

***Managerial Ethics: Managing the Psychology of Morality*, ed. Marshall Schminke (New York: Routledge, 2010)**

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This book misses the mark. No, forgive us, that is too harsh of an assessment. Let us qualify. From our perspective, the book did not adequately realize the objectives set by its editor or conveyed by its title. Below, we attempt to substantiate our assessment, but first we will address the meaning of the phrase, “our perspective.”

### OUR PERSPECTIVE

Recently, one of the authors of this review outlined his take on the past, present, and future of behavioral business ethics research (Brief, in press). “Our perspective” is captured best in that chapter. Here, we merely present the flavor of this work so readers might understand where we are coming from (i.e., our biases). Brief observed that the publication of two edited books can be taken as the birth of behavioral business ethics as an identifiable area of inquiry: Treviño and Weaver’s (2003) *Managing Ethics in Business Organizations* and Messick and Tenbrunsel’s (1996) *Codes of Conduct: Behavioral Research into Business Ethics*. The publication date of Treviño and Weaver’s book is a bit misleading, for it mostly summarizes research conducted by Treviño and her colleagues in the 1990s. The book is representative of social science research appearing in the management literature during that period, when behavioral business ethics research was becoming more visible and cohesive. Treviño and Weaver, in part, examined research pertaining to the influence of executive leadership (e.g., leader values and commitments) and external pressures (e.g., from government and the media) on formal ethics programs and informal ethical practices. In addition, they addressed how those programs and practices, along with individual and ethical-issue characteristics, affect ethical judgments and behaviors in organizations. This is important “stuff,” and work continues in this vein (e.g., Brown & Treviño, 2006; Brown, Treviño, & Harrison, 2005; Reynolds, 2006; Treviño, Brown, & Hartman, 2003; Treviño, Weaver, & Brown, 2008).

While Treviño and Weaver—and those that have followed them—have made significant contributions as we have noted, the work is not mold-breaking (an observation, not a criticism). That is, in large part, conventional theories and methods evident in the management literature were applied to the problem of unethical behavior. For example, Weaver, Treviño, and Cochran (1999) approached corporate ethics programs as a control system, observing, for instance, that top management’s commitment to ethics shaped the orientation of such attempts to regulate employee behavior (e.g., greater commitment was associated positively with a “compliance” [Paine, 1994] orientation).

Messick and Tenbrunsel (1996) did break the mold. Their edited volume was “based on the conviction that there are many domains of research in psychology and behavioral economics that are germane to business ethics” (Messick & Tenbrunsel,

1996: 2). Many of the ideas advanced were fresh, invigorating, and, most certainly, not then attended to by those aligned with conventional management research. A little more than a decade after the publication of *Codes of Conduct*, we have a changing world inhabited by an increasing number of insightful, social-psychologically driven papers (e.g., Chugh, Bazerman, & Banaji, 2005; Gino, Gu, & Zhong, 2009; Gino & Pierce, 2009a,b; Moore, Tetlock, Tanlu, & Bazerman, 2006; Paharia, Kassam, Greene, & Bazerman, 2009; Tenbrunsel, 1998; Tenbrunsel, Diekmann, Wade-Benzoni, & Bazerman, 2010; Tenbrunsel & Messick, 1999; Warren & Smith-Crowe, 2008).

As you can tell, “our perspective” entails a buying-into the need for management scholars to build on *and* contribute to what our peers in social psychology have to offer. Such a perspective in no way discounts the utility of a more conventional approach. Rather, it recognizes that there are multiple ways to ward off the cold—for example, clothing oneself in tried and true wool or experimenting with the latest high-tech fabrics and insulations.

Forecasting technological change can be a daunting task. Messick and Tenbrunsel’s collection did not foresee the recent revolution that has taken place in the area of social psychology most closely aligned with behavioral business ethics research—moral psychology (Haidt & Kesebir, 2010). This is not the place to detail these advances; rather, we merely note that the Kohlbergian (e.g., Kohlberg, 1981) approach to ethics in psychology appears to have been displaced theoretically (e.g., Graham & Haidt, 2010; Greene, 2007; Haidt, 2001, 2007; Haidt & Joseph, 2007; but see Narvaez, 2010) and methodologically (e.g., Graham, Nosek, Haidt, Iyer, Koleva, & Ditto, 2011; Greene, Sommerville, Nystrom, Darley, & Cohen, 2001). Closely aligned with all of this activity in social psychology is the boom in experimental philosophy, supplying another source for the novel, provocative, and insightful (e.g., Appiah, 2008; Doris, 2002; Doris & Stich, 2005, 2006; Knobe & Nichols, 2008).

All in all, these are exciting times for those of us that do behavioral business ethics. While admittedly it is difficult to sort out dead ends from promising paths to follow, or to merely stay abreast of the flow of new ideas and empirical findings, the “same old same old” does not cut it. Advances in the social sciences and the humanities demand those of us concerned with ethics in business to chart new territory.

### THE BOOK

Particularly given the subtitle of Schminke’s book, *Managing the Psychology of Morality*, we approached it with excitement—eager to learn how the chapter authors were building on and contributing to the advances alluded to above. Only three of the book’s thirteen chapters *mention* the recent advances in moral psychology. For example, Treviño and Weaver devote a paragraph to recognizing that emotions rather than reasoning often drive moral judgments, a key idea in the “new” moral psychology (e.g., Haidt, 2007)—an idea that questions much of the previous behavioral business ethics research resting on the notion of rationality, as briefly addressed by Schminke, Vestal, and Caldwell in the book’s final chapter. References to works in experimental philosophy were, likewise, difficult to detect. Indeed, reference to

Messick and Tenbrunsel's book and their important subsequent research on business frames of reference (Tenbrunsel & Messick, 1999) were nowhere to be found.

Forgetting our arguably limited perspective for the moment, how does the book stack-up against the goals the editor set forth in the "Preface"? First, he asserts that it "provides a basic reference volume for current business ethics researchers" (ix). Regrettably, we cannot fully agree, for as we already noted, recent and very germane advances in social psychology and experimental philosophy are not well represented; however, works by Brown, Cropanzano, Folger, Schminke, Treviño, and Weaver are. This imbalance in coverage suggests to us that we may be overclaiming the relevance of the "new" moral psychology to behavioral business ethics, or that Schminke provides a basic reference for only one side of the field.

Second, the editor asserts that the book "seeks to stimulate new ways of thinking about, and creating interest in, links between management and ethics among researchers" (ix). Correspondingly, and finally, he states that he hopes "to prompt leading management and ethics researchers, those who do not currently study business ethics problems, to consider the implications of each to their current interests" (ix). To hold each and every chapter up to such lofty standards could be construed as unfair, but the authors of some chapters clearly signaled to us that they missed the mark in terms of successfully calling others to arms—at least in our judgment. These authors, for example, simply wrote a "primer" or merely applied a well-researched "X" (e.g., social influence and self-efficacy) to ethical behavior in business. Our less positive evaluations in these cases largely is attributed to a lack of novelty, and thus, insight.

Enough of this negativity.

### SOME WINNERS

Not all is as mundane as it might seem. Some chapters clearly deserve attention. Below we identify some of those chapters and why they appealed to us. We turn first to chapter 9, in which Treviño and Weaver identify a number of insightful research questions related to punishment in organizations by exploring normative theory and perspectives. After briefly reviewing the body of descriptive/empirical literature on punishment—focusing chiefly on justice perspectives and social context issues—they go on to suggest the role that normative theory might play in broadening the perspective of future empirical punishment research.

Specifically, Treviño and Weaver explore four categories of normative perspectives on punishment: consequentialist, expressive, reintegrative/restorative, and retributive. After a brief overview of consequentialist theories of punishment, they assert that non-consequentialist justice expectations of organization members should be given more explicit consideration. Their treatments of expressive theories and reintegrative reform theories suggest new research questions related to the affect experienced by those who administer punishment and the potential changes in punishment practices if reintegration were the goal, respectively. They also discuss retributive theories of punishment—those that justify punishment based on an offender's past actions, regardless of a punishment's consequences. They propose that

recent work on moral intuition, moral emotion, and moral identity is well positioned to “put social scientific ‘flesh’ on the conceptual ‘skeleton’ of some retributive theories” (193). From “our perspective,” this proposed melding of social psychology, philosophy, and business ethics exemplifies the type of insight that ought to inform, if not prod, future research. Treviño and Weaver did, however, neglect Tenbrunsel and Messick’s (1999) path-breaking paper that showed that sanctions for wrongdoing could promote more unethical behaviors.

In chapter 10, Folger and Cropanzano effectively integrate research and ideas on social hierarchy, perceived norms of moral obligation, and moral emotions (e.g., guilt, shame, resentment, and indignation). By weaving their discussion in and through a social hierarchy perspective, the assertions they make about moral emotions are able to transcend the individual-level, eliminating the need for semantic gymnastics to demonstrate organizational relevance.

After describing the apparent tension in human nature between the desire to dominate others and the willingness to acquiesce to others, Folger and Cropanzano present a polished model of moral emotions and moral duties. *Moral emotions* are divided into two groups: self-focused (or norm-obeying) and other focused (or norm-enforcing). Self-focused moral emotions, such as shame or guilt, help motivate behavior that is consistent with internalized social norms. (A self-focused moral emotion mentioned but not attended to by Folger and Cropanzano is embarrassment; and based on theorizing by Warren and Smith-Crowe [2008] regarding the effects of embarrassment on the recalibration of moral judgments, it probably should have been given more attention.) Other-focused moral emotions, such as indignation or resentment, often lead to behaviors that can serve as social-conduct feedback for others, possibly influencing others to more fully conform to socially accepted moral norms. *Moral duties* are also segmented into two groups, based on the Kantian notion of perfect versus imperfect duties. Perfect duties are more proscriptive (i.e., “thou shalt not do”) and often considered obligatory, whereas imperfect duties are more prescriptive (i.e., “one should do”) and considered more discretionary—a distinction explored more fully in David Mayer’s chapter, discussed later.

Folger and Cropanzano combine *moral impetus* (self-restraint versus other-constraint) and *type of duty* (imperfect versus perfect) to create a 2-by-2 matrix from which to explore moral emotions. Guilt, for example, is a self-focused moral emotion (self-restraint) experienced after having done something wrong (imperfect duty). In addition, Folger and Cropanzano overlay a third level onto their model: one’s relative position in a social hierarchy. Guilt, to revisit the example, may result when you harm someone else (a violation of a perfect duty) to gain an advantage over them (a relatively higher position in a social hierarchy—at least along the dimension of the *advantage*). Using this three-pronged approach (i.e. moral impetus, type of duty, and position in a social hierarchy) as a backdrop, Folger and Cropanzano delve into details about guilt, shame, resentment, and indignation. In short, they present an insightful framework for exploring various moral emotions in relation to the social-hierarchical context in which they are experienced.

In chapter 12, David Mayer calls for the inclusion of prosocial behavior in behavioral ethics research, suggesting that *prescriptive* (what people *should* do) and

*proscriptive* (what people *should not* do) morality are qualitatively different. Recent evidence from social psychology supports this distinction. In a series of studies, Janoff-Bulman, Sheikh, and Hepp (2009) demonstrated that study participants viewed proscriptive morality as mandatory, concrete, and blame-worthy; whereas, they viewed prescriptive morality as more discretionary, abstract, and credit-worthy. Given such differences, we agree with Mayer's assessment that more fully adopting a dual focus on both unethical *and* prosocial behavior will help the field of business ethics flourish as it continues to mature. Mayer offers up a number of worthwhile avenues of future research for better exploring the role of prosocial behavior in organizational life. We briefly mention three of these avenues specifically.

First, Mayer suggests that we ought to explore *moral disengagement* mechanisms (e.g., Bandura, 1999) that might inhibit people from acting prosocially. Whereas recent literature has often used moral disengagement mechanisms to explain unethical behavior, it is also important to identify the mechanisms that might prevent someone from "doing good." We agree that business ethics in general, and behavioral ethics specifically, would benefit from greater attention to mechanisms that hinder prosocial behavior. Turning again to research in social psychology might be instructive. Mayer mentioned the *diffusion of responsibility* as one of several moral disengagement mechanisms used to explain unethical behavior, but, interestingly, he did not mention early studies regarding how the diffusion of responsibility can inhibit bystander intervention (Darley & Latane, 1968) when someone is in need of help—studies that have since led to a substantial body of literature on prosocial behavior in social psychology (Fischer et al., 2011). More fully incorporating such research into behavioral ethics could be informative.

Second, and related to the first, Mayer proposes that the antecedents and organizational processes associated with unethical behavior may not be the same as those for prosocial behavior. As organizations and individuals attempt to minimize violations of proscriptive morality while encouraging acts of prescriptive morality, it is important to understand the qualitative differences between what leads someone to "do bad" versus to "do good." In response to Mayer's proposal, we suggest that selectively incorporating the growing body of research on antecedents to organizational citizenship behavior (OCB) into the behavioral ethics domain might serve as a possible entry point—since many OCBs are, indeed, prosocial in nature.

Third, Mayer asks whether perceptions of an organization's ethicality is driven more by prosocial or unethical behavior. Do an organization's proscriptive and prescriptive behaviors differentially affect how it will be viewed by various stakeholders? According to diverging definitions of corporate social responsibility (CSR), some scholars hold a proscriptive view of socially responsible corporate behavior that focuses on not intentionally harming stakeholders and rectifying any harm that does occur (e.g., Campbell, 2007). Others, in contrast, adopt a more prescriptive view of CSR that focuses on voluntary firm actions—that transcend direct economic and legal interests—designed to contribute to the welfare of society as a whole (e.g., Davis, 1973; McWilliams & Siegel, 2001). We believe that future research should more explicitly address whether a "good" organization—or person, for that mat-



ter—is one that merely refrains from doing bad things, or one that actively engages in doing good things (Bradley, Brief, & Smith-Crowe, 2008).

Overall, while we believe that *Managerial Ethics* falls short of achieving its stated objectives, we in no way wish to disparage the research contained therein or the researchers who have contributed chapters. Much of the work follows in the recent tradition of business ethics that has taken large strides over the past two decades, contributing to an important body of knowledge. That said, from our perspective, the main value of the book lies more in its nuggets of insight—several of which we have outlined above—than in its goal of being a “basic reference volume” that “stimulate[s] new ways of thinking” (p. ix). In short, we feel that the book underdelivers, but that it still makes a contribution to a young field of growing importance.

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