

Rewriting the Narrative and Choosing the Right Questions: A First-Person Approach to Teaching Business Ethics

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Abstract

Business ethics is widely taught in schools of economics and business all over the world. This is a positive change and a sign of the increasing awareness of the need to incorporate ethics in business studies. Some authors have pointed fingers at the academic institutions responsible for forming those responsible for the financial crisis (e.g. Crossan et al. 2013). The widespread incorporation of business ethics, it seems, was long overdue; however, the way it has been taught has been questioned by a number of different authors, including philosophers (among them, the most relevant and recent critique is MacIntyre's *The Irrelevance of Ethics*, 2015) and the business ethics professors themselves. In particular, some streams of literature have stressed that, if it is to be effective, the ethical component must be woven into the very fabric of business school education, rather than serving as a mere addendum (see Dobson 2008).

Following in this line, this paper proposes a deep integration of business ethics into the curricula of schools of economics and business; it further argues that this integration will be effective only in the first-person approach to ethics. Ethics – if it is to give practical orientation in such a way that it leads to the agent's own personal flourishing and orders him or her to the common good – cannot be reduced to a mere set of norms or code of conduct, as many of the business ethics handbooks implicitly argue; rather, it should be grounded on the pillars of goods, norms, and virtues, understood in their unity and in the context of the narrative unity of human life (see MacIntyre 2007 [1981], 1992). Narrative theory in particular will be the key philosophical and existential tool for understanding, ordering, and giving content to these three pillars. This paper will both outline a more solid and theoretical justification for the ethical approach sketched above and give practical indications for its incorporation in the classroom, elaborating an interactive teaching method that seeks to make students aware of the narrative unity of their lives, prompting them to ask the most important questions.