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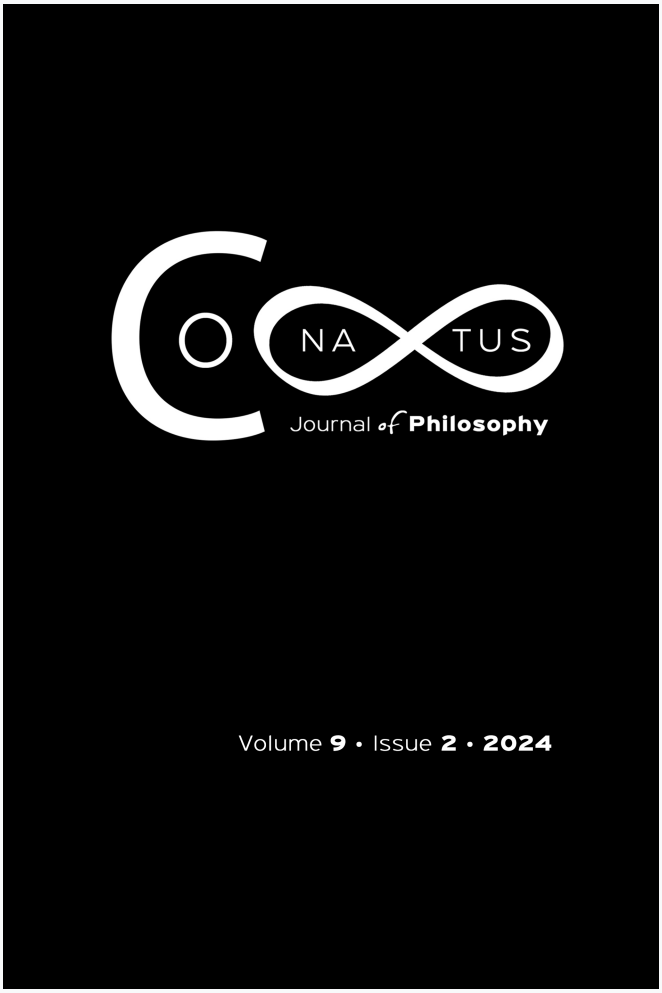

The Stoic Paradigm of Ethics as a Philosophical Tool for Objectifying the Concepts of Organizational Ethics, Corporate Social Responsibility, and Corporate Governance

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The Stoic Paradigm of Ethics as a Philosophical Tool for Objectifying the Concepts of Organizational Ethics, Corporate Social Responsibility, and Corporate Governance

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Abstract

In this article, the relationship between ethics in general and business ethics in particular to Stoic philosophy is investigated. Stoic ethics is used as a research tool, which step-by-step deciphers the position of the human as a functional part of a larger organization, such as the natural environment or civil society. Ethics is inextricably linked to the rational, free choice of what is right for both the individual and the total organism. Ethical rightness imposes a form of rational order within the organization, in the sense that each part must perform the function appropriate to its abilities. At the maximum degree of ethical integration stands the paradigm of the Stoic sage as a model of a virtuous leader, who is able to understand the causes of each decision or action and direct the organization towards the set goal. From this perspective, concepts such as leadership, organizational ethics, or corporate social responsibility acquire an objective status and view the philosophical cosmopolitanism of the Stoic sage as a timeless example of ethical rightness.

Keywords: *ethics; stoic philosophy; leadership; organizational ethics; corporate social responsibility; corporate governance*

I. Introduction

Organizational Ethics, in relation to Corporate Social Responsibility and Corporate Governance, is a dynamic, non-static area of research, as there is a separation of the purpose of ethical action and the purpose of the free market.[1] The purpose of ethics is the improvement of human nature and the blissful pursuit of human coexistence,[2] while the purpose of the free market is the unfettered and unstoppable profit as a result of equating bliss with the accumulation of material goods.[3] As Hobbes would say, bliss consists in the continuous transition from one pleasant material good to another, a course that ends only in death.[4] In the free market, human individualism and selfishness find fertile ground under the acquisition and management of capital, which translates into the possibility of acquiring material goods.[5] The more one possesses, the happier one is. So, the goal is not only the possession of matter, but also its possession to a greater degree than others.[6] This signifies a ceaseless competition between individuals or companies, to the extent that profit is not simply identified with success, but with surpassing others in the acquisition of material goods, an endless process without fulfillment.[7]

Here, the issue of objectivity arises; is there an objective perspective of a successful course within the free market, or is everything based on historicist criteria, that is, the consolidation of subjectivity as objectivity by force at a given historical moment?[8] Can business eth-

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[1] Elias Vavouras, "Hobbes' Hedonism in Front of Classical Hedonism and the Free Market's Way Out," *Dia-noesis: A Journal of Philosophy* 13 (2022): 85-114.

[2] Hans Friedrich August von Arnim, *Stoicorum Veterum Fragmenta* (Stuttgart: Teubner, 1964), 3: 140 [henceforth: *SVF*].

[3] Richard De George, "Can Corporations Have Moral Responsibilities?" *University of Dayton Review* 15, no. 2 (1981): 3-15.

[4] Elias Vavouras, "The Machiavellian Reality of Leo Strauss," *Dia-noesis: A Journal of Philosophy* 12 (2022): 265-273; Anusorn Singhapakdi, "Ethical Perceptions of Marketers: The Interaction Effects of Machiavellianism and Organizational Ethical Culture," *Journal of Business Ethics* 12, no. 5 (1993): 407-418.

[5] Peter French, "The Corporation as a Moral Person," *American Philosophy Quarterly* 16, no. 3 (1979): 207-215.

[6] Robert Solomon, "Business with Virtue: Maybe Next Year?" *Business Ethics Quarterly* 10, no. 1 (2000): 319-331.

[7] Christopher Gohl, "Reimagining Business Ethics as Ethos-Driven Practice: A Deweyan Perspective," *Journal of Human Values* 30, no. 1 (2024): 75-90.

[8] Elias Vavouras and Michail Theodosiadis. "The Concept of Religion in Machiavelli: Political Methodology, Propaganda and Ideological Enlightenment," *Religions* 15, no. 10 (2024): 1203; Elias Vavouras, "Machiavelli's Ethics of Expansion and Empire," *Conatus – Journal of*

ics provide a solid ground of objectivity and value, or is everything in a stormy fluidity? Is it possible for an organizational ethic to create objective success parameters of a business that is linked to the individual and collective bliss of man?[9] In this study we will try to show that business ethics analyzed through organizational ethics, corporate social responsibility, and corporate governance can be a solid basis for the development of business success in the free market, but also for individual and collective bliss under the participation of all stakeholders.[10] Stoic ethics will be a tool in this project, given that it responds more than any other ethical proposal to the concept of a universal ethics-political system that applies to every individual or collective human expression, but also fully understands the concepts of the part and the whole found in every living, political, or business organism. Undoubtedly, this is a demanding research project, but the data will lead us to important findings about the importance and objective nature of business ethics.[11]

II. Stoic ethics: The part and the whole

I must always remember, what is the nature of all things and what is mine.
Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, 2.9

One may wonder why the Stoic example is chosen to analyze the epistemological background of concepts such as organizational ethics or corporate social responsibility. What does Stoic ethics have to do with matters that fall within the realm of organizations and corporations and whose ultimate goal may be material gain? Also, why is Stoic ethics specifically chosen and not, for example, Platonic or Kantian ethics? The answer to these doubts lies in the view of Stoic ethics about the part and the whole.[12] Whatever a person does, whether as an individual or a total organism, is always done in relation to something larger than themselves, such as the political community or the world, or something smaller, such as the parts of their body or the material goods

Philosophy 8, no. 2 (2023): 703-723.

[9] Elias Vavouras, "The Political Philosophy as a Precondition and Completion of Political Economy in the *Ways and Means* of Xenophon," *Dia-noesis: A Journal of Philosophy* 9 (2020): 183-200.

[10] Matthias Huehn, "Ethics as a Catalyst for Change in Business Education?" *Journal of Management Development* 35, no. 2 (2016): 170-189.

[11] Claus Dierksmeier, "What is 'Humanistic' about Humanistic Management?" *Humanistic Management Journal* 1, no. 1 (2016): 9-32.

[12] Malcom Schofield, "Stoic Ethics," in *The Cambridge Companion to the Stoics*, ed. Brad Inwood, 233-256 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

they manages. Stoic ethics always moves from the microcosm to the macrocosm and vice versa, granting the human individual or collective action a greater responsibility to each part with which it is necessarily involved. Nothing in this ethical model moves individualistically; everything happens in relation to other people or organizations.[13]

But the purpose of ethics is human bliss,[14] which means that the purpose of man is a kind of progress from an imperfect to a perfect state. Bliss is a course of improvement from something worse to something better and not the other way around. If this improvement process is always done in relation to other human actors or wider environments, this means that the happiness of others is inevitably entangled with our own happiness, and vice versa.[15] If someone succeeds in being happy, perhaps this individual happiness contributes to the bliss of the whole organism to which it belongs, while conversely a happy organism contributes to the bliss of its parts. This implies that any individualistic or selfish action is contrary to ethics, but also contrary to individual or collective bliss, because the whole and the part are communicating vessels and the happiness of the individual passes through the happiness of the organism of which it is a part. [16]

Whatever a person does with a selfish purpose, it will always interfere with the general purpose and cannot change it significantly.[17] The Stoics likened the individualistic action of the human subject to a dog tied behind a carriage. Any individualistic action of man cannot vary the course of the chariot which is something bigger and stronger than him. The dog is well tied to the carriage, any selfish direction he attempts to take will only

[13] Pablo Ruiz-Palomino and Ricardo Martínez-Cañas, "Ethical Culture, Ethical Intent, and Organizational Citizenship Behaviour: The Moderating and Mediating Role of Person–Organization Fit," *Journal of Business Ethics* 120, no. 1 (2014): 95-108.

[14] Diogenes Laertius, 7. 94.

[15] Ludwig Edelstein, *The Meaning of Stoicism* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1966), 1.

[16] According to Long, "All ancient ethical theories are 'self-centered' in the sense that they recommend how to achieve eudaimonia, the best possible life for oneself. They are no less socially oriented because they all treat ethical excellence (arete) – courage, justice, etc. – as either the most important ingredient of eudaimonia (Aristotle and Plato), or an essential instrument of eudaimonia (Epicurus), or entirely identical to eudaimonia (Stoicism). According to Stoicism, human beings are born with instincts both for self-preservation and for family and community life. In caring for other people, the ideal Stoic is also caring for himself, i.e., his own excellence as a virtuous person. He is motivated by the desire to activate his virtues because they are the basis of his living well and successfully. He is not altruistic in the sense that he acts for the sake of others instead of herself, or by sacrificing his own interest. In doing good to others and desiring so to act, he is simultaneously desiring and doing good for himself." Anthony Arthur Long and Despina Vertzagia, "Antiquity Revisited: A Discussion with Anthony Arthur Long," *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 5, no. 1 (2020): 119; cf. Anthony Arthur Long, *Epictetus: A Stoic and Socratic Guide to Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 180-206.

[17] Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, 10. 6.

make it difficult for him, as he will end up dragging and forcibly aligning himself with the overall course of the carriage. To selfishly act contrary to the whole organism to which we belong essentially hinders our very path to happiness. It is up to us whether we align ourselves with the course of the carriage from the start or whether we sway selfishly left and right, making our path to happiness difficult.[18] There is no happiness of the part independent of the happiness of the whole, and the sooner we realize it, the easier it will be to get closer to happiness.[19]

III. Ethics as rational free choice

Ethics, then, is a path towards the good, towards human improvement and perfection. But this path of integration is not naturally predetermined; it depends on the correctness of human choices. In the world, there is not only good, but also evil. In fact, choosing correctly is much more difficult, and therefore rarer, than choosing incorrectly.[20] The predominance of evil and wrong in the majority of human choices is not necessarily a negative thing viewed from a Stoic perspective; it is better to be evil so that you can turn out to be good, than not to exist at all. Wrong choices are preferable to none,[21] as morality moves from a stage of imperfection to a stage of perfection. So, at the beginning of this endeavor, it is reasonable to be imperfect by making wrong choices, only to, then, rise to a higher stage of perfection by making the right ones. Good could not exist for man if evil did not exist. For some choices to be defined as good, the opposite, bad choices, must also exist.[22]

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[18] Cleanthes, *SVF*, 1: 527.

[19] Linda Treviño, Kenneth Butterfield, and Donald McCabe, "The Ethical Context in Organizations: Influences on Employee Attitudes and Behaviours," *Business Ethics Quarterly* 8, no. 3 (1998): 447-476.

[20] Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, 1106b.28-3: ἔτι τὸ μὲν ἁμαρτάνειν πολλαχῶς ἔστιν τὸ γὰρ κακὸν τοῦ ἀπείρου, ὡς οἱ Πυθαγόρειοι εἴκαζον, τὸ δ' ἀγαθὸν τοῦ πεπερασμένου, τὸ δὲ κατορθοῦν μοναχῶς διὸ καὶ τὸ μὲν ῥᾴδιον τὸ δὲ χαλεπόν, ῥᾴδιον μὲν τὸ ἀποτυχεῖν τοῦ σκοποῦ, χαλεπὸν δὲ τὸ ἐπιτυχεῖν, καὶ διὰ ταῦτ' οὖν τῆς μὲν κακίας ἡ ὑπερβολὴ καὶ ἡ ἔλλειψις, τῆς δ' ἀρετῆς ἡ μεσότης, ἐσθλοὶ μὲν γὰρ ἁπλῶς, παντοδαπῶς δὲ κακοί [Moreover, wrong is done in many ways (because the evil and the infinite go together, as the Pythagoreans taught, while good goes together with the finite), but right is done in only one way (that is why the one is easy, while the other is indeed difficult, it is easy to fail in our goal but difficult to achieve it) therefore for these reasons excess and lack characterize wickedness, while measure is virtue, we become good only in one way, but bad in many]; Matthias Hühn and Marcel Meyer, "Sophistry or Wisdom in Words: Aristotle on Rhetoric and Leadership," *Business Ethics, the Environment & Responsibility* 32, no. 2 (2023): 544-554.

[21] *SVF*, 1: 537; 3: 760.

[22] Robert Solomon, "Aristotle, Ethics, and Business Organizations," *Organization Studies* 25, no. 6 (2004): 1021-1043; Anthony Arthur Long, *Hellenistic Philosophy. Stoics, Epicureans, Sceptics* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1986), 182-183.

Man is absolutely free, precisely because he can choose either good or evil. If he were limited to being only good or bad, he would cease to be free. However, true moral freedom is doing the right thing in the right way,[23] because only then will one improve one's condition and not be destroyed. Human freedom collides with the anatomy of the human essence; one cannot be called free if one acts irrationally towards one's annihilation or deterioration. Human freedom, too, would be impossible without man's rational potential, which separates him from other living beings. The choice between good and evil, or its definition, presupposes rational thinking. Man chooses correctly when he properly weighs all the parameters through reason, and errs when he makes mistakes in the rational processes of choosing what is right or wrong.[24] Therefore, ethics is inherent in freedom and rationality; one cannot be ethical if one does not act freely and at the same time rationally.

IV. The objectivity of ethical choice

But if the ethical choice has certain axes of successful outcomes, this implies that not every choice is ethical, but only those with certain characteristics. As we have seen, the first basic feature of an ethical choice is freedom; it is not possible to speak of ethics when someone is forced to act against their own free will.[25] Free will, however, includes the element of rationality.[26] For there to be a will, there must be a reason. Therefore, to think irrationally against one's natural self-sufficiency and improvement is not aligned with the ethical orientation, but with self-destruction. Rationality is opposed to irrationality, and this excludes a huge range of human unethical choices.[27] Ethical choice, then, is identified with free will and, therefore, with rationality, that is, with the perception of natural improvement, not the destruction

[23] According to Strauss, "License consists in doing what one lists; liberty consists in doing in the right manner the good only." Leo Strauss, *An Introduction to Political Philosophy: Ten Essays* (Detroit, MI: Wayne State University Press, 1989), 53.

[24] Cicero, *De finibus*, 3.23; 31.

[25] Jennifer Chatman, "Improving Interactional Organizational Research: A Model of Person-Organization Fit," *Academy of Management Review* 14, no. 3 (1989): 333-349.

[26] Matthias Hühn and Sara Mandray, "Is Rationality Reasonable? How Ancient Logos Changes Management Theory," *Journal of Business Ethics* 191, no. 3 (2023): 1-15.

[27] Nicholas Epley and Amit Kumar, "How to Design an Ethical Organization," *Harvard Business Review* 97, no. 3 (2019): 144-150; Sotiria Triantari and Elias Vavouras, "Decision-Making in the Modern Manager-Leader: Organizational Ethics, Business Ethics, Corporate Social Responsibility," *Cogito* 16, no. 1 (2024): 7-28.

of man.[28] Therefore, there are no infinite ethical choices, as there are human opinions or the variety of positive law of different states, but specific rationally validated choices that promote the natural improvement and integration of man.[29] In this sense, ethics is opposed to relativism and subjectivism and acquires an objective or scientific status. So, every ethical rule, if it is to be called moral, must derive from the common objective background of reason and free will.[30]

The Stoics believed that understanding this common ground of ethical choice paved the way for human fulfillment and improvement. Free will is truly free and rational when it is freed from the limiting obstacles of internal or external influencing factors. The internal obstacles that prevent the free rational process are the passions, and thus ethics must be free from them in order to function effectively. Reason must be dominant over the passions within man for there to be ethical autonomy.[31] On the external level the ethical choice must not be influenced by the phenomena that can disturb rational clarity and lead the human will to wrong judgments. Therefore, when we refer to business ethics, we are not referring to a subjective perception of human affairs that is relativized over time, but to a solid, objective edifice of a scientific view of man and his natural integration under the integral factors of rationality and free will.[32] Business ethics must have a single objective background and not be based on subjective opinions motivated by selfish motives. Business ethics derives from reason and free choice and is intended to improve the people under its influence.[33]

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[28] Long and Vertzagia, 111-122.

[29] René Brouwer, *The Stoic Sage: The Early Stoics on Wisdom, Sagehood and Socrates* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 39.

[30] Hian Koh and El'fred Boo, "Organizational Ethics and Employee Satisfaction and Commitment," *Management Decision* 42, no. 5 (2004): 677-693.

[31] John Cooper, "The Emotional Life of the Wise," *The Southern Journal of Philosophy* 43, s. 1 (2005): 176-218.

[32] Mantzanas observes that "Man is his moral conscience and is fortunate or unfortunate (*SVF*, 3: 52, 18) because he freely and consciously chooses the way of living he consistently leads (*SVF*, 2: 295, 31). Personal morality (Marcus Aurelius, *Meditationes* 1.14, 15) according to the Stoics, must result from a rationalised moral conscience, which has a universality as the Universal Totality. The prevention of moral deviations is not subject to metaphysical designing but constitutes mental processing in the process of the distinction between good and evil. This is the formative role of moral conscience according to the Stoics: to lift the excuse that we cannot set apart good from evil or just from unjust. The stoic theory of moral conscience casts deficit and moral deficiency out from moral inaction." Michail Mantzanas, "The Concept of Moral Conscience in Ancient Greek Philosophy," *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 5, no. 2 (2020): 78.

[33] Maiju Kangas, Joona Muotka, Mari Huhtala, Anne Mäkikangas, and Taru Feldt, "Is the Ethical Culture of the Organization Associated with Sickness Absence? A Multilevel Analysis in a Public Sector Organization," *Journal of Business Ethics* 140, no. 1 (2017): 131-145.

V. Revisiting ethical choices: Business ethics

Another key feature of ethical choice is ethos. People may not be aware of the purpose of their ethical choices, but by repeatedly making ethical choices, they can be continually drawn towards an ethical tendency. Aristotle notes that the term 'ethics' is etymologically derived from the word 'ethos,' and that ethical virtue is acquired through the monotonous repetition of similar actions. However, it is not enough just to repeat similar actions; to be ethical, one must repeat the right actions.[34] One would need some scientist – a very good connoisseur – of the building art to show them the right way to build and thus with constant repetition, they will become competent builders. It is the same with all the arts, but also with ethical virtue.[35]

According to the Stoics, all people have a natural tendency towards goodness and rationality, but this alone is not sufficient for the attainment of virtue.[36] This natural tendency depends on two factors: a) by nature, by the agreement of the ethical choice with human nature, and b) by reason, by the rational justification of this choice.[37] The repetition of these accords with the nature and reason of ethical duties or functions and directs man ever nearer to the completion of his purpose.[38] The first stage of virtue is the habit of choosing according to human nature – e.g., exercising, eating the right foods, or thinking rationally are choices that help preserve and improve one's nature.[39] The second stage is the stability of these choices, not because they have simply become a way of life, but because the ethical agent's choices can be rationally justified; that is, the cause or purpose of each choice can be stated.

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[34] Saviour Nwachukwu and Scott Vitell, "The Influence of Corporate Culture on Managerial Ethical Judgments," *Journal of Business Ethics* 16, no. 8 (1997): 757-776.

[35] Aristotle, 1103b 8-14: ἐκ γὰρ τοῦ κιθαρίζειν καὶ οἱ ἀγαθοὶ καὶ κακοὶ γίνονται κιθαρισταί. ἀνάλογον δὲ καὶ οἰκοδόμοι καὶ οἱ λοιποὶ πάντες, ἐκ μὲν γὰρ τοῦ εὖ οἰκοδομεῖν ἀγαθοὶ οἰκοδόμοι ἔσονται, ἐκ δὲ τοῦ κακῶς κακοί. εἰ γὰρ μὴ οὕτως εἶχεν, οὐδὲν ἂν ἔδει τοῦ διδάξοντος, ἀλλὰ πάντες ἂν ἐγίνοντο ἀγαθοὶ ἢ κακοί. οὕτω δὴ καὶ ἐπὶ τῶν ἀρετῶν ἔχει [Because playing the guitar makes both good and bad guitarists, and similarly builders and all other craftsmen. That is, by building houses in a good way, they will become good builders, but by building in a bad way, bad ones. For, if things were not so, there would be no need for a master, but all craftsmen would be good or bad from birth. It is exactly the same with the virtues].

[36] *SVF*, 1: 566; Seneca, *Epistulae*, 120.4.

[37] Diogenes Laertius, 7.108.

[38] Shelby Hunt, Van Wood, and Lawrence Chonko, "Corporate Ethical Values and Organizational Commitment in Marketing," *Journal of Marketing* 53, no. 3 (1989): 79-90.

[39] *SVF*, 1: 202.

This theoretical documentation forms the basis of business ethics. Through the application of an ethical code, the executives of an organization acquire a tendency towards ethical behavior that contributes to its long-term coherence. In this first stage, most executives may not understand precisely the cause and purpose of the ethics standard, they simply get used to repeating rules or functions that they tend to believe to be correct. Gradually through human rationality, each part of the organization realizes that applied business ethics contributes to the development of both the parts and the whole organization and previous habits acquire a responsible character.[40] The ethics of each part is determined not only by habit, by the repetition of right choices, but, above all, by the knowledge of the cause and purpose of these actions. Therefore, in the second stage of ethical choice responsibility, everyone knows what they are doing and why they are doing it. It is important to understand that business ethics is not only the blind application and repetition of an ethical standard by all parts of an organization, but the responsibility of making the right choice through awareness of the cause and purpose of each choice.

VI. Reason, order and function: Organizational ethics

However, ethical choice is inherent in the right reason; it is not possible for a person to weigh possible options of action without going through a rational process of examining and evaluating those options. Man can be ethical only because he participates in rationality and can judge all the parameters of choosing right and wrong. Also, an ethical and at the same time rational choice cannot be directed towards chaos and disorder, i.e., towards dissolution, but towards order and reason, which leads to creation and unity. Ethical selection means the alignment with a rational order of unity of the parts of an organism. At the individual level, this translates into the proper order of human nature in terms of sustaining the existence and achievement of man's purpose. Reason must dominate the passions, which are an attractive force towards disorder and dissolution.[41] The dominance of passions over reason means an inability to properly evaluate options and an increased likelihood of catastrophic mistakes. At the collective level, this is perceived as enforcing the right order between the parts of the

[40] Judith Irwin and Katherine Bradshaw, "The Ethics Challenge: Establishing an Ethics Ambassador Network to Help Embed an Ethical Culture," *Strategic HR Review* 10, no. 4 (2011): 26-32.

[41] Daryl Koehn, "Some Modest Proposals for Improving Business Ethics from Primarily an Aristotelian Perspective," *Journal of Human Values* 30, no. 1 (2024): 38-51.

organization in relation to their efficiency and the value of their operation. This is precisely where organizational ethics emerges, as the imposition of proper order and function on the parts of an organization. Not everyone can perform all functions; it is necessary to define the function of each part according to its capabilities and value, and to impose an evaluative hierarchy of parts in relation to their importance.[42]

With organizational ethics, another important proposal of Stoic philosophy is applied; the avoidance of multitasking.[43] Each part of the organization must perform the work that is appropriate to its capabilities and not be involved in fields that it cannot respond to. This division of labor through self-awareness and proper discrimination of individual abilities gives the organization greater efficiency and stability and provides the parties with the opportunity to pursue a degree of refinement in their area of work responsibility.[44]

Thus, they become absolutely experts in the specific subject and do not need outside assistance to complete their work. Each activity runs on its own and supervisor oversight is almost formal or ancillary. Moreover, specialization opens a path of self-improvement, as it allows the individual to fully develop a natural gift or technique to which they are exceptionally responsive.[45] This granting of absolute responsibility in a specific area mobilizes the energy and initiative of the parts of the organization, pushing them simultaneously develop themselves while striving to contribute to the development and well-being of the organization. Specialization aligns with ethical choice, since they person who knows his field of action perfectly always chooses correctly between right and wrong and is not distracted by extraneous factors. Doing the right thing is both an ethical choice and work-organizational correctness.[46]

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[42] Michael Brown, Linda Treviño, and David Harrison, "Ethical Leadership: A Social Learning Perspective for Construct Development and Testing," *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* 97, no. 2 (2005): 117-134.

[43] Marcus Aurelius, 1.5.1: τὸ αὐτουργικὸν καὶ ἀπολύπραγμον.

[44] Mari Huhtala, Taru Feldt, Anna-Maija Lämsä, Saija Mauno, and Ulla Kinnunen, "Does the Ethical Culture of Organisations Promote Managers' Occupational Well-Being? Investigating Indirect Links via Ethical Strain," *Journal of Business Ethics* 101, no. 2 (2011): 231-247.

[45] Muel Kaptein, "Developing and Testing a Measure for the Ethical Culture of Organizations: The Corporate Ethical Virtues Model," *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 29, no. 7 (2008): 923-947.

[46] Maribeth Kuenzi, David Mayer, and Rebecca Greenbaum, "Creating an Ethical Organizational Environment: The Relationship between Ethical Leadership, Ethical Organizational Climate, and Unethical Behavior," *Personnel Psychology* 73, no. 1 (2020): 43-71.

VII. The relationship with the social and natural environment: Corporate social responsibility

The world is something like a city and a common state,
each of us individually is a part of this world;
this implies our obligation by nature to put
the common good above the individual
Cicero, *De finibus*, III.19, 64.

Did I do something for the society as a whole? So, I am benefited.
Always keep this in mind and never forget
Marcus Aurelius, *Meditations*, 11.4.1.1-2.[47]

The central Stoic idea is likeness to nature – living by nature. Man is a natural microcosm, part of a larger macrocosm. Rationality prevails within this great world, which can only be perceived and understood by rational human beings. All parts of the universe, both animate and inanimate, participate in its intended course, but only the human factor can express it rationally and reproduce it through ethics. Every ethical choice has substance if it corresponds to the correctness that nature reasonably transmits to the human mind. This implies that every human being is part of a larger natural organism and, therefore, must respect and serve the purpose of that greater whole. It is necessary to respect the natural environment, just as we do our individual existence, because we are a part of it, and its disharmony will cause us displeasure as well.

There is no stronger foundation than this for the construction of the concept of corporate social responsibility, since respecting and serving the purpose of the whole is a condition for the preservation and bliss of the parties. This perception makes the coexistence of human activity and the natural environment a necessary condition. But businesses are part of human activity, and that is why they must be harmonized with respect for the natural whole, otherwise they will contribute to the destruction of the people who make them up (executives, workers), as well as those with whom they interact (customers, society).[48] Respect for nature thus becomes a completely rational project, while, on the contrary, disrespect for nature is an obvious irrationality that contributes to the self-destruction of the business and its human

[47] Πεποίηκά τι κοινωνικῶς, οὐκοῦν ὠφέλημαι. τοῦτο ἵνα ἀεὶ πρόχειρον ἀπαντᾷ καὶ μηδαμοῦ παύου.

[48] Mitchell Neubert, Dawn Carlson, Michele K. Kacmar, James Roberts, and Lawrence Chonko, "The Virtuous Influence of Ethical Leadership Behavior: Evidence from the Field," *Journal of Business Ethics* 90, no. 2 (2009): 157-170.

parts.[49] Business is not just about numbers and cold profit, but about living human organisms struggling to fulfill their nature within a larger natural environment. From this point of view, the respect and protection of nature, as everything that surrounds us, is not just a resounding modern slogan, but an act of self-awareness and responsibility, which makes business activity a participant in human well-being. In addition, respect for the total natural organism includes respect for the rest of the organic parts.[50] Each party respects the existence and function of the other, even if they are diametrically opposed to its own. Marcus Aurelius describes this coexistence and contrasting function with the image of the bones of the upper and lower jaw, where the teeth constantly collide with each other and yet this opposition is necessary for the chewing of food and the maintenance of man's existence.[51] Therefore, within the organization itself, opposition does not necessarily mean conflict or dissolution, but rather the performance of a different functions to achieve the goal of collective welfare.[52]

The acceptance of the rationality of nature by every rational part of it and its service elevates all people who participate in the common rationality to citizens of the world.[53] Men who perceive through reason the common promptings of nature are citizens of a universal natural state, where there is no positive law, but all willingly obey natural law.[54] In fact, the Stoics[55] – Zeno, in particular[56] – envisioned the creation of such a cosmopolitanism, where people would live peacefully, each one performing the task assigned to them by nature according to

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[49] Marcus Aurelius, 10.2.

[50] Patricia Douglas, Ronald Davidson, and Bill Schwartz, "The Effect of Organizational Culture and Ethical Orientation on Accountants' Ethical Judgments," *Journal of Business Ethics* 34, no. 2 (2001): 101-121.

[51] Marcus Aurelius, 2.1: γεγόναμεν γὰρ πρὸς συνεργίαν ὡς πόδες, ὡς χεῖρες, ὡς βλέφαρα, ὡς οἱ στοῖχοι τῶν ἄνω καὶ τῶν κάτω ὀδόντων. τὸ οὖν ἀντιπράσσειν ἀλλήλοις παρὰ φύσιν [We were born to work together like feet, hands, eyelids, like rows of upper and lower teeth. So being opposite and fighting each other is against to the nature].

[52] Sean Valentine, Seong-Hyun Nam, David Hollingworth, and Callie Hall, "Ethical Context and Ethical Decision Making: Examination of an Alternative Statistical Approach for Identifying Variable Relationships," *Journal of Business Ethics* 124, no. 3 (2014): 509-526.

[53] Marcus Aurelius, 4.4; Epictetus, *Dissertationes*, 2.10, 1-4; 3.24, 64-67.

[54] Malcom Schofield, *The Stoic Idea of the City* (Chicago, IL, and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1999), 69; 103.

[55] *SVF,* 1:265; Plutarchus, *De Alexandri magni fortuna aut virtute*, 329a-d.

[56] David Konstan, "Cosmopolitan Traditions," in *A Companion to Greek and Roman Political Thought,* ed. Ryan K. Balot, 471-484 (Hoboken, NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 473-484.

their individual abilities.[57] In this natural state there would be no conflict, not even private property or the acquisition of material goods, and all would voluntarily cooperate in achieving the common welfare. In this sense, corporate social responsibility in modern businesses is not only aimed at the selfish interest of the business,[58] but also at the interest of all its human parts, as well as the society in which the business operates. If the business does something good for society as a whole or the natural environment, it certainly benefits itself, as long as it is part of these wider natural or social organizations.[59]

Furthermore, at this point, the objectivity and universality of moral norms is validated once again. Business ethics is not something ephemeral and subjective that varies according to space and time, but something fixed and non-negotiable, based on human and natural rationality. Whoever applies the moral rules is not just a citizen of a country or a member of a business, but a citizen of the world[60] and part of a global organization, where all parties who think morally and act morally contribute to the overall well-being.[61] Thus, business ethics must take on a unified status, in every business or organization, wherever it is based, ethical actors must think and act obeying the same ethical background.[62]

VIII. Knowing the causes: Leadership and corporate governance

All of this leads to the conclusion that ethical virtue cannot arise suddenly or by accident; there must be a reference point to label something ethics or non-ethics. To become ethical, one must receive some guidelines of ethical correctness based on knowing the causes and ef-

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[57] Anton-Hermann Chroust, "The Ideal Polity of the Early Stoics: Zeno's Republic," *The Review of Politics* 27, no. 2 (1965): 173-183.

[58] Iraklis Ioannidis, "Shackling the Poor, or Effective Altruism: A Critique of the Philosophical Foundation of Effective Altruism," *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 5, no. 2 (2020): 25-46.

[59] Gordon Wang and Rick Hackett, "Virtues-Centered Moral Identity: An Identity-Based Explanation of the Functioning of Virtuous Leadership," *Leadership Quarterly* 31, no. 5 (2020): 1-12.

[60] *SVF*, 3: 625.

[61] According to Dimitriou, "Collectively, the community formed in a business context is an environment in which members and leaders can behave virtuously towards the good of all involved parts. Furthermore, the products offered by a group behaving virtuously can be reasonably assumed to benefit society as a whole. Business entities are thus vehicles through which people involved have the opportunity to act for the common good." Dimitrios Dimitriou, "Corporate Ethics: Philosophical Concepts Guiding Business Practices," *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 7, no. 1 (2022): 42.

[62] Yoav Verdi and Yoash Weiner, "Misbehavior in Organizations: A Motivational Framework," *Organization Science* 7, no. 2 (1996): 151-165.

fects of a choice or, in other words, knowing the essence and purpose of man.[63] There are some who have reached a higher level of this ethical knowledge and therefore can transmit the ethical parameters to others.

Institutionalizing and controlling ethics cannot be done by everyone, there must be an expert who will promote the whole process, i.e., give others the correct moral rules, allocate the parts of the organization to the appropriate roles, control any deviations from the ethical standard, and generally supervise the proper arrangement.[64] This means that there are some parties that excel the rest in moral completeness and, therefore, deserve to have a leadership function.[65] This arrangement of authority within the organization according to ethical integration is linked to corporate governance, which is the way the organization's purpose is actually implemented and developed. The way management and decision-making are carried out is not unrelated to the organization's ethics; ethics not only includes the path to the final goal, but also reflects the individual value and specialized function of the parties. If ethics as a guarantor of the right choice is connected to the right decision-making, those who make the critical decisions must be the best in this regard. Therefore, ethical choice is inescapably linked to leadership and corporate governance.[66] The main parameter of this connection is the knowledge of the causes and effects of each action;[67] such knowledge is characteristic of science and philosophy, in particular, as a field of ethical inquiry.[68]

Leadership is thus inescapably linked to the ethical integration of man; not everyone can become a leader, but only those who have reached a high ethical level can now transmit this moral direction to

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[63] Elina Riivari and Anna-Maija Lämsä, "Organizational Ethical Virtues of Innovativeness," *Journal of Business Ethics* 155, no. 1 (2019): 223-240.

[64] Akwasi Ampofo, Bahaudin Mujtaba, Frank Cavico, and Laura Tindall, "The Relationship Between Organizational Ethical Culture and the Ethical Behaviour of Employees: A Study of Accounting and Finance Professionals in the Insurance Industry of the United States," *Journal of Business and Economic Research* 2, no. 2 (2011): 13-24.

[65] Walter Nicgorski, "Cicero on Expertise in Governance," in *Scientifi c Statesmanship, Governance, and the History of Political Philosophy*, eds. Kyriakos N. Demetriou and Antis Loizides, 41-55 (New York: Routledge, 2015).

[66] John Thoms, "Ethical Integrity in Leadership and Organizational Moral Culture," *Leadership* 4, no. 4 (2008): 419-442.

[67] *SVF*, 3: 285.

[68] Andreas Scherer and Christian Voegtlin, "Corporate Governance for Responsible Innovation: Approaches to Corporate Governance and Their Implications for Sustainable Development," *Academy of Management Perspectives* 34, no. 2 (2020): 182-208.

the entire organization. Stoic ethics points the way to the objectification of the leader's value over other executives and the direct correlation of leadership with the application of business ethics. Ethics is not only connected with making the right choice, but also with determining the value of a part in terms of the function it performs. Business ethics is an objective scale of evaluation of the parts in terms of the achievement of the organization's purpose. At the top of this ethical scale are the leaders who determine the functioning of the rest of the parts through knowledge of the causes and purpose behind every decision and action.[69]

IX. The ethics agent as an example: The Stoic sage as a paradigm of ethical leadership

Additionally, someone who has reached a maximum level of ethical perfection and functionality serves as a living model and an instructive example for others. The Stoics saw the sage as fulfilling this important role. Although it is very difficult, if not utopian, to reach a level of complete wisdom and ethical virtue, there are some people who come close to this goal, or, at the very least, are steadily aiming towards it.[70] The complete avoidance of passions, the diagnosis of the right moment for action, the delineation of man or the state as organisms within the great cosmic organism, and the Stoic sage's rational understanding of natural justice and causation make him an important and constructive influence on others who attempt to apply the ethical standard. The sage is a true citizen of the world, the embodiment of justice and ethics. He does not need the code of ethics or law to do the right thing, as he is the proven expression of ethics in the human condition. The possessor of ethics virtue always makes right choices, wherever they are, at any time, without having to refer to a manual of ethics. The figure of the sage also shows the goal of ethics; to create the conditions for making right choice in every situation.[71] If one is governed by an ethical

[69] Faust Corvino, "Sweatshops, Harm and Exploitation: A Proposal to Operationalise the Model of Structural Injustice," *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 5, no. 2 (2020): 9-23.

[70] Minna-Maaria Hiekkataipale and Anna-Maija Lämsä, "(A)moral Agents in Organisations? The Significance of Ethical Organisation Culture for Middle Managers' Exercise of Moral Agency in Ethical Problems," *Journal of Business Ethics* 155, no. 1 (2019): 147-161.

[71] Long aptly notes that "The Stoics used the word eukairos (*SVF*, 3, 521) to describe their wise man's 'timely' character and behavior. Chrysippus defined the Stoic goal of life as 'living according to experience of natural events.' (*SVF*, 3: 5-6; 9-10.) Such experience ideally equips people to be excellent judges of what it is appropriate or opportune for them to do by assessing their external circumstances, abilities and social roles and functions (duties). At the limit, you might need to decide, whether it would be better to die rather than to live. Epictetus gives

mindset, one will avoid error and accept the function that suits one's abilities by accepting order and rationality within the organization one is called to participate in.[72]

The sage is a model for other people in the midst of the ethical enterprise.[73] The way of thinking and acting of the ethical actor makes him an example from which others can learn and reach the ethical goal faster through imitation. When someone imitates, he may not initially be able to justify the cause and purpose of the imitated act, but, gradually, as he repeats the right action, he is ready to understand rationally the logical sequence of his actions and their purpose.[74]

The image of the Stoic sage as a teaching agent holds special importance in organizations that apply business ethics. Executives who reach a point of ethical integration and excellence can, through their actions, be reinforcing catalysts for the rest of the company members, so that they assimilate the right behavior more quickly and effectively, and understand rationally the organization and order of the whole. It is easier for someone to become self-aware of their functional role if they see the ideal form of rationality and functionality developing before them. Business ethics is enlivened by its correct application across the different parts of a company, because when a whole works exceptionally well, it is difficult for any arrhythmias to show, even by newly hired parts.[75]

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copious examples of such 'timely' behaviour. The essence of ancient Stoicism was not passively 'accepting events as they are' (that is a modern distortion), but making best possible use of events: as Epictetus said with reference to Socrates, he always played the ball well, even in prison" (Epictetus, 1.12). Long and Vertzagia, 119.

[72] Michael Brown and Linda Treviño, "Ethical Leadership: A Review and Future Directions," *Leadership Quarterly* 17, no. 6 (2006): 595-616.

[73] "It is evident that the members of underprivileged classes derive inspiration from leading figures within their community. The sense of affinity with the idealized person plays a crucial role in the community's overall development. Role-models who have overcome similar hardships, exploitation, and difficulties as the members of the community they belong, encourage their own people, especially when compared to idealized figures who belong to other communities. The mission of role-models is not to inspire others to become what they have become, or to achieve what they have achieved, but to stimulate their inner potential towards fulfilling desired objectives according to their own free will. In that sense role-models are not used as a means, but as ends-in-theirself, since taking incitation from an ideal does not violate one's intrinsic worth as an end-in-itself.19 The sense of belongingness pro-vides people immense encouragement to overcome hardships that are owed to centuries-long deprivation and exploitation." Sooraj Kumar Maurya, "A Reply to Louis P. Pojman's Article 'The Case Against Affirmative Action,'" *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 5, no. 2 (2020): 92.

[74] Jason DeBode, Achilles Armenakis, Hubert Field, and Alan Walker, "Assessing Ethical Organizational Culture: Refinement of a Scale," *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science* 49, no. 4 (2013): 460-484.

[75] Elias Vavouras, "Natural Right and Historicism: From Thucydides to Marx," *Cogito* 13, no. 1 (2021): 7-20.

Also, any disharmony starts at the top, with the leading members of an organization. No matter how well an ethical program is implemented, if those who control it and instill it are not functioning properly, then the whole organizational edifice will collapse with painful consequences. So, if the leaders of an organization are not ethical examples for the rest of the functional parts, business ethics becomes impossible, creating a vicious circle.

X. Fortune is afraid to enter the room of ethics

The house of the wise man is cramped, without care, without noise, without luxuries, served by no porter who directs the multitude of visitors with slavish arrogance, but through the empty threshold that is free from porters fortune does not pass: she recognizes that there is no place for it, where there is nothing of its.
Seneca, *De constantia sapientis*, 15.3-5

In another Stoic allegory[76] the wise man – and at the same time possessor of ethical virtue – is seen sitting alone in his small and unkempt room surrounded by few material goods in complete silence, while fortune stands fearfully outside the threshold knowing that even within his reach there is no room for it.[77] The ethics-luck opposition is reflected in this image, in the sense that the ethical moral virtue develops more as the influence of random factors is reduced.[78] This is because ethical choice is the child of rationality, order, and natural necessity, and when these factors fully influence human activity, there is no room for unforeseeable deviations from the pursuit of purpose.[79] Also, in the poor realm of ethics, quietness prevails; there are no violent movements and sudden transitions, as everything goes according to the ethical planning and the rational reading of man and the natural or social context to which he belongs.[80]

This example can be transferred to the field of business ethics, demonstrating that ethical rules contribute to the stability of an organization over time and in times of crisis. Ethics is not simply limited to the self-awareness of the human factor and the right order of the parts of the

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[76] Seneca, *De constantia sapientis*, 15.3-5.

[77] David Collinson, "Dichotomies, Dialectics and Dilemmas: New Directions for Critical Leadership Studies?" *Leadership* 10, no. 1 (2014): 36-55.

[78] Edward R. Freeman and Jeanne Liedtka, "Corporate Social Responsibility: A Critical Approach," *Business Horizons* 34, no. 4 (1991): 92–99.

[79] Philip Roth, "How Social Context Impacts the Emergence of Leadership Structures," *Leadership* 18, no. 4 (2022): 539-562.

[80] Nigel Hope, *A Commentary on the De Constantia Sapientis of Seneca the Younger* (Royal Holloway: University of London, 2017), 230.

organization, it also refers to the drawing of unshakable guidelines that will keep the course of the enterprise stable towards the achievement of the intended purpose.[81] Ethics is not man's subjective perception of things, but a scientific knowledge and practice of how man will become better and complete; the scientificity and objectivity of ethical choice eliminate the random factor and harmonize with the order of moral rules that lead seamlessly to the realization of the goal.[82]

The order and unity established through organizational ethics within an organization create conditions for long-term health and stability,[83] making that unified whole invulnerable to adverse circumstances. When each party accepts a specific role that corresponds to its capabilities and performs exceptionally well, a condition of complete satisfaction is created that can hardly be disturbed by random interference. Also, ethics as a rational justification of human behavior opposes the influence of the passions that open the door to chance. Ethics means primarily the mastery of reason over passions so that human choices are freed from the harmful influence of the passions that lead them away from their intended goal.[84]

XI. Conclusions

a. Ethics is not characterized by relativism and subjectivism; rather, is a free, rational choice towards the integration of man. Man is free to choose between good or evil, however ethical choice is not related to the destruction of man, but to his preservation and improvement. Ethical choice is a beneficial choice, tested by objective criteria as to the essence and purpose of man.

b. Part of ethical choice is the imposition of a kind of order consistent with nature. Organizational ethics is concerned with enforcing good order within an organization. Each party must perform the work appropriate to its nature and abilities and accept the evaluative gradation resulting from the value of the work produced. The correct order is the result of a correct rational process, which aims at the unity of the whole and the achievement of the goal.

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[81] Gillian Peele, "Leadership and Politics: A Case for a Closer Relationship?" *Leadership* 1, no. 2 (2005): 187-204.

[82] Aleksandra Jasinska, "Bring Back Philosophy: The Roots of Both Business and Ethics," *Journal of Human Values* 30, no. 1 (2024): 26-31.

[83] *SVF*, 3: 510.

[84] Susan Key, "Organizational Ethical Culture: Real or Imagined?" *Journal of Business Ethics* 20, no. 3 (1999): 217-225.

c. The person or organization is part of a larger whole, such as civil society or the natural environment, within which they perform a specific task. It is absurd for the actions of man or organization to cause harm to the wider organization to which they belong. If the unity and integrity of the civil society[85] or the environment are disturbed, then this disharmony will affect both parties, i.e., the person and the business. Corporate social responsibility is a clear extension of ethical choice, as it oversees the harmonious relationship of the part with the whole. The whole is the receptacle of human integration; the better the functioning of the whole, the easier the human or organism can function. Respect and contribution to the civil society and the natural environment is not an optional benefit, but the most important moral duty emanating from human reason, which realizes that the improvement and development of the individual or the enterprise presuppose the favorable political or natural reception.

d. Ethical choice cannot be made automatically by all humans. Humans tend towards the right and can, through habit, reach a stability of ethical choices, but they need guidelines to fit into the right moral framework. It takes an expert who can direct others in matters of moral order. This specialist, for the Stoics, is the sage, who has reached a maximum level of natural integration, mental order, and ethical rightness, and this superiority makes him the regulator of the moral conduct of the rest.[86] In companies, the structuring of the management of the organization and the evaluative classification of the staff in terms of decision-making fall under the field of leadership and corporate governance. Therefore, the implementation of business ethics is impossible without ethical leadership and corporate governance, which determines which executives will be found through evaluation at the leadership level to determine, through organizational ethics and corporate social responsibility, the goals of the organization and the long-term prime.

e. From the above findings, it can be seen that Stoic philosophy provides all those methodological tools for delimiting and clarifying the function of moral terms within business ethics and ethical leadership. The likeness to nature as human integration, the inescapable relationship of the part to the whole, the moral tasks as functions within the social or natural whole, and the wise man as a paradigm and model of

[85] Jula Wildberger, *The Stoics and the State: Theory – Practice – Context* (Baden: Nomos, 2018), 51-67.

[86] Arthur Walzer, "Quntilian's '*Vir Bonus*' and the Stoic Wise Man," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 33, no. 4 (2003): 25-41.

ethical rightness[87] are a guide to the understanding of ethical problems and the conceptual shielding of the concepts that make up business ethics, such as organizational ethics, corporate social responsibility, and corporate governance. In the era of modernity, where, under the power of historicism, moral concepts replace relativism and nihilism, the Stoic paradigm of ethics serves as a safe house for anchoring moral concepts and their beneficial development in the field of human entrepreneurship, which constitutes a part of human well-being.

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[87] R. W. Sharples, *Stoics, Epicureans and Sceptics: An Introduction to Hellenistic Philosophy* (NewYork: Routledge, 1996), 100-114; Nancy Sherman, "Stoic Consolations," *Conatus – Journal of Philosophy* 8, no. 2 (2023): 565-587.

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