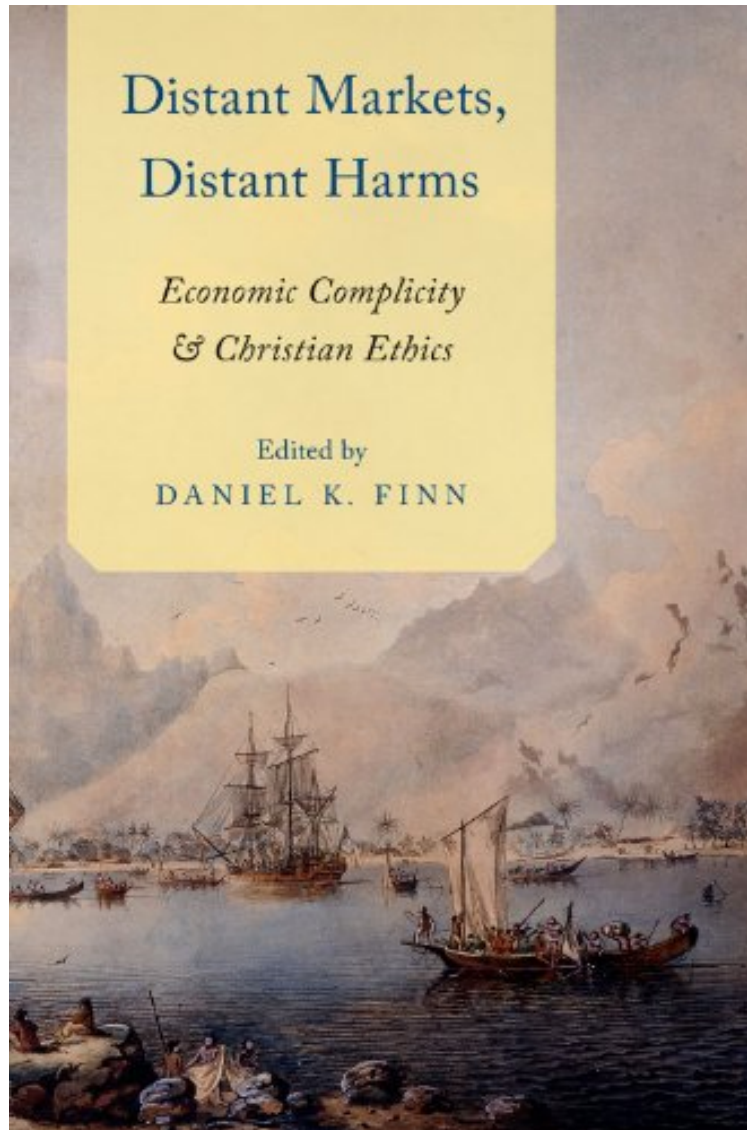


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## Distant Markets, Distant Harms: Economic Complicity and Christian Ethics

*From Oxford University Press*

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**From Oxford University Press : Distant Markets, Distant Harms: Economic Complicity and Christian Ethics** before purchasing it in order to gauge whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Distant Markets, Distant Harms: Economic Complicity and Christian Ethics:

0 of 2 people found the following review helpful. Very good but incomplete By Stephen Martin It is very surprising that the first essay by Douglas Porpora gives a very coherent introduction to critical realism and its relevance to economic theory within a framework of Catholic ethics, but does not reference Bernard Lonergan (1900-1984) who wrote much

the same things, even discovered the same things almost 60 years ago in his very influential work, *Insight: A Study in Human Understanding* (1957). For example, one of the key themes of Lonergan's work congenial to Porpora's arguments is the idea of "emergent probability" which the author of this essay highlights but in different words. It would be even more helpful if Porpora and the rest of the book where relevant could somehow incorporate Lonergan's *Macroeconomic Dynamics* (2007, *Collected Works*), the first and probably only critical realist macroeconomic theory (i.e, providing systematic and demonstrable understandings of the interrelated aspects of production, consumption, finance, fluctuations in rates of unemployment, causes of recessions and depressions and so forth). Porpora would approve of Lonergan's focus on economic understanding based on "relevant variables" and the importance of function over mere description, vs. the causality, rationalism and positivism of current economic thought that Porpora decries. For example, nowhere does Lonergan say, "assume \_\_\_\_\_" (full-employment, etc.) that mainstream economics substitutes for authentic scientific investigation and reasoning, a la Milton Friedman's "black box" that eschews understanding for (a poor track record of) "predictability." Rather Lonergan's critical realism relies upon the elements of scientific method applied to the human science of economics: be observant (data), intelligent (come up with hypothesis to try and understand the data), reasonable (judging whether the hypothesis is true) and responsible (act on one's best knowledge), each level relying on the one preceding. In this way, cohering to Christian ethics, a successful critical realist economics enables individual responsibility instead of negating it as in the orthodox view of the person as "self-interested maximizer of utility." Beyond this otherwise very helpful book, Christian ethicists in general need to at least investigate Lonergan's economic manuscripts following the precept that one must know what is going on before one advocates particular responsible actions. In Lonergan's words, "When the system that is needed for our collective survival does not exist, then it is futile to excoriate what does exist while ignoring the task of constructing a viable economic system that can be put in its place."rdquo;

Does a consumer who bought a shirt made in another nation bear any moral responsibility when the women who sewed that shirt die in a factory fire or in the collapse of the building? Many have asserted, without explanation, that because markets cause harms to distant others, consumers bear moral responsibility for those harms. But traditional moral analysis of individual decisions is unable to sustain this argument. *Distant Harms, Distant Markets* presents a careful analysis of moral complicity in markets, employing resources from sociology, Christian history, feminism, legal theory, and Catholic moral theology today. Because of its individualistic methods, mainstream economics as a discipline is not equipped to understand the causality entailed in the long chains of social relationships that make up the market. Critical realist sociology, however, has addressed the character and functioning of social structures, an analysis that can helpfully be applied to the market. The *True Wealth of Nations* research project of the Institute for Advanced Catholic Studies brought together an international group of sociologists, economists, moral theologians, and others to describe these causal relationships and articulate how Catholic social thought can use these insights to more fully address issues of economic ethics in the twenty-first century. The result was this interdisciplinary volume of essays, which explores the causal and moral responsibilities that consumers bear for the harms that markets cause to distant others.

"This set of essays, individually and as a group, offer a very strong, diversified yet coherent treatment of a crucial question for economic ethics - moral causality in complex market relationships. I would find this volume very helpful for my own research and writing in economic ethics, and could foresee assigning it to advanced undergraduates or graduates in courses on economic ethics, or Catholic/Christian social thought." --Christine Firer Hinze, Fordham University  
About the Author Daniel K. Finn teaches Economics and Theology at St. John's University in Collegeville Minnesota. He has published widely on economics and ethics, including *The Moral Ecology of Markets: Assessing Claims about Markets*, and *Just Trading: On the Ethics and Economics of International Trade*. He is a past president of the Society of Christian Ethics, the Catholic Theological Society of America, and the Association for Social Economics.