

# **Ethics, Meaning, and Market Society**

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## **Preface**

Hungarian writer Peter Muller once recalled something that his father, who had been a butcher in the 1930s in Budapest, had told him: “I was always honest in doing business, I never cheated my customers.” Behaving unethically in business was simply unthinkable. Honesty was hard-wired into his identity.

Today, being able to find this kind of uncompromising ethical behavior in business or other spheres of social life is almost unimaginable. This book discusses the new phenomena of globalization, privatization and financialization as the changing conditions of late modernity/contemporary capitalism and explores the underlying reasons for the pervasive dominance of ‘unethics’ in our contemporary affairs in business and society.

By ‘*unethics*’ I refer to a state of affairs in which actors tend to eliminate or minimize any kind of ethical considerations from their decisions, activities, or policies. I argue that unethics is related to market overreach and the dominance of market values in all areas of social life and human activity. A correlate of this development is the emergence of an extremely individualistic, materialistic and narcissistic mindset that dictates the decisions and behavior of people and organizations.

The result is an increase in social inequality, welfare malaise, and moral transgressions on the one hand, and the drastic degradation of the biosphere (climate change, biodiversity loss, and the collapse of ecosystems) on the other. The book discusses these topics in a holistic, multidimensional way.

I argue that *art* can help us to overcome the dominant market metaphysics of our age. Genuine art creates models of ‘poetic dwelling’ which can generate non-linear, progressive change and open up the playing field for ethics. English poet *Percy Shelly* once said that the great secret of moral conduct is “the identification of ourselves with the beautiful which exists in thought, action or person, not our own.”

Aesthetics and ethics go hand in hand. Acting ethically is not just right for its own sake, but makes the world a richer, more livable, and more beautiful place.