

## **BOOK REVIEW**

### **Taking Business Ethics Seriously- Why Ethics Is an Essential Tool for the Modern Workplace by John Hooker, Productivity Press**

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Taking the study of ethics seriously comes more naturally and easily to academics who study ethics, scholars who seek to further the arguments posed by ethical development, practitioners who work in compliance related fields, and to advocates who seek to develop societies social consciousness. Conversely, and perhaps in consideration of the average professional, *Taking Business Ethics Seriously- Why Ethics Is an Essential Tool for the Modern Workplace* by John Hooker provides a great ethics primer for society in general, for those of us working in today's workplace to understand and apply ethics in the context of our own concerns and workplace issues.

The book provides a refreshingly simple yet reflective and applicable framework for many of today's most relevant ethics issues in the context of case review. Beginning with an explanation of why ethical considerations are needed and how they are used in everyday situations for a functioning society worldwide moving into workplace applications such as co-worker/management relations and ending with even end-of-life medical ethical considerations which ultimately will effect many of us, the book is a simple yet useful tool for point of view and applied development.

John Hooker provides a thought-provoking and refreshing view into the place of ethics in societies today by using his own career experiences and some case reviews. The book takes the reader from inside their office, intermittently through brief ethical milestones and back into today's workplace. After reading the text, readers will find several thought-provoking issues, commentaries and perhaps issues for consideration not previously addressed by other works. The chapters move quickly, and the author organizes the material in an easy to read format any reader can enjoy. Whereas other materials may be more densely written, *Taking Business Ethics Seriously* takes a critical look at real situations through a proprietary framework of easy-to-understand cases and reviews.

The Framework, Dilemmas and the Modern Workforce After reading the book in its entirety, the framework presented uses a simple set of tools to determine the proper use of ethics: generalization, utility and autonomy. After explaining the framework rationale, Hooker moves on to applying these to Everyday Dilemmas in Chapter Five.

Principles and Philosophical Forebearers One benefit of the book is to provide simple yet critical views of ethics based upon popular philosophers and principles used throughout various industries.

Key principles referenced: *Golden Rule, Good Samaritan, Liam Murphy, Deontic, Generalization, Utilitarian, Interference, Difference, Autonomy, Joint Autonomy, Informed Consent, Implied Consent, Generally Accepted Accounting Principles (GAAP) and American Advertising Federation's Advertising Ethics and Principles.*

Philosophers referenced: Confucius, Greek Stoicism, Mencius (Master Meng), Marcus Aurelius, Aristotle, Immanuel Kant, Epicurus, G.E. Moore.

The principles and philosophers above are referenced as connected to discussion of everyday dilemmas such as distributive justice in the medical fields and personal decisions such as euthanasia. The author provides several relevant examples throughout the book.

Chapter One The Central Role of Ethics primarily addresses the necessity of everyone to study ethics. A key word in the chapter seems to be “interlocking and/or interconnected”. Hooker makes a solid case for a common understanding of ethical concepts for everyone’s point of view to be recognized and for a smoother function of society. He asserts how a society must come to an agreement of ethical and unethical in order to function at its best.

*“We must all be ethicists because we are parts of the system that must work together.” p. 6*

Next, he introduces the importance of applied logic to understanding of the framework. He acknowledges the framework focuses on a Western ethic precept due to the utility of his specific text yet does recognize the global application and interpretation of the use of ethics. For this text, he focuses most on Western ethics.

Chapter Two Myths and Misconceptions focuses on the rationality of ethics as a logical field of study. Very clearly, Hooker states the utility of ethics is again to focus on the functionality of society in general. He acknowledges the role of emotion in ethics yet also states its potential for bias in rational discourse among people in general. Additionally, he discusses the role of religion in ethics by acknowledging the role of Abrahamic religion in at least 28 centuries of rational debate. Finally, Chapter Two ends with self-interest as a motivator for ethical discourse. As a matter of practicality, individual empathy plays a role in advocacy. He quotes...

*Ethics is just a matter of opinion. Ethics is just about personal values. There is no objectivity in this field like chemistry or biology. I have my view and you have yours and that’s it. I don’t think anyone really believes any of this but many claim to believe it- until their own rights are violated.” p.22*

Ethics, to function best, should be about interpersonal values. He introduces a Stoic view of philosophy here which emphasizes the utility of universal reason. He ends the chapter by acknowledging the collaboration of reason and accumulated knowledge for ethics to function well.

Chapter Three The Generalization Principle: Here Hooker focuses on rationality and generalization of behaviors and actions. Near the beginning of the book, Hooker uses the example of the Ford Pinto issue as a primary case still used today in several law schools. He expands upon the framework presented earlier by focusing on the first principle of generalization. The rationale for the ethical issue must be coherent and rational. He compares ethical skills and math skills as both require years of experience to develop.

*“My action is ethical only if I can rationally believe that my reasons for the action are consistent with the assumption that everyone who has the same reasons performs the action.” P.33*

Chapter Four Utilitarian Principle: Next, Hooker focuses on the Utilitarian principle of whether the means justifies the ends. Again, we are presented with a pretty basic concept of whether ethical choice should result in the greatest good for the greatest number of people- no other action results in the greatest

expected utility. Hooker considers whether the concept of decisions are made or acted upon where the actor behaved according to duty regardless of consequences. With a consideration towards more of a deontological ethics versus consequential ethics, Hooker realizes the application of both yet chose to focus on more of the deontological behavior. Further in the text, he applies issues such as euthanasia to this type of ethics. He uses the Kitty Genovese case of New York which created the Bystander effect principle now utilized by many social advocates (p. 50). He addresses the individual's responsibility for the choices of others based on the concept of duty.

Chapter Five Everyday Dilemmas: We begin here with what the average professional may regard as the meat of the book, how can I use this material? Hooker begins with a basic example of boarding a plane. He explains the common issue of people boarding their flight outside of their boarding group and the initial dilemma presented. He asks consideration of the generalization, utilitarian, and autonomy concepts. Why do individuals behave in such a manner? Self-interest, lack of enforcement? Hooker goes on to discuss more common issues such as reporting damage to a car, the unethical use of sirens by a paramedic, reporting items not rung up at a store due to cashier's errors and other simpler issues. He goes through each using his framework to provide a resolution to such common issues.

Chapter Six Moral Agency and Autonomy: Finally, moral agency and autonomy as a part of Hooker's framework is identified. Here we discuss the reason behind many decisions. Hooker considers decisions made without reason as somewhat impetuous and as a behavior not an act. Autonomy on the other hand is considered an exercise of moral agency or independence. Additionally, here he differentiates between Western civilization and the rest of the world where Western ethics provides a greater focus on independence.

He discusses systems and decisions within systems. From a modern quality management point of view, most systems are built to withstand worse case scenarios. Hooker uses a famous trolley car dilemma presented by philosopher Philippa Foot in 1967 to point out how even in system of equal options, an ethical decision is not always present (p.101). He points out how ethical scenarios such as these present themselves in police work, the medical fields and on the battlefields. A perfect use for the average professional reader!

Chapter Seven Virtue Ethics: Virtue ethics (think of intelligence, honor, beauty i.e.) or the theory of natural law (natural gifts) are both explored for utility in Hooker's framework. In the past, virtue ethics were more heavily relied upon for ethical decision making, yet today, rational logic has grown in acceptance by several modern scholars. Thus, here he merely acknowledges its use in the past and the developmental foundation virtue ethics provided. Neither type of ethics is endorsed for its modern application in the framework provided.

Chapter Eight Buying and Selling: Here we discuss more specific everyday issues in buying and selling such as having 14 items in a 10 item checkout line or eating grapes in a grocery store. Yet the discussion moves on to more complex issues such as whether we as consumers should support companies who take advantage of cheaper prices by buying products or materials made by workers in unfair labor conditions. The conversation is also taken further by informing consumers about upcoming sales or selling items for the benefit of the company or the salesperson. Chapter Eight begins the discussion, to the average consumer, on the ethics of everyday purchasing and for the average retail producer about the right to sell certain products and or services in questionable manners. Here we delve into the ethics of buying and selling in a global economy.

Chapter Nine Ethics in Education: The ethics of today's education systems are discussed with an emphasis on the use of technology to entice cheating and/or lying and on whether to disclose unethical practices. The concept of students taking drugs to perform better or whether employees should take advantage of education benefits knowing they are likely to leave the company are explored with an emphasis on disclosure. Many issues in the education system are fodder for an ethical discussion, yet teachers, principals and even politicians could benefit from the information in the chapter as they relate to the concept of trading favors and making conscious choices with anticipated results.

Chapter Ten Job Search Ethics: Workforce ethics is discussed from the point of view of those searching for a job. With many people searching for positions in a post-Covid world, 5.7 million people (3.4%), the ethics of job searching is a relevant topic for review by many. Is it ethical to share interview questions with others competing for the same position? Is it ethical to use one offer to compete with another offer at any point in the employment process? Hooker makes plain one particular point of view as he discusses his point of writing the book...

*"Joe's cavalier attitude towards ethics is chilling...He fails to see the overt logical inconsistency in his dishonesty, a kind of inconsistency that I have taken pains to expose throughout this book."*

Clearly the author has a true intention of helping people see the virtues in ethics by writing his book.

Chapter Eleven Ethics on the Job: Human nature allows us to behave irrationally (and sometimes questionably) for multiple reasons. Sexual harassment at multiple levels in the workplace, lying to customers or your boss, use of promotional items in questionable situations, pretending to be a customer to get information from a competitor, discussing salary information with colleagues against policy... are these experiences ethical through reason or rationale? What is your fiduciary responsibility and when should it be exercised? Hooker considers the above situations and more through his Western framework. Are friendships ever worth lying for when considering consequences? What about breaking social contracts for the sake of a promotion? Again, about human behavior...

*"We often play these little games that tread the line between honesty and deception. Ethics must be capable of evaluating them." (p. 162).*

*"...analysis here suggests that there is indeed a limit to how much one must sacrifice to be honest at least in the short run, and the generalization tests helps us to tell us more or less what that limit is." (p. 167)*

Chapter Twelve Organizational Policy: We move ever closer to more general ethical principles such as life and death decisions. Hooker begins here to discuss how businesses routinely set a value to human life. He further discusses today's views of privacy and whether businesses are appropriately respecting rights to privacy using the example of Google's recent privacy violations and use of customer data. What is the appropriate use of data harvesting.

He compares and evaluates the perception of a more modern philosopher (18<sup>th</sup> century) and social theorist Jeremy Bentham who posited the panopticon. A model we somewhat live in today. Is it ethical to limit our privacy? Finally, the chapter ends with a discussion of the ethics surrounding social media. Facebook posts over 500,000 comments per minute and YouTube posts 300 hours of content every minute (p. 185). What is the responsibility of the business with this type of volume?

Chapter Thirteen Medical Ethics: The concept of freely choosing independent thought with complete information is elaborated upon in the chapter of medical ethics. Hooker explores medical ethics in the chapter surrounding end-of-life decisions, vaccinations, the right to refuse medications or treatment and withholding information from patients. The fact that previously eradicated illnesses have come back due to an increase in the choice not to vaccinate is considered from a local and global perspective. Additionally, he discusses euthanasia extensively with the point of view of the patient's lack of informed consent. Can a patient really know all scenarios when making decisions? Arguing that most do not, the concept is extended for consideration. Using concepts of Confucian ethics and normative ethics, he goes through a few scenarios where individuals both single and married are forced to consider decisions using the principle of joint autonomy. The concept of autonomous moral agency is described and used to make medical decisions.

*"Rationalistic Western ethics is designed to regulate conduct in a society of autonomous moral agents."* (p. 197).

Chapter Fourteen Ethics of Artificial Intelligence: The book ends with a discussion on artificial intelligence. He relates AI to the manufacturing industry. Ideally, Hooker explores our duties to artificial intelligence. From his viewpoint, we have a duty to artificial superintelligence such as we would to other entities. We should consider the autonomy of the machine and its relationship to humanity in general. By using Hooker's framework, a truly autonomous machine is an ethical machine (p. 210). He uses the strict liability argument of U.S. product liability law holding manufacturers liable for any issue arising from artificial intelligence on the grounds that there are social benefits when manufactures assume the financial risk of defects rather than consumers. And the book comes full circle by considering the social benefits and risks of individual ethical decisions.

After reading the book in its entirety, reflection on ethical texts and contexts such as discussions in business ethics classes, the recently reviewed book by English author Ian McEwan, *Machines Like Me*, and basic ethics considerations in fields such as medical ethics in large corporations are comparatively considered for their contributions to the field of business. For example, Hooker's text better explains by expanding the philosophies behind the actions taken by companies. The examples provide more of a simplified context to understand the why's behind famous credos. Other texts and studies are either too specific or too dense. *Taking Business Ethics Seriously* seems to fit really well into the understanding and application of the average professional reader. Other texts provide information whereas Hooker's text provides application and general understanding of principles and considerations in many industries of ethical dilemmas.

In summary, *Taking Business Ethics Seriously* by John Hooker uses many commonly understood concepts, familiar philosophies, and common scenarios many professionals find themselves in daily to introduce his framework and to make common scenarios easier to consider with a logical and rational scope. The reader is taken through a variety of industries including police work, medicine, retail, manufacturing and artificial intelligence to put scenarios into perspective. Finally, the reader is brought full circle as to the responsibility of the individual in understanding decision making. Hooker's contribution to ethical understanding primarily lies in his framework and in his ability to make the average professional consider ethical dilemmas from a broader perspective.

## References

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