Modern Values

Content and Contributors

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Moderne Werte – Inhalt und Beitragende

There are interdependences between the market economy and more general values in modern European societies. In this article, I will discuss the contribution of both theory and more practical morals of the market. Another source of influence on values is the unselfishness demanded by religion and honored by most philosophers. I will discuss whether this demand is positive. There is a danger of trivialization of ethics into a public-relations discourse, which reduces its function as an aid in dilemmas and as a serious constraint on behavior. An agent-neutral universalism is often suggested, but for companies with ambitions of setting norms, a more particularistic ethics is of interest. An appropriate theory to this is largely missing and many important issues are treated as juridical rather than ethical matters. There are reasons for business and economic ethics to reconsider the usefulness of conventional ethics, as it might be less a part of the solution than a part of value problems of modern societies.

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1. Introduction

There is widespread criticism of capitalism and modern society by conservatives, socialists and postmodernists. The intensity of the critique varies, but there is a common opinion that the market economy has negative effects on morality and value formation: materialism among consumers, alienation among employees, and greed among shareholders. But do we really face a value problem in modern Europe? If so, what is the cause, and what would be the remedy?

This article discusses present European values on two levels. The following section examines values from the standpoint of moral influence exerted by three major spheres of society. What is brought across to the modern European individual from the market, civil society, and the state, respectively?

The third section focuses on the ethics behind the morals of the three spheres. The distinction applied here, is that morals are seen as prescriptive ethics, while the term ethics is used for the theoretical framework and the justification for advocating special