

Foundations of Information Ethics. Edited by John T. F. Burgess and Emily J. M. Knox. Chicago: ALA Neal-Schuman, 2019. 168 pp. Index. Softcover. \$54.99.

Modern informational professionals face ethical considerations in every aspect of their work, from the way they design information systems to the choices they make about information accessibility, its description, and its organization. In the past several years, these issues have been at the center of public discourse with major controversies surrounding social media site algorithms, recurrent hacking of consumer data, and information trustworthiness. In this environment, an introductory text that outlines the issues facing the information profession is essential.

Foundations of Information Ethics is intended as this introductory text for new and emerging information professionals to introduce the history of ethical theories and provide a broad overview of the ethical choices, considerations, and issues in the field. For a field as broad as “information,” this is an incredibly tall order for such a short volume, but, for the most part, the authors and editors accomplish their goals. The editors did not attempt to write the definitive monograph on information ethics, and they frame this text more like an appetizer to get readers interested in information ethics while also listing extensive resources to promote more in-depth study.

This book provides a good overall framework for thinking about the different layers of information ethics within information science and provides a thorough outline of the field’s general theoretical history, current issues, and influential theorists. *Foundations of Information Ethics* is intellectually arranged into three sections (referred to as “clusters”): a general overview, a breakdown of ethical issues by topical area, and emerging concerns. This structure makes the daunting task of analyzing the totality of ethical concerns facing information professionals approachable and manageable. This structure also provides a convenient framework for teaching readers without overwhelming them by providing historical and philosophical frameworks before diving deeper into the enormous breadth of concerns within the umbrella term “information ethics.” This welcoming structure and extensive resources make this collection well suited for students and new professionals unfamiliar with the literature.

An additional strength of this book is its emphasis on how the access, accessibility, and use of information are human rights that are interconnected with other human rights. Human rights emerges as a semi-official key theme of the monograph and as a thread that links together many of the issues and considerations in information ethics. The authors and editors argue strongly that the ethical management and use of information is a way of promoting and protecting human rights worldwide. The authors demonstrate how concerns such as access, privacy, and bias in information systems are implicitly part of maintaining and promoting rights such as freedom of speech, the right to vote, and freedom of expression. I found this argument extremely persuasive and necessary in demonstrating to the reader why considering the many ethical questions surrounding information is necessary for all information professionals.

Although this book provides readers with a fairly good overview of information ethics, it does have three primary weaknesses: its overreliance on Western European and US

perspectives on information and ethics, its handling of intellectual property ethics, and the lack of structural unity between the “current issues” chapters. First, in an inherently global information landscape, non-“Western” viewpoints should not continue to be so marginalized in information ethics discussions, especially in an introductory text. With the Internet, ethical issues are inherently global and multicultural, and information professionals in all subfields will have to grapple with balancing different cultural practices, philosophical histories, and legal frameworks. Although the choice to restrict this volume to chiefly Western European and US perspectives was deliberate on the part of the editors, any information professional just needs to reflect on the last five years of international news to understand why this choice is shortsighted and insufficient in providing the best foundation for understanding information ethics.

This book’s second major weakness is its chapter on intellectual property. Kathrine Andrews Henderson begins her chapter, “Intellectual Property Ethics,” explaining that copyright law is not the same thing as intellectual property ethics. However, she then proceeds to neglect all consideration of intellectual property ethics in favor of a brief summary of US intellectual property laws (where even the Digital Millennium Copyright Act is only briefly mentioned, but not explained). All intellectual property laws outside the United States, which can conflict with US copyright law, are ignored. Many ethical issues arising from modern intellectual property laws apply to information professionals. For archivists alone, these can include whether to digitize and make available materials with questionable copyright, organizational investment in costly conversion projects of at-risk audiovisual materials that cannot be made available for decades, and respect for Indigenous peoples’ traditional conceptions of property in digital exhibits. Henderson sidesteps all consideration of the types of ethical questions faced by information professionals in favor of a narrow overview of intellectual property law. This is out of place with the other chapters of the book, which introduce different types of issues, concerns, and case studies within their theme. Information professionals would be better served with an introduction to the types of ethical considerations arising at the intersections of intellectual property law, preservation, and access, rather than this basic introduction to statutes that can easily be found elsewhere.

The monograph’s third major weakness is the lack of structural unity between chapters in the second intellectual grouping of current issues. This lack of cohesion between these chapters at the core of the book distracts from its overall narrative. These chapters have one or more of the following types of content: explanation of the topics and issues, description of major thinkers, overview of current issues, case studies, primary resources, and resources. However, no two chapters have the same types of content or the same structure. I found myself wishing that all of these chapters included the same types of content in a similar format to provide a better overview of the issues involved and that they acted more synchronously. As these are part of the same cluster that aims to topically explain different ethical issues within information sciences, this lack of unity between chapters disrupted the monograph’s flow, undercut the notion of a chapter cluster, and made some chapters more effective than others. For example, the two chapters that include excerpts from primary sources are jarring because these inclusions

are so unexpected, out of place, and undercontextualized. Editorially, this work would be more effective if the current issues chapters cohered with one another rather than comprising such a collection of stand-alone essays.

Despite these limitations, overall *Foundations of Information Ethics* provides readers with a good introductory discussion on how different information-related professions think about information ethics, their challenges, and potential approaches to these challenges. This book is successful in explaining the importance of information ethics in the modern digital landscape and how information access, accessibility, and use are intrinsically linked with human rights. This book is well suited for classroom use or for use by information professionals needing an overview of the broad variety of ethical issues within the information professions and their intellectual history.

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