

A Dialogue

Let's Quit *Thinking* About Integration for a Change

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Dr. Vander Veen challenges Christian business faculty to help students develop presuppositions with meaning that will motivate them to put on the mind of Christ. This, the author believes, will shield them from Hegelian and Socratic views of thinking, views which hinder the Word of God from bearing fruit because of their emphasis on "Truth" in humans.

Introduction

Dennis McCann (1995), in his "A Word to the Reader" preface to *On Moral Business*, speaks of the frustration of trying to overcome "compartmentalized thinking" and the excitement of watching the "academic orthodoxy" of "value neutrality" become gradually revised into an orthodoxy of multi-dimensional thinking. In other words, the authors of *On Moral Business*, frustrated by the lack of integration between disciplines such as economics and business and God's Word, were struggling with the same goals as the sponsors of this journal. McCann notes that currently the work of integration is being done mostly by academic revisionists and partly by Christians. He then mentions ways to integrate faith and business in the classroom through the reading and discussing of *On Moral Business* articles.

But I propose something quite different. I surmise that even though we may be winning the battle over one-dimensional thinking, we are still losing the war for integration. Maybe the work of multi-dimensional thinking is being done only in part by Christians because it does not have meaning for Christians to do it, and this is good, since Christians, in the words of Kierkegaard, may be "better hanged than married off to contemporary philosophy" (Evans, 1992, p. 25).

In other words, it would seem that Christianity must do better than borrow the multi-dimensional thinking of non-Christian academic revisionists. After all, Dostoevski's *The Brothers Karamazov* has taught us that it is impossible to have morals without Christ. Given Christians' general aversion to the real and imagined relativism of postmodernism, it is ironic that

Christians may have to get more deeply involved with Kierkegaardian existentialism if they want to better integrate their faith with their lives.

The reason multi-dimensional thinking, including reading and discussing articles, may not help us cross the River Jordan is that multi-dimensional thinking, like one-dimensional thinking, is stuck in the paradigm of thinking. This helps for communicating the reasons behind one's actions of faith, but it does little in terms of motivating actions of faith. *In short, the more we think about biblical integration in the classroom, the less likely we will get integrative behavior outside the classroom because we are ignoring what makes living the Christian life meaningful.* Ironically, by thinking about integration we may be allowing our minds to get in the way of our actions.

Instead of encouraging our students to think, we must help them actively "work out their own salvation" so that integrative behavior will flow naturally and subjectively. This is a tough lesson to teach, because it may be a lesson that cannot be taught, but rather grabbed hold of by faith. Yet I believe in my heart of hearts that God wants me to try, through Kierkegaard.

Of course, the fact that I say God is "calling" me should make you, the reader, skeptical and it

should be a debate-opening comment. For you must wonder whether it is God calling me to write this article or Satan. You may also wonder why a Calvinist is writing about a viewpoint more Lutheran. But it has been the wondering that for me has made all the difference, though I am as fearful as you that I am following the wrong call.

Nonetheless, the point of this lesson that is difficult to teach is demonstrating that, as Christian college faculty, we are currently overemphasizing multi-dimensional thinking, a thinking that attempts to integrate our various disciplines with the Bible in order to create Christian ethics. For in so thinking, we forget what it means to be individual heroes of faith, and worse, *we fail to experience our faith, which, ironically, would make us automatically integrative.*

Indirect Communication

To do this lesson, or rather to communicate to others why I am against thinking when it comes to motivating others to actions of faith, we must understand Kierkegaard. To understand Kierkegaard, we can turn to an understandable introduction by Palmer (1996).

Palmer tells us that a first thing to know about Kierkegaard is his Theory of Indirect Communication. Kierkegaard thought that subjective Truth was

the most important kind of truth (and for this reason, I will capitalize the "T"). Subjective Truth consists of "deep insights or revelations or choices" an individual makes in his/her life, and these are different in the case of each individual.


However, this is not to say that subjective Truth is

relativistic truth. A point Kierkegaard was trying to make, in opposition to Hegel and others, is that this Truth is not within humans. Rather, it is Truth given to humans by a source outside of humanity. Since Kierkegaard was a Christian, I will believe his source was God.

Unfortunately, subjective Truth, being what it is, cannot be communicated directly. Because it cannot be communicated directly, the receiver of this Truth does not know with certainty the source of this Truth. Therefore, the receiver is always living in a state of fear and trembling because he or she must rely on faith. Given that faith is merely "assurances" and "convictions" of things we cannot see (Hebrews 11:1), and given that humans are made in God's image (Genesis 1:27) and are not little pieces of God Himself, the idea of subjective Truth does not seem too radical. However, the ideas of

subjective Truth and Indirect Communication put Kierkegaard in the paradoxical position of trying to communicate directly that which can only be communicated indirectly. To make his point, Kierkegaard

made his writings difficult to read, yet meaningful. At the same time, he left room for



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various interpretations. Therefore, what I think Kierkegaard is saying may not be what others think Kierkegaard is saying; one could agree with Kierkegaard and not with me, or with me and not with Kierkegaard, or disagree or agree with both of us. But I am motivated to take this risk regardless because I have been rewarded for "sticking out my neck" in the past.

The idea of indirect communication also gives us something to think about when we read the words of Christ. According to Kierkegaard, Christ used irony. C. Hugh Holman (1980), in *A Handbook to Literature*, defines verbal irony as a "figure of speech in which the actual intent is expressed in words which carry the opposite meaning." In the Gospels, for example, Jesus used irony when he spoke of the Kingdom of God. He said it was like a farmer planting crops, yeast in bread, a

treasure hidden in the field, a buyer of pearls, a fisherman's net, etc. Although it is true that at one level Christ was using simile and metaphor, at another level Christ was using irony: the irony is that even though the Kingdom of Heaven is explained in earthly terms, it is not earthly at all!

Jesus used irony, thought Kierkegaard, because irony is unbalancing. Irony destabilizes the "smug complacency" that stands between the individual and Truth. Irony forces the listener to confront the paradoxical force of the message and, in so doing, forces the listener to confront himself or herself. Because irony is unbalancing and causes this confrontation, different interpretations result. *Irony, then, is the antecedent of subjective Truth.*

For example, when Jesus says "the person who loses his life will find it," He is using irony and it is unbalancing. Any attempt to understand this message causes the reader to think about who he or she is. Because different readers have different experiences, "taking up one's cross" can mean different things.

For me, taking up my cross means I must completely sacrifice my own self-interest and do that which God asks me to do, which may be to give whoever next comes to my office door my utmost attention, regardless of whether it is a student or whether

the action makes me unprepared for my next lecture or keeps me from working on this paper. It means I may have to sacrifice my own and my community's ethics in helping the person whom I may not even know, since being unprepared to lecture will cause me to violate the responsibilities I believe I have as a lecturer and scholar and provider for my family. But I will only really know what "taking up my cross" means when I act. *The point is that subjective Truth is synonymous with acting and meaning, not thinking,* particularly in the way Kierkegaard defines thinking.

But is taking advantage of an interruption a worthwhile act if it violates one's ethics? One only has to turn to Abraham (Genesis 22), whose daily activity was interrupted by God, a God who called him to murder his only son. And for attempting to do it, Abraham ended up in Hebrews 11! One can only imagine my community's actions if I decided to murder my sons because God "called" me to do it.

This, of course, raises another interesting question. How do we know whether or not the action is one of faithfulness to God? How did Abraham know? How did Noah? Or Rahab? Although we can "test the spirits" by seeing whether they acknowledge the incarnation of Jesus Christ (1 John 4:1), we can never really

know. Therefore, we are in a state of fear and trembling: the fear alone of following Satan should cause us enough trembling to limit our radical behavior. How Abraham did what he did, I do not know! But he did it—he went to Mt. Moriah. *Faith, then, is the antecedent of subjective Truth, or action.*

Yet only to think about “taking up my cross” limits meaning, particularly in terms of the way Kierkegaard defines thinking, because thinking puts barriers around the potential for experience. When that person comes to my door, when I live out this experience, is when I experience meaning, because it is then that I am living the tension of not knowing. When I make such actions reasonable, their unreasonableness may cause me not to do them at all!

In summary, then, irony is the antecedent of faith and faith is the antecedent of subjective Truth, or action. But it is in the acting where faith is integrated in a meaningful way, a faith continuously doubted by fear and trembling.

But being subjective does not mean we have to fear sliding down some “slippery slope” of relativity, with or without fear and trembling. On the contrary, if we still believe that God has the whole world in His hands (even though He really does not have hands because He is a spirit),

what is there to fear? Look at Christ’s disciples: they just left their work and their families and followed Jesus. They seemed to have acted without thinking at all. Had they thought much about it first, it is doubtful they would have gone with Christ. And when they did think about it, like when Peter thought about what he was doing when he was walking on water (Matthew 14:30), their faith grew weaker.

The point is that we cannot wait to base our faith or our actions on facts-in-evidence. Jesus was a historical person and this is essential to our faith. But one must also believe in the Incarnation if one is a Christian, for one must believe that it took a sinless God to be “the second Adam” since no other Adam would do. Yet it is beyond reason to understand how the eternal can become temporal, and if one waits for one’s reason to make this judgment, one’s faith is lost.

In the final analysis, then, we can only believe in Christ because we believe in Christ: the evidence of faith is faith. Undoubtedly, this is a circular argument, and it represents what Kierkegaard termed the “madness at the center of normality.” But the irony of “madness” at the center of “normality” is the antecedent of faith, because one is left with nothing else but faith. One has to believe in God or believe in something else.

Amazingly, many people make that something else money. But this too is mad since at the center of capitalism is merely pieces of paper backed by nothing except the words "I.O.U."

Subjective vs. Objective Truth

One cannot understand indirect communication without understanding subjective Truth. The second thing to know, then, about Kierkegaard is his emphasis on subjective versus objective Truth. Kierkegaard thought that to think objectively meant to grasp only those things which can be universalized. This, of course, is

the kind of knowledge we develop and measure in the social sciences. We point to

things and categorize them in terms of universal concepts and therefore when we say "to think" we mean to "elevate something from the unintelligible world of particulars to the intelligible world of general concepts," or abstractions. But it is in the unintelligible world of particulars where the meaning is because this is where subjective Truth lies.

Subjective Truth, then, is truth for which there is no objective criteria to which we can appeal. Subjective Truth has as its foundation faith, and faith is the only evidence of faith. Subjective

Truth, ironically, is not something we have within us, but something that is given to us by God. Yet we can only believe that it was given to us by God. The only evidence we have is the Bible, but then again we must believe that the Bible was inspired by God. So again we are left with a circular argument.

Because what we do and what we think naturally flow from what we believe, even objective truth has as its foundation faith, so that such universals represent a culture's collective faith. But collective faith is watered down and less

meaningful faith. This is why objective truths, like those business principles that I study and try to

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confirm empirically in my discipline, have less meaning to me than studying Christian business ethics, which have less meaning to me than my own experiences.

The point is that objective truth, or the truth we use to communicate ideas, has as its antecedent subjective Truth, which has as its antecedent faith. This brings us back to the beginning of the article: It is no surprise that we have been frustrated by one-dimensional thinking or by value neutrality. One-dimensional thinking is not

valueless, even though it tries to be (it too has as its foundation faith); it is rather thinking with little meaning. But we should also be frustrated by multi-dimensional thinking, because multi-dimensional thinking not only tries to create abstract universals, it does so by watering-down our individual experiences of faith. The reason it waters down these experiences is because it relies on thinking in order to communicate these ethical principles, whereas meaningful integration depends on acting, which follows an unbalancing due to some irony. But when was the last time an instructor of integration relied on irony to deliver his or her lecture?

For it is in thinking that all experiences become common and part of an overarching, abstract theory, at least three steps removed from the unbalancing caused by the irony of Christ's indirect communication, at least two steps removed from faith, and at least one step removed from actual integration, or subjective Truth. The point is that subjective Truth is acting and from acting comes deeper meaning: If one wants to experience meaning, the best way is to act.

Thinking may be an active activity, but its tools elevate the unintelligible particulars of many individual actions to intelligible concepts. For instance, to read that I must "lose my life to find

it" is unbalancing. But to try to communicate what this means to others or to borrow from others what it means kills its meaning for me before it has one. And because it kills its meaning for me, it also kills my motivation. Instead I must act to find out what it means for me. I must be given a situation that gives me the option to act if I want to experience what integration means. Once I experience the meaning, I may want to do it again. This seems like I am using my God-given brain to put myself in a different paradigm of mind in order to become more behavioralistic in my actions.

In short, we can think about integrating faith and business, and we can communicate how to do it, but such direct communication lacks deeper meaning for the listener because such communication is too abstract, too distant from actual experience.

Teaching Students What Cannot Be Taught

How, then, can we teach our students about something that cannot be taught? One thing we can bring to students is the notion that at the heart of normality there is madness, since every worldview's epistemology, and therefore every worldview's activity, has at its core the linchpin of faith. How to do this will become apparent when we

turn to Kierkegaard's Three Modes of Selfhood.

In short, we must see, first of all, the "madness of normality" and show that we have made a "leap of faith" to the particular worldview we hold. Second, we must see the madness at the center of our own worldview so that we will "infinitely resign." The final step is to take a second leap of faith to determine what it means that God will provide for us even though we will be sacrificing ourselves.

Kierkegaard's Three Modes of Selfhood

Kierkegaard wrote about three levels of selfhood: one centered on self, one centered on oneself and someone else, and one centered outside of oneself, hopefully on God.

At the aesthetic level of selfhood are those who operate according to the pleasure principle. There is, according to Kierkegaard, a hierarchical ordering even at this level. At the lowest rung are those who are uncouth: In our day these may be beer-drinking couch potatoes. At the next rung are some in the business world, because their idea of good is the pleasure produced by engaging in a clever business deal. Academics could also reside on this rung, particularly if the only reason they think is because of the simple pleasure it brings. At the highest rung are

"aristocratic hedonists," pleasure seekers who no longer have to work and who, because of this, have a difficult time avoiding boredom. Yet all three rungs represent humans who are not truly human because they are guided by the same principles that motivate amoebas and slugs: pleasure and pain.

Kierkegaard thought that besides being concerned with boredom (which, according to Kierkegaard, is the opposite of pleasure), the aesthete is also concerned with the problem of freedom. The reason is that because the individual is forced to live in society, the individual is forced to accept various roles, representing a loss of freedom. But playing a series of roles relieves boredom. Unfortunately, only playing roles is also equal to an empty, meaningless self. Hopefully, the aesthete will eventually realize how empty and lonely life is in the middle of all this activity so that he or she can make a "leap of passion." If not, the aesthete, according to Kierkegaard, is as good as dead. From my perspective, the aesthete must begin to associate, behaviorally, pleasure with meaning versus pleasure from role-playing; in other words, the aesthete must take that step to meaning where he or she takes that individual walk with God. This, I believe, is the freedom God has always reserved for us.

The first leap of passion results in a commitment to two things: (1) a commitment to self-perfection, which is an impossibility, and (2) a total commitment to other human beings, also humanly impossible. In short, such a commitment entails endorsing a particular ethical code. After this “either/or” choice, a human’s life is no longer fragmented or empty, but in all its roles reflects the new commitment.

But the result of such a commitment is that one is now under continuous self-scrutiny and self-judgment in trying to live up to the standards of perfection and commitment to others. For instance, Christians could be forever asking: “How can I be a Christian business person?” According to Kierkegaard, this relentless self-scrutiny should lead to ethical despair and to “infinite resignation” because such perfection (that is, being a Christian business person) can not happen. The madness is that we cannot do what we are responsible for doing because of sin. This could lead to the second “leap of faith” and the third level of selfhood.

The third level of selfhood involves two movements simultaneously: (1) resignation, or a negative element, and (2) a movement of faith which says “all things will work together,” or a positive element. But this

second leap of faith (from the ethical to the religious) is more horrible than the first (from the aesthetic to the ethical), for the second leap is from humankind, or at least the people or person one is committed to, and even the ethics (for example, Christian business ethics as defined objectively by a community) while the first is from one’s own sick self. But this irony is also expressed in Scripture: Not only must one lose one’s life to find it, one may also lose one’s friends and family (Matthew 10).

Preparing Oneself and Others to Follow Abraham’s Lead

How do we get students to move beyond the aesthetic mode of existence (where one-dimensional thinking pervades) and even beyond the ethical mode of existence (where multi-dimensional thinking pervades)? In short, how do we motivate our students and ourselves to action so that we can get our first dose of meaningful experience?

Most students are already beyond the aesthetic mode of existence. Students understand that there is more to life than hedonism. Most students come to our Christian colleges because they are looking for ways to perfect themselves and to help others. For example, many students participate in sports or scholarship and therefore know what it is like to seek perfection.

As business professors, we have also made these students work in teams. This may have had the effect of making students sympathetic and empathetic with their other team members while they strive for team perfection.

But there is still another threshold of selfhood to cross. Even though it is considered good business to be a team player, there are a lot of other people in the world who need our help.

Therefore, there is some irony in helping others, for it does not pay to help

everyone, particularly our enemies or competitors. But how do we reach the point when we realize we cannot possibly do all we must for others and that we cannot reach perfection?

Maybe the answer is to have ourselves and our students do more teamwork in a competitive environment. When students work on teams, they soon realize that life is unfair. Some of their members “free ride,” meaning that the other members have to pick up the slack if they want to maintain or improve their grade point average. Thus, the good and bad members of the team live out choices: The bad ones choose to live for self alone, and the good ones choose to live for self and others. But even the good ones do


not live for *all* others. Ironically, such behavior would violate the ethics of our business community where the team, or rather *our* team, comes first.

To make students understand this irony and to give them the choice of making a second leap of faith, the professor could offer the winning teams a chance to switch firms with the losing teams. Most good students, I am sure, would be furious, since they are being

forced to give all of their “good” work away. Some might even consider that they are “casting pearls

before swine” since they are helping the poor performer and penalizing the winner. But if competitors are enemies, is not such an act parallel to “loving one’s enemies” or to “taking up one’s cross”? And if the switch were made, would not the losing students experience, at least partially, the subjective Truth of grace, since they would be the recipients of something they did not deserve?

But there must be other ways to get students to move to the religious mode of existence. Maybe the answer is to spend time in class reading the words of Christ and reflecting on the ironies of His indirect communication. But then students must be given multiple



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opportunities of action so that they can learn what the verses mean to them. Maybe service-learning projects are the answer, but to me this means that they would have to be ones where the spiritual gains from a meaningful experience are positive but the worldly rewards are negative, for how else can one experience what it means to “take up one’s cross”?

Conclusion

The point of this article is to motivate myself and the reader to integrate the Christian faith with living. Even though the article may have caused us to think, the article is ultimately not about thinking, but acting. For integration should flow naturally from faith and may be, ironically, moderated by thinking.

Knowledge is based on universal abstractions, and as such, knowledge gets detached from existence or action. Thus when Paul says we are to transform ourselves through a renewing of the mind (Romans 12), maybe he is simply talking about utilizing a different paradigm, even a Kierkegaardian one!

Since faith without works is dead (James 2:17), we need to do something to encourage faith. Confronting students with the ironies of the Gospel could be one way. And giving them choices to act out their faith is another way we can not only help them keep their faith alive, but

also give their lives more spiritual meaning, which will then motivate them to keep their faith alive even more.

Let me end with an example to motivate the rest of us to keep our faith alive. My father and I were discussing the story of the rich young ruler (Luke 18:18ff). When the rich young ruler asked Jesus what he had to do to be perfect, Jesus replied that he had to sell everything he had and give the proceeds to the poor and he would attain treasure in heaven. My position was abstract and rational. I said, “Jesus must have meant that I should be ready to sell, for how else could I live?” to which my father replied, “Why don’t you see if you’re ready by selling everything right now?”

The point is that my father put the irony of the Gospel right between my eyes: How can I sell everything (take up my cross) and live? Was this a figurative or symbolic statement? But was Christ merely a symbolic figure? What does this verse mean? Yet the only way I can really experience the meaning of the Gospel is to act. Otherwise I must rely on the cold, passionless, objective truth of others. Having experienced the Gospel before, I desire to experience it again. I believe this is true for you as well.

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