

Dialogue III

The Perceived Godly Stockbroker: A Rejoinder

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*No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit.
Luke 6:43*

I'm just dying to know what happened to Dr. VanderVeen during his last year in undergraduate school that turned him away from the cloth and toward the stock exchange industry. Please, tell us what happened. Anyway, I am familiar with Hill's (1997) book, having required it for my business ethics students. I have also done some research in this area, so I would like to make some observations about VanderVeen's article in the present issue of *The JBIB*.

My understanding of Hill's (1997) main thrust is that Christian ethics (Is there any other kind?) consists of a balance of love, justice, and holiness. Hill uses the metaphor of a three-legged stool to characterize Christian ethics. That is because the three legs must be of equal length for the stool to be balanced and to stand (p. 15). For example, Hill states, "Obviously, all three

are needed in equal measure" (p. 15). This implies that the stool could not stand if any leg is missing or is too long or too short. Thus, my first point is that VanderVeen's interpretation of the legs (i.e., love, justice, and holiness) does not construe them as required simultaneously in contributing to ethical behavior as Hill suggests in his book, but as separate variables. In order to provide a better test of Hill's conceptualizations, as he conceives them, I believe the three concepts should be tested together as a model under the assumption that they are necessarily interdependent. They either predict together or not at all, since a stool stands with all three legs or otherwise tips over.

On the other hand, who knows? VanderVeen might be on the right track after all. My own early research (Fields, 2003), for example, suggests that an

interdependent tri-variable model does *not* hold up. Perhaps VanderVeen's future research planning could consider the alternate conceptual strategy suggested here.

In a similar vein, VanderVeen expressed Hill's three primary concepts as "communication purity" (holiness), "merit" (justice), and "self-sacrifice" (love), but these might also be characterized differently as submissive love (e.g., "I'll do whatever my boss tells me to do"), holy love (e.g., "I will never compromise my ethical principles, even if my boss requests it of me"), and justice love (e.g., "I will tolerate some questionable practices in this company in order to achieve the bigger picture") (Fields, 2003). Perhaps the author could consider different operational and/or conceptual variable definitions in future research. For example, I have had the best results with survey items which reflect a concept of submissive love.

Regardless of how variables are defined, however, if VanderVeen's results are supported by further research, this would suggest that separate Christian ethics often influence others' perceptions in a positive way, but ultimately have little

effect on important business outcomes. That's not exactly what we want to hear as believers, and that's not what the Bible says (Luke 6:43), so what gives? Well, that's why faith is necessary. Taken together, however, VanderVeen's contributions should be considered the beginning of a line of research to be continued, even expedited.

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