

# Proportionalist Reasoning in Business Ethics

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# Introduction

- Argument concerns foundation about ethics in the context of the world of commerce
- Argue that ethics has to do with one's participation in a moral universe
- Argue that modernity, and the culture of commerce, breaks with all traditions of this kind of participation, in which people are connected in to common forms of social life
- Conclusion is business ethics will have to challenge this thesis of the firm's profitability



# Objectives of the article

- To show that no founding commitment obtains in modernity, in our culture of commerce
- To explain the proportionalist reasoning characteristic of the premodern Aristotelian/Thomistic ethics
- To counter the idea that the guiding notion in this kind of ethics, that of a normative ideal of human flourishing
- Apply this to the world of business and to counter Rossouw's objection to the double effect principle in proportionalist reasoning



# Aristotelian ethics in the context of modernity

- Business ethics is a latecomer on the scene of contemporary world of work
- Appeal to our natural connectedness with others has gone
- Utilitarianism accords best with the culture of commerce
- Aristotle thinks of ethics of ethics as an enquiry of how best the agent, set on leading a good life, can discern what the appropriate means are to the goal.
- Young or immature people Aristotle claims are not good students of ethics



# Proportionalist reasoning in ethics

- The principle of double effect: prima facie
- Knauer: “one may permit the evil effect of his act only if he has commensurate reason for it
- Ethical reasoning only makes sense, in this approach, against the background of some moral vision
- Commentators have objected to proportionate reasoning on the grounds that it waters down moral principles
- Fundamental difference between any form of consequentialist reasoning and proportionalism



# Conclusion: an ethic of responsibility

- Ethics of proportionalism amounts ultimately to an ethics of responsibility
- The Just War requirement of there being a reasonable possibility of success
- Lying to the representatives of a totalitarian power maintains a semblance of community based on false ideology and blocks the development of real community based on the common good
- Guiding notion of being responsible would get its meaning from the moral narrative contrary to Rousseau's implicit assumption
- Moral reasoning takes place within the moral ambit of a common commitment

