

# Virtue: A Necessary Component of Ethical Administration

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## Abstract

*The objective is to offer a theoretical model to help conceptualize ethics and to clarify the characteristics and constraints of the different ethical theories. An integral ethical approach must include three dimensions: norms, good and virtue. It is argued that each of these dimensions stems from a comprehensive anthropology that deals with understanding human action. The article describes the principal aspects in terms of the pursuit of objectives, principles to be followed and virtues to be acquired. It concludes with a description of an experience in the application of this framework at two different universities in Spain: a Catholic inspired institution and a state university.*

## Key words

University education, professional ethics, ethics of teachers/professors, higher education, extensive university training (Source: Unesco Thesaurus).



Zona histórica de San Juan de Pasto.

## **Virtud: componente necesario para la gestión ética**

### **Resumen**

*El objetivo es ofrecer un modelo teórico que ayude a conceptualizar la ética y clarificar las características y los límites de las diferentes teorías éticas.*

*Las tres dimensiones que deben estar presentes en un enfoque integral de la ética son: las normas, los bienes y las virtudes, las cuales, según se argumenta, proceden de una antropología integral que trata de comprender la acción humana.*

*En el artículo se describen los principales aspectos, en términos de búsqueda de objetivos, principios que se deben seguir y virtudes que hay que adquirir.*

*Se concluye con una experiencia en el uso de este marco en dos universidades diferentes en España, una de inspiración católica y una universidad estatal.*

### **Palabras clave**

Educación universitaria, ética profesional, ética del docente/profesor, educación superior, formación universitaria extensiva (fuente: Tesouro de la Unesco).

## **Virtude: componente necessário da gestão ética**

### **Resumo**

*O objetivo é fornecer um modelo teórico para conceituar a ética e esclarecer as características e os limites das teorias éticas.*

*Uma abordagem ampla da ética deve ter três dimensões: regras, bens e virtudes. Estas vêm de uma antropologia integral que procura compreender a ação humana.*

*O artigo descreve os principais aspectos sobre consecução de objetivos, princípios a serem seguidos e virtudes a serem adquiridas.*

*Conclui-se com a experiência de este quadro em duas universidades na Espanha: uma de inspiração católica e outra estadual.*

### **Palavras-chave**

Ensino universitário, ética profissional, ética do docente/professor, ensino superior, formação universitária extensiva (Fonte: Thesaurus UNESCO).

## Introduction

The purpose of the paper is to present a theoretical framework to help conceptualize ethics and clarify the characteristics and limits of the different ethical theories. In other words, students with no philosophical background will find here a synthetic “road map” of ethical approaches. In this paper, the authors will describe the model and discuss how it has been tested successfully already in two different contexts: a Catholic-inspired university and a state university.

The proposed framework offers sound and solid philosophical foundations, consistent with Catholic social tradition. It allows students to engage with different traditions in business ethics, mapping the territory with a critical approach and showing their limitations. The authors of this paper strongly believe a sound theoretical background in business ethics education may help students to obtain firm standards to make intelligent judgments that work toward their own self-transformation and their contribution to the common good.

In this sense, the framework proposed here, rooted in realistic Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition, may facilitate the integration of knowledge and the dialogue between Catholic and non-Catholic based approaches.

The paper has four parts. The first one describes a three-dimensional framework that helps to classify the different ethical theories that have been proposed through the centuries, from ancient Greek philosophy to modern and contemporary theories. The three dimensions that should be present in a comprehensive approach to ethics are: norms, good and virtues. It is argued that these three dimensions come from a comprehensive anthropological understanding of human action. Based on this assumption, unilateral and bilateral approaches to ethics can be revised and criticized (Shaw & Barry, 1992; Boatright, 1993).

Using this framework, the second part of the paper briefly describes different practical approaches to business ethics. Thanks to the road map offered beforehand, it is possible to arrive at a diagnosis of the ethical approaches followed by business firms. In this sense, the authors illustrate three main practical perspectives (deontology, integrity and excellence), depending on the role played by every dimension of the framework.

The third part of the paper presents three ethics teaching experiences in Spain, based on this framework. Two of the experiences presented were at the University of Navarre, an institution inspired by the Catholic faith; the third was at the Universidad Estatal de Valencia. Then, in a fourth section, the authors discuss their teaching experience by analyzing various achievements and their implications. Finally, the paper concludes with a discussion of proposals, future challenges and recommendations.

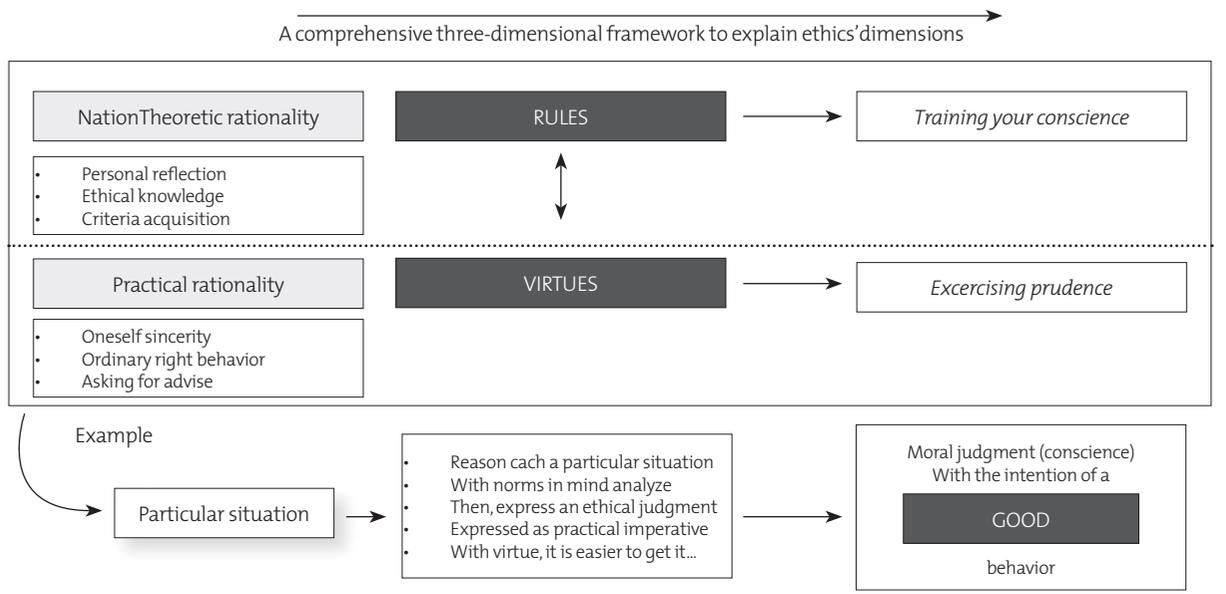
## A Three-dimensional Framework to Explain Ethical Theories

“The university can be conceived as an institution whose primary mission is the training of human excellence, trying to adopt the student as a person, to take the student towards good (bonum), truth (verum) and beauty (pulchrum)” (Esteban, 2010, p. 464). In this sense and to understand and classify ethical theories, a three-dimensional framework is proposed (see Figure 1). We maintain that a comprehensive approach to ethics, consistent with a totally anthropological understanding of human action, should explicitly consider three dimensions: norms, good, and virtues (Polo, 2008). The philosophers who historically best represent such a comprehensive perspective are Aristotle and those of the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition.

Moral good is known by reason, and the knowledge of good leads to moral norms as means to help attain what is good. But this good cannot be achieved without the work of the will. In our effort to attain what is good, we develop moral virtues or habits of conduct that will help us to achieve our purpose. Good produces attraction, and norms and virtues make it easier to achieve.

When these three concepts are treated separately, their meaning and scope are restricted and ethics is impoverished. Sundered from the perfectibility of the self, good becomes pure values, determined subjectively by feelings or autonomous reason; without reference to good, rules become mere impositions, and virtues are

FIGURE 1



reduced to a commitment to adhere to pre-established rational rules.

The three elements; good, norms and virtues, are interconnected and need each other to be understood properly (Fontrodona, Guillén and Rodríguez, 2010). Each one is important and necessary to understand ethics as human fulfillment, which is why this approach is labeled here as comprehensive or all-inclusive. In short, good, rules and virtues are closely interrelated. Therefore, any comprehensive view of ethics must necessarily incorporate these three dimensions. It is not simply a matter of adding dimensions so as to build a more complex theory; rather, it is a question of combining the three dimensions to create an interplay of tensions that prevents any one of them from growing out of proportion or taking undue precedence and, thus, obscuring the true meaning of ethics. Together, they create synergies that fill them with meaning and provide a more complete, intellectually richer and more fruitful view of ethics, albeit a more demanding one. Based on this scheme, we propose a critical review of different ethical theories (Fontrodona, Guillén and Rodríguez, 2010).

We first present one-dimensional approaches; that is, those theories focused mainly on just one of the three dimensions, while overlooking the role of the other two

(see Figure 2). In this sense, *hedonism* is an ethical theory that focuses mainly on what is good (pleasant) (Sen, 1979; Bentham, 1973). In ethics based solely on what is pleasant, it is difficult to find grounds for any hierarchy among the various types of good, and one ends up giving greater weight to those types of good that are easy to obtain. "Virtues have no place here, because virtues serve to organize life, whereas, if the important thing is immediate good, organizing life is superfluous: immediate pleasure forgoes any organization of the time of living. While virtues are stable dispositions with which a person faces the future, pleasures are ephemeral [...] the ethics of good involve a reductionist ethic that mistrusts rules; inevitably, rules have to be accepted, but not because they are ethical, merely because they are useful" (Polo, 2008, p. 124).

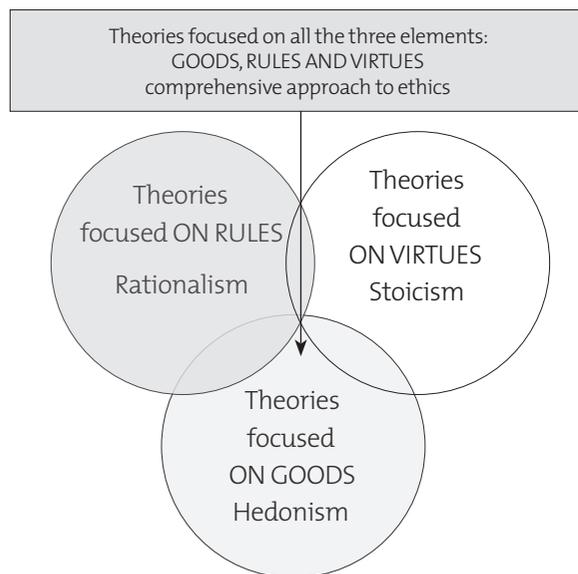
*Stoicism* is an ethical theory that focuses on virtues. «Stoic ethics is an ethics of self-control intended to make man capable of resisting outside influences. Stoic virtue is not aimed at exercising subsequent actions, but at constructing an inner refuge» (Polo, 2008, p. 116). Thus, the stoic ethic of

self-control becomes Nietzsche's will to power. For stoics, virtue is the strength to resist fate; for Nietzsche, it is the strength to face the future from a position of power on the part of a subject freed from all ties. While stoicism seems to lean more toward the passive act of resistance, which as Pieper (1988) notes is the most characteristic act of fortitude, the managerial version seems to opt for the active stance of attack. We could say that behavior in business is closer to Nietzsche than to the stoics.

*Rationalism* is an ethical theory focused on the norms that emerged when modern philosophy broke with ancient tradition (Pinckaers, 1988). Without virtues, conduct can become inhuman and ethically unacceptable. If conduct is governed by a fixed reason that allows no scope for moral growth, the rule is degraded and becomes a regulation (Polo, 2008, p. 121).

FIGURE 2

Using the three-dimensional framework to present ethical theories



Source: adapted from Fontrodona, Guillén and Rodríguez (1997)

We call intermediate approaches those that consider just two dimensions. This would be the case of modern approaches such as consequentialism. The term “consequentialism” was coined by Anscombe (1958) to refer to

ethical theories that judge the rightness or wrongness of actions according to their consequences. The so-called “theory of justice” ethics (Rawls, 1971; Rorty, 1991a, 1991b) considers moral norms and, in some sense, the moral good, but ignores the role of virtue. Without reference to virtue, rules and good are no longer dynamic and anchored in practice.

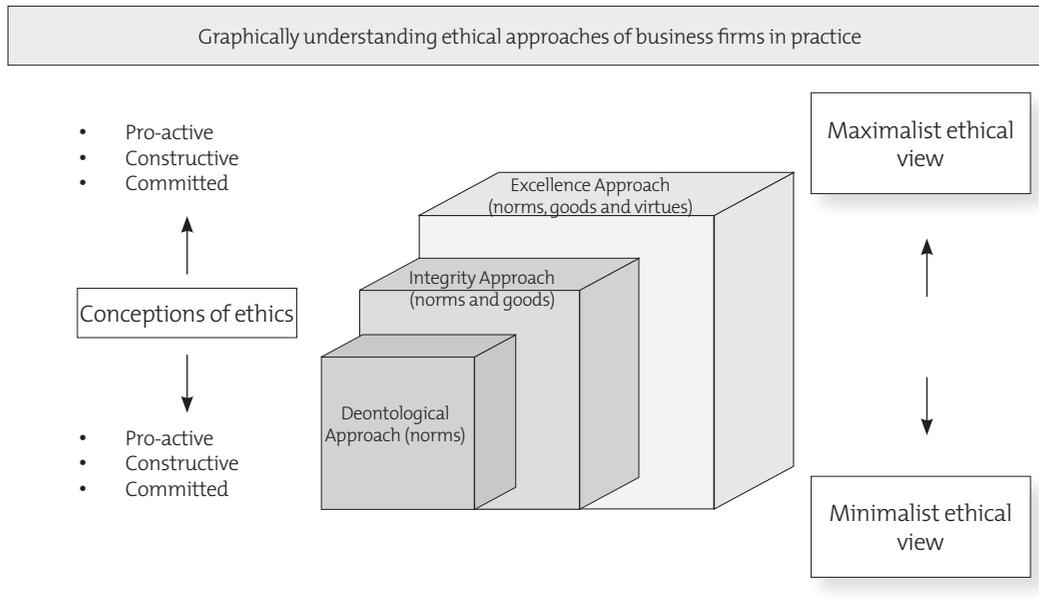
In *After Virtue* (1984), MacIntyre's analysis shows modern philosophy has lost the anthropological view founded in metaphysics. Consequently, no longer includes, among its objects of study, concepts such as human nature, the person (as a teleological being endowed with an end and a dignity) or virtue (as the unfolding of nature toward its fulfillment). The 18th century Enlightenment philosophers set out to rationally justify a set of moral rules, which subsequent development of the assumptions on which they based their justification has left without basis. Pursuant to MacIntyre's position, the role of virtue should be salvaged. According to Polaino (2006, p. 436) “emotional education is inseparable from virtue education”. Moreover, in this sense, a comprehensive approach to ethics represents an integrative proposal, one whose originality is simply to return to the origin of ethical thought in ancient Greek philosophy.

### The Ethical Approaches of Business Firms

After using this three-dimensional framework to explain different ethical theories and their limitations, we turn to management practice. The objective is to analyze the idea of ethics underlying the different practical approaches to business management.

Depending on the role played by every ethical dimension, and starting from Dale's (1990) account of the approaches to quality in organizations, we describe three main approaches to business ethics in management (see Figure 3): deontology (focused mainly on norms), integrity (focused on norms and good) and excellence (focused on norms, good and virtues).

FIGURE 3



Source. adapted from Guillén, M. "Ethics in organizations. Building trust". Prentice Hall. Pearson, 2006

The "deontology approach" is the one practiced by companies that follow legal and generally accepted moral norms. The emphasis these firms afford to moral norms constitutes an important step forward in terms of the practices surrounding business ethics. They tend to follow codes of ethics and try to avoid improper behavior on the part of their members.

When deontological principles such as these are essential to an organization, they are likely to be expounded in formal documents (codes of conduct) that are known to all the organization's members. If the principles are put into practice, the organization will not only be "ethically healthy," in that it will encourage its members to grow as people, it also will gain in ethical quality to the extent that such principles are adopted and implemented by its members.

"Integrity approach" is practiced by companies that take into account moral norms, as well as moral good or values. In terms of values, they are proactive and go beyond norms, offering a sense of mission to their members. Companies following this approach may present their values statements to the public, or simply include them as part of their mission.

Truthfulness and equity, for example, are valuable in themselves, because they contribute to the good of the person, regardless of whether they are useful or pleasant. Strictly speaking, this is the sense in which truthfulness and equity can be described as ethical values. It is also the sense in which a person who is truthful and just can be said to have ethical integrity. The integrity-based approach places the emphasis on ethical good and not just on ethical rules.

Finally, the "excellence approach" is practiced by companies that focus not only on norms and values, but also on the practice of virtue (*arête* in Greek or personal excellence). For these kinds of firms, their purpose includes the integral development of their members (professional and personal). The practice of good though moral virtues goes beyond integrity. In this sense, moral development of the person is regarded as a contribution to common good of society and part of their reason for being. These companies may use written documents, such as codes of conduct or

statements, but such documents are regarded as nothing more than the means by which the path to excellence is pointed out. This ethical conception coincides with the comprehensive perspective described in the first part of this work. All three dimensions of ethics (norms, good and virtues) are considered explicitly and promoted by ethically excellent companies.

The excellence-based approach concentrates on building stable, good habits among the organization's members. Besides rules of conduct and the pursuit of good, this approach insists such rules and that pursuit be implemented through ethical virtues. Thus, excellence extends to aspects beyond integrity, as the goal is for members of the organization to become better able to work in an excellent manner. The rules set out in codes of conduct and the values upheld in value statements can point the way to excellence; however, on their own, they would be insufficient. The important thing is not to write and issue statements, but to create the right conditions for people to improve and excel.

### Experiences in Teaching Ethics Using this Framework

The concepts described above have been presented in three different courses by the authors of this paper. Those three teaching experiences are discussed in this section. The titles of the courses are: "Professional Deontology," "Anthropological and Ethical Foundations for Management" and "Business Ethics and CSR". The first is a compulsory course taken by undergraduate students of the School of Education at the Universidad de Navarra (Pamplona, Spain). The second is a compulsory course taken by doctoral students at the IESE Business School (Barcelona, Spain), while the third is an optional course taken by undergraduate students of business management at the Universidad de Valencia (Spain) (see Figures 4 and 5).

The first two courses are presented in the context of a university based on the traditions of the Catholic faith, while the third is presented in a typical Spanish state university. In the third case, there is little institutional support and the presence of the course is due to the personal interests of the instructor. In the first two cases, at a Catholic university, both courses obviously are part of the curriculum and receive full institutional support.

The purpose of the **course in deontology at the Universidad de Navarra** (UNAV) is to familiarize students with the basic concepts of ethics applied to the profession (Altarejos, Ibáñez-Martín, Jover and Jordán, 2003). The contents of the course involve the fundamentals of ethics, deontological codes and professional ethos (habits and virtues). The methodology includes theory and practice (lectures, readings and team presentations). The three-dimensional framework on ethical theory is an integral part of the course and allows students to understand ethical approaches and the role of norms, values and virtues in their professions.

The purpose of the **doctoral course on anthropological and ethical foundations for management at the IESE Business School** (IESE) is to familiarize doctoral students with the main concepts of philosophical anthropology and ethics and to explain how they relate to management (Fontrodona, Guillén and Rodríguez, 2010). The contents of this course include issues from philosophical anthropology and ethics such as: world, man, knowledge, will, freedom, truth, action, society, ethics, etc. The methodology is mainly theoretical and includes readings and critical discussions. In this case, the three-dimensional framework on ethical theories appears explicitly and implicitly throughout the course and in its presentation.

The purpose of the **course on business ethics and CSR at the Universidad de Valencia Estudium Generale** (UVEG) is to offer students basic concepts, managerial tools and the necessary skills for ethical decision-making in business (Guillén, 2006). The contents include an introduction to ethics and ethical theories, followed by concepts of business ethics applied to personal, organizational and social levels. The methodology involves theory and practice (lectures, case studies, role-playing, analysis of movies and team presentations). The three-dimensional framework on ethical theories constitutes a fundamental introduction to the course.

FIGURE 4

Practical experience of using this framework

|                 | Universidad de Navarra (UNAV).<br>a University of Catholic<br>Inspiration                              | IESE Business School (IESE) a<br>University of Catholic Inspiration                  | Universidad de Valencia (UVEG):<br>a non-Catholic State University                                   |
|-----------------|--|--|--|
| Course          | Professional deontology  | Anthropological and Ethical<br>Foundations for Management                            | Business Ethics and CSR  |
| Characteristics | Education School<br>Compulsory / one semester<br>45 sessions<br>Fourth academic year (final<br>course) | IESE Business School<br>Compulsory / one semester<br>20 sessions<br>Doctoral Program | Valencia Business School<br>Optional / one semester<br>20 sessions<br>Third and fourth academic year |
| Students        | Students with and without<br>catholic background.<br>(40 Students)                                     | Students with and without<br>catholic background<br>(7-10 students per year)         | Students with and without<br>catholic background<br>(60 Students)                                    |
| Instructor      | Managerial and philosophical<br>background   | Managerial and philosophical<br>background   | Managerial and philosophical<br>background   |
| Course support  | Total institutional support  | Total institutional support  | Partial institutional support  |

FIGURE 5

Practical experience of using this framework

|                       | Universidad de Navarra (UNAV).<br>a University of Catholic<br>Inspiration                    | IESE Business School (IESE)<br>a University of Catholic<br>Inspiration  | Universidad de Valencia (UVEG):<br>a non-Catholic State<br>University   |
|-----------------------|--|---|---|
| Course                | Professional deontology  | Anthropological and Ethical<br>Foundations for Management   | Business Ethics and CSR   |
| Purpose of the course | “Offering knowledge of basic<br>concepts on applied ethics to<br>profession”                 | “Present main concepts of<br>philosophical anthropology<br>and ethics and their link to<br>management                                   | “Offering students basic<br>concepts, managerial tools and<br>the necessary skills for ethical<br>decision making in bussiness” |
| Course ethodology     | Theory and practice:<br>lecture, readings and team<br>presentations                          | Theory: readings and critical<br>discussions  | Theory and practice: lecture,<br>case studies, role-playing,<br>analysis of movies and team<br>presentations                    |
| Basic contents        | Fundamentals of ethics,<br>deontological codes,<br>professional ethos: habits and<br>virtues | Issues from philosophical<br>anthropology and ethics:<br>world, man, knowledge, will,<br>freedon, truth, action, society,<br>ethics,etc | Introduction to ethics and<br>ethical theories. Business<br>ethics applied to personal,<br>organizational and social<br>levels. |

The achievements of the three courses are illustrated in the following section. As will be discussed, the personal impressions of the three instructors contain common elements and important differences. The study of the perceived results will lead to final concussions.

### Discussion of the Teaching Experiences

In an exercise aimed at personal analysis, the three instructors listed their personal impressions of what the courses achieved. Then, the perceived outcomes were compared and discussed. The

listed results of the three teaching experiences, including common findings and specific results, are outlined below.

- In the first place, the use of a common framework in Pamplona (UNAV), Barcelona (IESE) and Valencia (UEVG) allowed the different instructors to introduce their students to the primary dimensions of ethics, including moral good, moral norms and moral virtues. This approach made it possible to avoid any relativistic concept of ethics from the very beginning, in all three cases.
- Secondly, use of the same framework allowed the instructors to offer a comprehensive anthropological understanding of human action. Thanks to the common anthropological roots of this framework, explicit considerations of ethics in human behavior were possible in different contexts (Catholic and non-Catholic) and for different purposes (education, research and the practice of management).
- Thirdly, a framework rooted in a view of the human being consistent with Catholic thought was totally in keeping with the rest of the curriculum, especially with the courses on Catholic social thought taught at UNAV and IESE. Such courses do not exist at UVEG. Nevertheless, the generally accepted concept of the human being allows for most of the principles in Catholic social thought to be included at non-Catholic institutions such as UVEG.
- Fourth, in courses explicitly devoted to business ethics, such as IESE's doctoral course and UVEG's undergraduate option, the three-dimensional framework constitute a very useful road map of ethical theories. In this sense and thanks to the framework, business management students at different levels and with no philosophical background are able to map the territory of ethical approaches with a sound and critical understanding.
- Fifth, the three-dimensional framework made possible a fluent dialogue between most business ethics traditions in IESE and UVEG classes. Moreover, this approach enlightened the role of ethics in relation to other academic disciplines in the case of UNAV's course on professional deontology.

- Finally, and thanks to explicit consideration of moral virtues in this framework, the deontology professor of UNAV's course was able to propose moral habits of behavior to his students, within the context of their profession. In practical terms, some of these habits were introduced as decision-making criteria in business ethics classes at UVEG. In this sense, it was easy to use practical examples of the impact of moral character and virtue on management, as well as on any other professional practice.

## Conclusions

As to the general conclusions of these three teaching experiences using a common three-dimensional framework for ethics rooted in human action, we emphasize the following findings (see Figure 6):

1. The fact that this framework has been tested successfully at UVEG, a state university, shows a model rooted in human nature and human action is appropriate for offering ethical training at Catholic and non-Catholic universities alike. The variety of students making use of this approach underlines the universality of its contents.
2. For Catholic universities, the use of a model centered on the concept of *person*, rooted in Catholic tradition and widely accepted, is a powerful instrument for common dialogue with other traditions. Thus, teachings on ethics can be presented in a way that makes them publicly intelligible and accessible to people of all backgrounds, whether religious or secular.
3. The concurrence of this rational framework with Catholic tradition makes easier for faculty members to present business ethics courses and Catholic social thought as complementary issues. If reason and faith are not opposite, and faith is rational, we should

- try to offer rational approaches that are consistent with faith and make a sound philosophical contribution to a common dialogue in the search for truth.
4. Given the complementarities of faith and reason in the search for truth, there should be a balance, not a dichotomy, between Catholic and non-Catholic con-

tributions to the common search for truth. In this sense, we strongly believe the promotion of common frameworks founded on human nature and rational dialogue, such as the one proposed herein, should be encouraged at Catholic and non-Catholic institutions.

**FIGURE 6**

**Main common contributions of these three teaching experiences**

| Universidad de Navarra (UNAV)   | IERSE Business Schools  | Universidad de Valencia (UVEC)  |
|---|---|---|
| <b>A COMMON FRAMEWORK</b><br>- To present main dimensions of ethics (goods, norms and virtues).                       |   |   |
| <b>A COMMON BACKGROUND</b><br>- To offer an integral anthropological understanding of human action.                   |   |   |
| <b>A HUMAN PERSON CONCEPT</b><br>- To give a concept of human person consistent with Catholic Social Thought          |   |   |
|   | <b>A ROAD MAP OF THEORIES</b><br>- To map the territory of ethical theories.      |   |
| <b>ENLIGHTENING AND DIALOGUE</b><br>-Enlightening the role of ethics in relationship with other academic disciplines. | <b>DIALOGUE</b><br>- To allow dialogue between most ethical traditions.           |   |
| <b>PROPOSE MORAL HABITS OF BEHAVIOR</b><br>- Behavioural implications of ethicaeducation through moral habits.        | <b>MAKES VIRTU EXPLICIT</b><br>- Theocetical implications od considering virtues. | <b>PROPOSES DECISION MAKING CRITERIA</b><br>- To transmit appropriate decision making criteria. |

The authors of this paper are aware of the limitations of their teaching experience in terms of generalization and practical implementation. The three-dimensional framework has been tested among students with no special interest or training in philosophical issues. What would happen if this same framework were presented to students with a stronger philosophical background? Would they see the model as simplistic? Of course, any model is a simplification of reality; however, in terms of generalization, this limitation should be tested.

This paper is based on what the instructors thought about their own experience. It would be good to contrast their ideas with the opinions of the students who attended the courses, so as to confirm whether or not this framework helped them to better understand ethics and the ethical background of management theories.

In terms of practical implementation, the use of a consistent framework to present ethical theories clearly is not enough to impart moral education to students. The course on business ethics at the state university probably had little impact on the student’s curriculum. And, perhaps, students could see the content of such a course as being isolated and opposed to the rationale of many other courses. Nevertheless, when ethics are presented as part of daily human action, specifically to help make people more humane, business students obtain an important instrument with which to critically recognize the scientific mechanistic rhetoric in many management approaches. At the very least, this seems to be a clear contribution to engaging the student in a deeper and not just technical understanding of business practice.

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