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Peer reviewed

Review: Shopping for Good
By Dara O'Rourke

Reviewed by Byron Anderson
DeKalb, Illinois, USA

O'Rourke, Dara. *Shopping for Good*. Cambridge, MA: A Boston Review Book published by The MIT Press, 2012. 103 pp. ISBN: 9780262018418, US \$14.95 hardcover.

Shopping for Good presents the complexity of issues surrounding ethical consumption by consumers. Ethical consumption, which views consumers as agents of change, is treated as an avenue for social change. In recent years, ethical consumption has taken on a number of global initiatives, including worker rights, environmental sustainability, and poverty in developing countries; however, changing consumer behavior, even for the good, is difficult. In general, people generally buy what they have always bought. Consumers are more likely to buy green if they, for example, know and trust the brand and do not have to change habits in using the product. To increase ethical consumption, much work will be required to change current buying habits, and this book serves as a good lead in to accomplishing this.

The initial part of the book introduces ethical consumption by presenting statistics on market growth for ethical products and providing ideas for empowering consumers to express their values when shopping. Surveys show that 30 to 70 percent of consumers say they want to buy greener, healthier, more socially responsible products (p. 6). Tied in with ethical consumption is having an awareness of greenwash, that is, recognizing products that are marketed as green, when, in fact, the products are only partially green or not at all green. The initial part of the book is followed by a "forum" of eight brief critiques by nine authors who respond to the initial article. A rebuttal by the book's author to these critiques concludes the book.

The book's coverage is thorough in the presentation of the issues surrounding ethical consumption and what it would take to expand these purchases. Emphasized is the role that technology can play, for example, apps for iPhones are now available that can provide point-of-sale information in the form of ethical scores for specific products that can assist a person's purchasing decision.

Ethical consumption has a skeptical side with some of the forum's critiques viewing it as little more than a panacea for middle-class guilt. Another critique questions the true power of individual purchasing decisions, but agrees that there would be a reckoning force if individual purchasers organized as a collective voice. Another critique argues that rather than focusing on well-intentioned consumers, "we need to explore more fully how private politics can enhance government programs to promote reform..." (p. 86). In the final part of the book, O'Rourke's rebuttal claims that individual ethical purchases still matter, and that ethical consumption has the potential to motivate government regulation.

O'Rourke is an Associate Professor of Environmental and Labor Policy at the University of California, Berkeley and is co-founder of GoodGuide, an online resource for information on health, environmental, and social impacts of consumer products. Moral and ethical consumption is a popular topic as shown in a number of recent publications, for example, *Ethical Consumption: A Critical Introduction* (2011) and *Ethical Consumption: Social Value and Economic Practice* (2012). *Shopping for Good* is easily read and has a lot of relevant information for both socially responsible consumers and those wanting to learn more how to shop for good. Highly recommended for all general library and personal collections.

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