Chapter 14 – Business and Medical Ethics

General Overview
As with the last chapter rights and obligations are explored but this time in relation to business and the media. The basic dispute with respect to business is whether making profits is the only obligation it has or whether it has other obligations to the consumer, the employee, the environment, etc. Business might, for example, be obligated to make positions available to certain groups because they have been discriminated against. In media ethics the topic of advertising is problematic since pressure to sell the product might offend against truth, responsibility and other values. The basic moral issue in journalism often boils down to a contest between the ‘public’s right to know’ and the ‘individual right to privacy’.

Class Suggestions
There are a number of good recent cases that fit into the ambit of this chapter, including Enron, the recent Supreme Court decision regarding affirmative action and the University of Michigan and numerous high profile cases involving the media (particularly the ones mentioned in the textbook). I recommend that instructors use these to bring out and focus on the main concepts and questions. A mini research project on affirmative action at their own college might be illuminating. Many students will already have work experience, so drawing on that could also prove to be a very useful source of data for moral examination.
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**Key Concepts:** Rights, Obligations, Business, Justice, Truth Telling, Honesty, Affirmative Action, Reverse Discrimination, Sexual Harassment, Right to Know, Right to Privacy

**Key Questions:**
1. Do businesses have any obligations other than profits? Use examples in your answer to critically evaluate this question.
2. Is it immoral for a company to exaggerate or even ‘stretch the truth’ in their advertising if jobs are at stake? Discuss the moral principles involved here and try to justify your position.
3. Is affirmative action morally justifiable?
4. If one person takes offense at a titillating office email does that constitute sexual harassment or someone being overly sensitive? Discuss the moral concerns that relate to this issue.
5. When Princess Diana died, were journalists pursuing a story that the public had a ‘right to know’?

**Chapter Summary**

**Rights and obligations in business**
Both general and specific rights and obligations are involved in business, e.g., right to pursue opportunities for employment as well as right to fairness, honesty and truth in business dealings.

**Two ways of approaching rights and obligations in business**
1. Competitive approach – ‘Dog eat dog’ or ‘free enterprise’ winner makes biggest profits, losers go out of business
2. Government control – State ownership of business enterprises
3. Moderate position – Free enterprise with some government controls, as system of checks and balances to overcome the excesses of the other approaches

**Justice, truth telling and honesty in business**

**Justice**
Three types in business:
1. Exchange justice
2. Distributive justice
3. Social justice

**Honesty and truth telling**
Honesty and truth telling important in a range of activities especially advertising and safety

**Ethical issues in business**

**Advertising**
Two main approaches:
1. Anything goes approach
2. The truthful approach

**Business and the environment**
Three positions:
1. Primacy of business – Business gives consumers what they want. This is their only responsibility.
2. Primacy of environment – Businesses must take responsibility for their part in maintaining the environment or putting right any damage it causes.
3. Moderate position – All to blame, not just business. Must work together to safeguard environment.

**Affirmative action and reverse discrimination**

**Argument for discrimination**
1. Business practices are the employer’s own affairs.
2. Business should not be singled out to make amends for practices that occurred everywhere.
3. Businesses should not be prevented from hiring the employees they prefer.

**Argument against**
1. Discrimination in employment one of the worst kinds of discrimination since its effects are so far reaching
2. Owed recompenses for actions committed against them
3. Affirmative action will right the wrongs of the past

**Moderate position**
1. Affirmative action should be implemented but not by hiring less qualified workers

**Sexual harassment**
Unwanted, sexual advances, or unwanted visual, verbal or physical conducts of a sexual nature.

**Arguments that sexual harassment is not immoral**
1. Enlivening the workplace
2. Women and men are naturally sexually attracted to one another
3. Positions of power imply certain rights
4. Often those being harassed ask for or cause sexual harassment

**Arguments that sexual harassment is immoral**
1. Unfairness of treatment
2. Creation of a hostile or offensive working environment
3. Positions of authority do not imply power over personal lives
4. Attraction does not imply involvement
5. Harassed often ‘ask for it’ is false.

**Media ethics**

*Journalism’s ideal*

The ‘pursuit of truth.’ Does the pursuit of the ideal legitimate any method of acquiring information? Is lying to get the truth acceptable?

*Public right to know versus individual right to privacy*

Perhaps the most significant moral problem. Test problem in relation to examples, e.g., Princess Diana, President Clinton, etc. Where should the lines be drawn?

**Corporate greed - Enron**
1. Lied about profits
2. Conflict of interest with auditors (Arthur Anderson)
3. AA’s shredding of evidence

How to prevent this from happening again?

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