

norms are conceived as absolute laws which permeate God's creation and express His will. Ethicists suggest that moral behavior leads to economic success, while immoral conduct troubles the soul and makes Hell a quite probable afterlife scenario. However, religious doctrine requires moral deeds to flow from moral motives, and moral qualities need to be constant, not opportunistic. Hence, ethicists skillfully slip their pragmatic sales pitch into a discourse that emphasizes general moral duties: God expects businessmen to be good Christians during office hours as much as during the Service, and each economic action must be subordinated to the higher ends of spiritual life.

The Moral Background belongs to the kind of books in which a demonstration is logically unfolded from the introduction to the conclusion. It reads well, and numerous lively examples make up for the slightly didactic overtone. The analytical framework is not only innovative but also productive, as it casts new light upon the social phenomenon of business ethics. Moreover, the historical approach usefully puts the ongoing claims of "newness" of contemporary business ethics and CSR into perspective. One hardly sees any difference between the trendy concept of "shared value"² and the semantics of "service" and "enlightened self-interest" which populated business ethics discourses in the first decades of the 20th century (chapter 2). Nor are codes of ethics and claims of self-regulation a new phenomenon (chapter 4). The author's ability to carefully delineate the limits of his argument conveys another quality to the book. References to patterns and probability avoid deterministic causal claims, and Gabriel Abend resists the temptation to infer statements about institutional and cultural change from his typology (pp. 263-264).

While these two limits are acknowledged, they remain frustrating nonetheless. G. Abend refers to the complex and evolving relationships between business ethics and other dimensions of "business-society" interdependencies in an almost anecdotal way. This is enough to link the floating business ethics discourses with biographic, institutional, and cultural variables. But the properties of these links, their effects, and their underlying mechanisms find little room for systematic analysis in the book. Conversely, the reader might wonder if the level of details with which the analytical framework is related to the work of selected philosophers is really necessary (chapter 1), and perhaps wish there would be less redundant arguments and examples along the way. Finally, while Gabriel Abend concludes his book with an interesting discussion on the new sciences of morality, which come primarily from neuro-science

and psychology, his critic is mostly an expression of disciplinary conflicts. The author highlights short-comings of these approaches, which bracket socio-cultural variables, and which overlook the role of background elements in the production of morality. But the critic falls short of applying the moral background framework to these new sciences of morality, which co-produce moral normativity according to their own background as much as business ethics used – and continues – to do.

Overall, *The Moral Background* is a fine piece of sociology, which combines multiple disciplinary perspectives (philosophy, history, cultural sociology, economic sociology) to craft a solid contribution to the understanding of the social production of morality in general, and of American business ethics in particular. The short-comings listed above are less about internal argumentative flaws than about analytical areas left untouched. In fact, the book opens up multiple horizons for future research, in particular for diachronic cross-national comparisons – European or Asian business ethics are likely to reveal different backgrounds than the U.S. case – and for the study of transnational processes involved in the production and diffusion of first-order and second-order morality.

Endnotes

¹Luhmann, Niklas, 2008: *Die Moral der Gesellschaft*. Frankfurt am Main, Germany: Suhrkamp, page 196, our translation.

²Porter, M. E./M. R. Kramer, 2011: Creating Shared Value. In: *Harvard Business Review* 89 (Number), 62-77.

Book: Beckert, Jens/Christine Musselin (eds.), 2013: *Constructing Quality: The Classification of Goods in Markets*. Oxford University Press.

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Constructing Quality, edited by Jens Beckert and Christine Musselin, is a collection of twelve case studies about quality construction in a wide range of fields. The chapters are distributed into five main sections (investing quality, the quality of labor, the quality of aesthetic goods, the morality of quality, and consuming quality). The main purpose of the book is to show how quality is socially constructed on

specific markets and thus highly dependent on history, institutional context, regulation, and power relationships.

The introduction, written by the two editors, presents quality as “the outcome of a construction process involving producers, consumers and market intermediaries” (p. 1). This introduction reviews the results of sociological investigations concerning quality. It is organized around three core mechanisms involved in the construction of quality: categorization (forming categories to which goods can be allocated), classification (identifying the products that fall within a given category), and qualification (ranking products within a category).

The first section of the book includes chapters dealing with the quality of investments. Zsuzsanna Vargha studies how bankers advise people on mortgages at two different periods in Hungary, and she shows how such advice affects the amount and terms of the final contract. Thus, uncertainty is not one-sided and qualities (of the product on the one hand, and of its consumer on the other hand) are discovered and co-constructed during the face-to-face selling relationship. There are no such things as “preexisting preferences”. Consequently, singularity is not only a property of the product as in Karpik or Callon’s approaches, but also a characteristic of the match.

Patrick Aspers, in his chapter on timber markets in Sweden, questions the way exchanges are realized when the quality of the product is only known after the selling. Indeed the quality of the trees standing in the Swedish forests is obvious only after harvesting. This chapter thus addresses a classical question in economic sociology with quite original fieldwork. It shows the importance of market structures, regulation, history, and ties between actors to explain the market’s existence and the risk distribution between buyers and sellers.

Agnès van Zanten studies judgment construction about schools among middle-class parents in France and their expert justifications. The author draws on pragmatic sociology and distinguishes between four categories of parents (technocrats, intellectuals, mediators, and technicians). Parents face two types of uncertainties: regarding their child (academic potential, maturity) and regarding schools (school mix, performance). What is a “good” school and how the information is gathered differ according to parents’ type.

The second section of *Constructing Quality* comprises two chapters dealing with the question of quality construction in the labor market. Emmanuelle Marchal questions the effect of “anonymous resumes” on recruiters’ judgment. From the analysis of a large-scale experiment conducted in 2010 in France, the author concludes that it “is not a good idea at all” (p. 104). It appears that it makes the recruitment process longer, that it is not always efficient since the hidden qualities can sometimes be guessed, and that the “preformatted” anonymous resume prevents the recruiters from evaluating the applicant’s ability to tell his or her career story. Thus the absence of information leading to a clear identification of individuals is regarded by recruiters as an additional source of uncertainty.

In his chapter, Philipp Gerlach investigates the evaluation practices in internal labor markets for engineers in French and German automotive firms. How do engineers become qualified as potential managers? To answer this question, P. Gerlach observes “critical moments” for the assessment of the engineers’ quality (annual interviews, career committees). He distinguishes between two different ways of dealing with uncertainty: a “technocratic” one which attempts to depersonalize evaluation using formal devices to make predictions; and a “trust based” one which relies on the personal knowledge of the person. HR experts who intend to establish a transparent internal labor market prefer the former whereas current managers favor the latter.

The third section tackles the issue of the quality of aesthetic goods. The work of Elena Bogdanova offers new perspectives on a classical question for sociologists studying quality. She studies how the quality of aesthetic goods (antiques) can be assessed in a context characterized by a temporary lack of institution guaranteeing safety in market transaction (post-soviet Russia), by an asymmetrical distribution of knowledge, and by an ambiguity of experts’ position. She distinguishes different segments of the market (high-end, middle-range, low-end) that differ according to the level of organization of the trade, and consequently to the level of uncertainty of valuation and price-setting. Her main argument is that storytelling (about the market and about antiques) is a core mechanism that reduces uncertainty and confers value in unstable contexts.

The chapter written by Sébastien Dubois and Pierre François aims at explaining how categories emerge as shared institutions by analyzing the structure of the field of French contemporary poetry. The authors examine 18

maps made by poets to describe their professional universe. They use network analysis for testing if people include the same poets within a given category (stability of classifications) and if different categories can designate the same groups of poets (substituability of classifications). Answers to these questions differ according to the location of the poets in the field.

The fourth section of the book deals with the social construction of value under moral constraints. Firstly, Frans van Waarden and Robin van Dalen question the construction of halal product quality. They identify two major sources of uncertainty regarding the quality of halal products: the absence of consensus over what is "halal" and, once a norm is established, the problem of quality assessment (whether or not the final product abides by the norms). In a context of long, global, and complex food chains, information asymmetries are strong for consumers living in Western societies. Since there is no state regulation of religious food standards, private quality certificates allow a market for halal products to exist. Those judgment devices give birth to several submarkets ("aunt-and-uncle", domestic, and export markets) with different levels of control, and thus different price ranges.

The funeral market studied by Dominic Akyel also faces moral issues. Following the perspective of V. Zelizer, the author examines how moral values "contribute to excluding certain information from the process of qualification and how market actors compensate for this" (p. 224). The funeral market is a regulated market where price competition is inappropriate since burial goods are considered as symbolic representations of the deceased. Like in aesthetic markets, one important question is: how to price something considered invaluable? The article shows that quality construction and trust building (through reputation) are closely linked in the death-care business.

The fifth section of the book offers an interesting focus of quality construction in the case of mass consumption goods. Sophie Dubuisson-Quellier argues that "consumer preferences do not exist outside the marketing work that is performed by firms and their partners [...] to build a representation of the demand" (p. 251). Marketing contributes to shaping values and value. According to her, mass consumption markets consist of leading companies that produce demand by shaping consumer preferences and defining products' features, and challengers that either supply cheap me-too products or highly differentiated niche market products.

Another chapter by Frank Wehinger deals with counterfeit goods and the problematic assessment of their quality. In the last chapter, Jörg Rössel and Jens Beckert question the relationship between two competing classification systems on the German wine market and the effects of each system on price formation. They use quantitative analysis to show that the two classification systems (one measuring the "quality in the glass" through chemical analysis of the wine, the other relying on "terroir") function as mutually exclusive strategic options for winemakers. The former is used in the "standard" segment of the market whereas the latter is used in the "status" segment of the market. Only the system based on "terroir" leads to price differentiation.

The various chapters offer different perspectives on the social construction of quality through case-studies of classification, judgment, regulation, competition between devices, pricing, etc. One major interest of the book lies in the variety of the case studies. They concern a wide range of empirical objects and countries, and the authors use different research designs, even if qualitative methods prevail. For the reader, a feeling of eclecticism may be the counterpoint of the empirical richness since theoretical approaches and level of analysis can be very different between chapters.

Book: Reichert, Ramón (ed.), 2014: *Big Data. Analysen zum digitalen Wandel von Wissen, Macht und Ökonomie*. Transcript.

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Eight years ago, Mike Savage and Roger Burrows (2007) published a paper which was to initiate major discussions in the English-speaking social sciences (to name a few contributions in *Sociology*: Crompton, 2008; Savage and Burrows, 2009; Tinati, Halford, Carr, and Pope, 2014; Uprichard, 2013). In their paper, Savage and Burrows suggested that sociology was facing a coming crisis by neglecting the field of what they referred to as "transactional data" and "knowing capitalism". According to the authors, these developments and the era of Big Data were going to fundamentally question the role of empirical social research, theory, and causality.