Learning Objectives

Upon completion of this unit, students should be able to:

1. Analyze and discuss the claims that the positions of both employers and employees are essentially even with regard to EAW.

2. Analyze and discuss the requirement of balancing of the interests of employees and employers in the matter of safety and include how these competing interests should be balanced from a moral perspective.

3. Analyze Boatright’s potential strategy regarding workplace hazards in which acceptance of hazardous work conditions may be balanced by negotiated increases in compensation.

4. Compare and contrast Davis’ two distinct theories of morally justified whistle-blowing.

Unit Summary

In this unit, you will explore the ethical treatment of employees. You will do this by reading the following five essays, all of which are contained within your chapter readings.

Patricia H. Werhane and Tara J. Radin, “Employment at Will and Due Process”

In this article, Werhane and Radin examine the arguments in favor of and against employment at will (EAW). Ultimately they defend a position that EAW treats employees like a disposable resource, violating the respect that they are due as persons.

Ruth R. Faden and Tom L. Beauchamp, “The Right to Risk Information and the Right to Refuse Workplace Hazards”

In this article, Faden and Beauchamp examine the arguments surrounding the right of access to risk information and the right to refuse workplace hazards. The authors contend that in order to claim that employees have freely assumed the risks of employment, they must be aware of those risks. However, the right to risk information is an essentially empty right without the means to do something about it, which entails the derivative right to refuse workplace hazards.

John R. Boatright, “Occupational Health and Safety”

In this article, Boatright examines the moral foundations for a right to occupational health and safety. He argues that the common law defense of voluntary assumption of risk is a faulty principle since it rests on how a right to a safe workplace is worked out. In the end, he argues for a strong duty to not only provide safety information to employees but a duty to seek out safety information and a correlative right to refuse the hazards that are discovered or disclosed.

Michael Davis, “Some Paradoxes of Whistle-Blowing”

In this article, Davis briefly examines the case of Roger Boisjoly and him blowing the whistle on Morton-Thiokol following the Challenger disaster. He then applies this case to the standard theory of whistle-blowing and discovers that this case does not seem to satisfy the demands of this theory. As a result, he proposes an alternative “complicity theory” of whistle-blowing.

Ronald Duska, “Whistle-Blowing and Employee Loyalty”

In this article, Duska begins by examining the notion that whistle-blowing requires a moral justification. He then goes on to examine notions of loyalty, ultimately concluding that companies are not something that can legitimately demand loyalty. If employees do not owe loyalty to their employers, there is no need to morally justify whistle-blowing.