

Book Review

Deirdre Shaw, Andreas Chatidakis and Michal Carrington (eds.) (2016) **Ethics and Morality in Consumption: Interdisciplinary Perspectives.**

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Ethics in Consumption: Interdisciplinary Perspectives is edited by the organising team behind the seminar series of the same name, many of whose presenters have also contributed to this book of edited works comprising 13 chapters. The aim of the seminars was to connect the range of contemporary concerns in the social sciences around ethics, consumption, commercial practices and the role of individual and social values and actions. Likewise, the editors state their intention to pursue this aim in the book in order to increase understanding of ethical consumption from a broader range of literature in order to address the complex and multifaceted nature of the ethical consumer movement as it has matured. As the editors note, other collected works on the subject have attempted to link different disciplines (such as consumption studies, geography and political science in Tania Lewis and Emily Potter's excellent *Ethical Consumption: A Critical Introduction*, or in Rob Harrison, Terry Newholm and Deirdre Shaw's seminal *The Ethical Consumer*), but this should not diminish the scope and diversity of this book which further adds to and expands these debates in drawing on and linking a variety of perspectives rooted in a range of subject areas including (but not limited to) psychology, cultural studies, politics, history, anthropology, economics, politics, theology, geography and the built environment.

The book is split into two sections, which also relate to two of the seminars: consumption ethics and the individual, and consumption ethics and society. The editors, in the introduction, position these sections in response to the ongoing focus on the role of the individual decision maker in consumption ethics, and the 'social embeddedness' of consumption ethics, acknowledging that the roles of consumer and citizen are not mutually exclusive. Here the oft-cited 'trade-off' between and micro individual choices and needs and macro societal concerns is implicitly addressed, but the second section also draws on how societies 'interact' with ethical

consumption the histories, virtual and physical spaces, and social or spiritual motives underpinning ethical consumption, revealing some novel perspectives on the subject.

In section one (consumption ethics and the individual), the individual is considered from a range of perspectives. Kate Soper sets the scene well in her treatise for an ‘alternative hedonism’, querying what levels of consumption are necessary for human flourishing. This is followed by Karen Wenell’s exploration of the ‘supramoral’ and religious motivations underpinning ethical consumption, and Martha Starr’s review of the economic research on the subject from both supply and demand-side. Significantly, the latter includes consideration and emphasis on the social dimension of ethical consumption and its role in broadening its adoption, reflecting current debates in the marketing and consumption literature especially around social identity and social practices. Judith de Groot, Iljana Schubert and John Thøgerson then provide an excellent literature review on ethical consumption from a psychological perspective, challenging some of the orthodoxy around the consumer as rational decision maker that is sometimes prevalent in this (and economic perspectives) on consumers. They also helpfully provide some reflections on applications at the end of each section, focusing particularly here on social marketing campaigns thus adding a further dimension to the work. Finally in this section, Marylyn Carrigan and Carmela Bosangit similarly give a thorough account of the marketing literature on responsible marketing and consumption, highlighting many of the problems and criticisms that have been levelled in recent times. They take good account of the challenges that marketers can face in making more ‘responsible’ decisions in difficult situations, and propose pragmatic solutions for both consumers and marketers in navigating the ‘deep moral waters’ of the marketplace.

In section two (consumption ethics and society), ethical consumption is first placed in a historical perspective by Terry Newholm and Sandy Newholm, reminding us that ethical consumption is not a ‘new’ phenomenon as is sometimes claimed. Their fascinating discussion itself takes in a variety of interdisciplinary perspectives, covering social movements, politics, literature and individual motivation and morality in service of their argument to restore a ‘lost’ consumption history in providing insight into current debates. We then turn to geography with Dorothea Kleine, who provides an overview of the key concepts of space and place, advocating a relational view of spaces and places and the linkages between them, essential in a globalized economy and society. The sociological view is provided by Kim Humphrey, who notes that in sociology ‘consumption’ generally begins from a negative frame of reference, but in taking in its (and ethical consumption’s) various critiques, argues for the possibility that it can be considered as a site of politics and citizenship, despite the challenges in ‘grasping’ the ‘ethical’ in ethical

consumption. Humphrey's identification of the dichotomy of ethical consumption possibly being both an element of social transformation as well as an ethic of consumer capitalism is neatly followed by Peter Luetchford's anthropological analysis, which reminds the reader that much of what is presented in this book and other literature is presented from a largely Western perspective, and that further intercultural anthropological perspectives in research are required. Lauren Copeland and Lucy Atkinson then pick up some of the strands in the earlier chapters in relation to political consumption and civic engagement, posing questions about the maxim of 'shopping for a better world', and in a novel chapter, Peter Newton and Denny Meyer focus on the built environment (and individuals' attitudes towards it) as both an enabler and barrier to sustainable consumption and lifestyles. The section finishes with Kathryn Hegarty's discussion of education for sustainability within (predominantly higher education) curricula, and Jo Littler's identification of two key aspects of cultural studies which can provide insight into ethics in consumer culture; firstly, its inherently interdisciplinary nature, and secondly the need for a conjunctural analysis (or understanding the power dynamics at play). This provides an appropriate finishing point, the previous chapters having to some degree worked in service of these features.

The editors' concluding chapter pulls together many of the identified areas for future research throughout the book, which provides both a helpful summary and stimulation for those wanting to take a more cross-disciplinary path. Here the editors aim to respond to a number of key questions that arise throughout the book: what is ethical consumption; who is the ethical consumer; what do ethical consumers do; and, is ethical consumerism genuinely progressive? Here they draw on perspectives within each chapter to demonstrate how the contributors have responded to these questions and to identify where further work needs to be done. Indeed, the identification of future avenues for research both here and in the dedicated subsection of the conclusion is invaluable for academics and students in the field, and a very welcome addition to the text. What is striking upon completing the book and as is noted here, in defining 'ethical consumption' there is a diversity of language used to describe the acts of and motivations which underpin it, but also a commonality between them which can act as a starting point in bringing these disciplines together under future research agendas.

The reader is borne in mind throughout, and the editors add real value to the chapters presented through contextualising the work (as would be expected) in an introductory chapter, and also through 'signposting' in each chapter to related themes and ideas throughout the book, and finally by the provision of a concluding chapter which provides a number of areas for further

research. Often edited collections of works can lack a coherence outside of a unifying theme, but this does not apply here, where some thoughtful structuring and narrative on the part of the editors bring a sense of cohesiveness and completeness to the book. Similarly in terms of style, whilst the collection of chapters as a whole is 'academic' in nature and approach, the style throughout is accessible for a variety of audiences from academics and students to those working in industry, policy and to more ambitious 'lay' readers with an interest in the subject. Many of the chapters not only provide original perspectives and insights into specific issues, but also provide concise yet thorough overviews of the literature in the different fields. This is particularly helpful to those who come to each subject from particular disciplines, and a real strength of the book is in helping to develop the understanding and knowledge of the reader to understand how the theory is structured and developed across these subject areas. However, the chapters have sufficient depth that readers from within each discipline will find something of value. The comments and signposting by the editors throughout further helps the reader to make the connections between the different chapters and disciplines, and lends the sense of coherence mentioned previously.

Clearly the individual chapters could be critiqued from individual perspectives, and there are certainly issues presented that are worthy of further debate. In answering questions about what ethical consumerism *is*, the book could possibly have benefited from a contribution rooted in moral philosophy. Also, whilst the various criticisms and limitations of ethical consumption that have emerged over the last ten to fifteen years or so are reflected in many of the chapters here, and the editors question whether ethical consumption is genuinely progressive in their concluding comments, these criticisms are not always dealt with 'head on', and are instead often alluded to or left open to question. However, these are minor points which do not diminish an important, original and superbly edited book which will enhance and broaden the perspective and knowledge of anyone involved in research or practice in ethical consumption and ethical consumer markets or spaces. Overall this is valuable and important addition to the growing literature on the subject of ethical consumption, and its wide-ranging nature and detailed and insightful editorial style mark it out as distinctive in the field. It will be of interest to a diverse audience with an interest in ethical consumption from different disciplinary backgrounds (and indeed achieves the editors' aim, setting a marker than ethical consumption *can* only be understood from a broad base), and is accessible and thought-provoking, directing readers to a much wider literature set in each field, and drawing out suggestions for both application and future directions in research.

For Citation

Hiller, A. (2017). Deirdre Shaw, Andreas Chatidakis and Michal Carrington (eds.) (2016) Ethics and Morality in Consumption: Interdisciplinary Perspectives. Reviewed in: *Journal of Consumer Ethics*. 1(1), pp. 53-58.