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## **Virtuous Exemplarity in Business Ethics Education: Insights from the Platonic tradition**

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### **ABSTRACT**

Following the discussion in the literature on virtue ethics, this study aims to explore how exemplarity can foster the development of virtues in business ethics education. We propose to draw on the Platonic and Neoplatonic view of exemplarity to determine how knowledge of the virtues can aid students' moral development. This examination of the complex but unified system of virtues derived from the Platonic tradition helps us to elaborate educational principles prioritizing 1) positive exemplification over negative exemplification, 2) exemplarity over exemplification, and 3) virtuous exemplarity over moral exemplarity. We thereby show that business ethics education based on these three principles avoids the pitfalls of negative or artificial exemplification and encourages students to engage in a contemplative, imitative, and reflexive approach that is conducive to the development of moral excellence.

### **KEYWORDS**

Business Ethics Education, exemplarity, imitation, Neoplatonism, Platonism, virtue ethics

## **RÉSUMÉ**

S'inscrivant dans le cadre de la littérature sur l'éthique des vertus, cette étude vise à explorer comment l'exemplarité peut favoriser le développement des vertus dans les formations en éthique des affaires. Nous proposons de nous inspirer de la vision platonicienne et néoplatonicienne de l'exemplarité pour déterminer comment la connaissance des vertus peut aider au développement moral des étudiants. Cet examen du système complexe mais unifié des vertus issu de la tradition platonicienne nous aide à élaborer des principes éducatifs privilégiant 1) l'exemplarité positive à l'exemplarité négative, 2) l'exemplarité à l'exemplification, et 3) l'exemplarité vertueuse à l'exemplarité morale. Nous montrons ainsi que l'enseignement de l'éthique des affaires fondé sur ces trois principes évite les pièges de l'exemplification négative ou artificielle et encourage les étudiants à s'engager dans une démarche contemplative, imitative et réflexive propice au développement de l'excellence morale.

## **MOTS CLÉS**

Enseignement de l'éthique des affaires, exemplarité, imitation, néoplatonisme, platonisme, éthique des vertus.

## **CITATION STYLE**

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## **Virtuous Exemplarity in Business Ethics Education: Insights from the Platonic tradition**

More and more business schools have been offering teaching programs designed to develop students' ethical skills and awareness and reduce the risk of unethical business practices. There is consensus around the idea that ethics should not only be taught to but also experienced by students (De Los Reyes, Kim & Weaver, 2017). Numerous authors praise the merits of experiential learning in business ethics education (Baden, 2014), considering that “the capacities of practical judgment we cultivate in our students are not based on a detached, cerebral calculation, but incorporate emotions and tacit knowledge” (Berti, Jarvis, Nikolova, & Pitsis, 2021, p. 7). In particular, as can be seen in *Academy of Management Learning and Education*, some scholars (Hartman, 2006; Giacalone & Promislo, 2013; Los Reyes, Kim & Weaver, 2017; Berti, Jarvis, Nikolova, & Pitsis, 2021) express a preference for education based on virtue ethics and agree that virtue “requires experience and time to be cultivated” (Mintz, 1996, p. 829). Giacalone and Promislo (2013) state that their goal “is to teach students not only to learn better ethical decision-making, not only to avoid the stigmatization of goodness, but also to live a virtuous life and build a virtuous world” (p. 96).

Academics question whether case-based approaches can promote the development of virtuous behaviors (Cagle & Baucus, 2006; Waples et al. 2009; Medeiros et al. 2017). Baden (2014) observes that the use of case studies based on scandals can foster cynicism among students and future professionals. Bisoux (2021) asserts that ethics lessons can be counterproductive if students are required to witness examples of institutions and people behaving badly. More generally, some academics point out that business ethics cases—such as those involving finance, accounting, and marketing—are often taught or studied from an

instrumental or artificial perspective where the students view the teachers' carefully selected examples as a way to stay out of jail, build a good reputation, earn more money, or achieve work satisfaction (De Los Reyes, Kim, & Weaver, 2017). The issue of developing learners' virtues and moral excellence seems to be hidden, as if teachers are unwilling to take a stand and reveal their ethical preferences (Roca, 2008).

There is certainly a body of academic literature in moral education advocating the use of moral exemplars (Kristjánsson, 2006; Sanderse, 2013). However, these scholars disagree on how exemplarism can promote the moral development of students. Like Haidt (2003), Zagzebski (2013, 2015, 2017) has highlighted the motivational role of emotions, in particular admiration, in the process of imitating a person or behavior deemed exemplary. It would suffice to highlight extraordinary people or behaviors that arouse admiration for the imitation process to begin. However, other academics such as Kristjánsson (2017) or Croce (2019) have developed a critical analysis of the motivational role of positive emotions, noting that admiration for a person who acts admirably does not necessarily motivate us to act or to become better. Kristjánsson (2017) suggests that, in addition to admiration for the person, imitation relies on knowledge of the virtues that the person exemplifies. The effectiveness of an education based on examples would therefore depend less on the consideration of some particular people than on the consideration of the virtues instantiated in their actions. We aim to contribute to this literature by reflecting on how the use of exemplars can contribute to moral development in business ethics education.

To answer this question, we consider the complex but unified system of virtues elaborated in the Platonic tradition that achieved its fullest expression in late Neoplatonism, a philosophical movement based on the interpretation of Plato's dialogues that flourished in the fourth and fifth centuries CE. The virtues of the Neoplatonists were not merely an abstract ideal but were demonstrated in the pedagogical process developed within the school and represented in the

figure of the teacher. We are offered a glimpse of a late fifth-century Neoplatonic school through the *Life of Proclus*, which was written by Marinus. Proclus is one of the main protagonists of the movement, and Marinus, his disciple and successor at the head of the Neoplatonic school, wrote a celebratory biography in an attempt to show how his teacher had encapsulated the full range of Neoplatonic virtues. It is on this tradition, and more specifically on these late and often neglected authors (Ferrero & Sison, 2014), that we will focus in the following pages in the belief that their thought can still be useful to us. We argue that the Platonic and Neoplatonic perspectives can help us to combine an exemplarity based on the admiration and the imitation of the ideals with an exemplarity based on the knowledge of the virtues. We also believe that the Platonic tradition can help us understand that business ethics education, and indeed all courses in a business school, are never morally neutral: rather than choosing negative or artificial examples, teachers can develop a moral and even virtuous exemplarity not only by seeking to align virtues and actions but also by inviting students to question their own virtuous practices through a model and a portfolio of virtues that we will reveal in this study.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. In the first section we review recent literature on pedagogical approaches, concentrating on examples and case studies in business ethics education. We focus on the role of examples in ethical teaching and criticize the use of many case studies presented to students that highlight ethical misbehavior and wrongdoing, or at least façade behavior. In the second section we explain why a detour through virtue ethics is necessary to address this issue and avoid harmful or artificial teaching. In the third section we examine the role attributed to exemplarity and imitation in the Platonic tradition. In the last section we draw on this philosophical teaching to suggest revisions to current practices in business ethics education.

## **THE LIMITATIONS OF EXEMPLIFICATION AND EXEMPLARITY IN BUSINESS ETHICS EDUCATION**

Despite its increasing popularity and influence in management schools, business ethics education in general has received much criticism. What has been questioned in particular is the ability of business ethics educators to foster the development of moral agents. There is no consensus on what pedagogical methods should be used, and the real impact of business education on ethical perceptions and sensitivity remains unclear (Slocum, Rohlfer, & Gonzalez-Canton 2014; Gentile, 2017; Berti, Jarvis, Nikolova, & Pitsis, 2021). Van Baardewijk and De Graaf (2021) suggest that most ethics courses focus excessively on theoretical perspectives such as deontologism or consequentialism, depriving students of the opportunity to experience moral dilemmas. Baetz and Sharp's (2004) analysis of learning materials available for business ethics education found that a sample of the leading textbooks provided only superficial coverage of ethical issues. Laditka and Houck (2006) also pointed out that preparing students for ethically challenging situations in the workplace is impossible without getting them to explore their own attitudes toward ethical issues and their own value systems. For this reason, many business ethics programs draw on real-life case studies or examples (Shannon & Berl, 1997; de Vries, 1986) to take business ethics education beyond the classroom and stimulate the reflection of management students. As we will see in the next paragraphs, there is some risk in using these real-life cases regardless of whether they exemplify success or failure, integrity or dishonor. The real impact of a case-based pedagogy on students' ability to make ethical decisions may depend on the relevance of the examples used in such business ethics courses.

### ***The Dangers of Negative or Artificial Exemplification***

Cagle and Baucus (2006) analyzed the effects of case studies involving ethical scandals on the perceptions of management students by examining their ethical perceptions before and after the course, pointing out that these case studies positively affect students' ethical perceptions and

make them less willing to tolerate unethical behavior. Likewise, numerous international business schools highlight on their websites the use in their business ethics courses of case studies involving fraud, financial scandal, or social or ecological issues. For example, many schools and universities use the Enron case to illustrate not only accounting fraud (artificially inflating profits) but also the chain of responsibility that can lead to the collapse of a company (confusion between consulting and control, pressures exerted by shareholders). By emphasizing the multiplicity of crimes related to the attempt to hide debt, this case study makes students aware of the conflicts of interest they may face and the possible consequences of the choices they make. Similarly, the Ford Pinto case—often presented to students to illustrate the dangers of marketing a potentially dangerous vehicle—is oriented around the following question: should a risk–benefit analysis be used in situations where a design or manufacturing defect could lead to death or serious injury? These cases represent what Croce (2020, p. 374) calls “injustice illuminators” in that they exemplify the economic, social, and ethical risks of financial pressure and managerial selfishness, reveal the plurality of ethical perspectives, and force students to develop moral reasoning.

In contrast, Cole and Smith (1995) questioned the positive impact of such case studies on students’ ethical perceptions. Baden (2014) explained that the case studies used in business ethics courses that focus on corporate wrongdoing can have unintended consequences, such as reinforcing students’ cynicism, that is, distrust of others’ intentions. Cynicism is based on the belief that human beings are motivated only by self-interest (Mirvis & Kanter, 1989) and that they “embody expedient, self-serving values, that support managers who engage in deceptive and exploitative practices, and that communicate in a one-sided, hyped-up, and disingenuous fashion to their employees” (Mirvis & Kanter, 1991, p. 61). In other words, the use of case studies involving ethical scandals could increase students’ cynicism and instill in their minds the belief that bad behaviors prevail in a world where profit and personal gain are the only rules.



Hence, exemplification is not systematically relevant: its impact on the moral development of students is highly dependent on the choice of exemplary practice. More frequent use of positive exemplars drawn from history, literature, philosophy, or the history of management could have an encouraging effect on students (Czarniawska, 1997).

However, even positive exemplifications may be seen as no more than superficial illustrations that serve more as a means of corporate communication—or even as a cover for internal dysfunction—than as a means of moral development for individuals in a company. For example, the increasingly popular corporate social responsibility measures taken by contemporary companies may only be symbolic (Scherer & Voegtlin, 2020), concealing rather than correcting social or environmental disasters or abuses of power. Similarly, excessive focus on companies' mission statements may lead students to attach more importance to companies' published social and environmental commitments than to reflection-in-action (Schön, 1983).

These risks can be overcome by a moral posture, that of seeking moral exemplarity, that is, a positive consideration of moral examples designed to elicit the admiration and imitation of observers. It is not certain, however, that in business ethics education, moral exemplarity as understood in this way actually contributes to the moral development of students.

### ***The Dangers of Moral Exemplarity***

Zagzebski's exemplarist moral theory extols the merits of a moral development based on the admiration and imitation of moral exemplars (Zagzebski, 2013, 2015, 2017). From the American philosopher's view, these moral exemplars are considered as admirable given the psychological sources of their behavior, the acquired psychological features, and the motive of concern for others. Zagzebski uses the term "emulation" to show that admiration is directed toward both the exemplary actions and the motives for these actions. Teachers themselves can be admired and emulated when their moral qualities and motives are reflected in the way they model desirable character traits and in the way "their modelling is effective as an educational

method” (Sanderson, 2013, p. 30). This moral theory has been the subject of multiple critiques (Kristjánsson, 2017; Croce, 2019, 2020; Szutta, 2019; Vaccarezza & Niccoli, 2019): there are several reasons why the admiration of exemplary actions alone would be insufficient.

First, the choice of exemplary people becomes irrelevant when the difference in age, social group, or profession prevents us from identifying with them. This is why Hyemin Han and his colleagues show that historical figures such as Mother Teresa and Martin Luther King were less effective in motivating prosocial behavior than people living today (Han, Jeong, & Cohen, 2017). The biographical description of these extraordinary people who do not share any similar skills, experience, or background with observers may cause feelings of inferiority, frustration, or resentment (Monin, 2007; Han et al., 2017). In contrast, the choice becomes relevant when it involves exemplars very close to people’s own experience and social and cultural background, which Han et al. (2017) call attainable and relevant exemplars. It may even be that these attainable and relevant exemplars improve the likelihood of emulation, which “enables students to go their own way – which really is what moral education is all about” (Sanderson, 2013, p. 37).

Second, the choice of exemplars presupposes a certain amount of ethical discernment to make that selection. Without this discernment, we may be tempted to admire people for the wrong reasons (Szutta, 2019). Our admiration is unreliable when it is focused on the performance achieved or the virtues displayed rather than the virtues embodied. For this reason, Szutta (2019, p. 287) states that “the experience of admiration presupposes some level of similarity in moral sensitivity between the one admired and the one who admires” and requires attitudes such as “the readiness to work on oneself, minimal modesty, or the ability to recognize that there are morally better people from whom one can learn.” In the absence of a certain level of moral condition, observers may fail to notice that, in an effort to arouse admiration, some apparently exemplary people lose sight of the moral dimension.

Hence, admiration is not enough to guarantee the effectiveness of moral exemplarity. Recognizing the limitations of admiration-based exemplarity, Zagzebski (2017) invites us to explore the benefits of exemplarity based on critical reflection. This reflective thinking can help us become aware of the “significant difference between ‘becoming like the exemplar’ and ‘becoming like what the exemplar exemplifies’” (Vos, 2018, p. 22; See also Sanderson, 2013; Croce, 2019, 2020). We argue in this study that knowledge of virtues can be at the heart of this critical reflection by allowing us not to imitate an exemplary person or behavior but to practice the virtues that the exemplar exemplifies in the daily complexity of our own lives. Thus, the admiration aroused by positive examples can only lead to carefully considered and personally assumed practices if these examples are examined in the light of virtue ethics.

### **EXEMPLARITY THROUGH THE LENS OF VIRTUE ETHICS**

From classical times to late antiquity, Greek ethical reflection was structured around the concept of virtue (*aretē*). Its origin lies in the ideal of excellence and the Homeric hero where virtue, or excellence, is not a theoretical concept but a disposition of the mind. Such a disposition forges character and leads people to the end of their own existence (*telos*), that is, happiness (*eudaimonia*), which is identified with the good. Indeed, the eminently moral reading of the concept of *aretē* in the history of thought is largely thanks to Plato, who repeatedly poses the problem of the definition and transmission of virtue. If *Meno*, a dialogue between Socrates and Meno on the definition of virtue, leads to an aporia, the philosopher has some confidence in the possibility of transmitting moral teaching. However, like any form of knowledge transmission, this teaching does not involve a mechanical reversal of contents in the passive soul of the disciple—as in the communicating vessels evoked in the *Symposium* (175de)—but a constant effort or active involvement on the part of the student, which begins with the application of the Delphic maxim “know thyself” (*gnōthi sauton*), as shown for example in the *Alcibiades* (124cd).

Aristotle is heir to this conception, giving fundamental importance to exercise: virtue comes from the habit that allows one to act in conformity with the good aimed at despite the difficulties encountered (Aristotle, *NE*, II 1105b20-1106a10). Indeed, as stated by Aristotle, “we learn an art or craft by doing the things that we shall have to do when we have learned it: for instance, men become builders by building houses, harpers by playing on the harp” (*NE*, II 1103a32-34).

Following this perspective, which, through Plato and Aristotle, reaches into late antiquity, ethicists have defended the view that the practice of virtues promotes the development of excellence of character, helping students to make sound ethical judgments in real life: “Teaching virtue is about influencing hearts as well as minds and requires a sensitive approach. [...] It is grounded in everyday practice and nurtured by exemplarity” (Begley, 2006, p. 259). This exemplarity cannot be reduced solely to moral principles and an individual’s decisions and actions (Colby & Damon, 2010) or a prescription of moral ideals (Walker & Hennig, 2004; Damon & Colby, 2015); it can also be experienced as a more personal invitation to know the virtues and to adopt virtuous practices. The shift from exemplification to exemplarity therefore implies a reference to virtue ethics, which permeates the academic literature and perhaps even dominates deontology and utilitarianism (Kristjánsson, 2020, 2021), although it remains scarce in business ethics education (Huo & Kristjánsson, 2018).

Giacalone and Promislo (2013) explain why virtue ethics hardly permeate business ethics education: Students are exposed to a plethora of language and thinking that espouses materialistic values and make them suspicious of virtue development (what the authors called ‘the stigmatization of goodness’). The rejection of virtue ethics is related to two languages inherent to a materialistic worldview: “ecophonic language,” which is a powerful, dominating language in which money is used to dictate and justify all actions, and “potensiphonic language,” which is a dominant language focusing on power and supremacy. In the

econophonic–potensiphonic world, virtues are disparaged and reconfigured into weaknesses, undermining the will of those who would embrace a virtuous lifestyle.

However, Los Reyes, Kim, and Weaver (2017) demonstrate how virtue ethics can authorize “integrated pedagogy,” that is a pedagogy integrating normative and behavioral ethics. Through the lens of virtue ethics, these authors propose business ethics education that answers the question of why people fail to act properly, even in the seemingly easy cases, but also how people might be better enabled to behave well. This research in business ethics education places a special emphasis on phronesis, the virtue of practical wisdom, allowing not only for correct judgment in a constrained environment but also for the desire for such judgment (Engberg-Pedersen, 1983). Virtuous learners seek a harmony among reason, emotions, and behaviors, which enables them to create an alignment between right thinking, right desire, and right action (Fowers, 2005; Hartmann, 2013; Kristjánsson, 2022; Sison & Redin, 2022). Echoing this approach to phronesis, Berti, Jarvis, Nikolova, and Pitsis (2021) advocate an “embodied phronetic pedagogy,” enabling teachers to avoid excessive focus on the application of theoretical principles or the adoption of behavior in line with social expectations. Phronetic pedagogy aims to develop practical wisdom to pursue an ideal of virtue based not on a detached, cerebral calculation, but on a consideration of feelings and emotions. Through the line of thought developed in *Academy of Management Learning and Education* (Hartman, 2006; Giacalone & Promislo, 2013; Los Reyes, Kim & Weaver, 2017; Berti, Jarvis, Nikolova, & Pitsis, 2021), business ethics courses aim to improve character and not simply teach principles that students can apply to situations in business (Hartman, 2006).

Consequently, we turn now to the quest for exemplarity according to the Platonic tradition, which offers invaluable insights into the various virtuous pedagogical practices of teachers using or embodying examples. Even if, in all philosophies emphasizing phronesis, happiness results from the practice of virtues, there are divergences between Platonic and

Aristotelian virtue ethics. The Platonic perspective invites the possession of a certain knowledge that causes moral excellence, while the Aristotelian ethics encourages the choice of a mediety or an intermediate state between two extremes as a perfection to be sought. Since the Platonic approach to virtues relies on intelligence and reflection, it promotes a knowledge of the good that can be sought as such. The Platonic perspective may appear excessively intellectualist, but it was tempered by the Neoplatonists, who also emphasized experience and freedom in learning the virtues. While virtue ethics and its application to business ethics education tends to be dominated by the Aristotelian tradition, it seems to us that, unfortunately, interest in the Platonic and Neoplatonic conception is somewhat neglected in the field of business ethics.

### **EXEMPLARITY IN THE PLATONIC AND NEOPLATONIC TRADITION**

Notwithstanding the centuries separating us from the thoughts of Plato and Aristotle, ancient Greek philosophy remains fertile ground for reflection on ethics education. Ancient Greek philosophers devoted their attention not only to the concepts of virtue and exemplarity but also to the modes and strategies of teaching ethics. We are naturally led to draw upon this immense heritage to discuss the conditions and modes of ethical teaching. This approach has already been pursued by many scholars who focused more on Plato and Aristotle (see, among others, Duska, 1993; Marangos & Astroulakis, 2010; Hartmann, 2008; Nyberg, 2008; Frémeaux, Michelson, & Noël-Lemaitre, 2018; Kristjánsson, 2021, 2022).

It is true that the use of ancient Greek philosophy as a coherent whole could be misleading as the history of ancient thought spans more than twelve centuries. But it is remarkable that in the field of ethics, as we have seen, antiquity proposes a steady methodological approach: for Plato and Aristotle, as for the Hellenistic reflections of the Epicureans and the Stoics and the later incarnations of Neoplatonism, moral philosophy is not only, or primarily, a series of concepts but constitutes an intellectual and spiritual exercise allowing us to transform our vision

of the world and our personality. As Pierre Hadot (1995, 2002) explained, philosophy, in antiquity, was a mode of existence, a way of life: studying ancient ethics is therefore of particular interest, as engaging in philosophy—according to this perspective—is synonymous with working on oneself, and implies the ascetic and regular practicing of spiritual exercises designed to bring about a profound transformation of the self.

The first contact with virtue and virtuous actions is realized through *mimesis*, or imitation, and entails the presence of examples and models: fear of punishment is not sufficient to initiate the path leading to genuine virtuousness. The author of *Economics*, be it Aristotle or a disciple (see Van Groningen & Wartelle 1968), clearly states that “without a good example, it is not possible to have a good imitation, and this is clear in all domains” (I, 6, 1345 a 9). Aristotle distinguishes between two kinds of examples: those based on historical facts and those based on invented tales (such as fables), which are useful when it is impossible to find pertinent historical situations (*Rhetoric* II 1393a). Whether they are drawn from history or from invented situations, examples can play an important role in teaching in general and in the teaching of virtue in particular.

We will build on the Platonic tradition, which has the advantage of highlighting the nowadays precious idea that the virtues, in particular the four Platonic virtues—which were later called the cardinal virtues (courage, prudence, temperance, and justice)—can form a virtuous whole.

### **Exemplarity according to Plato**

The centrality of positive exemplarity in Plato’s pedagogical project is particularly evident in books 2 and 3 of the *Republic*, in which Socrates describes the education of the guardians of the ideal city-state. From Book 2, it is clear that exposure to stories, myths, and legends is of the utmost importance, and Socrates maintains the need to “supervise storytellers” (377b): in particular, stories that paint an unflattering picture of gods and heroes should be systematically

rejected (377d-383a). In Book 3, Plato offers more details about the *positive* side of the argument: from childhood, the future guardians of the city-state should be incited to edify narratives, which will help them develop their virtue. Gods, famous heroes, and men of the past should be portrayed in a positive light, without showing their intemperance and weaknesses (for example, their lamentations, 387e-388a, or the tendency to be overcome by laughter, 388e-389a). The reason for this is that exposure to narrative examples—be they historical or legendary—triggers a process of imitation (Brisson, 2000, pp. 66-74; Halliwell, 2002, pp. 37-147) and, little by little, the models to be imitated “get established in the habits and nature of body, tones of voice, and mind” (395d), making the process extremely dangerous when examples of bad behavior are being discussed. In Book 10, the argument is developed further: no form of artistic imitation of the shameful and the vicious can be tolerated in the perfect city-state, no more than the imitation of excessive emotions can (Renaut, 2014, pp. 138-142). The only acceptable form of literary production is the one comprising “hymns to the gods and eulogies of good people” as it triggers a positive *mimesis* which is directed at exemplary models. This remark echoes what is suggested in Book 2, that is, traditional myths should be replaced by new stories, which are “the best possible ones to orient the listeners towards virtue” (379a) (Murray, 1996, pp. 14-24; Gastaldi, 2013).

Arguably, the *Republic* project cannot be considered to make a realistic contribution to the importance of exemplification because of its utopian nature, a claim which has been disputed, however, by recent scholars of the dialogue (see, among others, Ferrari, 2010, Zuolo, 2010; Vegetti, 2013). In the *Laws*, a work traditionally interpreted as a more down-to-earth attempt at philosophical legislation, a similar approach can be noted: the kind of literary production that is suitable for a good city-state should be morally irreproachable, and the “most beautiful drama” that can find a place in the new city will be the laws themselves, with their literarily crafted preambles that enable citizens to grasp the meaning of the legal dispositions



and to integrate it into their view of life (Naddaf, 2008). Similarly, excessive displays of emotion, such as the kind of funeral lamentations featured in the musical genre of the *threnos*, are explicitly condemned in the framework of the law on funerals in Book 12 (Bouvier, 2008; Renaut, 2014, pp. 300-320). Hence, the best teacher for the city may also be its legislator.

In pedagogical relationships, teachers are supposed to offer themselves as moral examples: how could they teach virtue if they were not abiding by the rules they wish to transmit? This general approach is inherited by the Platonic school as a foundation for its teaching methods: teachers in the ancient Academy tend to present themselves as models of virtue and living exemplars of their ethical teaching, detached from the bodily world and the violence of emotions. This clearly emerges from the valuable biographies of Academic scholars preserved in Diogenes Laertius' *Lives of the Eminent Philosophers*: while Diogenes' sources are manifold, it is plausible that some of the traditions he reflects can be traced back to the Academy's reflection and self-representation (Watts 2007). At least, starting from Xenocrates, the second head of the school after Plato's death, biographies depict Academic philosophers as embodiments of virtue: Xenocrates' self-control is such that he can endure excruciating physical pain, and his loyalty and trustworthiness are acknowledged by all the citizens of Athens (Diogenes Laertius IV, § 7-8); he is not motivated by greed, and Diogenes reports a significant anecdote: "when Alexander [the Great] sent him a large sum of money, Xenocrates took three thousand Attic drachmas and sent the rest back, saying that Alexander's need was greater, since more people depended on him." From the same author (IV, § 16), we learn that Xenocrates' class on temperance was so effective that it induced a young and debauched Athenian named Polemo to completely change his life and turn to philosophy: he eventually became head of the Academy, and was portrayed as a master of self-control and impassivity (§ 18-19), explicitly following his predecessor's example: "it would appear that in all respects Polemo emulated Xenocrates" (§ 20). At the same time, that is, at the beginning of the Hellenistic age, philosophical schools began to integrate

into their sets of models and examples the eminent philosophers of the past—such as Socrates—as “wise men” (Long, 1996, pp. 1-34; Donato, 2020). While similar tendencies can be traced in other Hellenistic schools, such as the Epicurean and the Stoic, the importance of the notion of exemplarity is especially evident in the Platonic tradition, where it is connected to the concept of philosophical authority (Erlar, Heßler & Petrucci, 2021).

### **Exemplarity according to late Neoplatonism**

The idealization of school teachers as exemplary figures increased in late antique Neoplatonism, starting with the figure of Plotinus (third century AD), about whom an inspired biography was written by Porphyry, one of his former disciples (See Brisson, Goulet-Cazé, Goulet and al. 1982, 1992). This process of idealization later reached its culmination with Marinus’ aforementioned *Life of Proclus* which, significantly, is subtitled *On Happiness*. Through the account of his life, and following a tradition that has been related to the fourth-century thinker Iamblichus (Chiaradonna, 2021, pp. 47-51), the fifth-century philosopher Proclus is represented in this delightful little work as the embodiment of all types of Neoplatonic virtue, where natural virtues (related to the body and to the innate quality of the soul), moral virtues (the fruit of education), and even the higher virtues belong to the political, cathartic, and contemplative realms. Of the different categories of virtues, three are crucial in ethical education: the moral virtues (generosity and sincerity), the political virtues (justice and courage), and the cathartic virtues (temperance and prudence).

In short (for more details of this complex scheme, see Brisson, 2006; Saffrey, Segonds & Luna, 2001), teachers’ knowledge of the virtues can help them to become virtuous examples: Marinus describes the practical manifestations of these virtues in detail, giving us an invaluable—if stylized—peek into the life of a teacher of Platonic philosophy at the end of antiquity. Proclus was a teacher of these virtues and at the same time practiced them through his actions (§ 18: “these virtues, he practiced them [...] and not only by teaching them to others

[...] but living in conformity with them and accomplishing those actions that enabled the mind to separate itself from the body”). This idealization of the school’s ancient teachers was one of the main pedagogical strategies that endured throughout the Platonic and Neoplatonic tradition. At the same time, and in the same context, a similar and even more evident process of “sacralization” of ancient philosophers such as Plato, Pythagoras (both Porphyry and Iamblichus [third to fourth century AD] wrote a *Life of Pythagoras*), or Socrates (Donato, 2021) was used for educational purposes.

Overall, the Platonic tradition absorbed Plato’s prescriptions in the *Republic*, concentrating on positive exemplarity and blotting out all controversial details in these philosophers’ lives to create a tradition that may be described as proto-hagiographic (Edwards, 2000) but which was ideally aimed at giving to moral injunctions a living and vital form. All examples should be positive: the idea in Platonic philosophy—especially Neoplatonic philosophy—is that we are already subject to the disorderly, dispersed, and chaotic forces of the bodily world and hence need to focus on models of purification and good moral conduct in a far broader sense than Plato had envisaged in his pedagogical project. For the Platonic tradition, there is no usefulness in exposing oneself to what is evil, or wrong: it can be dangerous at worse, useless at best. What philosophy needs to provide is a positive, useful, and correct stance to enable individuals to choose a worthy life: philosophy, in the ancient world, is as much a way of living as it is of thinking.

Another glimpse of Proclus’ pedagogical model is offered by his commentary on the *First Alcibiades*, which is attributed to Plato (its authenticity is still doubtful: see Denyer 2001). In this dialogue, which was the first in the reading order followed by the Neoplatonic school, Socrates confronts young Alcibiades, who is probably 20 years old, and his ambition to become the eminent political figure he is apparently destined to be. The Neoplatonic reading focuses on the pedagogical element of this historical and literary relationship (see Segonds, 1985, pp.

xxxix-lii): the *Alcibiades* is first and foremost a dialogue on the need for self-knowledge. Its message does not relate to a specific figure; it is universal and tied to self-care and self-knowledge (Renaud, Tarrant 2015, 179-180). This approach interprets the pedagogical process as happening firstly and eminently in the disciple's soul, as a liberation from ignorance of the self and an act of embracing one's own character and strength, which is guaranteed—in Neoplatonic philosophy—by the link between the soul and the divine. If the role of the teacher is essential in taking the first step, the rest of the process is based on a high level of freedom on the part of the disciple (Griffin, 2015; Charrue, 2019). In Proclus' thought, the students are not only educated by the exemplary actions of their master; they are also inspired by an exemplary questioning, a return to themselves, what Proclus calls a conversion towards themselves, which they can choose to experience or not. As Griffin (2015, 219) summarizes, for Proclus “that is what is good for us: that is what brings us to completion”.

Therefore, there are two main reasons why the Platonic tradition and, more particularly, Proclus' pedagogical model can support practical reflection on the virtues:

(i) First, the list of virtues is short, which is a practical advantage according to the recommendations of Wang and Hackett (2016): this classification is based on a small, philosophically grounded and coherent set of virtues consisting of cathartic, moral, and political virtues. We do not include natural virtues such as beauty or health, nor contemplative virtues (such as the ability to perform miracles), which are rarely at stake in professional life. Proclus takes the cardinal virtues of antiquity—courage (which enables people to do good in the face of danger), temperance (which fosters the control of desires), justice (which enables people to be fair), and prudence (which enables people to make the right assessment and/or decision)—and adds generosity (which enables people to show care and concern for the needs of others) and sincerity (which enables people to express their innermost being).

(ii) Second, this classification has the merit of having been established on the occasion of reflection on the pedagogical relationship between, and more precisely on, the virtuous exemplarity of the master and the virtuous learning of the disciple. The teaching of virtues, according to Proclus, does not consist of prescriptively imposing behaviors but in inviting learners to align their virtues and actions over time. This ethical teaching not only promotes the imitation of virtuous examples but also encourages students to identify virtuous practices and reflexively question their own practices. This is a major reason why Proclus' pedagogical model based on the Platonic tradition can be a source of inspiration for modern pedagogues: he advocates not a fixed vision of virtuous practices that the student should reproduce but a virtuous questioning that the student is free to engage in or not. In this sense, Proclus extols the merits of educational freedom, centered on the formation of the self (Griffin, 2015; Charrue, 2019). Because of this freedom, reflection on the virtues can be a personal and intimate experience for students.

## **IMPLICATIONS FOR BUSINESS ETHICS EDUCATION**

Virtuous exemplarity is based on virtue ethics, which differs from deontologism and consequentialism in that it focuses on the relationship between the agents and their actions and, more particularly, between virtues and actions. We define virtuous exemplarity as an alignment between virtue and action coupled with an invitation to know and practice virtues. Virtuous exemplarity is therefore based on positive exemplification, which, unlike negative or artificial exemplification, can be a way for academics to initiate a path toward moral excellence.

### **Theoretical Implications**

Based on the thought of Plato and Neoplatonists, our reflection invites us to rethink the use of examples in our pedagogical practices in business ethics by privileging 1) positive over negative exemplification, 2) exemplarity over exemplification, and 3) virtuous over moral exemplarity.

We become aware of the dangers of negative or artificial exemplification, which risks permeating our bodies and minds independently of our will. Positive examples, in contrast, help in the knowledge and contemplation of virtues. This reflection consolidates the points of view expressed by some academics denouncing, on the one hand, the flaws of a pedagogy in business ethics based on ethical scandals (Baden, 2014; De Los Reyes, Kim & Weaver, 2017) and promoting, on the other hand, the benefits of a pedagogy embodied by teachers whose exemplarity can be a source of inspiration (Colby & Damon, 2010; Frémeaux, Michelson & Noël-Lemaitre, 2018).

Following on from the works of Sanderse (2013) and Vos (2018), we have demonstrated how knowledge and identification of virtues can be a step in the diffusion of moral exemplarity. From this perspective, moral exemplarity is no longer based solely on the admiration of an exceptional person or behavior, but on a critical reflection on the virtues that we could develop in our daily tasks.

This reflective step justifies the use of what Han et al. (2017) call attainable and relevant exemplars. However, in the Platonic tradition, the multiplication of attainable and relevant exemplars does not preclude the use of exceptional moral figures. As Han et al. (2017) point out, exceptional moral figures can be referenced to illustrate high standards of moral behavior to students, while attainable and relevant narratives can alleviate feelings of inferiority, frustration, or resentment, thereby weakening the psychological barriers to moral behavior.

We therefore advocate the use of both extraordinary and ordinary stories: our analysis rooted in the Platonic tradition leads us to consider extraordinary stories as a way to become aware of virtues, and ordinary stories as a way to identify with a role model and to let the role model influence our moral identity. But we argue that ordinary stories can also be used to distance ourselves from the role model to identify the virtues that the exemplar exemplifies and that we might practice differently according to the circumstances of our own life. We therefore

reveal that ordinary stories drawn from descriptions of contemporary organizational life can be used from two perspectives: that of increasing the proximity of students to role models with whom they can then identify, and that of constituting a support for reflection on the virtues that can be practiced in their daily work activity. Drawing on both Platonism and Neoplatonism, we deviate slightly from the existing literature on this point by emphasizing that these different processes of moral exemplarity can be complementary. Rather than asserting that exemplarity relies either on direct imitation of exemplars “as ready-made models for our own” (Vos, 2018, p. 26) or on the imitation of what they exemplify, we distinguish and advocate three complementary forms of moral exemplarity: moral exemplarity based on admiration (of extraordinary exemplars such as heroes, sages, and saints, or of some recent leaders), moral exemplarity based on identification (with ordinary people sharing similar skills, experience, or background) and moral exemplarity based on an analysis of virtues (that other people exemplify).

Only the third form of moral exemplarity, which is the focus of our study, allows us to free ourselves from an imitation of roles exemplarily embodied by some persons; it shows us the path to a beyond-roles exemplarity that Vos calls “existential exemplarity” (Vos, 2018, p. 25) and that we propose to call virtuous exemplarity.

This is perhaps the major proposition inspired by the Platonic tradition that we formulate in this article: virtuous exemplarity denotes an alignment of virtues and actions, which is only possible through a knowledge of virtues and a critical reflection on our own practices. The classification of the virtues practiced by Proclus leads us to pay particular attention to the relations existing between the different categories of virtues, in particular the cathartic virtues and the moral and political virtues. By providing a definition of the notion of virtuous exemplarity and by specifying the way in which it can be encouraged, our study also enriches the current thinking on integrated or phronetic pedagogy (Hartman, 2006; Giacalone &

Promislo, 2013; Los Reyes, Kim & Weaver, 2017; Berti, Jarvis, Nikolova, & Pitsis, 2021): It indeed highlights the importance for students of: 1) reflexive questioning that requires knowledge of virtues, and not just values (Hartman, 2006); and 2) freedom in learning that allows them to experiment and analyze their own practices of virtues.

Finally, our argumentation in this study is in line with the recent literature on virtue ethics (Beadle & Knight, 2012; MacIntyre, 2015; Beadle 2017; Bauman, 2018; Rocchi, Ferrero, & Beadle, 2021), revealing that the consideration of work practices is not incompatible with the contemplation of virtues. By allowing for an approach to virtues and practices, our reflection aims to answer the fundamental question raised by virtue ethics: “what kind of person do I want to be?” (Audi, 2012). This question is based on virtue ethics defined as an ethics of being, which, through the knowledge of virtues and the rereading of one’s experiences, never ceases to want to become more virtuous. In other words, the fact that the “educated moral agent” acts “out of the knowledge that the exercise of a virtue is the right thing to do in a particular situation” (Mintz, 1996, p. 827) does not exclude an analysis of work practices (MacIntyre, 1984) and the identification of excellent practices in relation to the identified virtues (Blackburn and McGhee, 2004).

### **Practical Implications**

Virtuous exemplarity can be experienced in business ethics education, but it should also feature in all courses provided in business schools, which themselves are opportunities for students to contemplate virtuous practices and to question their way of working. Therefore, ethics teaching is not reduced to specific courses, but permeates all courses, contributing to an ethics of education in which all faculty could participate by developing exemplarity. Just as “dilemmas between efficiency and the morally good cannot be discussed only in ethics courses but need sufficient attention throughout the whole study program” (Van Baardewijk & De Graaf, 2021, p. 197), virtuous practices can be experienced in all courses, whatever the focus, on the occasion



of a personal, regular review of our way of working regardless of the difficult or contentious situations we face.

From this perspective, all teachers can invite their students to admire virtuous practices in extraordinary stories while devoting significant time to the study of attainable and relevant complex exemplars (Han et al., 2017). As Vos (2018) points out, these complex cases can be presented in the manner of Montaigne who “often starts with examples, without knowing exactly what they exemplify, and invites readers into a critical examination. In his essays examples serve neither to become part of a system of abstract ideas nor as a moralistic story but rather as the representation of a unique life full of ambiguities that exceed generalizations” (2018, p. 21). These real-life cases can obviously be selected from among bestselling management books (Kociatkiewicz & Kostera, 2016), including those that describe and illustrate the institution of management through the techniques of storytelling, theater metaphor, and Greek mythology (Hatch, Kostera & Kozminski, 2004). These cases can also be inspired by research into positive organizational ethics that studies “people, practices, and contexts that cultivate and sustain individual and collective ethical strength to achieve successful and durable moral performance in organizations” (Sekerka, Comer & Godwin, 2014, p. 439), giving teachers a robust set of tools to move away from negativity (Giacalone, Jurkiewicz & Dunn, 2006) and to reveal the drivers of virtuous behavior in the workplace. These real-life cases can be more accurately chosen from descriptions of companies pursuing the common good: these companies are not exceptional companies, focused on exceptional acts; they try to meet the real needs of society while considering the needs of their members (Bruni & Smerilli, 2014; Ahern, 2015; Frémeaux & Michelson, 2017; Melé, 2020; Pirson, 2022; Grevin, 2022; Frémeaux, Grevin & Sferrazzo, 2022). An analysis of their *modus operandi*, practices, and discourses reveals not just the pursuit of an ideal, but also a set of vulnerable people embodying virtues (and vices) and confronting dilemmas that testify to the “complexities and ambiguities of

everyday life” (Vos, 2018, p. 19). These cases are neither exemplary nor morally reprehensible moral situations; they are imperfect moral situations (Croce, 2019). Since they are intended less to provoke mimicry than to provoke reflection on the virtues necessary in the realization of our personal and collective projects, they do not need to be presented in an overly serious or academic manner. Other stylistic devices, especially ironic style, can also awaken reflection on the more or less virtuous behaviors of the protagonists (Mirvis, 2014).

Teachers and students alike can follow an approach of first contemplating virtues through the use of positive examples: what virtuous practices can I observe? What virtues can I contemplate in this way? This step can be followed by a process of imitating the virtues: on what occasions can I practice these virtues? What virtuous practices can I accomplish in the realization of my personal projects? Finally, this approach can lead us to a reflexive practice of questioning our own work practices and their conformity to the virtues: in the actions I have accomplished, which virtues have I developed or not developed? How can I become more aware of the virtues that I have not practiced? This last question leads us back to a contemplative approach that allows us to know new models of virtues and to identify new virtuous practices. These contemplative, imitative, and reflexive approaches are mutually enriching and form a positive spiral, allowing us to go beyond learning by simply applying principles or imitating predetermined behaviors. Moreover, this virtue ethics approach does not focus exclusively on ethical dilemmas that require learners to question the moral acceptability of the different scenarios proposed and to choose one scenario over another; it provokes a continuous questioning of our way of working, fulfilling Roca’s (2008) aim of “helping students to be aware of their own virtues and act according to them” (p. 618).

This model can be practiced in any pedagogical sessions integrating virtue ethics: teachers invite students first to identify and contemplate virtues, in particular those exemplified in the case studies. In a second phase, teachers can encourage students to consider opportunities for

virtuous practices in relation to their work. Finally, in another pedagogical session, teachers can ask students to question their practices and recognize the virtues they practice and the ones they would like to practice more. This model (see Figure 1) can be used on a daily basis, since virtue is not immutable.

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*INSERT FIGURE 1 ABOUT HERE*  
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This model could be complemented by a virtue portfolio whose purpose would be radically different from the skills portfolio commonly used in many business schools. The skills portfolio is built on the idea that the learner can justify the development of certain skills by simply citing the performance of certain activities. In internship reports, or more generally in retrospective analyses of their academic and professional career, students do not hesitate to review the list of skills provided by their institutions and to describe the actions they have performed in the course of teaching, internships, or community commitments to illustrate the skills they claim to have developed. This approach risks to be more a way of enhancing their curriculum vitae than a reflection on the skills they have actually used in a specific work activity.

The virtues portfolio would invite learners to develop an intimate and flexible rather than fixed vision of their ethical learning by identifying the work situations that allowed them to practice the virtues. While some activities conducted by students are displayed as signs of skills development, they do not guarantee the practice of virtues; they may, however, be opportunities to develop virtues.

The virtues portfolio would help learners to reflexively question virtues, those they manage to practice as well as those they glimpse through the contemplation of virtue models. This tool can be conceived on the basis of the classification proposed in this study including

the cardinal virtues of antiquity—courage, temperance, justice, and prudence—as well as generosity and sincerity. Following the contemplative and imitative steps, the learners can, in the reflexive stage, construct this portfolio by drawing on and complementing the examples of virtuous practices listed in Table 1 below.

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*INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE*  
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The virtues portfolio supports students’ reflection on their own practices in different work situations. Such personal reflection can only have an impact on the moral development of the learner if it eludes the logic of assessment. The competence assessment system is likely to reinforce the risk of an artificial, sometimes even hazardous, use of skills as well as the risk of a focus on objective, technical, and easily measurable skills. Teachers and students may choose to highlight the skills they are supposed to assess or develop according to the sole image they wish to give of their courses or their persons. The promotion of skills coupled with the logic of evaluation can have the effect of strengthening the managerialist logic, an increasingly scientific work, an objectification of evaluation criteria, an algorithimization of activity, and a development of forms of control (Morris, 2001; Alvesson & Spicer, 2016). This managerialist pressure can lead to the use of the competence portfolio to promote the teacher’s course or the student’s curriculum vitae to the neglect of real, spontaneous, complex work, the realization of which is closely linked to the individual’s moral qualities.

To avoid the same phenomenon occurring in an analysis of virtuous practices, the virtues portfolio should be understood as an individual deliberation, an inner dialogue, certainly not evaluable, allowing to identify retrospectively the virtues practiced in certain work situations and to consolidate the will to become virtuous through good habits.

While these pedagogical materials can be used in any course integrating virtue ethics, the design of specific sessions dedicated to the use of these tools is also conceivable. For example, the pedagogical approach could begin with a presentation of work narratives drawn from the aforementioned works describing common good-oriented enterprises (e.g., Pirson, 2022; Frémeaux, Grevin & Sferrazzo, 2022) and works of art evoking the virtues of people at work (e.g., Millet's *Gleaners* or Caillebotte's *The Floor-Scrapers*). In the next step, students could be given time to reflect on and contemplate the virtues practiced by the protagonists of the chosen works. Once the students have identified the virtues they think about when rereading or contemplating these works, they can be encouraged in the second session to discuss their thoughts on the ethics of virtues and, more particularly, virtuous exemplarity, drawing on the theoretical corpus of our study. During the third session, participants can be encouraged to experience one of the virtues previously analyzed in practice through, for instance, a collective artistic creation based on improvisation (music, dance, painting, poetry, or theater) and thus experience the virtue physically and emotionally rather than only intellectually. They can then be invited to build and participate in a collective business ethics project by choosing a goal sufficiently appealing that it would motivate them to practice the virtues. At the end of this project, participants can produce a report explaining the choice of the project in terms of virtue ethics and, in a more personal and intimate way, to fill in the virtue portfolio, highlighting the virtuous behaviors they have tried to practice or that they have witnessed.

### **Future Research Directions**

An education based on virtuous exemplarity avoids the risks presented in the first section, that of negative or artificial exemplification, which increases the dissonance between virtues and actions. However, courses incorporating this ethical reflection are not immune to criticism: the notion of virtues is complex, risks being confused with skills or values, or character traits (Bauman, 2018) and gives rise to a multiplicity of typologies, the most recent of which include

notions such as politeness or humor, which were not part of the old classifications (Friedland and Cole, 2019). As deplored by Ferrero and Sison (2014), “in most of the articles, ‘virtues’ or ‘virtue ethics’ were merely mentioned, and readers were left in the dark as to their exact meaning” (p. 386). The identification of virtues is all the more difficult as they are often practiced simultaneously. As illustrated by Friedland and Cole (2019), “acting in a just manner often requires courage, and prudence frequently demands temperance” (p. 583).

Another risk inherent to virtue education is denounced by Catherine Liu (2021), that of using virtues to exonerate activity that is contrary to social and environmental justice. According to the author, educators in business schools are part of the Professional Managerial Class, which turns production and consumption habits into virtues and urges students to join this artificial class. The word “virtue” used for instrumental purposes would then no longer be an ethical experience but a way of embellishing a status, a function, or a mission. This fixed vision of virtues is likely to permeate the teaching in business schools, when educators refer to the *a priori* virtue of certain activities. Even a more subtle understanding of virtues, as advocated in our illustrative portfolio of virtues, could be misused by teachers who have not themselves received philosophical training in virtue ethics or who do not necessarily have the will to develop a reflexive analysis of their own practices of virtues. Indeed, all teachers do not seek to demonstrate moral exemplarity in their relationships with students, in particular by respecting pedagogical commitments, paying attention to each student’s situation, giving benevolent and constructive evaluation, and listening to personal reflections that go beyond pedagogical expectations (Sanderse, 2013; Moberg, 2015; Frémeaux, Michelson, & Noël-Lemaitre, 2018). It may be that this ethical posture in relation to students is a prerequisite for a collective and reflective analysis of how the virtues are practiced.

The approach based on the experience of virtues is, however, quite simple, accessible to all, and covers all work activities, not just dilemma or responsibility situations. The reflection

can take place in any course and at any level in the student's training. Because our proposal is quite easy to practice and to implement, our study can justify the emergence of the following two avenues of research.

First, we reveal that the situations that provide opportunities to develop virtues and ways of practicing virtues are multiple. Just as there are different ways to contribute to the common good (Frémeaux and Michelson, 2017), there are different ways to practice each of the virtues. This awareness of the multiplicity of paths to moral excellence within a single learning context can foster a both virtuous and free spiral of contemplation, imitation, and reflexivity and reduce the *hubris* of teachers or students thinking they are doing the right thing because they are conducting certain activities (Sadler-Smith and Cojuharenco, 2021). Describing the numerous work situations (individual or collective) in which learners can practice virtues can be the focus of future studies.

Second, this approach by which the worker can become aware of work situations that provide opportunities to practice virtues can also be experienced by those with the power to act in the context of organizations. In line with the literature on virtuous leadership (Wang and Hackett, 2016; Bauman, 2018), future research could explore how leaders could initiate a positive spiral based on virtuous exemplarity. This line of research does not aim to assess the impact of virtuous leadership on followers' ethical character and happiness (Nassif, Hackett and Wang, 2021) but rather to examine leaders and followers' awareness of virtuous practices, which they might repeat.

## CONCLUSION

Most business ethics curricula are based on the belief that the use of case studies will allow students to act ethically when confronted with dilemmas or pressure in their professional life. However, this approach neglects the fact that virtue can only be maintained through continuous practice and should therefore be re-acquired through self-learning and practice. It is preferable

that virtue-based learning focuses on the process and not on predetermined behaviors, which this study based on the Platonic tradition clarifies.

If the aim of business ethics education is to give learners the strength to resist temptation and to make virtuous choices, the use of positive exemplars (rather than negative examples) is relevant, but it can only be successful if practiced by teachers whose exemplarity encourages students to learn about virtues, to practice them, and to identify work contexts conducive to the development of virtues. Such virtuous exemplarity practiced by teachers and students may foster a positive spiral based on contemplation, imitation, and reflexivity that allows each individual to seek happiness (*eudaimonia*) as an effect or goal of the virtuous life.

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Figure 1: Ethical guide for virtuous exemplarity-based learning

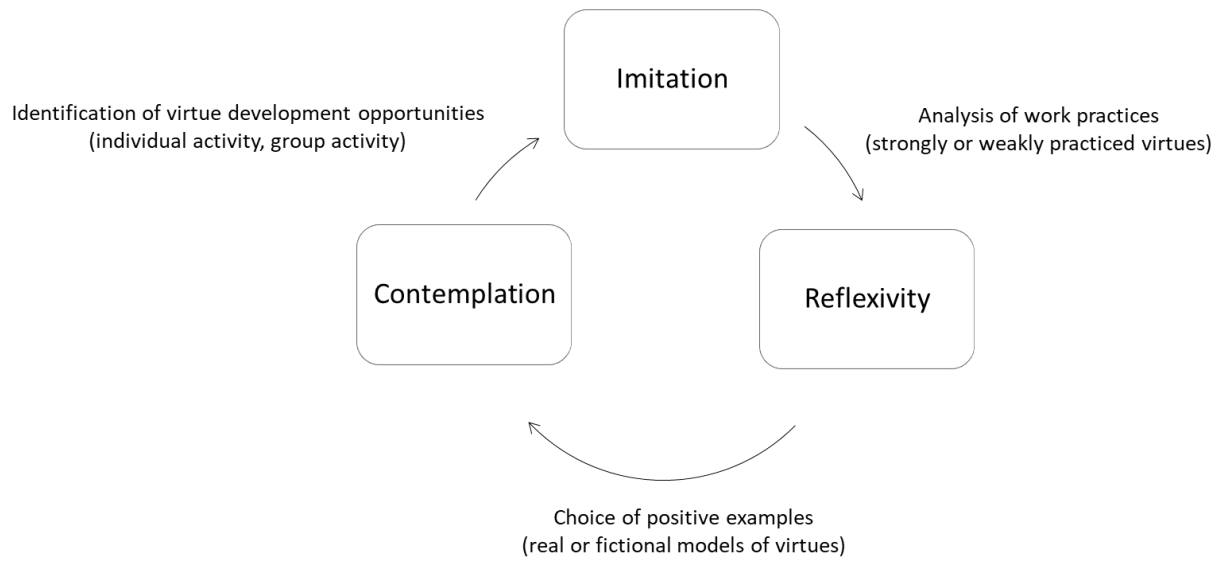


Table 1: Illustrative portfolio of virtues

Virtue development opportunities	Examples of virtuous practices	Virtue
Individual work activity	<p>Provide a certain amount of work that is neither excessive nor insufficient (e.g., take into account one’s physical and psychological needs as well as one’s aspirations in terms of work–life balance)</p> <p>Resist temptations (e.g., resist acrasia)</p> <p>Opt for a virtuous way of working (e.g., work seriously, carefully, and efficiently)</p> <p>Take time before writing (e.g., time to think before constructing ideas)</p> <p>Make the right decision (e.g., deliberate before making a choice)</p>	All the virtues with special attention to cathartic virtues (temperance, prudence)
Collective work activity	<p>Learning from others (e.g., asking questions)</p> <p>Accepting the point of view of others (e.g., listening to differing opinions; admitting mistakes)</p> <p>Giving freely (e.g., helping others in the performance of their tasks)</p> <p>Demonstrate patience in the relationship with others (e.g., patience with those who work less quickly)</p> <p>Expressing tactfully what we think (e.g., expressing appreciation or disappointment; expressing disagreement)</p> <p>Confronting conflicts and considering solutions (e.g., seeking alternative solutions)</p>	All the virtues with special attention to political and moral virtues (justice, courage, sincerity, generosity)