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Ethics and Librarianship (review)

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(Review)

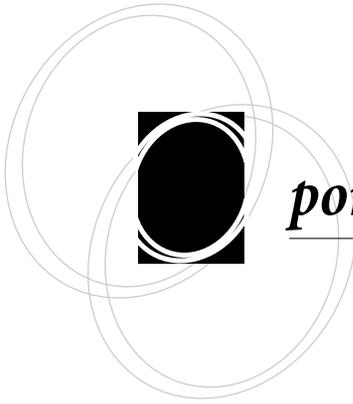
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Ethics and Librarianship, Robert Hauptman. Jefferson, NC: McFarland and Co., 2002. 162 p. \$35 (ISBN 0-7864-1306-9)

Ethics and Librarianship is the latest work by Robert Hauptman on the ethical issues confronting information professionals in many aspects of their work. Hauptman, Professor of Information Media at St. Cloud State University and editor of the *Journal of Information Ethics*, made his mark in 1976 with an article, "Professionalism or Culpability? An Experiment in Ethics," in the *Wilson Library Bulletin*. In a highly unscientific study, in which he asked thirteen public and academic librarians for information about building a bomb sufficient to blow up a suburban house, Hauptman was shocked that most librarians willingly provided the information. In Hauptman's view, librarians in such a situation should put their duty to the well being of society before their professional obligation to provide information.

Since then, Hauptman has reiterated this view without providing a more principled way for librarians to make such a choice. Unfortunately, *Ethics and Librarianship* does not advance the exploration of this admittedly difficult dilemma. It seems to have two purposes: to consider ethical issues beyond the reference desk, in all aspects of library operations, and to

consider ethical issues arising in the electronic information environment. Hauptman characterizes this work as a comprehensive overview and update of the topic, complementing his 1988 book, *Ethical Challenges in Librarianship* (Oryx Press), now out of print.

The book is organized around functional areas rather than ethical values. Chapters cover ethics in collection building, technical services, access services, reference, special libraries, special and archival collections, research and publication, intellectual property and copyright. Not until Chapter 12 does Hauptman address the question "Why Ethics Matter." The slim volume, only 140 pages of text, does not explore in depth any of the many issues raised. Hauptman does not clearly differentiate between ethical issues, such as confidentiality, in which basic professional and societal values may conflict; legal issues, such as copyright, where laws already establish which values take precedence; and management issues, such as serial subscription cancellations, where limited resources force difficult decisions. Failing to isolate the true ethical issues at stake, Hauptman leaves the reader at a loss as to how to approach these choices.

Hauptman has some harsh things to say about the failure of the profession in the area of ethics, but the source of his dis-

content is unclear. On one hand he suggests that librarians unthinkingly follow the dictates of the American Library Association in providing information regardless of the consequences. On the other hand, he chastises the profession for its inattention to ethical issues. Although there is an extended discussion of ethical issues in law and medical libraries, Hauptman does not include or even refer to the codes of ethics of the American Association of Law Libraries or the Medical Library Association. Referring to the ethical issues faced by librarians in special libraries, he includes, without a source, a box entitled "Special Ethics" (p. 73). He misrepresents an article on the topic by this reviewer as an endorsement of special ethics for special librarians (p. 79). He mentions the code of ethics for librarians of rare book collections but does not include a bibliographic entry.

Despite its promising title, *Ethics and Librarianship* is a disappointment, not only in the superficial level of discussion, but also in the apparent carelessness with which it is written. Hauptman roundly criticizes careless research as an indication that the author is not fully committed to the work (p. 102), but demonstrates some of the very editorial lapses he deplors. Factual mistakes are numerous: Tipper Gore's role in the pop music debate is mischaracterized (p. 20); the name of the library school at Indiana University is misstated (p. 28). He omits the citations for several legal cases and does not name the recent case, *N.Y. Times v. Tasini*, in which the Supreme Court ruled on the intellectual property rights of freelance writers (p. 116). Hauptman questions strictures against law librarians, even those with law degrees, providing legal advice. Regrettably, however, his chapter on copyright law is so riddled with mistaken information and misinterpretation that it should be disregarded altogether.

The bibliography is disappointing as well, both in content and lack of attention to detail. It omits John Swan's thoughtful article, "Helpful Librarians and Hurtful Books," (*Catholic Library World* 59, May/June 1988), includes only one article by Raphael Capurro, in German, and lists Kenneth Crews's doctoral dissertation on copyright policy in academic libraries but not its publication in 1993 by the University of Chicago Press. Consistency is lacking, with volume numbers provided for some but not all articles appearing in the same journal.

In his concluding remarks, Hauptman refers to the destruction of the World Trade Center and the difficult and dangerous times in which we live. He reiterates his belief that social necessity outweighs professional obligations. He can only advise us, however, that "We do this by making considered and judicious choices" (p. 140). Indeed, more than ever the profession needs a principled way to approach such choices. Hauptman leaves the choice up to each professional's view of the good of society. In hard times, the profession needs better guidance than this. Hauptman views the use of resources as an ethical issue. That being the case, an acquisitions librarian in all but the most comprehensive collections should probably wait until a volume appears that is worthy of the title *Ethics and Librarianship*.

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