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Counter-hegemonic ethics for sustainable business

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Abstract

Business ethics scholarship proposes alternatives for making companies sustainable. While these models may have advanced business practice, the alternatives rarely challenge the hegemony of the economic system. This article develops a new normative frame for sustainable business by investigating articulations of counter-hegemony and their ethical implications. Employing political discourse theory and drawing insights from a case in food production, the article finds three articulations of counter-hegemonic ethics: (1) the virtue of socio-ecological embeddedness, (2) the duty of local provisioning, and (3) the utility of regeneration. These findings reflect the three generic normative ethical theories and are proposed to support advancing sustainability. As its main contribution, the study contributes to the field of business ethics by offering a novel normative foundation that challenges power relations in the society, especially those concerning the hegemonic articulations of industrial economy.

KEYWORDS
business, discourse, ethics, hegemony, normative, political, sustainability, sustainable

1 | INTRODUCTION

Sustainable business theory problematizes increasing matter-energy throughput, economic growth, centralized distribution channels, and corporate power over democratic mechanisms as they conflict with the goals of sustainability (Bansal & Song, 2017; Barkemeyer, 2009; Heikkurinen et al., 2019; Pelster & Schaltegger, 2022). Owing to the prevailing global environmental and social problems, a business ethic failing to consider these pressing issues can be considered to represent a hegemony.

Building on the work of Laclau and Mouffe (1985), we define *hegemony* as the social order maintained through discourse and practice, which includes attempts to conceal its contestability and the struggles that oppose it (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). In the field of business ethics, the hegemony privileges discourses like corporate social responsibility (CSR) and stakeholder engagement (Banerjee & Bonnefous, 2011; Fougère & Solitander, 2020; Tencati & Zsolnai, 2012), which do not challenge the economic system. In hegemonic business ethics, corporations remain anchored in commonsense assumptions that drive their dynamics—for example, the cheapness and abundance of products and their value as commodities within national and international markets (Böhm et al., 2020; Rose & Lourival, 2019).

Since business ethics—in their hegemonic formulations—are claimed to contribute to the sustainability problems produced by industrial techno-capitalism (Boda & Zsolnai, 2016; Clark

et al., 2018; Suarez-Villa, 2016), meeting sustainability ambitions requires revisiting the normative foundations of the field. Ócsai, for instance, noted that the challenges in companies result from "the features that are inherent to mainstream business [which] prevent business enterprises, and primarily global corporations, from becoming genuinely ethical organizations" (2021, p. 264). We consider that the notion of *hegemony* may help us to understand this problem, which has become rather normalized. By identifying a hegemony and analyzing it, business ethicists are able to shed light on the marginalized and fringe practices (which are seldom considered relevant from within a hegemony). This conceals the fact that not only business can be different but also that alternatives already exist even if they exist outside the mainstream. Furthermore, examining the hegemony can open consideration of new counter-hegemonic solutions and thereby advance the field of business ethics within a certain context.

In this article, we look at discourses of alternative provision[1] in order to draw new ethical ideas for revisiting the normative foundation of sustainable business. Based on Chertow's (2000) critique of industrialism, Helenius et al. (2018), Koppelmäki et al. (2019), and Mazac et al. (2021) proposed that agroecological symbiosis (AES) is an effective alternative to unsustainable food production. Its potential is claimed to reside in the symbiotic form of economic organization, which creates systemic change in provision. The AES model is considered to bring together proximate food system actors—particularly agricultural producers and processors—to cocreate an organization capable of rearranging the primary production of food to support system-level sustainability (Helenius et al., 2020). By focusing on circular and seasonal matter-energy flows and integrating production, processing, and consumption, AES is considered to embody a bioregional, socio-ecologically sustainable food system that boosts rural livelihoods and enriches food culture (Koppelmäki et al., 2023). Moreover, Sebastiani et al. (2013) argued that alternatives like AES show radically different ways of thinking of ethics in relation to business ethics by contributing to a sustainable economy.

But what kind of normative ethics is the case building on? In what sense does it represent a counter-hegemony? What could business ethics scholarship learn from this alternative mode of provision? In this article, we address these questions by aiming to describe counter-hegemonic ethics that advance sustainable business. The article employs political discourse theory (PDT) to identify and analyze how the signifying chains in the AES discourse convey specific counter-hegemonic traits.[2] From our empirical field work, the article finds three articulations of counter-hegemonic ethics: (1) the virtue of being socio-ecologically embedded, (2) the duty of local provisioning, and (3) the utility of regeneration. These articulations reflect different normative ethical theories for business that emphasize the ethical duty and utility of becoming sustainable (i.e., deontology and utilitarianism), and the virtuous character of being embedded in a certain locale (i.e., virtue ethics). These counter-hegemonic articulations contribute to the field of business ethics by putting forward alternative norms that challenge power relations in the economy, especially those concerning the hegemonic articulations of business.

2 | PDT AS A RESEARCH APPROACH

In political discourse theory (PDT), Laclau and Mouffe (1985) combined the intellectual strands of Marxism and structuralism into a poststructuralist project[3] that goes beyond essentialist assumptions. The relevance of PDT for business ethics comes from connecting discourse to politics in a novel way where society and companies are not assumed to be determined by class struggle or essentialist principles. Instead, the tensions in economic structures and practices are comprised of temporarily fixed historical arrangements that lack a deeper ontological or teleological grounding. This foundational assumption of PDT also implies that society—including its businesses and households—has no predetermined direction. That is, a given social organization does not move through pre-defined historical stages toward an end point (Jacobs, 2022). As a research approach, PDT possesses a diverse set of concepts that enable business ethics scholars to critically analyze and explain social phenomena.

The central concept in PDT is *discourse*, which refers to the whole field of social relations and structures, and includes all forms of social practices, whether they are making political statements, conducting transactions, or, in the case of our study, cultivating, processing, and consuming food (Glynos et al., 2021; Gustafsson, 2013; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). In other words, PDT examines the world as discourses, as many other business ethics theorists do (De Graaf, 2006; Dion, 2012; Lähdesmäki, 2012). In PDT, discourses emerge in the process of articulation. *Articulation* is defined as the symbolic linking of different elements in a discourse. Words, objects, and ideas manifest as signifiers of the world but are not considered to hold any inherent meaning. Instead, they acquire meaning by being connected in a certain way. Articulation temporarily fixes these discursive elements together, thereby modifying their identity and giving a sense of stability to the social order (Jacobs, 2022; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985).

This understanding of discourse contrasts with that of critical discourse analysis (Fairclough & Wodak, 1997), which is more delimited in scope and predominantly approaches discourse as the framing through which social reality is affected and acted upon, but which is ultimately separate from other dimensions of the social (Carpentier & De Cleen, 2007). PDT also contrasts with the language-as-perspectivator understanding of discourse put forward by Alvesson and Kärreman (2011), who stressed that in this understanding "social reality is not denied, marginalized, seen as a pure constitutive effect of discourse" (pp. 32–33). Although PDT similarly acknowledges the materiality of social reality (Jacobs, 2022; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985), it views discourse as constitutive of social and political realities. Society, including business ethics, is brought into being via discourse and articulation, and is contested and transformed in discursive struggles (Glynos et al., 2021; Glynos & Howarth, 2007; Jacobs, 2022; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). The process of articulation forms signifying chains: units of meaning in discourses that partially fix elements in relation to other elements in a particular discourse. Discourses are held together by nodal points, privileged signifiers that partially fix the meaning of the phenomena under scrutiny. For example, *democracy* is a nodal point in political discourses because

other signifiers, such as *institutions* and *participation*, gain a specific meaning in relation to these nodal points (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985).

PDT is well suited for investigating hegemony (Jacobs, 2022) as it enables studying forms of social organization, like businesses, as constituted by conflicting ideas and the struggle for hegemony and power—a reality wherein *politics* can refer to the contestation and institution of social relations and practices (Glynos & Howarth, 2007; Howarth et al., 2016; Jacobs, 2022). Examining phenomena like business ethics through PDT discloses the vulnerability of apparently natural and uncontested discourses and opens them up to contestation. In this article, following Howarth et al. (2016, p. 100), *hegemony* refers to the "type of political practice that involves […] a form of rule that speaks to the maintenance of the policies, practices and regimes that are formed by such forces." We view the operation of a hegemony in business ethics as supporting the hegemonic economic system. That is, mainstream approaches to business ethics—such as the triple bottom line, a globalized outlook, and an emphasis on productivity—reinforce the forms of rule, policies, practices, and regimes of the hegemony (Clark et al., 2018). By doing so, the hegemony also conceals the viability of alternative approaches to social organization (De Lima et al., 2023), that is, the effectiveness to counter the hegemony.

The idea of counter-hegemony is best understood as the formation of discourses that contest the partially stable and "natural" conditions of hegemonic discourses. The goal of counter-hegemony is to disarticulate hegemonic discourses so that new social orders can emerge. Struggles for hegemony are characterized by antagonism, the feature whereby the discursive terrain is split into two opposing camps and each camp defines itself in radical opposition to the other camp. Antagonism can be temporarily resolved if one discourse becomes hegemonic (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). In PDT, hegemonic struggles often focus on signifiers whose meaning and centrality are fought over by the two opposing camps—these are called *floating signifiers* (Jacobs, 2022; Laclau & Mouffe, 1985). For example, "*sustainable* business" can be considered a floating signifier in two discourses, a circular economy that cultivates consumer-friendly subjectivities and a degrowth one that seeks to align business activity with the needs of ecosystems (Hobson, 2021; Nesterova, 2020).

3 | THE CONTEXT OF THE INDUSTRIAL ECONOMIC SYSTEM

In this article, *hegemonic business ethics* refers to the ethics discourses that constitute the industrial mode of production, including the wide scope and variety of its human and non-human inputs, processes, and outcomes. The global food system, however, is not limited to the industrial mode of production, as many traditional and extensive farming methods feed large proportions of humanity. In a global economy, such practices are nevertheless part of the overall industrialized economic system, even if they are only partially or indirectly hegemonic. Monoculture farming, dependence on external resource inputs (e.g., fossil fuels, petrochemical fertilizers, and toxicants), the competition of multinational and national agribusiness, and complex technologies can all be seen as manifestations of hegemony in the food system (Shiva, 2008; Smaje, 2020). For sustainability, the focal ethical business problem is the observation that industrial production intensifies climate change (Steiner et al., 2017) and leads to biodiversity loss (Kröger, 2020). Industrialism fosters unsustainable and unhealthy human dietary habits via origin- and quality-blind consumerism (Paddock, 2017). The worldwide reach and complexity of the hegemonic system have increased consumers' sense of detachment from food production (Sebastiani et al., 2013). The systemic structure of food provision estranges producers and nonfarming citizens and destabilizes the links between producers, processers, and consumers (Schermer, 2015).

The hegemonic economic system is deeply embedded within the capitalist world system and the attendant ideological forces of continuous economic growth (Foster, 2009; Hickel, 2021; Wallerstein, 2004). The ethics of capitalism rest heavily on the assumptions of technological efficiency, profit maximization, and private gain (Hornborg, 2019). Consequently, hegemonic ethics pressure actors to pursue economic rationality while overlooking the diversity often found in grassroots initiatives like rural peasantry and solidarity food networks (Giovannini, 2020; Niska et al., 2012).

Hegemonic food businesses routinely favor agricultural intensification in order to increase the crops cultivated from a unit area of soil. This degrades the soil of an agriculture field and prompts "the loss of organic matter and the release of greenhouse gases, the over-application of fertilizers, erosion, contamination, acidification, salinization, and loss of genetic diversity" (Kopittke et al., 2019, p. 1). A discourse of economic growth anchors agricultural intensification and increases ecological pressures by prioritizing production (Hickel, 2021). Prioritizing production in agriculture relinquishes "a view of socio-economic and environmental balance, highlighting the [need for] pluralism of development of territorial agricultural systems and local models" (Malorgio & Marangon, 2021, p. 4).

One hegemonic business ethics initiative involves setting standards of sustainability for global agrifood supply chains. Though such standards generally improve sustainability in production, they fail to ensure system-level sustainability and equity because certification organizations and development agencies purposefully choose farmer organizations with already-developed capacities (Meemken et al., 2021). Similarly, German et al. (2020) showed how business ethics in agriculture develop "inclusive business" corporate responsibility programs for smallholders and disadvantaged groups. This lofty goal results in the inadvertent *exclusion* of these groups in the Global South when the programs only address individual business behavior, not structural factors. For example, in Zambia, public–private partnerships enhanced agricultural cassava production value chains but failed to effectively link smallholders to markets, ignoring their concerns for food security and possibly increased household labor burden (German et al., 2020; Poole et al., 2013). In this way, corporate responsibility programs induce collaboration between stakeholders but also depoliticize structural conditions (Barthold, 2013).

Business ethics maintain the hegemony of the industrial economy by orienting businesses toward using tactics that keep capitalism and economic growth in place instead of contributing to structural change and sustainability. One of these tactics involves impression-management behavior that legitimizes business activities in the eyes of stakeholders (Bolino et al., 2008; Klotz et al., 2018). In the business ethics literature, Boiral (2016) showed how impression management manifests in the rhetorical actions of mining companies by, for example, denying the environmental impacts of their activities and downplaying the scope of their responsibilities. Other tactics involve designing programs based on the triple bottom line concept that appear to give equal weight to the environmental, social, and economic dimensions but actually privilege the economic dimension, benefiting capitalism (Clark et al., 2018). Similarly, Bull et al. (2021) suggested that international investment agreements, which constitute fairness in the current international economic system, are key enablers of corporate power.

Hegemony, therefore, is a discursive *and* structural feature. Discourse constitutes reality by giving meaning to infrastructures, institutions, and practices and by structurally arranging them to reflect said discourse, thereby concealing problematic beliefs and assumptions. But business actors may also intentionally deploy tactics like impression management or enter commercial partnerships in order to maintain the structural features in place and conceal the contested nature of business activities within the hegemony. Therefore, an inquiry into the counter-hegemony of emergent organizations (like AES) can reveal the problematic features of the current economic system by openly disputing the meaning and practices that shape the hegemony through antagonism and by articulating alternatives of what it means to be sustainable in ways that do not overly privilege economic considerations.

4 | THE CASE OF AES

Alternatives to the hegemonic industrial economy—such as AES—are suggested to constitute a transformation from a metabolic rift (Forssell & Lankoski, 2015; Foster, 2000; Grivins et al., 2017) to a metabolic fit (Salleh, 2009). Helenius et al. (2020, p. 3) define AES as:

> a form of food production and processing in which the farms, the food processors, and the energy producers' function in an integrated and local manner. The operations are running in spatial proximity to each other allowing efficient material and energy integration.

In AES, two key features allow for increased sustainability in food production by enabling a more efficient use of resources within the system: the biological fixation of nitrogen as a plant nutrient for primary production and the use of biomass-based renewable energy generated in a biorefinery. If the biorefinery in place is a biogas plant, it meets two of the needs of an agricultural system—energy supply and the provision of nutrient cycling—as biogas production allows for the plant nutrients to be recycled back into the farmland as digestate.

AES produces primary produce, processed food, and bioenergy. In such a system, bioenergy is produced without negatively impacting food production. The volume of production and the extent of surrounding farmland in AES correspond to the biophysical conditions of the agroecosystems in place without risking the integrity of ecosystems and ecological diversity. Inherent to the idea of AES is the aim to eventually develop networks of AES (Helenius et al., 2020), which adapt to planetary boundaries (Campbell et al., 2017) by fitting the production to the location-specific ecosystem space, rather than exceeding it using external inputs. The foundational ethics seem to be about "making peace with nature" (UNEP, 2021) by living within the ecosystem rather than fighting its constraints using external nutrient, feed, and energy inputs.

The practitioners of AES are critical of the industrial economy, particularly its linear resource flows and market globalization as both lead to ecosystem exploitation (Helenius et al., 2020). In Finland, AES emerged with the concrete aim to change the configuration of the local food system in order to support sustainability. This aim came from local farmers and operators. Previous studies focusing on Finnish food systems have discussed how farmers feel disempowered when facing vertical distribution channels for their agricultural products (Nousiainen et al., 2009). Meanwhile, contesting the dominant dynamics of hegemonic food systems in Finland is often restricted to practices such as "buycotting" and boycotting (Niva & Jallinoja, 2018). Finland has not passed strong legislation regarding food waste and primarily relies on the good will of retailers and their CSR programs to minimize food waste (Mesiranta et al., 2022). Greenhouse gas emissions have increased from using peatlands for agricultural purposes in Finland, but this issue is difficult to manage from a policy perspective because of farmers' socio-economic status and their difficulties in securing a livelihood (Huan-Niemi et al., 2023). In Finland, then, all these issues contribute to sustainability problems in food systems.

The transformative potential of AES is aimed at a systems-level, food production redesign that would address some of the sustainability problems in Finland (Helenius et al., 2020). This aim is worthy of closer inspection because initiatives to transform the economic systems often adopt a pragmatist approach to business ethics, reproducing the hegemony rather than contesting it (Bui et al., 2019). Initiatives like AES that explicitly oppose the dominant dynamics of the hegemony and contest the current mainstream approaches to business ethics might reveal unexplored pathways for sustainable change and counter-hegemonic business ethics.

5 | EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS AND LIMITATIONS

Empirical research under PDT proceeds with a problem-driven approach that assumes that a studied phenomenon acquires its

identity and dynamics as part of the very context which studies it (Glynos & Howarth, 2007; Remling, 2017). This means that researchers construct their research problem as they gain understanding based on explicit or implicit ontological and epistemological premises and the academic domains within which they frame their research. Researchers' initial understanding is gradually refined in a "retroductive cycle" which folds so-called hypotheses into the explanations themselves since the context of discovery and the context of justification become epistemologically inseparable (Glynos & Howarth, 2019). The research and analytical strategy must be defined on a case-by-case basis (Glynos & Howarth, 2007), which requires following an iterative process that oscillates between theory and textual data.

To empirically study AES as a case for developing counter-hegemonic business ethics, we assembled a multisource textual corpus. This corpus allowed us to get an understanding of AES and frame it within the domains of sustainability and business ethics in food systems. In line with previous empirical research using PDT (Hurtado Hurtado & Glynos, 2024), we initially assembled executive documents, promotional materials, blogs, and academic articles featuring the AES model in Finland and produced by key thematic and organizational leaders on AES. The sources were in English (sources exclusively in Finnish were not considered), and we integrated them into the textual corpus if they met the following conditions: (a) they introduce and/or explain AES, (b) they include AES as part of a discussion on food systems and sustainability, and (c) they are publicly available on the internet by searching for the term *agroecological symbiosis*. An overview of the assembled textual corpus is seen in Table 1.

Given the relatively recent emergence of AES, this textual corpus was not voluminous. To compensate for the smaller-than-average corpus and enable an inquiry into how people involved in AES create meaning for the model and its practices, six semi-structured interviews were conducted in English with practitioners of AES, which included policymakers, company CEOs, and thematic experts on agriculture. We selected these practitioners because they were involved in designing the model from the beginning and because they most clearly articulated AES as a counter-hegemonic alternative in terms of the sustainability of food systems. Similarly, the six practitioners were able to provide systemic view of AES and its potential and current challenges in the Finnish context because of their organizational positions. Therefore, we consider these interviewees to be leading organizational practitioners of AES in terms of configuring its discourse against the hegemony.

Table 2 summarizes the interviewees' profiles. These interviews were conducted digitally between October 2020 and January 2021, and each lasted approximately 1 h. They were transcribed manually (without the use of coding and data analysis software) using a videoconference software and integrated into the analysis. By including interview data, we enhanced the diversity of the textual corpus,

TABLE 1 Sources from the textual corpus, identifying their type, authors, scope, and pages analyzed.

Source type	Authors	Scope of source	Pages analyzed
Academic article	Helenius et al. (2020)	Offers overview of AES' approach to sustainability and socio-economic relations	Whole document
Academic article	Koppelmäki et al. (2019)	Describes in technical terms AES as a food system	Whole document
Academic article	Winquist et al. (2019)	Discusses AES as an option for sustainable business in Finland	p. 1435
Academic article	Koppelmäki et al. (2021)	Explains how food and energy production can be combined in AES	pp. 352–354, 362–364
Academic article	Marttila et al. (2021)	Discusses AES in the context of agro-industrial symbiosis	pp. 3–4
Conference Proceedings	Koppelmäki et al. (2016)	Introduces AES and its benefits for its members (producers and consumers of food)	pp. 171–172
Book chapter	Mazac et al. (2021)	Discusses AES as a sustainable food system alternative	Whole document
Blog	UH (University of Helsinki) (2020)	Introduces AES for a general audience	Blog webpage describing AES
Promotional video	UH (University of Helsinki) (2020)	Describes how the different elements of AES work together	Whole video (approximately 2 min in length)
Brochure	Helenius et al. (2018)	Describes the AES model and its innovations in relation to food systems	Whole document
Policy document	Kattilakoski et al. (2022)	Mentions AES as part of Finland's rural policy program	pp. 26, 33
Policy presentation	Eerikäinen (2019)	Describes AES' innovations for sustainable food systems	Two slides

TABLE 2 Interviewee profile—Practitioners of AES.

Interviewee designation	Professional background	Contribution to AES
Interviewee-1	Civil servant	Facilitates government support for AES
Interviewee-2	Department director	Finds business opportunities for agricultural producers (including those in AES)
Interviewee-3	Company CEO	Invests in AES' energy business model
Interviewee-4	Company CEO	Facilitates AES' market access
Interviewee-5	Project manager	Manages administrative and agricultural projects for AES
Interviewee-6	Forestry professional	Made recommendations for AES' agroecosystems

which allowed the development and analysis of a more comprehensive and nuanced discourse on AES.

The study's approach to PDT involved first constructing AES as the object of investigation by combining the textual corpus with the interviews and then (de)constructing the discursive functions that characterize and sustain its discourse (Glynos & Howarth, 2007). The study took the object of investigation to be the counter-hegemonic ethical articulations of AES. PDT favors analyzing textual data around the identification of discursive articulations organized around demands, assumptions, and contestations (Remling, 2017). Regardless of the thematic categories that researchers find, the analysis orients researchers to identify how subjects articulate equivalences between demands, perform antagonistic divisions in the discursive space, and use specific signifiers to represent a whole field of demands (Nonhoff, 2019).

In the first analysis round, the article's lead author immersed himself in the textual corpus and identified the signifying chains (sentences or strings of sentences) that reflected how the practitioners positioned it as counter hegemonic to the prevailing economic system. At this stage, the study focused on the signifiers articulated around AES or signifiers that refer to AES (e.g. *this project*, *it*, *operation*). Recurrent assumptions in the AES discourse surfaced, particularly on the following issues: (1) what sustainability means and how to practice it, (2) the appropriate scale for sustainability, and (3) the required actions in the context of unsustainable food systems. The lead author highlighted fragments of text that revealed these assumptions and shared them with the rest of the authors. The whole team then interpreted that the practitioners of AES antagonized the hegemony in regard to each assumption and articulated alternatives around their own understanding of sustainability in food systems.

In the second analysis round, the article's lead author identified how the hegemony was articulated with other signifiers and how the resulting the signifying chains framed AES in opposition to the hegemony. Here, the contested nature of the industrial system according to the practitioners of AES became clear as they (1) linked economic imperatives to unsustainability in current food systems and (2) emphasized problems of scale in the current economic system. As in the first round, the signifying chains were then shared with the rest of the authors who together interpreted them as marking a clear point of antagonism where the practitioners of AES linked the global economy to sustainability problems and presented them as obstacles to AES.

In the third analysis round, the resulting signifying chains were grouped into themes relevant to business ethics that were featured in the academic literature on sustainability in food systems and alternative food systems. To perform this grouping action, recurring moments in the discourse reflecting antagonisms between AES and the hegemonic economy were identified. For example, once we identified that AES was repeatedly articulated with signifiers related to spatial dimensions (such as *small* and *local*) and that hegemony was articulated with a set of opposing signifiers that also refer to spatial dimensions (such as *big* and *long*), the study defined a trait for counter-hegemonic business ethics. In this case, the resulting trait was *localization*.

Regarding the limitations of the study, one methodological challenge for the study is PDT's original intention to address shortcomings in political theory rather than being intended for widespread use in research. Research done in other fields often uses PDT in a "thin" or "minor key" fashion (Jacobs, 2022). Thus, the emphasis here is not in fleshing out the theory of PDT through an example of discourse in food systems. Rather, we use PDT to see how the practitioners of AES position this food system model in radical opposition to the industrial food system and how this radical opposition displays counter-hegemonic business ethics.

A conventional analysis in terms of codes and themes is not standard practice under PDT (although it is not incompatible). Instead, the focus is on identifying articulatory practices, specifically those that identify demands and contestations and how in this process antagonistic frontiers were formed (Nonhoff, 2019; Remling, 2017). This study relied neither solely on documentary analysis—often the standard in PDT—nor solely on interviews—less common but still frequently done in PDT. The retroductive mode of reasoning is instead present in the aim to craft from multiple textual sources the object of study as we refine our understanding of it (Glynos & Howarth, 2007), from which we derived an explanation into the counter-hegemonic dynamics it embodies.

The small "n" of the study is reasoned as follows. First, PDT proceeds from a problem-driven approach that constructs the

object of study and the problem it presents as researchers obtain more data and refine their knowledge on it. That is, instead of taking a more empiricist epistemological stance where the object of study exists independently and researchers simply aim to explain it, this study builds the phenomenon it investigates as it goes. This does not necessarily require vast amounts of data. Second, in integrating the documentary sources and the interviews, the data sources complement each other. The documentary sources allow for understanding the more official and technical positions on AES, whereas the interviews allow us to see how key participants of AES construct meaning and position AES against the hegemony, establishing demands in the process. Third, owing to their experiences and expertise on AES, the selected interviewees can be considered key informants of the phenomenon under scrutiny. These practitioners are experts in their field. Moreover, the case studied is still developing and does not have many people involved in its core. Adding more interviewees would have not necessarily aided the analysis. The data already presents the aim of the members of AES to dispute the hegemonic norms that configure the hegemony.

On theoretical limitations, a tension in reconciling business ethics with PDT seems apparent. PDT is conventionally considered to be normative in a weak sense because no particular normative position is strongly argued for (Jacobs, 2022). Instead, PDT's normative orientation surfaces in the examination of politics and how they sustain, challenge, or transform relations of power, especially subordination, domination, and oppression (Howarth et al., 2016), which all bear normative relevance. Advancing theorization of counter-hegemonic ethics involves temporarily assuming a subject position that foregrounds awareness of the natural environment and its structuring role in societies, businesses, and governments, where individuals and collectives frame their lifeworlds differently. Besides, business ethics that put forward norms about how business activity should be conducted, advancing counter-hegemonic positions that strive for strong sustainability, might dislocate and reorder power relations involved in the economic systems. Temporarily assuming this subject position, however, requires that we remain aware of the radical contingency of our own position, meaning that we as the research team acknowledge that alternative discourses of business ethics could be more effective at reordering power relations.

6 | FINDINGS

This section portrays how practitioners engaged in hegemonic struggle and advanced counter-hegemonic ethics by describing how different signifying chains portray AES in radical opposition to the hegemony, as well as describing how opposing signifiers were attributed respectively to AES and to the hegemonic, industrial economic system. The article identifies the three articulations that are relevant for ethicists of sustainable business, namely (1) the virtue of being socio-ecologically embedded, (2) the duty of local provisioning, and (3) the utility of regeneration. The findings reflect the normative ethical theories and are suggested to be complementary for advancing sustainable business.

6.1 | The virtue of socio-ecological embeddedness

Table 3 depicts how practitioners expressed their characters as being socio-ecologically embedded in AES. A moral relevance was found in this articulation of being embedded, and consequently, we make a connection to virtue ethics which emphasize the development of character in a manner that is considered ethically desired. This articulation shows how AES is understood by them as something "good" and, in the textual corpus, as a sustainable system related to organizing. Like virtues in general, sustainability is deemed to be a middle ground, in this case, the middle ground between the two evils of too little and too much consumption. In this articulation, AES opposes the general vices of the hegemony, a hegemony that is perceived to be premised on the maximization of profits, often at the expense of people and ecosystems.

In relation to the notion of (self-)sufficiency, AES is connected to the biophysical territory it operates in. This territory requires fewer matter-energetic inputs once the AES is fully operational, although it must be mentioned that substantial initial investments, funding, and material resources are needed in the setting-up phase of AES, in addition to the maintenance of machinery and infrastructure. These operations and processes are necessary in order to develop the infrastructure for the biogas plant and to transition farm equipment away from reliance on fossil fuels and other petrochemicals. Like classic Aristotelian virtues, this development requires building character over time.

The central signifiers, "sufficiency" and "self-sufficiency" are connected to natural elements, like "wood chips" and "manure," and to technological mechanisms, like "biorefinery." These linkages become meaningful through their association to thematic domains such as "energy." This association could be characterized as partially fixed due to the consistent repetition of these issues across the corpus. This characterization stands in opposition to the characterization of hegemonic vice, which requires the constant supply of external inputs. Industrial organization involves the presence of middle management in order to mediate the movement of commodities along supply chains from the farm to the consumer. Its character is global, dis-embedded from the local ecology and the social context. In the AES discourse, the hegemonic food system is described as "highly dependent" on outside energy flows that are portrayed as "excessive" (Helenius et al., 2020, p. 2). Excess was also a vice in ancient Greece.

The second identified signifying chain portrays AES as a sustainable business practice due to its efficient character, specifically the skilled use of technology and the recycling of nutrients and biomass for energy. The interviewees associated the signifier "efficient" to verbs such as "cycle," "recycle," and "decrease," and with nouns like "energy," "resources," and "waste." In stark contrast to AES, the industrial economy was depicted as "inefficient" because efficiency

TABLE 3 Articulation of the virtue of socio-ecological embeddedness.

	Examples
Counter-hegemonic articulation	
Sustainable because it is socio-ecologically embedded, highlighting sufficiency, efficiency, and the creation of community	"Their aim is to produce food and energy in an ecological and economical way by utilizing and recycling local resources" (UH [University of Helsinki], 2020) "It [AES] can create a whole community, really. That kind of community where you get to know each other, where you can be more transparent… Also, the power structures can be more openly talked about. And there can be people where you can get more mutual understanding, how they feel and how they live" (Interviewee-5) "In terms of sufficiency, what is enough must not exceed what is too much for the ecosystems that the human species shares with other species, both presently and in the future" (Helenius et al., 2020, p. 8) "Palopuro agroecological symbiosis-Knehtilä Farm is at the center of a cooperative food production system based on energy and nutrient self-sufficiency" (Eerikäinen, 2019, p. 22)
Hegemonic articulation	
Unsustainable by linking profit-maximizing goal with negative ecological impacts and indifference to social dimension	"The product flows and economic exchange are the focus with little regard to externalities or contextual factors whether biophysical or socio-cultural" (Helenius et al., 2020, p. 2) "Environmental costs are outsourced, and they are not reflected in the prices and they do not inform the consumers either. So, the whole system is very unsustainable in a very fundamental way" (Interviewee-1)

at the sub-system level "sacrifices" (i.e., reduces) system-level efficiency (Helenius et al., 2020). In terms of ethics, this efficiency is not limited to technical means but also includes an idea of enoughness or sufficiency, which is another virtuous trait of AES.

Finally, the close and direct relationships established through the AES facilitate economic exchanges and generate meaningful social relations that created a sense of community. The signifier "community" became a structuring moment that the subjects articulated with "trust," "mutual understanding," and "compassion," which are all signifiers representing transparency and cooperation that strengthen social ties. These were all considered virtuous behavior because they embody the disposition of AES members to perform actions that are good for people within the AES. Simultaneously, this kind of character building reveals the AES practitioners' connection to the food production process and to their biophysical surroundings. In contrast, the representation of the industrial economy involves instrumental, extractive relations between actors. The practitioners indicated that, in the hegemonic discourse, meaningful social relations are replaced by indifference. We interpreted this as a vice for AES practitioners. According to them, large supermarket chains or processing firms problematically seek to obtain the largest share of the profits while leaving small margins for the producers. The AES practitioners portray this as "very unsustainable," wherein "profitability" is connected to signifiers that manifest injustice such as "unfair share," related to the distribution of benefits between companies at the top and farmers at the bottom, a new vice.

The driving mindset in the global economy was considered to treat food primarily as a commodity, something that has value if

profits are generated, rather than considering what is "good" in appreciating food as a vital component of a biophysical cycle. In the industrial economy the central food system processes are "producing" and "selling" to "maximize profits." This commodification of food provisioning deepens the environmental problems caused by the economic system, where the motivating driver is profit rather than stewardship in regard to the social and ecological goals.

6.2 | The duty of local provisioning

Table 4 depicts the articulation of AES and the hegemony regarding the considered duty for a more local provision of goods and services. This theme is relevant for business ethics and revolves around distance and the scale of production, factors which are in stark contrast between AES and the hegemonic food system. In our interpretation, the practitioners of AES assigned a categorical imperative to localization. The Kantian formulation of counter-hegemony is about finding meaning in relation to the smaller size and scope of business activities (i.e., a local economy). They characterized AES as "small" in relation to the scale of production, making it suitable as a local-level food system. AES can be considered a categorical imperative in the sense that it could become a universal law; other similar symbiotic processes could be organized elsewhere and then these organizations could form a (translocal) network of sustainable provisions. This is antithetical to the seemingly ever-greater distances and scales attributed to the global economy. In the data, signifiers that evoke spatial dimensions and their effects on food production in both systems were brought to the forefront.

TABLE 4 Articulation of the duty of local provision.

	Examples
Counter-hegemonic articulation	
Small-scale; Local networks	"AES is so local; they are smaller producers… We are aiming to have this kind of symbiosis model and symbiosis thinking between urban and rural areas" (Interviewee-2) "What we are trying to do as much as possible in Palopuro is to use the local [human] resources to do the everyday jobs there" (Interviewee-3) "It is a small-scale operation, and you can combine the local societies" (Interviewee-4)
Hegemonic articulation	
Large-scale; national or global chains	"Here in Finland, one challenge is the quite long physical distances between different sites and producers" (Interviewee-4) "If I think about the usual food chain, it's really concentrated: I know that there are just a couple of big buyers in Europe who buy mostly the food, and then they deliver it to the shops" (Interviewee-5)

The first articulation in the AES discourse is related to size. A structuring moment here is the signifier "small," linked to the actors involved, "producers" and "consumers," and to the kind of dynamics being sought, that is, "symbiosis," "connection," and "combination." AES, as an alternative social organization, presents itself as a small-scale solution which, due to its size, facilitates stronger linkages between the actors involved in the discrete food system. The practitioners of AES felt a duty to act for an alternative and counter-hegemonic organization. The duty—motivated by social and ecological rationales—was about "rotating" and "circulating" nutrients in a certain territory (Helenius et al., 2020). In contrast, the practitioners of AES portrayed the industrial system by using signifiers that emphasize the larger spatial dimensions of those food systems, that is, "large" and "big" become core signifiers connected to the economic actors, "producers" and "consumers," with the addition of "retail firms," "supermarkets," and "processing companies." The duty was to move away from this hegemony. The interviewees associated these food system dimensions with signifiers that refer to quantity, such as "volumes" and "amount." This results in a signifying chain representing hegemony as privileging productivist practices that aim at maximizing production and profits for the multinational actors in the food supply chain.

Another articulation falling under the "duty to localize" theme is the scale of the networks formed by each discrete AES system. Due to the relatively small spatial scale of production, the practitioners of AES described it as a food system that facilitates the creation of local networks. The structuring moment "local" was linked to signifiers that refer to the human element of food production, highlighting "human resources," "people," "community," and "societies." The subjects linked it to signifiers related to the biophysical processes of producing food, such as "cycling," "nutrients," and "bioenergy" (UH [University of Helsinki], 2020). This signifying chain conveys that sustainability can only really be achieved via the formation of networks that consider the attributes of the local human actors and the characteristics of the biophysical environment. To our interpretation, this proposes a new categorical imperative for business ethicists: act locally in such a way that you respect the integrity of people and ecosystems. Such a duty contrasts with the characterization of the hegemonic system which calls for "globalization" and operates by moving commodified food via international supply chains. The hegemony significantly downplays the reciprocal element and instead highlights organizational actors, such as "big buyers," "supermarkets," and "shop," which were connected by the interviewees to signifiers that can be interpreted to focus on narrow duties like the duty to "buy," "sell," and "deliver."

6.3 | The utility of regeneration

Table 5 displays the articulation of AES and the hegemony in regard to their relation to ecosystems, which encompasses agroecosystems

TABLE 5 Articulation of the utility of regeneration and restoration.

	Examples
Counter-hegemonic articulation	
Regenerative and restorative	"AES could, to some extent, heal the ecosystems by managing the resources in a more sustainable way" (Interviewee-1) "[In AES] We need less phosphide, and it is leading to better nature. And we are using recycled nutrients, it also leads to better nature. And, of course, you are… if you are building this kind of local Agroecological Symbiosis, you live in close relations with the biodiversity" (Interviewee-2) "AES maintains the operations of the ecosystem services not only in human-centric terms (continuous productivity) but also from the perspective of holistic ecological sustainability (maintenance of ecological integrity)" (Marttila et al., 2021, p. 4)
Hegemonic articulation	
Degenerative and exploitative	"The excessive environmental impacts of these agro-industrial systems include the wasteful use of, and associated pollution and emissions from, the extracted natural resources, such as plant nutrients" (Helenius et al., 2020) "More agricultural land is needed for food production resulting in increased greenhouse gas emissions and other negative environmental impacts such as land degradation" (Koppelmäki, 2021, p. 2)

and nonagricultural biotopes and ecosystems. Table 5 shows how economic activities intersect and affect the environment within the biophysical territory of a food system. The practitioners of AES articulated the AES food system as regenerative in relation to agroecosystems, biodiversity, and resource management. Through articulatory practice, the signifiers "regenerative" and "restorative" acquire a partially fixed utility that characterizes AES as a healing system for nature, which has deteriorated after years of energy-intensive industrial agriculture. The ethical base of such meaning could be connected to the utilitarianism of Bentham, which is about maximizing the experience of pleasure and minimizing pain. The utility, however, in the case of AES was not merely connected to human actors; it also encompassed the biosphere as a whole. Here, the sustainability concept is transformed by a new understanding of utility between humans and nonhumans. The ethics that AES proposes for sustainable business are not limited to anthropocentrism—presented in the Brundtland Report—and also involve biocentrism and ecocentrism.

We see here evidence of a shift in perspective and an adoption of new conceptualization of utility. It is an ethic toward nature, described through verbs like "to heal" and "to restore" connected to the central signifiers of "nature" and "ecosystems." This ethical discourse characterizes the industrial system as the complete opposite to AES, with the signifiers "waste," "pollution," "greenhouse gas emissions," "land degradation," and "extraction" describing the common negative ecosystem consequences of the hegemony. These signifiers have negative connotations and focus on the exploitative utility of the economic system's impulse (which is derived from the productivity imperative) in relation to biophysical territory and biodiversity in contrast to the positive views on the practices belonging to the AES food system.

7 | DISCUSSION

Hegemonic business ethics rely on formulations such as CSR and stakeholder engagement to advance sustainable business. This article proposes that counter-hegemonic ethics support making businesses more apt to respond to the challenges of sustainability. Like Scherer and Palazzo (2011), we consider businesses to have a political role in a globalized world. We suggest that what they need to do in this new role is to challenge the hegemony of capital, productivism, and the idea of food as a commodity as a way of reordering power relations and bringing about new business practices. Hegemonic business ethics have been argued to perpetuate the status quo and reproduce inequalities among different stakeholders (Kourula & Delalieux, 2016). Counter-hegemonic ethics provide a way to search for alternatives to unsustainable business. With AES, this article has illustrated three new formulations of business ethics that are claimed to be counter-hegemonic.

Section 5 showed how AES creates a frontier that is antagonistic to the hegemony. It does so by defining itself in radical opposition to the industrial economic system along three articulations of a counter-hegemonic ethic. In the virtue of socio-ecological embeddedness, AES articulates virtuous signifiers (such as efficiency, sufficiency, and communality) into a partially fixed discourse, highlighting that business activities need to respect environmental boundaries and adapt to the local social dynamics (Hedberg & Zimmerer, 2020). The virtue of socio-ecological embeddedness opposes business ethics formulations such as the triple bottom line, which belong to the "weak" spectrum of sustainability. In weak sustainability, there is no ethical dilemma in excess, whereas the Aristotelian middle road would give predominance to the right amount of affluence or urbanization. Hegemonic businesses continue to be unsustainable and extractive of natural ecosystems in the pursuit of profits, even if CSR is integrated into their ethical codes of conduct and reporting (Banerjee & Bonnefous, 2011; Clark et al., 2018).

An ethic connected to the strong variant of sustainable business (e.g. through the virtue of being socio-ecologically embedded) is mindful of the role of natural capital as a dynamic biosphere that provides the material foundations for the existence of human and non-human life (Sebastiani et al., 2013; Upward & Jones, 2016). As Ketola (2008, 2010) explained, a virtuous enterprise acknowledges the living conditions of the Earth's ecosystems and thus they are not destroyed in pursuit of profit. Operating values should benefit the long-term well-being of nature and humans, with money as a peripheral or instrumental benefit. In practice, the virtue of socio-ecological embeddedness means that business managers and organizations need to respond to local circumstances and foster greater agency for the land. Organizations should also develop business cultures that respond to the needs of human and non-human beings, and continuously monitor activities that might harm the land (e.g., depletion of key nutrients in the soil) so that they can address them in their business model before the land degrades (Jungell-Michelsson & Nesterova, 2024).

The articulation of counter-hegemonic ethics that is visible in the AES discourse, the duty to source food locally, opposes the globalized outlook currently dominant in economic theory. Previous research suggests that multinational firms use CSR as an imperative for achieving their objectives of social legitimacy, maintaining flexibility in negotiations with governments and preventing the erection of barriers (Detomasi, 2008). Such an economic duty in the industrialized world maintains the stability of hegemonic business practices, continuing the circulation of commodities along the global food chain while ensuring profitability and downplaying the costs to society and the environment.

The localization duty integrates social and ecological aspects, and prioritizes them in order to work toward system-level sustainability. The smaller spatial scale of production allows for the recirculation of nutrients and facilitates the creation of strong networks of producers and consumers, thereby creating a "food community" (Helenius et al., 2020). Though food may remain a commodity in AES, the duty to source food locally no longer maintains businesses' profit-driven imperative. Instead of this, businesses in AES models require localization to operate, which seems to be their duty, thus carving out spaces for the emergence of new categorical imperatives for business ethics that foreground socio-ecological well-being. In practice, this means that managers and organizations should shift their operations and guidelines regarding supply chains, making them more local, vertically integrated, and culturally more sensitive.

The third articulation, the utility of regeneration, opposes the productivist utilities found in the global economy. Productivism within a mainstream business ethics formulation implies delivering utility for owners and other (mainly human) stakeholders, while also remaining competitive, maintaining business size (or even furthering growth), and gaining political-economic leverage in a changing landscape (Jay, 2007). The regeneration utility instead requires following certain principles from ecological economics. This manifests in three main ways within business management that delivers the desired consequences: alignment with the dynamics of the biosphere, mapping and analysis of the physical flows, and a re-conceptualization of value in relation to the biosphere, referring to politics and civil society (Stål & Bonnedahl, 2016). In practice, the articulation of the utility of regeneration may provide ethical orientation to businesses looking to develop strategies that restore, preserve, and enhance the health of social-ecological systems, such as preserving fauna and flora to sustain ecotourism destinations or enhancing the quality of the soil in agricultural businesses (Hahn & Tampe, 2021).

The counter-hegemonic alignment of ethics and sustainability is demonstrated in how the social organization brings utility by regenerating and restoring ecosystem dynamics. The reliance of the production system on local resources allows for maintaining biodiversity in the territory of operation. The mapping and analysis of physical flows is deemed central for a business ethic for sustainability, as evident in the substance flow analysis performed during the AES pilot project in Palopuro, Finland (Koppelmäki et al., 2019). This analysis estimated the cost–benefit of AES as a sustainable system. Finally, value is addressed in a manner that extends beyond the financial utility calculus; each instance of AES is designed to operate at a scale appropriate to the biophysical constraints in place. It is only through the overlapping of appropriately sized counter-hegemonic initiatives that the scaled-up networks of symbiotic systems are created. A single instance of AES, for example, is not encouraged to grow beyond its organic size. The growth instead comes through the establishment of additional AES systems.

Our analysis reveals that, in addition to sustainability, there is a hegemonic struggle in business ethics regarding another signifier, namely *technology*. Technology does not have a shared meaning across discourses, and it is articulated differently in the business literature as well (Heikkurinen & Ruuska, 2021). This makes *sustainability* and *technology* floating signifiers: signifiers whose meaning and centrality in the sustainable business discourse are being fought over by the opposing camps. Sustainability is contested in regard to its strong and weak variants. Technology, in turn, is contested in regard to the efficient per-unit recirculation of nutrients and the systems-level sufficiency. We ponder whether that which distinguishes counter-hegemonic ethics (as illustrated in our case study) is self-provisioning (see Suomalainen et al., 2023). If so, then it could become a nodal point distinguishing these ethical discourses from those found in mainstream business ethics.

The three-fold definition of counter-hegemonic ethics for sustainable business connects to Nesterova (2021), who highlighted a set of practices that businesses must adopt if they aim to be sustainable. Notable practices include using renewable energy, the frugal use of matter and energy, recycling, avoiding pollution, meeting the environmental needs of societies, supporting activists and entrepreneurs, sharing knowledge, thinking in the long term, incorporating non-monetary metrics of success, and monitoring compliance with socio-ecological standards. These practices align with the counter-hegemonic ethics outlined through the AES discourse, mainly because they situate business activity within the broader environmental and social landscape and avoid growth and capitalist drives.

The new ethics of business—including the proposed virtue, duty, and utility articulations—should be based on the quest for well-being over time in coexistence with other actors, species, and systems (Allen et al., 2019).

8 | CONCLUSION

Since the current economic system is deemed unsustainable, an ethical foundation for sustainable business must counter its hegemony. By employing PDT in the context of alternative economic provision, this study concludes with three articulations of counter-hegemonic ethics: (1) the virtue of socio-ecological embeddedness, (2) the duty of local provisioning, and (3) the utility of regeneration—which build on the normative ethical theories of Aristotle, Kant, and Bentham, respectively. They are suggested to be complementary in regard to supporting sustainable business.

This article has advanced the field of business ethics by contributing to the emerging sustainable business theory with an empirical analysis of counter-hegemonic discourses. The main theoretical contribution in our study is that instead of outlining applied ethics from normal ethical theories, we began by characterizing the hegemony in business ethics and its limitations, took the counter-hegemonic example of AES, and then illustrated how counter-hegemonic articulations of ethics have the power to advance sustainable business in a way that reorders power relations. In line with PDT, we emphasized that the three counter-hegemonic articulations are not exhaustive but are contingent and one specific approach to advance sustainable business among others that can surface. These ethical discourses are proposed to support businesses finding an alternative that challenges the hegemony of the industrial economic system. Business ethics for sustainability counter the hegemony. And: to unleash the full potential of a new business ethic, the hegemonic struggle must be particularly won over the meaning of two floating signifiers, *sustainability* and *technology*, and how they will be articulated in the future of business.

In practice, managers can benefit from developing and adopting counter-hegemonic articulations of ethics for sustainability in their organizations at least in three ways. First, in line with the virtue of socio-ecological embeddedness, they can develop cultures that respond to local conditions, grant greater agency for the land and care for human and non-human beings as a priority. In line with the duty of localization, supply chains can be made more local, vertically integrated and culturally sensitive. Finally, in line with the utility of regeneration, businesses can develop strategies that benefit both their models but also people and ecosystems by seeking not only to restore, but also to preserve and enhance the ecosystems.

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CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The authors have no conflict of interest to declare.

DATA AVAILABILITY STATEMENT

The data that support the findings of this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy or ethical restrictions.

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ENDNOTES

[1] By this notion, we refer to arrangements that employ innovative organizational models claimed to lie outside the industrial economic system (see Grivins et al., 2017) that are systemic in the sense that the they, for example, reduce the distance between producers and consumers through shorter supply chains, involve consumers directly in production, or offer governance arrangements that help to reorganize the ways producers and consumers share risks (see Forssell & Lankoski, 2015). In the case food, for example, alternative provision is also about promoting ethical food consumption through horizontal and collaborative networks and purposefully provide edibles to disadvantaged people (Giovannini, 2020; Golob et al., 2024).

[2] Regarding the structure of the study, within the more positivistic tradition of business ethics, there usually is a hypothesis development section proposing theoretical assumptions to be tested before the empirical section. Owing to the chosen PDT approach, however – which builds on a retroductive mode of reasoning – we begin with our theoretical premises (Section 2) and then move to presenting the context (Section 3) and the empirical case (Section 4), as well as describe the data (Section 5) and present findings (Section 6) in the form of articulations. We therefore contribute to epistemic diversity through the Political Discourse Theory lens and advance the field with a poststructuralist approach to business ethics.

[3] Poststructuralism here refers to an intellectual movement and a body of scholarly literature that departs from structuralist analysis: "structuralism is generally held to derive its organizing principles from the early twentieth-century work of Saussure, the founder of structural linguistics" (p. 882). Unlike structuralism, poststructuralist "thinkers were perhaps less concerned with the organization of social phenomena than with their initial constitution and subsequent dynamics. [...] Heidegger's critique of traditional metaphysics was one of the major influences in the discussions following structuralism, as was the reexamination of Nietzsche's earlier accounts of "genealogy," his anti-essentialism [...]" (Audi, 1999, p. 884).

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