The philosophical thought of Józef Tischner\(^1\) has its origins in the deep conviction that that upon which it is necessary to think does not come to us from the pages of a book but from the face of a man anxious about his personal destiny. This anxiety of man about his personal destiny is accompanied by a deep crisis of hope that, speaking metaphorically, provokes the death due to despair. Starting out from a detailed analysis of man’s existential situation, Tischner attempts to describe, in various writings, a human ethos that enables man to overcome despair and replace it with an orientation of hope. The research that follows seeks to highlight particular elements of Tischner’s proposal as a particular ethical orientation through which man can creatively shape his existence and give it a new vital dynamism. This novel idea was set forth by Tischner in one of his first philosophical writings entitled *Ethics of Value and Hope*.\(^2\) It is in this work that we find the fundamental exposition of this concept, which Tischner continued to develop throughout his philosophical career.

**MEANING AND IMPORTANCE OF HUMAN ETHOS**

The path that J. Tischner proposes begins with an analysis of the reality expressed by the Greek word *ethos*, a word that carries several meanings. For Tischner, the word *ethos* carries the meaning of a place in which a plant can grow without difficulty, live, and fructify. *Ethos* means an ambiance, a dwelling (house), life space. So that what is alive can bear its fruit it must find its own *ethos*,\(^3\) that is to say, a particular *life dimension*.

For a man to live, physically and spiritually, continuously consolidating the depths of his being, he needs to have his own *ethos*. Yet the *ethos* of man is special because it is primarily fabricated from other men. Man seeks a place among other men, he looks for persons among whom he need not pretend, he looks for someone with whom he can plan his future. For Tischner, “man is the ethical being; he is someone for whom the problem of *ethos* is simply the problem of his own existence”.\(^4\) From this
flows the fact that man can produce his own fruit if he discovers where and with which persons his own ethos is formed. On the other hand, if he does not find this intersubjective connection, he will live as a being estranged from himself, defective in his own being, with the problem of his being unresolved.

What does man as ethical being mean? A response to this question does not call for a theoretical explanation of man based on an anthropological-ethical discourse. Rather, what is more properly called for is an analogy to a musician who plays a musical composition. Before him, a musician has a score, yet it needs to be said that the score is not always what is written on a piece of paper. A score can be found in memory and even in an improvisation. Whatever shape the score takes, the musician is both creator and listener at the same time. He composes (excogitates) something that already was in existence but which revealed itself in silence. What is the content to which the musician gives absolute obedience and willing submission? A true score comes from a system of values that the musician expresses in the form of sound, that is to say he renders in material form the basic values of the musical composition. “To play a musical composition perfectly means to express the values that were present at its origin”.

This metaphor helps us understand man as well. The reality of man is similar to a song, according to Tischner. Who plays or sings this song? Man himself is both the instrument and the musician. According to what values does man sing (compose) his life-song? The answer to this question is difficult because there are as many scores available as there are men. This comparison between man and melody is a paradox in which the work of art, the instrument and the artist, are one and the same. With what language does one express the strange nature of man? Tischner observes that such unity in the work of art, between instrument and artist, instantiated in every human being, is expressed through a life which tends to be brought to fruition according to a world of values (an axiological structure). This axiological world is both the model and goal of a human life, i.e., an end or an always perfectable goal toward which man tends. Truth, justice, fidelity, benevolence, honesty and a number of other values ethically orient the life of a man and yet, it is true to say, that if a man does not relate to other human beings according to the same values, this entire ethical orientation ends up as a theoretical, fruitless and dead-end discussion. J. Tischner sees in the axiological world an invisible force that guides the life of man. And if the man comports himself according to such axiology he gradually discovers his ethos.