

Remarks on a recent incident concerning an attempt to eliminate ethical philosophy from business ethics

Outline of presentation at Åbo Akademi, 25 September 2007

Abstract

In this presentation I will discuss a recent attack that has been made by a prominent American professor of business ethics on what he calls the 'tenuous relevance' of the work of Jacques Derrida for business ethics and corporate social responsibility. Having worked with the writings of Derrida and having tried to consider the relevance of his work for organization studies, business ethics and corporate social responsibility for some years, I am drawn to respond. I will outline the charges made against Derrida, first of all to ask if they justify the attempted exorcism. Given that there is almost no substance to the objections, we will be led to consider what is *really* at stake in such attacks. Objections against this or that philosopher, or against philosophy as such, are remarkably common, although not always in print. They are often motivated by something of a 'policing' operation, which tends to select the philosophers that are relevant for business ethics and other fields according to their country of birth, and to treat those from certain terrains as *sans papiers*. Or, more viciously, they are repelled in advance by the idea that an area like business ethics would not need to reflect, and would not need to reflect *with* the tradition of ethical philosophy, on what it might mean to speak of the 'good' in 'good business' and the 'ethical' in 'business ethics'.

Campbell Jones is Director of the Centre for Philosophy and Political Economy and Senior Lecturer in Critical Theory and Business Ethics in the School of Management at the University of Leicester and Visiting Professor in the Department of Management, Politics and Philosophy at Copenhagen Business School. His publications include *For Business Ethics* (2005, Routledge, with Martin Parker and René ten Bos) and *Philosophy and Organization* (2007, Routledge, with René ten Bos). He recently edited a collection of essays on Emmanuel Levinas and business ethics, which appear in the journal *Business Ethics: A European Review* (July 2007, vol. 16/3), and he is organising a symposium on Jacques Derrida and business ethics, to be held at the Centre for Philosophy and Political Economy at the University of Leicester, 14-16 May 2007 (for details visit <http://www.le.ac.uk/ulsm/research/cppe/derrida.html>).