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ORIGINAL PAPER

Enchantment in Business Ethics Research

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Abstract

This article draws attention to the importance of enchantment in business ethics research. Starting from a Weberian understanding of disenchantment, as a force that arises through modernity and scientific rationality, we show how rationalist business ethics research has become disenchanted as a consequence of the normalization of positivist, quantitative methods of inquiry. Such methods absent the relational and lively nature of business ethics research and detract from the ethical meaning that can be generated through research encounters. To address this issue, we draw on the work of political theorist and philosopher, Jane Bennett, using this to show how interpretive qualitative research creates possibilities for enchantment. We identify three opportunities for reenchanting business ethics research related to: (i) moments of novelty or disruption; (ii) deep, meaningful attachments to things studied; and (iii) possibilities for embodied, affective encounters. In conclusion, we suggest that business ethics research needs to recognize and reorient scholarship towards an appreciation of the ethical value of interpretive, qualitative research as a source of potential enchantment.

Keywords Qualitative research · Enchantment · Scientism · Methodology · Interpretivism

Introduction

In recent years there have been calls for a 'deepening' of business ethics research (Freeman and Greenwood 2020). The current editors of *Journal of Business Ethics* suggest this requires moving "beyond 'the view from nowhere'" and seeking to understand the "lived experience of real human beings" by engaging in "thick descriptions and engagement with materiality" (Freeman and Greenwood 2016, p. 2). Here, we treat these comments as an invitation to consider the relationship between the axiological values that inform business ethics research and the methods used to generate knowledge. In considering the purpose of business ethics research, the founding editor of this journal considers ethics to include "all human action aimed at securing a good life" and improving "the human condition" (Michalos 1988, p. 1). Business ethics research is thereby positioned as a practice based on shared moral values (Werhane and Freeman 1999). Yet the capacity for business ethics research to deliver on this axiological claim is, we suggest, limited by dominant ontological and epistemological assumptions that shape this field of inquiry.

Much business ethics research is characterized by objectivism, as a set of underlying principles about how reality can be known, and positivism, as a way of producing knowledge (Brand 2009; Campbell and Cowton 2015; Crane 1999). Positivist research is associated with quantitative methods that focus on observing ethical issues directly and attempt to measure or count things numerically. Concerns about positivism in business ethics research are well articulated (Campbell and Cowton 2015; Collins 2000). Brigley (1995, p. 20) identifies the limitations of positivist approaches in researching ethical cultures, observing that the "positivist's paradigm seems only capable of producing fragmentary insights into the cultures of organisation". Bain's (1995, p. 14) critique of quantitative research, including the survey method, suggests its application in business ethics research is "somewhat consistent with what would result if serving society was not a requirement" (see also Randall and

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Gibson 1990). Crane (1999, p. 237) argues that the "tradition of positivist and highly quantitative approaches" may be responsible for the "relatively poor and unconvincing" quality of empirical research in the business ethics field. Clegg and Rhodes (2006) evoke Mills' (1959) concern with the "scientization of the social 'sciences'…[and] all forms of social inquiry that plundered the world through 'smash and grab' raids with a questionnaire… that [render] important social issues obscure and trivial" (Clegg and Rhodes 2006, p. 172). Campbell and Cowton (2015) bemoan the continued "dominance of the American positivist model" in business ethics research, noting it is a "curious feature" of this academic field, which is "essentially concerned with the moral values in which business activity takes place—that authors seek to use a quantitative toolkit as their primary weapon" (p. s5).

This article seeks to move beyond discussion of the problematics of positivist business ethics research by reframing the relationship between axiology and research methods. To achieve this, we draw on the concept of enchantment, through the work of political theorist and philosopher, Jane Bennett. Enchantment, we suggest, is essential in enabling the cultivation and enactment of more ethical business ethics research. However, the pursuit of enchantment in business ethics research is undermined by the implicit normalization of quantitative positivism. We draw a contrast with interpretive, qualitative research which is understood as "a situated activity that locates the observer in the world… [through] a set of interpretive, material practices" that represent and simultaneously transform the world (Denzin and Lincoln 2005, p. 3). Interpretive, qualitative research is founded upon the principle of naturalistic inquiry and acknowledges the inevitable partiality of understanding phenomena. It is thus a paradigm, rather than simply a set of methods. We argue that interpretive, qualitative research, when approached as affect-laden, lively, relational practice (Bennett 2001), offers greater possibilities for meaningful, ethical encounters and thus a more enchanted, ethical approach to studying business ethics.

We begin by discussing the concept of *dis*enchantment, focusing on how it has been used to critique modernity and challenge scientistic ways of knowing and doing research. We suggest that much business ethics research has become disenchanted as a result of scientism and the privileging of positivist, quantitative methods. The stance of detachment or separation encouraged by scientistic business ethics research absents the relational, dynamic and embedded nature of *all* research. We introduce Bennett's conceptualization of ethical enchantment and allied concepts of affect, research assemblage, encounters and entanglements. We explain how interpretive, qualitative research can facilitate moments of enchantment by honing the researcher's "sensory receptivity to the marvellous specificity of things" (Bennett 2001, p.

4). We conclude by calling for a repositioning of qualitative business ethics research as a site of enchantment with inherent ethical potential.

Modernity, disenchantment and knowledge production

The concept of disenchantment is closely associated with Weber (1991, 1992, 2004) who charted how modernity was being progressively rationalized in ways which appear to foreclose possibilities for enchantment (Schluchter 1981). "'The fate of our times'", Weber observed, "is characterized by rationalization and intellectualization and, above all, by the 'disenchantment of the world'", with the result that the "the ultimate and most sublime values have retreated from public life either into the transcendental realm of mystic life or into the brotherliness (*sic*) of direct and personal human relations.' (Weber 1991, p.155). Weber poses a distinction between a world in which *inter alia* mysticism and other-worldly forces resonate within our existence and offer meaning to our lives, and one in which technical mastery and rational calculation has taken hold. Echoing Kant's differentiation between practical and other forms of reason (see Neiman 1994), Weber draws a distinction between formal—calculable, procedural—rationality and substantive rationality: using the latter to argue that the exercise of reason is associated with a withdrawal from consideration of ultimate ends and ethics of action. For Weber, modern subjects were becoming subject to formal rationalization in increasing areas of their life. '[G]oal oriented rational calculation with the technically most adequate available methods' (Weber 1978, p. 85), dominated by numerically calculable goals, was the new logics of life. The process of rationalization reduces possibilities for exercising individually differentiated conduct, such that the modern subject's existence increasingly consists of disciplined work towards ends they did not set or choose. Important to our argument here, rationalization is associated with science, as the embodiment of 'intellectualist rationalization' (Weber 1991, p. 139), which is chronically unable to offer meaning (Weber 2004). Science reduces knowledge to "technical means and calculations", rendering the world calculable but constituting "an unreal realm of artificial abstractions" which seek to "grasp the blood-and-the-sap of true life, without ever catching up with it" (Weber 1991, p. 141).

Weber's discerning of the existential threat posed by scientistic rationality is further developed by Marcuse (1973, 2002) who denounces its impoverishing effects, particularly when transferred from the physical into the social sciences. Examining the emergence of the positivist 'science of man' [sic] in the writings of Henri de Saint-Simon, an influential figure in the early development of the social sciences,

Marcuse ([1973](#)) critiques Saint-Simon's portrayal, which relies on the "mechanical and uncritical application of habits of thought [in] fields different from those in which they have formed" (Lather [2007](#), pp. 60–64, citing Hayek [1952](#), pp. 15–16). By imposing on the social sciences methods developed in the natural sciences, "we can no longer understand science as one form of possible knowledge, but rather must identify knowledge with science" (Habermas [1987](#), p. 4). Such an uncritically deferential attitude towards science gives rise to concerns about naïve realism, fallacies of misplaced concreteness and pseudo-exactitude (Haack [2012](#); Hayek [1952](#); Stenmark [2001](#)).

Scientism then, is a story of rationalization, calculation, and scientific mastery; it "encompasses a variety of related processes, each of which opts for the precise, regular, constant, and reliable over the wild, spectacular, idiosyncratic, and surprising" (Bennett [2001](#), p. 58). Scientism systematizes knowledge, instrumentalizes thinking and secularizes metaphysical concerns. These rationalizing narratives encourage a particular form of thinking which is associated with mathematics and scientific experimentation and is oriented towards "*reliably* controlling experience" (p. 58, emphasis in original). The world becomes in principle calculable, thus "[o]ne learns to relate to things by seizing upon their structure or logic, upon the principle of their organization, rather than… by engaging their sensuous appeal in a world alive with animate bodies large and small" (pp. 58–59).

The consequences of scientism, particularly when applied to the social sciences, are profound. Habermas offers an account of knowledge in terms of a series of interests that he terms "knowledge-constitutive interests" ([1987](#), p. 308). Of particular note here is the distinction between technical cognitive interest of empirical-analytic sciences and the emancipatory cognitive interest of critical social science. In the former, the focus is on the measurement and control of an objective world, whereas the latter seeks to generate knowledge in service of progressive human flourishing. The distinction made by Habermas throws the critique of scientism into even sharper relief. His concept of knowledge-constitutive interests implies that scientistic research, specifically in the areas of the social or human sciences, is no longer allied to human flourishing. It is rather a technical process that produces only nomological knowledge; that is, a form of knowledge which reduces the world, human affairs, even consciousness, to a series of seemingly objective 'natural' laws and rules to which individuals are rendered subordinate. These considerations are central to our argument that scientistic, positivist approaches are inimical to enchantment and thus conspire against doing research that serves a moral purpose related to improving the human condition.

The reduction and categorisation that scientistic, positivist research entails renders studies conducted in a disenchanted manner complicit with wider technologies of regulation and subordination. Smith ([1996](#)) uses the term 'relations of ruling' to refer to the 'complex of objectified social relations that organise and regulate our lives in contemporary society' (p. 171). Such relations—whether evidenced in research practices, population governance, or wider public texts—supplant the local, embodied, particular and unique with generalization, abstraction, categories and concepts that claim universality. Scientistic, positivist, research thereby reproduces such relations of ruling: objectifying both knowledge and relations between persons that constitute the research process. Research conducted in this disenchanted manner might well prove efficacious in subordinating organizational subjects to further regulation and rule. However, social scientific, and particularly business ethics research that is conducted in this way produces forms of knowledge and types of research relations that diminish rather than enhance the human condition.

The disenchanting effects of scientism and positivism, and its particular ethical implications, may be underlined once more by returning to Marcuse ([2002](#)). Tracing positivism's historical emergence in the physical and social sciences, Marcuse argues that positivism "is a struggle against all metaphysics, transcendentalisms, and idealisms as obscurantist and regressive modes of thought" (p. 176). Approaching the social world from a positivist, quantitative mindset separates "reality from all inherent ends… the true from the good, science from ethics" (p. 150). Measurable, empirical, and ideally quantifiable, reality is privileged as objective—and the world of values is relegated to the 'merely' subjective. "Values may have a higher dignity… but they are not *real* and thus count less in the business of life… the same de-realization affects all ideas which, by their very nature, cannot be verified by scientific method"; as such, "their concrete, critical content evaporates into the ethical or metaphysical atmosphere" (p. 151). Ethical philosophy, as the realm of ideals, justice and beauty, thereby "becomes irrational and unscientific" (p. 177).

Positivist quantitative research risks negating meaning and ethics by encouraging the creation of "a synthetically impoverished world of academic concreteness" (Marcuse [2002](#), p. 191). Impoverishment extends to both the academic subject and those who are subject to their focus—objectifying and rendering both abstract. For social scientists driven by scientism, "the role of the subject as point of observation, measurement, and calculation" (p. 150) removes the need to think beyond the confines of facts, and this subject therefore "cannot play its scientific role as ethical or aesthetic or political agent" (p. 150). We suggest that to conduct research from a position of scientism forecloses the possibility of enchantment and negates the significance of ethics from the outset.

Disenchanted business ethics research

Disenchantment in business ethics research is associated with a 'rationalist paradigm'[1] (Guba 1981) that encourages positivist epistemology and encourages the use of quantitative research methods which tend to be viewed more favourably as a means of producing knowledge. A premium is placed on the collection of "measurable data… from large samples… to formulate and test hypotheses" with the intention of producing causal, generalisable propositions (Crane 1999, p. 238; Campbell and Cowton 2015; Reinecke et al. 2016). The normalization of positivist epistemology in business ethics research can be gleaned from meta-reviews of the field. Collins (2000) provides an overview of the first 1523 papers published in *Journal of Business Ethics*. Between 1982 and 1999, the percentage of empirical research published in *Journal of Business Ethics* that used quantitative (for example survey or database methods) ranged from 78 to 100% with a median of 94% and a slight upward trend. A review of 'cross-cultural ethics' 1981–2003, showed that 92% of empirical papers were quantitative (Brand 2009). Empirical studies of 'ethical beliefs and behaviour in business organizations' between 1974 and 1990 evidenced 81% quantitative research using a survey research design (Randall and Gibson 1990). 96% of studies of 'ethical climate' in the period 2006–2016 were found to be quantitative (Newman et al. 2017). The normalization of quantitative positivist research is further highlighted in a recent *Business Ethics Quarterly* editorial (Reinecke et al. 2016) which observes the extremely low number of qualitative papers being published in the journal, despite qualitative papers comprising 18% of submissions overall.

The normalization of positivism in business ethics may be related to the academic backgrounds of many scholars who are trained in finance, accounting or psychology, where quantitative empirical methods and techniques are common (Brand 2009). Disenchanted business ethics research additionally includes qualitative studies that are characterised by "a relatively commonsensical and realist approach toward ontological and epistemological matters" and are based on "traditional positivistic assumptions about the nature of social or organizational reality and the production of knowledge" (Prasad and Prasad 2002, p. 6). Prasad and Prasad (2002) refer to this type of research as "qualitative positivism" because it assumes reality is "concrete, separate from the researcher, and cognizable through the use of so-called objective methods of data collection" (p. 6; see also Randall and Gibson 1990). Rationalist positivist inquiry

is of particular concern in cross-cultural research (Brand 2009), where we suggest it is associated with neocolonial power imbalances that reproduce core/periphery relations of knowledge production (Bell et al. 2017; Kothiyal et al. 2018). Through its commitment to scientism, business ethics research has largely overlooked the "liberating potential" (Crane 1999, p. 237) of feminist, postcolonial, postmodern and critical scholarship which has transformed the social sciences and other fields of management research, such as organisation studies (see Laasonen et al. 2012; Lather 1991; Prasad and Mills 2010).

Disenchanted research is characterized by a relatively narrow concept of methodological rigour which is founded on an idealized, ideological, conception of the scientific method. This encourages 'methodolatry'—a form of methodological zealotry where the perfection of technique, whether quantitative or qualitative, becomes fetishized (Bell et al. 2017). The 'problem' of biases provides an example of how scientism leads to disenchantment in business ethics research. Positivist business ethics research has developed an ideologically-driven preoccupation with seeking to reduce, or even remove, social desirability bias—where individuals underestimate (or overestimate) the likelihood of engaging in socially undesirable (or desirable) behaviours or holding socially undesirable (or desirable) views (Chung and Monroe 2003). To address social desirability bias, researchers have investigated whether it is linked to gender (Dalton and Ortegren 2011) or religiosity (Chung and Monroe 2003). A related problem that preoccupies business ethics researchers is interaction bias, which arises when "data collected from study participants… [is] biased by the presence of the researcher(s) conducting the study" (Miyazaki and Taylor 2008, p. 779). To resolve this, they recommend the use of observational methods which remove the need for researchers to interact with participants in order "to facilitate the purity of the data that are collected" (p. 791). As this illustrates, bias tends to be treated as a source of empirical 'error' which has a "distorting effect" (Brand 2009, p. 431) on *the* 'truth'. Researchers seek to manage and remove sources of bias by controlling the scientific process.

Attempting to manage bias in this way "requires subscribing to the faulty psychological notion that one's situated action is the result of internal, stable, and ''real'' attitudes and opinions (which we can access through rigorous questionnaires) rather than a product of situated, collective negotiation" (Jerolmack and Khan 2014, p. 201). Such efforts towards achieving technical mastery over method involve rigidifying, reducing and imposing 'cuts' (Barad 2007) which generate "a profound relational disruption between researcher and researched" (Hendry et al. 2018, p. 46). As an alternative to the notion of bias, interpretive researchers

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[1] Guba (1981) uses the term 'rationalist paradigm' to refer to a research approach that is associated with scientism and contrasted with a naturalistic, interpretive approach to inquiry.

focus on enhancing trustworthiness[2] by enhancing the "isomorphism or verisimilitude between the data of an inquiry and the phenomena those data represent" (Guba 1981, p. 80). While interpretive researchers remain aware of a possible lack of trustworthiness associated with self-reported data, where "a subject's talk is [not necessarily] predictive of future action or an accurate account of previous behaviors" (Jerolmack and Khan 2014, p. 201), they decline to abstract "from the situations about which many claims are ultimately being made" and instead treat meanings and actions as "situationally contingent" (Jerolmack and Khan 2014, p. 201). Further, interpretive researchers assume generalizations "are not possible because phenomena are intimately tied to the times and the contexts in which they are found" (Guba 1981, p. 80). Such a position, we suggest lays the foundations for the possibility of enchantment, as we will explore later in this article.

Rationalist positivist business ethics research positions qualitative methods as subordinate to quantitative methods – as deficient but occasionally useful (e.g. Reinecke et al. 2016). Qualitative methods are recommended when studying topics where little prior empirical research exists, as a precursor to more 'rigorous' scientific testing using quantitative methods (e.g. Frish and Huppenbauer 2014). Alternatively, they are combined with quantitative methods as part of a mixed methods approach, because interpretive, qualitative research alone is seen as insufficiently rigorous (e.g. Nuttavuthisit and Thøgersen 2017). Mixed methods are thereby presented as a scientistic solution to a perceived 'problem', i.e. that qualitative research 'lacks' rigour (see also Hendry et al. 2018, p. 226).

To summarize, we argue that business ethics research is dominated by quantitative research and informed by a rationalist mode of thought that seeks to eliminate sources of potential bias and produce context-free, generalisable truth claims. The relative absence of business ethics articles based on qualitative research suggests an 'epistemological monoculture' that "suppress[es] and choke[s] out ways of knowing that depart from the stringent dictates of an exaggerated ideal of scientific knowledge making" (Code 2006, pp. 8–9, Kim and Donaldson 2015; Zyphur and Pierides 2017). We interpret such scientism as a form of control that treats method as "*the* master narrative" (Hendry et al. 2018, p. 219; see also Feyerabend 1975; Law 2004). This stance of detachment absents the relational, dynamic and embedded nature of *all* research as inherently political and ethical (Bell and Willmott 2019).

Enchantment and research practice

There is a significant literature, within and beyond business ethics, that provides ethical critique of relations based on detachment and separation. The writings of Levinas, for example, have been used to reconceptualize ethics from a place of distance—where the origin of ethics is presumed to be based on the independent rationality of an individual's judgement—to one of sensorial responsibility and affective proximity to the other. Authors have used these ideas to question the limited responsibility of already formulated ethical codes as insufficient embodiments of ethical responsibility and to argue for a more affective, corporeal understanding of business ethics (Aasland 2007; Bevan and Corvellec 2007; Byers and Rhodes 2007; Roberts 2001, 2003; Soares 2007). Considering the ethics of research practice, relations of distance and detachment have been critiqued by qualitative researchers (Lincoln 1993, 1995; Lincoln and Guba 1985), feminist scholars (Opie 1992; Smith 1990; Stanley and Wise 1983), researchers in Critical Management Studies (Bell and Wray-Bliss 2009; Brewis and Wray-Bliss 2008; Wray-Bliss 2003a), and those working with historically silenced voices and other marginalized groups (LeCompte 1993; McLaughlin and Tierney 1993; Spivak 1990). Each of these constituencies have advocated for and explored ways of conducting research that honour its relational and co-constructed nature.

The concept of enchantment, as formulated by Bennett (2001), offers possibilities for insightful extension of the above work. Bennett is an American political theorist and philosopher who writes on the points of intersection between ethics, politics and materiality. Her work offers a radical reassessment of the boundaries between such categories, as well as between the human and non-human, the subject and thing, the ethical and affective. Bennett argues that characterizing the world as a site of disenchantment reproduces and reifies its deleterious effects. Disputing the claim that Western modernity and rationalism has led, homogeneously, to disenchantment, she insists that enchantment can, and does, arise in the contemporary world. Enchantment is a possibility within every encounter—a lively potential than can never be closed down and "also a comportment that can be fostered through deliberate strategies" (p. 4). Such strategies include cultivating openness to encounters by picturing the world as a "web of lively and mobile matter-forms of varying degrees of complexity" (p. 131), leading to a stance of "presumptive generosity" where one is rendered "more open to the surprise of other selves and bodies and more willing and able to enter into productive assemblages with them" (p. 131). It is in such enchanted, affective, relationships that ethical responsibility for the world and its inhabitants is felt and enacted. As Bennett writes "to some small but irreducible

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extent, one must be enamoured with existence and occasionally even enchanted in the face of it in order to be capable of donating some of one's scarce mortal resources to the service of others" (p. 4).

Enchantment is "a temporarily immobilizing encounter" that "entails a state of wonder" and "interactive fascination" (p. 5). The 'mood' of enchantment begins with surprise, as a consequence of "meeting with something that you did not expect and are not fully prepared to engage". It is the "pleasurable feeling of being charmed by the novel and as yet unprocessed encounter" or the "*unheimlich* (uncanny) feeling of being disrupted or torn out of one's default sensory-psychic-intellectual disposition" (p. 5). Bennett (2001) argues that enchantment is connected to affect because the latter provides the vital 'spark' that enables one to become enchanted with one's world. In so doing, she treats affect as a flow that enables relations and emphasizes the capacities of entities to affect and be affected—in the form of physical, psychological, emotional or social changes of state (Fox and Alldred 2017). Affects are not linear or causal but flowing; this invites an analytical shift away from what bodies and organizations are towards consideration of the "capacities for action, interaction, feeling and desire that are produced… by affective flows" (p. 402). It is important to note that affect is not itself ethical. Rather, flows of affect provide a medium and provocation which enables ethical practice to be understood as an embodied sensibility of generosity—one that recognizes, responds to and re-affirms enchantment. Thus, Bennett argues, ethics and affect are not identical, but they are inseparable.

A focus on entanglements and flows goes beyond an account of ethics and extends to all relations, including those that arise through research practice. Consequently, enchanted research is not characterized by relations between an observer and the observed. Instead research is a lively organization of flows and entanglements within which knowledge is constituted. A space is thereby opened up "for forms of ethical practice that do not rely upon the image of an intrinsically *hierarchical* order of things" (Bennett 2010, p. 12, emphasis in original). Research occurs within and as a part of this flow—there is no outside or inside of it that can be observed without participation. These ideas are linked to the notion of the 'research-assemblage'—comprising researcher(s), methods, data and context—to explore the relational nature of "human bodies and all other material, social and abstract entities… [which have] no ontological status or integrity other than that produced through their relationship to other similarly contingent and ephemeral bodies, things and ideas" (Fox and Alldred 2015, p. 401).

The researcher—including their body as well as the methods or apparatus they use (Barad 2007)—forms part of this assemblage within the events that they are studying. Research tools and techniques (interview schedules,

theoretical frameworks, recording and analysis technologies) are nodes within these entanglements. They are thus productive and disruptive of material capabilities within a given research event. Assemblages draw attention to events and actions around which entities temporarily coalesce, the knowledge that this enables and inevitably precludes, and the flow and enchantments within this. The world can thus no longer be considered from the perspective of the researcher who imposes order and seeks to achieve 'mastery' by using methods to collect and analyse data (Code 2006; Fox and Alldred 2015).

Bennett's re-conceptualization of ethics and knowledge production is highly relevant to our argument here. Its value arises from understanding ethics as a material, affect-laden practice of enchanted entanglements. Within the research assemblage, knowledge is created in the flow of material relations. All knowledge is understood as situated, as created by engaging

> *critically in and with* the material and affective-political detail of situations, as natural sites of knowledge making inhabited by particular fallible, vulnerable human beings… [whose] epistemic practices are shaped by the instituted imaginary governing the institution of knowledge production within which they craft their knowledge (Code 2006, p. 117, emphasis in original).

The task for the researcher then, is to go beyond objectivity, diligence, and even reflexivity, and instead to approach research as a series of lively, entangled, ethical encounters (McCoy 2012). In the section that follows we explore how interpretive qualitative research supports such a relational practice of ethical encounters and enables greater consistency between the methods used in business ethics and the axiological values on which this field of study is based.

Qualitative research as an ethics of relationality

We focus here on the encounters through which enchantment can arise as in the practice of qualitative research, as a 'state of wonder' characterized by 'interactive fascination' and the uncanny feeling of being 'disrupted' from one's default disposition (Bennett 2001). Interpretive, qualitative research can facilitate enchantment by "cultivat[ing a] form of perception, a discerning and meticulous attentiveness to the singular specificity of things" (p. 37). Richly contextualized, embodied, lived understandings of business ethics can be cultivated through deep cultural immersion in the everyday experiences of those studied.

Moments of novelty or disruption

When moments of everyday enchantment are encountered in qualitative research they are, ideally, acknowledged and valued, rather than treated as a problem that compromises the ideals of scientism. Abductive and inductive forms of reasoning which start with a puzzle or surprise and try to identify the conditions that would make the phenomenon less puzzling (Mantere and Ketokivi 2013). Remaining open to the possibility of being puzzled or surprised by encounters with empirical phenomena, rather than using them to confirm preunderstandings, is a key skill that qualitative researchers seek to cultivate (Alvesson and Kärreman 2007). Attention is payed "to the paradoxical, the contradictory, the marginal" (Opie 1992, p. 52). We may ask "What is it that is left out?" (Spivak 1990, p. 18, also Wray-Bliss 2003a). "[I]t is the unanticipated and the unexpected—the things that puzzle the researcher—that are of particular interest in the encounter" (Alvesson and Kärreman 2007, p. 1266).

Moments of novelty or disruption create, in Alvesson and Kärreman's terms, 'friction' in the research assemblage. In disenchanted research, friction may be regarded as a disruption to the smooth functioning linearity of the research process. Friction is the hypothesis that does not work, the data that does not fit, the numerical result that requires massaging away. It can cause a breakdown in the rationalist machinery of disenchanted research, bringing the application of well-oiled, routinised calculations, and the desire for replicable, generalisable findings, to a grinding holt. In contrast, for qualitative researchers such breakdowns offer the possibility of coming to genuinely novel insights and theoretical development. They are thus to be hoped for, valued, cultivated and worked with.

How then can business ethics research be conducted in such a way as to enable us to produce, recognise, and work with breakdowns? For Alvesson and Kärreman (2007, p. 1277), "the more a study is processual, emergent, open, and empirically varied and rich, the more likely an interesting mystery, via breakdowns, will be produced and solved". Such studies are likely to be interpretive and qualitative, "open to the views of the research subjects… allowing them to express unconstrained voices in the research" (p. 1277). Research "move[s] beyond 'the view from nowhere' to understand the lived experience of real human beings" (Freeman and Greenwood 2016, p. 2). Interpretive, qualitative research provides genuine possibilities of enchantment in studying business ethics—the chance to experience Bennett's (2001) "meeting with something that you did not expect and are not fully prepared to engage" which gives rise to the "feeling of being disrupted or torn out of one's default sensory-psychic-intellectual disposition" (p. 5).

Deep, meaningful attachments to things studied

Bennett's (2001, 2010) ideas enable research practice to be understood as an assemblage that is suffused with affect-laden entanglements. The researcher is embedded within these entanglements, which provoke an ethical relation to the site of knowledge production and the entities assembled within it. Research may be driven by "generous reciprocity", the cultivation of vulnerability through openness and exposure of the self to claims of the other (Rhodes and Carlsen 2018, also Wray-Bliss 2003a). Such a non-possessive, unconditional form of relating is resistant to appropriation. It builds on and extends the notion of relationally reflexive organizational research (Cunliffe and Locke 2016) which recognizes the pluralities of voices and identities in research relationships and the need to engage constructively and productively with them. Power relations between researchers and the researched may be problematized, enabling a focus on the space between them and the relationships constructed. Dialogical, "intercorporeal encounters, felt experience and embodied engagement" (Rhodes and Carlsen 2018, p. 1307, see also Diprose 2012) may be cultivated.

Interpretive, qualitative researchers seek to cultivate relationships within the assemblage in a way that validates and opens up the ethical relations within it. In a reflection on narrative research practice, Hendry et al. (2018) speak about research as a "communion [in which] we become present to our relationships and interconnections with others" (p. 60). A key component in this practice is in the act of listening which they describe as

> …not simply an act engaged with the ear. Listening entails bodily sensations. It means taking note of temperature, vibrations, and megahertz… Listening is a full ontological engagement that takes tremendous time, energy, and effort. (p. 95).

The researcher needs to listen with "soft ears", listening in a "malleable manner" (p. 24) to the discourses that reverberate within an interaction. This is done not with the intention of extracting 'unbiased' knowledge from participants but rather as a way of engaging with the research event as a communal process where meaning is encountered.

In order to re-frame relations within the research assemblage, Rautio (2014) distinguishes between "participant observation" and "observant participation" (p. 464). In the former, the researcher is imagined to be at a distance from research 'subjects' whilst in the latter "the focus is on the relations and interactions of all of the people involved, researcher included" (p. 464). Such a commitment to problematizing positivistic relations of distance and authority generate challenges. This is especially the case when research participants are themselves entangled in problematic ethical relations that warrant critique. Collins and

Wray-Bliss (2005; see also Wray-Bliss 2003b) engage with such a challenge in ethics research which examined academic colleagues' discriminatory behaviours. Drawing on Stanley and Wise's (1983, p. 177) observation that we "owe responsibility to 'the researched', whether we morally approve of them or not", Collins and Wray-Bliss (2005) reflect on the means by which respect for the humanity of the persons entangled in research must be maintained even while we may not condone their behaviour. Meaningful encounters in the research assemblage are not simply a matter of 'respecting' the other. Research entanglements may go further and become disruptive and transformative. The authors' commitment to anti-discriminatory practice and to support the victim of discrimination meant full participation with research subjects who exhibited discriminatory behaviour was not possible. However, they were still able to extend an ethical commitment of generosity, manifested by not merely condemning their colleagues' discriminatory behaviour but exploring the ethically informed legitimations that these individuals applied in order to make sense of and authorize it.

Possibilities for embodied, affective encounters

Affect is a "material vibrancy" that creates "a field of forces" that do not necessarily "enter and animate a physical body" (Bennett 2010, p. xiii; see also Bell and Vachhani 2020). It provides the basis for flows that connect human and non-human materialities within research assemblages. Gherardi (2019) uses the notion of 'affective ethnography' to highlight the capacity for researchers to use their lived, sensory experience to engage affectively with other actors, texts and materialities and to "produce interpretations that may transform the things that they interpret" (p. 742). This way of thinking about affective embodiment in research "problematizes 'what counts as a body', noting that the word 'body' refers not only to human, individual bodies but also to any other living and non-living" beings (p. 747). Embodied, affective ethnography also draws attention to the importance of being or 'becoming-with' as a basis for embodied knowing. Hendry and colleagues (2018) draw attention to the importance of cultivating attentiveness or 'being present' in research. Possibilities for affective encounters arise from being and becoming in a research assemblage where affective flows are experienced, rather than from extracting data from research settings so that it be "cut, analysed, and reduced to knowledge" (p. vii).

The focus of inquiry then is on encounters where affect may be felt, as a 'spark' that passes between bodies (Stewart 2007). Understanding research as a series of embodied, affective encounters can require a more radical approach to using qualitative methods like interviewing. Instead of seeing methods as an extractive tool for data collection, research is understood as a dynamic encounter, where knowledge is socially and intersubjectively constructed through conversational dialogue. Attention is drawn to the importance of place in co-creating meaning (see also Gherardi 2019). For example, the 'walking' or 'go-along interview' method (Evans and Jones 2011) is based on the practice of physically being and moving through landscapes and conversing with participants in ways that enable them to make "connections to the surrounding environment"; this is suggested to help participants become "less likely to try and give the 'right' answer to questions that are asked" (p. 849). These methods seek to equalize the power relations between participants and researchers. While power differentials even in interpretive, qualitative research contexts cannot be completely overcome (Wray-Bliss 2003c), enchanted research is oriented towards cultivating more collaborative, less exploitative, research relationships.

Discussion

If business ethics researchers neglect to critically examine their own practice, then their "credibility as critics and analysts of what is going on in the world outside… is bound to be similarly diminished" (Butterwick and Dawson 2005, p. 52). The positioning of business ethics research axiologically, as a practice that is based on shared moral values which endeavours to improve the human condition (Michalos 1982, 1988; Werhane and Freeman 1999), necessitates examination of the ethical value of research practices on which this field of study is based.

Here, we have used Bennett's (2001) conception of enchantment to question the implicit normalization of positivist methods in business ethics research which, we suggest, encourages scientism and leads to disenchantment. The commitment to scientism in business ethics research has severely limited the capacity of business ethics researchers "to 'be' in the world" and recognize that they "are part of a complex, indeterminate, and always in process system of relationships constituted through and in the human, nonhuman, and more-than-human" (Hendry et al. 2018, p. 9). Interpretive, qualitative research is more conducive to enchantment than the prevailing norms of scientism permit. Through its receptivity to moments of novelty or disruption, cultivation of deep, meaningful attachments to things studied, and openness to embodied, affective encounters, interpretive qualitative research invites awareness of the ethical obligations that flow through all material entanglements. Methodologically, the demand is to valorise these attachments. The research assemblage becomes a less organized, more democratic space in which the co-creation of knowledge becomes embedded with practice and, potentially, a place of transformation. Yet not all qualitative research is

necessarily enchanting—for 'qualitative positivist' (Prasad and Prasad 2002) or 'neo-empiricist' (Johnson, Buehring, Cassell and Symon 2006) research is also prone to scientistic tendencies. Our argument, however, is that there is much greater potential for enchantment in interpretive qualitative inquiry than can be enabled by positivist quantitative studies founded on scientism.

The importance of enchantment in business ethics research arises from its role in "conjur[ing] up, and… [being] rooted in, understandings and experiences of the world in which there is more to life than the material, the visible or the explainable" (Jenkins 2000, p. 29). Enchantment introduces the possibility of unknowability, or uncertain knowledge, which arises from radically problematizing what can be known and our ability to produce knowledge (Bell et al. 2020). A willingness to move beyond "epistemologies of mastery" (Code 2006, p. 21) is necessary in order to look for what is silenced, and to question what it means to know. Enchantment positions research as a means of enabling surprising onto-epistemological encounters within which ethics may be experienced and observed. Business ethics research may then be understood as a practice of ethical relationality (Hendry et al. 2018), "an imaginative, creative, proliferative entanglement" (p. 217) in which enchantment provides a basis for research for exploring the relationality "of being in relation with ourselves, others, nonhumans, and the more-than-human" (Hendry et al. 2018, p. 227). Inquiry is thereby positioned not as "discovery of an event or object or representation… [but] an ethical engagement in creativity, multiplicity, and indeterminacy" (p. 227). Such a positioning acknowledges the indeterminacy of phenomena which are "always emerging and in flux" and thus cannot be reduced "to discrete, quantifiable objects" (p. 151, see also Bell and Willmott 2019). Hence the practice of research is based on being present and open to possibilities of unknowing, as well as knowing (Bell et al. 2020).

As the above implies, "research cannot be separated from ethics" (Hendry et al. 2018, p. 174). By drawing on the notion of enchantment, we have emphasized the need for greater alignment between business ethics as the phenomena of study and the methodological practices through which knowledge about phenomena is accomplished. Specifically, we have argued that enchantment in the practice of business ethics research, enabled by moments of novelty or disruption, deep, meaningful attachments to things studied and embodied, affective encounters, is necessary "before you can care about anything [else]" (Bennett 2001, p.4). This goes beyond the often narrowly conceived officialdom of research ethics (Bell and Wray-Bliss 2009; Brewis and Wray-Bliss 2008) and positions methods within assemblages that produce (ethical) enchantment and disenchantment. These arguments are relevant in determining the value of research in *all* fields of human inquiry. However, they are especially important in the field of business ethics because of the espoused axiological commitment to doing research based on shared moral values in order to improve the human condition.

Enchantment in business ethics research has affinities with other affect-laden relational approaches such as care, Levinasian or postmodernism (Clegg and Silfe 2009), which propose that research is a way of being that involves "the person of the researcher, his or her sensitivity and commitment to moral issues and action" (Kvale 1996, p. 117, cited in Clegg and Silfe 2009, p. 17). There are also parallels with aesthetic approaches to business ethics, which emphasize the role of embodiment and imagination in knowing "the good and the beautiful" (Ladkin 2018, p. 38). Theories developed by Bennett (2001, 2010) that we have drawn upon here and are aligned with feminist posthumanist new materialism (Barad 2007; Braidotti 2006), offer further radical possibilities and challenges that extend beyond the confines of this paper's current concerns: possibilities that we nevertheless wish to briefly touch upon. These arise from three central propositions. First, a radical decentering of the human subject entangled within relations between other human and non-humans, the human subject is conceived not as a sovereign but as a concatenation of material relations. Second, ethics and ethical responsibility is understood to reside *in* these relations. It is not as custodians of human and non-human others that ethical responsibility resides. Rather we are responsible *with* human and non-human others, predicated on an ethics of enchantment. Third, being, knowing, and ethical responsibilities are considered to be fundamentally co-existent. Barad (2007) uses the term "ethico-onto-epistemology" (p. 381) to capture this sensibility. Knowledge-making is thereby positioned as a "matter of ethical concern" through the "'world-making' powers of practices of inquiry" which bring specific objects of study into being (Mauthner 2019, p. 669).

The focus of the researcher thereby shifts from the human to the de-centred human and non-human world of entanglements and their enchantments—positioning knowing and being within them. The research assemblage so conceived is not only a practice of knowing within entanglements but also, simultaneously, an ethical obligation that flows through these relations. Such a position acknowledges the indeterminacy of phenomena which are "always emerging and in flux" and thus cannot be reduced "to discrete, quantifiable objects" (p. 151, see also Bell and Willmott 2019). Inquiry is thereby positioned not as "discovery of an event or object or representation… [but] an ethical engagement in creativity, multiplicity, and indeterminacy" (Hendry et al. 2018, p. 227).

Conclusion

Enchantment, understood as an ethical engagement characterized by lively relations, inserts a challenge into discussions about methods in business ethics research. This article

has proposed that the study of business ethics would benefit from taking account of, and being more strongly oriented towards, possibilities for enchantment in research. Through drawing attention to the humanistic and post-humanistic potential of Bennett's (2001) conception of enchantment, we have called for business ethics researchers to centrally engage with interpretive, qualitative research as a means of reconnecting with the ethical purpose of business ethics research. By providing moments of novelty or disruption, cultivating meaningful attachments to things studied and openness to embodied, affective encounters, we have suggested that the enchantment enabled by interpretive, qualitative research encourages a decentering of objective, scientistic methods as being capable of capturing, containing, or honouring ethics. We therefore call upon business ethicists to reappraise the methodological assumptions which contribute to the rationalization of ethics, ultimately leading to disenchantment and foreclosing possibilities for more ethically enchanted research practice.

Compliance with Ethical Standards

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