

Anthony Comegna: [00:20](#)

All right everybody, I'll start us off with this. I feel a little bad for our guest today. Professor Gary Chartier recently delivered a, Speak For a Sandwich Lecture to those of us at IHS. And normally that lecture comes along with lunch from one of the finest establishments in Arlington. But with all the COVID complications flying around, I presume he had to make his own lunch that day. So imagine my appreciation then when he took some time after the lecture to join us on the show.

We spoke about his recent book, *A Good Life in the Market: An Introduction to Business Ethics*; published in 2019 by the American Institute for Economic Research. As you'll hear, it's a comprehensive and nuanced guide to making ethical business decisions and other workplace decisions, very well worth your time. It has a gorgeous cover and it's incredibly affordable.

So if you like what you hear on the show, be sure to take a look and consider it for your own syllabi. It's virtually guaranteed to be the exact sort of business ethics book you wished you'd been using all along.

All right. When I was an undergraduate, I was a philosophy minor, mainly because my university didn't have a philosophy major, it was too small. But it means I took a lot of classes with the same two philosophy professors. And one of them, he would get asked now and then to teach a business ethics course at the business school, which was by far and away the largest school of the three or four on our campus. And he was very indignant one time when they asked him to do a presentation. And as part of the presentation, an hour long lecture or so, they wanted him to produce a business card with the steps to be sure that you're making an ethical decision.

Gary Chartier: [02:11](#)

Okay.

Anthony Comegna: [02:11](#)

And he was just aghast and indignant at this very idea that you could take ethics, a thousands of year-long set of complex conversations about the nature of the good, and boil it down to a business card, a little checklist, to make sure you're doing things right. And as long as you can tick those off, then you're fine.

I'm wondering a lot about process here for business ethics, and especially someone who comes to it from the heavy philosophy side, what is it like teaching business ethics?

Gary Chartier:

[02:50](#)

So, if anybody wants the content of a business card size business ethics primer, I would say, go to chapter two of my book and just write down recognition, respect, fairness, efficiency, and commitment. Now, you won't know what any of that means, but at least you'll have it written down.

So I don't, as it happens, end up teaching as much business ethics now as I used to when I started my appointment in the Zapara School of Business at La Sierra University. I taught undergrad and grad business ethics very frequently. I haven't done it for a while and I haven't done it actually since putting this book together. I guess I ... Well, sorry, I've taught it once as part of the philosophy as an adjunct in the Philosophy Department at Cal State Bakersfield, to a big group, mainly made up of business and AG business students. But I haven't done it in general for a while.

So much depends, I think, on the group of people you're teaching. Sometimes of course, you really do get people who are very intellectually curious and kind of morally intrigued, and who want to engage a lot. Undoubtedly, I think a lot of students, when they find themselves grappling with a subdiscipline and ethics, there really is concern often with very practical questions, are probably going to be inclined to think number one, "It's not very practical. It's not really going to help me very much in making decisions." And number two, "Who are you to tell me what to do?" And so I think those are probably both reactions that it's easy to get.

I don't of course, suppose that I have any magical ability in the course of a given term to revolutionize people's thinking and behaving. I do hope that an approach like the one I've taken in this book, will serve to expand people's imaginations, help them to see why business practice might be morally important and what kinds of tools they might be able to use to think more carefully about business issues. I want to be modest in my expectations about how much can happen over the course of a term. I suppose that people read and reread and reread a wonderful book like this, then everything will fall into place often.

Anthony Comegna:

[05:27](#)

Well, now like you said, you do have those five principles. That would be pretty good distilled down to a business card. But the awesome thing, it seems about this book and about the lecture you just gave here at IHS, is that those five simple principles are really, really, really fleshed out through the rest of it.

- Gary Chartier: [05:49](#) Absolutely.
- Anthony Comegna: [05:49](#) Even though it is an introduction to business ethics, it seems very deep on the philosophy side of that bridge, let's say.
- Gary Chartier: [05:59](#) Well, that's my goal. And probably just, that's a reflection of the way I approach these questions. I really do want to make sure that before people dive into individual questions, they've really got a framework to use. And I think that the kind of broadly Aristotelian approach that I take here, is probably less familiar to people than approaches that they might encounter elsewhere; contractarian or contractarian and or utilitarian approaches. [inaudible 00:06:38] it was probably very commonly in professional ethics contexts, sort of intuition as to approaches.
- And so I think that what I'm doing here, probably required a little more elaboration and a little more philosophical depth, just to make sure people understood the kind of approach that I was trying to take. It was also important, I think, to include some philosophical depth at the beginning. Because I think it's very easy for people in the kind of course that I can imagine this book being used for, to be sort of instinctive relativist or subjectivist.
- And I'm obviously not going to be able to resolve all the questions about relativism and subjectivism in the course of a few pages, but I at least needed to begin addressing and acknowledging those kinds of concerns. And so it was important to include more philosophical depth at the beginning of this book, than might have been the case for books or some other kinds.
- Anthony Comegna: [07:41](#) Yeah. Talk about fleshing out depth. I mean, this whole Aristotelian framework is very ... I agree, it's unlikely that most people will have heard much about it or have put it into practice very much, but when you do know a bit about it, when you have tried to practice it consistently, it's a lot; there's a lot to it. I mean, you have to have some idea for example, of what the good life would be for yourself and for others. And that is a constantly evolving, changing thing, based on circumstances and possibilities, et cetera. And so I was wondering in your talk, what does the good life look like for a lot of people operating out there in the business world making these kinds of decisions?
- Gary Chartier: [08:33](#) Well, that's a great question. So one of the things that I love about the particular kind of Aristotelian approach that I take,

which emphasizes all of these qualitatively different ways in which a life can go well, is that while there are some structural features that are going to be shared by good lives, the actual concrete particularities of those lives may be very, very different from each other. And there's a tremendous amount of variety and flexibility when it comes to thinking about and operationalizing this kind of flourishing.

And so obviously I hesitate to offer a portrait of the flourishing life for a person in the world of business. But I do want to emphasize that business practice offers not only the opportunity let's say to generate resources that can be used to foster flourishing in all kinds of ways, but also I think specific internal goods that people can pursue.

And so, of course, there's the good of skillful performance that business really can provide a constantly evolving and challenging context for the development of personal skills and capacities of all kinds, intellectual, emotional, social, and so forth, and also unavoidably. It provides, quite apart from generating resources and so forth, generating wealth, it provides an opportunity for people to build relationships.

And there are the interesting and complex tensions of the sort that Emily Chamblee Wright was talking about, during our conversation with folks at IHS a few minutes ago, about the way in which, sometimes it's unclear how to think about boundaries between the friendships one develops into what goes on in the workplace. But I think even allowing for that, there's very much the sense that I think a good life in businesses, at least often going to involve opportunities for developed opportunities for the relationships that develop with coworkers, with customers, with suppliers and so forth.

Neera Badhwar has a wonderful essay called, Friendship and Commercial Society, in which she looks at the way in which, what start out as arms length relationships, can develop into genuine friendships over time. So the commercial interaction provides a context in which these can initially emerge, but then they can over time, solidify and develop with an integrity of their own.

And so I think a good life, I'm not going to say every good life in the business world has to involve the development of friendships, because I recognize there are introverts out there who really don't want to feel somehow that they've earned in one way or another, if they don't connect with other people in a

deep way in the workplace. And that may be too demanding energetically for them. But I think skillful performance is always going to be a factor, is always going to be an aspect of a good life that will show up, especially in the business environment. And also at the same time, I think friendship often will be.

Another aspect probably of the good life that is really crucial, I'm not sure how I'd think about this in relation to my various sort of categories of human goods, but I'd say there's a kind of imaginative capacity to understand what's going on in other people's experience. And that I think is, it's part of being an effective participant in social life. It's part of being someone who reasons well practically about his or her choices. And I think we obviously see that whether we're talking about marketing and trying to understand what the customer needs and wants, whether we're talking about management, and figuring out how to communicate with and motivate people. It's perhaps even, to some degree, going to show up in contexts like accounting. Which I'm trying to figure out how to understand kind of why an accounting error has occurred in several.

So I think that's another aspect of what's important. It might be a kind of part of practical reasonableness, but this imaginative grasp of what's going on in other people's lives. Beyond that, I want to say there are so many ways in which I can live the adventure as I suggest in the book. So many ways in which a life can go well in business. Now there are many ways in which life would go wrong as well, but I'm delighted by the fact that there's so much potential variety out there for good lives in the business world and in general [inaudible 00:13:51].

Anthony Comegna: [13:54](#)

Have you encountered people throughout business schools or the business world, who maybe hear this or would hear it and say, "Oh, that's all great thinking about the good life and what kind of reasoner you are and stuff like that. But our job is to produce and to produce stuff that people want; whether it's good for them or not," and that kind of thing. And that maybe all of this philosophizing is just, as we hear all the time, an exercise in naval gazing that kind of gets in the way of just raw productivity and efficiency.

Gary Chartier: [14:31](#)

Well, I think it's certainly the case that on a day to day basis, most people probably don't find their time and energy best spent in reflecting on who they are, and what they're doing. People have lives to get on with, and they've got things to do to make those lives happen. But I also think that if you don't stop occasionally and reflect critically and thoughtfully on what it is

that you're doing and who you are, it's not, of course, that you're somehow going to avoid grappling with the issues, you're just not going to grapple with the issues in a consistent and sensible way. You're simply going to operate out of habit or out of response to immediate social pressure, or out of being a response to some inherited propensity to do this or that.

And so it seems to me that you can, of course, just ignore all of that. You can say, "I'm just fine with a life in which I just operate out of habit and response to social pressure, and whatever kind of dispositions I may find myself to have inherited."

It's hard for me to imagine that really stopping and chewing over what that involves would lead most people to be very satisfied with that. I mean, I think there are real reasons to question that. Obviously you're not going to question that if you're not willing to do a little philosophy in the first place. And I'm not urging everybody to run out and become a philosopher. But I think that being as it were, philosophically inclined, at least some of the time, enables people to live lives that they would want for themselves and that they would want for the people they care about, given the opportunity to reflect.

I'm not going to brow beat people into thinking about questions they don't want to think about, but I also think that in our workplaces and in the societies, in which those workplaces find themselves rooted, we run into problems of all kinds. And it seems to me that somebody who wants not just to stumble blindly through life, might notice those problems and might think, "In my own life and in the life in my organization, the life in my society, I want to do something about that. I might want to avoid it."

Trying to argue someone into concern with a good life, isn't something I'm going to accomplish in the course of a few pages in a book. I think that there are genuinely important things to say about when lives flourish and when they don't. And there is, I think something, I think somebody's probably ultimately making an important blunder by saying, "I'm not interested in, I don't care about that," but I'm not going to solve that problem by throwing a paragraph or two of philosophy at that person. But I'll hope that when that person looks at her own life and the life of the people she engages with, that she might at least sometimes think, "Things could go better, and I wonder how." And at that point then there's room for conversation.

Anthony Comegna: [18:10](#) Now, it also seems like part of the richness of the book and the lecture, is that this is more or less like a primer on radical, classical, liberal ethics too; kind of smuggled into a business ethics book almost.

Gary Chartier: [18:27](#) You're right.

Anthony Comegna: [18:29](#) I mean, you were talking about things like the ethics of evading all sorts of state controls and sidestepping sanctions, for example, and how that is often the ethical thing for a business to do. Could you talk a bit about some of the more radical elements of classical liberal ethics that you put in the book here?

Gary Chartier: [18:51](#) Yeah, absolutely. So, I think that when we stop and reflect on human life in society, human life with other people in relation to social institutions and social practices, it's very easy to see that we are social creatures. There's a kind of, I think generally uninformed criticism of the liberal tradition that suggests that liberals and especially radical liberals and libertarians, think of humans as atomic individuals. And I think that's just false. As my dear friend, Sheldon Richmond likes to say, "We're molecular individuals. We're necessarily caught up in relationships of all kinds."

And so when people hear that we are social creatures, one really unfortunate result is that they often think that that means somehow that we are necessarily participants, not just in social life, but in the life of societies dominated by states. Somehow being a social creature means being the subject of the state. The only kind of society I think many people can imagine as a society that's ruled by states.

I'm going to anarchist and I try to suggest very briskly and quickly in this book, some reasons why states really should not be seen as having the authority to create any duties for us, and why it's unhelpful and worse, often destructive, for states to try, quite apart from the question of creating duties for us, just to exercise force over our lives and to manage us.

And so given the fact that states are, I suggest, illegitimate, unnecessary and dangerous, businesses, which function happily as participants in social life, might nonetheless find themselves rightly critical of things that states do to try to constrain of voluntary social interaction.

And so one of the more, I think, radical things I try to do in the book, is to point out at the beginning, why states really aren't legitimate, can't create duties for us, and therefore shouldn't be taken terribly seriously. Now, of course, they should be taken seriously in the same way that we take the mafia seriously, if we're living in a mafia dominated environment, right? We certainly don't want to ignore the fact that people with guns can arrive and take protection money from us. But that's different from supposing that we should welcome them and treat what they do as legitimate and valuable.

And so what I try to suggest early on, is that indeed states lack this ability to impose duties on us. And that business people shouldn't proceed as if they do. You'll often find business ethics books that devote a surprising amount of time to the law and treating the law as a backdrop to what's going on, and I think that's just a mistake.

So therefore, I find myself talking about, let's say immigration, for instance. I think there are profoundly important reasons why we want open immigration. Open immigration benefits the immigrants, it benefits the societies they join, it benefits the societies they've left in a couple of different ways. Both because they can provide the resources to those societies through remittances, and also because the ability to leave then puts pressure on those societies to improve their institutions.

So for all of those reasons, I think open immigration is hugely important. We find that states frequently seek to restrict immigration, retard immigration, for reasons that don't recognize the economic reality of the tremendous benefits yielded by immigration, that don't recognize the importance of personal autonomy on the part of both the immigrants and the people who wish, let's say to employ them or otherwise transact with them. And so, these restraints on immigration that states seek to impose, are deeply problematic, deeply unjust. And I suggest therefore in the book, that it's a good thing for firms to try to evade them.

I live in a setting in which I frequently see firms displaying signs advertising that they employ the E-Verify system that the federal government has deployed. And I think what you might, well, in some particular case, have no choice but to participate in E-Verify; maybe you're going to get fined to whatever. That's fine. I'm not suggesting that you need to go out and be heroic, but why advertise? Why imply that you're voluntarily enthusiastically participating in an attempt to regulate people's

employment opportunities rather than seeking the best workers for you, quite a part from their possession of the right kind of permission from states?

And so, I think that firms certainly should be aware of potential legal consequences, and I'm not at all urging them to get themselves fined and so forth. But I also think that the ability to evade evil rules, like ones limiting employment based on passport status. I think that's certainly virtuous and certainly something firms should think about. Just like, let's say an apartheid era, South Africa, firms that evaded legal rules constraining who they could employ on racial grounds, where it seems to be doing something important and valuable. They were doing something that was undoubtedly beneficial to them and to their customers, but they were also doing something that had, I think, a broader moral impact that was worth celebrating. So that's the kind of radical liberal stance that I'd like to encourage in the book.

Anthony Comegna: [24:50](#)

And it also sounds like your discussion goes a bit beyond what we would consider the standard realm of even a radical classical liberal ethic. One of the more interesting things you mentioned in the lecture to me, was the ethical treatment of animals. Though I haven't made the leap to vegetarianism or veganism, and I don't know if I will, this is a really, really sticky issue for me, because I think it's just undeniable. I mean, we make entire industries central to our lives, all about torturing animals in really horrible ways.

And I wonder, let's assume that there is an ethical problem with the way our businesses treat animals and the way our consumers then consume them. Assuming there is that problem, how do we fix that?

Gary Chartier: [25:41](#)

So obviously, ultimately, it's a cultural issue, right? That is, there are deep seated attitudes that are widely shared. I think there's a kind of error that I think you often see on the part of, well people, from a variety of places along the ideological spectrum, who think, "We're going to fix the problem if we just get the right kind of legislation."

But the fact is, without a real cultural shift, where nonhuman animals are concerned, legislation, first of all, isn't going to get passed, and second, isn't going to be adhered to, right? Even if you think so, I'm an anarchist, I don't want states doing anything while there are states, they do things to prevent robbery and murder. And in the same way, they do things sometimes to deal

with concerns about animals. We can talk what from an anarchist perspective, would be appropriate there, and I devote a pretty substantial discussion, a portion of anarchy legal order to discussing what I think an anarchist society might do.

But in any case, you've got to have a cultural shift, a shift in attitudes that recognizes that there is something morally important about the lives of creatures other than humans. And again, what that looks like in practical terms, we can spend a lot of time arguing about it. And I offer just a brief treatment of this in the book, without any illusions that I've somehow covered all the bases.

But I think the most important thing, first of all, is just the recognition that at least some interestingly important subset of nonhuman animals. Whatever again, I mean, I think we don't want to suppose that whales and amoeba you're in the same moral category. But let's say for instance, whatever else you think, start out with elephants and whales and apes. Which are all, I think clearly highly intelligent animals. I think we really have no idea how intelligent the whales are, because we can't interact with them enough to really know. But certainly with the [inaudible 00:28:08] for instance, has a brain about seven times the size of mine, which may not amount to much, but in any case.

So I think that, start out with some important subset of creatures like that and ask, "What would it mean to treat them in a way that seems to be appropriate, given the characteristics that they have?" Characteristics such that when we exhibit them, we seem to certainly think warrant treating us in particular ways.

But yeah, there's a longterm cultural shift that really has to take place to reshape, I think the attitudes that people have toward creatures, who because they look different from us, we sometimes find it easy to dismiss.

Anthony Comegna: [28:50](#)

Is there any sense in which, I mean, given that you're a professor in this field, that you are a writer in this field, you're writing for people who are going into business, is there any sense in which businesses should try to take the lead? Or is that too risky because consumers haven't shifted their own cultural attitudes yet? I'm wondering, is there a case to be made that the business community has a stronger set of imperatives here than even consumers might?

Gary Chartier:

[29:21](#)

Oh, absolutely. I mean, I think the individual consumer's ability to impact the market here is nil. Individual businesses really can impact the market, and really can I think, affect the way real creatures are treated on a day to day basis. And I mean, I think it's been really striking to see how much the culture has shifted and how much businesses have responded to the shift. Not just in our lifetime, Anthony, but I would say just in the last 10 years, the shift has really been kind of remarkable. If you think about the extent to which, say vegetarian and vegan restaurants have proliferated and alternatives, let's say in the area of what would in the past had been leather goods have proliferated and so forth. Businesses are in fact stepping up and doing things that respond to the cultural shifts.

And I think of course, by responding, they help to lead the cultural shifts, by providing alternatives that people can notice and think through, right? It's a matter of saying, "Oh, I couldn't do that. There's really no realistic alternative." Well, actually there is, and businesses are providing those alternatives. And, "Oh, a business actually went to the trouble to provide that alternative. Why would I care? Oh, well, that's interesting. Let me think about that." So yeah, I think that businesses are already doing this and of course they can do more.

And in the book, I try to argue a bit for that and talk about ways in which I think it's not just a matter of doing what I just talked about; providing products that respond to and lead the cultural shift, but also at the same time, I think declining opportunities to contribute to serious mistreatment of nonhuman animals. And I guess I'm inclined to say, I mean, I hesitate to be the guy who stands atop Mount Sinai or Mount Olympus and makes wild, moral pronouncements, but I guess I would say, if you're operating a slaughterhouse, figuring out how to get out of that business.

So yeah, I think there are things that the businesses absolutely are doing already and things they can do to, as you say, kind of lead the shift.

Anthony Comegna:

[31:54](#)

Professor Gary Chartier is the distinguished Professor of Law and Business Ethics, as well as the Associate Dean of the Tom and Vi Zapara School of Business at La Sierra University. And after you first buy this amazing treatment of business ethics, why not check out a copy of his other recent book; co-edited with Chad Van Schoelandt, *The Routledge Handbook of Anarchy and Anarchist Thought*.

Our greatest thanks to Professor Chartier, both for his lecture and his time here on the show, and our best of wishes to him. Gary is certainly someone who always keeps the progress coming.