BUSINESS ETHICS: WHY A PERSON-CENTERED APPROACH?

A CONTRIBUTION FROM CATHOLIC SOCIAL TRADITION TO THE FOUNDATIONS OF BUSINESS ETHICS

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ABSTRACT

Drawing from Catholic social tradition, and particularly, from some writings of Pope Benedict XVI, we discuss the essentials of his approach, which can be interpreted as person-centered ethics. This is neither relativist nor rationalistic, but based on metaphysic realism. It is a "first person ethics", in which personal conscience and virtues play an important role; it leads to the awareness of justice in every phase of economic activity and orients this to the common good. We conclude by affirming that "person-centered ethics" overcomes some shortcomings of conventional approaches which currently we find in the mainstream of business ethics thought.

KEY WORDS: Person-Centered Ethics, First-Third Person Ethics, the common good, rationalism, relativism, justice

Introduction

An emerging perspective in economic and business ethics stresses the centrality of the person through personalistic philosophy and other related approaches. Several authors (Gronbacher, 1998; O'Boyle, 1998, 2001, 2003, 2007; Zúñiga, 2001; Beabout et al., 2002; Donohue-White et al., 2002; Grabill, 2003; Finn, 2003) have argued in favor of economic personalism. Whetstone (2002) related personalism with leadership theories finding it fits with servant-leadership satisfactorily.. Fontrodona and Sison (2006) stressed the notion of common good, closely related to human good, as the main reference for business ethics. Melé (2009a) supports the personalist and the common good principles as ethical postulates for business ethics. On his part, Sandelands (2009) describes a person-centered ethic of business based upon eight social principles taken from Catholic Social Tradition (CST), Melé (2009b, Chap 4) proposed a systematic person-centered approach to business ethics in which virtues are central, but which also includes values and norms. Alford (2010) suggests that personalism is a particularly good source on which to draw in order to design new foundations for ethical business practices. Acevedo (2012) drew from Maritain in deciding that personalism is a relevant approach to business ethics.

These perspectives are not far from CST, and may even have taken certain inspiration from it. CST sees service to the person as the beacon for economic activity. Thus, *Gaudium et spes*, an important document of the Vatican Council II, stated that "man is the source, the center, and the purpose of all economic and social life" (1965, # 63) and, as regards activities of production, added that "the fundamental finality of this production is not the mere increase of products nor profit or control but rather the service of man." (# 64) On his part, John Paul II clearly stated that the Catholic Church's teaching on social and economic matters has as guiding principle "a *correct view of the human person* and of his unique value." (1991, # 11, italics in original)

Continuing in this line of thought, more recently, Pope Benedict XVI, in his encyclical-letter *Caritas in veritate* (CV, hereafter followed by #) (2009), stated that "striving to meet the deepest moral needs of the person also has important and beneficial repercussions at the level of economics", and adds: "*The economy needs ethics in order to function correctly*" (# 45, italics in original), but immediately he adds that this is not just any ethics, "but an ethics which is "people centered" (CV 45) In accordance with the official Latin text, could be more literally translated as an ethics which is "friend of the person" or "person-centered ethics". He applauds certain initiatives in business ethics and corporate social responsibility and encourages them (CV 40, 45, 66) but, at the same time, shows concern for certain systems of morality which underlie some business ethics approaches (CV 45) and considers it advisable to develop a sound criterion of discernment, since the adjective "ethical" can be abused (CV 45). Similarly, the encyclical points out that not all the ethical considerations that currently inform debate on the social responsibility of the corporate world are acceptable from the perspective of the Church's social doctrine (CV 40).

From this position certain questions arise. First, what current approaches to business ethics might be unacceptable from a Catholic perspective and why? Second, what does Benedict understand by a people or person-centered ethics? Thirdly, could a person-centered ethics be a sound foundation for business ethics? This paper tries to answer these questions and its structure is consistent with this purpose. Firstly, we analyze some current business ethics approaches which seem incompatible with CST. Namely, those based on relativism and rationalism. Secondly, we discuss what Benedict XVI may understand by an ethics which is "person-centered". Thirdly, we reflect on whether a "person-centered" approach can be a sound foundation of business ethics and on whether it overcomes the shortcomings of conventional approaches which we currently find in the mainstream of business ethics thought.

Neither relativism nor rationalism

For many years ethical relativism has been dominant in business. In response rationalistic normative theories have been introduced in business, especially from the business ethics movement.

In the early years of this movement, at the end of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s, there appeared proposals mainly based on Deontology (Kantianism, Moral Rights Theories), Utilitarianism, and Contractualism (De George 1982, Velazquez 1982, Donaldson 1982). These rationalistic approaches are not substantially different to those theories dominant in the 19th century.

Some years later, the development of virtue ethics also made itself felt in business ethics (Solomon 1992, Koehn 1995, Hartman 1998, and Sison 2003, among others). In contrast with the rationalist self-legislation and freedom of Kantian deontology, and the calculation of happiness employed by Utilitarianism, virtue ethics proposes the cultivation of virtues as the basis for business ethics. Virtue ethics can be understood as rooted in the human nature (eudemonistic virtue ethics) or culturally based (contextual virtue ethics); the latter falls within relativism.

Some approaches based on natural law, realistic personalism and the human virtues can also be found in the literature of business ethics (Whetstone 2002, Alford and Naugthon 2001, Melé 2009a) but, for the present, these are still in the minority. Nevertheless Benedict XVI seems to tend toward this latter focus, as noted above.

In certain cases, procedural theories are also employed in BE; in them substantive ethical norms are replaced by procedural norms to determine when an action is correct. Other theories, with a postmodern character, have also tried to establish themselves in the field of business ethics. Thus, ethics of care (Held 2006), and the ethics approach of Lévinas based on intersubjective responsibility (Aasland, 2007), although certain limitations of these approaches have been identified, for example Koehn (1998), regarding ethics of care, and Bevan and Corvellec (2007), in the case of the approach inspired by Levinas.

Benedict XVI's reservations refer to both relativism and rationalism, as we will discuss in this section, but first let us review briefly these two streams of thought.

Ethical Relativism

Traditional relativism understands that the individual or the society is the source of morality (subjectivism and cultural relativism, respectively). Offering models which integrate several theories or proposing pragmatic approaches by using a variety of normative theories are also forms of relativism. When there is no objective reference it is not difficult to arrive at a relativist posture and even to positions of scepticism as regards business ethics - any theory will serve.

The integration of different theories of ethics into stakeholder management introduces a variety of interpretations and the consequent ethical relativism. As Hummels pointed out, "each interpretation provides us with a different set of stakeholders and stresses the importance of specific values, rights and interests. Hence, different stakeholder interpretations lead to different distribution of benefits and burden, of pleasures and pain, of values, rights and interests." (1998, p. 1404) This could be a more serious problem if stakeholder theory did not adopt a sound ethical theory and if the manager did not act uprightly. He or she could then simply seek the theory which best "justifies" or provides the reasons that best serve his or her interests.

Ethical relativism can be even more pronounced in some Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) approaches in which ethics is substituted by social or cultural values. This approach was present at the very beginning of CSR movement, in the mid-1950s, when Howard R. Bowen wrote his book *Social Responsibility of the Businessman*. He assumed that social responsibility of businessmen "it refers to the obligation of businessmen to pursue those policies, to make decisions, or to follow those lines of action which are desirable in terms of the objectives and values of our society" (1953, p. 6). Nowadays, theories of ethics may support CSR, but often such responsibility is based on values and norms provided by each society. Sometimes, ethics is put aside and what really matters is the satisfaction perceived in the stakeholders of the firm. Both social values and stakeholder satisfaction are certainly important, but do not alone guarantee an ethics-based CSR.

Ethical Rationalism

Rationalism emerged from the eighteenth-century "Enlightenment" movement. According to ethical rationalism, ethics should be based on aprioristic principles of morality provided by human reason. These principles are considered knowable *a priori*, without any sensorial contribution. Typically, the figurehead of this ethical rationalism is Immanuel Kant, with his Categorical Imperative. Utilitarianism, in spite of the empirical evaluation of consequences of an action generally in terms of satisfaction, is also founded on an aprioristic principle ("the greater happiness for the greater number"). Similarly, "Integrative Social Contract Theory" also has ethical rationalism as a founding principle in assuming that morality derives of social consent, but it also includes an empirically-based acceptance of empirical norms – termed hyper-norms and authentic norms. These theories are focused on determining whether or not an action is ethically acceptable and on solving ethical dilemmas. They operate, however, without any reference to how morality contributes to the human flourishing of the moral agent or to the role of character in making moral judgments.

Rejection of both relativism and rationalism

In a speech given just a few weeks after the publication of *Caritas in veritate*, Benedict XVI (2009b) said that 150 years ago there was a "dictatorship of rationalism" while in the current epoch a sort of "dictatorship of relativism" is evident in many contexts. According to the Pope, both rationalism and relativism seem inadequate responses to the human being's justified request to use his or her reason as a distinctive and constitutive element of his or her own identity. "Rationalism was inadequate because it failed to take into account human limitations and claims to make reason alone the criterion of all things, transforming it into a goddess; contemporary relativism humiliates reason because it arrives de facto at affirming that the human being can know nothing with certainty outside the positive scientific field. Today however, as in that time, man, "a beggar for meaning and fulfillment", is "constantly in quest of exhaustive answers to the basic questions that he never ceases to ask himself." (2009b)

Benedict XVI is not alone in his reservations over Rationalism. In the second half of the 20th century, ethical rationalism was severely criticized, among others by Elisabeth Anscombe (1958), Philippa Foot (1978), and Alasdair MacIntryre (2008 [1981]) for the failure to consider the agent and his or her moral character and how the action shapes virtues and vices of the agent. MacIntryre suggested as an alternative an ethical approach which considers the Aristotelian concept of teleology, focused on the human ends that human reason can discover from the innate human tendencies. According to MacIntyre (2008 [1981]), the philosophers of the Enlightenment, because their theories were shorn of teleological elements, used an incomplete framework for the moral foundation of ethics, and so did their successors. MacIntyre is also opposed to Emotivism, a meta-ethical view that claims that ethical sentences do not express propositions but only emotional attitudes. Emotivism is aligned with the thought of David Hume (see, especially in *A Treatise of Human Nature*, Book 3 and in *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals)*, who proposed a morality based on sentiments, and consequently opposed ethical rationalism. The position of Anscombe, Foot, and Alasdair MacIntryre brought about a great development of "virtue ethics", which stresses the relevance of the decision-maker's moral character. This development then entered business ethics, as noted above.

The integration of normative theories in managerial thought could be considered an advance if you compare them with the view of value-free business. However, when normative theory comes from rationalistic ethics, ethics appears exclusively as a constraint of economic activity: "you should avoid actions which are not ethically right". But, what is right? The answer is not other than any action which is in accordance with the rationalistic ethical principle adopted.

If Pope Benedict rejects both relativism and rationalism, what alternative proposal does he make?

Understanding Benedict's position on "person-centered" ethics

Benedict XVI stresses "striving to meet the deepest moral needs of the person" (CV 45), and consequently responds to the true good of the human being, and to an authentic human growth. As noted by Mauri, this "is an ethic that helps the personal growth that accompanies the human being in his individual and shared life path, which indicates the way that mediates between the possibility and excellence." (2010, p. 95)

The good of the person consists of the goods which reason discovers from trends inherent in human nature. Therefore, as noted Mauri, "any attempt to govern human life by rules that are contrary to human nature or dispense with it, either in part or in whole" can not be called an ethics of the person, nor can "an ethic whose rules only aspire to regulate the coexistence of humans putting aside personal moral and social development."(2010, p. 95)

Human dignity and the transcendental value of natural moral norms

In Catholic Theology, faith meets reason and reason meets faith: what Benedict XVI does is assert the need for an ethics that includes norms derived from the biblical reference of the Creation of man as *imago Dei*, "image of God", which involves "the inviolable dignity of the human person, as well as the transcendental value of natural moral norms." (CV 45) Benedict XVI emphasizes the unique value and dignity of the human being in several passages of *Caritas in veritae* (CV 15, 18, 25, 41, 45). "Christian vision –he affirms– has the particular characteristic of asserting and justifying the unconditional value of the human person and the meaning of his growth (CV 18). It is just on this growth where the encyclical puts a special emphasis talking in terms of "human development".

In the context of CST the dignity of the human person and natural moral norms, although they can be discovered by reason, have their ultimate value in the authority of God-the-Creator, the author of human nature. For believers, the Creation of man "in the image of God" is a solid foundation for the dignity and rights of the human being. Nevertheless, respect for human dignity, natural moral norms and human rights are a quite reasonable disposition in and of itself. These are respected by many non-Christians, be it due to arguments of reason or to the wide consensus reached around these matters. Although not everyone will come to accept the transcendent rationale indicated by the Pope, sharing the recognition and respect for every person and for natural moral norms is a crucial reference for ethics.

In Benedict XVI's writings the reference to growth or perfection as a human being appears always related to human nature. For example, by saying in the encyclical *Caritas in veritate* that the human being "cannot prescind from his nature" (CV 21). A nature, which is not static but dynamic: it is equipped with operational principles which present to each a call to perform well to become a better person.

Benedict XVI defends the necessity of "authentic development of every person and of all people" (CV 1). Encyclical *Caritas in veritate* sees such development as a calling, or an innate orientation to develop one's own humanity. In this sense, we can read: "the human being is constitutionally oriented towards a 'being more'" (CV 14).

The question is posed, what does "being more" mean in practice, and what reference we can find for this end? According to the encyclical human development "*concerns the whole of the person in every single dimension"* (CV 11) and must *include both material and spiritual growth* (CV 76). Regarding the latter, love and truth are seen as primordial. These two crucial values appear as an interior impulse, which in some way, is made evident in everybody. The encyclical stresses this, adding that "love and truth never abandon them completely, because these are the vocation planted by God in the heart and mind of every human person." (CV 1) Seeking the truth and loving in accordance with that truth leads one to discover moral norms in human nature.

Natural Moral Law

This approach is related to natural moral law based on philosophical realism, different from the rationalist natural law, as proposed, among others, by John Locke. The fundamental assumption of the first true man's rational ability is to discern between good and evil. A capability that captures the moral message of human nature, together with the imperative to act accordingly. In this sense, Thomas Aquinas says: "seek and do good, and avoid evil". This is the first principle of natural moral law. Unlike the rationalist ethical theories of nature, natural law is not a rule imposed from outside of man but lies in his being.

This approach is not new. In fact, the whole Christian tradition affirms the human capacity to know the moral order, at least at its most elemental. Human reason did not invent them but discovered them as something received as part of the creative plan of God. It also makes explicit the inviolable dignity of every human being.

The existence and universality of natural law is set as shown by Paul, who, referring to the Gentiles, says that they "show they have recorded in their hearts what the law prescribes, as witnessed by his own conscience and according and according to the accusing or else excusing arguments that are made for one another." (Rom 2:15).

Not only Christian tradition defends the existence of natural moral norms of transcendent value. In the pre-Christian world too certain leading authors referred to an unwritten law that is above positive law. This is expressed, by Sophocles, among others, who in his famous tragedy Antigone, puts into the mouth of the protagonist the reproach of the tyrant Creon who refused to bury the dead body of Antigone's brother by invocating the "the immutable unwritten laws of Heaven." (*Antigone*, vv. 563 ff.) Cicero, for his part, says: "There is a true law, right reason, conformable to nature, present in all, unchanging, eternal, so that it appeals to men with their mandates to do his duty or to prevent them from doing evil. This law is no different in Rome or in Athens, nor different now to tomorrow. It is an immutable and eternal law whose sole author, performer and lawgiver is God." (*De republica* III, 22, 33)

Another manifestation of the existence of natural law is the existence of the Golden Rule, to avoid doing the evil to others that one would not want to receive, and in some form, found in all the great world religions. As Benedict XVI (2008), in addressing the General assembly of the United Nations, remembered Augustine of Hippo (fifth century), one of the masters of our intellectual heritage. He taught that the saying: *Do not do to others what you would not want done to you* "cannot in any way vary according to the different understandings that have arisen in the world" (*De Doctrina Christiana*, III, 14).

Related with the Golden Rule we find human rights; since "respect for human rights is principally rooted in unchanging justice" and remembering that these "rights and the resulting duties follow naturally from human interaction, it is easy to forget that they are the fruit of a commonly held sense of justice built primarily upon solidarity among the members of society, and hence valid at all times and for all peoples." (Benedict XVI, 2008) Consequently, "human rights must be respected as an expression of justice, and not merely because they are enforceable through the will of the legislators. "

Benedict XVI speaks of the "overall moral tenor of society" and points out the necessity to look at "the book of nature", which is "one and indivisible" (CV 51). This can be interpreted as a call to restore the natural law as common ethics. Earlier, the Pope had expressed the urgent need to reflect on the issue of natural law and to rediscover its truth common to all men. (2007a) Advancing in this direction, in a meeting with the International Theological Commission, Benedict XVI invited its members to work on the fundamentals of natural moral law (2007b). The International Theological Commission (ITC) itself later published an important paper on natural moral law (ITC, 2009) that opens new horizons of their understanding and implementation, including for business ethics.

Being more specific, Benedict reminds us that the first and general principle of natural law ("do good and avoid evil"), stands out immediately to everyone. From this first principle, other particular principles flow. The latter regulate ethical justice on the rights and duties of each, including respect for human life, the duty to seek the truth, freedom shared with others, and respect for the truth of the human being with justice and solidarity (Benedict XVI, 2007b). "In these values –concluded the Roman Pontiff – are expressed unbreakable and contingent norms that do not depend on the will of the legislator and not even on the consensus that the State can and must give. They are, in fact, norms that precede any human law: as such, they are not subject to modification by anyone." (Benedict XVI, 2007a).

Virtues: love in the truth

A person-centered ethics includes not only goods, principles and standards, but also, and above all, virtues. The virtues are expressions of inner growth. Human virtues, as Thomas Aquinas observed, are linked to natural moral law, so its moral norms are intended to be acts of virtue (1981[1273], II-II, q. 44, a. 2, ad 1). Thus, it is not surprising that natural moral law is also a virtue-based ethics.

Consequently, the social doctrine of the Church includes both principles and virtues, and regarding the latter, insists especially in the virtue of charity, which should be done in truth. This is the central subject of the Encyclical *Caritas in veritate (#2)*, which affirms: "Charity is at the heart of the Church's social doctrine. Every responsibility and every commitment spelt out by that doctrine is derived from charity which, according to the teaching of Jesus, is the synthesis of the entire Law (cf. Mt 22:36- 40)."

According to Benedict XVI, love is closely united to the truth. In his own words, love in the truth, that is, *Caritas in veritate, "*is the principle around which the Church's social doctrine turns, a principle that takes on practical form in the criteria that govern moral action.*"* (CV 6)

Prudence or practical wisdom is central in a person-centred ethics. Benedict refers to this virtue (CV 41) which is so important in Christian Tradition. Practical wisdom makes natural law operative in practice and allows one to evaluate each situation in search of the true moral good as a dimension inherent in reality. This brings about acting with love and justice in accordance with the truth.

To conclude, a person-centered ethics is the one that is oriented to the good of the person and focuses on virtues rooted in love in the truth.

"Person-Centered" approach for business ethics

Business ethics posits as the first problem the nature of the relationship between ethics and business, but an even more crucial problem is what perspective should be adopted in considering ethics. As regards the latter, the "First-Third Person" question emerged, and the encyclical has a clear position on both topics. We will analyze these, beginning with the second.

A "First-Person" Ethics

Abbà (1995, 1996) has pointed out these two different perspectives in considering the point of view of the observer who makes moral judgments, which lead to two different manners of understanding ethics. In the "first person" perspective it is the decision-maker or the acting subject who seeks the "good" in deciding or performing an action. In doing so he or she is aware that this action contributes to a virtuous life, or detracts from it. In the "third person" ethics the perspective moves to an external and impartial observer who tries to determine whether an action is "right" and to this end seeks principles and norms. This is the case of most Modern ethics, including the above-mentioned rationalist ethics. In this way, the internal effects of the action on the person acting and its contribution to human flourishing are ignored. Under this perspective this latter concept would make no sense. Managing one's own life is a matter of personal preferences, a purely private and subjective question in which regard ethics has nothing to say. A set of rules or principles provide some constraints to human activity, but guarantee the satisfaction of individual wishes if these re are within the limits of the rules. Abbà stresses this point by adding that the aim of "third person" ethics is "creating a social order where man as a being of desires or as autonomous subject can do what he wants, but without hurting others, or hurting them only with a better end in mind, but silence reigns concerning the meaning of the life of these free subjects. But then a question emerges: "Why be moral? Why should the utilitarian rules of justice, for example, be observed?" These questions remain without an answer in third person ethics. Abbà concludes by saying: "The principle of the intelligibility of a normative ethics of the third person must be located in the ethics of the first person. Human conduct, in fact, in as much as it is constructed and produced by the acting subject, contains an original, practical knowledge that is not reducible to the knowledge of the legislator, the judge, or the critic; an operative knowledge that has its own logic." (1995, p. 105)

We should recognize that the “third person” perspective is quite common in moral systems employed in business ethics, and the answer to the motivation for a moral behavior is only based on utilitarian motives (ethics is profitable) or on moral duty without further justifications: “You should act rightly because this is your duty!” or “you have to do this because this is the right thing!” In contrast, the person-entered approach takes a “first person” position. This is evident in the central theme of the encyclical: the integral human development which is achieved through love in truth, and the role of the personal conscience (CV 34, 36, 68). Definitively, this focuss on the first person and gives a definitive response to the question about the need to be moral.

It is logical to think that flourishing as a human being requires discovering what we are and what is the end of the tendencies inherent to human nature, and who are others. In *Caritas in veritate*, we read: “we all build our own ‘I’ on the basis of a ‘self’, which is given to us.” (…) “we must fortify our love for a freedom that is not merely arbitrary, but is rendered truly human by acknowledgment of the good that underlies it.” (CV 68) In other words: you should act well because this contributes to integral human development: the development of the acting person and the others; or because this is the answer to your human vocation to become better as a human being, and ultimately to respond to the will of God. That is why moral norms should be coherent with this end, and each person “needs to look inside himself in order to recognize the fundamental norms of the natural moral law which God has written on our hearts.” (CV 68)

Justice in every phase of economic activity

Love in truth has in the first place a demand for justice, as the encyclical itself makes clear. Justice is inseparable from love, intrinsic to it, and the primary way of love (CV 6). Justice entails “recognition and respect for the legitimate rights of individuals and peoples.” (CV 6) Business, as the whole society should be built, first of all, according to law and justice; and justice, which leads us to give each his or her what is due (rights) should be applied to every decision and in *every phase of economic activity*, including locating resources, financing, production, and consumption (CV 37).

Along with justice, “traditional principles of social ethics like transparency, honesty and responsibility cannot be ignored or attenuated, but also that in *commercial relationships* the *principle of gratuitousness* and the logic of gift as an expression of fraternity can and must *find their place within normal economic activity*.” (CV 36) Following this idea, the logic of gift and the principle of gratuitousness, as an expression of fraternity, need a space within normal economic activity, and within BE. Without excluding justice, logic of gift and the principle of gratuitousness are necessary to make authentically human economic, social and political development (CV 34-36). Seeing others – employees, colleagues, clients - as persons worthy of respect, deserving of reciprocal treatment and even of gratuity, overcomes a purely transactional vision or a consideration of others as mere resources or means to economic or power-objectives.

The common good as the crucial reference for organizational e societal ethics

On the moral foundations of business ethics there is the concern and effective orientation and strive toward the *common good* as a requirement of justice and charity. (CV 7) It is just to contribute to the common good of the communities to which one belongs. One receives from the community and in reciprocity one should contribute. But such contribution is not only a matter of justice but also of charity (love). In this sense, the Pope explains that charity (love) must not be limited to these *micro-relations*, but also be extended to *macro-relations*, “like social, economic and political relations.” In the firm there are both micro- and macro-relations. The first in small work-groups or in professional relations from which fellowship and even genuine friendship can appear. Macro-relations exist at all levels in the firm and in its various divisions too if the firm is sizeable, and also in the relations between the firm and society. (CV 2)

The consideration of the common good should be a permanent and crucial reference for economic activity, and therefore in organizational and societal business ethics. According to Benedict XVI, the application of *commercial logic* “needs to be *directed towards the pursuit of the common good*.” (CV 36) Likewise, the common good should be the ultimate end in business. This contrasts with the approaches in which profit becomes the exclusive goal of business. “Once profit becomes the exclusive goal – the encyclical notes –, if it is produced by improper means and without the common good as its ultimate end, it risks destroying wealth and creating poverty.” (CV 21) Economic and business activity with real growth, which benefit everybody, and genuinely sustainable is highly desirable (CV 21). On the contrary, management should avoid favoring short-term profits which in the long term impedes reciprocal enrichment and the dynamics of cooperation (CV 33).

Conclusion

Drawing from Catholic social tradition, and particularly, from some writings of Pope Benedict XVI, we have discussed the essentials of his approach, which we interpreted as person-centered ethics. It is neither relativist nor rationalistic, but based on metaphysic realism.

"Person-centered ethics" does not see ethics as a set of principles or norms extrinsic to the human action, but as morality inherent to the human action and, therefore, at the core of economic activity. In addition, his proposal is far from a "third person ethics", in which morality comes exclusively from the application of principles and norms set by experts in ethics who determine the moral acceptability of certain types of action or to solve dilemmas. Instead, it is a "first person ethics", in which personal conscience and virtues play an important role; it leads to the awareness of justice in every phase of economic activity and orients this to the common good.

We showed that "person-centered ethics" overcomes some shortcomings of conventional approaches currently found in the mainstream of business ethics thought. Consequently, it seems quite promising although further work should be carried out for the full development of an alternative theory for business ethics and, what is more, for a sound integration of ethics in business management.

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* Last access to all websites mentioned were done on May 30th, 2012.