

Excerpt from email of April 9, 2014, to Professor Anthony Gortzis, President of EBEN (There had previously been correspondence mostly in December 2013 informing Professor Gortzis of the contention with dnwe.)

.....

Allow me to recapitulate: dnwe as represented by its officers

- has repeatedly engaged in censorship in various forms. That is, it has repeatedly and consistently suppressed debate on key concerns of business ethics
- its officials have engaged in vote rigging and have otherwise endorsed the manipulation of elections
- the board can be shown to have blatantly disregarded at least one set of resolutions by members at a properly constituted general meeting
- dnwe officials have discouraged networking among ordinary members
- appointments (of a sort that is anyway superfluous or inappropriate in a network) have been made in secret while active members and constructive contributions have been sidelined

We are not talking about isolated incidents, but of a consistent pattern, that I have documented in detail on [www.contra-dnwe.de](http://www.contra-dnwe.de). Upstanding professionals have left in disgust. dnwe refused, even before I was formally excluded (in a rigged process), to reply to my formal requests to disclose full – or indeed any – details about these exits.

This is a summary of the charges that I, as one of fourteen founder members of DNWE and an EBEN member since about 1990, have levelled against dnwe. My speaking out and refusing to go quietly were the real reason for my exclusion. I have never behaved disrespectfully to anyone

except where they first behaved disrespectively towards me.

The question for EBEN is whether it turns a blind eye to these blatant transgressions or chooses to investigate them transparently and to confront the culprits.

**As regards EBEN itself**, and this is independent of the charges against dnwe, there are two key matters that require a positioning, points that I raised in my original letter in November 2013.

If EBEN is a network, as its name implies, its members must be informed of who they are such that they can indeed network. The present constitution is that EBEN encompasses both individuals and national chapters. Therefore networking must be enabled for individual members, and not only for national organisations.

Moreover, if EBEN is serious about promoting debate in business ethics, it must set up a forum on an intranet such that members across Europe can discuss matters relating to business ethics in an informal and ad-hoc manner. Discussion cannot be limited to those who have the resources to attend short meetings at locations across Europe. Nor can it be the preserve of academics and their bizarre publication formats. Indeed, some hard (ethical) questions can be asked about the integrity and openness of the academic world.

One *raison d'être* for an organisation such as EBEN with paid membership is that it encourages commitment by members and can enable some kind of filtering of contributions. Otherwise it would be enough just to set up discussion groups using the various social media. The best form of quality control is to enable members to endorse (or

else dismiss) contributions. Let there be a market in ideas!

In view of the fact the members would seem to have widely divergent ideas about what ethics and business ethics are, this question, too, must be addressed. Otherwise we shall be talking at cross purposes. Members should be encouraged to state their personal position, and this should not be confined to a platitudinous generality.

Such a revamped and authentic EBEN would be an organisation worth joining. It might also hold out the prospect, over time, of actually changing things in the business world.

Indeed, Business Ethics is, today more than ever, a matter of concern with a future, but it would seem in the last twenty odd years to have been subverted (and so discredited) by people whose aim has been to make of it a business for themselves.

Business Ethics is an essential corrective, inter alia, because:

- cash flows do not always reflect wealth creation (they may indeed represent its destruction)
- markets can easily be subverted (distorted, manipulated)
- even when market forces work in the long term, the long term is often too long in coming
- legal process is everywhere slow and unreliable, and the costs (actual and hidden) of legal activists are rarely reimbursed
- penalties under legal process are often too low to have any deterrent effect, or else they are paid for by impotent shareholders rather than the culprits in management
- the law fails to keep pace with technology and social

change

- the anonymity of today's world enables persons of bad character to continue with impunity in professional employment or otherwise in business, rather than, as known quantities, their being debarred (named, shamed and excluded)
- no public can realistically be expected consistently and persistently to track corporate reputation and to use its custom to deter or reward corporate behaviour; in any case, corporations change, sometimes for the better, sometimes the worse, such that consumer and similar response to reputation, whether as a stick or a carrot, is wholly dysfunctional

In summary: Business ethics is, in part at least, a response to market and legislative failure. Its task is different from that of politics, because most politics, at least today and in the EU, seeks to correct for market failure by improving market mechanisms and legal remedies, i.e. with more of the same. Business ethics, on the contrary, seeks remedies at the level of business and professional culture. How this can be done is something I discuss on my various websites. Similarly, codes cannot be a substitute for character, but a lot can be said about ways to understand codes and character.

There is, nonetheless, an overlap between matters addressed by business ethics and management practice (it is astonishing how a lot of management is counter-productive even when measured in narrow commercial terms). Much error has to do with habits of thought and with fashion, or, in more intellectual language, with ideologies. One skill any (business or other) ethicist must possess is being able to spot and disarm confused thinking. Examples would be the common errors of

equating altruism with morality, or else confounding a refusal to give assent to a generalisation with refusing to pass judgement in a specific case.

Often this skill is a matter of being able to combat rhetoric. It cannot be done by being indulgent (i.e. nice) to people of bad faith.

Business ethics should moreover be distinguished from political philosophy (i.e. the nature of justice, of democracy, of corporate bodies etc.). It also needs to be distinguished from contemporary movements or ideas such as CSR, sustainability, social enterprise, corporate citizenship.

These are all very basic messages which do not require the (sometimes questionable) erudition of academics or their journals, and that can be elaborated in straightforward language. The rest is bringing examples, as a serious journalist would do.

.....