



To Flourish or Destruct: A Personalist Theory of Human Goods, Motivations, Failure, and Evil

Christian Smith

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In his 2010 book *What Is a Person?*, Christian Smith argued that sociology had for too long neglected this fundamental question. Prevailing social theories, he wrote, do not adequately “capture our deep subjective experience as persons, crucial dimensions of the richness of our own lived lives, what thinkers in previous ages might have called our ‘souls’ or ‘hearts.’” Building on Smith’s previous work, *To Flourish or Destruct* examines the motivations intrinsic to this subjective experience: Why do people do what they do? How can we explain the activity that gives rise to all human social life and social structures?

Smith argues that our actions stem from a motivation to realize what he calls natural human goods: ends that are, by nature, constitutionally good for all human beings. He goes on to explore the ways we can and do fail to realize these ends—a failure that can result in varying gradations of evil. Rooted in critical realism and informed by work in philosophy, psychology, and other fields, Smith’s ambitious book situates the idea of personhood at the center of our attempts to understand how we might shape good human lives and societies.

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