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A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF DIFFERENT BUSINESS ETHICS IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF THE COMMON GOOD

1. Ethics of Intentions

1.1 Introduction

Though Emmanuel Kant philosopher is often invoked with regard to business ethics as an exponent of *deontological* ethics, until 1999 no systematic studies on application of Kantian ethics to business world had been published[74]. Kant's moral theory's essence lies in making the supreme good reside in someone's good intentions and in believing that to act according to good intentions is the same as acting according to one's duty. Kant distinguishes between two kinds of duties (imperatives). Sometimes one must do something to obtain something else (for instance: it is necessary to train to become a good athlete). This is the form of the *hypothetical imperative*: if you want to get something, you ought to do another thing. Other duties are required *per se*, with no ifs, and these correspond to the ethical foundations of a society which are requested by Reason (*categorical imperative*). Though Kant spoke of categorical imperative in a single way, many annotators think that he had formulated it in three main duties (Bowie, 2002).

1.2 Act only on the basis of universal laws of nature

The first formulation of Kant's categorical imperative is a test to which every action (even in economic field) should be submitted to judge its moral acceptability. According to Kant, *an action (even economic) can be*

[74] N.Bowie's book "*Business Ethics: a Kantian Perspective*" has quite filled this gap (Bowie, 1999).

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done only if it passes categorical imperative test, *alias if it can be done at universal level without running into logic contradictions*.

For instance the false promise of repaying back a loan, without really honouring it, if universalized, would produce a widespread lack of confidence which should make the promise no more feasible. The false promise would self-destroy in a flash (*self-defeating nature of immoral actions*) (Kant, 1990, p.19).

1.3 Treat people always like an end, never like a means

Since human beings have free will and thus are able to act on laws required by Reason, Kant firmly believed that every person should be respected in dignity beyond market value.

Coherently to this assumption, people should not be instrumentally used, specially inside the company, only to satisfy company's profit necessities. The implications of Kantian "respect for person" principle in economic field, put some constraints on the nature of economic transactions, in the sense that they *must be made with no coercion* (*physical or moral*) *and no deception and must be arranged as to develop human rational and moral capacities instead of inhibiting them*. These moral requirements, if observed, should deeply change firm's organization and management. The translation of these moral principles into practice should mean to support workers' creativity and autonomy, to reduce information asymmetry between management and employees (through different forms of workers' involvement in company's management) or between customer and company (avoiding deceptive advertising), to entertain no despotic relations with supplying companies or sub-contractors. Naturally the anthropological vision which is at the root of the Kantian ethics applied to the firm is optimistic (in advance of McGregors's "Y Theory" on human resources), because employees are described like persons who want to work in a creative way and are willing to take their responsibilities rather than painted like lazy, opportunistic and irresponsible fellows ("Theory X" on human resources) (McGregor, 1960).

1.4 Act as if you were a member of an ideal kingdom of ends in which you were both subject and sovereign at the same time

This last moral requirement means, in organizational terms, that *rules must be approved and shared by everyone*, though they must not clash, in the name of democracy, with the two other formulations of categorical imperative. Extending this proposition to corporate level requires an active workers' participation to company's decisions/management/profit/ ownership (differently articulated according to the degree of evolution of the organizational context) and the consideration, in decisions taking, of the interests of *all* the company's stakeholders affected by them. Kant has really been a pioneer in throwing the moral seeds for the future growth of Corporate Social Responsibility's notion.

In Kantian view a company is a *moral community*, where each member stands in a moral, and not only economic, relation with others and with the more enlarged community in which the corporation operates. Company's good does not leave out of its consideration Common Good, which is a *relational good* because it is built and enjoyed all together and because it belongs to everyone, but also to each single person. In the Kantian case, anyway, Common Good is guided by the Practical Reason, by individual's response to interior moral law recall (categorical imperative), besides the obedience to legal norms. It is an algid Common Good, despotically ruled by the Reason, not by sympathetic relations among people[75]. Kant's critics stigmatize the excessive vagueness of his ethics which, in some cases, results of difficult applicability (Velasquez, 2002,

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[75] That is why Kant, despite of his attention to human dignity, can not be considered the inspirer of an economic development's vision in the *person's* perspective. See Grasselli P., Moschini M. (2007).

p.102). They also notice that his ethics, while requires the inclusion of all the company's stakeholders' interests in the decision process, does not provide rules of solutions of possible conflicts emerging among them, because it relies on the principle that all individuals have the same moral dignity (Velasquez, 2002, pp.101-3) (Weiss, 2006, p.125).

2. Ethics of Consequences. Utilitarian Ethics

Utilitarianism can be ascribed to the stream of *consequentialist ethical theory*, according to which an act rightness or wrongness is determined solely by act consequences (Snoeyenbos and Humber, 2002). For Utilitarianism an act is morally correct only if it maximizes *general* utility, though this does not mean to maximize the number of individuals who realize a positive difference between benefits and costs of an action. *In this view Common Good is the good of everybody, but not the good of each individual.* If we apply the moral principles of Utilitarianism at macroeconomic level, we can understand the acritical quantitative obsession, derived from them, for unlimited growth, with no care of income inequalities which can be generated by the more or less accelerated development processes. In economic horizon, concept of utility has progressively evolved. At the very beginning of its theorization, utility identified itself exclusively with pleasure (*hedonistic theory*) (Bentham, 1789), then with other components of well-being (*pluralistic theory*), finally with individual's preferences (*preference theory*). All these theoretical passages have been necessary because of the many calculation problems that the hedonistic theory showed (measurement of pleasure intensity and duration, determination of the criteria for pleasures classification) (John Stuart Mill, 1863). So pleasure has been replaced, in the neoclassical economic theory, by the more objective category of preference. This has implied a further theoretical slipping: the egoistic adrift of Utilitarianism. Together with the assertion of "homo oeconomicus" paradigma the main economic problem to solve becomes infact the maximization of *individual* utility[76].

In this theoretical frame, Common Good reduces itself to be the unintentional outcome of individual actions, all aimed to obtain the best for oneself (Adam Smith's "invisible hand"). In this case Common Good is unknown. It is infact the result of competition meant like a "discovery procedure"[77]. In this context company represents only a *coordination of productive factors*, which must not bother about Common Good, because it can be achieved unconsciously and indirectly through profit maximization (Friedman, 1979).

Utilitarianism, in its more recent formulation, has had a great success in business ethics sphere, and it is actually the prevailing moral philosophy applied to economics, because of its emphasis on results and because of the advantage of justifying a high management's flexibility. Utilitarianism infact, always starting from an objective evaluation of an act consequences, does not allow to consider any regulation inviolable by principle, but permits to breaking the rules with a certain nonchalance according to circumstances mutability and to context variety, alias when utility maximization requires it. Critics of Utilitarianism maintain that there are some rules (like promise-keeping) whose importance in economic field can not be relativized, if one does not want to destroy the moral tissue which is the catalyst of the market exchanges. Other critics fear the risk of no respect of individuals' rights inside a company managed according to an Utilitarian vision. Some others

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[76]Alain Caillè distinguishes between recent Utilitarianism, incarnated in standard economic science which requires men to become selfish calculating machines, and Bentham's Utilitarianism which entails individuals' egoistic interests' sacrifice to the respect of the interests of the greatest number of persons ("sacrifice's moralism" of Bentham's Utilitarianism). See Caillè (1995) and Salsano (2008), pp.46-8.

[77]Hayek defines competition like "a procedure for discovering facts which, if the procedure did not exist, would remain unknown or at least would not be used" (Hayek, 2002, p.9). According to Hayek competition's results are unforeseeable and totally different from those that someone would have consciously preferred.

allege that Utilitarianism, because of its reductionist vision of Common Good like a *total* good and not like a *relational* good, permits social injustice (Velasquez, 2002, pp.83-5).

3. Ethics of Virtue

3.1 From heroic to civil virtues

Between the two opposite poles of Kantian and Utilitarian Ethics there is a third option, the Ethics of Virtue. This ethics tends to focus on the agent, on the person who performs the action, on those *traits of his/her character which express his/her virtues which condition their actions* (Solomon, 2002). So what is more important to exercise a virtue is the individual's character, in addition to the social and cultural context in which the virtue is performed (Darwall, 2003). But virtue ethics raises an anthropological question. The virtues to be preferred depend on which "ideal model" of man is adopted in a given society at a certain time. Virtues infact may vary according to excellence models shared in a society. Virtues are those individual's qualities which reflect the exemplarity of a social role[78] and allow someone to do what the social role requires (MacIntyre, 2007, p.160). This definition naturally raises the charge of moral relativism, because virtues can be very different from a society to an other and become obsolete.

Anyway we can single out a "hard core" of virtues which are fundamental in every society and time. These virtues are those which refer to human kind and not to a pre-determined social role and are those qualities which are necessary to reach an indispensable end for every society: to get along well together. Are those virtues which are of great use not only to create and consolidate human society, but, more ambitiously, "to live a good life".

[78]In heroic societies for instance prevailed a notion of virtue meant like physical capabilities regarding man in the guise of *warrior* and *athlete* (corresponding to the social role requested) and not concerning man itself. See Pagani (2007), p.27.

In this horizon virtues are those individuals' characteristics, which permit the peaceful and active belonging to a community. For this reason some authors call them "cooperative virtues" to distinguish them from those "competitive" of Homeric derivation (Adkins, 1960). So to be virtuous is the same to be a good citizen. To conclude we can say that *virtues are those qualities of character which favour Common Good's achievement*.

The separation of the concept of virtue from social role and the discovery and celebration of the virtues necessary to civil living has been due to Aristotle (384-322 B.C.), for whom sincere friendship and citizenship are essential aspects of human and communitarian life as he has argued in his Etica Nicomachea (Aristotle, 1979).

In describing virtues, Aristotle followed Athenian society of his time or, at least, its idealized version. A virtue (*aretè* which can also be translated as "excellence") for Aristotle is "the mean between the extremes" (*mesótes*), each of those is a vice dictated by irrational impulse which must be governed by reason. An example of virtue is *courage* (between cowardice and recklessness), *temperance* (neither gluttory nor prudishness), *prudence* (between incautiousness and caution), *justice* (between giving neither too much nor too little on merit basis), *generosity* (between prodigality and avarice). Many other virtues reside in those individuals' characteristics which promote sociability, like *sense of humour* and *amiability*. To the virtues of practise, which can be gained by wonted excercise, are strictly connected, in mutual support, intellectual virtues, which can be acquired through systematic education. With the aid of both tipologies of virtues (practical and intellectual) people can moderate extreme passion through a "monarchic and not despotic" control of them by means of reason.

3.2 Business virtues

The business virtues should be those individual's qualities which serve the achievement of success in economic field[79]. The economic success depends infact on the cooperation with people inside and outside the company (employees, customers, suppliers, etc.). For this reason the characteristics which promote sociability, so important in communitarian sphere, should be just as precious in economic sphere. Besides if we want to do business in consonance with society, alias with objectives shared not only inside the company, but also outside, business virtues should be, mostly, the same essential to civil living. So, the business virtues should be those characteristics which consent to managers and entrepreneurs to build a *corporate citizen* without destroying the civil tissue in which the company operates. In this way a company can be conceived like a *social community* which acts in fine tuning with a wider community. According to this view company's good and Common Good are tied up. The business virtues which preserve social capital (inside and outside the company) are not those of Nietzsche's derivation, which aim to take one's distance from society, but those which do not tear work relations, team working, market exchanges, and strengthen social and economic links. *Reliability*, meant like to keep one's word and *honesty* imaged like truth telling attitude, are two basilar virtues for every market exchange stipulated in any society, because they consolidate trustful relations and in this way enforce contracts.

Besides reliability and honesty, other Aristotelian virtues like *courage*, *temperance*, *prudence*, *justice*, *generosity* can also be added to business virtues if interpreted in managerial key.

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[79] *Business virtues* should not be confused with *business skills*, alias with the specific capabilities necessary to manage an activity (for instance the manual ability of a craftsman).

Courage can be declined in different ways: risk taking capacity, resoluteness in company's activity in presence of threats or business difficulties.

Temperance refers to have a reasonable set of expectations and desires, without being overwhelmed by lustful passions, like greed, which becomes the origin of lies, deceptions, dishonest behaviour like the recent financial crisis has shown.

Prudence is the capacity of being able to ascertain and decide what is right or wrong to do in certain company's circumstances[80].

Justice turns into the attention to "acknowledge and honour the meaning of the different presences in relation to which our existence is led" (Pagani, 2007, p.31). Practically is the virtue of rewarding collaborators according to their merits, alias according to their capacity of contributing to the company's common good and goals.

Generosity is the capacity of create/consolidate human relations through gift, facilitating market functioning and company's operations, on the side of human, organizational, relational capital and of competitive advantage[81].

3.3 Generosity

Virtue of Generosity, whose importance has always been banished from economics because of Utilitarianism[82], has recently been appreciated as

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[80]Adam Smith (1711-1776), moral philospher and father of Political Economy, exalted for market's good functioning, the virtue of *prudence*, union of reason, self-control and practical sense (Smith, 1977) (Sen, 1999, pp.22-3) (Montesi, 2000, p.35). He also emphasized the virtue, central in Stoicism, of *compassion* which, converted in economic terms in *benevolence*, could lock up individuals to a corpus of rules richier than the traditional merchants' moral code, based principally on *reliability* and *honesty* (Smith, 1975).

[81]On gift's role in companies see Montesi (2008), pp.95-9. Gift is also the main activity which founds some kinds of non profit organizations which produce relational goods.

[82]For Utilitarianism gifts can not exist (because unselfish actions can not exist) or they are only hyprocrisy (because there is always a selfish interest in behaving

a very precious virtue in business because of some motivations (Montesi, 2008). The first motivation is the fact that generosity is the virtue that the famous philosopher MacIntyre defines as "the virtue of the recognized dependency" (MacIntyre, 2001, p.118), alias is the virtue which allows us to live well, like rational animals in mutual interdependence, in the different communities to which everyone belongs (families, and other social, religious, political, business communities). This happens because, according to the gift *relational interpretation*[83], gift creates and feeds personal relations. Gift founds communities and lets them function in the sense that, through gift, individuals try to become "domesticated" one onother[84]. If we make gift relational conception take a jump from social to economic level, we notice that it can be conceived, in an innovative way, like an act which can lubricate the market and company's functioning because, while it reinforces social links, it creates an atmosphere of trust more favourable to transactions and to information and knowledge passage, as MAUSS[85] exponents have shown, together with the "civil economics" promoters[86] and the theorists of social capital and of local productive systems.

3.4 Virtues of Giving: generosity, justice, charity, mercy

The prince virtue of giving is *generosity*, but we must distinguish it from *justice* (cardinal virtue according St.Thomas[87]), from *charity* (supreme

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altruistically). In the first case gift is only a loss and a sacrifice, in the second only an instrument in service of individual interest.

[83] See Caillè (1998) and Godbout (1993).

[84] Think of the gift like war's substitute discovered by anthropologists in archaic societies characterized by the triple obligation of giving, receiving and giving back. Competition moves from arms to generosity (*rivalistic gift*). So gift has a social and political function: it transforms enemies in allies. See Mauss (1923), Bourdieu (1987), Caillè (2008).

[85] Mauss is the famous Anti-Utilitarianism Movement of Social Science founded by Alain Caillè.

[86] See Bruni and Zamagni (2004).

[87] St.Thomas, who revises Aristotle's virtue ethics in a Christian perspective in the sense that man's ultimate end is not only to live in this world according to reason,

teological virtue in Thomistical conception), from *mercy* (virtue of less importance, maid of charity, in Thomistical perspective).

Generosity is different from justice because it is a form of giving spontaneous and with no calculation; *justice* on the contrary is a form of giving obligatory and calculating. Justice means infact to reward someone according to what is due to him, alias "suum cuique tribuere" (distributive justice) or in conformity with equivalence respect (commutative justice).

Generosity is also different from charity because it is a free giving, in a relation in which is very important the identity of the partners of the donation; it is a free giving with an expectation of return, but without having, in the very moment of giving, the warranty of reciprocity. Giving on behalf of generosity creates or makes social relations stronger, provided the freedom in giving and reciprocating.

Charity is a free giving too, but it is a gift characterized by no reciprocity and made in a generic and impersonal relation. It is a form of giving based on kind-hearted discretionality, on anonymous relations like those of exchange in force on markets. It is a gift which does not build social relations, being an unilateral act with no hope of restituition, which is hinged on methodological individualism (like market exchange to which it should theoretically oppose[88]). It is the gift proper of the philanthropist who does something good for others, but not with others. It is a gift which does not

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but to rejoin God in life after death, identifies four *cardinal* virtues (of Aristotelian origin) which are *natural* virtues: *prudence*, *justice* (which has generosity and gratefulness in the guise of maids), *courage* (which has magnanimity at its dependence), *temperance*. In addition to these cardinal virtues, there are *theological* virtues, unknown to Aristotle, which are fruit of divine Grace: *faith*, *hope* and *charity* (which has *mercy* like its minor articulation).

[88] Charity is the kind of gift which is nearer to "pure altruism", being an act totally disinterested (not moved by the calculating reason), gratuitous (performed with no hope of return), unilateral (it proceeds one-way from donor to donee), discontinous (being isolated). These gift's characteristics are so heroic to become true that some philosophers have theorized its ontological impossibility. See Derrida (1996), Marion (2001).

presuppose return and so forth neither neighbours's emancipation, which does not build fraternity, but only solidarity. It is the gift that more remind us of the figure of the Aristotelian *megalopsychós* (the magnanimous), the one that can be proud only of his own gifts, specially from a quantitative point of view[89].

Mercy, alias man's capacity of being sorry for others' pains as if they were his own, extends charity in the direction of a universalization of free, but anonymous, gifts to strangers[90].

In the name of mercy there is the gift to those who do not belong to the community (think of the gift of hospitality given to foreigners or of the gift made to enemies like in the good Samarian parable) or the gift to those who are not present yet (think of the gift of environmental goods to posterity). *But what makes once more the difference between generosity and charity and mercy is that generosity is a virtue, not a sentiment.* It is not a feeling of love for our fellowmen (horizontal charity) infused in human beings by divine Grace, as St.Thomas maintains, or innate like Enlightenment thinkers assert[91], neither the pale shade of God's sublime love for us (*agápe*), which can not be returned because of divine sacrifice disparity (vertical charity)[92]. This difference explains why generosity, unlike charity, must be laboriously gained; it is infact not congenital neither transfused, but it derives from determined will, from personal commitment, from selfish instinct control, from exercising sacrifice (*habitus*), from constant training, from education to Common Good.

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[89] See MacIntyre, 2001, p.125 and Russell, 1979, pp.184-5.
[90] Freedom to give and anonymous giving are two characteristics of contemporary gift in comparison with archaic gift.
[91] This is the case of *sympathy* feeling, similar to mercy, maintained by Hume and Smith or of *benevolence* theorized by Hutcheson and Shaftesbury.
[92] See Boltansky (1990).

3.6 Generosity, Person and Common Good

A second reason to give prominence to the virtue of generosity, in addition to the salutary economic consequences seen before correlated to being "the virtue of the recognized dependency", is that it allows us to get easier Common Good which, being a *relational goods*, requires a close cooperation with others. From this statement, one can hypothesize a new ethical tripod[93], based on an inner synergic work of relational symmetries, which originate a virtuous circuit among person-gift-common good. The *person-gift connection* is immediate: a person is a fellow with high relational capacity and the attitude of being open hearted to others; gift in creating/reinforcing social links, make this human connatural characteristic stronger.

The *person-Common Good connection* is obvious too: Common Good is a relational good which can be built and enjoyed together; the person, on its peculiar characteristic (sociability and solicitude towards people), becomes premise and vector for the realization of Common Good.

The *gift-Common Good connection* is as direct as the other two seen before: gift establishes and strengthens communities, works for "good life" and so forth for Common Good. Through generosity, alias through sacrifice of part of one's own interest for general purposes, it becomes easier to build Common Good which requires, being a relational good, cooperation among actors.

A third motivation to give the right importance to the virtue of generosity is that it improves life quality, because of *gift/happiness connection*. Happiness is a relational good: "there is no happiness without

[93]A reference must be made to Ricoeur's ethical tripod. His tripod, which is a connotation of the *person*, is composed of self-esteem, solicitude towards people, life led together and for Common Good, in the frame of fair institutions (Ricoeur, 1993).

others"[94]. Gift in creating/reinforcing social ties concurs to human happiness. One must also notice that gift giving, in the case of non conventional gifts not dictated only by social norms, makes people happy, because gift corresponds to donor's and donee's personality. Gift making is an important moment of self-individualization and of others' acknowledgment (Ricoeur, 2005). And the wish of acknowledgment is a need of identity which can not be suppressed in human being, but satisfied through gift. Business virtues celebration, and among them, generosity exaltation must not omit their fragility[95], in the awareness that: "to talk in an abstract way of virtues is easy, but to practise them requires ductility and comprehension of infinite complexity of human matters: a comprehension which can be acquired experimenting life's conflicts personally"[96]. This advice could also be extended to economic life conflicts which are, in many cases, harder and more dilemmatic.

4. Conclusion

This general excursus on virtues, and more particularly on business virtues, could sound extremely theoretic and out of date. Really it is not, because it allows us to explain the actual financial and economic crisis with a very different perspective from the dominant ones and to suggest different remedies for its overcoming. The crisis has mostly been explained both in terms of financial market failure (due to opportunism of financial operators, existence of informative asymmetries between customers and financial operators, excessive financialization of the economy in the passage from

[94] See Todorov, 1998, p.179.

[95] Virtue ethics has some other points of weakness. For some critics it is not able to solve some ethical delicate dilemmas because it does not provide general rules of conduct. Virtue ethics focuses mainly on long-term characteristics of a person, so it risks of discharging wrong acts done occasionally by individuals on the assumption that they could be behaviour's freaks only temporary. Besides the most important traits of a person's character are not constant, but may vary in time.

[96] See Ravasi, 2005, p.120.

industrial to share value capitalism which has made finance completely self-referring, creation of collateralized debt obligations linked to uncertain sub-prime loans) and in terms of State failure (financial deregulation) to be mended respectively with market and institutional formulas (Morris, 2008). But the most remote and deepest causes of the crisis are anthropological (Zamagni, 2009). It is the "homo oeconomicus" paradigma with its myths, in primis the myth of efficientism (not efficiency's)[97], which has transformed the market from *civil* and *free* to *greed*.

The economic mainstream which has incarnated this paradigma has legitimated and justified the adoption of some human behaviour marked by the research, with no limits, of easy capital gains through hazardous speculations.

Avarice's vice has kicked business virtues (like reliability, honesty, temperance, generosity) out of the market and has let very precious resource, like trust, so hardly accumulated, be destroyed in a moment transforming market euphoria into panic and generating the financial and economic crisis. Avarice, at the very beginning of capitalism, has been revalued like a vice more harmless than lust or thirst for power and glory (Hirschman, 1993). Really avarice is, like pride, *radix omnium malorum.* Avarice is source of fraud, treachery, violence because its purpose is to steal to others, with every means and strategy, to worship money. But it is also the more anti-social vice because it is opposed to justice, generosity, charity.

If this additional interpretation of the phenomenon is true, the cure to get out of the crisis consists also in "homo reciprocans" paradigma's recovery (Caillè, 1998). The three forms of regulation (market exchange, gift, autority) have always be connected in variable mix according ages (Polanyi, 1974; Cella, 1997). So what must be done is to re-balance the actual

[97] Efficientism interprets efficiency like an end in itself, not like a means adopted not to waste resources in the process of economic choice.

equilibrium, which sees the supremacy of market exchange on gift/reciprocity and on welfare state, in favour of a greater role of reciprocity to mitigate rapacity and its dangerous effects and to restore an atmosphere more favourable to the Common Good (Zamagni, 2007).

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RESUME

Notre article est a la relation entre l'éthique et les affaires qui est considerée comme stratégique pour le développement économique et humain. Les conceptions alternatives en éthique ont été examinées selon leur caractéristiques principales, points forts et aspects critiques (éthique d ;intentions, éthique de conséquences, vertu éthique). Ces conceptions ont été ensuite rapporté a leur tradition philosophiques (Kant, Aristote, utilitarisme) ainsi qu'aux courants de pensées économiques. Nous présentons aussi le point de vue d ;entreprises qui trouve leur fondement aussi dans la tradition philosophiques. Notre article présente l'analyse d'idées de dofférentes companies, les avantages et les contextes d'organisation et de la gestion, les possibilités de nouer des relations avec les investisseurs ce qui est engendré par la connexion des affaires aux théories morales. Les attitudes différentes sur la poursuite de Bien Commun avec tous les profits ont aussi été envisagées. Le lien entre «vertu éthique» et «capital social» est aussi dessiné, il s'avère que les vertus nécessaires pour la vie en société sont aussi essentielles dans les affaires, alors ce lien facilite la cooperation (a l'intérieur et a l'extérieur de l'entreprise). Entre les vertus symboliques, selon MacIntyre – «dépendance reconnue», on trouve la générosité (faisant la distinction entre autres vertus Thomistiques) – pour sa capacité des entreprises, par sa utilité pour la production de bons (le Bien Commun entre autre) et finalement par sa contribution au bonheur de gens.

SUMMARY

The paper is devoted to relate ethics and business with an interdisciplinary effort considering that this rejoining is strategical for economic and human development. Alternative conceptions of ethics are briefly examined in their main characteristics, points of strength and critical aspects (ethics of intentions, ethics of consequences, virtue ethics) relating them to the philosophical tradition in which they ground (Kantian, utilitarian, aristotelic) and connecting them to the streams of economic thought and to the different vision of companies to which these philosophical traditions have given origin. The paper analyses the various companies 'concepts and finalism with their advantages and limits, the different organizational and managerial contexts, the different way of conceiving the relations with stakeholders which can be generated connecting business to each of these different moral theories. The different attitudes to pursue Common Good together with profit are also taken into account. A connection between "virtue ethics" and "social capital" is also traced showing that some of the virtues needed to living in civil society are essential also to business, because both work to increase people's cooperation (outside and inside the company). Among the virtues which are emblem, in Macintyre's words, of human "recognized dependency", special attention is paid to generosity (distinguishing it from other similar Thomistical virtues) for its capacity of building social links (inside and outside the firm) indispensable to increase company's competitiveness, of being useful to the production of relational goods (among which Common Good), of being able to contribute to people's happiness.