



## Fidelis International Institute

### **Ethics in Global Businesses and Ideology**

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Businesses and global corporations fully express nowadays the dream of the modern paradigm, with its ideals, foundations and desires. As Descartes and Francis Bacon stated back in the 16<sup>th</sup> century, it consists in “creating a paradise on earth” where everything molds itself according to our wishes through scientific knowledge and technological operations on nature. Our way of living is in large part empowered or limited for our good by the services and policies that big corporations generate. From running water, which is a common good, to the most sophisticated necessities and possibilities that have been created so as to communicate across distances and times. Little by little the world is turning into one in which business is increasingly involved.

This reveals an ethical problem that must be considered when we belong to, design or relate with the corporate world, which becomes ever more “our world.” It is an ethical problem because it has to do with the decisions and actions of creations of human freedom, with their relationships, ties and meaning, which before corporations, after them, and beyond them makes us human, that is, our personal dignity and its inherent ends.

When we mediate through corporations our capacity and way of reasoning what “good for human life” means, we are on the verge of exchanging this fundamental good for an interest, legitimate or not. The ethical problem of the corporate world today, as I see it, is that it can confuse and convert what is ethically good into legitimate interests.

The difference is rooted in the fact that interests are valid in a particular form and in consonance with a system of reasons that justify them, outside of which these interests no longer seem valid. And what is good in no way depends on a system of reasons, but rather what makes up the very reality of nature, in particular of becoming a specific person or persons, that is, an ontological and metaphysical determination.

Global business ethics makes decisions on the frontier of the following dilemmas: interest vs. good, subject vs. person, instrumentation vs. teleology of the good, artificial or positive law vs. natural law, ideology vs. ethics. And each extreme struggle to be what is natural, that is, what is necessary and fundamental.

While each of these “corporate worlds” seeks at least to do something good and perfect the good of human life, the problem comes when their own rational system based on their interests seeks to go absolute, to transcend history, uprooting

tradition, culture, and attachment to a community of persons that feed it and benefit from it. The basic ethical problem is when these good intentions with universal rules set themselves up beyond time as the ultimate foundation of reality, as the very nature of reality: man and his dignity.

Therefore we must avoid falling into either theoretical extremism or pragmatic impotence, but rather think how interest can be tied to the good, subject to person, ideology to ethics. The so-called “ethical decisions” of global businesses have focused merely on choosing what the power that conforms them grants, that is, they are choices that attempt to usurp reality and truth. What they don't take into account is that before any power, instrument or interest, they are tied to a culture, a tradition, a community of persons. So, to choose would really have to be to receive what they have been given regarding what they are called to be. In other words, to choose is to receive themselves in various narratives. For example, Coca-Cola's choices don't only bear on the ideology their product imposes, but each decision is to receive again the time of life of the people that made it possible.

Every corporation was born in some way or other rooted in its own community of persons, or better, the corporation is a community of persons. But what happens now is they consider global positioning mechanisms as justified ways of detachment. That is to say, ways in which people are no longer tied to intimacy, heredity and influence in the corporation's style, climate, and culture. Rather, ideologies are suggested which constrain the spirit by ignoring it, annihilating it, or reducing it to a functional system.

If global business ethics is to stop being merely an ideology or a self-justification tool, businesses must always keep at the center of their reflection the involvement of the people they work with and on behalf of whom they work, that they are persons and not masses.

This means that corporations must make a fundamental option for the dignity and good of people in their specific condition of suffering. They must not use the system or their legitimate interest to justify themselves, but work based on their true origin, which is a community of persons. This origin means choices, it means ties in which each person receives himself in relationship with his common goods, such as culture, and which form the good of that particular person. They must not narrow their mission and vision to their own conceptions, but always take into account the transcendence of each person and his dignity. They must recognize that their mission is not the basis of the world and life, but rather a path to perfection and fulfillment and at least an opportunity to follow one's calling.

Global business ethics should include a perspective of love as the creation of a creature. The path and call to love, as the basis of ethicality, is not a mere utopia – often the source of ideologies and fanatisms – but the way to see and act in accord with reality, which is personal and intimate.

This is why, when an ethical standard known by reason is severed from its roots in the person and suffering, it becomes an ideology that rules despotically and claims to free people from evil, it becomes a nightmare as the thinker E.M. Cioran said: “in the prometheic megalomania of a race that bursts with the ideal, which shatters under its convictions (...) since there is no intolerance, ideological intransigence that do not reveal the bestial bottom of enthusiasm (...) creating simulations of gods.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Cfr. Cioran, E.M. *Breviario de Podredumbre*. Punto de Lectura. Madrid, España.2001. Pp. 30-31.

The true ethical attitudes mean to practice love to one's neighbor: such as listening and being humble to the narrative and testimony of the existence of the other. How different the world would be if instead of imposing functional standards to our neighbors, we guide ourselves by listening their narratives, because these are ways of molding the universal and objective good in a particular time and space; ultimately this ways are love incarnated in the dignity of the person as person.

As the Danish thinker Kierkegaard says, evil and falseness in our times is when what rules is the ideology of the crowd, or in many cases some global corporations, where to become human is merely to "belong as a specimen to a race endowed with understanding. Then the race, the species, is higher than the individual or then there are only specimens, not individuals."<sup>2</sup> To be a crowd is not something quantitative but qualitative, it is to stop being narrated in attachment and choice to what you are, or in your condition as creature, and to become something merely numerical. That is, it is to be indifferent to your own human condition, your conscience, your fundamental option, the love you hold.

Global business ethics as an ideology makes us "gladly" impersonal; global business ethics as true ethics makes us personal in a heartfelt and loving way. This is the ethical challenge of our times: to make our actions ways to personally love our neighbor. And this is not mere philanthropy, but a true means by which each person can face his existence and his decisions personally. Here is where the virtues and prudence become important, and as Kierkegaard says our hope is: "however much confusion and evil and contemptibleness there can be in human beings as soon as they become the irresponsible and unrepentant 'public', 'crowd', etc.-there is just as much truth and goodness and loveliness in them when one can get them as single individuals."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Kierkegaard, Søren. *My point of View*. "For that single individual". Princeton University Press. NJ, USA. P. 107.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 11.