

Social darwinism and business ethics

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Assignment: Social Darwinism and Business Ethics Business ethics is a relatively new academic term dealing with the application of ethical values in commerce. The concept of ethical dealing in business has existed in all ages and times, hoping to ensure 'proper' conduct of business. But they have not always been very successful. In modern times, democratic values have necessitated a study of business ethics. Businessmen in the modern age are identified with words like 'profit-mongers', 'sharks-in-the-suit' etc.

Unfortunately critics call the term 'business ethics' an oxymoron (Nick Arrizza M. D). Apart from the practical issues in business ethics like corporate social responsibility, corporate governance, stakeholder concept etc there are also philosophical issues conflicting with the nature of business. One of the most important issues among them is 'Social Darwinism'.

The encyclopedia Britannica defines Social Darwinism as " the theory that persons, groups, and races are subject to the same laws of natural selection as Charles Darwin had perceived in plants and animals in nature". The essential similarity between Social Darwinism and the nature of business is the term 'competition'. It is competition that drives progress. The alleged propounder of Social Darwinism, the late Victorian English philosopher Herbert Spencer coined the term 'survival of the fittest' to society, inspired by the scientific support from Darwin's work. This led to the belief that the weak exist solely for exploitation by the strong. Critics think Social Darwinism is to be blamed for issues like the eugenic programs of nineteenth century, the Nazi holocaust, imperialism, racism etc.

The eighteenth century philosopher Kant had a viewpoint quite similar to the social Darwinists, but much more superior. He argued that the theory of evolution was actually a step backwards in theoretical analysis of the species

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and illogical. But he declared that " any action is right if it can coexist with everyone's freedom in accordance with a universal law"(Frederick Rausher). This viewpoint does not contradict the theory of 'competition' and equal opportunity hailed by the social Darwinists. But Kant would be in conflict with social Darwinists when they consider 'elimination' of the weak as a natural process. Kant argues that the state or government is a requirement for freedom, whereas the social Darwinists like Andrew Carneige declared that the state was an impediment to freedom. This exposes the dogmatic belief of the social Darwinists in capitalism as a natural economic system that would best contribute to the 'welfare of the fittest.'

The emergence of game theory in mathematics has provided practical insights into some of the 'unsettled' philosophical issues like social Darwinism. The 'prisoner's dilemma' problem demonstrates that success can be achieved in a selfish game. Even if the problem demands cooperation, you can achieve success by cleverly sticking to your selfish goals. This shows the compatibility of social Darwinism and business strategy. Social Darwinism delivers success in a business scenario. All the big cartels are prime examples of this.

Then why should anybody care about criticizing the 'sharks' when they are steadily delivering' Why should ethics be applied to business, where everything can be weighed against profit' That's because life is much more complex than business. Ethics embody all the values that convey a sense of justice. In the absence of justice being delivered, societies cannot exist peacefully, even for the welfare of the 'fittest'. Historic revolutions like socialism fought tooth and nail against capitalist injustice, advocating trading for the sole purpose of the state welfare. A study of business ethics is a <https://assignbuster.com/social-darwinism-and-business-ethics/>

limited affair in a capitalistic environment. Social Darwinism is still taught as a fact in most of the countries. Arguments and criticism of social Darwinism are confined solely as academic exercises. Absence of ethics in business even threatens the existence of a democratic society.

Works cited

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