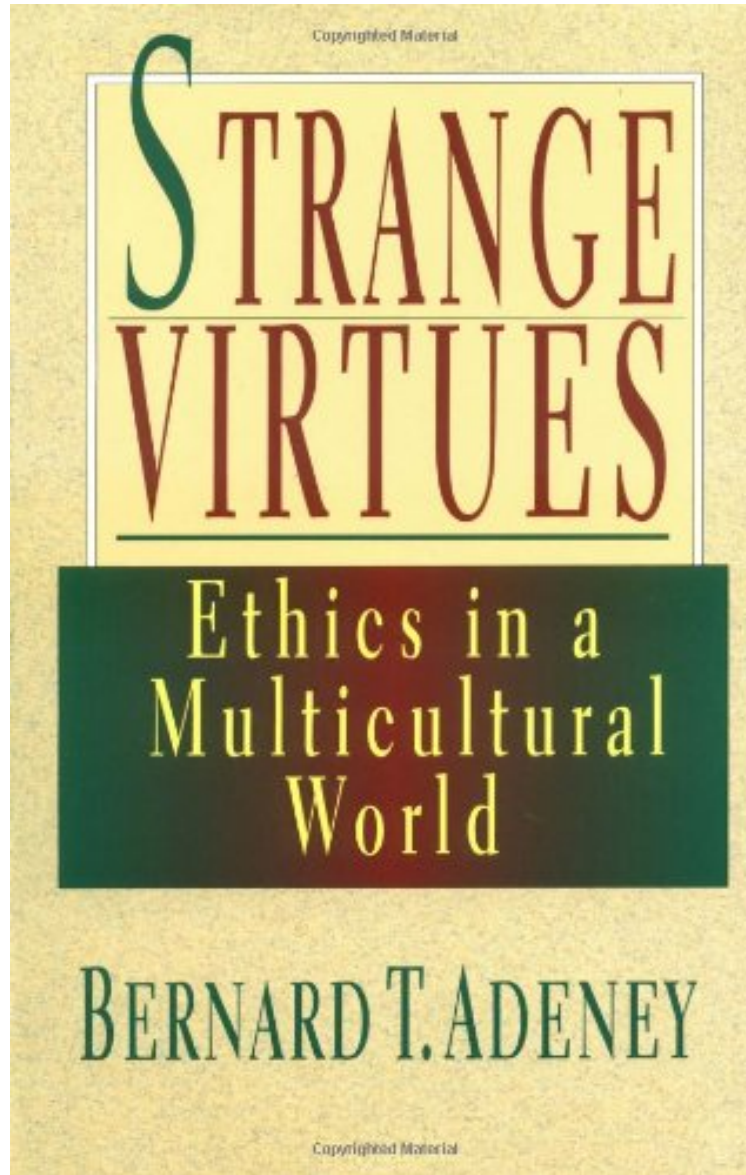


(Mobile pdf) Strange Virtues: Ethics in a Multicultural World

Strange Virtues: Ethics in a Multicultural World

Bernard T. Adeney-Riskotta

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Bernard T. Adeney-Riskotta : Strange Virtues: Ethics in a Multicultural World before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Strange Virtues: Ethics in a Multicultural World:

0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. five stars By Steven Stewart I read this book as an assignment for a bioethics class. It is written in an easy to read style. It made me thankful of our American way of life but also gave me some understanding into other cultures and their way of thinking about religion and society 2 of 2 people found the

following review helpful. Pretty Good, but Not Completely Great, review of "Strange Virtues" By Texas Gael Ethics, both in study and in practice, is a not-trivial exercise. In many ways it is where the rubber meets the proverbial road, that place where religion, philosophy and human interactions intersect (sometimes violently) as people try to "do right" by each other. In a world as divergent and varied as this one, there seem to be as many ethical standards, codes and systems as there are people to implement them. Violent collisions of different ethical assumptions and practices occur daily as people deal with one another. As the world networks and becomes truly global, these cross-cultural ethical conundrums become more and more frequent and harried. Travel is no longer needed to experience this distinctly human phenomenon, as the world has truly "come to our door", both in the form of immigrants and the world wide internet. It is no longer a question of if one will endure these ethical collisions, but a question of how to handle it when it does happen. Thankfully, this is a situation that men like Bernard Adeney attempt to understand and while there are some conclusions that some authors such as Adeney come to, their advice is helpful and frankly, necessary. Adeney's purpose for writing Strange Virtues is clearly stated in the form of a question: "How do we respond to situations where our values are incongruent with those of another culture?" (14) Simply put, people believe differently from each other. They have different values and different understandings of right and wrong. They have different political systems, religious convictions and cultural ceremonies. Different cultures have different views on what constitutes morality, manners, relations and proper epistemology. Cultures vary in how virtue is achieved and what is "...the vision of a virtuous person in a good community." (15) Rightly understanding these various perspectives and rightly responding to them can be a tricky business. The job becomes more difficult, in some respects, when one approaches the conundrum from the perspective of Christianity. Christian belief and doctrine are at their core exclusive. There are things that Christianity states are Truth and which it cannot budge from, or else it ceases to be biblical Christianity. It is not generally a religion of plurality and diversity of beliefs when it comes down to its core issues. Yet the Bible does not lay out patterns of expected behavior for every particular ethical possibility. In "Strange Virtues" Adeney brings up issues of bribery, theft, lying and honor where at first glance the appropriate ethical action may be obvious to our western sensibilities, but when viewed from the context of another culture, there is always more than meets the eye. As such, "Strange Virtues" is written by a Christian to Christians (particularly in the West) to encourage them to think out of and think through their ethical and cultural boxes and consider what Christianity teaches from other cultural perspectives. Doing so can be fraught with danger, but it can also be enriching and rewarding. If anything, "Strange Virtues" is a book seeking balance. Prescriptionist applications of Biblical commands and principles can be a good thing. Absolutist understandings of culture and the world about can be healthy and in fact is actually necessary and natural. Yet Adeney also understands the dangers of prescriptionism and absolutism in the realm of Christian Ethics when they are divorced from the Word and Will of God. It is a good thing to behave a certain way based on what God says in Scripture. Yet doing "good" based on your interpretation of what God says in Scripture can be another story entirely. Realistically, it is next to impossible to do one without the other. Yet, it is all too easy to allow culture assumptions and perspectives to creep in; taking the place of authority that should be kept for the Word and the work of the Holy Spirit. As a parallel, in asking Westerners to think outside of their cultural shells (while encouraging them to remain in them), Adeney does a fair job in presenting the perspectives of other cultures. When it comes to issues like bribery, most Americans would recoil at the thought of paying money to civil servants in payment for some service rendered. There are rules of law in America that discourage such practices. Adeney reminds the reader that this practice can be quite common in Asian countries, but not for the reasons Americans might think. In pointing to different cultural assumptions within peoples of the West and the East, the Author points out that it is quite possible that the gift or favor might be done, not out of greed or a desire for more wealth by the official, but because of Eastern focus on relationships and honor. To his credit, Adeney does not allow that this by definition should free such practices from the charges of bribery, but he does ask the reader to consider the situation more fully from an ethical perspective before rendering judgment. Additionally, Adeney shares some very helpful advice on communication in his chapter "Strange Communication". Any person who has been married for any amount of time knows just how important communication is. In marriage, there is in some sense a wedding of cultures. There is a man and a woman being married. Both think different, function differently and feel differently. Likewise, marriage is the joining of two people from different families. Families form their own miniature sub-cultures, complete with family dialects, philosophies and perspectives. For two such different people to have a successful, faithful marriage, communication and understanding must be a driving focus. Likewise, cross-cultural understanding starts at cross-cultural communication. I will never forget a weekend we spent with a French family in 1970. My wife and I picked up Jean Marie, who was hitchhiking outside Paris. We were just beginning to study French, and he spoke no English. When we left him off, he invited us to his home in a small village for the weekend. There, through music, laughter, food, wine, children, flowers, chores and shared grief over the injustice of the world, we became like brothers and sisters. Of the few words that we were able to exchange, only one do I remember as significant: the French word *simpatique* expressed what we had found together. (127) Adeney goes on to explain that communication need not even be purely verbal. As stated above, it can take the form of laughter, music, food and beauty, but it does require the effort of two or more parties submitting their ignorance and swallowing their pride to become a learner in a strange situation or

setting. Adeney's most helpful portion of the book follows along the same lines, and that is his discussion on the "adaptation of the role of a stranger" (130). In particular, his explanation of the three stages of assimilation is especially enlightening. The first stage is the "preliminary stage" or the "honeymoon stage". This is the time in the transition where the stranger is new and strange to the host culture, and the host culture is new and strange to the stranger. It is a time of new experiences and sensory overload, where everything is exciting, and both the host and the stranger tends to put their best feet forwards. Close on its heels, though, is the "Transition Stage". While the stranger is now accepted in this stage, his novelty has worn off and he might often be ignored. "The host wants to know how committed the guest really is and how long they are likely to stay. The guest wants to know if he or she is really still welcome and how long that is likely to continue. Neither side wants to be simply exploited for the interests of the other." (135) Finally, if he is accepted, the stranger becomes incorporated into the culture. She is now completely free to be one of the members of the host culture. Yet, a former stranger, while completely accepted, will never be "blood kin" but will be accepted as an adopted child. Quoting Gittins, Adeney goes so far as to say that "...if strangers are unwilling to accept this and show it in their attitudes, they are unlikely to be incorporated into the culture." (136). As helpful as this book is, it is not without its weaknesses and shortfalls. Perhaps the biggest shortcoming of the book is Adeney's attempted pluralistic tightrope act. It is one thing to be a pluralist, but Adeney becomes something of a meta-pluralist by attempting to be a pluralistic, inclusivistic and exclusivistic all at once. To be fair, Adeney does pose the proper questioning observation "If all religions are equal and truth is equally unknown by all, then there is no standpoint from which to condemn any religious practices". This is a problem that pure pluralism has no solution for, but Adeney tries too hard to balance too much. He wants to sympathize with liberal Christians as well as with conservative evangelical Christians, but his attempts at doing so ring hollow. In particular, his chapter titled "The Ethical Challenges of Other Religions" is rather unfortunate as he does a poor job of understanding other religions from a Christian perspective. In fact, his critique could really masquerade as a critique from a fair minded agnostic discussing all the major religions of the world. His repeated statements of the "goodness" of committed, sincere practitioners of these religions (even Christianity!) are troublesome at best when considered in light of the Ten Commandments and Romans 3. "Strange Virtues" is most helpful to the Christian man or woman considering cross-cultural work. Adeney's discussion on humbly submitting to the host culture as a stranger is golden and is extremely helpful and encouraging. Likewise, his repeated focus on encouraging Christians to consider their beliefs in light of possible inherent cultural assumptions is very helpful. It is all too easy to supersede God's Word and Law with what culture and personality says and then judge people by it. Such behavior is especially unfortunate when it comes to poor cross-cultural communication. Quiet respect for one man might be rank rudeness to another. It would be sad indeed for the second man to become angry, when the first man was simply attempting to be respectful. Yet, not being mindful of such cross-cultural intricacies can cause great harm. Still, understanding one's own culture is even more important than understanding another. Human beings often unknowingly create cross-cultural blind spots and immunities. Learning from other cultures help to reveal those blind spots and allow the Christian to better submit himself to God and to His Word. Such a man is then better prepared to move into a strange culture with strange virtues because he is better grounded in the Word of God, the Truth that transcends all cultures and peoples and time. "Strange Virtues", while not without some serious problems, is a thoughtful, thought-provoking, and ultimately encouraging treatise on the problem of cross-cultural ethics and how the Christian is to understand them, live with them and honor God by them. 0 of 0 people found the following review helpful. Unique - a must-read for cross-cultural workers who think deeply By F. Eick I have worked with this book now for many years. I do not know of any other book that addresses this area. This is a must-read for any Westerner who wants to consider how to live as a Christian in a cross-cultural setting. For theology students it might be an eye-opener that guidelines for living a Godly life are not as easy to draw. May we all grow in wisdom by His grace.

Theologian and veteran missionary Bernard Adeney addresses in-depth what may be the stickiest crosscultural communication problem of our day: differing approaches to morality. In this comprehensive treatment, he considers ethics across cultures, addresses the ethical import of other religions and gender relations, explores how the Bible and culture interact to produce ethical stances, and includes particular case studies. *Strange Virtues* will benefit not only missionaries, ethicists and students, but all Christians who want to better understand their neighbors here at home.

From the Back Cover *Strange Virtues* is one of the first books to comprehensively consider ethics across cultures, addressing the ethical import of other religions and gender relations, exploring how the Bible and culture interact to produce ethical stances, and examining such particular case studies as bribery. It will be invaluable not only for missionaries, ethicists and students, but for all Christians who want to better understand neighbors right here at home. About the Author Bernard T. Adeney has taught theology and ethics at New College Berkeley and currently teaches at Universitas Kristen Satya Wacana in Java, Indonesia. He has been highly involved in evangelical and ecumenical endeavors and has served as coconvener of the American Academy of Religion's Group on Religion,

Peace and War.