

Summary

“Mechanismen der Wirtschaftsethik – Zwischen Vereinheitlichung und freiwilliger Akzeptanz”

by Christoph Lütge

This article deals with different mechanisms for implementing business ethics. Usually, the mechanisms of coercion and voluntariness are distinguished, leaving little room for a middle way. The author argues that self-interested voluntariness is such a middle way that subverts the usual distinction. It rests on a normative conception that has its roots in the contractarian idea of consensus. However, this criterion is not taken as a normative postulate here, but justified further, with reference to the structures of competition and the structure of the Internet. Many multinational corporations are now recognising voluntary self-constraints as being in their own interest. Examples are given which include fighting against AIDS and cause-related marketing. Finally, a presupposition of self-interested voluntariness is analysed: the possibility of ascribing responsibility to collective actors. Several arguments are discussed, before concluding that corporations and other collective actors can be held responsible – which reinforces the argument in favour of self-interested voluntariness as a means for implementing ethical norms in business.