BUSINESS ETHICS AND VIRTUE
On Robert C. Solomon’s many ways of being ethical

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Table of contents

1. Introduction

1.1 Why this topic 1
1.2 Preliminary considerations 2
1.3 Thesis’ structure 4

2. Richard Taylor on virtue ethics

2.1 Return to areté in ancient Greece 8
  2.1.1 Considering ergon and eudaemonia in their original context 10
  2.1.2 Taylor on the problem of Ethics 17
  2.1.3 An ethics of aspiration and the role of religion 19
  2.1.4 Taylor’s view of Utilitarianism and Deontology 21
2.2 Aristotle on business 26

3. Robert C. Solomon through his articles

3.1 Business ethics from the virtue ethics approach 32
3.2 The Aristotelian approach in Solomon’s articles 33
  3.2.1 Corporate Roles, Personal Virtues 34
  3.2.2 The Corporation as Community: A Reply to Ed Hartman 36
  3.2.3 The Moral Psychology of Business 39
  3.2.4 Historicism, Communitarianism, and Commerce 41


4.1 Integrating integrity 49
4.2 Bringing business and integrity back to the picture 55
4.3 Honesty, Fairness and Trustworthiness 58
5. Reception and contribution

5.1 Contribution 66

5.2 Reviews and criticism 67

5.2.1 Christopher McMahon in Chicago Journals (Jul., 1994) 68

5.2.2 Roderick J. MacDonald in Journal of Business Ethics (Jan., 1994) 69

5.2.3 Allen Buchanan in Journal of Business Ethics (Feb., 1994) 70

5.2.4 John R. Boatright: Aristotle Meets Wall Street in Business Ethics Quarterly (Apr., 1995) 73

5.2.5 Eileen P. Kelly in The Academy of Management Executive (May., 2000) 75

6. Conclusion

6.1 An alternative 79

6.2 Final remark 83

List of references

Publications 85
1. Introduction

1.1 Why this topic

I chose to write my Thesis on this topic because, aware of the lack of consensus regarding ethical issues in the workplace, I wanted to examine unexplored solutions that could add value to the already existent ethical discourse. We spend half of our adult lives in the workplace and yet, there is no clear development of ethical discourses on this specific branch. To the question of whether virtues played a role in business decision-making, my answer has always been positive. Traditional theories have failed to solve contemporary ethical challenges as cases of corruption have grown exponentially in turbulent financial times. Ethical dilemmas await alternative responses while ethics demands for new solutions. That is the reason why I chose to study a philosophically powerful virtue framework, articulated by philosopher Robert C. Solomon, which has still much to develop. Precisely in the business context, where it has long been assumed that there is no space for ethical practice, a new virtue-embracing discourse has emerged.

The nature of the philosophical problem that I will be dealing with is twofold: one side refers to virtue ethics and another to its application in the specific branch of business ethics. The attempt of this Thesis is to show the richness and value of such an approach to solve ethical dilemmas in business and in life. Robert C. Solomon gives the kind of account of virtue ethics applied to business that renews my hopes of philosophical success. His argumentation, although slightly faulty, brings into the picture a solid proposal that he developed over two decades of thought. However, I will not limit this Thesis to Solomon’s work. I will try to seek further suggestions of applying virtue ethics in the workspace. To that end, a tripartite look upon business ethics will serve as conclusion to this investigation.

First, I would like to pose some questions that I feel need be made. These are linked to the lack of reformist attitude in Aristotle’s work, which will also be criticized by Solomon. Does a return to virtue ethics necessarily imply adhering to an ancient social
context? Shouldn’t a contemporary account of virtue ethics remain critical towards those material conditions that made possible such an ethical theory to thrive? Let us see.

1.2 Preliminary considerations

Ancient Greece, where western Philosophy started, displayed the civilization’s attempt to live ‘the good life’. In this ancient conception, happiness and virtue were intimately connected through an inseparable bond. If the pursuit of happiness were assumed as the simple quest for possessions, then the ‘good life’ would be reduced to a life of affluence. Versus the conception of material prosperity and wealth as life’s ultimate goal, one finds the ancients depicting personal excellence as the most rewarding activity, one of intrinsic value. Can we somehow bring this insight back to pluralistic societies in the twenty-first century?

Happiness consisted in the proper functioning of the person as a whole. If applied to business, can we say the same about a company? What is happiness or the proper function of a corporation? Such a questions did not make sense when virtue ethics was born, over two millennia ago, but it does now. One’s interpretation of ‘corporation’ will definitely affect the answer to this question. Solomon sees quite reasonable that a firm belongs to a community and needs to consider itself as a community. In such a setting, it is indispensable to place oneself and the corporation in the same map, because seeing both the micro and macro levels of the issue will give us the answer.

I contend that a virtuous enterprise is not only one that functions correctly, but also one that is responsible for its environment, clients and workers alike. Are organizations the places where its workers can flourish? I will argue so. If the reader thinks of an organization merely as a place where a rationale of maximizing benefits is applied, then s/he will probably not agree with what will be here asserted. I will argue here that corporations do not have a singular aim, namely, to become the most profitable of all. To my understanding, there is much more to an enterprise than what this biased portray depicts. In this Thesis, I
will go even further and will contend that there is a need for ethical enterprises, flourishing corporations and morally constructive working environments.

A virtuous corporation surely is one that respects environmental policies, has an excellent working atmosphere and sets the conditions for its workers to flourish. A virtuous enterprise is the kind of enterprise where human values are on top of the bottom line and employees come first in their list of preferences. This kind of enterprises, generally managed by excelling individuals, envision the future as a field full of possibilities where the firm has always something to give to society. A virtuous enterprise has as its leit motiv the enrichment of the community it constitutes in itself and the community where it operates.

If business is considered under such (Aristotelian) framework, then this Thesis will show how virtue ethics makes a point. Towards the concluding chapter, the reader will also discover why the interpretation of virtue ethics here offered does not exclude the other ethical traditions and does not consider itself theoretically superior. This Thesis does not have as its aim to show why Kantians or utilitarians are wrong, neither to analyze virtue ethics as ‘the single true’ moral theory. The aim is to show how an application of virtue ethics reflects one of many “ethical styles” (Solomon, 1999). If it is not only about wealth to achieve a virtuous life, then we shall turn to the human dimension underlying the concept of business. I believe virtue and integrity to be central in a normative ethical explanation of business, and it is my understanding that a voice must be raised to connect normative theory (on how corporations should work) with the Aristotelian tradition. Moreover, I hope that this Thesis will help to make the alternative reading of virtue ethics more widespread known. It is necessary that virtue ethics starts playing its long neglected role in ethics. My wish is that in the future, when discussions regarding business ethics arise, this tradition will have its own place.
1.3 Thesis’ structure

In the first chapter of this Thesis, I will go through Taylor’s interpretation of virtue ethics as an introduction to the problem in question. His account of virtue ethics will be completed and contrasted with other experts on Aristotle and their views on the same problem. Taylor’s emphasis on taking care of the context is highly valuable and will be connected to our topic in the conclusive pages of the Thesis. Taylor succeeds in giving an overview of the topic. That explains his introductory place in this Thesis. He provides the foundations upon which to build a future understanding of virtue ethics applied to business. Taylor’s position is arguable. He thinks that by exclusively adopting the virtuous ethical standpoint one will have a definitive answer to every moral problem. Yet, his overly simplistic analysis leaves certain aspects of Aristotle’s moral theory uncovered. I will discuss Taylor as I believe his proposal is flawed in some aspects. Interpreting his writings will provide the reader with an overall sense of what ‘virtue ethics’ is all about.

Notions like *areté, ergon* and *eudaimonia* will be explained and made familiar to the reader. A focus on the agent’s character is decisive to the Greeks, who thought that the ethical problem *par excellence* had more to do with living the good life and less with the ascription to some fixed principles. Next, a description of what Taylor calls an “ethics of aspiration” in contrast to the “ethics of duty” will be undertaken. To explain this shuffle of paradigm, Taylor will explain the role of religion in destroying the Greek paradigm and introducing the idea of duty through the obedience to the command of God’s laws. The last section of the first chapter will explore Taylor’s interpretation of utilitarianism and Kantianism as failing moral systems. The main problem, he contends, is that these traditions answer to the same questions that were posed by religion. In seeking principles based on experience and rationality respectively, these theories completely miss the original sense of ethics.

After this generalist description of virtue ethics, I will examine a more specific problem. The second part of the first chapter will attempt to connect Aristotle’s ethical theory to the specific branch of business ethics. A thorough examination of the concept of business will
lead the Thesis to clarify the theoretical misunderstanding between Aristotle and Solomon, who did not support the Greek’s unfair vision of trade and commerce. Such a misunderstanding can be explained at several levels. First, Aristotle was an elitist who had no mercy towards people other than aristocrats; and second, his view overlooks the importance of production for society, which was not even a matter of question in ancient Greece.

The third chapter of this Thesis focuses on Robert C. Solomon (1942–2007) and his contribution to the field of business ethics from the virtue perspective. This chapter is divided in two: a first part serves as introduction to the chapter; and a second where his four main articles (1992, 1994, 1998 and 2000) on the virtue approach to business ethics are presented.

The second part is subsequently divided in another four parts, where every subsection covers an article. The first one is an attempt to justify a micro-ethical approach to ethics, where a personal sense of the particular values is crucial. Here Solomon distances himself from other virtue ethicists, utilitarians and Kantians, and presents the six basic elements of his approach.

The second article examines and criticizes the comparison of a corporation with a commons (an area of grass that everyone is allowed to use) offered by Ed Hartman. Solomon takes time to explore the complex concept of community and ends up describing its essence as something more fundamental than having a space in common. A real community enables personal identities to flourish. He contends that the complete social dimension of communities is dismissed in the commons analogy. Also in this article, Solomon shows sympathy for sentimentalism, whereas in the third article he will be critical towards it.

This third article explores the place of care and compassion in corporations. In a more general level of morality, Solomon will be keen on adopting a vision where particular instances substitute general rules.
The last is a rather lengthy article where the philosopher gives a comprehensive account of the Aristotelian approach. The benefits of applying the Aristotelian approach are carefully examined. Solomon reminds the reader of the existing interdependence between individuals and the corporation, and the need of reformulating the preconception of business and the community if we want to succeed in the task of applying Aristotle in contemporary business ethics.

Chapter four of the Thesis examines the most relevant of Solomon’s books. Special attention is paid to *A Better Way to Think About Business: How Personal Integrity Leads to Corporate Success* (1999), because according to the author this book is a clarifying of a philosophy of business and an updated version of his earlier work *Ethics and Excellence* (1992). The chapter is divided in four subsections. The first is focused on integrity and the role that it plays within the book. Solomon eliminates the apparent contradiction between free ethics and constricted business on the one hand and between self-interest and ethics on the other. Solomon shows how they complement each other. The notion of profit and the profit motive are also scrutinized, and a result a materialistic understanding of the corporation is brought forward. The thinker tries to move away from overly theoretical approaches to ethics, but does not solve the problem that several arguments throughout his book are based on assumptions that still need further justification.

In the second part of the chapter, I will continue presenting Solomon’s arguments. One of the assumptions that the thinker makes is that business has a positive “civilizing influence”. In order to make himself understood, the philosopher gives examples of lack of integrity to define the concept of integrity itself. The three examples that he offers are: the opportunist, the chameleon and the hypocrite (a special type of hypocrite is the self-proclaimed “person of integrity”). All of these moral characters are here explored. Additionally, the notions of the individual, the code of ethics of any corporation and that of leadership are carefully investigated in Solomon’s work.

The next section of the chapter is a consideration of virtue, in the Chinese sense, and the virtues of honesty, fairness and trustworthiness in business. These are considered by
Solomon as the most essential virtues within business, but not the only ones. In his book, the philosopher inspects over a dozen of these particular beneficial ‘business virtues’. Along with the description of these virtues comes their corresponding vices. After these considerations Solomon, who alerts of the importance of corporations in the twenty first century, reminds why ethical practices are essential to the business practice.

The final section of this chapter works as a summary of this reminder. However, it is not simply that. In this section, Solomon clarifies his philosophical position regarding the Aristotelian framework – position that he has been arguing for during more than two decades. The philosopher offers a valuable insight through his concept of “ethical style”, which is an interpretation of Nietzsche’s idea of the uniqueness of every virtue. This scheme has at its heart the idea that no single ethical theory holds in itself “the ethical truth”, because there is no such a thing (Solomon, 1999). What Solomon offers is an ethical outline, which is sensitive to the context of every action and to the personal character of ethics. A Kantian is not more ethical or less than a utilitarian or a virtue ethicist, they just hold as preferable different virtues. Adherents to these ethical traditions show a constant preference in their ethical style, which is worth of attention. Solomon clearly states that not “everything goes”, and his proposal will argue for a contextualized ethics in which there are many ways of being ethical.

Chapter five leads the reader to an examination of those reviews and criticisms that are more constructive and appropriate. Where are the flaws in his theory? Why does he want to apply Aristotle’s moral theory in business ethics? Does he succeed in his task of convincing the reader? In order to accomplish this task I will start by referring to the contributions that Solomon offers. Then, in the second part of the chapter, I will investigate five different criticisms.

Finally, chapter six will be the conclusion to this Thesis. I will introduce the results of my investigation as well as an evaluation of an alternative to Solomon’s contribution, which will be based on the tripartite approach. This will be followed by some final remarks.
2. Richard Taylor on virtue ethics

2.1 Return to *areté* in ancient Greece.

In the following chapter, I will firstly examine Richard Taylor’s reflections on the subject of the Thesis and secondly establish the connections between virtue ethics and Aristotelian interpretation of business. Taylor’s writings will shed some light on this investigation, as they will help the reader to get acquainted with the topic. However, there are some theoretical holes in his portrait that will be noticed and covered. These holes do not affect the aim of this Thesis, as the purpose here is more to explore the possibility of a business ethics from the virtue perspective than to give an exhaustive account of this particular tradition. Some Aristotelian elements that are part of a business ethics based on virtue will be later analyzed. As British moralist Roger Crisp warns in his translation of *Aristotle’s Nicomachean Ethics* (2000), we shall always remember that interpreting Aristotle can never be a conclusive task. All we can state are hypothetical explanations, which are always arguable. Therefore, I have chosen to start by exploring Taylor’s *Virtue Ethics: an Introduction* (2002), because I believe it gives a comprehensive account as well as an accurate explanation of the process that this discipline has undergone and also because it serves as the prelude to the second part of this chapter as well as to the upcoming ones.

It may seem shocking to the modern reader to think about ethics in terms of virtue, happiness and function. For the ancient Greeks – whether Epicureans, Stoics, Plato or Aristotle – it went without saying that one's character and virtue were central to ethics. Moreover, the ethical problem of how to live one’s life was regarded as the most important philosophical reflection. Following Taylor’s suggestion, we feel urged to ask ourselves the question: why was such a longstanding and rich tradition abandoned? In Crisp’s work, we find a similar assertion: “There has been a tendency in modern ethics to concentrate on actions. Ancient writers clearly thought about right action, but were more ready to discuss lives as a whole” (2000, p. xi). In his book, Taylor suggests that *Nicomachean Ethics*, the most widely read treatise on moral philosophy ever written, is also the most widely misunderstood. The modern reader empties Aristotle's work of its original content and
replaces it by his own ideas of ethics. There is a big danger in not considering the context in which ancient moral philosophy was produced, Taylor warns. Overlooking particular instances comes at a high cost, because the idea of personal excellence that was developed by the Greeks (areté) has very little to do with the contemporary concept of virtue. According to Cambridge dictionary the definition of virtue is {{C or U} a good moral quality in a person, or the general quality of goodness in people}. In Oxford dictionary, that meaning is completed by another definition: {{mass noun} archaic virginity or chastity, especially of a woman}. Therefore, the contemporary reader understands by virtue something very different than the ancient Greeks did. Let us see what Pakaluk argues in his work:

The relevant Greek word is areté, which means broadly any sort of excellence or distinctive power. In Aristotle’s time, the term would be applied freely to instruments, natural substances, and domestic animals – not simply to human beings. If you were going into battle, for instance, you would seek a horse with “virtue”, in order to draw a chariot that had “virtue”, made of materials that had the relevant “virtues”. The term connoted strength and success, as also did the Latin term virtus. Our English word, too, in its origin had similar connotations. (2005, p.5)

The fact that word areté was used to talk about an animal’s ability to do well its function is something that strikes the modern reader. The difference is not as superficial as that, as the word has a deeper meaning. Ultimately, it implies the need of analyzing one’s life’s end or telos. The concept of areté, which will be here dealt with, is far more complex than what a priori seems. It has been commonly translated into “virtue”, but even this meaning has been modified after centuries of Christian influence and enlightened exposure.

It is also important to remember the context in which Aristotle composed his lectures. He was writing two and a half millennia ago, for noblemen in a city-state of tens of thousands (...) he should be read, carefully and sensitively, with an understanding of historical, social, and political context, as one of the best sources
Crisp, Taylor and Pakaluk agree in the importance of baring context in mind. Crisp’s view complements that of Taylor. They both refer to developing an adequate understanding of the Greek’s context as a necessary precondition for posterior reading of the philosophical ancient works. In my opinion, it is a very good point that both authors make. Taylor mentions that the adjective virtuous is nowadays attributed to people who would have never fallen under that category in ancient Greece. Indeed, the use and meaning of this adjective has definitely changed over time. I shall turn back to this later.

2.1.1 Considering ergon and eudaemonia in their original context.

Some current developments of virtue ethics move away from an Aristotelian tradition. Two clear examples are Annette Baier’s ethics of care and Michael Slote’s agent-based account of virtue ethics. I will not examine those streams of thought here, but will rather focus on the main development of virtue ethics in its eudaimonism form. However, we must first explore the basic philosophical concepts that were used in ancient Greece. How did the Greeks understand the concept of virtue? We will now explore the concepts related to virtue as well as the context in which it was developed. As Crisp points out:

Greek culture was one of excellence, in the sense that young men were encouraged to compete with one another in many spheres of life, including athletic, intellectual, and aesthetic activity. It is worth remembering that in Greek a horse that ran fast could be said to have a `virtue' or excellence, in so far as it performed well its characteristic activity. Aristotle, however, is speaking not so much of physical excellences as virtues of character and of thought. (2000, xiv)

If we associate virtue with excellence, therefore with what stands out for being especially good, then we need a deeper understanding of the human soul. For Aristotle the soul had a rational and a non-rational part. The former was source of intellectual virtue and the latter
of the virtues of character. The virtues of character could only arise through habit, whereas intellectual virtue was acquired through teaching. Education was crucial in developing those virtues of character such as courage or generosity. One could learn how to be a courageous and generous by imitation and habituation. Performing just actions was thought to lead the person to develop the corresponding character. On the contrary, one was born with or without an outstanding numerical ability, and there was little to do against this.

This theoretical point is missing from Taylor's account of virtue ethics, as it seems that for him the process of becoming virtuous had solely to do with excelling and proving one’s ability to do something exceptionally well. I interpret Taylor’s conception of Greek virtue as implying detachment from the rest of society in order to stand out. Accordingly, for Taylor being virtuous is regarded to be closer to a divine activity than to a human one.

Whether human or divine, for the ancient Greeks the virtue was the perfection of function. What do we understand by this? According to Michael Pakaluk in *Aristotle's Nicomachean Ethics: An Introduction* by the “function” of a thing, the Greek understood its characteristic activity. The translation function has been criticized and it derived from the original Greek word *ergon*, literally “work” or “task”. The explanation is further developed by Pakaluk giving an example in Plato. In the *Republic*, Plato identifies the function of a thing by considering what that sort of thing alone can achieve, or can achieve better than anything else (Republic, 352e). The paradigmatic example being that of the knife, where its function is defined as “to cut”. Later on, Pakaluk refers to the ultimate goal of the knife as consisting in what a knife can achieve precisely through its being sharp, safely constructed, and well maintained.

The Greeks applied the same line of thought to human beings. There was a common belief regarding what a good person was like. One might have disagreed in whether particular actions were right or wrong, but what mattered to them was to develop the good human being as to achieve the good life. This idea or mode of philosophy constitutes what Taylor calls an “ethics of aspiration”, the fruitful approach to ethics. His book denounces that the
idea of personal excellence, which is interwoven with the concept of function, has been later pushed into the background to be replaced by the idea of duty.

Given the importance of one’s function to the ethics of aspiration, one must ask what the ergon of the human being is. In *Nicomachean Ethics* we discover the answer: rationality is our distinctive and unique capacity and its perfection is our path to eudaemonia. Our natural virtue or excellence as human beings is directly connected to our rational capacity. The good person is depicted as the one that knows how to act virtuously under any circumstance. In doing so, the virtuous excels doing the function proper to human beings, i.e. being able to reason outstandingly well. The cultivation of a fully rational life at a high level was the aim of any virtuous person, and this is something that rather few could hope to be.

...then if this is so, and we take the characteristic activity of a human being to be a certain kind of life; and if we take this kind of life to be activity of the soul and actions in accordance with reason, and the characteristic activity of the good person to be to carry this out well and nobly, and a characteristic activity to be accomplished well when it is accomplished in accordance with the appropriate virtue; then if this is so, the human good turns out to be activity of the soul in accordance with virtue, and if there are several virtues, in accordance with the best and most complete (Aristotle, 1098a-1098b)

In *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle successfully divides the field of ethics into two categories and analyzes them. On the one hand, we find the vulgar virtue of the masses and on the other the intellectual virtue of the philosophers. The former (or conventional one) consists simply in adherence to custom and achievement of moderation, whereas the latter (or rational) consist in a kind of gift that is in possession of a few and which can be described as the perfection of individual excellence through the cultivation of reason.

Aristotle uses the metaphor of health to explain what happiness consists of and how one gets to know when it is lacking. Inspired by his father, a renowned doctor in ancient Greece, Aristotle introduces the health example. It is a valid example because it brings about an
important concept that we have already explored: that of function (ergon). As the healthy body is supposed to work well and according to its function, so does the happy person. However, there is a remarkable difference between them: the latter presupposes the former. There is no happy life (or it is at least very difficult to achieve) when one lacks something as fundamental as health. All of this, Taylor realizes, “suggests that happiness is understandable as consisting of the proper functioning of a person as a whole.” (2002, p. 117).

Now that these basic concepts have been defined, I shall address the most important omissions. There is no explanation of Aristotle’s doctrine of the mean in Taylor’s work. Likewise, the tripartite division of the soul is not even mentioned in Taylor’s work. Regarding the former, Aristotle believed the soul to be divided in reason, spirit and desire (Figure 1, Lotito, 2002).

![Figure 1]

While the spirited and desiring parts of the soul are also important, the rational part is what one can most properly consider a person's identity (Aristotle, 1102a-1103a). Even if Aristotle can be seen as following the same agenda as the Socratic tradition – identifying moral virtue with an ordering of the soul in which reason governs the emotions and appetites to the advantage of the virtuous person – there are elements with which he does not agree. According to Crisp, two aspects of Aristotle's ethics set him apart from Socrates and Plato: an emphasis on virtuous activity as opposed, on the one hand, to merely possessing the virtue, and, on the other, to other candidates as components of happiness, such as pleasure. For Aristotle, happiness consists in, and only in, virtuous activity. (2000, p. ix)
Regarding the doctrine of the mean, we can say that it defines what the virtues of man are. Ultimately, it constitutes a method towards achieving **eudaemonia**. As Aristotle viewed it, without the cultivation of virtue humanity would never find its way to **eudaemonia**. **Eudaemonia** has been previously defined as suggesting prospering and flourishing. Yet, one could also describe it as the synergy of both well feeling and well acting. Aristotle believed that virtue is a mean between excess and defect, “and it is this Arete which is required in pursuit of our Ergon and ultimately Eudaimonia.” (See figure 2, Lotito, 2002). Aristotle recognized that the doctrine of the mean was no definitive formula and exceptions should be admitted. Therefore, there will be some virtues which lack a vice and there will be some vices that simply do not have a mean. One of Aristotle’s favorite example was that of proper pride as the mean between its excess, empty vanity, and its deficiency, undue humility.

**Figure 2**

1. Recognition of Ergon or purpose.
2. Doctrine of the Mean and achievement of Arete.
3. Achievement of Ergon via Arete.
4. Balance of the characteristics of the soul and a flourishing happiness known as Eudaimonia.

Aristotle says that we can feel fear, for example, either too much or too little, but that having fear at the right time, of the right things, and so on is “the mean and best” (1106b). Still, Crisp finds it necessary to clarify that the doctrine of the mean is not a doctrine of moderation. “Sometimes, for example, one will be required to be very angry, and sometimes to give away only a tiny amount of money” (2000, p. xvi). What is most important is not to always find the moderate way, but for considering our actions ‘virtuous’
we need to examine the circumstances and act accordingly. Consequently, there is no objective fixed ‘mean’ that applies to everyone. As we will see, Solomon argues similarly in his proposal of a virtuous business ethics. However, that will be explored later in the next chapter of the Thesis.

For now, it should be noted that in ancient Greece the ideas of virtue, happiness and justice were all interconnected. Achieving one was essentially linked with achieving the other and, therefore, only the just were the truly virtuous and happy citizens. That is at least Taylor’s interpretation, which stands for a recuperation of virtues in the contemporary ethical discourse. Regarding his narrative of how virtues disappeared, the philosopher makes another strong claim when he affirms that we may all have the same rights as citizens, but we are by no means all the same. He takes for granted that there are superior and rare persons who possess virtue, but his conception has given way to that of the equality of all persons, first in the eyes of God, and then, by the custom and law.

And above all it never occurred to them (Greeks) that the least among human beings could, in the eyes of the gods or by any other standard, be as good, that is, as virtuous or excellent as the best. (Taylor, 2002, p. 87)

Taylor suggests that this elitism is no incidental idiosyncrasy, but rather lies at the core of Aristotle’s conception of ethics. Not everyone is born with the same capacities for a full and rich intellectual life. On the contrary, it was obvious to Aristotle that not all in equal degree clearly possess this capacity and one’s nature was conceived as a gift of nature and not of acculturation. Furthermore, his ethics could not be properly understood by articulating society as a place where every individual is inherently or by nature equal. It seems more likely that ethics was meant to stress the differences between individuals as to enable those who were naturally better to reach as far as possible and succeed in living the virtuous life. In other words, Taylor interprets Aristotle’s concept of virtue as something one should not take for granted as belonging to every individual alike, but rather as a rare gift from the gods.
Virtue is an innate capacity that lies within a few, and these truly exemplary people are “the ones who stand out as naturally better than the hordes of people who lack these great gifts” (Taylor, 2002, p. 95). According to his definition, the true virtuous person in the classical Greek sense is someone closer to the brilliant minds of talented mathematicians, who are very few in number. However, Crisp offers a different explanation of Aristotle’s virtue as a disposition that is engendered through practice or habituation (2000). Even if there is some aspect of virtue that for Aristotle had to do with one's inborn capabilities, it seems not fair to simplify the concept by limiting it to Taylor’s interpretation. Moral education will play an important role in our thesis and it is crucial to virtue ethics. In my opinion, there is much more to virtue than a simple gift of the Gods, and I contend that Taylor remains superficial when addressing this aspect of Aristotle's moral theory in his book.

Another good example of virtue understood as human excellence is provided by Taylor when referring to the Stoics. For the Stoics, dedication to virtue was conceived as personal excellence. More than a theoretical limit, Stoics sought to apply it in everyday life. This meant that a person's virtue consisted in the perfection of what is unique in one as a human being and therefore achieved only by the cultivation of one's proper function: “live according to nature”. This teleological approach can be summarized as the constant search for reason within one's life. It is also worth mentioning that in the Stoic's view it was not worth compromising one's integrity to achieve anything in life, as integrity was understood as the governing principle of life. Integrity must help us choose correctly between reason, which is nobility, and desire and its objects, which was baseness. The idea behind this was to avoid corrupting one's reason, as it was considered the most valuable element and even morality was defined by it. However, the principle of living according to reason was not something particular to the Stoics, but as we have seen earlier, they shared this common ground with the great Plato and Aristotle.

Actually, the idea that those naturally virtuous Greek people were meant to rule was depicted by Plato in his Republic. This masterpiece of classic Greek philosophy contains a philosophical discussion of justice that has very little in common with contemporary
interpretations of justice, such as the Rawlsian one. Plato's idea of justice concerned the cultivation of reason, and virtue had its place in connection with it. When reason governs one's appetites and will, one can act virtuously; on the other hand, injustice relates always to the dominance of desire. In order to achieve a just life we need to strive for the perfection of human excellence, which can also be stated as the aim of a fully rational life. If one has such an objective in life, chances are high that s/he will also achieve a good life, that is, a happy life in the Greek sense.

Yet, there were other interpretations of the concept of virtue that should not be simply dismissed. The Greek philosophers built their moral philosophy upon the notions here studied, but not everyone in ancient Greece shared their opinions. For example, in the dialogue named after the sophist, *Protagoras*, we find an alternative look on this concept. Protagoras thought of virtue as consisting of those traits of character, which were nourished by a given culture. Therefore, whereas the virtuous life was solely constituted by the intellectual life in Athens, it might well not have been the same for the Egyptians or Ethiopians, the so-called “Barbarians”. This relativistic conception frames virtues to the given societies and cultures where they take place. As Protagoras understood it, virtues had more to do with imbibing those ideals of character that were relative to one's culture. Consequently, being virtuous in Greece would clearly differ from being so in Egypt. Greek moral philosophy stood against the rhetoricians and argued for the normative nature of their claims. Life and philosophy was not simply a language game, but a very serious activity indeed.

### 2.1.2 Taylor on the problem of Ethics.

The ancient Greeks had a singular approach to the problem of ethics, which can be described as essentially humanistic. It was based on the ideal of human being that excelled in performing its function. Taylor proposes in his work a resurgence of an ethics of aspiration versus an ethics of duty. Such a contrast between duty and aspiration is somehow similar to what Solomon proposes and will be explored in the next chapter of this Thesis. As Solomon understood it, “ethics is not the study of right and wrong, anymore than art
and aesthetics are the study of beauty and ugliness” (1992, p.331). But what is it then? Taylor points out that the duty tradition has been dominating the philosophical arenas since modernity and it can be described as essentially religious. The main idea of this stream of thought was to consider action as primarily being right or wrong. However, questions about how one ought to treat the other or the moral rightness of a deed were not central in ancient ethics. Ancient ethicists did understand the difference between right and wrong. Yet, they did not consider it of much significance for ethics. It was their understanding that the right/wrong dichotomy was a practical distinction product of custom and law. The question to them was rather what to become in order to achieve the kind of life that fulfills one's function as human being, namely, how to behave in order to achieve a fully rational life.

The ideas of moral rightness and wrongness are not something new to the reader, as they were forged with the unfolding of modernity. However, their sense of familiarity in the ethical discourse does not justify their necessary pertaining to it. A critical examination makes us realize that on the contrary, with the establishment of these ideas as natural ethical questions, we set ethics apart from its original meaning. Thereafter, we have gradually lost track of the crucial sense of ethics as an inquiry about how to achieve eudaemonia (happiness, flourishing) through the quest of the virtuous life. Taylor portrays the result of the union of reason with religion as fatal. As he sees it, this gradual predominance of the ethics of duty reshaped our approach to ethics for the worse.

The contemporary Aristotelian readings in virtue ethics are linked to this normative idea of eudaemonia as constituting the telos or goal of human life. However, not all of them would agree with Taylor in describing the history of ethics as a continuous loss of virtues in a moral downhill. In my opinion, such a description is not precise enough and could be easily misinterpreted. Even if he only refers to moral reasoning, oversimplifying two millennia of ethical development can be risky. It seems dangerous to say that we experience decay when compared to the Greek culture. Our moral reasoning has maybe suffered, but shouldn't we also take into consideration other sociological facts such as chattel slavery, which was considered the natural condition for many? The slave pertained to their owners and could be subject of lease like any other chattel. Have we gone downhill also in this
respect? I would criticize Taylor's view for being too simplistic when depicting ancient Greece as a splendidous time. It is assumed in his work that we should go back to them. Shall we also bring slavery back to place? It seems to me that even if it might be true that there are important ethical considerations to be learnt from the ancient Greek culture, we cannot simply assume that a previous time was better than this without further argumentation or justification.

2.1.3 An ethics of aspiration and the role of religion.

It is very challenging for contemporary thinkers to apprehend the idea of human goodness the way ancient moralists did. When Aristotle described someone as good, he was referring to good as a person, outstanding in his human capacity for intellectual exercise. This kind of goodness, we shall repeat, was reserved for very few. The exemplar of virtue presented by Aristotle, the proud man, said nothing about what he did, but it was all about who he was. It is worth noting that there was a constant reference in Greek philosophy to the attainment of the rational life by the individual. As Taylor reminds us, “Aristotle's ethics, with its emphasis upon aspiration to an ideal of human nature, is thus paradigmatic of the moral philosophies of the ancients” (2002, p.70).

There are plenty of passages within Aristotle's ethical works where one finds hints of what Taylor calls an ethics of aspiration. In his opinion, a clear emphasis is made on a kind of elitism, which the present reader is no longer used to. The hypothesis that some people are literally and naturally better than others sounds politically incorrect and it is not the aim of this thesis to answer any questions regarding the nature of humankind. Instead, one should focus on the evidence that we have. When reading ancient texts and history books one realizes that this statement was supported as an axiomatic principle by Greek intellectuals and philosophers. In their given context and society the existing differences between people marked them since birth. This left one’s life to a matter of luck, because these differences could not simply be eradicated. I will return to the example offered before: except for the Stoics, for the rest of ancient moralists slavery was understood as a natural condition that was not subject to questioning. Same applies to widespread chauvinism. Trying to read
Aristotle without considering such cultural facts seems to Taylor as trying to understand Kant's philosophy without considering the idea of duty.

As already argued, and however strange it may sound to the contemporary reader, for Taylor it is impossible to understand the discipline of ethics without revisiting the idea of virtue within its original context. It is this idea that ultimately lies at the heart of the ethical questions and cannot be easily dismissed. Ancient philosophy identified virtue with personal excellence and with what one in essence is. With Christianity the notions of “equality” and “individuality” emerged. Ultimately, virtue was joined with obedience to God's laws, i.e. to what one does.

According to ancient Greek moralists, the function of a human being was unquestionably the perfection of the rational life. Yet, talking about function as key to ethics has not been a common practice since then. The question is, why not? Apparently, there are several reasons that could explain such a turn, religion being the most important one. At a certain point in history, it became increasingly common to think of ethics as solely having to do with one's will or choices, rather than with one's skills and abilities. To put it simple: the moral thought was focused on what one could do instead of what one could become. Centuries of religious influence have caused moral philosophy to follow this decisive reorientation. Thus, moral discourse has moved away from the ideal of personal excellence in favor of the concept of duty. In this point, Solomon and Taylor coincide. According to Solomon (1992), the rise of the individual and the dominance of Christianity have been two of the most decisive events that have shaped ethical thought in history.

Different religious and political traditions set the contemporary thinker apart from the Greek conception of virtue, Taylor thinks. It is for most western countries the case that their constitutions adhere to the doctrine of the inherent equal worth of each human being. As he observes, it is a doctrine basic to different religious traditions and it is exemplified in the Bible. In the sacred text, we find the metaphor of God's image, which is legally translated into the constitutional right of every citizen to be treated alike.
One of the strongest claims in Taylor's work is the conviction that the rise and spread of Christianity caused the destruction of the Greek ideal of personal excellence. Virtue was no longer understood as an ethical ideal. With the irruption of Christianity, the idea of moral right and wrong replaced that of personal excellence. Thereafter, the ancient notion of virtue was replaced by moral obligation and the ethics of aspiration left their central space to the ethics of duty. This ethics revolved around a conception of duty, which can be explained as the effect of new religious ideas: a new conception of human worth and the replacement of reason by faith. These ideas were interrelated to that of a supposed equality among individuals as being self-evident, and implied the supremacy of faith as a virtue. As we have here explored, for the philosophers the object of their ethics of aspiration was the achievement of the common ideal of reason. Reason, most be noted, was conceived as diametrically opposed to faith.

However, quite an inversion took place. A tradition started according to which our obligations as rational people solely concerned doing what was right. The consequences of such a worldview were (1) the emergence of the idea of natural law replacing that of natural virtue and (2) ultimately, the identification of the natural law with that of God. As Taylor put it, religion, representing God as lawgiver, bequeathed to philosophy a conception of ethics based upon duty, quite unknown to the ancients. (2002, p.95). Likewise, Solomon also observed that morality became set apart from the polis, its social base, and became more a concern of God and the individual. Abstinence and not excellence became central to virtue, and morality became a religious code imposed to us by God (1992, p.334).

2.1.4 Taylor’s view of Utilitarianism and Deontology

Taylor explores in his book the classical traditions in ethics in a more than questionable way. His attempts to question their validity against the virtue proposal. As a result of the aforementioned unfolding of history, “being versus doing” became an ethical dilemma that was apparently solved centuries later by Immanuel Kant, Taylor says. Kant adopted the confluence of these traditions in his ethical work and took them a step forward. He did so
not by destroying these traditions, but by uniting what was most viable in both of them. A new concept of law was born thereafter which was founded not on faith, but upon reason.

When first considering J. Stuart Mill and I. Kant’s writings, the influence of religion in their theories may not be apparent. Still, according to Taylor, it is clearly there. This influence shows not in the answers given by the philosophers, but in the questions they answer. The basic questions in modern ethics are still drawn from religion and there are two reasons for this. First, one notes how the traditional concept of obligation is replaced by moral obligation of the religious kind, i.e. faith in God; and second, the obliteration of the idea of virtue as personal excellence, upon which traditional ethics was founded. As seen in this chapter, moral philosophy rested upon that idea of personal excellence. An idea that later vanished from the moral discourse.

The fact that such an ethical conception was forgotten is connected to the emergence of moral rightness and wrongness as fundamental to ethics. An issue that was in ancient Greece related to custom and law, was later answered by the faith in a lawgiver who established what was right and wrong when creating the world. If modernity was characterized by its secularism, so did the modern philosopher's attempt to answer the big ethical issues. The principal of which was to seek some principle of ethics or some law that gave meaning to the sense of rightness and wrongness without turning to God's law. According to Taylor, this enterprise failed in modernity. Mill and Kant tried to give content to the distinction between right and wrong through reason or experience by basing the distinction on something different from faith. However, despite what may seem a total triumph, Taylor suggests that neither of them ever succeeded.

These philosophers formulated a law from which that distinction is supposed to follow, basing it respectively in experience and reason. As Taylor puts forward: “the source of that law is neither custom nor any human legislator, for if it were, the distinction of right and wrong would be merely conventional and relative, and without moral authority. Nor, as noted, is God the source. For Kant the source is reason and for Mill, experience.” (2002, p. 91)
Mill was convinced that if he could find one thing considered in its own nature and independently of its effects, which was universally and uniquely good, then he could derive his moral law from that. This law would command to increase this one thing that was uniquely good. Likewise, the law would also command to minimize its opposite, which could be described as universally bad. He thought of having found that one thing in pleasure, which he equated to happiness. The opposite of pleasure was pain, i.e. the thing to be minimized for being universally bad. He declared our duty to increase the amount of pleasure and decrease that of pain.

Actions are right in proportion as they tend to promote happiness; wrong as they tend to produce the reverse of happiness. By happiness is intended pleasure and the absence of pain. (Mill, 1863, ch.2)

Kant solved the problem otherwise. As he understood it, human reason does not invent, but engenders an imperative or law that he recognizes as universally binding on all rational beings. That is, a law that expresses an absolute moral obligation or duty merely for the sake of that duty itself seems to offer an answer to the moral question of what we ought to do. This is the reason why such a duty or imperative is described by Kant as categorical. One of its formulations is nothing else than a command to treat rational equal beings always as an end and never as a means. In any case, reason is here invoked to replace the role of God with respect to moral right and wrong, by creating a law and a concept of duty.

Several problems arise, such as the idea of giving a command without a commander. The way Kant apparently reasons is the following; there is something, which is needed to give authority to this presumed law, something that must be higher than human will or desire, but something nevertheless natural. That is how he comes to the conclusion that reason is the best candidate to fill the role that the faithful had taken. However, Taylor notices that there is still a difficulty in the fact that reason is utterly unsuited to such a role. The ancient moralists never assigned to reason the task of giving to the world moral laws of the kind envisaged by Kant. Moreover, Taylor notes that no one has ever been able to prove or show
that any such law of morality exists. As a response to Taylor, one could apply the same criticism to virtues. How can we proof the existing of such things as virtues or the integrity of a person?

When comparing Kant with Aristotle important differences in their interpretations of virtue should be outlined. In Kant we find a struggle against emotions. They are subjugated or eliminated. Kant understands moral worth as coming only from respect to duty. In Aristotle there is a picture of harmony between desire and reason, i.e. the virtuous person will desire what is most reasonable. If we explore a passage of the *Nicomachean Ethics* regarding virtue and the mean, we find feelings as a key element of his philosophy:

I am talking here about virtue of character, since it is this that is concerned with feelings and actions, and it is in these that we find excess, deficiency and the mean. For example, fear, confidence, appetite, anger, pity, and in general pleasure and pain can be experienced too much or too little, and in both ways not well. But to have them at the right time, about the right things, towards the right people, for the right end, and in the right way, is the mean and best; and this is the business of virtue. Similarly, there is an excess, a deficiency and a mean in actions. Virtue is concerned with feelings and actions, in which excess and deficiency constitute misses of the mark, while the mean is praised and on target, both of which are characteristics of virtue. Virtue, then, is a kind of mean, at least in the sense that it is the sort of thing that is able to hit a mean (Aristotle, 1106b - 1107a).

As Crisp (2000) asserts, in Kantian ethics an action can be regarded as moral if and only if the action is motivated by respect to the moral law, i.e. the moral worth of an action depends solely on this fact. Aristotle sees the matter otherwise. A virtuous person would choose to do something virtuous for his own sake, and not because of any moral law. In order to contrast both theories we shall remember the three different formulations of the same principle in Kant's *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* (1797):
Act only according to that maxim whereby you can at the same time will that it should become a universal law without contradiction (…) Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, never merely as a means to an end, but always at the same time as an end (…) Therefore, every rational being must so act as if he were through his maxim always a legislating member in the universal kingdom of ends.

Taylor denounces both Mill and Kant for having failed in providing a law of duty. Moreover, they still have not given any sense or meaning to moral wrongness and rightness. In case we would admit that pleasure is happiness, why are we obliged to increase it? Differently put, why does such an obligation follow? It seems a groundless assertion to imply the obligation. Where does the force and authority of the obligation come from? Taylor admits that even if we can say of something that it is good, we cannot make the rational connection with the statement that the person is morally obligated to pursue a given kind of conduct. If we cause good to others, we may say that we are incentivized to do something, but an incentive is certainly not the same as an imposition of obligation.

Even if the utilitarian statement would go more in the direction of avoiding pain than of doing good, there is a missing link. The problem reminds me of the “is-ought problem” in ethics. There is no correlation that entitles us to move from the realm of what there is to the realm of what there should be. One thing is to say of something that it is good, another that we ought to do it. One cannot take steps on the normative direction just because in the descriptive level there is evidence that, to some, it causes a certain incentive.

It seems that Taylor's main point is to show that it was both Kant’s and Mill's aim to retain the idea of moral right and wrong without appealing to any superior lawmaker, without abandoning the requisite of a higher law, and that they have both failed in their attempt. While Kant thought he would be able to set a universal law discovered by reason, Mill thought that there were better chances of revealing this law in the idea of an ultimate good discovered in experience. Yet, according to Taylor, one's reason does not discover any moral law and concepts of pleasure or happiness likewise imply none.
2.2 Aristotle on business

In the second part of this chapter, I will explore the possible connection between Aristotle’s teachings and business ethics. I will start by examining the answer given by Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics* to the question of whether the life of money making is a desirable kind of life or not. I will continue by questioning, despite its apparent impossibility, the possibilities of applying Aristotle’s moral theory and its legacy through virtue ethics onto business. This will smooth the way to the next chapter of the Thesis, which is devoted to Solomon’s proposal of applying an Aristotelian framework in business ethics.

If strictly read, Aristotle never supported the “business life” as being the appropriate one for achieving *eudaemonia*. Versus a life of enjoyment and the life of politics, Aristotle introduced in chapter five of his treatise the life of contemplation as the path to a fully rational and flourishing life. At the end of his chapter, one finds the passage where he rules out a life of money making, since money is merely instrumental to other goods. So the argument goes:

> The life of making money is a life people are, as it were, forced into, and wealth is clearly not the good we are seeking, since it is merely useful, for getting something else. One would be better off seeing as ends the things mentioned before, because they are valued for themselves. But they do not appear to be ends either, and many arguments have been offered against them. So let us put them to one side. (1096a).

As Boatright (1995) contends, business for Aristotle is no positive activity, but a perversion. The single idea of trading goods for money with a view to profits was regarded by Aristotle as an unnatural activity. The only reason to justify this view, the author thinks, is that in business goods are not being used for their intended purpose. Since goods should be exchanged only for their "real value," profit is a kind of theft, a charge which led to centuries of aversion to business (1995, p.353). Aristotle the economist was contrary to moneymaking and greediness, indeed. However, it is not Aristotle the economist but
Aristotle the moralist that Solomon (1993) will look at for theoretical inspiration. According to the thinker, Aristotle was probably wrong about the role of profit.

If one’s life is solely guided by the “profit motive” then it probably requires more thoughtful consideration. As I conceive it, a life devoted to money does not correspond to the concept of business as described by Solomon. An example against this equating formula of business as solely oriented towards the ‘profit motive’ is the fact there are not-for-profit and state-owned businesses. Another argument lies on considering that the twenty first century workplace is mostly within an organization; working in or for a corporation corresponds to the most ordinary of our human activities, and as Crisp suggests: “Aristotle believed that the good should be attainable in ordinary human activity” (2000, p. xi). Is it impossible to achieve one’s flourishing within contemporary business? Absolutely not. It seems obvious that belonging to organizations such as corporations constitutes part of our daily lives and it would not make sense to speak of flourishing only outside of this context.

If businesspersons in ancient Greek corresponded to the greedy and materialistic kind of person, as described by Aristotle, then we must agree that it makes no sense to continue this argumentation. However, if the term business is understood as something broader and more realistic than pure egoism, then we should reformulate the question. The issue is better put: what kind of life conducts to happiness in the twenty first century? A greedy person, who has moneymaking as sole aim in life, was as virtuous two millennia ago as today. That is, this person was and is not virtuous at all.

According to Solomon, it is our conception of business that needs to change if we want to apply an Aristotelian approach to business ethics. We find many examples of corporations that have had money as their single goal and have broken every possible ethical standards to achieve it. Many of those unethical businesses ended up rotten because of their self-corruption and many still exist. Yet, they do not accurately represent the whole concept of business or particularly represent the business world. Business can, and must, be conceived as the best way of generating wealth and securing well-being by increasing the possibility
of happiness in society, Solomon thinks. Charles M. Young also argues for this interpretation in the article *Aristotle’s Justice* available in Kraut’s book (2006). There, Young explores the meaning of *pleonexia* or Aristotelian greed. He clarifies that even if Aristotle affirms that the motive for particular injustice comes from gain (1130b),

This remark requires some qualification, since plainly it is common for people to act on the desire for gain without being unjust: consider, for example, business owners or investors. But the notion of excess is built into the word *pleonexia*, so perhaps Aristotle’s idea is that a desire for excessive gain is at the heart of greed: in particular, a desire for gain that goes beyond one’s fair share (see Hardie 1968: 187) (Kraut, 2006, p.190).

The concept of business itself is in constant change and the paradigm of sheer moneymaking is clearly obsolete. Just to mention an example, one can think of corporate social responsibility as the new paradigm of contemporary businesses. If Aristotle’s idea of business as a poisonous activity is overcome, we make space to think of it not as a mere financial transaction, but as the activity that provides possibility of improvement to society and thus, to people’s lives. The question should be better reformulated: what does acting virtuously mean? To this respect, Pakaluk answers the following: “as we have seen, to act virtuously is simply to do well in those sorts of actions that occupy the bulk of human life: work, business, administration, spending time with family and friends, seeking knowledge and culture. Thus, simply living life well is pleasant for a good person” (2005, p. 295).

A life devoted to business – “the life of moneymaking” – is obviously not the greatest good, since it is for the sake of something else. Therefore, this “something else” (a higher and nobler good) is on top of the mere economic motive. If we strictly follow Aristotle’s sense of business, then we must agree that the sort of life that just focuses on increasing profits must be dismissed at once. A more important reason to dismiss this ill “business” life is that it essentially involves necessity and compulsion (Aristotle, 1096a). As Pakaluk (2005, p.56) says, this kind of life is more a “rat race” than a flourishing one. My point, following Solomon’s work, is to argue that it is unfair to extend this unfortunate
case of Aristotelian “business” sense onto the whole business world and community. Because business, in the first place, is about integrity and trust.

If we move away from the Aristotelian understanding of business and we come closer to contemporary readings, we observe that business is contemplated as one of those activities in life in which we are given a chance to flourish. One should start by looking into the answer offered by Solomon (1992), who reminds the reader that Aristotle, like Plato, was the spokesman for the aristocratic class and was quite unfair to the commerce and livelihoods of foreigners and commoners. Solomon builds an argument in order to move away from such toxic conception of business and affirms that:

Aristotle distinguished two different senses of what I call economics, one of them ‘oecinomicus’ or household trading, which he approved of and thought essential to the working of any even modestly complex society, and ‘chrematisike’ which is trade for profit. Aristotle declared that latter activity wholly devoid of virtue and called those who engaged in such purely selfish practices as parasites. All trade, he believed, was a kind of exploitation. Such as his view of what I call "business". Indeed, Aristotle's attack on the unsavory and unproductive practice of "usury" and the personal vice of avarice held force virtually until the seventeenth century. (1992, p. 321)

Instead of attending to those Aristotelian prejudices that underlie much of business criticism, we should dig into it and go further, Solomon suggests. Is the Aristotelian proposal just an enemy and detractor of profit making or is there something in his moral philosophy that fits contemporary organizations such as corporations? The philosopher moves beyond the pars destruens in Aristotle's philosophy to focus on those aspects that contribute to build a richer understanding of business ethics. If Solomon stayed at this initial phase of Aristotelian criticism against profit-seeking organizations, he would not probably be able to formulate any positive theory about business ethics at all. However, he does move beyond Aristotle and offers an entire ethical framework inspired on Aristotelian principles (as we will soon see).
Aristotle spoke about profits in the Greek case, over two millennia ago. The nature of contemporary business is very different. As Boatright adds (1995), there is a major difference between Aristotle’s and Solomon. The former failed to appreciate, in the primitive Athenian economy based on slavery, the importance of production as opposed to exchange. This is a key difference that the latter appreciates, as he believes that production of goods is healthily linked with making of profit. In his opinion, “we can criticize Aristotle’s limited view of the role of commerce and speculate, without much difficulty, that an unmodernized Athens, despite its many accomplishments, would today be a largely underdeveloped civilization” (Solomon, 1992, p.259). As long as profit seeking is not sought as the sole end, commerce should not be considered a threatening activity for pursuing the good life. More likely, profit seeking is just a necessary precondition of a more fundamental leitmotif: providing quality services and products that enhance the living standards and enables the well-being of the whole community. Yet, there is still a difficult question unanswered, and that is, at what price?

If one were to read Aristotle in the strict sense, no person concerned with the life of moneymaking would ever find the path happiness. Does he imply that no capitalistic society will ever enable individuals to flourish? I do not think so. Reinterpreting Aristotle's words requires a comprehension of the context in which Nicomachean Ethics was written as much as an adjustment of his moral standpoint to contemporary issues and societies. Solomon succeeds in this task. As he interprets it, business and negotiations are legitimate activities. They are by nature social activities, as they necessarily involve other people. In such an Aristotelian framework, cooperation defines most virtues. Thus, it is not the isolated individual who will give meaning to himself, but the communities one belongs to will be the crucial elements in this process. Solomon believes that as social creatures, we get our identities from communities such as the corporation, where most people spend half of their adult life. As we will now see, the philosopher reminds the reader that it is the integrity of those people what configures the integrity of the whole organization.
In my opinion, Solomon goes too far assuming certain assertions like the above. I cannot agree with him that we completely get our identities from the organizations we belong to. That is too strong of a claim. Instead, I see the point in affirming that we partially get part of our identities through the organizations we spend the day in, be that a University, a firm or a Ministry. As I see it, the fact that Aristotle’s philosophical insights thrived two millennia ago does not limit us to put them to work today. I contend that we are urged to explore Aristotle’s ethical insights today. In order to do so, we need to realize that even if the settings have changed, the value of his powerful vision has not. There is an elaborated and precise approach to ethics in his philosophical corpus, which cannot be simply dismissed. His writings on the human nature and its ethical dimension will enrich and answer those current moral issues that none of the other traditions have been able to solve, especially in the workplace. Moreover, it is Solomon, through his interpretation of Aristotle, the philosopher in charge of giving us the key to unlock those problems.
3. Robert C. Solomon through his articles

3.1 Business ethics from the virtue ethics approach

Studying business ethics from the virtue theory perspective requires a deeper look for literature written from this angle. I have noted that there is an increasing amount of ethical papers about virtue theory, yet – given the novelty of the field – there is a lack of literature in the specific branch of business ethics. I will devote this chapter to one of the most prominent authors on this subject and will make sense of those works of his that reflect this standpoint. Robert C. Solomon developed this field as a respected philosopher and academician, and he was the person in charge of introducing the Aristotelian debate among American business circles in the late seventies of the past century. His works reveal an outstanding and fresh interpretation of virtue as part of a broader ethical thought. Aristotelian elements are gracefully poured into contemporary virtue theory and economics in his account.

Solomon authored and edited more than forty books and wrote lengthy articles on a variety of philosophical topics such as existentialism or emotions. For the purpose of this enquiry, I will explore what the thinker published during his lifetime on virtue ethics applied to business. I consider it more appropriate to start this chapter by exploring his initial articles on this field, as these articles built the framework for his later books. Some of the most prominent include: (1) *Above the Bottom Line* (1984); (2) *Ethics and Excellence: Cooperation and integrity in Business* (1991); (3) *It's Good Business: Ethics and Free Enterprise for the New Millennium* (1997); and his latest (4) *A Better Way to Think About Business: How Personal Integrity Leads to Corporate Success* (1999). The main theses that these works contain were developed throughout two decades of publications and reviews. After the initial exploration of his articles, I will move on to his books. More precisely, the second part of this chapter will include an examination of his last book on virtue theory in depth, because it constitutes the culmination of his work on this particular topic.
3.2 The Aristotelian approach in Solomon’s articles.

The ethics of business is not simply confined to “business” but begin by examining the very nature of the good life and living well in a business society (Solomon, 1998, p.531)

Solomon's proposal corresponds to the ancient way of studying ethics, which focuses on the development of a virtuous character and which has already been explored in chapter two of this Thesis. It is no longer simply a matter of what one ought to do, but also of what kind of person one ought to be. The assumption underlying Solomon’s first article is that corporations must necessarily be understood as communities of individuals that depend on each other. Like the virtuous person has the right character, so corporations with good policies will know how to act, and will do so virtuously. The existing interdependence between employee and corporation is also clear in the case of the individual and society. They both need each other to flourish.

A big part of the second article is devoted to stressing the need to pay attention to the kind of leaders we want in the board of every corporation. Moral leaders should act as role models for the other community members as well as for society as a whole. The transition from an “action-based” to an “agent-based” standpoint implies a reconsideration of the full ethical issue: it is virtue what is at stake. Focus is no longer placed on what leaders ought to do, but on what kind of character these leaders should have. More precisely, Solomon will explore those virtues and vices that populate the human character and which he takes as the starting point of his Aristotelian approach. The thinker’s proposal aims at broadening the spectrum of contemporary answers to morality in a pluralistic approach. He gives an answer to the following question: how can business and ethics conciliate?
3.2.1 Corporate Roles, Personal Virtues: An Aristotelian Approach to Business Ethics

In his 1992 article, Solomon criticizes the over-theoretical approach that most business books present and wants to argue for a more personally oriented business ethics. There is an evident difference between two main streams of thought, which means that there are always a few words on deontology and utilitarianism, without forgetting the act-rule and pleasure-preference differences. Theories are formalized and developed through sophisticated techniques such as the game theory or the social choice one. This is all very well, Solomon notes, but what is left out is an adequate sense of personal values and involvement. Courses in business ethics focus on these theories and policy disputes that ultimately forget the essential, so their scope and focus is at best, insufficient. Solomon believes that the micro-ethical scope of business has been long neglected and his article constitutes a defense of it.

Arguing from this micro level is not easy and may not convince the utilitarian and Kantian reader, but Solomon makes a point in opening our eyes to a different reality. Business ethics is not just concerned with abstract principles. If one wants to be fair, individuals and their roles in (and out) of business, as well as the role of business and businesses in society must be all counted in. This principle takes into account the responsibility of those individuals in a corporate setting, which is defined by their roles and duties in the company. Corporations are in turn defined by their roles and responsibilities in the larger community. A membership in a community (for example a corporation) is a basic trait of an Aristotelian ethics. Such communities have a defined set of goals, namely, to produce quality services and products for society and make benefits out of it. In sum, what Solomon suggests is that we should cultivate our characters. That is his way of addressing the ethical problem – or the way to think of ourselves in and outside the business context. It is not just a matter of policy making, but a different way of approaching oneself, thus the world.

In his 1992 work, Solomon distinguishes the Aristotelian approach from the rationality approach, the rights focused approach, as well as the Kantian and utilitarian ones. These traditions neglect individual responsibility as well as the cultivation of character, he
believes. Solomon also distances himself from those virtue ethicists that understand virtues as “mere instantiations of the abstract principles of morality” (1992, p.325) and denounces McIntyre’s and Taylor’s nostalgia for their unrealistic conceptions of community and naive tradition. Likewise, feminist virtue ethicist do not reflect the true core of the Aristotelian tradition, namely, the idea that character and choice are cultivated first.

In his first draft of an Aristotelian ethics, Solomon brings back to the picture the six basic concepts that play relevant roles in virtue theory. These concepts are: (1) community, which was the framework of Aristotle’s thought; (2) excellence, which refers to the Greek areté; (3) role identity, an essential characteristic of an Aristotelian contextual ethics that doesn’t try to transcend contexts like traditional virtue ethics do; (4) integrity, that will be later explained in the analysis of his book [3.3]; (5) judgment (phronesis), the ability to come to a fair conclusion in every individual case, which is a product of a good upbringing and education. This element is connected to the aforementioned role and context factors. The idea which is of extreme importance is that ethics is not simply a matter of applying principles but of judging and taking into consideration the particularities of the circumstances and persons involved, and doing it virtuously; thus, the last element is (6) holism or the harmonization of our roles.

Another important idea that Solomon develops in the article is the necessity of representing the context of the corporation adequately. A corporation is a community closer to a prosperous Greek polis than to a wild jungle or savage war. Those metaphors have damaged the image of the corporation by adding a hostile and undesirable environment to it. He will expand himself on this idea later. For now, he depicts the corporation as having more to do with a sophisticated and free city-state with pride in its products, philosophy and culture than with the aforementioned metaphors. The virtues of such a community are those that enhance a rich social life and therefore, the kind of virtues that are congenial and genteel.
3.2.2 The Corporation as Community: A Reply to Ed Hartman

In his 1994 article, Solomon reinforces the idea that even if any corporation can be conceived as a mere legal fiction, in its core a corporation is primarily its people. He spends a big part of the article discussing Ed Hartman’s metaphor of the corporation as a commons. A commons is, according to the entry in Cambridge Online Dictionary, the area of grass that everyone is allowed to use, usually in or near a village.

Solomon explores the similarities and explains the differences between these approaches, and succeeds in pushing the “community” closer to the Aristotelian domain. For him, interpreting what a corporation is and the metaphors one chooses to depict it play an important role in defining our attitude towards it. In addition, the way people treat each other within the corporation depends on this interpretation. Therefore, whether the idea of corporation is a game, a dog-eat-dog jungle, a military hierarchy or a cooperative democratic polis is not irrelevant, but makes the whole difference.

A community cannot be simply conceived as a space that has a common use, as a ‘commons’, because this conception says nothing about the relationships the people who share the land hold. In corporations, relationships between people define the entire organization. Likewise, in any community it is the people and their relationships what primarily counts. Solomon partially agrees with Hartman in the idea that a corporation looks like a commons because its people have all a private life. Yet, they share their time and energy in a place they depend on to flourish. As the author sees it, Hartman does not pay enough attention to the psychological aspect of the emotions that build all relationships (or any community for that matter). Yes, there is loyalty involved in belonging to a corporation as Hartman acknowledges, but there is even a stronger emotion than that one. Solomon reminds the reader that what is crucial to any member of a community is the sense of personal identification with the corporation. At the end of the day, this set of emotions glues corporations and keeps them going.
The traditional idea of community has been generally made incompatible with the bottom line. That is why the concept of profit is also an important aspect to reconsider. Solomon reconstructs and dismantles the traditional argument. He refers to Aristotle as well as to McIntyre to bring in the teleological side of any community. There is indeed some higher purpose in the community that includes the improvement and cultivation of its members (as well as its perpetuation). Profit is therefore no ultimate aim towards which all corporate activities should be driven, but it is one of the many purposes of any corporation. Every company needs profits to make it to the next season. Solomon offers the following clear metaphor: just as humans need air, so the company needs profits. However, one does not live just to breathe. Breathing is a necessary activity for many posterior and significant ones. Thus, talking about community is also talking about making profits and the apparent contradiction dissolves.

Solomon argues that profits are like air, necessary for flourishing. Yet, there is another concept, which is radically more important than profits in contemporary corporate life: that of values. The Aristotelian approach conceives the corporation as a shared tradition whose purpose is reflection and self-understanding. However, Solomon warns the reader against the uncritical and blind celebration of the term community. Without a further analysis this abstract term can be evil and destructive, he notes. Many so-called communitarians fall into this trap, and Solomon declares that "community" has become a buzzword, an excuse for the persecution and/or exclusion of minorities, a plea for protection, a demand for immunity and isolation, a warm and cozy metaphor for some mythical extended family left over from the commune days of the late sixties. (1994, pp.275-276)

The net of relationships within a community is what defines that community and the individuals themselves. Both complementarity and difference are essential for creating cooperative and reciprocal relationships in any community. A corporation consists of the relationships among its individuals (its people, shareholders, customers) and its products, buildings and means of production. In such a context, self-interest plays a more complex role than Hartman suggests. Self-interest is something which is encouraged and cultivated by the corporate culture and which is by no means natural in the Hobbesian sense. Solomon
questions rational self-interest as something given, even if for many economists it comprises the whole meaning of rationality. For Solomon, self-interest is an intrusion to a previous and natural system of oughts and expectations.

Against Hartman, Solomon says that a commons needs only a land that affects everyone to exist. Yet, they dismiss the dimension of the social. A community is not about having something in common (a land for example), it is more important to make your interests coincide with that of the community. In any community, one identifies oneself with it and in a community like the commons Solomon sees it clear. One’s reputation comes before profits.

Solomon’s philosophical claims are based upon a very specific notion of human nature, which belongs to the Enlightenment. The philosopher David Hume and economist Adam Smith are responsible for this. Solomon’s reading of *A Theory of the Moral Sentiments* (1759) places Smith closer to Aristotle than to Hobbes. Hume and Smith had a common ethical standpoint in sentimentalism.

According to Solomon, the Scottish thinkers were right when they describe human beings as having a necessary social dimension and being naturally benevolent. He goes on with the reading and suggests that both friends militate against an individualistic viewpoint of justice and support the idea that cooperation and social solidarity are keys to human nature. The fact that human beings have a strong principle of self-interest should not to be considered the same as saying that they are all selfish. This strong motivating principle exists in all of us, Smith affirms, but it is constituted within a community, with others, and with a given set of values. Moreover, self-interest does not necessarily refer to personal advantage or to an antagonistic attitude towards other fellow citizens. Instead, it points at the desire for approval and esteem of our fellows. Accordingly, for Smith not every act of benevolence (typically human) is grounded on egoism, but on the pleasure that the act itself causes.
In the last section of his article, Solomon recapitulates and suggests that we should not think of rationality as maximizing individual self-interest. This overly impersonal axiom must be fought against. Bringing back the picture of an Aristotelian community is the first step towards a broader and inclusive notion. If we consider the community as a living organism that affects its components and is affected by its surroundings, we will have better chances of succeeding in our task. The commons is not a valid example, Solomon realizes, because it dismisses precisely the “others”, those who do not share the commons. A community is always situated in a context that determines it and this aspect should not be overlooked. An all-embracing community suits better than the commons when describing the kind of corporation Solomon is working on in his work.

3.2.3 The Moral Psychology of Business: Care and Compassion in the Corporation

In a posterior article of 1998, Solomon refers again to Adam Smith and “blames” him for not having made the connection between his moral sentiment and political economy theories. Business ethics would have benefitted from such a contribution. Sadly, it was never done and it is the author of the article the first who dares to move in that direction, towards an unveiled an unexplored field. In this article, Solomon explores care and compassion as constitutive elements of any corporation conceived as a community. Virtue ethics is the ideal framework to study these ethical and corporate virtues, because in a Kantian or utilitarian analysis there is no place for such enquiry. Solomon also wants to move away from a purely theoretical virtue ethical approach and focus on the instances where virtuous actions take place. There, he thinks, it is possible to take into account the nature of the situation and context. Actually, underestimating the importance of sentiments and feelings is an essential problem of the more principle and rule-bound conceptions of ethics.

If one conceives ethics as a mere application of abstract and impersonal formulas, there will not be a chance to capture the idea of justice as fairness, which is key to business ethics. Without care and compassion, there is no possibility for fairness, because these sentiments are preconditions for a sense of justice. Moreover, any formula that attempts to
Express fairness is bound to fail, because it will always be self-defeating. Simply put, people do not fit into formulas and we are forced to look into particular instances. There is no simple categorization, and generalizations are necessarily vague in their ethical language.

If we take an example, like that of sympathy, one discovers that there is no one-sided simple definition to it. Sympathy involves concern for others and altruism as much as it deals with self-interest and competitive elements. Solomon criticizes Hume and Smith in this point, because they polarize passions as "moral" or "social" and others as "selfish" or "asocial", when in fact almost all passions and sentiments of any complexity at all pour across these artificial boundaries like clouds over state lines (1998, p.524). There is but a truth that concerns the entire moral sentiment theory according to Solomon: that we are all social beings who naturally care for others and not only about our own ambitions and interests.

Idealizing care as an abstract activity may be a challenging task. Instead, Solomon suggests looking into those particular cases where a person takes someone else’s interest as their own to discover what care is about. Only then can one be sure not to fall in the trap that was meant to be avoided. The idealization of care as a global affection, in line with the rational principle, needs to be surpassed. Similarly, the false antagonism between care and self-interest is to be overcome, the philosopher notes. In addition, the emotion of compassion is analyzed. With a larger scope than care, compassion is linked with sympathy and pity, as it relates to suffering with the other. It is a “minimal requirement for a decent manager” (Solomon 1998, p.528). The problem with compassion is that it may interfere with professional behaviors, be wrongly directed or self-serving. When intelligently combined, compassion leads to good management. A lack of it, however, bounds managing to failure. In the article, Solomon clarifies:

But when we think in terms of care and compassion, and of corporations as communities in which we all share affiliations and interests, the slippage is called "humanity", and the "dog-eat-dog" world of business becomes - as relationships
with real dogs make obvious - a warm and mutually rewarding experience (Solomon, 1998, p.531)

3.2.4 Historicism, Communitarianism, and Commerce: An Aristotelian Approach to Business Ethics.

What Solomon calls an Aristotelian approach to business is of great philosophical interest. In what terms can a given business be conceived as a community? Where does excellence and virtue come into play in the business world? And cooperation? Solomon tries, once again, to make sense of those elements in the Aristotelian theory that are valuable to him in building a virtue theory of business ethics. There are four aspects, within the Aristotelian pars construens, that Solomon finds useful for his own theory: (1) the idea that corporations should be understood as communities; (2) the idea that there is a telos, a purpose that defines every human enterprise, including business; (3) tightly related to the latter we find the idea of excellence as central to his virtue theory; (4) and finally he acknowledges the possibility of the development of the individual's character and virtues in its relation to the corporation.

The role that the individual plays within the business corporation counts as much as the role of any corporation within society, and these relationships are all understood as revolving around a common central theory, namely, the virtue one. Aristotle's holistic idea of community should be applied to current business ethics, Solomon argues, because if these criteria and categories were applied to business the whole society would benefit from it. A community, according to Solomon, is the place where business people and corporations belong together,

[Where the individual] thinks of oneself as a member of a larger community and strives to excel, to bring out what is best in ourselves and our shared enterprise. What is best in us — our virtues — are in turn defined by that larger community, and there is therefore no ultimate split or antagonism between individual self-interest and the greater public good (Solomon, 2000, p.120).
Good corporate and social policies are strongly linked and actually constitute a necessary condition for the flourishing of the individual to take place. Despite what one intuitively may think, it is only in a certain kind of job and business context where an individual can have a wholesome experience and develop with integrity. In order to create this context we should start by applying Aristotelian categories and conception of the good to obtain it. The working place, the business realm, should be regarded as a community, as the context where one can experience individual responsibility. In fact, individuality is developed and defined only in such a context. Even our sense of individual integrity is dependent upon and not opposed to the community, as it might be thought. It is in such communities as the business ones where integrity gets its full meaning and application, Solomon contends.

No matter how biased our conceptions of business may be, one needs to start reconsidering the axioms of the formula. Solomon develops the argument with a different formulation. Again, self-interest is not opposed to the public good, but actually the opposite: they walk hand in hand. Achieving the former necessarily implies achieving the latter. To the same extent, succeeding in fully developing one’s individual integrity requires pertaining to a certain community. It is hard to imagine the individual excelling by itself, away from society and other fellow citizens. The concept of human being as politically and socially constituted belongs to Aristotle. We find it in his ethical writings, one is virtuous insofar as there is an “other”, and this “other” and the community one pertains to are key in developing another concept, that of virtue.

An interesting characteristic of virtue, which was somehow advanced already by Protagoras, is that virtues change throughout history in the same way as mentalities and circumstances do. As seen in the previous section, Taylor already argued for the importance of the historical context (referring also to Plato’s Protagoras). The character of virtues is relative. As Solomon describes it in his 2000 article, a person with a great sense of humor nowadays (which is presumably a desired value) would have been declared in the ecclesiastical Middle Ages heretic and never a virtuous person. Likewise, being brave in war was an essential value for those virtuous men (kalos kagathos) fighting in the Trojan
War. The virtue of being brave has no longer the same value. Given that we do not find ourselves in that historical context anymore, that specific virtue has changed its meaning. Values that are now praised were once looked down upon and vice versa. Solomon underlines the role of the value's context in determining its meaning. A virtue appears in a certain social context and cannot be simply isolated from it without losing parts of its meaning. It is in the middle of human practice where virtues develop their meaning. Therefore, virtues go beyond the individual by binding people to the community they belong to.

According to Solomon, a corporation must be understood also in these terms: as a community of people working together for common goals. This is the first principle of Solomon’s potential Aristotelian approach to business ethics. However, this is a principle that many corporations seem to ignore. If we want to bring ethics back to the workplace, we need to start by understanding the organization as a community. Realizing that one belongs to a group of people with a similar objective is essential in actualizing the ideal of business that Solomon proposes. An ideal that could be defined as follows: to serve society's demands and the public good and be rewarded for doing so.

One can immediately appreciate a strong sense of function (ergon) as well as an aim (telos) involved in the aforementioned principle. Apparently, every corporation must have this principle as its ultimate mission and that is the only possible way if companies are to excel. Without this ideal to strive for, corporations reduce their meaning to a mere group of people working together to make money. What is wrong in such a conception is that it does not take into consideration the members of that community or the relationships that are essential to any association. If everyone involved in a common project is there just for the money, there is no belonging or pertaining to that human community. There is simply no community in the first place. As Solomon sees it, the idea of business as mere profit maker is irreconcilable with his interpretation of corporations as citizens. In other words, the corporation must be understood as a member of a larger community where the principle of 'social responsibility' is already embedded. Under this conception of corporation, one can understand better its telos and place within society.
What is worth defending in business is the sense of virtue that stresses cooperative joint effort and concern for consumers and colleagues alike. Aristotelian ethics is an ethics of virtue, an ethics in which personal and (corporate) integrity occupy the place of central concern and focus (Solomon, 2000, p.124)

This notion of the individual entails a series of metaphysical consequences. Therefore, when Solomon contends that, “‘the individual' is socially constituted and socially situated” (idem) he is implying that human beings are not just individuals, because even our thoughts and feelings are defined by our society. His metaphysical claim implies that one cannot think of himself without belonging to varied communities at the same time (office, family, associations, etc.), where every different community gives us a part of our sense and meaning. One’s interests then, largely end up being very similar to those of the group. We all want to have a meaningful job, we want to have certain stability and we want to be happy. Solomon believes that we undoubtedly share certain interests with the rest of our community and it is because of our shared nature that cooperation necessarily will find it way.

To seek what people have in common necessarily takes the reader to think of cooperation. The philosopher argues against neo-Hobbesian theories and their main idea that, in the market more than anywhere else, homo homini lupus est [Man to Man is an errant Wolfe (Hobbes, 1651, De Cive)]. If we pretend to understand business organizations and their nature, we should better leave behind this conception of man living in a perpetual state of nature. According to Solomon, developing an understanding of one's belonging to the community is an essential part in recognizing one’s personal integrity. Eventually, this is the only road that will enable us to excel. Solomon’s theoretical attempt is to undermine those conceptions of business as a state of war, as a jungle, as a dog-eat-dog world. He was consistent throughout his academic works in affirming that being consciously member and participant of a community is the necessary condition for building an Aristotelian understanding of business ethics. Solomon argues in this article:
The philosophical myth that has grown almost cancerous in many business circles, the neo-Hobbesian view that business is ‘every man [sic] for himself’ and the Darwinian view that ‘it’s a jungle out there’ are direct denials of the Aristotelian view that we are first of all members of a community and our self-interest is for the most part identical to the larger interests of the group (2000, p.128)

Solomon stands once again against a whole set of different traditions of thought that have stressed the idea that human nature is not a cooperative one. One of his contemporary intellectual rivals was the recipient of the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences and professor at the University of Chicago Milton Friedman (1912 – 2006). In a publication made in The New York Times, Friedman proclaimed himself against those who were arguing at that time for corporate social responsibility. As Friedman saw it, it made no sense to consider a corporation as a community with responsibilities. He shows his standpoint in the very title of the column he wrote for the periodical: “The Social Responsibility of Business is to Increase its Profits”. As seen, this interpretation of business (not as a potential social contributor, but rather as a mere profit maker) clashes with the one offered by Solomon. The latter answers to this issue by alleging that Friedman misunderstood the very nature of business and social responsibility in its entirety. If there is such a gap between these approaches, a middle term seems unachievable. Friedman said in the periodical the following:

What does it mean to say that "business" has responsibilities? Only people can have responsibilities. A corporation is an artificial person and in this sense may have artificial responsibilities, but "business" as a whole cannot be said to have responsibilities, even in this vague sense (1970, The Social Responsibility of Business is to Increase its Profits, The New York Times).

This classic argument against corporate social responsibility represents corporations as if they did not belong to the community or even as if corporations were not part of larger communities and society. Many theoreticians have developed their arguments regarding
the corporation’s responsibility assuming that every organization is an autonomous and completely independent entity. Once this is taken for granted, the following step is to look at the surrounding community to consider its obligations. However, Solomon believes that this way of perceiving corporations is wrong. He argues that as citizens or members of the community, corporations must bear responsibilities, which are intrinsic to their nature as social entities (as individuals do).

As I interpret it, there is a move towards an intrinsic value argument which may be difficult to hold and which will be denounced by various critics in the next chapter. If something has intrinsic value we are forced to accept it as axiom in the argumentation without further justification. In that stance, Solomon should give more and better arguments instead of assuming what is supposed to be proofed. This point is important for giving credibility to his argument and Solomon should have provided better answers to the question that is not so clear to many. This same topic of discussion and assumption is present in other works of the author (See 1997, 1999).

Moreover, corporations cannot be considered as machines that need to be oiled to work properly. There is little accuracy in a science that tries to make a company succeed following that principle, Solomon suggests. One needs to turn attention to the social psychology and sociology of communities to appreciate the inner mechanisms that make corporations work. In other words, making a corporation efficient depends upon the “working interrelationships, the coordination and rivalries, team spirit and morale of the people who work there and are in turn shaped and defined by the corporation. What drives a corporation is not some mysterious abstraction called ‘the profit motive”, but the collective will and ambitions of its employees.” (2000, pp. 46-47).

Yet, this interpretation should not mislead the reader. Just because a corporation is a community made by individuals, it should not be understood as a mere collection of employees who work in it. Every corporation is greater than its constituent parts. Any team, made out of employees working for a common aim, is something more than a quantitative sum of its parts. There is value and meaning added by every single one of the individuals
who are also altered by their condition of belonging to an always bigger community, which is the corporation and society itself. There is, in the philosopher's opinion, a bidirectional relationship between the individual and the corporation. They both need each other to fully excel, to become what they can be at their best and neither is an autonomous entity. Corporations are made up of people, and the people in corporations are defined by the corporation.

These Aristotelian communities are conceived as “essential units of morality”, where the number of employees does not count as much as the cooperation with the larger communities. If seen in a larger picture, it is in society where corporations play an unquestionable valuable social and economic role. Connected to the idea of cooperation, which Solomon has already developed in other publications, is that of exemplary excellence. The morality of a businessperson, the higher in the company the more noticeable, needs to be particularly exemplary. On the contrary, in practice one thinks of executives as probably the least moral among employees in any business. One can find many instances of such damaging literature in Hollywood productions. A paradigmatic example is the 1987 film Wall Street by Oliver Stone starring Michael Douglas and Charlie Sheen, which feeds the cliché of the businessperson as financial shark. "Greed is good. Greed works. Greed clarifies, cuts through and captures the essence of the evolutionary spirit," affirms Gordon Gekko in the movie.

Against such an interpretation of executives and business activity in general, the philosopher thinks that a big impact can be done through those holding higher positions in the company. Moral education is tightly bound to one’s upbringing, but also to exposure to certain values and role models. Such a task is the executive’s one, s/he should be a morally excellent agent. Their position as responsible for the company makes them role models for the rest of employees. They incarnate the values of the company and a lack of morality in the high spheres could be fatal in the long run both for the company and for society. Not only are these people the most visible in the firm, but also their personalities are the most influential. Therefore, their role is fundamental.
Being visible and having power are normally linked to each other in corporations. Accordingly, those on top of the pyramid in vertical organization charts have a bigger responsibility when it comes to influencing the corporation’s morality. These executives should have a certain character, a virtuous one marked by integrity, which must lead the corporation to financial and moral success. By definition, a virtuous character needs a great amount of effort as well as an adequate moral education to consolidate. Once consolidated, such a character will not find it difficult to choose what is right to do in every occasion. As Aristotle put it, once forged, the virtuous character will remain with the person until death.

It should be here also noted that an Aristotelian interpretation of business ethics takes into account the unquestionable role corporations have in the moral education of its stakeholders. Corporations have a huge role in contemporary societies, namely, that of edifying future leader generations. Being virtuous is not merely a natural characteristic of a community. It is not always easy to follow what is right, at times at expenses of a bigger monetary gain. Virtue is not like inborn beauty or intelligence, it has more to do with perseverance and determination. Acquiring the right habit is not always easy and requires immense resolution, but the whole well-being of a person or a community depends on the healthy virtues that one sets as core to himself and organization.

4.1 Integrating integrity.

Once the investigation of his articles has been accomplished, the next step will take this Thesis to explore his longer works. On this occasion, the analysis will not focus as thoroughly on each piece of writing. Instead of analyzing each of his works on this subject, a detailed exam of his last book will be here undertaken. As earlier explained, *A Better Way to Think About Business: How Personal Integrity Leads to Corporate Success* (1999), represents the culmination of his thought. References to his previous works will also be made, but it seems more appropriate to focus on a work where amendments to the previous ones have been made. As Solomon puts it:

> *A Better Way to Think About Business* is a condensation, a distillation, a sharpening, and a clarifying of a philosophy of business and of life that I have been developing over the years, and it is also an updated, much condensed, and more concise version of my earlier book, *Ethics and Excellence* (1991), which, I have been told often enough, helped legitimate the language of virtue in business circles and put "virtue ethics" at the center of ongoing debates in business ethics. (1999, p.xii)

In contrast to his previous works (Solomon 1984, 1991, 1997), the notion of integrity is here introduced at the very beginning of the book and gains importance throughout the pages. This book constitutes a philosophical exploration of integrity in business ethics and it is framed within the aforementioned Aristotelian context. When virtues are personally endorsed they become a natural way of thinking about business. Holding virtues in collaboration with one’s projects, ambitions and fears in a natural way implies incarnating these virtues in what Solomon calls “integrity”. Integrity is a sense of wholeness that derives from embodying one's life and one's career in those values that are held in high esteem. According to Solomon, these values should become the core value of corporate life and leadership at every level. There is no simple recipe for virtue and combining profits with integrity is no easy task, he knows it. However, as Solomon sees it corresponds to
business to merge profits with integrity, because profits at the cost of integrity are no real profits for any company.

An important issue is also raised at the beginning of his book when he suggests that ethics must be not imposed, but rather it must emanate from within each of the members of the enterprise. If we say that ethics is only a matter of authority and that free enterprises have no restrictions, the result will be an impoverishment of both concepts. What is so fascinating about his vision, as I see it, is that for Solomon ethics is a necessary part of business, and markets are meant to be both moral and free. Therefore, and as many times before stated, “business ethics” is not a contradiction of terms but rather the precondition of any flourishing enterprise (1999, p.xvii).

The charge of contradiction between the free enterprise and constricted ethics starts with the assumption that these realms can never coincide. Solomon’s argument, however, shows otherwise. We cannot understand ethics as a constraint to the free enterprise; rather, we should see the absence of ethics resulting in necessary unsuccessful human actions. Virtues are first portrayed as values turned into intelligent and visionary actions. These actions provide the foundation for free enterprises and humans to flourish. Acting in accordance with one’s values cannot derive from an abstract obligation. According to Aristotle, it is spontaneous for the virtuous agent to find the mean. Every virtuous action is the natural way of their being in the world. When these virtuous people become business leaders, they sense something that other people do not: how the world should look like. Next step, in an ideal setting, is that they turn their visions into reality.

As already seen in the previous section, Solomon stands against the trend of depersonalizing corporations. According to him, a corporation is not a faceless entity. In a materialistic manner, the philosopher argues for the flesh and blood that work together and make up any corporation. Cooperative work is based on the relationship between people and should be first thought of when envisioning any community. If we think of the corporation just as a legal fiction with obligations towards its stakeholders, we eradicate the responsibility and moral character of these working communities and of the people who
work in them. In an attempt to restore this human dimension, Solomon underlines that people become what they do. Likewise, a corporation is molded by the people who work in it as well as by the culture of that organization. These are just some of the reasons Solomon offers for devoting the whole introduction to the single concept of integrity. Without integrity, he thinks, we lose track of what the truly ethical organization should look like.

Based on his previous works, Solomon asserts that the Aristotelian approach to business begins with two concepts, the individual embedded in the community and the ultimate importance of happiness as the sole criterion for success. (1999, pp. xxiii-xxiv) He later defines the good corporation as the one that is not only profitable but also provides a morally rewarding environment in which good people can develop not only their skills, but also their virtues.

The author realizes that equating money with business implies dehumanizing an activity, which has for goal something different to mere profits: distributing quality goods and services in an intent to improving a given community. This side of business is too often neglected, whereas the “art of the deal” is constantly praised. Picturing business as a pure materialistic and selfish activity is a common practice in contemporary societies. Is it accurate? Fair? As already argued, Solomon battles against the idea of business as a dog-eat-dog world, as a fierce jungle.

These metaphors have spread like a disease, the author observes. Furthermore, such ideas bring along a clear sense of destructive competition that corrupts the business world, where fair play is no longer welcomed. The problem is that competition tends to eclipse what business is really all about and, in so doing, leads to business failure. (1999, p.23) Yet, who can buy these simplistic characterizations? Why is Solomon arguing sorely against misinterpretations? It might well be because such descriptions are not only made by people outside business and academia, but by businesspeople and intellectuals alike.
At this point one may admit the description of business as a Darwinian jungle or Machiavellian warfare as inappropriate. Unfortunately, it is true that putting profits before people is rather common in business. However, the fact that at a descriptive level such practices take place does not justify or legitimize their existence. Philosophically, Solomon’s task is to offer arguments why it should not and it actually does not. In a normative framework like the virtue ethical one, one seeks to clarify the nature of business and the potential future practices that should follow. In this respect, Solomon’s book is a breath of fresh air that shows how ethical business, based on virtue and integrity, is no intellectual chimera. Rather, in his ethical work business is defined by its ethics and business people, by their virtues. (1999, p.11)

If business is no ruthless competition for profits, then a cooperative enterprise may be seen as aiming at the prosperity of the community. Why is it so common that business leaders wear the masks of the military rather than the sensitive faces of those who care? In fact, virtue ethics has developed also into the strand of an ethics of care that takes into account the psychology and emotions of people (e.g. Annette Baier). Solomon had already written some articles on these ideas (1998). Again, in his 1999 book, Solomon points at care, compassion and virtue as the only true paths to human and corporate excellence. Solomon, who realistically suggests that business must be competitive, but not cutthroat, offers the answer to true leadership and management. Ordered and civilized societies are the setting where competition and cooperation can take place. It is not a jungle. Chaos is not the appropriate medium for business, cooperation is. A jungle resembles an unconstrained battle for survival; on the contrary, business is one of the most constrained of human activities.

As Solomon continues, he brings in the worst possible comparison. This is with a machine, which destroys every human trait that was once essential to any human community and corporation. Even worse than war, the machine is as impersonal as destructive. In an attempt of complete dehumanization, business must be efficient and oiled. Run smoothly, that we say. Control is therefore vital for a machine to work, whereas business requires a different kind of relationship based on human cooperation and creativity, i.e. trust.
Solomon offers a lengthy account of trust in other works (1997, 1998). Trust is of vital importance in any organization, because a community is far more organic and flexible than any machine. Adjustment to new circumstances is beyond the range of machines and lies at the core of businesses and human interaction. Therefore, the comparison with a machine is vain and inaccurate. Experience, cooperation, and community get lost from view when applying this metaphor. Moreover, machines serve a purpose set outside them, whereas humans have purposes of their own, Solomon notes.

Business tends to become a game when it loses its essential aim. It is when one thinks of business in terms of such narrow impersonal goals as making money that one loses sight of the larger enterprise (1999, p. 19).

Likewise, the game mentality is a disease for business, because it focuses on winning a game and considering other matters, like employees’ welfare or the environment, seem pointless. The rationality behind such an interpretation has already been studied here (Solomon, 1994). As he puts it, competition can be of two kinds: constructive and destructive, and we need a system that makes this distinction clear. The different metaphors that have been previously analyzed (the war and jungle ones) lead us to destructive competition. These descriptions generally bring along a zero-sum game whose point is to punch out your opponent, debilitate the competition, and win at his or her expense. Business competition, by contrast, offers us the best example of constructive and inspiring competition, in which competition serves as a spur to one’s own excellence and productivity. It provides incentives to improve, creating new heroes, ideals, and possibilities (1999, pp. 23-24).

Solomon makes an interesting remark regarding the concept of entrepreneurship. He believes that companies are most competitive when they do not compete at all. By developing and following their own values, companies win as a matter of course and not by knocking down other competitors (seen as mere rivals). Entrepreneurship and creativity is linked with the recognition of significant gaps that others are unable to see and requires healthy competition to develop. The entrepreneur discloses a new world, opens up a new
world of possibilities within the existing one. It happens the same with profit, Solomon notes, if you do not look for it you obtain it more easily than if you are obsessed about it. This phenomenon was defined as ‘the profit seeking paradox’. (Bowie, 1988) It also occurs with happiness, John Stuart Mill noted, "those only are happy (...) who have their minds fixed on some object other than their own happiness." (1960). Profits, likewise, are more easily obtained when not pursued as such. Such an argument is presented in the article The Long Way Around: The best way for a business to maximize profits is not to seek to maximize profits (Stark, 2011) available in The Wall Street Journal.

Profits are not the only motive in business, Solomon suggests. In a profit-making system, people do work for profits. However, we should not forget that profits are not the end in themselves, but the means to other meaningful ends. For any corporation that specific end is its survival and fortification, and for the person it is money to spend. Moreover, this aim should not be confused with sheer selfishness. Solomon makes a strong claim about the nature of stockholders, which however he does not justify later. He claims that stockholders are not homines economici, that is, merely economic self-maximizing beings. They are people with values and virtues who presumably care about something more in life than how their shares are doing (1999, p.31).

Solomon continues to build his argument by saying that there is a lack of vision and imagination, and that what one ought to do and what is in one's own self-interest are diametrically opposed. Of course, these may occasionally oppose each other, he notes, but more often than not they do not. The assumption that they do oppose is one of the theoretical stigmas that populate the business ethical discourse. Solomon wants to fight this and contends that the polarity between doing what is in our interest and doing the right thing is minimal. In serving others, ethical managers serve themselves. Therefore, these interests rarely clash. Solomon gives an example in his book following Doug Todd’s article (1996). In it, he suggests that it is not unethical for a company to donate money in order to avoid paying taxes (even if the motive may seem sheer selfishness, for a company to do so implies promoting both self-interest and public good at the same time).
Solomon’s Aristotelian approach to business ethics entails a focus on virtues that removes the opposition of self-interest (profitability) and ethics. Being virtuous implies acting in one’s best interest. This normally coincides with what is best for the community. The virtuous person wants whatever should be desired and there is no contradiction in doing that. Solomon assumes that being virtuous is by its very nature both acting in one's own self-interest and acting in a socially productive way. Again, one finds an assumption that somehow lacks a further philosophical grounding.

4.2 Bringing business and integrity back to the picture

When one thinks of business, one thinks of a self-contained activity, of a game with its own rules and rationale. The business world is characterized by the following paradigm: either we are ethical or we pursue our own advantage. Against that standardized picture of business, Solomon offers an alternative one. In any organization or corporation that has integrity one will find caring and cooperative individuals. Integrity involves a sense of social context where principles and ethical policies coexist. Business plays an important part of human lives and communities, not only because of its civilizing influence, but also because with business it happens again with happiness. The good life can be achieved only by doing what one ought to do.

According to Solomon, integrity is more than the quality to listen to every employee or to be honest. One cannot “have” it or “do” it. It takes a whole lifetime of good deeds to say of someone that they have lived with integrity. In his book, Solomon explores the concept of integrity as a sum of virtues. This sense of wholeness immediately rings a bell to me: integrity speaks the language of character. Consciously belonging and being part of something that is larger than oneself (a corporation, community or society) is what integrity entails. In this sense, wholeness implies acknowledgement of the social grounds one stands on. The concept of integrity involves taking into consideration the whole person as well as the larger picture, thus constituting an essential part of any virtuous life. Solomon describes seeing one’s life as “integrity” with having a coherent character that resists every circumstance. Integrity prevents one from being torn apart by moral conflicts, especially
in business. Business leaders must face these conflicts with integrity, as this sum of virtues provides the necessary strength to overcome difficulties. According to Solomon, there is no real success in business without it.

Solomon provides three examples of lack of integrity in the second part of his book (1999, pp. 40-42). In everyday life, we come across the hypocrite, who says one thing and does another. It is a classic example of someone who breaks that ethical wholeness that integrity requires. One could therefore affirm that hypocrisy stands at odds with integrity. The hypocrite fails in keeping his word, which ultimately results in a form of self-deception. A special case of hypocrisy is performed by the “person of integrity”, who proclaims himself or herself as the moral rock around which everyone revolves. S/he proclaims principles to solve every challenge, which can only be of the moral type. Besides the “person of integrity”, the business context is full of examples of people who shift like the wind: the chameleon and the opportunist. The former is depicted as someone without a self, someone who always reflects the social situation, the yes-man that changes color to its convenience. It must also be noted that this typology stands in diametrical opposition to the virtue of loyalty. Regarding the opportunists, these are characterized as the ones who use others as simple means to their ends. They do not consider others; they simply do not respect them and just have in mind their own goal. The opportunists act in a selfish way by not acknowledging others as ends in themselves.

Another important aspect in Solomon’s text is the concept of individual, which is always presented as a socially constituted and situated invention. One’s identity is built within the different communities one belongs to: corporations, institutions, family, etc. Therefore, we are communal beings that cannot avoid belonging to different communities. The individual belongs to artificial groups, such as corporations or education centers, which give meaning to her/him. The Aristotelian idea of corporation as a human institution is destroyed when focus is put on measurable quantities that are listed in the financial pages of the organization. Solomon thinks that we should return to those values that characterize the company in order to look into that organization’s culture.
The virtue of any culture is ideally manifested by every individual that belongs to it, and ultimately, corporate values are meant to be one’s own. Every corporation has a culture with its set of values, which should eventually become one’s second nature, Solomon argues. In other words, one’s interest cannot lie outside of that culture, but necessarily belong to it. As a result, and if I understand Solomon correctly, he implies that “the corporate social responsibility cause” is wrongly approached and formulated. If we think of corporations as communities that are part of society (and not simply independent), then the problem with “the cause” dissolves, because it will be assumed that corporations always have something positive to offer to society. However, the question is still how to make a corporate culture succeed. What methods are there to implement such a set of values?

A tentative answer could be through the development of codes of conduct, as Solomon proposes. These codes would help to inform and give an instrument to those employees who might find themselves in a particularly ethical conflictive situation. For example, is one allowed to accept gifts from colleagues? How can one say “no” to certain pressures that may come from within the organization? A code of ethics could help employees to stick to the values of the company. Still, others say it might be dispensable for the company to have such codes. Ideally, these codes should reflect the values that are already there.

Whatever position is adopted, one should always think of a code of ethics as a work in continuous progress, a self-affirming process that is never merely top-down imposed. What would be the point of having such set of rules? The whole company benefits when employees engage in those values and purposes they share. Among those most responsible for putting the ethical code to work are, again, the top executives. They should incarnate excellence as their mission, as a commitment beyond the profit potential and the bottom line (1999, p.57). If they ignore those values that the code of ethics holds essential, none of the coworkers in the organization will subscribe to them. Indeed, it is through witnessing, imitating and learning from other people in the community that people become virtuous (Bartholomew & Dawson, 2003, p. 127)
The author also explores in his book the concept of leadership. He sees leadership as an emotional relationship. Fear cannot be the basis of any such relationship. A true leader is not the one who is most feared, but the one who is respected and, to some extent, loved. Solomon believes that trust and empowerment lie at the core of real leadership. As he thinks of it, empowerment involves mutual creation of power through trust. All of these concepts have been here previously examined. The only notable difference from the previous texts is that leadership is here presented as a matter of emotions, where it is stressed that leadership can never be confused with a matter of emotional control.

4.3 Honesty, Fairness and Trustworthiness.

The last part of Solomon’s book is an enquiry about the different virtues that any corporation and society requires. Preceding it, there is a small section where he introduces, in even more detail this time, the concept of virtue. The idea of virtue as a pervasive trait of character that enables the person to excel within a given society has been previously mentioned. David Hume’s contribution to virtue refers to its usefulness: a virtue is a pleasing and useful trait for oneself and for others. A virtue has also been described by Solomon as a value that is embodied and built into action. Yet, what is new in this second examination is the observation of the existence of a conceptual linkage between the individual and society that virtues provide. Virtues make their possessors fit well in society.

As seen in chapter two of the Thesis, Aristotle believed virtues to be basic constituents of happiness: they were essential aspects of the individual as well as the "excellences" that a certain society embraced. The ideal in ancient Greece was that of the good person, an ideal that was interwoven by personal and societal virtues. Solomon’s point is to stress that virtues harmonize people with each other, even if these virtues are context-bound (an issue that will be heavily criticized in the next chapter). New practices will engender new virtues and there is an increasing interest in showing how corporations have first and foremost a purpose: serving society's demands and the public good. Without a sense of telos, of a mission, corporations become a liability to society, the author thinks.
In the third section of his book, Solomon firstly examines the Chinese interpretation of virtue. According to the Chinese philosophical tradition, a virtue is a potency, something that relates to one’s potential and power to succeed by becoming who one truly is. Virtues that count the most in Chinese philosophy are those that help us in the roles we play along our lives. In an original approach to virtues, Solomon examines over fifty of them, but refers to three, which he considers most basic for business. These include: honesty, fairness and trustworthiness. I will pay attention to these specific virtues now.

Honesty is for Solomon the first of business virtues. Honesty implies telling the truth, but not necessarily to a full disclosure. It is necessary to keep some things disclosed, as risk is also part of every transaction. The thinker offers several useful examples, from which I will refer here to one: the leaking roof. Imagine one is selling their second hand house with a leaking roof. In that case, this potential leaking roof may not be disclosed (if not asked). A seller is bound to tell the truth if asked, but not if not asked. In his opinion, one has the right to keep that information to oneself. As I see the example, not letting the potential buyer know about the problems of the house is not very ethical. It may be true that every transaction precludes total honesty and that there is no “black and white” contrast in this matter. However, in this particular stance I feel it morally right to tell the truth to the potential buyer and not because of a Kantian or utilitarian law. I believe a virtuous seller would be here honest. Along with honesty, ethical business demands straightforward information and candor. Clearly, a deficiency of honesty can only lead to the vice of lying.

Secondly, fairness appears as a virtue that necessarily involves other people. Its essence has to do with treating others equally with regard to those differences that exist between people. Being fair means giving each one what is theirs, and in doing so making this world a more harmonious place to live in. This virtue is sometimes found under the title of justice, but that is too broad of a concept, Solomon specifies. Under whatever philosophical category fairness falls, the author reminds us that fairness remains a basic expectation in every human interaction. It is not an ideal to strive for, but rather a common practice that is expected in everyday life. Fairness in business, in particular, is interrelated with honesty and trust, and it can be defined as a certain disposition to exchange goods or services in a
market through honest negotiation. Every price we see marked in labeled products is ultimately the outcome of a negotiation, therefore a variable and never necessary sum that depends on fairness to be just. Deficiency of fairness results in favoritism and irrational adherence to a theory of justice.

Finally, trustworthiness is the last of the three virtues that are basic for ethical business practices. Trustworthiness implies that someone is trusted. When someone fulfills one's responsibilities, one earns the right to be trusted. As with fairness, it also appears in the context of an interpersonal relationship. Solomon notes that it must be not mistaken with trust, which is used as an umbrella concept a little too often. Trustworthy is the condition of being worthy of trust and, as observed, it requires someone to earn such a right. How? Through a constant and coherent character that withstands the corrupting influences. It takes a lifetime to be trustworthy and a moment to destroy one’s trustworthiness. Actually, business is based on the premise that most people are trustworthy. People that do what they say they will do enable this social practice to continue. Otherwise, business people would never prosper, because nobody would ever trust them.

A similar argument is hold by Michael Pakaluk, who considers reciprocity crucial. According to him, Aristotle acknowledges that reciprocity is crucial for human association (1132b –1133b). He adds: “Reciprocity works especially in contractual, business relationships: for instance, a shoemaker trades a certain number of shoes to a carpenter, in exchange for the carpentry work involved in enlarging his shoe shop. The exchange is amicable only if the shoemaker believes that he has received goods of equal worth in return.” (2005, p.194) Reciprocity then fits well in Solomon’s aforementioned list of essential virtues in business. Along with honesty, fairness and trustworthiness one can find reciprocity playing a major role.

As Solomon observes, business can tolerate a limited amount of cheating, but not big quantities and never at its core. Business is essentially founded upon trust and trustworthiness. We could survive without money, but not without trustworthiness. Money is just a piece of paper that does not have any value, except for the extra trust that we put
in it. Our human relations are somehow similar; they depend on this virtue to flourish. Its deficiency is fatal, as it does not only result in untrustworthiness, but in a lack that is hard to restore.

Some of the last remarks of this chapter refer to the vital importance of corporations in reflecting these values in the context of an ever-growing globalization. Solomon believes that the future of the world lies in hands of corporations. In an article published after his book and with the title *Business with Virtue: Maybe Next Year?* (2000) He concedes that consumerism and the free enterprise mentality currently rule the world. Further in the article he postulates that “no government can match the collective power of the corporate world” (p.339) Coming back to his book, the author reminds us that this corporate world, more precisely the board of each organization, knows well that it is not justifiable to pursue profits at no matter what cost. Every corporation is responsible for the well-being of their customers and employees, and they cannot simply evade their task of building a better world.

**4.4 The many ways of being ethical**

The “putting it altogether” and conclusive parts follow the section dedicated to describing the aforementioned virtues. In these last paragraphs, Solomon reminds the reader of the importance of context and the personal character of ethics. This is intimately related to the personal style that everyone has in ethics. This “ethical style” is a concept derived from the writings of Friedrich Nietzsche (1954), who spoke of the unique character of each virtue. Nietzsche affirmed that one’s virtue is really one’s own and unlike nobody else’s. He also argued that there was no unity to the virtues, i.e. that the pursuit of one virtue may eclipse the others. Solomon does not go that far, yet he does underline that there is no simple recipe to act ethically. Ultimately, it is not as easy as Aristotle’s unitary conception of the virtues suggested – having a virtue does not necessarily imply having all of them.

Unlike what the rule-bound proponents assure, a sensitivity to circumstance is of absolute importance. That is the real value of applying an “Aristotelian approach” in ethics. Virtues,
the subject matter of his studies, are necessarily bound to their context and always relative. As I see it, this fact does not undermine his theory or limits its application, but on the contrary strengthens it. Shifting from a universalistic paradigm to a pluralistic and context bound one is more in accordance with recent developments in the ethical field, as we will see in the following chapter of the Thesis.

However, it may surprise the reader that Solomon waits until the last chapter of his book to refer to his view regarding the crucial question “what is essential in ethics?” It seems that the right answer to this question – after a book dedicated to integrity and virtue – would have been concern for the agent’s character and upbringing. One’s expectations are well founded, because throughout his work he has been defending an “Aristotelian approach” to business ethics. However, in the very last paragraphs Solomon surprises the reader by affirming that Aristotle and his writings do not serve him to discover the “right” theory. According to him, there is no single correct ethical theory. In turn, there is no fixed answer to the initial question.

The revelation is not surprising when compared to his former book *Ethics and Excellence*. In it, Solomon also waits until the last chapters of the book to explain the idea of an “ethical style”. He already notes then that an Aristotelian approach would not be the final answer to all questions in business ethics. In fact, quite the opposite happens. As he affirms, “the presence of alternative ethical styles suggests that, even in the best corporations with the best people, internal dissension will be the rule rather than the exception” (1991, ch.26).

This opinion also explains why Solomon does not spend much time invalidating other ethical positions different to the Aristotelian, as the strong virtue ethicists often do. He even claims that in trying to find “the correct” ethical theory history of ethics has proved to be a waste of time and energy. The problem has been that different contenders have tried to impose their ethical theory as preferable to “its rivals”. As he sees it, ethical theories apply to the world and its ethical dilemmas differently, and their success depends on the “ethical style” one adopts. This outlook leaves a door open to understandable skepticism and
relativism. The reader is left free to assume that a moral agent should know what style applies best to every particular case.

Every style has advantages and disadvantages, Solomon declares. Furthermore, he admits that changing styles is not an easy task, “and it may well be that an ethical style is no more easily changed than other lifelong traits of character such as thoughtfulness, recklessness, or spontaneous generosity” (1999, p.117). Solomon’s consistent referring to the Scottish sentimentalists (1998) makes me think that there could be some kind of moral intuitionism supported behind his proposal. However, he does not explicitly confirm this. All one can say is that it could well be the case that the philosopher assumed such position. If one extends the Aristotelian framework to his total ethical proposal there would be another plausible option, that the potential virtuous agent would always know whether to act upon Kantian, utilitarian or Aristotelian principles. His decision of adopting the proper ‘ethical style’ would depend on what best suits the situation.

This does not imply a focus on a single tradition or contender, it just means that for every case there is an option that works best (similar to Aristotle’s doctrine of the mean). Knowing what is most appropriate to apply in each particular case, then, cannot be a simple deduction from higher well-established principles or theories. Some ethical theories stand on this truth, that ethics is nothing else than an application of a law. In this sense, Solomon makes clear that his proposal stands elsewhere. His are highly context-sensitive grounds. Yet, he reckons that a Kantian or utilitarian ethicist would point at the risk of equating ethics with a mood or a taste. Talking about “ethical styles” is highly subjectivist and superficial, they would contend.

In order not to lose the point of his argument, Solomon does not leave everything to preferences. There is no single key to morality, no absolute rule that could solve every ethical problem; yet, there is an objective value in the Kantian and utilitarian positions, indeed. These theories prove that a person who is Kantian values certain virtues over others and acts always according to those values that rank higher. Therefore, talking about
different “ethical styles” is not a defense of reducing ethics to “anything goes”, to pure relativism or subjectivism. That is beside the point.

Among these “ethical styles” portrayed by Solomon, one finds the classical rule-bound and utilitarian ones. An example of the rule-bound style is the Kantian supporter, who acts based on the categorical imperative. Possible exceptions or circumstances are dismissed also in the case of the utilitarian style, which is characterized by the weighing of probable consequences. There is also the virtues style, which focuses on the reflection of one’s character when acting rather than on principles or consequences. The professional and loyalist moral characters are defined by a strong commitment to the company or organization. Finally, the empathetic and intuitive moral styles show less interest in argumentation than in emotions and feelings, especially those of sympathy and compassion.

As seen, these are all different valid forms of living ethically, different reasoning with a same purpose: finding a path that works for the individual in resolving those moral problems that must be faced in any community, business and life. According to Solomon’s representation, the intellectual battle among different ethical standpoints should come to an end and mutual understanding and cooperation should start strengthening. His words may sound like utopia to the reader, but at least they mark a clear direction towards which ethics should start to move.

Overcoming the paradigm that one theory should prevail over the others entails a certain relativism. Indeed, there are the circumstances, which must be considered in successful ethical problem solving. However, Solomon never eliminates the objectivity from his model. It is not “everything goes”, it is not a pure matter of spoiled choice. There are good reasons for having a particular ethical style, and these reasons are closely related to one’s education, friends and upbringing.

As I understand Solomon’s work, he advises that following Aristotelian ethical standards in contemporary societies makes the agent sensitive to the context, to the degree that s/he
must end up admitting that there is ultimately no absolute answer about “the right” ethical theory. Ethical styles are nevertheless more or less appropriate and worthy in each case, (Solomon 1992) and it is the particularity of each stance that must be considered. The result of applying this or that theory should ideally depend on the specific case considered in its own and attended its complexity. Each problem requires a specific kind of approach to it, depending mainly on the context. In this sense, Solomon agrees that certain styles have more advantages than others, but never that the virtuous one – the one he reevaluates throughout his works – is the most effective one in absolute terms. In Solomon’s words:

To insist, however, that the virtuous style is the "correct" view of ethics is itself a misunderstanding of the ethics of virtue. There are many ways of being virtuous, and there are many ways of being ethical. (1999, p.119)
5. Reception and contribution

5.1 Contribution

The previous study of Solomon’s ethical proposal has contributed to rebuild and reinforce a tradition that has not been treated justly in the history of thought. Reasons for this misfortune surely do not have to do with the rise of the individual, as Taylor suggested. Solomon offers a more elaborated proposal, where the constitution of the individual is key to understand that of the community. The analysis of Solomon’s work here conducted constitutes the most significant aspect of this Thesis. However, my standpoint does not completely match that of Solomon. To explain why the philosopher’s proposal may not be completely convincing I will now turn to a selection of the most relevant critiques and reviews that have been written on his works on business ethics.

Even if inconclusive or not sufficiently formulated, Solomon’s alternative to a conventional ethics seems to me of great value. His open and all-embracing examination of ethics is very valuable as a whole. Firstly, because it saves Aristotle from disappearing into obscurity in this field and he brings him to the forefront of business ethical debates. Reinterpreting a dismissed tradition, Solomon offers an alternative to flawed modes of answer the ethical dilemmas in the workplace. In addition, because his view of virtue ethics is original, he surpasses the already existing conceptions of virtue to offer his own. Secondly, because his reading of Aristotle is unique, as already seen. Solomon takes into account the different “ethical styles” as fundamental for virtuous ethical deliberation. Most importantly, because the thinker gives an attractive twist to a longstanding tradition without distorting it.

Roger Crisp notices in his work the fact that different traditions may find identical behaviors as morally desirable, but for diametrically opposed reasons. This idea supports Solomon’s previous observation, i.e. there are many ways of being ethical and virtuous. Crisp refers to utilitarianism and Kantianism as the two main modern competitors of virtue ethics. In this point, however, Solomon would have to disagree with the Crisp. The idea of
contenders fighting to win is very misleading in ethics. As already argued, there is no single true paradigm in ethics, but just a variety of ethical styles that have all the same worth. As Solomon contended, it is simply a matter of what virtues are preferred by our character.

It is important to recognize that these three theories [utilitarianism, Kantianism and virtue ethics] may largely converge in their practical conclusions. They may all, for instance, recommend that one be generous, or just. But the reasons that the theories offer differ greatly. According to utilitarianism, what makes actions right is their producing the largest amount of well-being overall. According to Kantianism, what makes actions right is their being in accordance with the law of reason. We might understand Aristotle, and a pure virtue ethics, as claiming that what makes actions right is their being virtuous (2000, p. xvii).

In sum, Solomon makes several important points that are of great value to contemporary ethicists. He clears the way to future development in an area that needs further study. His contribution comes in form of a pluralistic reinterpretation of Aristotle, as to apply his teachings to the difficult arenas of business ethics.

5.2 Reviews and criticism

I will now take a closer look to different reviews of Ethics and Excellence (1991), and then continue by addressing another review of A Better Way to Think About Business (1999). These reviews will give the reader an idea of those aspects that need to be improved, as well as of those passages in which Solomon makes good points. Generally, the philosopher’s proposal is positively commented on. The positive reviews outdo the negative ones. Still, several times criticism get serious in the following reviews, but never to the point of being harsh. A series of constructive overall criticism will result in a better understanding of the philosopher. Many assumptions seem unclear or not sufficiently justified.
5.2.1 Christopher McMahon in Chicago Journals (Jul., 1994)

In his review of Solomon’s book, Christopher McMahon praises the author’s clarity and simplicity when writing on business ethics, as it contributes to a necessary and healthy debate on the topic. He argues that Solomon makes accessible to the public a very specific philosophical topic, yet displaying vast philosophical knowledge. Despite its linguistic simplicity, the text can be seen as a contribution also to the eyes of academic philosophers, who can find quite a few relevant arguments to think about, McMahon thinks. He claims that Solomon’s work is written in a “light and engaging style” (1994, p. 911). Moreover, he recognizes the value of the Aristotelian proposal in the book. McMahon defines the Aristotelian approach as a view in which corporations are dedicated to a purpose. Therefore, corporations and communities are seen as dedicated to the endeavor of human prosperity. Ultimately, business is assigned a telos.

Another positive aspect is Solomon’s success in humanizing the concept of business by portraying it as a community rather than as a competitive or war-like arena. This is a noticeable contribution to the field of business ethics, as he tears apart the aforementioned destructive metaphors. It is pure common sense to think that everyone would benefit from conceiving business more as a cooperative process. However, McMahon criticizes Solomon for dismissing several important characteristics of cooperation in business. According to the critic, Solomon forgets that businesses have mostly flourished under liberal societies marked by permanent disagreement. Conflicting substantive moral conceptions make it impossible to achieve consensus regarding which policies to adapt in liberal societies. Not only Solomon oversimplifies the problem by stating that there is a particular moral standpoint that is preferable, but he also overlooks the liberal character of those societies where corporations operate.

When speaking of a community, one needs to fully address the questions of corporate governance that Solomon never answers. McMahon realizes that there is an omission in the Aristotelian approach, as Solomon never attends to the participation of those employees
in official decision making. If one takes the Aristotelian idea of community and citizenship seriously, shouldn’t we necessarily end up arguing for the democratic participation of employees in the management of any corporation? McMahon questions Solomon’s depth of analysis in this respect, and makes a point when reminding the reader of the necessarily conflictive nature of liberal societies.

5.2.2 Roderick J. MacDonald in Journal of Business Ethics (Jan., 1994)

Roderick J. MacDonald also offers a positive review of Solomon’s work. He agrees with McMahon in describing Solomon as an “erudite author who draws on many sources without falling into eclecticism. Both the specialist and the intelligent layman can enjoy this book” (1994, p. 69). As McMahon already underlined, it is the simple and knowledgeable approach that needs to be noted. MacDonald also refers to Solomon’s contribution in debunking the aforementioned myths about business, which have so much harmed the common belief regarding these activities.

Still, not everything is positive in his review. MacDonald points out that the main shortcoming in Solomon’s arguments is that these tend to fizzle out and that his book encourages the reader to surpass the rule-bound paradigm without offering any alternative solution. Hence, Solomon is criticized for writing more on philosophical anthropology than on business ethics. Actually, it is a good observation made by MacDonald, which I subscribe. Solomon is not clear enough regarding a possible application of his Aristotelian framework to business. He builds the theoretical framework, but then the reader is entitled to say, ‘now, what?’

When MacDonald reconstructs Solomon’s argument, he stresses the fact that the philosopher is forced to redefine the notion of business in his book. Solomon establishes the nature of business as a practice with goals, boundaries, rules and a purpose (Solomon, 1992, p.119). The problem is not concerned with such a description of business, but with a lack of further specific explanation of these elements. The reader is forced to interpret such essential elements, which according to MacDonald should be clearly outlined. For
example, the purpose of business seems to be the prosperity for all, but Solomon never states it as such in *Ethics and Excellence*.

There are three fundamentals that MacDonald spills out from the book. These ideas are all not that innovative, as they have a common denominator in Aristotle. First, businesses are conceived as communities with shared values that endure over time, they are what we commonly refer to as cultures. Second, individuals are essential to these communities, as they contribute to and bring along their personal virtues and characters. Third, business is no strange or inscrutable science, but “part of human life and a part of society” (1994, p.70). MacDonald believes Solomon’s theory to be inadequate unless the proposal truly goes beyond Aristotle and overcomes the notion of will.

The critic makes a last point. He agrees with Solomon in admitting that virtues are relative to a context. Yet, this does not make them context-bound. An example is courage, a virtue that is needed by the warrior as by the businessperson, to a different extent of course. Virtues adapt to the different contexts and are not bound by them, as Solomon suggests. This suggestion limits him to provide a rigorous structure for the last part of his book. MacDonald sees a major flaw in Solomon’s book, namely, the fact that he cannot justify why the pursuit of prosperity for all is necessary to flourishing or why it is a noble cause in the first place. Initial adherence to context is overcome in *A Better Way to Think About Ethics*, where this flaw is amended.

### 5.2.3 Allen Buchanan in *Journal of Business Ethics* (Feb., 1994)

Allen Buchanan agrees with MacDonald and with McMahon in describing Solomon’s style as lively, witty, and accessible to a broad readership (1994, p.94). He divides Solomon’s work in three main arguments similarly to the division proposed by MacDonald. The first thesis depicts business as a practice with a purpose, "to promote prosperity, to provide essential and desirable goods, to make life easier" (Solomon, 1992, p. 118). This purpose determines what is ethical and what is not in business. The second thesis adequately portrays the field of study, business, as inherently ethical. Third thesis relates to the
appropriate ethical theory, namely, the Aristotelian approach proposed by Solomon, which has a teleological nature. His proposal offers a theory, which focuses on the character of those individuals who make up corporations and business communities. Virtues are emphasized in accomplishing the *telos* of the organization.

Solomon works hard to dismantle those myths that have damaged the preconception of business. He believes that the right way to avoid misunderstandings is to recognize what business really is. Therefore, he deploys the problem to be a purely cognitive one. If we understand business correctly, then we must necessarily take into consideration the purpose of the activity. Yet, Buchanan sees the problem otherwise. To his understanding, it is not a mere cognitive problem, but it is a deeper one that involves economic and cultural factors. It is the case that liberal societies have produced incentives that reward people for treating means as ends in themselves. He goes a step forward in his criticism and contends that many reject the idea of business having a single purpose. Instead, the different agents involved in business have a plurality of purposes. Moreover, how to prove that “the” purpose of business is the one Solomon suggests?

If we are to admit that business has only the purpose proposed by Solomon (promotion of prosperity, easiness of life and provision of quality goods and services), then we are also forced either to say that it has by nature this purpose or that this purpose is the legitimating function of business. Solomon never admits the possibility of the latter. He rather admits an internalist viewpoint, according to which the ethical dimension of business lies in the purpose given by the nature of that activity. Buchanan is straightforward in this point:

Solomon should simply jettison the talk about the natural purpose of business and replace it with a focus on the legitimating function (or functions) of business (...) the ultimate moral justification of business as a social institution is the complex and heterogeneous array of human goods it provides and the worthy values it serves (1994, p.124).
According to the critic’s position, if we move towards a legitimating discourse we will open up space for creative and cooperative activity, which would ultimately restore the idea of a common good oriented towards collective goals in a community. We need to focus on the legitimating functions of business and not in its nature or single purpose. It is not simply a matter of having mistaken the nature of business, it is the whole approach that is wrong, Buchanan argues. He makes a strong claim when describing the book’s flaw as deriving ethics from the natural purpose.

To his understanding we should focus on each particular case, say retail businesses in the U.S, to see whether their activities achieve goods or services that justify their costs and legitimate their operations. Under such a scope, he affirms that these two interesting questions can be better addressed if we got rid of the Aristotelian teleology. (1) What is the need of creating unnecessary goods which damage the environment, reduce our resources and worsen the gap between developing and developed countries? Second (2), at what cost is this social activity known as business promoting absurd careerism instead of commitment to general prosperity?

Regarding Solomon’s analysis of corporate culture, Buchanan adds little. He agrees with him and praises his endeavor to understand actual communities instead of focusing on abstract disputes that go nowhere. Overly abstract theorizing has ruled out the possibility of focusing on those communities about which we know a great deal and which are truly relevant to our lives. The critic says that while Solomon expands and deepens the idea that corporations are communities “he breathes new life into the stalled debate between Liberals and Communitarians” (1994, p.124). Possibly, Solomon’s major contribution to virtue ethics is related to the recognition of virtues as making successful cooperation possible. At the same time, their role in facilitating cooperation can only be understood in the context of the concrete communities in which cooperation occurs. A call for considering the particular cases reflect the contextualized and particular ethics that Solomon puts forth in his book.
The second important flaw that Buchanan denounces is the lack of empirical support that Solomon’s book offers. His contentions about the role of virtues in achieving cooperation misses the empirical backup from the social science, the critic notes. He refers to the great amount of literature in Sociology and Economics that could support Solomon’s thesis, which yet the philosopher ignores. There is a lack of credibility that lies at the heart of the proposal, and if nothing is done to reverse this, Solomon’s book has high chances of being marginalized (especially among Business School faculty). In sum, Solomon’s is more a manifesto about how business ethics should be than a sustained application of the approach it advocates. Buchanan hopes that Solomon amends these early mistakes and moves on to prove the applications of a potentially effective approach.

5.2.4 John R. Boatright: Aristotle Meets Wall Street in Business Ethics Quarterly (Apr., 1995)

Boatright offers an extensive review of each of the three constituent parts of Ethics and Excellence.

In the first part, Solomon argues that success in business requires people with integrity and organizations that foster virtues. Excellence, both individual and corporate, is defined by success in achieving the individual and corporate telos. In the case of the human beings, this implies achieving a good life, and excellence for a corporation consists in being a good citizen. If corporations do this, they make the good life possible for everyone in society. Boatright notes that such teleological view has as a consequence that corporate social responsibility is no longer seen as something external to the operations of business but is intrinsic to its existence.

There are two questions that Solomon answers to: the first has to do with the personal dimension of business and the second with the nature of the ethical theory that should be applied to business. About Kantianism and utilitarianism, the thinker says in his book "they simply are not the right kind of theory to provide the day-to-day understanding of business required by business ethics" (Solomon, 1992, p. 113). Versus these theories, the
Aristotelian approach seems far more suited given its down-to-earth character. Solomon's view seems ready for practical application. However, when adopting the Aristotelian tradition, Solomon also adopted its shortcomings, Boatright asserts.

Solomon is accused of failing to take care of existing conflict with ourselves and with others not only in corporations, but also in contemporary societies. Hobbesian contenders offer a valid argument for many, since it seems evident to them that our interests often conflict. Therefore, they will not be convinced by Solomon’s argument, who simply overlooks an essential part of their philosophical outlook. In fact, as Boatright denotes, conflict of individual interests is at the core of every human relation, including corporate ones. Moreover, business involves power relations and this aspect is completely out of Solomon’s picture. His first shortcoming is neglecting the “darker” side of American businesses and focusing on those aspects that suit his theory.

Solomon depicts the free enterprise system as essentially the only possibility of achieving excellence and flourishing in contemporary society. He never contemplates the possibility of an alternative, because any other system is an impractical Utopia to his understanding. This strong claim is never justified in his book and it is too fast taken for granted, Boatright suggests. Against this standpoint, the critic thinks that some of the problems in business ethics might be structural. A second shortcoming in virtue ethics, and in contrast with principle-oriented ethics, is its inability to justify specific courses of action. Boatright claims that even if principle-oriented ethical theories may be uncertain at times, they have a well-defined course of action when applied. Ultimately, connecting specific courses of actions to virtues is not such a clear and easy task.

The answer remains open in Boatright’s eyes to whether Solomon is writing at a descriptive or normative level. It seems not clear whether his book is a conception of how business is or how business ought to be. Moreover, an appeal to an essence of business upon which everyone ought to agree is not easily defendable. If the philosopher derives normative conclusions of business ethics, he is forced into a dilemma. At some point in his book, Solomon seems willing to graft a set of fundamental human rights grounded on the human
nature to his Aristotelian framework. However, Boatright remains skeptic and asks the unavoidable subsequent question: how can Solomon be sure about the philosophical question of the human nature?

These methodological shortcomings would be acceptable only if, as a whole, the virtue ethics perspective would help to answer those business problems that need to be faced. If it were more effective in offering moral guidance than the traditional rule-bound theories, then we should definitely adopt it, Boatright thinks. Yet, he reminds the reader that Solomon’s proposal is more valuable only if considered in the “micro” approach, that is, only if we focus on the individual. If not, one is forced to admit that there are certain unjustified assumptions that operate at the core of Solomon’s theory. The critic suggests that strategy and policy matters, dismissed by Solomon, are also important to ethical business managers.

Boatright deals Solomon’s proposal a blow when examining its shortcomings. According to the reviewer, we cannot simply point at personal failings when it comes to business problems. Solomon too easily diagnoses the problem to be a “distorted perspective or deficient character. Some are, no doubt. But other problems are (again) endemic to business, and yet others result from the kind of pathological corporate environment...” (Boatright, p. 358). Ethics cannot be conceived just as a personal issue. Instead, it must integrate all levels of decision making in the corporation. Unfortunately, this dimension is completely lacking from Solomon’s view.

5.2.5 Eileen P. Kelly in The Academy of Management Executive (May., 2000)

In her review, Kelly limits herself to briefly describing the content of the work without further criticism. More than a review, Kelly’s is a summary of Solomon’s book. Her job in this review is merely informative. Only in the last paragraph she recommends reading the book, as it would do a great supplementary reading for business ethics courses, she thinks.

According to Solomon in A Better Way to Think About Business: How Personal Integrity
Leads to Corporate Success business is a social enterprise instead of a self-interested and mere profit-oriented activity, and business ethics is no oxymoron. His book is an attempt of justifying that ethics is good business, while amorality will not sell on the long turn. The apparent contradiction between what one feels s/he should do and what is necessary to be done generates a tension that many business practitioners face in their daily lives. Such a tension is solved when our personal value system matches our business system. In such a morally rewarding environment, good people can develop both their skills and their virtues (Solomon, 1999).

Part of the book is devoted to exploring those heroes and myths that hinder the developing of an ethos of integrity in business today. An analysis of the language used in these metaphors, such as dog-eat-dog or kill-or-be-killed, follows. As a result, Solomon argues that such dehumanizing language translates into a dehumanized business environment. When Attila the Hun or Machiavelli are used in managerial books, we cannot but expect according dehumanized policies and strategies to be implemented. Against this view, Solomon argues for the need of integrity in a true ethical business life. Through the conception of corporation as community, the philosopher restores a humanity that has been stolen from the business discourse. This Aristotelian approach aims to extend communal obligations beyond stockholders while multinational corporations exert growing power beyond frontiers in the era of globalization, Solomon contends.

In this setting, their primary role should be to increase cooperation and make it a condition sine qua non for success. However, the assumption that business has a “civilizing influence” is not proved by the philosopher and will let some readers and other authors unsatisfied. At the core of their criticisms lies the fact that Solomon’s premises are not sufficiently justified. The philosopher states since the very first pages of his book that among his purposes is not to question the capitalistic system itself and this is turns out to be problematic as seen before. Solomon’s objective is rather to demonstrate how integrity is a necessary element for the success of any sound business system in today’s society.
6. Conclusion

This Thesis has addressed the question regarding the possibility of applying virtue ethics to the business context. As seen, there are possibilities of combining virtue with business without falling into an oxymoron. Taylor argued for a strong virtue ethics, position that I do not support. Nevertheless, he did a good job in introducing a philosophical tradition through a general overview in his book. After the analysis of his book, it was easier for me to introduce the specific business issue in the Aristotelian tradition. After that, Solomon offered a convincing and thought-provoking version of virtue ethics. His version, it seems to me, outdoes the traditional and unconventional variants of virtue ethics alike. Yet, there are minor theoretical issues in his proposal that need reconsideration and ultimately, improvement. Among these, the lack of justification is certainly one of the most noticeable. However, the continuity and theoretical consistency in Solomon’s works benefits the integrity of his Aristotelian framework.

Solomon’s idea is to stress existing differences in order to enrich moral discourse. As he puts it, “If practice, if not in theory, ethical styles is all there is” (1992, p.254). Different approaches to ethics are equally valuable; none is theoretically superior to the others. What is new is the focus on particular instances and “ethical styles” as different ways of approaching ethics, because in such a framework nothing is given for granted. It is possible that in some cases Kant will offer a more suitable answer than Mill or Aristotle. Solomon’s proposal fights the “unique” theory paradigm that tried to impose a single truth and method in the philosophical realm of ethics. The Kantian, as much as the utilitarian or the strong virtue ethicist, consider their standpoint beyond negotiation. Most problematic is the fact that they cannot understand each other, unless in terms of moral pathology. Solomon argues against this rigidity and goes for a viewpoint that enhances diversity and plurality within ethics. Most importantly, he emphasizes respect for ethical differences: “[‘ethical styles’] differ considerably and have different advantages and disadvantages in terms of simplicity, clarity, applicability, and scope” (1992, p.255). It is the nature of the particular ethical problem what must be closely considered in each case in order to examine which “ethical style” could deal with it better.
I take issue with Solomon over his undefined ethical conception. He speaks of different styles as equally valuable. Yet, he recognizes, “Perfectly proper ethical styles can also go wrong. One way is to be inappropriate” (1992, p.257). How can he combine the relativistic standpoint with a normative and objective statement like this? How can we know if a virtue style is inappropriate in the first place? Still, granted we recognize a style as inappropriate, how can we determine what style works better? Under which objective scale should we place ourselves for such a task? Is there a guideline to follow?

As I see it, another possible problem lies at the core of his moral conception of ‘ethical style’. How is it possible to match an ethical character with a certain style? Aren’t character and style incompatible concepts? Moreover, a moral character is forged through a process of many years of character development and personal history. That does not make one blind to other approaches, in that sense Solomon makes a great point. However, what I find problematic is that Solomon never explains how to choose the best ‘ethical style’ for each case. He recognizes the problem recognized, but he does not offer a convincing answer.

If styles were adaptable to circumstances, then I suggest taking Solomon a step further and dare to think for a minute how to answer the initial question. Let us take the Aristotelian approach. Seen from the virtue ethicist standpoint, the virtuous person knows best what needs to be done and does so spontaneously and effortlessly. Why couldn’t it also be the case that the agent would always know what style to use? I admit that the question about justification has not been answered in this case neither. At least it would have been consequent with Solomon’s previous works.

However, my criticism of Solomon’s philosophical proposal is not so much focused on his moral scheme as on his political one. There seems to be unquestionable matters for him regarding the benefits of capitalism and its political system. He repeatedly assumes business, in form of private corporations, as Solomon understood it, to be an extremely beneficial “civilizing influence”. Yet, as the philosopher says, “I want to develop here is a theory which the free enterprise system is taken as a starting point and not itself subject to
scrutiny” (Solomon, 1992, p.7). Question remains: does this view solve the ethical problem of inequality or on the contrary, does it feed it? Scandinavian social democrat political models are the paradigm of the welfare state. These seem to represent the ideal democratic polis depicted by the ancient Greeks better than the harsh neoliberal American setting.

Instead of recapitulating the main ideas, in the following section of this chapter I will offer an alternative to Solomon’s proposal. Bringing a different character onto the stage may give the reader a better understanding of the whole performance. After several pages of exploring the thinker’s ideas related to business ethics, a different voice can help in the process of orientating oneself.

6.1 An alternative

In his paper, How Virtue Fits Within Business Ethics (2001), J. Thomas Whetstone proposes to add virtue ethics to the already dominating ethical formulations in business as a fully-equally complement to these. Versus a strong virtue ethics that sees virtues and the agent’s character as the sole explanation in moral theory (see Taylor’s), the author suggests a tripartite approach to ethics as more effective for business practice. A balanced position that combines consequentialist, deontological and character-focused ethics overcomes those deficiencies that the strong virtue position (and every mononomic or single-oriented position) entails (See Table 1, Whetstone, 2001). He contends that an approach that applies different ethical theories to decision-making and moral development is more realistic and better suited for moral guidance.
TABLE 1
Three ethics perspectives

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<th>Consequentialist teleology</th>
<th>Deontology</th>
<th>Virtue</th>
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<td>Primary focus:</td>
<td>Consequences;</td>
<td>Duties:</td>
<td>Character development</td>
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<td>Costs vs. Benefits</td>
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<td>consequences in which</td>
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<td>happiness is maximized</td>
<td>moral principle required</td>
<td>the circumstances in order to</td>
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<td>by God, natural law, or</td>
<td>flourish or live well</td>
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<td>rationality</td>
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Whetstone introduces the idea that ethics is more complex than it is normally assumed and presents Louden’s article to that purpose. Louden (1984) charges contemporary schools of normative ethics with being mononomic, as he believes that adopting a strong ethical standpoint without consideration of other approaches is a big mistake. The author’s aim is to use Louden’s statement as the principle upon which to build a more realistic account of our ethical experiences than the unitarian one. Louden argues that when judging ethical matters, sources vary greatly and there is no reductive method that can help the individual prioritize these values. There is simply no correct moral scale according to Louden and this resembles Solomon’s final arguments. Facts of moral experience show us that there is no reductive conception that can reflect the complexity of our moral existence, they both think. Louden proposes to add the ethics of virtue to the ethics of rules, which results in an enrichment of the conceptual scheme of morality.

As Crisp notes, a big part of contemporary business ethics and moral philosophy operates on a mistaken scientific model. In business ethics, the paradigm should shift from explanation to justification. According to him, “it is not necessary to explain our actions, as scientific models require, but to justify them” (1998, p.19). There is no unique reason for acting in a certain way, but a wide range of reasons that include rules, consequences and virtues alike. Likewise, Bowie (1982) proposes to consider several ethical theories as the best way to justify ethical actions. In his opinion, looking for insights from different theories can only enrich moral decision-making.
Whetstone proceeds by describing the potential benefits of virtue ethics, as these descriptions will help to argue for a tripartite approach. I will examine here these three that I consider valuable for the Thesis. First of these benefits of virtue ethics is its personal character. As Solomon understood it, one’s ethical style is a mix of vices and virtues that is unique. This was what the philosopher understood by the personal character of his theory. Whetstone, on the contrary, translates the personal character of virtue ethics into sensitivity for the peculiarities of human life. There is large acceptance among virtue ethicists that moral properties refer to people and not to choices. This sensitivity is precisely what the other traditions neglect. In fact, the latter tend to be impersonal. The second strength of this tradition is that it focuses on human motivation and conceives virtues as motivating and corrective. Virtues are not static, but they guide our moral behavior. Third positive aspect of an ethic of virtue is its contextual nature. A virtue is always considered in the overall context, not as a mere principle. Evaluating the context is a necessary aspect for acting under an ethics of virtue, and contexts are naturally changing.

Business ethics is generally studied under one of the three main traditions in ethics. For those virtue ethicists that have a strong position there is no other possibility than to focus on the agent’s character and moral education. If we take virtue ethics seriously, then we must ultimately choose it over the other traditions. One of the reasons why one must dismiss the other traditions is that their outcome might clash with ours, as they are mutually exclusive. However, Whetstone observes, there are different problems that virtue ethicists must face. One is the obscurity of the concept of eudaimonia and another the many shortcomings that also act-oriented theories have to deal with.

However, Solomon’s proposal has some shortcomings too, which have been already discussed. Whetstone points at Boatright’s (1995) criticism of Solomon, and argues that the critic proposes to amend a shortcoming by supplementing the Aristotelian perspective “with a fundamental human rights grounded in human nature” (Whetstone, 2001, p.106). It is his understanding that besides a telos, a deontological sense of what is right and wrong is needed to organize the set of virtues into a concept of the good. At the end of the day, it
is not a matter of superiority between theories, but of finding those benefits that result from the different ethical standpoints what counts.

One of the highlights of adding virtue ethics to a tripartite approach is the development of a personal identity and sense of purpose by the agent. It also resolves the conflict between adhering to universal laws and the free will of people who apply them in different situations. According to the author, as corporations get more global the benefits of virtue ethics will increase. Reliability on the moral character of the multinational corporations must be widespread in the twenty first century. An ethics of virtue offers the ideal towards which managers must strive, Whetstone argues. A complete ethics must be act-focused and person-centered, dynamic and static, decision-focused and contextual. Therefore, virtue ethics conforms an irreplaceable share of a wholesome ethical system.

Whetstone suggests that Solomon’s depiction of virtue combines the teleological side with a focus on motivation and character formation. Thus, an ethics of virtue for Solomon involves a reconsideration of the nature of telos in life and business alike. A combination of virtue with deontology results in specific code of ethics for corporations, which nevertheless never guarantee ethical conduct within the organizations. Moral codes can potentially benefit the ethical culture of the organization, but for this to happen the whole community needs to feel involved in the corporate culture. When we add teleology to virtue and deontology, we obtain the servant leader as a result. Servant leadership is portrayed as the perfect example of the tripartite approach by Whetstone. This leader is defined as a servant who leads others towards a meaningful telos according to principled means. This definition brings together conceptual and intuitive level of ethics through a tripartite account. The result is a positive trend, taking place nowadays, in which decision models combine attention to character and virtue with act-oriented approaches that respond to the reality of complex moral issues.

The author also pays attention to language as a key factor in implementing virtue ethics in business. He observes how the traditional virtue language is based upon medieval scholastics and old Greek, and alerts the reader of its inadequacy for contemporary business
contexts. This is seen by Whetstone as a challenge more than a roadblock. According to different sources, interviews and field observations, he concludes that the problem for business leaders is the lack of understanding of the moral language. The author calls for more research in the virtue and vice language field, as this will lead to a deeper understanding of the application of virtue in the contemporary ethical context.

6.2 Final remark

Although it might be tempting to describe Whetstone’s or Solomon’s views as cutting-edge, one should not forget that Aristotelian philosophy has been out there for all this time. These authors make the decision of taking ancient virtue theory one step further, as they believe that reinterpreting the tradition may be useful for addressing problems that were not possibly conceived by the time the virtue theory was firstly outlined.

I also think that there is a potential value in rediscovering Aristotle and adding his theory to the already existing ones. Both philosophers assert that a reinterpretation of Aristotle's ethical theory will also help to define and resolve problems that have not been noticed by the other philosophical traditions. I am positive that this is the major contribution of this thesis, the argument for Aristotelianism in business ethics. The fact that their approaches are not exclusive, but inclusive, makes them much more attractive to those of us familiar to pluralistic views in political philosophy. In the end, it is a matter of recognizing that moral reality has more possibilities and is more complex than traditional binary frameworks admit. True/false and right/wrong schemes do not appreciate the complexity and richness of our moral experiences. In an attempt to understand ourselves better, we need to draw a much subtler line when depicting moral life. Traditional ethical theories and paradigms use a thick brush that is inadequate. Portraying business’ moral dimension is nothing like drawing a thick straight line in the sky. It is rather an attempt of drawing the ever-changing clouds, which fill the sky with their unique beauty, constantly on the move (See Table II, Whetstone, 2001).
How to turn these ‘ethical styles’ into common standard in the business world and its discourse may well be one of the biggest ethical challenges today. Corporations are the great global agents of the twenty-first century and, as already alleged, can even hold more power than certain countries. Borders have melted and big multinational firms are in charge of setting the new rules of the game. Consequently, corporations need to act according to whatever dressing code best suits the occasion. Fortunately, it has become a more widespread rule in international business scenarios that one cannot walk around naked without falling into immediate disqualification. In the current game, the big corporations know better than anyone else that in the consumer’s demands for ethical responses lies their present and future survival. It is in their hands to choose what ethical dress to wear and in ours as consumers, employees and citizens to become conscious of the power of that decision to change the course of humanity. And to challenge it.

| TABLE II |
| Guidelines for applying ethics to business |

An ethics theory as applied within an organization should:
1. Offer normative recommendations that are grounded empirically;
2. Be concerned with forming and developing values and thus with actually changing behaviors;
3. Recognize the importance of the persons who act as well as the acts themselves; and
4. Consider the context, the environmental situation and cultural milieu, as they affect actors and acts.
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