2013 Society for Business Ethics Presidential Address

Why Business Ethics Needs Rhetoric: An Aristotelian Perspective

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ABSTRACT: If the ultimate purpose of ethical argument is to persuade people to act a certain way, the point of doing business ethics is to persuade others about what constitutes proper ethical behavior. Given that teleological perspective, the role of the business ethicist is to be an orator or rhetorician. Further, since one cannot expect more certitude than the subject warrants, from Aristotle's perspective,while rhetoric is the most persuasive means of arguing, it is not scientific demonstration. Rhetoric uses examples and enthymemes. Such an approach answers the postmodern claim that ethical argument cannot lead to certitude and shows how the use of rhetoric helps avoid relativism and leads to more effective persuasion. According to Aristotle, rhetoric involves gaining truth with a "rough and general sketch." This rhetorical approach allows the listener to "see as" the persuader sees, by attending to aspects of our shared experience and language. This mirrors insights of Kant's reflexive judgment in his third critique as well as the later Wittgenstein, who compares ethics to aesthetics.

KEY WORDS: Aristotle, teleology, postmodern business ethics, business ethics pedagogy, ethical persuasion

I SUPPOSE I HAVE A REPUTATION of being an Aristotelian. But if that is the case, I should note that I am not particularly fond of the reduction of Aristotle's insights to "virtue ethics."[1] However my reasons for that will have to wait for another occasion. Rather the primary guiding consideration I have taken from Aristotle and pursued over the years is to look at the purpose of things. That would indicate my Aristotelian teleological leanings. From that vantage point it is easy to define corruption as that which occurs when we lose sight of our purposes. What better focus then, than to inquire what role business ethicists should play by asking what is their goal or purpose in doing business ethics? Who are we? What is this art of doing normative business ethics?

I want to suggest that we should view our role in doing normative business ethics as that of orators. We are in the field of applied ethics. That means our goal is not only to understand the world, but to change it, and I would assert that effective change comes through rhetorical argument, the art of the orator. But how does one arrive at that conclusion? I would suggest by following a fairly circuitous route.

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POSTMODERN ETHICS

Several years ago, I did an analysis of the shortcomings of modern philosophizing and ethical theory and looked at the critique of modernism from a postmodern point of view, suggesting that Aristotle had a good deal in common with the postmoderns.[2] As I understand it, postmodernism rejects the ethical theories of both utilitarians and deontologists, Mill and Kant, to the extent that those theories would claim to offer unitary principles that would definitively resolve ethical disputes. On the one hand, Mill cannot resolve the tension between the desired and the desirable, because there is not one canonical view of what the good is, and consequently any appeal to the greatest good or the greatest happiness or the greatest pleasure, is simply an appeal to a preference. Further, even if one could identify the good, there is no resolution of the problem of distribution, "Who deserves what? Further, I would argue that utilitarians reduce ethical theory to emotion or desire, which simply leaves a formally structured decision principle, "Do that which maximizes preferences for the most people."

On the other hand, Kant and the deontologists seem unable to justify any project of any autonomous subject except by insisting that reason demands that any proposed rule of any autonomous subject be universalized, i.e., turned into a law. The Kantian conditions of law furnish us with a formal decision principle, "Make sure your projects can be consistently universalized," for laws must be universal. However, this move leaves deontologists with only one answer to the question, "Why obey the law?" "Rational consistency demands it!" But to that response, a further question arises, "Why should one be consistent, if it is not in one's interest?" Moral law on Kant's scheme is only generated if there is a willingness to concern oneself with being lawful. But why legislate for oneself? As Anscombe points out, legislating for oneself is as absurd as calling a self-reflective decision, a vote by a majority of one. "The concept of legislating requires superior power in the legislator."[3] Or as MacIntyre points out, for deontologists, "The demands of Rationality simply replace the demands of the Judaeo-Christian God."[4] While a God who can reward and punish makes it in a person's interest to obey a law, rationality provides only a toothless sanction, if that.

These points seem to be in sympathy with postmodernism. Rationality, according to postmodernism, following the lead of Nietzsche, is simply the accepted life form of descendants of the enlightenment. Thus, while Ronald Green, in his seminal article, "Business Ethics as a Postmodern Phenomenon,"[5] is correct in saying that "Efforts to construct morality on the foundation of a rationally justifiable principle or set of principles, in the spirit of Kant or Mill, are out of fashion," the postmoderns and Aristotelians would claim that Green does not go far enough. It is not just that they are out of fashion, they are out of fashion because, aside from laying down formal decision procedures (i.e., telling us to consider what would happen if everyone engaged in a practice, or telling us to maximize utility preferences), such ethical theories don't resolve ethical issues. To put it bluntly, they are out of fashion because they don't work. Rationality without content, be it universalizability or utility, doesn't allow us to resolve particular issues.

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Contemporary work in ethics and political philosophy, of course, does not amount to simple extensions of Kant and Mill. Contemporary philosophical work in these areas is much more subtle and complex. However, important elements of contemporary ethics are linked in significant ways to these traditions and there remains little agreement among modern ethical theorists and political philosophers regarding such key questions as the role of principles in ethics and which theory of justice is worthy of our allegiance.[6] What the postmodernists tell us, is that disagreement among ethical theorists or political philosophers over issues is not a scandal, but something to be expected, the necessary outcome of plurality and diversity. According to postmoderns, there are no right views, just a number of perspectives. Deontological and utilitarian approaches are simply examples of different, overarching perspectives to be applied by individuals with differing value perspectives.

A valuable example for getting at the significance of differing ethical perspectives is the closing of General Motors plants in Flint, Michigan, as portrayed by Michael Moore in the film *Roger and Me*, and recently reexamined by Daryl Koehn.[7] From the perspective of the CEO, Roger Smith, the reason for closing the plants is the accepted principle of profit maximization. Profit maximization can be legitimated by a utilitarian appeal to the social benefit of the capitalist system or by a deontological defense of private property and liberty. Appealing to these principles legitimates the system and the C.E.O.'s behavior, which is ethically justified because he has a fiduciary obligation to the stockholders. However, from the perspective of the workers who are losing their jobs, the reasons for not closing the plant are principles such as "Those in need should be helped by those capable," or the principle, "The company owes loyalty and gratitude to its workers who contributed in the past to the company's success," seemingly a requirement of compensatory justice—a requirement of any long term relation where one party benefited because of the activity of another. Consequently, we have a second perspective, not to mention a second culture, since the sympathy for the worker is part of a religious caring culture, labeled "bleeding heart" by the more pragmatic, business culture, which defends itself by insisting that only in making hard decisions will productivity, which will benefit more people, be increased. Can any application of a deontological or utilitarian principle gives us a resolution of this conflict?

My experience over the years is that this case presents a true moral dilemma—a situation where there are good reasons for performing an action as well as good reasons for not performing it. But does that mean there is no resolution? Let me suggest that the answer to a question such as "Did the CEO (Roger Smith) do the right thing in closing (General Motors) plants, and moving jobs to Mexico"? is both yes and no, depending on which perspective is adopted. If one adopts the view that business should maximize profit and accepts market transactions as legitimate, then Roger Smith did the right thing. Furthermore, from the perspective of the Mexican workers who got jobs with General Motors, at the new plants made possible by the closing of the old plants, Smith did the right thing. On the contrary, if one adopts the view that loyalty and obligations of gratitude for past services should be fulfilled, or that harm ought to be prevented when possible by putting limits on profit maximization, then Smith did the wrong thing.

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To use an old cliché, it depends whose ox is being gored, whether the action is viewed as right or wrong. Postmodernism, through its insistence that the viewpoint of the marginalized needs to be considered, and by its pointing out how unitary frameworks empower the defenders of those frameworks, helps us understand why we have such difficulties in resolving such an issue, and why traditional deontological and utilitarian approaches cannot deliver definitive decisions about what to do. The most that standard ethical theories can offer are frameworks for analysis from various perspectives.

What is fairly obvious is that from a stockholder's and Mexican worker's point of view closing GM plants in the US and Canada is a good thing, whereas from the United Auto Workers point of view it was not good. As postmodernists would point out, any decision on the basis of a principle, say workers' rights, or employer's rights, or even the welfare of shareholders or of the poor in the third world, would reflect the bias of the defender of the principle who uses the principle to legitimate her side, so that she can be empowered. But if we agree with postmodernists that standard ethical theory has these limitations, the question arises whether there is any hope for anything remotely resembling a resolution of such ethical situations?

DIFFERENT PERSPECTIVES, COMMON ENDS

I want to spend some time trying to show that some resolution is possible, but that that resolution will not be satisfactory if one adopts a modernist view of ethical theory, which requires certitude. The resolution is a limited approach to ethical disputes that does not require the definitive, certain resolution the modernist seeks. It is the approach laid out by Aristotle in the very first book of the *Nichomachean Ethics*, when he discusses the limitations of ethical and political inquiries.

Aristotle says:[8]

> Our discussion will be adequate if it achieves clarity within the limits of the subject matter. For precision cannot be expected in the treatment of all subjects alike, any more than it can be expected in all manufactured articles. Problems of what is noble and just, which politics examines, present so much variety and irregularity that some people believe they exist only by convention and not by nature. The problem of the good, too, presents a similar kind of irregularity, because in many cases good things bring harmful results. . . . Our discussion will be adequate if it achieves clarity within the limits of the subject matter."

Noting that such an Aristotelian approach is clearly at odds with a Cartesian quest for clarity and certitude, let us turn to unpacking this passage.

First, Aristotle asserts that precision cannot be expected in all subjects alike, and further claims it is "foolish" to search for more precision than the nature of the subject admits.[9] Unlike Descartes, he does not expect certitude or even clarity in deciding what to do in practical matters.

Second, while in this passage Aristotle distinguishes between ethics and politics, he sees them in continuity with one another. Ethics, for him, deals with the question of the good for individual human beings, but the accomplishment of those individual goods, happiness or eudaimonia (living well), is dependent on the existence of a

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just society, a consideration of which takes place in his work *The Politics*. Hence the questions contemporary applied ethics deals with involves delving into what Aristotle would call "politics" or what some today call "social ethics."

Third, the resolution of the problems of justice, which politics examines, "present so much variety and irregularity that some people believe they exist only by convention and not by nature." Aristotle's recognition of variety in these issues anticipates the postmodern's concern for difference and marginality—or Wittgenstein's "stand roughly here." It is important to note that for Aristotle, art, what humans make—which includes their political and social systems—is not in opposition to nature, but attempts to be perfective of nature, in the sense that it completes what nature did not finish, but always within the limits set by nature. From this perspective we can view capitalism as a convention, for it is a set of rules invented by people. But is it merely a convention, or is it a convention developed not in opposition to the natural, but as a building on the natural? So, where the justification of capitalism is simply one legitimating discourse among others for some, such as Lyotard and other postmodernists, for Aristotle it is an artifact that can be judged in terms of how it will enhance human good. Clearly, Aristotle insisted that some solutions are more than conventional, in that they respond to nature, and in that sense are not "inordinate."

Fourth, Aristotle recognizes that "in many cases good things bring harmful results." Thus, the most we can say about some actions is that they bring mixed results. This is quite important, for it shows that we can have knowledge without having a definitive answer to a problem. For example, it would be silly for anyone to deny that closing plants in Flint was not harmful. The truth is that people suffered, and suffering is not good. On the other hand, some good came from shutting down the plants, because Mexicans got jobs. Here we know a lot. But what we have doubts about is whether closing the plants and moving to Mexico was justifiable. Nor are we likely to resolve that question. Capitalism may be a good thing that brings harmful results. This means capitalism is not a justifying metanarrative so much as it is a system that has good and bad effects.

We have said that there are situations where either there is no one right thing to do, or if there is we genuinely do not know what it is. In the former cases we are faced with a dilemma, where one is damned if one does and damned if one doesn't. Aristotle warns that when faced with the kind of complexity we encounter in practical matters, we must be satisfied to indicate the truth with a rough and general sketch. If we view him in the light of contemporary ethical theory, Aristotle would probably be content with talking about the general acceptability of practices but not the absolute acceptability of practices. Because of these dilemma situations, Aristotle appeals to "rules of thumb" that can be abandoned in individual cases when circumstances make the general rule not applicable. It is well to remember that Aristotle recognized what is called the fallacy of accident, the fallacy of applying a general rule wrongly to a specific case.

Finally, the last sentence of Aristotle's caution about knowledge contrasts "the demonstration expected from a mathematician and the demonstration demanded from an orator." Just what sort of demonstrations do orators give and what are the purposes of oratorical demonstrations? To find the answers to these questions, we

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need to turn not to the *Nichomachean Ethics* but to the *Rhetoric* where we find the method appropriate for the orator.

Rhetoric is the art that combines logical argument and the ethical branch of politics. Aristotle says,

> The truth is . . . that rhetoric is a combination of the science of logic and of the ethical branch of politics; and it is partly like dialectic, partly like sophistical reasoning. But the more we try to make either dialectic or rhetoric not, what they really are, practical faculties, but sciences, the more we shall inadvertently be destroying their true nature.[10]

What is rhetoric's true nature? For Aristotle it is persuasion. "[O]ratory urges us either to do or not to do something."[11] The orator is engaged in the act of political persuasion, a process of attempting to persuade people to do what's right and avoid what's wrong and the methods of persuasion are different from the methods of science.

If one looks at today's business ethicists, or ethical theorists who are trying to apply their theories, and asks what the point of their activity is, is it not to persuade people to do what's right? And is that not the province of Aristotle's orator, who is arguably engaged in the same sort of activity as today's ethicist? If that's not what applied ethicists are trying to do (their purpose) nowadays, what are they about?

Aristotle designates two type of orators: political and forensic.

The political orator is concerned with the future: things to be done hereafter that he advises for or against.[12] The political orator aims at establishing the expediency or the harmfulness of a proposed course of action: if he urges its acceptance, he does so on the ground that it will do good; if he urges its rejection, he does so on the ground that it will do harm; and all other points, such as whether the proposal is just or unjust, honorable or dishonorable, he brings in as subsidiary and relative to this main consideration.

Forensic orators consider justice, and "aim at establishing the justice or injustice of some action." They too bring in all other points as subsidiary and relative to this one.[13]

Advice and encouragement are the orators' goals. What is their method? To persuade, the orator uses either induction or syllogism, but induction and syllogism of a particular kind. In arguing about what ought to be done, or what is just or unjust, Aristotle recommends two forms of oratorical argument: 'example' and 'enthymeme.'[14] Thus he says:

> With regard to the persuasion achieved by proof or apparent proof: just as in dialectic there is induction on the one hand and syllogism or apparent syllogism on the other, so it is in rhetoric. The example is an induction, the enthymeme is a syllogism.[15]

Arguing by example would be the use of stories or analogies, setting forth some paradigm or picture of the good person. Thus one can use stories or fables, to make a point, or set up examples of heroes or cads, or simply analogies. For example Aristotle uses the example of King Midas to argue against the greedy accumulator. Today we can use the movies *Wall Street*, *Other People's Money*, and *Margin Call* to give pictures of decent human beings and unscrupulous wheeler-dealers, like

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Gordon Gekko. Another example of rhetorical persuasion is seen in condemnatory talk about hostile takeovers that depends for its condemnation on words like "shark repellent," or "white knights," or "greenmail." Sharks need to be repelled, so depicting one who is attempting a takeover as a shark is making an argument by example. The savior of the damsel business of course will be the "white knight."[16] We also argue by example. We use analogies, indicating that the situation one is now facing is like some other situation one can speculate about. For example the rhetorical device of comparing certain behavior to that of Hitler, or to the Nazis, is often used to condemn that behavior. There are also arguments by paradigms of virtue or vice or argument by a story with a moral. These uses of inductive paradigms fulfill well the contemporary insistence on narratives, such as those recommended by Lyotard, Richard Rorty,[17] Alisdair MacIntyre, and Edith Wyschogrod.[18] All of these can be seen as instances of Aristotle's persuasive use of inductive paradigms. The fact that more of my students are persuaded by the evils of takeovers depicted in motion pictures or novels than in any class presentation shows the power of this rhetorical form of argument.

The second type of oratorical argument is the enthymeme which Aristotle calls "the substance of rhetorical persuasion."[19] Persuasion is clearly a sort of demonstration. The orator's demonstration is an enthymeme, which is, in general, the most effective of the modes of persuasion.[20]

The enthymeme is simply a truncated form of argument, or syllogism, where one premise is not stated. It is important to note that for Aristotle the premise is missing because it is taken for granted as a premise all would agree on and what is more, a premise assumed true. The implied premise involves what Aristotle calls "common knowledge," what is "manifest," not only to the wise but to the uneducated, a common knowledge that he takes to be true or approximately true. As he says,

> The true and the approximately true are apprehended by the same faculty; it may also be noted that men have a sufficient natural instinct for what is true, and usually do arrive at the truth.[21]

Aristotle assumes that we can arrive at some true knowledge about what to do. But his notion of the approximately true, shows he does not expect definitive knowledge. Of course we need to ask to what extent these claims of Aristotle are defensible, and how much legitimation his "truth" gives. To examine this notion of the approximately true and how it is arrived at rhetorically, it will be helpful to examine the role that aesthetics plays in the use of example and enthymemes.

I want to suggest that Aristotle's move to example and the enthymeme can be seen to anticipate both the Kantian rejection of representation in the *Critique of Judgment*, where he claims the beautiful is that which pleases universally without a concept, and Wittgenstein's insistence on common agreement when he notes in the *Philosophical Investigations* that "ethics is like aesthetics" and "what we agree on are forms of life." "What has to be accepted, the given is so one could say forms of life."[22]

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In the *Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals*, Kant, who has divided the epistemological world into the world of what is, what ought to be, and the beautiful, attempts to ground his ethics (his concern with what ought to be) in an unshakeable principle, the categorical imperative, which can be used as a rule to which all actions must submit in order to be legitimated. This is Kant's attempt to establish objective knowledge in ethics. Kant is trying to give ethics a scientific respectability. So, ethics, for Kant, must involve **determinant judgments**, which means judgments where concepts, which are construed as rules, are applied to phenomena. But in the *Critique of Judgment*, where Kant is musing about the possibility of gaining agreement about the evaluation of an art work, he appeals to a **reflexive judgment**, a judgment without a set of criteria to be applied to the object. Here representation for Kant, rather than being a mirror image of the world, is turned into a representation, an inventive way of viewing the object. This move was employed by Kant in the *Critique of Judgment*, where he appeals to a *sensus communis* in order to show that an aesthetic judgment, involving a representation of an object, through a reflexive concept (a way of getting others to see what we see rather than simply asserting that an object is beautiful according to the rule of some determinant concept), can be objective. Our assertion or judgment, according to Kant, would be that we expect anyone who sees the object in the way we see it to agree that it is beautiful, not because it meets any predetermined criteria or rules for being beautiful, but because we see it in a way that pleases us without a concept.

This, as we suggested, might put us in mind of a twofold kind of appeal that Wittgenstein makes to agreement in forms of life, which can arise because of agreements in the way we see things. The later Wittgenstein reads this as "seeing as." For example, Jastrow's duckrabbit, can be "seen as" (represented as) either a duck or a rabbit. There is no one canonical view of it. Getting others to see it as we see it is the narrative enterprise. As we intimated, Wittgenstein, in suggesting that ethical judgments are akin to aesthetic judgments, seems to repudiate the deductive model of Kant's ethical theory in the *Groundwork* and second Critique, but calls to mind Kant's reflexive judgments in the *Critique of Judgment*. Wittgenstein can be viewed as suggesting that appealing to perspectives we share, agreeing about the way we see things, is the way to resolve ethical disputes. We would suggest that Aristotle's approach toward ethical persuasion through rhetoric rather than dialectic, and through induction, his anticipation of narrative, would seem to be the solution that Wittgensteinians and postmoderns alike were looking for.

In short, just as art works can be viewed or interpreted in a number of ways so can moral situations. Each different view is a different presentation. The aesthetic approach does not concern itself with whether the way of seeing accurately reflects the world, but with whether the parts of the object can be seen to cohere and evoke aesthetic pleasure. This way of seeing the object will lead to the judgment that the object is beautiful, a judgment that will be shared by all who view the object this way, because they share a "sensus communis." This is how judgments of beauty are "objective" for Kant.

If we ask how this sharing is possible, we see it becomes possible because you begin by finding an area of agreement with a person you wish to persuade to your

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view. You then, so to speak, show the person you are persuading how to look at the object as (seeing as) you do (think art or music appreciation), and thereby elicit further agreement. Thus, in formulating an aesthetic judgment, the critic in evaluating a work is not so much saying or asserting that it is either beautiful or not, but is teaching another how to look at it—to see it as the teacher of art appreciation sees it. Hence, if ethics is like aesthetics, one of the functions of the ethicist in critiquing activities is not simply to evaluate them and judge them good or bad, but to persuade others to view them as she does and see how they are good or bad. Further, the ethicist/rhetorician can persuade others to use moral imagination to think of a better way to approach a problem. I think this is the force behind Patrica Werhane's insistence on moral imagination.[23]

Hence, while Michael Moore presents a vile picture of the General Motors executives, by dramatizing the hardship that accrues from plant closings, the apologists for General Motors attempt to get people to see a different picture—that they are simply maximizing stockholder value, i.e., fulfilling their fiduciary trust. The assumption is that people will approve or disapprove when they see things in a certain way. On that view, teaching ethics is not to teach others a rule to be applied to this situation, but rather, to start where there is agreement or consensus, and have people look at the issue from the point of view that the evaluator uses to designate the object or action good or bad, right or wrong. We have then, on a very general level, the "utilitarian" narrative, or the "deontological" narrative.

It is important to note that for Aristotle, or at least for his medieval and seventeenth-century commentators, the concept is not a picture, nor is it the primary object of knowledge. It is an instrument, a sign, by which we know the external object. It is necessarily a limited perspective, not the exact representation of what we know. It seems that Aristotle, in appealing to example and the enthymeme, can be seen to anticipate the rejection of representation which is taken to be a significant part of postmodernism. To summarize, he would not view the task of the ethicist as Kant does in the *Groundwork*, as the applier of rules. Rather, Aristotle seems to view the task of the ethicist to be much like Kant's view of the task of the art critic in his third Critique, a view enunciated by Wittgenstein in his postmodern work, the *Philosophical Investigations*, where languages are pragmatic ways of seeing, so meaning is use and not simply sense and reference.

But one might ask, "Doesn't this emphasis on "agreements in forms of life" simply lead to a sociology of knowledge, a relativism, which maintains that there are a multiplicity of ways of seeing, each of which is valid for each person's perspective? Our answer would be, that while that may be the case for postmoderns and create what Habermas calls the legitimation crisis,[24] for Aristotle that is not the case. There may be a multitude of perspectives, but reality is always a check on the validity of the perspectives. Some views are partially correct, some nearly correct, but none are complete. There are always more views. At any rate, one does not have to have the whole truth to have the truth. For as we have seen, Aristotle says:

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> The true and the approximately true are apprehended by the same faculty; it may also be noted that men have a sufficient natural instinct for what is true, and usually do arrive at the truth.[25]

It is only when we begin to doubt common sense, without a good reason to doubt it, in the manner of Descartes and other skeptics, that relativism becomes an enigma. The truth or the approximate truth which is manifest to the uneducated as well as the wise, is the common recognition of the *telos* of human nature, the agreed upon recognition of what sorts of goods count as the things that lead to living well. The implied premises in ethical enthymemes for Aristotle are the result of agreement, a virtual unanimity, for he says, "The various points that are made must be received in the same spirit," and those results of unanimity, the same spirit, generally tend to be true. One finds out about this agreement about what is good, by listening to what "everyone says," a technique adopted in the latter half of the twentieth century by ordinary language philosophers who were reacting to modernity. George Orwell and Huxley remind us that an effective way to change people's beliefs is to change the meaning of words. For Wittgenstein this would be to change the use of the word, for "the meaning is the use." We see this attempt to change the meaning of the word in Ayn Rand's attempt to legitimate selfishness, and change the meaning of the word "selfish" and the unanimity about the evil of selfishness by characterizing selfishness as a virtue.[26] Such a move would overturn the command of most mothers, "Don't be selfish."

But if there is unanimity, is there unanimity about the goods that will make humans flourish? For Aristotle the best place to look for what is good for human beings is at those common experiences about which there is agreement.

According to James Finnis: "Time and again Aristotle appeals to what 'everyone would say,' or 'no one would say,' or 'everyone (or no one . . .) would choose.'"[27] So the assumed premises about the ultimate good(s) of human life in any enthymemic argument would be attitudes or beliefs such as the following:

> No one would choose to live with the intellect of a child throughout his life, however much he were to be pleased at the things that children are pleased at. . . .
>
> No one chooses to possess the whole world if he has first to become someone else . . . ; he wishes for this only on condition of being whatever he is. . . .
>
> No one would choose the whole world on condition of being alone. . . .
>
> No one chooses eudaimonia for the sake of honour, pleasure, etc., nor as a means to anything whatever other than itself. . . .
>
> And so on.[28]

Still, we should note that appealing to what everyone would say does not definitively establish what to do, it just gives us the first word on what is good. Since practical reasoning is an attempt to persuade, Aristotle recommends that we start with commonly accepted beliefs, ones that 'everyone knows' and go from there. We might not reach certitude, but there are grounds we can establish, even cross-culturally, which will lead to at least some agreements and some truth. But it would be disastrous and foolish to think we can definitively solve issues where there are

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mixed goods. The attempt to resolve them would lead to the tyranny of the unitary canons that the postmodernists object to so much.

What we learn from Aristotle is this. Time after time we see that applying ethical theories to particular situations or practices doesn't result in any definitive answer. But we need not conclude from the lack of definitive answers that we ought to adopt the nihilism of Nietzsche or even the relativism of most postmoderns. We think there is truth, but we are not sure how to reach it and convey it. As a matter of fact, if everyone agreed with us or there were no conflicts, we would not have to teach ethics at all, or try to persuade others. But given disagreement and conflict there is a need for persuasion and resolution. Since all people have some grasp of the truth, it seems prudent to start at common ground, the common experiences gained by individuals and societies from sheer living and observing of what works and what doesn't. Even though one need not continue to agree with what 'everyone' says, when there are good reasons for thinking otherwise, it would not be prudent to assume the views of the uneducated are generally morally inadequate, as would Plato, who assumes most people are in an intellectual cave.

Aristotle assumed, contrary to Plato, that the uneducated share the same general principles as the learned. What they lack are, simply, some of the facts or some understanding of how underlying structures work. For example, the uneducated may not understand why dumping milk to keep prices up when people are starving makes sense. But they do understand that dumping milk is wasteful. To understand why wasting milk might be justified when people are starving requires understanding a view of how markets work, and why the farmers themselves would suffer if they didn't dump the surplus milk. Of course, achieving that understanding does not necessarily justify the action of dumping milk against the claims of the needy upon superabundant goods, but it does illustrate how harm can come to the farmers if they are generous and don't dump their surplus.

Similarly, in the example we already examined, not everyone might understand why it is beneficial to close plants and harm the employees of those plants, for they are not in the habit of adopting the perspectives of others. As we have noted, in *Roger and Me*, Roger Smith and Michael Moore each have a point of view about whether General Motors' plants in Flint should be shut down. Smith's lobbyist in the film can argue from the perspective of the committed libertarian capitalist, or from the perspective of the General Motors stockholders, or from the perspective of the developing world, the necessity of providing jobs for Mexicans, while Michael Moore throughout the film argues from the viewpoint of the Flint auto workers.

Almost every one of my students, when asked "Who should the profits of a business belong to?" answer "The owner." They overlook the Thomistic principle that "Whatever is held in superabundance is owed by natural right to those in need." These notions of justice, who deserves what, and the notion of profits which involves concepts of cost, market price, and property, are part of the assumed premises of most political arguments in Western culture. In this case our culture like other cultures are unanimities, in the literal sense of like-minded, or as Aristotle says, in the same spirit. But that capitalist set of beliefs about entitlements is the perspective of those

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entitled by our society and one could claim that my students are the entitled. It is not the perspective of the dispossessed. Their narrative is different.

The business ethicist's responsibility, in all of these cases, would seem to be to look at all perspectives to get to as much truth as possible. There are reasons why an owner is entitled. Hence the view is true. But there are reasons why the owner may not be entitled to everything. So the view is only partially true. There are other partially true views. Education can show us other's perspectives on the truth. Yet we must realize that like our perspective it will be tainted with self-interest. In this light, the abiding contribution of Mill and Kant can be seen not in providing us with a definitive ethical theory, or even an adequate view of what is right or good. They accomplish neither. But their contribution can be seen in insisting on universalizing, which is their repetition of the formal principle of justice that equals should be treated equally.[29]

CONCLUSION

As we have argued, the business ethicist in a postmodern world cannot be simply an applier of principles, but must be one who first seeks out and then seeks to understand the perspectives of all, the marginalized as well as those in the mainstream. Having understood those various perspectives she can then evaluate them in terms of how they contribute to *human well-being*, a well-being defined in terms of an Aristotelian telos. What I have tried to do is show that Aristotle settles for limited knowledge, based not on a pure Archimedean starting point, but on the common experience of human beings. What an Aristotelian with rhetorical insight can offer to the business ethics orator is the following strategy:

1. Drop the deductive model.
2. Settle for less than certain and definitive answers.
3. Adopt where helpful the use of narratives or paradigms.
4. Rehabilitate rhetoric through understanding the uses and limits of enthymemes.
5. Recognize that solving ethical issues is more like an art than a science.
6. Recognize that all views are within a context, a form of life, or a culture, but some distance can be gained from that culture and the views can be evaluated in the light of whether they lead to human flourishing.
7. Recognize that in persuasion we must start with agreements.
8. Trust the insight of the common person. They know from experience, and common experience provides the starting point for truth in practical matters.
9. Critique the perceptions of the common person, when they cause disequilibrium or when there is conflict, but do not question them, à la Descartes, when there is not good reason to question.

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NOTES

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1. Which is not to say that virtue ethics is not an important area of research for business ethicists. For recent discussions of the potential roles of virtue in business ethics, see Alejo Jose G. Sison, Edwin M. Hartman, and Joan Fontrodona, "Reviving Tradition: Virtue and the Common Good in Business and Management," *Business Ethics Quarterly* 22:2 (2012): 207–10; and Robert Audi, "Virtue Ethics as a Resource in Business," *Business Ethics Quarterly* 22:2 (2012): 273–91.

2. Ronald F. Duska, "Aristotle: A Pre-modern Post-modern? Implications for Business Ethics," *Business Ethics Quarterly* 3:3 (1993): 227–49. Thanks to David Bevan, Mollie Painter-Moreland, and others in EBEN for encouraging me continue to pursue this line of analysis.

3. G. E. M. Anscombe, "Modern Moral Philosophy," *Philosophy* 33 (1958).

4. Alisdaire MacIntyre, *After Virtue*, 2nd ed. (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 1984), 118, 111.

5. Ronald M. Green,"Business Ethics as a Postmodern Phenomenon," *Business Ethics Quarterly* 3:3 (1993): 219–25.

6. For discussion of some of the more prominent trends in ethics and political philosophy as they relate to business ethics, see Denis G. Arnold, Robert Audi, and Matt Zwolinski, "Recent Work in Ethical Theory and Its Implications for Business Ethics," *Business Ethics Quarterly* 20:4 (2010): 559–58; and Joseph Heath, Jeffrey Moriarty, and Wayne Norman, "Business Ethics and (or as) Political Philosophy," *Business Ethics Quarterly* 20:3 (2010): 427–52.

7. Daryl Koehn, "Ethical Darkness Made Visible: Michael Moore's *Roger and Me*," in *Aesthetics and Business Ethics* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2014), 83–101.

8. "Our discussion will be adequate if it achieves clarity within the limits of the subject matter. For precision cannot be expected in the treatment of all subjects alike, any more than it can be expected in all manufactured articles. Problems of what is noble and just, which politics examines, present so much variety and irregularity that some people believe they exist only by convention and not by nature. The problem of the good, too, presents a similar kind of irregularity, because in many cases good things bring harmful results. . . . Therefore, in a discussion of such subjects, which has to start from a basis of this kind, we must be satisfied to indicate the truth with a rough and general sketch: when the subject and the basis of a discussion consist of matters that hold good only as a general rule, but not always, the conclusions reached must be of the same order. The various points that are made must be received in the same spirit." Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics*, trans. Martin Oswald (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1962), 1094b12–23.

But what is an enthymeme? According to Aristotle:

> The enthymeme is a syllogism . . . different from the syllogism of dialectic. . . . [W]e must not carry its reasoning too far back, or the length of our argument will cause obscurity: nor must we put in all the steps that lead to our conclusion, or we shall waste words in saying what is manifest. **It is this simplicity that makes the uneducated more effective than the educated when addressing popular audiences makes them, as the poets tell us 'charm the crowd's ears more finely.'** Educated men lay down broad general principles; uneducated men argue from common knowledge and draw obvious conclusions. (Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1395b20ff.; emphasis added)

9. "For a wellschooled man is one who searches for that degree of precision in each kind of study which the nature of the subject at hand admits: it is obviously just as foolish to accept arguments of probability from a mathematician as to demand strict demonstrations from an orator" (*Nichomachean Ethics*, 1094b23–27).

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10. Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, trans. W. Rhys Roberts, ed. Richard McKeon (New York: Random House, 1941), 1359b9ff.
11. Ibid., 1358b89.
12. Ibid., 1358b15.
13. Ibid., 1358b13ff.
14. Ibid., Book 1, Chap.2.
15. Ibid., 1356b14.
16. Craig Lehman, "Takeovers and Takeover Defenses: Some Utilities of the Free Market," in Lisa Newton and Maureen Ford, *Taking Sides: Controversial Issues in Business Ethics* (Guilford, CT: Duskin Publishing Company, 1992), 234–35.
17. Jean-Francois Lyotard, *The Posmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxiii–xxiv. Lyotard,"Universal History and Cultural Differences," in *The Lyotard Reader*, ed. Andrew Benjamin (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), 318. Compare this to Richard Rorty, *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1979), and Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolution*, 2nd ed. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).
18. Edith Wyschogrod, *Saints and Postmodernism: Revisioning Moral Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1990), xxii.
19. Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1354a1415.
20. Ibid, 1355a710.
21. Ibid., 1355a12:
22. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 2nd ed. (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1967), 226.
23. Patricia Werhane, *Moral Imagination and Management Decision Making* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).
24. Jurgen H. Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1975).
25. Aristotle, *Rhetoric*, 1355a12.
26. Ayn Rand, *The Virtue of Selfishness* (New York: Signet, 1964).
27. John Finnis, *Fundamentals of Ethics* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 1983), 17.
28. "In each case, the 'no one would . . .' is a reminder of human experience, including the experience (actual or vicarious) or Aristotle's own reader, you or me. It is a reminder too, of a prephilosophic understanding of that experience, including, notably, the reader's own previous understanding. So the appeal is not to numbers. Nor, on the other hand, is it a mere dogmatic begging of the question. For the opinions in question are not recalled as being philosophical answers to the philosophical question in issue (the question of the true human good[s]). Rather, they are recalled as expressing an understanding of particular aspects of the matter as a set of insights which, when recalled, assembled and brought to bear on the question, will help to justify a thesis that is philosophical not being less practical but by being more general, more systematic in relating each relevant proposition to all the others, and thus, above all, more explanatory." Finnis, *Fundamentals of Ethics*, 1719.
29. Aristotle, then, can be seen as concurring with the postmodern project in the following ways:

First, he does not expect certitude in practical matters, and hence he would repudiate unitary rules from which scientific like deduction is possible.

Second, he notes that there are a variety of perspectives and views.

Third, his good is relative to human beings, for it concerns the telos of human nature. Human beings may not be the measure of all things for all things, but human beings are the object relative to which the good of ethics and politics is gauged. Human happiness or fulfillment is the object of ethics, and that takes on a multiplicity of forms.

Fourth, since his view is teleological, it would be incompatible with Kantian autonomy, by which I mean self-rule or self-determination with respect to what is good for human beings. We don't choose what our needs are. They are determined by our nature. We don't choose the conditions under which humans can flourish. Our choice rather involves whether we will do what will help us flourish or not. In short, nature is the author of what fulfills human beings, not human beings' wills. Certain things are fulfilling and we can know some of them.

Fifth, Aristotle's ethics appeals to general rules only as rules of thumb, rules necessary for achieving the individual or the common good. Aristotle also recognizes that activities are sometimes good for some while being bad for others.

But we must note clearly that Aristotle would not be a thoroughgoing postmodernist if postmodernism requires a radical relativism, for Aristotle does believe in the accessibility of truth or the approximate truth.

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