

Bad Teacher? Using Films as Texts When Teaching Business Ethics: Exploring the Issues

Josie Fisher¹, Bligh Grant² & Denise Palmer¹

¹ UNE Business School, University of New England, Armidale, Australia

² Centre for Local Government, University of Technology Sydney, Australia

Correspondence: Bligh Grant, Centre for Local Government, University of Technology, PO Box 123 Broadway NSW 2007, Australia. Tel: 61-2-9514-4901. E-mail: Bligh.Grant@uts.edu.au

Received: May 6, 2015

Accepted: May 28, 2015

Online Published: July 22, 2015

doi:10.5539/ijbm.v10n8p14

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.5539/ijbm.v10n8p14>

Abstract

The contemporary teaching of business ethics necessarily involves the recognition that texts, materials and modes of assessment ought to be rendered appealing to students, while at the same time ensuring the quality of teaching. Prima facie the use of film can be seen as a way to address this dilemma: Students may be attracted to the ‘delivery’ of course content through the medium of film as opposed to, for example, standard lecture format, participation in online activities or, at a stretch, reading and writing. An alternative scenario can also be envisioned where the use of film in teaching business ethics is bad professional practice, pandering to both the requirement for positive assessments from students and for technological change. This paper discusses these issues by critically examining the films recommended by a contemporary business ethics text, Crane and Matten (2010). We identify significant problems with the use of two films, *The Corporation* (2005) and *Michael Clayton* (2007). Against our own criticisms of these two texts, the paper then focuses upon Ken Loach’s (2007) film *It’s a Free World*, arguing that it is a useful text for the illustration of what students, more often than not, regard as the clichéd issue of unskilled foreign wage labourers being exploited in ‘advanced’ western economies. Despite the considerable virtues of Loach’s particular text, we argue that any recourse to film as an alternative method of examining a range of issues in business ethics has to be treated with caution.

Keywords: business ethics teaching, film, MOOCs

1. Introduction

In its recent discussion paper ‘More than MOOCs: Opportunities arising from disruptive technologies in education’, the Australian Trade Commission (ATC) (2013) provided a broad analysis of the changing environment of higher education. This analysis can be distilled into three observations. First, on the one hand the Commission noted that while ‘many OECD countries are concerned about the rising costs of education’, on the other hand it noted that ‘there is an inherent conflict between increasing access [and] maintaining or enhancing quality whilst keeping costs down’. Stated differently, the ATC identified opposing arguments in public policy that currently influence developments in higher education. Second, the ATC (2013, p. 1) observed that ‘technology-based products and models, with the potential to cost-effectively scale education whilst also enhancing student outcomes, may offer the solutions to some of the current challenges’. The ATC (2013, p. 1) also noted that in 2012 several prominent academics based in the United States had vacated tenured positions at Stanford University to found companies delivering Massively Open Online Courses (MOOCs). These developments, which prompted the *New York Times* to label 2012 the ‘Year of the MOOCs’ (ATC 2013, p. 1) we can label transformative of the higher education environment. Third, the ATC (2013, p. 1) observed that ‘beyond developments in providing free, online courses, institutions and companies are innovating around open educational resources, assessment practices, credentialing, research, and teaching and learning’, thereby ‘signal[ing] an appetite for, and a market shift towards, experimentation with new models of online education delivery’. We choose to label this third trend as the constant demand for innovation in Australian higher education. The atmosphere represented is one of imminent, radical change.

However, despite the considerable excitement surrounding these changes evidenced in the ATC’s Discussion Paper as well as elsewhere (see, for example, UNE, 2013) a moment’s reflection suggests that two of the trends identified by the ATC (2013) are quite mundane. The problem of ‘enhancing quality while keeping costs down’

reflects a problem common to all areas of public policy, namely that of equitable service provision balanced against the cost of those services. Similarly, from the perspective of people who have been involved in the delivery of higher education over the last 10 years, the constant demand for innovation, while (arguably) being heightened by the arrival of MOOCs, is hardly revelatory within what is now a firmly established online education context. On the contrary, what the ATC (2013) paper only implicitly recognised is the closer embrace of a market model for higher education services. This embrace is no longer confined to ensuring that students have choice of who their higher education provider is. The qualitative assessment of higher education based upon quantitative indicators of student satisfaction is the ‘pointy end of the stick’ of this market model. In the experience of the authors of this paper (and we will assert rather than seek to argue this point in any formal sense) these markers of student satisfaction are deployed strategically (for the purposes of promotion, for example) as well as being used, ideally, as one element to a suite of qualitative assessments of higher education teaching. More concerning is the recent development in the institution where the authors work of the introduction of quantitative criteria measuring the extent of online ‘innovation’ as necessarily a good thing. In other words, the technology ‘tail’ is increasingly being positioned alongside the course-content ‘dog’, quickening the drive to change (though not necessarily reform) derived from student evaluations.

Caught as they are between the delivery of a quality education product on the one hand and providing subjectively assessed entertainment for their students on the other, lecturers are consistently searching for ‘innovative’ ways to satisfy these competing demands. *Prima facie*, a promising avenue of ‘teaching as entertainment’ can be found in prescribing films for students to view, critically reflect upon and discuss.

Studies on the use of feature films as an education tool recognise the potential for films in stimulating classroom discussion and fostering critical thinking (O’Boyle & Sandonà, 2014; Pilant, 2010; Berger & Pratt, 1998; Proctor & Adler, 1991). For example, Berger and Pratt (1998) used two films by award-winning David Mamet, *Glengarry Glen Ross* (1992) and *House of Games* (1987) to expose undergraduate students to ethical problems and challenges in business. The authors concluded that the two films helped students to better prepare for the challenges of business ethics, and serve to ‘make ethical inquiry less abstract’ (p. 1822). Pilant (2010) uses successful feature films to change his students’ way of thinking about ethics, and states emphatically: ‘[A] great film captivates... film is not a logical medium’.

Further, O’Boyle and Sandonà (2013) argued that instead of written case studies, the use of feature films allows students the opportunity to develop the critical skills required to create ‘defensible moral judgements in marketplace and workplace situations’ (p. 331). They authors found that in a culture rich with electronic media,, the use feature films to teach business ethics has advantages over the use of written case studies alone.

The medium of film would appear to have several intrinsic advantages. First, it comes as a pre-made product. Second, there is no shortage of material, in both documentary and drama form. Third, the medium of film offers degrees of complexity when seeking to explore empirical and normative issues. For example, it can be profoundly richer than providing stylised scenarios through which to consider complex normative questions. Fourth, viewing films is an activity that students—hopefully—consider an entertainment activity, rather than ‘work’. Finally, and perhaps most importantly, watching movies avoids that seemingly most distasteful and anachronistic element of learning, reading books. Alternatively, would the extensive use of film as text encourage indolence on the part of those of us whose responsibility it is to teach business ethics—to be ‘bad teachers’ in the way that Cameron Diaz’s character is in the film of the same name (Colombia Pictures 2011)—walking in to class, slapping on a DVD and falling asleep?

2. Method

In order to explore these issues this paper examines a selection of films recommended by the text currently being used by the authors, Andrew Crane and Dirk Matten’s *Business Ethics* (2010). The paper is divided into four main parts. Initially we provide an account of how the text seeks to deploy film as an element in elucidating various components of business ethics. We then critically examine two of the recommended films, *The Corporation* (Big Picture Media Corporation, 2005) and *Michael Clayton* (Castle Rock/Section Eight 2007) arguing that for reasons associated with each individual text, neither are suitable for teaching the component of business ethics designated to them by Crane and Matten (2010). The paper then focuses upon a more promising example, Ken Loach’s *It’s a Free World* (Sixteen Films, 2007) arguing that this particular text is suitable. Our overall conclusions suggest that the medium of film is no universal panacea in serving the twin masters of quality teaching on the one hand and ‘education as entertainment’ on the other.

3. Discussion

3.1 'Ethics on Screen': Crane and Matten (2010)

The text that the authors use as the basis for teaching both undergraduate and graduate courses in business ethics recommends no less than 11 films as texts as supplementary material to the text. For the sake of brevity, these can be presented in tabular form alongside a synoptic account of the material Crane and Matten (2010) deem them useful for.

Table 1. 'Ethics on Screen' and associated textbook material (Crane & Matten, 2010)

Film	Associated Teaching Material
<i>Blood Diamond</i> (Warner Bros 2006). Government-business-criminal relations surrounding the illegal diamond trade.	'Introducing Business Ethics' (Ethics, morality and law; globalisation; sustainability)
<i>The Corporation</i> (Big Picture Media Corporation 2005). Documentary; Canadian critique of nature and operations of corporations and government.	Framing Business Ethics' (The corporation; stakeholder theory; CSR)
<i>It's a Free World</i> (Sixteen Films 2007). Ken Loach-directed British realist film about migrant workers in London.	Evaluating Business Ethics (Ethical theory)
<i>Michael Clayton</i> (Castle Rock/Section Eight 2007). Story of corporate amorality and personal failings set in case against U.S. Agrichemical company.	Making Decisions in Business Ethics (ethical decision-making and theories thereof)
<i>Wal-Mart: The High Cost of Low Price</i> (Brave New Films 2005). Documentary; effect of capital concentration on stakeholders of world's largest supermarket chain.	Managing Business Ethics (implementing business ethics, e.g.: codes of conduct, managing stakeholder relations)
<i>Wall Street</i> (20 th Century Fox 1987). Iconic 1980's film depicting traders and their firms as venal.	'Shareholders and Business Ethics'
<i>Picture Me</i> (Ole Shell 2010). Memoir of New York model's time spent in high global fashion industry.	'Employees and Business Ethics'
<i>Orgasm, Inc.</i> (Liz Canner 2007). Documentary; Medicalisation of women's sex at the hands of 'Big Pharma'.	'Consumers and Business Ethics'
<i>Black Gold</i> (Speak-It Films 2006). Documentary; scathing account of exploitation involved in global coffee industry.	'Suppliers, Competitors and Business Ethics'
<i>Battle in Seattle</i> (Hyde Park International 2007). Fictional examination of different perspectives of Seattle during 1999 WHO round.	'Civil Society and Business Ethics'
<i>The Constant Gardner</i> (Focus Features 2005). Pharmaceutical company's testing of experimental HIV drug in Kenyan slums intertwined with clichéd interpersonal story.	'Government, Regulation and Business Ethics'

Examining Table 1, the content of the films is relatively self-explanatory, either due to their mainstream 'Hollywood' status (*Wall Street*, 1987; Starring Michael Douglas; *Blood Diamond*, 2006, Starring Leonardo DiCaprio; *Michael Clayton*, 2007; Starring George Clooney & Tilda Swinton, for example) or their status as iconic oppositional films (*The Corporation*; *Wal-Mart: The High Cost of Low Price*, for example). Arguably, only two, *Picture Me*, a memoir of a New York-based international fashion model, and *Orgasm, Inc.*, an account of the medicalisation of women's orgasm by the pharmaceutical industry, are obscure. Crane and Matten (2010) appear to have chosen films that were already in the public arena (if not psyche) as additional texts in elucidating specific subject areas in the text. All of the films in Table 1 were viewed by the authors for the purposes of this discussion. We now address the question of to what extent they are useful in teaching business ethics by examining three films in particular.

3.2 *The Corporation*

This famous film by Mark Achbar, Jennifer Abbott and Joel Bakan, produced by Big Picture Media Corporation (2005) is currently distributed as a two disc set, comprising the original film and a second disc consisting of 'over five hours of additional footage of *The Corporation's* 40 interviewees, searchable by topic and subject'—taken together, a considerable text. The jacket of the product lists several high-profile reviews, which describe it as 'visually arresting and very funny' (*Weekly*), 'one of the must-see documentaries of the new century' (*Seattle Times*), and 'a fast moving collage; an ironic surreal visual riff', (*Wall Street Journal*). The film spruiks itself thus: 'starring 7 CEOs, 3 VIPs, 2 Whistleblowers, 1 Broker, 1 Spy and 1 really big mess'; 'with

Michael Moore, Noam Chomsky, Naomi Klein and Milton Friedman as themselves’.

Beyond its self-promotion (inclusive of the iconic motif of a businessman with a briefcase, an angel’s halo and a devil’s tail) at two hours 21 minutes the film is lengthy by any standards. Nevertheless, it is divided into 24 chapters (including credits) that make it more amenable to discussion. Table 2 comprises a list of these chapters, a brief description of each, and a grouping and labelling of them (a taxonomy) such that they can be efficiently examined.

Table 2. The corporation

Chapter	Description
Definitions	
1. What is a corporation?	As a privately owned collective entity with limited liability
2. Birth	Initially in Europe as single purpose, collective financial instruments; then in the U.S. corporations’ use of the 14 th amendment to achieve legal status equal to that of a person ¹
3. A legal ‘person’	Chomsky: ‘Special kinds of person (i.e.: no moral conscience)
4. Externalities	A definition and assessment thereof (provided by Milton Friedman) ²
Sociology	
5. Case histories	Corporations behaving badly (e.g.: Monsanto)
6. The pathology of commerce	Corporations’ ‘personality traits analogous with that of a psychopath’
7. Monstrous obligation	Chomsky: Distinguishes between institutional and individual morality
8. Mindset	Depiction of amorality in the account of Marc Barry, corporate spy and co-author of <i>Spooked: Espionage in Corporate America</i> (2001)
9. Trading on 9/11	Interview with a trader recounting watching the price of gold before and during the 2001 Iraq war
10. Boundary issues	Account of the Enclosure Acts and contemporary privatisation as analogous
Critical discussion of marketing	
11. Basic training	Advertising to children (the ‘nag’); the ontology of continual dissatisfaction
12. Perception management	Brand management
13. Like a good neighbour	Brand management
14. A private celebration	Depicts Disney Town; Naomi Klein (NOLOGO): ‘The dissemination of the <i>idea</i> of themselves is the act of production’.
15. Triumph of the shill	Undercover marketing
16. Advancing the front	Patenting living organisms (‘You can patent anything you like, except a full-birth human being’ (U.S. Patent Office); race to the genome (familiar)
Corporate power and state authority	
17. Unsettling accounts	Narrative of journalists Steve Wilson and Jane Akre’s travails with Fox 13 over their story on Monsanto, milk and BGH).
18. Expansion plan	Imperialism: Recounts story of Bechtel’s control of Bolivian water supply
19. Taking the right side	Connection of corporations with fascism (IBM; Coke-a-Cola with the Third Reich)
20. Hostile takeover	Account of U.S. corporations’ (J. P. Morgan; DuPont; Goodyear) connections with far-right political movement.
Accounts of the future	
21. Democracy LTD.	Iva Jackson, author of <i>Profits with Principles</i> advocates the market and self-regulation; ‘Corporation of Choice’ idea
22. Psycho therapies	Return to the Bolivian story and the eventual triumph of the people. Elaine Bernard, Trade Union Program, Harvard University, stating: ‘Ultimately, capital puts its foot down somewhere, and anywhere it puts its foot down it can be held accountable’
23. Prognosis	Details of Cochabamba’s victory in Bolivia; Mr Anderson ‘Climbing Mt Sustainability’.

Examining Table 2, one of the film’s *prima facie* merits would appear to be its comprehensive nature. For

example, it seeks to move from questions of definition, history and the account of externalities through to portraits of particular corporations as necessarily amoral (Chomsky) yet sinister (Monsanto receives particular attention). A depiction of marketing and branding is also presented, including a depiction of 'real-time' product placement. Further, the account of corporations as vehicles of imperialism and fascism, both historically (IBM, Coke-a-Cola and the Third Reich, for example) and contemporaneously (Bechtel's monopoly control of the Bolivian water supply under the guidance of the World Bank) are detailed and arresting.

Importantly, *The Corporation* is not confined to critique. There are three narratives of the possibility of positive change, or reform, which can be identified. The most consistent of these is the effectiveness of protest against multinational corporations. The examples range from the work of the Office of National Labor Committee, NYC in El Salvador and against GAP Corporation, through to the account of the Bolivian popular movement's (Cochabamba) victory over the monopoly-privatisation of potable water. A narrative is reiterated that protest against the excesses of corporate power can achieve inroads into the systemic, amoral system the remainder of the film exposes.

The second positive narrative is that of the virtuous corporation. Iva Jackson of Harvard University Business School and author of *Profits with Principles* are interviewed, advocating the market and self-regulation as mechanisms to affect positive reform to business; the 'Corporation of Choice' ideal is canvassed, alongside the virtuous CEO, exemplified by Mr. Raymond L. Anderson, head of the largest carpet manufacturer globally. He describes his personal and corporate mission as 'climbing the summit of [environmental] sustainability', aiming to have his corporation sustainable by 2020.

The third narrative for positive reform is the *laissez faire* story of a 'positive-sum game', explained in terms of the differential wage rates of the developing, compared to the developed world. This task falls to Michael Walzer from the Frazer Institute (billed as 'a market solutions think tank') approximately 20 minutes into the film; it does not reappear.

However, whereas business ethics textbooks put their ideological shoulders behind the promise of the positive-sum game of classical and neo-classical economics, alongside a commensurate process of democratisation (for an account of this phenomenon, see Fisher & Grant, 2012, pp. 86-88), *The Corporation* places its faith in the demonization of the corporate form and the possibility of change through protest. Some of the rhetoric of the film is instructive in this regard. From Chapter 1 'What is a corporation?':

Corporations are artificial creations... you might say that they are monsters attempting to devour as much profit as possible at anyone's expense'

Similarly, from Chapter 19 'Taking the right side':

Transnational corporations have a long and dark history of condoning tyrannical governments... Is it narcissism that compels them to seek their reflection in the regimented structures of fascist regimes?

The accompanying narrative of protest as the mechanism for reform is captured in the following excerpts:

'Small battles are being won around the world, but I think people are losing. I do see the present and the future of our children as very dark. But I trust the people's capacity for reflection, rage and rebellion' (Bolivian activist)

'Fifteen corporations would like to control the conditions of our lives, and millions of people are saying 'not only do we not need you, not only can we do it better, we can create systems that nourish the earth, and nourish human beings – and these are not marginal experiments, they are the mainstay of large numbers of communities across the world. That is where the future lies' (Indian activist).

The question of what is misleading with the narrative assembled through these, and similar sound bites and accompanying imagery may not appear self-evident to an audience in North America. Yet from the perspective of these authors, the sociological account of the state, or government, as the legitimate site of political action is glaringly absent. Several points serve to illustrate this. First, the historical account of corporations provided by the film sees them initially form as a response to the requirement for large amounts of capital—albeit with liability accruing to the owners. This fails to take into account that the suggestions of many scholars that the first corporations were municipal-public-originating as early as the 15th century (Wickwar, 1970) and were charged with collective responsibility of public assets. This oversight is then reiterated throughout the film, where the state is presented as either an institution that is whimsically manipulated by private capital (the manipulation of the 14th amendment, for example); or alternatively, where it cooperates with corporations to pursue a 'fascist' program.

Further, the account of political economy provided is counter-factual to business students on at least four

grounds. First, these students have been presented with a weight of evidence to suggest that the positive-sum game of classical and neo-classical economics does have some validity. Even in its 'strong state' or mercantilist forms (which many argue is the model pursued by economies in Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia) corporations have played a role in delivering greater economic security and prosperity. Second, to posit the state as merely the instrument of corporations, regardless of the government that holds power, is inaccurate (see, for example, Fenna & Tapper, 2012). Third, many business students are preparing for careers in the core regulatory instruments of government (Treasury; the Productivity Commission, for example). To argue that power equates to corporations is again counterfactual. Finally, presenting material such as this as an element to a general portrait of business ethics may well compromise the integrity of the course content in the eyes of students.

3.3 Michael Clayton

The 2007 Oscar-nominated film *Michael Clayton* is included in the resources for Crane and Matten's (2010) chapter 'Making decisions in business ethics'. This chapter describes models of ethical decision-making together with the individual and situational factors that are said to impact on these decisions.

The movie is '[a] tale of greed, lies, and under-the-table violence-an exposé of what corporations do, and the way corporate law firms help them get away with it' (Gleiberman, 2007). It focuses on the actions of the main character, Michael Clayton (played by George Clooney), who is charged with 'fixing' a crisis created within his law firm. Arthur Edens is one of the law firm's most brilliant lawyers and a friend of Clayton. Edens is having a breakdown partly due to a crisis of conscience related to his defence of the agricultural conglomerate, U-North—the firm's largest client. Edens threatens to become a whistleblower when he discovers that U-North has buried evidence that their product has known health risks and may be the cause of hundreds of deaths, while at the same time becoming infatuated with a young woman from a farming family that has been affected by U-North's chemicals. Clayton is tasked with protecting the relationship the law firm has with U-North, which includes keeping Edens quiet.

The film illustrates the lengths to which people will go when faced with a crisis that builds and builds until, for two of the main characters, Edens and then later Clayton, an invisible line is crossed and they can no longer support U-North. Interestingly, these characters are associated with the law firm defending U-North. The U-North characters, although in possession of the same information, continue to deny responsibility for the deaths caused by their product. While U-North is willing to negotiate a settlement, this is justified by considerations of self-preservation rather than any a desire to act ethically, exemplified by U-North's corporate counsel, Karen Crowder, played by Tilda Swinton (a role for which she won the 2007 Academy Award for Best Supporting Actress).

The viewer is enticed to empathise with Clayton and judge his behaviour relative to the situation, including his personal foibles such as his perennial gambling habit. Nonetheless, Clayton becomes a hero when he finally makes public the information related to U-North for which Edens was murdered at the direction of U-North's Karen Crowder. The film vividly depicts the operational logic of an amoral corporation. It is also careful to avoid depicting archetypical 'good' and 'bad' characters: All roles of any import are portrayed as being ethically complex and contradictory.

At first blush it seems impossible to relate this complex film with the material presented in text. For example, Crane and Matten (2010, p. 143) present a flow-diagram, or model representing the stages involved in ethical decision-making. The claim is that a person acts ethically when they have recognised the moral issue, made a moral judgement, established moral intent and, based on this decision-making process, then engages in moral behaviour. This model claims to be able to take account the distinction between knowing what is ethical and acting ethically, as well as wanting to be ethical and knowing what this requires. However, the model provides no insight into the decisions or actions of the key characters in *Michael Clayton*; it is simply too rudimentary.

Attempting to analyse the film using this model provides an extreme example of the so-called theory-practice gap that both students and lecturers struggle with. Unless the theories and concepts of business ethics can be applied in fictional and actual workplaces, then what is the point of studying business ethics? That this is the case suggests that *Michael Clayton* may not be a good choice for illustrating material in this chapter.

However, in the same chapter Crane and Matten (p. 145) introduce two broad categories of influences on decision-making: individual and situational factors. Before going into detailed explanations of these factors a cautionary paragraph identifies the limitations of this (and all other) ethical decision-making models. It is conceded that it is not always easy or helpful to break down the elements of the model into the units identified, nonetheless, the text claims it is 'a relatively simple way to represent a complex process' (p. 147). Again, the complexity of the film raises questions about its usefulness. Asking students to critique the model with reference

to the film would be a valuable learning experience for students, yet probably not the one intended by Crane and Matten (2010).

The majority of the chapter (over 75 percent) is devoted to listing and describing the various individual and situational factors that can impact on ethical decision-making. One of the problems of lists such as these is that they are precisely that: Students are required to memorise and repeat them rather than investigating in any depth what are some of the most profound elements of the human condition (personal values; personal integrity; moral imagination, for example). However, if presented with a text as complex as Michael Clayton, it would be possible to ask students to what extent, if at all, they see these factors influencing the decision-making of characters in the film (for example: 'who do you think has more moral integrity? Michael Clayton or Karen Crowder?'). Again, we suspect that this is not what was intended when the movie was 'selected because it helps to bring to life some of the key issues discussed in the ... chapter' (Crane & Matten, 2010, p. 22).

Our conclusion is that Michael Clayton, a complex, sophisticated and contemporary film noir, is simply too complex to be used to illustrate the content of this chapter of the text. If it is to be used as a vehicle to encourage critical engagement with the content of the chapter, then it is of value but raises the question of what can be achieved in a specified teaching period.

3.4 It's a Free World

Ken Loach's 2007 film *It's a Free World* is set in London and focuses on working class girl Angie, a single mother who works as a recruiter of cheap labour from Eastern Europe. The film opens with Angie being sexually harassed by her employer. Rejecting his advances, she finds herself without a job and desperate for money. Angie and her friend Rosie form their own recruitment agency, placing immigrant and mostly illegal workers in casual jobs in factories and on construction sites.

Angie's business is not legal-she hasn't set up proper accounts nor is she paying tax. She repeatedly promises Rosie that all will be legitimate in a few months, once the business is more established. Meanwhile she uses her sexuality to convince dubious employers to use her company for their labour requirements, and encourages workers to use her agency, which operates from the courtyard of a local pub. Angie and Rosie also engage in relationships with two workers. There are more workers than jobs, and angry scenes result when Angie yells at workers to go home once all jobs for the day are filled, or when workers receive less pay than promised.

Underpinning the story is Angie's desire to make a better life for herself and her son, Jamie, and escape the working-class drudgery that her family hails from. Her father opposes workers being treated poorly and questions Angie putting herself and her son first, at the expense of the rest of world.

The despair of Britain's immigrant workforce is a common thread throughout the film, one worker claiming that Angie treats them like animals, after she can't pay their wages. Angie is bashed, a veiled threat to solicit her payment of the workers. The film reaches a dramatic peak after Angie reports the location of an illegal workers' camp to the authorities, so that it is vacant for the illegal Ukraine workers she plans to bring to London. Jamie is kidnapped, with the kidnapper calling Angie a liar after she denies her son's life is more important than the sons of immigrant workers who have been killed or injured in horrific workplace accidents in the kinds of jobs Angie's agency places workers in. Jamie is unharmed, after Angie promises to pay the wages she owes her workers.

The stark final scene depicts Angie and Rosie's visit to the Ukraine to recruit illegal workers who are to be issued student and tourist visas. After hearing that a Ukrainian woman is leaving her two children to work in the UK, Angie quickly looks away from the look of hope on the woman's face, as she takes her money and counts it slowly.

It's a Free World provides students with a rich selection of material to discuss the application of normative theories of ethics. Crane and Matten (2010, p. 129) describe *It's a Free World* as a good example of ethical decision-making in complex situations. For example, Angie and Rosie request two of their workers to come to their flat for sex. When the workers arrive, Rosie whispers to Angie that the 'wrong guy' has come over, but Angie dismisses her with 'F*ck it, he'll do'. Implied in the narrative is that if the workers don't comply, then they face unemployment.

Angie takes pity on a particular family of illegal Iranian immigrants, inviting them into her home and promising work for the father. Rosie believes helping one family is futile, and that 'there's thousands of them out there'. Various ethical theories can be considered by Rosie's comment and Angie's actions, namely egoism, utilitarianism, virtue ethics and theories of justice.

The movie's title stems from a tense exchange between Angie and Rosie, after Rosie suggests 'the decent thing

to do' is to pay their workers' wages with the money they've saved. Angie retorts that Rosie can pay the workers from her cut, as 'it's a free world' and she 'doesn't give a shit'.

Despite the film's potential, two areas of concern emerge: its geographic location and the supporting role of Rosie. Students studying in Australia and New Zealand may adopt an attitude of NIMBYism about the film as the plight of European immigrants in the UK and the social and economic changes of the Thatcher years have generally not been experienced in these countries. Students' detachment could result in universal agreement about the inevitability of immigrant workers' situation. Alternatively, Proctor and Adler (1991) and Stillman (2006) argue that films concerning ethics pitch students from what is familiar to them and transport them into radically different worlds which they might never have experienced, essentially exposing them to experiences beyond their own. Despite her flaws, Angie is generally likeable, and her interactions with best friend Rosie produce some complex ethical situations. However students could perceive Rosie as a character 'plant' to educate the audience of Angie's unethical behaviour, with her role as 'good cop' a sham—despite her multiple protests as Angie's dubious business practices, her continued role as her partner in crime reveals her endorsement of said practices and disregard of her partner's ethics. The film could have explored Rosie's hypocrisy further—her verbal disapproval of Angie's unethical behaviour does not validate her continued support of its practice.

Nevertheless, *It's a Free World* is a worthwhile text for the illustration of what students generally regard as the clichéd issue of unskilled foreign wage labourers being exploited in 'advanced' western economies. The narrative allows for solid discussion of the application of normative theories of ethics, in particular to the relationship between the lead characters, Angie and Rosie, and their unethical business practices, as well as Angie's transformation from victim to exploiter. As director Ken Loach stated in a 2007 interview:

We thought the best film to make would be one where you saw the logic of what the exploiters do. It isn't arbitrary and they aren't necessarily bad people. It's the logic of business.

A review in Melbourne's *The Age* newspaper (2008) succinctly states that the film 'perfectly captures the instant when greed overwhelms ethics'.

4. Conclusion

The first point to be made following our brief examination of the use of film as texts in teaching business ethics is that, yes, potential does exist for particular films to be of some use in solving the 'teaching as entertainment'/quality curriculum dilemma. Nevertheless, the selection of this material is a time consuming exercise and, arguably, one that is governed by the particular circumstances any individual lecturer finds him or herself in. For example, while Liz Canner's 2007 film *Orgasm Inc.* (recommended by Crane & Matten, 2010) is an excellent exposé of the manufacturing of need and the creation and manipulation of the market, discussing the epistemic nature of 'female orgasm' is by no means uncontroversial in a multicultural teaching space, whether it be online or otherwise. Careful 'screening' would need to be undertaken in order to avoid a 'bad teacher' scenario.

The second point is that not only are there transaction costs involved in incorporating film as text for teaching business ethics, as our economist colleagues—and students—will only too readily remind us, there are opportunity costs also: perhaps those of us charged with teaching business ethics ought to focus more on combining the age-old craft of reading and writing with students' firm place in a world where the visual image has an everlasting presence. Our concluding point is that further research might move beyond the critical examination of the use of films as an element of pedagogic practice to incorporate the perspectives of a range of educators and students about their experiences in engaging with film to understand business ethics. This would offer different perspectives to those presented here.

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