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The Chair for Economic Ethics supervises doctoral dissertations in the Doctoral Program at the Wittenberg Center for Global Ethics.

This text provides information for doctoral students interested in applying for the WCGE Doctoral Program.

Ordonomics

Ordonomics is a research program developed at the chair of economic ethics at MLU. The ordonomic research program is located at the interface of philosophy (Kitcher 2011) and economics (Brennan/Buchanan 1985, Schelling 2006, Aghion et al. 2021); it has an interdisciplinary orientation and incorporates insights from psychology (Haidt 2012, Greene 2013), the social sciences (Henrich 2016) and history (McCloskey 2006, 2010, 2016, Mokyr 2009, 2017): Ordonomics is interested in learning processes – in society, in the economy, in the third sector and within organizations. It reconstructs societal learning processes as (mutual) adaptations of institutions and ideas, of social structure and semantics. “Social structure” refers to formal or informal rule arrangements and their incentive properties, which determine the patterns of outcomes resulting from our societal interactions; “semantics” stands for the terms and the underlying thought categories that drive our individual and collective self-understanding.

Ordonomics examines the interdependencies (and especially the discrepancies) between social structure and semantics. It does so by asking two complementary questions: On the one hand, it asks whether our modern social structure suits our morality: How far do the institutions of modern society and its market system comply with the requirements and evaluation criteria of our moral idea(l)s and normative convictions? On the other, it asks whether our morality and the according semantics suit the functional requirements of modern society: How far are our moral idea(l)s and normative convictions a good match for the functional requirements of modern society and the competitive structures in business and politics?

In this way, both institutions and ideas are put to the test. The first question aims at rule reforms of social structure (order of action), while the second question aims at reforms of semantics (order of thought). Hence, mismatch problems between social structure and semantics can be solved in two ways: via (re-)forming incentive arrangements as well as via re-assessing normative criteria, e.g. a “transvaluation of values.” The first question draws on rational-choice-based models of social dilemma structures, while the ordonomic idea referred to as “orthogonal position” is central to the second question. See Pies (2009a), (2009b) and (2022).

Topical Fields

We are interested in research proposals that cover or intersect at least one of the following fields:

- a) Ordonomic Analysis of Market Morality
- b) Ordonomic Business Ethics
- c) Ordonomic Ethics of Modern (Civil) Society

(a) We invite contributions to analyzing the moral status of markets. Here, the ordonomic core ideas are that competition is a means for furthering societal cooperation and that markets enable solidarity with strangers, thus helping us to expand the scope of our moral ideals.

Possible topics include the pros and cons of child labor, sweatshops, legal prostitution, markets for organs, minimum wage laws, price controls.

We are especially interested in the virtue ethics of market morality, along the lines of Bruni/Sugden (2013) and Brennan/Jaworski (2016).

For ordonomic publications, cf. Pies (2015), (2016a), (2016b), (2017a), (2018), Pies and Schultz (2023) as well as Reese and Pies (2022).

(b) We invite contributions to Business Ethics, especially to the research literature on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) and Corporate Citizenship (CC). Here, the ordonomic core ideas are that morality can be seen as a factor of production and that moral commitments can help to overcome social dilemma structures, thus reaping sustainable win-win potentials.

Possible topics include the legitimacy of the profit principle, strategies of sustainable management, the political responsibility of business firms (“responsible lobbying”), and initiatives for collective action like EITI (“Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative”), GRI (“Global Reporting Initiative”), or GBCHealth (“Global Business Coalition”). Furthermore, we are interested in innovative governance structures for the sharing economy and digital business models.

For ordonomic publications cf. Beckmann et al. (2014), Hielscher et al. (2014), Pies et al. (2009), (2010), (2014), Pies (2017b) as well as sowie Pies, Schreck and Homann (2021).

(c) We invite contributions to analyzing civil society organizations (CSOs) and their interaction with business. Here, the ordonomic core ideas are that due to several media biases (Rosling 2018, Pinker 2018) and the underlying “rational irrationality” of citizens (Caplan 2007) competition between CSOs (for funding, support, attention, etc.) may lead them to systematically exaggerate societal problems, thus contributing to democratic “discourse failures”. At the same time, many sustainability problems lack public attention.

Possible topics include the ethics of scandalization, e.g. with regard to financial speculation with agricultural commodities, or with regard to specific products like glyphosate or other herbicides. We are generally interested in the pros and cons of banning products or production procedures like GMOs (“genetically manipulated organisms”), or of regulating the use of certain ingredients, e.g. via a tax on sugar or fat.

We also welcome contributions to the research literature on collective self-regulation of CSOs and possible remedies against democratic discourse failures.

For ordonomic publications cf. Hielscher et al. (2017), Hielscher et al. (2022), Pies et al. (2015), (2017), Will / Pies (2017), (2018).

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