

# **The Impossible Writing of Business Ethics**

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## STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

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None of the work has been submitted for another degree in this or any other.

Signed: ..... Date: .....

For my parents, Stefanos and Vasiliki.

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## ABSTRACT

### The Impossible Writing of Business Ethics

Eleni Karamali

This thesis offers a deconstructive reading of Business Ethics. Following Jacques Derrida, it shows how a deconstructive reading is not a reading which brings a set of protocols to an object or judgments to a field - we are not here concerned with offering an external criticism of Business Ethics, as if we were privy to its incontestable truth from the very outset. Instead, our reading of Business Ethics is a reading which strives *to come to terms with Business Ethics' own limits by considering how the literature on Business Ethics limits itself*. We pursue this reading of Business Ethics as a self-limiting writing along two principal registers - hospitality and translation – in both cases demonstrating how Business Ethics constitutes its outside as an outside which it simultaneously treats as an inside, and thereby annihilates. It is in this sense that we read Business Ethics as an ‘impossible writing’, impossible precisely because the very self-presence it seeks to grant to itself - the would-be language of ethical business - is itself foreclosed within the very gesture of seeking an encounter with a language it takes as its own. The first such gesture we consider is the manner in which Business Ethics *invites* the work of Emmanuel Levinas, albeit on certain conditions which serve only to make a welcoming of Levinasian ethics impossible. The second such gesture we consider is the manner in which Business Ethics *translates* itself into and out of the languages of Business and Ethics respectively, only to make its own language impossible. These two instances of impossibility, rather than serving to fatally limit the field, must rather be read as fundamentally constitutive of it. I conclude by arguing for an understanding of Business Ethics writing as *both necessary and impossible*.

## Chapter One: Introduction/Contribution

Scholars who are interested in business ethics seem for the most part to have split into two camps in talking about two kinds of business ethics — the normative and the empirical — and each of these two domains are considered to be guided by different theories and assumptions, which often results in misunderstandings or lack of appreciation of the other's endeavours. The empirical approach is rooted in the social sciences and scholars here tend to devalue the normative interests of philosophers because moral judgements cannot be understood in empirical terms and cannot be verified by empirical test nor be used to predict or explain behaviour. On the other hand, the social scientist's statements about morality tend to be seen as of little value to the philosopher because they do not address the essential questions of right and wrong (Trevino and Weaver 1994) (Rosenthal and Buchholz, 2002: 118).

deconstruction has never claimed ... to be *possible*. And I would say that deconstruction loses nothing from admitting that it is impossible; ... For a deconstructive operation *possibility* would rather be the danger, the danger of becoming an available set of rule-governed procedures, methods, accessible approaches. The interest of deconstruction, of such force and desire as it may have, is a certain experience of the impossible, in other words, as the only possible invention (Derrida, 1992: 328).

### Introduction

This thesis is motivated by an interest in the conditions of possibility for a Business Ethics worthy of the name. It challenges the very ethicality of the discipline of Business Ethics by carefully reading how claims towards ethical business practice are made and supported. The thesis takes its' inspiration from the philosophical writings of Jacques Derrida, a thinker whose work has extensively questioned the limits inherent within many writings done in the name of ethics and ontology (Derrida 1974, 1978, 1982, 1986). Throughout the investigation I will be principally concerned with two distinct but interrelated instances where Business Ethics attempts to come to terms with something which it knows it cannot know. Derrida has repeatedly tested the very assumptions under which a writer works and the very conditions of

movements that declare themselves to be of a particular kind. Derrida therefore pays attention to the conditions of both possibility and impossibility of a piece of writing. Here, we consider two of the most prominent ways in which these deconstructive dynamics play out in the context of the Business Ethics literature.

More particularly, the thesis identifies how the Business Ethics literature attempts to come to terms with the irreducibility of alterity – the alterity of hospitality and the alterity of communication. I argue that during a series of identifiably readable moments Business Ethics embraces alterity in a way that paradoxically serves only to foreclose it. These moments are moments in which Business Ethics writers offer hospitality to what it has not already known and appropriated. Jacques Derrida's discussion of hospitality is mobilised in order to account for such moments. The ways in which the Business Ethics literature deals with alterity warrants special consideration. In this thesis I review the Business Ethics literature with an eye towards these moments. I consider two specific cases within which Business Ethics encounters alterity: firstly, in its encounter with Emmanuel Levinas and secondly, in its encounter with the need to translate the languages of ethics and business into one another. The thesis ultimately draws on the work of Derrida in order to demonstrate what will be referred to throughout as the simultaneous necessity and impossibility of the Business Ethics literature.

These particular engagements with such confrontations of alterity as evidenced in the encounters with Levinas and translation respectively are shaped by a more general concern with the Business Ethics literature and its ongoing pursuit of what, for better

or for worse, we might call progress. The core of my argument throughout this dissertation rests upon the need to demonstrate that discussions in the Business Ethics literature have progressed by *not* considering a whole host of normative and philosophical foundations upon which such a notion of progress has been based. In this respect the current study is hardly without precedent (see, for example Clegg and Rhodes, 2006, 2007, Jones 2003, Jones et al. 2005, McPhail 1999, Parker 1998a, 1998b, 1998c, 1998d, 1999, 2002, 2003, Roberts 2001, ten Bos 1997, 2002, 2003, 2007, ten Bos and Willmott 2001). Building upon the work of these self-professedly critical accounts of the Business Ethics literature, this thesis seeks to underline the significance of a reading of this literature which takes its bearings from Jacques Derrida's writing on hospitality.

Derrida's deconstruction is exactly a kind of reading that starts every time anew, without having already prefigured the text's contribution to the tradition and the prescriptions it needs to satisfy. In order to take that form of reading as our model, of course, we need to take into account the very way in which the discipline of Business Ethics has developed so far and delimit the possible foundations upon which it can be seen to rest. We also need to have an account of what that form of reading requires – we do this by taking our lead from Derrida's work, his reading of Levinas in particular, as our example. The contribution of this thesis is to engage with the ongoing debates within Business Ethics by simultaneously acknowledging their necessity whilst also alluding towards the impossibility of their achieving the resolutions they set out to achieve, much in the way that Derrida reads Levinas.

Continuing a tradition by questioning it is one of the main lessons we can learn from deconstruction, as will be demonstrated throughout.

This chapter introduces three of the central concerns which will guide this thesis throughout, namely ‘what is the Business Ethics literature?’, ‘How are we to approach this literature?’ and, no less importantly, ‘Why Derrida?’, ‘Why Levinas’ and ‘Why Translation?’ by relating to the important work which has gone on before with respect to each of these questions.

### **What is the Business Ethics Literature?**

#### *Prescriptions versus Descriptions and the Need for Dialogue*

As a field business ethics requires the concrete descriptive component supplied by economists and those who study business and corporations from sociological, psychological, and other social scientific perspectives; it requires the theory of organization, management and business activity provided by professors of business; and it requires the systematic development and application of moral norms and normative theory provided by philosophers and theologians (de George, 1987: 204).

The Business Ethics Literature has long been diagnosed as a site of both empirical and conceptual analysis. As in many other disciplines, social scientific and otherwise, this is more often than not described as something of an unhappy marriage, a sort of meeting point where the two never quite manage to become one. The chief proponents

of the hugely influential integrated stakeholder theory/social contract theory model of Business Ethics, for example, describe the predicament as follows:

[d]uring the last 15 years, researchers with philosophical training have introduced purely normative, nonempirical methods to the study of business ethics, just as they introduced them earlier to the fields of legal and medical ethics. In this way, the philosophical tradition of ethical theory has contributed rigor to ongoing discussions of business ethics (Barry, 1982; Bowie, 1988; Donaldson, 1982; Freeman & Gilbert, 1988; French, 1979; Gauthier, 1986; Ladd, 1970; May, 1987; Nickel, 1974; Sen, 1985; Shue, 1981). (Donaldson and Dunfee, 1994: 253)

On the one side we can see how Business Ethics is written into being within the literature as a site where philosophers come together to think about the world of business. They come together armed with the weapons of ethics which, if applied correctly, will see to it that businesses become more ethical. On the other hand, however, Business Ethics is also written about as a site for social scientific analysis and measurement – a site where business people come face to face not with questions of formal rationality, but rather with just so many calls for substantive rationality. Donaldson and Dunfee (*ibid.*) continue:

Meanwhile, using the alternative perspective, business school researchers with training in empirical methods have applied their techniques (often adapted from existing approaches in marketing, finance, and elsewhere) to study important issues in corporate and organizational ethics (Akaah & Riordan, 1989; Cochran & Wood, 1984; Fritzsche & Becker, 1984; Hunt, Wood, & Chonko, 1989; Treviño & Youngblood, 1990; see particularly Randall & Gibson, 1990).

Donaldson and Dunfee therefore mark what has become an all too familiar refrain within overviews of the Business Ethics literature, namely, that there is a deep

division, if not an outright tension, between the philosophical and the social scientific approach to Business Ethics. As they put it, “the empirical and the normative, have produced two powerful streams of business research” (1994: 253) within Business Ethics. Powerful, though by no means always harmonious. Wicks and Freeman attribute the descriptive/prescriptive divide to the dominance of positivism in the field since, for them, ‘positivism creates a sharp distinction between prescribing and describing (Flew 1979, Donaldson 1992)’ (1998: 125). In one of the most extensive critical outlines of the descriptive/prescriptive divide within Business Ethics, Wicks and Freeman note how:

Descriptive work involves talking about things as they exist. Researchers stand as neutral observers, using scientific techniques that allow them to get beyond human biases so that they can make contact with ‘reality’ and document facts. The results of such studies do not tell corporate managers what it is they ought to do, or why they ought to do it; it simply reports in an unbiased way what empirical forces are to be reckoned with in a given context (Wicks and Freeman, 1998: 125).

Prescriptive work, for its part, on the other hand:

is the domain of the philosopher or literary critic and it focuses on what ought to be the case. Prescriptive writing explores such questions as ‘How can we make organizations more humane or better serve the interests of an array of stakeholders?’ Prescriptive writers talk about how the world can be if one adheres to certain ideals’. (1998: 125)

According to Freeman (1994), the author of the influential stakeholder theory approach to strategic management (1984) it is due to a continued reliance upon the idea that such a descriptive/prescriptive divide exists *at all* that Business Ethics ever came to be mistakenly known as an oxymoron. Giving up on what Freeman calls the ‘separation thesis’ [see also Alzola (2011), Kahn (1990), Morris (2001), Rosenthal

and Buccholz (2000), Werhane (1994a, 1994b)] would therefore be tantamount to opening up to the possibility that Business Ethics is much more than an oxymoron.

According to Wicks and Freeman (1998: 127), therefore:

recent work suggests that the marginality of ethics is no accident. Rather, it is the result of long-standing assumptions about the nature of business which tend to isolate the ethics "parts" from business "parts": a view that Freeman calls the separation thesis.

So according to Wicks and Freeman an unsustainable conceptual separation between the business world and the world of ethics is to be blamed for the marginality of ethics within Academia, within Business and Management Studies and especially within the realm of Economics. Ethics can only appear on to the scene as an external supplement since very little room is left for it to intervene within an almost self-sustained business world. As they argue: "the separation thesis posits that society has come to see business and ethics as distinct and separate realms with their own relevant concepts, categories, and language" (1998: 127). Following the pioneering work of Nobel Laureate Amartya Sen (1987) they go on to insist that:

over the past 60 years, the mainstream economics literature has come to embrace an outlook very much like Freeman's separation thesis. Given the way these two realms are shaped and distinguished, there is not much room for ethics (seen primarily as altruism) to play a role in business (seen primarily as strict self interest) except as an overarching external critique. In this context, business ethics becomes, by definition, an oxymoron. (1998: 127)

More recently, Trevino (2010) underlines the parallel trajectories of an understanding of Business Ethics with a capital E, on the one hand, and an understanding of



Business Ethics with a capital B, on the other. Trevino is clear to argue that these two approaches to Business Ethics have to do with the fact that they derive from different origins, one that has to do with philosophy and one that has to do with social science. The first one is taken as a normative approach and the second one is understood as a descriptive one. Trevino argues that she works “under the premise that business Ethics (the normative approach to its study) and Business ethics (the social-science approach) are on parallel tracks that are highly unlikely to converge” (1994: 114). A fundamental divide between a philosophical and a social science approach to Business Ethics is therefore said to operate within the field. The reasons why reconciliation is to be seen as impossible are outlined elsewhere (earlier) by Trevino and Weaver (1994). There, they describe Business Ethics as a ‘divided house’ which is ‘becoming increasingly well-established and institutionalized (De George, 1987a)’. They note the specificity of the field of Business Ethics by arguing that

unlike other fields where institutionalization means a shared paradigm (Kuhn, 1962), practitioners of "business ethics" from these different domains are guided by different theories, assumptions, and norms (not necessarily problematic), sometimes resulting in misunderstanding or lack of appreciation of each others' work (presumably problematic)' (1994: 114).

The authors go on to note how a number of Business Ethics thinkers such as Fleming (1987) and Kahn (1990) have recommended integration of these two different domains. Against these proposed integrations, they instead suggest that such integration has been ‘attempted without full understanding of its meaning and implications’ (1994: 114). Trevino and Weaver instead seek recourse to their parent disciplines in order to outline the distinctive features of both the normative and the empirical Business Ethics research.

we (a philosopher and a social scientist) begin by illuminating the distinctive features of normative business ethics and empirical business ethics that we believe contribute to current misunderstanding. Only when key differences are clearly articulated—i.e., when we know wherein we differ—is understanding (and perhaps integration) possible (Trevino and Weaver, 1994: 114).

Until such differences are communicated and the deeper reasons why these two strands exist and persist are elaborated upon, reconciliation fails. According to Trevino and Weaver, ultimately, there are fundamental differences between these two approaches (the philosophical and the social scientific) that inhibit communication and understanding. Only by removing the obstacle of ambiguity can communication prevail. There is therefore a sense in which the two traditions are speaking different languages:

Imagine travelling to a distant planet where the inhabitants' language is comprised of familiar English words. As a visitor, you are delighted at the prospect of being able to communicate with these English-speaking strangers. But, to your dismay, you soon discover that many of their words carry very different definitions. Your well-intended statements about "ethical behavior" are regularly misunderstood leading to frequent faux-pas, conflict and miscommunication. You realize that learning the strangers' language will be even more difficult than learning a totally new language with a different alphabet or a different grammar because you will have to learn new definitions and uses for words you use every day. Even more troublesome is the fact that their word meanings are deeply rooted in cultural assumptions very different from your own. This scenario is similar to the dilemma facing philosophers and social scientists who study business ethics. Each has independently developed a vocabulary for talking about the phenomenon they study and how they study it. The philosophers' lexicon is quite precise, having developed based upon centuries of philosophical study. Relatively speaking, the social scientist has just begun to develop a vocabulary for asking and answering questions of interest.' (1994: 117-118).

It is these differences in language that make it necessary for the philosophical approach to appeal as 'familiar' to the business context so that a fruitful application takes place. This problem of non-communicability will become crucial within the penultimate chapter of the thesis. There we will see how translation of philosophical terms needs to be cast in a language that business people do not find too foreign so that communication is facilitated. More particularly we will attend to the ongoing attempt made by the philosopher Robert Solomon to translate the philosophical concept of *arete* in order to make Business Ethics a topic for two way communication, that is to say, for dialogue. In this attempt, as we will see, Solomon finds it necessary to underline how this concept is relevant to managers because it can be translated as 'excellence'. Immediate communication is valued by the field of Business Ethics, confusion and misunderstanding needs to be eliminated. The translation taking place there therefore is a particular kind of translation, one that does not tolerate difference and strangeness.

This kind of translation has particular kind of implications as we will later see, especially when translation is seen as an ethical exercise. For now we should bear in mind how what is being called the problem of translation here is by no means a minor concern within the Business Ethics literature. On the contrary, the translation problem goes to the very heart of the way in which the literature on Business Ethics is described as a divided literature. It is for this reason that it warrants the special consideration that it receives within this investigation.

### *Business versus Ethics and the Historical Need for Business Ethics*

Although business ethics is an interdisciplinary field, there is too little real integration of work by philosophers, theologians, and professors of business. There is a need for more integrated studies, and therefore a need for more philosophers and theologians with better training in and knowledge of business, as well as for more professors of business with better training in ethical theory and moral reasoning (de George 1987: 208)

In addition to the tendency to overview the Business Ethics literature on the basis of a predominantly comparative line, a line which creates a division between two separate traditions and takes a gamble on the possibility or impossibility of interdisciplinary dialogue, we also find a variety of historically inflected summaries and reviews of the Business Ethics literature holding sway. According to De George, for example, the 1980s brought with them the emergence of the field of Business Ethics as a discipline in its own right. He elaborates upon this argument as follows:

Previous decades from the 1920s to the late 1960s saw isolated texts and courses, but no concerted movement and nothing identifiable as a field. As late as the 1970s it was still possible to ask whether there was such a thing as business ethics. By the mid-1980s that question is no longer appropriate (1987: 201).

According to De George, then, business schools responded to the virulent anti-corporate/anti-capitalist sentiment characteristic of late-1960s campus politics, particularly within the United States of America, by offering a series of electives and specialisms in topics such as ‘social issues in business’ and ‘corporate social responsibility’. These initiatives largely took the form of a series of appeals to managers and lawyers, rather than broader civil society constituents, and therefore did

very little to make a convincing case for Business Ethics to a wider audience of stakeholders. These were mostly reactionary measures, in other words, and therefore struggled to gain any notable approval beyond the immediate interests of capitalist apologists in the midst of a crisis of capitalism. According to De George's analysis, it was only when philosophers started to produce Business Ethics writing that the discipline started to become taken more seriously and therefore became more popular.

In how many other ways they might differ, then, De George's older historical analysis of the relationship between radical politics and moralised capitalism comes very close to the findings evident with the more recent and more celebrated work of Boltanski and Chiapello's *New Spirit of Capitalism* (2007) and Rakesh Khurana's *From Higher Aims to Hired Hands* (2010), for example. Boltanski and Chiapello, for their part, tell the story of how the late 1960s critique of capitalism became incorporated within capitalism towards the ends of capitalism, via the business and management literature. Khurana, for his part, tells the story of how the business school was originally founded upon a professional ethics model only for it to become corrupted by the political upheavals characteristic of the post-68 fall out, specifically with regard to the development of a more stealthy financialized capitalism which is making its pernicious effects felt today. De George, thirdly, as we have seen, tells the story of how the field of Business Ethics became possible, perhaps even inevitable, when seen as the direct result of the late 1960s crisis of capital and the call to imagine an alternative. In all three instances we see the relationship between ethics and capitalism analysed historically, and in all three instances we see the late 1960s representing a crucial historical turning point.

It is also on this very point that the comparative analysis of Donaldson and Dunfee discussed above dovetails with the historical analysis of De George. Keeping the historical context at the very forefront of his account of the underlying nature of the Business Ethics literature, De George remarks:

[s]ome professors of management questioned the role, if any, philosophers could play in an area with which philosophers were unacquainted and towards which many of them were hostile (1987: 203).

In both forms of analysis (comparative/historical) fundamental tensions are clearly to be felt: the tension between philosophy and social science in the case of Donaldson and Dunfee, the tension between management professors and philosophers, in the case of De George. And yet, for both forms of analysis these tensions are entirely indispensable. Indeed, these inherent tensions are said not to be prohibitive of but rather constitutive for the field of Business Ethics – to have a Business Ethics literature is to have a set of seemingly irresolvable tensions such as these in play. As already suggested above, of course, tensions are also to be felt in the opposite direction. In as much as a philosophical disdain towards the murky world of business lies in evidence, business people too are regularly said to feel uncomfortable in the company of philosophers. The philosopher's language is cast as difficult to understand and for that reason described as hostile to the demands of business. At best philosophy gets described as a sort of interesting distraction or entertaining amusement (Kaulingfreks, 2007). As De George remarks:

business men and women also feel comfortable with professors of business, whom they feel understand management's problems and are on its side.

Businesses have been least receptive to philosophers, whom they do not understand, whom they mistrust, and whom they often assume to be anti-business (1987: 208).

Shaw's historical account of the emergence of Business Ethics differs from De George's. In Shaw's account the philosophical origin of Business Ethics is prioritized, at the expense of the managerial one. This is not to say that the dates aren't similar, only that the dynamics differ. In some ways initially echoing De George, Shaw argues:

Twenty-five years ago business ethics was not a recognized academic specialty, and few, if any, North American colleges and universities offered courses on it. In both the academic world and the world of business, many would, in fact, have greeted the phrase "business ethics" with a smirk and perhaps a joking remark to the effect that "'business ethics' is an oxymoron" or that "business has no ethics." (1996: 489)

Nevertheless, for Shaw (1996) it is important to underline how a demand for courses on Applied Ethics offered by universities came much earlier to the development of Business Ethics as a field of study. He notes how "these were, and continue to be, taught by professional philosophers, stationed in departments of philosophy" (1996: 490). Shaw takes this development to be the case still today, as he notes "although business ethics is not the exclusive province of philosophers, it is probably accurate to say that most courses in business ethics are taught by philosophers and that philosophy is generally perceived to be the home discipline of business ethics" (1996: 490). Crucially for Shaw, the teaching of Business Ethics was not viewed favourably by senior philosophy teachers who "still believe that we should not teach business ethics because it is not really philosophy" (1996: 490, see also Klein, 1998; Holt et al, 1997 and Collins and Wartick, 1995).

Shaw grants himself the position of a philosopher outlining the antagonistic environment between the business academic's and philosopher's teaching of Business Ethics. Accusations of philosophers not offering a representative account of the world of business acts as testament to the tension between these two strands. Here of course the assumption is that somehow access to this world is possible, and that this can be offered by different groups of academics that can move closer or further away from such a world. As Shaw notes:

My colleagues in business and management point out that philosophers teaching business ethics often have little experience of the business world, know little about economics or business and management theory, and have hostile attitudes toward the business system. One can appreciate why business professors might well be distressed to find ignorant and ideologically suspect philosophers treading all over their turf. Undoubtedly, those who are trained in philosophy do typically bring to the teaching of business ethics a perspective that differs from, and is sometimes antagonistic to, the perspective of business instructors' (1996: 490).

Shaw concludes by insisting that the paradox of integration will not be resolved any time soon and that, for all the productive work which philosophy can be said to have done for Business Ethics, there has been little by way of wash-back: business ethics has had almost no effect upon philosophy (1996: 492). The lack of concrete effects, as well as the lack of ambition characteristic of Business Ethics writing is also noted by Parker (1998) when he argues that Business Ethics makes requests rather than demands, and in so doing undermines the possibility of wider influence.

Along another trajectory Kahn's proposed integration of ethics and business (1990) takes its bearings from what will have become familiar to the reader in the name of



Freeman's separation thesis, that is, the routine separation of normative prescription and contextual description. According to Kahn the field of Business Ethics

lies at the intersection of two types of sensibilities: those focusing on abstractions and theoretical frameworks and those focusing on relatively concrete tools ... As an interdisciplinary field, business ethics research naturally builds from existing primary disciplines that are relatively disconnected from one another (1990: 312).

Kahn continues:

the developmental task of the field, is to create and build on shared territory. The difficulty in doing so is partly linked to the strengths of individuals' ties to their primary disciplines. Those primary ties guarantee that researchers are grounded in sets of concepts and methods that they can contribute. (*ibid.*: 313).

According to Kahn, then, it is disciplinary faith which stands as the firmest barrier to Business Ethics. For Trevino and Weaver (1994), to recall, Business Ethics can arise out of the fact of disciplinary reliance. But in stark contrast lies the argument of Kahn for whom the exact opposite is the case – only by a generalised shaking off of just so many disciplinary shackles, he suggests, can Business Ethics ever have a chance of overcoming the separation thesis as a means of coming into its own. He continues:

Researchers maintain ties to the concepts and methods of their primary discipline not only because of their training and the lack of ready alternatives, but also because of their uncertainty about what an evolved field of business ethics will contain. Would it be a subfield of organizational behaviour or philosophy? Would it be a separate discipline altogether? (1990: 313).

For Kahn the integration which Business Ethics requires is to be achieved only at the expense of its constitutive conventional disciplines. The purpose of his work, as he describes it, 'is to move toward a vision of that intersection and to construct an agenda

for business ethics research that will help move the field through its current developmental stage' (1990: 313). Kahn is more than aware of the fact that his proposal is likely to be resisted. Resistance occurs, he concludes, at the expense of a genuine Business Ethics. To make Business Ethics possible, according to Kahn, requires us to make disciplinary exactitude and fidelity no longer possible. This, for him, is a price worth paying.

This theory/practice trade-off question is a perennial concern of the business ethics literature in particular and of business and management studies more generally. It goes to the heart, for example, of the post-Enron crisis soul-searching in evidence on the part of *the Academy of Management* (Ghoshal, 2005) and *The Harvard Business Review* (Bennis and O Toole, 2005). It also forms the basis for much of what gets discussed in the ongoing 'rigour-relevance debate' where, as outlined by Augier and March (2007: 129), the battle lines are drawn with very similar broad brush strokes:

Persistently through the history, two contending exaggerations have framed the debates. The first proclaims that management education has sacrificed relevance to the esoterics of academic purity. The second bemoans the subordination of fundamental knowledge and research to the limited perspectives of immediate problems.

Certainly the role given to a discussion of Business Ethics within the academy has a crucial set of historical components to it. A Foucauldian analysis of the history of business ethics in terms of governmentality would certainly produce important insights. Indeed, the place at which Foucault's analysis (2008) of Chicago school economics stops is precisely the moment where much of the business school reforms discussed above, and analysed in Khurana's work, begins. A project of historicising

business ethics as a form of governmentality, much in the way in which Foucault analyses neo-liberal economic theories as modes of governmentality, would surely serve to compliment the current literature on Foucaultian ethics and their relevance to ethical organisational analysis (Everett et al, Ibarro-Colado, Keleman et al. 2001, McPhail 1999, ten Bos 1997, Chan et al 2002, Crane et al. 2008, Roberts 2003).

Apart from this potential historical project, however, is a different sort of problem still: the problem of squaring theory and practice off with one another in accordance with the demands of the day as an ongoing problem which defines the Business Ethics literature more or less irrespective of the specificities of an historical or geographical setting. Within this investigation, therefore, what is of primary interest isn't so much the question of which demands are prominent at a particular moment in time on the question of Business Ethics within the literature. Rather, what we are analysing here is the problem of how the quest for Business Ethics remains a quest to overcome a pair of structurally endemic conflicts: firstly the conflict between ethics and alterity (the hospitality problem), secondly the conflict between business and ethics (the translation problem). A Foucaultian project would certainly compliment the sorts of concerns being expressed and developed here, therefore, but it would not replace them. What I am interested in within this thesis is not so much the historicizing of Business Ethics as a discipline but its endless inability to move away from its inaugural translating endeavours.

## **Business Ethics in Practice**

For a long time Business Ethics advocates struggled to shake the monkey of oxymoronism off their backs. Then, as with now, the challenge remains one of trying to pull the variety of inherently interdisciplinary strands characteristic of the Business Ethics literature together for the sake of producing something of enduring substance which could be rightfully called Business Ethics. For many, this synthesis is to be achieved with recourse to the staple diet of classical business and management pedagogy – the case study. Case studies are taken to be representative of the business reality and therefore serve the purpose of providing preparation of students for confronting similar issues in the future within the business context. If future managers can learn how to solve ethical dilemmas by being continually exposed to them, the recurrence of unethical business practices might consequentially be avoided. De George again:

Developing cases is first of all an empirical and descriptive task. Analysis then involves normative activity. Cases are important for sensitizing students to problems they may have to face, for teaching them how to solve similar cases, and for discussing alternative structures in the business world that will preclude the reoccurrence of similar cases (1987: 204)

Nevertheless, the case study approach to Business Ethics has met with its fair share of criticism. According to Martin Parker (2002), for example, case studies only serve to create an artificial environment that has as its centre an almost heroic individual charged with the task of rescuing the world from the evils therein. World renowned management guru Henry Mintzberg has also recently spilled a lot of ink against the prevalence of the case study and its prominence within global MBA programmes –

not least of all for the assumption that the classroom can replace the boardroom (Mintzberg 2004, Mintzberg and Gosling 2004, 2006, Mintzberg and Lambel 2001). It is through technologies such as the case study, nevertheless, that business and management pedagogy separates a part of itself off in order to deal with ethics. This very act is constitutive and formative of a very prominent strand of Business Ethics pedagogy where it is pretended that Business Ethics is required. It is as if we would have had to have created Business Ethics before would-be managers can be put into contact with ethical considerations. This is to have the tail wagging the dog, surely, according to Parker and Mintzberg.

Donaldson and Dunfee (1994) suggest that students learn very little useful information and skills from case studies, specifically with regards to how they should act when in front of an ethical problem. For them, one of the chief disadvantages of a Business Ethics course of study is that students are never taught the most appropriate position with regards to solving an ethical dilemma, that they never gain moral certainty. Instead, students are offered a number of positions but no guidance as to which is the most relevant in particular situations. Students of Business Ethics courses soon find out that we cannot derive any specific recommendations for conduct after having familiarised ourselves with ethical theories and that there is no consensus among moral philosophers about which moral theory is most appropriate for guiding action. As they put it

[h]ow can one hope, it may be asked, to resolve some moral dilemma in business by reference to particular moral principles when there is no general agreement on the theories underlying those principles? (Donaldson and Dunfee, 1994: 495)

Ethical pluralism is therefore familiarly sensed as being in danger of becoming ethical relativism. A need for consensus, for integration and harmonisation is underlined by Donaldson and Dunfee, but the case study approach offers no such solution. Instead, they propose the model of 'pragmatic experimentation' (see also Wicks and Freeman 1998), that is, an approach to Business Ethics education that focuses on practical relevance instead of its more theoretical and philosophical aspects. Although these authors acknowledge that the non-empirical strand in Business Ethics is a powerful stream of research they prioritize the empirical significance of the research available.

Researchers doing this type of work would see organization studies as a vehicle to help people lead better lives. It would be characterized by a focus on the practical relevance of research as well as a desire to search for novel and innovative approaches ("experimentation") that may help serve human purposes (Donaldson and Dunfee: 1994)

This pragmatist proposal pervades. Douglas Anderson's *Companion of Business Ethics* (2002) prioritises pragmatism as *the* perspective through which we should look at Business Ethics. For him:

Pragmatism asks philosophy to address everyday issues and to deal with issues of social consequence: business ethics has been an ongoing attempt precisely for philosophy to deal with specific issues and practices in the world of business. In its basic purpose business ethics appears to be pragmatic. Ironically, however, the business ethics trade was not generated by, nor has it been heavily influenced by pragmatism. (2002: 58).

In making this argument Anderson notes how inappropriate it is for Business Ethics students and scholars to be focusing on ethical theories. He argues:

As most current textbooks in business ethics evidence, the primary method used by philosophers for textbooks in business ethics into the business world is to provide an overview of a limited set of ethical systems: deontology, utilitarianism, egoism, and so forth. These systems are then taken to the world of case studies where they applied, often somewhat mechanically.[ ...] The theories tend to functions as overlays on, not as direct engagements with living issues' (*ibid.*).

According to Anderson, then, the theories are in danger of becoming abstractions that miss the most important aspect of ethics, that ethics has do with living issues that cannot be touched by mere applications of theorists. Only pragmatism can square this circle, apparently:

Students and business practitioners often see in philosophical business ethics precisely what the early pragmatists saw in some late nineteenth-century systematic philosophy: a sense that ethics is a game of abstractions and that philosophers are tied to an intellectualism that, despite their insistence on getting down to earth, does not address the actual issues in the case studies. This I think is the ground of the cynicism that is occasionally aimed at philosophers by those who teach and deal with business ethics in schools and departments of business.' (*ibid.*).

Few writers would deny the need for a practical consideration of Business Ethics issues. What we see occurring in the call for a practical turn towards a business and management orientation to Business Ethics, however, is the call for a turning away from philosophical orientations. This break cannot be completely achieved, however, for reasons outlined above – Business Ethics is a discussion of ethics in as much as it is also a discussion of business. Ethics has always been a concern for philosophers and so Business Ethics cannot be completely purged of philosophy for as long as it remains concerned with ethics. The turn towards the Business Ethics case study and the turn towards pragmatist accounts of ethics (see also Margolis and Walsh 2001,

2003; Margolis and Elfenbein, 2008; Porter and Kramer 2002, 2006; The Economist 2008; Walsh et al 2003) are the rhetorical resources mobilised in the effort to overcome philosophy. The debate remains ongoing, however, business has not yet had the final word on philosophy – Business Ethics remains an ongoing debate.

*What is the Business Ethics Literature if not an Oxymoron?*

So far we have isolated three tendencies within the Business Ethics literature, as outlined above. *Firstly*, we have seen how for many there is and remains a series of tensions between a normative approach to Business Ethics, derived out of philosophical writings and ethical theory, and a descriptive approach to Business Ethics, derived out of the managerial and social sciences. For many seminal authors in the Business Ethics literature the question has been and remains one of attempting to reconcile these two oppositional approaches for the sake of founding the literature upon enduring and reliable foundations.

*Secondly*, we have seen how there is much controversy over how and indeed whether such foundations are to be best established. For many philosophically trained writers it makes sense to derive Business Ethics out of Ethics – Business Ethics gained much of its acceptance from the attention of philosophers and so the field should continue to take its bearings from their guidance. For others, however, it is much more a question of making interdisciplinary dialogue possible and of establishing the conditions upon which genuine debate could occur to the point where the concerns of one side



translated into the concerns of the other. This is a question we will return to in more detail within the penultimate chapter of the thesis.

*Thirdly*, we have considered the drive to purge Business Ethics of its conceptual components and philosophical determination for the sake of actually aiding managerial decision making, of actually being relevant to the demands of the day. This has led many to find sanctuary within the legitimacy of the case study whereas for others, the question is much more one of establishing the pragmatic credentials of Business Ethics, albeit not necessarily upon the parameters of this or that case study technology.

Each of these three controversies remains ongoing. Whatever is likely to happen within them one thing seems clear: the supposedly clever announcement that Business Ethics is little other than an oxymoron completely misses the point when considered at the level of the literature and its overview as undertaken here. Contributors towards ongoing Business Ethics debates know only all too well that what they are writing about gets written about upon a fundamentally precarious set of foundations. It isn't the case that these contradictions need to be pointed out to these authors and in so doing so many castles will finally fall straight from the sky. Such a critique need not be made since the authors are more than aware of its consequences. Indeed, everyone already knows that Business Ethics is an inherently paradoxical proposal, its chief proponents perhaps most of all. The remarkable thing is that this is an inherently

paradoxical proposal which continues to be made more often than not despite itself. We will continually allude to the Business Ethics literatures' simultaneous necessity and impossibility with the above in mind for it is the contradictory characteristic of Business Ethics which the literature upon it articulates as a matter of course.

### **How are we to approach the literature?**

Bearing what we have seen so far in mind, it is now briefly worth considering how the sort of reading proposed here is not as overtly critically oriented as the approaches towards which kinship has already been announced above. If we were more concerned with developing a critique of the Business Ethics literature then the series of paradoxes outlined above would have offered us sufficient food for thought. Here, however, it is not our intention to point out the conceptual deficiencies in what the Business Ethics literature can be said to be advocating, proposing or considering. It is rather our concern to see how the Business Ethics literature *persists*, despite the prevalence of reasons for it perhaps should have desisted long ago.

The paradoxes pointed towards above, on this sort of reading, aren't so much weaknesses of the literature as they are its defining characteristics. Business Ethics discussions are defined by theory/practice conflicts, they are defined by the possibility of communication which they might one day achieve and they are defined by an engagement with strangers that might be accepted on condition that they obey the pragmatic line. This is not a deficiency of the writings we are reading here, at least not for our purposes. Instead, this is what these writings are constantly struggling to deal

with, it is what they do rather than what they can be shown to be doing by a critic. It is in this sense that we are attempting to track down what it means for a literature to be hospitable and what it means for a literature to engage in translation. The specificity of our concerns should have been brought into some relief on the basis of what has been discussed above. They will come to take on additional specificity once we undertake each of our particular readings in more detail within the chapters that follow.

This chapter, as an introductory chapter, is charged with describing what this thesis is about, how it will develop and how it has been structured. It writes, in other words, about how its author plans to deliver it. The concern of the chapter, therefore, is with the establishment of borders, the borders of an argument which is yet to be made. Attempting to do this does not necessarily mean that the thesis will be accordingly confined. Indeed, as will be argued throughout, this very act of setting a variety of borders, itself presumably recently inaugurated, is not as delimiting an act as we might want it to be. Although the pre-setting of the limits of this thesis is the very purpose of this chapter, this operation does not necessarily confine the author or the reader (and the author as a reader and the reader as the author) to the space accordingly demarcated.

Indeed, the inseparability and interconnection of the very attempt to separate the author from what it is that the author researches will itself be a concern throughout this thesis. What needs to be considered in this regard is the nature of a decision, or set of decisions, as to the location and function of the borders which are to be drawn

around and within this thesis. Within this chapter, therefore, I argue that writing about the structure of this thesis, that is, attempting to describe it, up front, in a comprehensive way, necessarily does some sort of violence to what it is that I want to describe. The complicity of the very act of description to that which is described by it is therefore a driving concern throughout this thesis.

Nevertheless, such a description is entirely indispensable to the concerns of a writing exercise such as this - the very act of description is simultaneously an act of alteration. Yet for the most part, when writing introductions such as these, we seem to find ourselves having to confirm and reconfirm the exact opposite state of affairs: one which affirms nothing but the *passivity* of description. This tendency becomes extended within each subsequent chapter where we first of all open by describing what will be done, what has been done, what will follow. And it is here, in these very acts of description and re-description that the bordering practices of the thesis come into their own. Descriptions serve to border, to bracket, to demarcate. To introduce a thesis in advance is to describe the decisions that were made as to the borders that were drawn.

How, then, can we go back to the beginning, to the thought before the refutation, to the text before the demarcation? Or is it for us to force every chapter to follow the line which was eventually drawn? Our beginning has been moved because of our writing yet this is subsequently betrayed by the very need to reset our structure within every chapter, the very need to draw a line from which we promise not to digress. We seem to need to ensure that we have followed a line, a plan, a script. For Jacques Derrida,

‘writing’ is already there at the very beginning, already implicated in every attempt of beginning.

The very need to refer to the borders of writing is to set the route from which we will not digress. But this is to take us away from this route, to digress from it, to show ourselves that the way we have decided to go is not the only possible way. This already shows us that what we have called the initial delimitation has not been enough. We constantly consult the initial plan in order not to abandon it. Yet we simultaneously realise that the plan we have chosen not to abandon is guaranteed only by our having initially settled upon it. The necessity of conforming to a border does not mean that delimitation is of no importance or that it has no effects. On the contrary, the very fact that when writing a thesis we find ourselves in the midst of delimiting acts portrays the very prevalence of delimitation, the inaugural delimitation called the introduction not least of all.

To describe, therefore, is to border. Every time we refer to the border as something of determinative significance, we impose upon it even more - we aim to strengthen its divisiveness. But if it was determinative in this regard, such referring would not be necessary. This suggests that we cannot directly refer to the setting out of which the thesis emerges. It rather suggests that we need to read through the very act of description offered by this chapter. It suggests that we have to accept the fact that the first limitation was not *first* enough. So what does this mean for the one who seeks to work within the borders of Business Ethics in order to research Business Ethics?

The delimitation of this thesis along the lines outlined above allows the possibility of reinforcing these limits into the future. And the very possibility of such reinforcement, through the act of description, itself portrays a certain weakness of the border. We want the borders we draw to hold the thesis in place. And yet, these moments of reinforcement underline how delimitation is a sort of imposition, a use of force, the act of the construction of what eventually comes to count as limits. Limits, in this light, could have been constructed otherwise. Yet for all of this we cannot stop constructing limits; limits in a way presuppose the prior act of construction.

Announcing the limits of this thesis, declaring what it is that it will restrict itself to, is an act that gets cancelled out by the very necessity of performing just such a set of operations. The introduction narrates how the thesis has been settled upon; it transfers the acts of delimitation even before performing them. It seems as though this very movement of description and every subsequent one (describing what every chapter does) is an insistent attempt to stabilize the assumed initial setting of the borders of the thesis. But why does the initial setting need to be reset and subsequently related to something else? In order to describe what will be researched we need to separate the very act of objective setting from the objectives. By having a chapter responsible for describing the way in which the thesis will unfold we do more than merely describe the structure of what is to follow.

## **Why Derrida, Levinas and Translation?**

This thesis wonders about the conditions of possibility for encountering something like Business Ethics – it wonders about what we are reading when we say we are reading Business Ethics, and of what we are doing when we say we are reading Business Ethics. Approaching the field involves an approach towards something called the Business Ethics literature. So how do we approach the literature? How do we read the writing which serves to constitute the object of Business Ethics? Throughout this thesis we will consider how the Business Ethics literature is constituted as an object of enquiry by virtue of the very fact that it is ‘doing Business Ethics’. We will suggest that Derrida’s work helps us see something with regards to the relationality *within* Business Ethics. The literature works as self validating to the extent that it trades on the assumption that it offers the place where Business Ethics can be dealt with.

In our reading of hospitality (Derrida, 2005a, 2003, 2001, 2000d, 1999a, 1999b) and translation (Derrida, 1981, 1985, 1986, 1998) we consider how the Business Ethics literature works in a seemingly non-neutral but fundamentally constitutive way regarding what Business Ethics has become. When this constitutional nature of the writing body of Business Ethics is underestimated, Business Ethics is approached via the literature as if that approaching hasn’t already been shaped by the very necessity of the place it needs to occupy, extend and contribute towards - the place of the literature. This is to approach writing as if we were outside of it. The step proper to Business Ethics is seen as the step into the literature. According to Derrida’s conceptualisation of text, however, we are always already in writing. Writing cannot

be restricted to one place, where it can be done and enclosed there. If anything, Derrida's appreciation of writing underlines how a pre-understanding of the divisibility of boundaries serves to get in the way of an access to a more primordial understanding of what writing is, of how deeply it runs.

Following Derrida, a reading of the Business Ethics literature must start with Business Ethics writings. So in this sense a deconstructive engagement with Business Ethics, that is to say a reading of Business Ethics informed by the work of Jacques Derrida, must take its bearings from nothing but Business Ethics's own relation to itself, that is to say its writing of itself. So surely this is the literature? This will indeed be the case here. When we are reading the Business Ethics literature what we are reading is Business Ethics's account of itself. What the reading of the literature proposes here, therefore, is that Business Ethics is nothing but the literature on Business Ethics, that there is not a Business Ethics separate from the texts of Business Ethics. And what we concern ourselves with here, above all else, is the manner in which this very literature nonetheless has constant recourse to a supposed outside, an outside which it needs to render inside, an outside which it both requires but also requires in such a way that it cannot ever secure it. Our deconstructive reading of the Business Ethics literature concerns itself, above all else, with the ways in which the literature both presents and denies itself the right to speak in the name of Business Ethics.

We pursue this reading along two principle trajectories. In the next chapter we consider how Business Ethics invites its outside so as to become Business Ethics. This outside, in the next chapter, takes the form of the work of Emmanuel Levinas. On the



one hand, Levinas's work is treated as something which offers its readers a way of thinking which Business Ethics has not yet been privy to. Business Ethics does not have Levinas. And yet Levinas writes about ethics. Business Ethics too strives to write about ethics so surely it is duty bound to be able to reckon with the writing of Levinas. This is acknowledged and Levinas is invited to write in the name of Business Ethics. And yet this very invitation, as we will demonstrate, serves only to leave Business Ethics untouched by the thinking of Levinas. Levinas is invited, but only on the terms that his writing conforms with the concerns of Business Ethics. Levinas is invited, therefore, but only on condition that his writing already be rendered relevant to Business Ethics's account of ethics. Levinas is invited, but only the part of Levinas which can be rendered relevant to the already prevalent concerns of Business Ethics. The aspects of Levinas's thinking which cannot be brought in apparently need not be brought in. To relate to Levinas in this way, we will demonstrate, is not to relate to him as outside but as always already inside. The gesture which seeks Levinas does not seek difference – it seeks only what it already knows. And it is in this sense that we say the literature limits itself.

From here, we broaden out to a demonstration of how this reading of the literature on Business Ethics as a self-limiting literature is of a piece with deconstruction. Our reading of how Business Ethics reads Levinas isn't necessarily concerned with whether Business Ethics gets Levinas wrong, or not, therefore. What we are concerned with in undertaking such a reading is nothing other than a consideration of how the literature limits itself, of how it denies itself. This is precisely the position which Derrida takes towards Levinas in his reading of his work. For Derrida, it isn't

the case that Levinas is wrong, misguided, naïve, or any such thing. For Derrida, in his reading of Levinas, it is rather the case that Levinas's own writing denies itself the very thing it wants to achieve, namely, an ethics of alterity. Similarly here, in our reading of Business Ethics's reading of Levinas, what we want to focus upon is the way in which Business Ethics's account of Levinas is an account which makes an encounter with Levinas desirable, only to simultaneously render it impossible in the very performance of the encounter. This is not something we are reading into the Business Ethics literature. It is rather something which happens within the Business Ethics literature. This is what Derrida shows when he shows how Levinasian ethics stands as the greatest barrier to an achievement of Levinasian ethics. This is also what we want to show when we show how Business Ethics both invites Levinas whilst also making this very invitation impossible.

Our second account of the manner in which Business Ethics limits itself is derived out of a reading of how it engages with the act of translation. Here taking our bearings from the work of Robert Solomon, in his ongoing attempt to render the work of Aristotle relevant to the Business Ethics literature, we demonstrate how translation serves both to bring Aristotle into the literature, *and* to leave him outside of it. For on the one hand, Solomon recognizes how Aristotelian ethics presents us with the difficulty of translating a word which can be said to mean both virtue and excellence. The difficulty for the translator is therefore the difficulty of making a decision, of annulling difference in the name of similitude. On the other hand, once this difficulty is recognized, it is simultaneously ignored or forgotten. Yes, Solomon says, translation is a difficult matter, it isn't quite clear which way we should go in deciding

what Aristotle means, when translated into our own concerns. Nevertheless, Solomon also says, we should make the translation, reduce the Other to the Same, and carry on regardless of the fact which we know only all too well, namely, that Aristotle cannot mean what we will nonetheless treat him as having meant. As with Levinas, Business Ethics invites a thinking into its text. And as we saw in the case of Levinas, this invitation, this time of Aristotle, serves only to leave aside that which we know cannot be left aside. Translation of ethics into Business Ethics, as with the invitation of ethics on behalf of Business Ethics, serves only to leave Business Ethics relatively untouched by the very ethics it knows itself to require.

Business Ethics writes as if everything existed elsewhere, outside of its own text, waiting to be brought in. The literature on Business Ethics *limits itself*. This is what our deconstructive engagement with the literature strives to demonstrate. The reasons why I concentrate on Business Ethics in this way is because it is a discipline that promises ethics, a tradition that claims to be actually doing ethics. Rather than dismissing this claim out of hand I would like it seriously. I do this by questioning the field's ethicality, by pushing this logic of the field's inherent ethicality to its limits. The idea that Business Ethics is a place where ethics is done is at the core of this thesis and it is a claim that is rigorously challenged throughout. The two examples examined in this thesis involve moments when the field works against the very ethicality that it proclaims.

## **Chapter Two: Invitations 1: Levinas**

Surely, business ethicists are not pure moral theorists who needn't worry about practicality of their prescriptions. Any business ethics worthy of the name should be an ethics of practice. But this means that business ethicists must get their hands dirty and seriously consider the costs that sometimes attend "doing the right thing." They must help managers do the arduous, conceptual balancing required in difficult cases where every alternative has both moral and financial costs'. (Stark, 1994: 43)

### **Introduction**

The Business Ethics literature has traditionally been based upon the work of a number of philosophical figures whose work is supposed to have offered it a sense of grounding and a possibility for legitimation. According to Parker, the field has an understanding of ethics:

which it largely inherits from moral philosophy. This is a substantial piece of cultural capital, stretching back to Plato and Aristotle, and incorporating big words (utilitarianism, deontology) and big names (Immanuel Kant, John Stuart Mill). The usefulness of such language should not be underestimated, since it is sufficiently arcane to impress, and allows the putative business ethicists to be a gatekeeper to the knowledges that are primarily the province of the academy (2002: 95; see also Parker 1997).

In this sense, we can say that contributors towards the Business Ethics literature are expected, or better that they expect themselves, to be hospitable towards moral philosophy – that the question of doing Business Ethics is already an investigation into how one should act and hence it is an ethical question. For Derrida, indeed, the ethical moment is precisely such a moment of hospitality: a call for ethics is a call to show hospitality towards something which cannot be appropriated and as such will always remain pursuable. More and more philosophical figures are constantly invited

to contribute to the field of Business Ethics. Emmanuel Levinas is now being invited to the field – to what extent can hospitality be shown towards his work?

Derrida has extensively commented on Emmanuel Levinas (1978), a thinker who has written on both hospitality and ethics. Much of Derrida's philosophy of hospitality, indeed, is based upon his engagement with Levinas's work. Within this chapter Derrida's treatment of Levinas will be considered as a model for understanding how writing offers a kind of hospitality (to the Other in the case of Derrida's Levinas and to the Other that is Levinas in the case of Business Ethics) to a notion of radical externality, whilst simultaneously withdrawing the possibility of alterity's emergence as something other.

In recent years there have been a series of efforts to introduce the work of Emmanuel Levinas to Business Ethics (e.g. Aasland 2004; Jones 2003; Roberts 2001, 2003) and critical accounting (e.g. Campbell et al., 2009; MacIntosh, 2004; McKernan and Kosmala MacLulich 2004; and Shearer 2002). The published special issue on *Levinas and Business Ethics*, within which a version of this chapter was published, must be understood as a further intensification of this tendency (see Karamali 2007, see also Aasland 2007, Bevan and Corvellec 2007, Desmond 2007, Introna 2007, Kaulingfreks 2007, Lim 2007, Per-Anders Forstop 2007, ten Bos 2007), a tendency which has only continued since (e.g. Brennan et al. 2010, McMurray et al. 2011, Mansell, 2008, Muhr, 2010, Painter-Morland 2010, Soares 2008).

But if Levinasian Ethics is to be welcomed by Business Ethics, to what extent can Business Ethics be hospitable to such an ethics? This chapter seeks to raise questions as to the hospitality of the field of Business Ethics in terms of how it relates to its guests, in this case the guest that is called 'Levinas'. This is to suggest that the idea of introducing or inviting the work of an author *into* a field, as its guest, is by no means a simplistic problem of transference. For Jacques Derrida (1999a, 1999b, 2000d, 2003) there is hospitality only when the stranger's introduction to our home is totally unconditional. Such a conceptualisation of hospitality becomes even more demanding when the 'stranger' that is near our 'home' is an ethics also demanding hospitality, such as the ethics proposed by Levinas. An invitation puts in place particular circumstances that allow only for an arrival of the one invited. These conditions precede the so-called stranger, thereby predetermining the route to be taken, the destination to be reached and the correct manner of self-presentation. An invitation already reduces the Other to that which is expected by the inviter, that is to the Same.

The hospitality of the field of Business Ethics becomes an endorsement of a particular version of the stranger, recognizable by the field. The new thinker should be one that will *help* the field find the guidance that it is in so much need of, while at the same time and most importantly providing the kind of guidance that managers require from ethics in order to make their businesses ethical ( Cavanagh et al. 1983, Cavanagh, Moberg, & Velasquez 1981, De Cremer et al 2010, Velasquez, Moberg, & Cavanagh 1983, Velasquez 1992, Woiceshyn, 2011). An improved decision making process would hence be one that takes ethical considerations into account – it is in this sense that business thinkers regularly speak of the applicability of ethical models to business

practice. New moral frameworks would hence be of a better quality than those ideas which are already available within the field. A new thinker would offer better guidance than the guidance currently offered by the current thinkers. This is one sense in which the invitation to Levinas can be understood. Archie Carroll's work, to offer an example, differentiates between immoral, moral and amoral management and urges managers:

to understand what ethical management means, why it is important and how it should be integrated into decision making. Principles of ethics from moral philosophy and management theory are available to inform interested managers (Carroll, 2002: 151).

According to Carroll's logic, ethics exists as a set of tools which can be put to work by managers within this or that decision making process. This technological appreciation of ethics is the very opposite of an ethics of hospitality, as described by Levinas, as discussed by Derrida and as pursued within this thesis. Carroll continues:

[i]f the moral management model is to be achieved, managers need to integrate ethical wisdom with their managerial wisdom and to take steps to create and sustain an ethical climate in their organizations. If this is done, the desirable goals of moral management are achievable' (*ibid.*).

This thesis develops an understanding of ethics which is very much opposed to the ideas espoused by Carroll. Here, rather than suggesting that ethics exists as something to be used for the sake of aiding management, I want to suggest that ethics is the name given to decisions which we *cannot* make in good and unambiguous conscience, ethical decisions are decisions which we quite regularly find to be *beyond* our rational and emotional capacities. Against Carroll's entirely instrumental appreciation of

ethics I want to suggest here that ethics is not something we can add to this or that decision making repertoire. Instead ethics is a mode of relationship within which we ourselves at the moment where deliberation and thinking reach their limits.

This is to follow Kaulingfreks (2007b) in his insistence that philosophy must be understood as *useless* to managers. Useless in the sense that philosophy is misunderstood for as long as it is recruited for the sake of achieving this or that non-philosophical end. As he argues:

failure to reach a goal...is philosophy's main strength. Starting over and over again, philosophy underlines the fragility of thought. It makes us careful and therefore accurate. There is no precedent, and each philosopher has to start all over again and approach the questions from the beginning. (2007: 77)

Ten Bos (2006) is thinking along similar lines to Kaulingfreks when he asks: "Is an ethics possible that comes from the outside, that does not play the rules of the game and that is, strictly in this sense, deliberately unrealistic?" (2006: 30). Ten Bos argues that seeing community as a manageable project will no doubt be seen as useless and unrealistic from the Business Ethics community. However if we are to talk about community we need to do exactly that, to embrace our inability to technically organize it. Business ethicists will however have a number of organizational, financial, and academic reasons for being resistant to such an impossible idea of community. Nevertheless, ten Bos argues that this is exactly the moment that alterity should be allowed to intervene:

*to understand the ethics of business, we need not be business ethicists. It is, I propose very important to keep a discourse going about the ethics of business*



that comes from the outside. There should be some noise and, indeed, some strangeness in a world that generally does not manifest any doubt whatsoever about the goodness of its own endeavour.’ (2006: 30)

Perhaps conceptualising Levinasian ethics as an ethics that *cannot* be invited might protect it from procedures that reduce the ‘strangeness’ of the stranger, making it knowable. That will be the argument presented here.

### **Invitations**

A genuine test of hospitality: to receive the other’s visitation just where there has been no prior invitation, preceding “her,” the one arriving. (Derrida, 2005a:1)

A guest is always someone we expect, someone we have invited. Procedures which condition and appropriate strangers and therefore reduce the ‘strangeness’ of the stranger are central to the process of introduction making and boundary crossing. An invitation reduces the Other to someone expected by the inviter. At the moment one makes an invitation, one speculates upon where the one invited has come from. One can anticipate the route for the invited to follow, therefore increasing the probability of managing the procedures involved along their way. To this extent, anticipation always has something of the familiar. Giving to someone the status of guest already conditions something of the strangeness of the stranger, thereby making them less strange.

According to Jones et al. (2005: 76), the importance of the Levinasian contribution is that his ethics involves “an opening up of the subject, a willingness to allow oneself to

be changed by experiencing the difference of the Other”. In other words, Levinasian ethics involves a call for a profound experience where one is confronted with something fundamentally and unprecedentedly different to oneself and where one is confronted with the possibility of being affected and changed by such a confrontation. The authors note that “it is only by allowing the existence of otherness to change us that we can be said to have a truly ethical relationship. That which is outside us, and that which we acknowledge as strange, takes us beyond ourselves. Beyond our common sense. The Other transforms the one who sees the Other.” (*ibid.*).

What we experience with the invitation of Levinas by the field of Business Ethics is not just that this invitation transforms the stranger into a guest, but that this change restricts the actions of the guest to what is already allowed, thereby annulling the possibility of being affected. The otherness of the Other is thereby lost and their strangeness is familiarised. “The absolutely other is the Other” (Levinas, 1961: 39)” cited in Jones et al 2005: 76). Nevertheless, when invitations are made on certain strict conditions, the other is converted into the same and the ethical experience demanded by Levinas is in principle lost.

Business Ethics reduces the strangeness of Levinas if it assumes it already knows where his work is situated. To know the abode is to know the situatedness, the situation, to know that Levinas is situated somewhere, somehow or as something. Business Ethics anticipates how Levinas will look, recognises him as someone having a home, the home of philosophy separated to the one of Business Ethics and to the one of Management. All invitations have a number of discreet but undeniable conditions.

Relating with the new thinker is by no means unconditional, for it to have become the case a number of procedures have been put in place: the invitation has been opened, the route taken and the dress code followed. The invitation has fulfilled its purpose – the guest is the kind of person we'd want to be our friend. In this way, our new friend isn't totally strange, nor was he ever.

A peculiar competition between ethical models becomes noticeable once this instrumental idea of invitations takes precedence. This characterises not only the writings on Levinasian Business Ethics, but on Business Ethics more generally. As McCracken et al. (1998) note, virtue ethicists, for example, “believe the virtue-ethical model...captures the way we do think about moral problems and about ourselves” (1998: 32). It is within such a context that the turn towards Levinas takes place in Business Ethics, a context that prescribes ethical theory as being able to capture the way managers can or should think about moral problems. This environment conditions the passage of any new philosophical system into the field. McCracken et al continue:

A more adequate moral theory accounts, as virtue ethics accounts, for the conduct of a real human being with a real history situated in a community of shared values. So long as we limit business ethics to these rule-based theories, it will remain out-of-touch. Rule-based theories overlook the very principle of corporate business practice, namely that it incorporates the various individual efforts, talents and goals of its members into a unity. (1998: 31)

A number of demands are placed on any would-be new theoretical contribution to the field of Business Ethics. The stranger is conditioned to be a guest and carry particular gifts. More specifically the new theory - in order not to be dismissed by students attending Business Ethics courses as 'inadequate, arbitrary, and alien to their own intuitive pangs of conscience' (McCracken 1988: 33) - needs to have a clear relationship with everyday organisational practice. Confronting such requests, theories within Business Ethics can easily be judged as inadequate and thus create the need for a different theory to be required, one that will finally be able to justify itself in the face of the literature's demands. In that way both a need for a guest is created while specific conditions on how he/she should look are also put in place. In this sense the guest is simultaneously anticipated and commanded.

This transformation from stranger to guest and friend hinges upon a particular pattern of recognition. How are we to have recognised Levinas, this apparent new-comer? Recognition responds to the previously known, it is first of all a re-cognising. The recognisable is that which matches an image of it already held by the recogniser. If the object observed does not correspond to this already held image, then recognition cannot take place. Recognition is somewhat akin to correspondence in that it enables the recognizer to know the object it already knew, to know it again by virtue of correspondence to an already held ideal. In turn, it is this event of correspondence that allows the respective figures of the recognizer and the recognized to come about. The moment of recognition is therefore one of acknowledgement. To recognise the stranger is to know so much about them, it is to know them as not that strange after all.

And so, questions of Business Ethics can become questions of recognition. Thinkers are recognised when we already know what we are looking for within them and they correspond to that ideal. Through recognition there is insertion into the field and with insertion there is an alteration of the previously held-as-strange into the now known-as-such. Levinas becomes first of all recognisable when he is confronted with our expectations of him and he is seen to correspond with these. The one approaching our house is denied access if they do not correspond to the set of characteristics we look for within them, the new-comer must not upset the workings of the field; they cannot be too new or too strange. When we look *for* something, we are in a relationship of familiarity with ‘that’ which we are looking for.

We recognisers do our best not to allow fear to find its way into our house. Difference in the form of a stranger frightens us, and the last place one hopes to find fear is at home. Safe as houses, is that not what we say? One prefers the non-strange guest in one’s own home. When it comes to strangers, Business Ethics will embrace work that won’t contradict the house rules. Home is a place of rest; contradictions and arguments are best left unseen and unsaid.

### **Inviting Invitations**

Is it Business Ethics that invites Levinas into its house? Can it be claimed that there is something about Levinas that makes the invitation of his thought necessary and unavoidable for Business Ethics? Has Business Ethics ever had the option of not inviting Levinas? How far is it possible for Business Ethics not to invite ‘new’

thinkers such as Levinas? Is it Levinas that invites Business Ethics to invite him? Perhaps Business Ethics is looking for things to be attracted to, thereby moving towards such things. Perhaps it is Business Ethics that is moving towards Levinas.

The stranger is stripped of strangeness as they are recognised, approached and handed an invitation. A guest is a guest when s/he has the option of accepting or rejecting an invitation. The invitation is handed in, therefore becoming even more difficult to reject. Derrida differentiates between what he calls 'visitation' and 'invitation' when it comes to being hospitable towards a newcomer. It is the concept of visitation that is enabling of pure hospitality because it leaves room for surprises worthy of the name to take place. More specifically he notes:

If you are the guest and I invite you, I am expecting you and I am prepared to meet you, then this implies that there is no surprise, everything is in order. For pure hospitality or pure gift to occur, however, there must be an absolute surprise. The other, like the Messiah, must arrive whenever he or she wants. She may even not arrive' (Derrida, 1999b: 70).

Derrida continues by opposing 'the traditional and religious concept of 'visitation' to 'invitation': visitation implies the arrival of someone who is not expected, who can show up at anytime, un-invited. It is the difference between the one we ask to come, and the one which we can only hope for. If I am unconditionally hospitable I should welcome the visitation not the invited guest, but the visitor' (Derrida, 1999b: 70). Such an unconditional hospitality—which Derrida for one more time parallels to the

pure gift—involves an opening ‘without horizon of expectation, an opening to the newcomer whoever that might be’ (1999b: 70). In this pure hospitality the newcomer is left to come ‘without asking for any account, without demanding his passport’ (Derrida, 2004: 59). Derrida maintains that without this concept of unconditional hospitality there is no concept of hospitality, ‘this horizon without horizon, this unlimitedness of unconditional hospitality’ (2004: 60) is necessary and must be maintained if we are to talk about a hospitality worthy of the name. It is a hospitality that involves risk. As Derrida puts it: ‘one is exposed’ (2004: 60).

Is Levinas still a guest when we approach him, even if we approach him in order to invite him into our house? How far can Business Ethics claim Levinas to be its guest when it has knocked upon his door? By knocking upon Levinas’ door, Business Ethics becomes forceful, it demands acknowledgement. Is Levinas in such a position? It seems quite difficult to ignore someone who is knocking upon your door. Perhaps Levinas becomes the host, not the guest, even less the stranger. Business Ethics does not knock on Levinas’ door in order to ask permission to enter, in order to ask for hospitality. Business Ethics still offers hospitality, but in a very forceful way. In this sense, Business Ethics is *always already* the master of the situation. This offering is merely a self-offering, Business Ethics offers something to itself in the form of ‘Levinas’.

### **Expecting the Stranger**

Business Ethics is making an attempt to talk to Levinas. Why is Business Ethics now trying to speak to that which it considers a stranger? Isn’t speaking to strangers a

dangerous task? We are afraid of something that we don't know, that we don't perceive as familiar. It seems that there is a point when a field gets over its fear of a thinker's work and invites them to its house. Perhaps this conceiving of someone as a stranger is enough for the appropriating procedures discussed above to be initiated. If Levinas was not regarded as a stranger, if Levinas was considered someone with whom the field had worked before, Business Ethics wouldn't have invited him. However, even when the field hasn't previously related itself to a thinker, it does not mean that the un-related to thinker is in any way unfamiliar. Business Ethics considers a thinker to be a stranger when their work hasn't been discussed by the field, it is their absence that becomes the criteria for situating them outside of the field. In turn, the very non-relatedness itself becomes a reason for relating, a decision is made to relate to Levinas because Levinas has been constituted as that which has not yet been related to by Business Ethics.

The questions Business Ethics has been trying to answer through other thinkers raises certain expectations of the new thinker. It is these expectations that allow Business Ethics to direct invitations to thinkers, while at the same time it is these expectations that have rendered certain thinkers insufficient to the questions of the field. The placing of Levinas outside of the field is itself the condition of inviting his work inside. On account of the way in which Business Ethics constitutes its strangers, it becomes impossible for any stranger to appear as entirely unfamiliar, hence stripping the stranger of their strangeness. At no stage does the invited guest have the capability of being unfamiliar. The transformation of the stranger into an invited guest does not occur at the moment of invitation, the stranger is no longer strange even before the



invitation adds certain characteristics. The stranger is hence doubly betrayed. Not only because the one approaching needs to come in and therefore get through the appropriating procedures placed on the door, but also because the very moment a thinker has been located outside a field they are recognised as insufficient to that field. The moment of invitation invites that which was previously kept from being invited.

The strangers of Business Ethics are the thinkers that have not yet been touched by the field, yet the manner of this not touching is still one of tampering. To not have been touched, the evasive element has been placed upon a plane of those yet to be touched. The stranger for Business Ethics possesses certain qualities and characteristics, at a certain point these are understood to be of interest to the field itself. When Business Ethics situates a thinker outside of its field of study it is not because it hasn't engaged with their work but because they didn't carry the right characteristics. The engagement was the decision that considered the thinker to be presently insufficient or irrelevant. It is because of these qualities that Levinas has stayed outside the field for so long. These qualities have now made his introduction possible. Those considered by Business Ethics as strangers are already very well known by it. Business Ethics knows what it calls 'the stranger' by assigning certain characteristics towards them. This kind of conceptualising the stranger, exactly by being a conceptualization, already deprives the stranger of their strangeness. What Business Ethics calls a stranger has already arrived and been placed outside the field. Business Ethics directs this arrival once more.

Through procedures of expectation and invitation, the stranger therefore becomes a guest. The stranger has been exiled by the conditions of anticipation. Hospitality towards them has been cancelled. With the bestowing of the guest there is no longer a stranger. This is not to say that Business Ethics should endeavour to protect the stranger in its strangeness. The guest of Business Ethics cannot ever be a complete stranger, there is always something anticipated of it, prior to its arrival. What needs to remain impossible is arrival and the enforcement of status. The transformation from stranger to guest contradicts hospitality by making it possible, a responsibility that can be embraced. Business Ethics needs to understand Levinas, comprehend his work and match it with a set of its established characteristics.

Hospitality, when it comes to Business Ethics, is indistinguishable from expectations. Expectations of familiarity with a new writer overwhelm the acceptance of thinkers as well as the hospitality that can be shown towards them. Expectations: things to be gotten out of reading, lessons to be learned, messages to be understood. An intense desire to *read* an author's writing, to know them, to understand them, to clarify what the author is trying to say to us in their writing. A thirst to make Levinas' work our own. To get a grasp of him, to hold his work, to point to a thing and call it 'Levinas'. At the very moment Business Ethics engages with a procedure of expectations in relation to that which it engages with, it reduces the strangeness of the stranger and induces the impossibility of hospitality. The one coming to the house has to obey the house rules. Or else s/he will be denied entry. Such hospitality examines before accepting, it will not and cannot accept strangers. Hospitality opens only to those who have previously passed the door control, a restricted and selective openness. In other

words, an openness characterised by closure. Before being checked the visitors cannot be welcomed; they have the possibility of being welcomed only if it is assured that they deserve to enter the house.

Business Ethics makes decisions, it decides in an abrupt way about what it is and what it is made of. *Now*, Business Ethics decides that it is time to talk to Levinas. Is Business Ethics full of the work of a number of philosophers who have not solved its problems so that it now needs another philosopher in order to help accomplish its goal? Business Ethics is talking to Levinas because it does not consider him a stranger; it considers Levinas something or someone that will help the field. A stranger who we know will help the field? Such expectations always already prescribe the stranger. When we need the one approaching our home to have specific characteristics, we are already narrowing down the space through which we can let him in, we already condition the stranger's entering to our house. We leave only a small hole in our door and the stranger needs to adjust their body so as to fit, the stranger needs to follow us to find their way in. Business Ethics is not afraid to talk to the stranger Emmanuel Levinas because it has already decided that Levinas will help the field. Levinas is good. Levinasian ethics is good. Good for Business Ethics. Good for us.

### **Having Enough of our Guests**

What does Business Ethics anticipate from inviting Levinas? What does it hope itself to look like after inviting Levinas? Does it expect itself to benefit from Levinas'

presence? What is the dream Business Ethics holds in relation to all the thinkers it has concerned itself with? Business Ethics invites thinkers because it anticipates their bringing of particular results. But *why does Business Ethics need to anticipate something?* Why does it need to anticipate something and recognize it? It is very difficult for expectations *not* to exist. Business Ethics needs to expect Levinas because it needs to be prepared for him. Business Ethics needs to be ready. It needs to be ready to adopt Levinas. You can adopt someone only if you feel ready for such a move. But adoption can never be completely conditioned. The child might turn out to be a person who the parent would never expect them to become. Accepting without expecting is demanding. To accept without expecting the unexpected, to accept by saying yes to the unconditionality of the stranger - this is certainly a challenge to the very possibility of hospitality. Business Ethics has created a number of procedures that condition the entrance of the work of a thinker into its field. These are procedures on the limit, on the door, conditioned by the housekeeper. This line is always assumed indivisible, therefore allowing certain procedures of control. On such a borderline, Derrida notes:

The crossing of borders always announces itself according to the movement of a certain step [*pas*]—and of the step that crosses the line. An indivisible line. And one always assumes the institution of such an indivisibility. Customs, police, visa or passport, passenger identification—all that is established upon this institution of the indivisible, the institution therefore of the step that is related to it or not. (1993: 11)

If we avoided making invitations, might we then be capable of sparing the stranger from appropriation? Should we, in other words, try to avoid procedures that might appropriate the one we hope to arrive? Should we try to maintain the status of stranger

within the one approaching? When does the transformation from stranger to guest take place and where should we direct our efforts? Could we say that if Levinas appeared at some point in Business Ethics without any apparent intentionality, the field is then hospitable? The stranger needs to have established a right to hospitality for otherwise, as Derrida notes:

‘Without this right, a new arrival can only be introduced “in my home,” in the host’s “at home,” as a parasite, a guest who is wrong, illegitimate, clandestine, liable to expulsion or arrest’ (Derrida, 2000d: 61).

The guest should prove that it is the one who has all the characteristics of the one to whom the invitation was sent. There is no guest that can hold the status of a guest without having been first of all invited. If we get rid of invitations what we are left with is the non-invited which cannot be considered to be a true guest; s/he is instead considered a parasite, dangerous because s/he contributes nothing towards the host. When invitations are gotten rid of, the field does not become more hospitable, it instead dissuades all approaches made towards it. The non-invited cannot become the stranger, the non-invited is still recognised, this time, as s/he who can only be rejected, as s/he who has not made hospitality possible. The status of the stranger falls into appropriation and reduction of the Other to the Same. Not inviting someone Derrida argues needs here to be differentiated from non invitation or visitation, for it is being hospitable to such a visitation—which involves some kind of preparation as the double demand of hospitality would suggest, but a kind of preparation only insofar as we are being ‘prepared to being unprepared, for the unexpected arrival of *any* other’ (1999b: 70) — that allows for something indeed unexpected to arrive, to arrive indeed. By inviting someone we already place them in our own categories and we

already make available for them a comfortable seat in our home. The stranger does not fit into any of these categories. Levinas' own concern with hospitality makes the case even more demanding:

proximity, conceived independently of this spiritualism of consciousness and recognized as signification or goodness, allows us to understand goodness in another way than as an altruistic inclination to be satisfied. For signification, the-one-for-the-other, is never an *enough*, and the movement of signification does not return. (1981: 137-138)

Every time we force something to become something else we condition it to become *something* by suppressing its internal tendency for self-contradiction. The stranger is forcibly transformed from someone who can be related to a number of possibilities to a particular someone who is attached to one possibility. This possibility needs to match the fields' own conceptualisation of the appropriate. Indeed, as soon as one approaches the Business Ethics literature, it becomes apparent that this discipline is internally divided into a number of perspectives and that these divisions are more a product of the demand for utility than they are a representation of how the traditions divided actually divide of their own accord. We have already seen in the previous chapter how these fundamental tensions are constitutive of the field itself. What is also worth bearing in mind is how the field is sub-divided into a number of philosophical specialities and sub-groupings, each vying for attention and predominance.

We have, for example, the Kantian perspective on Business Ethics (e.g. Altman 2007, Arnold et al. 2010, Bowie 1999, Ciulla 2001, L'Etang 1992, Reynolds and Bowie 2004, Smith and Dubbink 2011), the Utilitarian perspective (Audi 2007, Beekun et al

2010, Carson 1997, Collett 2010, Ladkin 2006, Renouard 2011,) and the Aristotelian approach (Alzola 2008, Boatright 1995, Beadle 2006, Collier 1995, Graafland 2010, Hartman, 1998, Palanski et al. 2011, Moore 2002, 2005a, 2005b, 2008, Moore and Bertland 2009, Provis 2010, Solomon 1992, 1993, 1999a, 1999b, Whetstone, 2001). Each one of these philosophical approaches have come to be crystallised into a number of maxims that significantly limit and restrict the scope of contribution which these theories can make beyond what is already allowed to them within the context of the tradition of receiving them – the Business Ethics literature itself. As Parker (2003) argues:

[v]irtually all business texts hence contain references to Kantian conceptions of duty, particularly the implications of the categorical imperative – ‘do as you will be done by’. Such arguments are the usually counterposed to utilitarian notions of the greatest good for the greatest number, often connecting these to their contemporary formulations in stakeholder theory. Often there is also reference to and discussions of the importance of individual or organisational character’ (2003: 200).

Kaler takes the confusing, mis-leading and ultimately divisive situation caused by such conceptual fragmentation as reason enough for Business Ethics writers to dispense with moral theories altogether. As he puts it:

[P]revailing ethical theories can be largely dispensed with. Such theories are of limited use in solving ethical problem. They fail because they are ‘reductionist’. They take an aspect of morality to be the whole of morality. Moreover, the very process of constructing, testing, and modifying them reveals that we already have that understanding of the nature of the ethical which they purport to provide us with (1998: 206).

Stark chimes in along similar lines when he argues:

Far too many business ethicists have occupied a rarified moral high ground, removed from the real concerns of an real-world problems of the vast majority of managers. They have been too preoccupied with absolutist notions of what it means for managers to be ethical with overly general criticisms of capitalism as an economic system, with dense and abstract theorizing, and with prescriptions that apply only remotely to managerial practice. Such trends are all more disappointing in contrast to the success that ethicists in other professions – medicine, law, and government – have had in providing real and welcome assistance to their practitioners (1994: 38).

According to Crane and Matten, on the other hand, explicitly against Kaler (1999) and implicitly against Stark (1994), Business Ethicists should familiarise themselves with moral theories and their presuppositions, however tricky and time consuming such a demand might be, in order to allow Business Ethics to prosper. Indeed, to study moral philosophy is, for Crane and Matten, an inherently practical act:

ethical theories can help [...] to clarify different moral presuppositions of the various parties involved in a decision — as one person may tend to think in terms of one theory whilst another might think in terms of another theory. In making good decisions, we need to understand this range of perspectives in order to establish a consensus on the solutions to ethical problems (Kaler 1999) (2010: 93).

This is the climate into which Levinas is currently being introduced and re-introduced. Either moral philosophy should be dispensed with because it gets in the way of a practical application of ethical concerns into business, or else it should be pursued precisely because it practice will be more ethical if managers thinking is more philosophical. Either way, Levinas's lesson must not be learned. Every time the stranger is appropriated as s/he who will help Business Ethics reach its totality, the strangeness of the stranger is lost. The inoculation of the strangeness of any stranger seems a necessary factor of any appropriation. Business Ethics ends up talking about



thinkers by referring to one aspect of their work or another. By assigning a thinker to one concept, or one concept to one thinker, as if their work is accordingly restricted, the thinker's work becomes all of a sudden manageable. Such a procedure renders the thinker's work incomplete after a while, thereby necessitating another search for new thinkers, such as Levinas.

Jones, Parker and ten Bos (2005) stress that such an attitude has resulted in a very distorted portrait of Kant in Business Ethics, which gets extended in two directions—by those arguing *for* Kantian Business Ethics and by those arguing *against* it. Accordingly, Kantian philosophy gets reduced into a mere set of rules *or* gets converted into something that is the simple inverse of Utilitarianism (Jones et al. 2005, Parker 2003). This is a consequence not of Kantian ethics *as such*, but of the manner in which Kantian ethics is reduced to a series of simplistic positions by debates in Business Ethics that seek to make such an ethics plausible. We find the utilitarian approach reduced to the maxim 'the greatest good for the greatest number', while the Kantian approach to the maxim 'do as you will be done by'. Such crystallizations do not do justice to the complexities of these theories bring. The very existence however of these theories by itself anticipates a different one, one that will hold the promise of helping the field provide adequate guidance to managerial life, guidance that these theories have been competing with each other to offer (Bishop 2000, Goodchild 1986, Hasnas 1998). The new theorist in the field is shaped into a guest that will be able to provide adequate guidance to managers when in front of ethical problems. Ethical theory is explicitly required to provide guidance to managers when dealing with difficult decisions, the ethical ones.

## **The Gift of Levinas**

According to Arnold et al.:

The field of business ethics emerged as a species of applied ethics, akin to the field of bioethics . . . with the explicit intention of using philosophical reasoning and ethical theory to provide normative guidance for business policy and public policy regarding business (2010: 559).

For Brenkert this seems a little difficult to swallow:

one must wonder why we haven't seen more change in the business world to this point given the variety of ethical theories and frameworks that business ethicists and management theorists have come up with (2010: 705).

In Brenkert's (2010) quote we can identify the demand made by the field of Business Ethics for ethical theories that will change the practices followed by business managers. We see here, in other words, a repetition of the double-demand which we have seen so many times already – on the one hand Business Ethics should help managers and hence be practical. On the other hand Business Ethics should be undertaken by philosophers and hence be abstract. Ethical theory should not be remote from reality - it should influence the very context it tries to account for. The Business Ethics literature is in a continuous tension between the theoretical and the practical significance and relevance of any new contribution to the field of Business Ethics (Pamental 1991, Stark 1993). The call for new theorists such as Levinas can therefore be understood as an attempt to solve these inherent tensions, one more time, only hoping this time to have finally found what has already been sought – the veritable eureka moment of the discipline. As McCracken notes:

the quandary model for teaching business ethics, makes a sound assumption followed by a questionable one. The sound assumption is that managers inevitably find themselves in moral jams. The questionable one is that the job of ethical theory is to get the manager out of that jam. It is not surprising then, that courses built on this model blend ethical theory with the case approach. Students are forewarned of the dilemmas that they are likely to encounter and, then they are armed with the intellectual tools to extricate themselves from these dilemmas. (McCracken, 1998: 26)

The demand for a new theory, with Levinas or perhaps with any other, is shaped by an inherently ‘delicate balancing act’ whereby Business Ethicists constantly attempt to justify to themselves and their audience its right to write in the name of Business Ethics (Parker 2003: 200-201). We see this again and again – by acting as a gatekeeper of both putative knowledge and practical relevance (Parker 2003), Business Ethics needs to be constantly inventive of a vocabulary that will be the province of the business ethicist. Vocabularies such as Kantian duties and Aristotelian virtues have been used extensively in order to legitimise the new field. Whatever can provide Business Ethics with such a vocabulary becomes a potential resource for Business Ethics. It is for these reasons that Business Ethics approaches Levinas and thereby conditions his arrival.

Through such processes of categorisation and conditioning, Business Ethics ignores the complexity and contradictions of the work of ethical philosophers, advancing in their place simplistic superficial positions or unambiguously transparent models that will help the field sustain itself. This is not a shortcoming of individual Business Ethicists, it is rather a structural requirement for doing Business Ethics, for all of the reasons outlined above. Paradoxically, then, it is perhaps only by not deciding about what Levinas can become that his ethics might be protected from become yet another

option on the shelves of the Business Ethics perspectives super-store. Those shelves are already very full with, for example, religious perspectives (McMahon 1985), human resource management perspectives (Gond et al. 2011), jewish perspectives (Epstein 2000), cognitive theory and Hayek's philosophy (Gick, 2003), middle eastern philosophy (Michalos 2008), Confucius (Woods and Lamond 2011, Ackerman, Hu and Wei 2009, Chan 2008), Rawlsian political philosophy (Cohen 2010, Marens 2007, Samar 1995), ancient philosophy (Bragues 2008, Pearson and Parker (2011), moral development theory (Mudrack 2003, Ashkanasy 2006), religious traditions (McMahon 1985, Vasconcelos, A. 1985 Pava, 1998, Sauser 2005), feminist perspectives (Derry 1996, Burton and Dunn 1996, Liedtka 1996, Wicks 1996, Machold et al. 2008), discourse ethics (Stansbury 2009, Gilbert and Rasche 2007, Stark 1997, Beschoner 2006, Vasconcelos, 2010) Augustinian moral philosophy (Natoli, 2008), islamist ethics (Graafland et al. 2006, Rice 1999), expectancy theory (Fudge and Schlacter 1999), human rights based approaches (Campbell, 2006) and many more.

These contributions serve as testament to the plurality of the field and its constant struggle for validation and legitimation by more or less whatever means available. This climate of constant request for external validation that forms the body of Business Ethics necessarily create similar demands to any new contribution in the field. Becoming the decided, becoming something that will be better than the already extant, has limited potentiality. A way of thinking which advances everything that is new in a field discourages any possibility of rethinking what has already been appropriated.

Do we expect that Levinas will be something that can help us write about Business Ethics in a way that might make a difference? This will always involve a homogenisation, a kind of mastery at the expense of any potential difference that can exist within a category. By assuming Levinas will make a difference we unavoidably situate Levinas within a concrete moment. This can constitute a break in Business Ethics between what can be situated 'before' and 'after' Levinas (Royle, 1995). Such a way of conceptualising Levinas reduces the work which preceded him to a sum of thinkers, one added after another, and therefore renders Levinas's work a new addition to an already established heap. But will this mean that the potentiality of the work of a thinker in this field is already exhausted? Have their gifts been used up? Is the usefulness of the already appropriated gifts now at an end? Is it the case that difference can only be grasped from thinkers whose work has not yet been associated with hence far?

Such an attitude underestimates the internal differences that constitute the field. Business Ethics assumes that in order for a thinker's work to be worthy of study, they should be first of all talking the same language. Derrida underlines that 'the first duty of the host ... is to pay attention to ... to pay homage or tribute to linguistic difference' (1993: 8). Such a conceptualisation of language assumes that there are no internal differences within the field itself, that the field talks only one language. Derrida notes that 'the first violence which the foreigner undergoes: to have to claim his rights in a language he does not speak. ... An immense and dreadful task of

translation imposes itself here' (2005b: 7). This is where the question of hospitality begins for Derrida, within this paradox:

must we ask the foreigner to understand us, to speak our language, in all the senses of this term, in all its possible extensions, before being able and so as to be able to welcome him into our country? If he was already speaking our language, with all that that implies, if we already shared everything that is shared with a language, would the foreigner still be a foreigner and could we speak of asylum or hospitality in regard to him? (2000d: 15, 17)

Levinas is assumed to be a gift by Business Ethics because the field had already decided to invite him, because the field had already decided that it needed him. It had already been decided by Business Ethics that Levinas is worth inviting, that Levinas will bring good results. The gift, just like the stranger, can only be received if the present appears as present, if the stranger is not strange (Derrida, 1995). By opening its doors Business Ethics assumes that it offers its gift of hospitality to Levinas. But Business Ethics, in order to be able to open its door, first had to make sure that they had been closed to that which it wasn't yet ready to let in. When there is a concrete giving there is always an obligation to return. A gift should not provoke obligation. Even by smiling we return the gift. Smiling indicates a receiving that puts pressure upon our selves to find ways to make the one that offered us the initial assumed gift smile as well.

In order for Business Ethics to be given a gift it is assumed that it is able to hold it. What if you cannot hold the gift? What if it slips from your hands? Levinas as a gift might exceed the box, he might be restrained by it. Would Business Ethics try to apply pressure to Levinas in order to adjust its size to this small box? Perhaps Business Ethics will try to find a bigger box so that Levinas would fit comfortably and

there would be no danger of his work destroying the box. A gift is a gift when it exceeds a box. Derrida notes:

The simple identification of the gift seems to destroy it. The simple identification of the passage of a gift as such, that is, of the identifiable things among some identifiable “ones,” would be nothing other than the process of the destruction of the gift ... There is no more gift as soon as the other *receives*—and even if she refuses the gift that she has perceived or recognized as gift ... For there to be a gift, it is necessary that the gift not even appear, that it not be perceived or received as gift (1992b: 14-16)

Derrida’s concept of pure gift, indeed, is similar to his understanding of pure hospitality. Identifying the gift cancels gift giving in a similar way that hospitality gets canceled through a recognition process of the newcomer (Derrida, 1999b). But will Levinas make Business Ethics smile? How can we tell when a field is smiling? Even saying thanks is always already a return. There is an obligation to say thanks. ‘Thanks’ is not just something that is said, it *does* something. How can Business Ethics show its gratitude? Perhaps we should assume that Business Ethics has bad manners and it indicates a great deal of rudeness by not displaying its gratitude. Business Ethics expects Levinas to be its gift. A gift is something that will make us feel special, unique, singular. When we are given gifts we tend to assume that this gift will make us happy. We rush to unpack the wrapping paper, to find out what is in the box, to reduce the layers that keep the content hidden, unknown, secret. Are we sure that Levinas is something good, how can someone be sure that all the gifts are good? Why is it that we assume a gift to be something pleasant? The gift is the Other, the sign of the Other.

The problem with Business Ethics is not that it is looking for gifts and particularly gifts that are useful. The problem is to pose the question of Business Ethics, as a field.

Why is it that Business Ethics assumes it deserves gifts? According to Derrida in a hospitality worthy of the name “you don’t ask the other, the newcomer, the guest, to give anything back, or even to identify himself or herself. Even if the other deprives you of your mastery or your home, you have to accept this. It is terrible to accept this, but that is the condition of unconditional hospitality” (1999b: 70). Does Business Ethics need dedication, to recognise that something is devoted to it? Why does Business Ethics need such reassurance? Reassurance is a constant call for assurance. Assurance tries to eliminate risk. Derrida indicates that unconditional hospitality is always betrayed as there are procedures which condition the gift, Business Ethics attempts both:

to protect a ‘home’, without doubt, by guaranteeing property and what is ‘proper’ to itself against the unlimited arrival of the other; but also to attempt to render the welcome effective, determined, concrete, to put it into practice [*le mettre en oeuvre*]. Whence the ‘conditions’ which transform the gift into a contract, the opening into a policed pact; whence the rights and the duties, the borders, passports and doors. (Derrida: 2005c: 6) <sup>1</sup>

## **Gifts and Surprises**

For unconditional hospitality to take place you have to accept the risk of the other coming and destroying the place, initiating a revolution, stealing everything, or killing everyone. That is the risk of pure hospitality and pure gift. . . . Those are the risks involved in pure hospitality, if there is such a thing and I am not sure that there is’ (1999b: 71)

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<sup>1</sup> This passage has also appeared in a different translation undertaken by Rachel Bowlby in Jacques Derrida (2005b) ‘The principle of hospitality’ *Paper Machine*: 66-69. Stanford : Stanford University Press.



If we start by situating Levinas in this way, it seems that soon Business Ethics will be looking for another Levinas, for something new that will help the field. But what is it that makes thinkers *not enough*? Business Ethics has addressed others, and now Business Ethics addresses Levinas. Writers in Business Ethics write in relation to these thinkers in order to show how the thinkers' work can help Business Ethics. How do we make sure that Levinas is not going to become one more perspective amongst others, to be used in Business Ethics, as another exhaustible resource? Such a desire for guests that needs to be discovered and invited cancels and discourages any attempt towards rethinking. By reinventing our inventions, by rethinking the things that we thought, by repeating what we thought was done, a space for something new emerges. As Derrida says:

Our current tiredness results from the invention of the same and from the possible, from the invention that is always possible. It is not against it but beyond it that we are trying to reinvent invention itself, another invention, or rather an invention of the other that would come, through the economy of the same, indeed while miming or repeating it [...], to offer a place for the other. (Derrida, 1992c: 341)

Business Ethics is related to philosophical thinkers and appears to be in constant need of inviting them. By continuously inviting guests that are not going to disturb the field but will instead sit comfortably therein, we can expect many more invitations, along with the very strict conditions set for those invited. Business Ethics does not seem to like surprises. When Business Ethics is looking for its guests it cannot be looking for surprises. Surprises cannot be looked *for*, they are always unexpected. Business Ethics, by looking for its guests, by looking for particular characteristics that it would

like to invite, eliminates surprises. It doesn't want to be taken by surprise, but to take surprises out of the way. By doing so it eliminates both risk and astonishment. Eliminating risk disables our inventions from that which could transform them to inventions worthy of the name, that is, to inventions that indeed invent something new. When I give a gift in order to bring a particular result, there is no gift involved but only a demand for a return of a favour (Derrida, 1995). According to Jones (2003) the 'ethical relation is non-reciprocal and expects nothing in return. The instant I expect reciprocation I am in the realm of calculation of my own advantage and am thinking of myself rather than the Other' (2003: 227).

A gift should have a unique destination, a singular destination. This assumes that both Business Ethics and philosophy are concrete categories that don't disseminate. The possibility of invitation assumes that both an invitation should take place because something is concrete and there is, at the same time, the ever-present possibility of contamination. The possibility of contamination is always already in every category and is the condition of its possibility. Business Ethics is contaminated by both Business and Ethics. Each category is contaminated by the very fact that its frame is unstable and that each home talks more than one language. Business Ethics hopes that Levinas will talk in its language. In that way it is not ready to offer hospitality which acknowledges that both mine and the other's language are different from one another *as well as* within themselves. Maybe Levinas is already in a way *in* Business Ethics and appears in a form that is beyond recognition. Derrida's *arrivant* (1993: 33) is a prescient reminder in this regard. In relation to the *arrivant* Derrida elsewhere notes, that he or she:

must be absolutely other, an other that I expect not to be expecting, that I am not waiting for, whose expectation is made of a nonexpectation, an expectation without what in philosophy is called a horizon of expectation, when a certain knowledge still anticipates and amortizes in advance. If I am sure that there is going to be an event, this will not be an event' (1985b: 12).

I am expecting the *arrivant* by not expecting them, by being unable to expect them in an experience where '[t]here has to be the possibility of someone still arriving; there has to be an *arrivant*, and consequently the table – the table of contents or the table of the community – has to mark an empty place for someone absolutely indeterminate, for an *arrivant*' (2001: 31). With regards to the border involved and its relation to the *arrivant* Derrida notes '[B]ut if the new *arrivant* who arrives is new, one must expect—without waiting for him or her, without expecting it—that he does not simply cross a given threshold. Such an *arrivant* affects the very experience of the threshold, whose possibility he thus brings to light before one even knows whether there has been an invitation, a call, a nomination, or a promise' (1993: 33). As Levinas himself says 'a (*sic*) work conceived radically is a movement of the same unto the other which never returns to the same' (1986: 348).

## **A Double Demand**

absolute hospitality requires that I open up my home and that I give not only to the foreigner . . . but to the absolute, unknown, anonymous other, and that I *give place* to them, that I let them come, that I let them arrive, and take place in the place I offer them, without asking of them either reciprocity (entering into a pact) or even their names' (Derrida and Dufourmantelle, 2000: 25)

Hospitality cannot conform to any pre-given rules by Business Ethics, it has to be constantly reinvented. At the same time, unconditional hospitality is not a hospitality that gives nothing. It gives, it offers to the stranger without prescribing how the stranger should look. If unconditional hospitality gives nothing, it is not hospitality. The problem is not to give something to the stranger in such a way that it is not directed back to itself. However, by the very fact of necessity for giving, conditions are again re-inscribed in hospitality:

I cannot open the door, I cannot expose myself to the coming of the other and offer him or her of anything whatsoever without making this hospitality effective, without in some concrete way giving something determinate. This determination will have to reinscribe the unconditional into certain conditions. Otherwise it gives nothing. What remains unconditional or absolute ... risks being nothing at all if conditions ... do not make of it some thing. (Derrida, 2003: 129)

This unavoidability of conditioning involved in hospitality does not need to be seen as something restricting, something that cancels the very unconditionality of hospitality. On the contrary, such a demand underlines the impossibility of hospitality, its impossibility of not conditioning its borders and the potentiality that can be found in this procedure. This is perhaps why Levinas writes that:

The at-home-with-oneself of the dwelling does not imply a closing off, but rather the place of desire towards transcendence of the other. The separation marked here is the condition of both the welcome and the hospitality offered to the other. There would be neither welcome nor hospitality without this radical alterity, which itself presupposes separation. (1981: 92)

Bringing Levinas 'in', as if he were a thing outside, is an exercise always missing the mark, not because we have worked towards an inadequately developed solution but

because ours is in the first instance an always already inadequately formulated problem. The trace of Levinas is already in Business Ethics, appearing as an irreducible absence, an irreducible absent presence. This irreducibility is already demanding. What we have attempted to gesture towards is the necessity to see what Business Ethics has done with such traces, with how it has treated irreducible demands that allude to the work of other writers, in order to be able to invite this work as something it presently lacks. Such is the case with Levinas in as much as it is the case with those already assumed to be part of the Business Ethics canon. What has been attempted here is a problematisation of the conditions prior to any invitation.

The above discussion does not reject an invitation towards Levinasian ethics. It *does*, however, underline the fact that such an invitation has to remain impossible. If the stranger is already inside Business Ethics, an invitation is not unnecessary, rather it is impossible. In this sense the question becomes: *how ready is Business Ethics to accept that there is something foreign already inside it, something calling it to respond to a part of the self, alien to itself?* This question forces Business Ethics to rethink the manner in which it relates to its already appropriated guests, to see the strangeness in what we seem to have taken for granted in this apparently required searching outside of the home. Such an approach prohibits an understanding of Levinas as a sort of gift given *to* Business Ethics *by* Business Ethics. Perhaps Levinas shows us the strangeness of what we conventionally think and the absurdity of what we take to be the household names. Business Ethics is already stranger than it appears, it can always bring surprising and unconditional gifts.

### **Chapter Three: Reading Levinas and Deconstruction's Ethics of Reading**

It is probably worth noting how (surprisingly) little attention has been paid to connecting Derrida's work on ethics with questions of organization and with specific issues such as business ethics and corporate social responsibility' Jones (2003: 225)

#### **Introduction**

The surprisingly restricted preoccupation which Business Ethicists have had with the work of Derrida is noted by Jones in the above quotation. Jones acknowledges how Leitch and Willmott (1998) have made a sustained attempt to relate Derrida's work to the field but their work is very much an exception to the rule. Indeed, for Jones, such "efforts remain partial, and at times rest on unacceptable simplifications and misrepresentations of Derrida" (2003: 225). Parker similarly (2002, 2003a, 2003b) appeals for Business Ethics debates to pay more attention towards continental philosophy, suggesting that at the moment:

the moral philosophers who are mentioned most often are usually the classics of the analytic canon, and it is rare to find references to twentieth-century 'continental' philosophy here. Nietzsche, Heidegger, Gadamer, Sartre, Foucault, Derrida, Lyotard and so on are largely absent from the business ethics text. (2002: 93)

In a similar manner Jones et al. (2005: 3) write:

Despite the fact that ethics has been hotly debated in philosophy throughout the twentieth century and has been one of the sources of philosophical reflection up to the close of the millennium, the discipline of business ethics has insulated itself from these developments, either ignoring them altogether or misrepresenting them so that it looks that twentieth century philosophy has nothing interesting to say about ethics

This is no doubt the sentiment expressed and addressed within Painter-Morland and ten Bos recent textbook (2011). It is also a sentiment with which we have been preoccupied throughout – as will be elaborated upon within this chapter which serves as a crucial transition piece between our two abiding concerns.

## **Retrospect**

In the previous chapter we attended to an instance of the movement which the field of Business Ethics undertakes. We did this by considering the nature of the recent invitations this field has made towards the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas – invitations it made in order to account for itself as ethically endowed. We read these increasingly frequent invitations as anything but open – indeed – we detailed how the hospitality presently shown towards Levinas, by Business Ethics, is predominately the sort of hospitality which seeks to determine so much about his arrival in advance, thereby positioning inhospitality at the very heart of the would-be hospitable gesture. We therefore considered the invitation to Levinas currently being made by Business Ethics as something inherently anti-Levinasian.

By inviting Levinas as a guest, a guest invited on account of its utility, its relevance, its applicability, its similitude with what is already in motion, etc., we saw Business

Ethics inoculating the possibility of encountering its outside at the very moment where it explicitly admitted requiring recourse towards it. For by inviting Levinas, Business Ethics reaches outside of itself - it looks towards its outside for a solution to its present predicament, something different, something which might lift it up and beyond its hitherto lack of self-completion. Business Ethics is not yet Business Ethics. Levinas might make the completion possible. And yet, this very seeking of the outside is, as we have seen, definitively cancelled out as soon as it is initiated – the outside, as we saw, is so quickly rendered inside - it is no longer enamoured of the alterity initially seen to have been required from the supposed outside, by the apparent inside.

Nevertheless, even while the invitation made towards Levinas can be said to have been an inherently anti-Levinasian gesture in this crucial respect, it still confirms many aspects of Levinas's work. This is because the very search for an outside, for Levinas, is itself possible only because the self is never alone, it is never at home with itself. Business Ethics, in this sense at least, is defined by a wound of openness, an openness to the possibility of an encounter with the Other. For according to Levinas, as has been illustrated, we are constituted by the call of the Other to whom we see ourselves as responsible. We are thereby conditioned as subjects to such a call and to the urgency of its having to be attended towards, by us, in all of its particularity. In fact, Levinas suggests that we are constituted as subjects precisely because of this always present yet never definitive call for response.

Levinas's philosophy hence famously argues for 'Ethics as first Philosophy' offering a different formulation of philosophy to that suggested by Heidegger and, indeed, by



the Western philosophical tradition more generally, which, on Levinas's reading, puts ontology, rather than ethics, at its foundation. So even though Business Ethics might be said to have annihilated the possibility of being Levinasian by seeking to determine the nature of the Levinasian in advance of an encounter with the Levinasian, Business Ethics can still be said to be readable as Levinasian in that its openness to the Other confirms Levinas in other crucial respects.

Levinas, as we have seen, requires us to read Business Ethics differently. Business Ethics, in this sense, cannot be understood as a project undertaken on its own terms – as the self-willing project of making business more ethical, or something like that. Business Ethics, on the Levinasian reading, must rather be understood as a project whose own terms are themselves constantly negotiable, difficult to locate and perhaps ultimately impossible to determine in advance. Business Ethics isn't entirely in control of Business Ethics, therefore, precisely because of the inherent stability we can see defining it when it makes a move for its outside. In contrast to the way in which a field of study can be constituted by the subject seeking to investigate it, a Levinasian approach instead underlines the constitutive (and constituted) nature of such a field with regards to the demand for responsibility issuing forth from its outside, even prior to the formation of a supposedly well-insulated inside.

This inseparability of the way in which something is represented from *that which* it claims to represent is our concern when undertaking such a reading, therefore. This inseparability is traditionally treated within the field of Business Ethics as a moment not worthy of reflection, as a moment already missed by subjects that are already

formed, apart from a field which they plan to make their step into. It is this complacency that we are hoping to unsettle here. The unsustainable separation between the subject doing Business Ethics and the field called Business Ethics results in a number of prescriptions from the field of Business Ethics towards the subject that seeks to relate to such a field. And yet Levinas underlines how every call for responsibility is more powerful than any kind of intention formed by a subject.

It is the contention of this thesis that a consideration of an ethics of alterity, as informed by Levinas, destabilises the unjustified good conscience made possible by such an unsustainable separation between Business Ethics as object, and Business Ethics as ambition.

The philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, for us, therefore also raises the question of *reading as an ethical question*. And it is just this sort of ethical reading of Business Ethics that we will concern ourselves with as our investigation proceeds and develops. Such a reading, of course, has already started in our reading of the place of Levinas within Business Ethics, as well as within our comments concerning what a reading of Business Ethics might itself demand. Before continuing this already long ago inaugurated reading, therefore, we will now attempt to say some more about what this ethics of reading Business Ethics entails and what it *will* entail, having now briefly skirted around what it has already entailed, so far. Within this chapter, and indeed throughout this thesis, we will therefore be considering what it means to say that a concern with *deconstruction* is, amongst other things, *a concern with an ethics of reading*.

Deconstruction, of course, is not what Levinas calls what he is doing when he raises the questions he raises. Nevertheless, deconstruction, according to Jacques Derrida's writing, learns many things from Levinas's philosophy on the question of ethics and on the question of an ethics of reading. We will substantiate this crucial claim very shortly. Within the work of Levinas, as will be seen, Derridean deconstruction witnesses a concern with the difficulty of thinking alterity, a continuation of a critique of the metaphysics of presence, an interrogation of the difficulty of hospitality, and an investigation into how we might concern ourselves with Others – of how we might be capable of allowing Others (even other texts) to speak (and indeed write) for themselves, and many more things besides.

Within this thesis we are certainly interested in the types of questions Levinas might ask of Business Ethics – we already have been so far and will continue to be further on. But what we are also interested in considering here is the potential limits of this form of questioning, insofar as these have been acknowledged within deconstruction, within the work of Jacques Derrida. What deconstruction takes from Levinas, amongst other things, is a concern with an ethics of reading – this will be what we will attempt to argue within this chapter. This concern, which we will derive within this chapter and which has been in operation in any case already, is something which we will try to take seriously throughout as we attempt to come to terms with *an ethics of reading Business Ethics* both now and later on, as well as already.

To reckon with the question of what an ethics of reading Business Ethics entails, within the registers and along the trajectory outlined above, requires us to consider ourselves as duty bound to consider how Derrida's work relates to Levinas's. We will do this by trying to mark out differences between Derrida and Levinas insofar as they might be said to have questioned how to read something like Business Ethics. This chapter therefore attempts to articulate the relationship between Levinas and Derrida as writers on hospitality – hospitality here understood not simply as a question of how to treat a guest, but also as a question of how to pre-treat this other which calls us to respond – another which issues a call that precedes even us.

This chapter works with the tricky concept of *inheritance*, therefore, in order to explicate the interrelation between Derrida, Levinas and Business Ethics. Business Ethics as a discipline has explicitly turned its attention towards philosophical work in order to form, to renew and to sustain itself. We might be tempted to argue that there wouldn't be Business Ethics if there hasn't been an explicit acknowledgement from its part of its philosophical bearings and inheritance. A number of commentators have noted the way in which Business Ethics is a discipline that constantly draws its legitimacy from major philosophical figures (Jones 2003, Jones et al 2005, Parker 2002).

This thesis suggests that such a move is not only an attempt on Business Ethics's part to draw upon various legitimatizing resources which are available but that it is also and most importantly a constant attempt to declare its independence from both Business and Ethics – the others it needs in order to be what it is – the others it denies

in order to affirm itself. In what follows, then, we will focus on the Levinas/Derrida relationship, before drawing lessons from it for Business Ethics, and in order to distinguish and perhaps justify this method of reading from any alternative ethics of reading. We will therefore here attempt to justify the ethics of reading that has long been under way, and this without stating what this reading amounts to in any definitive sense.

### **Introspection**

Levinas wants to remind us that responsibility is at first responsibility of myself for myself, that the sameness of myself is derived from the other, as if it were second to the other, coming to itself as responsible and mortal from the position of my responsibility before the other, for the other's death and in the face of it. In the first place it is because the *other* is mortal that my responsibility is singular and 'inalienable' (Derrida, 1995a: 46).

Although Derrida's work has been in ongoing dialogue with Levinasian ethics for a quite prolonged period of time, it is within *Violence and Metaphysics* (1978), that arguably his most sustained and deliberate engagement with Levinas is to be found. Indeed, Levinas's writing in his second great work, *Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence* (1981), seems to come as a response to a number of points raised by Derrida within *Violence and Metaphysics* (1978). This dialogue between the two great thinkers itself offers evidence for Derrida's claim that inheritance might be best understood as an *active* process. Indeed, for Derrida, inheritance is active in such a

way that the one doing the receiving needs to read the inheritance and this for Derrida is always a process of choosing. He writes: “The heritage too, is a “text,” in the broad but precise sense I give to this word. The heir’s affirmation consists, of course, in his interpretation; it consists in choosing” (2004: 8).

In *Spectres of Marx* (1994), Derrida underlines how inheritance always involves the reading and re-reading of a legacy that cannot be “given, natural, transparent, univocal” (1994: 16). What goes there for the inheritance of Marxism therefore must also here go for the reception of Levinasian (and indeed any other) thought: “if it did not call for and at the same time defy interpretation, we would never have anything to inherit from” (1994: 16). We can never be sure of what we inherit, while nevertheless we can be sure that we are always already inheritors: “One always inherits from a secret—which says “read me, will you be ever able to do so?”” (*ibid.*).

In question for Derrida, therefore, is a kind of inheritance which “is never gathered together, is never one with itself. Its presumed unity, if there is one, can consist only in the *injunction to reaffirm by choosing*” (*ibid.*). Inheritance always involves a duty to choose, to reaffirm the legacy by choosing. When inheriting one must always “filter, sift, criticize’ and ‘sort out, several different possibilities that inhabit the same injunction” (*ibid.*) - the injunction of the ‘one must’. Derrida therefore understands inheritance as a process which needs to always be unsure of what it inherits, of the nature of that which it inherits from. Concerning *Spectres of Marx*, Norris (2002) notes that Derrida is alert to the spectral nature of communism, underlining how:

those who have been led prematurely to celebrate the realization of Marxist principles in practice, and those, far more numerous today who proclaim its imminent (or accomplished) demise in a jubilant spirit' have all been driven by 'their desire to have done with its spectral presence'" (Norris, 2002: xx). For Derrida, then, coming to terms with Marxism's promissory nature is a much more productive way of engaging with the tradition. Such an engagement, for Norris, will not "mistake the as yet unfulfilled promise of a discourse on social justice for its supposed instantiation in this or that order of "achieved" socio-political ends" (Derrida, 1981: xvii) and will instead invite constant reengagement with the tradition. It is along similar lines that we see the nature of Business Ethics as a promise that will necessarily not be fulfilled, a promise that for that reason will keep our engagement 'alive'.

So it is also with Derrida's interaction with Levinas. As Robert Bernasconi notes, the way in which Levinas has been inherited within the philosophical tradition has, of course, been substantially influenced by Derrida's *Violence and Metaphysics*. Bernasconi also maintains, however, that we need to develop 'an appreciation of Derrida's *strategy*' (Bernasconi, 1987: 138) when it comes to his reading of Levinas, rather than merely deciding that Derrida's writing, within this text, is to be understood as a straight-forward critique of Levinas. Appreciating such a strategy does not simply list the differences between the two thinkers, for example, by preparing a Derrida *versus* Levinas balance sheet. Nor does it simply collapse one thinker into the other, for example, by insisting only on their proximity, by saying something like Derrida's ethics *are* Levinasian.

At stake in Derrida's reading of Levinas, for Bernasconi, is an underlining of how, whilst Levinas resigns himself to a strategy of 'incoherent incoherence' (Derrida cited in Bernasconi 1987), so too does Derrida. Bernasconi therefore suggests that reading Derrida's *Violence and Metaphysics* as a simple critique of Levinas misses the particular strategy that Derrida adopts, a strategy which is structurally very similar to Levinas. More particularly, Bernasconi (1987) argues that Derrida himself adopts the 'incoherence incoherence' style of Levinas's writing in order to not simply oppose it in a negative manner but rather to affirm the necessity that had him writing in such a manner in the first place. Bernasconi goes on to caution that any questioning as to the correctness of Derrida's or Levinas intentions:

is not only unimportant and often unanswerable; the interest in posing it arises from the false assumption that the relation between Levinas and Derrida is to be viewed as if they were taking part in some sort of competition (1987: 130).

'Violence and Metaphysics: An Essay on the Thought of Emmanuel Levinas' (Derrida, 1978), for its part, begins with Derrida's contextualisation of Levinas's work in terms of what his concerns are and in terms of how these concerns differ from the extant philosophical tradition from which it must be seen as something of a radical continuation of, albeit by means of a radical break. Levinas's work, as Derrida puts it, can make us "tremble" (*ibid.*: 101) once we confront the radicality of its gesture – the difficulty of thinking alterity both with and against Western Philosophy. But Derrida's text is neither merely pedagogical nor entirely exegetical. This is because within his reading of Levinas, Derrida is also at pains to question Levinas's thinking on its own terms, at its own limits, as if it were posing critical questions to itself and of its own accord. As Derrida puts it by way of introduction:



in the style of commentary, we will try to remain faithful to the themes and audacities of a thought – and this despite several parentheses and notes which will enclose our perplexity. Faithful also to its history, whose patience and anxiety capitulate and carry within themselves the reciprocal interrogation of which we wish to speak. Then we will attempt to ask several questions. If they succeed in approaching the heart of this explication, they will be nothing less than objections, but rather the questions put to *us* by Levinas (*ibid.* 103-104).

Here we find Derrida's account of his ethics of reading, deconstruction, in all its elusive, challenging (and for many, frustrating) glory. Deconstruction, as seems to be the case on the basis of what Derrida says about his reading of Levinas on this particular occasion, isn't simply about coming to one text with the benefit of another. Derrida does not challenge or criticise Levinas, in other words, from the perspective of Hegel, Husserl, Heidegger, or even Derrida, for that matter. Derrida's reading of Levinas is a reading which follows Levinas's argument along on Levinas's own terms, as it were. As the above quote states quite clearly, what we bring to Levinas, in deconstruction, is not a sort of goody-bag of ready-made objections, criticisms, or judgments. Deconstruction rather needs to find a way of concerning itself with nothing but Levinas's own questions, asked from within his own work, by his own work. There is nothing smuggled in from outside, we take nothing to the text, other than the text's own terms – we read the text in terms of the text itself, not in terms of what we might demand of it, but rather in terms of what it itself demands of itself, on its own terms.

This apparent ability of the reader to take a position on a text *within* the text, rather than outside it, is an ongoing concern for, as well as insistence of, scholars of deconstruction. This is also one of the constant bug bears carried by most of its more

outspoken opponents who insist on deconstruction's self-presentation in the form of the thesis, or who challenge it from the perspective of an apparent thesis that it is supposed to have. As Geoffrey Bennington puts it in his essay 'Deconstruction and Ethics' (2000), deconstruction's resistance towards gathering itself into an ethical suggestion, axiomatic position or set of discrete yet interrelated protocols is absolutely part and parcel of deconstruction's devout reluctance towards the statement of a positive thesis of the 'deconstruction is x' variety. More particularly, Bennington notes that

Ethics is metaphysical through and through and can therefore never simply be assumed or affirmed in deconstruction. The demand or desire for a "deconstructive ethics" is in this sense doomed to be disappointed' (2000: 64).

We should not seek therefore to receive an ethics from deconstruction but employ deconstruction for the purpose of destabilising and questioning a number of certainties passed down to us from what could be called the ethical tradition. As Bennington further underlines:

Deconstruction cannot be ethical, cannot propose an ethic, but ethics might nonetheless provide a privileged *clue* for deconstruction, and deconstruction might provide a new way of thinking about some of problems traditionally posed by ethics (2000: 64).

Bennington does not define the ethical tradition from which, as he claims, we necessarily inherit our concepts and vocabularies, however it becomes apparent that he is referring to the concepts of the metaphysical tradition that are in need of deconstruction. Bennington argues (in a familiar Derridean fashion) that although we cannot escape the metaphysical concepts which we necessarily inherit, we need to

nevertheless ‘read’ these concepts and ‘thereby give oneself the possibility of displacing them’ (Bennington, 2000: 69). Arguing for ‘an ethics of reading’ that has preoccupied the Derridean project all along, Bennington argues that ‘reading-as-inheritance is not only itself an ethical relation, but that it can be taken to *exemplify* the ethical relation as asymmetrical relation to an unmasterable and unassimilable other’ (2000: 68).

Derrida therefore underlines how in doing deconstruction, the reader’s greatest weakness (the lack of a thesis) is also the greatest strength of that reading (its irreducibility to a given programme). Deconstruction, as Derrida enigmatically puts it, is (in-) famously ‘there where it takes place’ (1988). It cannot succumb to a universally applicable model of reading waiting to be wheeled out and inscribed upon any given text – it harbours or conceals nothing but a devotion to the text itself. Paul de Man notes along similar lines: ‘I would hold to the statement that the text deconstructs itself, is self-deconstructive’ rather than being deconstructed by a philosophical intervention from outside of the text’ (1986: 118). Or again, to return to Derrida, ‘the very condition of a deconstruction may be at work, in the work, *within* the system to be deconstructed; it may *already* be located there, already at work’ (Derrida: 1986: 73). Deconstruction operates by respecting the singularity of the text that is read each time. More specifically, deconstruction:

does not exist somewhere pure, proper, self-identical, outside of its inscriptions in conflictual and differentiated contexts it ‘is’ what it does and what is done with it there where it takes place. It is difficult to give a univocal definition or an adequate description of this ‘taking place’. (1988: 141).

Such a deconstruction cannot be applied universally in an homogenous and undifferentiated way irrespective of the specificity of the text in front of us. It is in that sense that deconstruction has been characterised as an affirmative operation.

Already in *Of Grammatology* Derrida had argued that

the moments of deconstruction do not destroy structures from outside, they are not possible and effective, nor can they take accurate aim, except by inhabiting those structures. Inhabiting them in *a certain way*, because one always inhabits, and all the more when one does not suspect it' (1976: 24).

Specificity prevails within any given text, therefore, and deconstruction attempts to allow for this to occur. For our purposes here we can see this concern playing out, again, within Derrida's engagement with Levinas, as cited above. But just what is it about Levinasian ethics which are *re*-markable, as far as Derrida is concerned? *Violence and Metaphysics* presents us with what seems to be the Levinasian holy/unholy radical trinity quite early on: the refusal to think as if thinking is Greek and Greek alone, the refusal to abandon metaphysics in the pursuit of the truly true, and, finally, the refusal to subordinate questions of the good to questions of the true or beautiful (1978: 100).

This radical trinity, taken together, constitutes the shape of Levinas's commentary upon, as well as his departure from, the Western philosophical tradition *tout court*. But whilst Levinas's is an intervention at the level of the Western philosophical tradition as such, it more often than not takes the form of a break from particular representatives of this tradition, Levinas's own teachers, Husserl and Heidegger – figures for whom this radical trinity (forget the Greeks, affirm metaphysics, prioritise

ethics) would have been absolutely anathema. As Derrida puts it, there is something quite anti-philosophical occurring within the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas:

In question, therefore, is a powerful will to explication of the history of Greek speech. Powerful because, if this attempt is not the first of its kind, it reaches a height and a level of penetration in its dialogue which the Greeks – and foremost among them the two Greeks named Husserl and Heidegger – are called upon to respond. (*ibid.*: 102-3)

The Other, for Levinas, cannot be assimilated into the same *as such*, the other cannot be known *at all*. This is the shortcoming of the Western philosophical tradition, a tradition which can find no shelter from the Levinasian intervention. Even Hegelianism, and indeed any other philosophy of recuperation or mediation, has no hope here. Alterity cannot be thought for Levinas - it rather gives itself to thinking, but never completely. It is the hubris of the Western philosophical tradition to believe the Other can be known, *at all*. It is the argument of Levinasian philosophy that it cannot, *ever*. According to Levinas:

Transcendence precisely refuses totality, does not lend itself to a view that would encompass it from the outside. Every “comprehension” of transcendence leaves the transcendent outside. (1978: 293)

Levinas wishes to break from the ontological tradition that has dealt with the Other only in ways which reduce and suppress its alterity. Alterity is not derivative for Levinas, of course, it is rather primary. For it is alterity, rather than identity, which, In Levinas’s philosophy:

constitutes the grounds which make separation possible; the self exists because the Other is irreconcilable with it. Otherwise, both self and Other would be parts of a greater whole or totality which would invade and invalidate their separateness...although the self may feel its separateness ensures both its

mastery and freedom in the world, the separateness depends upon the possibility of an encounter which will put both mastery and freedom into question. (Davis, 1996: 44-45)

According to Davis this means that the relationship between self and the Other:

does not imply that the Other is *with* me (therefore fundamentally like me) or *against* me (therefore opposed to me and dialectically part of the same totality). Instead the Other is simply there, present to me in an originary and irreducible relation. (1996: 46)

The Self/Other relationship, on Davis's reading of Levinas, 'cannot be explained in exclusively ontological terms because it involves more than Being, entailing a breach which cannot be understood as part of Being's relationship with itself' (*ibid.* 1996: 48). Levinas rather sees the relationship as one within which alterity cannot at all be presupposed within:

the tranquil identity of the same, a freedom sure of itself which is exercised without scruples, and to whom the foreigner brings only constraint and limitation... The relation with the Other is a relation with his transcendence—the relation with the Other who puts into question the brutal spontaneity of one's immanent destiny—introduces into me what was not in me. (1969: 203)

As John Caputo puts it, Levinasian ethics therefore requires us to recognise the call of the Other even "before we are even asked for our consent, always already laid claim to by the Other, always already addressed, overtaken, held hostage by the Other, who comes over us, from on high" (1993: 79). My responsibility towards the Other is not a matter of will, for Levinas, it is rather a matter of *inheritance*. My community with the other involves a welcoming that puts in question my freedom, puts in question the very ability of receiving and welcoming as abilities of an already formulated,

complete, and sovereign subject. Otherness in that way involves an immemorial antecedence where I am already chosen by the Good, where I have no choice but to have been chosen:

this antecedence of responsibility to freedom would signify the Goodness of the Good: the necessity that the Good choose me first before I can be in a position to choose, that is, welcome its choice. That is my pre-originary *susceptiveness*. It is a passivity prior to all receptivity, it is transcendent. It is an antecedence prior to all representable antecedence: immemorial. The Good is before being. (Levinas, 1989: 112)

Within the face to face relationship I am originally exposed to alterity. I do not encounter alterity out of similitude – I rather inherit alterity whilst being inherited by it. As Hand puts it:

The *original* form of openness is therefore my exposure to alterity in the face of the other. Moreover this substitution is not an abnegation of responsibility, but a passivity that bears the burden of everything for which the other is responsible. I become a subject in the physical sense of being hostage to the other. (1989: 88)

In the face to face relationship I am exposed to alterity and encounter the Other in a passivity that holds me hostage to the other. I substitute myself for the Other, I *am* because I am the hostage to the Other. It is in this kind of asymmetrical relationship towards the alterity of the Other which Levinas challenges us to think, beyond ontology/Western Philosophy. And this is what Derrida wants us to recognise as the challenge of Levinas.

This position on alterity and difference, for Derrida and Levinas, is not a provocation which can be pasted over or quibbled away by the tradition. By setting his stall out against the Western philosophical tradition, Levinas is not hoping to be redeemed by

this tradition, nor is he pretending to offer redemption towards it. It is in the Other that redemption lies. But the Other is absolutely Other. And so too, therefore, must be redemption. Thinking is hubristic. Openness to the Other is grace. According to Levinas, therefore, the subject is formed by a pre-ontological demand made by the Other. Or, as Levinas specialist Adrian Peperzak puts it

[T]he sense of my selfhood is my being-for-the-Other. The law before which the economical existence must bow is not primarily the autonomy of my own reasonability; the voice of Being that I should hear and obey. (Peperzak, 1993: 25)

Against the Western tradition, therefore, Levinas according to Peperzak maintains that

philosophy should be thought of the irreducible relation between the other and the same, a relation that cannot be absorbed in the totality of a supreme being or of universal Being integrating all alterity as a moment of itself. (Peperzak, 1993: 46)

According to Levinas, Heidegger ‘subordinates the relation with the Other to ontology [...] rather than seeing in justice and injustice a primordial access to the Other beyond all ontology’ (Levinas, 2002: 89). Transcendence for Levinas is originary, a transcendence which ‘transcends itself without losing its own identity’ (Peperzak, 1993: 197). Levinas continues:

The existence of the Other does not concern us in the collectivity by reason of his participation in the being that is already familiar to us all, nor by reason of his power and freedom which we should have to subjugate and utilize for ourselves, not by virtue of the difference of his attributes which we should have to surmount in the process of cognition or in a movement of sympathy merging us with him, as if his existence were an embarrassment. The Other does not affect us as what must be surmounted, enveloped, dominated, but as other, independent of us: behind every relation we could sustain with him, an



absolute upsurge. It is this way of welcoming an absolute existent that we discover in justice and injustice, and that discourse, essentially teaching, effectuates. (Levinas, 1978: 89)

Levinas can be therefore said to argue that:

the paradigmatic function given to modes of being such as consciousness, knowledge, becoming, temporal continuity, power, and possibility do not enable us to conceive of transcendence as an originary principle of ontology. (Peperzak, 1993: 197)

Not only, therefore, is Levinasian thought anti-Husserlian and anti-Heideggerian, it is also anti-Hegelian and, above all, anti-Greek, that is to say, anti-philosophical. Derrida readily acknowledges how the breaks proposed by Levinasian thinking are breaks which are doubtlessly unpalatable to many. Thinking differently isn't supposed to be easy, of course, and this is particularly the case with a thinker like Levinas, a thinker who asks us to think not from the perspective of the one who can know, the philosopher, but rather from the perspective of the one who cannot be known, the Other. This is a thinking which is impossible as such. And yet this is the challenge of thinking with Levinas – the challenge of pursuing impossibility, not despite but precisely because of its possibility.

Hope or faith, therefore, cannot be put into thinking – faith and hope must be given over to the Other without any demand for reciprocity. It is the difficulty of thinking in this way that Derrida wants to appreciate when he is thinking along with Levinas, by reading his work.

There are many ways of letting oneself off the hook and not following Levinas down this road. Derrida does not allow himself such shortcuts. There are, in other words,

many positions which a trained philosopher can adopt *against* Levinas so as to let the tradition off the hook, as it were. And yet deconstruction cannot allow itself such defences if it is to encounter Levinas. Derrida again:

If one is not convinced by these initial propositions authorizing the equation of the ego and the same, one will never be. If one does not follow Levinas when he affirms that the things offered to work or to desire – in the Hegelian sense...if one does not follow Levinas when he affirms that the true resistance to the same is not that of things...in all these cases one will follow Levinas no further. (1978: 117)

It is this trebly-difficult operation that deconstruction attempts to perform. Firstly difficult because one is required to be familiar with the thinking of the tradition. Secondly difficult because one might be tempted to defend the tradition against Levinas's accusations. And finally difficult because one must read on, perhaps despite oneself, in order to encounter the truly radical proposals pertaining to Levinas's break from the tradition. Not only all of this, of course, for deconstruction also offers questions to Levinas, on the basis of following his thinking as far as it can be followed – following it so far, indeed, that we end up with questions we can ask precisely because we walked the whole journey with Levinas, and didn't take the short-cut of raising objections which we might have felt ourselves entitled to make as readers familiar with the tradition being re-read by Levinas (and therefore by deconstruction).

To think with Levinas is therefore to think eschatologically. The Other, for Levinas's Derrida (which must also mean for Levinas, if deconstruction is to remain true to its claims concerning how it reads), is transcendence. We are lifted beyond ourselves, and the tradition, by the Other. The Western philosophical tradition has not allowed itself to think this way. Recalling the radical trinity again – philosophers have always

wanted words for this good beyond being (and to thereby represent it, and accordingly bring it into the remit of the same), they have always *either* filled the metaphysical with content or else, with and after Kant, left it alone as irrelevant, and they have always thought the good on the basis of what has been said to be. Levinas wants to reverse all this by thinking beyond it – by opening up to the Other, by making an encounter with alterity the condition of possibility of all his thinking. And deconstruction wants to go along with him, without raising reservations, in order to see how far this thinking takes us.

These remarks concerning the openness to the Other and the making possible of an encounter with alterity, are a crucial concern of deconstruction, and of what deconstruction takes from Levinas. Deconstruction is a strategy which takes the context which we find ourselves within very seriously - it attempts to think with a text on its own terms. Regarding Business Ethics, we might say that in setting itself apart from both Business and Ethics, Business Ethics aims to alter two seemingly opposing contexts in order to impose its own, in order to impose the context in which it would like to operate.

We have seen this already regarding the way in which Levinas's philosophy has been brought into Business Ethics. Our concern with this way of bringing Levinas in, as should by now becoming clearer, is first and foremost informed by Levinasian motifs. But these Levinasian motifs, for their part, are themselves fundamental to a project of deconstruction. The ethics of alterity proposed by Levinas is taken seriously by

Derrida, both within his reading of Levinas, of course, but also arguably across all of his work.

Within this investigation, a concern with Levinas, with Derrida, and with Business Ethics are slowly being woven together, not by way of stating theses in advance, but rather by way of attempting to establish protocols that will not, indeed cannot, be abstracted from the context which we are attempting to open our reading up to. In the name of a deconstruction of Business Ethics we are progressively attempting to demonstrate how Business Ethics requires ethics, and goes out in pursuit of ethics, albeit in a way that has so far presented itself as somewhat self-contradictory.

Yet this is not the same as deconstruction announcing its ethics in advance, outside of the text. Bernasconi is careful to underline that Derrida cannot simply offer an ethics because to do so would contradict the entire project of deconstruction as well as annihilating the deconstructive project of attempting to find a correct place for something called ethics. As Bernasconi argues: ‘Ethics is not simply to be put in its place — even if that place is the exalted one of “an original ethics” which already contests the name and place traditionally given to ethics’ (1987: 131). According to Bernasconi:

the demand that deconstruction provide *an* ethics betrays not only traditional presuppositions about the possibility of generating ethical systems, but also a miscomprehension about the nature of deconstruction, confusing it for one philosophy among others. (1987: 135, see also Bennington, 2000)

Deconstruction, on this reading, does not form a philosophical system, but rather involves a reading which by its very nature cannot offer general, universal and encompassing guidelines and positions. As Derrida notes:

All sentences of the type “deconstruction is X” or “deconstruction is not X” *a priori* miss the point, which is to say they are at least false. As you know, one of the principal things at stake in what is called in my texts “deconstruction” is precisely the delimiting of ontology and above all of the third person present indicative: *S is P*. (1991: 275)

Instead, deconstruction is rather something which needs to be happening singularly and by taking into account the particular context which is each time in question. The very nature of the ethics involved in deconstruction cannot but strive to be consistent with various precautions that Derrida has suggested with regards to deconstruction, most importantly his suggestion that deconstruction is not a method (1991). Derrida makes that point very clearly in his ‘Letter to a Japanese Friend’ where he declares:

Deconstruction is not a method and cannot be transformed into one... It must also be clear that deconstruction is not even an *act* or an *operation* ... Not only because it does not return to an individual or *collective* subject who would take the initiative and apply it to an object, a text or a theme, etc. Deconstruction takes place, it is an event that does not wait the deliberation, consciousness, or organization of a subject, or even a modernity. (1991: 274-5)

The implications of such a position involve an ethics which will not be separate from the very context which is each time taken into consideration. Deconstruction therefore is not separate to ethics, when deconstruction happens it expresses its ethics in this very happening.

So by attempting a separation between ethical and non ethical work we underestimate both Derrida's pre-cautions and Derrida's project with regards to challenging definitive divisions and illegitimate hierarchies. In order to talk about Derrida's work as ethical we will need to assume an ability to determine the boundaries of deconstruction and subsequently proceed to examine comprehensibly the corpus of such a work in order to define or select presumably 'ethical' aspects. Such an approach will need to proceed as if any of these endeavours are possible, which they are not. Such a movement will underestimate the textual interconnectness involved in Derrida's work which makes it impossible to be definitive with regards to any attempt of confining and defining a text.

In order for such foreclosures to be possible, it must be the case that an appeal can be made to something called 'ethics' – this incontestable place of ethics would then be the place from which deconstruction, and indeed any other practice at all, would draw its ethics. Things are not this way, however. And this is why deconstruction and ethics cannot be seen, and moreover do not see themselves, as distinct and separate realms. Deconstruction does not become ethical only after being qualified as ethical, namely 'ethical deconstruction' - it already involves ethics.

The difficulty of talking about the relationship between ethics and deconstruction stems from the impossibility of separating an ethical from a deconstructive endeavour. Deconstruction itself defies definition, it has to do with "what makes every identity at once itself and different from itself, haunted, contaminated, set beside itself" (Royle, 2000: 10). Neither deconstruction nor ethics could be confined within a particular

definition and separated one from the other. On what basis can we argue that something is absolutely ethical, and the other not? How can we make these distinctions when writing about ethics? These are not questions which deconstruction answers. They are questions which it asks, along with the texts which also ask after such things – Levinas's not least of all.

Derrida alerts us to the impossibility of talking about deconstruction as something that can be associated with something else through a certain 'and'. If deconstruction challenges the self-pronounced borders of a concept and the impossibility of self-enabling and self-sustained identities, deconstruction would do the same with both 'deconstruction' and the 'and' that will supposedly be the object of a given deconstruction. Deconstruction will always involve an 'and', even prior to having artificially added this 'and' in order to connect deconstruction with something else. In a way deconstruction is already connected with something else, with a number of 'ands'. A certain supplementation already haunts deconstruction and this makes it impossible for it to be supplemented with something presumably exterior. It is along similar lines that Royle (1995) alerts us to the peculiar force of a certain 'after' Derrida, of a time where we are positioned 'after Derrida'.

Given all of this, what sort of ethics of reading might we bring to our reading of Business Ethics? *How* have we been reading Business Ethics all along? How will we continue tread Business Ethics? Bernasconi suggests that: 'in the face of the demand for an ethics, deconstruction can reply in the course of its reading of Levinas that *the ethical relation is impossible*' (1987: 135). In giving a reading of Levinas, Bernasconi

continues, deconstruction ‘preserves the ethical relation without reducing it to the order of ontology’ (1987: 135). Such a reading, of course, runs the risk of preserving ‘the *thought* of the ethical relation...rather than the ethical relation itself’ (1987: 135). This requires deconstruction to enact ethics so that it does not betray the very assumptions it is claiming to challenge. As Bernasconi puts it:

we find the ethical enactment above all in the way deconstruction ultimately refuses to adopt the standpoint of critique, renouncing the passage of judgements on its own behalf, on its own voice. (1987: 136)

And yet for all of this, Derrida does proceed to raise questions of Levinas. As we have seen, these are accounted for as questions which, in a way, Levinasian ethics raises of itself, on its own terms. But Levinas does not ask these questions of ethics, Derrida does. So what are these questions? And how do they affect this investigation into Business Ethics? At least two things are at stake here. First of all, Derrida questions Levinas in terms of his account of the tradition – where Levinas is determined to see ruptures, Derrida is willing to see instances of dis-ingenuity, of lack of openness. We will consider this point shortly.

Secondly, where Levinas is so open to radical alterity as to place the Other beyond linguistic encapsulation or expression *as such*, Derrida wonders why Levinas therefore writes about alterity *at all*. Writing must itself end up bespeaking the very thing it otherwise strives to determine as *inherently unspeakable*. Simon Critchley focuses on this point when he argues that Derrida wants to show how “Levinas’s empirical metaphysics in fact presupposes the very things that it seeks to transgress” (1992: 93), namely ‘fundamental ontological transcendence’ (*ibid.*). On this reading,



everything rises or falls on the question of how Levinas's openness to radical alterity occasionally requires, indeed relies upon, the mechanisms of similitude otherwise decried. This might well amount to criticism, on the conventional reading. But for deconstruction, it is paramount to maintain that this sort of observation is not brought to Levinas from the outside, rather, Levinas's own thinking raises this problem of its own accord and must therefore take a position upon it.

This is a limit of Levinasianism acknowledged by deconstruction, at the heart of Levinasianism. Deconstruction brings nothing to Levinas, other than Levinas. More or less everything pertaining to deconstruction hinges on this lack of externality being the case – Derrida must not have brought anything else to the text – deconstruction must question the text on its own terms, and on no other.

The point concerning the tradition is no less important, however, for it is here that Derrida presents his hermeneutically generous reading of Levinas, in particular, within the context of a much broader generosity towards the Western philosophical tradition, more generally. Yes, we need to be open to what Levinas is trying to do, despite any potential reservations, if we are going to encounter the space within which he is thinking. But just as we strive to remain alive to the challenge of what Levinas offers to thinking, we cannot eternally suspend our generosity towards other spaces of thinking offered to us by, for example, Hegel, Husserl, and Heidegger. And it is here that Derrida reads Levinas as a reader of Hegel, Husserl and Heidegger, quite frequently finding him a lot closer to each of these thinkers than he would perhaps be comfortable in admitting.

Yes, Levinas wants to break with a tradition which, on his reading, has sought to reduce the Other to the Same. But in order for Levinas to be entitled to this break he needs to convince us that this tradition does indeed reduce the Other to the Same. To make this judgment, in turn, requires us to look over Levinas's shoulder when he is reading those whose work he reads as works which performs this foreclosing of the Other. Here Derrida finds the break with the tradition as not nearly as clean as Levinas would have wanted it. But again, there is no externality involved here.

Derrida reads Levinas's reading of other philosophers because Levinas needs it to be the case that these other philosophers have reduced the Other to the Same. This is Levinas's own claim, not Derrida's. Levinas needs it to be a compelling claim. Derrida merely demonstrates that it is not a compelling claim, that the very terms set by Levinas for Levinas are themselves not as secure as he would have wanted, as he requires. Deconstruction does nothing here other than take Levinas's project seriously, perhaps even more seriously than he himself took it. But there is no externality here, only openness to the text itself.

## **Prospect**

We are continuing to develop a sense of what it means to suggest that deconstruction is best understood as an ethics of reading. Of what relevance is such an ethics of reading within the context of a reading of Business Ethics? We cannot answer this question apart from the reading we are proposing, we cannot step outside of our

reading so as to speak from a supposedly pure space. This is a cardinal lesson of deconstruction – to start from where we are. We are now amidst the Business Ethics literature, we have been for some time. Within this literature, it is becoming increasingly clear that Levinas is both something which Business Ethics sees itself as requiring, and also something which Business Ethics denies itself, precisely in its mode of acquisition. The Levinasian pegs simply don't fit in the holes Business Ethics has made for them. *This reading of Business Ethics's reading of Levinas, for its part, is informed by Derrida's reading of how Levinas's writing limits itself.*

We might therefore say that we are reading Business Ethics through a Derridean appreciation of an ethics of reading, an ethics of reading which he calls deconstruction. Deconstruction, on this reading, is a matter of reading any particular writing on its own terms. Business Ethics demands Levinasian ethics. Business Ethics denies itself Levinasian ethics. Deconstruction reads Levinasian ethics. Deconstruction witnesses Levinasian Ethics denying itself. Everything we have so far said about Business Ethics is based on nothing but a thorough going engagement with Business Ethics itself.

Just as everything Derrida says about Levinasian ethics is based on an engagement with Levinasian ethics, so too, our own engagement with the Business Ethics literature is an engagement with the promises it makes to itself and to its readers. We want this promise to be kept. We want to go along with this way of thinking, despite the reservations we might have about it. Only then can we encounter the gesture which Business Ethics makes to its readers. And yet we see that this is a gesture

which ultimately cannot be made – the promise which Business Ethics makes to its readers is a promise whose side of the bargain it simply cannot keep. This is for reasons lying within its texts.

So why does deconstruction matter in this thesis? Why not read Business Ethics in a different way? In terms of its shortcomings, its blind spots, its would-be oxymoronic nature. Why not bring to a reading of Business Ethics an account of what it should be, of what it should have been? Why not bring Ethics to Business? Or Business to Ethics? Why insist on the double-disjuncture? To read in this way, and in no other, is the very difficulty of deconstruction, as well as the very possibility of deconstruction. To not have criteria other than the criteria with which we are presented within any given text – this is what a deconstructive reading demands. The limits we attribute to Business Ethics, in this way, cannot even be understood as attributions made by us to the texts we are reading. Deconstruction rather takes place. Texts deconstruct themselves. We have not disrupted the Levinasian gesture presently prominent in Business Ethics. We have simply concerned ourselves with this gesture so thoroughly as to see how the gesture itself makes itself impossible. We simply witness this self-limitation by going along with the text as far as we can.

What, then, is the relationship between deconstruction and Business Ethics? What can Business Ethics learn from deconstruction? And what can deconstruction learn from Business Ethics? It is the argument of this thesis that there is always a two-way learning relationship between two sides, a relationship which is always already one of mutual interdependence, an interdependence that makes it difficult to be talking about

two sides, two sides apart. If deconstruction is anything it is a practice of reading which takes the specificity of context into account, more or less absolutely. And here, therefore, it is the relationship of Business Ethics with its presumably exterior environment that we would like to put into question. The construction of the outside is not a reflection of the exteriority of the outside. The construction of the outside rather takes place within the text – we simply read the way in which this is indeed the case.

And it is in this way that what is written in the name of Business Ethics creates a particular kind of institution - the institution of Business Ethics. Business Ethics writing itself produces an outside, the idea of a literature which scholars can enter into, or not. This institutionalisation effect is one which we de-stabilise here. Business Ethics *writes* a particular kind of institution and therefore forms the very way in which the supposedly external institution itself works. By ‘writing’ here we allude to both the conventional meaning of the term that is the writing produced by the institution called Business Ethics in the form of the Business Ethics literature, *and* to what Derrida recognises as ‘whatever refers to inscription in general’ (1998: 360).

With regards to the second kind of writing, which necessarily includes the first one, we refer to the multiplicity of ways in which the institution of Business Ethics is constituted and inscribed by the very writing that itself produces, ways that are uncontrollable by its presumed creator. In that way we would like to underline the force of such a discourse into shaping the institution which presumably exists outside of the text. Our deconstructive engagement with Business Ethics renders this institution as anything but external to the text.

Business Ethics, as we have seen, and as we will continue to see, constitutes itself as a discipline in order to make the gesture of turning towards and paying attention to philosophical work possible. It is the very possibility of this gesture which makes the writing institution of Business Ethics possible. Our argument here is that this foundational gesture is itself unstable. There is no Business Ethics apart from the writing on Business Ethics. There is no institution on the one side, and the writing on the other. There is only the writing – the writing itself is the condition of possibility for anything like the institution, or of institutionalisation.

We might be tempted to go so far as to argue that there wouldn't be Business Ethics if there hadn't been an explicit acknowledgement on the part of Business of its philosophical bearings and philosophical reliance. A number of commentators have noted the way in which Business Ethics is a discipline that constantly draws its legitimacy from major philosophical figures – we have already seen this numerous times in what has been written within previous chapters. This thesis suggests that such a move is not only an attempt on Business Ethics' part to draw on legitimating resources. Such an attempt is nothing but Business Ethics's declaration of independence from both the discipline of Business and the discipline of Ethics.

This independence, of course, is nothing of the sort since Business Ethics draws its resources from Business and Ethics. In this sense Business Ethics distances from *and* moves towards Business and Ethics. What is written in the name of Business Ethics creates a particular kind of institution - the institution of Business Ethics. We notice a performative gesture made by Business Ethics of establishing a writing self which it

nevertheless constantly needs to invoke as if already established every time writing is held under its name. This writing *writes* a particular kind of institution and therefore forms the very way in which this institution works. We have already attempted to show how these institutionalisation effects are at play in the context of the ongoing invitation of the work of Levinas. In the next chapter, we will further consider these effects by paying attention to the account of the nature of translation within the writing on Business Ethics.

## **Chapter Four: Invitations 2: Translating *Ethics* into Business Ethics**

As I recall, I attended my first Society for Business Ethics (SBE) meeting in the mid- to late 1980s— about twenty-five years ago. Not having a background in philosophy, as most of the participants during that period did, I was somewhat overwhelmed by the different language and jargon evident at those meetings (Carroll, 2010: 716)

[t]he word virtue is derived from the Greek word *arête* which is translated as excellence. Virtues are based on the idea that define good character and originally meant strength and superiority. According to Aristotle, virtue implies that there is a set of qualities which will make people fulfil their functions as people properly and well. Without virtue, people are unable to fulfil their task well. For Aristotle, it is not enough that a person have the know how of doing something, but virtue lies in the difference between doing something and doing it well or virtuously (excellently) (Arjoon, 2000: 162).

### **Introduction**

This chapter concentrates upon the role given to the practice of translation within the field of Business Ethics. Rather than articulating translation as something of a minor component of the ongoing debates within Business Ethics, I instead want to demonstrate the extent to which translation is in fact a crucial concern within the field, both implicitly as well as explicitly. Translation, I will demonstrate, is a concern for Business Ethics precisely because its advocates attempt to introduce ethical concerns to business and to therefore translate one language into another. So translation, in this sense, is an issue for Business Ethics in its attempt to make philosophical matters palatable and accessible to an audience which (it claims) does not relate so closely to



such concerns. This is the task which contributors to the Business Ethics debate have set themselves and one another – the task of translation. Within this chapter we analyse how this process of translation occurs: firstly, through a consideration of some prominent examples of Business Ethics translations and secondly, with the aid of Derrida's discussions of translation.

Rather than considering the status of translation within the field as such, however, the chapter instead focuses upon how a particularly influential translation has been undertaken, namely, the translation of Aristotle's *Ethics* into Business Ethics. Throughout the chapter I will consider how this translation has been achieved by focusing upon the work of Aristotelian ethics' main advocate within the field - Robert C. Solomon. Solomon has extensively used Aristotle's work in order to produce a perspective from which it might become possible to lead a virtuous life within contemporary managed organisations. His most influential work in this regard is to be found in *Ethics and Excellence: Cooperation and Integrity in Business* (1993), *A Better Way to Talk about Business* (1999a) and 'Corporate Roles, personal virtues: An Aristotelian approach to business ethics' (1992) (see also Solomon 1999b). This chapter engages in a close reading of these works as instances of translation and attempts to demonstrate just how crucial the seemingly trivial process of translation actually is within the context of Business Ethics literature.

The choice of Solomon's work, for its part, is by no means arbitrary. It is largely on account of Solomon's pronounced and prolonged advocacy of Aristotle that the virtue ethics approach to Business Ethics has been met with such broad enthusiasm within

the literature (Brewer 1997, Forsyth 1992, Limbs and Fort 2000, Murphy 1999, Shanahan and Hyman 2003). Singer (1993), for example, explains the significance of Solomon's contribution by highlighting how the range of issues and topics he writes about in his applications of Aristotelianism (character, intention, emotion, persuasion, etc.) have something of an enduring and foundational quality (see also Bull and Adam 2011, Moore 2002, 2005a, 2005b, Koehn, 1995, 1998, Jones et al 2005, Frederick 2002, ten Bos 2007). As the best known representative of Aristotle's work in the field of Business Ethics, therefore, Solomon's work functions similarly to what Michel Callon (1986) has called 'an obligatory passage point' to *any* discussion of Aristotle's work within the field. Within this chapter I consider how Solomon's translation of Aristotle's *Ethics* into a Business Ethics lexicon has served both to productively open up the debate as well as to destructively foreclose it within certain limits.

### **Translation, Accessibility and Clarity**

An important challenge for academics working in the field of business ethics is to find a way to translate philosophical questions into generally accessible languages and practical methodologies. Business persons typically are not trained in philosophy, nor are they necessarily interested in questions framed in philosophical terms (Fort, 1997: 1381).

If we accept the suggestion that a concern with translation is at the core of Business Ethics debates, rather than at the periphery, we are quite naturally led towards the related suggestion that translation is required within the field for the sake of facilitating communication between conventionally disparate groups. After all, the very idea that the field of Business Ethics holds itself responsible for/should be held responsible for the provision of ethical guidance within the context of difficult

decisions demands, as we have already seen within the introductory chapter, that practical considerations take something of an upper hand (Arnold et al. (2010), Audi et al. (2006), Brenkert (2010), Donaldson and Dunfee (1999), Doorn (2010), Egels-Zanden et al. (2010), Margolis (2001), Svensson et al (2008) and Webley (2008)). Exemplary here is the work of Crane et al. (2011) which, in the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary edition of the *Business Ethics Quarterly*, bemoans how *even now* “business ethics often lacks practical guidance on how to solve ethical dilemmas” (2011: 160) and that “there is often little practical guidance in what to do (knowledge “how”)”, thereby further underlining the need for “guidance for good and successful management decision” (*ibid.*).

The guidance expected by Business Ethics advocates from philosophers might then, according to Waters and Bird (1998: 493), take the form of a “typology of morally questionable managerial acts which managers can use to develop and communicate a more differentiated appreciation of the variety of ethical issues that can arise in their own organizations”, or something else similarly practical. Philosophy should, in other words, get translated into plain language so that business people can use it in the pursuit and achievement of ethical business practices:

Talking about ethical issues at a global level of abstraction or aggregation can be at best uninformative and at worst misleading because important distinctions among the various types of such issues are obscured. A finer grained language with respect to ethical conduct and ethical questions can help senior managers to clarify and communicate their concerns more effectively (*ibid.*).

It is in this very context that the sense of the need to translate ethics into business emerges. It is also within this context that Solomon reads Aristotle's *Ethics* for the sake of Business Ethics. It is in this context, in other words, that Solomon translates Aristotle. This task of translation makes Solomon responsible for addressing two interrelated acts of translation. On the one hand, he needs to translate the work of Aristotle, itself quintessentially philosophical, into an idiom which is not philosophical from the outset, Business Ethics. But on the other hand Solomon is also engaged in a more overtly conventional or literal form of translation when confronted with the Aristotelian term, *arête*, and when confronted with the challenge of describing to his audience what that Greek and Aristotelian word means. It is in connection with this demand for a sort of double-translation that Solomon says:

It might be worth noting that the Aristotelian word *arête* is sometimes translated as 'virtue' sometimes as 'excellence,' and that ambiguity is significant. In business life, this assumption—so basic that it is rarely even discussed as such—is that excellence (like quality) sells, that excellence is the key to success. In other words our emphasis on excellence also presupposes a particular sense of justice, a meritocracy, in which merit — excellence is rewarded in the market place (Solomon, 1993: 153).

According to Solomon, then, Business Ethicists have put too much of an emphasis upon the notion that *arête* translates as excellence. Excellence presupposes a number of things that should not have been presupposed when we have decided that excellence is always rewarded. Solomon suggests that we need to re-evaluate the two meanings of *arête*, to be attentive to the fact that *arête* also means virtue and move away from the business orientated meaning of excellence towards the philosophical one, the one of virtue. Solomon suggests that interpreting *arête* as virtue does not mean that we are not anymore in contact with the business context. *Arête* as virtue

according to Solomon, although philosophical, can nevertheless aim at *both* the bottom line and ethics. It is within such a context that we would like to evaluate Solomon's decision to translate *arête* as virtue. Solomon wants his translation of *arête* as virtue to derive from the correct origin - the philosophical one. Solomon corrects the way in which the Business Ethics tradition has interpreted this word, but at the same time he needs his virtue not to be merely philosophical but to be equally corresponding to the request of the field that these concepts are applicable, that is they are not restricted to the remote world of philosophy.

We can note here how Solomon in his translating endeavour very much stays within the oppositional structure that we have identified above in the thesis's literature review. Solomon translates philosophical work into a business context but he does so from the position of the philosopher. Nevertheless, Solomon, the philosopher, cannot eternally abstain from non-philosophy - the very reason he is translating is in order to create the possibility of engagement with the practical concerns of a business realm, itself made (more) ethical (or at least more ethically informed) by that very engagement.

*Arête*, the word, presents itself to Solomon, and therefore to his readers, as a word which has an ambiguous meaning, even for the Greek speaker, even for Aristotle, even for the philosopher. The inherent ambiguity of *arête*, the word Solomon translates, is sustained throughout his translating - its influence is suppressed within ambiguity but cannot be ultimately eliminated – and he acknowledges as much. *Arête* does not necessarily fit within the oppositional structure (Business//Ethics) which

Solomon nonetheless uses in order to translate it. As we progress, we will attempt to interpret the initial presentation and subsequent suppression of ambiguity within Solomon's translating practice with recourse to Derrida's concept of the *pharmakon* (1981).

Solomon, for his part, observes that the translation of *arête* has been interpreted in what he calls a business orientated manner. *Arête* has been translated as excellence, and this is the case because excellence is valued within what he calls the business world. Solomon proceeds to offer a different translation to the one offered by the Business Ethics canon. What kind of translation is this and can it be said that we are right to underline this difference? In order to claim that his translation is legitimate, more legitimate than what has come before, Solomon needs to first of all stabilise the meaning of *arête*. What I want to argue within this chapter, however, is that such a meaning is not as stable as Solomon might wish to convey. The very act of stabilisation sought by Solomon relies upon the assumption of linguistic originality – of meaning's identifiable origin.

The meaning of *arête* that Solomon suggests to be correct should be indeed correct because it is derived not from the murky temporally and materially bound world of business, but rather from the timeless elevated world of philosophy and its utopian ideals. The very moment at which the allure of originality is disrupted, that is to say, the very moment at which Solomon himself senses the ambiguity which is itself prior to the original, he has to defend his reading with recourse to the motif of personal possession – whatever else might be said of this reading, it is *his*. Solomon is able to

offer his own reading of *arête*, and to offer it as superior, exactly because he is offering his translation as one derived from the correct ‘original’, the philosophical one – he himself is a philosopher and can therefore speak from within its lexicon. It is such a self-granting of origin that offers him the right to translate a philosophical concept as a philosopher, on behalf of business.

Two hierarchies come forth within Solomon’s translation work, therefore. One which accepts the value of unambiguous legibility as primary and the value of challenging ambiguity as secondary, the other which prioritises the philosophical demand for rigour at the expense of the managerial demand for relevance, on the other. The first hierarchy makes its appearance when Solomon encounters ambiguity as something which he very quickly has to move beyond and leave behind. The second hierarchy appears when Solomon decides to replace a philosophically ambiguous word with a demonstrably unambiguous one which a predominantly business audience can work with and use. For such a translation to be initiated a number of things need to be taken for granted – the principal of these is that there is something called philosophy and something called business which are separated one from the other. Philosophy and business do not communicate with each other and therefore translation is required. A self-confessed philosopher first and foremost, Solomon posits ambiguity from the outset by opposing the business orientated interpretation to the philosophical one.

In a different passage we again find Solomon insisting upon the two meanings of *arête*, only this time he develops a slightly different emphasis:

The Greek '*arête*' is often translated either 'virtue' or 'excellence,' as opposed to the rather modest and self-effacing notion of 'virtue' that we inherited from our Victorian ancestors (indeed, even Kant used the term). The dual translation by itself makes a striking point. It is not enough to do no wrong. (Solomon, 1992: 327)

Solomon again underlines the dual translation of *arête* already discussed above in order to again collapse the two meanings into one. This time, according to Solomon, *arête* means virtue, virtue that is excellent. What needs to be again underlined is that Solomon's discourse cannot tolerate ambiguity and un-decidable meaning. He translates as a means of eradicating the doubtfulness of meaning, replacing it with clarity and seeming specificity. In order to do this, Solomon needs to claim to know what virtue means, this 'modest and self effacing' word. This word, virtue, gains its proper meaning because Solomon reminds us that *arête* does not need to have such a humble meaning, it might mean virtue but at the same time it also means excellence. *Arête* can also mean excellence.

To have *arête*, to be virtuous, is to have excellence. 'Doing no wrong' is merely being virtuous, but *arête* is excessive, it involves doing something in an excellent way. To have *arête* needs to mean something more than just being virtuous, *arête* means something more than virtue, it is virtue that is excellent; *arête* is being excellent. If a virtue is exercised in a way that is not excellent then it is not *arête*. *Arête* is an excessive form of virtue. In that way Solomon aims to elevate the meaning of virtue from its impoverished position and replace it with a virtue that is excellent, with excellence itself. In that way we find Solomon arguing now for an *arête* that again has one and only meaning, *arête* means being excellent, excellently virtuous.



More programmatically, then, Solomon argues that if we are to talk seriously about Aristotelian ethics within the context of Business Ethics *at all* then we will need to bring into being the double translation of *arête* which he has highlighted, a translation that adds something to our now over-simplified translation of *arête* as virtue and virtue alone. ‘Virtue’ alone doesn’t capture everything pertaining to *arête*. With the addition of excellence to its meaning, however, *arête* becomes itself, its translation is corrected, the correct meaning is attributed to it. Solomon continues: ‘Virtue is doing one's best, excelling, and not merely "toeing the line" and "keeping one's nose clean."' (1992: 327). So for Solomon, virtue has to be an inadequate translation of *arête*, a translation which somebody, in this case nobody other than himself, will have to correct.

On the one hand the idea that *arête* as virtue is needed by Solomon for the translation that he puts forward. But on the other hand, this understanding is needed only so that it can be overcome. To translate ‘*arête*’ as merely ‘virtue’ is an inadequate translation for the word ‘*arête*’, the double meaning needs to be embraced and the importance of excellence underlined. It is from this double meaning that *arête* will have the chance to be something different from mere virtue. *Arête* is virtue but virtue only matters when it is excellent, *arête* therefore becomes excellence. In such a way the ‘double meaning’ earlier underlined by Solomon is now written over; it is not a double meaning anymore.

Solomon has underlined the double translation of *arête* in order to offer a complete translation of that word, one that represents it correctly. The double translation that

Solomon has identified in *arête* is double because of the two complete meanings that he has attributed to it. In his attempt to talk about excellence, Solomon comes to terms with the necessary incompleteness of every term, an incompleteness which is much more fundamental and necessary. This incompleteness disturbs and challenges both what Solomon considers as double and what he considers as complete. One term needs the other; two terms that become themselves only by referring to each other.

What has happened to the ambiguity that Solomon initially identifies in *arête*? We find Solomon collapsing the ambiguity that he earlier noted in order to make excellence an attribute at virtue's disposal. In that manner the necessity of virtue comes to the fore again; the impoverished virtue is necessary for Solomon to talk about excellence. Solomon cannot write out completely the *arête* that he doesn't like, he relies on it. It is not enough to be virtuous as such - you need to be excellent in business virtuousness, otherwise you are not virtuous, otherwise you do not have the *arête* of ethical business.

The peculiar conjoining of the double translation which Solomon is engaged in (of the meaning of the word *arête*, and of the meaning of the language of philosophy to the world of Business Ethics) is precisely what allows him to take possession of his translating practice – it is this specific conjoining which gives him the right to translate, the right to the meaning of his translation, even if this translation does not translate without ambiguity. Translation therefore involves *decision*. In our first example of Solomon's writing, he criticizes the tradition for having prioritised a business-orientated translation only to prioritise it again at the expense, and via the

detour of, a philosophically-orientated translation. In that way he finds himself in a similar position to the one he is working against. In the second example excellence is prioritised, an excellence that supplements and completes virtue. Above all, Solomon needs to communicate a particular meaning of the word *arête*. He needs to bring the message, one which he alone is able to write, decipher *and* deliver, all at once. He treats the message of Aristotle, of *arête*, as both sendable and receivable, as of a nature, of *a particular* nature. But what is it that resists the possibility of a more rigorous translation? Why can't Solomon have the final word he wants to give himself here? If the language of philosophy is pure, what is the importance of ambiguous words such as *arête*? Such words are considered ambiguous exactly because the rule of clarity has been valued above and imposed upon language. This is what we want to consider within the remainder of this chapter with Solomon, with Aristotle, and above all, with Derrida.

### **The Promise of Translation is also its Poison**

We are in the process of reading Solomon's attempt to translate Aristotle's *Ethics* into the lexicon of Business Ethics. This task of reading Solomon, or indeed reading anything, according to Derrida, should strive to hone in on

a certain relationship, unperceived by the writer, between what he commands and what he does not command of the patterns of the language that he uses (1976: 158).

Our relationship to Solomon, informed by Derrida, it should be clear, cannot eventually happen upon what it is that Solomon really should have translated *arête* into. Our reading of Solomon's translation of *arête*, in other words, is not an attempt to identify what Solomon does and does not control with regards to the way he uses language. We too are also writers and readers and as such, we too are similarly involved within instances of powerlessness with regards to the production of the meaning of a text.

We therefore follow Derrida in his repeated suggestion that readers are not themselves 'masters' of language and as such able to perceive what remains unperceived by the writer. Rather, Derrida's practice of 'double reading' (1976) invites us to read with one eye towards what the author 'means to say', and the other towards moments where what the author 'means to say' is cancelled or contradicted by the very means the authors uses in order to make a convincing argument. For Derrida, then, the writer writes '*in* a language and *in* a logic whose proper system, laws and life his discourse by definition cannot dominate absolutely' (1976: 158). Derrida frequently underlines how an author uses the system of language 'only by letting himself, after a fashion and up to a point, be governed by the system' (1976: 158). Reading should attend to the relationship between knowing and not knowing for, as Nancy puts it, such reading "advances unknowing, it is always an unjustifiable cut in the supposed continuum of meaning that opens a book. It must lose its way in this breach" (1993: 336). Such a reading should also seek to take a position on the relationship between the commanding and not commanding which takes place in writing. This is what we have been trying to do in our reading of Solomon so far.

Such a strategy of reading, if it can even be called such, occupies Derrida throughout his work, wherein he repeatedly insists on the impossibility of owning language, in particular he notes:

It is of the essence of language that language does not let itself be appropriated. Language is what does not let itself be possessed but, for this reason provokes all kinds of movements of appropriation. Because language can be desired but not appropriated, it sets into motion all sorts of gestures of ownership and appropriation. What is at stake here politically is that linguistic nationalism is precisely one of these gestures of appropriation, a naive gesture of appropriation. (2005d: 101)

Translation therefore evokes appropriation and a series of imperial tendencies that desire to generalise or perhaps even universalise an idiom. In our context we can identify such gesture of appropriation at work in the initiation of the language of certainty and un-ambiguity and, relatedly, the sheer refusal to tolerate the undecidability of *arête*. Solomon's desire for translation, as well as the desire of Business Ethics more generally for unambiguous translations, suffers from aspects of such linguistic imperialism, or what Derrida elsewhere calls the 'imperatives for immediate translatability' (Derrida, 2002b: 13), where everything has to be 'immediately intelligible and thus, in every sense of the word, *receivable*' (*ibid.*). For Derrida, within such a context:

recourse to facile consensus and the established code becomes the rule—and the theme from which the variations do not stray very far. Any question about the dominant code becomes inaudible, unless it takes the form of an easy and symmetrical provocation in the same register, which never changes anything in the scene (*ibid.*)

The word *arête* is used by Solomon in order to make it possible for him to bring his own translation, in order for him to work against the canon. Solomon has taken on the task of the translator, along with all of its responsibilities. Accepting this task, Solomon aims to replace this wrong translation and immunize that translation so as to suggest a correct and superior translation. The translation that Solomon suggests needs to be the final one, it should terminate the very need for translation. It should become the translation that will prevail and be inherited by all future readers of Business Ethics – or at least those readers of (a suitably etiolated) Aristotle in Business Ethics. But as we are starting to suggest, translation is not a process which can be controlled by the intentions of the translator – it is something which, following Derrida, we understand as *impossible yet necessary*. Let us consider how Derrida undertook a similar operation in his reading of the translation of the Platonic word *pharmakon* – the parallels are by no means superfluous to the issue at hand.

The mastery of the inherent ambiguity of the *pharmakon* is betrayed, Derrida argues, every time we come across clear and neat oppositions like the ones produced by Plato. Ambiguity is what makes the *pharmakon* work, its poetic ambiguity is what allows it to produce its effects. As Derrida shows in ‘Plato’s Pharmacy’ (1981) the persistent gesture of the Platonic tradition is the ongoing attempt to eliminate ambiguity – to overcome difference in the name of identity – to think as if identity preceded difference. Indeed Derrida argues that this *pharmakon*, supplement, is at the heart of all focal points necessary for any attempt at communication. The *pharmakon* returns without having gone away, its strength stays untouched, even if we believe ourselves

to have overpowered it with reason, with thought, with language. According to Derrida (regarding Plato):

In order for writing to produce, he says, the opposite effect from what one might expect, in order for this *pharmakon* to show itself, with use, to be injurious, its effectiveness, its power, its *dunamis* must, of course be ambiguous. As is said of the Pharmakon in the Protagoras, the Philebus, the Timaeus. It is precisely this ambiguity that Plato, through the mouth of the King, attempts to master, to dominate by inserting its definition into simple, clear cut oppositions: good and evil, inside and outside, true and false, essence and appearance. (1981: 99)

So what allows Derrida to see this form of translation as, in a way, condemned to failure from the outset? According to Derrida, textuality *itself* is “constituted by differences and by differences from difference, it is by nature absolutely heterogeneous and is constantly composing with the forces that tend to annihilate it” (1981: 98). Difference is therefore the case within text – the task of translation is the task of legislating otherwise. It is the task of presenting difference as if it were not what we are always already within. Plato himself ‘decides in favour of a logic that does not tolerate such passages between opposing senses of the same word’ (Derrida, 1981: 98-99). One word will signify one meaning or another and only that – we look for stability rather than oscillation, we demand identity because we cannot tolerate difference. It is this ‘blockage of the passage among opposing values’ that is ‘itself an effect of “Platonism,” the consequence of something already at work in the translated text, in the relation between “Plato” and his “language.”’ (1981: 98).

Such a blockage is, according to Derrida, not natural but rather the result of a logic that Platonism could not have tolerated, a logic which we find already at work within

the Platonic text; a logic of what Derrida elsewhere calls the maddening supplement (Derrida, 1976). According to Derrida it is the *pharmakon* which ‘constitutes the medium in which opposites are opposed, the movement and the play that links them among themselves, reverses them or makes one side cross over into the other (soul/body, good/evil, inside/outside, memory/forgetfulness, speech/writing, etc)’ (1981: 127).

The *pharmakon* introduces ambiguity and play as fundamental, as not a mere effect of an opposition. Indeed, Derrida considers ‘every process of signification as a formal play of differences. That is of traces’ (1981: 26). This play of differences ‘supposes, in effect, syntheses and referrals, which forbid at any moment, or in any sense, that a simple element be *present* in and of itself, referring only to itself. Whether in the order of the spoken or written discourse, no element can function as a sign without referring to another element which itself is not simply present’ (2002: 26). It is because of this interweaving which Derrida calls the text that a word is able to signify.

According to Derrida nothing is more originary to *différance*: ‘There is no subject who is agent, author, and master of *différance*, who eventually and empirically would be overtaken. Subjectivity—like objectivity—is an effect of *différance*, an effect inscribed in a system of *différance*’ (2002: 28). Practices that appeal to some sort of present reality amount ‘to a subordination of the movement of *différance* in favour of the presence of a value or a *meaning* supposedly antecedent to *différance*, more original than it, exceeding and governing it in the last analysis.’ (2002: 29). Or, as Derrida elsewhere mentions



one could demonstrate that every time a philosophy or science claims to have constituted its own coherence in some fashion, it has in fact been led to reduce the element of play or to comprehend it by assigning it a place, to hem it in somehow (1985: 68).

The *pharmakon* too precedes any opposition and is already contaminated by oppositionality. Derrida notes that the choice of only one of the renditions involved in the meaning of the *pharmakon* ‘by the translator has as its first effect the neutralization of the citational play, of the “anagram,” and in the end of the very textuality of the translated text’ (1981: 98). Within such textuality, according to Derrida, there are ‘tensions, heterogeneity, disruptive volcanos ... which cannot be reduced to an institution, to a corpus, to a system’ (1997a: 21). Textuality demands reading, no theoretical system can account for what a singular engagement with a text can bring, can indeed *read*.

Plato’s reading of the *pharmakon* neutralizes textuality and thereby restricts the way in which the *pharmakon* might be read otherwise. It is for the exact same reason that Derrida insists on reading. A reading which always has the possibility to unsettle and destabilise any external and imposed instructions made upon the text. A reading enabled by the untouched reserve of the *pharmakon* (1981). Texts such as Plato’s can only be read in ‘a way which has to be constantly reinvented’ involving something ‘which can be totally new at every moment’ (1997a: 21). So the translation process, according to Derrida (1981), will necessarily destroy the *pharmakon*. This fact is not negotiable on the part of the translator; it is rather a very condition of possibility of all translation. According to Derrida:

All translations into languages that are the heirs and depositaries of Western metaphysics thus produce on the *pharmakon* an *effect of analysis* that violently destroys it, reduces it to one of its simple elements by interpreting it, paradoxically enough, in the light of the ulterior developments it itself has made possible (1981: 99).

Translation destroys the *pharmakon* but at the same time is defeated by it - it is unable to destroy it completely and render it ineffective, to destroy it well enough. Something of the *pharmakon* is retained, is saved and survives our translating endeavours. The *pharmakon* is ambiguous, and this is why it troubles translation, it cannot be adequately replaced. What Derrida illustrates with his discussion on the *pharmakon*, is not that the *pharmakon* has been interpreted in one particular way although it should have been interpreted in another. On the contrary, he insists that it became necessary within the tradition of *Western Metaphysics* for the *pharmakon* to be always in need of translation, although it defies translation. Respecting the *pharmakon* transforms and opens up the contours of what Derrida refers to as the ‘model of classical reading’ (1981: 104) or ‘the recognised models of commentary’ (*ibid.*).

The *pharmakon* attends to the space already opened in the text for a reading that does not anymore form a ‘genealogical or structural reconstitution of a system’ where ‘this reconstitution tries to corroborate or refute, confirm or “overturn,” mark a return-to-Plato or give him a “send-off”’ (*ibid.*). The *pharmakon* is unsettling because ‘far from being governed by these oppositions, it opens up their very possibility without letting itself be comprehended by them’ (1981: 103). Reading the *pharmakon* is challenging, ‘We cannot qualify it, name it, comprehend it under a simple concept without immediately being off the mark’ (1981: 103) while at the same time we cannot avoid it; it forms a ‘functional displacement’ which demands reading. ‘It writes itself. One

must therefore begin by reading it' (1981: 104). Such a reading is dangerous, not dangerous in itself, but

in that aspect of it that can present itself as a thing, as a being-present ... but here the supplement *is* not, is not a being (*on*). It is nevertheless not a simple nonbeing (*me on*), either. Its slidings slip it out of the simple alternative presence/absence. *That* is the danger. (1981: 109)

And it is in this sense that we have been approaching Solomon. As with Plato, in his attempt to create unity out of difference as if there was only ever unity, so too Solomon equally obscures the *pharmakon* effects and its inherent ambiguity by inserting *arête* within a clear opposition, the one between something called Business and something called Ethics. Just as much as the ambiguity of *pharmakon* comes back to haunt Plato at the very moment where he believes himself to have exorcised it, so too, the intense ambiguity at the heart of *arête* is always there within Solomon's translating practices; even when he presents his translations as correct, as right, as justified, as true. That which both Plato and Solomon strive to leave behind is never quite left behind – it is always there, in a way. According to Solomon the Business Ethics tradition has translated *arête* as excellence being in that way faithful to an original business text. The tradition according to Solomon has tried to get closer and closer to such a business text in order to validate itself as a good translation. Business Ethics, with or without Solomon, accepts the very possibility of translation as its task and relies upon the idea of an authentically possible original.

What Solomon does is argue for a different original, the philosophical one. Solomon rejects the business *arche*, the business origin, and aims to replace it with the

philosophical one. When such is the translating set up, a set up that recognises an original text as prior, superior and original to the translated one – in short, as complete - then any translation would be deemed to be *going after* ‘it’, to be trying to reach it, with the aim of replacing it adequately and completely. What would such a completion involve if Solomon relied on the translated text in order to talk about an original? How would such a completion look if what we are trying to cover is not as complete a coverage as would be required? There can be no business text without ethical aspects and no ethical one without business inclinations, by taking the *pharmakon* seriously we are always already in Business Ethics.

### **The *Pharmakon* of Business Ethics**

Solomon encounters ambiguity - he witnesses the untranslatability of *arête*, of the *pharmakon*, of its impossibility to be of a decidable meaning. The discussion of the *pharmakon* brings us to terms with the seeming impossibility of translation - an impossibility, as Derrida insists, which is nevertheless the only possibility (1979, 1981, 1985a, 1985b). That meaning is not of a decidable nature renders the transference that Solomon attempts quite impossible. We are therefore led to the possibility of considering translation not as a mode of transference but rather as a mode of translation (see Derrida 1981, 1985). The above discussion of the *pharmakon* reveals how, just as in Plato’s language for Derrida, so too there is more than one language within the language which Solomon holds as *one*, for us. Solomon cannot erase excellence from *arête*, precisely because he needs excellence in order to offer his own suggestion, virtue. In other words, Solomon cannot suppress undecidability.

What he offers in the place of undecidability, as the overcoming of undecidability, itself labours within the *pharmakon* which conditions signification. For that very reason, whether we reject or accept Solomon's interpretation of *arête*, different suggestions will continuously appear as potential destructions of the illusion of origin - the *pharmakon* effect will therefore continue to impose itself, with or without Solomon. The *pharmakon* effect cannot be managed - it produces hierarchies and oppositions which it at the same time undermines. Solomon, or anyone else involved in translation, cannot escape this pre-condition of translation – it is both the condition of translation's possibility and the fact of its impossibility.

Solomon needs recourse to something different to textuality when he is translating *arête*, he needs something, an outside, which is uncontaminated by textuality. In order to translate *arête* as virtue he needs to suppress undecidability and appeal to a clear and definitive boundary between Business and Ethics so that he can offer his translation as a legitimate one, one which can stand in between two disciplines which do not disseminate. He appeals to a strict boundary between business and ethics so that he can offer a translation that fits the 'ethical' side of the border, to the proper place of ethics. Although his translation encounters the necessary blurring of such a division, it nevertheless proceeds and works with them in order to sustain them. Within textuality there is nothing that justifies the signifier *arête* to be translated as virtue and not excellence, or vice-versa. The author needs to appeal to something outside the text in order to offer their interpretation as the correct one.

Derrida calls this pursuit of an outside the transcendental signified (2002). Appealing to the transcendental signified, to something outside language and signification is what, according to Derrida, Western Metaphysics has set as its thesis. As he puts it:

[W]hat does a philosopher say when he is being a philosopher? He says: What matters is truth or meaning, and since meaning is before and beyond language, it follows that it is translatable. Meaning has the commanding role, and consequently one must be able to fix its univocality or, in any case, to master its plurivocality. If this plurivocality can be mastered then translation, understood as the transport of a semantic content into another signifying form, is possible. There is no philosophy unless translation in this latter sense is possible [...] The origin of philosophy is translation or the thesis of translatability, so that whenever translation in this sense has failed, it is nothing less than philosophy that finds itself defeated. (1985b: 120)

Solomon appeals to legibility in order to work against the interpretation that has so far been legitimate in the field. It is in the name of such legibility that Solomon offers his interpretation of Aristotle's ethics. As we have already seen, Derrida underlines the impossibility of making just such a definitive decision as to the meaning of the *pharmakon*. Derrida criticizes Western philosophy, from Plato onwards, for wanting to create a purely philosophical, technical and unambiguous vocabulary, precisely because this very tradition strives to forget the fact that it knows this operation to have been impossible from Plato onwards. Derrida underlines how this tradition will always be undermined by the dependence upon everyday language. The philosophical tradition since Plato, according to Derrida, continually tries to 'decide' upon a pure and univocal meaning for the *pharmakon* at the expense of the fact that it knows this term to have been always already anything but straightforward.

We can illustrate this point along another register, as Derrida does, with recourse to a reading of the fable of Babel. Derrida argues that in the story of the Babel construction, God, in order to punish the Semites for attempting a universalisation of their language, interrupts their attempts by giving his name to their construction. His name needs translation even though it is totally untranslatable. Semites are therefore condemned to always translate, to strive towards the need to no longer translate, even though non-translatability acts as the very foundation for each and every act of translation:

[W]hen God imposes and opposes his name, he ... interrupts also the colonial violence or the linguistic imperialism. He destines them to translation, he subjects them to the law of a translation both necessary and impossible; in a stroke with his translatable-un-translatable name he delivers a universal reason (it will no longer be subject to the rule of a particular nation) but he simultaneously limits its very universality: forbidden transparency, impossible univocity. (Derrida, 1985a: 253)

God weakens the stability and independence of the proper name and underlines its dependence and therefore contamination by the common name. The proper name risks contamination in order to be *itself*. Derrida indicates therefore that the possibility of a pure address becomes impossible:

To the extent to which it can immediately become common and drift off course toward a system of relations where it functions as a common name or mark, it can send the address off course. (1985b: 107-108)

Every name therefore lends itself to a chain of substitutions which are themselves deconstructible - nomination gets trapped in a process that it doesn't control. Parts of this structure are words such as *pharmakon* which 'do not simply turn back in

themselves by means of auto-affection without opening. Rather they spread out in a chain over the practical and theoretical entity of a text' (2002: 40). And here we meet again the concept of play with regards to the process in which the proper name enters; a process into which the proper name enters without having ever been able to have existed elsewhere, away from play. This is a kind of play that moves beyond 'the activity of a subject manipulating objects according to or against the rules, et cetera' (1985: 69). It is not Solomon who sets this process in motion, the process where the proper name 'loses its way'; a way that could never have been the one intended or not intended by a *present* subject. Derrida notes

[P]laying with one's own name, putting it in play, is, in effect, what is always going on ... But obviously this is not something one can decide: one doesn't disseminate or play with one's name. The very structure of the proper name sets this structure in motion (1985: 76).

Or as he continues a bit later on:

Thus the proper name is at play and it's meant to play all by itself, to win or lose the match without me. This is to say that at the furthest limit, I no longer need to pull the strings myself, to write one way or another. It is written like that by itself. When it comes to names, the relation between the proper and the common already programs the whole scenario (1985: 77).

The 'Tower of Babel' story therefore underlines the fact of the irreducible multiplicity of languages. As Peggy Kamuf argues, it exhibits 'an incompleteness, the impossibility of finishing, of totalizing, of saturating, of completing something in the order of edification' (1991: 244). Derrida's concept of *différance* refers exactly to this interruption of the totalizing tendency that reading, naming and translating entails - a self-interruption: an interruption of the self. God punishes the Semites 'for having



wanted thus to make a name for themselves...to construct for and by themselves their own name ... He punishes them for having thus wanted to assure themselves, by themselves' (1985b: 248). This demand for translating is nevertheless 'the law; it even speaks the language of the law beyond the law, of the impossible law' (Derrida, 2001: 183). The name of God 'is divided enough in the tongue, already, to signify also, confusedly, "confusion" ... God deconstructs. Himself' (1985a: 249). Or, as Spivak (1999) puts it: 'Translation is thus not only necessary but unavoidable. And yet, as the text guards its secret, it is impossible' (1999: 27).

Solomon can be read as a continuation of this Platonic refrain. His translation experiences its own impossibility from the outset. He needs to decide out of undecidability. Undecidability makes his decision possible (Derrida 1992, 1995a, 1996). Otherwise the decision is just 'the programmable application of a calculable process' (Derrida, 1992: 24). But in as much as it enables his decision, it also disables its termination. Because we can translate we will never finish translating.

When Business Ethics translates with Solomon we do not have a chance to encounter undecidability, we come across it only to quickly suppress it again and make a decision, as if *arête* had only one meaning all along. Such a translating process is precisely *not* a translation according to Derrida. A translation, in order to be worthy of the name, needs to be both possible and impossible. It is temporarily possible only because it will be ultimately impossible. Translation will involve a kind of decision with regards to its process that is not merely a consequence of a premise or an application of a rule. It will reinvent the very text each time it translates it. Every

subsequent reading will perform a sort of translation which a previous translation cannot absolve the reader of the need for. According to Derrida a possibility that is not at the same time impossible is a safe assured possibility, an empty possibility that would never be able to bring something new and therefore entail an event. As he puts it:

[F]or a possible that would only be possible (non-impossible), a possible surely and certainly possible, accessible in advance, would be a poor possible, a futureless possible, a possible already *set aside* so to speak, life assured. This would be a programme or a causality, a development without an event.' (1997: 29).

Derrida continues that such a 'possibilisation of the impossible possible must remain at one and the same time as undecidable – and therefore as decisive – as the future itself.' (1997: 29) This is precisely what makes a decision worthy of the name possible for Derrida. To quote again:

What would the future be if the decision were able to be programmed, and if the risk [*l'alea*], the uncertainty, the unstable certainty, the inassurance of the 'perhaps', were not suspended on it at the opening of what comes, flush with the event, within it and with an opened heart? (1997: 29)

It is this very 'limited assurance of the perhaps', of a perhaps that we are not able to think in advance, a perhaps whose nature we cannot recognise and be sure of, that will be able "to open up a concatenation of causes and effects, by necessarily disjoining a certain necessity of order, by interrupting it and inscribing therein simply its possible interruption" (1997:29). Within such a concatenation a decision worthy of the name is inscribed, a decision that allows something which will destabilise our expectations and therefore make us responsible for the making of another, yet another, decision.

Without experiencing such an impossibility there is no decision worthy of the name, the decision will merely involve the application of a rule or would be a consequence of a premise. Against Solomon we might therefore say that we will always need a new decision. Solomon's translation, for its part, simply follows a rule and expects its inheritors to remain accordingly bound to that rule.

The success of Solomon's translation, if it can be called such, is to make an encounter with undecidability impossible from the outset. With Solomon we come across undecidability only to suppress it, only to leave it behind. Deconstruction, for its part, is not the erasure of the frame, there is a context but that context is itself undecidable as such. As Derrida puts it: "each decision is different and requires an absolutely unique interpretation, which no existing, coded rule can or ought to guarantee absolutely" (Derrida, 2002: 251). So here we are not arguing for undecidability for the sake of undecidability, or for the sake of being difficult. Here we are arguing for undecidability in order to make translation possible. For in order for translation to be possible it must be done within the context of undecidability and out of the experience thereof (Derrida 1981, 1985, 1986, 1998). Furthermore, that experience does not relinquish or abate after translation. Translation is always undecidable. Solomon isn't as in control of Aristotle as the seeming possibility of his translation would allow us to pretend. As Sharpe (2004: 64) puts it: "an individual subject could fully control the meaning of everything they say, think, and do: an illusion promoted by the situation of an isolated and fully self-conscious subject "hearing-itself-speaking" without an external interruption, or "leakage" of the meaning" (Sharpe, 2004: 64). Or similarly Roden: "The subject of thought, experience and intentionality is, accordingly, an

‘effect’ of a mobile network of signifying states structurally open to modification or recontextualisation” (2004: 96).

In this sense Solomon cannot appeal to clarity in order to justify his decision of translating *arête* in an unambiguous way. He necessarily has to make his decision within the particular context where he finds himself. This context is not as stable and self-enclosed as Solomon requires. Because the context of a decision can never be absolutely closed, appealing to a certain principle of supposed guarantee can never be enough for such a justification. Our justification will always be as incomplete and uncertain as the context which supposedly guarantees it. Solomon makes a definitive decision where such a decision seems rather unstable. What Sharpe calls ‘an irreducible surplus of meaning over conscious intentionality’ (Sharpe, 2004: 64) will be haunting Solomon’s decision. If Solomon is the author of the word *arête*, its one and sole signatory, then he is duty bound to admit that it is impossible for him to be such. As Derrida puts it

The subject of ‘writing’ does not exist if we mean by that some sovereign solitude of the author. The subject of writing of writing is a system of relations between strata: ... the psyche, society, the world. Within that scene, on that stage, the punctual simplicity of the classical subject is not to be found’ (1978: 226-7).

Deconstruction is therefore not concerned with the intentions of the translator/author – writing is already to a large extent prescribed by the context within any given text is written.

## Context and Reading the Translation of the *Pharmakon*

Whatever we read is read in a context. Reading would be impossible without a context within which it already makes relative sense. We cannot exist in difference always when we are reading. As Derrida notes, we should not imagine a sentence or a mark in general without any context (Derrida, 1997). As he puts it “This never occurs, and the law remains unbreachable” (Derrida, 1997: 216). This is only one side of the story, of course. Yes there is always a context for reading, in this case Business Ethics, but the context isn’t all. As Derrida also puts it “a context is never absolutely closed, constraining, determined, completely filled. A structural opening allows it to transform itself or to give way to another context” (*ibid.*).

The context within which reading and writing takes place cannot be determined absolutely, otherwise reading would not be necessary since knowledge of the context would be knowledge of anything which emerges within that context. But it is also because a context is not absolutely self-enclosed that reading is necessary. We have to read because the context never tells us enough about what we are to read in that context. There is no substitute for reading, in other words. It is precisely on account of the instability of the context that reading becomes possible. According to Derrida

This is why every mark has a force of detachment which can not only free it from such and such a determined context, but ensures even its principle of intelligibility and its mark structure – that is, its iterability (repetition *and* alteration) (*ibid.*).

So what does the very idea of a context necessitate? Again Derrida:

The ties between words, concepts, and things, truth and reference, are not *absolutely*, and purely guaranteed by some metacontextuality or metadiscursivity. However stabilised, complex, and overdetermined it may be there is context and one that is relatively *firm*, neither absolutely solid [*fermete*] nor entirely closed [*fermeture*], without being purely and simply identical to itself (Derrida, 1988: 151).

This indeterminacy of context for Derrida is essential, a context is a context because of this indeterminacy and the inability to achieve closure that is exhibited by its borders, its ‘nonclosure’ and ‘irreducible opening’ (1992). It is an opening that involves ‘the opening of the future itself, a future which does not allow itself to be modalised or modified into the form of the present, which allows itself neither to be foreseen nor programmed’ (Derrida, 1992: 200). Within any context: ‘there is a margin of play, of difference, an opening; in it there is what I have elsewhere called “supplementarity” (*Of Grammatology*) or “parergonality” (*Truth in Painting*)’ (1988: 151). Once more Derrida on context:

I do not believe that phenomena which are marginal, metaphorical, parasitic, etc. are in themselves “indeterminate,” even if it is inevitable that there be a certain play in the general space for them to produce and determine themselves, which is quite different from calling them “indeterminate” in themselves. (1988: 155)

Regarding the irreducibility of context, Derrida argues: ‘Deconstruction must neither reframe nor dream of the pure and simple absence of the frame’ (1987: 73). Deconstruction must read in context. We have seen this in the previous chapters. And we are seeing this again here. Our concern with Solomon translating is a concern with the specificities of this operation, on the one hand, and the openness of this operation to its apparent outside. It is however the instability of the idea of a frame which the idea of a context makes possible that makes it possible for something new to appear.

Within that opening of the context to a supposed outside, un-conditionality (which is for Derrida also necessary for an invention worthy of the name) is already inscribed:

[T]he very least that can be said of unconditionality ... is that it is independent of every determinate context, even of the determination of context in general. It announces itself only in the *opening* of context. Not that it is simply present (existent) elsewhere, outside of all context; rather it intervenes in the determination of a context from its very inception. (1988: 152)

Solomon is not able to justify his definition of '*arête*' when we are reading his text, a definition that we might say Solomon signs as his own. And he is not able to do so not because he is simply not present while we are reading his text, but because he was never able to be present with what 'he meant to say', as one singular and autonomous speaker in control of his intentions. Such is the structural absence Derrida finds in every text. An absence no longer defined in terms of presence, an absence that will therefore be simply not present; a structural absence which cancels any attempts of meaning being guaranteed by recourse to the author's intentions:

For a writing to be a writing it must continue to 'act' and to be readable even when what is called the author of the writing no longer answers for what he has written, for what he seems to have signed, be it because of temporary absence, because he is dead or, more generally, because he has not employed his absolutely actual and present intention or attention, the plenitude of his desire to say what he means, in order to sustain what seems to be written 'in his name. (Derrida: 1988: 8)

Elsewhere, Derrida uses the postal metaphor in order to underline the dynamics at work within this process:

However much a text is intended to be personal (a postcard, a pop song, a novel), its textuality opens it to manifold receptions, readings, interpretations

and other unintended and unintentional effects. Nothing can destine a text to mean whatever someone might intend it to mean. (Derrida 1987, in Lucy, 2004: 98)

And so, according to Derrida: ‘the sign possesses the characteristic of being readable even if the moment of its production is irrevocably lost and even if I do not know what its alleged author-scriptor consciously intended to say at the moment he wrote it, i.e. abandoned it to its essential drift’ (1988: 9). For reading to be possible and for a text to be indeed in some manner ‘received,’ a text is necessarily organised by a structural law of ‘essential drift’. Such ‘essential drift’ makes it possible for a text to signify something other than what its author might have intended. For Derrida the ‘structure of iterability’ (Derrida, 1988) is characteristic of the process of writing. It is this very structure which makes it possible for text to signify, irrespective of the author’s wishes and presence. As he puts it:

The essential drift [*derive*] bearing on writing as an iterative structure, cut off from all absolute responsibility, from *consciousness* as the ultimate authority, orphaned and separated at birth from the assistance of its father. (1988: 8)

In this sense an author can always be read as saying ‘more, less, or something other than that what he *would mean*’ (1976: 158). The ‘force of rupture’ (1988: 9) at work within any context makes meaning uncontrollable with regards to an author’s intentions. Solomon tries to testify otherwise. And yet Derrida notes that ‘by virtue of its essential iterability, a written syntagma can always be detached from the chain in which it is inserted or given without causing it to lose all possibility of functioning, if not all possibility of “communicating,” precisely’ (1988: 9). Such ‘essential iterability’ makes it impossible for an author to be able to ‘contain’ the text within



their intentions. When translating, Solomon comes to terms with the divisibility of a word, with the opening of a text, with its inhomogeneous and differentiated nature; which he nevertheless aims to stabilise and definitively decide. So it is the nature of a text and its relation to writing that always refers to something other than itself, that is to more and more traces that a presumably autonomous consciousness cannot claim to capture and stop. As Derrida notes:

[A] text is henceforth no longer a finished corpus of writing, some content enclosed in a book or its margins, but a differential network, a fabric of traces referring endlessly to something other than itself, to other differential traces. Thus the text overruns all the limits assigned to it so far (not submerging or drowning them in an undifferentiated homogeneity, but rather making them more complex, dividing and multiplying strokes and lines—all the limits, everything that was to be set up in opposition to writing (1979: 69).

The structure of the text is always one of iterability. To pay attention to such a structure is to pay attention to the way in which such iterability ‘both puts roots in the unity of a context and immediately opens this non-saturable context onto a recontextualisation’ (Derrida, 1992: 63). Such a context will always destabilise a firm self-enclosed frame. In this sense ‘the limit of the frame or the border of the context always entails a clause of non-closure. The outside penetrates and thus determines the inside’ (Derrida, 1988: 152). Reading the figures in a field, usually philosophers in Derrida’s case, Solomon in this particular case,

has nothing to do with the unveiling of the identity of the thinker or of the philosopher; this field was constituted, precisely by cutting itself off from the autobiography or the signature of the philosopher” (Derrida, 1992: 135).

This means that Business Ethics, as with any other field, can exist very well without relying on the intentions of the authors composing its body. As Derek Attridge puts it, self-presence is based ‘on the experience of hearing oneself speak, and requires a particular insistent rejection of writing and all that it represents’ (1992: 76). As we have seen within the fields of Business Ethics, *arête* reveals itself to be a kind of writing for Business Ethics already involved within its production.

*Arête* exists as a kind of ‘dangerous’ supplement which intervenes in Solomon’s writing so as to reveals his writing’s own ambiguity; it reveals the ambiguity of writing as such as something which characterises the texts of Business Ethics. It is an ambiguity that Solomon would like to, but ultimately cannot, do without. Solomon translates un-responsibly, suppresses undecidability, and makes a definitive decision as to what the process should involve. Solomon translates according to the rule of legibility and un-ambiguity which makes his decision not a decision worthy of the name. Ambiguity supplements Solomon’s prioritisation of clarity. It is a supplement which according to Derrida is not a mere external addition but an essential contamination (1976) of something which claims to be complete and adequate to itself.

Solomon’s interpretation can be located within a wider context where Business Ethics demonstrates its intolerance of un-ambiguity. This intolerance becomes apparent in Business Ethics when we come across calls such as the following:

Making ethical decisions is easy when the facts are clear and the choices black and white. But it is a different story when the situation is clouded by

ambiguity, incomplete information, multiple points of view, and conflicting responsibilities. In such situations—which managers experience all the time—ethical decisions depend on both the decision-making process itself and on the experience, intelligence, and integrity of the decision maker. (Andrews, 2003: 71)

Dealing with ambiguity by taking decisive steps towards enhancing the ethical climate of organisations is also what Andrews (2003) recommends in his ‘Ethics in Practice’ by noting:

promulgating and institutionalizing ethical policy are not so difficult as, for example, escaping the compulsion of greed. Once undertaken the process can be as straightforward as the articulation and implementation of policy in any sphere. (Andrews, 2003: 83)

Along similar lines we find Donaldson (2003) to be promoting the law of clarity and unambiguity by calling for the introduction in organizations of codes of conduct that will eliminate any doubts and ambiguity with regards to ethics in organizations:

Codes of conduct must provide clear direction about ethical behaviour when the temptation to behave unethically is strongest. The pronouncement in a code of conduct that bribery is unacceptable is useless unless accompanied by guidelines for gift giving, payments to get goods through customs, and “requests” from the intermediaries who are hired to ask for bribes. (Donaldson, 2003: 125)

Unambiguity is also promoted again by Nash (2003) who argues:

[w]hat is needed is a process of ethical inquiry that is immediately comprehensible to a group of executives and not predisposed to the utopian and sometimes anti-capitalistic, bias marking much of the work in applied business philosophy today. So I suggest, as a preliminary solution a set of 12 questions that draw on traditional philosophical frameworks but that avoid the level of abstraction normally associated with formal moral reasoning. (Nash, 2003: 23)

It is also within such a rationale of ambiguity elimination that De George (1999) outlines his five steps approach of his duty based analysis (1999: 93), and his twelve steps of general moral analysis (1999: 129). The very emphasis of resolvability of ethical dilemmas is also another indication of the intolerance of ambiguity by the field (Chryssides and Kaler 1996, Beauchamp and Bowie 1997, De George 1999). As Crane argues drawing from Johnson and Smith (1999) '[e]thical theory as the product of reasoned argument and rational deduction therefore provides prescriptions for behaviour which replace uncertainty and ambiguity with moral order and consensus (Johnson and Smith, 1999)' (Crane, 2002: 370). Conflicting theories and conflicting demands need to be eliminated and appeased since,

the litany of conflicting theories ... gives conflicting signals to people in positions of responsibility in business and other organizations and can at times allow them to play fast and loose with ethical responsibility. (Rosenthal and Buchholz, 1999: 5)

Translation, in all these cases, is undertaken for the sake of achieving clarity. Such clarity cannot be achieved simply by denying the claim which fundamental ambiguity makes upon all ethical decisions, as Derrida demonstrates.

### **Translation and the Justification of Meaning**

We have suggested that the process of translation involves the impossible task of having to decide between a number of possibilities without the support of stable foundations. For that reason we relate it with Derrida's concept of justice which he differentiates from rights and law. According to Derrida

You can calculate what is right. You can judge; you can say that according to the code, such and such a misdeed deserves ten years of imprisonment. But the fact that it is rightly calculated does not mean that it is just. A judge, if he wants to be just, cannot content himself with applying the law. He has to reinvent the law each time. If he wants to be responsible, to make a decision, he has not simply to apply the law, as a coded program, to a given case, but to reinvent in a singular situation a new just relationship. (1997a: 17)

The very possibility of justice is destroyed when we believe ourselves to have made a good decision, a decision which we can leave behind with the title of justifiable. It is only through intense moments of not being sure, either before or after our decision, that we can maintain the possibility of justice. As Derrida puts it:

it is from the moment one surrenders to the necessity of divisibility and the undecidable that the question of decision can be posed; and the question of knowing what deciding, affirming—which is to say also deciding means ... It is when it is not possible to know what must be done, when knowledge is not and cannot be determining that a decision is possible as such. Otherwise the decision is an application: one knows what has to be done, there is no more decision possible; what one has here is an effect, an application, a programming. (1995b: 147-8).

Translation, as must now be clear, is a form of decision, a form of decision which is implicated within questions of justifiability, of justice. Solomon decides to translate in one way rather than another – he judges in one way and not another. Here we are questioning whether he is justified in having done so. On the one hand he recognises the necessity of translation, and therefore makes a justifiable translation possible. But on the other hand he makes a decision, eliminates the suspension of decision, and thereby annuls the possibility of justice as the maintenance of the need for, rather than the fact of, decision. As Derrida notes elsewhere: “The only decision possible is the impossible” (1995a: 147-148). Deconstruction is a sort of reading which pays attention to the radical tension at the very heart of all translation enterprises:

But is what we call deconstruction not above all a taking into account of forces of dissociation, dislocation, unbinding, forces in a word, of difference and heterogeneity such that a certain 'and' itself can translate them? And above all, the forces of hierarchized opposition which set up all the conceptual couples around which a deconstruction busies itself (speech *and* writing, the inside *and* the outside, spirit and matter, this *versus* that, etc)? (Derrida, 2000b: 291)

The way in which Derrida suggests that we should respond is by necessarily going through the very contours and conditions of the possible knowledge involved in every decision, while also taking into account the order of the unknowable by experiencing it. Such a taking into account will necessarily involve doing so in the name of what is exceeded by such an order. A claim towards a justifiable response to the call for decision would need to proceed out of both a possibility to investigate knowledge and work with paths and solutions that are suggested to us (such as the two suggested interpretations of *arête*, excellence and virtue) - as far as this can be possible- *and* to move beyond it, to act without any of the assurances that such an investigation can provide.

We have tried to do this with Solomon, to proceed without being protected by the law of un-ambiguity. This involves our decision constantly oscillating between these two poles without settling with either of them. In other words, the only way in which our decision will not stay within the realms of the possible and therefore indeed bring something new so that it forms a decision worthy of the name, is by responding each time singularly to the situation we are involved with. Responding singularly means that this needs to be done without appealing to some rule which we could apply in any situation, such as the rule of clarity followed by Solomon. In order to be able to attest to this singularity, and invent our response each time, we need to make sure that we

have dealt with all the other ways that work in order to cancel such a singularity. By attesting to the singularity of the situation:

The response, not the solution, should be invented each time, at each moment in the singular situations. This, of course, doesn't exclude the process, but at some point when I respond, if I wanted to respond in the name of justice, I have to invent singularly, to sign so to speak, the response (Derrida, 1999: 72).

This invention of responding can only take place when I am committed to a kind of responsibility that is infinite. This responsibility towards the infinite with which justice is inseparable, brings us back to a consideration of alterity, of radical openness towards alterity, to Derrida's reading of Levinas, and to Derrida's thinking of hospitality. As Derrida puts it:

I would say, for Levinas and for myself, that if you give up the infinitude of responsibility, there is no responsibility. It is because we act and we live in infinitude that the responsibility with regard to the other is irreducible (1996: 86).

This forms the condition required for someone to take responsibility that responds to singularity. Without infinite responsibility we would not be able to account singularly for the demands made upon us, demands waiting for our unique response. Without this individualisation of infinite responsibility, ethics itself would be inconceivable.

If responsibility was not infinite, if every time that I have to take an ethical or political decision with regard to the other, this was not infinite, then I would not be able to engage myself in an infinite debt with regard to each singularity. If responsibility was not infinite, you could not have moral and political problems, and everything that follows from this, from the moment when responsibility is not limitable (Derrida, 1996: 86).

Simon Critchley corroborates this intimate connection between translation, justice, responsibility, alterity, hospitality, and ethics. As he puts it: ‘On a Derridian view if you give up the infinitude of responsibility, then the moral and political realm risks contracting into an untroubled, uncritical complacency’ (1999: 113). A responsibility that is infinite will never leave us satisfied with a decision made; indeed the decision made out of infinite responsibility will be a decision that we dwell in, that affects us profoundly and changes us.

More specifically, it will be a decision that we will not be able to leave behind; we will carry it with us because of the transformation that it entails. Such is the burden of translation. Such is the condition of possibility for a justifiable translation, as well as the fact of such a translation’s ultimate impossibility. And it is because it is impossible that we can, indeed must, constantly strive to make it possible. Such is the burden of translation, the burden of reading; a burden which Solomon, like so many others, seeks to absolve himself from, all the while recognising that this absolution is ultimately elusive.

When communication between an assumed original and its translated version is considered impossible, when the border between the original and the translation is set as restrictive of the exchange between them, then each side is encouraged to regulate this communication; to adjust it to the particular requirements so that the translation they offer is legitimate. It is for this reason that the rule of clarity prevails in Business Ethics. The border is regulated and conditions are imposed. When communication is regulated, the stable nature of an original needs to be assumed. When translation is



not considered a procedure already at work within the presumed original, the translating endeavours undertaken by Business Ethics will necessarily need to be working as supplementary, secondary mechanisms which will be directed towards an assumed original, the business one or the ethical one, the practical one or the normative one. According to Derrida:

Translation does not come along in addition, like an accident added to a full substance; rather, it is what the original demands—and not simply the signatory of the original text but the text itself. If the translation is indebted to the original ... it is because already the original is indebted to the coming translation. This means that translation is also the law ... Translation is writing: that is, it is not translation only in the form of transcription, it is a productive writing called forth by the original text (1985b: 153).

When the interrelation between the original and the translated text is not realized, when the border between them is seen as only one that separates, directionality is encouraged in the way that we translate. The translation becomes one way. The border aims to block our way but it can't, it encourages *a way, one way*. In that way we are looking for more and more solutions that will fit in the most adequate way with the original; that will cover the original. Business Ethics is called to read and reading is not assumed to be a changing procedure. Readers in Business Ethics assume a different original as their starting point. Business Ethics in that way encourages proceeding, encourages progress. What it does not encourage is dwelling with undecidability and struggling with reading (Derrida 1992, 1995a, 1996).

The translation process is considered a one way process - the one way of constructing endeavours such as the Tower of Babel; a construction aiming to bring people closer and closer to God (Derrida, 1985), without any obstacles or slippage towards the

opposite direction. The more they move towards the original, an original creator, the more they try to copy and get to where God is, the more they are reminded that this procedure which they have assumed as possible, *merely possible*, is what will condition them to having to start again. This is the process of translation - a process which is possible only because it is impossible; a process which will try to follow a one way movement only because it is constantly held back by oppositional forces.

Within Business Ethics, as already demonstrated within the opening chapter, we can attend to two such movements which each assume a different original. One movement involves philosophers in Business Ethics suggesting the right translations, as the ones closer to the original philosophical text. On the other hand, practitioners translate with the aid of a different original – for them the ‘real’ world reigns supreme – it is there and only there that Business Ethics can make sense. The undecidability and translatability of the assumed original is largely derived out of this set up – Business Ethics constantly strives to make these two origins one. Therein lies the possibility and impossibility of translation – a double-bind which both the promises and the failures of Solomon’s translations illustrate all too clearly.

### **Concluding Un-Decidably**

This chapter has problematised the very possibility of initiating a translation by the field of Business Ethics. Nevertheless, as a self-consciously derivative field it can only exist by translating. At one moment, the philosophical text according to Business Ethics is in need of translation. What cancels the unconditional hospitality within the

translating endeavours of Business Ethics is the task of translation that is imposed on the stranger. The stranger is conditioned as incomprehensible. S/he is a stranger that needs to be translated in a particular way. If the philosophical text is the one in need of translation then the hospitality that the field of Business Ethics can offer towards the philosophical stranger is conditional; the stranger is incomprehensible, the stranger is in need of translation, the stranger has already been interpreted in some way. If translation is a process where we come to terms with the irreducible singularity of the guest-text, the irreducible strangeness and the un-masterable reserve of meaning that their text will entail, then translation is an ethical relation; a relation where I come to terms with something Other that I cannot assimilate into the Same. Hospitality is conditioned every time a duty is imposed on the guest.

Derrida, it should be highlighted, does not support indeterminacy for its own sake in his analysis of undecidability. In fact, as he argues, we need to calculate as much as possible - we need to do so in order that we can identify the projected determinacy within the text and can follow their limits. As he puts it:

Decision, an ethical or a political responsibility, is absolutely heterogeneous to knowledge. Nevertheless we have to know as much as possible in order to ground our decision. But even if it is grounded in knowledge, the moment I take a decision is a leap, I enter a heterogeneous space and that is the condition of responsibility (Derrida, 1999: 73).

Undecidability therefore is always a *determinate* oscillation between possibilities. It is the very condition of an ethical decision. Once more Derrida:

There can be no moral or political responsibility without this trial and this passage by way of the undecidable. Even if a decision seems to take only seconds and not to be proceeded by any deliberation, it is structured by this *experience and experiment of the undecidable*. If I insist in this point from now on, it is, I repeat, because this discussion is, will be, ought to be at bottom an ethical-political one (1988: 116).

Within the locus of the undecidable, according to Derrida, I am amidst ‘the play of forces’ (1992: 23) where the subject is not able to hold ‘the power to decide, where *no one ever holds that power*, where the undecidable forces one to release one’s hold, where one cannot even hold into it—the undecidable’ (1992: 23). Any decision worthy of a name is not as active as the self-assured undivided subject would be able to claim that they can make. A decision that is an ethical one is one that divides me from myself, affects me so profoundly by showing me the limits of my deciding abilities, it is something that profoundly changes me. Such a change involves a certain passivity on my part, a passivity introduced by an absence of a programme to which I can appeal, a kind of law that I would be able to apply in order to enable movement. Such a passivity is radically active, it is a passivity which does not cancel the possibilities offered by a relation with the radically unknown to us, a relation which exactly because of the unknowability that it entails is without relation, without the content that such an understanding would try to secure and entail.

This is a passivity which works our anticipatory responses to their limits, a movement which recognizes the closing force at work in every context while at the same time taking into account that such a force is indispensable from an equally defining force of what it means to define a context; that is its opening and the border erasing force at work therein. When we *look* for Ethics we lose sight of the Ethics in which we are

already embedded and the value of pushing the limits of its perceived and somewhat recognizable limits and borders.

Business Ethics tries to sustain a strict border between Business and Ethics by announcing the incomprehensibility of the philosophical text. Such a conceptualisation by Business Ethics assumes the original to be something given. The philosophical text is understood as incomprehensible and in need of translation. Philosophy has been bordered as incomprehensible and that's why a different discipline should be involved, that of Business Ethics; a translator who will translate, a translator able to translate. Such a conceptualisation of the philosophical text has to do with the set up between business and ethics which does not allow for commonality and overlaps between the two participants. Philosophy and business are seen indeed as two participants distinct and unrelated. In that way they are treated by Business Ethics as disciplines that talk a different language to each other and more particularly Philosophy talks a language that needs to be understood and put into use by Business.

Philosophy is therefore seen as useful but only on the condition of further translation. In that way the Business context will be imbued with ethical principles and values. Such a way of translating conditions translation as an aspiration towards the merely possible. The commonality should be a result of translation. Once this translation takes place and is completed, the result would be not a common language which can be used by both in order to communicate, but a language that Philosophy should adapt to and adopt so that Business understands it. The host discipline aspires to work as if immune from translation. If we think of translation as a process where a text accepts

foreignness, then we can indeed see here the demand made from the translator for the foreignness involved in translation to be reduced. It is this reduction of foreignness that will allow comprehensibility to prevail. The need for translation comes from Business; Business demands translation so that philosophy can be changed and simplified. Solomon grants himself this role when he translates *arête*.

In this way translation is only possible and not impossible as well. The way in which Business Ethics translates when knowing the nature of the philosophical text - that it is the incomprehensible nature of the philosophical guest - is by employing translation as an effect, a result; something that we knew and that we will be able to arrive at, and wish to arrive at. Once we know the result of translation, translation is no longer necessary. We don't really need to translate when we already know the result. The translating endeavours of Business Ethics have to do with the fact that Business Ethics has been founded on the assumption that each one of the disciplines that appear currently in need of relation can be related, via translation. Business is presented as a discipline set up in Business. Philosophy is accordingly produced as something set up in Philosophy. The way that these two disciplines need to be considered unrelated needs to be established, they need to be talking a different language. In that way a mediator, a translator, a discipline between them becomes necessary.

This discipline will need to undertake translation. In order to do that it needs to create directionality, to assume an original. Such an endeavour creates two opposing directionalities in the field that multiply the oppositional forces at work there. We get various philosophical approaches that prioritize this or the other philosopher and

translate by competing between them in order to offer the most adequate translation. At the same time we get arguments stating that such intensely philosophical approaches are not relevant to the Business audience that Business Ethics as a discipline aims to reach; arguments claiming again and again that the field needs more practically orientated approaches. We see in this preoccupation with business practice and the language of 'the business world' a translating attempt that tries to reach what it perceives as a business like original. We see the translating endeavours of Solomon equally affected by these two originals that are assumed by the field and responding to such translating approaches. The most profound opposition apparent within the Business Ethics tradition is the opposition between Business and Ethics itself. Solomon attempts to offer this translation. Nevertheless, as Derrida puts it, this translation or indeed any other translation isn't simply a matter of a once and for all decision:

I would argue that there would be no decision, in the strong sense of the word, in ethics, in politics, no decision, and thus no responsibility, without some experience of some undecidability. If you don't experience some undecidability, then the decision would simply be the application of a programme, the consequence of a premise or of a matrix. So a decision has to go through some impossibility in order for it to be a decision. If I knew what to do, if I knew in terms of knowledge what I have to do before the decision, then the decision would not be a decision. It would simply be the application of a rule, the consequence of a premise, and there would be no problem, there would be no decision. Ethics and politics, therefore, start with undecidability (1999b: 66).

When there is a rule that directs my decision, the decision is cancelled. The decision becomes just an outcome of a known process, a process that I can know in advance. In that sense the decision effectively becomes the last stage of a programme that I have been following, the programme given by the rule. A decision, in order to be a

decision, needs to break with both knowledge and programmes. It needs to involve a process where no programme, rule or anything else can let me know what to do. For a decision worthy of a name I should not know what to do. Solomon, by following the rule of clarity, the rule of unambiguity and clear cut answers, does not *decide* in the strong sense of the word. He comes across undecidability but very quickly misses the chance to dwell in it and decides without undecidability; decides with a decision not worthy of the name.



### **Conclusion: The Necessity and Impossibility of Business Ethics**

The secret is: one-step-more. When you arrive ‘at the end’ (of a thought, of a description etc) take one more step. When you have taken one more step, continue, take the next step (Cixous, 1997: 83).

[c]ertainly, we need to know how to approach ethical problems, but we must ask if the goal of a business ethics worthy of the name should be to offer ‘comfort’ or whether it should be to call into question the self-satisfying rules, excuses and alibis that *produce* a reassuring sense of comfort (2003: 238).

### **A Limited Reading**

In this thesis we have tried to read the Business Ethics literature on its own terms and to underline the limits to an engagement with the question of Business Ethics upon those terms. Following an ethics of reading elucidated within the works of Jacques Derrida, we have been concerned with demonstrating how currently influential Business Ethics writings bring with them a series of procedures which encourage a step into Business Ethics – a beginning which treats certain procedures as fundamental and unavoidable. The literature, in this sense, mobilises a certain notion of how one is to start writing about Business Ethics – it tells its reader how to begin even thinking about Business Ethics in the first place. It offers its reader, in other words, a beginning that is able one is able to begin with, a literature that gives us a way into the field, a description that is able to describe a project, an invitation that fails to invite, an ethics of reading that proposes nothing of its own from the outset, a translation which translates its own impossibility and a contribution which nevertheless adds something to an ongoing discussion. All of these concerns have been discussed, interrogated and above all *read* along deconstructive lines throughout this dissertation.

As we have progressed we have tried to underline that what can be said to restrict any would-be contribution to the field of Business Ethics must also be seen as a necessarily unavoidable step. What a reading of Business Ethics sets for us is its own requirements for being researched – it presents us with its own limits. The literature sets in place what can be read about Business Ethics. The fact that there is a literature means there is a discussion already taking place, a discussion which cannot be avoided, whatever its limits might be said to be. Calling the field oxymoronic from the outset achieves nothing, therefore – a reading is required if a justifiable position is to be taken. The limits of Business Ethics which we have underlined here, must therefore be understood as *both enabling and disabling*. It enables an ongoing discussion, but within very strict parameters. To read the literature, for us, has meant to consider those parameters in what has at times doubtlessly been an excruciating level of detail. This detailed reading is unavoidable in accordance with the understanding of deconstruction we have mobilised throughout.

This does not mean we can now give up on Business Ethics on account of the limits we might have identified within it, of course. It only means that an engagement with Business Ethics, indeed a deconstruction of Business Ethics, must pay attention to these moments of undecidability, rather than drawing attention away from them. This is why we speak of deconstruction as an ethics of reading. Deconstruction asks that we are hospitable towards the ideas we are opening ourselves up to, even if these ideas show themselves as inhospitable towards what we might want to do with them. The field isn't simply a matter for our concerns – it has its own concerns and must be

appreciated in terms of these. If we bring our concerns to the field then the game is already lost, at least if Derrida is to be taken seriously.

According to Derrida (2005a, 2003, 2001, 2000d, 1999a, 1999b), therefore, and as has been repeatedly demonstrated, we cannot engage ourselves in some kind of hospitality which we ourselves are not affected by. That is to say, we cannot observe (business) ethics as if it were separate to us – we must rather embrace (business) ethics and all the uncertainties attaching to it. Otherwise, what we offer as hospitality will necessarily be something pre-determined, that is, of a limited, and already decided upon nature. It will not be hospitable enough, in other words. We as readers of Business Ethics are by no means separate from this double-bind – we rather strive to bring the dynamics of this double-bind out into the open.

In so doing something heterogeneous might be revealed - a notion of Business Ethics separate from the literature, an idea that there might be a Business Ethics other than the Business Ethics prescribed within the Business Ethics literature - the sense that the literature might serve as a host for something other than itself. It is this tension between requirements and the protests against them, determination and its unsettling, enclosure and its necessary enclosure, that we have tried to pay attention towards in our deconstructive engagement with Business Ethics. The Business Ethics literature has its limits, of course, even whilst it has constant recourse to the idea of overcoming them. Our reading has sought to pay attention to both aspects of the ongoing discussion.

## **An Anti-Incremental Reading**

So where are we to go from here? What can we do now? What, above all, are we arguing should be done with Business Ethics? To offer closure on any of these counts would be to cover over and again conceal everything which we have been attempting to prise out and bring into the open from the very outset. According to Derrida there can be no alibis when it comes to the question of ethics and ethical decisions. Much like Abraham onto Isaac, we too must directly experience the challenges and the anxieties of the call towards responsible action in the midst of radical uncertainty. We must, in other words, learn to reckon with the fundamental lack of certainty characteristic of such a disposition – anything less, according to Derrida, would fall short of an ethics worthy of the name. At the very least, as should be clear, a deconstructive reading of Business Ethics requires us to dispense with the idea, once and for all, that ethics can be incrementally programmed within some sort of decision flow chart, check-list, or score card.

Deconstruction requires us to dispense with one of the characteristic refrains of the entire Business Ethics literature, therefore – a refrain which we have considered in detail throughout, both in terms of the requirements it makes of those who engage with it but also, and much more importantly, in terms of its own limits. So what we can say, along the logic of a sort of negative theology, is that a Business Ethics worthy of the name will look nothing at all like what Kitson and Campbell (1996: 23) have in mind when they offer their five stage business ethics process to the world:

identify the problem; generate alternative solutions; evaluate the alternatives, using cost–benefit approaches; select the solution; implement the chosen solution’ (1996: 23).

Equally so, it will have nothing whatsoever to do with Nash’s (1981) twelve questions that precede the making of an ethical decision:

Have you defined the problem accurately? How would you define the problem, if you stood on the other side of the fence? How did this situation occur in the first place? To whom and what do you give your loyalties as a person, and as a member of the corporation? What is your intention in making this decision? How does this decision compare with the likely results? Whom could your decision or action injure? Can you engage the affected parties in a discussion of the problem, before you make your decision? Are you confident that your position will be as valid over a long period of time as it seems now? Could you disclose without qualms your decision or action to your boss, your CEO, the board of directors, your family, or society as a whole? What is the symbolic potential of your action if understood? If misunderstood? Under what conditions would you allow exceptions to your stand? (1981:9)

Such incremental programmes assume and prefigure, thereby foreclosing, precisely what counts when it comes to ethics, according to Derrida: the taking of responsibility – the bearing of a responsibility to strive towards ethics in the absence of an already existing incorrigible programme. It is precisely such a separation of the ethical from the decision process that allows so many Business Ethicists to unreflectively recommend ways in which the ethical can be the end product of an already worked out process. Such a separation of the ethical renders the ethical a supplement that can be added, or not, to the decision process. Knowing the ethical as something that we can plan to achieve, a process that we are in control of is precisely what, according to Derrida, cancels any decision that claims to be free, any decision worthy of the name.

The purpose of incremental guides to Business Ethics, on the other hand, is obviously to show the decision makers ‘the way’, to help them not lose their way and not to be alone when dealing with ethical issues. We argue, however, that it is precisely this sense of losing one’s way and of being profoundly alone that introduces ethics, or at least the possibility of ethics, onto the scene. Incremental ethical guides remove all of this – indeed they are specifically designed in order to remove such anxiety. They are therefore designed to purge the ethical moment out of ethics – techniques for eliminating ethics rather than illustrations of its essence. For Derrida, unlike for the advocates of such ethical technologies, an ethical disposition is one of profound questioning, of a fundamental inability to hold oneself above or outside the scene. For that very reason the ethical subject finds itself in a position of extreme loneliness, a place that, because of the extreme forces that are at work, deprives us even of the knowledge that we *are* in such a deciding position. It effectively renders the ethical disposition into a sort of non place, in other words.

So much of the Business Ethics literature remains predicated upon precisely the opposite notion, however, one which insists that managers are in need of moral guidance from Business Ethics gurus who obligingly and self-righteously provide the steer (see also Carroll, 1996, 2002). This arrogant tendency has been rightly called into question within recent debates (e.g. Clegg and Rhodes (2006), Clegg and Rhodes (2007), Cummings (2000), Desmond 1998, Jones 2003, Kjonstad and Willmott (1995), Letiche, 1998, Munro (1998), Parker (2002), Roberts (2003) and within this thesis we have attempted to raise further questions of such a peculiar and moreover potentially dangerous refrain.

## **An Un-Decidable Reading**

Ethics, Business based or otherwise, as we have tried to note throughout with Derrida, is something that profoundly affects the ethical agent. It has to do with an experience that we could never appropriate in advance, and certainly not within ethical programmes or decision making flow charts. Ethics exposes us to the limits of our anticipation and discards all preparatory attempts to encounter it prior to experiencing it from within the very core of our subjectivity. In that sense ethics has to do with the unpredictable and the incalculable precisely because it has to do with nothing other than the very uncertainties of being alive and of not knowing how to act. It is its relation to such a condition, of ethics as an existential-ontological concern, that makes ethical discussions so unsettling, so necessarily unsettling. Little wonder then that Business Ethics is such a contested field of investigation and enquiry.

According to Parker (1998), then, competing accounts as to how organisations should deal with ethical problems evolve because of the two differing origins of the field - the prescriptive and the descriptive. Both forms, Parker demonstrates, offer their own justifications and recommendations with regards to the 'problem of ethics' and most importantly their own 'solutions':

This is going to involve new behaviours, or new justifications for old behaviours, but either way it is going to require the application of knowledge generated by one 'truth terminology' or another. So, the argument is about who has the right answers, and the right methods for producing the right answers. The 'set up' disallows anyone from asking any other questions, simply because they are no longer speaking to business ethics, or perhaps even to ethics itself (Parker, 1998: 290).

Within such a setting where everyone is encouraged to settle on one side of the fence or the other, ambiguity and undecidability needs to be very quickly be dealt with, very quickly overcome. Parker is clearly correct in his diagnosis of the dual nature of the field – we have elaborated upon it in some detail within the opening chapter. All that remains to be said on it here is that the characteristic divergence of the field must be understood not only in terms of the dual-dynamics of the field's protagonists but moreover in terms of the multifaceted nature of ethics more generally. It is because ethics as such is so multifaceted that we have the idea that the field is characterised by a fundamental split between philosophers and practitioners (chapter one). It is because ethics is so multifaceted that a Levinasian ethics of hospitality is made to fit the already existing mould of business ethics (chapters two and three). It is because the field demands progress, certainty and clarity that Solomon ignores the difference he initially encounters (chapter four).

Undecidability needs to be avoided in all cases, undecidability adds confusion to the field and needs to be taken out of sight. This refrain is one which we have taken issue with throughout – this hastiness towards decisiveness cannot be sustainably abided, nor has it been here. Following Derrida, undecidability, and an insistence upon it, instead:

opens the field of decision or of decidability. It calls for decision in the order of ethical-political responsibility. It is even its necessary condition. A decision can only come into being in a space that exceeds the calculable program that would destroy all responsibility by transforming it into a programmable effect of determinate causes. There can be no moral or political responsibility without this trial and this passage by way of the undecidable. Even if a decision seems to take only a second and not to be preceded by any



deliberation, it is structure by this *experience and the experiment of the undecidable* (1988: 116).

The hail to decisiveness, that is to say to resolvability, ubiquitously prevails (e.g. Arnold et al (2010), Crane and Matter (2004), Doorn (2010), McCabe et al (1994), Ostapski et al (1997), Lindblom (2007), Salvador and Folger (2009), Stansbury (2009), Martin et al (2009), Moore (2008), Soule et al. (2009). Nevertheless, within this thesis, we have tried to argue in favour of the contrary – the need to reckon with the inherent difficulty of achieving a decision worthy of the name – the need to take undecidability seriously. We argue, along with Derrida, that such an inability to make an easy decision is the very condition of a decision worthy of the name, an ethical decision. As Clegg et al. (2007) demonstrate, following Derrida:

For a decision to be considered an instance of responsible action it must be made with neither recourse to knowledge of its outcome nor to the application of pre-ordained rules' (Clegg et al., 2007: 393).

A decision, according to these authors, and to Derrida, cannot simply involve the application of a calculus - a decision is not a process where I am in control of a theory that I can apply to a situation whose parameters I can rationalise adequately before hand or justify afterwards. As Reynolds (2004: 48) puts it: 'for a decision to genuinely be a decision, it must invoke that which is outside the subject's control, and it must hence be partially mad'. Attending to the limits of the programmable can therefore make us attentive to what is beyond all calculation. Insanity may well dwell there – we cannot know in advance. As Derrida puts it:

the undecidable is not merely the oscillation or the tension between two decisions; it is the experience of that which, though heterogenous, foreign to the order of the calculable and the rule, is still obliged – it is of obligation that we must speak – to give itself up to the impossible decision, while taking account of law and rules (Derrida, 1992: 24).

With undecidability an element of unpredictability enters the picture, perhaps even taking over. Such unpredictability unsettles the rule prevailing so far in the field and opens a possibility of something new to appear. In that way we might discover that the potential resolvability of our ethical problems is only one possibility of the way in which ethical matters can be dealt with. Instead, there might be something productive within the honest recognition of how aporetic the very idea of Business Ethics really is. This would require an advocate of Business Ethics to decide by taking nothing for granted. It might well drive us mad just thinking about the gravity of such a demand. Even this has to be a risk we must be willing to take in pursuit of a Business Ethics worthy of the name.

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