

On the moral level, Piketty disappoints, as do most of the Left, by failing to offer any argument as to why it is moral simply to take resources and redistribute them because some state mechanism approves it. Did the wealthy steal to get that wealth? Did they defraud? Did they force the less well-off to give up their wealth? (This is not to imply that these abuses are impossible or never happen; the point is that Piketty does not even address the matter.) Somehow for Piketty, having great wealth (income, capital) is inherently immoral, it seems. Of course, as for most of the Left, this is intertwined with the idea of the utopia of equality of outcome and the evil of property (defined narrowly and broadly).

Moreover, Piketty's philosophical bases for his proposals are rather thin if not non-existent. He invokes the historical foundation of the French *Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen* of 1789, but interprets it through the lens of Rousseau. He also mentions John Rawls' *A Theory of Justice* (1971), arguing that "the basic rights and material advantages must be extended insofar as possible to everyone, as long as it is in the interest of those who have the fewest rights and opportunities to do so" (480). That is just about it philosophically.

It is also strange that, as an economist, Piketty ignores the possible effects of steeply progressive taxes on economic behavior and the resulting consequences. What might be the disincentives for work or investment? Does Piketty believe that individuals and firms will not care about tax rates or that they will continue to work and invest at the same levels? Apparently social justice trumps all economic considerations.

This book will appeal to those on the Left who already hold Piketty's views—which, by the way, are popular already in France (as evidenced by governmental policy). It is somewhat tedious and superficial overall, but it was what I expected in its conclusions. It may well be significantly factually flawed, though that judgment will have to wait. It must, however, be read by those who would wish to counter its ideas. I look for a comprehensive rebuttal of the book, but suspect it may have already been published, perhaps some years ago (e.g., Nozick or Hayek).

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## The Character of the Manager: From Office Executive to Wise Steward

**Gregory R. Beabout**

London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013 (269 pages)

Managing a company is not an easy job. Managing it profitably, honestly, and fairly; producing useful goods and services for consumers; generating profits for its owners; creating a work environment in which employees can satisfy their needs and evolve as free and responsible people; and building a prosperous organization that, at the same time, contributes to the common good of its community is, in fact, a very difficult job. Indeed, many believe that it is impossible to fulfill all of these conditions simultaneously.

However, Gregory R. Beabout argues that it is not only possible but also essential to become an excellent manager.

Beabout, associate professor in St. Louis University's department of philosophy, exhibits a profound knowledge of moral philosophy and management science, based on his experience as teacher, researcher, and manager. The subject of the book is the character of the manager, although the organization (he calls it institution) is also important because it impacts directly on how the manager acts. Ultimately it is the person who shapes the organization, which is why the author declares that "my goal is to cultivate and grow a transformed conception of the character of the manager" (29), from office executive to wide steward. It is not a question of techniques but of virtues.

The book opens with a reconceptualization of the figure of the manager (chapters 1 and 2). Following Alasdair MacIntyre, chapters 3 through 8 present a critique of the character of the modern manager, "stuck with the motivational pursuit of success and unable to pursue human excellence for its own sake" (33), who "trades increased pay, power, and prestige ... in exchange for a life that is morally hollow, lacking virtue, and without purpose when considered in terms of the human quest for an integrated and meaningful life" (59), and who eventually becomes "a manipulator, a sham expert, an amoral technician, a disengaged ghost, a person who is fragmented, a cultivator of acquisitiveness, and a destroyer of communities of virtue" (99).

He then goes on to discuss the role of virtues in transforming people's character, in varied situations (chapters 9–13), finally proposing (chapters 14–16) the ideal of the manager as a wise steward who "artfully manages a group of people, seeing the available means on each matter, organizing, planning, and leading in a way that moves as near as possible in each circumstance toward a worthwhile goal ... guided by standards of excellence internal to managerial activities relative to the practices housed in one's institution" (171).

Included in Palgrave Macmillan's *Humanism in Business* series, the book aligns with the intellectual movement that seeks to remold corporate management as a humanistic activity, although stopping short of the intention pursued in many manuals on business ethics that propose different moral standards for management decisions, recommending one or the other (deontology, utilitarianism, feminism, and so forth) as the nature of the problem—or the decision-maker's interest—dictates. The use of criteria unrelated to the management task can never be a good guide, and the author has made the wise decision to clearly identify the role of virtues in building the manager's character from within his praxis.

The book is mainly intended for moral philosophers, management scholars, and managers. Moral philosophers will find a detailed analysis of the literature on character building, a searching critique of contemporary moral philosophy, and a comprehensive discussion of the connection between this discipline and management science.

Management academics will find a magnificent presentation of the person of the manager. In these times of fragmentation of the social sciences, this book, or at least some of its chapters, should be compulsory reading for management professors, instilling an awareness of the fundamentals of the management function, its limitations and the biases

that an ill-understood vision of management may create among their students. Managers will also profit from reading the book, although its presentation (solid text, no subsections, boxes or other aids) makes it difficult reading, in spite of the excellent summary at the beginning of each chapter.

The author proposes using the book to initiate a process of dialogue, “to do the groundwork to encourage managers, future managers, and moral philosophers who engage in a dialectical conversation with them to achieve a transformed understanding of the character [of] the manager as a wise steward” (211). I have no doubt that a discussion seminar focused on the subjects examined in *The Character of the Manager* will be an extremely useful exercise for MBA students or participants in executive education programs and, as I have already said, for business school professors, as it will compel them to revisit their views on the bureaucratic manager, an expert in the efficient use of means but unable to analyze the ends, and narrowly focused on external goods such as maximizing value for the shareholder.

The dialogue that Beabout proposes is consistent with virtue-based moral philosophy where virtues are learned by example, explanation, and practice. The author accepts the manager’s functions as they are portrayed in recent literature, with which he is very familiar, but does not develop them from a genuine theory of action, which, so it seems to me, goes beyond the content of a given practice. That is why I fear that his proposition of the wise steward will not be welcomed by managers unless they already know and are receptive to the potentialities offered by this ideal.

To summarize, offering the guidance of good philosophy, this book will enable its readers to build their ideas on a solid foundation and, above all, to develop their skills as good professionals and excellent—and successful—managers.

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## The Moral Background: An Inquiry into the History of Business Ethics

**Gabriel Abend**

Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2014 (399 pages)

This is an ambitious book by an extraordinarily erudite author. Its major aim seems to be to “shed new light on the tension between markets and morals” (15). It attempts to do this by developing a science (sociology) of morality. Not content simply to focus on behavior/practice or moral judgments, Abend focuses on a third level, namely the larger philosophical/social/context within which moral debate takes place. He believes that this moral background can be the object of scientific analysis; moreover, he specifically contextualizes the background as it existed in America between 1850–1930.

What he discovers is that there are two conflicting background views (narratives, meta-ethical positions, and so forth). One of these frameworks he identifies as the Standards of