

INSIGHT

ETHICS

The Meaning of Life


SIRA ABENOZA

Professor of Sustainability, Business Ethics and Social Entrepreneurship, ESADE Business and Law School Barcelona, Spain

Teaching ethics to today's law and business students is not just important — it is essential. Students currently studying at the top law and business schools will be the leaders of tomorrow's world. In other words, they will hold a large share of the power to decide what sort of world our children will live in. And this, obviously, is no trivial matter. The good or bad use of power will determine the future of the world.

To take just one example, the blind exercise of power prompted Eichmann to organise the transport of hundreds of thousands of Jews to concentration camps. It prompted Enron traders to leave thousands of people without electricity, jobs or savings. Blind power is unaware of how its actions impact the environment — in the broad sense. It is only capable of pursuing its individual — or organisational — interests.

It's easy to make the analogy with today's world and deduce that this type of power will not allow us to avoid the climate-change catastrophe that could flood hundreds of islands and destroy entire countries. With this form of power, we won't be able to lift out of poverty and hunger the millions of people who unfortunately, even today, live under such conditions.

However, we're now seeing signs that make us think there may still be hope. The agreement at the Paris climate summit and the new IMF policies for reducing inequality are two good examples of a new way of wielding power: responsibly.

Today, education means educating people,



professionals and future leaders who are able and properly equipped to exercise power in a responsible manner. Education, therefore, means providing training in values, expanding one's conscience, and awakening knowledge in oneself and in others. It means teaching that the good truth — or the real truth — is that which contains not only our own truth, viewpoint and perspective but also that of others; that of all affected parties. Therefore, good decisions — correct decisions — are brave and open-minded enough to unite visions and experiences that might initially seem to be in conflict.

In other words, if we want to educate the good leaders of tomorrow, we must first teach them how to engage in dialogue. And dialogue doesn't just mean talking to people who look like us; it means opening up in order to listen, respect and adopt the vision of "the other" — people who are different from ourselves.

This observation, and this goal, led to the idea of having ESADE Law School students participate in a lengthy exercise of Socratic dialogue with prison inmates (see box). It also inspires us to teach our business

PHILOSOPHY BEHIND BARS

For 11 weeks in a Catalan prison, seven prisoners and seven law students participated in a two-hour weekly session of Socratic dialogue that started with philosophy but quickly turned towards life's experiences. What started as an academic exercise ended up being judged as the best Spanish documentary at a film festival in Barcelona last year.

Sira Abenoza wanted to take her law students to the prison so they could experience what they have been studying in their books about justice. The philosophy course of the law school (in co-operation with the Catalan Department of Justice), led by Abenoza, is called 'Philosophy Behind Bars' (the original name in Catalan is *Filosofia a la presó*). It was her idea to film the interactions as she had experienced the course once and saw a lot of potential in it for larger society.

In the documentary, one of the students questions the inmate's right to freedom by saying "You gave up that right when you committed a crime." But her professor asks whether society has the right to judge and condemn prisoners or should the former put prejudices aside to hear the latter's story?

The documentary, which combines clips of the law school sessions with stylised portraits, tracks the evolution of each participant throughout the process, from the initial reticence and prejudice to an understanding that the truth is complex and cannot be reduced to a stereotype.

At the end of the sessions, a student says: "When you go in there and talk to them, and you start to understand their background — not understanding what they did, but understanding their background — your perception changes. Society often speaks from a position of ignorance." Students are required to write diaries during the course as part of the academic requirements to obtain credit. The inmates who participate are encouraged to do so as well

students to talk with trade unions, NGOs and other representatives of society.

Teaching today's students to become good legal professionals or good managers necessarily entails teaching them to engage in dialogue. Doing this is not just possible — it's necessary. Not only will it benefit our environment but it will also lend meaning to our students' professional and personal lives. There is no better form of teaching than that which helps students find the meaning of their lives.

COURSECURSOR

MSC IN GLOBAL COMMERCE+STRATEGIC MANAGEMENT

3 continents, 2 Master's

A SPANISH, US AND CHINESE INSTITUTE JOINTLY LAUNCH
A PROGRAMME LEADING TO MULTIPLE CREDENTIALS

With internationalisation and diversity emerging as the most influential drivers of higher education, institutions are increasingly looking at different models to offer students a more comprehensive world view. A Master's programme to train future executives about the complexities of the global business environment from three continents' perspectives — North America, Europe and Asia — was launched in Barcelona in 2015. The programme is being offered by three institutions across continents. On completion, students would earn two Master's degrees and a certificate.

ESADE has partnered with the McIntire School of Commerce at the University of Virginia (US) and Lingnan College at Sun Yat-sen University (China) to offer the Master of Science (MSc) in Global Strategic Management from September 2016. The programme is designed for graduates to shape them into future executives who can manage diverse and multi-cultural teams.

According to Josep Franch, dean of ESADE Business School: "We want to create a new generation of leaders who can do business on a global scale by being sensitive to practices across nations."

The programme will provide students with the

opportunity to study and live in three continents over the course of 10 months. On completion, students will receive an MSc in Global Commerce from McIntire, an MSc in Global Strategic Business from ESADE and a certificate in international management from Lingnan. The curriculum has been developed by faculty from all three schools.

Carl Zeithaml, dean of McIntire, said: "The new programme allows students to study in three continents and receive two

Master's degrees and a certificate from three business schools in one integrated experience. It marks a critical step forward in providing a new generation of business

leaders with the skills and experiences they need to meet the challenges of today's demanding global business environment." Xinzhong Xu, dean of Lingnan, added: "Students will be exposed to very different cultures and business environments that will have an impact on their careers as well as their personal lives."

— Malini Sen



AT A GLANCE

Language: English

Location: 15 weeks in Virginia (US), 9 weeks in Guangzhou (China) and 15 weeks in Barcelona (Spain)

Admission requirements: Bachelor's degree in Business Administration; proficiency in English is a must; prior work experience is not a requirement