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## Ethics of Responsibility? Some Postmodern Views

Ecaterina Croitor<sup>a,\*</sup>

<sup>a</sup> University Assistant, PhD Student, Stefan Cel Mare University of Suceava, Romania

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### Abstract

Responsibility is customized in the context of a consistent ethical principles derived from the knowledge based society as a corporate social responsibility. Responsibility is not of the individual but of collective entity, being a synthesis between ethics and pragmatic-utilitarian.

The responsibility of knowledge based organization-main building blocks of the knowledge society - is far from what is classically called business ethics, or rather simply reporting the moral correctness based on the construction of communication strategies for social action.

Corporate social responsibility as a particular form of responsibility adapted the knowledge based society, addresses the sources of uncertainty, given the post-industrial society, seen as a risk society.

The purpose of this paper is to search for possible prerequisites for building an ethics of responsibility to accommodate postmodern society.

Therefore we start by questioning the specificity postmodernity, both philosophical and civilizational aspect. We will discover the great challenges that postmodernity raised, namely globalization, especially the globalization of mass communication at the end of ideologies-called big stories end Lyotard's language. We reflect on ethical meanings generated unprecedented scientific advance, which allows some thinkers to believe that postmodern society and knowledge society are part of the same contemporary cultural paradigms.

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### Introduction

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\* Corresponding author.

E-mail address: [ecaterina\\_croitor@yahoo.com](mailto:ecaterina_croitor@yahoo.com)

society as a corporate social responsibility. Responsibility is not of the individual but of collective entity, being a synthesis between ethics and pragmatic-utilitarian.

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## 1. Constituting the ethics in postmodernity

While postmodernism refers to a cultural attitude of rejection of metastories and their deconstruction, postmodernity represents the historical period in which specific cultural phenomena of postmodernism is conducted and worsens the social space. End of modernity is linked to the end of history in the sense of lack of events but the end of history as a process, as evolution which intended a meaning. History no longer flows in the sense of inexorable progress (Vattimo, 1993) of the human species from a barbaric past to a bright future of civilization. The end of history is more correlated with the end of ideology who Daniel Bell spoke. Totalitarian political utopias gave way "weaker" attitudes with fewer claims than the universalisation of equality or superior race, but with impact on the individuals coexisting: decentralization, free economy, pluralism and human rights (Morar, V., 2006, pp. 24-25). At the social level, deconstruction takes the form of a polycentric and luxuriant plurality of social interactions which change the patriarchal community cohesion.

Postmodern Ethics is established from the deconstruction of metastory that we call *justice* (Derrida, 1997, pp. 20-26). Derrida applies deconstruction on ethics and on the possibility of justice itself. Exercise of justice involves free will. Author notifies the aporia that the very decision to follow the law implies an obligation to reinstate for a new trial/judgement. The law reinstatement cannot be perfectly consistent to ethical and legal codes. The justice performance itself is under the horizon of injustice (Derrida, 1997, pp. 20-26).

Postmodern Ethics, in agreement with the deconstruction of the great stories, give up discussing the call of ultimate moral principles, replacing the primacy of theoretical ethics with the empire of applied ethics and bioethics mainly. Hypermodern society associates the consumerism with the immediacy. We are in a civilization of the image and PSEO-event, that event that happens only and only because there is a camera that recorded it (Sartorini, 2005, p 65).

The society of image uses advanced technologies as illusion techniques, as excess of virtual and of reality-illusion mix (Lipovetsky, Serroy, 2008, p 49).

Postmodernity opposes the individuality specific to modernity, the idea of difference and constant negotiation of positions of power and domination, with other members of society. The two postmodern ethics that obstinately deny the centring of ethics within the principle of autonomy, are represented by the communitarian ethics and the ethics of care (Dumbravă, 2005).

### 1.2. Deconstruction of metastories about responsibility

Andrew Eshleman identifies a number of elements necessary to identify a moral theory about responsibility: *the concept of moral responsibility; the qualification criteria of an entity as a moral agent; the conditions under which attribute moral responsibility is properly used* (more precisely the conditions under which an agent is morally responsible for their actions freedom, free will, autonomy, etc...)

Moral responsibility is a perennial *ethical value*, being present in the writings of Greek philosophers, starting

right from the Homeric period. Both the human and the superhuman beings - heroes, gods etc. - get the status of moral agents that are made responsible for their own behaviour. Natural or supernatural factors, which expel a behaviour under the control of moral agent, constitute the grounds for a reduction to the annihilation of moral responsibility (Eshleman, 2009, pp.1-31).

The Greeks introduced, in relation to responsibility, the concept of fatalism, the belief that at least part of the future of a person or a number of events are predetermined by fate and the gods intervene, which makes the agent to be relieved of moral responsibility for his actions. So the Homeric philosophers understand moral responsibility in a dual form, both in terms of intent of act and from the perspective of its consequences. Moral responsibility can remain entirely pointless if the fatality is absolute, as will be considered later in Islamic philosophy. The two meanings will give birth during modernity, to ethical trends, ethics of Immanuel Kant line open, and consequentialist ethical trends.

For Immanuel Kant only *good will* is concept as the absolutely good. *Good will* is included in the concept of duty, but only a number of limitations (Timmermann, 2010, pp. 52-73). Kantian vision debts are direct or indirect, to himself or another. Autonomy and duty are complementary, because the primacy of reason in their pursuit. Duty commands necessarily true, even to the detriment of the agent's own happiness, just by virtue of its autonomous nature (Timmermann, 2010, pp. 52-73). For Kant moral judgment concerns the intention and not the consequences of the act. Acts have moral worth only if the intentions are moral, and not if there are the results of random gestures or actions whose intent is evil or selfish.

### 1.3. Ethics of Communicative action

Jürgen Habermas (2000) outlines the nature of communication problems, which it considers crucial, both with their own sense of self and in relation to otherness. Expressing moral conscience is the fundamental role in determining social action.

Sorin Tudor Maxim draws attention on the Habermas distinction to three common cognitive interests of human beings: *technical interest, knowledge and control of nature; interest in self-knowledge; the interest of mutual understanding to collective action* (Maxim, 2010, pp. 35-40).

In line with these interests, Habermas distinguishes three types of action to achieve success in different instances of both social and individual life (unsocial): *Instrumental work, unsociable-field success, manifesting wealth; Strategic business-success in the social sphere, manifested by influential; Communicative activities, for mutual-sphere* (Maxim, 2010, pp. 35-40).

Sorin Tudor Maxim asks rightly, unless the surplus of social responsibility and entrepreneurship is not in fact a way to control social action in respect manipulative. Ensuring minimum moral comfort of the employee would have the ultimate aim of integrating it into the organization and increase productivity. Corporate responsibility towards the social environment could be a "subtle ideology designed to maximize profits", and increase consumer loyalty to the various brands. Excess ethics can take the form of "subtle instrument of perverted self-regulation of the behaviours" (Maxim, 2010, pp. 35-40) came to replace the old forms of authority and control. A number of ethical behaviour in the organization can be attributed to the relevant regulations, which requires organizations to responsibility in areas such as environmental protection, consumer protection, responsibility for workers' rights, quality policies, etc. Pressure media, civil society in general, is also remarkable, resulting in increased above the level of profitability, unethical behaviour, and therefore the obligation of organizations to build such ethical policies.

It can therefore talk about a *smart and applied ethics* (Maxim, S.T., 2010, pp. 35-40), interested in obtaining beneficial results, instead of supporting analysis or justice of pure intentions.

Ethics based on communication (Morar, V., 2006, pp 29-31) of European construction, from the writings of Jürgen Habermas, Hannah Arendt (Arendt, 1996) and K. Otto Apel (1987), called the discourse ethics, exceeds the American utilitarian ethics, being an effective participation of all those involved - listening to all voices, not just a theory of ethical decision of the leaders. All participants on ethical deliberation are considered "communicants" to this ethic (Morar, V., 2006, pp 29-31).

The force of this school of thought is summarized after Vasile Morar (2006, p 29) as it follows:

- The emergence of moral norms deriving from the social and interpersonal processes and not as evidence in the critical thinking;
- Transformation of the Kantian ethical universalism, in the "simple rule of argumentation"
- "Relative" interpretive consensus ethical obligation to ethical standards;
- Custom ethical debates for each situation, and the emergence of communication frameworks, moral norms and private codes of conduct;
- Focus on accepted criteria of moral negotiation processes, and avoid impartiality, arbitrariness or manipulation.

## 2. Ethical responsibility in Knowledge based organization

Business, believes Sorin Tudor Maxim, is conducted in a community setting, as a result of social interaction and communication between social agents, and not a direct result of efforts, no matter how they might be giants, of isolated individuals. Business development involves an existing ensemble unanimously accepted by the business community members, norms and rules that guide the proper conduct of business.

*When we speak of an organizational culture - the fundamental institution of the market economy, whether belonging to public or private property - we consider that in any social ensemble there is overall and other organizations / institutions whose purpose is not profit making and as such, to develop their own organizational culture related to specific purposes of their activities: educational institutions, cultural organizations, administrative, political, NGOs, trade unions (Maxim, 2010, pp. 30-34).*

Organizational Ethics aims to affirm the specific set of values, attitudes towards stakeholders, requiring a certain level of ethics education, became part of the culture. Organizational culture or the philosophy of the company includes the management culture, but also the traditions, attitudes, incidents and events that company took, representing the firm ideology and spirit of excellence benefits.

A first ethical challenge concerns the ability of managers to place the median between efficiency and fairness, profit and interest of employees, but also of the community / communities where the organization operates, between entrepreneurial freedom and social solidarity (Maxim, 2010, pp. 30 -34).

Especially when in the corporate knowledge situation, ethical conduct that takes the form of fairness in the conduct of business and social responsibility is becoming increasingly significant for their organizational culture. We can identify the concerns of corporations to develop their own code of ethics, to form a strategic partnership with their employees, beneficiaries, and community, precisely because the particularity of knowledge society is that human resource is valued for physical labor, but especially for the intellectual, making each employee unique, at which company would have to adjust for future loyalty.

Sorin Tudor Maxim shows that:

*"Beyond the natural tendency of obtaining profit, the purpose of a corporation is actually to serve the public, providing the necessary and quality products and services and not harm the community and its citizens, but this goal is a less costly and more, with moral consideration; Obviously it does not realize the extent of intemperate profit searching, it pollutes the air and water, waste community resources or threatening material and spiritual comfort of fellow. Against such practices, may maximizing profit but, certainly, morally detestable, the community has the right and duty to defend itself, requiring to corporations / businesses their own ethical standards, which they are called upon to observe" (Maxim, 2010, pp. 30-34).*

Another ethical dimension of knowledge-based organizations is the management and their leadership. Organizational culture is part of that knowledge capital just ensuring corporate competitiveness, therefore essential values and goals should not only known by their members (Maxim, 2010, pp. 33-37), but should create the means to provide organization members adherence to these norms and values and ethical behaviour proposed by the organization.

As for the decentering management, and transition to democratic corporation, and even more to the corporation

based on internal deliberative democracy, constitute the prerequisites necessary, although not sufficient for ethical management performance. Participatory management corporation respond to the requests of un-responsibility to its own intellectual capital, which lies in the leaders knowledge, but the amount of knowledge gained in the organization by its members over the professional work -is effectively available to fulfil the organization's mission and achievement of competitive products and services, and tailored to the request of target groups of organizations.

Organizational climate of fairness and cooperation ensure social and personal development of members of the organization, and this is transmitted to the organization as a whole. Responsible attitude of organization members to the organizational climate, allow the corporation to carry out human resource retention policy and, default, maximum stability and valuing intellectual capital of the company.

Companies in the third wave, not working with classic white-collar nor with yellow collar, from the beginning of the technology (Toffler, Toffler, 2006), but rather are drawn to the creative process - *Knowledge workers* (Ivan, et al., 2011, pp. 11-32) defined a new category of labour who may very well interpret data from a particular field (Huang, 2009, pp. 430-438).

Company orientation towards a total quality management, adaptive and transformative capacity of the organization as a whole, and all levels staff represent also ethical priorities, not just the management of the organization, as the quality of products and services is a corporate commitment to user satisfaction, and implicit quality policy compliance is a key feature of the organization's accountability to its target audiences.

Corporate responsibility on front of the globalizing challenges comes from the particularities of new risks to which the company is part, precisely because massive technologization of production and consumption. Alvin Toffler speaks about technologization's mask (Toffler, Toffler, 2006), referring to dismantle social processes and social solidarity, alienation, etc. We are talking about environmental hazards and pollution –already existing not only in modern industrialized society- and its transformation through technologization and almost complete elimination of the natural factor in some urban habitats.

Ethical evaluation of technology is therefore required as priority in knowledge based society, and ethics policies of the knowledge based organizations should include the existence and functioning of ethics committees, of experts in applied ethics. We are referring today to a *risk society*, which prudence and confidence values are called upon to manage sociability. Individual or social responsibility is not required to regulate and minimize the risk, as it would be to admit only consequentialist ethics, but rather to manage the reporting to individual and collective risks. Responsibility derives from the ability of the individual / community / organization to be trusted.

### 2.1. Corporate social responsibility of a knowledge based organization

In general there are three opinions (Iamandi, 2012, p.32) about the possibility of any relationship between ethics and business:

- Absolute impossibility, ethics and business are incompatible;
- Relative compatibility, as businesses have a significant role in community development;
- pre-eminence on business ethics, ethical considerations and community must exceed business interests (Bowie, Duska, 1990, pp. 17-44).

Theories that deny the role of corporate responsibility towards society shows companies are responsible only to their shareholders, to maximize profit, respecting the law. Basically, says Irina Iamandi from Carr's work, there is an ethical business, but it has nothing to do with common morality. Ethical decisions in business are made strategic, meaning that decisions are based, we say, on the economic ration, and not on the moral one. An ethical strategy can bring competitive advantages, but what underpins corporate ethics is the profit motive. The moral principles of business man should not interfere with his professional ethics. The only ethical rules are actually legal constraints.

It is the role of the state to ensure a fair behaviour and a competitive business environment, devoid as possible the illegal competitive advantages, the contrary legality practices, such as corruption, extortion, monopoly practices.

Theories of corporate social responsibility point out there is a moral responsibility on the company to all those who contribute to the consolidation of profits- stakeholders but not just shareholders (Etzioni, 2002, p 168).

Minimalist approach to corporate social responsibility, proposed by Friedman states that their responsibility is the

profit (Iamandi, 2012, pp.34-35). Businesses are useful to society precisely because they produce profit, and hence social, employment, prosperity. The managers duty is to shareholders, and it would be illegal diversion and partly of profits to charitable activities.

The company has other levers of equitable distribution of surplus value and restoration of social justice than corporate intervention.

Current corporate social responsibility theory states that firms should aim just promoting the welfare of society and not just maximizing the entrepreneurs' profit. Corporation move to a larger business model, based on a partnership with the social environment, businesses are an open system, managers are preoccupied with the problem of quality of life of employees and clients, being involved in conservation and environmental protection, being responsible not only of the quality of their products and services, but the overall quality of life of those who consume and / or produce those goods and services, but also future generations, etc..

Corporate social responsibility comes from the internalization of values existing in the social environment in which the corporation operates, and not external constraints applied to the corporation. Corporation assumes a moral duty to stakeholders who bring their contribution to the success of the company, have implicit rights therein. It is a vision related to the idea of knowledge-based organization where success is not given the robotics work of proletarian employees, but the creator impact of all stakeholders, from the knowledge-workers acting on behalf of the company to customers served by the company.

*The theory of "stakeholders" assumes that every business must fulfil a social role and purpose of a business is not to make money for its owners, but to provide high quality goods and services to their customers, at acceptable prices, to create jobs for its employees, protect the environment, to financially support sports, arts and technological advances and so on, obtaining finally a reasonable profit for its owners as a reward earned for community services (Iamandi, 2012, p.38).*

Criticism extensive moral responsibility of corporate to stakeholders is conducted from the perspective of limited capacity of the organization to serve equitably throughout society, the task remains in the public sphere of social redistribution of income (Etzioni, 2002, pp. 263-277) and distributive justice accomplishment (Rawls, 2012). Etzioni opines in favour of ethical decision based on pragmatic rather than deontological (Iamandi, 2012, p 40).

Corporate social responsibility can be seen in a minimalist view, the obligation not to do evil, or maximalist an obligation to consider the interests of the community and to do good in their interest. Social responsibility can be based on pragmatic reasons - an increase of public confidence in the organization, lead to an increase in business organization, or a deontological side (Iamandi, 2012, pp. 41-43), the organization feeling forced to the community in which it operates and to the stakeholders involved in the process of obtaining profit. Negative obligations gradually turn positive obligations, and best practice become models and then widely accepted quality standard.

## 2.2. Ethics of care

Ethics of care, is one of moral theories developed by postmodernity, with the central ethical value - *care*, and hence responsibility.

*It [morality] is related to the responsibilities, obligations and values, especially values. [...] From my life experience, I link morality to interpersonal relationships, concerning respect for the other person and myself. "Interviewer then asked: "Why should you respect other people?" received the following answer: Because they have a vulnerability to feelings, a conscience that can be hurt (Gilligan, 1993).*

Ethics of care concern - in the opinion Mihaela Frunza- one of the most important and most original chapters of postmodern feminist ethics (Frunza, 2003-2004, pp.143-148). Ethics of care developed from the Carol Gilligan's contribution, which contests in the works *In a Different Voice*, the stadiality of moral development proposed by Kohlberg, and shows that it is not likely to apply in the case of women's moral development. To the domain development had contributed a series of authors, such as Joan Tronto, Annette Baier, Nel Noddings, Margaret Urban Walker, etc.

Carol Gilligan formulates the theory of care as the specific area of feminine ethics, countering the masculine ethics variant, centred on the idea of justice. The literature shows that care ethics has been established not as a moral

theory, but as a psychological theory about the development of moral conscience (Paley, 2000, p 65).

The author distinguishes between the morality of male and female, from the peculiarities of the socialization process through which passed representatives of both genders. Male reporting is generally decontextualized - oriented towards principles and values, while, conversely, contextualization and network action in order nurturing, is the expression of feminine morality. Different feminine voice of the male subjects identified by Gilligan in concern for networking and communication, care, both in the sense of the caring for others- for women, and that for detachment, individualism and appeal to general and abstract principles – in case of men (Frunza, 2003-2004, pp.143-148).

Gilligan criticizes Freudian theories specifically tailored to the male ego development analysis, described in terms of success (over phase Oedipal, solving the conflict) and female ego in the failure of (unresolved oedipal phase). Moral ideal male is described in terms of the quest for perfection, while the female is the ideal nurturing (Frunza, 2003-2004, pp.143-148).

Susan Hekman interprets Gilligan findings in terms of challenging the existence of a single postmodern moral truth - the male truth- in a deconstructive manner of the relativization of moral truth (Frunza, 2003-2004, pp.143-148). Hekman finds in Gilligan's writings, identification between construct itself and the construct of morality, theorizing the existence of a relational self in contrast to the separate self, as it is conceptualized in classic Piaget and Kohlberg psychology. Heckman introduces theories of narrative and narratology, grammatology, game theory language, power, and narrative as a form of construction of meaning.

Mihaela Frunza (2003 - 2004) shows from the works of Susan Hekman a number of features of the new paradigm:

- Task of psychologist and a sociologist, social worker and not least the ethicist is to gather narratives, personal stories, not objective data;
- Abandoning the myth of objective researcher; The researcher is part of the investigated universe, and as such the results employing the terms of their values, beliefs, goals;
- The method is hermeneutical; the researcher learns about himself with the discovery of his subjects. It's actually a plea for transdisciplinarity knowledge in the social and human world;
- Particular political commitment of the new method, defined as relational and feminist; aimed at social change and challenging the patriarchal order (Frunza, 2003-2004, pp.143-148).

Hekman shows the gender, the way is promoted by Gilligan is responsible for one of the moral significant voices, but not only, together with the intervening race (Frunza, 2003-2004, pp.143-148), (ethnicity), disability etc. Gilligan paradigmatic mutation carried in ethics is a deconstruction of the idea of moral knowing, and with it claims ethicists to establish a moral abstract knowledge. Moral voices can be heard when morality is seen plural.

## Conclusions

Community postmodern ethos replaces mechanical solidarity, the primacy of the individual to the community with solidarity associations, the community also prevail, as in the case of organic, pre-modern, in which the community does not have an ethos in itself, but a combination of autonomous agents interrelated to each other. Modern culture, culture of self-exacerbated individualism proposed a self-centred ethics and duty. Individualism as a cultural manifestation of modernism marks the decadence of social, community spirit. Postmodern responsibility is to each to all, and each to himself. Increased interdependence involves the disappearance of individual actions, receiving social meanings at any level, to the global. Contemporary society offers a number of ethical reflection topics unknown to humanity in any previous historical period: the wars, the birth of life in vitro, euthanasia, eugenics, genetic mutations, etc.

Responsibility customizes in the context of a consistent ethical principles derived from the knowledge society as a corporate social responsibility. Responsibility is not the individual, but collective entity, is a synthesis between deontological and pragmatic-utilitarian.

Responsibility of knowledge-based organization – the main building blocks of the knowledge society - is far

from what is classically called business ethics, or rather the mere reference to a moral fairness, based on building communication strategies for social action.

Corporate social responsibility as a particular form of responsibility adapted to knowledge- based society, addresses sources of uncertainty, given by the post-industrial society, seen as a risk society.

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