

# The Non-Ethics in Business

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## Abstract

*The business environment involves, like all the human existence, the difference between what it should be in relation to ethics and what it often is in the real plan. So the reality of the business environment frequently offers the image of a universe in which non-ethical mentalities dominate. The paradigm of the jungle, of the war, of the machinery, of the virtual environment or of the game are a few metaphorically named situations in which the businessmen are addressing to their own company and to foreign companies, to their own employees and to employees of other companies or to public consumers from the positions of a deeply non-ethical perspective, perspective which is lacking any assumption of the respect, tolerance and compassion for the other.*

**Keywords:** *Business Environment, Non-ethical Business, Company, Darwinist Perspective, Mechanized Vision, Conflict, Virtual Reality, Competition.*

The concept of *business* involves multiple valences which are not only economic, political or social, but also *ethical*. The moral problems and dilemmas appear everywhere where the mark of action and reflection is the human being. Despite the appearances, the dynamics of the business environment has not as central operating unit the financial systems but the *human person* with his positive and negative potential, with his defects and his qualities. From the human paradigm is enlightened any political and economic vision which can dominate the evolution of a nation or of a group of nations, which may decisively influence the entire course of history. This human paradigm is the base for different social mentalities and economic policies, it is the basis of visions of the world that can generate a general sense of the development of human society. Any economic and political vision can develop, can improve only if there were produced essential changes at the level of the mentality and of the existential and moral perspective which is the basis of such a vision. Thus, any policy and approach in business is directed and shaped according to the essential ethic perspective of those who develop such a policy. Success or failure, the ascendance or the decay of a political

vision of business substantially depend on the general ontological vision, on the option and on *the moral conduct* of actors who build and apply such a vision. In this respect, a business which is based on principles of respect for the other will be the one that falls in the area of ethical procedures while a business which departs from the premises of the gain acquired without taking into account the other's interests, without the valuation of these interests is located outside any positive moral bench-marks. From an economic point of view, the term business designates a *commercial transaction* in which is effectuated a purchase or a sale effective for all the actors involved in such a transaction. The ethical principles require that such businesses rely on mutual trust and respect, on the faithfulness and the confidentiality of the information, as well as on the balance of the involvement of all parties anchored in the process of economic exchange. If ethical principles are absent here, we are witnessing the emergence of a range of negative statuses among of which the most frequent are the lack of trust, the manipulation, the use of false information in order to cheat on the others, the attempt to discredit and destroy the reputation of the other business partners, the steps to sabotage the actions of other actors involved in the business. This kind of negative approach of the business domain is based on a wrong mentality, malefic from a moral point of view. It is about the way in which some businessmen can understand the inter-human relations, about the perspective which they assume as regards the other, a business partner or an ordinary subordinate. In this respect, one of the most prestigious analysts who tackled the theme of the need for ethics in the business, Robert C. Solomon identifies a few paradigms of erroneous mentalities, negative from the ethic point of view, that can be found in the world of the business dynamics. It is about a few ways to interpret and discuss businesses, implicitly the inter-human relationships thereto, in a deeply *non-ethical* manner.

One of these paradigms is based on the tendentious interpretation of the Darwinist theory on the evolution and the selection of species. Thus, from such a perspective, the businesses shall be regarded as actions taken in a reciprocal fight for survival, the most powerful and adapted one exterminating the inferior one. Here, the priority is given to the techniques of harsh and non-ethic competitiveness in the sense of non-compliance with moral principles in the relationships with the other business partners. They are looked at like an inferior species that should be assimilated and subsequently destroyed. *The aim justifies the means*, the aim being only one's own survival and the extinction of capabilities that belong to other companies or businessmen, companies and entrepreneurs that are regarded as rivals and opponents who destroy or are destroyed. The business environment is

seen, in this context, like a *jungle* in which each one is fighting for himself and against all others. This paradigm is not only denaturing, presenting the business environment in a false manner but it is also dehumanizing, excluding the most important factor in the complexity of business dynamics, namely *the human being*, with his feelings, options, and ideals. The constructions in the political and business environment can reach higher levels only in the cohesion of the human community, in inter-connecting and not in the blind conflict of endless competitions. The human being is supposed, from the point of view of ethic rules, to raise above the instincts of his species, thus proving, through the balance of wisdom, of compassion and inter-cooperation among the humans, he is superior to the other categories of the animal kingdom. Another paradigm governed by the non-ethics of businesses is that of *the war*. Here the business environment is thought to be a battlefield, a battlefield opened to the toughest and inhuman operations. The purpose of any company, in such a vision, must be the defense of the territory, that is *the segment of the market* which has conquered it. Therefore, a different company that gets nearer to this territory should be regarded as an opponent, an enemy in relation to whom any negotiations are excluded, only his defeat being the sole option. The employees of that company look like a group of soldiers in a state of maximum mobilization, the war being unavoidable. This metaphor of the war shows a deep immoral understanding in relation to the business environment, where the human being is regarded as a simple pawn on a board of a conflict that does not know the bench-marks of respect and compassion. The extermination of the other at any cost, his defeat and annihilation represent here the sole purpose. The adoption of such a vision does not actually allow a significant advancement for any company or businessman. The conflict, the violence and the lack of relationing with the other partners may give rise to the self-destruction of their own structures. All the destructive energy re-launched on the others returns to the source which generated it by striking it decisively in such a way that the tackling of businesses as a broad war cannot bring to any actor in the business world consolidated benefits in the long term but only ephemeral gains followed by extensive unrecoverable dissolutions.

Another paradigm, another non-ethic positioning of the businessman or of a company is constituted by the vision of businesses as a *machinery* having as a sole purpose the fast production of huge financial benefits. A company regards itself, in this context, as a machinery system like a clock which should be as accurate as possible. Here the employees of the company look like mechanical parts to be used, operated to their maximum potential as long as they are efficient. When such

a component part is showing signs of fatigue it must be immediately replaced by another one. All that is human, everything about feelings, and thoughts, about personality features, wishes, ideals and affection is cancelled in this context. Actually the human being is regarded without its defining element: the consciousness. This one is totally neglected, being replaced by assuming an attitude of blind submission which becomes mechanical within the framework of a complex mechanical design. When this complex is no more effective it must be *restructured*, enhanced, the human sacrifices being understood only as a mere act of replacement of the parts of a motor which is no more powerful.<sup>1</sup> Although the metaphor of the machinery may sometimes be tempting by the induction of the illusion of control and of the efficient performance, its application has proved to be every time in the history of humanity as a source of incredible imbalances and atrocities. Considering the human being as a simple part of a mechanical system is equivalent to the rejection of human nature and its replacement with a dangerous falsity that can serve as a first step towards the loss of the human species identity by cancelling its meditative, emotional and creative freedom. The idea of a perfect mechanical human organization would also induce the image of a world that would have in its centre an improved human being, a much more powerful and more efficient *over-man*. The danger of such an image was also evoked by F. M. Dostoievski who considers that, if in a first phase, this over-man will impose his principles ensuring a strict harmony of the world,<sup>2</sup> he will subsequently lose his fragile equilibrium, becoming a slave, a beast, a criminal.<sup>3</sup> So that completion of the man by the appearance of the over-man,<sup>4</sup> that progress so strongly evoked by Nietzsche represented for Dostoievski an ontological throw away of the human being, a substantial side-slip of the man towards a dangerous fiction, unnecessary from the point of view of the human species evolution. Also, Martin Heidegger will evoke, in his turn, the dangers of anchoring of man in a highly-technological society, a society in which the machine model proves to be supreme. For Heidegger the assimilation of man in such a social mechanism is equivalent to the full forgetfulness of the *Being* as a basis of the world and with the location of the human existence under the tyranny of the impersonal *Se*. So, the man behaves in a certain manner, for that is the way in which he has to behave, that is the way in

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<sup>1</sup> Dan Crăciun, Vasile Morar and Vasile Macoviciuc, *Etica afacerilor (Business Ethics)* (Bucharest: Paideia Publishing House, 2005), 272-276.

<sup>2</sup> F. M. Dostoievski, *Frații Karamazov (The Brothers Karamazov)*, vol. II (Bucharest: Univers Publishing House, 1982), 445.

<sup>3</sup> Ion Ianoși, *Comentariu la Frații Karamazov - F.M. Dostoievski (Comment on The Brothers Karamazov - F.M. Dostoievski)* (Bucharest: Univers Publishing House, 1982), 660.

<sup>4</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Voința de putere (Will to Power)* (Oradea: Aion Publishing House, 1999), 5.

which everyone behaves. Here intervenes the avoid of the identification of the conceptual trio *nothingness-nothing-death* and the placing of the man under the collective naivety, under the spectrum of the automatism of the everyday banalities and of the excessively used technology.<sup>5</sup>

Another extremely risky perspective on the business environment is the one in which is made the analogy with the *IT-virtual environment*. Here, any procedure in business is considered as a computer program and its protagonists are deemed as simple calculation factors that can be adjusted or replaced. The business is regarded as a simple operation carried out in the virtual environment, the environment that is opened to all opportunities of permanent change and transformation. In such a context, the human factor is excluded again. Also, the ethical principles of the inter-relationing with the others are non-existent. Just like a *Videogame*, a business has its characters that can be easily deleted from the program, being replaced, and the problem of moral damages is excluded. What is forgotten, in such a perspective, is the fact that people have not been created for computers, but vice versa, these ones are constructed to support the human activities. Also, modernity knows a great inflow of information but what is missing is its ability to filter and organize this information. Such a capacity is not related to the resemblance with the computer systems of calculation but, on the contrary, arises from the human consciousness, the computers holding a certain degree of intelligence, but being incapable to reach that particular human feature, namely the *wisdom*. Mistaking the business environment for the virtual reality also means replacing the real human being with a complex of graphics directed through a wide, but limited program. It is a path by which a man may lose the awareness of his identity, becoming a virtual chimera without spiritual expression.

The metaphors of the jungle, of the war, of the machinery or of the virtual reality represent non-ethical ways of action and reflection in the business world. These metaphors often indicate an attitude free of any inter-correlation with the imperatives of respect and compassion towards the others, employees of one's own company or activating within other rival companies. What these paradigms lack is the responsibility for the human factor, they reveal a total absence of reporting on the other, an incapacity for *empathy*, of transposition in the situation of the other. In the case of these positioning what matters is only the self-interest, the reaching of the target established at any cost and regardless of any possible negative ethical results. Compared to these above-mentioned metaphors, the

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<sup>5</sup> Martin Heidegger, *Ființă și timp (Being and Time)* (Bucharest: Humanitas Publishing House, 2003), 250-254.

metaphor of *the game* may appear much more human. The approach and the understanding of business as a funny game could be interpreted as ethical attitudes imperatives which comply with the imperatives of compassion for the others. In reality, however, this paradigm is proving at least as harmful as the other contexts already mentioned. Thus, considering and interpreting the business environment, one's own company or other companies, as well as their respective employees from the perspective of a metaphor of the game means to calculate and operate aiming to obtain only *the score and the victory*. Also, competitors must only be overcome, defeated, the possibility of negotiation with them being excluded. Also, this creates a radical delimitation between players who are relatively few in number and the general public who is not entitled to participate effectively in the game but only to assist supporting a team or the other. These features indicate that also the paradigm of the game is a situation belonging to the non-ethics of business. Moral rules provide for the field of business dynamics, in contradiction with the paradigm of the game, the fact that the other competitors are co-participants with which may be build complex and profitable businesses. Therefore it is not against them, and not in opposition to them, not looking for a table of the a score that does not take into account the means but only the finality that may be build a durable construction, an ethics of the business. Also, in the business environment there is not a mere dividing line between a wide audience and the protagonists of a game on a limited land. On the contrary, in the business environment we are all players in the sense that the manner in which they develop is a reflection of our own elections of conduct at the level of the society and of the nation. A nation that assumed the order and discipline in the act of thinking and of the labour will determine a harmonious and progressive political and business environment. The results and benefits of this environment will be useful in the first place for that people. Here is running a circularity of the recompense, a dialectics of the action and of the retroaction. Therefore, in politics or business we are all players, more exactly, actors, our elections, our choices and actions determining the subsequent situation of the nation we all are part of and also of each and every one of us. This environment is much too important to the life of a society to be considered a game, to be addressed to from the positions of following a good score or a detached victory.

The absence of ethics from the dynamic world of business, more exactly, the intense presence of the non-ethics, of an immoral axiology in which are postulated and imposed the imperatives lacking the respect and compassion towards the others, regardless of their social position and status, lead to an irreversible falling,

towards fatal dissolutions, which are irretrievable even if they often result in special and momentary benefits. An attitude at a political and business level which assumes these paradigms of the jungle, of the war, of the machinery, of the virtual world or of the game will determine, in the long term, the involution of a society, and the construction of a sick, corrupted economy, incapable of spectacular leaps, of progressive ascendances that would ensure the prosperity and the civilization of a nation. The dilemma that reveals here is not *how can we fight* against these benign forms of the political and business environment but rather *what we need to do* in order that such socially malefic paradigms not to appear at all, in what way we must act for not to create the soil conducive, fertile for such negative mentalities. The answer to this decisive question is still long in coming.

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