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Book Reviews

Norm and Context in the Social Sciences. Sander Griffioen and Jan Verhoogt, eds. (New York: University Press of America) 1990. 295 pp. Paperback. \$30.75. Reviewed by Harry Van Belle, Visiting Scholar at the Studies Institute of Dordt College and Associate Professor of Psychology at Redeemer College, Ancaster, Ontario.

The buzz word in the social sciences of the late twentieth century is surely "contextuality," meaning the view that those sciences can lay claim only to "local knowledge," to borrow Clifford Geertz's phrase, rather than to universal knowledge. Social scientific knowledge is knowledge of a specific context, without claims that reach further.

Appeals to "contextuality" often have strong relativistic overtones. They leave little or no room for norms that transcend the context. For this reason many Christians fear that any appeal to contextuality *ipso facto* implies the end of normativity. But the notion of contextuality need not have this as a result. It may also be an acknowledgement of the diversity of shapes, forms, and situations in which things present themselves to us. It may be rooted in a respect for the qualitative variety of creaturely life.

The central conviction of this book, which contains the proceedings of a conference held at the Free University in Amsterdam in 1987, is that contextuality need not obstruct acknowledgement of normativity. Citing Albert Wolters to the effect that norms are put into practice in specific contexts, and J.P.A. Mekkes to the effect that norms are discovered in action rather than the product of theory, the book states that norms are to be found in, not construed by or from the context. Contextualization is the application of norms to specific situations. But if normativity is granted to these specific situations themselves, contextualization deteriorates into relativizing. This is what William Rowe refers to as a "collapsing of normativity into contextuality."

This book further argues that proponents of contextualization need to maintain some reference to normativity. If they continue to advocate a mere plurality of viewpoints in the social science they will never be able to escape the present day dilemma of the leveling uniformity of positivism over against the exuberant pluralizing of post-positivism in the social sciences.

In a seminal essay, Johan Vander Hoeven attempts to break through this dilemma by arguing that universality conceived of as by itself alone leads to a radical

loss of meaning just as uniqueness by itself leads to rigid isolation. What is needed, he states, is an "encounter" between the two and he views this encounter as the "hearth" of normativity. With reference to Buber he argues that normativity exists "in between" universality and particularity.

Vander Hoeven's "root duality" is a key to all the other essays of this volume. Characteristic of these contributions is a common effort to account for how normative choices present themselves and are being decided in doing social science. The activity of this effort is one of "probing" the "data" and "reshaping" these in accordance with one's Christian worldview.

For example, in describing the dominant paradigms within feminism Mary Stewart Van Leeuwen argues that post-positivism has created a climate in which the worldview-dependency of basic concepts can be acknowledged in public. This prepares the ground for fruitful dialogue between Christian scholars and others. Her worldview analysis of the basic paradigms in feminism leads her to appreciate the emerging paradigm of "differentiating feminism" because of its acceptance of gender differences. However, she argues that, to be truly fruitful, this "datum" must be probed, anchored, and reshaped in accordance with the creational norms for female and male maturity.

In another essay Harry Fernhout attempts to demonstrate the double meaning of "human autonomy" in Kohlberg's notion of development. It can either signify autarchy or human maturity. On the basis of this analysis he argues that the notion of "development" must be supplemented by the notion of "becoming," or the preparation for "human vocation."

André Droogers explores the possible danger that our so-called "biblical criteria" may sometimes hide an ethnocentric bias. He illustrates this in a discussion about anthropological and missiological views of "syncretism." He is wary of "normative definitions" of syncretism because they frequently consider Western Orthodox Christianity as the norm. Jim

Olthuis points out that this is not due to a tension between the "normative" and the "contextual," but is rather a difference between "authentic" and "in-authentic" contextualizations of the norm.

David Lyon critically examines the notion of an "information society" and the reductionism and determinism which this notion implies. As an alternative he offers the concept of "responsible technology," which Arthur Zijlstra in his critique of Lyon's essay rebaptizes as "reflexive technology."

The many other essays of the book hold forth in a similar vein, enough to show that Christians can fruitfully work with the conceptual pair of "normativity" and "contextuality" in the social sciences. I personally

Business Through the Eyes of Faith, by Richard Chewning, John Eby, and Shirley Roels (San Francisco: Harper and Row) 1990. 266 pages, paperback, \$9.95. Reviewed by John Visser, Professor of Business Administration.

Business Through the Eyes of Faith (BTEF) is not a critique by theologians of current business practices. Neither is it an attempt by "successful" business people to justify, through an appeal to the Scriptures, what they would like to do or have already done. Rather, it is a book by college business professors which attempts to communicate the often superhuman challenge of doing business "Christianly" in twentieth century North America. The overall conclusion is that those who seek to use the Scriptures as a lamp for their business lives are likely to find the process very difficult and challenging, but not impossible. At the same time, the authors make it clear that the potential blessings (not necessarily financial) to Christians in business and those directly affected by the decisions they make can also be substantial.

A theme that emerges early in the book is that most of the difficulties confronted by Christians in business go well beyond the temptation or pressure to do things that are quite obviously beyond either the law or generally accepted tenets of Christian morality (although, of course, issues along these lines can and do come up). Rather, the major challenge to Christians in business involves making very specific and very difficult business decisions which do justice to the broad Scriptural themes which we claim govern our lives. Early on the authors appeal to God's injunction in Micah 6:8 to "do justice, to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God." They define justice as "a call to do the right thing in the right manner with the right motive" (27). They note that this becomes extremely difficult when one abandons the simplistic idea that a business exists only (or primarily) to make

like Quentin Schultze's narrative approach to an analysis of popular culture.

A fascinating feature of this book is that it illustrates how its authors work with their Christian worldview in their field of study. Each of them wants to practice their discipline Christianly, yet in close contact with the world. They want to challenge others to demonstrate the explanatory power of their concepts, theories, and approaches. They do this with humility, yet under the conviction that their own Christian approach is able to stand the test as well as any other. In discussion with others they want to justify their worldview as a compass essential for proper scientific work. In my opinion every Christian scholar ought to read this book.

money (although they are careful to enunciate the critical role that profits play in business).

BTEF defines business success in terms of service. The authors admit, however, that this definition opens a Pandora's box of sticky business decisions. Since businesses exist to serve their customers, employees, owners, neighborhoods, etc., it is never easy to decide how to divide the resources flowing into the business. When times get tough, it is even more difficult to decide how the losses should be handled. In addition, since Christians also have clear responsibilities to such diverse elements as creditors, competitors, governments, God's creation, the poor (both near and far away), future generations, etc., the number and complexity of the decisions to be made becomes almost mind-boggling.

The authors' attempt to develop Christian perspective at the broadest possible level seems to be both a necessary and appropriate first step. They note that one's faith affects the way in which he approaches issues as diverse as product quality, leadership style, compensation, hiring, firing, employee development, planning and organization, working conditions, pollution control, pricing, advertising, community involvement, etc. Spliced into these discussions are descriptions of the essentiality of moral and ethical behavior to business practice as well as some suggestions as to how Christians should approach broad economic questions, such as how to evaluate the economic system in which they are immersed, or how to maintain a proper perspective on business-government relationships.

The book's strength is also its weakness. Many subjects are touched so lightly, that they remain virtually