The Common Good

In recent years, references to the common good have papered the public square. Presidential and congressional candidates infuse their stump speeches with common good language. Political think tanks organize forums on the common good. It's debated in the pages of intellectual journals and the mainstream media. Senator Robert Casey Jr. of Pennsylvania, for example, made the common good the defining theme of his successful 2006 campaign against incumbent Republican Senator Rick Santorum, who had written his own book about conservatism and the common good.

It's not hard to see why this often misunderstood concept of moral and political philosophy has caught on with a new generation of public officials, political consultants, and grassroots social justice activists. At a time when war, corporate scandals, the fraying of traditional community bonds, and the economic dislocations of globalization have left many people feeling adrift in a rapidly changing world, Americans are hungry for a new vision of leadership and community. We recognize the potential for something bigger and better than narrow partisan agendas, divides between so-called red and blue states, and pandering politicians whose most urgent priorities seem to be promising earmarks, tax cuts, or whatever else tests well in the polls. We're

looking for leaders who aren't afraid to challenge us to embrace a cause greater than ourselves.

In his book *Why Americans Hate Politics*, *Washington Post* columnist E. J. Dionne argues that many Americans have given up on politics because instead of real solutions to our most serious moral and political challenges, it presents a collection of false choices such as civil liberties *or* national security, economic growth *or* a healthy environment. These false choices obscure the fact that our success as individuals is closely tied to our collective well-being. A hallmark of the politics of division is the reduction of our public debates to either-or categories that inevitably paralyze our political process and impede progress toward actual solutions. Americans are tired of this stalemate and desperately want our values to move us forward as a united nation. A 2006 poll by the Center for American Progress asked Americans from across the political spectrum about the role of faith and values in public life. Sixty-eight percent strongly agreed that "our government should be committed to the common good." Seventy-one percent said that "Americans are becoming too materialistic."

Politics is more than a hodgepodge of policy proposals. It's about a larger story of who we are as people and what we aspire to as a society. Thomas Jefferson instilled the rhetorical seeds of revolution with the power of what in his day was a radical idea: the belief that all people are created equal and have rights and dignity that come from a creator, not a monarch. Reverend Martin Luther King Jr. challenged the conscience of a segregated nation to live up to the ideals of those principles. A century and a half after the end of the Civil War, we still pursue, in the language of Abraham Lincoln at Gettysburg, the "unfinished work" of freedom and justice for all.

Itself a close relative to the American ideal of a nation for all, the common good has helped influence some of our most important political and social movements. In this chapter, we will examine how we can reclaim the best of this tradition for

our own historical moment when we face so many challenges that require us to recognize our common humanity and destiny. We will also explore how embracing a Catholic vision of the common good—one rooted in the essential dignity of the human person and the specific demands of justice—can help save this idea from becoming just another political slogan.

Origins of the Common Good

As a philosophical idea, the common good has roots in many sources: classical philosophy, the Catholic social tradition, our American experiment, and the wisdom of many faiths. In the fourth century B.C., Aristotle first articulated the notion that a just society must recognize the common good as ultimately "nobler and more divine" than individual desires. "The good is justice," he wrote, "in other words, the common interest." In the thirteenth century, Saint Thomas Aquinas developed Aristotle's concept of the common good and linked it closely to the Christian tradition. Framing the common good as a philosophical extension of the biblical prophets' call for justice and Christ's message to love our neighbors as ourselves, he emphasized that the common good is not a threat to our own personal interests; rather, our individual well-being is intricately connected to the health of the community. "He that seeks the good of many," Aquinas insisted, "seeks in consequence his own good."

The transformation of our nation from a fragmented colonial society under British imperial rule to an independent and unified republic put to test a bold democratic experiment that honored the "unalienable rights" of individuals. It also recognized the vital need for a responsive government "of the people, by the people, for the people" that represented the collective interests of citizens working together for shared goals of peace and prosperity. While this communitarian spirit has sometimes clashed with our nation's value of "rugged individualism," an authentic understanding of the common good reminds us that the fate of our neighbors here

and around the world is closely connected to our own destiny. Especially in a time when globalization is making our world smaller, we can no longer afford to address in a vacuum such issues as war, abortion, climate change, and energy policy. For our own good and the good of others, we must as a society begin to make these essential connections.

The common good is a familiar concept for people of faith. Catholics and Protestants alike believe in the moral obligations of individuals and government to build a just society that responds to the needs of all its members, particularly the poor and most vulnerable. In the Jewish tradition, the Hebrew prophets denounced greed and hunger for power while reminding the community to care for the poor, the widows, and the suffering. Islam stresses the importance of community and the responsibility of government to serve the common good. Centuries of interfaith dialogue have been built on this shared commitment to justice for all God's children and respect for universal human dignity.

A Catholic Vision of the Common Good

Unlike the vague and simplistic references to the common good that often pervade our public debates today, the Catholic vision of the common good is as clear as it is challenging. The *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church*, which the Vatican released in 2004, notes that the specific "demands" of the common good are deeply connected to the fundamental dignity and rights of the human person:

> These demands concern above all the commitment to peace, the organization of the State's powers, a sound juridical system, the protection of the environment, and the provision of essential services to all, some of which are at the same time human rights: food, housing, work, education and access to culture, transportation, basic health care, the freedom of communication and expression, and the protection of religious freedom.

A robust commitment to the common good dates to the very beginnings of our faith and is rooted in both the Old and New Testaments. The Hebrew scriptures call readers to look beyond their own self interest to create a just and healthy community; and the Gospels teach us to love God with all of our heart, mind, and soul, *and* to love our neighbors as ourselves.

The common good also requires a concern for the entire world community. In the sixteenth century, the earliest followers of Saint Ignatius of Loyola—the Jesuits—were among the first Westerners to travel beyond Europe, inspired by a global vision of the common good. In 1963, Pope John XXIII introduced the phrase "universal common good" in the Catholic social tradition in recognition of the duty to promote the good of our neighbors around the globe as well as at home. Later, Pope John Paul II spoke eloquently about a "globalization of solidarity" among people of the world committed to peace and justice. This vision of solidarity is an important counterpoint to profit-driven globalization, which can idolize the marketplace at the expense of human dignity.

While Catholic teaching values the importance of personal responsibility and respects the distinct spheres of church and state, it insists that government has a vital role to play in assuming duties that the market or individuals alone cannot or will not meet. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* asserts that the common good is the very "reason the political authority exists," and other elements of Church teaching make clear that societies should not make an idol of the marketplace and that "ownership of goods be equally accessible to all." By promoting living wages, recognizing the value of labor unions, and affirming the dignity of work, the Catholic Church has offered a consistent moral critique of the sort of minimalist governing philosophy that abandons individuals to the vagaries of the marketplace or to the whims of charity.

There was a time when a Catholic vision of the common good helped inspire and shape seminal movements in American political history. Franklin Roosevelt drew heavily from Catholic social thought in his New Deal agenda, which advanced minimum

wages, Social Security, welfare, labor standards, and a broad array of economic policies that challenged monopolistic concentrations of wealth. Though himself a nominal Episcopalian, Roosevelt's ideas were heavily influenced by Monsignor John A. Ryan, a populist Catholic priest from Minnesota whose writings on economic justice, labor, and social inequality were widely read in the decades following World War I. In 1919, the U.S. Catholic Bishops tapped Ryan to write their *Program for Social Reconstruction*, a document that Jesuit scholar Joseph M. McShane credited with launching the "American Catholic search for social justice" in earnest. The program called for what at the time were dramatic social reforms: a minimum wage, public housing for workers, labor participation in management decisions, and insurance for illness, disability, unemployment, and the elderly.

In 1931, Pope Pius XI released *Quadragesimo Anno* (The Fortieth Year), an encyclical that included a section ambitiously titled "On Reconstruction of the Social Order." Issued to commemorate the anniversary of Pope Leo XIII's landmark labor encyclical *Rerum Novarum* (On the Condition of Labor), Pius XI offered a stinging critique of unchecked capitalism that resonated far beyond the ecclesial halls of power. That same year, as Lew Daly observed in his article "In Search of the Common Good: The Catholic Roots of American Liberalism," Roosevelt delivered a speech calling for "social justice, through social action," in which he quoted extensively from *Quadragesimo Anno*. In Roosevelt's words:

> It is patent in our days that not alone is wealth accumulated, but immense power and despotic economic domination are concentrated in the hands of a few, and that those few are frequently not the owners but only the trustees and directors of invested funds which they administer at their good pleasure. . . . This accumulation of power, the characteristic note of the modern economic order, is a natural result of limitless free competition, which permits the survival of those only who are the strongest.

Although we all know that Roosevelt went on to win the election, many of us don't remember that the president asked the man who had influenced so much of his New Deal agenda to give the invocation at his second inauguration. Monsignor Ryan was the first Catholic priest to hold that honor.

So what happened to the Catholic vision of the common good in the public square? In general, the past four decades have witnessed a slow erosion of common good values, along with the decline of community, a rise in corporate power, and the movement of working-class Catholics from the economic margins of American society to a comfortable place in the middle class. The 1980s in particular witnessed the advance of a political philosophy that vilified "big government"—an idea that resonated widely at a time of economic stagnation and gloomy American morale. Indeed, as many Catholics themselves began to realize the American dream, they started to view government less as a protector of basic rights and services for the marginalized and the poor and more as a meddlesome "tax-and-spend" bureaucracy. America also lost the ability to imagine government as a servant of the common good—a deeply Catholic concept.

As we move into the twenty-first century, the realities of both Wall Street and Main Street show us just how divorced we've become from authentic common good values. A 2007 front-page article in the *New York Times*, headlined "The Richest of the Rich, Proud of a New Gilded Age," featured billionaire tycoons who bemoaned taxes on their fortunes and had little to say about why more than thirty-seven million Americans live in poverty in the world's richest country. The NASDAQ exchange launched a private stock market in 2007 for elite investors with assets of more than $100 million. Meanwhile, in many towns and cities, blue-collar jobs that once supported the middle class have disappeared as corporations (many of which are run by our era's new tycoons) pursue cheap labor and higher profits outside the United States. And a commitment to the

"commons"—public spaces and resources that benefit all—is being replaced by private gated communities where strangers of different classes or complexions are kept at a comfortable distance.

The U.S. Catholic Bishops emphasize, in addition to many other primary concerns, the enduring power of the common good in their political responsibility statement *Faithful Citizenship*, released ahead of every U.S. presidential election. "Politics in this election year and beyond should be about an old idea with new power—the common good," they wrote in 2003. "The central question should not be, 'Are you better off than you were four years ago?' It should be, 'How can we—all of us, especially the weak and vulnerable—be better off in the years ahead?' " Indeed, this message speaks directly to the excessive individualism that has accompanied American political movements in recent years, including the "Reagan Revolution" and interest-group politics from both sides of the political spectrum.

Our church's long history of grounding the common good in the dignity of the human person and the specific demands of justice makes Catholics especially well suited to challenge our nation's leaders to embrace a more robust common good agenda. No political party has a monopoly on moral values, and both Republicans and Democrats have an equal opportunity to succeed or fail in living up to the obligations of the common good. As Catholics, our faith inspires us to help reshape our culture and serve not as members of just another interest group but as participants in a global church that recognizes our common humanity as children of God. We should take up this struggle with hope, insisting that our public officials treat the common good as the foundation of moral leadership, rather than another catchphrase in a campaign playbook. In this way, Catholics speak from the heart of our tradition with a message as old as the Gospels and as powerfully relevant today as it will be a century from now.

Restoring the Common Good

Building a culture of the common good isn't just something we think of as a theological ideal or the right moral thing to do. It turns out that it's also the smart thing to do—it makes common sense. Statistics confirm what we know intuitively in our own hearts and minds to be true *and* what our Catholic faith tells us: that we are all better off when we look out for the interests of everyone, not just the few. We see the crucial value of the common good when we consider the effect that neglecting it has on *all* Americans.

Challenges to the Common Good

Today's wealth gap poses a serious challenge to the common good. The glaring disparities between wealth and poverty threaten the well-being of everyone—the rich, the poor, and the middle class. CEOs take home over 360 times the pay of average workers, and the richest 1 percent of Americans own 34 percent of the nation's private wealth, more than the combined wealth of the bottom 90 percent, according to United for a Fair Economy. With this kind of extreme wealth gap we all live shorter lives, including the richest Americans. When we abandon the common good, the economy also stagnates, homicide rates increase, more children grow up poor, and charities get less support. And numerous studies, compiled by a project called Extreme Inequality, show that this huge wealth gap isn't good for business either. The last time rich and poor stood this sharply divided was in 1929, right before the stock market crashed, erasing fortunes in the blink of an eye.

Turning our backs on the common good is also dangerous for America's standing in the world and for our national security. It makes us less competitive and it weakens our democracy. After decades of neglecting such common goods as public education, health care, and affordable housing, America is hurting. Our

students lag far behind in math and science when compared to students in most European countries, putting our future economic competitiveness at risk. In 2007, according to the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development and the *Economist* magazine's 2007 *Factbook*, when it comes to infant mortality, abortion rates, poverty, and access to health care, the United States ranks behind most industrialized countries in the European Union. All of these facts offend our patriotism and our faith in the American dream. We can and must do better in order to thrive in a global economy and restore our nation's moral leadership in the world. By rebuilding a culture of the common good here in America, we can live up to our greatness as a country and as a global beacon of hope and freedom.

Building a Culture of the Common Good

How do we build a culture of the common good? First and foremost, we need to put the commandment to love our neighbor into action at all levels of society. We have to restore our nation's rightful balance between vibrant self-reliance and robust concern for one another. We must be prepared to address the problems in our *culture*, including the values and choices that orient our daily lives. We need to stop looking for instant fixes and immediate gratification and take the long view, to start thinking about our own futures and especially those of our children and grandchildren. The common good also requires that we think about how our own lifestyles and patterns of consumption affect those around us.

Although restoring the common good requires that all of us make better individual choices, we are not arguing that building a nation for all is merely an individual or private enterprise. On the contrary, it requires that we look at the function of every structure of society—our politics, our pop culture, our businesses, and all levels of government. We also need leaders who have the courage and conviction to hold these structures to a higher

standard, to embrace the notion that in the long run, we all do better when we take care of everyone.

This is no simple task. We live in an increasingly fragmented society in which pervasive corporate and media influences shape a consumer culture that divides us up according to our purchasing preferences, and in which sophisticated advertising campaigns create insatiable appetites for the latest must-have accessories. Corporate branding, twenty-four-hour shopping channels, and aggressive marketing even to toddlers have a significant effect on how Americans view the world.

In his book *Consumed: How Markets Corrupt Children, Infantilize Adults, and Swallow Citizens Whole*, Benjamin R. Barber demonstrates how the powerful forces of this consumer culture breed conformity and threaten the essential values of critical thinking and civic engagement. "Once upon a time, capitalism was allied with virtues that also contributed to democracy, responsibility, and citizenship," Barber writes. "Today it is allied with vices which—although they serve consumerism—undermine democracy, responsibility, and citizenship." As Americans consume more and participate less in civic and political life in their local communities, the foundations of a healthy democracy become weaker. As we'll see in the next chapter, Pope John Paul II challenged a culture of excessive materialism and consumerism, which he blamed for many of our modern social problems.

In 2007, Catholics in Alliance, along with a number of prominent Christian leaders, sponsored a campaign to challenge the commercialization of Christmas and the seasonal Christmas pundit, Fox News commentator Bill O'Reilly. O'Reilly, a self-proclaimed culture warrior, wants us to believe that Christmas is under seige by secular liberal campaigns to remove religious displays from public places and force us to say "Happy Holidays" instead of "Merry Christmas." But most Americans feel a different kind of panic and pressure every December: the need to fight snarls of traffic and run around like maniacs to buy the latest and greatest gifts. Christmas itself is supposed to be a gift—a message

of hope and peace and love for the poor in the darkest time of the year. It's a time to spend with family and friends and to reach out to neighbors who are suffering. But instead the holiday is often experienced more as a season of shopping that can make or break the U.S. economy. Americans from across the country called to thank us for helping get this message out, and many asked what they could do to help make Christmas a holiday for the common good and good news for the poor.

Strong communities and widespread participation in civic associations were once defining features of American life. Civic engagement swelled after World War II as Elks Lodges, the American Farm Bureau Federation, the Rotary Club, parent-teacher associations, and a host of other men's and women's clubs provided opportunities for people across class lines to gather in community. These groups offered more than networks for socializing. They actively engaged citizens to participate in the process of government and public life. The Veterans of Foreign Wars and the American Legion, for example, were integral in pressuring Congress to pass the G.I. Bill, one of the most important pieces of legislation in our nation's history, which provided college tuition for generations of armed service members. Today, high-priced lobbyists set the agenda in Washington, and the voices of average Americans are rarely heard when it comes to decisions that affect all our lives. Although the G.I. Bill still exists for soldiers who survive their tours in Iraq, a growing number of veterans return home to battle injury and depression.

While public places where diverse groups of citizens once gathered to argue about politics and community activism are harder to find, many Americans are finding ways to rebuild these kinds of networks in new and creative ways. Increasingly, Americans are joining faith- and community-based groups such as the Gamaliel Foundation (http://www.gamaliel.org), PICO—People Improving Communities through Organizing (http://www.piconetwork.org), and ACORN—Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now (http://www.acorn.org). These

citizens' groups do heroic work improving our neighborhoods and cities, connecting people of faith with efforts to engage elected officials to expand affordable housing, improve education, and spur economic development.

The incredible popularity of JustFaith (http://www.justfaith.org), a Catholic movement that promotes Catholic social teaching and develops social justice leaders at the parish level, also reveals how eager many people are to work together to build a culture of the common good. We can all participate in these kinds of community efforts—in fact, your own parish or congregation may already be a member of one of these organizations. Ask your pastor or church social justice committee if your parish is involved in such an effort, or check the Web sites mentioned here to find active projects in your part of the country.

While today's increased work hours, longer commutes, and growing financial pressures have left many Americans with less time and energy to be actively engaged in their communities, evidence suggests that we may be reaching a turning point. Neighbors are coming together in new and old forms of community associations. More and more local citizens' organizations are challenging the wisdom of building big-box stores on Main Street, and are encouraging the survival of local businesses. Together we are thinking more about the connections between the things we buy, the people who produce them, and their effect on our health and the environment. Colorful farmers' markets, which make for smart economics and good civics, are becoming common features in suburban and city neighborhoods. These markets help local producers sell their goods directly and more profitably to city and suburban folks, who in turn get healthier, less-expensive, environmentally friendly, and locally grown food. They also serve as important community gathering points, helping neighbors build the bonds necessary for vibrant neighborhoods and real democracy.

The Catholic Church and the broader faith community support this kind of exchange on a global level. Catholic

Relief Services' Fair Trade Program (http://www.crsfairtrade.org) encourages consumers to see how their spending habits affect the global common good by providing access to and information about environmentally sustainable and labor-friendly products. The 2007 uproar over poisonous lead found on toys imported from China drove home the dangers of the alternative: accepting a race to the bottom for the cheapest goods, and a political culture that rejects even minimal government regulation and product safety rules. The bottom line, we are learning, is that the daily decisions we make and the relationships we create as citizens and consumers can help build a culture of the common good and promote and protect human dignity, both in our own communities and around the world.

Rebuilding the Common Good for Our Families, Jobs, and Environment

Our postindustrial consumer culture, in which individual profit has increasingly eclipsed the common good, has placed growing strains on the America family. Real wages (the actual value of the dollars we earn) have declined for years, home ownership is becoming tenuous, and close to half of all marriages end in divorce. Parents worry about the values children are learning from "reality" shows and Hollywood movies that glorify violence and portray sex as a casual activity devoid of commitment or consequences. While our culture often seems to measure success in financial terms alone, many Americans feel they must work longer hours to buy bigger houses, suffering loss of community and extended commutes in the process.

Many families, however, are making different choices. In 2007, the *Washington Post* reported on church-based support groups for families who are trying to live within, and even below, their means in order to resist cultural pressures to buy big and then live strapped for cash. Some parents are working from home when they can in order to spend more time with

their children. They are trying to keep their houses and lifestyles smaller and shortening their commutes. But the pressures are still strong. To build a culture of the common good, we need to challenge these cultural pressures and make choices that help keep our families and our society strong. We also need to get our priorities straight. Are having the big house and the fancy car really worth it when the time we spend working for these things keeps us away from our children? A number of Web resources are available to help us begin to shape our everyday lives in ways that won't drain us of time, energy, and money, including http://www.christiansimpleliving.com and http://www.newdream.org. Catholic author Jeff Cavins has also written extensively on living simply; you can find his books at http://www.ascensionpress.com.

The recent mortgage crisis and credit crunch devastated families across the economic spectrum, leaving several million people struggling to keep their homes. To stem the tide of foreclosures, the banks and the government worked out a deal to freeze rates for some homeowners, an essential and appropriate action to protect the common good as well as our economy as a whole. Even before this action, community organizations were lobbying for reform of the kind of predatory lending practices that contributed to the crisis. But certainly the whole problem could have been avoided if a basic understanding of the common good—awareness that what hurts the least among us eventually hurts all of us—had driven our policies in the first place, instead of an unfettered drive for profit on the part of mortgage companies and real estate speculators.

Catholic Charities USA (CCUSA) identifies a shortage of jobs that pay a just wage as a root cause of U.S. poverty and, in their words, a "threat to the common good." They call for more living-wage jobs and an increase in the minimum wage as part of their campaign to reduce poverty here at home. Successful livable-wage initiatives across the country have provided an important model for job creation. When leaders make short-term promises to create new jobs using tax incentives and

investments, governments and churches will eventually have to provide assistance to new workers if the new jobs don't pay living wages. We end up paying twice: first in tax breaks or subsidies to companies to create new jobs and second in public or private assistance to those same underpaid workers. These initiatives work to ensure that jobs created with taxpayer dollars pay well to begin with. Meanwhile, membership in unions, which has been integral to ensuring adequate family wages, has declined dramatically since the 1950s. In response, labor leaders are emphasizing new organizing efforts, as well as innovative public-private partnerships in order to create secure jobs and improve workers' lives.

The global climate crisis, one of the most urgent issues of our time, presents us with rich opportunities to build a culture of the common good here in our country and around the world. The reality and impacts of climate change remind us of an essential truth that underlies a commitment to the common good: that our lives are deeply interconnected with others here and around the globe. The cars we drive, the pollution we emit, and the excesses of our consumer lifestyle have tremendous consequences for others. America's carbon emissions disproportionately affect our poorest neighbors in Africa and Asia, who bear the brunt of extreme weather, drought, food shortages, and rising sea levels. The response of our own country and the global community to this crisis is a life-and-death issue for millions around the globe and for the planet as a whole. And failure to act will have dire consequences.

Many Americans are already making better choices: conserving energy at home, driving smaller cars, recycling, and supporting wind and solar energy. Hybrid gasoline-and-electric vehicles are becoming more affordable and more popular. And wind farms are popping up across the country, providing economic benefits to financially pressed farmers (who lease their land and continue farming it) and infusing struggling rural towns with new tax revenues.

But in addition to personal choices, Americans want and need incentives: policies and leaders who will help make these changes more universal and these choices more accessible. We need leaders who will level the economic playing field for clean technologies by making sure that incentives for clean technologies rival those for dirtier technologies. American businesses are also pleading for leadership and calling for certainty about future regulations that they know are both essential and inevitable.

As people of faith, we believe in the kind of moral urgency that inspired movements to end slavery, secure women the vote, and galvanize black and white Americans to confront the sins of racism and bigotry. To build a culture of the common good, we need courageous and creative policies that respond to the urgent moral issues of our time. We need laws to help create more just and equitable social structures and to protect everyone's rights. In Chapter Five, "An Agenda for the Common Good," we will take a deeper look at the role government, law, and public policy can play in restoring our focus on the common good and building a nation for all.

Agape is a Greek word that generally translates as "love." But in Judeo-Christian thought, it is understood more specifically as the selfless, unconditional love that God shows for his children and that we are called to reflect in our own lives. Agape is not a sticky-sweet emotion or vague affection. It's a demanding and redemptive love for our neighbors that challenges us to recognize ourselves and the image of God in all humanity. Jesus explains this most clearly when an expert in the law asks him, "Who is my neighbor?" and he tells the parable of the Good Samaritan who finds a Levite man beaten and left for dead on the side of the road. A priest and another Levite have already passed and ignored the man, but this Samaritan, a foreigner, puts bandages on the man's wounds and takes him to an inn for care. You don't have to be Christian to recognize how that profound teaching speaks to us

more than twenty centuries later. You just need enough faith to believe in the common good.

Fortunately, our faith already has a blueprint for action to rebuild the common good. This framework is called the Catholic social tradition, and we'll explore its core message, key themes, and history in the next chapter. The tradition explains how core Catholic values of human dignity and the common good intersect with the problems and possibilities of modern society.