

Book Reviews

The Work of Inclusion: An Ethnography of Grace, Sin, and Intellectual Disabilities. By Lorraine Cuddeback-Gedeon. New York: T&T Clark, 2023. xii + 200 pages. \$29.95.

This recent contribution to the *T & T Clark Studies in Social Ethics, Ethnography, and Theology* series is sure to be considered a classic, especially for the vital work it does to build bridges between fields. Lorraine Cuddeback-Gedeon has produced a compelling example of why theology is an inexhaustible enterprise and must always attend to the margins of social concern.

Cuddeback-Gedeon writes with exceptional clarity, making this text accessible for undergraduate students or anyone interested in learning more about the experience of people living with intellectual and developmental disability (hereafter, IDD). She defines the complex reality of IDD as a “set of impairments and behaviors that arise from delayed intellectual development, resulting in persons being unable to attend to the everyday tasks of life without a significant level of assistance from caregivers (paid or unpaid)” (4). The introduction alone is a masterful account of what a liberationist lens brings to human experience (as deconstructive, reconstructive, and political) and how the moral demands of solidarity aim for personal and collective transformation. Citing Ada Maria Isasi-Díaz, Cuddeback-Gedeon focuses on solidarity “as mutuality and shared praxis between the privileged and the poor” or those rendered socially insignificant (9). Here she notes the importance of the ethnographer’s reflexivity to scrutinize one’s social context and the need to disrupt, contest, and interrogate the accompanying biases, especially as a nondisabled theologian. By taking seriously the “embodied revelation” of persons with IDD, we can be more attentive and responsive to the wisdom and grace of their experiences while fostering “careful forms of accountability between nondisabled and disabled persons (11–12). This introductory chapter also employs Elizabeth Dreyer’s fascinating work on grace which, by focusing on the “description” (rather than “definition”) of grace, helps us become more attuned to grace and explore its consequences on individuals and communities (16).

The remaining chapters draw on Cuddeback-Gedeon’s ethnographic fieldwork, where she observed clients with various kinds of IDD at

“Payton Center” (a pseudonym) and interviewed staff, clients, and family members. The first chapter overviews how Payton reflects the local development of the broader disability rights movement. It summarizes the evolution of language for persons with intellectual and developmental disabilities and the role parents have played in trying to advocate for the dignity and rights of their children with IDD, with important implications for the future of parental advocacy.

The second chapter examines the shift toward self-advocacy, autonomy, and flourishing in the pursuit of “disability justice” for persons with IDD. Cuddeback-Gedeon turns to Wolf Wolfensberger’s proposal for “social role valorization” to challenge social stigma and other obstacles to inclusion and integration into community life (66). This chapter provides a thoughtful and thorough consideration of the spatial and relational “sense of belonging” that orbits around moral questions pertaining to agency, rights, friendship, and structured independence (74).

The third chapter focuses on the grace that arises within relationships and the care work done for and with persons with IDD. Cuddeback-Gedeon presents care work as the interface of dependence and independence, a fecund *locus theologicus* to explore the moral entanglement of autonomy, vulnerability, and power differentials. Aspiring to build “epistemic respect” between persons, “testimonial justice” points toward honoring the experiences, meaning-making, and flourishing of persons with IDD (98). This is a remarkably rich exploration of the encounters and relationships that can help people feel understood, respected, and supported, even while wrestling with the dependency both clients and care workers experience.

The fourth chapter traces difficult conversations regarding the structural sin of ableism and how both staff and clients can be complicit in it, leading to moral complexity. Here Cuddeback-Gedeon applies Darlene Fozard Weaver’s work on moral agency and social sin to the “sin of normalcy,” “the primary structural sin against which people with IDD are struggling for liberation and grace” (130). Here we see Cuddeback-Gedeon at her best: masterfully weaving together her expertise in ethnography with theological and ethical reflections on accompanying people with IDD. Her writing on “soft agencies,” taking risks in the face of normalcy, and tensions between resistance and complicity is marked by both realism and hopefulness.

A robust conclusion addresses where faith communities’ current inclusive practices reflect the principles of normalization (in both positive and negative senses) and potential for greater dialogue between faith communities and secular social services. For those who teach religious ethics, Cuddeback-Gedeon’s final lines may help show students why thinking theologically is still of pressing importance: “Following the ADA, churches were accused of deciding to be

‘excused from the table’ of disability justice. Now is the time to earn back our place and join our voices together for the work of inclusion” (164). While some may be skeptical of the difference academic writing can make, this book urges us onward, holding us accountable to the cause of justice—especially for those whose dignity and flourishing remain in question.

MARCUS MESCHER
Xavier University

Modern Virtue: Mary Wollstonecraft and a Tradition of Dissent. By Emily Dumler-Winckler. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2022. xii + 375 pages. \$80.00.

Modern Virtue: Mary Wollstonecraft and a Tradition of Dissent by Emily Dumler-Winckler is an ambitious text that simultaneously exegetes the thought of Mary Wollstonecraft, critiques Wollstonecraft scholarship, provides a substantive biography, engages contemporary discourses in Christian ethics, feminist ethics, and political theory, and argues that Wollstonecraft provides necessary interventions to those discourses. This book is oriented toward a scholarly audience, although one could certainly excerpt it for undergraduates in upper-level courses that touch on topics like virtue theory, modernity, Enlightenment philosophy, or religious and political dissent. There are already quite a few published reviews of Dumler-Winckler’s *Modern Virtue*, which nicely summarize her overall project in its dimensions as historical-political corrective to the genealogies of modernity from thinkers like MacIntyre and philosophical-theological corrective to both defenders and despisers of virtue ethics who, for very different reasons, see modern virtue “as a contradiction in terms” (314).

Given that, here I will focus on the virtues she identifies as modern and to which the title alludes by way of outlining the book. *Modern Virtue* proceeds in seven parts with five main chapters. The introduction is where Dumler-Winckler contextualizes Wollstonecraft within her own time as well as the way Wollstonecraft and her legacy are still at work within the present day, despite how she is often left out of most narratives of modernity, especially in theology and religious studies (13). Dumler-Winckler informs the reader that she offers an Aristotelian-Thomistic reading of Wollstonecraft, whereas other scholars offer a more Stoic or Platonic-Augustinian reading of her virtue theory (31). For that reason, it would have been helpful if Dumler-Winckler had more explicitly identified the excesses and deficiencies of each of the modern virtues she argues Wollstonecraft sets forth, since it is not always clear how these modern virtues are virtues in the Aristotelian-Thomist sense rather than just ways the