

Niewdana concludes that “what we have now is a cleverly designed system where private banks have been granted a monopolistic control over money created as debt and, ultimately, a net transfer of assets toward the wealthiest strata of societies” (158).

The root problem is the leverage that banks are allowed to take. The value of the equity of most corporations exceeds 50 percent of its enterprise value (equity plus debt). Therefore, when a corporation goes bankrupt, the equity holders suffer the most. Banks, however, have massive leverage with their equity accounting for only 3 to 10 percent of their total value. Therefore, the owners of banks have the incentive to take high risks because the winnings go to them but the losses ultimately fall on “its creditors and finally the taxpayers who must pay for the rescue packages in the end.” As Niewdana concludes, “The little guys get tough love. The big guys get forgiveness. This is a total reversal of the ways forgiveness of debts was exercised in the ancient world” (169).

Niewdana proposes an ingenious solution: eliminate the limited liability of banking corporations. That would make their lending practices more conservative and substantially reduce their profits. This policy change would incur stiff resistance, but it would clearly benefit society as a whole.

This is an important book that would work well as a textbook for a graduate-level seminar on money and banking.

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Business and the Greater Good: Rethinking Business Ethics in an Age of Crisis

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This book is a collection of papers originally presented at the Seventh TransAtlantic Business Ethics Conference (TABEC) held at the NHH Norwegian School of Economics in 2012. Eleven works are collected and organized around three themes: (1) From Inequality to Equality, (2) From the Technical-Materialistic to the Ecological-Spiritual, and (3) From Compliance and Enforcement to Autonomy and Responsibility. The editors contribute one of the chapters, and they write an introduction that summarizes the main points of each of the works that follow. A final chapter captures the thoughts on the future of business ethics that the contributing authors expressed in a roundtable discussion at the conclusion of the conference.

The subtitle of the book conveys its focus. It promises to “give genuine insights about the causes of the current crises [financial, political, environmental, moral, and spiritual] as well as new directions and fruitful solutions” (3). Not only is the “legitimacy” (276) of business ethics at stake in fulfilling this purpose but also the very “salvation of society” (269).

Will this book save the field of business ethics and a dying civilization? The key step in returning anything to health is making the correct diagnosis of the ailment. An effec-

tive prescription follows from a proper assessment of why the symptoms of ill health have appeared. Our civilization is in dissolution because we no longer live in the reality of things; indeed, we no longer even try to discover this truth. Instead, we are content to live in worlds of our imagining. Severing ethics from its metaphysical roots has plunged us into a state of nihilism. Unless sanity can be restored, the raw exercise of power will continue to determine what is right and wrong.

Business and the Greater Good is unable or unwilling to acknowledge this state of affairs. Consequently, it does not meaningfully engage in the metaphysical reconstruction that is needed. This renders many of its prescriptions vacuous.

Part 2 of the book, consisting of four chapters, offers a new ecological-spiritual vision to replace the technical-materialistic worldview in place. Does not this get the metaphysical job done? I would say no for a few reasons. First, there is no recollection of either the intellectual commitments that gave rise to and now sustain technological civilization or the metaphysical and moral realism that was supplanted by the birth of this new order. The historical and philosophical shallowness of the critique makes it seem that it is inordinate desire for material goods that is being protested not ontological materialism. Second, while it is good to reclaim the ground of spirituality for the human person, there is no discussion of the origin or destiny of our spiritual nature. Rather than spirituality being an objective element of the human constitution, the impression is left that it is something we choose for ourselves. The danger of solipsistic spiritual exploration is that it need not lead to “deeper love and compassion toward others” (110). Evil also, not just goodness, exists in the spiritual realm.

In addition, while *homo spiritualis* is brought back into the picture, *homo religiosus* is excluded. There is no sense in this section or the entire book that Christianity had any part in bringing our social world into being or that it might provide the resources for cultural renewal. This is despite the fact that well in advance of the conference, Pope Benedict XVI, addressing the very topic of TABEC 2012, wrote, “without God man neither knows which way to go, nor even understands who he is” (*Caritas in Veritate*, 2009, no. 78). The thoughts of this great mind should have been considered, but there is no desire exhibited in the volume to return to Catholicism’s sound metaphysical science of the human person or the salvific Good News brought by Jesus Christ.

The chapter on ecological economics in this section ends by saying that “the failure to address metaphysical questions has led to many of the central errors of conventional economics” (178). The point is taken from Joseph Pearce’s book *Small Is Still Beautiful* (London, UK: HarperCollins, 2001). Pearce’s work is, of course, a tribute to the great Catholic economist E. F. Schumacher. In addition to *Small Is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered* (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), Schumacher wrote *A Guide for the Perplexed* (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), a singular work of philosophical reflection. Schumacher’s enormous contribution to restoring metaphysics in this latter volume is simply not accessed. It must be deliberately left out since reading Pearce would have made its existence known.

Absent a solid metaphysical foundation, the prescriptions presented are ungrounded. One chapter critiques four multistakeholder codes of conduct (International Council of Mining and Minerals: Sustainable Development Framework; Kimberly Process Certification Scheme; Equator Principles; Forest Stewardship Council) against eight conditions. The excellent analysis brings out the difficulty in forming such codes and substantially abiding by them. But in a “dictatorship of relativism” (Pope Benedict’s term for our moral state) what is a promise or a vow (implied in a code) and *why* should executives be held to them? Another chapter does a good job of synthesizing various strands of thought on what it means to create wealth—the purpose of business. The stock of wealth in society includes financial, physical, human, and social capital. This is not going to help, however, when human capital and social capital are anything people deem them to be. How does one even consider what ethical business is in an environment where rights can be imagined into being and claimed and words can mean anything the user wants them to signify? Incredibly, the family is not mentioned when discussing social capital even though it is the basic cell of social existence. The role of the family in building a good social order is left out of *Business and the Greater Good* entirely.

Another chapter examines personal responsibility in organizational life by looking at the decision of a Statoil executive to leave the Norwegian oil company to go to work for Greenpeace. The decision is noteworthy because she is seen as living out her life project. But if we subjectively make up the standards for our conscience, then why is not the Statoil executive who stays at the firm to live out his life project equally admirable? Prescriptions that appeal to the law are particularly naïve considering that the law has lost its grounding in anything other than the will of the lawmakers.

In two different places in the book a work is referenced that holds that we are undergoing a birth crisis; we are being expelled from the old world into a new world. There is no guarantee that this new world will be something humanly beautiful. It could just as easily be a descent into greater chaos and barbarity. Unless we return to the truth of being, then this is surely where we will end up.

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