

**By Dr. Teresa de Dios Alija, Dr. María de Carmen de la Calle Maldonado and Dr. José Ángel Agejas Esteban
Universidad Francisco de Vitoria**

Originally published in the Fidelis Ethics Review, Summer 2015 edition.

Summary

The history of humanity has passed through different streams of thought that have substantiated social, cultural and political movements of various kinds. We are the children of other times marked by coercive utopias, totalitarianism, authoritarianism and liberalism which have never worked at all. Today we are living, in part, the failure of a democratic and capitalist model, considered by many the ideal system, even though it has caused a significant economic and social crisis because of greed, recklessness and mismanagement.

In the current economic model is prioritized the possibility to market anything, whether a service or type of relationship, that can meet the diverse needs of the human being. In the regulation of these transactions, which may turn out to be absurd, the individual has a primary role in which he must be aware of himself and of his great work in building a sustainable social reality. On the basis of everything, what fails are not the ideals, but the lack of shared moral convictions that allow the individual to actually live in freedom in a society that belongs to him in his own right.

In order to achieve the sustainability of the world we live in, it is necessary to provoke critical thinking in man that promotes change in his way of thinking. It is not enough that a few will rebel against a system that encourages individualism, selfishness and material welfare. The transformation of society is possible only through raising awareness of people in favor of the responsibility that is possible within the framework of freedom and justice.

1. Responsibility, Freedom and Justice

Responsibility is a consequence of one's own consciousness, which determines that man is responsible for his acts, acting in accordance with fundamental moral principles. A responsible person has the initiative and the power to decide what actions he is going to take. This choice must be, as far as possible, objective and independent from the surrounding circumstances, but we know that in his approach, one is always influenced by the environment in which he carries out his activities and it is, therefore, difficult to discharge all subjectivity. If the individual through his conduct loses the power to act in ways

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY AND SOCIAL CONTRIBUTION TO SUSTAINABILITY.

that respond to his actions and the consequences thereof, we cannot consider him a socially responsible man.

We cannot judge a person just by the outcome of his actions. It is necessary to take into account the causes and reasons for his behavior and its consequences. Being responsible involves not only consideration of the type of acts that are performed, but also the inner principles that move a person to decide to perform certain actions. The intention to do what our conscience tells us is the key and foundation of responsibility. Each individual acts in a manner guided by his own thoughts and decisions, but also influenced by his own feelings. The expectation of pleasure or displeasure as the result of his behavior can interfere with the outcome of his conduct. The person cannot be conducted only in accordance with the guidelines set by reason.

Good will is not to do what has to be done following rules and regulations that others propose, but wanting to do what must be in accordance with reason. This is not only to follow our own interests or emotions, but rather to pursue perfection through the development of a sense of duty. There are values that guide actions in the right direction and disvalues that disorient the individual on the purpose of responsible behavior. The moral principles at all times act in undertaking an activity from the very decision to carry it out, to the analysis of its consequences and implications, and even the intention of reparation or compensation of injustice or harm.

2. Cultural Transmission and Socialization

That an individual is responsible for each of his actions requires the development of virtues in the course of all stages of life. In this work are involved the State, for its role in the transmission of culture through, for example, regulation of education systems, and also socialization agents (family, school, media) in their task of disseminating values, morals and even lifestyles and groups of relation and influence, such as the organization (institution, company) where the person performs his duties. The discovery and understanding of moral values is easier when people are capable of inspiring respect in the place of fear, and genuine authority, not just power, and honesty rather than the mere appearance of it, and especially humility.

In their role as transmitters of culture, States must ensure minimum social standards and equal opportunities for all citizens, while considering that each of them has different capabilities. The difficulty lies in establishing what minimums are really needed and how to justly reward them without anyone feeling hurt. We cannot answer this question unless we enable each individual to be aware of his own limitations and privileges, and understand the realities facing others who share with him the dignity of every human being but are determined by a different social reality.

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY AND SOCIAL CONTRIBUTION TO SUSTAINABILITY.

Another important agent of socialization is the business organization, the place where human beings work for much of their lives, spend time with others and where, ideally, we grow and develop at professional and personal levels. Business activity does not, however, appear to be used today in the sense of guaranteeing minimum social standards that we have mentioned above, rather it aims to obtain economic returns, regardless of whether the value the individual can generate is larger than the economic benefit of a few, supporting the belief in the importance of *having over being*, and with it the false belief that the accumulation of material goods ensures status, power, or even happiness. At present, it seems that prestige is achieved only by that person or organization that is able to get rich quicker, that achieves its goals effortlessly, that can use others at will as means to achieve its purposes. This way of measuring success leads to thinking that it is not really important to be socially responsible, but just to look like it. Hence, the best efforts of many companies are focused on communicating their good deeds, regardless of whether the activities carried out according to their lines of business are truly socially responsible.

Socializing agents play an important role in this regard, as they have the ability to influence and persuade people, and even to discover innovative and creative solutions that promote greater involvement of individuals and social groups, thus enabling the individual to stop worrying about what will benefit only himself.

2. Personal and Social Responsibility

Progress should not be understood solely as economic development, as advocated by some ardent supporters of radical capitalism, nor should it be based only on the consideration of differing aspects of an individual, as advocated by some relativists, to justify the many rights that the person has, without questioning at all the obligations or responsibilities of life in society.

There is no social progress without the possibility of generating well-being for all. The company is not sustainable without creating value for all stakeholders. Although organizations are formed by people, by values, principles, responsibilities and corporate goals, they need not identify with the personal members of the organization. In short, business ethics employs differential components in order to clearly discern individual ethics. While individual ethics appeal to the conscience or the right of every person, the ethics of organizations has to appeal to the organizational equivalent of the processes that determine the decisions and behavior of enterprises. However, individual ethics and organizational ethics cannot be separated, because after all, those who perform tasks in organizations are real people with moral values and personal convictions about what to do at all times.

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY AND SOCIAL CONTRIBUTION TO SUSTAINABILITY.

Individual responsibility is the basis on which social responsibility is based. The person who decides to act in a certain way is responsible for it. But the responsibility should not be understood only from the acts themselves, but also from their influence on others. We cannot always give an answer about what aspects of our behavior affect others, but if we are not aware of the implications of each of our actions, we cannot take responsibility for each of our actions. We need to reflect about what we do, how we do it, and what impact it will have on ourselves and others. This is the only way to achieve socially responsibility someday.

A company is a wide network of relationships between individuals who, for one reason or another are affected directly or indirectly by what happens in it. The cooperative action does not relieve the company of having a moral behavior. On the contrary, it should give you more strength if possible. The provider, supplier, shareholder, employee, employer and the client, all groups of interest that relate to an organization, should ask themselves whether their moral principles are consistent with the activity involved in certain organizations. To do this they must understand the operation of enterprises and contrast it with objective benchmarks, with the assumed stable moral values they themselves believe in, without being susceptible to change in the scale assumed by particular circumstances and impulses, interests and unilateral judgments or distorted values . With this in mind, they may look for common strategies aimed at the satisfaction of all parties and encourage the entrepreneurship that often tries to force things without getting any positive result.

Behind the responsibility of the company, which is itself an abstract entity, we can always find the responsible subject, which in any case has to be an individual (or group of individuals) to respond to the consequences of a particular type of performance. In this way we can hold an operator accountable for the result of a certain activity, for making a mistake, his supervisor for failing to control the operator's job, the area coordinator who does not provide the means and appropriate procedures for others to carry out their functions and tasks correctly, and even managers who possibly have not been careful in defining work processes and the allocation of tasks.

Thus, responsibility belongs not only to the owners or managers of a company, but to each of its members and all those who, by interacting with it, pursue certain economic objectives and/or social, personal or collective. Each member of the chain of production is partly responsible for the results of the actions taken. Each has responsibility for a certain act, but they all are responsible to some extent.

Each person can lead the CSR in the company. Regardless of occupying a certain hierarchical or functional position, any individual can exert a positive influence on others guided by the sense of encouraging responsible behavior. Man's duty is to act according to the dictates of his own conscience without expecting others to do the same. We should not wait for others

PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY AND SOCIAL CONTRIBUTION TO SUSTAINABILITY.

to lead by example, but rather encourage and be an example to others. If we always wait for somebody else to take the first step. progress will never achieved.

Conclusion

We think that social responsibility is a virtue that helps individuals to improve, to become that to which one should tend to be. The way someone acts in life makes one a happy or unhappy person, to choose one or another way to go toward the goal of happiness is a decision that each individual must make for himself. Human beings have the ability to learn from experience, by correcting their deviations they can manage to have a responsible behavior, which will make them responsible persons.

For the development of virtue, it is wise to recognize reckless behavior. Prudence helps us to weigh the consequences of our actions and therefore their meaning for others and for the whole of society. Prudence is what allows us to properly discuss the methods and means that will lead to the aim pursued and that will lead to responsible behavior. We cannot choose to be socially responsible or not, we can simply choose to behave responsibly or not in every action that we perform, taking into account the consequences to ourselves and others. The intention of the action determines its goodness. It is not only the action in itself and its consequences that are important. The foundation of a good action comes from goodwill, the sense of duty that is marked by conscience. Man can distinguish between what is right and what is wrong, if he freely uses reason to think in universal terms (which are valid for all men in all situations).

The first premise we must begin with in order to find universal moral laws is to respect the dignity of every human being. We are social beings, able to know ourselves through reciprocal relationships with each other, who are dependent on each other to develop as individuals, and to that extent we are all worthy of respect. The biggest challenge is to ensure that all people consider the same universal laws and this can only be achieved through language and communication. Dialogical ethics that transcends contexts, cultures, traditions, circumstances, and the particular situations experienced by each person, may be established in a way that is valid and fair to all.

The Western world is profoundly marked by the importance it gives to material goods, to capital. Our is largely a purely economic system that is transmitted through culture and communication to all individuals, and unfortunately it gives precedence above all to having rather than to being. But we must not forget that the profit motive is not a natural instinct of man but a historical and ideological product that meets the need of control, security, success and self-seeking.

References

DEDIOS-ALIJA, T. (2013), Perspectivas económicas, sociales y filantrópicas para el análisis de la responsabilidad social corporativa, Revista de responsabilidad Social de la Empresa, 15, Centro de estudios Sociales, ISSN 1888-9638

DEDIOS-ALIJA, T. (2013), Ser socialmente responsable. Decisión y compromiso. Comunicación y Hombre. Noviembre 2013, ISSN 1885 365

DEDIOS-ALIJA, T. (2012), Responsabilidad Social Corporativa: De La Antropología a la Empresa, Editorial Académica Española, Nº. 15606. ISBN 978-3-659-05118-0

DEDIOS-ALIJA, T. y OUBIÑA, J. (2011). Hombre, ética y responsabilidad social corporativa desde un enfoque antropológico, Encuentros Multidisciplinares nº 40, 2012. Madrid. ISSN: 11399325.

AGEJAS ESTEBAN, J.A y DE DIOS-ALIJA, T. (2011) Aplicación a la empresa periodística de un nuevo paradigma de Responsabilidad Social Corporativa, Comunicación escrita, 9º Congreso internacional de Ética y Derecho de la información, Fundación Coso, celebrado en Valencia los días 11 y 12 de noviembre de 2011. ISSN: 9788461543274.