The Question of Ethical Decision in Marketing and Ethics

ANTON JAMNIK

Marketing raises some of the most widely and hotly disputed ethical issues regarding business. Whether it is advertising, retailing, pricing, marketing research, or promotion (to name just a *few* marketing areas), marketing has been charged with engaging in practices that involve dishonesty, manipulation, invasion of privacy, creating unsafe products, as well as the exploitation of children and vulnerable consumers. Two general studies which refer to these (and other) criticisms of marketing are John Tsalikis and David J. Fritzsche (1989) and Bol et al. (1991).

In the preparation of this paper, I have drawn primarily on articles and books which are to be found within the "marketing ethics" literature. This means that there are numerous other articles and books outside of marketing (so defined) which have implications, both direct and indirect, for the topics and issues discussed here on which I did not draw. I adopted this approach to give yet a further sense of the state of marketing ethics today. Whether this shortcut best serves the topics discussed, the reader must decide for him or herself. However, because some sort of marketing activities are necessary in any society beyond the most undeveloped, the elimination of marketing is not the answer to the problems listed above. Rather, we must look to the formulation and implementation of an ethical theory for marketing.

In the past several decades, a great deal has been written about the ethics of marketing. This article attempts both to provide a brief overview of the main currents of this literature and to participate in the development of marketing ethics. I do the latter, in part, by suggesting a framework according to which present work in marketing ethics that might better be understood and to identify areas of future work. The aim of such work must be twofold: to develop an evaluative response to present ethical challenges to marketing, and, proactively, to create an ethical theory to tell us how marketing activities ought to be morally constituted to avoid those charges. Such an ethics must evade the Scylla of irrelevant idealism, but also the Charybdis of an unwarranted defense of the *status quo*. Accordingly, an ethical theory for marketing cannot limit itself simply to current assumptions about present capitalist markets. It must examine these assumptions as well as the activities which take place within their confines. (This view contrasts with that of Robin and Reidenbach 1993: 104), who seek to measure the ethical or unethical nature of basic marketing functions "within our understanding of their history, the times in which they are applied, the context in which they are applied, the expectations of society, the requirements of capitalism").

The creation of a marketing ethics is not simply a matter of theoretical interest, but also one of practical concern. This has been demonstrated by the creation, in the past century, of significant regulations and regulatory bodies to oversee marketing activities, for example the Food and Drug Administration, the Federal Communications Commission, and the Federal Trade Commission. The development of these agencies has been, in part, a response to concerns about the ethics of marketing. A marketing ethics will provide a basis whereby the actions (or omissions)

of such agencies and regulations may be appraised. It will also, however, furnish the grounds upon which those in marketing, those who are the targets of marketing, and society more generally, may morally judge the activities and relations marketing engenders.

I. Ethics and marketing: initial distinctions

A marketing ethics will not be a simple thing. To emphasize this, some initial distinctions concerning both ethics and marketing will be useful. When people speak of the ethics of marketing, they refer most generally, to the principles, values and/or ideals by which marketers (and marketing institutions) ought to act. Arguably, these "norms" are the core of a marketing ethics, since we are interested in how marketing morally ought to be organized and undertaken. As such, a marketing ethics is a normative ethics. It tells marketers how they morally ought to act. However, this leaves empirical and analytical (or meta-ethical) discussions of marketing ethics, which are crucial to its normative ethics, without a home. It would be better to use the rubric "marketing ethics" more broadly to encompass:

• *descriptive (or empirical) studies* of the moral values, beliefs and practices of marketing
• *analytical studies* of the nature of ethically relevant marketing concepts and the kinds of justifications which can be offered for normative ethical marketing claims
• *normative studies* of the values, principles, and ideals to which marketers should be held.

Though descriptive and analytical studies can be engaged in for their own sakes, ultimately they should serve to enhance our development of a normative ethics. "Marketing ethics" then, refers to this comprehensive study of the ethics of marketing from these three different directions. To develop such a marketing ethics would be to respond to the call by Murphy and Laczniak (1981: 262) for a "global theory of ethics". Unfortunately, these distinctions are not often made, with the result that the same discussion may move seamlessly from one approach to marketing ethics to another. The article by Laczniak and Murphy (1991) nicely illustrates the seamlessness by which discussions of marketing ethics may move from descriptive marketing ethics, to normative and analytical marketing ethics without particular notice being given of the transitions involved. The danger is that the criteria which are appropriate for one area may not be similarly appropriate to discussions in other areas of marketing ethics. Thus, for example, the standards by which we would judge a discussion of what we mean (or should mean) by "honesty," "confidentiality," "privacy," or "vulnerability", will differ from those we would use in judging whether a marketing researcher who secretly codes survey forms so as to identify respondents, have done something morally permissible or morally wrong.

Since we are interested in the ethics of marketing, it is also appropriate to say something, briefly, about the nature of marketing. The nature of marketing was the source of considerable dispute, particularly during the 1960s and 1970s. Battles raged over whether marketing must necessarily be linked simply with market exchanges (Luck, 1969), as opposed to whether it may be conceived to include transactions and exchanges of a much broader nature (Kotler and Levy, 1969). What is clear is that those in favor of broadening marketing to include the marketing of traditional non-business activities, such as religion, education and politics, have prevailed. As such, the American Marketing Association has defined marketing to refer quite broadly to activities involved in conceiving, pricing, promoting and distributing ideas, goods and services so as to create exchanges that satisfy individual and organizational objectives. For the American Marketing Association's definition of marketing, see Assael (1993: N-l).

Two ethical implications of this development are worth noting. First, the ethics of marketing today encompasses a much wider range of activities than before. When religion, politicians and education (among other traditional non-market arenas) are viewed as products or services to be marketed, the range of ethical questions regarding the ways in which marketers' skills and knowledge may benefit (or harm) its objects is greatly extended. Accordingly, marketers must address standard ethical questions regarding (for example) manipulation, truth-telling and freedom over a much wider and more diverse area than in the past. Second, the broadening of marketing's

reach also raises ethical questions concerning whether these areas, heretofore outside marketing, are being transformed through marketing into forms of markets, subject to the values, standards and expectations of markets. Thus, questions concerning the "selling" of ideas, the "packaging" of politicians, and the commercialization of religion, raise significant ethical issues in their own rights about the moral integrity of these domains. In short, the nature or scope of marketing may not simply raise particular moral questions regarding the instrumental support that marketing may give to other areas, but also important ethical questions about the transformation of the areas to which marketing is extended.

II. Descriptive marketing ethics

A complete marketing ethics, as I have indicated above, would include a descriptive, a normative and an analytical ethics. Normative moral discussions of marketing depend, either directly or indirectly, on empirical matters. Consider the following hypothetical: suppose that it is morally wrong to advertise to children, if they are unable to discern the nature and purpose of the advertising directed at them; suppose that, if various marketing activities unnecessarily promote environmental degradation or cause the poor to pay more for their products and services, those activities are morally wrong.

The hypotheticals in these claims involve empirical questions. It is of no small importance, then, for marketers to address such crucial empirical issues as follows.

• In what ways do advertisements influence people?

• What cognitive conditions are required for an individual to discern the purpose(s) of advertisements?

• What moral problems do marketers and consumers believe they face?

• What are the effects of marketing on economic development, the environment and the poor?

• What processes do marketers go through when they seek to make ethical decisions?

• How do customers or marketers morally rationalize unethical behavior in the market?

• What different moral beliefs regarding marketing do societies such as the US and India maintain?

It should be obvious that a wide range of marketing descriptive studies may fall within this category. Such studies empirically investigate a moral value, belief or principle people hold, or they investigate empirical conditions which bear directly on the realization of moral values or principles. Accordingly, a brief summary of such studies is impossible to provide.

However, there is one area of descriptive marketing ethics which is particularly worthy of more detailed consideration, due to the attention it received within the last twenty years. This is the empirical study of ethical decision making in marketing. These studies take two major forms, which are not always distinguishable. On the one hand, some have investigated various influences on the ethical decision-making behavior of marketers. On the other hand, researchers have tried to devise models which will describe and/or explain the ethical decisions marketers make.

Among the former, the influences on individual ethical decision behavior have been divided into two rough categories: individual and situational. The individual category includes variables associated with the individual decision maker such as sex, nationality, education, religion, age, employment, personality, attitudes, and values. The results of these studies are many times mixed. For example, some find that there is no distinction between men and women when it comes to various modes of moral reasoning in organizations (Derry, 1989; Schminke, 1997), while others find that gender is a significant factor (Fritzsche, 1988; Konovsky and Jaster, 1989). Fritzsche, for example, reported that male respondents are less likely to pay a bribe than female respondents, but more likely to ask for a bribe than female respondents (Singhapakdi et al., 1996: 638). Chonko and Hunt (1985) found that female marketers are more likely to perceive ethical problems than male marketers. However, Singhapakdi and Vitell (1991) found no relationship between the gender of a sales professional and his or her perception of an ethical problem. The role of gender in moral decision making remains one of the more hotly contested disputes regarding influences on individual ethical decision behavior.

Situational factors include peer group influence, organizational climate and/or culture, top management influence, codes of ethics, corporate ethical values, rewards, sanctions, organization size and level, and various industry factors such as industry type and competitiveness (Ford and Richardson, 1994; Akaah, 1996: 605). For example, Akaah looked at organizational rank and role as ethics correlates, and found that "marketing professionals of lower organizational rank do not differ significantly from marketing professionals of upper organizational rank in ethical judgments". However, he also found that "marketing professionals of executive role reflect higher ethical judgments than marketing professionals of research role" (Akaah 1996: 612).

One concern in such studies is that the factors whose correlations are examined are truly empirically separate, rather than conceptually linked. It is not obvious that this point is always recognized. It is the distinction between descriptive ethics and analytical ethics. Thus, when Singhapakdi et al. (1996: 641) claim that "our survey results generally indicate that professional values do influence a service professional's ethical perceptions in a positive way as hypothesized", one might wonder whether an individual having certain professional values necessarily or conceptually (rather than empirically) involves having certain ethical perceptions. Suppose, for instance, that the individuals in this study had not had the appropriate ethical perceptions. Would the investigators conclude that they nevertheless had those professional values but simply did not see the scenarios as involving ethical problems, or (instead) that they did not have those professional values?

The other kind of study of individual ethical decision making involves the development of explanatory models and frameworks of ethical decision making which seek to identify the various steps involved in arriving at ethical decisions. One of the more elaborate accounts is that of Hunt and Vitell (1993), who take a cognitive, multi-staged perspective:

1) An individual must, first, perceive an ethical problem.
2) The individual seeks to identify various alternative actions that might solve the problem and what their consequences would be.

3) Two kinds of evaluations take place: one looks to the inherent Tightness or wrong-ness of each alternative (deontological considerations); and, one considers the probability and desirability of the consequences of each alternative as well as the importance of the relevant stakeholders (teleological considerations).
4) These two evaluations are merged to form a single ethical judgment.
5) Such ethical judgments impact on a person's behavior through the intervening variable of his or her intentions, which may, however, differ (due to other preferred consequences) from what he or she judged to be ethical.
6) The resulting behavior may vary from the individual's prior intentions and ethical judgments, depending on "the extent to which the individual actually exerts control in the enactment of an intention in a particular situation" (Hunt and Vitell, 1993).
7) Personal characteristics, as well as organizational, industrial, professional and cultural environments directly influence steps 1-3 above.

While the Hunt and Vitell model encompasses many, if not most, of the factors which are included in models of moral decision making, others theorists emphasize some steps more than others or introduce them at different stages. In addition, other models inject various decisions rules (Fritzsche, 1991), ideological frameworks, or interpretations of moral development which are not part of the preceding model. In general, all such theories move from the recognition of an ethical problem, to the search for alternatives, evaluation, choice and behavior. However, the devil is in the details and here they go their separate ways.

The descriptive studies of marketing ethics noted above and empirical studies of ethical decision making are useful for a marketing ethics in a variety of ways. The former help us to understand the effects of marketing on various groups of people, as well as what excuses are used to deflect moral criticism. The latter help us to see more clearly how ethical marketing decisions might actually be made. The upshot of models of actual ethical decision making may lead to the redesign of

organizational and strategic mechanisms for improving ethical decision making (Laczniak and Murphy, 1985). Ferrell and Gresham (1985) claim that in making these changes, individual, organizational and opportunity variables will require attention. Further, these models may reveal ethical conflicts and tendencies which marketers would not have otherwise suspected. As such, descriptive marketing ethical studies can play a significant role in directing the attention and research of normative marketing ethical studies.

However, these studies do not always recognize their own limitations. For example, some descriptive studies conclude from the diversity of moral decisions they survey, that it is impossible to say what is right or wrong (Ferrell and Fraedrich 1997: 105). Similarly, on the basis of his empirical decision model, Fritzsche (1991: 851) speculates that decision makers are practicing situational ethics rather than absolute ethics. However, these conclusions do not follow simply from such descriptive studies. Instead, they are conclusions which can only follow from an analytical marketing ethics, for instance, a study of the forms of justification available to marketing ethical judgments. In short, though descriptive marketing ethics plays a vital role in any general theory of marketing ethics, its relation to normative and analytical studies requires close attention.

III. Normative marketing ethics

Two broad streams of discussion - the applied and the theoretical - address the normative ethics of marketing. The former uses various moral (and non-moral) values and principles to evaluate marketing and to engage in efforts to change those practices. These accounts tend to mix, sometimes uncritically, descriptive and normative considerations regarding marketing.

Four basic sets of values are prominently appealed to in these discussions - truth, freedom, well-being, and justice - although some marketers still speak of the main ethical issues facing marketers as the "key values of trust, honesty, respect and fairness" (Smith and Quelch, 1993: 11). Most often, in applied accounts, the values - truth, freedom, well-being

and justice - are used to criticize marketing for various ethical failures. Accordingly, with regard to truth, advertisements, purchase agreements, and promotions have been attacked for dishonesty or misleading customers (Carson et al., 1985; Jackson, 1990). The nature and limits of puffery (hyperbole) in advertising has been a constant source of concern (Preston, 1975; Pollay, 1986). Marketing researchers have been criticized for using hidden codes to identify supposedly anonymous response questionnaires, for sending undercover investigators into stores to observe the behavior of customers and employees, and for not revealing the nature of their research to their informants (Crawford 1970; Tybout and Zaltman, 1974; Akaah and Riordan, 1989). Studies of the ways and occasions on which marketers have provided their customers with correct information about their products are much less frequently part of the normative marketing ethics literature.

The value of freedom lies behind criticisms of forms of promotion which pressure or coerce vulnerable and ordinary consumers (Beauchamp, 1993). Morally unscrupulous marketers are said not to value the freedom of choice of the elderly, the grieving, and the young, when they manipulate them into buying what they do not need or understand (Paine, 1983; Gentry et al., 1994). In channels of distribution, large retailers are sometimes accused of coercing small suppliers to accept agreements they would not otherwise accept. And since freedom is usually understood in terms of lack of constraint, the intrusiveness of some marketing activities (e.g. telemarketing during the evening) has increasingly raised moral questions of freedom as well as privacy (Morris-Lee, 1996).

In particular, the development of new technologies (computers, scanners, monitoring devices) has become a threat to freedom and is one reason that privacy has become a paramount concern. Thus, many have raised normative ethical questions concerning the nature and amount of information that can be gained today through scanning devices, computer records of credit card purchases, and Internet purchasing. Once again, normative studies of the ways in which current marketing practices that involve such technologies might enhance the freedom of their customers, are relatively rare.

The well-being of people is partially captured by concerns about the quality and safety of products, as for example, the Ford Pinto, drugs, pesticides, food, breast implants. Various motorized vehicles, such as the Suzuki Samurai, All Terrain Vehicles, among others, have been criticized due to their performance features, as well as the ways in which they have been promoted and advertised (Smith and Quelch, 1993). The marketing of tobacco, both in the US and in developing countries (where the percentage of women smokers and lung cancer in women has greatly increased), has been attacked for its lack of concern for the well-being of its users. In addition, marketers are criticized for encouraging people to acquire new products, go into debt more deeply, collect new experiences and participate in rampant forms of consumerism (Korten, 1995; Jacobson and Mazur, 1995). Their accumulation of information on consumers, through the various sources noted above, has been said to threaten individual privacy (Fost, 1990).

Finally, justice (or injustice) has underlain criticisms of the prices of products, debt arrangements, and the targeting of children. The marketing of alcohol (e.g., PowerMaster) to inner-city residents and of tobacco through the use of Joe Camel have occasioned strong justice-based objections. Various forms of marketing are said to constitute forms of exploitation, such as the target marketing of certain alcoholic beverages to inner-city blacks and the use of women in the Swedish Bikini Club commercial. Exploitation of a very different form has been the charge in developing countries, where marketers have been accused of paying very low wages to workers, even though these companies frequently pay above the average wage in those countries. Disney, the Gap, Nike and many other businesses have been criticized for their policies in the use of foreign labor and suppliers. These objections raise difficult questions regarding what is a just wage and the role that local conditions should play in such a determination. On the other hand, marketing has been praised for bringing efficiency and economic progress to developing countries.

The moral appeal in these cases is both to mid-range and fundamental values or principles. In each of the above cases, the charge is that marketing has either failed to safeguard these values or has given one an unjustified priority over another. The value of competition, for example, which might be captured under freedom, is less frequently heard in these accounts (Nelson, 1978). The importance of efficiency, which might be brought under well-being, is also infrequently heard when it comes to the wages of employees or the use of greater amounts of information so as to be able to tailor products to various specific customers (Maitland, 1997). Right or wrongly, the pressures that marketers are under are often not taken into account. Accordingly, many times the criticisms focus on individual instances, rather than address the systems within which those cases arise. To this extent, they appear to accept a market system but chide marketers for ethical failures within it.

Theoretical normative discussions have sought to formulate the values and standards to which people ought to appeal in marketing. They also attempt to provide normative guidelines for managers to follow in resolving moral disputes as well as in moral investigations of functional areas of marketing, for instance, marketing research, advertising, and retailing. These normative studies come in two main types. On the one hand, there are normative models of the substantive steps which individuals should take in making moral decisions. Articles on this topic have become much more prominent in the last couple of decades. On the other hand, some normative accounts, apparently despairing of identifying any small set of moral principles, simply list a number of normative questions which marketers should ask when making moral decisions.

Examples of the former approach include the limited relativist theory of Robin and Reidenbach. In their view, moral issues in marketing are to be decided according to the actions and policies that promote a "well-structured and happy life" within the constraints of a society's history, capitalist objectives and human psychological limitations (Robin and Reidenbach, 1993: 102). They suggest such a marketing ethics is a form of moral relativism, inasmuch as it is constrained by the preceding limitations and relies heavily on descriptive ethics. As such, they reject the

tradition of grand narratives and overarching moral principles such as Utilitarianism and Kantianism. Nevertheless, it would seem that their view has strong sympathies with utilitarian moral philosophy.

A rather different approach is taken by Smith and Quelch, who offer a continuum of moral decision making criteria (from caveat emptor to caveat venditor) which may provide benchmarks for marketing managers. However, they maintain that one criterion on this continuum is superior to others for ethical decision making: consumer sovereignty test (Smith and Quelch, 1993: 20-34; Smith, 1995). This normative guide is composed of three sub-criteria: the consumer's capabilities regarding understanding the product and purchase decision, the information provided, and the consumer's ability to choose among products. This normative guide is, however, of limited usefulness. As Smith (1995) notes, it can only be applied in a narrow band of issues which arise for marketers and consumers. It does not extend more broadly to other normative issues marketers might face in marketing research, channels of distribution, environmental questions, etc. Further, how much consumer sovereignty (capability, information and choice) is required? Must the sub-criteria of this test be maximized in some manner or other? Smith and Quelch provide some tentative suggestions for determining how adequately these criteria are fulfilled by referring to various consumer expectations and preferences. Thus, they ultimately say that the answer is "likely to change as society's expectations of business change" (Smith and Quelch, 1993: 34). But then the consumer sovereignty test provides no means to judge society's expectations, which may be unreasonable or even unethical. Further, it derives the moral criterion for marketers simply from the fact of social expectations, an "ought" derived from a fact, something which requires further explanation and justification.

The second normative approach noted above is followed by those who do not propound a single or small number of general principles, but instead turn to a list of norm-laden questions which they would have marketers to ask in order to arrive at justified moral judgments. This kind of approach has affiliations with casuistry, as for instance, the attention to "the concrete circumstances of actual cases, and the specific maxims that people invoke in facing actual moral dilemmas", rather than an emphasis on "universal rules and invariant principles" (Jonsen and Toulmin, 1988: 13). Nevertheless, no one has explored this connection.

Laczniak and Murphy (1991), for example, defend what might be called a multiple responsibilities test which involves a "sequence of questions" that each marketer should use to determine whether a contemplated action is ethical. This test includes questions which ask whether the action is: legal; contrary to widely accepted moral obligations; violates any special obligations; has a harmful intent; imposes major damages on people or organizations; is the alternative that produces the best consequences for affected parties; does not infringe on inalienable rights; or does not leave others less well off (Laczniak and Murphy, 1991: 267; 1993: 48-51). They do not claim that if an action passes all these questions it is moral, only that the action "is quite likely to be ethical" (Laczniak and Murphy, 1991: 268). Crucial for this test is that the implications and effects on all stakeholders would be weighed. However, they do not say how these multiple considerations are to be weighted, whether some ought to have greater weight than others, or what should be done when the answers are opposite. It is exactly these difficulties that have driven other marketing ethicists to take the first approach above, which seeks basic normative principles by which to make these determinations.

Several general observations regarding the above normative ethical studies are appropriate. First, it is striking that many applied normative studies of marketing offer ethical criticisms with little reflection on the system within which marketers are operating. It is also noteworthy that many marketers are more concerned with consumer complaints from the standpoint of how to identify and control them so as to enhance the bottom line, rather than satisfy them in an ethically appropriate manner. If there is to be normative ethical progress, both groups need to consider their cases more broadly.

Second, a large number of the scholarly studies of marketing ethics in the US occur at the meso level (the marketing institution)

and the micro level (individual manager and customer) - which contrasts with the more systematic (or macro-level) approach of many European business ethicists. For example, many US marketing texts take the view point of the marketing manager. Numerous articles examine managers' ethical beliefs and also attempt to develop practical guidelines and theoretical statements regarding ethical decision making by managers. However, not everyone in, or affected fay, marketing is marketing manager. If moral reflection is to consider one's action in light of the full circumstances and the moral point of view, micro and meso-level studies carry an important limitation. Thus, for example, if a marketer claims that the use of "push money" to retail sales associates "to present the manufacturer's products to the store's customers" is a legitimate form of sales promotion, we might wonder whether they have overlooked the view point and interests of others, for example, customers. In short, one might regard "push money" differently depending upon whether one saw the retailer as a selling agent for manufacturers or as a buying agent for customers (Langrehr, 1994). Accordingly, it would benefit the development of a marketing ethics if scholarly studies took a broader view, while the practical critics of marketing ethics would find their accounts deepened if they considered the specific contexts or situations within which the issues they discuss arose.

IV. Analytical marketing ethics

Though marketers rarely characterize their work under the heading of "analytical marketing ethics", this is a distinct area, properly identified, for their discussions of such topics as the nature of various marketing concepts, the kind of justification that can be given to basic marketing moral judgments, whether marketing ethics is a separate ethics from ordinary ethics, and why marketers ought to be worried about being moral. Clearly, these kinds of studies are more theoretical than applied, but, as others have said, (normative) marketing ethics has suffered from the lack of a theoretical basis (Laczniak, 1983). It might be noted that Andrew Stark (1993) has criticized business ethics as being too theoretical (and

impractical) and Craig Smith (1995: 86) has suggested, in reply, that by focusing on ethical issues as they relate to the various functional areas of business, for example, marketing, one "...is more likely to produce theory useful to marketing decision makers").

The topic of the justification of basic marketing ethical norms has received attention in a number of recent accounts. The options here include skeptical, relativist, objectivist and absolutist views. For example, Chonko (1995: 39) rejects ethical relativism, which he interprets (in an analytical, rather than a normative, sense) as the view that "no ethical guideline has any greater claim to objectivity and universality than any other". He understands this means that one cannot justify any value judgments at all. Since he apparently thinks that this is so obviously false, he does not argue against it.

Nevertheless, he maintains that "there are no universally accepted absolute standards..." (Chonko, 1995: 23). Accordingly, he accepts some form of descriptive ethical relativism (i.e., people in fact accept different basic moral norms), but not analytical relativism (all justifications are equally valid). As such, he maintains that ethics requires absolutes (1995: 20). Then, how are these "absolutes" justified? Chonko says little on this, though he refers to his own Christian religious preferences and seems to suggest that the justification of absolute standards derives from this religious source.

Other marketers have advocated a more relativist or contextualist approach to the justification of moral beliefs. Drawing on MacIntyre, Robin and Reidenbach (1993) defend a view of marketing ethics which is bounded by the constraints of history, time, and context. Such an account tells us how to justify normative moral standards, rather than defend any particular standard. So characterized, theirs is clearly a relativist account. It is for this reason that they speak of "boundaries", rather than principles or values. Indeed, they reject the use of deontological and utilitarian principles, as well as all grand narratives (Robin and Reidenbach, 1993: 97).

However, to make their account more realistic, they introduce four other boundary conditions in addition to history, time and context (1993: 101):
1) The constraint of morality viewed as

having the basic purpose of ameliorating the negative outcomes of life
2) Societal constraints of laws and the satisfaction of consumers' needs
3) Constraints relating to capitalism including meritarian justice, the reward of risk taking, creativity, and industriousness
4) Constraints related to human capacities and limitations, such as psychological egoism.

Unfortunately, these additions undo their relativist marketing ethics. First, by invoking as the purpose of morality, the aim of creating conditions so that individuals may "pursue a well-structured and happy life", Robin and Reidenbach (1993: 100-102) provide a non-relativist touchstone for the justification of moral beliefs. And, second, their invocation of one form of justice and advocacy of certain values (e.g., industriousness) amount to the identification of certain normative bases which any marketing ethics must adopt. As a consequence, their analytical ethics is not relativist in the standard sense that an objective justification of moral beliefs cannot be given, but only in the sense that the justification of moral beliefs is relative to the features they identify. But given these values and purpose of morality, this would permit a non-relativist justification of moral beliefs. In effect, Robin and Reidenbach have restricted their relativism out of existence. Nevertheless, their paper is an explicit and sophisticated effort on behalf of an analytical marketing ethics. Where other accounts of marketing ethics simply assume or briefly mention their relativistic views on justification, Robin and Reidenbach have looked much more closely.

A somewhat similar approach has been taken by Thompson (1995: 183), who argues that "a person's moral viewpoint... [is] fundamentally entwined with cultural belief and value systems, that is, a person's understanding of ethical dilemmas ensues from a socialized perspective rather than from a detached perspective of society". Now this might be the case in a causal sense, in which those who reject ethical relativism could agree. However, Thompson further claims that our moral reasoning and its justification are logically tied to the contexts in which they are situated. Accordingly, our assessment of the moral reasoning of marketers should be made "in relation to the more context specific influences that are exerted by corporate culture". And this leads to this acceptance of the view that "significant disparities may arise between the logic of moral reasoning used in private and professional contexts". Thus, Thompson's contextual view rejects not only the absolutist or objectivist views of Chonko, but also the bounded relativism of Robin and Reidenbach.

The upshot is that there is little agreement among marketers on what kind of justification can be offered for normative moral judgments made regarding marketing. There is also considerable disagreement on whether marketing ethics is (or should be) separate from the rest of business ethics - or, indeed, from the ethics of (non-business) society. Again, Chonko (1995: 24) holds that "marketing professionals do not operate under an ethical code different from those of us in society", a position that Peter Drucker (1981) strongly defended years ago. However, the result of Thompson's view is that the logic of the two is different. Robin and Reidenbach (1993: 103) claim that a separate marketing ethics must be developed, that would take into account the "mission, constraints, and directives created for [marketing] by others..." At the same time, marketing's "own" ethical philosophy must recognize "the history, time and context of its pronouncements". The upshot of their view seems to be that the logic of ordinary and marketing ethics may be the same, but the results diverge due to the boundary conditions. Accordingly, the justification of basic marketing ethics norms clearly requires considerably more attention.

Why should marketers bother about morality? Why should marketing organizations attempt to foster ethical behavior? Laczniak and Murphy have responded by noting the various significant personal, organizational and societal costs involved if they do not do so (Laczniak and Murphy, 1991: 262; 1993: 6). They also note that "the obvious answer [is] that being ethical is simply the proper thing to do" (Laczniak and Murphy, 1993: 6). Like all others, however, marketers continue to struggle to find answers to why they or marketing organizations ought to do the morally right thing, rather than simply the expedient or profitable thing. Clearly, one of

the difficulties faced by those seeking to answer this question is the primacy of self-interested justifications which marketing (and business) tend to assume. Only if this assumption is successfully challenged, will answers to the present question seem defensible.

These studies in analytical marketing ethics are particularly important if marketers are to understand the moral situations and dilemmas that face them, not only in national but also in international marketing. They need to formulate a theory which tells them when (and which) moral principles or standards are justified, and whether the domain of that justification is restricted to particular societies or extends to all societies. Do such principles hold, for example, simply for developed (capitalist) nations or do they hold cross-culturally? Do they hold regardless of what people believe or only because of what they believe? These are, admittedly, theoretical questions of the first order, but they are also questions which carry direct practical implications for marketing ethics. For example, answers to these problems will affect the positions marketers take on the cross-cultural role of human rights, the treatment of women, nepotism, gift-giving and bribery. Marketing ethicists must face these issues in one manner or another.

V. New directions and challenges

Both the ethics of marketing itself and ethical theorizing about marketing will be challenged, in the coming years, from a number of different directions. Many of the ethical challenges for marketing will come from three present sources. Prominent among these has been the development of various technological innovations involving, for example, computers, systems which monitor customers' purchases, the Internet, pagers, faxes, e-mail, etc. Electronic marketing of books, music, medical and legal advice, and education are among many of the developments which will provide increasingly more complex ethical challenges to marketing. Low-cost television screens will advertise goods and services in new and unexpected places. New technologies may be developed to permit monitoring what shoppers look at while visiting a store and to alter their moods while shopping.

What ethical limits should marketers adopt regarding the ways in which they should reach customers and how much they should know about the customers they seek to reach? Additional technological developments will only increase the need for answers to these already important questions.

A second important source will be the increasing influence of global competition. Product development, pricing strategies, and advertising programs will raise, with greater intensity, questions about the ethical propriety of products produced, the prices charged and the ways in which they are advertised and promoted. The homogenization of lifestyles, the sustainability of forms of production, and the justice of using sophisticated marketing techniques on those in developing nations who lack experience and training regarding such forms of marketing, are important ethical challenges which will be increasingly heard.

Third, the continued expansion of marketing activities into non-traditional business areas will serve as an additional source of ethical challenges. For example, secondary schools are increasingly an arena for marketing. Principals and teachers have been involved in marketing efforts. Marketers now reach into churches, not only on behalf of religious institutions but also political campaigns. Further, marketing efforts are undertaken to gain support for legislation, which has yet to come before the Congress. The expansion of marketing efforts will continue throughout society - we may become the "marketed" society - on school buses, in schools, embedded in movies, cartoons and television, on the Internet, wherever people may be reached. Some marketers wish to buy the right to name streets after their companies or products. As these efforts and the techniques of persuasion they use become more subtle, powerful and pervasive, we can be confident that ethical questions regarding marketing will continue to arise.

Challenges to the further development of a marketing ethics will involve continued studies on the interrelation of descriptive and normative marketing claims. The effort here is to develop a normative ethics that would be realistic in order to be applied to practical situations and yet not simply be a stamp for approval of present affairs. Towards

this end, some have urged that efforts should be made to expand the range of theories relevant to questions of marketing ethics. Laczniak (1993: 94) has urged the application of more diverse theories: deconstructionism, feminism, Eastern Religions, humanistic criticism, and non-Kohlbergian models of moral development. He also has advocated greater cross-cultural explorations and evaluations. These would involve descriptively comparing and contrasting the beliefs and practices of a wide spectrum of culturally diverse managers and companies. Marketers might also look to the implications of postmodern philosophy (Robin and Reidenbach, 1993). These challenges might fruitfully expand the vision of marketing ethical theorists.

These efforts might have salutary effects on overcoming some of the limitations of current marketing ethics. For example, there has been a strong individualistic bias shared by those doing research in marketing ethics. Marketing ethicists have tended to focus on the ethical decision making of individuals (usually managers) in marketing. Though this is clearly an important area of marketing ethics, the emphasis on individuals has led to the neglect of moral evaluations of marketing as an institution or activity, as well as the neglect of collective forms of moral responsibility. Indeed, some moral problems at the individual level can only be solved by moving to a higher organizational or system level, a move that De George (1993: 97-99) calls "displacement".

The introduction of a wider range of theories might also expand the amount of effort that is expended on international marketing ethics. Though there has been a number of discussions of international marketing ethics, these remain fairly modest in light of the increasing amount of marketing, which has international implications and impacts.

Finally, marketing ethics is due for some self-reflection on whether, and to what extent, it has been successful. Has it had any significant effects on the ethics of marketing? (Thompson, 1995: 177; Laczniak and Murphy, 1993). In short, an important area of empirical and analytical research in marketing ethics might be to identify those moral changes which have occurred in marketing over the years, and attempt to determine those factors led to their occurrence. If it turned out that important changes have been primarily due to external moral forces in society, for example, monitoring by private watchdog groups rather than internal developments of moral codes, ethics workshops, or ethics ombudsmen within productive organizations engaged in marketing, this would have significant implications for future work in marketing ethics. In any case, such a self-critical turn is appropriate if marketing ethics is to know whether it has helped to respond to the many current ethical challenges to marketing noted at the outset of this article.

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