

Dear Readers,

Business ethics as an individual area of scholarship is merely thirty years old. It was in the 1980s that Harvard Business School established a department devoted to the investigation of ethics in business, thus ushering in the era of modern business ethics research.

Ethical dilemmas that occur in the course of business dealings nevertheless date back to the beginning of recorded human history. The Bible is a rich storehouse of examples of the complex nature of relations between economic processes and ethical conduct. Another noteworthy early source is Cicero's account of the situation on Rhodes, a classical business ethics dilemma: in times of an acute grain shortage on the island a merchant of Alexandria managed to sell his wares at a highly favourable price. When setting sail in Alexandria he saw many other vessels loaded with grain bound for Rhodes and knew the crisis would soon be solved. The inhabitants of the island were not aware of this. The merchant's ethical dilemma therefore is whether to tell the people of Rhodes that the lean days are soon over or keep the news to himself, selling his grain at the highest possible price. At the end of the story Cicero comments that providing appropriate information is a merchant's moral obligation even if he faces losses of profit by doing so.

These examples clearly show that correlations between the economy and ethics are easy to find in almost all aspects of business. Quite evidently, the primary economic value of market processes is the striving for profit, or in other words, the pursuit of efficiency. As early as the 17th century, John Locke clearly emphasised the idea that the operations of the market involve issues of natural ethical values, with a focus on power, freedom and private possession. Private possession in turn means complete appropriation of and dominance over certain resources. This must be based on the individual person's free and uncoerced will to bring their goods to the market for exchange. It is a principle upheld by natural law. Intervention by an external factor (e.g. the state) must be justified by economic equilibrium or ethical/legal issues. Economists tend to approach ethical questions in market processes from a primarily pragmatic stance, placing the motif of self-interest in the centre.

This is perforce a biased attitude, as the market at the same time is a specific territory of the

workings of ethical values, serving not only the creation of individual profit but also the generation of profit for a community or society in general. Beside the material and practical, the individual's involvement in market processes improves abilities that in turn serve to unfold individual talent and innovative spirit. The market must not only be perceived as a terrain of direct economic interactions but as an entity that contributes to a specific construction of social life, with its intricate network of connections and oppositions. This means that while individual interest indeed plays an important role in economic motivations, it is far from being the sole determinant in the distribution of tasks or the system of aggregate social achievements. Another aspect of this issue is the fact that in reality there is no market which will exclusively conform to ethical norms. The evident reason for this is that all markets are competitive, with actors wanting to gain advantage over others. People of various ethical creeds will exhibit divergent morals in the race to gain advantages.

The economic crisis that has been with us for two years now has certainly justified the launching of this modern internet-based journal on business ethics under the web title gazdasagetika.hu. As editor, I gained personal aspiration to start up a journal after thirteen years of research and instruction in business ethics at the University of Pannonia. The summary of this period is published in a volume entitled *Self-interest and Selflessness* (2007; second, revised edition: Perfekt Kiadó, 2009). My aim is to present an interdisciplinary approach to studying the relationships of economics and societies, contributing to the emergence of a world in which fairness is a far more fundamental value than perhaps it is now. The broader professional background of the journal is provided by the Social Sciences and International Studies Institute of the University of Pannonia.

Economists, philosophers, sociologists, psychologists and political scientists of international renown have kindly granted their assistance to giving birth to the journal: professionals who share a creed of working towards the creation of a more ethical world than ours. I am also dedicated to enlarging the circle of contributors to the journal. Articles from university lecturers, researchers and PhD students are heartily welcome. Future issues will be accompanied by a series of conferences and symposia and forums to promote the ideas promoted in the journal. In addition to quarterly editions, several sections of the homepage will be gradually developed, e.g.: ethical codes, branch ethics, novelties, ethics committees, partner journals, forum, sponsors and supporters etc. The journal aims to address the interested general public while strictly maintaining scholarly standards.

I wish you pleasant and thoughtprovoking reading, hoping that you will decide to visit gazdasagetika.hu on a regular basis in the future. Please feel free to share your ideas and comments with the editorial board and all readers.

Dr. habil. Imre Garaczi

Editor in chief