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Editors' Note

We've all heard the lament: "It's not that we don't know *how* to reduce poverty ... the real problem is that we lack the political will to get it done." But what, exactly, needs to get done? And is it true that we really know "what to do" to reduce poverty?

The purpose of this issue is to explore the answer to these questions. We have asked distinguished commentators to go beyond well-known "consensus poverty plans" that place political constraints at the forefront. We of course admire these plans, think they're the work of angels, and are foursquare in favor of continuing to develop them. But there is also value in developing plans that ignore all the usual assumptions about what is or isn't politically feasible and instead rely exclusively on our aspirations, our commitments, and the best available evidence on how they might be realized. How, in other words, might poverty be eliminated if we could freely recast our approach and investments in ways that are most consistent with the evidence? Would we resort to a basic income? Is a jobs program the answer? Should we work instead on human capital development? Is a hybrid program the best way to hedge our bets? Or are all such conventional answers off the mark?

This line of questioning might be viewed as the very definition of an academic exercise. Although it may make for a good magazine issue (we hope!), skeptics would argue that it ends at that. We are not so skeptical ourselves. When the history of major institutional change is examined, one finds that fundamental reforms widely assumed to be impossible, impractical, or infeasible are suddenly on the table. As Michelle Jackson notes in her concluding essay, such swift changes often unfold when it is assumed—wrongly—that "everyone else" is a moderate and would never support fundamental change. It often turns out, as with the gay marriage movement, that "everyone else" is in fact a far smaller group than anyone imagined. The moral here is that second-order assumptions about everyone else's beliefs can sometimes be an unduly constraining force and that we would accordingly do well to shake loose, at least occasionally, from the shackles that those beliefs impose.

Are we nearing one of those moments when fundamental change becomes possible? It is not altogether implausible. The takeoff in income inequality has triggered widespread worries; these worries have parlayed into anti-inequality movements on the left and right alike; and the resurgence of populist politicians is tapping, at least in part, a growing interest in distributional problems and a growing distrust of reformist approaches to them.

This issue is a response to precisely such sentiment. We of course recognize that the voices represented here cannot possibly do justice to the many poverty plans and visions on offer. As a further tribute to these visions, we have opened up a new forum devoted to collecting and representing them, the most compelling of which will be summarized in our next issue of *Pathways Magazine* (please visit the Stanford Center on Poverty and Inequality Facebook page to contribute). The discussion that we're seeking to open up here is, then, nothing more than a beginning. We would be honored if our readers further developed it by contributing their own thoughts and visions.

—David Grusky, Charles Varner, and Marybeth Mattingly