An Unmanageable Rationale

How Business Ethics Textbooks Unwittingly Recommend a Virtue-Ethics Account of Moral Reasoning

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Even among the most popular, normative business ethics textbooks today, there prevails a significant presupposition regarding moral reasoning. They argue that in light of competing theories of moral reasoning the business managers ought to perceive what the situation at hand demands and choose their principles of moral reasoning accordingly. The presupposition is that this "perceiving what the situation demands" does not already indicate a form of moral reasoning. In this article, I make the contrary argument: Moral perception, especially of the kind that is so often suggested by the contemporary normative textbook on business ethics, is in fact indicative of an Aristotelian virtue-ethics form of moral reasoning. Consequently, while the lessons taught to the student of business ethics today are correct, the textbooks' authors are in need of rethinking their conclusions.

Introduction

A severe difficulty exists today concerning the solutions typically proffered by some textbooks on business ethics regarding moral reasoning and moral decision making.[1] Of the authors who endeavor to lay out a normative form of business ethics with a careful eye to that ethic's philosophical foundation, the problem of competing forms of moral reasoning is nearly universally noted: No one form of moral reasoning can, by itself, assist tomorrow's future managers in their decision-making process. Frequently this conclusion is accepted on the grounds that if one of the competing theories of moral reasoning were satisfactory in such a way, then there would be universal (or a large majority) consensus (which is itself perhaps another thorny presupposition). This problem is underscored and

then treated, albeit in various ways, in nearly every contemporary, normative business ethics textbook.

The issue I wish to consider is not with the problematic (the uncertainty or difficulty inherent in a situation or plan) that arises but with the response such textbooks typically offer the student. The article begins with an analysis of the answers being offered to the student by contemporary normative business ethics textbooks. In so doing, the presupposition of those textbooks will become increasingly apparent: They assume the student to be capable of perceiving what form of moral reasoning is most fitting for the situation or crisis at hand. However, I want to argue that the kind of insight they wish their readers to come to is, in itself, indicative of a particular form of moral reasoning: namely, Aristotelian virtue ethics. To demonstrate this last point, I will need to argue how the kind of perception presupposed is not simply a neutral form of moral insight but one that is uniquely espoused by an Aristotelian concept of virtue ethics. This will require separating a rule-based moral perception from a virtue-based moral reasoning. I will do this with special emphasis on the important issue of whether or not what is perceived can ever be codified into rules and principles.[2] In closing, I will work out three different consequences of the resolution introduced by this perception. In all of this, the point of the article is not only to demonstrate that these normatively minded business ethics textbooks are incorrect in their prescription but also in their diagnosis. Simply put, the authors are teaching the correct answer but for the wrong reason. There is much to be gained if only we take notice of *why* their suggestion is correct.

I have limited the study in a few different ways. First, I have taken only from textbooks pertaining to Anglophone business ethics that are normative in nature. Thus, this article is not concerned with a sizable number of business ethics textbooks that include normative theories as merely one aspect of ethical decision-making procedures. These latter, descriptive texts are content to cite what it is people typically do in making ethical business decisions, rather than working out what people should do in making such choices. The "manageability" of making such a distinction is itself worth questioning, but this is a question I cannot address here. Consequently, the problematic I seek to address arises only when authors attempt to give some normative guidance on how a manager should go about making a moral decision.

A second limit imposed on this study is a critique of those business ethics textbooks that explicitly approve of some multitheory approach to moral reasoning. Herein, I call a multitheory approach that method by which one is encouraged to decide among the various concerns embodied in rival normative theories of moral reasoning. I will describe this problematic more in detail now.

The Problem of Moral Reasoning in Multitheory Approach

As one examines how certain business ethics textbooks address the issue of moral reasoning, a specific pattern begins to emerge. Each author notes the various forms of moral reasoning and typically spends some time outlining each. Typically, deontology, consequentialism, and a Rawlsian brand of justice are the main features inspected. (Note the relative lack of a virtue ethics approach, a point to which we will return.) Next, the textbook draws the student's attention to the obvious problem of no particular form of moral reasoning superseding its rivals. Lacking the kind of expert approbation that one would wish for, the authors next highlight various positive aspects of each form of moral reasoning. Finally, they prescribe a mixture of these various forms of moral reasoning, usually indicating that the successful manager will develop the honed ability to "identify," "perceive," "recognize," and "discern" which form of moral reasoning best fits the situation. Let us see in greater detail this problematic and their proposed response.

Manuel Velasquez's *Business Ethics: Concepts and Cases* is a common textbook in the Anglophone world of business ethics.[3] Herein, when the specter of the problematic arises regarding how to choose among the various forms of moral decision reasoning, the authors recommend a simple combination of the three forms previously highlighted (utilitarian, rights, and justice). In his 1998 edition, Velasquez provides some guidelines on how these various forms of moral reasoning relate. He then writes, "There are some moral problems for which utilitarian considerations are decisive, while for other problems the decisive considerations are either the rights of individuals or the justice of the distributions involved."[4] Yet, this seems to leave the problematic unanswered: On what criteria does a manager depend while discerning what is appropriate or what factors are decisive? At best, it seems that Velasquez's textbook leaves the question unanswered. At worst, it begs the question by emphasizing the importance of an unarticulated form of moral reasoning. To his credit, the philosophical Velasquez seems to see the difficulty here and simply concludes, "but these criteria remain rough and intuitive. They lie at the edges of the light that ethics can shed on moral reasoning."[5]

Vincent Barry and William Shaw's *Moral Issues in Business* (2001) also seems to draw similar conclusions. After giving an overview of various theories of moral reasoning, their section entitled "Choosing a Theory" argues that while there is no one principle to adopt, the choice of a form of moral reasoning is not arbitrary. This might seem to be a hopeful sign indicating that this choice rests on some

reasonable criteria. However, in the end, *Moral Issues in Business* points out that one ought to learn the various forms of moral reasoning so as to become "aware of the moral options available to us."[6] Barry and Shaw dedicate the remaining chapters of their book, among other aims, to showing how the various ethical rationalities might be applied. They conclude, "it's hoped that such an exposure proves valuable in helping business people recognize the various kinds of ethical systems that may be employed in given situations and in determining what values override others in a conflict."[7]

Business Ethics: Policies and Persons (2006) by Kenneth Goodpaster et al. contains a similar analysis. After looking through a refreshingly wider scope of variants of moral reasoning, Goodpaster et al. attempt to form a checklist to resolve ethical conflicts. The checklist is largely constituted by appeals for the decision maker "to understand," and "identify the moral issues," by "using normative frameworks which apply," to "reach for synthesis," "to weigh conflicting moral considerations," and "to be open to insight."[8] Finally, the authors conclude by arguing that "the manager who is ethically attentive in facing such complexities stands a better chance of coordinating the administrative and moral points of view."[9]

Introduction to Business Ethics (1993) by Kaler and Chryssides follows the same pattern we have already seen.[10] After indicating three schools of moral reasoning and concluding that each individually is insufficient for the complexities of professional life, they advocate distilling the most positive elements of each and forming a checklist. However, one glance at the resulting checklist reveals that this methodology again takes up the presupposition that the agent's ability to "calculate," "distinguish," "recognize," "apply," discern the "importance" of conflicting rights, and so on is not itself a form of moral reasoning, nor does it imply a particular form of moral reasoning.

In examining other contemporary textbooks of moral reasoning the same, multitheory suggestion is proposed in one form or another.[11] We can now venture a description of the multitheory approach. The multitheory approach is that decision-making approach that, in an effort to resolve the problematic of competing forms of moral reasoning, suggests (1) the manager becomes aware of the various positive elements of the diverse forms of moral reasoning, and (2) perceives and evaluates the elements or qualities of the situation at hand in order to determine which concerns encapsulated by the various forms of moral reasoning are most salient. This approach counsels, then, learning the rival forms of moral reasoning in order to access those concerns that it enshrines (justice, consequences, and so forth). Next, it asks the managers to decide which concern is the most demanding given the particular situation.

I do not suspect that anyone will greatly disagree with what I have stated thus far. However, I intend to make one further claim that is not as obvious. My complaint is that while each of the multitheorists highlights the importance of a perception on the part of the manager, they seem to assume that this form of perception is not itself indicative of any one form of moral reasoning. Being capable of utilizing any one of these three forms of thinking outlined by the multitheory texts may, at least prima facie, seem helpful. Often it is. However, it is quite possible that the authors of these normative business ethics textbooks have encouraged the use of an aspect of moral reasoning that eludes the three forms of moral reasoning from which the reader is encouraged to choose. Is it not odd that, just at the most critical moment, each of these multitheory authors prescribe a certain trained intellectual insight into what is most salient for the particular situation at hand and that this should *not* be said to characterize a form of moral reasoning? This honed ability to discern the most salient facets of a particular situation is what has been dubbed by others as a sort of "perception" of the practical mind. I will use this same terminology adding greater specificity as I go.

I propose that perception—specifically the form of intellectual perception described as so necessary by contemporary, multitheory business ethic textbooks—indicates an appeal to nothing other than the first breath of an Aristotelian virtue ethics form of moral reasoning. Lurking behind Kant, Mill, and Rawls is Aristotle. In order to make this last claim apparent, I now turn to a description of what is happening in this act of perception and its intrinsic link to a virtue ethics form of reasoning. Our ethical education of tomorrow's business leaders will only be bettered by taking account of this role of perception.

Resolution of the Problem: Perception

In order to demonstrate that the form of moral insight that the multitheory textbooks have encouraged is, in fact, a form of intellectual perception possessed only by Aristotelian virtue ethics, we need to understand (1) what this perception essentially is, and (2) how it initiates a form of moral reasoning that differs in kind from rule-based moral reasoning.

The Essence of Perception

The form of moral reasoning that has ethical perception as its first breath possesses diverse features but three of special interest here. We arrive at the first feature by noting again some of the recommendations the multitheory texts make. Exhortatory statements such as "be aware," "recognize," "determine,"

"understand," "identify," "reach," "weigh," "calculate," and "distinguish" form the limit of the advice possible here. Yet, it must be noted that each of these recommendations possesses an object. One cannot become aware without becoming aware of a something. With perhaps one exception, the object of one's awareness in these texts is the particular situation at hand, not the principles of the various moral theories immediately preceding this recommendation.[12]

Now, one might wish to become aware of a particular situation for at least two reasons. One might wish to direct one's attention at the particular—where particular means a certain type of quality or value. Conversely, one might wish to attend to the particular—where the particular means a particular event or situation as that particular represents a concrete instantiation of a certain quality or value.[13] In the first case, the object of one's mental attention is "a particular type." In the second, the object is an instance of a particular type, "a particular instance." The first perception ends in a judgment regarding the value of the type (e.g., chicken is healthy). The second terminates in a description of the kind of situation that is unfolding (e.g., this piece of meat is a piece of chicken).

Are the multitheory business ethics textbooks recommending a perception of particular types or particular instances? No doubt, the texts wish the manager to be aware of both sorts of particulars, but their advice is for a perception of the particular instances. For while it seems that, to some extent, particular types could be imparted by a thorough exposure to the concerns encapsulated in various rival theories of moral reasoning, this exposure still leaves tomorrow's manager impotent without a perception of the particular instances. This is precisely the problem the multitheory texts face: they have seemingly taken the student as far as is possible, though the student will need more information. Thus they rely on advising a perception, but this is a perception of the particular instance. One's perception first needs to construe the given situation under a certain description of the situation at hand. Consequently, if the particular types imparted to the student are to be useful at all, then it presupposes seeing those concerns in various instances of a given situation.

To conclude, then, the first feature of the form of moral reasoning these multitheories encourage begins with a perception of the particular as an instance of φ. Only after this perception of the particular instance under some description has taken place can one proceed to a perception of the particular type. Furthermore, note that the particular instance is of *dire* importance, and without it the business manager cannot proceed further in the advised choice between the forms of moral reasoning recommended by the multitheory approach.

If the first feature draws our attention to the perception of the particular instance and its gravity for proceeding with the advised moral-reasoning program, then

the second feature is perception itself. Consider the not unimaginable case of one business manager perceiving p to be the primary concern in a given situation, while a second manager, given the identical situation, perceives q to be the overriding concern. How is this divergence in perception possible? Supposing the given situation is, in fact, identical, one is forced to assume that the cause of the divergent perceptions lay in the difference between the first and second manager. Further, the divergence might be in two parts: either the first manager does not perceive the concern the second manager does *or* the first manager does not perceive the second manager's primary concern as the most salient, as primary. In either case, the difference of perceptions stems from the difference in persons who are attending to the situation. However, we can add another common observation to this divergence in perception. Whatever the difference between managers, such differences in perception are generally thought to be affected by one's memory, one's capacity for accurate foresight, and one's ability to draw all these various impressions together.[14] These aspects each help constitute and shape what is perceived. To this list, one might also acknowledge the various ways that one's emotional state can alter the ability to see situations aright.[15] If one wishes to find the source of two different descriptions of a single, given situation, then one quickly begins speaking of persons and not the principles of the various forms of moral reasoning already proposed to the student. Questions of not only intellectual ability but also of character quickly come to the fore. Notice, however, that these questions are *directly* tied to the kind of perception that the contemporary, multitheory textbooks all too easily advise.

Sorting out the third feature of the advised perception is not as easily decided. It concerns the role this perception ought to play in moral reasoning. Consequentially, this third feature must be situated inside a larger issue of whether moral reasoning might ever, even in an ideal world, be codifiable. While the answer one gives to this theoretical issue may adjust slightly how ethical perception is understood, it becomes far more important in practical ethics like business ethics. Theoretically considered, if moral reasoning is codifiable, then it would limit the necessity and/or weight one's ethical perception plays in moral reasoning.[16] One could with greater ease trust those codified principles. Conversely, if moral reasoning proves uncodifiable, even in an ideal world, then greater weight must always be given to one's perception of the situation. As a result, the issue of codifiability of moral reasoning becomes of particular interest to anyone involved in a realm of policy-making, whether that is inside or outside the confines of a corporation.

Because I have been arguing that the advised perception of the multitheory's approach is, in fact, a form of Aristotelian virtue ethic perception, and because

an Aristotelian form of moral reasoning is generally accepted to give some of the greatest weight to ethical perception that I see these texts advising, I then wish to explore the issue of codifiability of moral reasoning from inside the vantage point of contemporary Aristotelian virtue ethics. If Aristotelian moral reasoning can be codified, then certainly we have good reason to doubt whether perception is as important an issue as I have been arguing. In the following discussion, I will rely heavily on a debate between John McDowell and David Wiggins.

The debate over an ethical life's codifiability concerns the question of whether moral reasoning itself can be codified. That is, it asks whether a universal rule of virtue is capable of being developed, which can simply be applied at a later time. These two Aristotelians are split. John McDowell thinks it could be codified by the perfectly virtuous practical reasoner.[17] David Wiggins, McDowell's former teacher, disagrees.[18] The fundamental issue that dictates codifiability is how rigorous or narrow one takes the ethical realm to be. McDowell takes it to be quite narrow. He argues that two things dictate this narrowness in faithful Aristotelian thinking. First, Aristotle's phrase that the virtuous action ought to be done "for its own sake" severely limits what can count as virtuous activity. If a virtuous agent acts to avoid baseness but not for the noble, then this agent fails to act virtuously. Hence, McDowell's Aristotle sees very little as counting as truly virtuous action—only that which is done for its own sake. The ethical realm is further narrowed by McDowell's Aristotle by focusing on virtue that lies in "doing well," and not in "faring well." That is, for McDowell, Aristotle's virtue is an activity, and never, strictly speaking, the productions or satisfactions of that activity. Everything outside of the doing well and done for its own sake fail to meet the requirements of the ethical. McDowell's interpretation of the authentically virtuous life, then, is a very rigorous one. It is because it is so strictly defined—with allowance for nothing short of these actions counting as virtuous—that McDowell thinks the good practical reasoner would be capable of codifying his actions.

This rigoristic interpretation is partly agreed upon by David Wiggins. However, Wiggins refuses to narrow the realm of the ethical to the point that McDowell does. Wiggins seeks to expand McDowell's domain of the ethical. He begins by agreeing with McDowell's interpretation of Aristotle's done for its own sake clause. However, seeing that this criteria that McDowell puts so much emphasis on is articulated in a single sentence, Wiggins also thinks Aristotle is not trying to be overly clear. This leads Wiggins to take away from the passage a far less significant reading than does McDowell. Aristotle is just not attempting to be as clear as possible, and hence, McDowell is too hasty in making such an undeveloped statement so central in the definition of the virtuous activity.

Second, Wiggins expands the realm of what counts as ethical by pointing out that doing well is not the only concept that defines virtuous activity. He thinks there is some important role for faring well.[19] That some activity will produce a state in which a person or business will fare well can be a significantly motivating factor for virtuous action. McDowell's overly rigorous emphasis on doing well seems to ignore this fact. Attaining resultant states of doing well (i.e., faring well) are also motivating for virtuous action.[20]

Because McDowell's argument that moral reasoning can be codified by the good practical reasoner hinges on the narrow understanding of what counts as ethical, by broadening that interpretation Wiggins can reject the idea that ethical perception could ever be codified. Moral reasoning slips through the fingers of articulate codification. Naturally, the only reason that moral reasoning is not lost to realism is that ethical perception steps forward to fill in the gap. As a consequence of this uncodifiability of Aristotelian moral reasoning, ethical perception secures a privileged and indispensable role in the whole process of moral reasoning.[21]

The multitheory approaches advise a form of perception that I have been arguing is not neutral. It is an ethical perception that differs *in kind* from the rule-based forms of moral reasoning among which the manager of tomorrow is encouraged to choose. I will spend some time arguing this point in the next section. However, before doing so, I would like to note that this ethical perception seems to also differ from two other forms of moral reasoning, namely, a sentimentalist or intuitionist one.

First, the perception the multitheory approach advises is not a form of sentimentalism. The multitheorists do not leave perception at the level of sentimentality. They advise not only perception but also articulation of the concern about the facet of real-world situations that this perception has grasped. In other words, the perception is justified, and rightly so, not on the fact of a sentiment but on a certain construal of the real world events and situations. The concerns identified by the manager are authentic articulations of what the perception has grasped, not merely the statement of discerned sentimental preference. Thus, while the form of perception the multitheorists advise may be highly influenced by the emotions and may—on some accounts—even be constitutively emotional or desire-based perception, it is never reducible to mere sentiment. The correct perceiver is thought to rightly identify the object of the perception in the world rather than in oneself. This would not be the case if the perception were merely a form of sentimentality.

Second, the advised multitheory perception is not a form of intuition wherein this is taken to be an intuitionist moral reasoning. The kind of perception counseled by the multitheory approach is not merely a grasping of something that cannot be

explained but a grasping of something that is accompanied by comprehension. The right perceiver is thought to possess, and claims to possess, understanding of the situation—not merely to espy something about the situation at hand. If intuition is taken to indicate what I have argued, then I see no reason why one could not call this a rational intuitionist account of moral reasoning, though perhaps there is such a reason.

Putting aside the thought that the advised perception by the multitheory textbooks has assumed a sentimentalist or intuitionist form of awareness, I turn to my main concern.

How Aristotelian Virtue-Based Moral Reasoning Differs from Rule-Based Moral Reasoning

After distilling the three features from the perception advised by the multitheory texts and indicative of an Aristotelian virtue ethic, all that remains is how this form of perception differs from a rule-based moral reasoning. This assertion can be demonstrated in at least two ways: first, by examining the central suppositions of each approach to moral reasoning and, second, by identifying the different nature of rules within each mode of moral reasoning.

One of the central suppositions of rule-based moral reasoning is that codifiable knowledge, represented by rules, can serve as the canvas on which particular instances can be measured and resolved. Indeed, McDowell rails against a further implicit supposition that "to act rationally" means being guided by some such set of principles that can be formulated.[22] Perception-based moral reasoning is, then, clearly different in its relation to rules and principles. It is built on a vastly different foundation.

Even if it were successfully argued that perception-based rationality has rules, they would still be completely other in nature. Wiggins draws attention to the insufficiency of rules and principles in practical reasoning and highlights this new form of a rule:

> From the nature of the case the subject matter of the practical is indefinite and unforeseeable, and any supposed principle would have an indefinite number of exceptions. To understand what such exceptions would be and what makes them exceptions would be to understand something not reducible to rules or principles. The only metric we can impose on the subject matter of practice is the metric of the Lesbian rule.…[23]

Wiggins cites the following passage from Aristotle that describes what this "Lesbian rule" is and points out its unusual nature: "For when the thing is indefinite the rule also is indefinite, like the leaden rule used in making the Lesbian

moulding; the rule adapts itself to the shape of the stone and is not rigid, and so too the decree is adapted to the facts."[24] Clearly, perception-based moral reasoning is different in nature, even with regard to the rules it does allow from a rule-based moral reasoning. There is one more clear way to compare the two.

Both forms of moral reasoning can be translated into what might be dubbed a practical syllogism. The relationship established between the major and minor premises discloses the relationship between the kinds of consideration that occupies each spot. Thus, it brings into focus, by way of a formal structure of analogy to logical argumentation, the differences between the two approaches to moral reasoning: "The idea of a practical syllogism is the idea of an argument-like schema for explanations of actions, with the 'premisses,' [*sic*] as in the theoretical case, giving the content of the psychological states cited in the explanation."[25]

McDowell yields himself to Wiggins's articulation of moral reasoning based on perception:

> The first or major premiss [*sic*] mentions something of which there could be a desire, *orexis*, transmissible to some practical conclusion (i.e., a desire convertible via some available minor premise into an action). The second premiss pertains to the feasibility in the particular situation to which the syllogism is applied of what must be done if the claim of the major premiss is to be heeded.[26]

Wiggins describes the major premise pertaining to the good—a good that calls forth a desire for it. This vision of the good forms the needed backdrop for any perception. The minor premise pertains to the possible. This implies feasibility given the situation of the agent and suggests the relevance of some aspects of the situation. Identifying these salient features is clearly the work of ethical perception.

The practical syllogism of rule-based moral reasoning looks and operates differently. Here, the major premise is occupied by a codifiable knowledge that can be articulated. The minor premise is given by the situation. Here, the biased assumption is that acting rational necessarily entails acting according to some such codified knowledge. To act rationally means to apply one's rule to the situation. The salient features of this form of moral reasoning are dictated from a matching of concerns with the values and possibilities present in the situation. Rather, these salient features are completely derived from the agent's rule. Consequently, such moral reasoning is often accused of taking no direction for one's actions from the situation itself. Rule-based moral reasoning seeks to wholly and completely conform one's actions to a preconceived rule.

Laying out the differences between perception-based moral reasoning and rule-based moral reasoning provides one with the opportunity to glimpse how differently each schema thinks through various moral episodes.

Consequences of This Resolution
for Business Ethics

Obviously, the first consequence of this Aristotelian virtue ethical perception is that it is a solution to the dilemma faced by multitheory textbooks on business ethics. In encouraging future business leaders to choose the proper form of moral reasoning for a given ethical situation, multitheorists take up a presupposition that there is an accurate form of moral reasoning that is *neither* rule nor principle bound. They are right to do so. However, their reasoning for such encouragement does not highlight the very rational reason for doing so. This, naturally, would involve them in a further conundrum. Because an Aristotelian virtue-based form of moral reasoning is the only form of moral reasoning that can provide the now visibly needed account of ethical perception, it seems hard to imagine that multitheorists could remain multitheorists. Once one notes the kind of work that ethical perception performs for these multitheorists—that is, once one acknowledges that this is not a neutral form of perception but one thoroughly Aristotelian—then it becomes impossible to suppose one is not promoting a form of moral reasoning that ought to come prior to the concerns encapsulated by various other theories of moral reasoning. Consequently, the multitheorist approach ceases to be multitheory and must acknowledge being Aristotelian virtue-ethics based.

Second, the acknowledgement that one is unwittingly promoting an Aristotelian virtue ethics form of moral reasoning (albeit operating in the background) makes the omission of virtue ethics as at least one of the rival forms of moral reasoning all the more grievous. This has been remedied in some cases, though not in all. However, even where it is mentioned, virtue ethics is presented in an extremely weak sense that is easily dismissed. An example of this is Crane and Matten's *Business Ethics*.[27] Virtue ethics is presented but in a manner with which many virtue ethicists would not identify. In the following, however, the process of decision making is presented in four steps with the first step being "recognizing the moral issue."[28] It is then declared that normative theories only have to do with the second step: "making a moral judgment." The authors have either not understood or not accurately presented an account of virtue ethics that finds its foundation in ethical perception.

A third consequence of acknowledging that the counseled perception is an Aristotelian virtue ethic is the effect the issue of uncodifiability has on how one thinks of company policy on ethical behavior. The uncodifiability of moral reasoning helps clarify what one might expect from such policy. Should one expect an exhaustive set of rules that managers refer to in ethical decision-making? Or

should one expect a set of rules that act as ethical signposts by which the successful business manager is enabled to assimilate the ethical perception of the company, no doubt furthering that same corporate insight by the addition of one's own personal insight, and engage in an ethically responsible decision-making procedure? Even if McDowell is correct, then this merely means that *theoretically* the perfectly virtuous, practically reasoning CEO would be capable of codifying the proper and virtuous action for infinitely various moral situations. Yet, even McDowell will happily stipulate that this is only to speak theoretically. On the practical level, questions abound. Questions such as: Who determines who the perfectly virtuous, practically reasoning executive is, and so on? On the other hand, if Wiggins is correct, then no codification is possible, even by the idealized, perfectly virtuous agent. The breadth of considerations taken into account will necessarily render it too complex for a codification ever to take place, even by the best of moral reasoners. Wiggins' answer would emphasize that even with a corporation's necessary articulated ethical policies, the corporate culture must be one in which the manager is not hemmed in by policy or rules. Instead, the corporate culture, acknowledging that its own ethical policies can never fully exhaust what it means to act ethically, must foster an environment that sees the policies as ethical signposts by which one is enabled to become the best possible practical reasoner—especially in the difficult decisions of leadership and management. Therefore, if Wiggins is correct, there is a huge difference between moral reasoning that yields to ethical perception an essential and foundational role, and forms of moral reasoning that are either rule or principle bound.

Fourth, an Aristotelian virtue-based perception has another positive consequence. Ethical perception, well-grasped by business ethicists and leaders alike, will assist in someone's coming to understand how training in the corporate world or in the classroom can be best understood. It helps one understand that business ethics training must be formative of the agent's character, perceptions, and subsequent reasoning, rather than merely instilling obedience to rules regardless of the situation at hand. I hasten to add that this last concern was not something lost on any of the contemporary multitheory authors cited above. Business ethics training ought to seek to instill in its students a way of cultivating a reliable sensitivity to the salient features of an experience.

This last statement reveals a brief glimpse of a fifth consequence of this resolution. Ethical perception, in seeking to cultivate a reliable sensitivity to the salient features of an experience in the business world, acts as a type of bridge by which various dimensions of the human person can find expression. Philosophers such as Michael Stocker and Martha Nussbaum have both given us fascinating glimpses of the role one's affectivity and emotions play in ethical

sensitivity.[29] Emotions, holds Stocker, are both essential constitutive aspects of important experiences as well as an epistemic bridge to values in the world. To miss one's emotional reaction can mean misunderstanding oneself and the other. Emotions are not only facticities, but they are revelatory of a world of meaning and value—a world rigorous cognitivism misses. Ethical perception becomes the vehicle that allows us to see that one's emotions can be indicative of essential values in the world. Moral reasoning is doomed to imperfection so long as it refuses to take these essential values into account.

Still, there are other dimensions of the human person for which ethical perception can act as a vehicle. If the fifth consequence of ethical perception concerns renewed attention to the affect world of the manager, then the sixth import might be a renewed consideration of how one's spirituality makes a similar impact on one's ethical perception. If one's affectivity can introduce important values into ethical considerations, then it seems that the human person's spirituality can do the same. Outside of obvious improper obstructions of religious affiliation, business leaders of tomorrow may find it imperative to address and incorporate the more vertical dimension of the human person. This seems particularly true as business becomes a more central part of people's lives in an ever-demanding market. Furthermore, if a business leader seeks to instantiate a particular "spirit" of a corporation, then there already seems to be ample room to discuss the spirit that is already there and what dimensions of the human person business leaders can (and cannot) address in the workplace. All of this entails a discussion of spirituality's role in the workplace, without any form of a prephilosophic dismissal. Ethical perception can act as a vehicle in bringing together these saliencies of an experience, and spirituality may be one fundamental way of opening business leaders of tomorrow to discover previously hidden saliencies.

Finally, ethical perception comes forward as an answer with a tempering effect on moral judgment. Some might fear that the claim that one person *perceives* an ethical reality in a more proper way than another will foster a dangerous sense of arrogance of "the moral elite." Instead, ethical perception is not about arrogant dismissal of another's ethical perception and consequent reasoning. Rather, it induces a profound sense of humility. Precisely because ethical perception can be gotten wrong, it requires every agent to be willing to question his or her own perceptions. Indeed, neither David Wiggins nor John McDowell finds an egotistical error in ethical perception. Instead, quite the opposite is true. This stance inculcates a profound sense of humility. There is, in fact, a difficulty in seeing situations properly: "If we are aware of how, for instance, selfish fantasy distorts our vision, we shall not be inclined to be confident that we have got things right."[30] Consequently, the authentically well-formed business manager

will embody that virtue, which at the very moment he or she is susceptible to a myopic viewpoint, opens him or her to learn from his or her colleagues and coworkers. This, of course, presupposes that ethical perception is understood in the context of serious talk of virtues such as humility. Ethical perception, then, yields an opportunity for business ethics to grow both in its depth and breadth as it seeks to answer the fundamental question, "What should I do?"

Conclusion

I have attempted to introduce the reader to the problem lurking in a certain class of contemporary Anglophone business ethics textbooks called multitheory. The authors of these textbooks have many virtues that should not be overlooked for the points I have raised here. Nevertheless, they have apparently also made a common gaffe in advising a form of moral decision making that is not altogether neutral while nevertheless thinking it was. The appeal made to that which here has been called ethical perception, is, in fact, indicative of one particular form of moral reasoning: that of an Aristotelian virtue ethic. To support this thesis, I have endeavored to clarify three specific features that characterize this ethical perception and how that perception is the first movement in a form of moral reasoning that is different in kind from a rule-based form of moral reasoning. After defending its initial claim, the essay indicated seven ways that this perception-based moral reasoning, with the privileged role reserved for ethical perception, can be of assistance to tomorrow's business managers. In closing, it is worth reiterating what was said at the outset: the authors of today's Anglophone, multitheory, normative-oriented business ethics textbooks have not erred in their prescription, but they have in their diagnosis. They have given the right advice by appealing to ethical perception in arriving at a moral decision. However, they have gone amiss in failing to recognize that this advice, albeit very correct advice, does not indicate one particular form of moral reasoning over another. Throughout, I have argued that that form of moral reasoning is nothing other than an ethical perception upon which Aristotelian virtue ethics alone relies.

Notes

1. I am grateful to Professor Dr. Johan Verstraeten and blind referees for their helpful comments on a prior version of this article.

2. It will be noticed that the ethical approach that has recently reopened the issue of moral perception is virtue ethics. No attempt is made to hide this source of moral perception. Moral perception has arisen out of virtue ethics; whether this is a conceptual necessity or a historical accident is a subject for another essay. What is essential is the primacy of moral perceptions over deontic notions of moral reasoning; only in this way is moral perception an answer to the above dilemma.

3. His faculty page at Santa Clara University states that Manuel G. Velasquez's *Business Ethics: Concepts and Cases* is "the most widely used business ethics textbook in the world." Accessed March 2012, http://www.scu.edu/business/management/faculty/velasquez-profile.cfm.

4. Manuel G. Velasquez, *Business Ethics: Concepts and Cases* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1998), 104–5.

5. Cf. Velasquez, *Business Ethics*, 106. In later editions of the same textbook and more recent works in general, Velasquez seems to deepen his reflection. In his 2002 article entitled "Moral Reasoning," in *The Blackwell Guide to Business Ethics*, Velasquez makes mention of the importance of virtue ethics' emphasis on moral perception but points out that it has never indicated this reasoning process. Cf. Manuel G. Velasquez, "Moral Reasoning," in *The Blackwell Guide to Business Ethics*, ed. Norman E. Bowie (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 102–16 at 111–12. In his sixth edition of *Business Ethics: Concepts and Cases* (2006), Velasquez includes care ethics as another form of moral reasoning. Herein, virtue ethics is treated separately, but he holds that virtue ethics only provides a different perspective regarding the same realities highlighted by the other forms of moral reasoning. "What the principles of utility, rights, justice, and caring do from the perspective of action evaluations, an ethic of virtue does from the perspective of character evaluation." See Manuel G. Velasquez, *Business Ethics*, 109.

6. V. E. Barry and W. H. Shaw, *Moral Issues in Business* (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Press, 1986), 70.

7. Barry and Shaw, *Moral Issues in Business*, 70.

8. Kenneth Goodpaster, L. Nash, and H. C. de Bettignies, *Business Ethics: Policies and Persons* (Boston: McGraw-Hill/Irwin, 2011), 522.

9. Goodpaster et al., *Business Ethics*, 522.

10. Cf. George D. Chryssides and John H. Kaler, *An Introduction to Business Ethics* (New York: Chapman & Hall, 1993), 103–6.

11. Cf. Richard T. De George, *Business Ethics* (Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson/Prentice Hall, 2006), 122–23; A. Crane and D. Matten, *Business Ethics: Managing Corporate Citizenship and Sustainability in the Age of Globalization* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 119–21; and A. K. Gavai, *Business Ethics* (Mumbai, India: Himalaya Publishing, 2010), 117–28.

12. The one exception to this statement might be Barry and Shaw. They urge recognition of what rules apply, but this—as others have already shown—still presupposes recognition of the particular situation.

13. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Terence Irwin, 2nd ed. (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing, 1999), 245.

14. Martha C. Nussbaum, "The Role of *Phantasia* in Aristotle's Explanation of Action," in *Aristotle's* De Motu Animalium*: Text with Translation, Commentary, and Interpretive Essays* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978).

15. Michael Stocker, "The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories," *Journal of Philosophy* 73 (1976): 453–66; Michael Stocker, "Emotional Identification, Closeness, and Size: Some Contributions to Virtue Ethics," in *Virtue Ethics: A Critical Reader*, ed. Daniel Statman (Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press, 1997), 118–27; Michael Stocker, "How Emotions Reveal Value and Help Cure the Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories," in *How Should One Live? Essays on the Virtues*, ed. Roger Crisp (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 173–90.

16. Particularism is not the same as denying that everything can be reduced to principles. One need not read Aristotelian perception of particulars to be the whole of moral reasoning, as will become clear below.

17. John McDowell, "Eudaimonism and Realism in Aristotle's Ethics," in *Aristotle and Moral Realism*, ed. Robert Heinaman (London: University College London, 1995), 201–18.

18. David Wiggins, "Eudaimonism and Realism in Aristotle's Ethics: A Reply to John McDowell," in *Aristotle and Moral Realism*, 219–31.

19. Wiggins raises the fascinating example of the maimed war veteran and our reaction to him. No matter what gloss is given by Aristotle on the virtue of bravely acting for its own sake, we do feel this does not quite account for how we view this war veteran. He is seen as unfortunate, not as completely virtuous. Some good in life has been stolen from him, and this seems to open to the thought that there is more to our concept of eudaimonia than acting virtuously "for its own sake." "Faring well" is included in our concept of eudaimonia, not just "doing well."

20. Finally, Wiggins points out that book 1 of the *Nicomachean Ethics*, in fact, stresses that the idea of "faring well" is a part of the considerations of the good life. "Such a conception must interpret the good for man narrowly, you will remember, and

purely in terms of doing well rather than faring well—even though the 'faring well' sense of *eu prattein* is open to view in *Nicomachean Ethics*, Book 1." See Wiggins, "Eudaimonism and Realism in Aristotle's Ethics: A Reply to John McDowell," 227. This interpretative point indicates that not only is McDowell's Aristotle too rigorous but also suddenly seems too un-Aristotelian.

21. Aristotle's comparison between right practical reasoning and scientific knowledge (1140b26–30) is reminiscent of Velasquez's own reflection cited earlier: "But these criteria remain rough and intuitive. They lie at the edges of the light that ethics can shed on moral reasoning." See note 5.

22. John McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," *The Monist* 62, no. 3 (1979): 331–50, at 336–38. McDowell proceeds to argue that this cannot be correct, for we are able to identify when "behavior comes adrift," which rule-based rationality does not allow. McDowell also points out that this is evident from how we argue with those who see some situation differently. We do not begin by arguing by deduction unless general principles were agreed upon prior. We begin by asking them to consider the situation in another light, to see different salient features as we see them. Our arguing is not on the basis of deductive logic but in the form of persuasion. (cf. 342)

23. David Wiggins, "Deliberation and Practical Reason," *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, New Series 76 (1975–1976): 41.

24. Aristotle, "Nicomachean Ethics," in *The Basic Works of Aristotle*, ed. Richard McKeon, trans. W. D. Ross (New York: Oxford University Press, 1941), 1137b27–31.

25. McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," 342.

26. Wiggins, "Deliberation and Practical Reason," 40.

27. Crane and Matten, *Business Ethics: Managing Corporate Citizenship and Sustainability in the Age of Globalization*, 110–11.

28. Crane and Matten, *Business Ethics: Managing Corporate Citizenship and Sustainability in the Age of Globalization*, 130–33. Crane and Matten also list several factors under "situational factors" that a virtue ethicist might describe as influencing ethical perception from inside the agent. Note especially their discussion of "moral intensity" and "moral framing" as situational factors. See pages 152–55.

29. Cf. Michael Stocker, "How Emotions Reveal Value and Help Cure the Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories," 173–90. Also see Stocker's preceding 1976 article, "The Schizophrenia of Modern Ethical Theories," 453–66, reprinted in *Virtue Ethics*, ed. Roger Crisp and Michael Slote (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 66–78.

30. McDowell, "Virtue and Reason," 347. Alasdair MacIntyre has treated of a similar theme in the second half of his 1999 book. Cf. Alasdair MacIntyre, *Dependent Rational Animals: Why Humans Need the Virtues* (Peru, IL: Carus Publishing, 1999). His point is quite the same: we need other people, especially those who do know our interests (our vision of the good life), to help us in our moral reasoning. See especially chapters 8, 9, 12, and 13.