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# Marketing Education

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## Alterity & Sensitivity: Contours of the Tutor in Marketing Ethics Education

Ross Brennan<sup>3</sup>, Lynn Eagle<sup>2</sup>, Nick Ellis<sup>1</sup>, Matthew Higgins<sup>1</sup> *<sup>1</sup>University of Leicester, Leicester, United Kingdom, <sup>2</sup>University of the West of England, Bristol, United Kingdom, <sup>3</sup>Middlesex University, London, United Kingdom*

### Abstract

This paper attempts to (re)plot the contours of the Tutor by scrutinising the way in which ethics is taught in the modern marketing syllabus. We open up a debate on how the Tutor role as a conduit of apparent ethical knowledge to students has somehow failed to map with sufficient sensitivity the terrain of the moral impulse in business practice. In particular, we argue for a reappraisal of the Tutor/student relationship such that we may facilitate a greater understanding of how marketing students can make sense of themselves and of 'the other'. Drawing on literature from educational philosophy and the work of Emmanuel Levinas, we suggest that the conceptualisation of ethics in marketing cannot be divorced from the question of pedagogy and the responsibilities of the tutor. Whilst the largely conventional model adopted for the teaching of marketing may provide students with a prescribed set of knowledge and skills, it may by the same token refuse us the moral education that seems to be necessary.

The paper concludes that that recent economic problems offer an opportunity for a reappraisal of the teaching of marketing ethics. It is an opportunity to re-imagine the relationship between the student and the tutor.

## **Introduction**

Corbyn (2008) asks whether business schools should take partial responsibility for the collapse of financial markets. Academics, teaching in business schools, are accused of failing to equip students with the necessary skills for graduate careers (Shultz 2009). The error, it is claimed, is in the provision of a curriculum that prioritises narrow technical skills over 'broader' learning (Dunne et al 2008). The suggestion is that had students received an education that incorporated dialogue on ethics and social responsibility, the perceived excesses of the financial services industry could have been avoided.

This is an intriguing call for action. The study of business ethics has been a central tenet of most business school education in recent years (Harris 2008). Of course, such calls are far from new. A call for 'more' ethics has been apparent in earlier crises. Ethics education came into sharp focus after the 1987 stock market crash, when Bok (1988:4) asserted that: —Suddenly, ethics has become a national obsession. The 1987 crash was in part attributed to a perceived decline in ethical standards within business, and there was an implicit expectation that ethics education could rectify this. This was coupled with the suggestion that there was a need to prepare students to deal with the types of ethical dilemmas they will encounter in the workplace (e.g. Grant, 1990). More recently, cases of business wrong-doing such as WorldCom, and Enron and Arthur Andersen (Enron's auditors) have led to renewed calls for ethics education to be made mandatory (McAlister, Ferrell & Ferrell, 2005). Tadjewski (2008) has argued that such forgetfulness is both a part of the process of writing and also a strategic tool for authors.

Just because this is a recurrence of an old problem does not mean it should be ignored. In responding to this call for more ethics in marketing education, this paper sets out an alternative reading of the literature on the teaching of ethics. This is a vista of absences and assumptions amid a rich discourse on marketing ethics. Through this we endeavour to draw back into the discussion the question of the tutor and thus reframe responsibility in moral education.

### **On Teaching Marketing Ethics**

The debate on whether ethics should be taught in business schools is seemingly —settled (McWilliams and Nehavandi 2006: 421). Despite this suggestion of closure, the teaching of ethics to marketing students is not without its critics. Gaski (1999:330) for example has argued that the norms of marketing practice should be aligned with prevailing ethical standards, requiring only that students are taught —normal commerce under democratic law. Scepticism has been expressed that an enhanced ethics education provision would reduce corporate wrong-doing (Bok 1988). Indeed, the study of ethics and the quality of the educational institution is no guarantee of moral behaviour. McAlister (2004) notes that many of those responsible for recent corporate scandals hold MBAs from prestigious institutions and Gorovitz (1988:426) cautions that —there are a lot of people in jails who have passed ethics courses.

Despite these reservations, the drive for an enhanced education in ethics is bolstered through the expectations of accrediting bodies, employers and students. Ethics education improvement is a major priority in the USA, particularly among institutions with AACSB accreditation (Baetz and Sharp, 2004). While ethics education does not receive the same level of prominence within the European Quality Improvement System (EQUIS) accreditation standards, values and ethics education are an explicit expectation, both within their Guidance Notes on the EQUIS Quality Criteria and EQUIS Quality Standards (EFMD 2004a and 2004b). Ethics education is deemed to make a difference to students by improving both awareness of ethical issues and ethical reasoning (Hunt and Laverie 2004). Despite this, ethics is acknowledged in surveys of teaching faculty as being the issue in which most curricula are significantly deficient (Barnett et al 2004), a view also held by students (Buff and Yonkers, 2004). Spain et al (2005: 8) suggest that a failure to teach ethics adequately results in students missing out —on a topic that will be critical at some undeterminable point in their careers. The reasons for this deficiency are seen to be a consequence of the priorities of the business school. Porter & McKibbin (1988) in their large-scale study of students, academic staff, alumni and employers found that business schools concentrated too much on teaching quantitative aspects of the curriculum (—hard skills) and too little on the behavioural side (—soft skills).

The imperative for marketing ethics to be an essential component in preparing students for marketing careers has provided a focus on the teaching of ethics that is practical and assumed to be relevant to practitioners (Chonko 2004). Accordingly, to satiate the hunger for praxis, the debate on the teaching of marketing ethics has tended to focus on content, scheduling and approach. This is perhaps neatly demonstrated by the question of whether ethics should be taught throughout the curriculum or in a dedicated module. While full integration seems attractive in resource terms and to meet the demands for subject integration espoused by accreditation bodies, the evidence is that this approach results in atheoretical, superficial and incomplete coverage of the topic (Haas, 2005).

The module/course debate often leads to the related issue of the balance between practice and theory. Chonko (2004) has asserted that business students lack the philosophical background to apply abstract ethical principles and are thus deemed comparatively ignorant of ethical theory. To counter this ignorance, Spain, Engle and Thompson (2005) report that multiple pedagogical methods, including case studies, lectures, assignments and debates, enhance students' self-reported understanding of the material presented.

The arguments surrounding the teaching of ethics are important but they are of interest here simply to focus attention on what is going unsaid. Absent from the discussion is reflection on the particularly narrow approach to ethics being adopted. We also draw attention to the absence of any reflection on the relationship between the student and the tutor in the literature. Reviewing the epistemological and ontological preferences of the discipline may provide an explanation for this.

### **Re-imagining the Teaching of Marketing Ethics**

Marketing ethics is, we suggest, constrained by the knowledge base of its subject and the dominant orientation within the discipline. Marketing is a modernist conception, sharing with modernity many of the desires for control, prediction and measurement (Arndt 1985). This has implications for the manner in which parties to marketing are constituted. Individuals are presented as instrumental beings to be managed from the perspective (and for the benefit) of the marketer's organisation (Alvesson 1994).

We argue that this perspective shapes the approach to ethics in marketing. The orientation of much of the research and textbooks in marketing ethics is of interest, displaying as it does a strong emphasis on deontological and in particular teleological schools of ethical thought (e.g. Ferrell and Skinner 1988; Hunt and Vasquez-Parraga 1993). This perhaps should not be that surprising after all, if we are to assume a managerial definition of marketing as satisfying human needs through an exchange process, the orientation is already framed within a utilitarian calculation (Nantel and Weeks 1996). Pragmatic considerations such as the audience for marketing texts and the need to provide tools for managerial decision-making are also pertinent. Normative approaches are often susceptible to being condensed and transformed into a memorable framework or artefact (cf. Ferrell and Ferrell, 2008) that can be applied by managers across a broad range of contexts. Ethical theory in marketing is often judged by its practicality for tackling the problem that the manager is confronting (Primeaux and Shebor, 1995).

These forces engender an approach to the teaching of marketing ethics that presents the construction of ethics and morality as rules, codes and guidelines. These serve to maintain —the system's performance-efficiency|| (Lyotard, 1984: xxiv). When experienced by the student in the classroom, the issues are often packaged to consist of high profile cases rendered neatly accessible but comfortably detached (Standish 2001). The student is required to choose from the available options to settle on a moral result (Bauman 1995). Such an attitude, Bauman argues, has implications for the realisation of the potential moral self. In a similar fashion to the art of shopping, the attitude involves the individual perceiving life as a series of problems that can be specified, singled out and dealt with. Decision making skills may be sharpened, but the questions and tensions of ethics remain aloof. In looking to re-imagine marketing ethics and the teaching of marketing ethics we turn now to the work of Emmanuel Levinas (1969/1974).

Levinas has been largely ignored by writers on management and marketing ethics (Jones et al. 2005). This omission is perhaps to be expected; whilst Jones et al. (2005) note the existence of a —large and controversial work||, they should perhaps also note the seemingly wilful complexity of the writings of Levinas which confront the reader (Desmond 2007). It is in the response to the other that Levinas situates the site of morality and the construction of subjectivity. For Levinas, ethics and morality have been displaced by western philosophy. Reason, calculation and identity have promoted a thinking of the same at the expense of the

relation with a being that is utterly foreign. Taking a challenging position, Levinas argues that the relation with the other places an unbearable and ceaseless responsibility, a necessary responsibility, not contracted or agreed, but a primordial aspect before being. Levinas is proposing an approach to ethics that offers little in terms of answers. There is no consideration of intent or calculation of consequence. Levinas is requiring us to interrogate the impulse, the emotional response, the act of compassion despite itself (Ten Bos and Willmott, 2001).

The focus on the relation to and responsibility for unsettles the customary approach to marketing ethics in which reason and rationality are enforced with tools and guidelines. This unsettling we argue extends beyond the mere introduction or application of Levinas' ideas in the delivery of course materials. Critically, it brings into consideration the relationship between student and tutor. Through the other, subjectivity is negotiated and through this engagement with the other, the act of teaching and process of being taught occurs (Lim 2007). If marketing educators are to give Levinas' ideas serious consideration, it is to the relationship between student and tutor that we must open ourselves.

### **Returning Morality in the Tutor-Student Relationship**

The construction of teaching plans, module outlines and content driven learning outcomes prioritise the dominance of transmitting knowledge and the promotion of cognitive skills over and above socio-affective development. Education relies heavily on a Kantian like understanding of the relationship between the teacher and the student (Joldersma 2008). The teaching of marketing ethics assumes a neutral classroom environment in which ethics is inserted, accordingly ethics is brought in from outside. The tutor's goal is to produce autonomous individuals capable of rational self-determination. The student offers the ends of the encounter and effective teaching is deemed to have been achieved when the student is able to distinguish right from wrong.

Ruiz (2004), drawing from the work of Levinas argues that the relationship between student and tutor is a moral relationship, a relationship characterised by an attitude of reception and commitment to the learner. This involves the tutor sensitising herself to the difference of the student (Morrison 2009), acknowledging the student's culture and traditions and appreciating them as a unique human being (Joldersma 2008). Representing the tutor as a moral mediator and animating their responsibility to their learners problematises the contemporary mode of engagement between student and tutor within a narrowly defined teaching syllabus. For Ruiz (2004), Morrison (2009) and Joldersma (2008), education is about how we understand ourselves and our place in the world. It is held distinct from the development of a skill. It is an intervention directed to the future: making sense for oneself.

Releasing the idea of alterity (otherness) in the teaching of marketing and of ethics demands time, resource and presupposes both theoretical and experiential approaches to teaching. The momentum of a responsibility for the other requires exposure of the limits of self-interest and a reconsideration of the boundaries employed to foreclose responsibilities. Such thinking takes us beyond more conventional models of business ethics into a far more demanding sphere of ethics, a huge space of potential agency that can have ethical consequences. It makes us recognise all the social relations that are embodied in the exchange (Jones et al., 2005).

This is perhaps at the crux of the engagement with the other, the entry into a problematic and troubling space. The command of the other exposes a vulnerability in the self and it is in the response to the pain of the self's vulnerability that the inescapable tensions of the response appear (Levinas 1996). The demands of the other pull in different directions, numerous options become available and in the heat of oscillation the action forms. This is not to guarantee that the action will be satisfactory or pleasing, the self may pull away from the other's demand, responsibility is always unfulfilled (Levinas 2004). This exposure to the distress of being for the other must be a prerogative for the marketing ethics tutor, both in their relationship with the student and with offering opportunities for the student to experience the obligations of the other.

The other cannot be reduced to a module or constrained within the syllabus, however in both the module and the broader curriculum, the other can be introduced and a broader reading of marketing proposed. Those not usually incorporated within readings of marketing; the unemployed, the factory workers, the volunteers, the ragpickers, the families of smokers, kleptomaniacs and alcoholics, can be allowed entry within the teaching of marketing. This also offers an opportunity to incorporate within the discussion objects not normally accorded moral

consideration. This brings witness to the question of animals, the environment and the product etc, and how these help in the construction of the idea of the human (Introna 2009).

This places demands on the tutor over and above the conveyance of material. It requires imagination to consider how to negotiate intersubjectivity between student and tutor. This may bring into consideration game playing (Golan and Gumpel 2000), live cases (McWilliams and Nahavandi 2006), dramaturgy (Mazer 2003), the use of film (Lauder 2002), or even the Feldenkrais and the Alexander technique of body awareness (Lim 2007), but all too frequently the focus on teaching method or evaluation of ethical decision making outcomes overrides consideration of the relationship (c.f. Nguyen et al 2008).

How then should we articulate the tutor as a moral mentor? Perhaps inspiration can be drawn from the field of nursing. Since the 1990s, the preparation of nurses to participate in ethical decision making at work has become far more prominent (Dinç & Görgülü, 2002). Moral education for nursing students has sought to free itself from the 'virtuous woman' conception. In the process it has sought to balance the observation of good practice in the workplace and the development of personal experience. This composition assists in the accounting for the pressures to compromise ethical standards that nurses will encounter when they enter the workplace (Woods 2005). Developing this idea, Galvin and Todres (2009) employ a series of four vignettes drawn from the typical nursing experience. The vignettes are used to exemplify what they refer to as 'nursing openheartedness', a '—foundational resource for acting in caring ways' (pg 141). The vignettes consist of details of soiled bed sheets, self abuse, pleas for an assisted suicide, and the final moments of life. Central to these stories are the characters, the patient and the responsive nurse for whom the alterity of the other, their body, their pain and their suffering exposes a shared human vulnerability. These stories are not used to showcase or legislate a desired response, but rather to highlight the process the nursing staff experience as they negotiate the idea of 'openheartedness'.

Through the articulation of 'openheartedness', the caring central to the nursing profession is celebrated through alterity, embodiment and the harnessing of practical knowledge and technology. Whilst parallels can be drawn between the marketing and nursing professions and the relative positions of the moral educations, the purpose of the discussion is to highlight how this idea of 'openheartedness' can be used to distil an essence of the profession. Through the idea of openheartedness, we can see a negotiation of care set against an instrumental audit culture, where the potential for objectification through 'procedural, instrumental or technical knowledge' (pg142) is made apparent.

The purpose of the moral education for nursing is not to instil but rather to open up and sustain the idea of 'openheartedness'. We are not suggesting that 'openheartedness' is an appropriate expression for dealings with marketing and management students, however the idea of a 'complex sensitivity' expressed in this way does allow us to return some focus to the relationship between the tutor and student. It is also reconfigures the idea of a responsibility for the business school with which we began this article.

### **Conclusions**

In this paper we have suggested that the literature is replete with discussion of teaching ethics, which tends to focus on premier courses and North American institutions. The impression is of an approach to the teaching of ethics shaped by the dominant logic of the discipline. In this paper we have sought to provide a challenge through the reappraisal of the tutor and their responsibility. We have argued that we need to reinstall a belief and confidence that the tutor possesses the potential to do more than offer technical skills on ethical decision making or moral reasoning (Harris 2008). The teaching of ethics on business courses is not merely a publicly acceptable response to global problems, academics can bring out the moral possibilities amongst students.

There needs to be an appreciation that tutors can have an 'impact' on the lives of students through taking on our responsibilities to others. This is not an ethics confident and comfortable in itself to proclaim a judgement of is/ought in dealings with marketing, but a complex sensitivity to the relation with 'the other', a willingness to receive and commit to the learner that goes beyond the delivery of a monologue.

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