

Developing a Virtue-Imbued Casuistry for Business Ethics

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Developing a Virtue-Imbued Casuistry for Business Ethics



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*This is dedicated to Patricia Werhane
A great teacher
A great leader in business ethics
A great colleague
And a great friend*

Preface

Developing a Virtue-imbued Casuistry for Business Ethics is the first book to explore the overlap and synergy of casuistry and virtue ethics and to proffer the combination of the two as a useful way to incorporate ethics in business practice.

On one level, it is a book that brings together seemingly disparate methods for the purpose of offsetting some of the shortcomings of each when used in isolation. In this regard, the book details how case-based and virtue ethics approaches compare to other approaches, how various stakeholders can approach a similar problem differently, and how business practices can be enhanced by means of virtue-imbued casuistry.

On another level, *Developing a Virtue-imbued Casuistry for Business Ethics* takes on select business-related social issues—the genetic modification of foods, aging pharmaceuticals, disease eradication, and risk management—to show how virtue-imbued casuistry can be instrumental in business problem solving, strategizing, and risk management.

Throughout, *Developing a Virtue-imbued Casuistry for Business Ethics* recognizes the longstanding objections to casuistry as a method and virtue ethics as a normative approach. It addresses these objections directly and in depth and ultimately determines that the objections are not meritless, but mostly due to failures to understand casuistry and virtue ethics fully and in contrast to other moral approaches.

In addition, the book acknowledges the limits of its own expansiveness, particularly in regard to the issues of risk management. Nevertheless, it tackles these and other complex business issues in a clear and simple manner to encourage the reader to go on to learn more about the topics and the ways ethics might be more effectively advanced there.

In the end, *Developing a Virtue-imbued Casuistry for Business Ethics* maintains that the combination of casuistry and virtue ethics can not only stand its ground against alternative approaches, but that it is more suitable than other moral methods for everyday business contexts and use by the ordinary people charged with actually making moral decisions.

Overview

*Let us endeavour, then, to think well; this is the principle of morality.*¹

—Blaise Pascal

Oliver Cromwell (1599–1658)—English military and political leader and one of the most reviled figures in Irish history—allegedly once quipped: “He who stops being better stops being good.”²

Although regicidal and tyrannical, Cromwell nevertheless made the important observation that when we cease to practice habits of moral excellence we begin to atrophy as moral beings. Our moral fiber begins to weaken just as an athlete’s prowess deteriorates when he or she stops exercising. We become not just frozen in the state we were in when we stopped striving, but we decay and become worse off as people.

Cromwell’s observation is not so important in itself as it is as a caution against moral entropy and its ensuing atrophy. His is a challenge to figure out how not to just stem moral deterioration, but to discern how to advance in moral excellence and become better people.

Developing a Virtue-imbued Casuistry for Business Ethics attempts to address these challenges in its own way, by explaining how ordinary people can make better ethical judgments in the context of business by means of a case-based approach imbued with virtue ethics.

The book is divided into four main parts. The first three parts describe the terms and history of each portion of the approach and how casuistry and virtue ethics compare with other methods. Throughout, these sections show how the two methods overlap and create a synergy in combination that compensates for the shortcomings of each when used in isolation.

The fourth part applies the combination of casuistry and virtue ethics to select business issues. Here we see how the approach can help break stalemates by defusing ideological polarization and how it can caution against attractive but ultimately harmful exclusively mathematics-based strategies. This section also shows how the

¹ (Pascal 1958, p. 347).

² Oliver Cromwell supported the regicide and the overthrow of the Stuart monarchy and as 1st Lord Protector of the Commonwealth of England, Scotland and Ireland, massacred Catholics who stood in the way of his invasion of Ireland. For more, see (Gaunt 2004).

method can be integrated deeply and effectively as a viable element of model driven scenario-based risk management processes to thereby help managers better assess their companies' risk exposure.

In the end, *Developing a Virtue-imbued Casuistry for Business Ethics* charts new ground in moral theory and business practice. It reinvigorates interest in casuistry for business, applies virtue ethics to business in new ways, brings casuistry and virtue ethics together for the first time, and then applies the combination to specific business problems. In these ways, this book explains and models the proposed approach while simultaneously challenging business managers to account for moral norms in their day-to-day operations.

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