

ON THE RELATIONSHIP OF BUSINESS ETHICS AND CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

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Purpose: The aim of the article is to indicate several important relationships between business ethics and corporate social responsibility (CSR). The author points out both the differences between them, but also tries to discover some similarities.

Design/methodology/approach: The article analyzes selected, available literature on business ethics and CSR. Apart from literature review, the author uses the method of analysis and logical construction.

Findings: The article presents the issue of the relationship between corporate social responsibility and the business ethics concepts. Despite the differences between these two concepts, research seems to show that CSR can be treated as a subset of business ethics.

Research limitations/implications: The text refers to a limited number of studies. The issue of detailed relations between business ethics and CSR in individual sectors of economic activity obviously requires further research.

Originality/value: The article refers to selected literature in the field of CSR and business ethics. The value of this article is the indication of the close relationship between business ethics and CSR, but also their fundamental importance for economic activity as such.

Keywords: Business ethics, corporate social responsibility, moral values.

Category of the paper: Conceptual paper.

1. Introduction

The very concept of business in its broader sense has been known at least since the ancient Sumerians, who had extensive trade and records around six thousand years ago (Kramer, 1977). The concepts of business ethics and CSR are very important for modern management science. Both concepts have been actively discussed for many years in scientific and business circles. Despite the fact that both of them are a product of the 20th century, it is worth remembering that the view that business is an ethical activity and has a certain responsibility towards society has been around for centuries (Adi et al., 2015).

There is no single universally accepted definition of business ethics. This term functions in different meanings depending on the adopted definition of ethics itself. It is also difficult to determine precisely the moment of birth of business ethics. In its modern meaning, the term “business ethics” began to function in the United States in the 1970s (De George, 2005). The attitude towards business as such has undergone historical changes. Business ethics is currently understood as an area of interest of general ethics, which formulates the ethical foundations and canons of human activity in economic life. It establishes a set of rules specifying the scope of management and indicates moral standards of conduct for business people. Business ethics examines the moral and ethical principles and problems that arise in business activities, both those relating to individuals and entire organizations (Donaldson, 1982).

The term "corporate social responsibility" (CSR) was first used by H.R. Bowen in a book published in 1953 entitled *Social responsibility of a businessman*. According to Bowen (1953), entrepreneurs have a duty to be aware of the expectations, goals and values of society and to implement these goals and expectations in their activities. Since then, the concept of CSR has had many different theoretical approaches. There is currently no single definition of CSR accepted by researchers. However, a certain evolution of this concept can be noticed, consisting in a gradual departure from its original meaning as philanthropic activity to its multidimensional understanding (Mosca, Civera, 2017). This evolution was caused by various changes taking place in socio-economic life.

Currently, one of the most frequently cited CSR definitions is the one found in the International Standard ISO 26000 Guidance on Social Responsibility of 2010. According to this definition, CSR is the responsibility of an organization for its decisions and actions towards society and the natural environment. Its goal is the sustainable development of the organization's environment (ISO 26000, 2013). Therefore, the analysis of the environment in which the organization operates becomes a necessary condition for the effective implementation of CSR principles. It should be remembered that it is not the company that sets the direction of its socially responsible strategy, but the needs of individual groups of stakeholders determine the area in which socially responsible activities are expected.

In view of the above statements, it should be recognized that CSR is an important trend that is almost always discussed in the area of reflection on business ethics. The concept of CSR is based on three pillars: economy, ecology and ethics. In this article, we are particularly interested in the latter aspect.

2. Research methodology

In order to achieve the research objectives of this article, the study used techniques such as literature review to collect, analyze and synthesize relevant information from a wide range of sources. The databases were searched based on the following keywords: business ethics, corporate social responsibility, moral values. The literature review is based on the Google Scholar and Science Direct platforms.

The method of logical analysis was also used in the article. The use of this method is particularly important when accepting the view that both concepts need much more conceptual clarity and consistency (Enderle, 2010). The above mentioned method relies mainly on the idea expressed in the belief that logic is a tool that helps distinguish correct arguments from incorrect ones. In a sense, logic and its methods allow us to discover the structural aspects of our thinking and actions (Peregrin, Svoboda, 2017). Since the rules of logic govern the most general rules of our natural language, the analysis of text written in such a language is the most precise tool for detecting relationships between concepts.

The author does not use formalisms. The aim is only to apply the method of logical analysis to capture the most central issues of the concept of business ethics and CSR. In other words, only the notions that constitute the conceptual framework of the eponymous concepts are analyzed.

There are many studies analyzing the relationships between business ethics and CSR. Although most academic works on business ethics and the definition of CSR are conflicting, there is a consensus that business ethics is more about decision-making by individuals and social units, and CSR is more about the impact on stakeholders. The selection of literature was made taking into account works that constitute a comparative study of both analyzed concepts.

3. The concept of business ethics and its brief history

Business ethics is a field of ethical reflection devoted to moral issues that arise in economic activity. In this context, a proper understanding of the essence and tasks of business ethics requires at least an outline presentation of the essence and tasks of ethics as such.

In the most general sense, ethics is a philosophical study of morality. Despite the fact that the birth of business ethics falls on the 70s of the twentieth century, ethical issues appear in business activities from its beginning (Bowie, 2020). Considerations about a fair price one can find, for example, in the Code of Hammurabi written nearly four thousand years ago (Hoffman, et al., 2014). Aristotle, one of the greatest ancient Greek philosophers, also analyzes the virtues and vices of tradesmen and merchants (Klimoski, 2006). Cicero, in turn, wrote: "To everyone who proposes to have a good career, moral philosophy is indispensable" (Hoffman et al., 2014). Problems of ethical business conduct appear in the Old and New Testaments, the Jewish

Talmud and the Koran. The considerations in those distant times were about the right way to do business. Such issues as fraud, theft, just prices, proper weights and measures, competition and free entry or usury were analyzed. In the scriptures of the great religions, the problems of business were considered in relation to the problems of wealth and poverty. Ethics as a science, however, was born in ancient Greece.

Socrates is considered the first ethicist in the Western tradition. The ethical theories formulated by the Greek philosophers are theories about the good life; their point of departure is the question Socrates asks in the Platonic dialogue *Gorgias*: how to live in order to be happy? Greek philosophers after Socrates assume that happiness, identified with the good life, is the object of desire of every human being. The view that happiness is the goal of life and the highest value is called eudaimonism (Greek: εὐδαιμονία-eudaimonia commonly translated as 'happiness' or 'welfare'). The Greek thinkers, of course, differed on the nature of the good life. However, since the time of Socrates the view, shared by most Greek philosophers, that recognizes the virtues as belonging to the good life, either as a means, or as an ingredient, or even as identical with it, can be noticed. Eudaimonism was adopted and developed in many respects by philosophical schools of the Hellenistic period, such as Stoicism and Epicureanism. Richards (2013) points out that the Hellenistic thought found application after many centuries in the search for the principles of a good life and the formulation of the ethics of environmental virtues.

Aristotle's works in the field of ethics developed the model of eudaimonistic ethics established by Socrates and Plato. He defines the virtue of character as a disposition to make decisions adequate to what is determined by reason. He also analyzes the different types of virtues and the relationships between them. In his *Nicomachean Ethics* Aristotle says that the good we are looking for must be something sought always for its own sake and never for the sake of something else, and it must be self-sufficient, that is, it must be something which taken on its own makes life worthwhile and lacking in nothing. These are the properties of happiness (Richards, 2013). According to Aristotle, if life is to be worth living, it must be for something that is an end in itself.

It seems reasonable, at this point, to ask how ancient ethical theories are combined with modern business ethics? First of all, it should be noted that morality was not regarded in antiquity as based on rules until the time of the Stoics (Striker, 1987). The issue of the foundations of moral principles becomes crucial in ethics developed in the following centuries. Each epoch, of course, makes its own contribution to ethical thought. However, Aristotle's analyzes set a trend in the scientific treatment of ethics. It is also worth to remember that the deliberations of this philosopher also gave rise to economics within Western European tradition. This view is shared especially by economists (Meikle, 1997). Aristotle distinguished two different meanings of what we call economics. The first of them was *oikonomikos*, i.e. the art of household, which he praised and considered necessary for the functioning of any society, even a slightly complex one, and the second one is *chrematistike*, i.e. the art of obtaining money. The Stagirite considered the latter activity to be completely immoral, completely devoid

of virtue. His criticism of the wicked and unproductive craft of the usurer remained valid well into the 17th century.

The Christian tradition of business ethics also focuses on condemning unfair business practices, especially usury. Jesus banished merchants and moneylenders from the temples, and Christian thinkers from Paul of Tarsus to Saint Augustine, Thomas Aquinas and Martin Luther followed His example, strongly condemning most of the activities that we today call business. However, it should be remembered that the attitude towards business changed during the development of Christianity.

Bay et al. (2010) distinguish five stages of this development: (1) early Christianity, (2) Patristic period, (3) Dark and Middle Ages, (4) the Reformation, and (5) the Enlightenment. The above-mentioned authors analyze changes taking place in Christian business ethics using the example of five issues: (1) the purpose of work, (2) land ownership, (3) wealth, (4) interest on loans and (5) profits. They point out that the direction of the evolution of Christian philosophers was such that what was initially considered unacceptable and immoral becomes acceptable and admired. An example would be the attitude towards property. Early Christian thinkers taught that personal wealth should be given to the poor or collected in common stockpiles. As time passed, however, being rich was becoming more and more acceptable, and eventually the thesis of keeping one's wealth for oneself was accepted.

It is worth remembering that the idea of the social responsibility of businessmen can also be found in the interests of many Puritan and Protestant writers. One of the factors shaping Christian views on business ethics was the position of the Church in each of these eras. It seems that the characteristic feature of business ethics practiced by Christian philosophers, which determines their views in this area to the greatest extent, is the belief that God has set a goal for business people that goes beyond the profit motive (McMahon et al., 2015). The most important task for Christian business ethicists is how to reconcile faith with business.

Business ethics grew out, therefore, of a long tradition of ethics as a theoretical reflection on the essence of moral phenomena and behaviors, and what is particularly important, the characteristics of human character traits as the subject of moral actions. We should agree with the opinion that "The history of ethics in business goes back as far as both ethics and business" (De George, 2005, p. 339). Within this history, two trends in business ethics have developed: religious and secular. They are parallel but often intertwine.

Abend (2014) argues that morality consists of three levels:

1. the behavioral level: moral or immoral behavior;
2. the normative level: moral understandings and norms;
3. the moral background: moral concepts existing in a society. This division shows that business ethics is a comprehensive approach to moral phenomena occurring in economic activity treated as a part of the social life, as an integral part of the social structure.

Svensson G. and Wood G. (2008) propose a model of business ethics consisting of three essential elements (i.e. expectations, perceptions and evaluations) which are interconnected by five sub-components (i.e. society expectations; organizational values, norms and beliefs; results; society assessment; reconnection). This model leads to several important conclusions allowing for a better understanding of the nature of business ethics. First of all, according to this model, business ethics is a continuous and iterative process. This process is subject to constant changes caused by phenomena such as the development of new technologies, changes in the approach to the use of natural resources or the development of a global business network. The above-mentioned phenomena are accompanied by a growing awareness of the importance of ethics in running a business. Research shows that the list of potential consequences of ignoring ethical principles in business activity is very long (Wolska, 2013).

Due to the difficulties in defining the concept of ethics as such, business ethics, which is its subdiscipline, encounters similar difficulties. However, in the field of applied ethics, business ethics, alongside medical and legal ethics, occupies a unique position. Unlike medical and legal ethics, business ethics deals with this area of human activities whose entities do not enjoy a very high professional status and whose motives, to put it mildly, are considered not very noble. It is often believed that the only motive for running a business is "greed" (previously "avarice"). Therefore, it is not easy to find positive opinions about this type of activity in the history of business ethics.

It is worth noting that there is a current position called Economistic Business Ethics Denial, according to which modern business is significantly inconsistent with ethics (Von Kriegstein, Scott, 2023). It assumes that all actions undertaken out of moral goodness are ethical. Supporters of this view claim that business activities are undertaken out of a desire for profit and are therefore immoral. In contemporary business ethics, however, they are a distinct minority.

In contemporary business ethics, one can see its philosophical and religious roots. Also today, economic activity raises many interesting philosophical problems, such as: responsibility, truth, manipulation, exploitation, justice, charity and more (Moriarty, 2019). The change in attitude towards business did not happen suddenly, of course. It was a long process of changes taking place in the sphere of ideas, which took place under the influence of phenomena such as urbanization, rapid technological progress, industrial development and the accompanying development of needs, desires, as well as social structures. In modern ethical theories profit is no longer condemned as immoral and businesses are no longer seen as deprived of ethical principles entities. Instead the question arises about the place of profit in the context of business activity and social responsibility, as well as about how businesses as complex communities can best serve its employees and society as a whole.

4. The Concept of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

There is no single universally accepted definition of CSR. The earliest and best-known is that given by H. Bowen, called the father of corporate social responsibility (Carroll, 1999). Bowen writes: "Are businessmen, by virtue of their strategic position and their considerable decision-making power, obliged to consider social consequences when making their private decisions? If so, do they have social responsibilities that transcend obligations to owners or stockholders? The answer to both these questions is clearly yes. (...) The term social responsibilities of businessmen will be used frequently. It refers to the obligations of businessmen to pursue those policies, to make those decisions, or to follow those lines of action which are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of our society" (Bowen, 2013, pp. 4-6).

Classic of management theory and practice, P. Drucker concludes: "society is not just the environment of the enterprise. Even the most private of business enterprise is an organ of society and serves a social function (...). the very nature of the modern business enterprise imposes responsibilities on the manager (Drucker, 1955, p. 375). Drucker developed his concept of CSR in subsequent works. He points out that until the sixties, the discussion on CSR was not about "the social responsibility of business, but with the social responsibility of businessmen" (Drucker, 1974, p. 314). In short, a prominent management theorist mentions here increasing interconnectedness of business and society. It is worth noting that in the light of intensifying globalization processes, his remarks turned out to be true.

Another scholar from the early period of CSR development, H. Johnson, writes: "A socially responsible firm is one whose managerial staff balances a multiplicity of interests. Instead of striving only for larger profits for its stockholders, a responsible enterprise also takes into account employees, suppliers, dealers, local communities, and the nation" (Johnson, 1971, p. 50). The concept of responsibility is treated very broadly in the above definition. This shows that already at a relatively early stage of development, researchers were aware of the multidimensionality of the category of responsibility in the context of running a business. This would not be possible without a long period of development of ethics as a scientific reflection and the issue of responsibility developed within it.

The above opinion is not trivial in any way, i.e. it was not always the case that scientists shared the view on business responsibility in such a broad sense. Just point to the example of Columbia professor A. Berle, who believed that managers are responsible only to the company's shareholders (Berle, 1954). A different opinion was expressed at that time by Harvard professor, E.M. Dodd, who stated that managers are also responsible to society as a whole because a large company is supported by the law precisely since it serves the community, not because it brings profits to the owner (Dodd, 1932). This discussion is the evidence of the development of the CSR concept.

Nowadays, one of the most frequently used definitions of CSR is the mentioned above formulated by the European Commission, according to which: "CSR is a concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in their interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis" (2010). This definition is simple, but it seems to capture the essence of CSR quite well. Moratis (2016) analyzing the above definition of CSR, calls it "out of the ordinary" because, unlike the currently dominant instrumental definitions, it clearly promotes a moral perspective when it comes to the obligations of enterprises towards society.

Hamidu et al., (2015) note that the lack of a single definition of CSR may be related to the constantly changing role of CSR in company management practices. Definitions formulated in the fifties and sixties indicate the need for business to be philanthropic and contribute to the prosperity and development of society. The task of CSR in that period was interpreted as volunteering and contributing to social well-being. The next stage was a period of growing concern and awareness of employee rights, stakeholder satisfaction, relationship management, regulated CSR practice and consumer protection. The final stage is the period of instrumentality and sustainability, in which CSR is treated as a strategic tool in achieving organizational goals. CSR is now highly institutionalized and standardized by various international indicators for responsible investment and sustainable development. One should remember, however, that CSR is a concept but also a set of actions embedded in the ethicality of the business.

There are interesting attempts undertaken by some researchers to determine the trends characterizing the development of the CSR concept by analyzing its various dimensions. Dahlsrud (2008) compared thirty seven definitions of CSR used in the subject literature over the last twenty years of the twentieth century. He noted that the concept of CSR is socially constructed in specific contexts. He distinguishes five dimensions of CSR definitions:

1. Environmental dimension.
2. Social dimension.
3. Economic dimension.
4. Stakeholder dimension.
5. Voluntariness dimension.

The distinguished dimensions of the CSR definitions seem to show the increasing degree of rationalization of this concept (Lee, 2008). It is also noticeable that the analyzed concept is increasingly closely linked to the company's financial goals. One should also note that this is consistent with the above expressed opinion that ethical reflection is moving away from condemning economic phenomena as immoral. At the same time, it points to the problem of the relationship between business ethics and CSR, which is of particular interest in this article. It turns out that both business ethics and CSR concepts evolve according to a similar principle.

Rahman (2011) notes another interesting regularity in the development of the definition of CSR, manifested in the departure since the mid-twentieth century from thinking dominated by "social responsibilities" to a concept that appeared in the twenty-first century, which

emphasizes the importance of issues such as: economic development, the integration of social and environmental aspects, or transparency of activities undertaken in business. The list of dimensions is significantly expanded by this author. He lists:

1. Obligation to the society.
2. Stakeholders' involvement.
3. Improving the quality of life.
4. Economic development.
5. Ethical business practice.
6. Law abiding.
7. Voluntariness.
8. Human rights.
9. Protection of Environment.
10. Transparency & accountability.

The evolution of the CSR concept outlined above can be understood as a response to society's needs related to business development in particular historical periods (Orbik, Zozul'aková, 2019). The modern theory of CSR emerged as a result of the transformation that started at the beginning of the twentieth century. The importance of the development of the CSR concept for contemporary business is aptly characterized by the following words: "Over the past several decades corporate social responsibility (CSR) has grown from a narrow and often marginalized notion into a complex and multifaced concept, one which is increasingly central to much of today's corporate decision making" (Cochran, 2007, p. 449). Indeed, it is difficult today to imagine a company operating, at least in the Western world, which activities would be indifferent to principles resulting from the CSR strategy.

Nowadays, we can talk about open and closed CSR models (Gorova, Qiwen, 2021). In the open CSR model, companies take responsibility for solving problems in society and include CSR in their overall strategy. Operating according to a closed CSR model assumes the existence of both, formal and informal institutions, through which companies' responsibility for social interests is agreed with business representatives and thus their compliance is ensured. The current state of CSR development may be the result of the influence of many theories from both ethics and economics on this concept. In this article, the interest is, of course, focused on the former ones (Lindgreen, Swaen, 2010).

Implementing CSR principles, which should also be remembered, also brings many different benefits. The most important include improving the image of the organization, more effective implementation of innovations, but also a beneficial impact on the natural and social environment (Orbik, 2022).

5. Discussion

After clarifying the meaning of the concepts of business ethics and CSR, a question arises: are we dealing with two completely different concepts or are they synonymous? Moreover, what are the fundamental differences or similarities between them in terms of the content of these concepts?

Let us note that the term ethics is a combination of two well-known terms: "ethics" and "business". CSR, on the other hand, is a term that combines three terms: "corporate", "social" and "responsibility" (Dimitriades, 2007). The meaning of the terms constituting the above-mentioned concepts also determines, at least in some sense, the meaning of the concepts we are interested in this article (Zhou, 2022).

The two eponymous concepts have been discussed above. A brief history of business ethics as part of general ethics and various dimensions of the CSR definitions have been also presented. Companies doing business activities are an integral part of social, economic and biological life. Conducting business in accordance with the principles of CSR results from the belief which has accompanied people for a long time that business is not an amoral field and therefore, like any type of human activity, it is also subject to ethical assessment.

The concept that connects CSR with ethics is moral responsibility, especially the moral responsibility of an organization. Most often, the organization's responsibility for ensuring financial success and economic growth was emphasized, leaving aside moral considerations (Ulrich, 2008). This view suggested that managers or employees do not need to focus on moral issues related to decision-making in the company. The concept of economic responsibility dominated this approach.

However, if an organization chooses an action plan based on moral rather than economic responsibility, the ethical behavior of the organization is then manifested in social systems such as CSR policies, codes of conduct or ethical principles developed within ethics (Eriksson et al., 2013; Ha-Brookshire, 2017). Many studies show that the individual moral responsibility of organizational employees and the moral responsibility of the organization are interrelated (LoMonaco-Benzing, Ha-Brookshire, 2016; Poonamallee, Joy, 2018). This is a relation of the type that if the set goals of the organization are consistent with the principles of moral responsibility, then it strengthens the moral responsibility of employees and vice versa.

The close connection between the moral responsibility of an organization and its employees results from the fact that organizations are social institutions. If we realize that ethics also arises as an attempt to organize interpersonal relations, then we see a direct relationship between business ethics and CSR.

The following definition of CSR seems to be explanatory according to which CSR is "the integration of an enterprise's social, environmental, ethical and philanthropic responsibilities towards society into its operations, processes and core business strategy in

cooperation with relevant stakeholders” (Rasche et al., 2017, p. 6). In the light of the above definition, the concept of CSR appears as an attempt to implement various dimensions of responsibility, including social responsibility, in business. It should also be remembered, although this issue requires a separate study, that practitioners and academic researchers have a different view of the relationship between business ethics and CSR (Ferrell et al., 2019).

The development of business ethics and the concept of CSR in a practical dimension has given us the paradigm of an entrepreneur as a person who combines business life with ethical life. This is a person who produces goods and services for society but also treats other stakeholders in a fair and equitable manner. The summary of the quite long scientific discourse on CSR shows that this concept has not lost its vitality. Some problems were caused by framing CSR as an issue related to the actions or results of a single entity, subject to self-regulation within legal limits with a wide range of possibilities, and resulted in a frustrating and in many respects futile discussion (Owen, Kemp, 2023). Linking the issues of CSR in the context of business ethics, i.e. in the social context, allows us to avoid these difficulties. Also, responsibility outcomes are better viewed from the point of view of multiple actors. because one is always responsible to someone.

6. Conclusions

Both the concept of business ethics and Corporate Social Responsibility are concepts that are actively discussed in the scientific literature. Let us indicate the most basic common features of business ethics and CSR.

It turns out that business ethics as a concept is changing in the context of new technologies, new ways of using resources, and the evolution of social practices and development towards a constantly connected global business network. These phenomena introduce business ethics as one of the most important elements of the discussion about social norms (Goel, Ramanathan, 2014). Literature analyzes show that the concept of CSR is also undergoing an evolution that takes place in specific social contexts. The close relationship between the two is indicated by the tendency characterizing both the historical development of business ethics and the CSR concepts, which is to move away from a negative assessment of business activity as such.

The close relationship between business ethics and CSR concepts is also evidenced by the fact that some researchers just call the latter one "corporate ethics" (Carroll, 1998). However, these two eponymous concepts should not be easily equated. Nevertheless, the opinion that the condition for understanding the CSR concept is to understand business ethics seems to be accurate (Kilcullen, Ohles Kooistra, 1999).

First of all, it should be recognized that business ethics not only created the foundation for CSR but also, by pointing to the ethical dimension of business activities, justified the need for companies to operate in a socially responsible manner (Jastrzębska, 2010).

It is also worth bearing in mind that the concept of CSR also had its opponents, especially among supporters of the free market (Friedman, 1970). Their arguments, however, do not seem serious and are based on the erroneous assumption that profit is the only goal of business (Salomon, 1997).

One should remember that CSR is not only a theoretical concept, but also a set of activities embedded in business ethics. It is also worth emphasizing that the research also shows that customers equally value activities undertaken as part of business ethics and CSR. Despite the fact that both concepts are often combined in academic discourse, they are concepts with a common origin and, although synonymous, are not the same.

CSR is a practical dimension of business ethics. It is based on the concept of responsibility, which has been developed for centuries within ethical considerations. Various thinkers treated this responsibility as individual responsibility. Only in the concept of CSR was it recognized as a responsibility occurring between social groups: on the one hand, the organization, on the other, society as a whole. Corporations are basic structures of society (Berkey, 2021).

An issue requiring further research is the social perception of activities undertaken by businessmen within the framework of CSR. There are reasons to assume that the term CSR still has primarily an academic dimension (Atif et al., 2023).

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