Personalist Anthropology

A Philosophical Guide to Life

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with James Beauregard

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To Karol Wojtyła, philosopher

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Foreword to the English Edition

Personalism moves forward with determination in the 21st century, with new publications, Congresses and Associations, growing interest on the part of young researchers, and application in new fields such as psychology and education. However, there is still a long way to go, and a lot of work to be done, in order for it to become the philosophy of reference for those who are committed to the dignity of the human person.

This text wants to contribute to this path by providing a personalistic, integral and structured vision of the human being, placed within the intellectual framework of Integral Personalism (see *An Introduction to Personalism*). There are many personalistic essays on the person, the fruit of such brilliant minds as Marías, Mounier, Wojtyła, Guardini, Von Hildebrand and many others, but there are very few systematic presentations. This book offers one of those few presentations and, perhaps, one of the most accessible, pedagogical and structured, if we pay attention to its reception (six editions in Spanish).

Now is the time for its translation into English, an important moment for any text, given the global significance of that language. To this end, it has been completely revised and updated both in terms of content and bibliography. I harbor the hope that it will have a similar reception to that obtained in the Spanish language, since, according to the comments of readers and students, it seems that it contributes to improving the understanding of the human person and to forging minds capable of defending it with intelligence and open-mindedness.

Juan Manuel Burgos, May 2021

Introduction: What is Philosophical Anthropology

1. The Genesis and Development of Philosophical Anthropology

The question regarding the human being is a universal constant. Every man, every woman, asks about him or herself, seeks to know what he or she is, or better, who he or she is, and seeks to respond to the fundamental questions about existence: What does it mean to be free? What are my feelings? Do I have a spiritual soul? What happens when someone dies? These questions form an inseparable part of life because we cannot live without answering these questions more or less explicitly. Not doing so would imply living in absurdity, in ignorance, or in irrationality, something evidently inhuman.

There exists, however, a special type of response to these questions: the philosophical response. A series of people throughout history have thought of going beyond the individual, quick answer, elaborating a field of knowledge that might respond with profundity, with precision, without improvisations, and with radicality. This field of knowledge is philosophy, and the field of knowledge that is focused on the study of the person is philosophical anthropology.

The perspective of philosophers in relation to the study of the human being has varied over time. Initially, the reflection was centered not so much on the human being as on the soul, due to the influence of the first work of systematic reflection on the human being, Aristotle's *De anima*, which marked the tendency of the following centuries until well into the 17th century. Thus, for example, Saint Augustine wrote treatises entitled *De inmortalitate animae*, *De quantitate animae* and *De anima et eius origine*; Ibn Rushd (Averroes) wrote a commentary on Aristotle's *De anima* and Thomas Aquinas, on this point, faithfully followed his venerated teacher by also commenting on *De anima* and studying human issues from this perspective. The last great work situated within these coordinates is, probably, Francisco Suárez's *De anima*, an important text in the history of philosophy, according to Heidegger.

The arrival of the Renaissance and the advent of modern philosophy by way of Descartes was an important change. The Renaissance, as is well known, emphasized the centrality of the human being, his or her importance as such and not just in relation to God, and this gave impulse to studies about the human being and not just about the soul. Descartes, for his part, insisted on the subjective and interior dimension of the person. This set of propositions allowed for a reconsideration of studies on the human being which, already in

the context of the Enlightenment, were integrated into the name *rational Psychology*, popularized by Christian Wolf (1679-1754). The term "psychology" included the subjective aspects advocated by Descartes, and the term "rational" on one hand distinguished it from empirical or experimental psychology and, on the other, made reference to the zeal for the systematic and deductive, proper to rationalism.

The denomination *rational Psychology* was maintained for a long time, but at the beginning of the 20th century, it began to cede way to the term "anthropology". It seems that the origin of this term should be attributed to O. Casmann, who published in 1596 a work titled *Psychologia anthropologica*. Kant took a step forward with his four famous questions: What can I know? What should I do? What am I permitted to hope for? and, what is the human being? He comments that "to the first question, metaphysics responds; to the second, morality; to the third, religion; and to the fourth, anthropology. In the end, everything could be attributed to anthropology because the first three questions refer to the final one."[1] But Kant did not, properly speaking, elaborate an anthropology text and, in fact, the definitive consolidation of this term as we currently understand it only came at the beginning of the 20th century with Scheler's famous text, *Man's Place in Nature* (1928)[2]. There, Scheler proposed a unitary and integral philosophical vision of the person and his or her relations with the rest of reality, removing himself both from a fundamentally metaphysical analysis (*De anima*) and from an interior and subjective one (*Psychology*). From the time of these works onwards, the term philosophical anthropology imposes itself as a term corresponding to the systematic philosophical study about the human being.

It was not easy, however, for philosophical anthropology to take its place, because it was quickly put into question by an important group of philosophers in the second half of the 20th century (Foucault, Lévy-Strauss, etc.). Moreover, they posed the question in the most radical terms, because what was placed into doubt was not the terminology or content, but the very *possibility* of philosophical anthropology itself. It was argued, for example, that the current complexity, development and fragmentation of the sciences regarding the human being (ethnology, cultural anthropology, psychoanalysis, ethology, etc.) impeded a philosophical approach to the person with at least a

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[1] Immanuel Kant, *Logik*, in *Kants Gesammelte Schriften*, vol. IX, 25.

[2] Max Scheler, *Man's Place in Nature* (New York: Noonday 1961). From the same year (1928) and also relevant for the consolidation of philosophical anthropology is H. Plessner's work *Levels of Organic Life and the Human: An Introduction to Philosophical Anthropology*.

minimum of precision, to the point that it would not be possible to even identify the "human object", There was also a question of whether philosophical anthropology was able to overcome its own presuppositions and perform a constructive development that was not a mere conclusion of what was already contained in the starting point.

These criticisms weighed greatly at the time, but today they have receded to a large degree because, although they have been accepted in part, it has also been noted that they do not have sufficient weight to invalidate the anthropological reflection. It is manifestly true, for example, that we all have cultural and philosophical presuppositions, but that in itself does not take away the validity of philosophical investigation or reflection on anthropology. It simply situates it within determined coordinates. In fact, today we are instead witnessing a revitalization of philosophical anthropology, and the reason, or at least one of them, is to be found precisely in the fragmentary and plural character of modern society, which previously appeared as an obstacle. The multiplication and specialization of the fields of knowledge is very beneficial from a technical and gnoseological point of view, but it requires, as compensation, an overall vision that may account for the human being as such. Otherwise, the person ends up being lost in the hyper-labyrinth of knowledge and information which shapes our society[3].

The present work is framed within this context, and its objective is to contribute a systematic and integral vision of the person from a precise philosophical perspective: personalism. Such a clearly defined position-taking calls for a more detailed explanation, but before we offer it, we will make a bit more explicit what we understand by philosophical anthropology.

2. Characteristics of Philosophical Anthropology

Philosophical anthropology[4] is nothing other than the philosophy of the human being, a much more common expression in the English-speaking world where the expression philosophical anthropology is not frequent. But, since philosophical perspectives can differ a lot, the ways of conceiving how to understand it also change. For this reason, we are going to indicate various characteristics which, in our opinion, a philosophical reflection on the human being should possess.

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[3] Cfr. Juan Manuel Burgos, *La vía de la experiencia o la salida del laberinto* (Madrid: Rialp, 2018).

[4] Its etymology comes from the Greek *anthropos* (man) and *logos* (treatise or science).

- *Explicative:* Philosophical anthropology seeks to *explain and to understand*. From the standpoint of philosophical anthropology, it is not enough to describe what occurs or what one observes; rather, philosophical anthropology strives to comprehend, to relate and to reach the foundations of things. For example, it asks about the meaning of life, the significance of death, or what feelings are. In this, it differs from other sciences, which also study the human being, but which center more on the how and not on the why (sociology, psychology, etc.). Philosophical anthropology also differs from cultural anthropology, which basically intends to *describe* the different ways in which the human being confronts existence through culture but does not radically ask about the why of those customs or their meaning.[5]

- *Metaphysical or ontological:* many philosophical conceptions about the human being exist; the correct one understands the human being not as a flux of sensations or of phenomena that flows with time and does not have coherence (like Hume, for example), but as a subsistent being, permanent and rooted in being. Philosophical anthropology should adopt this metaphysical or ontological perspective.

- *Integral:* it should offer a vision of the human being which takes into account all its aspects and dimensions: psychological, biological, sociological, spiritual, etc. In this, philosophical anthropology is distinct from the *human sciences*, which only treat one concrete aspect, such as medicine, law or economics. Philosophy's mission is to consider the human being in a holistic way, something which is particularly important today given the fragmentation and multiplicity of knowledge. Without *synthesis* or *holistic visions,* the human being becomes lost in the ocean of information and knowledge.

[5] Logically, there is room for nuances. There are cultural anthropologists who pose questions about human topics in a deep way, but, in any case, the basic distinction is valid.

There are, however, philosophical anthropologies (that is, anthropologies that seek to comprehend) that adopt a *reductionistic* attitude because they center exclusively on one aspect of the person. For example, all the philosophies that dispense with the spiritual dimension, such as Marxism or scientistic materialism, are reductionistic. But it is also possible to fall into this error on the opposite extreme, dispensing with or undervaluing the corporeal and material character of the human being.

Due to its integral character, philosophical anthropology should take into account, as much as possible, the developments of the other sciences which contribute knowledge about the human being (law, ethics, psychiatry, etc.), because in this way its knowledge increases and is enriched and it avoids falling into errors that come from a reflection on experience which is too simple or not sufficiently the fruit of comparison and contrast.

- *Scientific:* Anthropology is a scientific field in the sense that it seeks to know with profundity, establishing connections and structuring knowledge in a systematic way. This does not mean that it is an experimental science like mathematics or physics. Until the beginning of the 20th century, the concept of science had been reduced and was erroneously identified with this type of sciences; but numerous subsequent studies (Kuhn, Popper, Polanyi) have allowed us to clearly comprehend that there are many different scientific fields of knowledge depending on the characteristics of the object to be studied.

- *Experimental:* philosophical anthropology arises from the analysis *of human experience* understood as integral experience (see chap. 5.2). It is not an abstract field of knowledge, deduced from theoretical and unreal premises, but rather a reflection on the human being and his or her life. Thus, whoever does philosophical anthropology should, as much as possible, have profound and rich contact with human existence. To this end, recourse to the experiences of others is of great usefulness, experiences which they transmit to us through literature, art, and film.

3. A Personalistic Philosophical Anthropology

The philosophical anthropology presented in this textbook is based on personalism, a philosophical current that began in France during the

interbellum years of the 20th century and which later extended to other European countries: Italy, Spain, Germany, Poland, etc.[6]

Personalism is characterized by being, in a broad sense, a realist philosophy and thus is framed within what tends to be called classical philosophy, whose eminent representatives are Plato, Aristotle, Saint Augustine, and Saint Thomas, among others.[7] But within this wide framework, personalism develops some new elements which define it and distinguish it and which depend, in part, on modern philosophy. First of all, it is radically structured around the notion of person, which is the key to its conceptual architecture, and it elaborates specific philosophical categories to treat the person. And, on this basis, it develops a series of topics and perspectives in an original way: the radical importance both of affectivity and of relations, which leads to the importance conceded to interpersonal relationships; the primacy of moral and religious values in confrontation with a possible intellectualism; the insistence on the corporeal and sex-differentiated aspect of the person; the importance attributed to the social dimension of the person and to action as a manifestation and realization of the subject, etc.

A number of brilliant essays exist on many of these aspects, which have arisen from eminent personalists, like Maritain, Wojtyła, Guardini, von Hildebrand, Mounier, Marías, Marcel and Buber**,** to mention only some. But rarer are the visions of *synthesis* which bring together or systematize this thought, so rich and suggestive. This deficit is especially striking in the area of anthropology because, if personalism is some type of specific philosophy, it is evidently an anthropology. The objective of these pages is to fill this void, developing in a systematic way, with the format of a college textbook, the anthropological perspective which we consider proper to personalism.

A final nuance. There are different types of personalism which, within a common theoretical framework, possess relatively significant differences. In

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[6] A detailed explanation of the essential characteristics of personalism and its principal representatives can be found in Juan Manuel Burgos, *An Introduction to Personalism* (Washington, DC: CUA Press, 2018). See also E. Mounier, *Personalism* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul,1952); Th. R. Rourke y R. A. Chazarreta, *A Theory of personalism* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2007); J. O. Bengtsson, *The worldview of personalism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); J. N. Mortensen, *The Common Good. An introduction to personalism* (Wilmington: Vernon Press, 2017); B. Mondin, *Storia dell'Antropologia Filosofica, vol. 2* (Bologna: ESD, 2002): *Le antropologie personaliste,* 514-660.

[7] There is also an idealistic personalism whose main representative is Borden Parker Bowne. See, for example, Borden Parker Bowne, *Personalism* (Cambridge: The Riverside Press, 1908).

this text, we use as a basis the *Integral personalism* developed principally by Wojtyła and Burgos.[8]

The structure we have developed is the following one. Part I is an introduction to the notion of person and its key concepts. The second part (chapters 2-7) is an investigation into the structure of the personal being through three dimensions – corporeal or physical, psychological and spiritual – which traverses its most essential elements: the body, sensibility and inclinations, affectivity, intelligence, freedom and the personal self. Part III (chapters 8-10) is a reflection on personal action, both from a general point of view and in some of its modalities (language and work). Part IV (chapters 11-13) takes on interpersonal relationships on three levels: person to person, familial and social. Finally, in Part V (chapters 14-15), we have considered the ultimate questions which decide the holistic meaning of life: death, immortality and religion.

4. Methodological Novelties

This division in parts and chapters responds to a profound theoretical conception rooted in personalism and, more concretely, in Integral Personalism. Without burdening the reader with methodological questions, which are not to the point in this textbook, we will briefly indicate some of the most representative ones, so that the reason for the structure and configuration of this work, which is original, may be better understood.

a) The person as starting point. It has been frequent in anthropology treatises to begin with an ascent which leads from the mineral world to the vegetative-biological world, and from there to the human world. This perspective has its roots in a Greek type of vision according to which the human being would be a rational animal, that is, a very special animal, but, to a good degree, an animal. Personalism, on the contrary, without discarding the relevance of the somatic and biological aspects in the person, considers the person to be a unique reality, irreducible to the animal world and thus believes that anthropology should begin directly with the person, which is its topic of study; in addition, only in this way will it be able to develop authentic personalistic categories, that is, specific categories for the person, instead

[8] Cf. J. M. Burgos, *Wojtyła's Personalism as Integral Personalism. The future of an Intellectual Project,* Questionaes Disputatae, vol 9. N. 2 (2019) 91-111.

of using categories thought up for animals and modified to adapt them to the human being. This is the reason why this book begins, without any type of preambles, with the human being, that is, with the person.

b) Integral experience. This book uses the philosophical method of integral experience (derived from a proposal by Karol Wojtyła), which consists of analyzing reality through our experience, conceived as a complex lived experience (*vivencia*) which has an objective and a subjective dimension and in which, from the gnoseological point of view, intelligence and the senses operate together. We experience reality in a unitary way thanks to our intelligence and our senses, and this rich (subjective and objective) reality is what we propose to analyze philosophically. Concretely, in philosophical anthropology we analyze the person's experience: our individual experience (to a great degree subjective) and the experience we possess of others (fundamentally objective).[9]

c) Anthropological novelties. This text presents some very significant thematic novelties which it may be worth the while to make explicit: c.1) the tridimensional structure of the person. Amplifying the classical perspective which divides the person into body and soul, we divide the person into three dimensions: body, psyche, and spirit. In this way, the complexity of the human subject is better reflected and a *de facto* dualism is avoided; c.2) a great relevance is given to affectivity, which is understood as an original and founding reality of the person, with equal importance as the dynamic and the cognitive dimensions; c.3) attention is paid to the subjective dimension of knowledge and not just the objective dimension; c.4) freedom is understood not just as choice, but fundamentally as self-determination; c.5) action is not considered to be ontologically detached from the person, but

[9] Cf. Juan Manuel Burgos, *Integral experience: a new proposal on the beginning of knowledge*, in J. Beauregard, S. Smith (eds.), *In the Sphere of the personal. New perspectives in the philosophy of person* (Wilmington USA Vernon Press, 2016), 41-58. See also, Juan Manuel Burgos, *La experiencia integral. Un método para el personalismo* (Madrid: Palabra, 2015).

rather it is conceived as an active prolongation, that is, as the person in action. Action, moreover, is multiform, in such a way that it cannot be explained in a satisfactory manner by way of the simple tripartition of action proposed by Aristotle; c.6) An entire fourth part of the textbook is dedicated to studying interpersonal relationships (in addition to the references in the third part), due to its decisive role in the configuration and life of each human being; c.7) Finally, there is an insistence on the temporal character of the person due to the understanding that temporality forms part of his or her most basic configuration, in such a way that death and the hereafter pose a question which, in one way or another, should be answered by every human being.

d) The unity and diversity of the person. We strongly insist on the unity of the person. Thus, without radically putting into question the theory of the faculties, we have tried to develop an anthropology in which there is not a very strict differentiation between the subject and his or her faculties. In this way, the "personalization" of the faculties is avoided, a personalization which occurs when we forget that it is always a subject who performs the action, one of the results of which is the well-known short-circuits related to determining who has the final decision in human action: the intelligence or the will. Both potencies doubtless have a certain autonomy in the ensemble of the complex structure of the person, but in their deepest dimension, they are not autonomous entities, but dimensions of the subject. It is the *person* who is free, not just his or her action. And it is he or she who knows through the intelligence. Definitively: *I* want. *I* know. *I* love.

e) The diagram of the person (figure 0.1). Many of these features can be expressed pedagogically in a diagram, useful for understanding the fundamental structure of the human being, with the understanding that it is only a pedagogical instrument which facilitates an overall vision which allows one to perceive at first sight, for example, the tridimensional structure of the person, the importance of affectivity, the unifying role of the self, etc.

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