Authorities in Business Ethics

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ABSTRACT. It is the purpose of this study to identify the most-referenced authors, works, periodicals and publishers in business ethics. A computer analysis was made of over eight hundred references taken from fifty-seven recent articles. The result is a special type of bibliography designed to conserve time for readers in this field. The two most-cited authors were Milton Friedman and Christopher Stone; while the most-referenced works were Where the Law Ends by Stone, "Is the Ethics of Business Changing?" by Brenner and Molander, and Ethical Theory and Business edited by Beauchamp and Bowie.

Authorities in business ethics

Who are the authorities in the field of business ethics? To whom do writers refer in current business research articles? Answers to these questions can be useful guidelines to readers in this area. It is the purpose of this paper to provide such answers through a new form of literature review.

Eight hundred references were taken from recent journal articles dealing with business ethics. These references came from issues for the last two years of the following publications: Journal of Business Ethics, Business and Professional Ethics Journal, Academy of Management Journal, Academy of Management Review, California Management Review, and Business Horizons. Only those articles were included in the study that contained at least one of the following key words in their titles: ethics, values, conscience, moral, integrity, or philosophy. Forty-seven of the fifty-seven articles studied (82%) came from the first two journals listed above, those dealing primarily with business ethics. The remaining ten articles were found in management journals.

Each of the references was entered into a personal computer for analysis. The data base management program, PFS:FILE, was used for the processing. This provided a simple and flexible means to sort the data by a number of different categories.

Most-referenced authors

Exhibit I shows the most-referenced authors in the study. They are listed in descending order of the number of articles that contained references. Those with equal frequencies of articles are listed alphabetically. Each author was referenced in at least three journal articles. The number of works cited for each author is also indicated.

The first two authors in the list are prime examples of two different types of authorities. Friedman represents those that have a number of works (in this case six) to which references are made. Stone, on the other hand, is in a category of authors who have one primary work to which all of the citations are made. These two examples form the ends of a continuum along which there is considerable variation.

It should also be noted that some of the authors in the list are not authorities in the normal sense of the word. They are, in fact, more critics or holders of minority views concerning business ethics. Friedman and Carr would be considered by most to fall into such a classification.

In Exhibit II are listed the philosophers and historical authorities whose works were referenced.
directly in the study. It seems quite surprising that this list is so short. The thirty-six references that it contains are a mere four percent of the total. Perhaps this can best be explained, at least in part, by the applied nature of business ethics. It may also be affected by the mixed readership of the source journals which would include many who do not have a philosophical background.

**Most-referenced works**

The most-referenced works of recent authors are shown as follows: eight books in Exhibit III, and six periodical articles in Exhibit IV. Each work was