

TEACHING BUSINESS ETHICS AT A CATHOLIC UNIVERSITY

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Comments on Marilise Smurthwaite and Douglas Racionzer CST in Business Ethics Education in South Africa

I resonated with this paper because of my experience teaching Ethics at St. Augustine University of Tanzania (SAUT) in Mwanza, Tanzania. I found that all of the core principles of CST were as important as in the USA, but that the application of these principles is very different. They must be applied in the African context. Let me raise just three points.

When teaching business ethics in the USA, I give little time to government corruption and how business must deal with it, except for US multinationals operating in other countries. The issue of corruption, however, is core to business ethics in most of Africa. Second, the Tanzanian MBA students when asked the purpose of business would nearly always give a high priority to paying taxes. In the US taxes are a cost to be paid, not an end of business. Third, in the USA by the time students are in an MBA program they understand delegation, empowerment and trust in an organization. This was not so for most of my Tanzanian students.

African scholars are looking at African issues in the context of CST and that is good and we in the West need to become aware of this literature. One of the theologians at SAUT has written an excellent book using CST and its foundations to analyze African ecological issues from an African perspective, to give an example of what is being done. Therefore, I am delighted that we have Marilise's and Douglas's paper as well as the one by Sister Hellen Bandiho from SAUT on this program. We enrich our own understanding of CST as we consider its application in other contexts.

The authors note that they place an emphasis on the moral formation of the student as a person. I found the African student's acceptance of the concept of person to be far more open to Catholic Social Thought than is true for most of my US students who too often see themselves, and all employees as a cog in a production machine and consumers as simply a means to the end of profit. Their manifesto that convincingly uses the term "ongoing construction of the truly human good" comes across as part of a system of thought truly believed. We in the West are being led by "the Rest", at least in Africa, in the use of such concepts.

I am intrigued by the institution's commitment to an M Phil in Applied Ethics and the specializations within it. I recently reviewed a similar program, although in Theology for the Jesuit University in Quito Ecuador. We again have a case of "the Rest" leading "The West." The willingness to commit limited resources to empowering those in the community, the disadvantaged, is to be commended. I find that we at Catholic Universities in the West do too little of this. This weakness is particularly visible in a state like Wisconsin with the public outreach and extension emphases of our public system of higher education.

The emphasis on contextualization is right on the money, exactly where our emerging institutions in Africa should be in my opinion. I would like to see much more on their programs of research and teaching.

Comments on Ron Nahser, Jack Ruhe, and Scott Kelley paper

I thank the authors for an engaging paper and I look forward to reading more of their work, especially in regard to Lonergan. Many chapters of the Woodstock Business Conference have used the Lonergan methodology to stimulate ethical thinking in an Ignatian context for business. The Pragmatic Inquiry sounds very promising and also very Ignatian. I would, by the way, be very careful in the use of the terms Jesuit and Ignatian. We in the laity who are Ignatian and grounded in the Spiritual Exercises are not imitation or second class Jesuits; we have found a spirituality for the laity that makes great sense in modern times. And remember, Ignatius began the evolution of the Exercises when he was a lay person and most of what he did after becoming a priest was simply some rearranging of the chairs. Further, he always resisted second and third orders within the Jesuits. I believe he saw clearly the distinctiveness of the various vocations.

In many ways we in the historically Jesuit universities have hoisted ourselves on the petard of our marketing. Jesuit is a word that moves product. On the other hand, for at least the next 50 years we will be Ignatian in and through laity, even if under the leadership of the few remaining Jesuits, or we will not be anything but mediocre schools without a guiding philosophy for rich kids. Read Vatican II for what this means!

I find this paper tackling another major philosophical and pedagogical issue in business ethics. The issue is not how we are deductive or how are we inductive, and which is the way to go. It is not either/or it is both/and. To worry about becoming relativists, although a very real issue, is oversimplification. Every ethical decision exists in a context of ends or intentionality, means, and circumstances. And the circumstances include the hierarchy of ends in which a specific decision is enmeshed. As we are ever more global this reality is ever more present.

The tie of vocation, or fundamental option, I really like this, to the allocation of limited resources, ultimate meaning and ethics is very sound and worthy of further development. One of my conclusions when I reflect on my 52 years in the academy is that our greatest obligation as professors, no matter what we teach, is to help our students develop a sense of purpose for their lives. As I work in the field of Strategy, there is no doubt that sense of purpose, mission and vision, is the foundation of corporate success and ethical behavior.

I do not mean to be picky, and I know it is not a settled question, but I have become uncomfortable with the use of the term vocation as applied to business or to dentistry, or to tending bar or anything else. I have a greater degree of comfort with the term calling, reserving vocation for the broader call to the married life, single life, religious life or priesthood. Each of these involves a much fuller approach to "being" and the integration of all in our lives, which in all cases can include a calling to being a university professor, business person, or some other occupation.

A great strength of this paper is the understanding of the purpose of business as an institution for serving the common good, or as a response to social need. Profit is a motivating or instrumental causation. If the business institutions or system do not enable every stakeholder to become more fully the person God intended, society has the right, the obligation even, to change the system. And I emphasize all stakeholders, not just the stockholder as the Chicago School might, and not just the worker as others do. I do not care how profitable the firm might be or how well the workers are treated, if the product dehumanizes the customer, then the firm is evil. That is why I

teach my students that they cannot work for a tobacco company and at the same time consider themselves to be a moral person.

The authors emphasis on “a thorough analysis of the social and environmental consequences” I think is core to ethical behavior. If one is not competent at what she does, including understanding the context of the firm’s actions, then that person starts out by being unethical. All aspects of competence are part of the foundation of ethical behavior. In a society where 56 percent of adults do not read any anything other than the technical and news, if that, we in the university face a challenge, for if reading stops once assignments stop, the graduate will not be competent, and therefore will not be ethical.

I can comment on many other points, but I will conclude with absolute praise for their tie of ethics and business to self-reflection. Self-reflection is core to Ignatian spirituality, and to success in business. What do we really do to teach it? Very little!

