

Call for Submissions

Business Ethics Quarterly
Special Issue on:

Socio-Technological Conditions of Organized Immaturity in the Twenty-First Century

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Overview:

The purpose of this special issue is to collect and promote research that examines forms of organized immaturity in contemporary society. The phenomenon of organized immaturity is a manifestation of a human condition that results from the erosion of the autonomy of the individual and is advanced by socio-technological systems and their surveillance and control mechanisms. We seek conceptual, normative, or empirical studies that identify, analyze, and critique current technical and social sources of organized immaturity and develop solutions for resisting new forms of surveillance and control. In line with the disciplinary and thematic scope of BEQ, we invite authors to consider the role of (business) organizations and organizing in both control and emancipation of the individual in business and society, and to analyze possible ethical implications.

Justification:

We understand “immaturity” as a condition arising when an individual deliberately or implicitly defers or delegates his or her own independent reasoning to socio-technological systems or authorities. This phenomenon has been a matter of concern for philosophers, psychologists, and social theorists over decades (see Adorno, 1951/2005; Dewey, 1939; Fromm, 1941/1969; Habermas, 1970, 1984; Marcuse, 1964; Zuboff, 2019). The Enlightenment freed individuals from their “self-inflicted immaturity” (Kant, 1784: 481, own translation). Yet, the Enlightenment understood as a societal development and achievement is not irreversible (see Arendt, 1951; Horkheimer & Adorno, 1947/2002).

Rather, there are technical, social, and political conditions and developments that push in the opposite direction and discourage human beings from using “one’s reason without the guidance

of another” (Kant, 1784: 481, own translation). Whereas the resulting constellations are not necessarily planned and steered by a central authority, these developments may reinforce each other in their autonomy-eroding mechanisms and effects so that the overall impression is that of an orchestrated and collective phenomenon: the erosion of individual autonomy as a consequence of an “organized immaturity” that results from prevailing socio-technological conditions.

Today, many forms of such organized immaturity are possible when technologies advance, ideologies flourish, “influencers” gain prevalence, unethical businesses and practices spread, and autocracies rise while democratic systems and individual liberties are in decline, and every form impacts a person’s autonomy in their role as a citizen, consumer, worker, investor, entrepreneur, or even in everyday life (Bradshaw & Howard, 2018; de Jonquières, 2017; Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018; Taplin, 2017). Despite modernity’s efforts to promote liberty as a natural right of humans, modern society, assisted by technological revolutions (digitalization, internet of things, AI, social scoring, etc.), also creates more complex systems that not only expose the individual to external or manufactured risks that (often) cannot be attributed to accountable actors, authorities, or organizations (Beck, 2009), but place the individual under more external surveillance and control (Gorton, 2016; Hansen & Flyverbom, 2015; Richards, 2013; Zuboff, 2019).

Current big data technologies, such as algorithmic filtering of content in social media, forms of pattern recognition and machine learning (Tegmark, 2017), and social scoring or social credit systems (FastCompany, 2019), are capable of colonizing and structuring the lifeworld of individuals (Habermas, 1987) in ways in which giving up individual rights of freedom (e.g., privacy) and subscribing to ethically dubious practices become the norm (Zuboff, 2019). Accordingly, the individual deprived of the exercise of mature, independent critical-reflective reasoning is likely to unwittingly participate in the creation of this new “normality” by feeding these systems with data and routinely relying on the outputs, given their apparent convenience and use value (Galloway, 2017).

As a consequence, safeguarding the basic liberties of mature individuals becomes increasingly difficult, and the social institutions emerging from uncritical forms of agency are likely to stifle rather than encourage human flourishing. In other words, instead of harnessing social and technological progress to create propitious environments for human fulfilment and self-determination (Tegmark, 2017), individuals engage such advancements in systems that can constrain, dominate and oppress people in novel ways (Zuboff, 2019).

Challenged by the emergence of new forms of immaturity and by the “dark” role of organizations, businesses, and authorities in turning these forms into systems of dominance and control, we call for business ethicists, philosophers, and social science researchers to focus their attention on these new phenomena. It is only from a nuanced and sophisticated knowledge base that we can build the critical responses needed to protect self-determination qualities that are so fundamental to enable human beings and to advance economic *and* political liberties in democratic societies that are key for establishing ethical businesses and practices.

Scope:

This special issue is open to conceptual, normative, or empirical work that shows how engaging philosophical reasoning, business ethics, and social science research can help us identify, analyze, or resist forms of organized immaturity in contemporary contexts of businesses, organizations, and institutions in society.

Topics and contexts of interest for this special issue can be, for example:

- Loss of individual autonomy, and diffusion of responsibility for actions and consequences, in the context of the new technological revolution or digital transformation (Beck, 1998, Bradshaw & Howard, 2018; Galloway, 2017; Gulenc & Ariturk, 2016; O’Connor & Weatherall, 2019; Richards, 2013; Taplin, 2017; Tegmark, 2017; Zuboff, 2019);
- Denial of scientific findings that challenge the foundations of enlightened, democratic societies, e.g. increasing beliefs in conspiracy theories and “alternative facts,” including the denial of scientific findings on anthropogenic climate change or epidemic diseases (Grasso, 2019; Gunderson et al, 2018; Jarvis, 2019; Prasad, 2019);
- The trade-off between state-mandated restrictions (e.g. lockdowns, big data controls) during public health crises and individual autonomy, as progressively evidenced in the COVID-19 pandemic of 2020;
- The rise of nationalist, populist, and illiberal political ideologies and their influence on individual liberties and social and economic exchange in business and society (Crouch, 2004; de Jonquières, 2017; Eatwell & Goodwin, 2018; Gorton, 2016);
- Research intersecting or combining topics such as the above (Fuchs, 2019; Greaves, 2015; Thomson, 2000; Weisberg, 2015).

Generally, this special issue is oriented toward the ethical implications of organized immaturity for business and society, and looks at phenomena that illustrate the irrational effects on individual autonomy and maturity of the instrumental and controlling rationality of contemporary socio-technological systems.

Examples of questions:

Manuscripts considered for publication in this special issue may address questions such as:

General business ethics and social theory studies:

- What old forms of organized immaturity prevail, and what new forms emerge, in today's societies?
- What ethical issues do these forms of organized immaturity raise for business practices and for society?
- How can tendencies towards organized immaturity be resisted? What escape alternatives can be conceived or envisaged, and on what levels?
- How can the ideas and values of the Enlightenment be strengthened (Pinker, 2018)?

Social issue and context driven studies:

- What are the cultural and/or institutional conditions, and social mechanisms, that sustain organized immaturity and constrain individual liberties?
- How can we advance our knowledge of business and human rights issues such as inequality, discrimination, modern slavery when looking through the organized immaturity lens?
- What counter-mechanisms and narratives exist or emerge in business and society that could protect or enlarge the maturity and liberties of individuals vis-à-vis the increasingly controlling socio-technological systems and authorities such as influencers, opinion or political leaders?

Studies of the social and ethical impacts of technology:

- How do business-driven technical advancements (such as digitalization, social media, AI and machine learning, etc.) affect individual rationality, maturity and autonomy?
- How do big data technologies influence the freedom of choice of consumers, workers, patients, investors, citizens?
- How can philosophical reasoning, business ethics, and social science research challenge new forms of control generated by contemporary and emerging technologies, and promote alternatives that protect individual autonomy and self-determination?
- How can socio-technological innovations contribute to the abolishment of organized immaturity (see, e.g., Gulenc & Ariturk, 2016)?

Submission Process:

Manuscripts must be prepared in compliance with the journal's instructions for contributors: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/business-ethics-quarterly/information/instructions-for-authors-submission-guidelines>. Submissions that do not conform to these instructions, in terms of manuscript style and referencing, will not be reviewed.

Manuscripts should be submitted after March 31, 2021, and no later than May 31, 2021, using BEQ's online submission system: <https://mc.manuscriptcentral.com/beq>. When submitting be sure to choose the option that indicates that the submission is for this special issue.

All papers will be initially reviewed for suitability by the guest editor team, and submissions that pass initial review will undergo double-blind review by external referees in accordance with the journal's standard editorial process. By submitting a paper for consideration, authors consent to be called upon as reviewers. Authors also agree, in the event that a submission after review receives an invitation to revise and resubmit, to resubmit within three months of that invitation.

Presubmission Virtual Workshop

A few months before the special issue submission window opens, the guest editors will organize a virtual workshop (via appropriate web conferencing software) designed to provide developmental guidance to prospective submissions. Participation in this workshop is not a precondition for submission to, nor does it guarantee acceptance in, the special issue. The workshop will be organized in the form of one virtual plenary followed by virtual paper development roundtables that bring together paper authors with senior scholars for in-depth feedback and advice. The workshop will be virtual in order to promote sustainability and equality of opportunity to participate. To be considered for the workshop, please send a proposal or extended abstract (up to 3,000 words) to organizedimmaturity@gmail.com by September 15, 2020.

Key Dates:

- Presubmission virtual workshop application deadline: September 15, 2020
- Decisions/Invitations to participate in virtual workshop: October 15, 2020
- Presubmission virtual workshop convenes: November 2020 (specific day TBA)
- BEQ special issue submission window: March 31 – May 31, 2021
- Publication: late 2022 (est.)

More Information:

For further information on the special issue, contact the guest editorial team at organizedimmaturity@gmail.com.

For information on the BEQ more generally, contact editor in chief Bruce Barry at EditorBEQ@Vanderbilt.edu or visit the journal's website at www.cambridge.org/beq.

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