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# Ethics in organizations (III): An anthropological perspective

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**In the previous post** we talked about the context in which organizations address the challenge of being ethical and successful. We have talked about **organizations** and now we will talk about the **people** who make up those organizations.

> A life filled with values such as
>
> autonomy, equality, solidarity and justice
>
> would be worth living, would have in itself its own *télos* (end):
>
> Whoever lived it would want to continue living it.
>
> (Cortina, 2008, page 21)

A fast review of some **definitions of philosophy** shows that it aims to find the ultimate "why" of things, seeking "truth" through the use of reason. However, many thinkers have asked themselves from time immemorial **What is man? Who am I? What is the meaning of human existence?** Thus, these and other similar questions dominate the field of philosophical anthropology, as Joseph Gevaert points out in *The problem of man. An introduction to philosophical anthropology.*

### Fernando Menéndez González

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The answer given to the question *What is man?* will define the field of action and of decision-making not only of common and ordinary men, but also of organizational leaders. This means that **we all have** at least an idea of the **answer to this question**.

Through **philosophical anthropology,** thinkers have given many answers to this question throughout the centuries. Thus, **Gevaert** claims that "man sees himself far from the target, alienated, not yet fully a man, on the way to realizing his existence, *homo viator*". To others, like **Aristotle**, man is an *animal rationale*; to **St. Thomas Aquinas** he is an "incarnate spirit"; to **Marx** he is a *homo faber*, who works and makes, while to **Viktor Frankl** "he is the being that always decides what he is".

The German philosopher **Kant** (1724-1804) had a significant impact on this work with the second formulation of the categorical imperative, when he states: "Act in such a way that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in the person of any other, **never merely as means to an end, but always at the same time as an end".** If the organization's leader has this type of anthropological perspective, **he places people at the core of the organization.**

The opposite will be the case when a leader has an anthropological perspective where man is merely a means to an end. A **means to achieving other ends**, a perspective where the main end is to maximize profit. If this is the case, man will consequently become a means, and workers, customers, other partners, the government and other stakeholders will simply be a means to an end. This is why we sometimes find poor companies with rich owners.

But, what is ethics? It can be stated that **philosophy appears in everyday life through ethics**, and that ethics is not merely a theory about happiness, but has rather been considered since antiquity as the practical art of reaching happiness: "Since the end of this **science** is not **knowledge,** but action (praxis)" and "happiness is something final and self-sufficient, and the aim of everything we do" -according to Aristotle.

Thus, the **definition** that is considered to be more focused for working from the perspective of ethics in organizations is the one that **Kidder** calls *"Obedience to the unenforceable"*. It is a definition where **ethics is conceived from the autonomy of the individual**,

where he voluntarily lives the values he has taken on in his life: those that will help him become a mature, autonomous, free and responsible person.

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