# Work, education and civil society: Building a better society through a full understanding of work[1]

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Work is a human reality that has taken on key importance in today's world. The impact of human work on the world has increased considerably as a result of the technological advances of the last century. Moreover, from a more existential point of view, work also has a major impact on people and society. Paradoxically, precisely at a time when work plays such an important role, the concept we have of work may be losing importance compared to other moments in the history of thought.

Recovering all the aspects that make up a complete idea of work is important to be able to understand and value work in itself, as well as to define the educational process that takes place before and during our professional lives, and the social dynamics in which work takes place.

This paper will first describe work from a phenomenological and anthropological perspective. Secondly, we will describe the different dimensions of work and the outcomes gained during each step of the learning process. We will then present an evaluation of the educational framework for the development of competencies that is currently being prepared in the European Union as an example of how the concept of work is losing sway, as well as discuss the practical implications this may have on education. Finally, we will reflect on social dynamics and propose that "practical reason" and the "logic of truth" be recovered as factors that can help understand the concept of work in all its detail.

*An Anthropological Look at Work*

Human activity has a number of characteristics that distinguish it from the activity performed by other living beings. First of all, human activity forces us to make contact with the environment. Other living beings also make contact with their environment (*Umwelt*), i.e. the world around them that takes on meaning as dictated by their biological needs. But humans are capable of going beyond what is immediately significant and creating distance between what is around them and themselves. Thanks to this distance, they are able to give this reality a different meaning. Humans therefore not only have an *Umwelt* but a *Welt* (universe), to which they give their own meaning while respecting reality for what it is. That is why art is such a quintessentially human concept, because it is the ability to turn reality into an object to be contemplated. Animals kill and eat. Humans have turned this biological need into a cultural event by creating gastronomy.

In their relations with the world, humans are "non-specialists". All other living beings specialize in one thing or another: some are designed to fly, others to spend their lives in water; some can withstand the cold, while others can tolerate tropical heat. However, humans are defined by their lack of specialization. Humans can adapt to any environment and situation, not because of their biological conditions, but because they are capable of coming up with solutions that allow them to survive in different situations. When they want to fly, they invent the airplane. When they want to move underwater, they invent the submarine. When they are cold, they wear warm clothes. When they are hot, they invent air conditioning or freeze water to make ice. Aristotle said that: "humans have been given hands because they are the most intelligent of all animals". In other words, humans make up for their lack of biological conditions with their intelligence and ability to create devices with their hands. Their ability to make things is strengthened by their ability to think.

A second feature is that when humans take action, it not only produces external results, but also modifies them and contributes to whom they are. Human life is not only a biological process, but also a profoundly biographical one: by their very

actions, human beings write their own history and that of all of humanity. In one of his discussions with his followers, Socrates asks if it is worse to suffer injustice or commit it. You might think it is worse to suffer injustice because the person who commits it gets something out of it, whereas the person who suffers injustice has to put up with unexpected and unwanted distress. And yet Socrates answers that committing injustice is worse because the person who commits it becomes less just. In other words, something inside the person who commits an act of injustice creates a change for the worse in that person. This is much worse than the positive results that person may gain from the unjust act.

It may not be that easy to understand this important aspect of human action. It might console us to know that even Socrates' followers had trouble grasping the concept. When we evaluate the effects of our actions, we should not only think about the externally patent consequences, but also about the other consequences that remain inside the person who takes action. They may not have an immediate impact but more long-term effects, and their effects may be much more radical because they help shape our personality and determine who we are. Someone who commits an act of injustice is preparing to commit the same act in the future. The next time it will be much easier and this person will be much closer to committing even more unjust acts. To look at it from the opposite perspective, someone who commits an act of justice, a magnanimous, charitable, generous or friendly act, is more predisposed to continue in the same vein, thus making it easier to perform such an act again in the future. The Greek philosophers referred to these predispositions we acquire as virtues. When we take action, we acquire virtues (or vices if our actions are bad). We are not only doing things, but also creating the person we are.

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A third characteristic of human activity is that humans not only do things themselves, but do them with others. Humans are also capable of having others do things for them. Humans not only do things, but also are able to manage others. Managing others involves getting other people to do the things one wants. Managing does not involve modifying inert materials (which is producing), but modifying someone's will so that the person (who is an equal) does what one wants. Objects and goods can be administered. People are managed. Managing is the hardest job humans can do because it does not merely involve informing others (communication is a major part of management, but management cannot be reduced to merely transmitting information), but having an influence on their behaviour (making them do what one wants them to do) and at the same time respecting their condition as free, intelligent beings. When this is not respected, management becomes manipulation.

Managing people is an art that cannot be reduced to a simple set of rules. It is not the application of a technique, but calls for a specific mind set from the manager and the people being managed. Ultimately, management is based on the manager's ability to generate trust. This trust not only arises from the manager's technical knowledge (managers do not necessarily have to know more than the people they manage; in many cases, the opposite is true) or a kind of emotional collusion (managers do not have to be nice or share interests and tastes with the people they manage), but is based on the perception that when managers manage, they are thinking about what is best for the people they manage, who trust them and put themselves in managers' hands. To paraphrase Aristotle, we could say that: "I put myself in his hands because he is the most trustworthy of living beings".

These three characteristics indicate in one way or another the dimensions of work. In any job or professional activity there is an objective dimension, a result that is exteriorized and accomplished, and a subjective dimension, which is the result of the action in the person doing the action. This subjective dimension is present in the person who does the action, as well as in the people who receive the action. We change through work and the people who we deal with also change.
We can therefore say that a good job not only consists of doing what one should, but becoming a better person as a result and improving the other people one works with. When these three

dimensions are borne in mind, they result in positive synergies that contribute to the development of society because we become better people and make the world we share a better place.
In his Encyclical on work, Pope John Paul II pointed out two senses of work which have some relation to the dimensions discussed above. He first mentions work in the objective sense, which expresses the divine mandate of control over the Earth, for which humans make use of technology. Technology is man's ally in that "it facilitates his work, perfects, accelerates and augments it", though it can also turn into his adversary (John Paul II, 1981, 5). With regard to work in a subjective sense, John Paul II indicated that the source of the dignity of work should be sought by the person actually doing the work. Moreover, the purpose of work resides in man himself. St. Josemaría Escrivá, a saint of our days, understood work as the frame that supports the entire spiritual life of today's Christians. Using a description with a rather ascetic tone, he presents the three dimensions discussed above when he says, "It is we, men walking in the street, ordinary Christians immersed in the blood-stream of society, whom Our Lord wants to be saints and apostles, in the very midst of our professional work; that is, sanctifying our job in life, sanctifying ourselves in it, and through it, helping others to sanctify themselves as well" (Escrivá, 1977, 119). He concludes by saying that "since Christ took it into His hands, work has become for us a redeemed and redemptive reality. Not only is it the background of man's life, it is a means and path of holiness. It is something to be sanctified and something which sanctifies" (Escrivá, 1977, 47).

*An Aristotelian approach to human action*

Aristotle's reflections on human action can give also some insights on the different dimensions of work. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle distinguishes between *theory* and *praxis*. *Theory* is the knowledge of what is universal and necessary, of that which cannot be in another manner. On the contrary, *praxis* is the knowledge of what is particular and contingent. These two definitions of knowledge can refer to the same reality, but they do so in different ways, according to the well known example used by Aristotle: "[A] carpenter and a geometer investigate the right angle in different ways; the former does so in so far as the right angle is useful for his work, while the latter inquires what it is or what sort of thing it is; for he is a spectator of the truth" (*Nic. Eth.*, I, 7, 1098 a 30-33).
Aristotle introduces a new distinction in the ambit of the contingent, when he affirms that "among the things that can be in another manner, is that which is the object of production and that which is the object of an action or an act" (*Nic. Eth.*, VI, 4, 1140 a, 1-2). Aristotle distinguishes between the production of artefacts and a moral action, which the subject is responsible for. For this second type he reserves the name of praxis, while he gives the name of *poiesis* to the production (technical or artistic).

Therefore, Aristotle refers to three types of knowledge, each one of them with its proper object:

- *Theory*, which occupies itself with universal and necessary objects.
- *Praxis*, which occupies itself with actions, which morally make perfect the subject. In Latin it corresponds with the terms "*agere*", "*actio*" (*to do*).
- *Poiesis*, which occupies itself with the material production. In Latin it corresponds with the term "*facere*", "*factio*" (*to make*). The concept of *techne* (*ars* in Latin) corresponds with this ambit. Therefore, both technical actions and artistic productions would be included here.

For Aristotle these are not only three ways of knowledge; they have to be understood in a much more vital way. They are three ways of life. Theoretical life, proper of the philosophers, is a life of contemplating the eternal and the inherent. Practical life is expressed in a proper way, in the participation in public life, as in the case of politicians. The technical life corresponds with manual work, carried out by those who in the Greek civilization did not really have the condition of citizens.

Hannah Arendt has warned about the danger of a vision that devaluates the world of human action (the *vita activa*) subordinating it to the life of contemplation (the *vita contemplativa*). The task she set herself was to reinstate the life of public and political action by systematically elaborating what this *vita activa* might be said to entail (Yar, 2006). Arendt argued for a tripartite division between the human activities of labour, work, and action (Arendt, 1958):

1. Labour is that activity which corresponds to the biological processes and necessities of human existence (*animal laborans*), the practices, which are necessary for the maintenance of life itself.

2. Work corresponds to the fabrication of an *artificial* world of things, distinguished by its durability, its semi-permanence and relative independence from the individual actors and acts, which call it into being. *Homo faber's* representatives are, for example, the builder, the architect, the craftsperson, the artist and the legislator, as they create the public world both physically and institutionally by constructing buildings and making laws.

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3. Action is defined by freedom, that is, as an end in itself and so as subordinate to nothing outside itself. To act means to take initiative, to begin, to set something in motion. So, intrinsic to the human capacity for action is the introduction of genuine novelty, the unexpected, unanticipated and unpredictable into the world. Arendt's theory holds that actions cannot be justified for their own sake, but only in light of their public recognition and the shared rules of a political community. Action is therefore the proper activity of the social character of the human being (*zoon politikon*) and requires a public space in which it can be realized, a context in which individuals can encounter one another as members of a community (Yar, 2006).

In our present times, it seems that we have gone a step further. Greek philosophy situated *theory* as the highest form of life. On the other hand, Arendt wanted to underline the value of active life, and stated that man is only free when he moves about easily in the ambit of action *(praxis)*. Finally, nowadays the idea of production (*poiesis*) has acquired an important relevance. Therefore, the question is: Is there any way of relating all these three ambits? From our current situation, can *theory* and *praxis* (action) contribute something to *poiesis* (technique and art)?

When defining the three types of knowledge, the differences between them have been underlined. The first difference is that *theory* moves in the ambit of the universal, while *praxis* (action) and *poiesis* (technique and art) move about in the ambit of the particular. The second difference is that *theory* and *praxis* are inherent operations, i.e. actions of reason whose results revert on the subject. On the other hand, *poiesis* refers to transitive operations, whose results are modifications of exterior material (Table 1).

Therefore, *praxis* (action) is equally far apart from the technical or artistic skill (*poiesis*) and the sure knowledge of universal truths (*theories*). Praxis shares with *poiesis* an interest for particular questions. Unlike *theory*, it is not interested in knowledge in itself, but unlike *poiesis*, its activity does not translate itself in exterior results. *Praxis* asks how one knows what is alright, how to decide at every moment what has to be done, and what methods have to be used in order to achieve this.

Now, the question is not only how to distinguish these three kinds of knowledge, but if they are related in any way. Aristotle contemplates this possibility when he alerts that through action the flute player's art improves, as well as that of the sculptor and all who produce or work on some thing, and which reveals a certain inherence of the act (*Nic. Eth.*, I, 7, 1097 b 23-1098 a 20). The hypothesis that the three kinds of knowledge could be found in the same action can be easily taken into account if they are understood in categorical terms. In terms of the subject at hand, what we are interested in is how *theory* and *praxis* are present in poiesis.

*Poiesis* (technique and art) needs *theory*. The *homo faber* cannot be understood only as that who executes or transforms the material in virtue of the perfection of his corporal organs. He is also *homo sapiens*, which means that technique and art are impossible without knowledge (Chirinos, 2002). In order to produce artefacts, the human being needs both, the sensorial knowledge of the material which is the object of the transformation process as well as the scientific knowledge of the laws of the process (Chirinos, 2002).

*Poiesis* (production) needs *praxis*. *Poiesis* has to be understood as an action, which intervenes in the course of a process. Arendt underlines that work has essentially an *instrumental* character. Work is essentially a *means* to achieve the thing which is to be fabricated (be it a work of art, a building or a structure of legal relations) and so stands in a relation of mere purposiveness to that end. Therefore, the activity of work is not an end in itself, but is determined by prior causes and articulated ends (Yar, 2006).

The technical action has a relative purpose, the production of something, but this end is accompanied by another absolute objective, which defines not only what we do (production), but for what we are doing it (action) (*Metaph.*, V, 1013 a. 32). This final objective of the act is characterised by Aristotle as something perfect and autosufficient (*Nic. Eth.*, I, 7, 1097, b 20-22). This 'for what' is what corresponds to *praxis*. For that reason Aristotle underlines in *Politics* that human life is basically *praxis* not *poiesis.* (*Politics*, I, 2, 1254, a 7), because human life is oriented towards a purpose, a "for what". Spaeman (1991, 254) has insisted on this point by underlining that "all *poiesis* is inscribed, in fact, in a *praxis*".

Any human action worthy of the name has a theoretical side, a *poietic* side and a *praxis* side. Let us use the example of John, who is building a house. To build the house, John will need to know a number of things about the use of materials and will have to make calculations and follow a set of more or less accepted rules. All this is *theory*. Then, if it is something John thinks is important, he will think about the needs of the people who will live in the house or how the construction of the house will affect the environment. He will also have to deal with the people who help him build the house. He will have to negotiate, give orders and accept advice. All this is *praxis*. Finally, he will make use of a series of technical and artistic skills that will ultimately finish off the house and make it all come together. This is *poietic* activity.

The reflection oriented towards an end (*praxis*) is what puts human action in movement, and therefore *praxis* governs the technical production (*poiesis*), because everyone who does something does it with a view to an end (*Nich. Eth.*, VI, 2, 1139 a 31 – 1139 b 6) (Chirinos, 2002).
We are mistaken if we think that all we do when we work is to make things. The external results of our professional activity are an important effect of our work, but not the only one. As a result, when we think about performing a professional activity and its impact on society, we cannot simply think that our work is transforming the environment in which society advances. People have only an incomplete vision when they think that all they have to do when they perform their role as professionals is to worry about doing the technical things as well as they can and that there will be other areas in which they can put other sides of their personality into play. This is because all essentially human activities have a technical side (*poietics*), as well as a practical side, which is related to the values of the subject and her significant vision of the world and herself. A good professional is someone who does not only do things technically well, but who does them for a reason that is worthwhile. She should not only worry about "what" she does, but "why" she does it. Focusing on the subjective dimension of work, it could be of interest to ask what the learning outcomes are that we obtain through our work.

The three types of activities are related to the faculties of the human being, inasmuch that the human being uses his faculties to carry out the different activities. In the exercise of his faculties the human being acquires some dispositions through which he finds it easier to carry out similar actions in the future. These dispositions receive, in classical philosophy, the name of 'habits'. Therefore, the concept of habit as a disposition of the subject to act is very much related with the idea of learning. *Learning* is, in Aristotelian terms, the *acquisition of habits through actions*. In a more contemporary language, it is "a cumulative process where individuals gradually assimilate increasingly complex and abstract entities (concepts, categories, and patterns of behaviour or models) and/or acquire skills and wider competences" (European Commission, 2005 b).

Aristotle in his *Nicomachean Ethics* states: "We divided the virtues of the soul and said that some are virtues of character and others of intellect" (*Nic. Eth.*, VI,1, 1139 a 1-2). Thus, the faculties that are subject to habits are two: understanding (or apprehensive faculty) which is the faculty which allows us to know the things, and the will (or the appetitive faculty), which is the faculty which inclines us to look for good things and to act well.

Within the faculty of the intellect, Aristotle distinguishes two parts, "one by which we contemplate the kind of things whose originative causes are invariable, and one by which we contemplate variable things". He calls one of these parts "the scientific and the other the calculative; for to deliberate and to calculate are the same thing, but no one deliberates about the invariable" (*Nic. Eth.*, VI, 1, 1139 a 6-14). Continuing with the distinctions, Aristotle affirms that "in the variable are included both things made and things done" (*Nic. Eth.*, VI, 4, 1140 a 1-3), which corresponds with the distinction that has been previously made between *praxis* and *poiesis*.

Therefore the habits of the different faculties are the following ones:

1. The habits of the scientific or theoretical intellect, which are three: understanding or the habit of the first principles; wisdom, which facilitates the knowledge of the last causes in general; and science, which is the knowledge of the last causes of the different kinds of being. Commenting on these three principles, Thomas Aquinas affirms that there is a certain order in these three habits: "science depends on understanding as on a virtue of higher degree: and both of these depend on wisdom, as obtaining the highest place, and containing beneath itself both understanding and science, by judging both of the conclusions of science, and of the principles on which they are based" (S. Th., I-II, q. 57, a. 2, ad 2).

2. The habit of the practical or calculative intellect, which refers to the things made is technique or art. Technique or art is defined as the right reason of the things that have to be made (recta ratio factibilium). It is an operative habit, which refers to the development of the capacity of making things technically well. It is the responsibility of art to produce good works (whether useful or pleasant), without reference to how these works are used, which would have to do with the habit of prudence (or practical wisdom).

3. The habit of the practical intellect, which refers to the things done is prudence or practical wisdom. Prudence is defined as the right reason of the actions that are carried out (recta ratio agibilium). While technique and art require that a good act be done, prudence requires that the artist acts well, as the good of art is considered in the same work produced, while the good of prudence is considered in the same agent (S.Th., I-II, q. 57, a. 5, ad 1).

To act well, it matters not only what a human being does, but also how he does it, which means, that he does it from right choice and not merely from impulse or passion. Rectitude of choice requires two things: namely, the due end, and something suitably ordained to that due end. Regarding the latter, prudence (or practical wisdom) is the habit that perfects the reason and makes it suitably affected towards things ordained to the end, towards choosing means to achieve the end. As for the first, the recognition of the right goal corresponds with the habits of the will.

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4. The habits of the will are those denominated by the Greek philosopher as moral or ethical virtues. As we have just stated, to act well not only a good election of the methods is required, but also a correct inclination towards the goals. The moral virtues are those operative habits, which make human beings behave in a way which contributes to the flourishing of his or her personality. It is generally accepted to numerate four principal or cardinal moral virtues. Three virtues are related with the will: justice, fortitude and temperance. The fourth virtue is prudence, which occupies a special place because, although it is a habit of the intellect, it is also considered a moral virtue, being a virtue, which allows choosing the correct path, the middle way, to attain the desired end. To define the three moral virtues, which correspond with the will, among the many definitions that have been given, we follow that of Cicero. He states:

"Virtue is a disposition of spirit in harmony

with the measure of nature and of reason. So when we know all its parts, we will have considered all the force of simple honour. It has four parts: prudence, justice, fortitude, temperance. (…) Prudence is the knowledge of what is good, what is bad, and what is neutral. (…) Justice is a disposition of spirit which, having preserved the common utility, gives to each his due. (…) Fortitude [courage] is considered the undertaking of dangers and the enduring of labours. (…) Temperance is a firm and moderate control exercised by calculation over lust and other impulses of the spirit that are not right" (*De Inventione,* 2.53.159-164).

Table 2 summarises the different faculties which have been described, the habits that are proper of them, and their relation with the activities. As it can be seen, art or technique (i.e. making something) is not confused either with *theory* (pure reflection) or with moral virtue (the orientation towards the goal).

A categorical interpretation of the three types of activities allows saying that in the same human action the three types of activity can simultaneously be present (Table 2). Therefore, in any action there is simultaneously a moral and a technical or artistic dimension. Besides, given that the production of a work has an instrumental character, it could also be added that the technical or the artistic dimension is governed by the moral one. In this way, it could be concluded that in the same working action (the *poietic* action), not only a certain skill (technical or artistic) but also virtues are acquired (Chirinos, 2002, 88). As it has been underlined (Polo, 1987, 220), using a business terminology, virtue is an "added benefit" to the correct exercise of the *poietic* action. In the same *poietic* action we produce something good and "besides" we become better or worse. One shall be aware of these salient moral features of the situation with which one deals, and that are marks of good character (Hartman, 2006).

Socrates was well aware of this point when, as it has been mentioned above, he argues in *Gorgias* that "it is better to suffer injustice than to commit injustice", because the person that commits injustice becomes unjust. If we accept the notion that work brings together a wide range of different dimensions, and that a number of human skills come into play and very different habits are acquired, some technical, others ethical, we can then conclude that the preparation required to work as a professional should address these dimensions and learning experiences. Ethical habits are acquired on the job and not through theoretical reflection about the meaning of work, but being more aware of these aspects can help people acquire moral habits because this knowledge can help improve decision-making processes and subsequent action.

From this perspective, we can look now at the proposals being presented in the European Union in relation to the European Qualifications Framework For Lifelong Learning, as an example of how the ethical dimension of work has been taken into account, or, unfortunately, has been forgotten.

### *Education and virtues. The case of the European Qualifications Framework's proposal*[2]

The creation of a common European space for higher education began in 1998 with the so-called Sorbonne Declaration by education ministers from France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom. A year later, in the Bologna Declaration (1999), twenty-nine EU Member States and accession countries set themselves the goal of promoting a shared European higher education system (Bologna Declaration, 1999). The European space for higher education was due to be completed in 2010. The aim was to increase the international competitiveness of European education and enhance the mobility of workers and learners.
As part of this process, the European Qualifications Framework (EQF) for lifelong learning is intended to provide a common reference for comparing qualifications, among the EU Member States based on *learning outcomes* and *lifelong learning* (European Council, 2005).

The "lifelong learning" approach is in accordance with the widely accepted view that links each level and cycle of the education process with the achievement of objectives that the knowledge society demands (Schriewer, 2000; Castells, 2000; Kelly and Morder, 2001; Rodríguez and Altarejos, 2001; McLaughlin, 2005). The 1996 Delors Report stated: "The concept of learning throughout life is the key that gives access to the twenty first century. It goes beyond the traditional distinction between initial and continuing education. It links up with another concept often put forward, that of the learning society, in which everything affords an

opportunity of learning and fulfilling one's potential" (Delors, 1996, p. 36). In this perspective, the task is to increase individual responsibility for learning, with the aim of developing the competences that will allow each citizen to achieve lifelong employability in a dynamic and changing world (Smith and Spurling, 1999; Prahalad and Hamel, 1990; Spencer and Spencer, 1993; Cheeetham and Chivers, 1996; Kwiek, 2004).

The European Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (Cedefop) was commissioned to produce a study that would provide a basis for an agreement on 'learning outcomes'. The Cedefop report, aiming to bring together most of the approaches and models used to date in the different member countries (Cedefop, 2005), proposed a typology of "learning outcomes" based on *knowledge*, *skills* and *competences* (abbreviated as KSCs) (See Table 3).

Some months after receiving the Cedefop Report, the EQF working group of the Commission adopted "competences" as the general term for the different elements of the typology of "learning outcomes", and also the terms used for the first two types: cognitive competences (knowledge) and functional competences (skills). However, instead of the third type (competences), two more groups of competences were proposed: *personal competences* and *ethical competences*.

Therefore, the April and July drafts of the document elaborated by the working group identified four types of professional competences: "1) cognitive competence involving the use of *theory* and concepts, as well as informal tacit knowledge gained experientially; 2) functional competence (skills or know-how), those things that a person should be able to do when they are functioning in a given area of work, learning or social activity; 3) personal competence involving knowing how to conduct oneself in a specific situation; and iv) ethical competence involving the possession of certain personal and professional values" (European Commission, 2005a, p. 4; European Commission, 2005b, p. 11; our emphasis).

In these documents, the European Commission considered ethics one of the four competences that everyone should acquire throughout his training or education. Ethics was understood as the "possession of certain personal and professional values" (European Commission, 2005b, p. 11).

The need for ethical training of employees, and managers in particular, had already been formally acknowledged in the Green Paper of the European Commission on 'Promoting a European framework for Corporate Social Responsibility', which stated that "in response to the need to integrate corporate social responsibility into the training of existing managers and employees and to anticipate the skills that will be required of the managers and employees of the future, courses or modules in business ethics become quite a common element of business degrees" (European Commission, 2001, n. 65).

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Once the four types of competences had been identified, one might reasonably expect the new 'grid' to include eight rows (for the eight levels) and four columns (the four competences defined by the Working Group). However, in the same documents, when moving from the definitions to the implementation, a new division of competences in three groups was proposed: *knowledge*, *skills* and '*wider competences*' that included the *personal* and *ethical* competences:

"Acquiring a certain level of competence can be seen as the ability of an individual to use and combine his or her knowledge, skills and wider competences according to the varying requirements posed by a particular context, a situation or a problem. Put another way, the ability of an individual to deal with complexity, unpredictability and change defines/determines his or her level of competence. This understanding of competences will be reflected in the EQF reference levels described in this document where a distinction will be made between knowledge (reflecting element (i) of the above definition), skills (reflecting element (ii) of the above definition) and, finally, wider competences (reflecting elements (iii) and (iv) of

the above definition)". (European Commission, 2005b, p. 11).

The July 2005 Staff Working Document proposed a new table in which the 'wider aspects of competence' changed name again and were called 'personal and professional competences'. This category contained four aspects: (i) Autonomy and responsibility, which had to do with the degree of experience; (ii) learning competence, which had to do with the capacity to deal with complexity; (iii) Communication and social competence, which included capacities and skills relating to communication and interpersonal relations; and (iv) Professional and vocational competence, which was the capacity to deal with social and ethical issues (European Commission, 2005b, p. 18-20 and 40).

In conclusion, 'ethical competence', which initially was one of the four main types of competence, ended up as an aspect of a broader 'professional and vocational competence' (see Table 4).

As the working documents progressed, the ethical dimension lost the importance it appeared to have at the beginning. It is no longer one of the main types of competences; not even one of the four aspects within the "wider competences" type. Looking at the eight levels into which the "lifelong learning" is divided, ethics is explicitly mentioned for the first time at level four, and only in the column of the fourth aspect of the fourth type of competences.

Specifically, the fourth level requires the ability to "solve problems by integrating information from expert sources taking account of relevant social and ethical issues". At the fifth level the student should be able to "make judgments based on knowledge of relevant social and ethical issues". The sixth level requires the ability to "make judgements based on social and ethical issues that arise in work or study". The seventh level implies being able to "respond to social, scientific and ethical issues that are encountered in work or study". Lastly, at the highest level of qualification the student is expected to be able to "promote social and ethical advancement through actions" (European Commission, 2005b, pp. 18-20 and 40).

In September 2006, on completion of a consultation period based on the working document, the Commission presented its 'Proposal for a Recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council on the establishment of the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning', that was endorsed by the November 2006 Council. This document contains a new version of the 'grid'. Two aspects are worth noting.

First, there is a clarification of the term 'competences'. The results of the learning process are called again 'learning outcomes'. The term 'competences' is reserved exclusively for the type of outcomes referred to in earlier documents as 'wider competences' or 'personal and professional competences'. Also, the fourfold division of 'personal and professional competences' found in the July 2005 document is abandoned in favour of a single term, 'competences'. The Recommendation goes back to the original typology: knowledge, skills and competences. Competences are defined in terms of autonomy and responsibility (European Commission, 2006, p. 18).

Second, the term 'ethics' disappears completely. The only implicit reference is in the term 'professional integrity' in level 8 of the grid (European Commission, 2006, p. 20).
If the solution finally opted for is the one reflected in the September 2006 document, the gradual dissolution of ethics will be a fact. References to ethics gradually disappeared, both in the basis of the model and in its practical development, whether in terms of learning outcomes or in terms of learning levels. As a consequence, we may find ourselves with an education system without ethics. But without ethics can we really still talk about an "education system"?

The gradual dissolution of the ethical dimension during the preparation of the EQF grid and specific learning outcomes has led to an imbalance between the technical and other dimensions. 'Hard' variables (knowledge and skills) have taken precedence over 'soft variables' (competences).

It seems reasonable to assume that excessive insistence on education in intellectual and technical skills, to the detriment of ethical skills, will lead to a basically instrumental education. We believe that explicit inclusion of ethics, as initially proposed, would be conducive to a more all-round development, one that aspires to human excellence and that includes knowledge but

without neglecting virtue (Solomon, 1992; Milton-Smith, 1995).

A more holistic professional education would include moral competences (or moral virtues) such as responsibility, integrity, honesty, equity, industriousness, loyalty, orderliness, willingness to serve, and many others. These are essential professional qualifications and to omit them would have serious consequences for future generations' ability to contribute to the sustainable development of our society.

Within the world of management education, at least, there has been a widespread call for the inclusion of ethics in the education given to future managers (Weber and Wasieleski, 2001; Donaldson, 2002; Pfeffer and Fong, 2002; Mintzberg et al., 2002; Mintzberg and Gosling, 2002; Sims and Brinkmann, 2003; Trevino and Brown, 2004; Mintzberg, 2004; Rockness and Rockness, 2005; Ghoshal, 2005). Bennis and O'Toole (2005) pointed to MBA programs' failure to impart useful skills, produce leaders, and instil standards of ethical behaviour as the causes of the corporate scandals that made headlines in the early part of this decade. Quoting Thomas Lindsay, they maintained that genuine leadership requires not only technical training but, above all, an education in moral reasoning (Bennis and O'Toole, 2005).

If ethics is not taken explicitly into account throughout the educational process, the result is likely to be managers who have no notion of the rules of professional conduct, nor of the virtues they must have in order to follow those rules. The fact is that professional integrity is not explicitly included in the EQF until the last stage of learning (level 8) (European Commission, 2006). If this means that those who do not reach that level will never have the opportunity to acquire the necessary moral competences for sustained employability, then the proposal is clearly impoverishing for human development.

In contrast, it seems reasonable to suggest that a lifelong learning process based on the development of professional excellence should explicitly require a continuous personal improvement, that is, the development of human excellence (Arendt, 1958; Whetstone, 2003; Solomon, 2004; Hartman, 2006).

*The civil society and its logics*

The description of professional activity as one of the defining elements of society is related to the importance that so-called "civil society" has gained in recent years. Civil society is understood to be the capacity of members of society to make their opinions known and take action in society through association movements and other initiatives, rather than through established political and economic structures.

*The creation of a common European space for higher education began in 1998 with the socalled Sorbonne Declaration by education ministers from France, Germany, Italy and the United Kingdom*

Thus, civil society has become a third element of discord that has managed to break the balance between the two kinds of logic that had established their hegemony in the design of social harmony, at least in Western societies. These two kinds of logic can be referred to as "the logic of the market" and "the logic of political discourse". Work acquires different meaning depending on which logic dominates.

The logic of the market has its roots in liberal theoretical approaches. Liberalism is based on the assumption that human beings look out for their own interests and that society is nothing more than an additional necessary construct that provides the individual with the minimum conditions to ensure that freedom of action is not in danger. Social harmony seeks a balance of interests between all the parties by having each one compromise something to achieve the optimum situation. In this scenario, the market is presented as the most suitable tool for achieving this balance, where everyone can look out for her own interests. The market should be neutral and aseptic. It should not judge intentions or learning. It should find an objective way to give each party what corresponds to her. Therefore, only the exterior results of actions are taken into account, i.e. "how much you make and how much you lose". In this kind of logic, the world is seen through the prism of the

economic calculation of costs and benefits, and the decision-making criteria involve opting for the alternatives that produce the greatest good for the most people. A society that follows the dictates of the logic of the market can only interpret reality based on economic reasoning (*pensée unique* or single thought). The only discourse is one based on making (though it may be more accurate to say "making money"), i.e. *poiesis*. *Praxis* and *theory* simply do not matter.

In this kind of logic, work is seen as an element of commercial exchange between the person doing the work and the person requesting the service. In this case, the businessperson has more negotiating power. Economists would explain this by saying there is probably an excess of supply. But whatever the reason, this exchange takes the form of a contract, which is sometimes enriched with expressions such as "emotional salary" and with remuneration formulas such as stock options.

In contrast with this kind of logic is the "logic of political discourse", which has its theoretical roots in all the approaches that understand that the government's function is to determine what is good and bad for the members of society. Compared to the liberal approach, these are more collective positions where the good of society is what matters most of all, and is decided by whoever holds power. Individuals are nothing more than gears in the social machine. When this logic takes place in authoritative societies, individuals lose all ability to act in favour of whoever is in power; whereas, in democratic societies, individuals are a percentage of the total and their voice is heard depending on the size of that percentage. If economic reasoning is what determines which actions are true and good in the logic of the market, here truth and good are determined in discussions between the people who form part of this society (closed, except to a select few, in authoritative societies, and open to all in democratic societies).

In Ancient Greece, truth was discovered, which is why *theory* was the most prominent human activity. In the logic of political discourse, truth is made, which is why *praxis* and *theory* are somehow reduced to *poiesis*. As Marx said, "Thus far we have only thought about the world. Now it's time to transform it". In this kind of logic, work is seen as a tool of power and negotiation in the hands of those who do the work. Work is the medium through which the "class struggle" is won.

These kinds of logic may at first appear to be very different (to such an extent that, in politics, the right is often said to use the logic of the market, whereas the left is said to use the logic of political discourse), but they actually have one thing in common, namely, that they focus on the objective side (*poiesis*) of human activity and do without the subjective side.

From Greek thought until the modern age, the centre was reality, i.e. the world as it was. What was important was how humans could learn about this world and relate with it. The modern age turned everything around: exterior reality began to be questioned; the subject became the centre and an autonomous being capable of judging and deciding about reality. Therefore, subjectivity lost scientific interest and became a given that was not eligible for study because it occupied the realm of privacy. Instead, all the attention shifted to the reality that autonomous human beings built, evaluated and judged, based on their own interests and power.

The modern and contemporary world has been torn between these two kinds of logic. The scientific and technological progress we have witnessed in recent centuries has its ultimate explanation (at least from the perspective of ideas) in that affirmation of a subject who claims to be the lord of the universe with total capacity to dominate it. Thus, another kind of logic was born, based on theoretical research driven as much by economic interests as the utopian vision of a perfect society. According to this kind of logic, scientific and technological progress is always a positive step forward that takes the place of other moral considerations and renders them useless. Morality was the old response to questions that can now be solved through science and technology.

And yet, our analysis would only be partial if we did not acknowledge that this progress is not always positive. It sometimes produces negative effects, and rather than making moral questions unnecessary, it gives them greater importance.
The term "postmodernism" has been used for some time in the field of thought as a way of acknowledging that modern (and contemporary) thought has come to a dead end and that the only way out is a clean break with the current model. In the area of action, we appear to continue to trust in

scientific progress, although phenomena such as climatic change are now forcing us to question the assumption that "everything that is technically possible is good" and to open the debate as to whether human action should be limited in some way, because one action transforms the world and another destroys it. In the social context, humans are beginning to break the hegemony created by the two kinds of logic: with regard to the logic of the market, people are considering the need to use other criteria and perspectives besides economic reasoning; with regard to the logic of political discourse, people are questioning the government's right to always control social dialogue and action. The rise of civil society is one example of this.

However, the rise of civil society does not ensure a change in model will occur above and beyond the dominant kinds of logic with regard to the achievement of social harmony. Civil society can still be mired down by a modern discourse if it conforms to following another variation of modern thought known as the "logic of feelings". The subject of the modern world who places himself in the centre of attention can end up identifying what he feels he should do with his desires, so that ethics is reduced to a questions of feelings and emotions: "whatever makes me feel good is ethical".

This kind of logic is gaining considerable ground in today's society because, unlike the other kinds of logic that look outside the subject, this kind places all its attention on the subject himself: what matters is why I do things. This "why" has no other reference than the subject himself, given that only the subject can decide what makes him feel good. With this kind of logic, what matters is "being authentic", showing who you really are and being free to do exactly what you want. And yet this kind of logic, from a theoretical perspective, overlooks the fact that your actions have effects that are evaluated independently, regardless of your intentions. And from a practical perspective it overlooks the fact that everyone cannot have the same intention and if we have to accept that everyone is driven by good intentions, we have to find a procedure for determining which intention should prevail. This procedure can be found through one of the other kinds of logic, mainly through the logic of political discourse ("let's reach an agreement"), although the logic of the market can also help ("let me do what I feel like, given that this does not force you to do the same and that way we're both happy").

Civil society may find that the logic of feelings provides a theoretical base that can be used to justify its actions. In fact, it is easy to observe how many of civil society's philanthropic, altruistic and humanitarian discourses are supported by strong emotional discourses. But what makes the case interesting and paradoxical is that a civil society that follows the dictates of the logic of feelings will become an ally of the dominant kinds of logic: they have no trouble with a society governed by feelings because they can resort to them to decide on what to do. If we pay some attention, we can see that this is exactly what is happening today: a combination of good feelings (the logic of feelings), with blind faith in the power of technology (the logic of progress), to achieve certain results (the logic of market) and a relativist discourse that accepts the notion that anything goes (the logic of political discourse). Let's take a look at the questions that arise from biotechnology: there are no limits to the manipulation of human life and, what's more, we have the technological capacity to do it and are convinced that it allows us to fight diseases that cause suffering and pain. Who dares to say under these circumstances that there are limits in human life that should be respected or that technology can produce harmful side effects, or that a good intention does not justify reprehensible means, or that there are alternatives to the research proposed, or that a full life is one that is able to find a meaning for pain? And if someone dared to say

*The need for ethical training of employees, and managers in particular, had already been formally acknowledged in the Green Paper of the European Commission on 'Promoting a European framework for Corporate Social Responsibility'*

these things, would anyone listen to her?

Therefore, besides promoting civil society's appearance on the scene, we have to call for a change in our mentality when dealing with the reality around us. Until the onset of modern thought, we had a certain amount of faith in the idea that we could use our brains to comprehend the world and ourselves. The knowledge we possessed of the world might have been limited, but that did not keep us from affirming that we were absolutely sure about that part of the world we understood, or that we might be wrong. We were driven by a "logic of truth" based on a certain level of inherent balance between reality, which was reasonable, and human beings, whose intelligence allowed us to discover the meaning of things. We trusted the notion that we could learn the truth about things, but were also "realistic", because we acknowledged that we could only know a limited amount of that truth, and we could be wrong. In any case, being wrong had no effect on reality (which continued to be just as it was), but it represented a desire to correct that error and a drive to discover, alone or with others, the truth of things.

With the onset of modern thought, this inherent balance between reasonable reality and rational human beings was broken, either because people felt that reality did not make any sense at all, or because people began to question whether humans could ever know that reality, should it exist. Therefore, the reference to the truth was lost and replaced with the "logic of opinion". Truth is an empty concept, either because things are not real, or because we cannot really know them. All we can have are opinions on things: opinions that are based on empirical experimentation (logic of the market), an agreement between all parties (logic of political discourse), a blind trust in science (logic of progress), or what each person feels (logic of feelings). However, these opinions are always under "suspicion". Based on this new approach, truth is not necessarily partial (because of our limited knowledge) or provisional (with the understanding that we can be wrong), but is "apparent" because it is ultimately only supported by our opinions. We do not discover the truth, but create it. That's why we can change it whenever it is in our interest, whenever we want, or whenever we come to an agreement.

This way of weakening thought ("weak thought" or *pensiero debole*) has been presented as the only way to achieve social harmony in a democratic state that wants to guarantee respect for the many opinions and life options. It is argued that if we accept that things have a reality that may be different from what we think about them, this will imply imposing a number of restrictions on certain behaviours that would go against the tolerance we feel is appropriate. Given that the logic of truth has the ethical correlative of the existence of certain "absolute values" that put limits on human action, this position is considered intolerant by some people because it makes it impossible to grant moral legitimacy to certain actions. The conclusion is therefore that a tolerant society should reject the logic of truth and accept the logic of opinion because the latter is not governed by "absolute values" and, as a result, all opinions are equally acceptable.

However, it is not true that the relativism of the logic of opinion guarantees tolerance. Just the opposite is true. If all opinions are equally valid, how can we decide which ones should prevail? If all opinions should be respected, why do the people in power always end up getting their way? It might be argued that this is the way things are because, in a democratic society, those in power have the support of the majority. But this does not seem to be a valid explanation. If it were, we would have to agree that Martin Luther King or Gandhi were intolerant because they fought against laws accepted by the majority. And yet these two men are presented as paradigmatic examples of civil society.

The weakness of the ideas supported by "weak thought" do not guarantee tolerance, but open the doors to the intolerant abuse of power by those who are responsible for governing. However, based on the confidence in your own convictions (confidence that does not come from how loud you present your opinions, but your understanding that these convictions are based on things as they really are), open, tolerant dialogue can begin. As Machado said: "My truth? Your truth? No. The truth. Let's go and look for it together. Put yours away for now". Anyone who accepts the idea that there are "absolute moral truths" can become intolerant (fundamentalisms) when the list of these truths gets longer and longer and invades the realm of freedom of action. The existence of "absolute truths" involves reproving certain actions, not forcing people to do others. But in practical terms relativism necessarily does away with intolerance,

because there is no more intolerant argument than one that says something should be done "because I say so".

In short, revitalizing the weight of civil society is less important than rediscovering the logic of truth, which is fundamentally made up of three separate approaches: from the metaphysical perspective, recovering the notion that things (and humans) have a way of being, a nature, that is different from the opinion we may have of them; from an epistemological viewpoint, recovering the confidence that, through their ability to reason, human beings can find out the truth about things, can discover the truth, and that this is something that can only be done in the company of others (through dialogue we discover the truth, which is very different from saying that through dialogue we decide what is true); and, lastly, from an ethical point of view, accepting that not everything is subject to human free will, but based on the nature of things that humans are able to discover through reason, there are a number of rules or principles of action that should be respected (regardless of whether or not we like them, or whether we are able to obtain certain benefits when we do not respect them). Again, *theory*, *praxis* and *poiesis* come together. They mutually enrich and reaffirm one another.

*The gradual dissolution of the ethical dimension during the preparation of the EQF grid and specific learning outcomes has led to an imbalance between the technical and other dimensions*

In the world of human action, a characteristic of theories is that they are self-fulfilling (Ferraro et al., 2005). Such is the case of the athlete who thinks, "I'm going to lose this match", and then actually does lose. The conviction that she was going to lose was confirmed, whereas what she should have done was start the match with a winner's attitude.

For many centuries, we have been convincing ourselves that we cannot know reality, that everything is just a set of opinions and that "no one can tell me what's right or wrong." We have ended up building a world in which these principles prevail and have become what is known as politically correct. However, it is typical of human reasoning to submit everything to criticism. Human reasoning is forever young in that it is typical of youth to question everything. As people grow older, they lose this youthful approach and become more conservative because they have more things to preserve and they structure their lives around what they have managed to accumulate over the years. Human reasoning grows old when it is based purely on established assumptions, does not question things but accepts them without criticism. The way to keep reasoning from becoming atrophied and to stay healthy is through education. Human beings should therefore always keep on learning to remain young.

Everyone is fully aware of the importance of education. However, the actual content of education is another matter. Educating is not simply transmitting knowledge or training people in socially acceptable behaviour. That is "inculcating" knowledge from the outside. According to the etymology of the word, educating is leading, helping individuals develop their full potential, helping them take shape and become everything they can. Socrates knew perfectly well what education is: accompanying someone in the process of "giving birth", discovering the truth. That's why his worst enemies were the sophists, who did not encourage people to discover the truth by themselves, but aspired to train them to be politically correct citizens. Sophists did not believe in the truth, but in the most widely accepted opinions.

A consequence of this reflection is that education is of tremendous importance to society. It is a social asset. However, the fact that it is a social asset does not mean it should be controlled by the government. When a government aspires to be the sole party responsible for transmitting education, it is usually because it wants to use education as a way of indoctrinating the population. All individuals (or whoever is responsible for them in the case of minors or people who cannot fend for themselves) should have the right to decide who accompanies them through the process of "giving birth to the truth".

Education is the basis of a strong civil society because, through education, people can recover their trust in the power of reason and free themselves from the bonds of what is politically correct. Free-thinking people are the last thing that the followers of single-thought economic liberalism and weak-thought sociological relativism want, which is why the logic of the market and the logic of political discourse constantly attack education.

An educational process that encourages people to be free and responsible and that aspires to bring out everyone's potential should bear in mind all the aspects of human activity mentioned above. Besides the theoretical side of human action, education should therefore address acquiring the skills that enable people to reflect logically based on this knowledge and to use the techniques required for the practical application of this knowledge; personal attitudes and political skills that ensure these actions are accepted personally and socially; and, lastly, the development of ethical habits that contribute towards the improvement of the subject who performs the action, as well as the predisposition to improvement of the other subjects involved.

All the members of civil society should have access to an integral education that provides them with the increasingly specialized technical knowledge required to face more and more complex problems, but which also gives them a universal vision of the ultimate reasons for their professional and personal actions. Unless due reflection is given to these questions, we will be training disoriented, emotionally unbalanced people who are incapable of assuming risks and commitments, and who have no other reference but their own convenience. They will be the meek, cowed citizens that the dominating powers want, but not the builders of the vigorous, enterprising civil society we need.

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| | **Object** | **Operation** |
|---|---|---|
| **Theory** | Universal | Inherent |
| **Praxis** (action) | Particular | Inherent |
| **Poiesis** (production or art) | Particular | Transitive |

**Table 1. Differences between the three types of human knowledge**

| **Faculties** | | **Habits** | **Activities** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Intellect** | Theoretical (scientific) | First Principles<br>Wisdom<br>Science | Theory |
| | Practical (calculative) | Art or Technique | Poiesis |
| | | Prudence (practical wisdom) | Praxis |
| **Will** | | Moral virtues | |

**Table 2. Human faculties, habits and activities**

| | | **Typology of KSCs** | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Levels | | Cognitive competence (**K**nowledge) | Functional competence (**S**kills) | Social and meta-**C**ompetences (Behaviours and attitudes) |
| Level 8 | Higher education | | | |
| Level 7 | | | | |
| Level 6 | | | | |
| Level 5 | | | | |
| Level 4 | Vocational education and training | | | |
| Level 3 | | | | |
| Level 2 | Until school leaving | | | |
| Level 1 | | | | |

Source: Adapted from: Cedefop, 2005, p.42

**Table 3. Table of competences and levels, for the evaluation of learning outcomes**

| Level | Knowledge | Skills | Personal and professional competences | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | ***(i) Autonomy and responsibility*** | ***(ii) Learning competence*** | ***(iii) Communication and social competence*** | ***(iv) Professional and vocational competence*** |
| 1 | | | | | | Demonstrate awareness of procedures for solving problems |
| 2 | | | | | | Solve problems using information provided |
| 3 | | | | | | Solve problems using well known information sources taking account of some **social issues** |
| 4 | | | | | | Solve problems by integrating information from expert sources taking account of relevant **social and ethical issues** |
| 5 | | | | | | (…) Make judgements based on knowledge of relevant **social and ethical issues** |
| 6 | | | | | | (…) Make judgements based on **social and ethical issues** that arise in work or study |
| 7 | | | | | | (…) Respond to **social, scientific and ethical issues** that are encountered in work or study |
| 8 | | | | | | (…) Promote **social, and ethical** advancement through actions |

Source: Adapted from European Commission, 2005b, p. 18-20

**Table 4. Ethical references within the learning outcomes of the eight levels of the EQF**

**NOTE:**

[1] A first draft of this paper was presented at the Seminar on "Ethical and rational underpinnings of work in the current economic context" of the European Meeting of University Professors, Rome, 21-24 June 2007

[2] For a more detail explanation on the reference to ethics in the EQF development see Guillén, Fontrodona and Rodríguez (2007), which this epigraph relies on.