

BIOETHICS

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CHRISTIAN ETHICS AND BIOMEDICAL INNOVATION by Stephen Goundrey-Smith. Lexington Books, 2025. 304 pages. Hardcover; \$130.00. ISBN: 9781666953602.

Stephen Goundrey-Smith is an associate tutor in Christian ethics and doctrine at Cuddesdon Gloucester & Hereford, England. His PhD research was in the Department of Theology and Religion at the University of Exeter, on transhumanism and medical/therapeutic ethics. That led to his book *Transhumanism, Ethics and the Therapeutic Revolution: Agents of Change* (Routledge, 2023). The book under review here continues the same theoretical methodology. Its most telling contribution is calling for dialogue about what helps people flourish, new medical technologies, and public policy.

Chapter 1 states three relevant topics in the Christian ethical tradition: the goodness of creation, humanity in the image of God, and human vocation in the material world. Chapter 2 argues that the currently dominant, utilitarian, and individual-driven method of health technology assessment should be augmented to consider “social justice and autonomy,” “embodiment and identity,” “status of the person and human dignity,” and “immortality and destiny.” Chapter 3 recognizes the importance of public institutions for how biomedical innovations are implemented. Chapter 4 advocates that public deliberation will be more successful if it is focused on values rather than on ethics. Chapter 5 calls for biomedical technology, ethics, and public policy to work together. The last chapter, chapter 6, lauds as a model Augustine’s early fifth-century book, *The City of God*. There we see appeals to “the common good.” Goundrey-Smith believes that, with concerted effort, pursuing the common good can develop an ethical consensus amidst pluralist societies then and now. While this book is centered on hope for such a consensus today, how that should be practiced is not specifically articulated.

Natural law also plays a substantial role in the author’s discussion, but not as the often-cited appeal to consider our first created form as a given and set ideal. Since Goundrey-Smith is considering technology that aims to alter our nature, which would then change what fulfills it, he appeals to natural law as pursuing God’s future purpose for humanity. The start of humanity was but a beginning, not a pinnacle to return to. “Humanity, as created co-creator, mediates God’s creative power in the material world” (p. 258).

While highlighting its titled topic is the book’s most important contribution, its greatest weakness is that it tries to encompass an already broad purpose, extending the inquiry even wider to make a plethora of dis-

tantly related observations. For example, to address the already daunting task of defining “the common good,” the text begins by discussing the modern nation-state as it was first formed in the sixteenth century. To help readers follow through such disparate musings, the book often offers directions such as those found in just one paragraph on page 71:

I will discuss this issue in greater detail in a later section of this chapter. However, in order to facilitate discussion on the ethical impact of biomedical technologies in subsequent chapters ... we need to acknowledge two important issues ... However, before addressing these issues, I am going to examine in more detail the concerns that different identity groups in human society might have ... the views, hopes, and fears of all diverse groups must be considered.

It takes much flipping back and forth throughout the book to assemble the lines of reasoning.

Pricing the book at \$130, its intended purchasers will probably be libraries that are prodded by constituents to obtain a copy. Most potential readers would find its dense bricolage impenetrable. Those who request the book might be graduate students or faculty specifically studying public policy or ethics, who are seeking bibliography, though most of the works are referenced only in passing. Augustine, Aquinas, Brian Brock, Philip Hefner, Neil Messer, Stephen Pope, and Brent Waters receive the most note. There might also be interest from those professionally addressing public policy, to search for a proposed theoretical methodology for Christian ethics and policy formation.

Where Goundrey-Smith is most salient in this book is in advocating that Christians as citizens, and as participants in a long and thoughtful tradition, should contribute to public policy. This reviewer says a hearty “yes” to that summons, especially for such a formative set of challenges as we find in the title’s reference to “biomedical innovation.” How biomedical innovation should be developed and implemented is not specifically addressed in this book but, whether we are ready or not, biomedical innovation is requiring a set of present decisions, with others quickly coming to the fore. Such does warrant our best attention.

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BIOENHANCEMENT TECHNOLOGIES AND THE VULNERABLE BODY: A Theological Engagement by Devan Stahl, ed. Baylor University Press, 2023. 252 pages. Paperback; \$54.99. ISBN: 9781481318273.

New biomedical technologies purportedly do things such as prolong life, heal infirmities, and increase the