

## Juan Manuel Burgos, Response to James A. Harold

First, I thank James A. Harold for his reading of the book and his evaluation and, in particular, his indication that it offers an overview of personalism that is difficult to find elsewhere. As this is the objective of my book, by which I believe it should be valued and judged, I feel comforted by this indication even though several criticisms, questions, and comments are added to it and to which I will try to respond below.

1. From my point of view, I understand that many of the criticisms presented by Harold are due to an initial blurring of his reading since it seems that he is not reading an *Introduction to personalism*, but reading, or better stated, wanting to read what would be called an *Introduction to person*. And this wrong approach would explain some of his arguments, beginning with the first in which he asks, "Where is Chapter One?" Harold, in fact, considers that my text lacks, just at the beginning, an exposition on the person that would explain issues such as "What distinguishes the realms of person and non-person? What is it that is unique about persons? Specifically, what is it that distinguishes a person from, say, a higher order animal? (...) Is it true that a person is ordered to transcendence? And then what does that transcendence mean?" As I claim, this book is not an essay on anthropology (or at least not directly), but an introduction to personalism. Therefore, the answer to Harold's objection is that Chapter 1 is in its place since it offers the set of socio-philosophical elements that gave rise to personalism, which is what this book is about. This does not mean, however, that I have answered all the questions he raises, but only that I do it by means of elucidating the thought of personalist thinkers so that it is known to the reader what they think, or, to state my point different, so that it is known to the reader what the personalists think about the person.

The problem that is identified in Harold's approach also affects point 2, according to which I overemphasize what people think in contrast to asserting what is the case. Harold's blur is still lurking behind this objection because what this book intends to do is to explain what personalism amounts to, and, since I have not invented personalism, it seems quite sensible to expose what the personalist authors have so far claimed as a means of the reader coming to know what personalism is. Logically, through personalism, a vision of the person is derived, but this cannot be invented *a priori*. Whatever concept of a person is arrived at is the one created by the personalists. It is true that it would have been possible to have started with a general vision of the person, one which is the synthesis of the positions of the personalists (I suppose that is what Harold would have wanted), but I have preferred to follow my own path so that it would be clear that the synthesis, which is offered at the end of the book, fits what the personalists actually claimed. From this perspective, one could also say that the chapter that Harold looks for is indeed to be found in the book, but it constitutes the last chapter and not the first.

2. A second problem is his reductive and perhaps somewhat naive view of scholarship. Harold frequently complains that I am not addressing real topics, but instead what the authors think of those topics. I have already indicated why I do this, but a further reason would be that, in philosophy, it is not so easy to separate reality from interpretations. The history of philosophy *is* philosophy. It is not possible to achieve pure visions of reality uninfluenced by interpretations. For this reason, a good part of the philosophical task consists of having knowledge of what others have said and the humility to recognize that often, one's own thoughts rely at least implicitly on those of others. Whether or not this task is considered "academic" (in the pejorative) is irrelevant. It is a

necessary task that every philosopher knows that he or she must perform. This task, however, does not prevent the development of one's own vision. On the contrary, it consolidates and reinforces it if it is done correctly. I have no difficulty or fear in expressing my own view of the person (as Harold seems to suppose) and it can be found in many of my other published books, most notably in *Personalist anthropology: a philosophical guide to life*. But *An Introduction* was not the place for it.

For the same reason, the suggestion that I must speak from the person's inner vision is inconsistent. How can the philosophy of other authors be exposed from one's own subjectivity? It does not seem the most appropriate perspective to do them justice. What one should do is attempt to present one's thoughts as objectively as possible. But it should be recognized that philosophers are not only thinking minds, but concrete people with a personal and collective history. And precisely for this reason, to attend to *their* subjectivity (not mine), their biographies and stories are presented with the brevity allowed by the structure of the book.

3. Harold also comments, finally, on two important issues: my view of substance and my assessment of Descartes. In relation to both topics, the first thing that must be considered is that, since this book is an introduction, it must be taken for granted that the topics cannot be dealt with in depth. If I had delved deeper in depth, the book would double or triple its length, ceasing to be an accessible introduction, which is the objective with which it was written.

In any case, starting with the issue of substance,<sup>48</sup> Harold indicates that my criticism of substance is unsatisfactory because it does not take into account that substance is analogous and affirms the existence of a subject in itself. Actually, I am not only aware that these elements are present in the notion of Aristotelian substance, but I also appreciate them, most particularly, the affirmation of the existence of a subject in itself. Analogy seems to me, on the contrary, too easy a way of solving problems without solving them, by the convenient procedure of indicating that what is affirmed is not exactly what is affirmed, but that it is a little different and depending on the case. The point is that I assume the central idea present in the Aristotelian substance, namely the subsistence capacity of some entities. Now, what Harold does not consider, if I am not wrong, is 1) it is very difficult to assume Aristotelian substance and leave aside the rest of the notions of Aristotelian teleology: accidents, four causes, etc. and 2) it is impossible to introduce subjectivity, so valuable to Harold and to me, into Aristotelian teleology. This is why the notion of substance has been frequently criticized within personalism (Marías, Zubiri) and, much more frequently (Polo, Wojtyła, Stein), it has simply not been used at all to avoid falling into a simple teleology. In short, the main distinction that should be made here, and which Harold does not make, would be the following. 1) Substance understood as a formal Aristotelian concept within the framework of his teleological theory is clearly inadequate to develop a contemporary anthropology that considers subjectivity and therefore, I reject it. 2) The main ideas underlying the Aristotelian notion of substance, namely permanence in time and self-centeredness, are necessary ideas in the definition of person, but they can be assumed without using the Aristotelian theological concept or, as Wojtyła does, speaking of auto-teleology.<sup>49</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> See also my answer to Seifert on this same topic.

<sup>49</sup> Regarding substance, see my dialogue with John Crosby: Juan Manuel Burgos. (2017). "El yo como raíz ontológica de la persona. Reflexiones a partir de John F. Crosby", *Quién* Vol. 6, 33-54; John F. Crosby. (2018), "On solitude, subjectivity, and substantiality. Response to Juan Manuel Burgos", *Quién* Vol. 8, pp. 7-19; Juan Manuel Burgos. (2019). "De la sustancia al yo como fundamento de la persona. Respuesta a John F. Crosby", *Quién* Vol. 10, pp. 27-44. And about the Aristotelian categories, Juan Manuel Burgos, *Personalism and Metaphysics*, chap. 2.

Finally, as far as Descartes is concerned, Harold's text seems to me really confusing. On the one hand, he considers that I am "afraid" of subjectivity for which he provides support by elucidating this statement about Descartes: "One evidence for Burgos finding refuge in the objective while avoiding subjectivity is his attitude towards Descartes' *cogito*. Burgos states, 'Modern thought's starting point was an error: the *cogito* of Descartes. This fact could not be denied, and the consequences were readily visible: the development of all the idealist philosophy with its atheist cadence...' It seems to me this point does not necessarily follow at all."

Now this text is misguided in many respects. In the first place, I do not take refuge in objectivism for the simple reason that it is one of my enemies. On the contrary, one of the main objectives of my anthropology, in which I follow Wojtyła, is to integrate subjectivity, an idea that is presented in *An Introduction*, as one of the central features of personalism by showing the relevance of affectivity and subjectivity (pp. 225-226). Harold's second important error is that, in the quotation he presents, I am speaking of Maritain's position, not mine, a nuance that seems significant if he wants to determine what *I* think (and not what Maritain thinks). The third error is that both in my opinion and in that of personalism in general, Harold seems to forget the places where it is indicated that personalism saw *positive* elements concerning modern philosophy and, in particular, in the Cartesian *cogito*, as, for example, the following. "The conclusions which some personalist thinkers have made have led them, on the one hand, to reject the basic approach of idealism and, on the other, to try to *take up some of the fundamental concepts of modernity*—subjectivity, consciousness, "I," etc.—reformulated or modified as necessary" (p. 209).

Finally, the fourth error or problem is that neither the personalists in general, nor I, in particular, have considered that relativism is automatically derived from the *cogito* or from subjectivity. Maritain himself (*An Introduction*, p. 48) sought to integrate subjectivity into his anthropology. And my opinion is this: "Subjectivity and subjectivism are two very different concepts. Subjectivism is a relativistic epistemological attitude. Subjectivity is an anthropological datum. Man possesses subjectivity as a matter of fact" (*An Introduction*, p. 226).

Harold, finally, proposes the possibility that the *cogito* does not lead to a radical dualism. If we understand by *cogito* a simple recognition of subjectivity, obviously it does not have to be that way. Now, if we understand the *cogito* in the sense in which Descartes understood it, it would be really striking to think that it does not generate dualism, since it was generated by Descartes himself, who had no choice but to resort to the strange solution of the pineal gland to try to remedy how two wholly different substances could interact. But perhaps Harold may be able to find a solution to the problem.

I conclude. Although I respond with some force to Harold's statements, I do not, of course, do so from any academic enmity. I have limited myself to pointing out, what constitutes an objectivity that will always be a little mixed with subjectivity, my opinion about his evaluation, for which I sincerely am thankful.