nots, about which the libertarians reason so flawlessly, there is also the relation between the haves and God, about which they are silent. It is as if they explained sailing as a relation between boats and ports, but forgot to mention the sea.

The argument looks different when the concept of God is introduced. If it is correct to assume that God is the giver of everything, not only of goods, but of life itself, then he cannot be repaid, let alone placed in our debt. If we are assumed to be God's creatures, we have an obligation to him that we can in no way discharge. According to Butler's reasoning, the interest on our debt is the most we could repay, but the only currency in the transaction is obedience. He was then able to conclude that what God requires of obedient persons is that they exercise charity toward their neighbours. Thus, contrary to

what the libertarian believes, we do have an obligation of charity, deriving from our dependency on God, together with his command of love. "By fervent charity," Butler writes,

"with a course of beneficence proceeding from it, a person may make amends for the good he has blamably omitted, and the injuries he has done, so far as that ... his charity should be allowed to cover the multitude of his sins."

Hats off to an 18th-century bishop who can so easily rescue an "obligation of charity" from the objection of 21st-century libertarians. With the same implacable lucidity Butler lays out what charitable obligation amounts to, why it is always personal, rather than collective, why these obligations should be as great, rather than as little as we can afford, and several other

uncomfortable truths that there is not space to discuss here in detail.

Clever people will no doubt notice that they can evade Butler's heavy demands by denying the existence of God. That is true. But then, if they are consistent, they will also have to give up their dreams of a compassionate society. It's hard to know what clever people do then. Will they perhaps give up consistency?

Graeme Hunter PhD

Professor
Department of Philosophy
University of Ottawa
Ottawa, Ont.

Graeme Hunter lectures on literature at the summer conference for physicians at Augustine College, Ottawa, Ont.

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POETRY

Wardrobe

The man in the next bed vomited
Red, then his monitor danced.
He called me lucky, a name I wear
On my finger, like a lead, to check myself.

My daughters never visit. I want them
To rest their hands on my head;
I look for "dad" like a scarf
I haven't felt in years.

The resident complains about me,
The end-stage pancreas in room 2;
Medical students call me Sir
So they can poke and percuss.

I wear the name "patient,"
Like another paper gown; sensible
But thin and far too sterile,
The smell lingers on me, foreign.

Soon my wife will come with a name,
To take me home, draped
In her soft "dear;" my favourite
Sturdy, old coat.

Joshua Liao MD
Baylor College of Medicine
Houston, Tex.

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