

BOOK REVIEW

**Teaching Business and Human Rights, by Anthony Ewing (ed.),  
(Cheltenham, UK and Northampton, MA, USA: Edward Elgar  
Publishing, 2023)**

**I. Introduction**

Companies affect human rights along their entire value chain, and in a globalized economy, there is a rising need to address complex business and human rights (BHR) risks. Businesses across several jurisdictions are grappling with human rights challenges throughout their supply chains and wider business operations. The surge of laws such as the Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence Directive (CSDDD) in Europe underscores a growing trend of legislative initiatives imposing obligations on corporations to uphold human rights standards.

*Teaching Business and Human Rights*, edited by Anthony Ewing, is an indispensable BHR resource addressing some of the emerging human rights challenges in a globalised world. It covers the foundations of BHR as well as the latest developments in the field and helps educators translate these topics into the classroom. The book pays tribute to the multidisciplinary character of the field and discusses each topic from a law, business and policy angle.

The individual chapters are written by experts from academia and practice with distinguished experience on the respective topic. Each chapter combines a theoretical framework with information on the state-of-the-art discourse, implications for practice, teaching approaches and concrete exercises for the classroom and a repository of further readings. The chapters end with question sets which promote further discussion and allow space for critical thinking.

The edited book is a collection of contributions that naturally have different styles. Cross-referencing between chapters creates logical connections that enhance the scholarly depth of the book. The efficacy of the structure is reflected in the synergy of the theoretical framework and practical issues that enriches the reading experience as it provides a holistic approach to questions of corporate responsibility for human rights. While each chapter is valuable on its own, the true worth of the book is realized when it is read in its entirety.

The book is published at a time when several new legislations have been passed (primarily in Europe) that make human rights due diligence mandatory for the private sector at large. Implementing these laws will require building expertise, for example, for managers to understand and manage their organizations' human rights impact; for legal experts who may engage with these laws to ensure remediation for rightsholders; and for policy-makers to develop clear and measurable criteria for assessing companies' human rights impact or to reduce barriers of access for rightsholders.

These developments in BHR have led to changes in educational institutions with a growing number of universities reinforcing human rights in their respective course materials to train the next generations of practitioners and leaders in business, policy-making and law. This book makes an important contribution to higher education as it illuminates the

transformative potential that teaching BHR can have for training university graduates to address local as well as global business challenges. A unique feature of the book is that it acknowledges the interdisciplinary nature of BHR as a field of inquiry. The contributors to this book have successfully produced a learning resource that introduces the foundations of an emerging interdisciplinary field and at the same time reaffirms the relevance in practice by diving into timely BHR issues that are currently discussed at the intersection of law, management and policy-making.

## II. What can readers expect from the book?

The book is divided into four sections: Foundational Topics, Business Practice, Corporate Accountability, and Key Issues. The first section on “Foundational Topics” reflects on a range of normative and legal concepts that form the bedrock principles of BHR, including corporate responsibility, human and labour rights and the right to remedy. The second section, on “Business Practice,” systematically explores the expectations towards companies under the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights—arguably the most widely accepted authoritative global standard on BHR—including human rights due diligence (HRDD), human rights impact assessment and nongovernmental grievance mechanisms. The third section moves the focus towards different forms of “Corporate Accountability”, including modalities that fix legal liability on corporations such as mandatory HRDD laws, nonstate remediation systems such as the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development National Contact Points, and collaborative approaches such as multistakeholder initiatives in which the members hold each other accountable to a jointly agreed-on standard. The last and longest section, “Key Issues,” relates the topics discussed in the preceding sections to contemporary BHR challenges. This section bridges theory and practice and discusses an array of specific BHR issues covering the grand challenges of our time, for example, by addressing human rights issues in relation to modern slavery (chapter 18), environmental concerns (chapter 19), technological advancements (chapter 24), trade dynamics (chapter 29), finance and accounting (chapters 26 and 27) or business and conflict (chapter 30). This concluding section offers a fresh outlook on timely topics that highlight the relevance of BHR in practice and bring actual societal challenges to the classroom that may be omitted in conventional BHR teaching.

The four-pronged structure enables a systematic overview of fundamental normative and legal principles in BHR scholarship whilst simultaneously exploring avenues of practical implementation of BHR approaches to modern business challenges. The structure helps the reader appreciate the evolution of efforts to assign responsibility for human rights to companies and hold them accountable within a broader framework of principles, making the book a viable read for both lawyers and nonlawyers alike. From a management perspective, the topics covered in the book also help future business professionals in understanding and addressing the impact of business operations on human rights along the value chain.

## III. How can lecturers from different disciplines benefit from the book?

The four fundamental sections connect to build a coherent teaching resource covering various teaching methods, pedagogies and styles. *Teaching Business and Human Rights* admirably maintains depth, internal coherence, and a logical flow between chapters through observing a human rights-centric approach which is relevant to a wider audience. While featuring the legal perspective on BHR quite strongly in the beginning, the book matures into an interdisciplinary resource that covers multiple topics beyond law. The topics discussed are not only immersed in legal assessment but also touch upon

socio-political impacts due to corporate activity which makes for an interesting read for researchers across different fields of study. The inclusion of exercises, seminal case studies, key questions and an extensive bibliography after each chapter indicates its usefulness to not only lecturers but also students.

Students who may be interested in advancing BHR research may find the book to be a handy companion, especially with those in their final and post-graduate years of study. The book presents itself as a valuable teaching resource, including for early career researchers in law, management, or political science who may be in the process of beginning to teach BHR courses at the university level. Despite its title as a teaching resource, the book transcends its intended purpose and serves as a comprehensive teaching-cum-research compendium for early career researchers and students.

Besides its obvious usefulness for courses on BHR, corporate responsibility and sustainability, the book also lends itself to lecturers whose focus is not BHR but who may be interested in dedicating one session to a related topic of interest. In the context of management studies, for example, a lecturer on supply chain management could use the chapter on modern slavery as an entry point to discuss human rights, possibly in combination with the chapter on multistakeholder initiatives as one way to address complex human rights issues. The book's emphasis on interactive exercises using key questions, examples and case studies provides concrete guidance for applying theoretical knowledge to typical situations that practitioners encounter on their jobs.

The authors of the book generously share their own teaching experience of what works in the classroom. The book supports immersive learning through interactive teaching methods and not only discusses abstract topics but also provides cases from different industries. The chapters are short and provide a quick overview while being extensive enough to serve as a directory for further reading. Given the book's scope, lecturers might have to tailor the exercises and case studies to their respective contexts or subdisciplines. Yet overall, the book deserves credit for uniting a variety of expertise and teaching approaches into one resource.

#### **IV. Why is this Book Relevant for Advancing BHR?**

The goal of teaching BHR is to equip the next generation of decision-makers with the skills to identify, analyse and address complex BHR issues – whether that is at a law school, business faculty, or political science department. The book provides a good starting point for discussing different modalities for teaching the impact of the private sector on human rights – focusing both on leveraging the impact of companies as a force for good to advance human rights, as well as on strengthening accountability to ensure remediation of human rights abuses.



The book will engage individuals who are interested in applying human rights law in everyday life. For instance, the chapter addressing the right to water provides a relevant example as it highlights the pressing global water scarcity crises from a BHR lens, giving a tangible practice case to the right to water. The emphasis on a range of contemporary issues, such as those pertaining to water rights, may remain neglected in traditional human rights discussions but found space in this book. The courage to explore diverse topics in the book sheds light on the need to expand the horizons of existing BHR curricula across different disciplines. The current curricula taught mostly in law schools often overlook the practical aspect of interdisciplinary integration beyond law. Through exploring newer horizons, the book emphasizes the imperative need to broaden the scope of human rights education across various academic disciplines.

A unique feature of the book is that it tackles current BHR challenges that are relevant to business practice. Management students, for instance, tend to ask about possible solutions

and ways to address concerns when they learn about the complexity of human rights challenges. Lecturers will find ample sources of information in the book which becomes pertinent when discussing potential mitigation strategies. One outstanding element is the focus on acknowledging the role that different stakeholders play in BHR, as illustrated, for instance, by a chapter on the rights of indigenous peoples (Chapter 21) as a particularly vulnerable group whose rights are regularly at risk in the context of business operations, or by a chapter on investors as a crucial yet often overlooked contributor (Chapter 26), or a chapter on multistakeholder initiatives as a promising approach to create measurable and context-specific standards (Chapter 16) that help address issues that cannot be resolved by one stakeholder alone.

*Teaching Business and Human Rights* through expert analyses, compelling case studies and teaching pedagogy offers a comprehensive resource that is valuable not only for academics but also for practitioners, policy-makers, and business leaders. Anthony Ewing and the contributors have created more than a teaching resource; the book is a compendium for transformative cross-disciplinary human rights education which moves BHR as a concept beyond the imperial shadow of legalese. The book manages to balance the theoretical foundations and the devolution of the field of BHR into thematic segments, e.g., through discussing contemporary challenges within BHR from a conceptual and practice-oriented point of view. It offers a fresh perspective for shaping future research agendas and fostering an interactive teaching pedagogy pertinent to both students and researchers. By providing a holistic and accessible overview of the field, the book facilitates the introduction to BHR and has the potential to contribute to mainstreaming BHR education.

**Competing interest.** The book includes a chapter coauthored by author A's manager. Author B declares none.

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