

Why the Practice of Business Ethics Calls for a Due Regard for History*

FREDERICK BIRD**

In this essay I will examine four reasons why a due regard for history is important for business ethics. These are as follows: (1) In order to learn and to appreciate local cultural norms and practices; (2) In order to understand both how current problems developed as they have and how to envision the current responsibilities for past legacies; (3) In order to gain a lively sense of what is now possible and what is not and when what kinds of actions are called for; and (4) in order to monitor existing practices as they evolve over time.

Keywords: Ethics, History, Business, Contingencies, Responsibilities, Legacies

Warum die Praxis der Unternehmensethik einen sorgfältigen Blick in die Geschichte braucht

In diesem Essay werde ich vier Gründe untersuchen, warum ein sorgfältiger Blick in die Geschichte für Unternehmensethik wichtig ist: (1) um lokale kulturelle Normen und Praktiken schätzen zu lernen; (2) um zu verstehen, wie gegenwärtige Probleme entstanden sind und welche Verantwortung für die Vergangenheit besteht; (3) um einen lebhaften Sinn dafür zu entwickeln, was jetzt möglich ist und was nicht, und wann welche Art von Handlungen gefragt sind; und (4) um zu beobachten, wie bestehende Praktiken sich über die Zeit entwickelt haben.

Schlagwörter: Ethik, Geschichte, Unternehmen, Kontingenz, Verantwortung, Vergangenheit

1. Introduction

Often we associate the practice of ethics with efforts to make judgments about how to act with respect to particular issues by invoking general, often universal normative standards – whether these are expressed in the form of principles, values, rights, rules, virtues, or ends. This is the approach to ethics modelled especially in the works of Plato, Aquinas, Kant, and Rawls, as well as in sacred texts like the Dhammapada, the Qur’an, Leviticus and Deuteronomy, and Canon Law. An equivalent approach is embodied in the efforts to arrive at common normative standards for business practices as these are set forth in business codes like the SA 8000, the ISO 14000, Benchmarks for Excellence,

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** Prof. Dr. em. Frederick Bird, Department of Political Science/University of Waterloo, 200 University Avenue West, Waterloo, ON, Canada, Tel.: +1-(0)519-8884567, E-Mail: fbird@uwaterloo.ca, Fields of Research: Business Ethics, Global Ethics, Global Poverty, Comparative Ethics, Ethics as a Social Practice.