

Summary

„Corporate Ethics between Regulation and Self Regulation. The state of the Debate.“

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This paper deals with the current scientific debate in German speaking countries concerning the role of Corporate ethics as meso-level ethics of an (business-) organization. While these countries have developed own approaches to business ethics which can be discerned from Anglo-American approaches, it still seems not clear which legal and structural elements are needed to “motivate” companies to follow the path of social responsibility. Such elements have to be identified if the EU Commission’s goal of making Europe the top region for CSR shall be reached.

After giving an overview on current approaches to business ethics and their philosophical groundings, the authors depict the specific place of corporate ethics between social ethics (ethics within the social framework) and individual ethics (ethics of the manager). Ethical legitimation is provided for an understanding of responsibility that is directly connected to the enterprise as quasi-public organization. It is shown how proactive “compliance” can be understood as a self-regulating framework for entrepreneurial action. One of the most important instruments to reach a new picture of CSR and business ethics is stakeholder management. Some implications for such an approach, seen from economics and ethics likewise, are described. Lastly, some hints to what a legal framework for CSR and business ethics activities would comprise in the future, are given.