

OTHER BOOKS OF INTEREST

Buddhist Economics: An Enlightened Approach to the Dismal Science

Clair Brown

New York: Bloomsbury, 2017 (224 pages)

Clair Brown, a professor of economics at the University of California, Berkeley, pursues answers to economic concerns through the religious and moral resources of Buddhism. She acknowledges the influence of E. F. Schumacher's *Small Is Beautiful* and seeks to expand on—and bring up to date—that book's insights. Brown identifies the two most pressing economic concerns as climate change and income inequality, and she argues that the free-market system is so entangled in the illusions and practices of self-centeredness, desire, and consumption that it is incapable of addressing these two central concerns. The solution, she argues, is a holistic Buddhist (though not exclusively Buddhist) approach that takes into account the reality of human nature and that pursues a meditative mindfulness that embraces our interdependence with one another and with Nature. Brown raises good questions about human happiness, materialism, and the busyness of modern life, but *Buddhist Economics* relentlessly repeats caricatures of market economies and, in the end, is more indebted to the collectivist and redistributivist policies of the modern political left than to any uniquely Buddhist economic insights. The book would have been greatly improved if the author had been more mindful of her own illusions and had engaged some of the best, holistic accounts of how market economies contribute to human flourishing. Instead Brown's Buddhist economics differs little from her own characterization of free markets as "a prop in a political debate" (45).

Civil Economy: Another Idea of the Market**Luigino Bruni and Stefano Zamagni**

Newcastle upon Tyne, United Kingdom: Agenda Publishing, 2016 (160 pages)

Bruni and Zamagni aim to recover the tradition of civil economy. The authors previously published a more extensive, scholarly treatment of this tradition (*Civil Economy: Efficiency, Equity, Public Happiness* [Peter Lang, 2007]). The present work is an introduction. Civil economy stands against many aspects of capitalism as it has come to exist today. It seeks to, as it were, rehumanize markets by directing them back to deeper questions of morality, relationality, and cooperation. The book is divided into two parts: civil economy's history and its ideas. The historical chapters introduce some important contributors to civil economy: Antonio Genovesi, Giacinto Dragonetti, John Ruskin, Achille Loria, and Amintore Fanfani. The second part, on ideas, includes chapters on the inadequacies of GDP as a measure of well-being, the concept of the commons, and social responsibility among economic actors. More is at issue in this book, however, than a debate about right economic order. It turns out that civil economy's criticisms of modern capitalism map rather well onto Roman Catholicism's criticisms of Protestantism. In fact, Bruni and Zamagni note that civil economy is largely Italian and Roman Catholic in its origins, and they depict modern capitalism as rooted in Anglo-American and Protestant thought. Suffice it to say that these cultural and religious overlays raise the stakes of the economic debate considerably.

Creatures of Possibility: The Theological Basis of Human Freedom**Ingolf U. Dalferth**

Grand Rapids, Michigan: Baker Academic, 2016 (240 pages)

This book (a translation of the 2011 German original) is a fascinating work of theological anthropology from one of today's most distinguished theologians. In sum, Dalferth argues that human beings have a basic, fundamental passivity that grounds all human activity. Our freedom and possibility are grounded in our passivity. In Dalferth's words: "we have come to exist, and we did not make ourselves" (7). Human beings first stand in relation to God. Hence "there is no neutral human *esse* that could form the basis of human life and activity" (69). *Creatures of Possibility* is a work of Lutheran theology in the sense that it expounds and interprets several anthropological insights of Martin Luther. Nevertheless, the text is rich in engagement with broader philosophical and theological literature on the nature of the human person. In addition to Luther, Dalferth interacts substantively with Nietzsche, Derrida, Marion, Friedrich Schiller, Lessing, and Hans Blumenberg. Along the way, Dalferth reflects theologically on gift, self-sacrifice, love, and the incarnation. The technical nature of this book likely will limit its audience to those who are used to reading academic theology and philosophy. The writing style is dense and the argument sometimes circuitous, but there are many moments of piercing clarity about the nature of the human person.

C. S. Lewis on Politics and the Natural Law**Justin Buckley Dyer and Micah J. Watson**

Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016 (160 pages)

Political scientists Dyer and Watson seek to correct the neglect of the political dimensions of C. S. Lewis's thought. The authors acknowledge that they are up against conventional wisdom and extensive evidence—including Lewis's own statements—that he was not interested in politics. But they argue that there are in fact extensive political aspects to Lewis's thought and that, despite his disdain for politicians, campaigns, and policy disputes, he had deep convictions about the political order and an extensive grasp of political theory. The book mines Lewis's works and sketches his political thought from the ground up, as it were, with chapters on Lewis's Christian convictions regarding human nature as created and fallen, his bedrock commitment to natural law and moral realism, his account of modernity's rise and its rejection of moral realities, and a practical chapter that applies Lewis's political thought to the realities of the post-Christian West. Scholars and students in the disciplines of ethics, theology, political science, cultural studies, and modern history will especially benefit from this book. Of particular interest for theologians is the presentation in chapter 3 of Karl Barth and Lewis as representing different Christian positions *vis-à-vis* natural law in the wake of Nazi Germany. This book paves the way for further study of the political thought of one of the most prominent Christian intellectuals of the twentieth century.

The Social Gospel in American Religion: A History**Christopher H. Evans**

New York: New York University Press, 2017 (304 pages)

This is by no means Christopher Evans's first foray into the history of the social gospel. His work on this subject includes a critically acclaimed biography of the father of the social gospel, Walter Rauschenbusch. In the present work, Evans adds his expertise to the ever-growing body of literature that seeks to understand the broad phenomenon of social religion in America. Several features of Evans's work are of particular note. He stresses that the social gospel was a "dynamic tradition of religious idealism" (221), but that it was also characterized by political aims, namely, the "desire to fuse religion and progressive political action" (11). He also argues (contrary to much scholarship on the social gospel) that this movement was not limited to the Progressive Era but endured through the civil rights movement and, in fact, throughout the twentieth century. In a provocative final chapter, Evans traces the way that the Christian Right and progressive evangelicals have adopted the tactics and ideas of the social gospel and have continued the movement's legacy. Throughout his analysis Evans is careful to include Roman Catholic, Jewish, and African American contributions to this movement of social salvation. It is worth asking whether Evans has stretched the duration and the concept of the social gospel too far. However readers answer that question, his history is both a readable survey and a significant study that deserves a place in the scholarly bibliography on the social gospel in America.

Big Hunger: The Unholy Alliance between Corporate America and Anti-Hunger Groups

Andrew Fisher

Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2017 (360 pages)

Drawing on many years of experience in the antihunger field, Andrew Fisher examines the rise and expansion of the emergency food sector (food banks, pantries, and soup kitchens) in modern America. These institutions, supported by community groups, government funding, and corporate donations, distribute some \$5 billion in food a year. Fisher argues that this charitable sector has exploded beyond its original intended purpose as an emergency measure. It has become an institutionalized behemoth, has failed to address the root causes of poverty and hunger (such as income inequality and unemployment), and has neglected long-term solutions. As the title's phrase "Unholy Alliance" suggests, Fisher argues that there is an immoral relationship between many major corporations and the antihunger industry such that the very corporations responsible for perpetuating hunger through low pay and other economic injustices are shielded from having to change their ways. Fisher explicitly endorses the solutions of the "progressive community" (8) and its economic and social reforms, including minimum-wage increases. Undoubtedly his proposed solutions will spark debate, but Fisher has nevertheless penned a perceptive analysis of the failure to adequately address America's hunger problem.

Moral Commerce: Quakers and the Transatlantic Boycott of the Slave Labor Economy

Julie L. Holcomb

Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 2016 (272 pages)

Julie Holcomb is assistant professor in the department of museum studies at Baylor University. In this history of the abolitionist free-produce movement (the boycott of slave-labor goods), Holcomb traces the movement from its origins among seventeenth-century Quakers to its decline in the nineteenth century. Taking a wider perspective than previous histories of the subject, Holcomb argues that the free-produce movement "was the first consumer movement to transcend the boundaries of nation, gender, and race" (3) and that this cause attracted abolitionists from across the ideological spectrum. As Holcomb shows, the free-produce movement was an intersection point for various social and intellectual realities: the Industrial Revolution and the rise of consumer culture, evangelical Christianity and its social activism, ideas of womanhood and the place of women in social action, and African American abolitionism and the development of black nationalism. *Moral Commerce* should be considered an indispensable history of this oft overlooked movement, and it may be of interest to anyone concerned about the enduring relationship between morality and commerce.

Economic Ethics in Late Medieval England, 1300–1500

Jennifer Hole

Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016 (300 pages)

Appearing in the series Archival Insights into the Evolution of Economics, Hole's book is a "socio-cultural study" of the theory, practices, and attitudes of economic life in late medieval England. The author builds on James Davis's *Medieval Market Morality* by widening the scope of the subject, and she argues that the union of morality and economics reached beyond urban trade practices and scholastic debates over usury. Hole's study is ambitious, with chapters on the origins and doctrines of economic ethics, the translation of these ideas into the life of the laity, economic ethics in great literary works of the period, economic law (including case studies of economic injustice), the ethical and unethical actions of landowners, and the understanding of economic ethics among individuals as gleaned from their personal correspondence. Nevertheless, the book delivers on its ambitious plan. This is a fine contribution to the history of economic thought. It is yet another demonstration that medieval economics was inseparably joined to morality and church doctrine, and Hole has presented compelling evidence that economic ethics pervaded all levels of English society in this era.

Global Perspectives on the Reformation:

Interactions between Theology, Politics and Economics

The Lutheran World Federation

Anne Burghardt and Simone Sinn (Editors)

Leipzig: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 2017 (158 pages)

The essays in this collection were papers and addresses given at the 2015 Lutheran World Federation (LWF) international conference. The book takes its title from the conference theme. Social transformation is the central goal arising from the interactions among theology, politics, and economics at this conference (8, 153). Specific proposals from the conference included "challenging centers of power"; "speaking out and acting against injustice such as economic, gender and climate injustice"; and recognizing that "some dynamics of power and privilege need to be overthrown" (154). As is often the case with conference volumes, the essays span diverse topics and disciplines. Essays touch on public theology, the relationship between Lutheran theological distinctives and socioeconomic issues, biblical perspectives on economic issues, and in-house matters related to the LWF. Not all the essays explicitly address economic themes, but those that do generally assume that capitalism is an exploitative system that the church must oppose. Beyond the LWF itself, this collection may appeal to anyone interested in Lutheran public theology or to Christians working in the social-justice industry.

Brand Islam: The Marketing and Commodification of Piety
Faegheh Shirazi

Austin: University of Texas Press, 2016 (294 pages)

Brand Islam expertly sheds light on a unique intersection point between faith and markets: the Islamic culture industry. The global market for Islamic consumer goods is booming, and corporations, marketing agencies, and entrepreneurs are eager to meet the demand. Shirazi examines “the process of Islamic commodification” and analyzes “how the phenomenon is affecting the religious, cultural, and economic lives of Muslim consumers” (7). The opening salvo of the book—a chapter on Western Islamophobia that catalogs xenophobic reactions in the West after 9/11—is a bit disconnected from the book’s main argument. Shirazi takes a rather moderate stance in this chapter, however, and she criticizes extremism on “both sides of the East-West equation” (37). In subsequent chapters Shirazi explores the seemingly endless complications that Islamic halal regulations face in the food industry and beyond. What counts as halal? Who decides? Can genetically modified foods be considered halal? Can a consumer trust that a product labeled halal is truly halal? Another chapter traces the expansion of the halal label from food to mundane products, such as toys, and highlights the targeted marketing of toys to Muslim children. There is also a chapter on beauty products and two chapters on Muslim fashion (specifically women’s fashion) and the clothing industry. Ultimately *Brand Islam* is an illuminating case study in the relationship between religion and the consumer market. The book details and documents contemporary trends in Islamic consumer goods, and these details will not interest everyone, but the book’s broader questions related to religion, markets, and East-West interactions will have wide appeal.