Ethical Issues in Aviation

The book is dedicated to the first 7 students who have completed the Aviation Ethics course at Lewis University. This emphasizes the need to explicitly incorporate ethics in education and training. As such, the book is a novelty in its kind and provides a unique opportunity for aviation students, scientists and practitioners to get explicitly acquainted with ethics in aviation beyond the level of codes of conduct, normative behavior and anecdotic, operational dilemmas.

By Elizabeth A. Hoppe

Book Review by: John Stoop

‘Ethical issues in aviation’ explores an array of ethical theories, backgrounds, motives and control mechanisms in the American aviation industry that have had a frequently hidden impact on ethical issues. The book is very informative for in particular non-American readers, because it highlights contexts and developments in the USA that are not frequently made explicit to the rest of the world, such as the Deregulation Act of 1978. The approach in this book differs from the ethics and safety discourse that is going on in other parts of the world, in particular the European region which are more dealing with human error, organizational failure, responsibilities and judgments of operator behavior. For a further reading on such more normative topics, Ashgate provides other books in its human factors and resilience engineering series. This book provides a refreshing and new line of reasoning into aviation ethics.

This book is a collection of contributions of 25 authors and is structured along 5 parts, each focusing on a specific aspect of ethics and aviation, emphasizing decision making and moral standards. The most interesting part as far as I am concerned dealt with four theoretical frameworks, covering a Utilitarian, Kantian, Rights and Virtue based perspective on ethical decision making. The novelty of this part is in the clear description of strengths, weaknesses and assumptions of each of these theories, highlighting their potential and limitations. A unique chapter is on capitalism and its critics, putting the generic moral issues and ethics theories in the context of a specific high-technology industry, the aviation community and national governance control. This chapter elaborates not only on the role of labor and the position of workers in the system, but provides an interesting insight in the role of consumers as well and how they are captured in a never ending cycle of consumer behavior. A next series of authors opens up crucial questions by touching on the topics of pricing, maintenance and manufacturing outsourcing, cost control and corporate and governance responsibility, which are closely related to the issue of safety. The other parts of the book deal with other critical issues in aviation which are in the center of public and political eyes, but have a less distinct or direct relation to ethical questions in terms of business continuity and safety. These parts deal with equal rights for minorities, with airport, ATC, security, health and environmental issues.

A moral dilemma that is not discussed in this book however, is how these aspects interfere with safety critical design decisions and operational behavior of the aviation system. There is anecdotic evidence that noise abatement procedures, strict security regimes, free flight concepts, certification of new aircraft configurations and technological innovations may jeopardize safety by defining acceptable quantitative risk levels and sacrificial
decision making considerations. Such decision making is based on utilitarian principles only and does not mobilize the array of opportunities that have been presented in this book. The ethical underpinning of such complex multidimensional decision making at an integrated systems level could be the subject of a next book. This could be done even in a multi-modal context because as the CEO of a major railway company once said at a European safety conference: if we start killing our crew and passengers, we are on the wrong track.

My conclusion: a very worthwhile book that deserves reading, a follow-up on some unresolved issues and a wide audience.

About the author:
Dr. Elizabeth A. Hoppe is Associate Professor of Philosophy at Lewis University, Illinois. She is a member of the Association for Professional and Practical Ethics.

About the reviewer:
John Stoop is an aerospace engineer, specialized in safety investigations in all modes of transportation. He works at Delft University of Technology in the Netherlands and is a guest professor in safety investigation methodology and systems engineering at the University of Lund in Sweden. Stoop is a full member of ISASI, the international, professional association of air safety investigators.

About the Book

---

Get Your Thesis Published in Aerlines Magazine!

Have you written a great academic thesis on Air Transport? Get your thesis published in Aerlines Magazine and reach over 10.000 Industry professionals, fellow students and researcher worldwide!

Three simple steps to getting published:
1. **Send** a copy of your finished thesis, including an executive summary and a request to get published to info@aerlines.nl.
2. **Write** an article on your research findings (for size and format requirements visit our website and search for ‘Author Guidelines’).
3. **Adjust** your article according to feedback of our editors and editorial review board.

Now you are all set! Your article will get published in Aerlines Magazine and potentially read by over 10.000+ Aviation professionals! Still want to know a bit more? Contact our chief editor; Bram du Saar at bram.dusaar@aerlines.nl

No thesis, but a PHD research project? Follow the same steps and get published as well!