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Ethics and Poverty Tours

“Poorism”—organized tours that bring predominantly middle and upper class people to impoverished regions—is growing in popularity, touted by its supporters as conscientious consumerism. Evan Selinger examines the arguments of poorism’s advocates (it raises awareness of global suffering and provides needed funds to eliminate poverty) and of its detractors (both the intentions behind poorism and the consequences following from it can be morally problematic). He concludes that this kind of privileged voyeurism is at best a morally complex endeavor.

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Recreating the Creation

In this excerpt from his forthcoming book, *The New Holy Wars: Economic Religion versus Environmental Religion in Contemporary America*, economist Robert H. Nelson provides examples of how current “environmental religion” is beset by underlying “theological” confusions. Intent upon restoring the natural world to a state prior to destructive human intervention—whether through trying to reintroduce extinct mega-fauna to the Americas or saving the endangered spotted owl—environmentalists are unwittingly engaged in their own contradictory project of defying Darwin and playing God.

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Mini-Symposium: Ethics and Mental Illness “Mental Illness” and Justice as Recognition

Disability scholars have argued that the disadvantage of disability is caused primarily by social factors and calls out for social change as a matter of justice. But what about psychiatric disability? While noting several factors that make psychiatric disability a special case—the mentally ill individual’s unreliability of judgment and instability of functioning—Sara Goering argues that much is gained by viewing mental illness through the lens of social oppression and working toward recognition of individuals with mental illness as equal members of the human community.

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Stigma and Openness

Moving from the social and political arena to the choices we face in our own private lives, Claudia Mills asks how information about someone’s mental illness should be shared with others. While open communication about mental illness works toward the important goal of reducing its unfair stigma, it can cause harm or embarrassment, violate privacy, and challenge an individual’s own preferred self-representation. She offers tentative guidelines for how to proceed on this sensitive and morally charged issue.

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Ethics and Poverty Tours

Evan Selinger

A new word has entered into travel discourse: “poorism.” “Poorism” refers to organized tours that bring predominantly middle and upper class people to impoverished regions. Programs exist in Brazil (South America), Soweto (Africa), Mumbai (India), Rotterdam (Netherlands), and New York (United States). According to a recent *Newsweek* article, the poorism market already is “booming.” Poorism attracts attention because advocates characterize it as a moral enterprise, a form of conscientious consumerism. But poorism is at best a morally complex endeavor.

The Poorism Debate: Advocates

Just as advocates of ecotourism associate nature-based tourism with environmental education and environmental justice, so too do champions of poorism associate their endeavor with education (raising awareness of global suffering) and justice (providing needed funds to destitute regions either by direct transfers to the poor themselves or by targeted spending within the impoverished areas visited).

The *Newsweek* article focuses on trips taken by Kevin Outterson, a law professor at Boston University. Outterson offers the following observations on the

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consciousness-raising potential of poorism, as well as its capacity to promote service learning and beneficent volunteerism: “We live in a world of both poverty and abundance. Many universities encourage foreign study programs as part of a globalized curriculum. But it is possible to visit middle-income countries like Brazil and Mexico without actually encountering poverty, other than chance encounters on the streets. I took my

students into Rocinha favela in Rio de Janeiro because the residents of Rocinha make the tourist experience of Rio possible. . . . Rocinha residents are the workers, cooks, maids, street sweepers, waiters, store clerks and street vendors who serve Ipanema, Leblon and Copacabana. To understand how Brazil works, you need to experience more than one perspective, especially if you can do that with the permission of the community. My students have generally been impressed with many aspects of Rocinha, especially how the community has self-organized in response to government neglect.”

Generalized further, advocates who adopt Outterson’s outlook insist that poorism should be an obligation that all tourists accept. Mainstream tourism ostensibly idealizes geographies and further insulates people from awareness of the extent of existing inequality. Poorism can provide a needed glimpse into the underbelly of geopolitics. Dramatically put, then, if the slogan “We should never forget” captures an appropriate attitude concerning the immorality of turning a blind eye toward the barbarism that occurred during the Holocaust, then the slogan “We should not avoid” seems to capture an appropriate attitude toward activities such as poorism that reveal large-scale degradation that the privileged may be complicit in by virtue of their ignorance of human rights violations.

Timothy Engström, co-editor of a recent book on theories and practices of imaging, offers the following insight into the problem of ignorance applied to his own experience touring a favela. Engström remarks that in order to appreciate why some poverty tours can affect participants in powerful ways, it’s useful to consider how visual technologies and cultural habits of sight shape what we perceive or consider worth perceiving in the first place, and to consider how these technologies and cultural practices mediate the “presence of the real” when experienced.

In this context, Engström focuses on the disparity between experiencing a favela first-hand and learning about the damage done to New Orleans by Hurricane Katrina. In the latter case, typical Western media presentations framed the disaster as a catastrophe by

favoring a grand scale of presentation through sweeping images, including panoramic helicopter shots of flooding taken at a distance, and the billboard politics of stranded residents holding up signs requesting assistance. By contrast, Engström's favela tour was conducted on a small scale, with a guide and only a handful of people. According to Engström, "the favela's design is resistant to the camera's intrusion; it does not offer . . . a safe distance, or a grand spectacle to capture and consume." The experience of being embedded in the midst of poverty can differ significantly from being exposed to poverty through media representations. While still framed within a tourist script, the evidentiary power of embedded experience is difficult to replicate.

The Poorism Debate: Detractors

Just as ecotourism has detractors, who highlight a range of problems, including the promotion of a consumerist attitude toward the environment that leaves the financial structures that have contributed to pollution and global warming unchallenged and the creation of environmentally deleterious infrastructures to

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support tourism, so too does poorism have critics. The *Newsweek* article, as well as essays in *The Observer* ("Slum tours: a day trip too far?") and *Smithsonian* magazine ("Next Stop, Squalor") note that critics decry poorism as exploitative voyeurism.

In a *Globe and Mail* article, "On the left, notice the poverty," we find the following account of a contrarian's position, quoting David Fennell, author of *Tourism Ethics*: "Maybe you give 1 or 2 or 3 or 4 percent of the profit back to the community, but you've now commodified these people, you've turned them into a product in the service of an industry. I'm not sure that's ethical." Fennell continues: "We feel we have the right to go anywhere we want on the planet . . . Everest. Antarctica. The Amazon. Wherever. If you put your money down, you have a right to go."

Fennell draws our attention to three problems that advocates of poorism may not have fully considered. The first problem concerns intention. Fennell questions whether altruism is the primary motivator of poorism: "In assessing the legitimacy of poverty tourism it would seem helpful to recognize—as a starting premise—that tourism by nature has proven to be

more about greed, power and superiority, and much less about altruism. If this type of tourism further emphasizes the tourist's freedom to go anywhere, any time and at any price, and the service provider's willingness to capitalize at the expense of others, poverty tourism would seem to be generally exploitative."

The second issue concerns distributive justice. Fennell questions the value of the financial assistance poorism provides: "Local people may be induced to support poverty tourism enterprises if they themselves somehow stand to gain. However, it seems improbable that the collective would rally around poverty tourism because of the inability to spread benefits equally among members. If very few stand to benefit in the face of so many others, there is the danger that such inequalities would compromise community cohesion."

The third issue concerns unintentionally induced suffering. Fennell questions whether misunderstanding could arise during poverty tours: "Even those tourists who sympathize with the plight of the impoverished, irrespective of the reasons for being there, they run the risk of being identified as part of the crowd communally responsible for the hardship in the first place—the divide between the haves and the have-nots."

Practical Difficulties

Criticisms of poorism fall into two categories: (1) clearly specifiable practical difficulties and (2) dilemmas that have deeper subjective dimensions. Let us begin with the first. I do not intend to cast these problems as refutations of poorism, but as concerns that a moral defense of poorism must be able to address.

The first difficulty concerns initial justification. How can someone justify poorism as a moral enterprise when, instead of going on any vacation at all, they could simply refrain from going on holiday and donate the funds they would have spent to a reputable charitable organization, such as Oxfam?

How can someone justify poorism as a moral enterprise when, instead of going on any vacation at all, they could simply donate the funds to Oxfam?

The second difficulty concerns assessing the impact of the practice on the tourist. How can the impact of poorism be measured? Even if an immediate and informative survey of tourist responses were given, it is unclear how the results would be assessed. Moreover, given the potential for a tourist's immediate emotional responses to weaken over time, it is unclear how much significance should be granted to their initial reaction in the first place.

The third difficulty concerns assessing the impact of poorism on poverty. While the financial benefit that accrues from poorism may help particular individuals, skeptics ask whether supporting suffering individuals in the context of poorism is a self-refuting endeavor, reinforcing the underlying social and financial structures that give rise to poverty and perpetuate it. For example, supporting poor people by purchasing inexpensive goods that they make may disincline them to demand access to enhanced education that could better alleviate their poverty.

The fourth difficulty concerns tourist intent. Is someone planning a poorism tour primarily going to increase awareness of global misery, rather than embarking on adventure designed to provide interesting and self-aggrandizing cocktail party fodder? Might the main allure be the seductive promise of an “authentic” and “real” experience coveted precisely because the middle or upper class world has become so mediated by technology that life itself has taken on a virtual flavor? (Lest this concern about authenticity seem hyperbolic, we should recall that in the early 1990s, Massimo Beyerle, an Italian travel agent, offered “war zone” tours for \$25,000. The trip entailed a two-week tour of a war zone, accompanied by security forces and doctors. Arguably, the war zone tour appeals to people who find televised coverage of war to be too mediated to overcome the distance between spectator and spectacle.)

The fifth difficulty concerns the tour guide’s intent. Given the lack of regulation, how can potential poverty tourists be assured that a particular tour guide or tour company has beneficent motives and is not taking advantage of the perceived morality of their enterprise for the primary purpose of enhancing personal

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finances? How can poverty tourists be assured that the areas visited were not selected over alternatives because representatives from that area cut a special deal with the tour company?

The sixth difficulty concerns the danger that endorsing poverty tours can be interpreted as legitimating other, more morally problematic kinds of tourism. According to a BBC News article, some Jewish settlers have offered special “terror tours” of the West Bank and Gaza where tourists receive training in hand-to-hand combat and weapon use (how to drive a tank and use M16s, Uzis, pistols and Kalashnikov machine

guns), view Palestinian “terror enclaves” from a helicopter and suicide bomber belts that the Israeli army seized, and, finally, engage in a paintball fight in a simulated Arab village containing simulated Arab terrorists. This practice raises questions about the extent to which tourism can exacerbate extant prejudices, rather than improve one’s understanding of the world.

The seventh difficulty concerns the problem of profit. Should poverty tours be entirely non-profit, or is it morally permissible for tour operators to make money? Unless some tour money is given to the poor

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community, it becomes difficult for a poverty tour operator to make a compelling moral case for the activity. But even if it is permissible to turn some profit, we can ask whether the benefits of poorism become tainted by accruing through the underlying capitalization on human suffering.

The eighth difficulty concerns informed consent. What assurances do poverty tourists have that the people being observed consented to be observed? If photography is permitted, is the consent offered to it genuine? Given the conditions of poverty, token gestures of consent may be undermined by asymmetries of power and capital.

The final difficulty concerns the educational prerequisites needed to ensure that poorism actually serves an educational function. Despite the experiential benefits of embedded observation discussed above, what tourists see will still be informed by their preexisting conceptions of culture, race, history, economics, and justice. Since poorism is not a regulated industry, what guarantee do tourists have that guides can provide appropriate background understanding? Or that even expert guides can provide the needed information, given the limited amount of time at hand? Or that the presentation of new information will be sufficient to overcome detrimental background prejudices that can have affective as well as intellectual dimensions?

On this last possibility, it is instructive to consider lessons already learned from philosophical analysis of ecotourism. In conjunction with researchers from the School of Earth and Environmental Sciences at the University of Wollongong in New South Wales, Robert Figueroa, a philosopher at the University of North Texas, conducted case studies of the joint management effort between indigenous and non-indigenous stake-



Slums built on swamp land near a garbage dump in East Cipinang, Jakarta, Indonesia (Jonathan McIntosh, 2004, Creative Commons Attribution)

holders in Australia to oversee Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park. The explicit goal underlying the park tours is reconciliation (between the former and latter groups) through conveying appreciation of the park's heritage. Despite this good intention, Figueroa and his collaborators learned that it is exceptionally difficult for tourists to attune themselves to the experience, such that they can experience the park as a "moral gateway." Even some of Figueroa's own students found it difficult to respect indigenous values, despite elaborate formal instruction on the tour.

Voyeurism and Negatively Dramatizing Difference

Having just reviewed some of the practical difficulties that are of general import to poorism, we now can turn to some deeper dilemmas. The charge of voyeurism can be combined with a related criticism concerning the negative dramatization of difference.

A voyeur is someone who watches others and often objectifies what he sees. If the tourist's gaze reduces complex lives to mere economic status, then perceptual and conceptual simplification may entail dehumanization. The negative dramatization of difference is a phenomenological corollary to the problem of voyeurism. It refers to the specific ways in which tourists stand out from the people they observe when they engage in their acts of observation. When poverty tourists dress in expensive clothes, travel in expensive vehicles (such as air-conditioned SUVs), reveal themselves as having leisure time available to take a tour and disposable income to spend while touring, they risk making the poor feel even worse about their situation. It can be one thing for poor people intellectually to know that well-off people exist, and quite another for them to see significant wealth disparities for themselves—particularly in a context where the poor are, even if only implicitly, identified as inferior.

The advocates of poorism dismiss these reservations as incorrectly presupposing that poor people lack agency. They point out that under conditions of poorism, many of the destitute who are observed take an ironic attitude toward the situation; instead of feeling ashamed by the tourist's gaze, they play with it subversively, allowing the tourists to project their own thoughts onto the situation, in exchange for material benefits that follow. However, not every poor person is capable of assuming a subversive stance, and even if such objectification is not directly harmful to the poor, it can remain morally problematic.

Consider our reactions to the following two examples.

The first example is fictional, but it does not take much imagination to conceive of its occurring in real life. The movie *My Man Godfrey* (1936) opens in a city dump where two upper-class sisters compete to find a "forgotten man" to bring to the Waldorf-Ritz hotel. When a homeless person inquires into why one of the society girls is willing to pay for his company, he's informed that he's being recruited to participate in a game: "A scavenger hunt is exactly like a treasure

Advocates of poorism must be able to respond to the skeptic's dual retort that it promotes objectification and the negative dramatization of difference.

hunt, except that in a treasure hunt you find something you want, whereas in a scavenger hunt you find something that nobody wants." Although this arrangement could bring financial benefit to an indigent person, the scenario still would repulse many viewers. By reducing a human being to a "forgotten man," the sisters challenge dignity through objectification. One of them even refers to the act of "playing games with human beings as objects" as "sordid." Additionally, by inviting a homeless person to a gathering of the wealthy, the sisters risk exacerbating shame by dramatizing difference. The homeless man thus quips: "Shall I wear my tails, or come as I am?"

Moving from fiction to fact, let's turn our attention to the opening of "The Foreign Legions," Laura Papano's recent *NY Times* article on college study abroad programs: "For a student at the University of Ghana in Legon. . . electricity is not a given. Nor is running water. Students might have to fetch buckets of water to flush the toilet and wash clothes." But now "the country, and its flagship university, have become a newly popular destination for studying abroad: about 300 American students, representing dozens of campuses, take classes at Legon. But American students expect a standard of food and housing . . . that is

not typical in West Africa. So New York University has imported the creature comforts of home. Its nearby complex has air conditioning (power guaranteed), 24-hour security, an on-site nurse, wireless Internet." Some students think the accommodations are superior to those at NYU.

Papano casts the Ghana program in a positive light. American students can gain a sense of independence and newfound cultural understanding—which may be beneficial to them in the current economic context where preparation for the global workforce is seen as an asset—without sacrificing the quality of life they have become accustomed to.

We may ask: Should we view the exacerbation of difference exemplified by the NYU Center as problematic—perhaps, as akin to bringing a homeless person to a party filled with wealthy guests? Should we view the construction of an infrastructure that converts African experiences into commodified Americanized versions as objectification—perhaps, as akin to a scavenger hunt, where the unwanted aspects of the impoverished Ghanaian culture are converted to treasures that appeal to the bourgeois American palette? Finally, should we be concerned about the voyeuristic aspects of the NYU experience? After all, the students are not obligated to do volunteer work while studying in an impoverished country. It seems that in good conscience, they can treat the people they encounter as merely resources for cultivating personal aesthetic satisfaction.

Conclusion

Beyond the pragmatic difficulties listed above, advocates of poorism must be able to respond to the skeptic's dual retort that it promotes objectification and the negative dramatization of difference. They also need to have a reply to the skeptic's objection that transferring money that could have been spent on a holiday is better than going on a poverty tour. And, if the advocate of poorism appeals to distributive justice, then the issue of whether poorism further entrenches the structural conditions that give rise to poverty need to be addressed.

Despite this complexity, some instances of poorism may be morally permissible. One defense of this position would center on the idea that while dignity is a crucial moral concept, analysts need to be careful of idealizing it. Poverty can be so dire that in some contexts the very notion of dignity is little more than a Western luxury. Indeed, it seems insufficiently pragmatic to ban poorism in favor of holding out for a perfect solution to eradicate global poverty. The benefits of some forms of poorism may outweigh the costs, despite the poverty tourist's potential complicity with questionable structures, and despite the likelihood that a poverty tourist will have to negotiate with ambiguous motives.

While I am sympathetic to the reasoning just outlined, coming to a final judgment goes beyond the preliminary scope of this essay: to clarify why poorism is morally complex.

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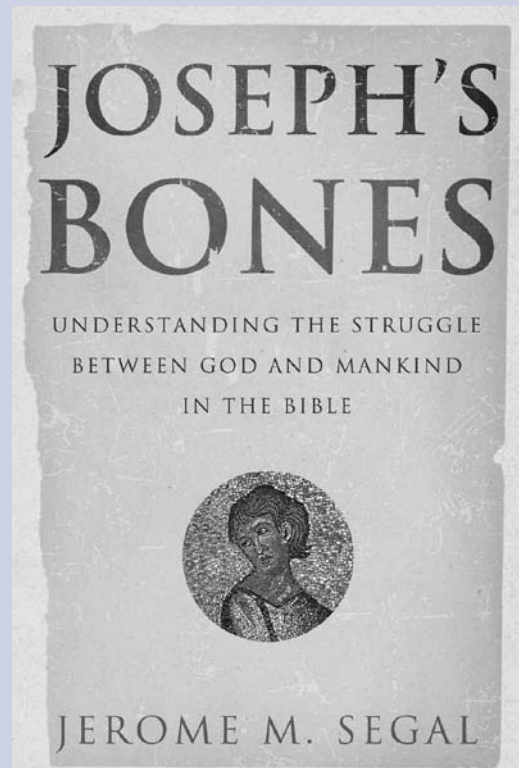
Joseph's Bones

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Jerome M. Segal

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Recreating the Creation

Robert H. Nelson

The following is an excerpt from *The New Holy Wars: Economic Religion versus Environmental Religion in Contemporary America*, forthcoming from Pennsylvania State University Press.

In 1999, Connie Barlow, an advocate for environmental causes, declared that the “rewilding [of nature] must be undertaken because, next to outright species extinctions, the most abhorrent outcome—the greatest crime against creation—humankind might effect would be for surviving lineages [of plant and animal species] to skew their future evolution substantially in response to us.” She acknowledged that the human species in this case would not be acting according to Darwin’s model of competitive struggle. Rather, it was based on a “strong ethical, even religious appeal.” Like many secular environmentalists, she was notably vague about the basis for her strong religious convictions. Perhaps the theological sources did not need to be spelled out formally—a view consistent with pietistic and some other branches of Protestantism that historically have been skeptical of any “scholastic” tendencies toward an overly intellectual statement of their beliefs. In essence, for her it was self-evident that

“Restoration” to what natural order? It would be difficult to know now what this original state of nature would have been, either in a general way for the earth or for any given landscape.

“we shudder because we know in our souls that this behavior [of human hegemony over nature] is not right. This is not the way to be human. This is not our ideal for participation in the Earth Community.” Indeed, it was a simple truth too obvious to require elaborate justification: Human beings must not play God with the world.

The idea of “rewilding” large parts of the North American landscape was the most radical form of what in fact had become a general theme of mainstream American environmentalism—the urgent necessity of “restoring” significant parts of the natural world. This was not meant to be merely a general statement of philosophical principles but to offer a

specific guide for government policy and management. Restoration of ecological systems, environmentalists increasingly declared, should be the operational goal of the U.S. Forest Service, the National Park Service, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and the many other government agencies whose activities had in the past and could in the future still significantly affect the natural world.

But “restoration” to what natural order? The answer of a literalist Christian conservative might be to restore nature to the condition of the world as found at the beginning — some 6,000 years ago. But even such a Christian would have to admit that it would be difficult to know now what this original state of nature might have been, either in a general way for the earth or for any given landscape. The answer would have seemed much clearer until the nineteenth century because the world then was seen in static terms, and the restoration of “the creation” could be interpreted as simply reversing any recent modifications (the only ones likely to be known) of nature that had resulted from human actions. Since the nineteenth century, however, there has been a much greater awareness of the very long history of the earth as well as of the continuing dynamic and evolutionary character of the natural world, operating in some cases to transform natural conditions significantly even within a time frame of 6,000 years or less (sometimes through rapid climatic shifts, for example). Much of the current area of the Sahara desert, for example, received much more rainfall until around 3,500 B.C.

As Barlow suggested, one solution to this problem would be to restore nature to the condition that existed at the specific point in the past where human actions began to alter the character of evolution. Even if this did not result in the restoration of the one “creation state” (an impossibility in any case), it would mean that the outcome of evolution might itself be described as “natural.” Many environmentalists, moreover, have assumed that North and South America were largely unaltered by human actions until the arrival of Europeans. For them, restoring a

natural evolutionary order has meant a return to the biological world of the Americas as it existed before European settlement.

Barlow saw the Euro-centric fallacy of this thinking, however. As she had to acknowledge, there is “strong scientific evidence that we humans are centrally implicated” in the large-scale loss of mammoths, mastodons, sabertooth cats, American lions, and many other mega-fauna that lived in North America and South America at that time. The arrival of modern humans from Asia had seemingly led to the extinction of many species. Barlow considers that it will also therefore be necessary to redress this earlier “crime against creation” in the Americas even well prior to European settlement. It is difficult to see how this could be accomplished, however, given the absence of any surviving mega-fauna. As a substitute, Barlow proposes the restoration of African elephants in North America today as wild animals.

Although hardly a perfect solution, and certainly a politically unlikely prospect, it would be in concept—along with introducing wild lions, tigers, and other appropriate large species now found only in Africa and Asia—the closest approximation possible to the goal of restoring some of the great American mega-fauna of the past. If we do not “bring elephants back and offer them a chance for an evolving, deepening citizenship” in the current natural world, she says, “then Order Proboscidea will never again produce American endemics; the evolution of Order Proboscidea in the New World will be over.” For Barlow, that would be unconscionable and unimaginable—a terrible evil. Instead, elephants should be brought back and allowed to evolve in whatever directions nature might take them, perhaps eventually resulting in new species of “wild” American elephants altogether.

Barlow has of course ended up in a tangle of contradictions. She wants natural evolution to occur without human impact and control and then goes ahead to propose that current human actions should set the

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stage for future evolution in the Americas. She sees a natural evolution as the highest policy goal and yet is asking human beings to behave in the most unnatural of ways by the standards of any other plant and animal species. She does not speak directly of human acts of “playing God” with the earth but would no doubt disavow any such objective. Yet the idea of “restoring the Creation” is about as God-like an action as can be imagined, tantamount to “recreating the Creation.” It

presumes that human beings not only should replicate the plan for the world that God had at the beginning but also that human beings have the same capacity as God to take a divine design and transform it into a physical reality in the world. In other words, human beings would virtually have to be God, the very antithesis of the goal supposedly being sought by Barlow and others with similar views.

Barlow is not alone in her confusions. Leaving aside any talk of God and the creation, the goal of restoring nature is widely advocated among environmentalists, even as they also advocate less human “manipulation” of the natural world. But it cannot be both ways. The technical and engineering skills that would have to be applied to restore past natural conditions would be substantial. Large financial and other resources would have to be committed to scientific study of the workings of ecological systems. Large numbers of ecological “engineers” would have to be put in the field. It would be a new comprehensive “scientific management” of nature—achieving what might be called a new form of “environmental progress.” Yet a main theme of contemporary environmentalism is the past failures of scientific management of nature, its frequent infeasibility, and its inappropriateness for the future. Environmentalism routinely criticizes the past misguided worship of a false god of scientific and economic “progress.”

Some environmentalists are aware of these tensions in thinking about restoration and have sought to address them. Probably the majority of environmentalists have not thought the matter through in any careful way. American environmentalism has had the character of a moral crusade. Like Barlow above, it is enough to feel and assert powerful new (or old) religious convictions in the treatment of the natural environment. There has been little urgency given to developing a well-crafted and carefully reasoned body of environmental theology that would reconcile messages that might otherwise seem to be contradictory. This anti-intellectual strategy has thus far been workable at the level of enunciating broad environmental values and declaring their central ethical importance for the future protection of the earth. But more careful analysis and thought will eventually be necessary in making specific policy recommendations to government agencies that will then be responsible for the regulation and management of American lands and other parts of the natural world in the future.

Spotted Owls and Barred Owls

There is no more visible project for ecological restoration on the public lands than the federal effort to protect and revive populations of the northern spotted owl—and the “old growth” (or “ancient” in environ-

mental writings) forests in which spotted owls live. Indeed, in the late 1980s and early 1990s the political and legal struggle over the fate of the spotted owl set the stage for the emergence of ecosystem management as the guiding philosophy of public land management. Partly based on court interpretations of the federal Endangered Species Act, timber harvesting was drastically reduced on public lands in Oregon, Washington, and northern California in order to set aside large areas for spotted owl habitat. Biodiversity objectives of species preservation for the first time had trumped a high value economic use of the public lands over an entire region of the United States.

It is thus ironic that the spotted owl has now become a prominent symbol of the tensions, confusions, and even contradictions rife to environmental religion. Despite all the heroic federal and other government efforts of the past 20 years, as reported in 2008 in the *High Country News* (the unofficial environmental journal for the mountain West), the spotted owl “is now in a steep, unanticipated tailspin.” There was no sure scientific consensus, but “one of the most likely contributors to the bird’s decline is a newcomer to the Pacific Northwest. The barred owl, which has been moving in from the East, is bigger than the spotted owl and more aggressive. And it has been thriving as the spotted owl falters.” In terms of a Darwinian struggle, although similar in many respects, the barred owl had significant advantages. “Compared to spotted owls, barred owls ... are as much as 15 percent bigger. Their young emerge earlier, and there are more of them”—broods that averaged three barred-owl young, versus one or two for spotted owls. Also, “barred owls are not picky about what they eat, picking up insects, frogs, shrews, and moles,” while “the spotted owl is much more dependent on rodents” alone.

Historically common in the East, until 75 years ago there were no reports of barred owls in the Pacific

It is ironic that the spotted owl has now become a prominent symbol of the tensions, confusions, and even contradictions rife to environmental religion.

Northwest. Then, “in British Columbia, signs [of barred owls] had appeared in the 1940s” and in the 1970s in Oregon and Washington. Even as the protections for the spotted owl were being set in place in the late 1980s and early 1990s, there were emerging reports of “giant, ghostly owls [that] . . . had yellow-green beaks like spotted owls and tails like barred owls.” They were in fact “hybrids,” usually the product of a male spotted owl mating with a female barred owl (even though separate species, they are capable of

jointly producing—sterile—offspring). In one Oregon forest, even though barred owls were seldom seen as recently as ten years ago, in 2008 they outnumbered spotted owls by three to two. Despite the absence of definitive scientific proof, as one northern California biologist states, “biologists in the field know without a doubt that the barred owls are having an effect on spotted owls.” Indeed, he knew of no cases in which “a spotted owl has managed to retain its territory when a barred owl shows up.”

Given the emblematic status of the spotted owl as the poster child of the Endangered Species Act, all this was disconcerting if not embarrassing for the Act’s defenders. A bitter political war had raged for years across the Pacific Northwest, and many small rural economies had been thrown into turmoil under the auspices of the Endangered Species Act, perhaps now all to no avail. Darwinian laws were more powerful

The protections of the Endangered Species Act in their own way were another attempt by human beings to play God. But the God in heaven (or “nature”) was not cooperating.

than human hopes and expectations. The protections of the Endangered Species Act in their own way were another attempt by human beings to play God. But the God in heaven (or “nature”) was not cooperating. Perhaps again He had not been pleased, despite the novel form of this particular challenge to his authority, which now claimed to scientifically “restore” rather than “use” God’s own creation.

Perhaps because of the emblematic importance of the spotted owl crusade, the owl’s advocates, however, were not prepared to give up. They suggested that perhaps the barred owl was really a non-native or exotic species to the Pacific Northwest. The barred owl had in fact probably moved from its historic habitats in the East by traveling through forests that had been significantly altered by past human actions—“perhaps making their way through forests that grew as humans suppressed fire, perhaps taking advantage of higher summer temperatures in altered habitat, perhaps using trees along [humanly altered] creeks and rivers as pathways across the Plains.” But it was impossible to really say with scientific certainty whether the arrival of the barred owl in the Pacific Northwest was “natural” or “unnatural” (or even precisely what this distinction might mean). Perhaps the new competitive success of the barred owl was just another evolutionary episode following after many millions of other such Darwinian events over a billion years of natural evolution of the earth’s plant and animal species.

In any case, the possibility of the wide killing of barred owls in order to save the spotted owl is now

being actively considered. In 2007 a new federal draft recovery plan for the spotted owl included an appendix on a "Barred Owl Removal Strategy." According to another proposal, "one person, well-versed in barred owl strategies, could shoot two to four pair a night. . . . Getting adults in the spring before they breed would keep populations low enough to give the spotted owl a chance." The government is already moving to keep barred owls from moving further south in national forests of California, part of an Endangered Species Act strategy to protect the genetically different Mexican spotted owl. If any barred owls show up in these more southerly national forests, the policy now is that they should all be killed as soon as possible. Further north in Oregon and Washington, however, the goal might be to manage them to sustain surviving populations of both northern spotted owls and barred owls. A complicating factor here is that this would probably induce new evolutionary changes in spotted owls—"the resulting bird would probably be smaller, to exploit niches unavailable to the larger barred owl. In south-central Mexico, the diminutive Mexican spotted owl coexists with a subspecies of barred owl that is larger than those moving in to the north."

As discussed above, the basic objectives of ecosystem management and restoration for the public lands are that wild nature should be kept "untouched by human hand" to the maximum extent possible and, when nature has already been altered by human influences, it should be restored to an unaltered condition to the extent that this is practically feasible. As is now being contemplated, however, the Darwinian workings of recent possibly "natural" forces might actually result in the extinction of the northern spotted owl. If that threat exists, it is also being suggested that perhaps human beings must now actively manage the forests to protect the original (or at least pre-European) status of "the Creation"—a natural condition which included large numbers of spotted owls and no barred owls in the Pacific Northwest. As the conservation director for the Audubon Society of Portland states, and however uncomfortable the choice, it may be necessary to kill barred owls because, if they are not removed, "you may be making a decision to allow another species to go extinct"—for him an even more morally offensive outcome.

If the choice is between protecting the original creation (however this is understood) and allowing new evolutionary forces to do their thing, the former objective seemingly must prevail. Once again, secular environmental creationism implicitly comes close to its Christian fundamentalist cousin. If the goal is to protect "the Creation," and the Creation has not been altered from the original six days in Genesis, then Darwin be damned. And it is not only the northern and the Mexican spotted owls. "Natural" sea lions and Caspian terns have been removed from the mouth of



There is no more visible project for ecological restoration on the public lands than the federal effort to protect and revive populations of the northern spotted owl.
(Fish and Wildlife Resources)

the Columbia River in order to protect endangered salmon runs. In the Channel Islands off California, growing numbers of federally protected golden eagles threatened the survival of an endangered subspecies of the gray fox. In response, a 2003 article in *Science* proposed "lethal removal" as a means of "removing protected populations [of eagles] to save [other] endangered species." The National Park Service backed off from directly killing the golden eagles but did succeed (with the use of helicopters) in capturing and removing them (at very high public expense). As Kim Todd reports, "it's only recently that agencies have begun trying to control one animal for the sake of another that is more endangered. But it's happening now with increasing frequency."

The result is a contradiction of the goal to maintain a true "natural" condition. Nature is being actively man-

The New Holy Wars

Robert H. Nelson

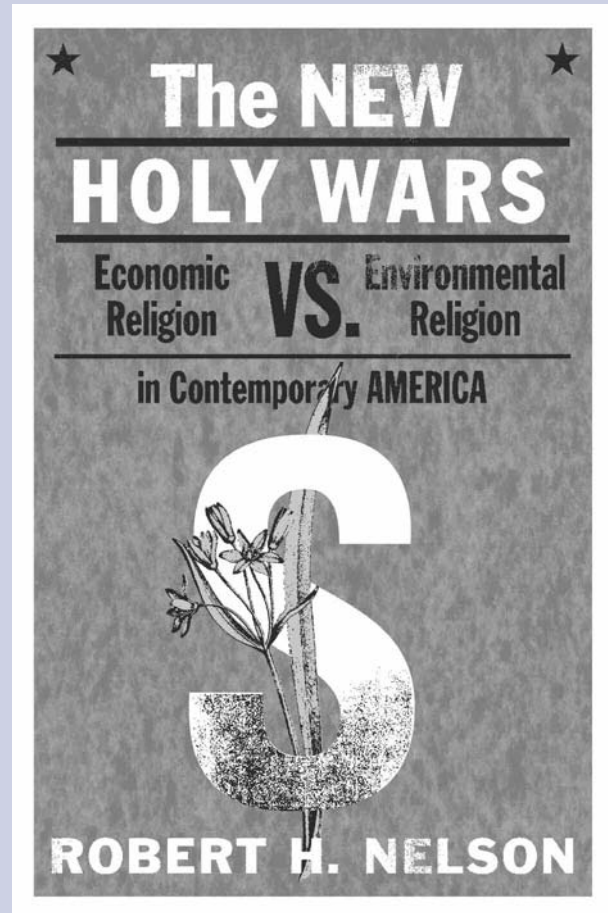
The present debate raging over global warming exemplifies the clash between two competing public theologies. On one side, environmentalists warn of certain catastrophe if we do not take steps now to reduce the release of greenhouse gases; on the other side, economists are concerned with whether the benefits of actions to prevent higher temperatures will be worth the high costs. Questions of the true and proper relationship of human beings and nature are as old as religion. Today, environmentalists regard human actions to warm the climate as an immoral challenge to the natural order, while economists seek to put all of nature to maximum use for economic growth and other human benefits.

Robert Nelson interprets such contemporary struggles as battles between the competing secularized religions of economics and environmentalism. The outcome will have momentous consequences for us all. This deep book probes beneath the surface of the two movements' rhetoric to uncover their fundamental theological commitments and visions.

"Nelson makes an overwhelmingly persuasive case that in our times the leading secular religion was once economics and is now environmentalism. . . . Out of that utterly original idea for scholarly crossovers—good Lord, an economist reading environmentalism and even economics itself as theology!—come scores of true and striking conclusions. . . . It's a brilliant book, which anyone who cares about the economy or the environment or religion needs to read. That's most of us."

—Deirdre McCloskey, University of Illinois at Chicago

"Nelson compellingly argues that religion is a powerful force in economic and social life, . . . even if that fact is seldom recognized by most academics and policy makers. The dominant religious influences are secularized versions of Catholicism and Protestantism, not because the leading scholars are piously trying to advance their faith by other means, but because their intellectual horizons have been shaped by worldviews that have framed their consciousness. He convinces me that unless these presuppositions are acknowledged, examined, broadened, and



revised, the economic and ecological crises that the world now faces will not be understood or met at their deeper levels."

—Max L. Stackhouse, Princeton Theological Seminary

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aged in pursuit of human theological understandings, however confused they sometimes are. The spotted owl habitat of the Pacific Northwest is on the verge of becoming a vast permanent zoological garden. The spotted owls will have to be protected from all potential threats, "natural" and "unnatural" alike. The inherent contradictions of environmental religion at this point become glaring. It is simply not logically possible to actively manage something in order to achieve the goal of an unmanaged result. And such theological confusion inevitably will lead the federal natural

resource agencies to a corresponding policy confusion—to be sure, a typical outcome in practice over the 200 years of public land history.

Conclusion

Christian creationists have a logically developed and internally consistent way of understanding the arrival in the world and the religious meaning of the creation. The problem for them is that the biblical story is contradicted by Darwinism and other prod-

ucts of modern geological and biological investigations. Secular environmental creationists experience virtually the same sense of religious awe and inspiration in the presence of nature—"the creation"—as their Christian counterparts. Yet they also profess to accept Darwin and other modern science. The result, however, would seem to be a large confusion in their thinking about the natural world. They experience it religiously, on the one hand, as "the creation," and yet also write as professional experts and speak about it in biological terms as the product of hundreds of millions of years of random mutation and other Darwinist evolutionary workings. The ecological economist Herman Daly characterizes this as the "lurking inconsistency" in the thinking of the contemporary environmental movement.

These tensions within secular environmental creationism come to the fore when it is necessary to consider the meaning of ecosystem management and its central goal of environmental restoration. What is it that is being restored? In practice, it cannot be "the creation." It is not necessary, moreover, to restore a process of Darwinian evolution because the workings of evolution never stopped—nor in principle could evolution ever be halted by human action. The

It is simply not logically possible to actively manage something in order to achieve the goal of an unmanaged result.

goal might be to reset the evolutionary clock to a time frame preceding human impacts on the evolutionary result, but it now appears that this would be many tens of thousands or perhaps even a few hundred thousand or more years ago. Given the theological tenets of environmental creationism, in short, the goal of restoring the natural world would seem to be incoherent.

Nevertheless, heroic human activities are taking place with a justification of "restoring" nature. If the results are likely to be problematic, it will be due to intellectual—really theological—confusion as much as any technical difficulties in reengineering past natural systems. Theology is not just a matter of living a private moral life, or finding the personal path to a salvation in the hereafter. Religion, contrary to a widespread current impression, is not limited to matters of faith and emotion. A theology can be grounded in well-established facts and otherwise well constructed or it can exhibit an irrational logic and otherwise be intellectually deficient. A confused environmental theology is then likely to also produce wide policy and management confusions among the

many government agencies that today must attempt to work out issues of the true and proper relationship of human beings and nature.

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“Mental Illness” and Justice as Recognition

Sara Goering

My friend T was diagnosed with bipolar disorder over a decade ago, just in the midst of his medical residency. Since that time, he hasn't been able to complete his residency, though he's held a variety of different jobs, some of them making use of his medical knowledge (intake physician for insurance companies), others not (golf course attendant). Although T will grant that he needed help at the time of his diagnosis, to this day he doesn't approve of the kind of help he received (relatively coerced but officially “voluntary” commitment, a wide range of ineffective pharmaceutical cocktails, electroshock). Like many people diagnosed as bipolar, he has at various times come off the medications prescribed for him. In part this is due to frustration with their side effects (liver damage, weight gain, hair loss, mental fuzziness, anxiety) and their limited effectiveness. But it's also because he questions whether whatever occurred in his brain and resulted in his difficulty functioning “normally” is *chronic*, and in any case, he's not convinced that “normal” functioning is always to be preferred. In this judgment, he is echoed by many patients and former patients, both those relatively sanguine about psychiatry (Redfield Jamison) and those who identify with the more radical “psychiatric survivors’ network.” What he wants is to be respected for his abilities, accommodated for his illness (when it cannot be adequately treated), and treated as capable of making a positive social contribution.

When many people hear T's story, they think, “What a sad story; what bad luck!” They understand it through a lens of personal tragedy and misfortune. If they sense unfairness, it is unfairness in an existential or perhaps even divine sense: how could the impersonal world or God treat him so poorly? The idea that some part—perhaps even a large part—of his disadvantage is *socially imposed* is foreign to them. Most people firmly believe in a medical model of disability, and by extension, a medical model of psychiatric disability. For them, disability is an intrinsic feature of a person, and the best way to help a disabled person is to find a cure. If a cure is not available, the person might be compensated for an inability to work, or pitied and

offered charity. But according to my friend and people in the disability rights movement, many of his disadvantages could and indeed should be addressed through *social* change. If so, then we shouldn't shake our heads in pity over his case; we should wrestle with how to do justice for him.

Sociopolitical Conception of Disability

Disability scholars often distinguish between an *impairment* (usually taken to be a non-standard state of the body, such as deafness or paraplegia) and *disability* (understood to be a lack of fit between the body and the social environment, resulting in disadvantages for the individual who is impaired). With this distinction, the *disadvantage of disability* is something that calls out for social change. In many cases, people with impairments prefer not to have their bodies altered (as when Deaf individuals do not want cochlear implants), or are simply faced with no known medical treatments for their impairments (e.g., spinal cord injuries result in paralysis that cannot be “fixed”). The disability rights movement has emphasized how such people deserve fair opportu-

The disability rights movement has celebrated the diversity of ways of living and attempted to help the non-disabled public rethink the concept of disability.

nities to work and to engage in a variety of aspects of social life, even if their modes of functioning are non-standard. Indeed, it has celebrated the diversity of ways of living and attempted to help the non-disabled public rethink the concept of disability.

One problem with the impairment/disability distinction is that it creates terminological confusion in discussions with people who presume that disability is inherently in the body. One consequence is that the sociopolitical model of disability may appear overstated if it always insists on social change *rather than*

bodily treatments, when many people recognize that some impairments clearly result in bodily disadvantages. Disabled people acknowledge the existence of negative “impairment effects” (e.g., pain, lack of energy) that also create disadvantage and might rightly be addressed through medical means, but their point is that such disadvantages are often minimal compared to the social, institutional, and attitudinal barriers they face daily.

In an attempt to clarify the language confusion, Ron Amundson and Shari Tresky offer a distinction between “conditional disadvantages of impairment” (what could be eliminated via social change) and “unconditional disadvantages of impairment” (what will linger even after social change for inclusion). So, for example, a blind person might have the unconditional disadvantage of being unable to see, but the relevance of that disadvantage might be minimal if she did not have the *conditional* disadvantage of not being able to get a job (if the use of Braille texts or online screen readers is presumed to be an obstacle to performing the duties of the job).

Disability scholars have argued that addressing the conditional disadvantages of impairment should be a matter of justice rather than charity. Furthermore, justice cannot simply offer paltry compensation to people who are unable to work in a typical fashion, as the U.S. model of disability insurance has tended to do. Disabled people are often forced to choose between taking disability payments and taking a job; if they are working, they do not qualify for any assistance, even if the costs of wheelchairs or attendant services are prohibitive.

Disability scholar Anita Silvers has argued that when capable disabled people are kept out of the workforce, they are stigmatized and isolated, even if they are financially compensated for their inability to work. For most of us, flourishing involves being part of a community and contributing to it. People who could contribute but are not accommodated are then left feeling less valuable and are often perceived by others to be burdens on the system. Furthermore, the group of people who may be unable to work without accommodations will likely include all of us at some point in time—nearly 1 in 5 people in the U.S. is disabled, and that figure does not include the number of people who are temporarily disabled, nor does it account for the coming surge of impairment as the baby boom generation ages and lives with the inevitable frailty of their bodies. Providing accommodations for disabled people, then, should be seen as part and parcel of the practice of providing access to opportunities for all citizens, rather than seeing people with impairments as a special needy class.

One way to frame the question of justice for disabled people is through appeal to *recognition* as an element of

justice. By this I mean that disabled people have a right to be recognized for their distinctive features (impairments) and their valuing of them, to be part of decision-making about institutional structures that may include or exclude them, and to be treated with respect and as equal partners in that decision-making. Borrowing from Nancy Fraser, misrecognition occurs when “some individuals and groups are denied the status of full partners in social interaction simply as a consequence of institutionalized patterns of cultural value in whose construction they have not equally participated and which disparage their distinctive characteristics or the distinctive characteristics assigned to them.” In being misrecognized, they are rendered “inferior, excluded, wholly other, or simply invisible, [and] hence less than full partners in social interaction.” Gay and lesbian couples make a claim of misrecognition in regard to access to marriage; disabled people have clearly made this claim in regard to access to work. Justice, then, requires those who are more dominant to listen carefully and respectfully to the claims of the misrecognized and socially oppressed, and with them to craft policies that allow for their full participatory parity. In the case of disabled people, this involves recognizing the nature of conditional disadvantages of impairment (as reported by disabled people) and providing accommodations that allow them participatory parity (including access to education and the workplace).

Sociopolitical Conception of Psychiatric Disability?

The matter is a bit more difficult when we turn to mental illness, or what might be called psychiatric disability. Here the *kind* of impairment seems to challenge more fully the “norm” of a worker or even a regular citizen. We may be open to multiple modes of functioning (reading text vs. Braille, conversing verbally or with ASL, rolling vs. walking, etc.), but we tend to think that functioning itself takes a certain kind of cognitive capacity and reliability. Even making reasonable claims of misrecognition requires cognitive reliability. So mental illness seems to challenge the sociopolitical model of disability and our understanding of justice as recognition.

Here I use bipolar disorder as my example. Briefly, bipolar disorder involves cyclical episodes of mania and depression. The mania may include delusions, inflated self-esteem, diminished judgment, racing thoughts, distractibility, and “excessive involvement in pleasurable activities that have a high potential for painful consequences” (e.g., shopping well beyond one’s means). Depression involves a depressed mood, feelings of worthlessness, despondency, lack of energy, weight loss or gain, and sleep disturbances. Furthermore, many

Mental Health in America

	DISORDER	PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION THAT WILL SUFFER FROM IT IN THEIR LIFETIME	AVERAGE YEARS UNTIL TREATMENT
ANXIETY	Panic Disorder	4.7	10
	Agoraphobia (without panic)	1.4	12
	Specific phobia	12.5	20
	Social phobia	12.1	16
	Generalized anxiety disorder	5.7	9
	Post-traumatic stress disorder	6.8	12
	Obsessive-compulsive disorder	1.6	No data
	Separation anxiety disorder	5.2	23
MOOD	Major depressive disorder	16.6	8
	Dysthymia	2.5	7
	Bipolar I-II disorders	3.9	6
IMPULSE	Oppositional defiant disorder	8.5	4
	Conduct disorder	9.5	No data
	ADHD	8.1	13
	Intermittent explosive disorder	5.2	13
SUBSTANCE	Alcohol abuse	13.2	9
	Alcohol dependence	5.4	6
	Drug abuse	7.9	6
	Drug dependence	3	5

SOURCE: National Comorbidity Survey

people diagnosed as bipolar, especially in the throes of mania, do not consider themselves in need of any help or treatment.

At least two features of mental illness complicate the possibility of making claims of misrecognition and understanding mental illness as a psychiatric disability for which sociopolitical adjustments are due. First, as noted above, people with mental illnesses may not be reliable reporters of their own needs and interests (given the nature of their impairment and its effect on their judgment and recognition that they are impaired). Second, the accommodations that need to be made for physical impairments are relatively stable (i.e., once put in place, the individual can function steadily: think of curb cuts or elevators). In contrast, the functional capacities of many individuals who have mental illness often fluctuate significantly over time.

Unreliability of Judgment

One problem with relying on individuals to make claims of misrecognition is that you have to be able to

trust their judgment in making those claims. With bipolar disorder, the symptoms of the disease include delusions that may result in diminished judgment. When my friend called up to report that he'd lost his job, he told me a friend-turned-enemy called the police and attempted to have him committed, after growing animosity at work and a charge that he was manic and potentially a harm to himself and others. I confess that my first inclination was to think that maybe this "friend-turned-enemy" was truly a friend, trying to help in the only way he knew. I couldn't imagine my friend making any violent threats, but why would his good friend turn against him? I would normally believe him, but knowing his psychiatric history, I hesitated. He was talking quickly, he was agitated, and he was distraught. Of course, all those symptoms would also be expected in someone who has just been betrayed by a friend and wrongly accused, resulting in the loss of his job. So herein lies the difficulty. When the impairment in question is one that results in diminished judgment, and in inability to self-reflect accurately, how are we to evaluate claims to misrecognition

or mistreatment? Our usual best source of information—the misrecognized individual himself — appears unreliable.

I should note that people who have success in treating their bipolar disorder, or who learn to live with it even without drugs, are generally trustworthy sources. Indeed, they may know best from personal experience how to understand the disadvantages and difficulties of mental illness and also how best to accommodate and assist an individual in the throes of depression or mania. But the problem is that it is not always evident who is in the throes of mania or depression and who has successfully treated or adapted to the disease, as my friend's case above demonstrates.

In pondering the unreliability of judgment, one relevant consideration is how the *label* of bipolar disorder affects third party evaluations of judgment and mood. People who have received a bipolar diagnosis report feeling that they have to control their emotions much more so than other people, in part to avoid the suspicion that they are “going crazy” again. In *The Loony-Bin Trip*, Kate Millet reports on her own battles with bipolar disorder and highlights how difficult it is to be ebullient when everyone keeps asking “are you still taking your medications?” She suggests that in many respects she did not “go mad” but was rather “driven crazy” by this obsessive focus on her possible symptoms. If people expect you to be crazy, they may skew their interpretation of your judgment. This seems particularly dangerous when the person in question is already marginalized in many respects.

Another consideration is our tendency to generalize from some experiences of delusional thinking or diminished judgment to the belief that the *person* is unreliable or delusional broadly speaking. We might think that to be reliable, one must exhibit an overwhelming dependability, with honest and accurate judgment, and so we might be led to think that a person with bipolar can't be reliable. But *episodes* of unreliability can surely be excused, as they are for all of us. I can't be relied on to do my job well when I am sick or when my daughter is sick; my friend may be unreliable when he's experiencing an episode of mania or depression. That doesn't mean that he is never capable or even that he's generally unreliable. Furthermore, an individual's ability to recognize that something is wrong in his thinking might be easier to exercise if he isn't faced with the possibility of job loss or blame or stigma in admitting that he needs help.

My simple point here is that while unreliability in judgment may suggest that claims of misrecognition are not to be trusted, if we recognize the episodes of unreliability against a larger background of ability and competence, we can see that people with bipolar diagnoses can effectively speak for themselves and may simply need accommodation for the fact of their ill-

ness. We need to listen carefully to reports from people who have “been there,” as well from people who are currently there. As the disability rights activists proclaim: “Nothing about us, without us!”

Instability of Functioning

In my friend's case, a significant conditional disadvantage of his illness is that he has difficulty finding jobs that both challenge him intellectually and are able to accommodate his episodes of illness. In part, I think this has to do with the inflexibility of most job requirements. He desperately wants to work and to contribute, and he would very much like to make use of his considerable medical skills. It seems unlikely that he'll complete a residency, given the high stress environments that are built into the structure of medical training (long hours, little sleep, large caseload). We might argue that the structure of residencies ought to be changed, and likely there's a good case to be made that it should be more humane for every aspiring physician. But even with significant changes, my friend might not be able to succeed there given his unpredictable and overwhelming anxiety attacks. This is part of the difficulty of accommodating people with mental illness. If a person's mood or ability to concentrate changes regularly (and more sharply than is “normal”), how can a workplace provide “reasonable” accommodations?

In trying to figure this out, it's helpful to compare mental illness with chronic illness, such as chronic fatigue syndrome or multiple sclerosis which primarily affect physical parts of the body but do not do so

If a person's mood or ability to concentrate changes regularly (and more sharply than is “normal”), how can a workplace provide “reasonable” accommodations?

consistently. Pain, energy levels, and mobility may shift drastically by the day. As such, the unconditional disadvantages of the impairment are difficult to ignore, and making appropriate accommodations is challenging.

Philosopher Susan Wendell has written eloquently about her own struggles with chronic fatigue and argues that, like other impairments, chronic illness can be understood as both epistemologically rewarding and physically troublesome. She says she would welcome a cure, but doesn't need one, and through her struggles she has learned to see both the unfairness of ableism and the ways in which standard modes of functioning are institutionalized as the only modes of

functioning. She notes that people with chronic illness need “access to the workplace [that] often includes the ability to work part-time, with some flexibility to accommodate periods of greater or lesser illness.” In her own situation, the university policy was that faculty could work part-time for two years under disability insurance, but after that they were required either to be fully rehabilitated or fully disabled. Individuals with chronic illness cannot meet the former, but are still capable of working successfully and so should not be described as the latter. Why couldn’t workplaces offer a wider variety of options for workers, at least recognizing that impairment or illness need not fully incapacitate a person?

Other accommodations might not be tied to jobs so much as improved *services* to make flourishing without a job easier. Mental health services are poorly funded, despite a variety of legislative and public education efforts to achieve parity in health funding and insurance coverage. Services that do exist are often quite disjointed and may not have any fail-safe mech-

Why couldn't workplaces offer a wider variety of options for workers, at least recognizing that impairment or illness need not fully incapacitate a person?

anisms. For instance, my friend recently received an eviction notice after his disability-related housing assistance check failed to arrive for three months (due to administrative bungling by the county in which he lives). Provision of reasonable housing and more than a minimal level of financial and social support could drastically improve the situation of many who are currently living on the edge.

In the book *Havens*, which examines projects around the country that have attempted to provide housing for a variety of people in need, the authors describe grassroots programs that provide residential homes for people with mental illness. Residents pay a small monthly fee for room and board and have chores in the house, but otherwise are free to do as they like. When the authors interviewed the members of one such house, they found that the house members “seemed to value each other in a way that did not rest on the usual conditions of social status. They did not judge each other by what they had *become*. They knew they were no longer part of the American frenzy for overachievement—no curriculum vitae could describe their successes. They valued each other for just *being* there, which gave them a much keener appreciation for each others’ unique and lovable quirks. They knew they were characters, as sympathetic as the ones in a good story.” Such programs deserve funding.

Conclusions

I don’t want to romanticize mental illness. It can be devastating and emotionally wrenching for all involved parties, and working out appropriate accommodations will be difficult and may be expensive. Yet surely we can figure out ways to create more flexibility in the workplace and in laws and policies that govern disability insurance and payments so that people with mental illness can live better, more satisfying lives. In my friend’s case, he has worked extensively as a volunteer peer counselor and mental health advocate. Such work is undoubtedly valuable. But it is unpaid, and the disability payments he receives keep him at the poverty level, with no cushion. Surely we can do better in recognizing the value he brings to the world, and supporting him in making his contributions.

When we think about mental illness as a medical problem, we have a tendency to think that medical experts are best placed to know what to do about it. But if we see it through the lens of social oppression, what we find is that people who have experienced the disadvantages might be best placed to offer their insights into their needs and the best methods to include them in society. Listening to them, and working to include them more fully in the workplace or at least to recognize their equal status as beings in the human community, is a matter of doing justice.

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Stigma and Openness

Claudia Mills

Most of us exchange information about ourselves, our families, and our friends with others all the time. We make casual conversation with seatmates on an airplane, chat with colleagues at the workplace, send holiday letters with a summary of our family news, and have heart-to-heart conversation with our friends about the minutia of our lives. My question is how information about someone's mental illness should be treated in our routine exchanges with one another.

On the one hand, it is widely regarded that mental illness should be regarded as any other illness: admitted openly and discussed without shame, on the model of how we treat diseases such as cancer or diabetes. If I would mention that my sister had breast cancer, why wouldn't I mention that she was struggling with bipolar disorder, when the conversation had turned to the topic of current family crises? If I would mention that my child was being treated for diabetes, why wouldn't I mention that he was being treated for depression? Mental illness is a genuine illness, with an identifiable physiological basis in aberrant brain chem-

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istry. To avoid mentioning mental illness, when one would have openly mentioned some other form of illness, is to perpetuate a stigma surrounding mental illness that—one hopes—is woefully outdated. It certainly seems important to act collectively to reduce the stigma that wrongly surrounds mental illness, and one way to do this is to refuse to shroud mental illness in protective secrecy, as if it were indeed something one should hide.

On the other hand, three distinctive features of mental illness need to be considered in deciding how best to proceed with open communication about it. The first feature is shared by other socially sensitive condi-

tions such as homosexuality and AIDS, so we may gain insight by comparing how information about these other conditions should be shared as well. The other two, however, seem distinctive to mental illness.

Reducing the Stigma of Mental Illness

First, even if we believe that mental illness is unfairly stigmatized, the ongoing existence of stigma means that we need to weigh an individual's interest in avoiding the deleterious consequences of revealing his illness against the good to be achieved by taking one small step toward the goal of stigma reduction. Here we need to perform some weighing of clear and significant immediate harm to one individual versus diffuse and distant collective gains. This raises a host of philosophical difficulties. As with many collective action problems, such as those faced in reducing global warming, any one individual's contribution either to solving or worsening the problem is miniscule, if not completely without any actual practical significance, whereas the costs to the individual of engaging in or refraining from the relevant behavior may be great.

We might want to distinguish here between the individual herself choosing to take the step of announcing her illness and someone else making that announcement about her. If we compare the case of mental illness to the case of homosexuality, we may have a different assessment about the individual outing herself versus being outed by others. Two plausible principles suggest giving considerable weight to this distinction. One is the principle that the person most directly affected by an act should have the greatest say over whether or not the act is performed. If she is the one who will be harmed by her outing, she is the one who should decide whether or not to make her sexual orientation public. Ditto with the revelation that one has been diagnosed with AIDS, or with the case that concerns us here, mental illness. The other is the related, but distinct, privacy-based principle that each individual is in some sense the owner of information about herself; it is hers to divulge or not to divulge as she chooses.

The Economy of the Earth
Philosophy, Law, and the Environment

Second edition

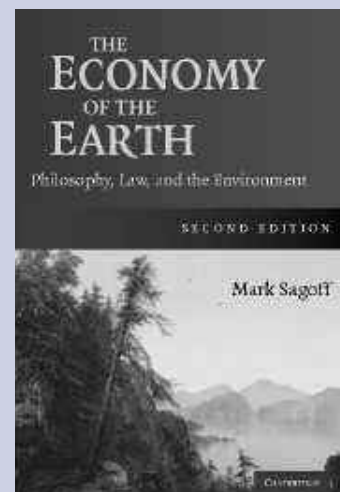
Mark Sagoff

Mark Sagoff draws on the last twenty years of debate over the foundations of environmentalism in this comprehensive revision of *The Economy of the Earth*. Posing questions pertinent to consumption, cost-benefit analysis, the normative implications of neo-Darwinism, the role of the natural in national history, and the centrality of the concept of place in environmental ethics, he analyzes social policy in relation to the environment, pollution, the workplace, and public safety and health. Sagoff distinguishes ethical from economic questions and explains which kinds of concepts, arguments, and processes are appropriate to each.

The second edition incorporates the increasing engagement of mainstream and evangelical religious communities with environmental protection into his argument for a democratic environmentalism not constrained by either economics or science. Sagoff's carefully reasoned and wide ranging arguments will infuriate economists, ecologists and elite environmentalists equally, but the book is essential reading for anyone interested in the future of environmentalism.

—Dan Tarlock, Chicago-Kent College of Law

The Economy of the Earth presents a masterful synthesis of Mark Sagoff's seminal contributions to the theory of environmental policy analysis. Sagoff argues that good policy design requires accommodation between strongly held,



incommensurable moral values. Yet the techniques of policy analysis rest on strong and sometimes naïve ethical assumptions.

Sagoff shows how careful philosophical reasoning can reform the practice of policy analysis to better serve the democratic process. This provocative book deserves a central place in the environmental studies literature.

—Richard B. Howarth, Dartmouth College

The first edition of The Economy of the Earth staked out a position that many felt but few had said: the most important reasons for protecting nature are moral and aesthetic, not economic and instrumental. In the second edition, massively revised and updated, Sagoff preaches the same sermon but even more clearly and eloquently. The second edition of The Economy of the Earth is as vital to debates about environmental policy as the first edition was in its time.

—Dale Jamieson, Director of Environmental Studies, New York University

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Considering only the individual's own self-disclosure, both pragmatic and moral reasons encourage the open sharing of information about mental illness. Kay Redfield Jamison writes in her memoir, *An Unquiet Mind*, about her lifelong journey through manic-depression: "I have no idea what the long-term effects of discussing such issues so openly will be on my personal and professional life, but, whatever the consequences, they are bound to be better than continuing to be silent. I am tired of hiding, tired of misspent and knotted energies, tired of the hypocrisy, and tired of acting as though I have something to hide." Here Jamison herself voices the relief that comes from being able to refuse to hide informa-

tion about her medical condition. Looking beyond the pragmatic to the moral, Richard Mohr has argued that gays who hide their homosexuality from public view, to avoid social condemnation of who they are, cooperate with the forces that maintain that condemnation; closeted gays help to maintain social norms that assault their own individual dignity. Thus Mohr, controversially, endorses "outing" of gays. There is no right to contribute to the maintenance of oppressive social norms. For Mohr, then, the same reasons that require closeted gays to reveal their true identity also license others to expose that identity as well. The normative difference attaching to first-person and third-person revelations disappears.

Turning to the privacy-based privileging of each person's choice of whether or not to reveal certain information about himself, it isn't clear that each of us does have an exclusive claim to be owner of such information. Where our lives intertwine, our stories become intertwined as well. If it is a fact about my child or husband or brother that he has schizophrenia, it is equally a fact about me that I am the mother or wife or sister of someone with schizophrenia. Imagine what conversation would be like if I responded to every question about a family member or friend with the evasive comment: "You'll have to ask him about that." Certainly, absent someone's explicit request to keep some item of information secret, there seems no general obligation not to share general facts about our associates. When such a special request is granted, one has moral reasons to keep the promise made. But should such a request be granted in the first place? While it might seem that one would have stronger reasons to grant such a request for confidentiality to intimates than to casual acquaintances, I believe that the opposite is true. I have no particular reason to share information about casual acquaintances—though I might feel that honoring a request of confidentiality in some cases is tantamount to complicity in maintaining the relevant stigma. But with intimates, it places too great a burden on me not to be able to discuss their illness openly, to be forced to forgo the relief of being able to share my struggle with supportive or similarly situated listeners.

So far, then, I have considered a first reason why disclosing information about mental illness is problematic (harm or embarrassment to the mentally ill individual) a reason shared with the disclosure of information about any wrongly stigmatized condition, and concluded that this reason generally isn't weighty enough to tell against disclosure.

Why Mental Illness Is Special

My second set of considerations appeals to ways in which mental illness poses special issues absent from AIDS or homosexuality. Unlike the stigma attaching to, e.g., AIDS, a diagnosis of mental illness more sweepingly and persuasively affects how a person's entire identity is viewed, so that all the person's behaviors may come to be interpreted through the lens or label of the illness.

Some stigmatizing conditions are arguably of no genuine importance in themselves in determining how we should relate to the individual in question, but acquire importance given social conditions and prejudices that might better be resisted.

Consider a diagnosis of AIDS. While there have been publicized cases of mass hysteria over the enrollment of an HIV-positive student in a public school, such a reaction is completely unwarranted. The only real

issue involving someone's HIV-positive diagnosis concerns easily contained risks to others of contact with their blood through shared needles, sexual activity, and so forth, risks that can be handled through simple and generally applicable safety procedures. People often do react to AIDS differently if they believe that it is "blameless" AIDS contracted through a blood transfusion, or by a child in the womb, versus "guilty" AIDS contracted through homosexual sex or through intravenous drug use. The latter background information is often used, wrongly, to ground a more sweeping judgment of the person. But properly speaking, knowledge of a diagnosis of AIDS just provides a reason to give someone additional sympathy and support for the long medical journey on which he is embarking. While homosexuality seems to involve someone's identity much more than AIDS does—most of us think our sexual orientation is a fairly central fact about us—someone's sexual orientation should make no difference to how I treat him, unless I am looking for a sexual partner and am trying to determine someone's eligibility given my own sexual orientation. Put another way, my knowledge that someone has AIDS, or is gay, generally

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does not benefit me in any appreciable way, nor does my knowledge that someone has AIDS, or is gay, generally benefit that person in any appreciable way.

Mental illness does seem different here. It would be too huge of a topic to look at our long and tortured history of response to people who are mentally "different." Clearly at various times people have been judged to be mentally ill (or depending on the times, satanically possessed) for behaviors that were merely socially deviant; sometimes such "deviance" was morally preferable to compliance with prevailing norms that were sexist, racist, and conformist. Some would argue that our current diagnosing of mental illness is just a way to label social deviance, that we all fall somewhere on a spectrum of "normal" to "abnormal" depending on the norm in question. Someone who believes this would reject the opening premise of my discussion, that mental illness is an illness like any other, and would argue instead that mental illness is not an illness at all.

I believe that careful professional diagnoses of mental illness do tend to identify a variety of conditions that have serious negative implications for one's ability to survive and meet basic human needs,

as well as to interact with others within our society. Most relevant for my purposes, many behaviors caused by mental illness are arguably morally problematic, or would be rightly assessed as indicating a character flaw if observers did not instead understand these behaviors as symptoms or products of mental illness. We view a low-achieving student who has missed turning in the last two assignments as lazy and immature; then we learn that the student suffers from incapacitating depression, and we retract our earlier assessment of her character. We view a friend's excessive spending as crassly materialistic, only to discover that it is an expression of bipolar mania. Another's persistent and unwarranted suspicions would seem to indicate a moral failing until we discover that he is schizophrenic. In each case, moral judgment is undermined, replaced by a compassionate understanding.

Yet, as Peter Strawson has so famously argued in "Freedom and Resentment," the switch from the moral attitude that holds a person responsible for how she acts, to a therapeutic or clinical attitude that excuses the person because of her diminished capacity for moral responsibility, also involves our coming to see the person as less of a person. There is something condescending about our very reluctance to hold someone morally accountable for her behavior. "She couldn't help it" both excuses and diminishes the person. The excuse has a tendency to swallow up the person, so

Do we have any reason to privilege a person's own self-representation? Our principle might be that each of us decides how to present ourselves to the world.

that the person is identified only through the lens of her illness; in the eyes of others, she becomes her illness. So while awareness that someone has a mental illness can serve the positive function of enabling others to be more compassionate and less harshly judgmental, it can also serve the negative function of excluding the person from full-fledged membership in the moral community.

Finally, the third relevant feature of mental illness is that the affected individual often rejects the diagnosis, although others around her view her as mentally ill. This raises the question of how much weight to give to an individual's own self-assessment versus the assessment of others. For bipolar mania, for example, one frequently given indicator of the disease is precisely "denial that anything is wrong." People with paranoid schizophrenia likewise often do not view themselves as mentally ill, but view those around them as hostile and conspiratorial. A clinically depressed

person may view herself as merely responding appropriately to the dismal condition of the world. Here first-person and third-person assessments come apart completely. If I make mention of such a person's mental illness, I am attributing to her a condition that she, perhaps emphatically, denies.

I earlier considered the question of whether we are permitted to reveal information about someone that the other person prefers to keep private. There I suggested that one reason not to respect a preference for privacy is when that preference problematically contributes to the maintenance of oppressive stigmas. In the current case, the mentally ill person cannot be accused of being complicit in maintaining a climate of oppression, for he does not see himself as having the oppressively stigmatized condition in the first place. So that reason for challenging his preferred self-description does not apply. Instead the issue seems to be that he has a false or mistaken assessment of himself, while others have a true and accurate assessment. Is there any reason to protect a person in his mistaken self-identification?

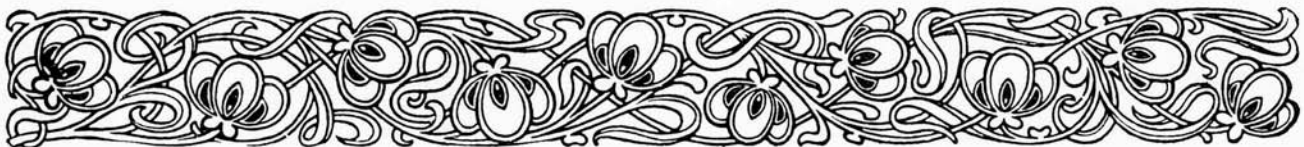
Put another way, do we have any reason to privilege a person's own self-representation? Our principle might be that each of us gets to decide how to present ourselves to the world, and others should respect that decision. There seems something right about this—consider our typical deference to persons' self-reports of their own ethnic identity—but also something that is far too extreme. To use the clichéd example of the mentally ill person who thinks he is Napoleon, certainly the rest of us do not have to treat him as if he were Napoleon. But here it also doesn't seem necessary for one of us to point out to the rest that the man is deluded: the rest of us are going to find this out for ourselves soon enough.

This leads me back to my opening contextualizing of the discussion: most of us share information about ourselves, and about our families and friends, with others all the time. I asked then if any special restrictions should be placed on the sharing of information about mental illness. At first I was drawn to the view that information about mental illness should be treated just as any other kind of information about any other kind of illness. Now that I have considered some of the special features of mental illness, I am less sure. It is vitally important to be able to share our stories with others, including stories that involve our loved ones. However, given the sensitive nature of information about mental illness, we may need to ask: why are we sharing this information? To what end? Because of the real implications for the person with mental illness, we need more weighty reasons than the mere encouragement to share our stories, or the benefits of stigma-reduction, to talk openly about the illness. Here, in closing, are some guidelines:

1. When talking to a person who is unlikely ever to meet or have any first-hand interaction with the person with mental illness, openness remains an important value. Here stigma reduction seems paramount, as there are only negligible countervailing factors. Every time someone speaks openly about his own mental illness, or the mental illness of his friends and family, the shroud of secrecy surrounding mental illness is to that small degree lifted. Some of this stigma reduction can be accomplished by discussing mental illness without giving any identifying features of the person being discussed. However, stigma reduction is greatest, I believe, when one does give mental illness a face, when it is *my* sister, or *my* husband, or *my* child, who is ill, not some nameless, faceless other.
2. When talking to others who know the ill individual, if their interactions with him are fairly few and casual, he should be allowed to present himself to them as he chooses. There is no compelling reason why it should be my project to go around challenging someone else's self-representation, to be the dispenser to the world of information about him. However, questions about his behavior, should they arise, should be answered honestly.
3. With intimates, such as close friends and immediate family, a number of factors need to be balanced: possible harm to these associates from the ill person's behavior (physical risk, financial risk, emotional pain), harm to the ill person himself from his interactions with them because of their uninformed response to him (strained and broken relationships), the value of an increase in compassion for him versus the disvalue of a decrease in respect for him.
4. The hardest case, in my view, is when one parent has to decide how much to reveal to his children about his assessment of the other parent's mental health. Here I think the most important consideration is the children's psychological well-being, that they feel as safe and secure as possible given the instabilities in their family, and also that love and respect for all parties are preserved. Age-appropriate knowledge about mental illness can be beneficial. As the children get older, and are able to handle a more nuanced presentation of the situation, it seems respectful for the parent who is discussing the other person's mental state to acknowledge the other parent's different perspective. This helps to preserve the balance between love and respect.
In the end, the most I can conclude is that there are no easy answers here. Tolstoy opened *Anna Karenina* with the famous claim that every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way. Every family and friend of someone struggling with mental illness may have to deal with how to share information about this struggle in his or her own way, as well.

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Sources: Kay Redfield Jamison, *An Unquiet Mind* (Vintage 1997); Richard Mohr, *Gay Ideas* (Beacon Press, 1992); Peter Strawson, "Freedom and Resentment," *Proceedings of the British Academy* 48 (1962).



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