



AN ENVIRONMENT FOR GROWTH: LEONARDO POLO ON LEADERSHIP AS A SYSTEM OF COLLABORATION

Juan Andrés Mercado

Pía Valenzuela

This is an unpublished conference paper for the 12th Annual Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues conference at Oriel & Magdalene Colleges, Oxford University, Thursday 4th – Saturday 6th January 2024.

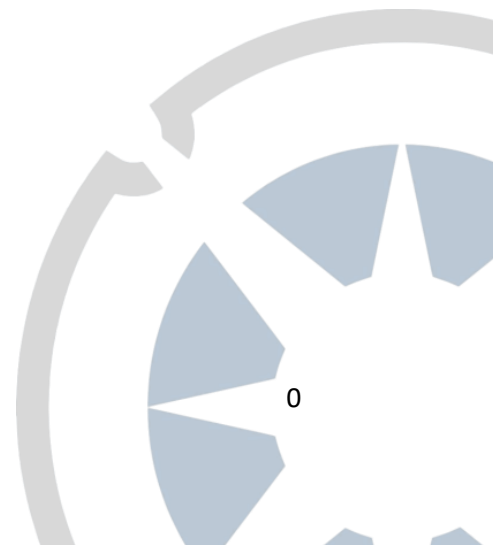
These papers are works in progress and should not be cited without author's prior permission.

Jubilee Centre for Character and Virtues

University of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham, B15 2TT United Kingdom

T: +44 (0) 121 414 3602 F: +44 (0) 121 414 4875

E: jubileecentre@contacts.bham.ac.uk W: www.jubileecentre.ac.uk



An environment for growth: Leonardo Polo on leadership as a system of collaboration

[Version 231130]

Juan Andrés Mercado and Pía Valenzuela

1. Essential Points of Polo's Anthropology

Leonardo Polo (Spain, 1926-2013) developed an insightful philosophical anthropology that exalts human freedom and the need to promote constructive relationships. He elaborated a set of ideas and a methodology for pursuing an anthropology of the human person rooted in classical philosophy. At the height of his research, Polo proposed valuable ideas regarding human organisations during fruitful exchanges between business people and scholars.¹

He made use of a number of fundamental Aristotelian technical terms as in the distinctions of different modes of being: between act and potency, cause and effect, as well as substance and accident.

Anchoring Polo's fundamental thoughts on the human person is the notion of Creation, perceived according to the Judeo-Christian tradition and as an enrichment of Greek metaphysics. Its conceptual maturity reached its peak in the Middle Ages, especially with Thomas Aquinas and his distinction between "essence" and "act of being." Indeed, Polo's deepening of Aquinas' intellectual insights opened up a new pathway for understanding the human person's growth and flourishing by reframing philosophical anthropology and separating it from metaphysics.

This clear distinction allows for a much fuller understanding of freedom and its manifestations in human action, especially as applied to human relationships. Polo can, thus, unite descriptions and observations of human action from different philosophical traditions into a more complete conceptual framework.

2. An Anthropology of Openness

¹ Polo refers to the "Enterprise and Humanism Seminar" organised by University of Navarre as the most significant project he shared with several scholars and entrepreneurs. Cfr. *Filosofía y economía* (hereafter *FyE*), OC-A, XXV, 2015, pp. 398-399.

When Polo treats the Aristotelian understanding of the intellect, he speaks of it as capable of getting the form of the things it happens to know, yet “without ceasing to be itself.” This capacity is consonant with parts of our body, especially our hands which are universal instruments that can take on various instrumental forms. Both our intelligence and bodies when working together, can help fashion new tools and technologies. Working together, they form an open, holistic system that brings about progress in the very process of perfecting the world and, simultaneously, perfecting themselves.²

For Polo, this progress is also interior: human beings require care and education over a long period of time; it takes years to learn a rich and complex language; we need to reach maturity before we may harmonise potential action according life objectives and plans. Polo sums up these two dimensions (i.e. improving the world and improving oneself) by saying that the human person is a *perfectible perfecter*³ and a *problem solver*.⁴

This path toward enhancement and overall progress is not predetermined, even if it rests on a pyramid with a broad base of cultural heritage. Each person receives a call to appropriately use his natural and learned capacities while responding to environmental, familial and various changing social demands. Such indeterminacy requires freedom, which is where the activity of reason⁵ and will come into play.

Polo systematically confronts a series of observations that evolved, yet lacked focus, from different philosophical traditions. For example, when certain metaphysical principles are not clearly distinguished from properly human ones, it is normal to fall into different forms of determinism. At the other extreme, some 20th-century philosophies end up exacerbating the role of freedom, claiming that the human person actually creates or determines her own essence.

Polo’s thought is not simply a mean between two extremes. For him, the human person is *untouchable*, (i.e. *a permanent act of being*) and yet, at the same time, a *perfectible essence*. The Thomistic distinction helps us

² *Ética: hacia una versión moderna de los temas clásicos*, OC-A XI, English transl. *Ethics. A Modern Version of its Classical Themes* (hereafter *Ethics*), pp. 26-27 (160-161). The first set of pages refer to the English version; the one enclosed within parenthesis refers to the Spanish original. See *Quién es el hombre* (hereafter *QH*), OC-A X, p. 65 and notes 24 and 48, below.

³ *Ethics*, p. 210 (298), *Lecciones de ética*, OC-A XI, p. 124, and “El carácter perfectible de la esencia humana”, *La esencia del hombre* (hereafter *Esencia*), OC-A XXIII, pp. 135-140.

⁴ “El hombre ante los problemas. Los límites de la ciencia”, *QH*, pp. 25-41. See Esclanda, R. and Sellés, J. F., *Leonardo Polo. A Brief Introduction*, Leonardo Polo Institute 2015, pp. 35-36.

⁵ The terms “reason” and “intellect” are used interchangeably throughout this study.

understand both the universality of human nature as well as its capacity for growth or degeneration. In other words, concerning our human essence, we can improve or degrade ourselves through our good and bad choices and actions.⁶

3. Humans as radically Proactive Beings: a Revitalised Understanding of Synderesis

St. Jerome explained that the first principle of human action—*synderesis*—is the well-known formula “do good and avoid evil.” Polo expressed his formulation of synderesis in a simplified way: “Do good, act.”⁷ Polo does not merely present a “less is more” approach; he enriches the notion of synderesis by assessing that every one of us should act as much as we can and improve our behaviour. The “no” in terms of avoiding evil is not the first principle,⁸ because “the moral knowledge of principles impels [and] confirms that human beings should have initiative.”⁹ Moreover, developing our efforts to act is not an added duty or rule, “but rather [it is] the expansion of freedom: to pursue good and execute it without giving up and failing to act [and] not being lazy.” All these imply a permanent commitment on our part, that is, maintaining a general attitude while facing the lengthy task of living and coping with constant challenges to our individual plan of life. In this way each person remains committed to “the development of his existence by increasing what is real.” As Polo himself exhorts his readers:

“Throw yourself into life, contribute, put something on your part, do not fall short. This is the great principle. Is this a moral norm in the strict sense? I do not think so. It is rather the connection of any norm with me.”¹⁰

Polo emphasises the proactive character of human nature. Hence, he explains that moral activity is a challenging process of discovery, that is, of what reality demands from the knowing protagonist subject at

⁶ Polo explains these core ideas of his proposal in *Why a Transcendental Anthropology?* Esclanda and Sellés offer a systematic explanation in Esclanda, R. and Sellés, Juan F., *A Brief Introduction*, pp. 31-37.

⁷ *Ethics*, 185 (280).

⁸ On the role of negative commandments, see *Ethics*, p. 134 (240).

⁹ *Ethics*, 186 (280).

¹⁰ *Ethics*, 186 (280). For more on “doing good”, see *Ethics*, pp. 60-62 (184-186), 134 (240), 206 (295), 210 (298).

every stage of his life and, through his rational free will, discerns the best path and means to cause a certain effect.¹¹ This is a core idea for the remainder for this study on Polo's thought.

4. Thales and the Oil Presses: translating Intuitions into Tasks

The intellectual evaluation of complex situations and the subsequent risk taking implies a harmonious interaction of human nature's highest powers.¹² One of Polo's most thorough explanations of this harmonising capacity is found in a text he wrote on invention and creativity. He argues that human inventiveness depends on "connecting the dots" or "understanding *systems*" that is, grasping interrelationships rather than analysing disconnected fragments of reality.¹³

Aristotle's *Politics* illustrates the particular human ability to visualise opportunities and make choices as a coherent practice. We read this in his recounting of the story of the pre-Socratic philosopher, Thales of Miletus. Aristotle explains the economic notion of *chrematistics* (the accumulation of money or wealth for its own sake often by immoral means) via a lengthy discussion of human needs and the means to satisfy them in the context of the good life.¹⁴ In this passage, he explains how Thales had enriched himself by monopolising the oil presses of his city. His clever observations enabled him to foresee that the next olive harvest would be plentiful, and so he bought many oil presses in advance at a cheap price. Thus, when the harvest began, he could profitably rent them at a much higher value compared to he had originally paid.¹⁵ In contrast to this ability to harmonise needs and opportunities, Aristotle tells us about the case of King Midas, who could not in fact even organise the means to reap profits due of his intellect being obfuscated by his own greed.¹⁶

¹¹ Polo devotes numerous pages to *synderesis* in his anthropological works, especially in *Antropología trascendental*, OC-A XV, 2015, pp. 299-529. For references to other parallel texts see J.A. Mercado's "How close are contemporary ideas on Human Flourishing and the Classical Philosophy of man?" in *Personal Flourishing in Organizations*, Springer 2018, pp. 31-32, and his "Tiempo, tarea y satisfacción. De la sindéresis a la medición de resultados", *Empresa y humanismo* 25/1 (2022), pp. 112-113.

¹² See J.A. Mercado's "Desire, Purpose, and the Meaningful Life," *Forum. Supplement to 'Acta Philosophica'*, 7 (2021), pp. 49-84.

¹³ Cfr. *Esencia*, pp. 29 ff.

¹⁴ Aristotle, *Politics* 1, 1258a-1259a36. Regarding Thales as a wise man detached from material things, see Plato's *Hippias Major*, 281e and Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* 6, 1141b3-8. The episode of the Thracian maid's mockery of Thales falling into a well while staring into the sky is found in Plato's *Theaetetus* 174a.

¹⁵ Aristotle, *Politics* 1, 1259a6-36. Polo comments on the passage in *Esencia*, p. 41.

¹⁶ Aristotle, *Politics* 1, 1257b15-17.

Polo uses the sociological term in vogue in the 1970s—“structuring structure”—to emphasise that commercial enterprises are a necessarily *flexible arrangement* of persons. This elasticity improves living conditions and helps refine colleagues’ capacities to respond to the demands of life.¹⁷ This flexibility is directly related to the ability to cope with and promote change. Today’s commercial enterprises are a relatively recent phenomenon, reaching levels of structuring of time and human activity that did not exist in prior eras, with the exception of military organisations.¹⁸ Critical progress in optimising time, both for improving work and life, has permeated other less dynamic institutions, such as schools and universities. In any case, Polo believed that all institutions require greater *humanisation*, and this happens through education, as in the offering colleagues the necessary “help to grow.” For him, institutional authorities ought to promote growth and the eventual flourishing of each person (the “growth of the human being”).¹⁹

The interplay of reason and will forms the very basis of the aforementioned ideas regarding openness. Openness means that humans can grow indefinitely, expanding their constructive activity through collaborative efforts. Polo understands openness also as the ability to fruitfully cope with a permanently evolving reality and, thus, proposes an attitude contrary to what he calls “installation”, that is “settling down” or “getting comfortable” which he thought was an anthropology for retired people.²⁰ Openness implies the ability to correct oneself and dialogically renew one’s knowledge. Polo frequently underscored the importance of avoiding what is akin to “Hamlet’s existential crisis”, that is, a mix of perplexity and immobility when facing life’s challenges and major questions.²¹ The limits of our knowledge should be more of an incentive to overcome them, little by little in cooperation with others, by helping each other

¹⁷ Cf. *FyE*, pp. 379 and 397.

¹⁸ Complexity and systems-based treatments have also found their way into the management literature. See, for example, Peter Senge’s *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organisation* (1990), followed by MIT’s Otto Scharmer’s Theory “U”. Senge closely followed the work of Kurt Levin, who shared the same scientific and cultural background with Goldstein. Goldstein explained the human body as a system in *The Organism: a Holistic Approach to Biology Derived from Pathological Data in Man*, 1939. There are also essential overlaps in Sun Tzu’s principles as a contemplative attitude towards phenomena to gain perspective, understand them, and engage in activity after grasping the deep dynamics of facts and processes.

¹⁹ The obviousness of the statement does not make it any less relevant. From a perspective based on “non-violent communication”, this point is frequently stressed by Miyashiro, M. R., *The Empathy Factor: Your Competitive Advantage for Personal, Team, and Business Success*, PuddleDancer Press 2011.

²⁰ *FyE*, p. 239.

²¹ Cfr. *Antropología de la acción directiva* (hereafter *Antropología*), OC-A XVIII, p. 453, and *Lecciones de ética*, p. 81.

understand the right choices rather than to giving up, while trapped in perplexed isolation like Hamlet, on resolving major challenges the good life demands of us.

All this highlights both the effusive character of the human person and his offering oneself enthusiastically in collaboration with others, in addition to the need to structure this impetus through the generation and promotion of both stable and flexible channels that strengthen it.²²

5. The Person at the Centre of a Commercial Enterprise

Polo describes any company (a publicly listed corporation, an LLC, a family business, et al.), among other things, as a private collaborative venture. He goes on to say that any enterprise is also “a discovery of something that is worth pursuing. It is like a distant goal, which is rediscovered as it develops.”²³ This vision integrates aspects of economic performance because the enterprise “is what the entrepreneur wants it to be in the future, even outliving its own members.”²⁴

Companies are, therefore, environments for expanding human potential in order to achieve long-term goals.²⁵ They do not offer structures merely for satisfying the demands of a needy people. Polo counteracts Marx’s materialist anthropology by arguing that human beings are best understood by identifying part of their essence with its practical definition of a *perfectible perfecter*: motivation is not reduced to needing for “resources are not only material: over them the human cognitive endowment imposes its own inventive nature that transforms and elevates them.”²⁶

Organisations are there to serve individuals and society; and, in a different capacity, they also serve their own collaborators. However, for Polo, the human person’s centrality means that all the actors “irradiate” from the core of the joint business project to give of themselves to building product and service

²² Cfr. “Otras indicaciones acerca del carácter de además”, in *Presente y futuro del hombre*, OC-A X, 2016, pp. 382-387.

²³ *FyE*, p. 424.

²⁴ *FyE*, p. 424.

²⁵ Cfr. *Antropología*, pp. 412-413. This is the first of the three principles of organisations that Polo explains in *FyE*, pp. 371-396. The other two involve communication, as explained in section 8 of this paper. See also J.F. Sellés’ “Nueve consejos de Leonardo Polo al directivo”, *Miscelánea poliana* 42 (2013), §2.

²⁶ *Ethics*, p. 210 (298). See also *Esencia*, pp. 156-158. Polo linked his ideas to the notion of objective and subjective growth of the person developed by John Paull II in his social encyclical *Laborem Exercens* in cc. 2 and 4 of *La originalidad de la concepción cristiana de la existencia*, OC A-XIII, pp. 228-230, 235n11, 241; 325-331, *Ethics*, p. 98 (213) and *FyE*, p. 197.

structures.²⁷ In more general terms, Polo understands all dimensions of ownership and stewardship as channels for the essential unfolding of the person's being, which is naturally free and *giving (donal)*.²⁸

From Taylorism to motivation theory, Polo evaluates positively several advances in the vision of collaborative commercial actors.²⁹ Although companies are production centres, all organisational elements assume that the organisation itself arises out of the human person's development, namely, from forming the dynamism of his higher faculties, whose most relevant manifestations are at the beneficiary's service, while activating their capacity to give.³⁰

In his most philosophically dense writings, Polo calls this manifestation *freedom of destination* and explains it as the desire *to be more*, to grow *with* other persons.³¹ In short, according to Polo, the most sublime activities of freedom can only be understood as forms of collaboration which is impossible without the virtues.³² The healthy tension between wanting and giving shows that we are continually launching ourselves in joint ventures with others towards a future that can be better than the present. Its thrust is based on the love of hope, which is the unceasing backbone of the human existence, and rooted in the will.³³

Polo's *Ethics* contains a more practical explanation of collaborative business ventures, emphasising the peculiarities of the person in her "effusive, contributing dimension" rather than merely in terms of the person's body-soul distinction.³⁴ This is thanks to the fact that:

"[it] is not subject to the laws of nature, but rather rises above them and enjoys a radical freedom.

Because of this, his presence in the world through his nature is inventive. The human being takes from

²⁷ Cfr. *FyE*, pp. 396-397. Cf. Sellés, J. F., "Nueve consejos", §8. See note 39 below.

²⁸ Cfr. *Ethics*, pp. 98-101 (213-215). For a systematic explanation of this question, see *FyE*, pp. 229-233. This idea regarding human giving is at the core of Polo's transcendental anthropology.

²⁹ *FyE*, pp. 429-431.

³⁰ Cf. Sellés, J. F., *33 virtudes humanas según Leonardo Polo*, EUNSA, Pamplona 2020, pp. 15-16.

³¹ Cfr. "28. La conexión sistémica de las virtudes", in *Artículos y conferencias*, OC-B III, XXX, pp. 522-525.

³² Cfr. *Esencia*, pp. 138 and 307.

³³ Cfr. *FyE*, p. 225; *Ethics*, p. 167 (265). *QH* pp. 202-209 concerning an argument that associates human freedom and the sense of mission with those who benefit from the mission and the role of friendship and assistance. The issue regards education in broad terms.

³⁴ *Ethics*, p. 97 (212). Cfr. *FyE*, p. 381.

himself, gives of himself, contributes; we have called this manifestation. The human being is a being who manifests himself and who can also refuse to do so”.³⁵

Hence “every human initiative is an initiative to give: the initiative to receive is not a primary [objective].”³⁶ Human beings give and share. If our actions depended merely on our reactions to whatever we receive, there would be no genuine initiatives but merely reactions.³⁷

Showing initiative is inherent to human nature. For Polo, initiative goes hand in hand with our natural *giving* character, which is why a situation of disorder (where immorality prevails) implies some form of *depersonalisation*. Those who cannot develop by giving impoverish a fundamental expression of their human essence.³⁸

Our outwardly focused nature, that is, being “other-directed”, is coherent with the dynamism of human anthropology: our lives do not rely on some homeostatic equilibrium or the mere satisfaction of needs but on an overflowing of our good will that expands outwardly when it finds adequate channels. These channels allow individuals to combine their *surplus of good will* with the *surplus of other persons’ good will*. Any outcome of human action is typically more significant when, together, a good project is built together.³⁹ In terms of business, in this sense, the company must be subordinate to the growth of its colleagues,⁴⁰ to the beings who can project themselves towards plans to be achieved in the future. This is why the first thing we must wonder is “what do we want to be? The second thing, how?”⁴¹ The personal achievement is executed by way of collaborative organisation. In this way, being and doing can be combined because

³⁵ *Ethics*, p. 97 (212-213).

³⁶ *FyE*, p. 324.

³⁷ Cf. *FyE*, pp. 323-324. Polo calls *hyperteleology* the ability to choose the modalities of giving and self-donation: cf. *Esencia*, pp. 60-63.

³⁸ Polo considers this phenomenon common to societies and small organisations: cf. “VI. Educar el interés”, *Ayudar a crecer* (hereafter *Ayudar*), OC-A, XVIII, 2019, pp. 265-285. See *FyE*, pp. 379, 392; 420-421, 451-452.

³⁹ According to the Aristotelian explanation, Polo stresses that form falls short of explaining the scope of activity. He thus coined the term *hyperformalisation* to indicate that acts modify the subject and its environment. Human beings must continue to perfect themselves by employing their abundant resources: this is one of the manifestations of what Polo calls *being “additionally”*: see *Why a Transcendental Anthropology?*, pp. 42-43, 51, 61-64, and *Esencia*, pp. 54, 143-147; 271-273. See note 26 above.

⁴⁰ *FyE*, p. 451. “Ethics is the science that studies the growth of human capacities through education. This is the secret of human life: man must improve. This is where being and doing come together. In order to be able to subordinate doing to being and not to limit the result, it requires the growth of being.”

⁴¹ *FyE*, p. 451.

they work from the perspective of the growth of agents working together toward achieving a common goal.⁴²

In continuity with what was explained above regarding the essence of the person, Polo also explains why it is a developmental *task*. He asserts that our human nature involves the task of a constant acquisition of general character traits or types of habits.⁴³ It can be said to be a flowering of the personality, and precisely insofar as it is about growth:

“because the essence of man is only in so far as it grows (if it did not grow it would not depend on the person, and if this growth were not free, it would not be other than the essence of a physical organism [...]) This entails using the features of the type to perfect them. This perfecting use is the responsibility of virtues and is therefore ethical.”⁴⁴

It is within this ethical approach that Polo understands business companies as “highways of synderesis” where the person can do good and according to the best of her fundamental abilities.⁴⁵

6. Growing in a Network

The human person grows when she interacts within a network of relationships. As people become more social, they improve in character. Central to the notion of interdependence is that of the ongoing improvement of all collaborative agents.⁴⁶

The indeterminacy defining our entry into the world demands that we that we also define what means we have at our disposal to improve the state into which we are born. We are called to establish or improve upon an order that guides our lives, to generate innovative contexts, and to create avenues of growth by producing new interconnections between people and things. By way of our free actions, we are therefore

⁴² Cfr. *FyE*, p. 451.

⁴³ On Polo's reading of *type* in sociology and psychology, see *Ethics*, pp. 77-82 (199-202) and *Esencia*, pp. 152-158.

⁴⁴ *Ethics*, p. 79 (200).

⁴⁵ Cfr. *FyE*, p. 437.

⁴⁶ Polo refers to relationships in the various spheres of human life: e.g. the interrelation of inner powers is indispensable for organising life (cf. *FyE*, p. 377); his discourse on possession and giving concerns a deep understanding of relationships and the structure of institutions and organisations depend on them. Closely related to the foundations of Christian theology, Polo asserts that the notion of intimacy only makes sense if other intimacies are involved: *Esencia*, pp. 65-68. Cf. *FyE* 379-380.

continuously achieving new syntheses in nature.⁴⁷ Even our bodily structure makes us intervene in nature differently than animals do; moreover, we continually modify our environment to facilitate our actions to achieve the good.⁴⁸ Human inventiveness, in terms of being more or less, correlates with bodily strength and fragility.⁴⁹ This is so, since people manage to overcome adversity in different contexts, and to different degrees, by mastering or failing prey to certain elements of their surroundings. Human beings, thus, vary in their physical independence from their environment. While they can be industrious, a great virtue of strength, persons can also exhibit traits of laziness, a great vice of weakness.

Human beings can also exhibit intellectual power in dealing with their environment. For example, persons can live in creative, thus making an ordinary meal a beautiful art form. Hence nourishing oneself, amid the survival challenges of nature, becomes culinary art; and, even in terms of the value of the meal itself, participates the science of nutrition.⁵⁰

On several occasions in his writings, Polo emphasises the importance of being creative together. Human dynamism brings diverse people together to form a community that is integrated, in terms of talent pools, and dialogical, in terms of cooperation.⁵¹ Concentrating energies and talent is indispensable to creatively overcoming the limits placed on us by our environment, for no one single person is self-sufficient. Not even small communities could improve their quality of life without taking care to breed connections between their own organisation and other networks. Technology is just one of the fruits of human collaboration and is necessarily ethical.

Significantly, the last lines of Polo's *Ethics* refer to the serious issue of marginalisation, precisely in terms of not counting on others, while acting in isolation, when attempting to manage or govern our circumstances:

“To marginalise oneself is a vice; to marginalise others is also a vice. It is necessary to encourage the contrary attitude, to be attentive to others, to be interested in the qualities of others, in the possibility of

⁴⁷ *FyE*, p. 381

⁴⁸ *Ethics*, pp. 20-33 (155-164); 196-199 (288-290). See note 2, above.

⁴⁹ Cfr. *Ayudar*, pp. 148-149, 207-209; *QH*, p. 66; *Antropología*, pp. 326-327; 475.

⁵⁰ Cfr. *Ethics*, pp. 28-29 (161-162). More radically: “man invents needs: it does not occur to the animal to eat cooked meat: the meat does not say so, because it can be eaten raw. The only being who discovers opportunities in fire is man”: *QH*, p. 63.

⁵¹ Cfr. *FyE*, pp. 382 and 419. On the relations between freedom and beauty, Cfr. *QH*, p. 209.

their future contributions, to learn and to teach. It is truly advisable to count on others in everything we do in life.”⁵²

7. Leadership as an Environment

Polo states that business firms work well when they have long-term objectives. Any commercial venture, after all, is a plan for the future with respect to an imperfect present, not an already perfect Utopia. Companies, therefore, naturally promote the structuring of society to alleviate obstacles to help achieve their future objectives. This also prevents falling into routine, as there is an implicit constant need to transform means into ends through intermediate stages for achieving higher goals. This naturally leads to the generation of new endeavours and ideas to improve upon current means and processes. Avoiding mediocrity has moral value, and businesses can prevent mediocrity and discouragement by setting high objectives and to meet them through accurate and creative planning. That is why companies are called upon, by Polo, to work toward new goals and objectives, setting about “new beginnings” after each successful achievement.⁵³

Businesses are places where an individual’s initiative should be coordinated with the initiatives of others: it is a forum for exercising one’s free action with the freedom and actions of others which, in turn, depends on internal growth and is promoted through the virtues.⁵⁴

Polo concludes that cultivating initiative requires leadership, yet he asserts:

“Leadership is not the leader, but that system of organisation by which all members of the institution perform better than in any other. This definition of leadership is the most relevant to the challenge of our time. Leadership is a system of collaboration.”⁵⁵

The same non-individualistic notion of leadership emerges in his comments on the importance of collegial governance which promotes participation in decision-making:

⁵² *Ethics*, p. 229 (313). Cfr. *Why a Transcendental Anthropology*, p. 57n. (376-377n).

⁵³ Cfr. *FyE*, pp. 378-379. On the detrimental outcomes of short-term views, see *FyE*, p. 448.

⁵⁴ Cfr. *FyE*, pp. 424-425. At the basis of this exercise is personal freedom, which is only meaningful if other persons recognise it. Cfr. *FyE*, pp. 444-445, and note 46 below.

⁵⁵ *FyE*, pp. 379-380.

“The leader is a system; it is leadership. The leader is never a person. No one is sufficient by himself alone to lead according to the virtue of fortitude and according to the virtue of temperance”.⁵⁶

This way of understanding the management of companies focuses the manager’s responsibility more on the things to do so, and the best collaborative way of achieving them, so that others can develop their personal traits and qualities in the best possible way for achieving the shared objective.

Such an approach is complementary to a view based on the development and fostering of virtue in the workplace. Polo stresses the importance of virtues for the overall organisation of work:

“Capturing [i.e. identifying] the virtuous character of others is the most critical thing in choosing entrepreneurs. An entrepreneur lacking ethical dispositions, who does not have at least ‘in nuce’ these virtues—the so-called cardinal virtues—is no good as an entrepreneur. If virtue is not personalised or incarnated, society starts turning into something else”.⁵⁷

This “something else” arises when examples of personal integrity cease to exist. Its consistent development is fostered by societies whose culture is based on codes of conduct, ethical norms and behavioural guidelines. When this standard of comportment are no longer firm points of reference, a bleak future, in moral terms, awaits us.⁵⁸

The visibility of leaders and their real integrity confirms the classical idea that “ethics is learned from the righteous man” and not from books.⁵⁹ Such visible and verifiable virtue proves to be a determining factor in inspiring others to live the same ethical framework.

8. Command and Communication

Polo discusses the relations between language, communication, work and truthfulness in several texts; in others, he connects them with the virtuous life in general.⁶⁰

⁵⁶ *FyE*, p. 418.

⁵⁷ *FyE*, pp. 440-441.

⁵⁸ Cfr. *FyE*, p. 441.

⁵⁹ *FyE*, p. 439.

⁶⁰ On the profound relationship between language, spirituality, and culture, see *QH*, pp. 145-148.

In the section dedicated to “Work and Language” in his *Ethics*, Polo explains that the use of language is the purest form of technique. He says associating verbs and nouns is fundamental to motivating collaboration: it is in language where the sense of “command” arises. This is why Polo states the formula “work plus language equals direction.”⁶¹ Verbal instructions enable joint work and the organisation of tasks to occur which have immediate ethical repercussions in terms of commanding and obeying.⁶²

In this interaction, one person speaks and the other listens: one refers to a desired reality and how it should be “assembled;” the other understands and executes the order to his best ability or does not execute it at all. In this relationship, the value of truthfulness comes to the fore: referring to things as they are and respecting as valid the instructions stipulated for achieving a goal.⁶³

Maintaining a coherent relationship with reality and the other participants in the work requires a well-integrated character. In other words, to effectuate what is expected—assigning names and functions and passing on instructions—there is a need to develop virtues organically within an organisation. In *Antropología*, Polo and Carlos Llano state that virtuous character and its exemplary value rely on habits, which allow human beings to develop as a free and within a non-homeostatic system.⁶⁴ Habits pave the way for the development of true freedom and for a life marked by ongoing formation and learning.⁶⁵

Polo and Llano then underscore the importance of virtuous habits and learning for fostering of human relationships:

“Habits are at the service of interpersonal relationships. Likewise, the difficulty of learning lies in its ordination to treating others as persons. *The whole system of habits is required for such treatment to be adequate.* From this follows the need for dialogue and also that truthfulness is at the service of the recognition of the dignity of the person. Freedom marks the coexistential character of the person.”⁶⁶

⁶¹ *Ethics*, p. 33 (165).

⁶² Cfr. *Ethics*, p. 33-34 (165). In *FyE*, pp. 404-406; 410, Polo explains that language is more relevant to coordinating human activities than productive processes because what is at stake is the enhancement of persons.

⁶³ *Ethics*, pp. 33-34 (165).

⁶⁴ Cfr. *Ethics*, “Man as free system” and “The equilibrium of the free system: happiness,” pp. 120-125 (229-233).

⁶⁵ Cfr. *Antropología*, pp. 401-402.

⁶⁶ *Antropología*, pp. 401-402. Emphasis added. There is a substantial coincidence with a suggestion of P. F. Drucker to a manager in 1990: “Your first role [...] is the personal. It is the relationship with people, the development of mutual confidence, the identification of people, the creation of a community. This is something

Llano and Polo emphasise that the action of leadership depends on a harmonious set of positive qualities which are indispensable for establishing and strengthening relations between collaborators. In this way, the person acquires the highest priority in the social fabric and this weighs upon manager with considerably more responsibility.

Polo stresses the two-way nature of this communicative relationship: “to command and to obey are correlative” and “the more information is created and communicated in the institution, the greater its fruitfulness”.⁶⁷

The correlation and alternation between commanding and obeying appears in the concluding paragraph of Polo’s *Ethics*.⁶⁸ Here he records his opinions on the value of quality information in giving orders and successively uses them as a guide to establish the relevance of commanding, obeying and several associated notions.

He argues that language involves understanding reality and recognising the other person as an intelligent subject. Such intellectual functions are required to coordinate activities to intervene in natural processes in a way that satisfies the demands of the good life. Polo, therefore, connects these dimensions of rational comprehension with truthfulness and stresses the value of dialogue as a channel for constructive communication at all levels.⁶⁹

At this point we connect again with the non-speculative character of orders and their execution as discussed above. Giving orders presupposes structured dialogue and the freedom for collaborative agents to act. What is more, the manager in charge must issue an order that can be clearly comprehended. This is why the rational value of giving orders is most significant in terms of having all the necessary elements to be understood and that it is executable:

only you can do. It cannot be measured or easily defined. But it is not only a key function. It is one only you can perform,” in Doerr, J., *Measure what matters*, Penguin Books, N. Y. 2018, p. 176. See Zak, Paul, *Measurement myopia*, (2013), www.drucker.institute/thedx/measurement-myopia/ (cons. 8/09/2023).

⁶⁷ *FyE*, p. 380. He develops these two ideas through pp. 389-394, following the first regarding far-sightedness. See paragraph 5 above.

⁶⁸ There is a substantial overlapping of ideas in *Ethics* 221-229 (‘The action of government’) and *FyE* 386-394.

⁶⁹ On the Aristotelian roots of his proposal and some links with Analytical Philosophy, see *Ethics*, pp. 33-37 (165-167).

“People who are not well-informed work on their own, so they neither obey nor command. People who don’t know what it’s all about can’t collaborate, they don’t contribute anything to the common task. Strictly speaking, there is no common task without communication.”⁷⁰

On the other hand, let us suppose that a subordinate colleague is intelligent and self-governing—with a great imaginative capacity for generating innovation—⁷¹ then there will be a deviation between what the manager thinks will be done⁷² and the way and scope his subordinate actually executes the assigned task.⁷³ Therefore, the manager must monitor the task’s implementation and intervene to correct error or encourage an appropriate deviation which improves the project. Practical reason is embodied in the criteria of judgement and measurement systems which must be constantly improved.⁷⁴

For his part, the person who receives the order must understand it, ask for clarification, and report regularly on progress in whatever way is most appropriate. In some cases, communication systems may illustrate partial measurements. However, in many other cases, it will be up to the prudence of workers to report on the evolution of plans. In the same vein, the one who obeys is in a position to rearrange things, to improve the situation, and to correct himself. For Polo, this interaction is a privileged example of practical reason in Aristotelian terms: reason is, thus, “right reason” and “corrected reason” in a continuously adjustable flux of circumstances.⁷⁵ In practice, corrective action means intensifying the appropriate decision and to make it more effective.⁷⁶

Initiative relates to this co-creative communication, which is a virtuous interaction based on trust, on the one hand. and prudence, on the other. Without trust, relationships deteriorate and, consequently, so too do joint business ventures.⁷⁷

⁷⁰ *FyE*, p. 380.

⁷¹ Cfr. *FyE*, p. 366.

⁷² Cfr. *FyE*, p. 354. Polo makes us of Aristotle’s observation that it is much more interesting to guide free humans than enslave people or even animals. See Aristotle, *Politics* 1, 1254^a. On the degrading effects of dealing with subordinates as machines, see *Antropología*, pp. 405-407, 412, 420.

⁷³ En *FyE*, p. 380 asserts that “the person as a free agent in history is the protagonist of innovation”.

⁷⁴ Cfr. *FyE*, pp. 393-394.

⁷⁵ Cfr. *FyE*, p. 393 and *Ethics*, pp. 177-178; 202-204 (273-274; 293). See also J.A. Mercado’s “La relevancia moral de la estructuración del tiempo humano en la empresa”, pp. 122-124.

⁷⁶ Cfr. *Ethics*, p. 202 (293).

⁷⁷ Cfr. *Ethics*, pp. 33-34; 228-229 (165; 312); *FyE*, pp. 428; 440; *Antropología*, ch. 2. See also S. M. R Covey and R. Merrill’s *The Speed of Trust*, Simon & Schuster, N. Y., 2006.

Prudent persons maintain a close connection with changing realities and try to adapt to them while seeking to obtain the same objective despite necessary modifications to the original plan.⁷⁸ This attention to changing realities and being in frequent contact with team members avoids problems of despotism within a company. In other words, it avoids the rule of a single person over all others in by holding them accountable.⁷⁹

Some tasks allow participation, actively and frequently among a manager and his colleagues. This occurs in the case of doctor who visits patients while accompanied by his medical students: he shows them how to interact with his patients, and then teaches them how to listen, to discern among alternative treatments, and to weigh the risks of applying new techniques.⁸⁰ Moreover, the doctor can broaden the views of the students by teaching them about the relative demands of each patient, factors that depend age, family issues or personal economic situation. Connecting this with the previously explained idea of moral integrity is significant in realising that one can be a teacher in many collaborative activities. Polo and Llano would welcome the practices of accompaniment or onboarding insofar as what they imply regarding sharing experience, fostering growth, and even gratification of working and discerning together.

Polo often writes about the importance of delegating tasks.⁸¹ Although his discourse usually remains very broad in terms of the selection and training of employees, as will be seen in the following section, it is valid to extend it to some aspects of developmental psychology. In addition to growth (due to personal resources and good working environments), people mature in their perspectives and value their abilities differently. It is normal for expectations to evolve because the idea of the life-long job, which is pervasive in some bureaucratic and civil-servant traditions, does not seem to respond to human need for change and proactivity. However, it seems reasonable for people to find their development niche, often in the same field—without excluding permanent improvement—and perhaps for family reasons, they consider it appropriate not to make major leaps in their professional journey. It is perfectly normal for many employees to want to contribute to top management in different ways, either by rising within the

⁷⁸ Cfr. *FyE*, p. 391.

⁷⁹ On how the modern ways of giving feedback in organisations foster these constructive attitudes, see J.A.Mercado's "Tiempo, tarea y satisfacción" pp. 129-135.

⁸⁰ Cfr. *FyE*, pp. 394-395.

⁸¹ Cfr. *FyE*, pp. 420; 447. On the severe challenges of delegating, see R. Kegan and L. L. Lahey's *Immunity to Change*, Harvard University Press, Boston 2009, c. 5.

leadership structure or by finding new ways to make a positive impact when they have acquired skills and maturity in different areas of their work. It is within the scope of management's responsibilities to ensure a constructive channelling of these expectations to preclude wasting this aspect of the company's investment,⁸² and to make the best possible use of mature and reliable staff.

9. "Phronetic" Management

There is a statement Polo makes that is worth quoting in its entirety, as it links the managerial role to the exercise of prudence:

"The one-sidedness or rigidity of command, the invariability of the order, is the death of command. Only he who knows how to modify his orders in accordance with the circumstances of those who execute them, that is to say, only he who knows he is commanded by those he commands, is a leader, a man who can devote himself to any kind of management, in the business firm, in the university, in politics, in the conditions of today's world".⁸³

Here, for Polo, alternating between commanding and obeying takes on a more radical position, as it refers to the power of the one who obeys, which has a decisive influence on the command. The two sentences concluding the above paragraph are severe:

"He who does not do so is obsolete and cannot compete; he fails and causes those who have collaborated with him to fail because they drag them down to their ruin. It bankrupts the industry or the university, which sends people to the professional market who are not qualified."⁸⁴

On the other hand, working together and reviewing achievements and processes facilitates the selection of valuable collaborators, a task of paramount importance for the manager, who must always bear in mind the expiration of his position and think about succession with colleagues who are potentially better than he is.⁸⁵

⁸² Cfr. *FyE*, pp. 135-142 and 271, respectively. On the idea that technique is in a certain way invested time and work, see *Ayudar*, p. 176.

⁸³ *FyE*, p. 391. Among the numerous writings regarding the argument, see the aforementioned *Immunity to Change*.

⁸⁴ *FyE*, p. 391

⁸⁵ Cfr. *FyE*, pp. 389-391. On p. 420, it is only fair that everyone should be in the position for which he or she is best suited and that management must avoid rewarding incompetence.

Polo always combines this ability to adapt with the need to intervene effectively. In “La acción de gobierno” (The action of government),⁸⁶ he explains that *responsible action* is activity that effectively impacts reality without yielding to conformism and feelings of inevitability. He then breaks down the four factors that effectuate action: *knowledge*, *concrete activity*, *personal motives* and *institutional ends*. Knowledge is the ultimate guiding factor because those who plan and coordinate must know the whole picture. This guiding role of knowledge depends on the intellect and how it draws from a rich philosophical conception of cognitive activity. Knowing and reasoning are activities that are in a certain way above movement and time and, therefore, can discern in a notional “top down” way how to direct the relationships of the different dimensions of action.⁸⁷

That is why the person can stop and think to understand the meaning of events and redirect them according to his rational discernment. This classical idea of the extra-temporality of knowledge makes it possible

“to influence the temporal in such a way that its course is not inevitable for man [...] If we did not have a present or non-temporal dimension, which we call knowing, we would not be able to intervene in the temporal, we would not be capable of innovative actions”.⁸⁸

In this way, effective intervention or “transformative effectiveness” rises from company goals that harbour personal motives and intentions. Managerial action continually is geared toward the alignment of individual motives with long term goals. As mentioned in other passages, a direct consequence of this constant focus is the revision and improvement of a company’s procedures and protocols.⁸⁹

Later, in the same text on the action of government, Polo raises relevant connections with the fundamental virtues.

10. Conclusion: The Joy of Sharing

⁸⁶ Ch. X of *FyE* (pp. 401-422) and the last paragraph of *Ethics* under the title “The Action of Government” (“La acción de gobierno”)

⁸⁷ Cfr. *FyE*, pp. 404; 410. See also “Temporalización de la idea”, in *Ethics*, pp. 303-305. *El hombre en la historia*, pp. 41-42, 47-49; *Introducción a la filosofía*, pp. 37-51, *QH*, pp. 167-168.

⁸⁸ *FyE*, p. 404.

⁸⁹ Cfr. *FyE*, pp. 404-406; 410.

As already stressed, in Polo's view, the fruit of encountering of two or more freedoms is a shared initiative. Business is thus understood as the professionalisation of channels for people to grow, to create added value and to make quality products in joint collaboration for the benefit of all.

In such collaborative partnerships, joy arises spontaneously. Polo makes a highly positive reading of human interaction, in which the joy of the shared task is not something accidental. Deep gratification actually strengthens relationships and help people grow. Gratification is not passing emotion or pleasure. Mere hedonism, on the other hand, erodes the capacity for enjoyment and bids persons to sensorial pleasures, limiting their capacity to savour deep enjoyment and to live together in joyous harmony.

When Polo mentions his initiative to create a course syllabus on "The Aesthetics of the Company", to a large extent he is referring to the enjoyment of sharing and growing while giving to others and to the business endeavour itself.⁹⁰ This goes hand in hand with experiencing beauty and catalyses positive works. This is also why celebration is expressed by the human spirit. For example, to celebrate the harvest is to share a moment of joyous collaboration in creating a surplus.⁹¹ Joy, therefore, is a culmination of this process and success. As Polo writes: "We are called to deal with important things [together], and from dealing with them joy is derived."⁹² He goes on to say, but "the greatest joy is produced by our neighbour"⁹³ whom we celebrate and "joy is the pure essence that is found in [this] reality. The source of joy is the growth of the [other] person."⁹⁴

Doing good things in partnership with others is a source of joy. Even though it is quite normal, since we naturally tend to share our co-creative powers, achieving the good is not always automatic. The right environment has to be created and cultivated by someone while considering the quality and costs of means used to achieve the good. For Polo, the leadership model is not narcissistic because is simultaneously personal/individual and communitarian because leading is only possible through

⁹⁰ Cfr. *FyE*, p. 418, and note 51 above.

⁹¹ On the deep anthropological meaning of the *fiesta*, see *FyE*, pp. 323-324; *La persona humana y su crecimiento*, pp. 47-48, and Sellés, J. F., *33 virtudes*, pp. 127-128.

⁹² "Optimismo ante la vida", *Escritos menores (1991-2000)*, OC-A, XVI, p. 44.

⁹³ *Escritos menores (1991-2000)*, p. 43.

⁹⁴ *Escritos menores (1991-2000)*, p. 44.

interaction with others. As indicated in the last lines of his *Ethics*, Polo subordinates the role of virtues to a collaborative dialogue and warns against isolation and self-marginalisation.⁹⁵

That is why, even with respect to the cardinal virtues, there is also truthfulness and, above all, friendship. Polo concludes that friendship is “the most important of the virtues according to Aristotle. Friendship demands respect, mutual esteem. What friendship can there be without dialogue?”⁹⁶

References

Leonardo Polo's Books, Articles and Essays

Complete Works (Obras completas, abbreviated “OC”), EUNSA, Pamplona (Spain).

The first reference to each work appears as “*Work name* + OC + Series A or B + page or pages numbers”; successive references: *Work name* (or abbreviation) + page or pages numbers.

E.g. *Antropología de la acción directiva*, OC-A XVIII, p. 437 = *Antropología*, p. 437.

Antropología trascendental, OC-A XV, 2015.

Filosofía y economía (FyE), OC-A XXV, 2015.

La persona humana y su crecimiento, and *La originalidad de la concepción cristiana de la existencia*, OC-A, XIII, 2015, pp. 19-185 and 187-378.

Epistemología, creación y divinidad, OC-A XXVII, 2015.

La esencia del hombre (Esencia), OC-A XXIII-A, 2016.

⁹⁵ Cf. *Ethics*, p. 229 (313). See note 52 above.

⁹⁶ *Ethics*, p. 229 (312-313).

Quién es el hombre. Un espíritu en el tiempo (QH) and *Presente y futuro del hombre*, OC-A X, 2016, pp. 23-211 and 213-387.

La esencia del hombre (Esencia), OC-A XXIII-A, 2016.

Lecciones de ética, and *Ética: hacia una versión moderna de los temas clásicos (Ethics)*, OC-A XI, 2018, pp. 15-138 and 139-313.

Ethics. A Modern Version of its Classical Themes, Sinag-Tala, Makati City, Philippines, transl. Paul A. Dumol, 2008.

Escritos menores (1991-2000), OC-A, XVI, 2018, “Optimismo ante la vida”, pp. 37-44.

Antropología de la acción directiva (Antropología) and *Ayudar a crecer (Ayudar). Cuestiones de filosofía de la educación*, OC-A XVIII, 2019, pp. 309-482 and pp. 137-308.

Artículos y conferencias, OC-B III XXX, 2022, “28. La conexión sistémica de las virtudes”, pp. 487-525.

English Translations by Leonardo Polo Institute of Philosophy Press

Why a transcendental anthropology?, transl. Chafuén, G., Esclanda, R., and Vargas, A., 2015. The original text is the last chapter of *Presente y futuro del hombre*, “¿Por qué una antropología trascendental?”, OC-A, X, pp. 337-387.

Having, Giving, Hoping, transl. Esclanda, R., and Vargas, A., 2023, original: “Tener, dar, esperar”, OC-A XXV, c. 2, pp. 193-266.

Other Authors

Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics, Politics, The Complete Works of Aristotle. The Revised Oxford Translation*, J. Barnes (ed.), Princeton University Press, 1986

Covey, M. R. and Merrill, R., *The Speed of Trust*, Simon&Schuster, N. Y., 2006.

Doerr, J. *Measure what Matters*, Penguin Books, N. Y. 2018.

Esclanda, R. and Sellés, Juan F., *Leonardo Polo. A Brief Introduction*, Leonardo Polo Institute of Philosophy Press 2015 (2nd corr), ISBN 978-0-9912568-2-2

- Kegan, R., and Lahey, L., *Immunity to Change*, Harvard University Press, Boston 2009.
- Mercado, Juan A., “How close are contemporary ideas on Human Flourishing and the Classical Philosophy of man?”, in J.A. Mercado (ed.) *Personal Flourishing in Organizations*, J.A. Springer 2018.
- “Tiempo, tarea y satisfacción. De la sindéresis a la medición de resultados”, *Empresa y humanismo* 25/1 (2022), pp. 111-141.
- “La relevancia moral de la estructuración del tiempo humano en la empresa”, *Studia Poliana* 24 (2022), pp. 103-132.
- “Desire, Purpose, and the meaningful life,” *Forum. Supplement to ‘Acta Philosophica’*, 7 (2021), pp. 49-84, DOI: 10.17421/2498-9746-07-04
- Miyashiro, M. R., *The Empathy Factor: Your Competitive Advantage for Personal, Team, and Business Success*, PuddleDancer Press 2011.
- Scharmer, Otto, *Theory U. Leading from the future as it emerges*, Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2009.
- Plato, *Hippias Major, Theaetetus*, in *Platone. Tutte le opere*, Newton Compton Ed., 2014.
- Sellés, Juan F., “Nueve consejos de Leonardo Polo al directivo”, *Miscelánea poliana* 42 (2013).
- *Las virtudes teologales*, SPUN, Pamplona 2018.
- Senge, Peter *The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of the Learning Organisation*, 1990.
- Zak, Paul, “Measurement myopia,” (2013), www.drucker.institute/thedx/measurement-myopia/ (accessed 25/01/2022).