

Stephan Rothlin
Parissa Haghirian *Editors*

Dimensions of Teaching Business Ethics in Asia



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*To our friend Msgr. Jean-Claude Hollerich S.J.
Archbishop of Luxemburg
A true master of ethics and pedagogy*

Contents

1	Introduction.....	1
	Stephan Rothlin and Parissa Haghirian	
Part I Theoretical Aspects of Business Ethics		
2	The Competitive Edge of Moral Leadership	9
	Gerhold K. Becker	
3	Rethinking the Impact of Religion on Business Values: Understanding Its Reemergence and Measuring Its Manifestations.....	29
	David W. Miller and Timothy Ewest	
Part II Business Ethics in Asia		
4	Understanding Integrity Across Generations in China: Implications for Personnel Choices in Chinese Corporations	41
	Rev. Mark Bandsuch	
5	Corruption and Anti-corruption in China: Challenges and Countermeasures	61
	Changzheng Dai	
6	Taking Your Codes to China	77
	Kirk O. Hanson and Stephan Rothlin	
7	“Do as the Romans Do in Rome”?.....	91
	Peter Verhezen	
8	Mahatma Gandhi’s Satyagraha: A Business Ethics Paradigm	105
	Jose Maria Ybanez Tomacruz	

Part III The Asian Dimension of Teaching Business Ethics

9 Teaching Business Ethics: Challenges and Responses.....	121
Antonette Palma-Angeles	
10 Reframing Business Ethics in the Management Education Curriculum.....	133
Mike J. Thompson	
11 Implementing Business and Professional Ethics in an Asian Context: Three Steps to Integration.....	147
Roderick O'Brien	
12 Why and How to Use Case Studies in Teaching Business Ethics	153
Dennis P. McCann	

Part IV Towards a New Paradigm of Business Ethics in Asia

13 Can Business Schools Lead the Way to a World Worth Living In?.....	169
Henri-Claude de Bettignies	

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Stephan Rothlin is co-founder and Secretary General of the Center of International Business Ethics in Beijing, China. After running an Academic Center at the University of Zurich, he moved to China in 1998 where he focuses his research on International Business Ethics in the Asian context. Since 2009 he is Chief Editor of the *Journal of International Business Ethics*. He is regularly invited to teach at UTSA, the University of Texas at San Antonio.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

Stephan Rothlin and Parissa Haghirian

Within the globalizing context of international business we intend to give full prominence to an aspect of ethics that is often overlooked or completely ignored: virtue ethics.

The ongoing financial crisis has provoked not only a worldwide wave of economic anxiety, but also widespread frustration over the irresponsible behavior of all-too-many business corporations. The result has been a call for decisive change that goes beyond the question of reforming regulations for financial institutions, to challenge the basic mindset associated with business-as-usual. Given the success with which the paradigm of profit maximization has been inculcated on various levels of education it is not surprising that the sea change involved in transforming that basic mindset is not likely to happen overnight. The need to respond in a consistent and positive way to a situation that apparently has gotten out of control is what prompts us to reexamine conventional approaches to business ethics in order to rediscover the perennial wisdom enshrined in the many spiritual and cultural traditions generically identified as virtue ethics.

We attempt therefore to develop much further some dimensions of virtue ethics and argue for positive strategies that in cultivating the virtues specific to good business may actually prevent the disorders exposed in the current crisis. By contrast, by the time ethical considerations are usually raised in business-as-usual, they tend to come into the picture when it is already too late.

Though the virtues are often overlooked or completely ignored in conventional approaches to business ethics, we hope to stress the creativity of ethical reasoning by focusing constantly on the following questions: What kind of people should we

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strive to become? Which character traits should be cultivated so that leaders might emerge who would stand firm in highly demanding and sometimes troubling situations? How can we develop our ethical potential? If we focus on strengthening moral character, how might ethics inspire change for the better on the level of a firm, as well as on the whole society?

Obviously in the realm of business the possible answers contributing to change for the better need to be as down to earth as possible. Virtue ethics, properly understood, is pragmatic because it provides the missing link between the individual and institutional components of ethics. It is grounded, not in philosophical abstractions, but in the “social practices” (Alasdair MacIntyre) by which human interactions are successfully accomplished. However common the misunderstanding of virtue occurs when it is restricted to individual proper behavior, the fact is that virtue flourishes in a certain social environment. As every great tradition of virtue ethics, for example, Confucianism in China, clearly understood, the *social* and political components of virtue must be taken systematically into account.

Business ethics will never be improved, nor can it be taught effectively, simply by analyzing case studies *alone*. Appropriate financial and legal regulations are urgently needed but these will not be enough to overcome the far reaching loss of public trust. The public is right to demand a pragmatic, and not just an idealistic framework for cultivating virtues sufficient to guide a fair, as well as functional, international economic system. Arguably, this demand was recognized from the beginning in the first treatises on ethics, the, *Nicomachean Ethics*, by the Greek philosopher Aristotle, and the *Analects*, by the Chinese sage, Confucius. These classics describe the character traits that are necessary for living a fulfilling and happy life. They understand virtue as a character trait developed by habitual action. Consistent with their insights, in today’s business world, we should be inquiring how truthfulness, reliability, and honesty can also be instilled through habit, or the practice of virtue.

As the nineteenth century Hindu philosopher Vivekananda put it, we must learn to conceive the World as a “Grand Moral Gymnasium”: virtues need to be exercised, for ethics to reach its full blossoming. When we attempt to ground ethics not only on Western philosophy but also on different sources of Eastern wisdom virtue ethics it seems both appropriate and necessary to take into consideration how different religious traditions did and do shape moral convictions, attitudes and social practices. Understanding the impact of religion on morality is not just challenge for believers. Even in secular societies where the practice of religion may seem to have virtually disappeared, as in much of Europe, it is clear that religion had a profound historical impact on the value systems of different cultures and societies. Their continuing influence, even when unrecognized by most people, for better or for worse, remains strong. It therefore seems necessary to take religious traditions more systematically into account in order to unlock the deepest aspirations of people and activate their potential for positive change.

Virtue ethics explores the ultimate sources of values and norms, which is a very large and never ending task, more like finding and following a way to live, rather than arriving at a destination. Our book is only a first step in shaping ideas and

models demonstrating how values can deeply transform our thinking and acting for the better. We intend to offer no “Magic Kingdom”, a dream world detached from the hard reality of finance and business. Our assumption is that if ethics is just perceived as soft skill it may be lacking in social relevance. In order to establish its relevance persuasively, virtue ethics must take into account the personal, institutional, as well as the psychological and spiritual aspects of society.

A widespread prejudice is that the bottom line on business ethics basically boils down to philanthropy; as if its concrete demands would be satisfied when the firm's expenses include giving handouts here and there in order to sustain its reputation for good citizenship in supporting various social or cultural undertakings. While the creation of a new philanthropic culture can be considered a fruit of virtue ethics, the *core aspect* of virtue ethics touches upon all the key issues of business strategy, including but hardly limited to labor and employment, relations with the government, and environmental policies.

In a situation of rapid change as well as of a financial crisis of unprecedented scale, we have the challenge to develop new economic models that take into account the ethical implications of management, economics, finance and the related social sciences. Virtue ethics identifies an ethical foundation that presents the ethical choice in business not only as rational, but also as the most fulfilling choice, a reliable guide for shaping concrete policies. Virtue ethics, then, need not be regarded as an alternative to conventional approaches based on *applied ethics*, but rather as an effective means to a common end. Both seek to explore every possible theoretical and practical venue which might lead not only to better insights into the challenges afforded by any given situation and an increased ability to distinguish between right and wrong but also to act upon such capacities in ways that render them more effective in the complex and wide ranging challenges of today's business world.

New approaches to virtue ethics, however, should not only be searched for in traditional Western economic models but also in other parts of the world. Philosophical and business traditions differ, but can bring innovation and inspiration to our ideas of how ethics should be applied in businesses.

In this book we therefore present a so far little investigated perspective on business ethics – an Asian perspective. Asia, which has been the most interesting place of international investment and management, is rarely discussed as a place to look for models on how businesses are run. Over the past decades only Japanese management styles have been considered a “real” economic model. The Japanese system however, lost its appeal to Western observers during the recession of the 1990s and recent scandals in Japanese firms (e.g. Olympus) have strengthened the image of Japanese organizations operating in unethical ways.

Another aspect which comes to mind, when thinking about ethical business, are problems with market entries in the most popular Asian market at the moment: The People's Republic of China. Copyright issues place a major hurdle for international investors in China.

News featuring stories about corruption and cross-cultural challenges when interacting with Asian enterprises have shaped the Western idea of Asia as being a place where business ethics are still missing and have so far been a topic of little interest.

Despite this assumption, Asian businesses and researchers have started to research and to discuss on how businesses in their countries could become more ethical and have more members of their society participate in their success. In our book we would like to present ideas and philosophies which are the base of this process. Most chapters presented here have been written and presented at the Seminar “The Asian Dimension of Teaching Business Ethics” organized by the Centre for International Business Ethics (CIBE) in Beijing. In these yearly seminars, scholars, researchers and business experts from various countries discuss ideas and proposals on how to improve and implement business ethics in their countries.

The first part of the book presents theoretical aspects of International Business Ethics. Gerhold Becker is here exploring the moral dimensions of leadership in business. Assuming that business does not operate in an amoral space and that business decisions are not exclusively determined by economic factors of the market, business leaders are not necessarily and exclusively self-interested but act within a moral culture shared with society and its basic institutions. Becker argues that moral leadership is leadership whose power and authority has not only a legal basis but is also grounded on normative principles of common morality, and is therefore something for which ethics has more than merely instrumental value.

David W. Miller and Timothy Ewest contributed the chapter called “Rethinking the Impact of Religion on Business Values: Understanding Its Reemergence and Measuring Its Manifestations” (Chap. 13). In their chapter they argue that religious values have impacts on and in the workplace, and that these impacts are still extant, worthy of continued research, and are possible to measure. Moreover, the recent emergence of intense scholarly interest in the study of the connections between religion/spirituality and the workplace is driven not only by a desire to understand the variables and interrelationships of the phenomenon, but increasingly also by other interdisciplinary questions of interest to scholars and practitioners alike, such as leadership studies, ethics, diversity and inclusion, cultural competence, human rights, globalism, and changes in immigration patterns, organizational and economic structures, and geo-politics. In their chapter they offer The Integration Box (TIB) theory as a means to understand and potentially evaluate how individuals integrate faith and work, as well as a means for organizations to understand, and respond constructively to the phenomena of religious values in the workplace.

In the second part of the book we investigate business ethics in Asia. Here we would like to outline how challenging it is to implement ethical guidelines in Asian corporations.

The first chapter in this section written by Dai Changzheng is named “Corruption and Anti-corruption in China: Challenges and Countermeasures” (Chap. 5) and discusses how corruption is a serious challenge that China faces as it moves to modernize its economy and society. This chapter examines what is different in the nature and extent of corruption in China compared to those of other nations based on its different political structure and reform policy. It differentiates the typologies of corruption and analyzes the causes and the dilemma that the country faces in wrestling with ways to eradicate corruption.

In their chapter “Taking Your Codes to China” (Chap. 6) Kirk O. Hanson and Stephan Rothlin discuss which challenges occur when companies wish to apply their ethical codes in the People’s Republic of China. With pressure for human rights, environmental sensitivity, and the fight against corruption rising in their domestic homes and in global commerce, nothing is more critical to these companies’ reputations and success than learning how “to take their codes to China.” This chapter presents the learning of the two authors and the companies they have consulted and worked with over the last 10 years in China. It summarizes why it is so difficult to apply Western Business Ethics, and what the most successful companies are doing to make it work.

Peter Verhezen argues in his chapter called- “Do as the Romans Do in Rome”?- A “pragmatic” corporate governance perspective beyond ethical relativism in Asian Emerging Economies- (Chap. 7) that Asian companies are still lacking behind in terms of transparency, accountability to all its shareholders and being responsible to affected stakeholders. He describes three models of corporate governance, arguing that the Asian model is strongly relationship based and Asian businesses often show family like structures which make it difficult to keep international corporate governance standards. However, an abolition of these practices is neither possible nor advisable. In the chapter examples of Asian companies which changed not only their business practices, but also their attitudes toward ethical business are presented.

The final chapter of this section leads us to another striving Asian Economy: India. Indian Business Ethics are strongly influenced by the teachings of Mahatma Gandhi, which are presented and discussed by Jose M. Ybanez Tomacruz. In his chapter he explains the background and main intentions of Mahatma Gandhi’s Satyagraha, a philosophical practice which is often seen as the foundation of the “Civil Disobedience” movement in India. Ybanez Tomacruz investigates main aspects of Gandhi’s writing and draws ethical inclinations from it, which can also be applied to business practices.

The third part of the book investigates on how business ethics can be taught effectively in an Asian context. Our authors draw on their experiences teaching business ethics in Asian classrooms.

Antonette Palma-Angeles from Ateneo de Manila University writes in her chapter on “Teaching Business Ethics: Challenges and Responses” (Chap. 9) Ethicists are of two minds about the cause of ethical failures. One side says, ethical failure is a function of cognition; it stems from the agent’s lack of understanding of the ethical dilemma, stakeholders, available options, and their consequences. The other side believes that unethical decisions happen because agents prioritize their self-interests above anything else, most especially above those of the group for which they are responsible. Now third reason is moral numbness without sensitivity to the dilemma, no moral reasoning can ensue and no moral courage is required. In her chapter she discusses these three challenges confronting the teaching of Business Ethics in the Philippines and proposes a course framework and outline, and some notes on how to handle case studies.

Mike Thompson of China Europe International Business School in Shanghai further addresses the topic and suggests reframing business ethics. Business ethics has traditionally been a discipline to provide tools to management dilemmas. Reframing business ethics however, may challenge the relevance of traditional ethical theories whilst not rejecting their role in the discourse of moral philosophy”.

Roderick O’Brien argues in a similar manner in his chapter “Implementing Business and Professional Ethics in an Asian Context: Three Steps to Integration”. He argues that our philosophies and theologies, integrating our ethics and also considering culturally different ethics in this attempts. More integration in business ethics curricula are needed. He suggests that key individual introduced to students can support the integration of intercultural business ethics.

The chapter “Why and How to Use Case Studies in Teaching Business Ethics” (Chap. 12) by Dennis McCann focuses on using teaching materials in the Asian Business Ethics classroom. He further discusses a prominent example of business ethics, the introduction of a Code of Conduct in Hong Kong. He concludes that Asian case studies should be preferred when teaching in Asian classrooms.

The final section of the book asks what the future will bring for Business Ethics Education. Here Henri-Claude de Bettignies asks the question “Can Business Schools Lead the Way To a World Worth Living In?” (Chap. 13) and discusses which role teaching and in particular teaching in business schools can support a more virtue and ethics oriented approach to management and business processes.

According to de Bettignies their role is a vital one, but the current paradigm of business teaching is not changing fast enough. The current economic crisis has not been integrated successfully in business curricula to teach students about business ethics. A new paradigm is needed which does not only go beyond teaching traditional classes in business ethics, but also should rethink the purpose of the firm, challenge existing models, and question the techniques and tools we use to teach business ethics to students in all parts of the world.

We hope that this book is a first step into this direction.