

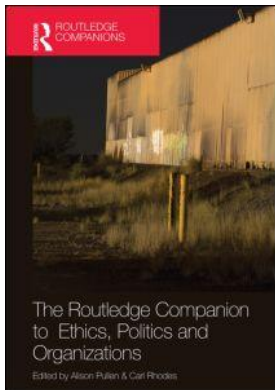
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Introduction

The inseparability of ethics and politics in organizations

Alison Pullen and Carl Rhodes

In recent years ethics has become of increasing interest to those who study organizations (e.g. Parker, 2003; Kornberger and Brown, 2007; Wray-Bliss, 2009; Helin and Sandstrom, 2010; Pullen and Rhodes, 2014). Both preceded and informed by a so-called ‘ethical turn’ in theory and philosophy more generally (Davis and Womack, 2001; Garber et al., 2000) ethical matters are no longer sequestered as the subject of the specialized discipline of business ethics, and more an issue for management and organization theory in general. This attention to ethics is perhaps a sign of the times; times of escalating corporate power (Barley, 2007) ushered in by the liberalization of global markets ruled by networks of giant corporations (Carroll, 2010) which have been freed from the old burdens of state regulation (Veldman, 2013). Indeed, when corporate power is ideologically justified and legally enabled, what might be beholden to keep it in check and hold it to account?

The situation is one where the growth of corporate freedom and power has led to a new interest in ethics and organizations. Symptomatic of the call to ethics in organizations is the phenomenon of the ‘corporate scandal’: a public shaming of an organization for alleged ethical wrongdoing. We might even say that the twenty-first century has seen the heyday of the corporate scandal with corporations regularly being trawled through the press for accounting fraud, corruption, rogue trading, tax avoidance, market manipulation, executive sex scandals and corporate espionage. These scandals highlight public concern over the morality of the exercise of corporate power, as well as highlighting the idea that ‘ethics’ is somehow the remedy for the problem. This remedy is often perceived as a form of ‘managerial voluntarism’ that would serve as a replacement for state regulation (Marens, 2013) in ensuring that business organizations ‘do the right thing’.

In light of the questioning of corporate power and morality, there have been various calls for a new and different type of ethics that might better serve organizations in contemporary global capitalism (Jones et al., 2005). One view is that the issues and contexts that characterize organizations are unique from those of other institutions and as such this requires a specialized set of ethical theories. This is so, it has been argued, because organizations contain “dynamic social processes that defy attempts to apply traditional moral theory and detached philosophical wisdom” (Barker, 2002: 1099). It has been proposed that “organizations need an ethics of their

own” (Phillips and Margolis, 1999: 619) and that this is to be developed by professional ethicists who would busy themselves by “specifying and justifying substantive aims for organizations, their owners, and their managers to pursue” (p. 630). In both practice and theory the most common way that such an ethics is conceived is that it is the responsibility of a managerial elite to control and ensure the ethicality of their organizations.

It is in response to both the acknowledgement of the problematic of corporate power, and the presupposition that ethics in organizations lies within the domain of managerial responsibility and agency, that we conceived of the idea for this book. It seemed to us so limited and privileged to reduce ethics to the justification of organizational action as beholden to an organization’s rights to exercise power in accordance with the values and desires of a managerial class (e.g. Phillips and Margolis, 1999; Verkerk et al., 2001). The prevalence of the idea that there might be an ‘ethics of organization’ (Phillips and Margolis, 1999; Hancock, 2008) or ‘organizational ethics’ (Sims, 1991; Barker, 2002) that can be developed and enforced seemed to us to be more about entrenched forms of managerial power and authority than it did about ethical deliberation or questioning. Indeed, ethics appears, at least in this formulation, as an expansion of managerial domination into newer and more subversive domains of life. There is room for cynicism here. In one sense this is because most generally corporations have “failed to responsibly use whatever autonomy and discretion they possessed to produce fair and generous outcomes for their various stakeholder groups” (Marens, 2010: 761) and in another sense that ethics can be used as a smokescreen to fend off demands for corporate regulation (Fleming et al., 2013). In both senses expanding the scope of corporate liberties that are central to neoliberalism comes through as the (not so) hidden purpose of managerially oriented business ethics.

At stake is a distinct relationship between ethics and the exercise of power in organizations; in particular the deployment of ethics for the purposes of securing and enhancing corporate power. Acknowledging the veracity of this deployment of ethics in organizations, our intention in editing this book was to contribute to the development of a very different approach to ethics in organizations; one where organizations are brought into question by ethics rather than bolstered by it. This approach is one that has been referred to as ‘ethico-politics’ (see Parker, 2003, McMurray et al., 2011; Pullen and Rhodes, 2014); a relationship where ethics is both questioned and mobilized, and where politics are directed by ethics. In adopting and referring to the term ethico-politics we were influenced by its use within feminist theory to render problematic the traditional hierarchies of thought that have served to reproduce inequality and domination (Bar On and Ferguson, 1998). Such work attests to the long-standing yet false separation of the domains of ethics and politics in western thinking, as well as seeking to unite them through forms of resistance that oppose and/or destabilize normalized social and institutional actions and arrangements (cf. Diprose, 2002; Pullen and Rhodes, 2014). In feminist theory much focus has been on ethico-politics as it relates to gender identity, women’s agency and political dissent (see Parkins, 2000; Ferguson, 1998). This has clear relevance for organizations, given the dominance of rational and control-based managerial approaches to ethics that can be seen to embody an ‘ethics of manliness’ that prizes mastery, legitimacy and achievement (Bologh, 1990). It is this powerful and manly notion of ethics that is brought into question such that alternative ethics can emerge.

The ethico-politics of organization that forms the theme of this book seeks to contest an ethics of organization that promises a means by which managers can effectively manage ethics. Further, an ethico-political approach concerns itself with the way such forms of management might actually inhibit ethical behaviour. It has been suggested, for example, that dominant cultural norms in organizations diminish “the capacity for organizations to scrutinize the ethics of their actions” (Rhodes et al., 2010: 535). Such an approach proffers a mistrust of organizational ethics

understood as being beholden to a legislative, authoritative (Wray-Bliss, 2009) and calculative impetus (Jones, 2003) that exerts pressure “against moral agency” (Nielson, 2006: 317).

This focus on ethico-politics, while not always named as such, is central to the possibility not just of evaluating and informing the moral righteousness of organizations, but also of questioning the legitimacy of organizational action at all levels (Parker, 2003) and contesting taken-for-granted organizational power inequalities (Willmott, 2010). This is a context where “politics is how ethics becomes actualized in practice” (McMurray et al., 2011: 546) and where different conceptions and practices of ethics come into contest with each other. Our goal with this volume has been to invoke an exploration of this actualization as it relates to organizational action, management practice, business functioning and different forms of resistance and opposition to organizations. As such it was our starting plan that the book would both synthesize and extend existing research on ethics in organizations by explicitly focusing on ‘ethico-politics’ as well as on the different ways that ethics and politics are conceived, theorized and co-enacted. In so doing the book has been designed to review and generate research and theory that draws new connections between ethics and politics in and around organizations and workplaces internationally.

Having set out the basic themes of the book we began approaching established and emerging scholars as potential contributors whose work we felt would be relevant to those themes. We were pleased to find that the people we approached responded positively to the idea. Editorially we were not didactic in specifying in any detail the format or the content of the chapters, instead encouraging authors to develop their ideas and writing as a response to the themes we had articulated. Further, we did not seek to impose or define the meaning of the terms ethics or politics; rather it was our intention that authors bring their own diverse deployments of these terms to the project. Our editorial approach was not to enforce our own meanings on others in an attempt at authoritative signification, but rather to question how ethics and politics might be made meaningful in different contexts and in different traditions of research and thought. For us, the ideas that came forth far exceeded what we might have conceived of ourselves. As a result the authors have collectively pushed the boundaries of what might be understood as inhabiting the nexus of ethics and politics in organizations. Accordingly the book considers the range of different ways that both ethics and politics can be conceived and understood, and the different domains to which those conceptions have been researched. In terms of ethics this spans various ethical traditions, as well as the discursive deployment of ethical terminology in organizational settings. In relation to politics the book concerns itself with large-scale political structures and processes as they relate, for example, to geopolitics, party politics and activism, through to micro-political behaviour in organizations themselves. These many possibilities are united by a focus on how ethics are and can be mobilized into or used to question, inform and/or justify the exercise of power in and around organizations.

Following this introduction, the book contains 30 chapters organized into six primary parts. Part 1 examines the relationship between ethics and corporate power, covering both how corporations can and have used ethical discourse to bolster their own power, as well as how ethics has the potential to translate into political action against that power. In the opening chapter Steen Vallentin provides a critical reappraisal of ethics and politics as it relates to corporate social responsibility (CSR). Arguing that dominant approaches to CSR have become progressively more instrumental, Vallentin argues for a revival of ethics; one that would consider CSR itself as an ethico-political phenomenon and that would highlight the ethical and social value of CSR. Vallentin attests to a middle ground between instrumental and critical approaches to CSR, one that acknowledges its positive potential while being wary of its problems and pitfalls. This is followed in Chapter 3 with Amanda Early and Michael Saren rethinking the very idea of

marketing so as to establish its primacy as activity of corporate politics. The chapter reads recent research in critical marketing as an antidote to the managerialist and apolitical assumptions of dominant approaches. The tensions that arise between marketing and politics are teased through a consideration of the marketing of how the Occupy Wall Street movement of 2011. Drawing on Alain Badiou's ethical thought, the chapter concludes by asserting that marketing is an exercise of power, and as such is to always be considered as ethically suspect so long as it serves the interests of the powerful. In Chapter 4, Mary Phillips provides a critical review of the ways that corporations have responded to environmental issues and concerns. Phillips argues that the apparent greening of corporations is a process focused less on environmental matters, and more on furthering the power agendas of corporations. As an ethico-political alternative Phillips turns to ecofeminism and an ethics of care that can contest corporate power through grassroots activism and community politics. Maria Ceci Misoczky and Steffen Böhm's chapter follows by exploring how the people of the Famatina Hills in Argentina have struggled against the exploitation of their land by global mining corporations. Locating their argument within Enrique Dussel's philosophy of liberation, the chapter details the way that the community activism opposed corporate coercion, oppression and domination. This is a local ethics opposed to seemingly insurmountable corporate power, yet one that does not give in. Chapter 6, the final chapter of this part of the book, sees Mona Moufahim and Michael Humphreys take a different view of corporate power, one that considers the ways in which the techniques developed in the business world have been adopted in broader political practice. They examine how corporate discourse has infiltrated political marketing, particularly analysing the case of the far-right Flemish Vlaams Blok/Vlaams Belang movement's use of marketing to construct a moral identity against accusations of racism and xenophobia. In such practice voters are recast as consumers of political discourse, such that corporate-style marketing diminishes the power of the citizen at the hand of the political institution.

Part 2 moves on to look at the way that ethics and politics play out in relation to various international and cross-cultural dimensions. An important uniting focus here is a critique of the western-centric approach to management in favour of an acknowledgement and recognition of what both unites and differentiates the various localities that make up the global. We start in Chapter 7 with Maddy Janssens and Chris Steyaert focusing attention on ethics in international business as evaluated from the perspective of cosmopolitan theory. Considering political, cultural and social perspectives on cosmopolitanism, they discern the different ways that global organizations are positioned in the nexus of ethics and politics. Janssens and Steyaert use this to support an ethical practice of global organizations fuelled by a desire for hope, solidarity and inclusivity. On the darker side, the next chapter by Sharif As-Saber and George Cairns investigates a commonly overlooked dimension of globalization, one they name 'black international business'. This term refers to the black market and black economy as it operates on an international level. In theorizing this, As-Saber and Cairns address the contested legality and ethicality of such forms of business, drawing on Aristotle's notion of *phronēsis* to suggest how they might be considered in terms of competing cultural value rationalities. In Chapter 9 Robert Westwood explores the ethics and politics of the postcolonial, with specific attention to organizations. Westwood's position is that the ethics and politics of identity and difference have long been central to postcolonialism and that this opens up important avenues for considering postcolonialism in management and organization studies. Westwood's critique shows how practices and discourses such as diversity management and cross-cultural management serve to 'inferiorize' the non-western other, not the least by rendering the other within the hubristic representation of western discourse. Westwood draws especially on Levinasian ethics to demonstrate how this abrogates the western knower from responsibility for his/her knowledge

and its effects. Management is thus centrally implicated in the politically powerful and ethically dubious postcolonial project of eradicating non-western alterity. Chapter 10 presents Dhammika Jayawardena's fieldwork where he studied the management of female factory workers in the Sri Lankan apparel industry. Sensitively portraying the daily challenges, collective identity and acts of political resistance of the women working in a particular factory, Jayawardena criticizes the current attention that the ethics of alterity is getting in western organizational theory in favour of a more important concern with the very struggle for existence amongst the working classes in the global south. Chapter 11 by Tim Butcher and Barry Judd addresses the ethico-politics struggles of postcoloniality as they manifest in the organization of Australian Rules Football in the central Australian town of Alice Springs. In particular they assess how football relates to the possibilities of indigenous self-determination and resistance in the context of a country dominated by an imported and imposed western culture. The sport illustrates political and ethical problematics and possibilities for the relationships between indigenous and non-indigenous people in a world still dominated by western forms of organizing.

In Part 3 we turn our attention to ethics and politics as they play out in relation to different functions and activities of business. In Chapter 12, Ken McPhail examines the relationship between accounting and ethics as it relates to contemporary geopolitics. In particular accounting's potential to enable organizations to fulfil their obligations as regards human rights is considered. McPhail suggests that state and corporate responsibility needs to be rethought in relation to human rights. For corporations, this means not just an increased responsibility, but also a new democratic accountability. In Chapter 13, Peter Edward and Hugh Willmott focus on the ethics and politics of decision making. The task they set themselves is to rethink managerial decision making from a post-foundational perspective, especially as informed by the work of Ernesto Laclau. Using the historical case of Daniel Ellsberg's leaking of the Pentagon Papers to build and illustrate their argument, Edward and Willmott conclude that ethical decision making must always be done in recognition of the political contingency of any moral justification of the decision, and, as such, in terms of the decision confronts the subjectivity of the decision maker. Leadership is the topic of Chapter 14 with Edward Wray-Bliss investigating how the leader has become a culturally heroic figure of our times; one which, he argues, is imbued with the presumption of both ethicality and sovereignty. In critically exploring this he shows that the discourse of leadership is neither positive nor benign, instead serving to obfuscate the neoliberal redistribution of power towards increasingly powerful corporations. In Chapter 15 Pascal Dey and Chris Steyaert embark on understanding how ethics and politics can come to bear on entrepreneurship. Following Paul Ricoeur they use a 'critical hermeneutic of imagination' to examine and affirmatively critique entrepreneurship. In so doing, they offer an ethico-politics of entrepreneurship conceived of as ideological or utopian imaginings that intertwine in the lived experience of entrepreneurs. Using microfinance as an example, Dey and Steyaert show how, ethically and politically, it is utopian imagination that enables people to think of and strive towards a future different to, and emancipated from, the past. In Chapter 16 Matthew Higgins and Nick Ellis explore issues of power and ethics in supply chain management. In an era when large and powerful corporations outsource supply and production across global networks, Higgins and Ellis argue that serious and potentially harmful consequences have resulted from global supply chains. Despite this the ethics of the supply chain as it is currently understood is usually limited to issues of sustainability and legislative compliance. Using an organization's Code of Practice for Supply Chain Management as an example, Higgins and Ellis propose that existing approaches to ethics might actually diminish managerial engagement with the ethical complexities of the supply chain.

Part 4 continues to look at organizational activity as it relates to ethics and politics by critically interrogating a range of different dimensions of organization practice that are considered to be

in the domain of ethics. Pasi Ahonen and Janne Tienari's Chapter 17 critically interrogates the ethics of diversity in organizations. Analytically informed by Michel Foucault's theorization of biopolitics the chapter illustrates how both business and justice-based arguments for diversity problematically objectify the subject of diversity such that it is amenable to being managed. Doing so, they evince, precludes the very acknowledgement of difference that might have been hoped for under the name of diversity in the first place. Bent Meier Sørensen and Sverre Spoelstra's chapter follows by scrutinizing the historical relationship between work and play. They argue that play has become valorized as a mode of engaging with post-industrial work, and further that this way of working is seen to be imbued with moral virtue. In performing a theological analysis of business play they are able to show how play is sacralized at work, and how this serves to surreptitiously legitimize the capitalist mode of production in which it is embedded. In Chapter 19 Hilary Monk, David Knights and Margaret Page address whistleblowing as an ethico-political practice, focusing especially on corporate response to whistleblower protection law as a form of counter-resistance. Their contention is that corporations may well actively sabotage attempts at whistleblowing and in so doing perpetuate corporate wrongdoing and curtail democratic speech. Chapter 20 turns to ethico-political practice in health services. Robert McMurray explores how elite groups in organizations can marshal ethical discourse as a means to further their own power and self-interest. Theorizing this as 'ethical violence', McMurray works through a series of case studies to illustrate what happens when ethics becomes reduced to yet another resource put in service of maintaining inequitable power relations. This part of the book closes with Mollie Painter-Morland critically evaluating those practices that organizations engage in when they deliberately attempt to manage ethics; examples being codes of conduct, ethics training programmes, ethics measurement systems and ethics reporting. Painter-Morland argues that despite their claims and intentions such practices fail to engage with the macro-political dimensions of organizational life, are preoccupied with control and can inadvertently serve to diminish individual moral responsibility in organizations. It is an ethico-political perspective, she asserts, that can counter these tendencies so as to develop a fuller and more robust approach to understanding ethics management.

Part 5 concentrates on struggle and resistance as an ethically motivated politics enacted against organizations. This begins with Alison Pullen and Carl Rhodes's chapter where we examine ethics and politics by asking the question: is becoming-woman possible in organizations? This discussion is informed by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's notion of 'becoming-woman': the transformative process of overcoming oppressive masculine norms. This critique serves as an ethical challenge to the masculine-rational ideal that so commonly dominates organizational life. We propose that becoming-woman is an ethically necessary political task in organizations, one that would free us from restrictive gender norms in the spirit of enhancing power and joyousness. Chapter 23 follows with Peter Bloom's re-evaluation of the relationship between ethics, politics and resistance in organizations. Bloom argues that resistance in organizations might ironically support rather than disturb or transform the managerialism to which it is ostensibly opposed. Bloom's radical contention is that a revolutionary subject position rather than a resistant one is necessary if organizational exploitation and inequity is to be overcome. Also focusing on resistance, in Chapter 24 Peter Fleming examines how the character of work, as well as our relationship with it, has changed under the conditions of neoliberal capitalism. Following Foucault and Deleuze he argues that 'biopower' is the new mode of workplace regulation; one where it is embodied life as well as work that is subject to organizational control. This demands, Fleming contends, new practices of resistance and refusal and he proposes that being ill is an important way we can break the biopolitical spell of contemporary work. Chapter 25 locates Martin Parker theorizing and exemplifying two aspects of a resistant counterculture of organizing: criticism through

representation and criticism through escape. This counterculture is shown to be present in various manifestations ranging from city graffiti, to the Internet, to the products of the mass media. Parker sensitively illustrates how the counterculture of organizing is a form of political resistance; one whose struggle is palpable but whose effects are indeterminate. Gerard Hanlon and Matteo Mandarini end this part of the book by reconsidering the very meaning of business ethics starting from the politics of the working class. Drawing on a Marxist Workerist tradition their chapter asserts that social and economic progress is driven by the working class rather than the bourgeoisie. In contrast, they argue, the institution of business ethics seeks to deny this by valorizing the morality of global market capitalism. Such an appropriation of ethics by capital, they argue, serves as an attempt to use ethics to diminish and fragment working-class solidarity and politics. In question is the very possibility of resistance to and struggle against subordination.

The sixth and final part of the book develops a range of non-conventional approaches to ethics and politics in organizations. These are non-conventional in the sense that they break with established theory in organization studies and business ethics, and non-conventional also in that each approaches ethics as being intimately wound up in difference and diversity rather than consensus and convention. In Chapter 27 Torkild Thanem and Louise Wallenberg explore what they call 'monstrous ethics'. Initially considering how the idea of the monstrous can be conceived of as immorality or moral weakness, they go on to draw on the philosophy of Benedict de Spinoza to articulate a positively monstrous ethics. This is an ethics that transgresses the moralizing force of social norms in a manner that can also ethically question exploitative business practices. The possibility that this monstrous ethics offers, they aver, is a joyous organizational life enabled through difference and transgression. In Chapter 28 Nick Rumens and Melissa Tyler continue with the theme of difference and ethics with specific reference to queer theory and how it might be productively deployed in the study of organizations. This productivity emerges from a theory that brings to the fore the ethical problematics of the organizational normalization of difference, whether it be sexual, gender or identity difference more generally. The queer ethico-politics that Rumens and Tyler advocate is one enacted through parody, disruption and transgression that serves to undo the normative and narrow ways of being perpetuated in organizations. David M. Boje and Rohny Saylor's chapter changes tack by discussing the ethics and politics of storytelling in organizations. Their purpose is to present four different approaches to pragmatic storytelling: critical, ontological, post-positivist and epistemic (COPE). Positioned in relation to a Marxist critique of liberal capitalism, the COPE pragmatisms Boje and Saylor discuss are offered as a series of alternatives to the narratives of corporate power. Ultimately this embodies a liberatory politics and ethics for organizations, one that is wrenched free from the hands of a managerial elite. Chapter 30, by Sheena Vachhani, questions both the gender-neutral assumptions of business and organizational ethics, as well as subordination and/or suppression of women and femininity in organizations. In response she discusses feminist ethics as means to explicitly question the silenced relationship between gender and ethics in organizations. Vachhani draws attention to the grey zone between ethics and politics in organizations; a zone of moral ambiguity where oppression and privilege coexist. Complicating any simplistic moral position on difference, the chapter shows how feminist ethics alerts us to the political and moral compromises that are enacted in organizations. The book ends with Kate Kenny and Marianna Fotaki's assessment of the contribution of Bracha Ettinger's notion of matrixial trans-subjectivity to ethics in organizations. The direction this takes is to radically question the ethical relation with difference by considering the other to be both symbolically and materially entangled with the self. This ethics of mutuality and coexistence is explored through the example of gender in the workplace. Kenny and Fotaki conclude with the productive possibility that affectual relationality can be considered primary in an organizational ethics that privileges connection, inclusion, compassion.

As can be seen in our introductory summary and review of the book our call to the authors to think through the relationship between ethics, politics and organizations has yielded great diversity of ideas, arguments, theories and perspectives. Collectively this attests to the wealth of possibility that the co-joining of ethics and politics offers for the theory and practice of organizing, if not more precisely for contesting, critiquing and destabilizing the ways that organizations wield sovereign power. This also promises the continued growth of a critical and socially aware approach to studying organizations, as well as one that is mired in the often troublesome realities of work, business, organizations and life. What is presented here is not a consistent, unified or utopian theory of ethics or politics but rather an attestation to the need for such matters to be approached in a plurality of ways, and understood in terms of their locality and contingency. What is at stake is a future that has not yet arrived, yet one that might at least in part be informed by calling power into question.

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