

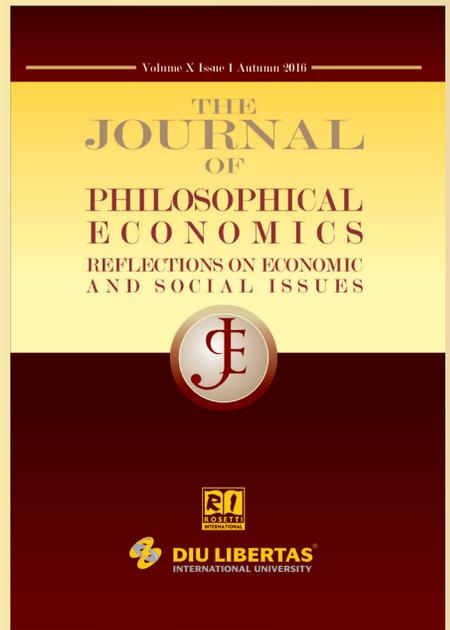
THE JOURNAL OF
PHILOSOPHICAL ECONOMICS:
REFLECTIONS ON ECONOMIC
AND SOCIAL ISSUES

Volume X Issue 1 Autumn 2016

ISSN 1843-2298

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*Review of Mary Godwin, Ethics and
Diversity in Business Management
Education. A Sociological Study with
International Scope, Heidelberg,
Springer-Verlag, 2015, eb, x + 94 pages,
ISBN 978-3-662-46654-4*

Stipe Buzar



Review of Mary Godwin, *Ethics and Diversity in Business Management Education. A Sociological Study with International Scope*, Heidelberg, Springer-Verlag, 2015, eb, x + 94 pages, ISBN 978-3-662-46654-4

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Mary Godwyn's *Ethics and Diversity in Business Management Education* is part of Springer book series on CSR, Sustainability, Ethics and Governance. Godwyn's book draws on a qualitative study of business ethics programmes in 17 different countries, spanning five continents. As a sociologist, rather than a philosopher or an economist, her goal was to research the various business management education programs, but also delve into public opinion within various cultural backgrounds in order to provide the data for a rich comparative analysis. Such a goal should certainly be praised, since so much work in the field of business ethics is done almost exclusively by philosophers or economists, and it is often discussed without the benefit of solid empirical work as a building foundation. Godwyn's work is precisely that – a solid social scientific empirical foundation for a number of questions that are of great interest for researchers and teachers from various academic fields with an interest in business ethics, such as philosophy, economics, law, sociology, etc. The foremost research questions that Godwyn wanted her respondents to answer were:

1. Are there different definitions and expectations for business ethics and socially normative ethics, and if so, how do they differ?
2. How much does business ethics education affect business practices?

Received: 7 November 2016

Buzar, Stipe (2016), 'Review of Mary Godwyn, "Ethics and Diversity in Business Management Education. A Sociological Study with International Scope"', *The Journal of Philosophical Economics: Reflections on Economic and Social Issues*, X: 1, 106-109

3. How do larger cultural values impact the presentation and interpretation of business ethics?

Based on this research, Godwyn concluded that ethical behaviour is not merely relative to space, time (in terms of geographical and historical context) and culture, but that it [...] depends upon the group with which [respondents] are currently identifying.' (p. v) In short, she found that the same person would make different decisions and have a different grounding for their ethical arguments, depending on whether they are asked the same questions as members of companies, or citizens, or consumers, etc.

Godwyn presents and comments on her findings through five chapters and a conclusion. In the first chapter, *A Qualitative Study of Business Ethics: A Sociologist Walks into a Business School* (pp. 1-20) she introduces the idea of ethical reasoning and behaviour as relative to the group with which a person currently identifies, and explains the basic theoretical framework of her research. This framework is crucial for explaining unethical behaviour in business, and in creating it; Godwyn relies on Hannah Arendt's concept of *the banality of evil*, and Emile Durkheim's concept of *solidarity*. This also makes the first chapter the most interesting and engaging from a philosophical point of view, which is why we will grant it a bit more space in this review.

Ultimately, Godwyn is interested in why essentially good people do bad things in business, and the framework connecting Arendt's and Durkheim's concepts allows her to say that this is often done out of a sense of group solidarity, or rather solidarity with the prevalent *ethos* within companies, the business environment, or any other environment for that matter. To show this, Godwyn cites examples from Nazi concentration camps, to large companies like Enron, to business schools and professional athletic associations. The point that she tries to make in presenting her theoretical framework is that throughout human societies we will often be able to find pockets of activity in which the actors conduct themselves according to a moral framework that is often at odds with, and sometimes completely contradicts the moral framework of the society at large. When the activities in one such pocket (a political party or movement, company, or association of competing athletes) become so immoral that it is hard

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to believe they actually occur, they can only be explained by reference to an *ethos* that is specific to that same pocket.

In the second chapter, *Management Theory and Business Education: Is Business Behavior Anti-social Behavior?* (pp. 21 – 34) the author attempts to explain the various underlying assumptions within management theory to see how they influence business education, but also the entirety of the business culture in a particular society. In lieu of this, the most important questions she explores are: What are the actual attitudes and values within our business cultures? Do business ethics courses have any actual impact on the day to day running of businesses and the business culture as a whole? Are there significant differences between what is taught in ethics courses and how business is conducted, and how do companies actually approach the values within their ethical codices?

In the third chapter, *Putting Ethics in Business* (pp. 35 – 52), Godwyn focuses explicitly on the connections and disconnections that exist between business ethics courses and the actual practice of business. She does so through a series of engaging questions about the responsibility of business educators in the processes of shaping the prevalent business culture, about the experiences of teachers and students in ethics classes, about possible pedagogical approaches to business ethics, and ultimately, about the impact of ethics courses, if any, on students' business decisions. She maintains that students are generally disillusioned when it comes to the day-to-day functioning of businesses and that they consider their business ethics courses to be inconsequential.

In the fourth chapter, *Diversity in Business: Is It Still a White (Heterosexual, Christian, Western-Educated) Man's World?* (pp. 53 – 84), she discusses the demographic element within business schools themselves, and maintains that the changing global business environment has begun to pose a great challenge to both business practices and the way business ethics are taught in business management schools. In order to do this, she explores examples from Denmark and New Zealand (countries with very low corruption rates), Ghana (with a mid-range corruption rate), and India (with a very high corruption rate). She

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examines them by taking a look at the demographic and cultural diversity of faculty members, authors, and course materials.

In the fifth chapter, *Alternative and Critical Perspectives in Business Ethics* (pp. 77 – 84), Godwyn searches for alternative approaches to how business ethics are taught in hope of finding an approach that would help students seriously question those tenets of business practice that are usually taken at face value and left without examination as though they were self-evident truths. Here she finally asks two crucial questions: 'How can business students and faculty members engage in, promote, and develop critical thinking that can be applied in the classroom and beyond?' and 'Do the pressures of the marketplace quell critical thinking in faculty research and publications?' (p. 78)

Godwyn's short concluding chapter, *Is Change Possible or What Changes Are Already Underway?* (pp. 85 – 88), is an attempt to subsume her previous conclusions and show that various cultures can and do adopt morally praiseworthy behaviour, which is relevant to business ethics and the business culture. The most widespread opinion, she concedes, is that business practices, such as they are, have their basis in human nature - that people are 'greedy, evil, and competitive' (p. 85) because it is in their nature. Thus, immoral behaviour simply 'reflect[s] natural, self-interested human behaviour, and therefore will never change.' (p. 85) She, of course, attempts to devalue that proposition, but in the attempt to do so, she makes an even more important philosophical point - that business behaviour is the result of an economic system (the free-market system) rather than of any fixed idea about human nature. She argues that the result of the current system is a constrained, one-dimensional view of (business) people that describes them as simple profit maximizing beings, devoid of their social, environmental, ethical and cultural dimensions, and warns that the current axiom of profit maximization serves as a way to 'relieve people of responsibility, culpability, and accountability' (p. 86) and potentially creates a sort of *Eichmann-ian* individuals discussed by Hannah Arendt.

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