



*Perspectives on Teaching Business Ethics
from the Philosophy Department*

TEACHING BUSINESS ETHICS FROM A PHILOSOPHY DEPARTMENT PERSPECTIVE

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In the thirteenth century, St. Bonaventure wrote a marvelous little treatise entitled *De reductione artium ad theologiam* (*The Reduction of the Arts to Theology*) in order to resolve the controversy over the place and, indeed, the very independence of philosophy. It seems that the University of Paris was engaged in an intemperate rhubarb of the sort not unknown today. The Dominicans, Franciscans, and Latin-Averroists each believed that the university should reflect their school of thought, and curricular discussion had turned heated. Bonaventure argued that the Dominicans allowed too much license to natural reason, but at least they sided with the Franciscans regarding the Latin-Averroists: throw those rascals out!

Bonaventure won the battle, and the arts were to serve theology. However, Thomas Aquinas won the war, and, to that extent, natural reason was accorded respect as a viable avenue to truth. Thus Aquinas became a champion for the philosophic perspective.

Of course, curricular disagreements were not new in the time of Bonaventure and Thomas, nor have they disappeared from the academy. Contemporary controversy over “the canon” demonstrates that debate over what should be taught and how material should be handled

is still with us. My entry point into the discussion involves the question of how best to handle the education of business students with regard to ethics.

My position blends the thought of Bonaventure and Thomas: it is less important that a business ethics course and its teacher be housed in the philosophy department or the business school—though there are practical matters to consider—than that the course be taught from a philosophical perspective by a person with an education, formal or informal, in philosophy, and especially in ethics. I support this point, first, by delving into the writing of Plato to show that the problem of who should teach ethics is several millennia old. Second, relying on Aristotle, I explain Plato’s distinction between being good and knowing the good. I suggest that the cognitive aspects of ethics typically are underestimated by those outside the discipline. Then, relying on recent psychological research, I show that the philosophic perspective is the most adequate perspective, at least in terms of human activity, for instruction in ethics. Finally, I offer caveats with regard to philosophers teaching ethics in professional schools, including business schools.

Plato and an Ethics Education

Plato’s dialogue *Meno* concerns virtue and speaks not only to the question of what virtue is but also to the possibility of its being taught. At one point, Socrates asks Meno, “Since the goodness does not come by nature, is it got by learning?” (89b). After Meno agrees that people learn goodness, the two conclude that teachers of goodness must exist (89d). Just as the two inquire into where to find these teachers, Anytos, a “good citizen” of Athens, joins them.

Socrates says to Anytos, “If we wanted Meno to become a good doctor, shouldn’t we send him to doctors to be taught? And if we wanted him to become a shoemaker, to the

shoemaker? And so on with the other trades?” (90a ff.). Anytos and Meno assent to this line of reasoning. The three then ask after “good men” and come to the realization that the question is not

whether or not there are good men in Athens or whether there have been in times past, but whether virtue can be taught. It amounts to the same question whether the good men of this and former times have known how to hand on to someone else the goodness that was in themselves or whether on the contrary it is not something that can be handed over, or that one man can receive it from another. (93a–b)

This passage suggests that people may be good but without conceptual knowledge of the good and without the ability to “hand over” knowledge of ethics. In other words, Plato is arguing that there is a difference between having the right opinion about the good, sufficient for action, and having knowledge of the good, sufficient for teaching.

As far as Plato is concerned, knowledge is the key to being good at a craft, and it is the same for the teacher of ethics. Plato argues in the *Republic* that the key to piloting a ship well is knowledge of piloting. It does not matter what other knowledge an applicant for a position as ship’s pilot may have (488a ff.). After all, “no other tool if picked up will make anyone a craftsman or contestant, nor will it even be of use to the man who has not gained knowledge of it or undergone adequate training” (374c). Relevant knowledge, not just any knowledge, enables a person to do an activity well.

Anyone who takes Plato’s reasoning seriously—and of course it does not have to be taken seriously—might ask: who has knowledge of ethics and has “undergone adequate training” with regard to ethics? Have business professors ‘undergone adequate training’ to teach business ethics? Have pharmacists and doctors “undergone adequate training” to teach healthcare or biomedical ethics? Does it make sense for professors in accounting, or marketing, or finance to

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teach ethics? Does it make sense for philosophers to teach accounting, or marketing, or finance?

Plato answers these questions at the conclusion of the *Republic*:

And there, dear Glaucon, it appears, is the supreme hazard for a man. And this is the chief reason why it should be our main concern that each of us, neglecting all other studies, should seek after and study this thing—if in any way he may be able to learn of and discover the man who will give him the ability and the knowledge to distinguish the life that is good from that which is bad, and always and everywhere to choose the best that the conditions allow, and, taking into account all the things of which we have spoken and estimating the effect on goodness of his life of their conjunction or their severance, to know how beauty commingled with poverty or wealth and combined with what habit of soul operates for the good or for evil, and what are the effects of high and low birth and private station and office and strength and weakness and quickness of apprehension and dullness with one another, so that with consideration of all these things he will be able to make a reasoned choice between the better and the worse life. (618b–e)

There is no doubt in Plato's mind that students "should seek after and study" philosophy and that the "man who will give him the ability and knowledge to distinguish the life that is good from that which is bad" is the philosopher. Plato would not be convinced that an education in pharmacy, accounting, engineering, or journalism prepares professors to teach the philosophical material in ethics.

Plato and I agree that there are good people who are professors in those disciplines but whose knowledge is of a different sort than philosophical knowledge. It is not a question of whether an accounting professor is virtuous or not; it is a question of the kind of knowledge the accounting professor has to "hand over" to students. A difference exists between doing an activity and knowing the concepts that underlie it. In his own discussion, Aristotle clarifies and embellishes the ideas of Plato.

Aristotle and the Cognitive Content of Ethics

Aristotle opens the *Metaphysics* with a discourse on learning. His discussion draws a distinction between the “man of experience,” i.e., the practitioner, and the artist, i.e., the person who knows theory. After observing that “animals other than humans live by appearances and memories, and have but little of connected experience” (98b25–6), Aristotle states that “the human race lives also by art and reasoning” (980b227). He adds that “art arises when from many notions gained by experience one universal judgment about a class of objects is produced” (981a5–6). Aristotle here is suggesting that “art” is a matter of conceptual knowledge.

Yet it happens that the practitioner’s “experience seems in no respect inferior to art, and people of experience succeed even better than those who have theory without experience” (981a14–15). While the practitioner may not have the conceptual knowledge underpinning certain actions, he or she may do good acts or do an action well. For instance, a baseball player may become great because of hitting prowess but may lack the conceptual understanding of baseball or even of hitting. As such, great players do not always make great coaches, for if they lack knowledge of baseball or of hitting itself, or if they cannot communicate, they cannot teach.

On the other hand, “if a person has the theory without experience, and recognizes the universal but does not know the individual included in the universal, the person will often fail” (981a20–22). The person with conceptual knowledge alone may not recognize to whom or what the knowledge applies. Nonetheless, “we think knowledge and understanding belong to art rather than experience and we suppose artists to be wiser than people of experience for men of experience know that the thing is so, but do not know why, while the others know the why and the

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cause” (981a29–30). Professors uneducated in ethics lack theory in a way that philosophers do not.

Again, it is not a question of whether philosophy professors, business professors, or pharmacy professors are good and virtuous. They are usually very good role models for students to imitate. But simply being a good role model does not mean an individual possesses knowledge of the “why and the cause” of ethics. If business ethics courses involve the transmission of knowledge, then the practitioner will perform less capably than the artist, i.e., the one with “knowledge and understanding.”

Aristotle’s reasoning suggests that teaching involves more than simply doing well in an area. The difference between a person who knows something and one who does not is that “the former can teach, and therefore we think art more truly knowledge than experience is; for artists can teach, and people of mere experience cannot” (981b18–19).

Aristotle’s observations and analysis notwithstanding, business schools do not take the knowledge associated with ethics very seriously. For instance, more than 60% of business schools require no ethics course. Then, too, one current debate in business schools concerns the desirability of teaching ethics using the stand-alone course or using an “integrated” model, sometimes referred to as a “diffusion model” or a “dispersion model.” In the integrated model, the teaching of ethics is incorporated into business classes by business professors. These professors, with extensive education in business fields such as marketing, accounting, and finance, teach ethics as a secondary subject. It is likely under these circumstances that ethics will be handled superficially by people with limited knowledge and understanding of ethics. Further, while schools sometimes have dedicated, stand-alone courses in ethics, several schools of my

acquaintance staff the course with people whose experience is exclusively in business or business education.

Much like other institutions in our society, business schools underestimate the cognitive aspects of ethics and choose the practitioner over the artist. To their credit, business schools stress the importance of ethics and of acting ethically. The integration model's repetitive mentioning of ethics does indeed teach students that ethics must count for something. The result, however, is a curriculum in ethical business, not in business ethics. The integrated model may do a very good job at teaching students to want to behave ethically; it does a poor job of teaching students how to reason to the sort of behavior that is ethical.

In other words, ethics, like accounting, depends not only on the desire to do well but also on the knowledge to do well. A good accountant not only wants to perform the tasks associated with accounting well, but also has the "knowledge and understanding" of accounting necessary to the task. An accountant ignorant of good accounting procedures or indifferent to good accounting practices will produce poor results. The discipline of ethics is no different from other disciplines insofar as ethics is also a knowing related to a doing. A person may perform a wrong act either through cognitive failure or failure of the will. Sometimes people want to do the right act but do not know what it is. Sometimes people behave unethically knowing full well that they are doing so. The ethics professor works on the cognitive aspects of ethics in a way that people trained in other disciplines cannot. The ethics professor, like the accounting professor, offers "knowledge and understanding" in his or her field of specialization.

That "knowledge and understanding" can grow. As the research of Lawrence Kohlberg and of William Perry and colleagues shows, skills associated with making ethical judgments

change and develop over the course of a lifetime. The “art and reasoning” of a child is different from the “art and reasoning” of the adult; the child’s “knowledge and understanding” is considerably less developed than the adult’s. Children need to learn what most adults already know, namely, to be good. But adults can do more than be good; they can take the time and trouble to grasp “the why and the cause” of ethics and of being good.

Most adults, if Kohlberg is correct, do not undertake the last step. Most people think that it is enough to do good and that it is unnecessary to know the reason and the cause of doing good. Most people fail to appreciate the cognitive aspects of ethics. This observation can often be made of business schools and certainly of the typical college student, including business students.

Kohlberg, Perry, and the Structure of Thought

Society underemphasizes the body of knowledge associated with ethics, and students make the same error. For the last several years, I have asked students in my business ethics classes and in my team-taught, six credit-hour ethics, law, and business classes to respond to the following questions:

- Can ethics be taught?
- If so, how?
- If not, why not?
- What is the relation of ethics to business?

My students say things such as, “Ethics are completely subjective,” “Everyone has their own personal ethics to abide by,” “Each individual has a unique lifestyle,” “Everyone has their own definition and their own views on what is considered ethical behavior and what is not,” and “No two people have the exact same ethical beliefs.” Of course, if my students are correct, then I

am wasting my time and theirs in class. Further, if they are correct, ethics are wholly relative to the individual, and ethical subjectivism is the correct position to adopt with regard to moral judgment.

But students also say that “our thinking is shaped by what we are taught from the people around us and this varies from region to region,” point to “parameters of what our culture has bound our ethics by,” suggest that people “have different origins and are accepted differently depending on the groups,” and that “society will often have an idea of what the norm should be for a certain ethical standard.” If these students are correct, I can only teach societal expectation and norms, and cultural relativism is the position to adopt with regard to moral judgment.

Some students see the logical conclusion of the responses articulated above. They have told me that “moral knowledge cannot be taught, it can be instilled,” “ethics cannot be taught because I believe that one’s ethical values are a result of personal experience and morals, which cannot be taught,” “today students are being taught in classes to reinforce their moral standard,” and “when faced with the question whether or not ethics can be taught I am filled with mixed emotions.” Other students are not sure if ethics can be taught. One student commented that ethics “can be taught if done tastefully and thoughtfully. Ethics should be taught as a subject that has no final answer.”

Would students dare make these sorts of remarks to an accounting professor or a finance professor? They would never think to say, “Accounting cannot be taught” or “Finance cannot be taught.” Students assume that there is a body of knowledge associated with accounting and finance but do not seem to think the same about ethics. Further, and more important, students understand their ignorance when it comes to accounting and finance, so they see that further

development in those fields is possible. With regard to finance or accounting, they accept the observation of Thomas Aquinas that “it seems to be the nature of human reason to progress by stages from the less perfect to the more perfect” (ST I–II, 97, 1). They are not as apt to see the possibility of further development in ethics even if the psychological research of Kohlberg and of Perry and colleagues shows that further development is possible.

Lawrence Kohlberg has shown that people “progress by stages from the less perfect to the more perfect” level of moral development. He also has found that people do not necessarily move to the “more perfect” stages of moral development. Some people stop developing. That is, when the skills of a certain stage of moral development are challenged and shown to be wanting, some people, including some students, disengage from the hard work of growth. They flinch from the work of both maintaining integrity, or an intact sense of identity, and accommodating challenges to their identity.

Yet challenges to the sense of self, called *cognitive conflict* by Kohlberg (1981), can produce upward development. For example, research by Kohlberg shows that moral dilemma, real or imagined, can induce moral growth (27–8, 146–7). The move from one stage of development to another is not, however, a function of gathering more information—even if students constantly refer to learning as a matter of “knowing more facts.” Kohlberg writes, “Presumably, then, movement to the next stage involves internal cognitive reorganization rather than the mere addition of more difficult content from outside” (146). If so, the advance to a higher stage of thought is a matter of re-orienting the structure of thought.

Kohlberg's work charts those structures, noting the safe harbors that shelter people from moral development. Of particular interest to those teaching ethics, including business ethics, are

the safe harbors of stages 3 and 4, but especially the “society maintaining orientation” of stage 4. Although the person in stage 3 or stage 4 has more capacity to resolve moral issues than the person in the self-interested stages of youth, or stages 1 and 2, the capabilities of the stage 3 or 4 thinker can improve. In the first two stages, “maintaining the expectations of the individual’s family, group or nation is perceived as valuable in its own right, regardless of immediate and obvious consequences. The attitude is not only one of conformity to personal expectations and social order, but of loyalty to it, of actively maintaining, supporting, and justifying the order” (18). In the third level and the last two stages, “there is a clear effort to define moral values and principles that have validity and application apart from the authority of the groups or people holding these principles and apart from the individual’s own identification with these groups” (18). Growth to stages 5 and 6 frequently demands a restructuring of identity.

Perry’s research is analogous to Kohlberg’s. For instance, Perry observed that when people, including students, face *cognitive dissonance*—Kohlberg’s cognitive conflict—they often avoid adjusting their orientation to the world and altering their identity. Such a student demonstrates “the wish to retain earlier satisfactions or securities, the reluctance to admit one has been in error and most importantly, the wish to maintain a self one has felt oneself to be” (Perry, p. 52, 1999). In professorial jargon, students do not get out of their comfort zone. Perry suggests that they resist learning.

Perry even observes common techniques of resistance, or *negative defense mechanisms*: *escape* (177), wherein a person detaches himself or herself from the conflict, at least in part; *temporizing* (178), wherein a person does not engage the problem and hopes it will go away; and *retreat* (182), wherein a person regresses to a lower stage of thought instead of growing toward the

unknown. Perry notes that retreat is often accompanied by anger and hatred directed towards other positions and the people who manifest them (177). Other researchers (Hart and Chmiel, 1992; Haan, 1963) offer similar observations.

Advance, notes Perry, “involves risk, subjective and objective” (178) and forces a “reiterated choice between courage and despair” (32). Perry remarks that movements from one position to another “express the work of considerable psychic energy” (49). Both Kohlberg and Perry suggest that the higher stages of thought involve a restructuring of identity. At this point in the paper, it is germane to ask: does teaching business ethics from a business point of view involve restructuring? Does teaching healthcare ethics from the perspective of a healthcare professional demand a restructuring of thought? Can there be “a clear effort to define moral values and principles that have validity and application apart from the authority of the groups or people holding these principles and apart from the individual’s own identification with these groups” when the individual lacks a structure of thought apart from that of business, or healthcare, or journalism, or whatever discipline is involved with applied ethics?

Academia houses different disciplines in various schools not only because different substantive bodies of knowledge exist but also because different disciplines provide different avenues of thought. People educated in different disciplines think differently. If moral development is a matter of “internal cognitive reorganization,” people in the same discipline as the student, with a similar structural perspective, are less likely to stimulate any sort of reorganization. People are needed therefore who, formally or informally educated, can stand outside the perspective of the discipline and teach ethics for those within the discipline under ethical scrutiny.

Were Bonaventure alive today, he might countenance philosophy, but he would not write *De reductione artium ad negotium* (*On the Reduction of the Arts to Business*).

Business ethics can only be taught from a philosophical perspective.

Caveats Regarding the Philosopher

If the preceding reasoning holds, then it is a necessary condition for educating students that business ethics be taught from a philosophical perspective by a person educated in philosophy, especially ethics. But stating that a philosophical perspective and a philosopher are needed is not the same thing as saying that they suffice for teaching business ethics. It is not enough that a philosopher teach business ethics, given the rancorous treatment many philosophers give business and business students. Far too often, no love is lost between philosophy and business. I have observed over the years and at many schools that the two disciplines, business and philosophy, have an uneasy relationship and that their discomfort affects faculty relationships.

Anecdotes abound. At one school, two philosophers were hired to teach the business ethics course. Within a week of the semester's start, the dean of the business school was besieged by students from the classes. It seems that the professors had told the students they were wasting their time majoring in business and that they should get a "real major." At one school where I taught business ethics, a business professor said to me, somewhat derisively, "You know what they are like in the liberal arts." I said, "Yes, my office is in the liberal arts." At the same school, my colleagues in the philosophy department would pat my shoulder and ask sympathetically, "How can you teach so many business students?"

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I am not alone in my observation that there is a divide between business schools and the liberal arts. A dean at Leeds School of Business, Robert Kolb, noted that the situation is similar to that described in *The Two Cultures*, C.P. Snow's treatment of the divide between faculty in science and in the humanities.

Philosophers at times do not appreciate their own discipline's history and are consequently hostile toward business enterprises. As my philosophical colleague Richard Klonoski (2003) points out, "Thinkers such as Aristotle, St. Thomas More, Adam Smith, even St. Thomas Aquinas, either accept the fact that human beings are 'commercial beings' or indeed revel in this fact. For example, both David Hume, in his essays, 'Of Commerce' and 'Of Refinement in the Arts,' and Smith, in *The Wealth of Nations*, argue that human beings have a natural tendency or propensity to engage in the commercial activities of exchange and barter" (27). As Aristotle put the matter of property, "the amount of property which is needed for a good life is not unlimited; there is a boundary fixed" (Pol. 1256b32–34), but, nonetheless, "there is a natural art of acquisition which is practiced by managers of households and by statesmen" (Pol. 1256b37–8).

Aristotle's thought seems especially appropriate for philosophers to remember as they teach business ethics. On the one hand, Aristotle says of "the theory of wealth-getting" that "the discussion of such matters is not unworthy of philosophy but to be engaged in them practically is illiberal and irksome" (Pol. 1258b9–12). Philosophers who are contemptuous of business activity pay heed to only half their philosophical history. Such a matter as teaching business ethics is not unworthy of philosophy or philosophers.

Conclusion

I have argued that business ethics should be taught from a philosophical perspective by a philosopher. The problem of who should teach ethics dates back at least to Plato, as does the distinction between knowing the good and doing the good. Modern psychological research suggests that moral advance involves higher thinking skills of the sort normally found in the discipline of philosophy. But the philosopher teaching business ethics must remember that business activity is a natural human activity.

These are the thoughts I try to keep in mind as I teach business ethics. My affiliation is with the liberal arts, but my office is in the business school. Sometimes I feel like a man without a country, but I know that dual citizenship is possible.

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STEALING OUT THE BACK DOOR

Business Ethics and the Loss of Education

Eugene Heath

This, then, to the undergraduate, is the distinctive mark of a university; it is a place where he has the opportunity of education in conversation with his teachers, his fellows and himself, and where he is not encouraged to confuse education with training for a profession, with learning the tricks of a trade, with preparation for future particular service in society or with the acquisition of a kind of moral and intellectual outfit to see him through life. Whenever an ulterior purpose of this sort makes its appearance, education (which is concerned with persons, not functions) steals out of the back door with noiseless steps. (Michael Oakeshott, 1989)

Many individuals, including students and not a few academics, think that the point of business ethics education is to make students better persons or, more broadly, to reform commercial society. Perhaps these were among the original motivations for launching business ethics programs in the 1970s. If so, such motives were founded, presumably, on either the notion that businesspersons were insufficiently responsible or the idea that citizens must reassess or reform the institutions of commercial society. That these contentions are contestable, even doubtful, does not mean that they played an insignificant role in the establishment of courses in business ethics. There exists to this day a strong reformist, if not missionary, character to the comments and discussions of many business ethicists. In some instances the message

communicated, in speech and in writing, is that the scholarly and pedagogical fields of business ethics provide a bulwark against the ruthless corruption of commercial practice. But if this sort of enthusiasm enters the business ethics classroom, it must not become a single-minded attempt to reform or to change the student; such attempts would introduce into teaching the “ulterior purpose” of which Oakeshott writes and thus transform a business ethics education into the “acquisition of a kind of moral . . . outfit.”

Although there is something right in saying that the point of business ethics is to make people better (or to make society a better place in which to live), this should not be the immediate goal of a business ethics class or curriculum, for the purpose of teaching business ethics is not to engage in a protreptic exercise in moral suasion or to deliver a semester-long homily on social responsibility or stakeholder theory. As a pedagogical enterprise, business ethics should not seek to make students into better persons, but rather, to assist them in thinking carefully about moral matters relating to commerce. A business ethics course should enhance a student’s moral perception and foster the ability to sift ideas and to reason deliberatively about principles and practices of business and markets. Such an end, rather like happiness itself, is best achieved in the pursuit of something else. What, therefore, ought to be pursued in teaching business ethics?

Value

It has become fashionable to think of education, including business ethics education, in terms of skills, objectives, and outcomes. One should not yield to such fads, however, or to the dubious assumption that education is training in technique, or the inculcation of a theory that will

equip one to navigate the shoals of life and commerce. Moral perception and careful deliberation, especially within the context of business and markets, are neither straightforward skills that aim at set results nor techniques that may be disengaged from traditions of moral endeavor. They are more akin to manners of awareness and modes of engagement, and these cannot be understood adequately in terms of technique, routine, or training but arise out of one's character and the traditions of one's community. Moral perception as a manner of awareness, and deliberation as a mode of engagement reflect valuable human dispositions that equip students to recognize how a situation or a circumstance may demand a mode of response drawing on qualities moral and commercial. These traits dispose one to perceive the relevant particulars of a given situation and to recognize not only the underlying conditions of exchange but the complexities of market processes.

Perception and deliberation cannot be developed *ab initio* in the classroom; they can only be honed by an exposure to a curriculum reminding students of the practical complexities of decision making and calling for an appropriate exercise of thought. In this way, a business ethics course is part of a liberal education. The medieval conception of the liberal arts placed great emphasis on logic and argumentation (Haskins, 1972). Central to this conception is the idea of the "liberal," *liberalis*, as that which "befits" or "is suitable for" a free individual, or one who, in being self guided, must deliberate and decide on his or her own. To assist the development of perceptive and deliberative capacities, the very content of a business ethics education should broaden and enrich one's thought about the moral connections and relations attaching to business practice and underlying the institutions of commerce.

Thus, the value of business ethics derives from the content of the course, both in terms of its curriculum and in terms of the example set by the professor. If one sets aside the (very important and not unrelated) role of the professor, the curricular content of such courses should render the student more aware of the implications, complexities, and consequences of commerce and more disposed to consider the moral assumptions and practical postulates of markets and exchanges. In this manner, business ethics courses suit the “free” individual. At the same time, their purpose is not to have the student master some current policy debate, or to reshape the learner into an adept at the application of Kantian terminology, or to convert the callow to ritualistic references to “multiple stakeholders.” The purpose is precisely not to fashion a “moral outfit” for students, but to provide the conditions in which a student may become more morally perceptive, thoughtful, and engaged. Such courses should eschew moralizing, politicization, or any tendency to fashion a moral outfit laced, perhaps, with the professor’s response to current urgencies.

Content

If the value of business ethics courses rests not on skills but on content, then what should the curriculum be? Despite unceasing debate as to the content of liberal education, one may delineate certain general features of the liberal conception of business ethics. The subject demands a meditation on and a conversation about moral issues relating to commerce, as well as a philosophical consideration of normative issues relating to the essence of business, the voluntary exchange of goods and services, and its institutional manifestations. Voluntary exchange occurs under practical conditions setting forth laws, regulations, and policies; these conditions also may presuppose certain moral, social and psychological norms and postulates. Those who interact—

whether as individuals or within firms—must render a variety of judgments and decisions. The pattern of decisions, as well as the laws and institutions, may have unanticipated effects, beneficial or no.

From these general remarks, one may glean three entry points into business ethics, each point suggesting distinct curricular emphases. One may enter into the study of the normative postulates of business and exchange, through a consideration of the *foundations*, the *effects*, or the *operations* of businesses and markets. As has been stated, the foundations of markets include the laws, institutions, and regulations that should frame and govern business and markets, as well as any moral or social norms or expectations essential to their successful functioning. Another entry point might bring the student to an examination of the consequences or effects of business and markets on various aspects of society, culture, or nature. And a third would encourage the students to consider day-to-day practices and engagements of commerce. These utilize or require moral, social, and psychological principles or qualities and involve individuals who—in talking, buying, selling, renting, cooperating, advising, working, fixing, waiting, making, adjusting, assisting, promising, constructing, risking, amending, dispatching, delivering, and so on—must exercise judgment and take into account distinct goods and interests, perhaps balancing one against another.

A single business ethics course may contain multiple entry points although it is also possible to have each entrance serve as the focal point for *distinct* courses, not all of which need to be designated as courses in business ethics. For example, the foundations of markets serves as an entry to courses oriented around themes of politics and markets, justice and commerce, or to classes in business and society. Such courses emphasize questions concerning rights, property and

equality, economic justice, regulation, and whether or not certain moral, cultural, or social dispositions or characteristics are essential to markets. Only secondarily, if at all, would such courses consider individual conduct (or decision making) within the firm or the effects of markets and business. One might expect that many traditional business ethics courses would focus on individual decision-making, perhaps taking into account the traits and moral qualities relevant to business success or the standards of sound business practice and moral endeavor. Such courses tend, however, to gravitate to foundational questions, in particular to matters of law and public policy. Such an approach is not misguided, but that it should be the dominant focus is unclear. After all, an exploration of law and public policy is distinct from an inquiry into the ethics of individual moral decisions. Moreover, a serious consideration of issues of law, regulation, or public policy requires rigor, depth, and an understanding of the complexities of markets, elements often in short supply in much of the literature on business ethics.

Another type of business ethics courses, or a segment within courses, focuses on the consequences of commerce. A course devoted to the effects of markets might consider ethical questions regarding the environment, a subject related to the topic of market foundations (including the bearer of rights, the extent of property rights, the perils and promises of regulation, and so on). Such a course might center on the role of business in innovation and technology, however, or on whether markets and business provide conditions for progress (and of what sort). Another type of class might treat the manner in which markets affect the overall culture, including the arts and morals. Excepting the topic of the environment, these are not the standard issues of business ethics courses, but they are relevant and important matters and have a history and a literature.

Implications

It has been argued that the aim and value of business ethics courses lie in how curricular content should provide avenues for honing capacities of moral perception and deliberation, because these capacities concern the foundations, operations, and effects of markets and business. The outline limned in section II raises more questions than it answers, but it is proffered to suggest the kinds of questions that should be posed. Does it also imply cautionary theses about the current state of business ethics? Already three such notes have been sounded. Too many business ethicists focus on public policy rather than individual moral decision, and too much of this discussion fails to recognize adequately how many questions of policy are economically complex and rife with unintended consequences. Additionally, except for the discussion of environmental questions, there is relatively little normative evaluation of the overall effects of business and markets. Are there other implications?

Even as this account cautions against missionary zeal, it provides grounds for teaching business ethics as independent courses rather than as topics broached only in so far as they can be integrated into other business or management classes. An integrated curriculum risks inserting the ethical in a spasmodic or haphazard way, perhaps encouraging moralizing or ideological insinuation and precluding a focused, thorough, and deliberative encounter with important themes and issues. (As a field of study, can financial accounting be integrated throughout the curriculum? Business statistics?) Moreover, there is room for supplementing courses in business ethics with courses in philosophy (social and political philosophy; classics of political thought; philosophy and literature), history (business and society, history of business), sociology (social theory), or psychology (industrial psychology). In sum, the general field of business ethics, especially its

complementing courses, is multidisciplinary. This suggests that the readings for a business ethics course may be drawn from a variety of thinkers, epochs, and disciplines.

Even though various parties are engaged in market production and exchange, too much of business ethics focuses on the corporation as the locus of commercial activity. A predominant emphasis on corporate modes of decision making and functioning ignores how much of business involves the small firm, not to mention the activity of the entrepreneur. Because of this preoccupation with the ethics of one type of firm, too many business ethicists seem fixated on doctrines of social responsibility (corporate social responsibility, socially responsible investing) and on the stakeholder theory although neither doctrine nor theory has been developed or justified adequately.

This state of affairs should be especially disconcerting if one takes into account that the focus on individual decision-making within the operations of business, corporate or not, is precisely what most students seek when they enroll in business ethics courses. Some students seek answers rather than inquiry, thereby gratifying the professor who teaches the course so as not to cultivate perception or deliberation in the student but to provide guidance. Business ethics, as an academic subject, is not moralizing, however, for there remains a distinction between guidance that is appropriately *liberal* and that which reflects the moral predilections of an individual. The sort of guidance that is warranted and crucial encourages students to recognize moral issues and to explore and to comprehend their complexity. This guidance avoids preaching, question-begging arguments, and any presumption of moral consensus about how business should act or society be “organized.” And yet, as Aristotle recognized, such guidance does have a practical component

even though it does not give the student pat answers. That it does not is, again, a testament to how business ethics is part of the liberal arts.

The business ethicist should eschew moralizing, insinuation, or programmatic response. This conclusion is wholly compatible with acknowledging ethical truths of a general sort (honesty is right and good, generosity is to be cultivated, promises are to be kept, and so on). But ethical life is not simply a matter of applying rules or principles although it includes that. The ethical life is a matter of perception as well, not to mention *will*. This is one reason, I think, for adopting within the traditional course on business ethics a model or approach emphasizing virtue. Students bring their dispositions, commitments, and principles to our classes and to commerce. It is worth considering how a business ethic of virtue might allow students to investigate and to appreciate how traits and qualities that already have some salience in their lives may also have relevance in business. How does courage affect entrepreneurship, innovation, or business risk? How might generosity of time and effort help colleagues, clients and customers? How does integrity underlie the will of the whistleblower? And can personal ambition be reconciled with the life at home as well as the life at work?

Too much of business ethics smacks of desperation: We must teach business ethics because otherwise commercial life will go off the rails! But if commercial enterprise seems disjointed from larger moral concerns and if business leaders and colleagues do not seem attune to the moral life, it is doubtful that a course will alleviate these ills. Disconnection between business and morals may be the result of a more widespread failure to think carefully about how our economic, social, and cultural lives do (and must) have roots in long-standing practices and traditions. That we have not been sufficiently mindful of this hypothesis has left many of us

scrambling after moral and theoretical outfits that ill suit a genuine education in the moral practices of commerce.

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A PHILOSOPHICAL APPROACH TO THE ETHICS OF COMMERCE Child Labor as a Pedagogical Template

Richard J. Klonoski

No single approach to teaching business ethics can do everything. Traditional applied ethics offerings accomplish different goals than business and society courses do. This is the case, as well, with the decidedly classical philosophical approach to business ethics education I am about to propose. This alternative approach would seek to treat contemporary ethical issues in business as *gestalts* of sorts, whereby such issues would appear as figures against various grounds. These issues would take shape or form against the multifaceted backdrop, or ground, that constitutes the horizon of understanding, a ground not only commercial but also often philosophical, i.e., metaphysical, epistemological, political, social, and historical in nature.

One goal of what I have elsewhere described as a philosophical “unapplied” approach (Klonoski, 2003) would be to inform business students of the rich philosophical discussions that predate and inform debates about contemporary ethical problems in business. An even more substantive goal would be to infuse in students a capacity for philosophical reflection about issues in classical philosophy relating to ethical issues in business today and to teach them how to reflect on their own nature as commercial agents. While it is certainly useful for students to learn to apply

ethical decision-making models to solve ethical problems, application can only be enriched when students inquire into such issues, the decisions made regarding them, and their effects on students themselves as members of commercial and other communities. In what follows, I will explain what philosophy can contribute to business ethics education. I will argue, further, that a philosophical view of commerce immediately precipitates a distinctive direction for ethics education. Then, using the issue of child labor as a pedagogical template, I will briefly show what a decidedly philosophical approach to this issue is like. Finally, I will conclude by identifying advantages of taking a philosophical approach to teaching the ethics of commerce.

The study of philosophy provides students with a reflective access to their world, to themselves, and to their relationships with others. Being philosophical is a unique manner of “being in the world.” No doubt, studying philosophy can help students develop analytical and synthetic thinking skills and refined communication skills. Students of philosophy tend to become more persuasive at making arguments or building intellectual cases. Such skills are indeed serviceable for ethical decision-making and success in business. Yet disciplines other than philosophy might also contribute to such skill development. Philosophy brings something more to the educational table—something distinctive. The philosophical person is interested in studying human nature *as* human beings engage in such analytical argumentative activities. Philosophical people are interested in what it means to be human in the first place, to live a fully human life, to occupy a place of importance in the human world. As the German thinker Martin Heidegger put it in *Being and Time*, *Dasein*, or the human being, is the only being whose being is of concern to it (Heidegger, p. 40, 1996), the only being who can reflect on the meaning of its own being or existence. In this text, Heidegger refers us to St. Augustine, who in his *Confessions* echoes a

similar thought. At one point in the narrative, Augustine describes his state of mind upon learning of the death of a dear deceased companion. He had thought that he himself was a good friend, one who appreciated his friend. But now at his friend's death, Augustine is thrown into a state of confusion that prompts him to reflect upon himself. He famously states, "I have become a great riddle to myself" (Ryan, p. 98, 1960). There is a rich and complicated significance to the word for "riddle" [*quaestio*]. This word is translated here and elsewhere in the *Confessions* varyingly as *question*, *enigma*, *problem*, and of course *riddle*. In any event, the meaning that Augustine hopes to convey in using this word is plain. In a moment of deep philosophical reflection, he finds himself reduced to a state of great confusion about things he thought he understood. He now questions who he is and what he really knows.

The *Confessions* is a deeply contemplative book, a book that chronicles a meditation on the self. It is at moments such as this in Augustine's meditation that we witness a profoundly important effect of philosophy: *it brings us face to face with ourselves*. Indeed, a most significant consequence of philosophical reflection is that it causes us to be enigmatic and problematic to ourselves, in particular with regard to who we are, what we know, and what we believe or stand for. Who we are and what we stand for are made manifest in the world through an array of human activities that we take up. Philosophical people seek to investigate the nature of any human capacity, activity, or potentiality as it relates to their own identity, development, perfection, and to that of human beings as such. Philosophical people constantly critically examine their presumptions, thought or unthought, and evaluate their conduct. Indeed, they "rethink themselves" in all venues of their lives in which the human spirit is made manifest. Philosophers are then interested in how the human spirit is expressed in such things as science, art, and music,

commerce, politics, law, language—in a word, in any “artifact” that human beings produce, in the activity through which it is created, and, most especially, in its relation to their own lives.

Business, or, as I would prefer to call it, commerce, can and has often been used as a catch-phrase to indicate a variety of techniques and strategies agglomerated to create profit, to facilitate economic progress, to produce economic advantages for those who have put their capital at risk, or to return on the risk/investments of those who enter the free market. Yet these characterizations of business seem to ignore or to under-sell business or commerce as a “human artifact.” In my view, commerce must be viewed as a human and cultural artifact akin to science, law, medicine, politics, education, art, music, and even philosophy. Commerce is no more a mere collection of techniques than the above-mentioned areas of human endeavor. Commerce, is, rather, one more way of “being-in-the-world,” of expressing our nature as human in the activities of interchange and exchange, of understanding ourselves, of relating to others and our world. Such artifacts are essentially outgrowths of a range of capacities or potentialities integral to our common humanity.

We should seek to understand in a philosophical manner the essential nature of each of the many artifacts of human nature, commerce among them. Philosophers investigate the extent to which, and in what respect, human beings are “commercial” beings and how commerce contributes to and/or inhibits human flourishing and the flourishing of human society. Philosophers ask what commerce is, what wealth is, and how these are related to the perfection and/or development of human nature. Philosophers examine our penchant toward commercial activity, or as Adam Smith put it in *The Wealth of Nations*, our “propensity to truck, barter, and exchange one thing for another” (182). He asks what this propensity tells us about human nature

and about our moral responsibilities for the development of our nature as humans. In that remarkable book, the economist and philosopher Smith, a great advocate of commerce and commercial life, reflects on the nature of the human person as well, and specifically on our capacity of speech and our rationality, and wonders about the origins of commercial life.

While business and society and various types of applied business ethics courses have been a mainstay in preprofessional business curricula for only a few decades, philosophers have contemplated commerce since the inception of Western thought. Indeed, throughout the history of philosophy, thinkers such as Thales, Plato, Aristotle, Aquinas, More, Smith, Hume, Locke, Hegel, Marx, and many others have written rich philosophical reflections on commerce and commercial life, treating commerce as a human and cultural artifact, a distinctive expression of human nature. While some have written with concern about the possible corruptive influence of commerce, even some mentioned above, others have seen commerce as part of the human effort to bring human nature to perfection, to project human nature toward its full fruition in the human world, to bring this human spirit to bear on the project of shaping the world in a human and humane mold, to create and to recreate the lived world, or interspace, that human beings share, indeed, to advance civilization.

Note William Hazeland's remarks to this effect in his 1756 text *A View of the Manner in which Trade and Civil Liberty Support Each Other*:

It hath been hinted already, that the manners introduced by Trade are a considerable furtherance of Liberty. I would place in this view, that general improvement in the arts of life, that refinement in the public tastes and sentiments, in short all those intellectual and moral acquirements that are duly to be ascribed to Commerce. (p. 408, 2003)

Hazeland continues to describe the circumstances of human beings and human society where commerce has flourished. He writes,

That wide experience of men and things which this affords, that active and enterprising spirit which it cherishes, those encouragements of genius and invention that are proposed by it, have changed ignorance, barbarity, and inhospitable distrust into mutual confidence, arts and humanity; have given rise to all that is useful and ornamental in human nature. (ibid)

If so much rests on commerce, then those who enter into it must take it seriously and not merely as a problem or a set of problems, exclusively commercial in nature, that need to be solved, but rather as a human artifact offering those who engage in commerce great opportunities to contribute to the betterment of human beings. And yet, admittedly, commerce has also contributed and can contribute to the diminution of human beings and their societies. Recall David Hume's words on the positive side regarding the potential of commerce. In his essay "Of Commerce," Hume writes, "The greatness of a state, and the happiness of its subjects, how independent soever they may be supposed in some respects, are commonly allowed to be unseparable with regard to commerce" (p. 157). Hume and many others in his generation of thinkers believed that commerce worked a civilizing effect on human beings. Like any other profoundly significant human artifact such as medicine, law, politics, or science, commerce should be subjected to philosophical and, most especially, ethical evaluation. But, perhaps most important for the purposes of business ethics education, students must become reflective and learn to take themselves seriously in professional and moral terms.

Such a view of commerce and the implicit moral character of commercial life precipitates a unique vision of ethics education, one that should serve both to enhance students' abilities to think in terms of ethical principles or ethical decision-making models and to invigorate their own

capacities to reflect on the very nature of commerce itself and its human consequences. Students should come to view commerce as a window of sorts onto the human soul, their own souls included. But such a reflection is possible only if those who enter business learn to look beneath the bottom line to examine the variety of metaphysical, epistemological, psychological, social, and political aspects of the human and moral concerns people in business face. The view of commerce I have elicited would demand something of a philosophical education—at least one that draws on the rich ground in the history of philosophy in relation to which contemporary ethical problems in business arise.

In an effort to show how such a vision of education might work, I will discuss a specific ethical issue in international business: child labor. I will seek to delineate the wide and variegated range of issues lying beneath the surface of this ethical issue. I will indicate briefly how the study of texts and thinkers in classical philosophy can help students think about this contemporary ethical problem. I will also show that only a full appreciation of these issues will reveal the actual and possible impacts that commerce can have on solutions to this ethical problem.

The facts about child labor are startling. There are approximately 246 million child laborers between the ages of 5 and 17 around the world. 186 million are between the ages of 5 and 14; 110 million are under the age of 12. One hundred and seventy-one million work in hazardous conditions in such areas as agriculture, mining, manufacturing, (of rugs, textiles, apparel, for example), quarrying, domestic labor, and military service (IPEC, 2003). Of this latter “employment,” 300,000 serve in armed conflict around the world (Basu and Tzannatos, p. 1, 2003). Many children also work in the “informal economies” of many urban centers/cities. Proliferation of child labor has spawned an industry in child/slave trafficking and related sex

trades, in which 1.8 million children are exploited each year (IPEC, 2003). Approximately 61% of child labor occurs in Asia, 32% in Africa, and 7% in Latin America (Hindman and Smith, p. 1, 1999), in largely nondemocratic nations. And, yet, in any given year in the United States, 290,000 minors are employed and work illegally. These children work too many hours or in dangerous/hazardous occupations (Kruse and Mahony, pp. 5–6, 1998).

The question as to the ethicality of child labor gives birth to a host of cultural/social, economic, psychological, and political questions. Not the least of these are questions concerning the psychological or philosophical identity of a child and the ethical and political responsibilities of families, societies, commercial institutions, and governments to children.

A recent statement issued by the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU) claimed that “Burma needs democracy and human rights”; that “the international community must redouble its efforts to bring democracy to the country [Burma]” (ICFTU Online, p. 1, 2003). The comment was made in response to a report of yet more exploitation and abuse of children in Burma (under the Burmese dictatorship) in the areas of agriculture, fishing, manufacturing, military service, domestic labor, the restaurant business, construction, and mining. The face of the comment seems plain enough: with a democracy in place, human rights would follow, and with such rights would come the eventual eradication of child labor and also the exploitative and abusive treatment of children in the commercial sex industry.

While I think this comment about the importance of democracy bears within itself considerable truth, it and comments like it can be met with some rather serious questions. The first of such questions is how likely is it that democracy can be brought to developing nations in light of their individual histories and culture, including family structure, domestic customs, and way of

life in general, a way of life in many cases that is fundamentally ideologically at odds with a democratic way of life. Factor into the circumstance of the developing nation great poverty, low levels of education for children and parents, a downwardly spiraling economy, violence and/or the threat thereof, social and political instability, and the challenge of bringing democracy to such nations seems most daunting.

Many who assess the prospect of decreasing or eliminating child labor, or at least the worst forms of it in developing nations, think in terms of bringing foundational democratic institutions to such nations—institutions such as universal suffrage, free elections, and a democratic political infrastructure that includes a democratic subdivision of governing bodies or powers. But democracy, like all manner of political rule or regime, is first and foremost a way of life, a set of practices, and a manner of “political being-in-the-world.” Aristotle was quite clear, and in my view correct, about this in his work *The Politics*. There he argued that every political regime is both a reflection of a people’s way of life and also formative of that way of life (1337a 11–171984). For Aristotle the *politeia*, or constitution or regime, of every city/nation is not only the arrangement of offices and/or the structure of the ruling and legislative bodies, but more especially the soul or very character of life in that nation. People in a democracy live according to “mores” (to borrow from de Tocqueville), customs, and practices that are “democratic.” Such mores have developed over time and through traditions that have as their guiding ideas such concepts as freedom, equality, representation, majority rule, private ownership, and, perhaps most important, public reasoning or deliberation. Among the many fascinating discussions of the prospects for democracy arising in nondemocratic developing nations is Amartya Sen’s recent article drawing on his seminal writings of late on the global roots of democracy (Sen, 2003).

While it seems that Sen is rather more sanguine than most about the possibilities for democracies to develop beyond the West, my point in referencing his work is to indicate that there is a growing debate about this issue that has implications for the problem of child labor.

In any event, it is clear that several important conceptual underpinnings of democracy are relevant in a consideration of the special place of children in a democracy. Of these, most are ethical and political in nature, and others are economic as well. British philosopher John Locke argues that “the great and *chief end*, therefore, of men’s uniting into commonwealth, and putting themselves under government, [democracy I would add] *is the preservation of their property*” (p. 66, 1980). According to Locke, one has an original right of property when one has mixed one’s labor with what has until then been common, or unowned. The ground of this right is one’s originary ownership of one’s body; humans have a right of ownership in their own persons and therefore have a right to the labor of their bodies, and to the fruits thereof, i.e., property.

It seems clear that, for Locke, the establishment of the self-governing political society has much to do with commercial and ethical concerns, specifically, with the right to property, and therefore with the commercial implications of one’s right of ownership in one’s own person. We cannot help but see that child labor, slave labor, or bonded labor of any sort is at odds with this fundamental concept of democracy and with equally primordial concepts such as equality or equal treatment of human beings. As Locke says in §55 of Chp. 6, “Of Paternal Power,” “Children are not born *in* this full state of equality [that adults are], though they are born *to* it” (p. 31). What Locke means is that adults are in a state of full equality and therefore their property, it would follow, cannot be seized from them. Slavery or forced labor can never be justified. In the case of children, adults would have a responsibility to protect children from having their bodies, their

labor, and their very persons taken from them, not to mention the fruits of their labor. Eventual equal treatment of children depends on adult discharge of such responsibility.

Locke goes on at some length to argue that parents, and implicitly all adult supervisors of children, have a temporary jurisdiction over their charges/children. Among the reasons he gives explicitly for this temporary jurisdiction, and for the obligation to care for children, are the weaknesses of infancy, their age, and their undeveloped reason. This latter capacity is, of course, needful of improvement so that they will one day “be at their own free disposal” (ibid). Eventually, as children grow and improve their faculties, they will enter a state of full equality, at which point they must be treated as free, self-governing human beings. To be sure, in Locke we see the implication that children are of such a nature that adults *must presume* that they will develop into rational, free, equal, self-sufficient adults. From Locke’s point of view, the human species is, in its very nature, created and designed to “improve.” Children need other rational and free human beings to govern them during their time of improvement. Jurisdiction over children is less rulership in an authoritarian sense than it is a kind of stewardship; i.e., parental or adult-supervisory control is for the purpose of keeping children fit to follow a path of improvement toward rationality, freedom, and equality. The end point of such improvement, in part, must be for each child eventually to access his or her equal right to “natural freedom without being subjected to the will or authority of any other man” (§54).

Clearly among the most obvious benefits of such freedom and equality is the grown child’s right to his or her own person, body, and labor. Most child labor is physically very demanding, often debilitating, even life-threatening. The physical, not to mention the psychological, health of child laborers is dramatically worse than that of children who don’t work.

Child laborers often are deprived of education as well. Even Adam Smith, a fairly enthusiastic advocate of capitalism, observed that education might serve as something of an antidote for the mutilating and deforming effects on people of the severe and singular work that results from the division of labor (pp. 197–201). Democracies must protect children from bonded/slave labor because such practices are a most basic violation of their nature as human, a clear inhibition to their improvement, to preserving the fitness of their bodies and minds, and therefore constitute a denial of their right to their bodies and their eventual right of ownership. Even important issues such as whether in fact democracy will ever develop in nondemocratic nations, and thus whether in fact children will ever have “rights” that protect them from exploitation in such nations, may not alter *the* responsibilities we have, as members of a democratic nation, toward children. It would appear a contradiction to support the protection of children at home while not doing so abroad.

Locke’s thinking provides a theoretical context from within which to argue for the eradication of child labor. While Locke worries about protecting children for their eventual adult autonomy, it is clear that for him children as children are not adults at all. This last observation leads to a series of concerns gathered together into the question, “What is a child?” Such a question might best be classed as one concerning the “metaphysics of personal identity.” In an article indeed entitled “What is a child?” (Shapiro, 1999), Tamar Shapiro examines this question by meditating, in part, on various works by Immanuel Kant which discuss children. Among these works are *The Doctrine of Right* and *Education*. Following Kant, Shapiro argues that ethical responsibilities toward children are grounded in the very identity of the child as a certain sort of human being. Children exist in an imperfect, undeveloped condition; they are not fully

autonomous or do not have complete control of their own will; they do not have a fully integrated self-understanding, or cannot project their own self-concept toward their future life. Shapiro argues that the only real work children should perform is “play,” precisely because through play the child begins to develop self- understanding. In fact, the child creates and recreates a self (pp. 732–733). Given that one could characterize the child’s condition as one of innocent possibility, adults have an especial moral obligation to protect children for the time when they will have become “integral selves” with full access to their own powers and faculties and who can indeed make their own choices and fashion their own lives.

I invoked Locke and Kant in this discussion of child labor to demonstrate the relevance of classical philosophical discussions to a contemporary ethical problem in international commerce. In a course on business ethics in which this topic was treated from this decidedly philosophical perspective, one could imagine raising and having students raise such questions as [1] Is the identity of a child self-same across cultural boundaries? [2] Do exigencies of poverty and starvation affect our view of whether children should labor? [3] What do culture, custom, and family structure have to do with the ethicality of child labor? [4] What responsibilities, if any, do commercial institutions from democratic nations have toward children in foreign nondemocratic states wherein a lack of a democratic way of life and a cultural climate devoid of respect for human rights continue to breed exploitation of children? [5] What responsibilities do democratic governments have with regard to trade and trade agreements with foreign nations that exploit children? And finally, [6] What responsibilities do consumers have toward children in regard to their purchase or consumption of goods manufactured by child laborers? Perhaps the question with the most reach is whether those who engage in commerce making use of, nay, exploiting and

abusing children claim, at the same time, that they contribute to the flourishing of human beings and human societies? Recall that commerce must be viewed as a human artifact, or a unique manifestation of the human spirit. We must be vigilant that it, like other such artifacts, expresses the very best of what the species has to offer itself.

And, yet, in a course on business ethics addressing the topic of child labor and taking a truly “philosophical” approach such as the one I propose, adequate time would have to be given to arguments that either support or do not entirely deny the legitimacy of child labor. Note, for example, the short but provocative list of such arguments assembled by Budhwani, Wee, and McLean in their article “Should Child Labor be Eliminated?” Continuing poverty and starvation of a child and her family might require children to work; children might enjoy work and develop both a work ethic and marketable skills, not to mention social skills in the right workplace environment; children might learn that education is better than hard unskilled, low-paying labor; working is better for children than thievery, begging, prostitution and the like; and, finally, punishing countries with large numbers of child laborers will result in less cheap labor, higher costs of production, loss of competitive advantage, less successful commerce, decreased national wealth and therefore greater poverty, making child labor more necessary (Budhwani et. al, p. 11, 2004). Needless to say, the issue of child labor is complex and continually is becoming more so if the vast and burgeoning high-quality literature on this issue is any indication. Note exceptional scholarly examples of this literature in such highly regarded publications as the *Human Rights Quarterly* and *The World Bank Economic Review*, each of which recently has dedicated considerable space to the ethical, economic, social, and political issues surrounding child labor.

Again, no single approach to ethics education for business students can accomplish

everything. It is possible, for instance, that the philosophical approach to the ethics of commerce I have outlined briefly, unless supplemented with rudimentary instruction on ethical decision-making models, in effect absent an applied component, might appear to fall short on the side of clear solutions to specific ethical problems. I do think this supplementation can and must be included. I have some thoughts about the model and the pedagogy required, though they would take too long to develop here. Nonetheless, what in sum and more generally does such a wide-ranging philosophical approach have to commend it?

- Students will learn to think about contemporary ethical issues in business in relation to their philosophical ground or history.
- Students will develop a philosophical capacity to reflect deeply and broadly on commercial activity in all its variety and, most importantly, on themselves as commercial beings.
- Students will develop a view of commerce that may inspire them to see it as a human artifact, and like other significant human artifacts, one that can contribute not only to their own human flourishing but to that of other human beings and human society.
- Students will learn to appreciate the remarkable complexity of commerce, especially with respect to the multifaceted nature of the ethical problems vexing it.
- Students will therefore see the importance of rethinking the long-held view of business as merely a collection of techniques and strategies organized around narrowly economic goals and will seek to understand commerce rather as a social and cultural force with distinctively human and humane purposes and responsibilities.

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