

# Chapter 12

## Care and Loyalty in the Workplace

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### Introduction

Should employees be loyal to their employers? Can employers require their employees to be loyal? The academic and public debates on these questions usually begin with the presumption that loyalty is a good thing, and that it can be a duty or a virtue. This is odd, since expressions of loyalty seem inevitably to be about showing partiality to someone on the basis that one cares for or is concerned about her, and the morality of such expression depends largely on the context. Since people can be loyal to morally problematic organizations and ideals, loyalty does not seem to be the kind of characteristic about which one can easily make universalizable prescriptions. While the appropriate relationship between an employee's personal interests and her obligations to a firm is indeed important, supposing that loyalty is a virtue or an obligation ultimately misconceives its nature and gives rise to the strange and intractable arguments that the current debate on employee loyalty has been mired in.

Understanding loyalty in business as a kind of care, and as an analog to relationships of friends and family, can provide a unique and more satisfying account of when it is morally appropriate to be loyal in business contexts. For example, we usually think that a loyal friend will help a friend who is struggling, for example, with alcoholism, even if such loyalty requires taking that person to a rehabilitation center against her stated wishes. Similarly, loyalty in business may include performing actions that are difficult and that go beyond or even against stated job requirements and the traditional law of agency. By understanding loyalty as an expression of care, we are able to explain the intuition that loyalty is neither simply a duty nor a rational requirement of the pursuit of mutual self-interest. Any duties or obligations to a corporation or to an employee are better described as requirements that flow

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from the contractual relationship, rather than flowing from a requirement of loyalty. This is because loyalty is not just a set of actions required by a contract. Loyalty involves feelings and a disposition to go above and beyond what is already required by the contract. Approaching loyalty as a kind of care can also explain why it should be secondary to more fundamental moral requirements. If loyalty is an expression of care, we are able to make sense of the intuition that the natural development of loyalty is praiseworthy and rightly contained within our conception of the ideal employee, but at the same time is neither a duty nor a virtue, and not always an unambiguous good.

This chapter will begin by showing how loyalty has been defined as a wide range of concepts: an obligation that flows from contractual commitments, an ideal that contributes to the pursuit of mutual self-interest, a mere feeling, or an inappropriate kind of self-sacrifice. We suggest that these are impoverished conceptions of loyalty. We then develop a robust account of loyalty that is conceptually grounded in care, and explain why loyalty should be understood as an expression of care and concern. Next, we describe how this conception of loyalty can be applied in the personal aspects of business relationships and explain why loyalty as care is more recognizable when it is expressed in personal relationships, such as to co-workers. Fourth, we argue that it is also possible for an employee to be loyal to a corporation, and examine the way whistle-blowing can be an expression of critical loyalty. We conclude by examining whether loyalty as care can be *obligated*, and argue that loyalty to a corporation can be *deserved*, but never obliged, since loyalty itself involves going above and beyond duties and obligations.

## Traditional Approaches to Loyalty in Business

In the academic study of business ethics, one of the most important questions regards how loyalty should be defined. There are descriptive approaches that seek to clarify what is meant when loyalty is discussed among non-academics involved in the conduct of business (e.g. Mele 2001; Herman 1992; Jensen 1987). There are normative approaches, some of which define loyalty as an obligation based upon fiduciary duties and the law of agency (Corvino 2002; Bok 1983); others of which define loyalty as a desirable virtue, based upon a commitment to social values shared or served by the corporation (e.g. Hoffmann 2006; Vandekerckhove and Commers 2004; Mele 2001); and finally, still others of which base an obligation of loyalty upon an express or implied pledge or oath which may or may not be made (Pfeiffer 1992).

Those who instead address loyalty in psychological terms straddle descriptive and normative approaches. For example, some describe loyalty as a feeling that is desirable but not obligatory (Hoffmann 2006; Rosanas and Velilla 2003; Randels 2001, and Solomon 1998, whose overall view is very similar to ours here), and others define loyalty more prescriptively, as an implicit understanding (Cavanagh 2010) or “psychological contract” (Wicks et al 2010; Hart and Thompson 2007; Werhane 1994, Argyris 1960). Authors taking a more psychological approach nevertheless claim that considerations of desert are still relevant, since “emotion and judgment are not, of course, entirely separate matters” (Ewin 1993), and claim that

loyalty may be more or less “appropriate” or justifiable depending on employer reciprocation and the “worthiness” of the business (Randels 2001, Schrag 2001, Hartman 1994). While some authors (e.g. Vandekerckhove and Commers 2004; Werhane 1999; Carbone 1997) say that their approach is opposed to a “traditional” view of loyalty, the “traditional” view of loyalty varies from one author to the next. Our definition of loyalty will seek to be consistent with ordinary language and with the normative considerations that follow from an ethic of care.<sup>1</sup> Our view is that loyalty is an expression of care and concern for others, and that any duties of loyalty are grounded in the caring relationship.

Another difficulty in defining loyalty in the conduct of business is that there are many ways that loyalty is manifested in business. As an example, consider the diversity of this non-exhaustive list of kinds of loyalty: loyalty may be (i) an inhibiting consideration relative to whistle-blowing, (ii) a behavioral set which consumers may develop relative to a brand, (iii) a set of obligations owed to the employer by the employee, or (iv) obligations owed to employees by the employer. Moreover, there are many dimensions to business ethics, and appropriate loyalty often depends on the position adopted on other issues such as the nature of corporate agency or the nature of the particular business in question. For example, those who assume that corporations are incapable of moral agency dismiss any version of loyalty based upon reciprocal self-sacrifice (e.g. Carbone 1997; Duska 1984), but this conclusion does not as clearly follow when considering, for example, very small, family-run businesses containing personal relationships with employees. It also does not necessarily follow when the stakeholder view of corporate social responsibility—when businesses or professionals uphold values beyond profit maximization—is adopted (e.g. Duska 1992 and Mane 2005).

These conceptions of loyalty are all impoverished because they fail to acknowledge that loyalty is usually an expression of care in a personal relationship, rather than a requirement of implicit or explicit contract or obligation. Although loyalty is expressed in a variety of ways—as concern for others, as advocacy or sticking up for someone or something, through a ritual, as a kind of identification, or as an allegiance to certain beliefs—these expressions are a result of care and concern for someone, and express partiality toward that person. Our central argument is that loyalty is a form of care and concern for others, and as such, loyalty cannot be obligated—either by the corporation, or morally, all things considered. This thesis, we believe, is more consistent with a commonsense understanding of what loyalty in business consists in, and avoids the conceptual muddle that ethicists seem inevitably mired in when trying to address how loyalty can be obligated. A conception of loyalty that is rooted in care and concern for others will appropriately capture the role of loyalty in business.

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<sup>1</sup>It is hard to see how defining the necessary and sufficient conditions of loyalty could cover these various loyalties without emptying the concept of any force since not all expressions of loyalty are “good” or moral. For example, a loyal employee might fail to become a whistle-blower when confronted with damning evidence of corporate wrongdoing, or a loyal Nike or Gap customer might willfully refuse to acknowledge allegations of use of sweatshop labor out of loyalty to the brand.

## Loyalty As a Product of Care

Care ethics provides a useful framework for examining the nature of loyalty defined as a commitment to some person or thing in virtue of one's care and concern for it. If loyalty is a form of care, then it can be understood within the context of interdependence and personal relationships, as something one does for those one cares for. Let us examine the core commitments of care ethics, and develop a substantive conception of loyalty by using its ideals. Although there are different versions of care ethical theories, in general, they claim that:

- (1) The language of care, care activity, and care work are central to our everyday lives.<sup>2</sup>
- (2) The concepts, metaphors, and images associated with the practice of caring, rather than contracting, best express the dynamics of the moral life and should thus be used in ethical analysis.<sup>3</sup>
- (3) Moral agents ought to seek to nurture and preserve the concrete relationships they have with specific others.<sup>4</sup>

Contemporary care ethics theories do not in general give pride of place to loyalty over other virtues or emotions, but a substantive conception of loyalty emerges while keeping in mind these core commitments. Since the ethics of care “values the ties we have with particular other persons and the actual relationships that partly constitute our identity,” it emphasizes the relatedness of people to each other and the caring nature of the relationship (Held 2006). On this view, loyalty would be an expression of care for another person in virtue of an interdependent relationship, and is virtuous insofar as it contributes to the flourishing of the relationship. Loyalty to particular others naturally develops as a result of care and concern, and is a product of the caring relationship. Loyalty should thus be interpreted as a kind of *partiality* to those one cares for, justified on the basis that one cares for the other. Care ethicists would not consider it virtuous or morally desirable for an employer to

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<sup>2</sup>Carol Gilligan's early research suggests that men and women discuss morality using two different “voices:” the voice of justice and the voice of care. For Gilligan, loyalty would be an expression of care to particular individuals in concrete relationships. (See Carol Gilligan 1982.)

<sup>3</sup>See especially Virginia Held, who argues that the concepts, metaphors, and images associated with the care involved in parenting/mothering best express the dynamics of the moral life. (Held 2006) Nel Noddings also argues that we each exist in a web of relationships, and that in these relationships of care, one should be both a care-er and a cared-for. We should seek to preserve and nurture the concrete and valuable relationships we have with specific persons. (See especially Chapters 2 and 3 of Noddings 1984.)

<sup>4</sup>The obligations that flow from our caring relationships are described differently by care ethicists. For example, according to Gilligan, we should exercise special care for those we are concretely in relation to by attending to their particular needs, values, and desires. Eva Feder Kittay, on the other hand, argues that we have an obligation to exercise special care toward those particular persons with whom we have valuable close relationships, particularly where the relationship is one of “dependency” such as that of a child on a parent (Kittay 1998).

exhibit loyalty simply out of concern for universal principles or because it is mutually advantageous. Rather, a care ethicist would say that an employee's loyalty is virtuous when she cares for her employer, sees that she is in an interdependent relationship with her, and seeks to care for and be loyal to her employer in a way that contributes to the flourishing of the relationship.

Simon Keller's (2007) treatment of loyalty characterizes loyalty in this way, and emphasizes that loyalty is an emotion that involves attachment to a particular object. To Keller, "whether or not you are loyal is in large part a matter of your feelings and motivations; it depends on what is going on inside your own head," and this means that demands or requirements of loyalty must be limited. He argues that "we do not have direct control over our feelings and emotions; we do not have the ability suddenly to become loyal to a specified individual. Our loyalties are not directly subject to choice, and that is a reason to doubt the suggestion that they are the subjects of duties."<sup>5</sup> To see why we should understand loyalty as an expression of concern or care for another that is rooted in an emotional attachment or response, let us consider whether a morally appropriate expression of loyalty could *not* spring from concern or care for another person or object.

In his distinctions of loyalty, Keller (2007) argues that while most philosophers treat loyalty as a kind of concern, he says that this concern is expressed as "prioritizing the interests of the loyalty's object." That is to say, loyalty as concern involves placing the interests of another being ahead of oneself or another person. Nevertheless, says Keller, there are several ways of expressing loyalty that do not come down to prioritizing the interests of the loyalty's object. These include loyalty as advocacy or sticking up for someone or something, loyalty expressed in ritual, loyalty as a kind of identification, and loyalty as a kind of belief. While we agree with Keller that there are types of loyalty that do not involve prioritizing the interests of the loyalty's object, and that caring for something does not always result in prioritizing another's interests, it is misleading to say that there are genuine expressions of loyalty different from "loyalty in concern," for it seems that all expressions of loyalty are an *expression of concern and care* for another's interests even if they do not result in *prioritizing* another's interests.<sup>6</sup> In some ways, this complaint regards terminology, for we support the idea that there are indeed different expressions of loyalty; nevertheless, our idea is that a genuine expression of loyalty is grounded in care and concern.

With this background in mind, we can now ask, how can loyalty be an expression of care in business relationships? While relationships of employment begin as contractual and maintain that character as long as the contract endures, business relations are *interpersonal* as well as contractual. It is in the interpersonal aspect of the

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<sup>5</sup>Keller argues that the only time loyalty is a duty is between children and their parents. Children should perform loyal actions, out of loyal feelings and motives. Keller (2007), 143.

<sup>6</sup>In addition, Keller is right to say that not all forms of loyalty involve prioritizing another's interests, and that this is neither sufficient nor necessary for loyalty to that entity. One may prioritize someone's interest out of duty or obligation and not as an expression of loyalty, and conversely, loyalty can be expressed without prioritizing another's interests.

business relationship that there is a need for an account of loyalty as a form of care. Business relationships are interpersonal in the sense that they involve people who must work together on a personal level. Co-workers must learn to give credit where credit is due, know how to communicate effectively with their bosses, show others how to perform tasks without insulting their intelligence or offending them, learn from others without intruding on their “territory,” and seek to develop relationships of respect and trust. These interpersonal relationships are central to the practice of business because they are integral to the possibility of cooperative ventures. In this regard, business is, essentially, about people working together harmoniously so that operations flow smoothly. Business relationships are interpersonally robust, and can indeed be the proper context in which to address loyalty an appropriate expression of care.

So what would care ethics recommend regarding loyalty in interpersonal working or business relationships? Let us begin with employee loyalty within interpersonal workplace relationships. We can account for many of our intuitions about loyalty as an expected trait of employees by appealing to personal relationships of interdependence within the workplace. It is evident that there are elements of care between employees, except in the coldest and most hostile work environments. Now, certainly, some elements of the give-and-take between co-workers are best characterized as legal and social contracts motivated by mutual self-interest: successful job performance may depend upon maintaining good working relationships with others on the job, and both success and happiness in the workplace can be improved if one can do some favors for others while expecting them to return the extra help when one is in need. Nevertheless, these contractual obligations do not exhaust the kind of relationship we think that a good co-worker has with her peers. We think of a good employee as being cognizant of the way in which those around her are dependent on her proper and conscientious fulfillment of her role. The role which “teambuilding” retreats play in the corporation, with their trust falls and ropes courses, is more clearly about a recognition of the *interdependence* of employees and the need for care in workplace relationships than it is about building an awareness of mutual self-interest and obligations. Put simply, a good worker is not necessarily a good co-worker, but a good employee, ultimately, is both. From the perspective of care ethics, one should be loyal to these people as friends and nurturers in virtue of the interdependent nature of the relationship to each other.

Keller also argues that one can also express loyalty through performing or participating in rituals, or participating more generally in practices that are understood to symbolize or express loyalty. Keller’s classic examples include expressions of patriotism such as reciting a pledge of allegiance, saluting the flag, or standing to attention during the national anthem, but there are also ways of ritualizing loyalty in business. Some examples include going to weekend workplace-related events, attending the annual holiday party, contributing to a firm’s charitable donations, or participating in company activities such as raffles or fundraisers. These are ways of symbolizing one’s commitment to the firm by going through the motions of loyalty. Again, they are not required by one’s contract, and thus are not a duty or obligation to the firm, but do express a kind of loyalty to the firm, department, or workplace community.

How would a virtuous *employer* express loyalty understood as a kind of care? If we can assume the possibility of something like a virtuous employer—an employer that approaches the employee in a way that goes beyond enlightened self-interest—we can say that not only is the development of a loyal disposition psychologically more-or-less likely and perhaps mutually beneficial, but morally praiseworthy as well, and the failure to develop such a disposition morally blameworthy. An example of employer loyalty can be exhibited in the idea of a virtuous manager. In a business, the manager has legal obligations and obligations of fairness, but a virtuous manager will not apply these obligations in a purely mechanical and unfeeling way. We expect managers—*good* managers, at least—to “have a heart.” By this, we mean that we expect her to take circumstances and contexts into account, to be sensitive to the needs and life-projects of those she manages, and to be aware of the effects that her decisions and determination have on those who she manages. If she must discharge a long-term employee due to budget cuts, the loyal employer will not simply keep the employee on as an expression of loyalty to that person—rather, her loyalty to that person might motivate her to help her in other, more personal ways. For example, she might offer to help the person to find another job, loan her some money, or go to extraordinary measures to help that person succeed.

This is not to say that developing this kind of loyalty to an employee is morally required—we are not arguing that there is a *prima facie* obligation even to attempt to form such a relationship. Rather, we are suggesting that in circumstances where contractual obligations have been met, interpersonal relationships have been developed, and moral principles have been committed to, then insofar as one cares for an employee, expressing concern through loyalty is morally praiseworthy because it is appropriate given the nature of the relationship; failing to demonstrate loyalty to that individual as a person demonstrates a moral failing on a relational level. An employer that is unable to express some feeling of loyalty to a loyal employee is deserving of moral censure, not because loyalty is a “two-way street” but because a person that is unable to express loyalty toward another individual has not followed through on what naturally follows given that the nature of the relationship is a caring one.

Although it seems plausible that loyalty in the personal aspects of business and work relationships is virtuous, one might object that loyalty that flows from care and concern for another person generates unfair favoritism toward those with whom one is in personal relationship. We now turn to examining the appropriate place of loyalty in business itself.

## Loyalty and Obligation in Business

Having outlined the way that loyalty may be expressed as care in business relationships, we can now examine whether loyalty (as based in care) can ever be considered a workplace duty or obligation. Although some have argued that employers<sup>7</sup> may

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<sup>7</sup>In the preceding, we have used “employer” to refer ambiguously to the business in its role relative to the employee, in which the “employer” may be conceived of by the employee as being both the

appropriately require loyalty, it is also true that employers cannot demand loyalty as a kind of care. As we will argue here, the *requirement* of loyalty is best understood as a fiduciary duty obligated by in virtue of the Law of Agency,<sup>8</sup> or an express or implied contractual obligation. Our view is that these are not expressions of genuine loyalty but are instead one-sided demands better characterized in moral terms as requirements of allegiance, following simply from fiduciary duties. After showing the shortcomings of an idea of loyalty which can be obligated, we then outline a care ethic approach to loyalty which goes beyond fiduciary duties, and describe what it recommends regarding conflicts of loyalty, such as in cases of whistleblowing.

Any view of “loyalty” that can be obligated in virtue of being an employee is better described as fiduciary duty through the law of agency or contractual obligation. For example, being a “team player” may be implied merely by our fiduciary duty as agents, “because the proper function of business *does* require a certain degree of self-sacrifice in the service of a collective goal” (Corvino 2002), but loyalty is usually taken to refer to actions and commitments beyond those required merely for satisfactory job performance. Since satisfactory job performance itself may require self-sacrifice and adopting the interests of the corporation, this *obligation* of loyalty is best understood as one that springs from the Law of Agency, even though these fiduciary duties may include actions which are outwardly similar to loyal actions, including “some degree of ‘self-sacrifice without expectation of reward’ ” (Corvino 2002).

Sissela Bok (1983) bases loyalty on either a fiduciary duty or an express or implied contract, stating that “[i]n holding his position, he has assumed certain obligations to his colleagues and clients. He may even have subscribed to a loyalty oath or a promise of confidentiality.” But arguing that loyalty is owed because it is part of an obligatory sworn oath or contract ignores the question of whether loyalty can be simply promised and whether such a promise can be required. It is question-begging to say that an employee has an obligation to loyalty based on a contractual requirement to do so. At most, an employment contract can establish an obligation to perform specifiable actions whose outcomes are approximate those that would follow from loyalty as care. For example, employers often require employees to sign non-compete clauses and maintain trade secrets. These are requirements of

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abstract legal entity of the corporation and the representatives of that abstract legal entity. Since we will now be discussing particular interpersonal relationships within business, we will avoid the ambiguous term “employer” in favor of speaking either of “corporation” or “management”. By “corporation” we will mean exclusively the abstract legal entity and by “management” we will mean exclusively the group of actual people who represent the corporation in their roles as managers, supervisors, and executives.

<sup>8</sup>As stated in the *Restatement (Third) of Agency*, “Agency is the fiduciary relationship that arises when one person (a “principal”) manifests assent to another person (an “agent”) that the agent shall act on the principal’s behalf and subject to the principal’s control, and the agent manifests assent or otherwise consents so to act” (American Law Institute 2006). Having entered a relationship of special trust, in which the agent is taken as representative of the principal, there are special obligations to promote the ends of the principal.



loyalty that are demanded by a contract, and are not robust expressions of loyalty. Following through with these obligations is not well-characterized as loyalty—it is more like doing one's duty rather than showing personal commitment to a firm. Working weekends, abiding by a non-compete clause, and going out of one's way to consider the greater good of the business are often part of the job, but are not, in fact, genuine expressions of loyalty.

This is not to say that corporations should not require loyalty of this sort. It *does* make prudential sense to ask employees to perform actions that are in the interest of the relationship and the business, and these can be specified in a contract. As Keller (2007) emphasizes, while these agreements might privilege the interests of the corporation and *may* occur as expressions of loyalty, such actions are neither necessary nor sufficient to constitute genuine loyalty. If genuine loyalty goes beyond actions that can be captured by fiduciary and contractual duties, but is also an affective orientation, then it is incoherent for management to require loyalty. Loyalty involves feeling concern or care for an object of interest and being concerned with the relationship with that entity, and managers can really only require *allegiance* to the corporation, where the employee is expected to act loyally in limited and specifiable ways, but not to be loyal. Loyalty involves having the motivation to go above and beyond what is already required by the contract, and involves emotional motivations of care and concern.

To think that loyalty is derivative of duties and justice or contractual obligations, and to treat loyalty as a duty or obligation, mistakes the effect for the cause. Consider an analogy with interpersonal relationships. Do you have an obligation to care for a family member? As care ethicists have argued, there are certainly duties and obligations involved in family relationships, but they do not capture the extent or the core of what it is to be, for example, a caring mother. Similarly, when we describe employee loyalty in terms of duties and obligations, we capture neither the extent nor the core of what it is to be a loyal employee. While it is evident that parties have certain duties that follow from agreement to a contract, it does not make sense to say that loyalty to a company is required in virtue of a contractual relationship. We would have just as much difficulty—and difficulty of a similar kind—if we tried to argue that parents have an *obligation* to care about their children.

When the question of whether loyalty can be obligated is asked from the care ethical perspective, it turns out that obligations of loyalty to a business are like obligations of loyalty to a family member. In both cases, the moral obligations flow from the nature of the relationship. Care ethicist Michael Slote (2007), for example, suggests that our duties and obligations to others are directly correlated to the nature of the relationship and its care dimension.<sup>9</sup> The more one cares for another, the greater her obligations to her; the less that one cares for another, the fewer the obligations. Nel Noddings also argues that we have subordinate ethical obligations that derive from the ethical ideal of caring. On her view, there are two criteria that

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<sup>9</sup>See Slote (2007) Chapter 1.

govern obligations of “ethical caring”: “the existence of or potential for present relation, and the dynamic potential for growth in relation, including the potential for increased reciprocity and, perhaps mutuality” (Noddings 1984). When these criteria are applied to loyalty, there is no simple recipe to follow regarding how to be loyal to another person. If being loyal contributes to the possibility of growth in a relationship, and to the potential for increased reciprocity, then one is obligated to be loyal and perform actions that cultivate the caring relationship. But in absence of a caring relationship, there are limited obligations of loyalty. The extent of the obligation of loyalty is thus informed by the (more or less) caring nature of the interpersonal relationship.

This thesis regarding the obligation to be loyal in personal relationships can be applied to business relationships: the nature of the caring relationship gives guidance regarding the appropriate moral obligations and obligations of loyalty to the one with whom one is in relationship. And the way that loyalty should be expressed in these relationships is unique and highly variable.

For care ethics, then, only a limited obligation of loyalty in personal relationships can be derived from the ethical ideal of caring, since loyalty is one of many obligations we have in a caring relationship. Is the same true in business relationships? Is loyalty one of many moral obligations that arise in relation to the other? It is, insofar as obligations of loyalty can potentially conflict with other obligations to a corporation. The most important of these conflicts occurs in cases of whistle-blowing, where an employee’s obligation to be loyal to an employer may conflict with her obligation to follow the law, company policies, or other moral principles such as justice. Care ethicists have been careful in addressing the relationship between obligations of care and obligations of justice and are sensitive to the idea that justice is also an important part of the moral life. Their approach is to say that care ethical principles should apply to relationships of “partiality” and the domains of family and friendship, while “universal” requirements of duty and justice should apply to the domains of law (Held 2006). When this thesis is applied the workplace, then, duties of loyalty and duties of justice apply to different domains; obligations of loyalty should be cultivated in the personal domain, while obligations of justice motivate one’s response to violations of justice, etc. (Held 2006). This interpretation of care ethics would thus recommend that employees uphold duties of justice and disclose violations of justice that harm society, but cultivate loyalty to the dimension of the relationship that involves care. Employees should “blow the whistle” when they are motivated by concerns of justice, and at the same time, show care and loyalty to the person with whom they are in a caring relationship. The extent of the requirement of loyalty to the individual depends on the extent of the caring nature of the relationship. For example, if the relationship is a close family one, individuals should still seek to care for and be loyal to those others in order to promote the caring nature of the relationship. If the relationship is not a close one, and the relationship is not a caring one, the employee’s obligation to be loyal to the employer is diminished. We now turn to examining the requirement of employee-employer loyalty in greater detail.

## Care for and Loyalty to a Corporation

To this point we have argued that care ethics recommends a limited obligation of loyalty in business, one that is highly variable and dependent on the nature of the caring relationship. Most loyalty in the course of business is personal, and takes place between managers, employees, and co-workers and so loyalty as an expression of care in this realm is plausible. But a central issue business ethics is whether employees should be loyal to the corporation itself. We now turn to considering whether employees ought to be loyal to their employers when that employer is a *corporation*. In order to isolate the corporation itself as an object of loyalty, we will imagine a corporation of the most impersonal and least humanized form: a publicly-traded for-profit national or multi-national corporation. If we are able to provide an adequate account of loyalty to this kind of corporate entity, and if we have been successful in the above in providing an adequate account of loyalty to co-workers, employees, and managers, then we take it that all cases should be covered by either one, the other, or both at once.<sup>10</sup>

As captured by the Law of Agency and fiduciary duties, the employee is clearly in a position of caring *for* the corporation in a literal sense. The corporation is a legal entity, given a fictional personhood by law. The corporation is the legal property-holder, and therefore legally the principal who the employees represent as its agents—and the corporation, for its part, is clearly in a relationship of dependency relative to the employee: without its agents, the corporation cannot manufacture, trade, provide services, or engage in any activity in any way, since outside of its representatives, it is nothing but an abstract legal entity. In some cases, the *caring for* which the employees must engage in qua agents, however, amounts to nothing more than making good on contractual obligations: showing up on time, making a good-faith effort to meet performance expectations, and preserving trade secrets whenever possible. We agree with Soles's assessment that "if [this] minimalist conception of loyalty is accepted, it seems clear that employees ought to be loyal to their employers," but that "[this] minimalist view is sufficiently attenuated . . . that such a claim does not amount to much," and "does not impose upon them the sorts of obligations that often are urged in the name of loyalty" (1993). Rather than call this minimal and contractually obligated fiduciary duty a kind of loyalty at all, we prefer to reserve the word "loyalty" for something more robust.

Loyalty, as we have discussed it, is the expression of a partiality towards those one cares for, in which care and concern is shown, and through which the relationship is able to flourish. If loyalty to a corporation also fits this model, it must not be merely a dependent and fiduciary relation—i.e. that the employee is of necessity in the position of caring for the corporation—but must extend this caring-for into

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<sup>10</sup>For example, in a small, privately-owned, family-run business, there may be little sense in speaking of loyalty to the business separately from loyalty to the owner-manager, while in most U.S. businesses, loyalty to the corporation may be quite separable, and may indeed come into conflict with, loyalty to one's co-workers or managers.

caring-about, in which care is shown for the interests of the corporation *for its own sake* rather than out of contractual obligation. This loyalty would be an expression of partiality in virtue of a caring relationship, in which the interests of the corporation are given additional weight on the basis of this relationship of care.

For the time being, let us bracket the additional teleological condition of tending towards flourishing, and concentrate on partiality which grants additional weight to the interests of the corporation, for there is a question which immediately presents itself here: are the interests of the corporation of a kind appropriate to loyalty? If these interests consist of nothing beyond profit maximization, it may be argued that our understanding of loyalty is inappropriately applied, for profit is a very narrow scope of “interests.” Yet, even a corporation that subjugates all other concerns to the profit motive has a robust set of other interests, even if they are secondary and subsidiary. Corporations have public personae, products, services, and brand identity. While each of these may be adopted out of nothing other than market analysis, they impart sufficient character to the corporate entity to allow some employees to come to see the corporation as an object of care. Employees who defend their corporation’s products against criticism, who actively seek to improve the corporation’s public image, or who venture beyond their job description to improve efficiency perform actions that can be meaningfully called loyal, in that these actions exhibit a concern for the various direct and subsidiary interests of the corporation as a legal entity, which concern goes beyond contractual obligation or the expectation of reward. Indeed, this is all the more clearly a form of loyalty where the corporation is more narrowly concerned with profit maximization, for here the employee is less likely to expect her actions to result in gratitude or reciprocation.

We expect that the degree to which employees are able to adopt the corporation as an object of care and loyalty will vary at least in part along with the variety and richness of interests that the corporation adopts and exhibits. Compare, for example, the same employee’s relationship to her bank account. If we can mean anything by the “interests” of a bank account, these interests must be exhausted by maximization of profits and holdings—and surely the bank account is similarly dependent on the employee’s agency on its behalf, since it, like the corporation, is a legal entity having no independent agency. It seems strange indeed to imagine that this employee would develop loyalty towards her bank account, which, based on our model, would consist of the additional weighting of the interests of the bank account out of concern for it rather than out of the self-interested and contractual aspects of her relationship with it. Here, surely, there is a relevant difference in the independence of the interests at stake: the bank account exists for the sake of the employee, while the corporation does not. Still, at least a part of the strangeness of the idea of loyalty to a bank account has to do with the lack of a variety of aims and goals bound up with the activity of the bank account.

Conversely, employee adoption of the corporation as an object of care is more likely if the corporation has a particularly rich set of aims. Imagine that the employee believes her corporation takes a stakeholder view of corporate social responsibility. Perhaps it is an industry leader in sustainability efforts, taking financial losses and market risks in order to try to change the way that business is done within

its industry. In this case, the perceived interests of the corporation go beyond profit maximization and its subsidiary goals, and the type of caring support and intervention that the employee may be able to render begins to widen.

Why are employees more likely to be loyal to a corporation that seems to have a broader view of corporate social responsibility? The established mode of debate about loyalty would chalk this up to the employee's identification with the corporation, based upon a shared set of values (Duska 1992). If we consider other modes of corporate social responsibility, such as community support or employee involvement in managerial decisions, the established debate might tie this difference back to mutual benefit and obligations to reciprocate. But the care-ethics-based account of loyalty is able to recognize that some employees are loyal even in the absence of the likelihood of reciprocation, and in the absence of an assessment of the moral worth of the corporate enterprise. Moreover, whether or not it is wise or virtuous to do so, it is uncontroversial that there are some employees who exhibit loyalty to their corporate employers simply because they are its employee, without ever asking whether the corporation's products, services, or business model are in accord with the employee's personal moral values and ends, or whether this loyalty is more likely to serve their self-interest than seeking alternate employment. Surely, though, if promoting the interests of the object of care is one way of expressing loyalty, as we have claimed, those corporations that have a more varied and robust set of apparent interests are more likely to inspire loyalty in employees. And we acknowledge that having a shared set of values and mutual self-interest might both play strong roles in the development of employee loyalty.

It remains for us to consider whether the teleological aspect of our definition of loyalty may be appropriately applied to employees' relationship with corporations. Here we can return to each of the examples just given in opposite order. First, we can begin with a corporation with a demonstrated interest in employee involvement in managerial decisions, or in employee and community welfare. Here we may easily see that the employee who pursues these interests beyond contractual obligation tends towards the flourishing of the employee-corporation relationship insofar as it is a caring relationship. Where the corporation invites employee involvement in these ends, and takes these ends seriously, employee commitment to these ends will tend to strengthen and further develop these connections. Furthermore, a corporation that is able to demonstrate an apparent awareness and appreciation of interdependence between itself and its agents is far more likely to be adopted as an object of care, since adopting policies reflecting support for and gratitude to employees causes the employee-corporation relationship to more closely resemble the kinds of personal relationships of interdependence that are typically accompanied by care and loyalty.

Next, we can consider the corporation which may have a demonstrated interest in goals other than profit maximization but not including specific commitments to employees and community, as in our example of the corporation which seeks to reform environmental practices within its industry. The employee who adopts this corporation as an object of care will be likely to pursue these environmental interests, and give them additional weight in her practical reasoning on the basis of this

relationship of care. We can expect the corporation that has adopted this goal to be more likely to continue and intensify pursuit of it when employees actively contribute and commit to the goal. Since we can assume that the employee has adopted this goal because of her caring about the corporation, this likelihood of continued and intensified pursuit of the goal represents a strengthening and development of the employee-corporation relationship, which we can appropriately call a flourishing of that relationship insofar as it is a caring relationship.

Finally, we have left to consider the most extreme case: the corporation that pursues profit maximization in the most crass manner, subjugating all other interests to the bottom line. We claimed in the above that there are some employees who may exhibit care and loyalty even in the absence of any assessment that the corporation is pursuing ends which accord with the employee's personal moral values, and in the absence of any reasonable expectation of reciprocation or mutual self-interest. Can this relationship be described as a genuinely caring relationship that may flourish on the basis of that care and loyalty? From the perspective of care ethics, can and should an employee be loyal to this corporation?

There is, in principle, no reason why an employee would be unable to adopt the corporation as an object of care in this situation in the same way as she might for the corporation with environmental goals. If the corporation, for example, seeks only its own profit, and does so by attempting to corner a particular market, the employee may take on that goal on the basis of her caring about the corporation, just as, in the other case, she may take on the other corporation's environmental goals. For example, the corporation may set its proximal goal (in pursuit of the primary economic goal) as making its product the next "must-have" technological gadget. The employee may adopt and commit to that goal, beyond self-interest or contractual obligation, as a "loyalty to the corporation-with-its-function" (Ewin 1993). In this case, it is again reasonable to describe this adoption as tending to produce a caring relationship within the employee-corporation model, for both the corporation and the employee have adopted this goal, and the pursuit of this goal will tend to strengthen and develop the sense in which it is a caring relationship, based as it is upon the mutual adoption of this non-moral interest.

In fact, the care-ethical definition of employee loyalty is nicely illustrated using this example. In a distinct divergence from the idea that loyalty is based upon a set of values shared by both employee and corporation, an employee may adopt the corporation as an object of care despite significant disagreement about values, and this may motivate the employee to express loyalty in a very different way while still tending toward a form of flourishing of that relationship. Consider an employee who believes a particular corporate policy to be indefensible, but chooses to attempt to reform the corporation from within, rather than to dissolve her voluntary association with the corporation by accepting a job elsewhere. By exercising *voice* rather than *exit*, to use Hirschman's terms (1970), this employee is exhibiting loyalty by pursuing what she believes the company's true interests. In this way, the situation is similar to accounts of whistle-blowing as "the highest form of loyalty" in that she pursues the corporation's best possibilities as she sees them, rather than the corporation's own implied conception of its interests. This may be motivated out of

loyalty to her co-workers, who may not have the ability to exercise the option of exit, or may be “loyalty to principles, which can lead somebody to oppose the other members of a group claiming to espouse the principles if she believes that they have really moved away from them” (Ewin 1993). However, in some cases this may also be motivated out of loyalty to the corporation as a legal entity. In this case, by adopting the corporation as an object of care, she is clearly going beyond (and perhaps even against) contractually obligated actions in order to pursue the interests of the corporation as she sees them.

This kind of critical loyalty is best explained using the model of loyalty as a product of care, in which the employee is loyal because she genuinely cares for the corporation and its well-being. The starting point is one of disagreement: the employee raises objections to the current practices of the corporation, claiming that the corporation is not properly pursuing its best possibilities. Sometimes the result of this action will be termination or discipline of the employee, but if the corporation, through its other agents in managerial and executive positions, is able to adopt additional concerns which add variety and robustness to the set of demonstrated corporate interests, not only will the relationship between this employee and the corporation flourish, develop, and strengthen, but it will be more likely that other employees will care more for the corporation and develop loyalty to it as well.

These examples, concerned with loyalty towards a corporation that subjugates all other interests to profit maximization, reveal an important difference between our definition of loyalty and those definitions that suggest that loyalty must be based on the pursuit of the moral good of the corporation. In our view, it is possible for an employee to care for and be loyal to a corporation that pursues amoral interests, as in the example of the corporation pursuing the “next must-have technological gadget.” In fact, our definition of loyalty includes the possibility that employees may also care for and be loyal to corporations whose interests are immoral from the care ethical perspective and from other moral perspectives as well. Like Ewin (1993), our view is that loyalty can be morally problematic from the standpoint of justice, as well as from the standpoint of care, and believe there is no reason to define “loyalty” as a term only appropriately used when it is in support of moral acts or people. It is plausible for loyalty to be directed towards immoral acts or persons, and the only apparent reason to insist otherwise is that this creates a problem for those who want to claim that loyalty is an obligation of employees. For how can loyalty be a moral obligation if loyalty can include taking immoral actions, towards immoral ends, for the sake of an immoral entity? Business ethicists must either allow that there is no moral obligation to be loyal, admitting that at least some expressions of loyalty can be morally impermissible, or must artificially define “loyalty” as applying only to the morally acceptable parts of what is called loyalty in ordinary language. We avoid this pseudo-dilemma entirely: loyalty, understood as a form of care, cannot be obliged, and is not always moral, even from the perspective of care ethics.

This pseudo-dilemma has introduced confusion into the debate about loyalty, even when it is not directly taken up as an issue. For example, Corvino (2002) seems to accept that the word “loyalty” may be meaningfully used to refer to immoral behavior, stating that “[t]he mafia underling who turns state’s evidence is indeed

disloyal to his boss,” but that loyalty, in this case, is not good because the object of loyalty, or the values embodied by it, are not moral. But then this commonsense view is not consistent with his use, elsewhere in the same article, of phrases like “proper loyalty,” “true devotion,” and “tough love,” which imply that the mafia underling is engaged in a form of *false loyalty* when obeying his don, and *true loyalty* when he forces his don out of a life of crime by presenting evidence against him to the authorities. But this distinction seems arbitrary—why not simply say that these are two different expressions of loyalty, only one of which is in keeping with objective moral standards? We agree with Varelius (2009) that “[a]lthough it can be morally repugnant, the idea of a loyal Nazi, a gangster who is loyal to the mafia, etc. is quite coherent.” The simpler and less question-begging analysis suggests that in these different circumstances, what varies is not whether the underling is truly or falsely loyal, but instead from what perspective the underling views his boss’s interests: from an immoral perspective, his best interests lie in committing crimes and getting away with it; in another moral perspective, his best interests lie in going straight, repentance, and incarceration. Using this distinction, we can respond to the resolve this discomfiting moral ambivalence of loyalty by differentiating *appropriate* from *inappropriate* loyalty. There may be a satisfactory way to do this through the ethics of justice, but care ethics can also make this distinction from within its own realm by recognizing that, while loyalty is a form of care, caring for another can sometimes help the other to be more caring, and can at other times enable the other’s failure to be caring.

From the perspective of care ethics, while loyalty is an expression of care for another, not all expressions of loyalty are appropriate. While people may in fact care for and be loyal to a wide range of corporations, care ethics distinguishes between *appropriate* and *inappropriate* loyalty using a criterion of care: it recommends employee loyalty to a corporation whose effects and interests are caring. In other words, the propriety of employee loyalty tracks the extent to which a corporation’s interests are themselves caring. The more that a corporation’s goals, interests, and practices express care for consumers, the environment, and its own employees, the more an employee should care for and be loyal to that corporation. This is *appropriate loyalty*, or loyalty that is motivated by care and tends towards the flourishing of the corporation and the employee-employer relationship. But if the corporation has a dearth of moral values and social concerns, it is not appropriate for employees to be loyal to this kind of corporation in the sense that she ought to carry out this corporation’s goals and interests. If the employee genuinely cares for a corporation whose interests and practices are morally problematic, she should exercise critical loyalty, as described above, by seeking to reform the corporation’s practices so that they tend toward genuine moral flourishing.

The care ethics account of loyalty is also able to explain why loyalty is an ambiguous motivation for whistle-blowing. Loyalty can motivate an employee to blow the whistle when the corporation is engaging in uncaring activities regarding its employees, the environment, or its consumers—and, here, this critical loyalty is appropriate. But loyalty can also be a motivation to attack and silence whistleblowers, when that dissent has a strong and apparent moral basis. This



is inappropriately uncritical loyalty. While Larmer (1992) is right that loyalty often involves pursuit of the best interests of an object of care, his claim that “to the degree that an action is genuinely immoral, it is impossible that it is in the agent’s best interest,” is a non-sequitur. This is because the issue at hand for the employee’s approach to her loyalty is not necessarily what is *actually* in the best interests of the object of care, but what is *perceived* as in the best interests of the object of care, and we cannot ignore that employees exhibiting loyalty can certainly at times be morally benighted, especially when in an atmosphere of conformity and groupthink. Those who argue that there is an obligation of loyalty have a strong incentive to artificially define loyalty so that it is always moral from an impartial perspective, since it is problematic to claim that we can be obligated to perform immoral actions. By arguing instead that loyalty is an expression of care, we are able to distinguish between appropriate and inappropriate loyalty without making the question-begging claim that the inappropriately loyal employee is not “really” loyal at all. This analysis more consistently shows that loyalty involves a pursuit of perceived interests which, although based on a moral element within our relationships, may take place within a misguided moral context. Insofar as loyalty can express care and concern for a corporation’s well-being, then this account provides a way to resolve the apparent tension between loyalty and whistle-blowing that is both more theoretically sound and more descriptively accurate.

## Desert, Care and Loyalty

Employees may care for and develop loyalty to a corporation which expresses no interest in anything beyond profit maximization, even though it is more likely that care and loyalty will develop toward a corporation that is able to demonstrate a wider and more robust set of interests, particularly when they have values and goals in common with the employee. But a view of loyalty in business must also provide some account of when loyalty is more or less *appropriate* in the sense that it is worthy of moral recommendation or discouragement. We mentioned this briefly above, but the established debate in business ethics is concerned with whether and under what conditions loyalty may become an *obligation*, and in order to address the intuition that loyalty is at least sometimes obligatory, we must give a more detailed account of appropriate loyalty. The analysis we present here shows that there is never an obligation of loyalty independent of contractual agreements, but that in some cases, a corporation is *deserving* of employee loyalty.

Even though the language of “desert” seems entirely distinct from the language of care, there is a sense in which the idea of desert is present in personal relationships of care. As we will argue here, the idea of “desert” within caring relationships is different from the idea of “desert” within relationships of obligation and contract. Our central idea here is that “desert” in caring relationships has to do with symmetry, and not justice.

To see this, consider everyday usages of “desert” in personal relationships, the most common of which might be in romantic relationships: “You deserve better

than him,” or “She doesn’t deserve you.” In the cases of certain very strong and close friendships, honorifically referred to as “true friendship,” we may make similar claims, such as “she doesn’t deserve a friend like you.” In these examples, we use the concept of desert to emphasize the idea of symmetry in a caring relationship. We do not mean that there is some action which is obligated of the other, such as that a friend might deserve remuneration when she has lent a friend some money, or that a favor deserves to be repaid—instead, we mean that the friend who does a favor without a thought of when and whether it might be repaid deserves a friend who cares for them in the same way, and would be similarly willing to help without expectation of reward. “Desert” within an ethics of justice refers to equitable and fair treatment, whereas “desert” within caring relationships refers to similar kinds of commitment and similar willingness to move beyond equitability and fairness to altruism or selflessness. This does not mean that there is an *obligation* to care—indeed, when there is a lack of emotional attachment to the other, we are likely to say that the relationship has failed and will result in dissolution, rather than saying that one party is “not living up to his side of the agreement.” Although there may be an obligation to ensure that past care cannot be regained, especially in the case of a marriage which has become loveless, the relationship is rooted in a commitment based upon, but extending further than, reciprocity or the expectation of mutual benefit. There are elements of reciprocal benefit and obligation in such a relationship, but these capture neither the core nor the extent of the commitment, which is not a first-order concern with contract and fairness, but a second-order mutual commitment to value one another and the relationship in a far more unconditional and giving way, not delimited by first-order considerations of equitability.

In romantic relationships and friendships there are elements of mutual satisfaction and partnership towards shared ends that are similar to the voluntary and economic arrangements of employment. Yet, if a relationship is pursued solely on the basis of mutual satisfaction of needs, this is a mere relationship of convenience. If this aspect of the relationship is one-sided, it seems that the more committed partner is being “used” by the partner who views the relationship as a mere mutual satisfaction of needs. The Hegelian definition of marriage as a “contract against contract” exemplifies our conception of romantic relationships as including mutual benefit and give and take, but being, in fact, based upon a refusal to take note and keep account of whether these benefits are justly distributed. Hegel claims that to view marriage as a civil contract degrades it to “mutual caprice” and “a contract for reciprocal use,” while to base it on love alone makes it “exposed in every respect to contingency,” and so, although marriage does include love and “begins in contract,” the true basis of marriage can be neither of these, but instead “a contract to transcend the standpoint of contract, the standpoint from which persons are regarded in their individuality as self-subsistent units” (Hegel 1952 [1820]). The partner, married or unmarried, who makes an honest commitment to transcend contract and justice can be said to “deserve better” than a partner who takes such a vow while remaining a self-centered narcissist. The problem here is an asymmetry in the relationship: the one party has made a commitment based only upon contract and mutual self-interest; the other has made a far more unconditional and altruistic commitment.

The same may apply to friendships. Friendships, most of all when they are exceptionally close or long-lived, may be viewed as being “beyond” the give-and-take of obligations and favors. Favors may be viewed simply as something friends do for one another, without any accounting of whether a favor is earned or deserved. And a similar asymmetry is possible here: As in Wilde’s story of *Little Hans and the Miller*, it is perfectly possible—but undesirable—for one party to maintain a commitment that “true friendship [is] quite free from selfishness of any kind” (Wilde 1915) while the other party acts in the most selfish and inconsiderate ways. But if one party acts on the basis of care, and the other does not, the relationship is asymmetrical, and according to care ethics, this impacts the nature of the obligations of each party.

When we refer to desert in our personal relationships, it does not signify whether care has been “earned” or is obligatory, but refers to an asymmetrical kind of commitment within a relationship, where one party acts on the basis of care, and the other does not. Similarly, we can speak of whether loyalty is deserved in a business relationship based on similar claims of symmetry or asymmetry within the relationship, where the employee may maintain loyalty towards an uncaring corporation, or the employee may fail to develop loyalty towards a caring corporation. In employee-corporation relationships, though, we must be even more careful to separate deserving loyalty from being owed loyalty, since in this very abstract relationship there are not clear markers of care as there are in our personal romantic and friendship relations. Corporations and employees show care in far more ambiguous ways—a corporation may support an employee during a time of need, but whether this is done out of concern or self-interest is usually inscrutable, especially when compared to a confession of love from a romantic partner, or a friend’s willingness to help move a couch. Consequently, our account of desert and symmetry is largely in line with Hart and Thompson (2007), who assert that when employees and employers have asymmetrical degrees of loyalty towards one another “the misalignment in perceptions does not necessarily mean that one party is *disloyal* to the relationship, although the other may deem it to be so,”—but that “asymmetry may also be characterized as the case of two actors conceiving of different reciprocal obligations in their relationship to one another . . . [and] loyalty asymmetries may occur despite good-faith efforts by both parties.”

This care-based account of desert is consistent with the claim that employee loyalty is a “two-way street,” not because loyalty is owed on the basis of contract or mutual self-interest, but because a party willing to move beyond these self-interested concerns in taking their partner as an object of care is deserving of receiving care from their partner in return. Since this kind of care requires subjugating considerations of fairness and obligation to the interests of the other, it makes no sense to say that this kind of loyalty can generate an obligation to reciprocate through first-order implicit agreements—loyalty is a “two-way street” regarding second-order agreements only, and those second-order agreements-about-agreements consist of a refusal to insist on requiring our first-order agreements to be a “two-way street.” This is why it has been argued that, “without transcendent motives on both parts (i.e., the individual and the organization), it is not possible to feel identified with

an organization, or feel loyal to it. Consequently, loyalty cannot be a gimmick” (Rosanas and Velilla 2003). Appropriate loyalty in this regard is highly dependent on the nature of the relationship between the two parties.

Understanding loyalty as an expression of care, we can conclude that the reciprocation of loyalty with loyalty in return may be deserved, without claiming that loyalty is obligatory, a claim that would lead to intractable contradictions regarding whether “loyalty” can be distinguished from considerations of justice or mutual self-interest. To say that loyalty is obligated by a business relationship or in an employee’s and an employer’s best interests conflicts with the idea that loyalty expresses partiality, care, and concern for the other. Loyalty is best understood as a commitment that goes beyond obligation, and is often a desirable and praiseworthy aspect of the employee-corporation relationship. Care ethical theories help to explain the intuition that, while a business has no obligation to be loyal to a loyal employee, a loyal employee does *deserve* loyalty in return, even though she is not *owed* loyalty in return. This voluntarily reciprocated loyalty could be manifested in a variety of ways. Since loyalty tends to arise from a varied and robust set of demonstrated corporate interests, a company which is able to demonstrate a valuation of employees which goes beyond contract and obligation is more likely to generate loyalty in return. Similarly, an employee who meets her contractual obligations and who acts appropriately as an agent of a corporation does not wrong that corporation if she does not demonstrate loyalty, even if that corporation demonstrates loyalty towards her. Such a corporation deserves employee loyalty, but this desert does not generate an obligation, since loyalty is a going-beyond of relationships of obligation.

From the perspective of care ethics, is it wrong for an employee to maintain loyalty to a company that does not “deserve it” in the sense that it is unable to transcend mutual self-interest in its policies and behaviors? Employees do sometimes maintain care and devotion to their corporate employers even when they are ruthless profiteers, socially irresponsible, or cut wages for the sake of overall profits. In some cases it would be appropriate to compare this situation to that of the battered wife who chooses to “stand by her man,” even in the face of overwhelming evidence that he is undeserving of loyalty; in other cases we can see where this choice of “voice” rather than “exit” can be praiseworthy rather than unhealthy and morally quixotic.

In order to address this kind of case, Larmer (1992) uses an analogy with a parent’s loyalty to “an erring teenager,” wherein we see a loyalty to a party that actively refuses to demonstrate loyalty in return. We can easily imagine a more extreme example that more dramatically and clearly parallels the loyal employee’s relationship with a corporation truly unable to recognize moral value: the parent’s relationship with a child suffering from Attachment Disorder. Such children may resist or reject affection, demonstrate manipulative and sociopathic behavior, and may be unable to care for and value those around her. These are extremely difficult circumstances in which to maintain a caring relationship. And yet, while the child may not “deserve” loyalty in the same way one might in romantic and friendship relations, this surely does not mean that the parent is wrong or misguided to care for the child—he is right to believe that the child is in need of his caring engagement, for a variety of reasons: because the child is dependent on him; because he has

responsibility for her; because through his caring support, she may become a better and healthier person; and because she is a thinking feeling being who is struggling and suffering.

Obviously, not all of these conditions will apply to a loyal employee's relationship with an uncaring corporation, and so the analogy is not perfect. An employment relationship is voluntary, explicitly founded on mutual benefit, and lacks the strong moral particularism and commitment appropriate to the relation between a parent or guardian and a child. Nevertheless, there are some significant similarities between a parent's relationship with his troubled child and an employee's relationship to a corporation that suffers from behaviors analogous to Attachment Disorder or sociopathy: the corporation is dependent upon its various managers and employees, and through its employees' caring intervention, the corporation may be able to realize its better possibilities, and form a meaningful attachment and caring relationship to the beings *it* is dependent upon—care for employees, for the community, and for the environment. Employees may exercise voice and stay with abusive corporations because they care enough to want things to be done differently, and by remaining loyal, those possibilities are more likely to come to be. Like a parent who cares for his uncaring child, the caring loyal person has faith in the organization's better possibilities, and will work to improve the corporation and the relationship out of loyalty to it. We should not be quick to judge an employee who maintains loyalty to an undeserving corporation, or one which has harmful or immoral policies, for there remains the possibility that her loyalty can improve the corporation in the long run, even though this relationship may be unwise or unhealthy for her to maintain.

## Conclusion

Our main aim in this essay was to argue that loyalty is often based in care, explain how this is expressed in business, and show why this account provides a view of loyalty in the workplace that is preferable to the relevant alternatives. By treating loyalty as an expression of care and concern towards another, we can account for the intuition that loyalty is not just a set of actions required by a contract, but involves feelings and a disposition to go above and beyond what is already required by the contract. Moreover, care ethics captures the way that expressions of loyalty are partial, and thus highly dependent on the nature of the caring relationship. And yet, even from the perspective of care ethics, the obligation of loyalty is subordinate to substantial impartial, universalizable moral requirements. In showing that the relationship between an employee and her employer is complex and robust enough to mirror personal relationships, we argued that employees can even be appropriately loyal to large, seemingly uncaring corporations, even from the perspective of care ethics. Finally, we showed that in a caring relationship, loyalty can be deserved but not obligated, except in those situations (such as a parent-child relationship) where the caring relationship is asymmetrical but dependent.

Our analysis provides an important corrective to the dominant academic approach to loyalty in workplace relations that presumes that the requirements of loyalty can be understood as impartial and universalizable. In recognizing that loyalty to others is partial, and appropriately rooted in a relationship, we reflect the common view that loyalty is more a matter of feelings and relationships than of obligation and justice. As agents who are embedded in contractual and interpersonal relationships in the workplace, there is moral importance in responding to co-workers, management, employees, and the corporation itself as persons with whom one is in a caring relationship, although every expression of loyalty is by no means “moral.” The capacity to develop caring relationships which tend toward the flourishing of mutual care is certainly praiseworthy, and the failure to develop loyalty to one deserving of it is certainly a kind of failing, but loyalty cannot be simply called moral, nor disloyalty immoral, and deserving loyalty generates no obligation. The moral ambiguity and contextual specificity of loyalty is nicely captured by care ethics, and prior attempts to generate a theory of loyalty in business have been impoverished by reducing the complexity of our personal relationships and emotional commitments to too-solid and too-objective abstract moral judgments.

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