is essentially a "*politic* speech." The subservience Socrates here displays toward the oracle at Delphi, correspondingly, is "a *mythically* true account," while Lampert will elaborate the "*non-mythic* account" (100).

The *Phaedo*, still famous for the denouement in which Socrates drinks the hemlock and dies, is narrated by the disciple Phaedo to a group of Pythagoreans in a city far from Athens, perhaps suggesting that existing Pythagorean schools could help spread the Socratic teaching. Although Pythagoreans believed the soul was immortal, the two young ones in attendance (Kebes and Simmias) expressed doubts to Socrates about that proposition (70a-b, 85c, 101). We read that Socrates paused (95e) before articulating a key response to Kebes. He proceeded to deliver "the argument he knows will be *the last argument of his life* because the sun is sinking and he has to drink the poison at sundown." To explain the pause, Socrates says that Kebes was forcing him to address 'the cause concerning generation and destruction as a whole.' That question, Lampert adds, concerns "the comprehensive topic of philosophy, the *cause* at work in the whole of nature, the whole of becoming" (102).

As is well known, the *Phaedo* portrays the very young philosopher as a pre-Socratic focused on "natural" causes. That Socrates was perplexed until he "heard about" the teleological teachings of Anaxagoras, for whom "Mind" was the "ordering cause" for natural changes (97c, 102-3). When he read the books of Anaxagoras, however, he concluded that even Anaxagoras relied upon "natural causes" rather than mind (98b-c). All this suggests that Anaxagoras had used "exoteric and salutary teaching to cover his own esoteric naturalism" (103) as Lampert elaborates in his second Plato book.

In the *Phaedo*, Socrates proceeds to stress the limits of natural causes, e.g., because it is evaluative opinions (belonging to Socrates and other Athenians)—rather than 'bones and sinews' (99a)—that explain why he was in prison awaiting execution. He proceeds to sketch the famous 'second sailing in search of the cause' (103): a "turn away from the things to be explained" toward "the speeches or accounts that human beings use to talk and think"

about them. Socrates then invokes 'the form (*eidos*, idea) of the cause with which I've busied myself' (100b), which illustrated "the *ideas* or *forms* that he has been talking about ever since." Socrates, furthermore, then invokes the ideas (e.g., of the Good and the Beautiful) to prove the soul's immorality (105)—and placates Kebes, who can now accept Socrates' death.

For additional details about the timing of Socrates' education, Lampert examines the *Parmenides*, which Plato set at a "famous moment" in philosophical history, 450 at the great Panathenaia (127a, 105). Though only around 19, Socrates "had thought through the whole history of Greek philosophy before him and arrived at his own novel solution to the problem of cause." Plato's manipulation of the setting suggests how this ancient conversation would have been preserved. The dialogue's narrator is named Cephalus, one of the 'men of Clazomenae,' a Greek city in Asia Minor. Cephalus had sailed across the Aegean sea to Athens to "find out if *the one person* who *might have memory* of that conversation is still able to remember what was said about 60 years ago." Lampert, drawing again on Planeaux, infers that the journey and the subsequent conversation would have taken place around 390 B.C.E. The interested parties from Clazomenae hoped to find a second-order recounting based on what a man named Pythodorus had heard directly in 450, memorized, and later shared with Antiphon, the half-brother of Glaucon and Adeimantus (106). Antiphon displayed no interest in repeating what he had heard from Pythodorus (127a), and all the interlocutors were dead by 390, but the visitors from Clazomenae persuaded Antiphon to share what he recalled (106-7).

Invoking the transcendent and fixed ideas, the young Socrates boldly attempted to refute the views of old Parmenides and his disciple Zeno. According to Lampert, Socrates had "no argument" that could defend the ideas against the objections Parmenides presented.[18] At the end of his critique, Parmenides says this:

> Only a *naturally gifted man* could learn that there is a certain kind and beinghood in itself for each thing; and only a *still more wondrous person* will discover all these things and be able to teach someone else to be able to judge them clearly and sufficiently for himself (135a-b).

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18 Although I have rarely encountered anything baffling in Lampert's writings, I was unable to fathom what his *How Socrates Became Socrates* book (University of Chicago Press, 2021) conveys about Parmenides' arguments that allegedly defeated Socrates' theory. In its *Parmenides* chapter, indeed, Lampert draws heavily on what Benardete had written in "Plato's *Parmenides*: A Sketch," which was published in *The Archaeology of the Soul: Platonic Readings of Ancient Poetry and Philosophy*, edited by Ronna Burger and Michael Davis (South Bend, IN: St. Augustine's Press, 2012), 229-243. Although Lampert cites both the chapter and the collection, he fails to indicate that the latter houses the former, so I have done so here.

Lampert suggests that Socrates had already made "the fundamental step of philosophy and learned for himself that things have *natures*, that each thing belongs to a *kind*, a natural kind," as suggested by 'idea' (this perspective on the ideas is clearly indebted to Strauss). In addition, Lampert suspects that Parmenides was challenging Socrates to become the above-sketched "wondrous" individual (108). Lampert then quotes a long passage in which Parmenides attempts to encourage Socrates:

> if someone . . . after focusing on all these problems and others still, shall *deny* that there are ideas of the beings and will not distinguish a certain idea of each single thing, wherever he turns he'll understand nothing, since he does not allow that there is an ever-same idea for each of the beings. And so he will entirely destroy the power of dialogue or dialectics. But you seem to me only too aware of this (135b-c).

Lampert offers this pitch for the ideas: "If things are to be understood at all, then each thing must have its idea, must be an instance of its own kind. It must have a nature. And furthermore, that nature must in some sense be knowable" (109).

After pointing out that Cephalus had identified the men of Clazomenae as 'quite the philosophers' (126b, 109), Lampert poignantly infers that without them the story would have died. He adds other humbling inferences. Despite the deep influence Socrates presumably had on Adeimantus and Glaucon four decades earlier in 429 (the dramatic date of the *Republic*), the *Parmenides* implies that Antiphon's brothers had no "real interest in this story of the young Socrates: in all those years they never bothered to ask their brother to tell them the story" (110). The Clazomenae men, fortunately, were so eager to learn "how Socrates *became* Socrates" that they crossed the Aegean based on a rumor that someone in Athens could enlighten them. Regarding these pivotal but "nameless latecomers from abroad," Lampert adds, Plato apparently implies that what he preserves in this dialogue is "only for the passionately interested few, nameless future travelers from afar, potential philosophers willing to expend a lot of time and effort to learn what even close associates of Socrates do not need to know." So "the essential esoteric Socrates is embedded in the preserved conversations of the exoteric Socrates" (111), which can "continue to train" individuals like Plato's brothers in "the edifying, moral teaching with which philosophy will be identified and which they will believe" (111-12). Successors to the Clazomenae men, by contrast, will strive to understand what Socrates has "esoterically sheltered"—while attempting to "test" and "judge" the views they unearth (112).

Given the chronological linkage of the *Phaedo* (which sketches the young Socrates' account of the ideas) and the *Parmenides*, Lampert highlights that Socrates, in the final argument of his life, "teaches young Pythagoreans the

very view of the ideas that he himself, 50 years earlier, learned from Parmenides was rationally indefensible" (113). As Lampert proceeds to remind us, Socrates "repeatedly calls his last argument using the ideas, *the safe view*, the view his young audience can *trust*; it is the view he encourages them even *to shout* whenever anyone argues for a contrary view."[19] Like what the *Republic* teaches about the ideas, the *Phaedo* "belongs to political philosophy as a safe view that makes philosophy publicly defensible as morally trustworthy. It is a part of philosophic poetry, part of what Strauss called ministerial poetry" (113).

To get a better handle on how the mature Socrates approached "the serious philosophical problem" regarding nature and causes, Lampert turns to the *Symposium*.

His captivating account draws heavily on Strauss's posthumously published course transcript[20] and the interpretive essay Benardete appended to his 1986 *Symposium* translation. It is the only dialogue "named for its occasion," that occasion being "a *drinking party* at which wine loosens tongues," and the dialogue ultimately reveals "a secret about the gods and what they know" (114). Alcibiades plays a prominent role, and he was widely reviled in Athens because he was suspected of profaning its religious mysteries in 416. The Plato-directed chronology here is complex, and Planeaux concludes that its frame is 399, just before the trial of Socrates. The same year included the famous trial of Andokides. According to Lampert, both trials were part of "the purification of the city of Athens after the war with Sparta ended in 404 and after the civil war against the 30 Tyrants. . . . a time of fervent religious purification to which Socrates fell victim" (115). Compared to the Delphic mission Socrates mythically touted in the *Apology*, the *Symposium* reveals how Socrates really became wise.

The party took place shortly after the host Agathon won the tragedy contest, and "all Athenians would know that his victory occurred in 416." That was also the year their religious mysteries had been profaned by "revealing the secret core of Athenian religion"; Strauss focuses on "a profaning of different mysteries, the mysteries of what a philosopher is and what a philosopher can know." As Lampert will elaborate, Socrates' speech at the drinking party "opens for inspection the most hidden truths about philosophy that Plato will ever reveal, an unveiling of the mystery of Socrates' being as a philosopher that is at the same time an unveiling of the mystery of being itself" (116). Although no convention or law prohibits its disclosure, "the genuine mystery of nature always withdraws from articulation, resists being put into words." The *Symposium* nevertheless "suggests that to a degree, or in a way, that mystery can be divined." Not surprisingly, the unveiling is "itself mysterious, true to the

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19 Socrates invokes safety at *Phaedo*, 100e, 101d, 105b, and 105c. My best guess is that, regarding the shouting, Lampert was drawing upon 77e-78a, where Socrates encourages Kebes to "sing" certain "incantations."

20 *Leo Strauss on Plato's* Symposium, edited by Seth Benardete (University of Chicago Press, 2001).

hidden ways of nature" (117).

Regarding the Plato-generated chronology, Socrates ends up recounting a lesson he'd apparently learned around 440 (when he was roughly 30, and clearly older than the stages suggested by the *Parmenides* and the *Phaedo*). And that implies that he had completed his "*philosophic* education" before the *Protagoras* shows him "first mounting the public stage" in 434. So the 440 setting also implies that this education was completed before the political-philosophy education Plato portrays in *Protagoras, Charmides*, and *Republic* (117).

At the 416 party, when Socrates was roughly 53, he issues this famous proclamation: 'I claim to have expert knowledge of nothing but erotics' (177d). The guests, Lampert helpfully maintains, were "among the most sophisticated knowers in highly sophisticated Athens. . . . the most distinguished audience that Plato will ever show us for a speech by Socrates." Despite the party setting, furthermore, they speak more than they drink, and they dismiss the flute girls (118).

Apart from the drunken Alcibiades, who arrives later, each interlocutor delivers a speech about eros, and Socrates speaks last. Socrates begins by dissecting the view of Eros that Agathon had just given. And Socrates brings Agathon to *aporia,* to "admitting that he does not know what he thought he knew and had talked about so beautifully" (118). Socrates then mentions that he himself "was once put in that same state of neediness by a wise teacher [Diotima] who then led him, with the help of his own persistent questioning, to genuine knowledge of eros." Lampert adds, quite reasonably, that Socrates' speech to "everyone present" was especially directed at Agathon, "that brilliant young writer of tragedy who had just won the prize." But Socrates in effect hints at a greater prize: the possibility of Agathon's grasping on his own, after sophisticated investigation and questioning, "the true understanding of eros that he wrongly thought he already had" (119).

Diotima had begun by refuting a view held then by Socrates and now by Agathon: "that Eros is beautiful and good and wise." In challenging the implied binary regarding wisdom and ignorance, Diotima initially highlighted 'correct opinion' (202a) as an intermediate condition. As Lampert proceeds to explain, the philosopher, being neither wise nor ignorant, is passionately "*driven* to remedy his lack of wisdom" and "occupies the between *erotically*" (119-20). Lampert reminds us that in the *Parmenides*, Socrates' speech began where "the extremes were the ideas and the particulars, or we could say, pure permanence and pure flow." The *Symposium*, correspondingly, will later show how philosophy, "driven erotically, can best think the reality that lies between those abstractions of permanence and flow, the reality that the philosopher in fact *is* as erotic, *is* as one particular in the totality of particulars." The philosopher, in other words, "can come to know by knowing himself" (120).

The next lesson Diotima taught Socrates is that Eros is "something between a god and a mortal" and has the "power of *ferrying*" between them.

To Lampert, Diotima "seems to imply that the power of eros is constantly generating mortal approximations of immortality." In response to Socrates' asking who Eros's father and mother were, Diotima presents an explicit myth, subsequently bolstered by reasoning (120). At a divine feast, *Poros* (Resource), a guest who was the son of Intelligence, ended up coupling with *Penia* (Poverty), who was there to beg. Lampert here channels Strauss's "main conclusion" about the *Symposium*. "Plotting Poverty" knew what she lacked and acted to get it. Poverty, consequently, is *resourceful*; she does not lack intelligence. Strauss infers that Eros 'resembles only his mother.' In Lampert's words, "Eros springs from eros and eros results in eros." Citing George Dunn, Lampert says eros is "always coming into being as a result of its own activity and always slipping out of being as a result of its self-expenditure, its dying away in its expressing itself" (121). Citing Benardete, Lampert adds that eros is a 'self-aware desire' whose "deep structure" always "disappears into the concrete experience that it enables"; in "being what it is," it is "dynamic and directed out beyond itself," as Penia desired to procreate with Resource. In sum, eros is "always *dynamic*, *relational*, and *temporal*"; backward toward its origins and forward toward its outcomes (122), eros is desire inherently directed to "fulfillment or satisfaction," which in turn "always drains away and revives seeking fulfillment" (122-23). Responding to Socrates' suggestions that fulfilment lies in "the happiness of the good's being one's own forever," Diotima ends up defining the fulfillment of eros as a "begetting in the beautiful" (206b), and that fulfillment is never permanent. Recalling Socrates' above-quoted claim about expertise, we can infer that the erotic character of philosophic self-knowledge "extends out to the whole of what is as erotic" (123). In Strauss's words: 'Eros, we can say, is the heart of coming into being and perishing. Eros, we can say, is the nature of nature.'[21] To Lampert, Diotima thus anticipated Nietzsche by suggesting an ontology built on "the sovereignty of becoming." Lampert then formulates another takeaway that I would celebrate: "It is a thing worthy of wonder and of gratitude that the totality has an intelligible structure that can be known by humans existing within it" (124).

Reviewing the internal chronology of the three dialogues about the education of Socrates, Lampert claims that Socrates, despite his 'second sailing' turn to speeches about the human things, did not abandon "the question of *cause* concerning generation and destruction as a whole" (124). In the final *Symposium* stage, furthermore, Socrates "solves the problem of cause by resolving the problem set by Parmenides": "what *is* lies in a *between* between pure flow and the pure fixity or permanence of the ideas; everything that *is* has the dynamic, relational, temporal character of *eros*." Referencing the Delphic command to "know thyself," which Socrates regularly quoted, Lampert again touts the philosopher's straddling—between ignorance and wisdom—as a guide to the

21 This quotation appears in *Leo Strauss on Plato's* Symposium, 196.

"erotic between-ness of all things." In other words, all beings "exist in a way that is similar to the way that the highest, the most intellectual/spiritual being exists" (125).

After recalling the profanation-related chronology baked into the *Symposium*, Lampert suggests that if *we* put Socrates on trial and "test what he is saying," we too can discover that Socrates did justice to "the being of beings"—in a manner that is "itself hard to know but knowable." Unlike the criminals (perhaps including Alcibiades) who profaned the Athenian mysteries, he "treated the genuine mysteries appropriately: Socrates provided a way to be *initiated* into the mysteries, a way that initiates into the true secrets of nature those who pay him the closest attention." Recall how Socrates initially gave Agathon "the gift of knowing that if he was ever to know what eros is he had to begin again." And Socrates would become his Diotima (126). So Socrates "prepares an initiation" into the deepest mysteries, and Plato as author makes Socrates, "the instrument of Agathon's possible initiation, available for all future Agathons, for you and me."

To conclude his Plato lectures, Lampert again illuminates philosophical poetry by exploring how knowing spawns making. After leading Socrates to the crucial insight about eros and being, Diotima concludes her teaching with a long speech about a ladder. In Lampert's summary, she describes what happens at the peak as "both *a seeing* and *a doing*": the climber "*beholds* or *sees* perfect beauty" but also "*gives birth* or engages in a kind of *making* or *poetizing* in the presence of the beautiful." Transitioning to his lectures on Nietzsche, Lampert again quotes Strauss's claim that will to power 'takes the place' of Platonic eros (127) and in turn engenders eternal return as a "poeticizing of the new highest ideal." In "becoming themselves," Lampert adds, philosophers "become akin." But their doctrines can differ radically because "a teaching must fit its times, must be ministerial in an effective way that depends on a true understanding of the times," which themselves regularly change. Hence the "warring opposition" between Plato and Nietzsche. For the new political theology/philosophy to blossom, "all 108 suitors must die."

I'll conclude my discussion of Lampert's Plato with a few general reflections that highlight Strauss and his legacy. Strauss demonstrated that Plato was vastly more complex and subtle than either historicists or Platonists acknowledge, an approach further advanced by Joseph Cropsey, Allan Bloom, Christopher Bruell, Thomas Pangle, Catherine Zuckert, David Bolotin, Benardete, and other Straussians. Some of them, furthermore, have contributed to a Plato revival by producing meticulous English translations of most of the dialogues.

Lampert presents a vastly longer version of his revolutionary approach in the two Plato books of his that he mentions: *How Philosophy Became Socratic* (on *Republic*, *Charmides*, and *Protagoras*) and *How Socrates Became Socrates* (on *Phaedo*, *Parmenides,* and *Symposium*). His approach, I would argue, puts additional

nails in the coffins of the literalist interpreters—including Bertrand Russell, Karl Popper, the Manuels (in *Utopian Thought in the Western World*), Hannah Arendt, Sheldon Wolin, Christopher Bobonich, and most "Platonists"—along with the historicists who prioritize theories about when Plato *wrote* various dialogues. In two other respects, however, Lampert drifts towards other types of historicism. In both of his lectures, Lampert works with interior clues to argue that Plato sketched how Socrates' thoughts developed over time—and how they responded to larger political and theological developments in ancient Athens.[22] Strauss and some of his followers may have thought similarly, but they certainly haven't broadcast that, perhaps because they think "our times" would fare better if scholars opposed Nietzsche's deadly teachings, particularly the sovereignty of becoming, which includes the death of God. I lack the wisdom to adjudicate this dispute, but it provides a natural segue to Lampert's two lectures on Nietzsche.

LECTURE FIVE:
Nietzsche Becomes Nietzsche (131-63)

Unlike Strauss and Plato, Nietzsche conspicuously made "his own becoming" a theme. After finishing *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* and *Beyond Good and Evil*, "the two greatest books of his maturity," he wrote new forewords to his prior books. In 1888, furthermore, while attempting to write the "decisive, history-making book" that he never completed, he published the autobiographical *Ecce Homo*. In the book he regarded as his most important, finally, he strove to show Zarathustra's "becoming," which in Lampert's view was "a poeticized version" of his own becoming (132).

According to Lampert, Plato and Rousseau were the philosophers Nietzsche "most criticizes." Although he held them "most responsible for what Western philosophy and Western culture had become in his own time," he suggests (in *Human, All Too Human*, §408) that he belongs with them as a top-tier thinker along with three other pairs: Epicurus and Montaigne, Goethe and Spinoza, Pascal and Schopenhauer. Lampert proceeds to convey a characteristic twist. "Working to become *wholly free in his thinking*," Nietzsche "takes his *standard of action* from the history of great thinkers and actors who have determined the spiritual and intellectual course of the West." So they are "the standard by which he determines his own doings and he knows that their doings determined the history of the West" (134). I would have replaced "knows" with "believes" or "thinks." What would it take to "know" that a few dozen books "determined the history of the West"?

When describing Machiavelli as the founder of modernity, Strauss is very bold, but less sweeping than Lampert. By claiming that Machiavelli was

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22 As a referee commented helpfully, interpreters who are "working with interior clues . . . planted by the author" are *resisting* the historicist tendency to understand authors "better than they understood themselves."

"the first philosopher who attempted to force chance, to control the future by embarking on . . . a campaign of propaganda,"[23] Strauss reinforces his prominent thesis that pre-modern thinkers, starting with Plato, stood out for the priority they accorded to understanding or contemplation. Lampert elsewhere argues that Strauss downplayed both the ancient commitment to changing the world and the modern commitment to interpreting it. Be that as it may, I agree with Lampert that Nietzsche aimed to match the scale of the transformations that he traced to Plato et al.

Lampert proceeds to illuminate passages in *Ecce Homo* and (especially) *Beyond Good and Evil* that document Nietzsche's recognition of exotericism (135). Drawing deftly on *BGE* 30, which potently relates knowledge to tragedy and suffering, Lampert poses a gripping question: "Is it time for a new teaching that does not lie about suffering by inventing or endorsing some comedy of a purpose to existence that gives suffering meaning?" Quoting a notebook entry from 1888, Lampert asserts that the philosophic tradition of "exoteric noble lying comes to a self-conscious end with Nietzsche" (137). As previously mentioned, I think Lampert strives to be relentlessly honest and lucid. I hope it is by now obvious that his writings are vastly more accessible and comprehensible than Nietzsche's. As previously discussed, something like exotericism lives on for Lampert's Nietzsche in the ways that he wanted his thinking to generate "art" or "philosophic poetry." Lampert's last two lectures focus on this theme (138).

According to Lampert, Nietzsche's first five books (published from 1872 – 1876) placed him in the "service" of Schopenhauer and Wagner, but in the summer of 1876 he made a "decisive turn" to take his own path and free his mind from prejudices. Echoing points about self-knowledge in Socrates, Lampert says that Nietzsche's turn centered on studying the human soul "with knowledge of his own soul," but also on studying the history of philosophy to understand the sources of general "bias and prejudices" (139). And that required "using all the resources of *modern science* . . . which had made solid progress with strict methods of gaining and communicating knowledge." With his 1881 book *Daybreak*, his campaign to free the mind also became a long-lasting 'campaign against morality' (140). On the back cover of the first edition of *The Gay Science*, published in the summer of 1882, one encounters this announcement: "With this book a series of writings by Friedrich Nietzsche comes to its end, the writings whose common goal it is to erect a new image and ideal of the free mind." Nietzsche, adds Lampert, would then aim at "*showing what the free mind can come to know*, showing the truth that the freed mind can rightly *tie* itself to" (141).

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23 Leo Strauss, *What Is Political Philosophy?* (Glencoe, IL: The Free Press, 1959), 46. He adds that Machiavelli was inspired by the impact of Christian "propaganda" on "many generations of many nations" (45); pre-modern philosophers "of all persuasions" had never even dreamed of "controlling the future fate of human thought in general" (46).

To explain these discoveries, which Nietzsche elaborated in his later books, Lampert focuses on the notebook he began in 1881, which was a crucial source for *The Gay Science*. Lampert concedes that Nietzsche "never intended that anyone ever read" the notebook in which he first laid out the new discoveries. His notebooks, however, manifest exceptional quality, in part because he trained himself to organize his thinking during long walks; because of his terrible eyesight, after 1886-1887 he could only read or write for about 90 minutes without experiencing "extreme headaches" (142-43). Except for the very late ones, indeed, the notebooks were "very orderly, written in steady handwriting on almost every line of the lined pages" and filled with "polished paragraphs." In composing his later books, consequently, he would "organize and assemble these already coherent paragraphs into ordered themes and chapters, editing and rewriting the entries, adding and subtracting, until he had arranged the entries into whole chapters." Especially in the later books, furthermore, "each chapter is a disciplined sequence with a beginning, middle and end" (143).

The 1881 notebook builds on a key *Daybreak* challenge to the "prevailing morality" that exalted altruism. Nietzsche argued that "*all* human actions . . . are based on drives or passions that are in principle egoistic or self-serving," that every "seemingly altruistic action actually fulfilled a veiled or hidden egoistic drive." Lampert shares, very helpfully, a list of the compound terms the notebook used to describe what unites our diverse egoistic drives (Lampert will soon highlight how "will to power" came to be Nietzsche's preferred term for this phenomenon). The notebook typically described the "highest" drive as "*the passion for knowledge*," what Nietzsche "recognized as his own most powerful passion, a passion not categorically different from the other passions but the peak of the passions, the *geistigste*, the most intellectual/spiritual, the top of the rank order of the passions." The entries add that "within the individual soul the drives exist in a constant war with one another for *supremacy*, or for *rule*" (145).

Lampert proceeds to sketch how the notebook moves from uncovering the will to power in human drives to finding it in "all actions of all living beings" (145-46) and even in "all actions of all things" (recall *BGE* 36, discussed above). Psychology, in other words, expands to biology and then to physics.[24] Here is Lampert's helpful pitch for the will to power:

> what was basic was a desire to overcome; it was a force that reaches beyond itself and encounters the other in the form of *resistance*, and drives to overcome that resistance. And that other is not other in its essence; it too is a desire to overcome. So

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24 At the end of *BGE*'s first chapter, in which he makes four references to the will to power, Nietzsche provocatively invites psychology to resume its status as "the queen of the sciences" (23).

> what is ultimately at work in all things is *force* that always exists within a *field* of forces (146).

He quickly proceeds to acknowledge that Nietzsche (in *BGE* 22) concedes that will to power is a 'weakening and limiting metaphor.'

The 1881 notebook also records Nietzsche's discovery of eternal return, making this the most important of the notebooks (148). Lampert proceeds to examine the *Sanctus Januarius* (Saint January) chapter/book of *The Gay Science*; he wrote this chapter only after deciding he would write *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* to elaborate his 1881 discoveries.[25] In *Out of the seventh solitude* (§309), the chapter's central section, a 'wanderer' overcoming several obstacles faces "a final, unexpected crisis": thinking that his quest had finished, in '*Armida's garden*,' so that he could rest. The reference is obviously obscure, and Lampert explains it briefly: a certain Rinaldo was there "tempted to stop just short of his ultimate achievement, conquest or capture of the Holy City." Nietzsche is here warning his most rarefied readers not to falter before "discovering the central matter" (149), which he will intimate in the next section. In §310, "*Will and Wave*," Nietzsche presents a captivating metaphor about a wave's "secret" that he had grasped (149-50). In dissecting its implied ontology, which seems to conjure the will to power, Lampert notes that the draft version included a few words that elaborate the secret. The published version, in other words, "leaves it to *you* to figure out the secret of what you in your knowledge-seeking share with the waves crashing into the cliff and trying to force their way into every crack and corner of the cliff" (151).[26]

Both the notebook and the chapter enact the move (sketched above) from the ontology of will to power and introduce (for the first time) Nietzsche's radical "new ideal," eternal return (153). Drawing on points from Strauss's Nietzsche chapter, Lampert here builds to the conclusion that "fact" and "value" are connected in the way that "*understanding* the world" is connected to loving it.

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25 In *What a Philosopher Is: Becoming Nietzsche* (University of Chicago Press, 2017), a book published after he delivered the lectures, Lampert provides an intricate discussion of both "Saint January" and the 1881 notebook.

26 In *What a Philosopher Is*, Lampert explains 'the seventh solitude' as Nietzsche's "play" on the traditional image of bliss in seventh heaven (232). Based on *Gay Science* §308, which challenges the "special reader" driven to make his or her conscience (and all other drives) "an object of science" (231), the seventh solitude of §309 "appears as what a knower of conscience is ultimately driven to understand" (232); Nietzsche discovered the will to power after years of solitary investigation (237), and Armida's garden represents the "temptation" that a "comfortable skepticism" would present (233). Lampert also notes that Rinaldo (according to *Gerusalemme Liberata*, a 1575 epic poem that many operas later drew upon) was the leader of the First Crusade (232). Armida was apparently a sorceress who abducted Rinaldo to her magical garden, where he escaped enchantment after his two companions appeared at the gate and persuaded him to depart: https://www.artic.edu/artworks/16485/rinaldo-and-armida-in-her-garden.

And Lampert praises Strauss for calling that (on *SPPP*, 181) Nietzsche's 'relapse into Platonism' (156).

Nietzsche introduced eternal return at the end of "Saint January," the final chapter of the 1882 *Gay Science* and its only named chapter (he added a fifth chapter in 1887). For this and other reasons, Lampert maintains that the introduction was "highly prominent." Indeed, Nietzsche ended the book and the chapter "in a *January* way, a way that fits a new year." After propelling readers with several "important" sections that summarize his take on morality, §340 sketches "what is ending, the core teaching of the old year." That section (three from the end), is *The dying Socrates.* For Lampert's Nietzsche, Socrates is "ultimately responsible for the teaching that came to dominate western civilization, the teaching that life can only be suffered and that humans need to be redeemed from a life of suffering by a healing god." And now that teaching is dying. §341, which unveils the new teaching of eternal return, is titled *The heaviest weight* (157). Nietzsche had addressed the waves as 'you' in §310, and §341 personalizes by asking 'you' to consider how you would react to a visiting 'demon' who revealed that you would endlessly relive your exact life (157-58). After sketching two extremely divergent reactions that you might have, based on your assessment of your life, Nietzsche drops the demon and speculates about how you would react if his thesis 'gained power over you': it 'would transform you . . . and perhaps crush you.' Lampert infers that eternal return is "a *selecting* thought, a *separating* thought depending on who you are" (158).[27]

The last section of the chapter (§342) introduces Zarathustra as someone who was preparing to descend from the mountains with a new teaching. As Lampert observes, this is an ending "no reader could possibly understand and that every reader would find surprising and questionable" (158-59)—even though a few might know that Zarathustra was the Persian prophet who was "the founding teacher of transcendence and of an afterlife of reward for the good and punishment for the evil." Many later readers, though, would know that this section in effect launches the book Nietzsche was planning to write—"to present the teaching of eternal return" (159).

Lampert proceeds to discuss how Nietzsche discusses his two "great discoveries" in *Zarathustra* and *BGE*. In Part One of the former, the will to power appears just once, but it is used "to illuminate what lies behind 'the greatest power on earth,' morality." Zarathustra explains it in Part Two [in "On Self-Overcoming"], but only for 'you wisest' (159-60), for whom it underlies their 'will to truth.' Before explaining it, Nietzsche presents "The Dance Song," where Zarathustra "abandons his skeptical 'Wild Wisdom' who had maintained

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27 As a referee reminded me, the title of §341 is literally "The greatest heavyweight" (*Das größte Schwergewicht*), and the German *Dämon* conjures the ancient Greek *daimōn*, a spirit that mediates between humans and gods. §341 memorably adds that the prospect of eternal repetition would "lie upon" your actions (*Handeln*) as the greatest *Schwergewicht*.

that life or being is unfathomable." He "embraces instead his true love, Life herself who suggests to him she is *not unfathomable*"—that she "can be *fathomed*, that she has a character or way that can be understood."[28]

Zarathustra ends his speech to the wisest by saying, 'There is many a house yet to be built.' According to Lampert, the will to power "needs to be known only by those with the most powerful passion to know." It is they who will join Zarathustra to "build the house yet to be built; they will construct the teachings that will house future human beings, or be incorporated into future human beings." Eternal return is thus "the *teaching for all* that will house future humanity." First comes "*insight* for a few," which then spawns "a *teaching* for all" (160).

BGE, as sketched above, follows a similar chronology. Lampert now relays Strauss's claim that its first chapter's claims about the will to power seem dogmatic. Chapter Two ("The Free Mind"), however, presents an argument for its being "the comprehensive truth," but that argument is "only for his special audience of freed minds he has been educating"—and he expects they'll initially balk by invoking God and the devil.[29] Eternal return, meanwhile, is presented as "the public teaching for everyone"—to ameliorate the death of God—in the religion chapter that follows. In the late work that Nietzsche had begun writing when his breakdown happened, he employed the same pattern: "the will to power would be a *truth* to be thought through by those driven to think whereas eternal return would be a *teaching* within which everyone could live their lives and celebrate their lives and celebrate the whole of life" (161-62). Here again, Lampert implies that Nietzsche—like Plato and Strauss—insisted that human beings can attain knowledge of innumerable things, even ontology, and that genuine philosophers are not attempting to impose their arbitrary preferences on their communities.

Before presenting a final sketch of how the will to power and Platonic eros are "close kin" as ontological insights, Lampert displays attractive humility: "Here we are at the highest and hardest. Here the limitations of language and of thinking and of *my* thinking are most evident." Both concepts, first of all, assert the "*sovereignty of becoming*." More specifically, both assert that "*becoming* is a surging and satisfying and surging again." And both add that in "that *ever-self-renewing activity* there is an internal directionality that aims at a kind of self-satisfaction." This "*discharging of energy or force*," furthermore, is "a reaching beyond itself that encounters the *other* as a discharging of force reaching beyond *itself*," so the discharging is "*relational*." The "total field of such relations," moreover, is "the *totality simply*, *all that is*."

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28 For Lampert's comprehensive analysis of the love triangle among Zarathustra, Wisdom, and Life, see *Nietzsche's Teaching: An Interpretation of* Thus Spoke Zarathustra (Yale University Press, 1986), 103-9.

29 See the discussion above of *BGE* 36-37.

Lampert concedes that Plato's language of *eros* is "attractive and affirmative, expressing the process in human terms that make it easily lovable" (162). Nietzsche, by contrast, had a "tough-minded resolve to avoid what he called 'word-tinsel' or verbal beautification, in favor of terminology that described the process more exactly though necessarily still inadequately" (recall *BGE* 22 on the "weakening and limiting metaphor"). Indeed, Nietzsche "became Nietzsche in a way similar to the way in which Socrates became Socrates. Genuine philosophers are genuine kin."

LECTURE SIX:
Nietzsche's Philosophic Poetry (167-99)

This is the last lecture Lampert delivered in Beijing. He begins by repeating what might have been his favorite sentence in Strauss (from the introduction to *Thoughts on Machiavelli*): "*The problem inherent in the surface of things and only in the surface of things is the heart of things*." I have always found this puzzling, and I cannot improve on the explanation Lampert here provides regarding great books:

> woven into the surface through their art of writing, was the heart of things, what the philosopher who composed that surface wanted *you* to follow into the heart of things. And the heart of things that Strauss discovered and wanted his careful readers to discover was what a philosopher always aims to discover, the truth, ultimately the truth of being or of what is, the ontological truth. We can discover that truth only with the most responsible and thorough skeptical method that tests what is mere belief in order to discover if anything can be known.

Strauss, furthermore, "showed that with good method, exegetical method that learns the philosophers' art of writing," we can "read our way" into the genuine ontological "heart" of Plato and Nietzsche (167).

In discussing how Nietzsche moved from the ontology of the will to power to "philosophic poetry, a teaching that can be lived" (167), this lecture starts with *BGE* 36. Here, just after the center of the chapter, Nietzsche addresses the epistemological skepticism, partly indebted to Kant, that represents the peak insight of the 'free minds,' including the 'friends' whom Nietzsche's earlier books had helped to train. In the chapter's central section (§34), Nietzsche clearly challenges the exaltation of skepticism. There follows a short—and manifestly quirky—section (§35) that Lampert quotes in its entirety (168):

> O Voltaire! O humaneness! O nonsense! There is something about 'truth,' about the *search* for truth; when a human being goes about it too humanely—'He seeks the true only to do the good'—I bet he finds nothing!

Voltaire was the hero of *Human, All Too Human* (1878), so Nietzsche now implies that modern skeptics err by assuming the true and the good align,

which excuses their "continued *belief* in modern virtue" regarding inequality and suffering. Skepticism, in other words, "gives permission to place morality above knowing" (169). Because Nietzsche proceeds to present (in §36) the only "argument" he himself makes on behalf of his will-to-power ontology, §34-35 signal why his times were "unripe" for that ontology. At the end of Zarathustra's only "argument for will to power," correspondingly, he asked only "*you wisest*" to "*talk* of this." In both books, the ontological argument is directed at "the most select audience." This, Lampert concludes (in effect channeling Strauss's pitch regarding "the surface"), is "the esoteric core of Nietzsche's thought however much it lies open on the page" (170). Recounting some of the passages I shared above from §36, Lampert stresses the hypothetical terminology they include, and infers an invitation to "suspend the view of classical modern physics (the physics of Descartes and Newton) that a *mechanics* of cause and effect is at work within a mechanistic world-whole." The alternative is to "view events in nature hypothetically as *will* events, events in which *will* is active." Needless to say, this supports the crucial hypothesis that "human beings are not essentially different from other living beings," one of Nietzsche's three deadly truths (171).[30]

As discussed above, both Lampert and Strauss cleverly explain the transition from §36 to the startling invocation of God and devil from Nietzsche's "friends" in §37. As Lampert returns to discuss Nietzsche's move from philosophy to philosophic poetry, he notes the small punctuational dash that ends §36 (172). Lampert now adds that the free minds who would be "shocked" by §36 are not "fully free" because they still wed the good to the true. In his second Strauss lecture, Lampert didn't elaborate the political stakes, but he does so here. If Nietzsche is correct about the will to power, his "friends" face a major obstacle: "their good of perpetual peace at the end of history in a paradise of equality of rights and the end of suffering is neither attainable nor true." Hence their recourse in §37 to 'popular' theological language. They react conventionally because "only that language can express their extreme feeling" (173).[31]

Again recalling Strauss's repeated claims that Nietzsche's new doctrine is 'a vindication of God' (173), Lampert eventually comments that the modern "free minds" friendly to Nietzsche (in the words of §58) 'no long even knew what religions are good for.' As Lampert notes, the religion chapter ends with two sections (§61-62) where Nietzsche argues that religions are needed in

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30 By invoking "living beings," Lampert goes beyond Nietzsche's claim (in "On the Uses and Disadvantages of History for Life") that there is no "cardinal distinction between man and animal." I would first offer the obvious rejoinder that no other animal discusses morality, mortality, ontology, skepticism, or the quest for truth. And given Nietzsche's notorious efforts to convey immense differences of "rank" among human beings, how could he deny there is a "cardinal" distinction between a prokaryotic bacterium and an average kindergartner? I concede that even bacteria constantly engage in an attenuated "dialogue" with reality; if they don't find nutrition, for example, they die.

31 For Lampert's longest discussion of *BGE* §36-37, see *Nietzsche's Task*, 84-91.

"any social order." Only religion, says Lampert, "can structure the daily life of a culture," and cultures "live on . . . incorporated beliefs that one takes in from the earliest age in the stories told to little children and reinforces in the rituals and festivals and customs that give meaning and structure to ordinary daily life." Paraphrasing from §62, he adds that religion, to be beneficial, "must be guided in the appropriate way" by philosophers; reason, in other words, "must rule the instinct to worship and adore" (176).

Lampert's lectures have three final sections devoted to "philosophic poetry"—in connection with eternal return, gods, and ecology.

After revisiting some above-discussed claims from the second Strauss lecture, Lampert expands his account of how Nietzsche moved from the nihilism that could easily follow God's death (§55) to the maximally affirming ethos of eternal return. In sketching how he escaped from the deepest pessimism, Nietzsche proclaims that he stands 'beyond good and evil and no longer . . . under the spell and delusion of morality.' And his eyes are now open to 'the ideal of the most high-spirited, alive, world-affirming human being' (177). Based on his claim (in §56) that he made this discovery 'without really meaning to' while 'driven by some enigmatic longing'—phrases that Lampert credits Strauss for emphasizing—Lampert infers that Nietzsche did not undertake his investigations to "discover a new ideal." He was instead driven by "the 'enigmatic longing' that is the need to understand." Lampert proceeds to offer the moving passage I previously quoted about the "affirmation of the world because the world makes the philosopher possible," which Lampert unearthed in §56's concluding invocation of *circulus vitiosus deus* (178).

'There is an important ingredient, not to say the nerve, of Nietzsche's 'theology' of which I have not spoken and shall not speak' (*SPPP*, 181). Lampert speculates helpfully about this odd passage from Strauss's chapter, suggesting that said 'nerve' is Nietzsche's "introduction of gods." Strauss thus "refuses to speak about the theological-political project that Nietzsche suggested could be the center of a future world" (179). Lampert, though, plunges ahead to dissect the 'tempter' god that Nietzsche celebrates in §295, the penultimate aphorism in *BGE.* Nietzsche here (after alluding to *The Birth of Tragedy*) proclaims himself to be 'the last disciple and initiate of the god Dionysos,' who is a philosopher. So 'even gods philosophize,' which contradicts claims by Plato and Diotima that the gods are "already wise" (180). Nietzsche again worries about his friends, who 'today . . . no longer like to believe in God and gods.' Elaborating what §295 adds here about 'the right moment,' Lampert emphasizes that those friends had only recently escaped the old "tyrannical" God (181).

By pairing Dionysos with Ariadne, §295 leaves *The Birth of Tragedy* behind. Lampert's Nietzsche doesn't "believe that humanity could go backward and reestablish the religion of Homer," so why did Nietzsche select this pair? According to Strauss, §295 presented Dionysos as a "super-Socrates" (*SPPP*, 175). But what does Ariadne add? If human beings indeed have a "natural

inclination to make into gods what we hold highest" (181), we would divinize life, as implied by eternal return. And life is "the constantly renewing cycle of being born and dying, being born through sexual reproduction and dying." Hence Dionysos and Ariadne, "who belong together in their difference; they are the war between the sexes and the love between the sexes." As a philosophizing god, Dionysos "is driven to understand." In "some more fundamental sense," however, Ariadne "already knows," as "*she* has the thread that leads out of the mystery at the heart of the labyrinth" (182). Invoking *BGE*'s opening hypothesis that 'truth is a woman,' Lampert elsewhere discusses how Ariadne provided both the sword Theseus used to kill the Minotaur and the thread that helped him escape the labyrinth.[32]

In the *Republic*, Socrates said the new theology could coexist with the already established religious institutions, i.e., "the practices and rituals, the song and dance" (427b-c), which could adapt to his innovations. For Nietzsche, however, there are no comparable institutions regarding Dionysos and Ariadne (182). Gods and the highest ideals, Lampert adds, "seem believable only when they have always already been believed, when they are the gods of the ancestors that we have known since childhood, and when we already know how to sing their praises and how to dance our gratitude." In *Ecce Homo* 4.1, Nietzsche distinguishes himself sharply from 'the founder of a religion.' So perhaps this is the advice he leaves to his friends:

> *recognize* the necessity of religion; *recognize* the universal naturalness of Dionysos and Ariadne as the gods of life: *recognize* that and leave it to the god-making instinct. The love of life will do what love does in human beings, prompt us to divinize, to make divine what we most love, life as reproduced through sexuality. Dionysos and Ariadne are the natural gods of human beings in love with life, and the natural human instinct to make gods will see to their rebirth (183).

Lampert proceeds to his final section: the philosophic poetry of ecology as "the human way of being on the earth." The obvious power of this poetry (compared to gods and eternal return) is that "an ethics of ecology or environmentalism is something that could be much more easily welcomed by a contemporary audience" (184). He initially reviews points from his second Strauss lecture about assigning limits to the conquest of nature. Strauss, however, was worried that the conquest of *human* nature could end philosophy by rejecting all rank and all suffering. Lampert adds that "suffering properly understood," e.g., as "the human struggle to attain the high," includes the "sacrificial . . . subordination of every drive to the drive for knowledge" (185). To extend the analysis to ecological themes, Lampert returns to what Nietzsche's

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32 Lampert, *Nietzsche's Task*, 292, 70-71.

1881 notebook said in criticizing the simplistic opposition between egoism and altruism (186-87). From remarks about living 'for the sake of the true' (188), Lampert perceives the prospect of habituating people to "the genuine reality of things that underlies I, you, and nature" (188-89).

Lampert's Nietzsche has "understood the process that made humans what we are, the molding process of history and culture that is based on the real drives that constitute us." Nietzsche crucially recognizes that we will "always be *the uneasy beings*, living the particular forms of suffering that our particular psychic and social orders of rank impose on us." Nietzsche does not aim to summon a utopia. Instead, he hopes that "the nihilism and turmoil at the end of the moral period" can, with his help, yield to "a better reorganization of the drives" that "fosters stronger and more noble specimens of the human species" (190).

The notebook ends up offering a new ideal emphasized with an "NB" (the Latin abbreviation of "Note Well"): 'No *possession* in the young to strive *to must have (müssen) or to want (wollen)*!: as well as no *prestige* for command over others—these two drives are *not to be developed* at all!' (190). To replace greed, possessiveness, and ambition, the paragraph offers this environmentally friendly alternative: '*Letting* us *be possessed* by the things (not by persons) and by the largest possible range of *true things*' (191). The notebook, consequently, shows how Nietzsche "learned to free himself from the false I-feeling of a separated, isolated, possessive I and had won the freedom to know the relatedness of all things." This developed along with "the desire to let the true things *be the things they are*" within himself. This philosopher's experience, which "culminated in knowing what is to be will to power and nothing else" in turned spawned his NB "task to educate the young in the new stage," in the *I-feeling* that ultimately wants "the natural things to be what they are in their continuous becoming and decaying, in their natural order of rank, and in all the other facets of their naturalness." Here again, Lampert reminds us, "insight into *what is* is followed by insight" into necessary action. The NB includes a final green statement: after we're possessed by the immense 'range of *true things*,' we 'become *farmland*' for them (192); corresponding '[*i*]*mages of existence*' will 'grow out of us,' and we would become 'the farmland that would bring forth such fruit.' In Lampert's summary, such images—echoing the *Symposium*'s emphasis on *poiein*—would "celebrate and let be what naturally is in its coming to be and passing away." Using the phrase I selected for my epigraph, he adds that "words and songs spring out of us by nature, generated by our fruitful soil" (194).[33]

Lampert proceeds to offer this compelling elaboration:

The new images of existence conceptualize the earth as the

33 Lampert later states that this notebook's concluding account of the "I-feeling" is the very first "completed version of Nietzsche becoming Nietzsche" (197).

> natural home of humanity; biological science studies the interconnected web of life on the planet; political and social movements make ecology central to decision-making or, as Strauss words it, assign limits to the conquest of nature out of love of nature (194).

Plato's images were so influential because "they serve deep drives that are part of the human make-up." For Nietzsche, they were dying—deservedly—to be replaced by the "deep drives" Nietzsche illuminates, "affirmative drives" that clash with what Plato's "images of transcendence came to serve, negating drives of hatred and vengeance" (194-95). The new ideal, obviously, is not "an eternal fixity" but "the eternal return of ever-changing life just as it is." As previously mentioned, European modernity (for Nietzsche and Lampert) "carried forward secular versions of Christian virtues, the modern ideals of the end of suffering and equality of rights," and these were the primary current adversaries against which Nietzsche waged a spiritual "war" (195).

Dionysos and Ariadne "are not our judges; they don't punish or reward us; we don't have to bow down to them or beg them for favors." Instead, they resemble us (and other living things) by being male and female, "sexual, generative beings" that happen to be "far superior to us in their manliness and womanliness." So we should emulate or copy them as best we can, for they "lift us up by being what they are. They are what we would most dearly love to be like" (195-96). Although Nietzsche elsewhere offers other "images of existence" (including a "new good and bad") capable of "judging by natural, affirmative standards," they all can be connected to "the fundamental passion of attraction, the passion of love" (196). I find my thoughts turning to 'the vindication of God,' and I am not sure Lampert's claim about love can accommodate Nietzsche's occasional pitches for cruelty, exploitation, slavery, and war.

I do endorse Lampert's thesis that Nietzsche's "whole story ends in *ecology*, in knowledge of the interconnectedness of life on earth that generates the human imperative to be true to the earth." And it is reasonable to add that "the ecological movement, already strong in certain parts of the West, is bound to get stronger as the evidence becomes ever more undeniable that environmental disasters are caused by human-initiated climate change" (196). Lampert even hopes that we'll eventually come to worship "new gods true to the earth."

To conclude his lectures, Lampert returns to Strauss and Plato, again referencing Strauss's suggestion (in the 10/20/1938 letter) that 'the specifically Platonic philosophy' can be separated from the Plato 'nearest my heart' (197). As I discuss above, the latter Plato is "Socrates becoming Socrates, gaining his comprehensive understanding of being as becoming, as *eros*." Although Lampert clearly thinks Strauss was a supremely gifted reader, writer, thinker, and teacher, he doesn't regard him as the "philosopher and philosophic

poet" that Plato and Nietzsche were. Repeating some points from his first Strauss lecture, in any case, Lampert argues that Strauss expressed "cautious encouragement of reading Nietzsche as the platonic political philosopher of our time" (198). Lampert finally invokes the final sentence of Strauss's chapter on Nietzsche: *Die vornehme Natur ersetzt die göttliche Natur* (noble nature replaces divine nature). In thinking about why Strauss presented this sentence in German, Lampert references *The City and Man*. As Lampert's first lecture quoted (but I didn't discuss), that book ends with 'the all-important question which is coeval with philosophy although the philosophers do not frequently pronounce it—the question *quid sit deus*' ("what is a god?" or "what might a god be?"). By deploying untranslated Latin, Strauss doesn't himself "pronounce" the question.[34] In both texts, Lampert powerfully infers, Strauss ended with "something he did not want to *pronounce* directly but wanted you to *question* and *wonder about*." Regarding the German ending of his Nietzsche chapter, Lampert eventually reached this conclusion about what Strauss meant: "nature as Nietzsche teaches it replaces nature as Plato taught it." And that, he adds, explains the title of his Beijing Lectures: "Strauss, Plato, Nietzsche."

CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS ON PHILANTHROPY AND POLITICAL PHILOSOPHY

In interpreting Plato, Lampert is perhaps the most innovative. Unlike Plato, Nietzsche did not present a seductive surface that differs profoundly from what Lampert uncovers about him. Even regarding Nietzsche (and Strauss), however, Lampert provides abundant illumination regarding centers, sequencing, allusions, repetitions, untranslated quotations, and even punctuation. Lampert also works wonders regarding Zarathustra's disciples and *BGE*'s complex interactions with Nietzsche's "friends."

Following Nietzsche, Lampert worries intensely about the damage that "modern" compassion and egalitarianism are doing to both societies and souls. Fortunately, most people today appreciate the "genius" that continues to garner acclaim in science, engineering, music, dance, sports, and other realms. Although Lampert protests the contemporary world's commitment to "the equality of rights," he is more egalitarian than the trio he dissects because he lays things out so clearly. I assume that most readers will nonetheless join me in perceiving all four authors as having a higher "rank" than we do. Lampert, however, does not advance debates about equality by developing–in the *Lectures* or elsewhere–policy implications regarding abortion, taxation, unions, reparations, food stamps, the

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34 As I did previously mention, Lampert says that the theological discussion between Socrates and Adeimantus in Book III reflects "the implicit premise that there are gods, or that there is a god and that they know what a god is" (24).

minimum wage, academic "tracking," standardized tests, or the voting age.[35] Nor does he address roiling disputes about suffering in connection with immigration, health care, homelessness, incarceration, police brutality, human trafficking, or famines. It is reasonable to infer, however, that he had reservations about fist-on-the-scale affirmative action and more recent academic policies such as "labor-based grading" and "citation justice." He would certainly oppose the war on Classics,[36] and he might even welcome the return of schoolyard dodgeball.

Among the four authors, Plato delves the most into institutional analysis, demonstrating a nuanced appreciation of regime structures, but Lampert and Strauss discourage us from concluding that either Socrates or the Athenian Stranger intended to push practical proposals. Correspondingly, Strauss identified Aristotle rather than Plato as the founder of "political science" (*CM*, 12, 21, 29). Strauss himself provided modest guidelines, or at least suggestions, regarding issues such as constitutionalism, the separation of powers, electoral terms, and executive prerogative. He also presented critiques of "behavioristic" political science and barbs about the Cold War. Lampert's work, meanwhile, can promote an array of Green agendas—attracting Straussians and Nietzscheans while deconstructing Greta Thunberg.[37]

Given where the lectures were delivered, we should think about how China might ally with the United States to express love of the earth. Educational discipline, aesthetic refinement, "rank order," and reverence for the past are not being widely denounced there by progressives;[38] in his foreword, Lampert reports that all of Strauss's writings have been translated into Chinese (viii-ix), along with most of Lampert's books (xi). China is already taking huge strides to promote solar power and electric vehicles. If serious study of Plato, Nietzsche, Strauss, and Lampert continues to advance there, perhaps China can be persuaded to stop expanding its nuclear arsenal, building aircraft carriers, bullying Taiwan, and creating artificial islands as military bases. I assume Lampert would share my worry that both countries, for the foreseeable future, will be facing titanic challenges regarding pollution, global warming, collapsing biodiversity, and other environmental problems. To address these challenges, consumption must decrease, despite the suffering that would follow, and international cooperation must increase.

Lampert's works excel in the philanthropy they channel to the minds,

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35 A Cambridge political scientist, David Runciman, argues that six-year-olds should be casting ballots: https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2018/dec/13/cambridge-academic-defends-idea-of-giving-children-the-vote. Lyman Stone, an American demographer, would extend the franchise to newborns: https://www.nytimes.com/2021/09/01/opinion/politics/kids-right-to-vote.html.

36 For a recent salvo, see Dan-El Padilla Peralta, *Classicism & Other Phobias* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2025).

37 I have made brief forays along these lines in "From the Death of God to the Death of Man: What Nietzsche and Lampert Can Teach Catholics—and Straussians—about Environmentalism," in Dunn and Telli, eds., *A New Politics for Philosophy*, 251-273.

38 Such principles, of course, were widely assaulted during the Cultural Revolution.

hearts, and souls of their readers. In this respect, they provide a fitting tribute to his three favorite authors. Moreover, I hope that studying him seriously would help immunize readers against demonizing, scapegoating, *ressentiment*, consumerism, vulgarity, celebrity culture, and even the MAGA movement. And wouldn't worship of Dionysos and Ariadne be preferable to infatuation with the caliphate, militarism, intoxicants, slot machines, Mortal Kombat, Tik Tok, transhumanism, cryptocurrency, pornography, QAnon, and "the right side of history"?

Regarding politics, Lampert is less alarmist, contemptuous, or harsh than Strauss sometimes is. On the other hand, perhaps Strauss, by promoting escape from various "caves" (e.g., by reopening "the quarrel between the ancients and the moderns") rather than using poetry to conjure new ones, models humility better than Nietzsche or Lampert. Regarding politics, morals, and religion, furthermore, perhaps Lampert is too rapturous regarding Nietzsche. Neither Nietzsche's reasoning nor his "poetry" have succeeded in vanquishing biblical monotheism or widespread belief in an afterlife; Strauss differs from the two professed atheists by conveying regular tributes, or at least accommodations, to revelation and the Bible.[39] As Lampert elsewhere laments, moreover, some of Nietzsche's poetry proved catastrophic in the impetus it gave to the Nazis. But perhaps Lampert's kinder, gentler, and vastly subtler version can lure contemporary Nietzsche-lovers away from Nazism, fascism, and militarism, not to mention the Bronze Age Pervert.

Lampert loved the last sentence in Strauss's essay, "What Is Liberal Education?" And that sentence echoes both Plato and Nietzsche: "By becoming aware of the dignity of the mind, we realize the true ground of the dignity of man and therewith the goodness of the world, whether we understand it as created or as uncreated, which is the home of man because it is the home of the human mind."[40]

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39 To cite only texts discussed above, I would emphasize the "Jerusalem and Athens" chapter in *SPPP* and the second paragraph of *The City and Man*, which invokes "the Divine message," "the Faithful City," the Ten Commandments, and "the living God."

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About the Author

Peter Minowitz is professor of political science at Santa Clara University, where he cofounded the environmental studies program. In addition to Profits, Priests, and Princes: Adam Smith's Emancipation of Economics from Politics and Religion *(Stanford University Press, 1993), Minowitz wrote* Straussophobia: Defending Leo Strauss and Straussians against Shadia Drury and Other Accusers *(Lexington Books, 2009). Along with his articles about Smith or Strauss, Minowitz has published chapters or articles about Plato's Apology, More's Utopia, Machiavelli, Locke, Marx, Nietzsche, Lampert, Harvey Mansfield, Frank Herbert's Dune series, Woody Allen's Crimes and Misdemeanors, diversity, campus protests, Laudato Si', and the Stop WOKE Act. He also edited the 2015* Perspectives on Political Science symposium on Arthur Melzer's Philosophy Between the Lines: The Lost History of Esoteric Writing.

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