

Mark Ellingsen

Finding Peaks and Valleys in a Flat World

Goodness, Truth, and Meaning in the Midst of Today's Mad Chase for Prosperity and Instant Feedback

SERIES IN PHILOSOPHY OF RELIGION

About the author

Mark Ellingsen is a Professor of Church History at the Interdenominational Theological Center in Atlanta. With a Ph.D. from Yale University, he is the author of 500 published articles and 24 books, several used as textbooks for courses in seminaries and colleges. His most recent book, *Ever Hear of Feuerbach? That's Why American and European Christianity Is In Such a Funk*, analyzes the marked growth of the religiously unaffiliated in America and what to do about it. He has offered other analyses of what occurs in everyday American life in his critically acclaimed *Blessed Are the Cynical: How Original Sin Can Make America a Better Place* and his *When Did Jesus Become Republican?*

Mark Ellingsen has written a creative book showing how insights from the Danish philosopher, Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855) can be directly and significantly relevant for us today. Ellingsen skillfully describes our contemporary culture, with the famed image used by Tom Friedman to describe the globalized economy, as a "flat world," marked by individualization and self-concern where people live in "valleys" of sensuality and as mere spectators of life. He shows that internet life only exacerbates these ways of living. To understand, Ellingsen uses Kierkegaard's images of stages of life as: 1) Aesthetic, including boredom and a search for meaning which does not come; 2) Ethical, which can be a "peak" when one focuses on what life might be and 3) Religious life where the highest good for life can be found: concentrating on one's self in relation to the infinite. Jesus Christ is the "absolute paradox" who as God become a human person makes it possible to be liberated by God and find true happiness through being totally dependent on God. The worthwhile life—"peaks"—is life transformed by Christ, by grace. Christian life is "sheer gentleness, grace, lovingkindness, and compassion" (Kierkegaard).

Ellingsen provides helpful questions so we can examine our stages of life. He draws on brain research in illuminating ways. Becoming Christian in a flat world is a "leap of faith." For Ellingsen, "only a leap of faith into the loving arms of God can break the monotonous meaningfulness of life in the flat world."

This original and engaging book touches us all. It calls us to honest self-examination and provides a vision of life filled with "meaning, excitement, and a sense of mission."

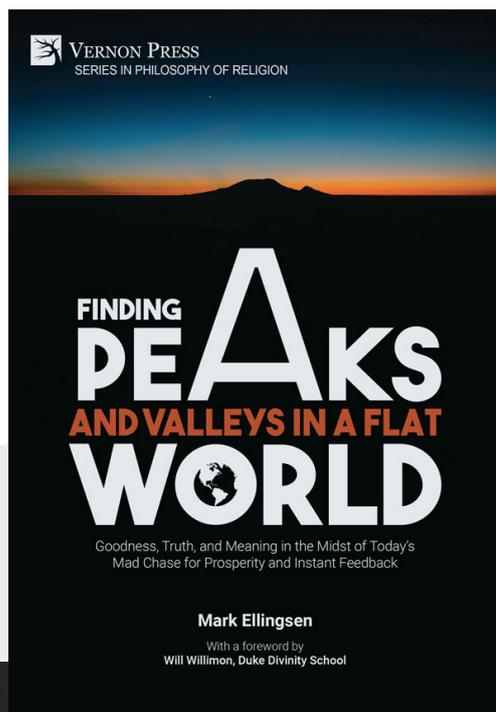
Donald K. McKim

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Summary

The flat world of our globalized economic order—with its information technology mandating the need for the labor force to compete globally—has led to turmoil, injustice, and growing unhappiness in our everyday lives. We need a way to find some mountaintops and fulfillment in our flat world, to have a sense that some moments can have eternal significance. Søren Kierkegaard, forerunner of Existentialism, provides us with a vision of life to help us cope and give us joy. Along the way, we'll see how a lot of his insights connect with cutting-edge findings on brain research about the biological dynamics of joy and fulfillment.

Finding Peaks and Valleys in a Flat World will be of interest to undergraduate Philosophy and Religion students as well as Kierkegaard specialists. It will also be a good reference work for people interested in social analyses and theologians of every denominational affiliation.



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