

International Immersion for the Common Good: Catholic Social Teaching as a Framework for  
International Service Learning in the Business Curriculum

Abigail B. Schneider  
Daniel P. Justin  
Regis University

## Abstract

In an International Service Learning class that travels to Uganda, students encounter the global inequity that statistics alone do not capture. Yet the well-worn debate between foreign aid and free-market solutions fails to foster in students a sense of agency and hope. Students similarly struggle with the parallel dilemma of Western intervention versus leaving those in the Global South to have control over their own destinies. Underlying these debates is the assertion that the institutions ostensibly established to address issues like poverty have failed, and any progress depends on enterprising individuals working on the ground. Business schools, in particular, have valorized the social entrepreneur as the newest and most innovative solution to the problem of poverty. Yet, this focus on the individual fails to recognize the interconnectedness between the Global North and South and the inevitable role that anyone participating in modern consumer culture, like our students, already plays in that system.

Drawing on insights from sociology, political philosophy, and Catholic Social Teaching, the current paper seeks to address this gap and offer a third perspective on solutions to end poverty by making three key arguments: 1) business leaders must develop a mindful awareness of their own role in the systems that perpetuate global wealth disparities so that they can be free to align the purpose and practice of business with the common good; 2) scholars must shift the narrative of the self-interested individual to one that focuses on human beings' cooperative and virtuous nature; and 3) business education must provide opportunities for developing hope-filled solidarity with the marginalized as a way to catalyze future business leaders to develop structures of virtue and establish economic and educational institutions for the common good.

## Introduction

As the modern business environment becomes increasingly global, diverse countries, cultures, and people are becoming ever more connected and interdependent. Yet while economic globalization has led to prosperity and an increased standard of living for some, it has also served to widen the wealth gap between the rich and the poor. In response to this growing injustice, economists, business people, and academics alike continue to debate and grapple with the most effective and equitable solutions to ending global poverty. From the perspective of business education, the Association to Advance Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB) has noted that, amid a profoundly changing business environment impacted by “global economic forces...[t]he fundamental purpose of AACSB accreditation is to encourage business schools to hold themselves accountable for improving business practice.”<sup>1</sup> Yet, what does business practice look like when its end is to serve the most marginalized members of the global community? What role can the business sector play in the fight against global poverty? And what does it look like to educate future business leaders for the common good?

In an International Service Learning class that travels to Uganda during spring break, students attending an American college of business encounter the global inequity that statistics alone do not capture. Yet the visceral encounter with extreme poverty and classroom discussions often leave the students with a sense of despair and hopelessness. The well-worn debate between foreign aid and free-market solutions fails to foster in students a sense of agency and hope. Students similarly struggle with the parallel dilemma of Western intervention versus leaving those in the Global South to have control over their own destinies. After tracing the failure of

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<sup>1</sup> “AACSB Accreditation Standards,” 4, accessed May 31, 2018, <https://www.aacsb.edu/-/media/aacsb/docs/accreditation/standards/accounting-standards-2013-update.ashx?la=en>.

institutional solutions, many business and development courses valorize the social entrepreneur as the newest and most innovative solution to the problem of poverty. Yet, this focus on the individual fails to acknowledge the interconnectedness between the Global North and South and the inevitable role that anyone participating in modern consumer culture and the business environment, like our students, already plays in that system.

Drawing on insights from sociology, political philosophy, and Catholic Social Teaching, the current paper seeks to address this gap and offer a third perspective on solutions to end poverty. By challenging the dominant economic assumption that humans are rational, self-interested beings and instead shifting the conversation from problematic notions of individualism to one of human interdependence, we argue for a reorienting of business education and practice toward the common good. After a brief outline of the Ugandan immersion course and an examination of challenges that arose within its first offering, this paper will examine the flawed view of the human person operative in both business education and our wider contemporary society. Next, we will suggest a vision of human nature rooted in interdependence and relationality as not only a more promising foundation for young agents of social change, but a more adequate basis for business and economical reflection. Finally, we will suggest concrete strategies for business educators to cultivate both a deeper sense of interdependence and hope in the students we teach.

### *The Uganda Project: An Immersion Class on Solutions to Ending Global Poverty*

As the spring semester neared its end, an atmosphere of helplessness and frustration descended upon the classroom. The class on solutions to ending global poverty, entitled *Marketing for Social Change: The Uganda Project* (henceforth: *The Uganda Project*), had raised

more questions than it had answered, and it had fallen short of giving students the roadmap to eradicating poverty that they desired. The students, a motley collection of mostly business and peace and justice studies majors, had enrolled in the class for two overarching reasons, roughly broken down by major. The peace and justice studies majors, whose education up to that point had been largely based in theory, wanted to gain practical skills to combat the economic injustices that they had identified in their previous classes. Moreover, their previous classes had mostly centered on critiques of the major aid organizations (e.g., the International Monetary Fund [IMF] and the World Bank), and the students hoped that *The Uganda Project* would offer concrete solutions rather than simply hurl critiques at the dominant official development assistance institutions. From the other side of campus, the business majors felt confident in their skills but were yearning for an outlet to apply those skills in a socially responsible way. They enrolled in the class assuming it would offer a celebration of social entrepreneurship as the newest and most promising answer to eradicating extreme poverty, and by aligning themselves with this valorized profession, they could find a way to use their degree for good. But, by the end of the semester, students from both majors were disappointed.

During the first half of the semester, *The Uganda Project* offered additional support for what the previous peace and justice classes had asserted—that the global institutions ostensibly established to eradicate poverty had failed. Yet, during the second half of the semester, instead of promoting social entrepreneurship as a viable alternative to the limited aid institutions, the course challenged students to question the ability of the free market to foster a just economy that could truly serve the world's most marginalized. Perceiving that these—the aid institutions and the free-market—were the only two options for solving poverty, and that neither could effectively eradicate poverty, the students felt helpless and started to disengage with the course material.

Instead of empowering the students to imagine a more effective solution, by re-engaging with the bipolar development debate, the course had inadvertently paralyzed the students who wanted to understand how they could help create change.

### The Current International Development Debate: No Good Options

The current debate over international economic development and solutions to end global poverty is often caricatured as having two main camps: one spearheaded by Jeffrey Sachs, American economist, director of the Earth Institute at Columbia University, and adviser to the United Nations; and the other led by William Easterly, American economist and co-director of the New York University Development Research Institute. According to Sachs, poor countries are poor because of factors such as climate, disease, and geography (e.g., being landlocked), and they cannot be productive without an initial large investment to help them overcome these endemic issues, or “poverty traps.”<sup>2</sup> As a result, foreign aid is critical because it can provide the initial investment necessary to help poor countries invest in the areas that can help them become productive. Typically, assistance takes the form of bilateral aid (given from one country to another) or multilateral aid (given from international organizations such as the United Nations, World Bank, and International Monetary Fund [IMF], which receive money from multiple countries).

Conversely, Easterly, as well as others such as Zambian economist Dambisa Moyo who formerly worked at the World Bank and Goldman Sachs, has argued that aid causes more harm

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<sup>2</sup> Jeffrey Sachs, *The End of Poverty: Economic Possibilities for Our Time*, Reprint edition (New York, NY: Penguin Books, 2006).

than good.<sup>3</sup> Rather than support “planners” who develop solutions at a distance within the framework of institutions, Easterly’s perspective argues in favor of “seekers” who develop solutions on the ground. Thus, the perspective held by Easterly and Moyo challenges Sachs’ focus on aid in two key ways: 1) it critiques the institution of aid itself, arguing that aid corrupts and that handouts undermine local institutions and markets, and 2) it promotes a localized, individual-oriented versus a foreign interventionist solution, maintaining that when markets are free and incentives are right, people can solve their own problems, quelling the need for Western assistance. In other words, there exists a parallel debate between aid versus free-market solutions and Western intervention versus leaving those in the Global South to have control (or freedom) over their own destinies.

As with many of our most entrenched social debates, each side has proven far more capable of critiquing the other than offering a comprehensive solution. According to Nobel Laureate, former World Bank chief economist, and Professor at Columbia University, Joseph Stiglitz, markets by themselves cannot solve all social problems.<sup>4</sup> While charity and aid may breed corruption and dependence, the free market also falls short of being the panacea it promises to be. Due to the uneven playing field on which it operates, the global market merely serves to force a wedge ever deeper into the gap between the rich and the poor. The one-sided trade barriers, quotas, and structural adjustment programs enacted by the IMF, Worldbank, and WTO have largely served the interests of those in the Global North and reinforced their power by making the loan-receiving nations in the Global South beholden to the conditions imposed by the global institutions. In what has become a form of neocolonialism, global trade, despite having

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<sup>3</sup> William Easterly and William Russell Easterly, *The White Man’s Burden: Why the West’s Efforts to Aid the Rest Have Done so Much Ill and so Little Good* (Penguin, 2006); Dambisa Moyo, *Dead Aid: Why Aid Is Not Working and How There Is a Better Way for Africa* (New York: Macmillan, 2009).

<sup>4</sup> Joseph E. Stiglitz, *Globalization and Its Discontents* (New York: Norton, 2002).

helped many economies to grow very quickly, has also expanded the wealth gap between the rich and the poor, leaving many in the developing world behind. Even many smaller NGOs, despite good intentions, have ended up causing more harm than good,<sup>5</sup> and corporate involvement in these countries was seldom more than wealth extraction and local government corruption approached kleptocracy.<sup>6</sup> As a result, an effective solution to global poverty must not only free developing nations from the political entanglement of aid agencies but also, it must address the systems that reproduce and exacerbate economic injustice on a global scale.

### Our Latest Hope: The Lone Social Entrepreneur

In response to the inability of large aid organizations to eradicate poverty, solutions have increasingly taken bottom-up, localized, individualized approaches. A focus on individual market actors is especially apparent in the business sector's most recent answer to poverty—social entrepreneurship. Increasingly, taught at collegiate schools of business, social entrepreneurship has taken center stage as the newest and most innovative solution to global poverty.

If one searches for the term “social entrepreneur” on Google, the search engine returns over 10.7 million pages, and the definition is often the subject of much debate. For the purposes of the present paper, “social entrepreneur” will be defined as, “people with new ideas to address major problems who are relentless in the pursuit of their visions, people who simply will not take ‘no’ for an answer, who will not give up until they have spread their ideas as far as they possibly

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<sup>5</sup> Steve Corbett and Brian Fikkert, *When Helping Hurts: How to Alleviate Poverty without Hurting the Poor...and Yourself* (Moody Publishers, 2014).

<sup>6</sup> John Perkins, *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man: The Shocking Story of How America Really Took Over the World* (Random House, 2011).



can.”<sup>7</sup>. Though social entrepreneurs have existed throughout history, the term was formalized by Bill Drayton, former assistant administrator of the United States Environmental Protection Agency, in 1978 when he founded the Ashoka organization. While social enterprises are often thought to be hybrids of for-profit and nonprofit organizations or to be for-profit businesses with social missions, the above definition allows for flexibility in categorization, as it emphasizes an approach versus dictates an organizational structure. Specifically, Drayton’s approach was to “search the world for individuals with fresh ideas for social change who combined entrepreneurial ability and strong ethical fiber.”<sup>8</sup> Drayton “was looking for people with compelling visions who possessed the creativity, savvy, and determination to realize their ideas on a large scale: people who would, in his words, leave their ‘scratch on history.’”<sup>9</sup> Drayton’s organization, Ashoka, would then provide these social entrepreneurs with funding, mentorship, and a network to help them grow. By 2018, Ashoka had supported over 3500 social entrepreneurs in 93 countries.

As with entrepreneurship more broadly, the ideology undergirding social entrepreneurship is intimately linked with the “American form of capitalism”. Based on the “American mythos: social mobility achieved through individual ingenuity and hard work”, social entrepreneurship glorifies “the power of the entrepreneur as the primary proponent of change.”<sup>10</sup> As a result, the movement gained increasing traction in the United States at a time when there was particular reverence for “individual adroitness and a general disaffection for large

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<sup>7</sup> David Bornstein, *How to Change the World: Social Entrepreneurs and the Power of New Ideas* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 1–2.

<sup>8</sup> Bornstein, 11.

<sup>9</sup> Bornstein, 11.

<sup>10</sup> Georgia Levenson Keohane, *Social Entrepreneurship for the 21st Century: Innovation Across the Nonprofit, Private, and Public Sectors* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2013), 3.

organization, government or corporate.”<sup>11</sup> Social entrepreneurs, like others in the private sector, were seeking nongovernmental solutions and believed that an improvement in social welfare depended on market-based solutions. Even those who recognize the role of the government see that role as chiefly serving to promote entrepreneurial activity and market efficiency.

Though the goal of social entrepreneurs is to “advanc[e] systemic solutions to major social problems”<sup>12</sup> and to change systems, most work within a capitalist framework, and admittedly few social entrepreneurs have actually achieved scale, even on a national level. While this absence of scale is due in part to a lack of structural support, it likely also stems, at least to some degree, from the field’s focus on individuals. In *How to Change the World: Social Entrepreneurs and the Power of New Ideas*, the proverbial “bible” for social entrepreneurs, David Bornstein focuses on the qualities that successful entrepreneurs possess, noting that “[i]n the business sector, individuals have long been recognized as engines of change.”<sup>13</sup> Likewise, other authors in the field have compiled lists of the characteristics that make social entrepreneurs successful. While theories of social change emanating from the field of sociology have focused on how ideas, institutions, and customs affect individuals, Bornstein argues for the need to study “how people move ideas.”<sup>14</sup> To this end, Bornstein even structures his book to focus on stories about individual social entrepreneurs from around the globe. According to Bornstein,

[t]hey are relentless and their efforts, in many cases, are truly heroic. But we also need a lens to recognize the heroic efforts that take place in front of our noses. Social entrepreneurship is not about a few extraordinary people saving the day for everyone else. At its deepest level, it is about revealing possibilities that are currently unseen and releasing the capacity within each person to reshape a part of the world.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Keohane, 3.

<sup>12</sup> Bornstein, *How to Change the World: Social Entrepreneurs and the Power of New Ideas*, ix.

<sup>13</sup> Bornstein, 93.

<sup>14</sup> Bornstein, 93.

<sup>15</sup> Bornstein, xvi.

Yet, whether those studying social entrepreneurship focus on ‘a few extraordinary people’ or the heroic capacity within many people, the aim, ultimately, is to identify the innate ability of individuals who are working ‘quietly’ to advance change. According to Bornstein, “[m]any social entrepreneurs spend decades steadily advancing their ideas, influencing people in small groups or one on one, and it is often exceedingly difficult to understand or measure their impact.”<sup>16</sup> Like social entrepreneurship, other business-oriented approaches have taken a more localized approach. For example, MIT economists Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo, who critique both Sachs and Easterly for “fixat[ing] on the ‘big questions’” take a micro-approach, using randomized controlled trials that focus on the behaviors and choices of individual people living in poverty.<sup>17</sup> Likewise, Kotler and Lee advocate for using a social marketing methodology to “understand, influence, and assist the poor in participating in developing their own solutions.”<sup>18</sup> While the direct effects of such approaches are more measurable than are the results of macro-approaches, focusing on the behavior of those living in poverty and absolving the Global North of its responsibility to participate more fully in developing solutions, fails to acknowledge the hundreds of years of historical and sociological context for the injustices present today. As with social entrepreneurship, the focus on individuals also fails to acknowledge the institutional antecedents of maldevelopment, which were developed to accelerate the flow of capital as the business sector expanded. By taking a polarized, reactionary position and focusing on individual solutions, those promoting free-market solutions exacerbate rather than ameliorate the causes of the institutional failures by promoting a sector responsible for many of the wealth disparities in the first place. After all, nearly one quarter of all the world’s

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<sup>16</sup> Bornstein, 242.

<sup>17</sup> Abhijit V. Banerjee and Esther Duflo, *Poor Economics: A Radical Rethinking of the Way to Fight Global Poverty*, vol. 2011, Public Affairs, n.d., 3.

<sup>18</sup> Phillip T. Kotler and Nancy R. Lee, *Up and Out of Poverty: The Social Marketing Solution* (Pearson Prentice Hall, 2009), xxiv.

wealth is controlled by only 300 multinational corporations. Moreover, they set themselves up for a major challenge by advocating individual solutions to remedy institutional problems. That is, institutions like the IMF and World Bank are in need of reform, and foreign aid may not be the answer, but systemic social and economic issues require solutions that can be scaled.

### Challenging the Narrative of the Heroic Individual

Our most pressing social problems are seldom purely technical in nature. Indeed, in many cases we already possess the scientific resources to diagnose and correct systemic threats. What we often lack is the will and imagination necessary. Our problems are thus often moral or even spiritual in nature, and no technical solution will succeed without addressing these fundamentally human variables.

The two realms, the technical and the moral/spiritual, are not nearly as distinct as we might imagine, however. Indeed, what we tend to separate in theory are often deeply intertwined in practice. Our moral and religious worldview undoubtedly shapes our approach to labor and economics (a link Max Weber famously made clear in his text *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*).<sup>19</sup> Our images of the transcendent, the good life, and human freedom will determine what we believe is possible and desirable in the business realm. An outlook that is overly fatalistic will likewise determine that there is little point in attempting to change what is ultimately a product of fate, genes, or the will of God.

Of course, the colonization can also occur in the opposite direction. It is more often the case today that the economic principles of contemporary capitalism form the basic contours of our moral imagination. That is, they give shape to our fundamental understandings of what *is*

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<sup>19</sup> Max Weber and Anthony Giddens, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Talcott Parsons, 1 edition (London ; New York: Routledge, 2001).

and what *ought* to be. What were developed as narrowly defined and technical notions of the human person and social project have become the most foundational insights about our human nature – to the point that imagining a contrasting view is nearly impossible.

The frustration and despair witnessed in the students returning from Uganda were rooted in an inability to imagine a meaningful role in overcoming the pervasive and systematic obstacles blocking the liberation and flourishing of those whom they encountered, as well as their own. The challenges themselves were readily apparent. The students had developed the capacity to trace systematic failures from global institutions to individual victims. Yet they could not see themselves filling a role that could be at the same time effective and socially beneficial. While the technical challenges themselves are undoubtedly daunting, this was more fundamentally a matter of moral imagination.

In particular, society had taught them from early childhood to view themselves as mainstream economists view all human persons: as self-interested individuals. Whatever their familiarity with classical economic theory, broader culture socialized them into having little doubt over how to view themselves and the good life. Their experience in Uganda made abundantly clear the shortcoming of the first half of the equation. They were not purely self-interested and in fact sought to take on the struggles and burdens of the Other as their own. Initial experiences of encounter and solidarity through experiences such as this can bring students to recognize that their flourishing alone is never a sufficient lifegoal and perhaps it is only possible in any real way when it is shared with others. They had experienced in a small way the Aboriginal aphorism made famous by Lilla Watson: “If you have come here to help me, you are wasting your time. But if you have come because your liberation is bound up with mine, then let us work together.”

Yet the individualistic dimension of our human anthropology is much more difficult to shed. After students determine that the good life for themselves requires that they must work for the empowerment of others, they must further determine how to go about pursuing this goal. This is where many students find themselves at a loss. The challenges are pervasive and the responses limited. The class itself, by engaging with the aid versus free-market dichotomy, helps to reinforce this paradigm. Yet, students must be given guidance to reimagine a more just economic system based on their new conception of human interconnectedness.

#### Toward a Vision of Human Interrelatedness

Any attempt to empower students to meaningfully engage global social challenges must engage these fundamental assumptions about the human person. Fortunately, there has already been much good work engaging these questions – though much of it falls outside of the purview of business studies.

Concerns about individualism can be traced to the very first mention of the term in De Tocqueville's *Democracy in America*.<sup>20</sup> Reflecting on his travels through the United States in the mid-1800's, De Tocqueville sought to understand why American experiments in democracy flourished while France's first attempt ended in disaster. The answer, De Tocqueville believed, lied in the numerous private associations that Americans formed that deepened their capacity as citizens and strengthened their social networks. Nevertheless, he cautioned, two challenges threatened the entire enterprise. The first, slavery, would lead to a bloody civil war within decades. The second he called individualism. De Tocqueville feared that once Americans attained a basic level of self-sufficiency they would no longer feel it necessary to engage in the

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<sup>20</sup> Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America (Wordsworth Classics of World Literature)*, ed. Francis Bowen, trans. Henry Reeve (Hertfordshire: Wordsworth Editions Limited, 1998).

common projects of democracy. With basic needs attained, they could withdraw to like-minded enclaves and leave broader society to fend for itself. Such neglect could give rise to what De Tocqueville termed a soft-despotism – a political condition in which leaders have no need to coerce the subjugation of the citizenry – they have already happily handed over the concern and care of our shared civic life. “Such a power,” Tocqueville argues, “does not destroy, but it prevents existence; it does not tyrannise [*sic*], but it compresses, enervates, extinguishes, and stupefies a people, till each nation is reduced to nothing better than a flock of timid and industrious animals, of which the government is the shepherd.”<sup>21</sup>

The conversation has continued into modern times with many sociologists and philosophers perceiving Tocqueville’s cautions as coming to fruition. Robert Putnam, for example, traces the decline of what he terms ‘social capital’ in the United States over the past half century.<sup>22</sup> By this, he means the decline in connectivity across social differences and our general trust in our wider community. This decline is far from innocuous. Putnam traces significant consequences for our health, economy, and capacity for civic progress. Other sociologists have offered a more interpretive and qualitative analysis of the shifts in civic trust and participation that Putnam identifies. Most famously, Robert Bellah and colleagues in *Habits of the Heart* offer a rich portrait of American individualism, which traces distinct moral traditions embedded within the historical narrative of the United States.<sup>23</sup> In particular, self-expressive and utilitarian themes have encouraged us to withdraw into “lifestyle enclaves” in which we need not engage larger social challenges or others with whom we deeply disagree.

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<sup>21</sup> Tocqueville, 359.

<sup>22</sup> Robert D. Putnam, *Bowling Alone: The Collapse and Revival of American Community*, 1st ed. (Touchstone Books by Simon & Schuster, 2001).

<sup>23</sup> Robert N. Bellah et al., *Habits of the Heart: Individualism and Commitment in American Life*, 3rd ed. (University of California Press, 2007).

A particularly comprehensive and insightful contribution is offered by Zygmunt Bauman, who characterizes our historical moment as “liquid modernity.”<sup>24</sup> This is in contrast to the ‘solid’ modernity of preceding centuries, which emphasized the construction of totalizing systems and structures. While the modernizing impulses of the past five centuries have continued (hence his avoidance of labeling it a post-modern age), our basic views of our individual and social projects have shifted greatly. Whereas solid modernity emphasized the dominance of space and valued the permanence of ideas and structures, liquid modernity resists any semblance of finality and stability. Solid modernity imagined steady historical progress toward an unchanging utopia. Liquid modernity anticipates and embraces unending change and perpetual incompleteness. There is perhaps no clearer example of this distinction in the field of business than the contrast between last century’s union-backed factory work, which promised retirement with full pension, and the gig economy of today.

What is true of our societal projects is likewise true in our attempt to build a personal identity: “To put it in a nutshell, ‘individualization’ consists of transforming human ‘identity’ from a ‘given’ into a ‘task’ and charging the actors with the responsibility for performing that task and for the consequences (also the side-effects) of their performance.”<sup>25</sup> Unlike past generations, we no longer have a clearly defined role within a broader system, nor a unifying end or goal that provides meaning to our daily lived realities. Rather, each one of us is tasked with assembling a meaningful identity that fully expresses our unique individuality. In this work, to draw on established traditions, archetypes, or authorities is a mark of inauthenticity. Rather, we must always seek the new and novel, knowing that the work is always tentative and never complete.

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<sup>24</sup> Zygmunt Bauman, *Liquid Modernity*, 1 edition (Cambridge, UK : Malden, MA: Polity, 2000).

<sup>25</sup> Bauman, 31–32.



At a glance, liquid modernity would seem to be a moment of maximized freedom: “the present-day situation emerged out of the radical melting of the fetters and manacles rightly or wrongly suspected of limiting the individual freedom to choose and to act.”<sup>26</sup> Unencumbered by totalizing institutions and metanarratives, the individual is free to determine their own identity and life project. Yet the emancipation we have accomplished often feels more like impotence. At its most basic, freedom implies the ability to do what one desires. While we no longer face the external coercion of oppressive authorities and burdensome regulations on behavior, we have also lost social bonds that make it possible to work collectively toward a common end. The challenges we face today are large and complex. Individual effort alone – no matter how heroic – cannot mount a sustained response.

Bauman’s theories help to shed light on the impasses encountered in the typical debates outlined above and also help to explain the frustration and despair felt by students in *The Uganda Project*. The first half of the class only affirmed what they already knew to be true: large institutional responses were at best ineffectual and quite frequently destructive. Moreover, linking our identity to such broken institutions would only negate our striving for authenticity and self-expression. To the extent that group identities were at play at all, students could only imagine themselves as potential colonizers repeating the dynamics of previous generations. The relationship could only move from nonexistent to problematic. Yet, the students also could not imagine anything that they might accomplish as individuals having any meaningful impact on global realities. The students were young, well-educated, and ambitious. Yet, they could not imagine a way of translating their ambitions into reality.

As a social and political problem, the plight of these students is a familiar reality to many social theorists. Yet, what makes Bauman’s contribution unique is not his analysis of our dire

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<sup>26</sup> Bauman, 5.

condition, but his call for a radical way forward. In times of solid modernity, it was appropriate and indeed necessary for social critics to deconstruct the totalizing systems and metanarratives modernity was creating. It is the very nature of any hegemonic discourse to silence and marginalize those that do not fit neatly into the overarching scheme. In liquid modernity, it is undoubtedly important that this work continue. The voices and experiences of those that fall outside of the mainstream discourse are still often ignored, if not outright silenced. Yet the more challenging task, and perhaps the more radical, is to make it possible to collectively build again. Liquid modernity has so thoroughly exposed and rejected the corruption and hypocrisy of institutions that they are no longer viewed as viable means toward social transformation. The public spaces so central to Tocqueville's understanding of what made American democracy flourish have been vacated. As Bauman observes,

The table, so to speak, has been turned: the task of critical theory has been reversed. That task used to be the defense of private autonomy from the advancing troops of the 'public sphere', smarting under the oppressive rule of the omnipotent impersonal state and its many bureaucratic tentacles or their smaller-scale replicas. The task is now to defend the vanishing public realm, or rather to refurnish and repopulate the public space fast emptying owing to the desertion on both sides: the exit of the 'interested citizen', and the escape of real power into the territory which, for all that the extant democratic institutions are able to accomplish, can only be described as an 'outer space'.<sup>27</sup>

This also is the task of business educators. We must once again make it possible build spaces and institutions at the service of the common good. Yet again, the challenge is not technical or programmatic, rather, it requires a full reimagining of the self and society. Fortunately, there are good resources available for this work.

### Educating for Interdependence

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<sup>27</sup> Bauman, 39.

It is here that Catholic social teaching offers an important contribution to the conversation. Usually traced back to Pope Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum* in 1891, Catholic social teaching refers to the large body of theological and pastoral reflection on the world's economic and social realities. While firmly rooted in the Roman Catholic Church's theological tradition, it also draws from the human experience and expertise (Pope Francis's *Laudato Si*, for example, engages the best available climate science). While often represented as a set of eight to twelve general principles, it is perhaps better to speak of a unified Catholic social vision. At the center of this vision is the dignity of the human person. Yet this foundation is itself deeply theological. Human dignity, from the Judeo-Christian perspective, is rooted in our being made in the image and likeness of God who, according to the Catholic tradition, is a trinity of persons in relationship. Thus, at the most fundamental level, we are built for relationships:

The revelation in Christ of the mystery of God as Trinitarian love is at the same time the revelation of the vocation of the human person to love. This revelation sheds light on every aspect of the personal dignity and freedom of men and women, and on the depths of their social nature. "Being a person in the image and likeness of God ... involves existing in a relationship, in relation to the other 'I', because God himself, one and triune, is the communion of the Father, of the Son and of the Holy Spirit."<sup>28</sup>

This vision profoundly shapes the Catholic Church's approach to social issues. Womanist theologian M. Shawn Copeland elaborates on this insight while also affirming room for difference and diversity: "Human beings are relational, and being human is to be in relation.

*Interrelatedness intimates multiplicity, plurality, differentiation, yet finitude and limitation as*

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<sup>28</sup> Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, "Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church," 2004, para. 34, [http://www.vatican.va/roman\\_curia/pontifical\\_councils/justpeace/documents/rc\\_pc\\_justpeace\\_doc\\_20060526\\_compendio-dott-soc\\_en.html](http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060526_compendio-dott-soc_en.html).

*well*. Further, it suggests need, cooperation, collaboration, even communion.”<sup>29</sup> (God Among the Ruins, 24).

From the Catholic perspective, the common good is not simply the aggregate of all our individual goods. In its deepest meaning, it refers to those goods that can only be experienced together. Chief among these good is our shared life and conversation. If relationality is central to our humanity, our dignity is most fully expressed through participation in a community. Thus, from the perspective of Catholic social teaching, poverty is not simply a matter of material deprivation, it is an experience of exclusion from that which makes us most human: our shared conversation about life together. Even the language of human rights finds its grounding in relationality from the Catholic perspective. Rather than private possessions belonging to the individual, they are viewed as the minimum conditions for life in community.<sup>30</sup>

The emphasis on human relationality in turn prompts the Catholic church to examine structures and institutions as inescapably moral projects. From this perspective, the state, the market, and globalization are human constructions and subject to moral evaluation. While they do exist independent of us and in many ways form our individual identities, we nevertheless play a role in their generation and maintenance.<sup>31</sup> Through the tradition, this perspective has prompted a reflection on social and structural sin. Yet more recent contributions have likewise noted the potential for reflecting on the positive dimensions institutions. Daniel Daly, for

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<sup>29</sup> M. Shawn Copeland, “God Among the Ruins: Companion and Co-Sufferer,” in *Violence, Transformation, and the Sacred: “They Shall Be Called Children of God.”*, ed. Margaret R. Pfeil and Tobias L. Winwright (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 2012), 24, emphasis added.

<sup>30</sup> David Hollenbach, “A Communitarian Reconstruction of Human Rights: A Contribution from Catholic Tradition,” in *Catholicism and Liberalism: Contributions to American Public Policy*, ed. R. Bruce Douglass and David Hollenbach (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 127–50.

<sup>31</sup> Kenneth Himes, “Social Sin and the Role of the Individual,” *Annual of the Society of Christian Ethics*, 1986, 183–218.

example has called our attention to structures of virtue,<sup>32</sup> and Kevin Ahern has developed a theology for structures of grace.<sup>33</sup>

The Catholic social framework provides a useful lens for understanding and engaging experiences like *The Uganda Project*. First, it emphasizes the ways in which we are already and always in relationship. While we are not individually responsible for the original creation of unjust social structures, we unavoidably participate in their perpetuation. Our choice is never whether we should be in relation with the victims of globalization, but only what sort of relationship we ought to have with them. Our response need not be as individuals. We have the potential to build structures and institutions that honor our relationality and strive for the common good. Indeed, to do so is the most authentically human task we could undertake.

There is nothing uniquely Catholic about the view of the human person as fundamentally interdependent. Indeed, much of the Catholic social tradition draws from the classic Greek notion of the human person as *zoon politikon* – a political animal. In contemporary discourse, one can find a surprising ally in the ‘New Atheist’ Richard Dawkins. In line with the evolutionary biological view that humans have “selfish” genes, competing for survival and the ability to propagate themselves,<sup>34</sup> economists developed a market system based on the assumptions that humans are naturally self-interested, and by pursuing this inherent drive, humans can realize the most efficient market outcomes.<sup>35</sup> This perspective is flawed, however, for a number of reasons. And, as we shall discuss, the same biological reasoning upon which the

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<sup>32</sup> Daniel J. Daly, “Structures of Virtue and Vice,” *New Blackfriars* 92, no. 1039 (2011): 341–357.

<sup>33</sup> Kevin Ahern, *Structures of Grace: Catholic Organizations Serving the Global Common Good* (Maryknoll, New York: Orbis Books, 2015).

<sup>34</sup> Richard Dawkins, *The Selfish Gene* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1976).

<sup>35</sup> Adam Smith, *The Wealth of Nations*, Book 1 (London: Methuen & Co, 1776); Barry Schwartz, *The Battle for Human Nature: Science, Morality and Modern Life* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1987).

field of economics has justified the defense of innate human self-interest can alternatively be used to support the notion that humans are naturally altruistic and cooperative.

First, to assume that human beings themselves are selfish is a misinterpretation of Dawkins' work. Dawkins intentionally used the word "gene" in his book's title, *The Selfish Gene*, in order to express that natural selection occurs at the level of the gene rather than at the level of the organism or of the group. In other words, it is not that human beings are selfish but rather that our genes behave as if they were. In fact, the effects of genetic self-replication and survival can actually result in the organism's display of altruistic behavior, or behavior that does not benefit the organism but rather the gene. For example, in what is known as kin selection, organisms are more likely to behave altruistically toward close genetic relatives.<sup>36</sup> That is, organisms might engage in behavior that sacrifices the organism for the survival of the genes. Similarly, in what is termed reciprocal altruism, an organism is more likely to behave altruistically toward another who is likely, in turn, to behave altruistically toward the organism or the organism's close kin.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, Dawkins intended to examine not only genetic and organismal selfishness but also altruistic human behavior, even if of a limited kind.

Second, the economic perspective based on the self-interested individual fails to acknowledge the growing body of research supporting this alternative perspective that humans also possess a highly cooperative and altruistic nature. While the meaning of altruism, beyond its limited biological definition, is a topic of much debate, in the present context, the term altruism will be defined as, "[v]aluing the other and being concerned about his [or her] situation."<sup>38</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> William D. Hamilton, "The Genetical Evolution of Social Behavior, II," *Journal of Theoretical Biology* 7, no. 1 (1964): 17–52.

<sup>37</sup> Robert L. Trivers, "The Evolution of Reciprocal Altruism," *The Quarterly Review of Biology* 46, no. 1 (1971): 35–57.

<sup>38</sup> Matthieu Ricard, *Altruism: The Power of Compassion to Change Yourself and the World* (S.I.: Atlantic Books, 2018): 19.

Altruism does not necessarily involve sacrifice—it can even lead to benefits to the self—but the ultimate motivation must be with regard to the other’s welfare. Again, despite misinterpretations of biology by certain social agendas (In *The Descent of Man*, Darwin mentioned “survival” of the fittest” only twice but wrote about “love” 95 times),<sup>39</sup> evidence from biology and primatology suggest that there is an evolutionary basis for human altruism and cooperation. Chimpanzees, for example, who do not know how to swim and are afraid of water, have run across electric wires to rescue other chimpanzees they did not even know struggling in a moat.<sup>40</sup> Elephants have also been found to enlist friends to help pull heavy boxes.<sup>41</sup> And even interspecies altruism has been observed. Humpback whales, for example, will interfere with attacking killer whales to help other species such as gray whales and even seals.<sup>42</sup> Some in the business world have suggested that if entrepreneurs adopt a mindset more in line with compassionate aquatic creatures, rather than simply assume that competition drives market success, their businesses can thrive.

In an article titled, “Forget Shark Tank; Be a Dolphin Entrepreneur Instead,” entrepreneur Christopher Sherrod argues that competition is not inherently linked to business performance, and for those overly competitive entrepreneurs who alienate potential allies, it could even hurt.<sup>43</sup> Especially in a highly networked economy, finding supportive peers can significantly enhance business success. Indeed, despite what economic theory would suggest, cooperation may be more prevalent than we think. For example, when political scientist Robert Axelrod organized a

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<sup>39</sup> Charles Darwin, *The Descent of Man and Selection in Relation to Sex*, vol. 1 (Murray, 1888).

<sup>40</sup> Ricard, *Altruism*.

<sup>41</sup> Frans BM De Waal, *The Bonobo and the Atheist: In Search of Humanism Among the Primates* (WW Norton & Company, 2013).

<sup>42</sup> Elin Kelsey, “What Humpback Whales Can Teach Us About Compassion,” *Hakai Magazine*, August 18, 2017, <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/science-nature/what-humpback-whales-teach-us-compassion-180964545/>.

<sup>43</sup> Christopher Sherrod, “Forget Shark Tank; Be A Dolphin Entrepreneur Instead,” *Conscious Company*, August 18, 2017, <https://consciouscompanymedia.com/personal-development/professional-relationships/forget-shark-tank-dolphin-entrepreneur-instead/>.

prisoner's dilemma tournament, allowing people to develop strategies for the game and then pitting those strategies against each other using a computer simulator, the cooperative strategy outcompeted the competitive ones.<sup>44</sup> As this example suggests, the assumptions underlying economics should be revisited. Indeed, according to activist Parker Palmer and physicist Arthur Zajonc,

[e]conomics has long objectified the human being, reduced to an idealized homo economicus, a hypothetical rational actor who maximizes his or her utility function...our relationships to fellow members of our community are reduced to the limited concept of the market...As in physics, the simplifying assumptions of classical economics were made because economic theory could not handle the complexities of the real world. [As a result,] the limitations of its methods are projected onto reality, truncating our image of self and community in ways that ultimately are not only wrong but pernicious...Objectification and impersonal economic transactions come to not only dominate our models but also infect our views of each other and the natural world...emotions, altruism, fairness, community, and so on have no real place in the economic calculations.<sup>45</sup>

Yet, as demonstrated above, humans are highly cooperative, altruistic beings who possess a likely innate sense of fairness and morality.<sup>46</sup> Thus, if scholars from multiple disciplines could continue to shift the narrative of human nature from one of the self-interested individual to one that focuses on human beings' cooperative and virtuous nature, it might be possible to reimagine a more equitable economic system that draws on this perspective of human nature.

#### Business Education for Interconnectedness

Not only is the view of the self-interested individual incomplete from a biological, psychological, and philosophical perspective of human nature but also, it fails to acknowledge the interconnectedness of all people around the world. We are not isolated economic agents but

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<sup>44</sup> Robert Axelrod, *The Evolution of Cooperation* (Arizona: Basic Books, 1984).

<sup>45</sup> Parker J. Palmer, Arthur Zajonc, and Megan Scribner, *The Heart of Higher Education: A Call to Renewal* (John Wiley & Sons, 2010), 82.

<sup>46</sup> Jonathan Haidt, *The Righteous Mind: Why Good People Are Divided by Politics and Religion* (Vintage, 2012).



rather highly interconnected nodes in a global social and economic network. To the extent that poverty is, at least in part, a result of the inequitable trade policies and barriers that characterize the global economy, we cannot expect to solve poverty until we remedy the structures that maintain global wealth disparities. In the words of Nobel Laureate and economist Muhammad Yunus,

Global trade is like a hundred-lane highway criss-crossing the world. If it is a free-for-all highway, with no stoplights, speed limits, size restrictions, or even lane markers, its surface will be taken over by the giant trucks from the world's most powerful economies. Small vehicles—a farmer's pickup truck or Bangladesh's bullock carts and human-powered rickshaws—will be forced off the highway.<sup>47</sup>

Thus, it is critical for business leaders to develop a mindful awareness of their own role in the systems that perpetuate global poverty so that they can be free to align the purpose and practice of business with the common good. As the famous commencement speech by David Foster Wallace suggests, we must be “conscious and aware enough to choose what [we] pay attention to and to choose how [we] construct meaning from experience.”<sup>48</sup>

### Being Mindful of One's Position in an Interconnected World

What does it mean to be conscious and aware enough to choose? What does it require to be “free to align the purpose and practice of business with the common good”? As biological beings, much of our behavior, our judgments and decisions, are driven by biological motives that operate at a subconscious level.<sup>49</sup> As such, we are mindlessly driven to achieve goals that would

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<sup>47</sup> Muhammad Yunus, *Creating a World Without Poverty: Social Business and the Future of Capitalism*, Public Affairs, 2007, 5.

<sup>48</sup> David Foster Wallace, *This Is Water: Some Thoughts, Delivered on a Significant Occasion, about Living a Compassionate Life* (Little, Brown, 2009).

<sup>49</sup> John Tooby and Leda Cosmides, “Conceptual Foundations of Evolutionary Psychology,” in *The Handbook of Evolutionary Psychology* (John Wiley & Sons, 2005); Douglas T. Kenrick and Vladas Griskevicius, *The Rational Animal: How Evolution Made Us Smarter than We Think* (Arizona: Basic Books, 2013); Gad Saad and Tripat Gill, “Applications of Evolutionary Psychology in Marketing,” *Psychology and Marketing* 17, no. 12 (2000): 1005–34.

ultimately promote our survival or at least the survival of our genes. If we can slow down, however, and operate from a more conscious and deliberate process of thinking, if we could be more mindful of our actions before we automatically react to a stimulus, we could reclaim more freedom over how we choose to act.<sup>50</sup> Such is one of the goals of mindfulness meditation. It allows one to be more aware of how one's own mind works and to, ultimately, have more control over one's thoughts and actions.<sup>51</sup>

Meditation has also been found to help cultivate social skills such as empathy, compassion, and perspective taking, which are critical for cooperation, especially in our increasingly interconnected world.<sup>52</sup> Emerging research in neuroscience has found that by strengthening the connection between the Dorsomedial Prefrontal Cortex (dmPFC), the part of the brain that processes information related to people who are perceived to be dissimilar from the observer, and the insula, the “bodily sensation center”, meditation can help people feel more empathy toward others who are different from them.<sup>53</sup> According to Thich Nhat Hanh, Buddhist monk, scholar, and human rights activist, “[t]o understand the suffering and the fear of a citizen of another country, we have to become one with him.”<sup>54</sup> As Thich Nhat Hanh suggests, in order to bring peace, we must be in solidarity with the other. We must experience their suffering and offer compassion. We must realize that we are intimately interconnected with them, and we must bring peace by reexamining our own actions. As Thich Nhat Hanh points out, “[i]f we are aware of our lifestyle, our way of consuming, of looking at things, we will know how to make peace

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<sup>50</sup> Daniel Kahneman, *Thinking, Fast and Slow* (New York: Macmillan, 2011).

<sup>51</sup> Robert Wright, *Why Buddhism Is True: The Science and Philosophy of Meditation and Enlightenment* (Simon & Schuster, 2017).

<sup>52</sup> Britta K. Hölzel and Mark Vangel Carmody, “Mindfulness Practice Leads to Increases in Regional Brain Gray Matter Density,” *Psychiatry Research: Neuroimaging* 191, no. 1 (2011): 36–43; Sofie L. Valk et al., “Structural Plasticity of the Social Brain: Differential Change after Socio-Affective and Cognitive Mental Training,” *Science Advances* 3, no. 10 (2017).

<sup>53</sup> Rebecca Gladding, “This Is Your Brain on Meditation,” *Psychology Today*, May 22, 2013, <https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/use-your-mind-change-your-brain/201305/is-your-brain-meditation>.

<sup>54</sup> Thich Nhat Hanh, *Being Peace*, 2008, 73.

right in the moment we are alive, the present moment. . . . If we are very aware, we can do something to change the course of things.”<sup>55</sup> And, this is true not only of our lives as consumers but also as citizens. He goes on to say, “[t]he foreign policy of a government is largely dictated by its people and their way of life. We have a large responsibility as citizens. We think that the government is free to make policy, but that freedom depends on our daily life. If we make it possible for them to change policies, they will do it.”<sup>56</sup> The economy is a complex system and to only focus on one individual element of that system—one country’s policies, or one person’s consumption behavior—is to fail to see reality. As evidenced by entanglement and emergence in quantum physics, we must attend to the whole rather than to its discrete parts.<sup>57</sup> By acknowledging the interconnectedness of humankind and the impact that our decisions have on those living around the world, people will be more likely to develop a sense of solidarity with others. From the perspective of achieving the common good and alleviating poverty, it is especially important for people to develop solidarity with those who are living in a context different from their own but who are intimately connected through the global economic system. Thus, it is critical for business education to provide opportunities for developing hope-filled solidarity with the marginalized as a way to catalyze future business leaders to develop structures of virtue and establish economic and educational institutions for the common good. The following section will discuss the predominant method, an immersion experience, used in *Marketing for Social Change: The Uganda Project* to help students develop solidarity with their community partners in Uganda.

### International Immersion for the Common Good

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<sup>55</sup> Hanh, *Being Peace*, 69.

<sup>56</sup> Hanh, 76.

<sup>57</sup> Palmer, Zajonc, and Scribner, *The Heart of Higher Education: A Call to Renewal*.

As part of the semester-long course, *Marketing for Social Change: The Uganda Project*, students travel to Uganda over spring break to meet with three main groups of community partners. First, they meet with BeadforLife, a nonprofit organization that helps lift women and their communities out of poverty by offering “Street Business School” classes that help women develop and run their own sustainable microbusinesses. Students learn about the operations of the nonprofit organization, they attend classes at the “Street Business School,” and they visit the women in their microbusinesses to learn about their work and what it means to them. Students also meet with the founders of Unreasonable East Africa, an accelerator program for social enterprises, and they meet with the social entrepreneurs who have gone through the program. Finally, students meet with conservationists to learn about the intersection of business and the environment as well as human rights. Unlike typical service learning trips that engage students in service activities in the “other’s” community, *The Uganda Project* emphasizes listening and learning from the Ugandan community partners. Moreover, while the content would suggest that the focal aim is to have students learn about social entrepreneurship from those who are engaging in it on the ground, that is only a surface outcome. More substantially, the course aims to help students develop relationships and a sense of solidarity with those from whom they learn.

### The Post-Immersion Experience

Upon arriving back in the United States, there is a tendency for the students to be overwhelmed by the visceral experience of poverty that they had witnessed, compounded by the seemingly hopeless critique of the literature with which they engaged on both sides of the immersion. Instead of feeling a sense of hope and seeing a clear path forward, students can be overwhelmed by a sense of guilt (e.g., being struck by the abundance of food in the grocery

stores when they return home), lack of connection (e.g., sadness of walking past fellow students on campus who have their heads bowed down, eyes entrenched in their cell phones), and a dire sense of helplessness (e.g., overwhelmed by the seeming magnitude of the problem of poverty). One approach that the class has used to at least start to attenuate the despair is to remind students that they are not alone—that they, as individuals, do not have to solve all of the world’s problems by themselves. As individuals, they cannot solve the world’s problems. Rather, they are part of a network of changemakers who, only when working together, will achieve the outcomes of which they dream. It is important to remind students that they are part of an interconnected whole; they do not have to work quietly alone like a social entrepreneur. In fact, if they do, they will likely fail to scale their efforts despite the fact that social entrepreneurs proclaim to work toward scale. As Polish poet, Stanislaw Jerzy Lec wrote, “No snowflake in an avalanche ever feels responsible.” Framed more positively, the students each play a small role in a major social movement, and together, they can achieve an outcome that they could not achieve alone.

To underscore this point, during the semester, students meet with a prominent Ugandan LGBTQIA+ activist who openly acknowledges that they do not think that the issue of LGBTQIA+ rights will be resolved in their lifetime, but they are okay with that because they understand the role that they play in the larger movement, and that is the end on which they focus. For the students, the key is to just determine what their “piece of the pie” is, and to that end, we encourage them to find their passion. We remind them to not “ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive, and go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.”<sup>58</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Howard Thurman, *Jesus and the Disinherited* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1949).

## Beyond Immersion

If international immersion is not possible, there are other, more local techniques that can be used to help students become more mindful of how their participation in consumer capitalism impacts others and to feel a greater sense of interconnectedness and collective responsibility for the common good. One such way, as alluded to above, is through mindfulness meditation.

According to Thich Nhat Hanh,

[o]ur daily lives, the way we drink, what we eat, have to do with the world's political situation. Meditation is to see deeply into things, to see how we can change, how we can transform our situation. To transform our situation is also to transform our minds. To transform our minds is also to transform our situation, because the situation is mind, and mind is situation. Awakening is important.<sup>59</sup>

As Thich Nhat Hanh points out,

[m]any of us worry about the world situation. We don't know when the bombs will explode. We feel that we are on the edge of time. As individuals, we feel helpless, despairing. The situation is so dangerous, injustice is so widespread, the danger is so close. In this kind of situation, if we panic, things will only become worse. We need to remain calm, to see clearly. Meditation is to be aware, and to try to help.<sup>60</sup> According to Thich Nhat Hanh, "[m]editation is not to get out of society, to escape from society, but to prepare for a reentry into society."<sup>61</sup> He continues, "When you meditate, it is not just for yourself, you do it for the whole society."<sup>62</sup> As noted above, mindfulness meditation is especially apt for a deeply interconnected world where one's actions can impact others thousands of miles away, as it can

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<sup>59</sup> Hanh, *Being Peace*, 77.

<sup>60</sup> Hanh, 21.

<sup>61</sup> Hanh, 51.

<sup>62</sup> Hanh, 52.

help to enhance empathy and compassion. Importantly, mindfulness meditation can serve as a catalyst for mindful awareness of one's consumption and a propensity to change how one consumes based on its impact on others and the environment.

In their book, *The Heart of Higher Education*, Parker Palmer and Arthur Zajonc, describe one pedagogical technique implemented by Frank Maddox, an award-winning economics professor at Oxford College of Emory University. According to Palmer and Zajonc,

He uses a variety of strategies to make vivid the realities of poverty and wealth, industrial and craft production, and consumption. For instance, after his students have studied standard economic theory in which consumers are modeled as maximizing utility, he gives them an unusual assignment. They are asked to go to a store like Wal-Mart or McDonald's and note the expressions, actions, and so on of the people there. Students are to observe, without judgment, anything that will help them gauge the degree of consciousness shoppers give to what they are doing. Then Maddox asks the students to observe themselves in the same way, again without judgment. How attentive are they to what they are doing at any moment? What would it mean for us if we were more aware of our consumption? He calls it mindful consumption, and he asks what it might mean to replace maximizing utility with mindful consumption. At the end of the semester Maddox's economics students all present their Interbeing Projects. *Interbeing* is a term taken from the Buddhist teacher Thich Nhat Hanh that emphasizes the interconnectedness of all things. Students select a consumer good or service and then research some aspect of its production, becoming more conscious of their connections and responsibilities to it. Maddox teaches economics not only with interconnectedness in mind but as an experience for his students.<sup>63</sup>

Like Maddox, other economics and business professors have used experiential pedagogy to help students understand their impact on the natural world and other beings through their consumption and to help them better align their consumer behavior with their values and the needs of society and the environment. For example, in what they term the "Consumption Challenge," Jacobson, Weis, and Schneider describe a project for which students choose a way to reduce their consumption, or otherwise align it with social and environmental causes, over the

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<sup>63</sup> Palmer, Zajonc, and Scribner, *The Heart of Higher Education: A Call to Renewal*, 85–86.

course of the semester.<sup>64</sup> Importantly, as with meditation, this self-transformation must serve as a catalyst to transform society. To that end, students regularly blog about their progress throughout the semester so that they can share their successes and challenges with their community of changemakers and simultaneously hold each other accountable to the norms the class sets and provide support to achieve the consumption challenge despite the inherent challenge. Then, together, the class can scale its impact through the community norms and network it fosters.

### Establishing Institutions for the Common Good

Just as the lone social entrepreneur can only do so much to combat the major social, environmental, and economic challenges we face today, individual consumers can only change the tide of rampant consumerism to a limited degree. Instead, as journalist Chris Hedges suggests in an article on the impending collapse of the American economy, “[w]e must invest our energy in building parallel, popular institutions to protect ourselves and to pit power against power.”<sup>65</sup> In other words, we must build systems of mindful consumption. For example, instead of developing solutions that are more equitable than, but ultimately compatible with and reinforce the power hierarchies in, the existing free-market system (such as Fair Trade labeling),<sup>66</sup> we must qualitatively rethink our economic and social institutions. For example by focusing on basic needs such as food, water, shelter, and community, we can imagine systems that support the common good (e.g., community gardens, community food bank farms, permaculture parks,

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<sup>64</sup> Susan Jacobson, Bill Weis, and Abigail B. Schneider, “‘Laudato Si’ and the Consumption Challenge: Giving Students a Visceral Exercise in Saving Our Planet,” *Jesuit Higher Education: A Journal* 6, no. 1 (2017): 12.

<sup>65</sup> Chris Hedges, “The Coming Collapse,” Truthdig, accessed May 31, 2018, <https://www.truthdig.com/articles/the-coming-collapse/>.

<sup>66</sup> Daniel Jaffee, *Brewing Justice: Fair Trade Coffee, Sustainability, and Survival* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014).



cooperatives, community groups and centers that provide services, hubs, and inspiration<sup>67</sup>).

According to environmental justice lawyer and activist Meredith Crafton, “People protect what they love. Fostering love of community, wild spaces, fresh water goes a long way.”<sup>68</sup>

### Conclusion

If we want our students to reimagine the global economic system that currently maintains wealth disparities, they must be able to truly understand what the marginalized are experiencing yet also not be weakened by a sense of helplessness. We must be at peace ourselves. If we panic or feel guilty or allow ourselves to get wrapped up in despair, we cannot be a source of support and peace. Thus, to answer Arthur’s Zajonc’s questions—“What kind of attentiveness will enable us to see a true whole? What is the pedagogy for beholding interconnectedness as a primary reality and not a derived one?”—our response would be one that promotes mindful awareness and that fosters a sense of solidarity, whether that be through immersion experiences or meditation or something else. In Zajonc’s words, “[c]ompassionate action is fostered in students when they learn not only with the intellect but also with the heart.”<sup>69</sup> Not only must we ourselves “be peace,” but we must be peace for society and to change the institutions of injustice that characterize the global capitalist economy. Certainly, individual social entrepreneurs have made great strides in bringing about change, but as Hedges writes, we must “pit power against power,” and it is only when we, as human beings, harness our empathy and innately cooperative nature that we will be able to erect structures of virtue that can overcome systems of injustice and work toward the common good.

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<sup>67</sup> Meredith Crafton, personal communication, May 23, 2018.

<sup>68</sup> Meredith Crafton, May 23, 2018.

<sup>69</sup> Palmer, Zajonc, and Scribner, *The Heart of Higher Education: A Call to Renewal*, 98.

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