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## Woke Capitalism: How Corporate Morality is Sabotaging Democracy and A World of Three Zeros: The New Economics of Zero Poverty, Zero Unemployment, and Zero Net Carbon Emissions (Book Reviews)

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# BOOK REVIEWS

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Carl Rhodes, *Woke Capitalism: How Corporate Morality is Sabotaging Democracy*. Bristol University Press, 2021. 240pp. 978-1529211665, and Muhammed Yunnus, *A World of Three Zeros: The New Economics of Zero Poverty, Zero Unemployment, and Zero Net Carbon Emissions*. New York, Public Affairs Press, 2017. 304pp. 978-1610397575. Reviewed by Marc L. Andreas, Associate Professor of Business Leadership, Kuyper College.

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Teaching business and economics at a Christian college and preparing future business leaders for the wider world means staying engaged in the current conversations, whether the speakers are professed Christians or not. To this end, two newer books caught my attention. Each one advocates for one side of the current debate regarding companies involving themselves in broader social-justice issues. As I plan to bring up this debate in my upcoming classes, my students, like our society at large, will surely have different views. Some may agree that companies should step up to make a difference with major challenges in our society, while others may prefer that businesses remain focused on their economic duties and avoid explicit involvement in social or political issues.

Carl Rhodes, the author of *Woke Capitalism*, sees a direct correlation between the erosion of democracies and companies becoming vocal and active in social issues. He provides a helpful background on the history of the word “woke”: a term referring to being awake to (or cognizant of) what is actually happening in society in terms of socio-political issues, in contradistinction to those who may not be paying attention. For Rhodes, the new and growing trend of companies becoming active in social issues is a type of capitalism that is actually a rhetorical ruse to maintain our current status of significant economic inequality. In his opinion, companies are only providing lip-service in favor of certain social issues, but in truth they don’t sacrifice enough to make a significant difference. Corporations are merely “going woke” (or “liberal”) to ensure that capitalism continues and people are satisfied with (or don’t pay attention to) the current inordinate gap between the rich and

the poor. Ultimately, he is both cynical and pessimistic. For Rhodes, companies are motivated to say the right things to make sure that the majority of people don’t revolt against the income and wealth inequality that exists in the US and many other major democracies.

As an Australian, Rhodes spends most of his time explaining current issues such as Black Lives Matter or climate change to help provide an American context to readers who may live outside of the US. However, he concludes each chapter with very little evidence of how these movements and problems will actually erode democracy. There are plenty of anecdotes about large corporations in *Woke Capitalism*, but little measurable evidence of how exactly our democracy is changing. For example, he claims that wealthy CEOs giving away millions of dollars to charitable organizations working on social issues is replacing our government’s efforts to do so through a democracy. He discusses Amazon at length—how Jeff Bezos is pledging to give \$1 billion/year to fight climate change over a ten-year period—but it does not seem clear how that is replacing the \$400+ billion/year that US corporations pay in taxes, a large portion of which gets funneled into social programs.

Fundamentally, Rhodes is unable to accept the blurring of the three spheres of government, business, and nonprofits, as most want to do good and solve problems. He wants strict divisions of these spheres. What about social enterprise, or the 5,000+ B-Corps in more than 80 countries around the world that focus on tackling social and environmental challenges? His only solution to the problems he describes seems to be that companies should stop being active in social issues and let the

government take care of these instead. It seems illogical, and a bit naive, to assume that the wealthy business elites are giving away millions (and billions) of their dollars—often publicly and jointly—as a secret method to keep the masses supportive of an economy that continues to allow them to make their millions (and billions).

Rhodes makes the mistake of trying to oversimplify our complex world by imagining a vast, hidden conspiracy, and thereby misses the benefit of drawing from Abraham Kuyper's idea of sphere sovereignty. Even from his nineteenth-century perspective, Kuyper advocated for a collective effort that both (1) acknowledged the expertise of each sphere or sector of society and (2) encouraged those spheres to work together to tackle some of society's biggest problems (such as poverty, educational inequality, and the negative impacts that the industrial revolution was having on families and communities). Only when multiple spheres work together, each playing a vital role in impacting a social issue, can we bring Christ's shalom to the suffering in our world.

In contrast and as a much better alternative to Rhodes's book, Muhammad Yunus' *A World of Three Zeroes* shares more than three decades of experience in leading and supporting the exponential growth of social businesses around the world. So-called "social businesses" (also known as "social enterprises") are the new kind of business that focuses on solving social or environmental problems while still remaining profitable. Utilizing inspira-

tional stories and robust metrics, Yunus provides convincing evidence of how the new movement of businesses working on social problems can collaborate with governments and nonprofit organizations to make significant progress on some of the biggest social challenges in our world. This movement is widespread in Yunus's home country of Bangladesh but is now also growing rapidly in many larger developed countries such as the U.S. The importance and opportunity here cannot be overstated. As Yunus explains, "[s]ocial business represents a crucial element in the transition from our current greed-based civilization to a civilization based on the deeper human values of sharing and caring. It's a transition we must complete successfully if we want to pass along a truly sustainable way of life to the generations that follow us" (142).

Yunus may not be a Christian, but it seems obvious that God has granted him the wisdom to help us all get a glimpse of a godly economics, one that honors God's design for our world. In my upcoming Kuyper College classes, my students will be reading Yunus's book. We will be exploring Abraham Kuyper's sphere sovereignty together and looking for evidence of its blessings in the everyday business interactions that populate our lives. How might we, like Muhammad Yunus, create communities filled with businesses that promote and reinforce social justice, economic fairness, and environmental sustainability? This is a key twenty-first-century question for all of us.