

2009 School Seminar Series

Waikato Management School
Te Raupapa



Ethics at Work: If Spirituality is the Answer, What is the Question?

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Abstract

Spirituality as a basis for ethical business is an increasingly common theme in the business ethics literature. We are interested in three questions:

- What is spirituality?
- What is the basis for the claims made for spirituality as a foundation for business ethics?
- Are these claims justified?

We examine a number of conceptions of spirituality, which vary from the purely secular to the theistic. We accept that spirituality as such is independent of specific religions, though we note that concrete applications of spirituality in the literature are almost always overtly religious despite authors' own concerns about the divisiveness of religion in the workplace, at least in pluralistic societies.

We accept that spirituality in general and religion in particular are an appropriate basis for business ethics in some cultural contexts. However, we defend the position that the most plausible arguments for a spiritual basis for business ethics reduce to secular arguments, commonly in terms of virtue ethics.

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