

Business and Moralities

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Abstract: This research paper aims to bring the business ethics into perspective through a theoretical approach of the terms ethics, morality and business in the desire to draw attention to the need for ethics in business and its impact on society and the business environment. It is often questioned why the association of these two terms is important as long as the purpose of business is the profit and not the correct behavioral or decisional conduct of an economic institution? Certainly the tension created between the two poles is not easy to reduce, what this paper seeks is to set the theoretical basis of the concept of business ethics and to have a theoretical approach both locally, with reference to Romania, but also an international approach, by trying to investigate the interest in terminology in various other economic and political areas.

Key words: Business, Morality, Ethics, Economics, Business Environment

1. Introduction

For a better understanding and for being able to talk about the authority of ethics, we need to ask the question of its origin. Also, in order to understand the necessity of this concept and the significance of this question, we should imagine a society without rules, which would be almost impossible. An interesting answer would be that of Christian origin, which explains morality as "a human attempt to align our imperfect nature with divine nature" (Singer 2006, 30). But this possible alignment can not be done without the awareness and deepening of the two dimensions mentioned: "our imperfect nature" and "divine nature." Here are more than two antagonistic concepts. I consider that, to speak of the fallen human nature, we have to go from a theological concept called "sin." Regardless of whether or not we take into account the theological notion described above, the idea of the imperfect nature, meaning, devoid of ethical and moral concept, remains something wrong, reprehensible. However, if we compare the realistic term of human nature, lacking in perfection, to divine nature, then we can speak of a final point to which we should reach. Through these two concepts, the starting point of human nature and the final point of divine nature, we can discuss a process of ethical reformation, a possible process that transforms the individual not only ideologically but also factually.

Certainly, the question of ethical origin can find much more answers, but this one seems relevant to man's tendency to reach a moral pre-existing standard, so in a universally valid way. Many questions can be asked about the effectiveness of the

example, but I think that at this level of discussion the theoretical aspect is sufficient, but during the paper, I will present other arguments to make this plea viable.

If we look at another origin-related reality, we can discover the beginnings of ethical preoccupation in the Greek philosophical world, more sure in Aristotle's teachings. Ever since, trends have been highlighted to create ethics, as a philosophical discipline, by which it is called the ensemble of human habits and traditions. It is important to bear in mind that ethics had already been moved to the center of philosophical discussions with the appearance of Socrates (www.wikipedia.org).

Going into a practical area, can we talk about the uniformity of ethical thinking irrespective of the scope of action? Is it possible for a multinational to apply the same ethical code in every cultural and national context? The national, regional or cultural context does not diminish the importance of ethics, especially in business, but gives a much wider picture of the subject, requiring the ethical approach to be taken into account through a scientific prism. Such an approach amplifies both the research and the application of ethical principles, on the one hand, confirming them, on the other, developing and aligning the concepts to a universal thinking, so that efficiency can prevail.

2. Ethics

Before going into the middle of the problem, it is necessary to define the terms to be used. An understanding of ethics is extremely important to us as individuals because healthy ethics is the very essence of a civilized society. Ethics is the basis on which all our relationships must be built. It is our way of referring to employers, employees, subordinates, customers, colleagues, suppliers, to the community we are in and to each other. Ethics refers to the quality of these links. Relevant in this regard are the definitions given by various authorities in the field.

According to the Romanian Language Explanatory Dictionary (DEX), the word "ethics" comes from fr. *éthique*, but also from the lat. *ethicus* and can be defined as "the science that deals with the theoretical study of values and the human condition from the perspective of moral principles and their role in social life; all the corresponding moral conduct rules; moral "(DEX, 1998, 350).

I would like to make a few assessments about this definition. It is worth noting the complexity of DEX's treatment of the definition. I want to highlight three of the quite sensitive elements that appear in the definition. The first - ethics treated as a science, the second - the role of moral principles in social life, and the third - the norm of conduct. It is difficult to make a classification of the importance of these elements, however, I tend to appreciate the second element, that of the role of moral principles in social life. This is not easy to achieve if we start from the idea that the role of ethics is predominantly philosophical. I believe that ethics must go beyond the theoretical and scientific level and become a more applicative, practical, rather than theoretical, philosophical one.

The dictionary of neologisms defines this concept as "a philosophical discipline that studies the moral principles, origin, development, and content" (Mark 2000, 456).

Crăciun (2005, 26) captures three meanings of the term "ethics". First of all, ethics refers to so-called manners, customs and traditional practices specific to different cultures. This may explain the influences of the religious world and certain economic behaviors that differentiate one nation from another, one system of thought from another.

By the second meaning given to the term, ethics is understood "the set of values that defines in a certain society the man of character and rules of fair, dignified and worthy of respect behavior, whose violation is blameless and worthy of contempt" (Crăciun 2005, 27).

The third meaning of the term ethics lies in "the theoretical interpretation of ethos and moral phenomena" (Crăciun 2005, 27).

Professor Dan Crăciun, a prominent personality of the Romanian ethical thinking, especially the business, appreciates in a fair way the aspect of multiculturalism. It is to appreciate the complexity of the definition and the evaluation of the terms from various points of view and research. Addressing this topic does not seem so easy, considering the universality of the scope. However, beyond the fear of complexity, the term remains exposed to the risks of inapplicability in a uniform way, I am talking here about ethical uniformity, yet the aspect of the diversification of the application remains to be appreciated.

If we are talking about the universality of ethical application, it is nevertheless to be particularly appreciated that ethics seeks to provide answers of universal value to questions about the possibility of being moral and the way it is done, trying to define good and evil.

According to the Wikipedia encyclopedia, *ethics*, a term derived from the Greek *ἠθoς* *ēthos*, meaning "tradition, practice, is one of the main branches of philosophy and can be called the science of moral reality. It engages in researching moral issues, trying to answer questions such as: *What is Good / Evil? How should we behave?*

Here is an interesting approach, which I would like to highlight. It is the origin of the ethics from the Greek term translated "custom, practice". This reality changes the ability to implement ethical thinking in the individual's activity, forming a possible routine in meeting ethical requirements. This may be good or bad, depending on how the action is looked at. For example, it may be good as long as we appreciate the fact that it is applicable, so possible, and that it can become a habit and, like all habits, it can automatically become in the nature of being. On the other hand, automatic application can reduce both the intensity of ethical experience and the possibility of developing its concept and applicability. It is certain that the dictionary definition offers a favorable, and therefore possible, picture of an ethical reality including in the business field.

3. Ethics and morality. Types of morality

We can get into the discussion of ethics and morality by exemplifying the importance of moral perception from the point of view of social groups. There are groups that can be identified as appreciating a particular type of morality that is based on certain historical sources. The religious profile also has an important role in the group that is characterized as moral in a particular context.

As the Encyclopedia of Philosophy and Human Science (2004, 710-714) says, morality is developed or limited, depending on religious influence. Thus, we have "Buddhist morality," being defined as the doctrine or precepts of good that come from the teachings of the Buddha. Another approach to morality is the "confucian morals," representing the "set of ethical doctrines contained in Confucius' thinking." Another perspective of morality is the "Islamic morality," based on "the tradition derived from the Qur'an and the traditions of the Prophet Muhammad, which formed the basis of Islamic civilization and was the subject of critical systematisations and reflections in medieval Arabic philosophy." The last approach of the discussion is the "Hebrew and Christian morals". It represents "moral thinking related to the Hebrew and Christian religious tradition founded on divine revelation, which primarily focuses on salvation and covenant between God and His people, and only then contains moral prescriptions."

Personally, I believe that each of these types of morality influence or are influenced by both the religious context and the source of inspiration. The level of authenticity is hard to establish, at least in some approaches that go from the level of understanding of the leader that influences moral aspects. These can be considered relative or important only in a historical, religious, social or political context. These types of morality create over time both conceptions of groups and through them certain religious and moral identities, as well as individual, exclusive or non-conceptual behaviors, depending on the concept, which can obtain martyrdom valences. I believe that of all four moral approaches, the Christian perspective, including the Hebrew one, is the most appreciated, if we go from the idea of "inspiration." This type of morality is also appreciated due to its timelessness and also its practical and profound capability.

4. Morality

In order to better understand the importance of the ethical and particularly the moral concept, I think it is important to start from the reality that man's life is not only biological, but also moral and spiritual. Moral aspect plays a decisive role in defining a person. Crăciun (2005, 27) defines morality as "the condition of the man who aspires to live according to the highest ideals and principles". I like this approach. The idea of aspiration offers a special beauty to the human being. As long as he aspires, man lives physically and may think he can fulfill his dreams. But as long as

he aspires to live according to ethical and moral ideals, he is much closer to living ethically and morally.

In the moment when the individual ignores family, spiritual or moral rights and obligations, or defies community and social responsibilities, he becomes overwhelmed by hedonism and selfishness. A selfish person is more than one who pursues his or her own interests, but can also be considered one who is unhappy with the accomplishments of others. However, when he understands his purpose in the world, when he becomes aware of the need for dependence on the community in which he lives and the need to preserve material and spiritual resources, we can say that man has begun to navigate the path of moral values. It is difficult to apply moral principles and appreciate the correctness of their application when the individual lives in solitude. His chance is that he can practice his ethical abilities in a human context with his pluses and minuses.

If we go back to the idea of morality, we will be able to discover that morality is the standards that a person or a group of people has in regard to what is right or wrong, good or bad (Velasquez 2006, 8). The idea of standards is correctly interpreted if we take into account the source of inspiration for standards. When we talk about good and evil, about truth and lie, we can not be complete unless we introduce the idea of a legislative, written or unwritten forum. This has to be a starting point in order to arrive at a basic conclusion.

On the other hand, ethics is a discipline that examines personal moral standards or the moral standards of societies (Velasquez 2006, 10). It answers the question of how these moral standards can be applied in life. But what are the moral standards? Moral Standards, in the view of Manuel G. Velasquez (2006, 10), are standards that deal with issues that have serious consequences, consequences that can be associated with feelings of shame and fear. Standards have good motivation, are not based on authority and are not reduced to self-interest or cannot be accused of partiality. This definition is comprehensive and creates multiple possibilities to make a proper assessment for the idea of standards. However, the implications of "shame" and "fear" may call into question the relativization of terminology if it starts from the multitude of applications. In other words, what produces shame in an Eastern society can be appreciated in a European society and vice versa. I believe, however, that these possible confusions create an interest in discovering aspects of the importance of diversity that could otherwise be undiscovered. Far from diminishing the importance of principles, this diversity offers value and develops application strategies under various conditions.

If we limit ourselves to moral standards or norms, and not to the modalities of implementation, we need to establish some coordinates in order not to dilute their importance. That is why standards or moral norms are imperative statements that indicate what a conscious individual should or should not do so that his behavior can be appreciated as good by others or the community (Țigu 2003, 18). A similar approach can be seen in Crane Endrew and Matten Dirk's definition (2007, 8). In their

view, morality is concerned with the values, norms and beliefs embodied in social processes that define what is good or bad for an individual or community. Personally, I think the approach is interesting, but it has a limit. Reporting, however, I think it needs to be expanded from peers or communities, therefore from the human sphere to God, which remains the source of morality.

In Gabriele Țigu's opinion (2003, 11), morality designates a certain social code, a set of rules to which each individual must comply in order to be accepted in society. Morality is the totality of beliefs, attitudes, habits, feelings reflected in principles, norms, rules determined historically and socially which governs behavior and reports, as well as between them and the community, depending on the categories of good - bad, justice - injustice and whose observance is based on conscience and public opinion. The logical and functional order of the terms used by the author is something to be appreciated. We can not talk about genuine action if we do not get away from the idea of conviction. Convictions, however, have no role if they do not materialize. Most of the time, however, convictions materialize in attitudes, skills, actions, etc. In this way we can say that it is a correlation between thinking and action, between facts and words. Regarding the correlation between consciousness and public opinion, I believe that the first must prime and constantly develop through moral exercises of alignment to an absolute moral level.

5. Business ethics

Ethics in business is a discipline of study that is part of applied ethics. It represents the particular, economic and financial aspect, starting from the study of the applicability of moral values and principles. Several definitions that complement the meaning of business ethics can be observed, starting with the study of the need for moral application and continuing with the study of their application in different contexts.

In the next definition of business ethics, we can capture various aspects previously unsettled in this study. Ethics is regarded as a system of beliefs that supports a point of view of morality (Țigu 2003, 12). This idea of the creed system brings a novelty about the accentuation of the creed. It is interesting to define the moral aspect based on beliefs. I think this is what the Romanian people lack, the belief that something is good. If it is worth making an effort, this must be an intellectual effort to raise awareness and develop beliefs based on moral principles.

Manuel G. Velasquez (2006, 12) completes this puzzle of defining terminology. In his opinion, business ethics is a study of what is right or wrong from a moral point of view. He focuses on the moral standards that apply to institutions, but also to individual behavior. This applicability, both institutional and individual, has an important role. I think a person who is required to have certain standards in an institution may be disinterested in them in private life. This can create a duality of thought and unfavorable action. On the other hand, a person who personally has

moral beliefs will be interested in living permanently within the institution, which may or may not impose these standards, as well as in private life.

A definition to be appreciated is the one given by The American Heritage Dictionary (2002) defining business ethics as "studying the general aspect of moral nature and specific moral choices; moral philosophy; and the rules and standards that lead people to professionalism. " There are at least two terms to be appreciated in this approach. The first is the one referring to the moral nature, which brings me closer to the real aspect of the term. As long as it is of a different nature from the human one, which I consider to be immoral, morality is closer to divine nature or, more preferably, divine origin than is human. The second term is that of moral choices. This process of moral choice is remarkable. It implies both the individual's beliefs and the individual's reasoning by assuming the consequences of some decisions. Apparently, the two aspects do not seem to have much in common, but I think here is the beauty of these two terms. Man can attain moral nature starting from moral choices.

I would like to stop at the last definition, not because of the exhaustion of the subject but of the wish for concrete. I appreciate what Ferrell O.C., Fraedrich John and Ferrell Linda (2008, 6) say in the seventh edition of *Business Ethics Decision Making and Cases* - that business ethics encompasses the principles and standards that create a behavioral guide in the business world. Having a guide, this is the idea that needs to be emphasized in the study, because I think that an idea, no matter how beautiful it is, will soon wither if it does not find materialization. A guide requires a study, therefore a research, but it also involves the idea of materialization through concrete recommendations to novel situations.

After presenting several definitions of ethics and morality, one of the central points of the ethical business study remains to be found: How can moral standards be applied in a society in full economic development and interested in profit? What is to be done by organizations, but on the part of employees, so that business ethics is not just a beautiful but not applicable theory but a necessity arising from the desire to do what is right because it is right? The idea of intrinsic correctness can create both a good image of the institution and a good profile of the employee interested in long-term well-being rather than an immediate, good or bad result.

Conclusions

A correct understanding of terminology becomes important amid the existing moral confusion. Ethics remains that science that deals with an almost inexhaustible field of research of moral values and principles and their role in social life. If we make a realistic assessment, we will come to the conclusion that the theoretical aspect is very important, but it is not everything. Without the theoretical aspect, we could not begin the scientific approach to ethics. Without the practical aspect, we could not complete the application. At the same time, a connection between the two elements, the theoretical and the practical, is difficult to realize, considering that the assimilation of

information becomes a simple fact compared to a rather difficult aspect of the application. Based on this idea, I would like to say that the ethics specialist may have a theoretical competence, but not automatically moral authority. This last aspect offers value to the ethical study, but also credibility. Practical and theoretical skills should give the individual a holistic view of the field of ethics in general and business ethics in particular.

If I should refer to the ethical origin issue, I believe that regardless of whether ethics can be established as having Aristotelian or somewhat distant origins, in the profound sense of morally degraded man, it is to be appreciated the human attempt to report to "good" as an indispensable or even imperative requirement. This necessity provides the force of the scientific approach to ethics and the hope of achieving a change of society in continuous moral degradation.

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