

The principle of “respect for persons” is not a sufficient guide for moral decision-making. Theoretical simplicity cannot do away with the need for practical wisdom, which is the result of the hard work of building character. Virtue matters, a point the author herself makes in contradiction of her thesis: “It seems it all comes down to the character of the characters involved” (133).

The book is not innocuous, however. When Klein finally (after 100 pages) gets around to considering who counts as persons, what we find in the page and a half (too minimal by far) she devotes to the question is positively disturbing. Personhood is determined by being able to demonstrate self-awareness. By this performance criterion of human personhood, if you bump your head and lapse into a coma you cease to be a human person. If you are severely mentally disabled (the definition of which is itself a problem), then you are not a human person. If you are a human baby developing in your mother’s womb, you are not a human person. These ideas have contributed to what Pope John Paul II has accurately called a “culture of death.”

How do such ideas arise? It was Aristotle who stressed the importance of avoiding little errors in the beginning: “The least initial deviation from the truth is multiplied later a thousand fold.” Klein’s starting point is in the mind with ideas and not with things in reality: “I take the epistemological questions of justifiability to be more fundamental than the metaphysical questions about being and essence” (4). What if it is just this assumption that gives us the nihilism of our times and stands in the way of a renewal of moral understanding? What if the essence of moral being is to be open to the truth of real things and to live by the truth that one has grasped? If it is, then facile rejections of the ideas of the great metaphysical realists, such as is found in this work—“Aristotle has put a great deal of weight on the nature of human beings themselves. Unfortunately, there seems to be no one human nature” (30)—are to be looked at askance.

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Kingdom Ethics: Following Jesus in Contemporary Context

Glen H. Stassen and David P. Gushee

Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2003 (538 pages)

Glen Stassen, Professor of Christian Ethics at Fuller Theological Seminary, and David Gushee, Professor of Moral Philosophy at Union University, have produced a thoughtful text on Christian ethics that models the complexity of ethics as an academic discipline. Roughly, they propose that Jesus’ teaching in the Sermon on the Mount, understood in what they call the grace-based prophetic interpretation and situated within Jesus’ life and proclamation of God’s kingdom (itself situated within the Christian Scriptures as a whole), should set the agenda for Christian ethics. The Christian ethical

life is part of Christ's call to discipleship. Theirs is what has been called a character ethic, which is a somewhat broader and richer form of the currently popular virtue ethics. Their commitment to biblical authority will, I suspect, make this a prominent ethics textbook in evangelical seminaries.

This decidedly holistic approach emphasizes the role of concrete practices in forming virtues within a specific community, which is part of a larger historical narrative and which itself forms character. This kind of approach is often contrasted with the liberal Enlightenment project of seeking universal abstract principles that can guide all ethical decision-making. Nevertheless, the authors are careful to avoid the excesses of much contemporary narrative theology and ethics, which seem to eschew rules, principles, and universality altogether. They recognize the importance of rules for guiding decisions but understand rules to be grounded in more general principles. These principles are themselves grounded in foundational theological beliefs, which can only be nurtured and inculcated in the right kind of community. Within the Christian community, a firm commitment to God's grace in Jesus Christ should prevent any such principles from encouraging either legalism or works righteousness.

The thoughtful exegesis of Jesus' teachings is perhaps this book's greatest strength. Its weakness is an overuse of the contrast between so-called Greek and Hebraic ways of thinking. Perhaps as a result of this, the authors' show little or no awareness of the recent work in the natural-law tradition. Their treatment would be richer and more balanced if it took into consideration the insightful works of natural-law thinkers such as J. Budziszewski and Robert George. The authors sometimes give the impression that a search for universal moral categories started and stopped with the Enlightenment. For those who use this book as a text in a basic ethics course, I would recommend supplementing it with another text, such as J. Budziszewski's *What We Can't Not Know* (Dallas: Spence, 2003).

That said, there is much to commend in Stassen and Gushee's detailed treatment of the central issues about which ethics is expected to speak: war and peace, criminal restoration, the death penalty, the life issues, human sexuality, truth telling, care of creation, and economics. Let us consider their treatment of economics.

They argue, plausibly, that Jesus' teaching on money and wealth emphasizes the dangers of wealth, especially as a form of idolatry—the evils of hoarding and greed—and the importance of caring for the poor and oppressed. This exegetical work stands on its own, quite apart from the authors' understanding of modern economics, about which I have some misgivings. Still, their treatment of economics itself is much more nuanced than I expected. I hope that this signals a shift within Christian ethics more generally, toward a greater appreciation for the subtlety and humane virtues of a properly ordered free-market economy.

In the 1980s (when I first started reading contemporary Christian ethics), it was difficult to find a mainstream Christian ethics textbook that displayed even basic knowledge of economics, let alone the nature of capitalism and the free market. Too many Christian ethicists drew on their aesthetic intuitions about the vulgarity of capitalism or

defined it as the theoretical manifestation of avarice itself. It was distressing to read screeds that presupposed basic economic misconceptions that were rarely made explicit. To simplify, the three main mistakes were: presupposing the zero-sum game fallacy, incorrectly defining the nature of capitalism and the free market, and failing to weigh realistically the costs and benefits of preferred economic proposals with their live alternatives.

The zero-sum game fallacy treats wealth as though it were a fixed pie. Economic activity merely shifts the slices of pie around. If someone makes a dollar in Topeka, Kansas, then someone, somewhere, must have lost a dollar. Put so baldly, few would assent to such a doctrine, but for many years, this was a pervasive assumption within Christian ethics. In truth, a well-ordered political economy allows wealth to be *created*. The pie can grow.

Similarly, capitalism has no unique jurisdiction over greed and avarice, which are universal human problems. In some ways, in fact, entrepreneurial capitalism counters the hoarding of money that is so harshly criticized in Scripture. An investor, such as a venture capitalist, must put his money at risk, must forgo short-term satisfaction for the hope of uncertain future gain; must put faith in the efforts of others; must, in short, *not* hoard his money. Such activity encourages the principle source of wealth creation, which is not found—especially in high-tech economies—in land or material resources but in human creativity and invention.

Finally, Christian ethicists have too often emphasized the weaknesses of free-market economies while downplaying the deficiencies of the alternatives, such as state socialism and top-heavy bureaucratic regimes.

Kingdom Ethics reflects some sensitivity to all these issues. The authors recognize that wealth can be created; they mention (at least in passing) that evangelicals have generally extolled the benefits of a free-market economy; and they clearly reject the forms of socialism and communism that were so attractive to many Christian academics in the 1980s. In fact, they offer a biblically balanced defense of the right to private property, without, of course, making it an absolute as some secular libertarians are inclined to do. They prefer some form of a mixed—or what they call a “balanced”—economy, which blends aspects of state regulation with respect for the value of free markets. They also argue that debates among thoughtful Christians seem to be converging over the issue of how exactly to balance these elements.

But, alas, there is still room for improvement. The authors at times seem to suffer a hangover from an earlier, cynical view of the free-market system. In their chapter on truth telling, for instance, they say without flinching: “The free-market ideology says that corporations should be free to do whatever they calculate is in their self-interest, and checks and balances, regulation and honest auditing are bad interference.” One might have liked for them to cite at least one mainstream free-market theorist who has advocated such a view.

There remains, too, a tendency to draw on the fallacies that the authors’ elsewhere reject. For instance, they cite a disparity in wealth between North America and poorer

nations as if that were unambiguous evidence of “predatory” economic injustice on the part of North America. Because wealth is not a fixed quantity, however, the wealth of one nation does not necessarily cause the poverty of another. (In fact, mere disparity need not even involve poverty. I live three miles from Bill Gates. The disparity between his wealth and my own is enormous, but that disparity is not obviously the result of an economic injustice.)

Still, given how poor the understanding of economics has been among Christian ethicists, *Kingdom Ethics* is a sign of progress. On this trajectory, perhaps in twenty years there will be a consensus in Christian ethics that the free-market system, undergirded by mediating institutions and a broadly Judeo-Christian rule of law, is the most just economic alternative available.

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Business, Religion, and Spirituality: A New Synthesis

Oliver F. Williams, C.S.C. (Editor)

Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 2003

(323 pages)

Although the literature on religion and spirituality in business is already substantial, this is a timely and interesting book. It contains an introduction, written by Oliver F. Williams, Academic Director of the University of Notre Dame’s Center for Ethics and Religious Values in Business, and fifteen chapters commissioned by the Center to answer the following highly topical question: What role should religion and spirituality play in the world of business?

The chapters are varied and uneven. Most are theoretical or descriptive in content, but a few contain cases and practical experiences (chaps. 10–12 and 15, among others). Most are based on Christian spirituality, although there are also chapters devoted to Jewish (Edwin M. Epstein, chap. 5), Hindu (Krishna S. Dhir, chap. 6), and Islamic (Jamal A. Badawi, chap. 7) spirituality.

This is obviously not a textbook or systematic exposition of the subject. Yet, the variety of the chapters and the inevitable repetitions and contradictions help to make it an interesting read. Anyone who believes that spirituality can and should have an important place in business will find valuable arguments in support of his view as well as critiques and reasons to look for solid foundations for it. In this review, I shall concentrate on four questions that came to my mind as I read this book and that I believe are important for the future of spirituality in business.

The first question is: What spirituality is appropriate for the business context? To find the answer, it is worth recalling the three risks identified by Stephen Porth, David Steingard, and John McCall (chap. 13):