

Daily Meditation 8-24-2026

Lessons Learned from a Serious Gaffe re. Arthur Brooks

Good morning.

Today, I want to meditate with you on the difficult daily meditation that I wrote this morning, about Arthur Brooks. After writing two daily meditations on his work, which I praised, and I still praise some of his work — but having discovered his relationship to the American Enterprise Institute and the far-right political movement in America, he has given birth to MAGA. I necessarily have to raise a flag.

But in doing so, I reiterate how important all Four Paths are: That we can experience the Via Positiva and the Via Negativa in their many dimensions. But if we are not also involved in the Via Transformativa, where justice and compassion are forefront, then we are like Saint Paul said: We're “sounding cymbals.” We're empty. Because Love is about action.

And I did not see in any of the research that I did, and I do not pretend to be a scholar of Arthur Brooks's work, so I am saying it's not definitive. But I do not see any apologies on his part for pleasing the likes of Rush Limbaugh, for example. I mean, there would be no MAGA movement without Rush Limbaugh and his very, very loud and negative diatribes against women, his calling the feminist movement “femizasis,” and certainly his raging anger on a daily basis, hours every day. This had a lot to do with the building of the so-called manosphere, and the carrying around of resentment and anger as some kind of virtue of healthy masculinity. And of course, Rush Limbaugh and a lot of loud capitalists, died a very, very rich man. Of the negativity he left behind, we are still paying for. And the fact that Newt Gingrich endorsed Arthur Brooks, would give me pause. I would pause very deeply if either Rush Limbaugh or Newt Gingrich praised me for my writings on spirituality! And I just didn't see any of those doubts in writings of Arthur Brooks. I hope I'm wrong.

I looked at his story more, and it was an interesting story. How he was raised in a fundamentalist Baptist background, but at the age of 15, he happened to show up at the shrine of Guadalupe in Mexico. And he had a mystical experience, that he felt he was being spoken to by the Divine Mother, by Mary.

The next year, at 16, he converted to Catholicism. And he's lived that religion out, as he says, how do you put it? “It is a real religion.” Implying that that he believes, as I do, that

there's such a thing as unreal religion or anti-religion religion. And he has tried to live that religion out, his faith out, and I could certainly give him credit for that.

However, is he aware of the Via Transformativa that Jesus preached? Matthew 25 is about finding the divine, finding the Christ in the poorest people. This is not a philosophy embedded in today's capitalism by any stretch of the imagination. And there is the issue of Christian Nationalism. Where does he stand on that? Anyone who thought himself Christian? But the movements in the far-right of this country, in the years that he's been teaching at Harvard Business School, have become more and more ugly, and more and more contrary to the teachings of Jesus and the Gospels and of justice.

Now again, I praise him when he talks about the role of transcendence. And he tells this wonderful story, which I really appreciated: How the most popular undergraduate class in the university is astronomy. He says, *Students are lining up at the door for astronomy classes. I didn't know why, because they're not astronomers. They're English majors, classics majors, and so I asked one of the students at one point, "Why do you all love astronomy so much?" She said, "I actually don't know, but it's Thursday mornings at 9 a.m. When I go into class, inevitably, I'm all stressed out because I, you know, I had a big argument with my mom, and I think I might be breaking up with my boyfriend, and I'm not doing so well in class. An hour and a half later, I come out and I say, I'm a speck. I'm a speck. I'm a speck. And I'm at peace. I'm at peace because I can see myself with the vantage point of things that are bigger than me."*

And then Brooks comments, "That's transcendence." And he wisely says, "You don't get transcendence by looking in the mirror. Narcissism is not a path to transcendence." Now we have the most narcissistic president ever in the history of America. Has Arthur Brooks stood out about, spoken out about that? I don't see it. Maybe he has. *By looking in the mirror, literally looking in the mirror or figuratively, by looking at your notifications on social media, this does not give you transcendence. The problem with modern tech is its a big mirror on ourselves, and it makes transcendence impossible.*

And then he talks about two ways to transcendence. One is to look upward at things, and that's cosmology. And again, I affirm his affirmation of the new cosmology and what this can do to awaken young minds to the huge world, vast universe, and history that we are part of. So he talks about romantic love as an experience of transcendence, and so is a deep friendship, Platonic friendship. And so too is this perspective that we get from awe and wonder and looking at our place in the universe, that he calls "vertical transcendence." And of course the role of service. Now that is the Via Transformativa, isn't it?

And again, I appreciate his allusion to that, but does he practice it concretely? And I think being president of the American Enterprise Institute is not a good point on one's resume. But we all can change. But what struck me is he's been a Catholic since he was 16, and how does he stand on climate change? Has he studied *Laudato Si*?

Now, other far-rightwing Catholics like Steve Bannon or J.D. Vance who is owned by Peter Thiel, literally, he made him a senator, gave him \$13 million and made him senator of Ohio, and then he went to Trump and made him vice president. Does he stand up to these versions of Christianity, and as I said, to Christian nationalism also?

So these are very valid questions, and there is a danger, as I say. Arthur Brooks is out of the closet as a practicing Catholic and even attends daily mass. And as he says, he finds transcendence there, which is very fine. Worship and prayer ought to bring transcendence into our lives. But there is a danger, and I've seen it many times, that people can hide in church from the *Via Transformativa*, from the demands that justice-making and compassion make on our souls and on our work, on our business and on our politics and our economics.

So these are just questions that need to be asked of anyone who claims to be a practicing Christian, that how thoroughly are all the Four Paths engaged in. And I might point out that I praised him for talking about the *Via Negativa*, insofar as he talks about silence, he talks about boredom, and how that can be a positive thing. And it's a good thing that our minds learn to wander and not just be following our work all the time. But I wonder how much he talks about the suffering of the poor. That's part of the *Via Negativa*, to be awakened by those who suffer at the hands of the powerful, at the hands of those who are running Silicon Valley today, for example.

And beginning in tomorrow's meditation for two days, I am reflecting on this book, which I highly recommend. And I highly recommend it for Arthur Brooks, called *The Nerd Reich: Silicon Valley Fascism and the War on Democracy* by Gil Duran, very fine journalist from the Bay Area, from the Silicon Valley scene, if you will. He's been studying the realities behind the current administration. These billionaires and one trillionaire who want to banish democracy, wipe it off the face of the map, and replace it with their versions of what a human being is about. So again, I recommend to Arthur Brooks that he read this book, *The Nerd Reich: Silicon Valley Fascism and the War and Democracy*, and that he read my own book on *Trump and the MAGA Movement as Antichrist*. As I point out, very great saints in the history of the church, such as Hildegard of Bingen, have been very outspoken. She even painted the pathos, the pathology of the overly powerful.

Thank you. We'll see you next week.