

Bioethics After God: Morality, Culture, and Medicine. By Mark J. Cherry. Notre Dame Press, 2024. ix + 333 pages. \$55.00 hardcover, \$43.99 e-book.

This book critiques the sources of authority in contemporary bioethics by forwarding the following epistemological claim: “Without God, morality can no longer appeal to any ultimate foundations to ground claims to truth” (7). The third and fourth chapters are the most comprehensive cataloging of examples intended to support this claim, and researchers investigating any of these specific topics will find these chapters valuable. The third chapter discusses modern bioethical dilemmas in eugenics, mitochondrial DNA replacement therapy, and euthanasia. The fourth chapter focuses on transgender issues, sex robots, brain transplants, and modern attempts to redefine the nuclear family. Each of these topics demonstrate how contemporary bioethics has assigned “cardinal moral value to individual liberty conceptualized as autonomous self-determination” (77), an unreliable authority for resolving these complex bioethical issues because of the moral relativity that emerges.

The fifth chapter is titled “Secular Fundamentalism,” which the author defines as a power that “requires rigid adherence in the public forum” to the “core doctrines of diversity, inclusion, and equity” (160). This secular fundamentalism is illustrated within two contemporary issues: the banning of smoking in public places and significant restrictions on legal gun ownership. Because many public hazards exceed the dangers of secondhand smoke and gun ownership, restricting either is inconsistent with secular logic, and apparently the author’s logic. A similar critique is applied to coercive tactics in administering vaccines, especially during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The sixth chapter and final chapter confuses the overall argument when the author suddenly states, with little argumentation, that lying should be employed to avoid conflicts with secular power or to “maintain purity of purpose” (201–202). All previous chapters argued that God’s commandments are the source of securing moral normativity, making it difficult to understand how this endorsement of lying contributes to the book’s thesis. The author makes no attempt to either acknowledge or explain this difficulty.

The author cites two sources of moral relativity that are likely to be contested by some readers. The first cited source of such relativity is the professionalization of bioethics, which is focused on achieving secular standards while neglecting any significant attention to “right worship and appropriate asceticism directed toward a personal and loving God” (70). This professionalization of bioethics creates a situation in which “a bias toward novel and creative academic arguments effectively guarantees religious change, spiritual disorientation,

defense of nontraditional moralities, and innovative forms of heresy” (57–58). Such an academic climate means that “moral theology has lost its grounding in God” (77), and without God, there is only relativity, not normativity.

The second provocative source of moral relativity is some modern pontificates. The author says that both Pope John XXIII and Pope Francis, in varying ways, have deflated Western Christianity “into a moral project to support progressive political objectives and liberal religious reform” (62), a project that has contributed to “a subtle but significant change in Roman Catholic bioethics” (67). This change (not development) is supposedly destructive to normative ethics.

As a whole, the central claim within this book is not so much convincingly defended as it is dogmatically repeated (at least forty times, by my count), making it more of an unflinching slogan rather than a developed conclusion. Such dogmatism appears throughout the text, such as the abrupt assertion that “a female Methodist minister wearing a pink shirt with a white collar will provide quite different religious moral advice than an Orthodox Christian priest, Orthodox Jewish rabbi, or traditional imam” (171). Apparently clothing, gender, and denomination are thoroughly sufficient grounds for discriminating the moral viewpoint of a Christian theologian. Dogmatism also emerges in the frequent use of partisan language that is exclusively critical of “left-leaning” (69), “progressive” (78), and “liberal” (79) perspectives, raising suspicion that one is reading more of a rhetorical rather than academic account of the issues.

One dogmatic assertion this book does prove convincingly is that “It is not unusual for bioethicists to operate as partisans of specific moral agendas and ideological perspectives” (108). There is no apparent effort to shield this book from such a tendency, and thus many readers are likely to heed the author’s own advice: such bioethicists “ought to be approached with a healthy dose of skepticism” (108). The moral questions raised by this text do demand answers, and this book succeeds in convincing the reader that ideological perspectives are incapable of answering them.

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Christology and Global Ethics: Encountering the Poor in a Pluralist Reality. By Alexandre Andrade Martins. Paulist Press, 2023. vii + 256 pages. \$34.95 paperback, 27.96 e-book.

It is the rare occasion that one discovers a true “gem” amid the prolific overflow of books from the academy of theological ethicists. However, such is the descriptor fitting for our present title. This work