

BOOK REVIEW

Values and Ethics in Social Work (Third Edition)

Chris Beckett, Andrew Maynard and Peter Jordan
Sage, London 2017
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This is the third edition of a popular and well-cited social work values and ethics text that has maintained the original structure but provided some useful extensions of content to acknowledge contemporary issues. Chris Beckett and Andrew Maynard have been joined by Peter Jordan in this edition to provide a United Kingdom (UK) based text that has global appeal and application to an international readership. To achieve this, the authors have avoided a common trap in presenting case scenarios that can be only narrowly interpreted through a knowledge of UK laws and policies and, instead, have provided examples that could be applicable in many contexts. Where certain well-known UK cases have been explored or mentioned, such as that of Victoria Climbié or Baby P, the context is acknowledged, as are the UK professional regulatory bodies and relevant legislation. One of the strongest points of this text is the inclusion of a number of case-based exercises in each chapter. What sets this text apart from the many others that use problematic cases for exploration is the following of each exercise by a section titled “Comments on exercise” where the authors provide their own perspectives on the questions posed. In many cases the authors state what they consider to be a *right* response in accordance with professional responsibilities, which gives the reader more reassurance that the way they may have responded to a question on initial reading was on track. It can be anxiety provoking for a reader, particularly a student or an inexperienced graduate, to be left with a scenario that they try to work through to the best of their knowledge, only to be left not knowing whether or not their response fell into the acceptable practice range. This text does not leave readers ‘hanging’, which is a real strength of the book. The other feature of this text is the reliance on case examples that are clearly within the practice realm of each of the authors. There is, perhaps, an emphasis on child protection, which is not surprising given the authors’ backgrounds and the propensity for ethical dilemmas in this field, but this is well balanced by case discussions of practice complexities in work with older persons, mental health, disability, and refugee and migrant groups. The cases are well written, interesting, topical, and the ethical dimensions are able to be drawn out relatively easily, which is helpful for the reader.

The structure of the text has not changed too much over the three editions, however there are some important inclusions, notably a new chapter on “Risk and blame” (Chapter 8).

This is a good inclusion given the risk society in which many services operate, as is the updated material on values and religion (Chapter 3) that sets out very clearly why attention to religious positions cannot be avoided in practice. This is a topic that often rates only scant mention due to its sensitivity. For any social work ethics educators looking for a comprehensive and straightforward reading on moral philosophy, Chapter 2 meets the criteria. The definitional explanation of deontology, utilitarian, virtue ethics, ethic of care, and the always difficult to explain differentiation between act and rule utilitarianism, make this a particularly good chapter for students. The concept that is somewhat unique in this text (not generally included in other similar texts on values and ethics in social work) is that of *realism*, a concept that is almost taken for granted in social work as *how things actually are*. Devoting a whole chapter to this concept on first read may seem a little out of place in the text, however, the examples that have been used and the way the concept of realism has been unpacked as it relates to ethical principles is useful. Of all the chapters, it is perhaps the one that requires most turning of the mind to a philosophical lens, and it would be worth reading in conjunction with other articles written by Chris Beckett (in the reference list) on this concept and its applications.

In summary, this is a text to be commended for its sincerity, promotion of professional understanding, and enlightening regarding what are often difficult to grasp philosophical concepts. I use this text in ethics education and recommend it to those seeking solid case examples to accompany understanding of moral concepts. This text is a really good contribution to social work values and ethics literature, and it is good to see that references are inclusive of a broader international scope. This is what makes a text meaningful to a wider audience, and it is hoped that the authors continue their work to make ethics content accessible and much more easily understood.

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