

Zion, Deborah, "Moral Taint" or Ethical Responsibility? In: Journal of Applied Philosophy: Vol. 15, 3/1998.

The Ethics of Transformation and the Role of Business Ethics. The Polish Perspective

Jacek Sójka

1. Introduction

The economic, social and cultural transformation which has occurred in Central and Eastern Europe is not only a highly complicated process but also one which invites many different interpretations and evaluations. Since this process is not completely spontaneous or out of control,¹ subjective views of different actors, from the so-called man on the street (a potential voter) to high-level politicians, become important or even crucial factors influencing and directing the change. One of the most interesting questions in these circumstances is: To what extent does the moral point of view matter? Can it have any practical impact on the course of events? Or, as some people claim, should moral judgements be suspended during the transition period? As a matter of fact, there are a great many supporters of the "first million" argument. Is it really justified or rather extremely dangerous? I am deeply convinced that the latter is true despite the common views to the contrary.

Naturally, the evaluation of the very process of transformation is an extremely interesting subject and can hardly be avoided within academic and everyday discourses, but my focus is on the conditions for and the legitimacy of such evaluation and the role of business ethics as an academic and practical ("professional") activity. I have stressed the "Polish perspective" not to narrow my analysis but to underline the origins of my interest in the transformations of the whole region. In other words, I am interested in the possibilities of evaluating the moral fitness of a complicated process of socio-economic transformation in Central Eastern Europe (CEE), i.e. the legitimacy of an ethical perspective, and in reflection on business conduct (morality), "business ethics," as one of the possibilities.

¹ Paradoxically, the restoration of free market economy was planned and introduced by reformist elites. It was and still is a "capitalism by democratic design". *Offe, Claus, Varieties of Transition. The East European and East German Experience, Cambridge, Mass. 1997, p. 29.*

