

4. Weronika Janczuk, *The Fundamental Value of the Person as Origin of Philosophical Inquiry: A Response to Burgos' An Introduction to Personalism*

The human person comes into ideas in multiple ways: certain ideas are given to him, others are generated in him in response to different stimuli, and even others he himself generates.

Given their intellectual nature, once comprehended or generated, ideas retain an intrinsically interior mode of being, with the potential to inform external actions. It is thus that St. Aquinas could teach us that action *sequitur esse*—that action follows being. These ideas serve an infinite number of purposes, but it might be said that, among that infinity, one purpose served is the provision of the necessary theoretical framework by which the person copes with and articulates reality, which includes the breadth of his experience—from which he can never be separated. This is so if we agree with Aquinas, that sense experience is the original source for all knowledge, and with the general personalist tradition, that there exists an inherent potential for subjective experience and consciousness in the human person as a natural necessity of his own nature.

It could be said that one way the human person receives ideas is in the passive impression they leave on the intellect, and there retain a sort of passive quality. The human person can observe the way his intellect is formed in the movement of ideas, whatever their origin, even as those ideas remain solely interior and self-contained by the intellect. Persons can then pose the question about the origin of these ideas and engage the project of purifying and crystallizing their own intellectual life.

I can remember, for example, the first time that a Thomist taught me to understand that, when I say something is a tree, I perceive an object that I understand to share essentially in certain characteristics that makes the said object this object rather than another object, that is, the recognition of these characteristics that I boil down into a particular word given to me in the structure of my language to refer to “said object, with said characteristics.” From then onward, I can know this idea and rest in it.

It might also be said that these ideas, whatever their origin, have the power to become the framework toward which the human person directs all his reality, choices, and experience. Ideas thus bear a potentially generative and creative power on the person, in that, beyond a sort of passive receptivity at the level of the intellect, the human capacity to reflect on his own ideas and to direct his will means that the person can engineer reality—in his actions, in his projects—from within those ideas that he has either passively received or into which he has reasoned.

It is within this context that persons are given a unique choice:

They can either (a) develop and adopt ideas that are never tested by a broader intellectual or experiential body, and thus, let their personal limitations determine the scope of reality to which they are exposed (i.e., I read about the communion of the saints and understand from self-professed theologians who aren't immersed in a life of deep contemplative prayer that the communion of the saints is reserved to Heaven alone, but over the years, my own deep prayer teaches me that I can walk in the communion of the saints and meet them thought to thought, heart to heart, in a walking interpersonal communion) or these persons can (b) seek transcendence in their intellectual and

experiential inquiry before said reality, one discovered—as can be argued—in relationship with others, including the Trinitarian persons themselves.

The 20th century witnessed certain political, economic, social, and cultural infrastructures—including different forms of totalitarianism and communism—rise and then collapse. Their collapse was, arguably, the logical consequence of problematic anthropological foundations upon which each was built, and it gave rise to one of the most profound movements in the history of philosophical inquiry. The movement came to be known as personalism.

Personalism sought to return to an intellectual primacy centred upon the existence and subjectivity of the human person—as one built within his human nature for a unique transcendence, and thus a unique body of experience. With some variance, personalism’s “starting point is the phenomenon of the person which, since it is accessible from the start in a realist way, becomes the key, the model, and the criterion for understanding being in general”⁵⁰. Within personalism, therefore, when it is compared to a coherent metaphysic, “knowledge of reality is of a ‘personal’ type because the person not only knows nature, but also transforms and personalizes it. The person is the third type of being, in which the *contractio entis* takes place, because he not only possesses a material and spiritual dimension but is body and spirit”⁵¹.

A departure of this form from Aristotelian-Thomism meant “reworking the traditional metaphysical categories of an Aristotelian stamp, which structurally depended on the notion of *ens* [being, abstracted], and taking a step further into other, new categories that derived from the notion of the person, beginning with the first of them, the category of ‘being’”⁵².

At its apex, personalism proposed and continues to propose a “‘cultural matrix’. that is, a living framework of ideas, shared by many and capable of orienting new generations of intellectuals who, in addition, have creatively and ingeniously applied them to new spheres”,⁵³ including economics, law, and bioethics.

A recent and key 20th and 21st-century contributor is Spanish personalist Juan Manuel Burgos, who today serves on the faculty of the Universidad Villanueva and is a member of the Jacques Maritain International Institute.

His text *An Introduction to Personalism* provides a brief, concise, and insightful summary of key historical and intellectual developments that have fostered the evolution of personalism, along with an analysis personalism’s promise for the decades to come.

Burgos makes it his project to explore the origins of French, Italian, Polish, German, Spanish, British, and American personalism, or to state his project differently, to explore the response of personalism to the socio-political conditions of the time. That is, he attends to the practical versus academic commitments of key personalist thinkers, among them Maritain, Marcel, Wojtyła, and Guardini, the latter two being priests of the Catholic Church. He furthermore attends to the conversations that those personalists had with Thomism, each other’s bodies of thought, and the intellectual currents of the time, and the rise of phenomenology from within personalism’s infrastructure, which is iconized in the lives of thinkers such as Dietrich von Hildebrand, Max Scheler, and Edith Stein.

⁵⁰ Juan Manuel Burgos, *An Introduction*, p. 117.

⁵¹ Id., 118.

⁵² Id., 93.

⁵³ Id., 100.

These thinkers advanced theory on questions of empathy, interpersonality (the structure of the I-Thou relationship, which proposes that two persons relating to one another do so not just from a place of objectivity, as two objects, but from an inherent place of subjectivity, that is, as two subjects possessing incommunicable subjectivities, the affective life, virtue, value, mysticism, ethics (including debates about the relativity between metaphysics and experience, particularly ethical and between ontology and the structure of ethics), historicity, and more. Their thought stands informed by a spectrum of religious, ethical, political, social, and cultural commitments, and within the religious context, for these thinkers, it was often clear in principle that “there is no strict separation of philosophical and anthropological subjects from Christian and theological ones, ... [with Christianity] a holistic proposal for the interpretation of reality”.⁵⁴

A small anecdote from the life and thought of philosopher-theologian Edith Stein helps further make concrete the relevance and influence of personalism, illuminating the intellectual and creative heart of Burgos’ text. Prior to her conversion to Catholicism, and thus prior to the revolutionary *summas*, she would write about the nature of the human person, spiritual life, and woman’s vocation, among other questions. Stein completed a little treatise titled *An Investigation Concerning the State*. A phenomenologist and personalist trained by Edmund Husserl and Adolf Reinach, the founder of the school of phenomenology and one of his early students, Stein stands as a fundamental contributor to the philosophy of the last century.

In her text, Stein examines the process by which the state comes to be, along with the state and the law’s essential natures. For her, the state is an entity that requires the individual intent of individual members (“I want this”) to be made a collective intent as the state is brought into existence (“I want this” and “you want this,” and therefore ‘we agree mutually that we want this”). Once such a condition exists, the state is then maintained—the conscious and shared intent of these individual members is the causal pre-requisite to the state itself. Stein perceived truthfully that the infrastructure of the state follows from the persons who make it, and even more so, that the interior nature of the state will be contingent upon the interior nature of the persons within it.

This necessary grasp of causality—causally, the state cannot and would not exist without its members—illuminates a certain irrevocable cause underlying the different, broken infrastructures that the personalists of the 20th century observed, namely human persons.

These persons founded those very infrastructures that later fell, for no communism and totalitarianism exists without their makers. Those persons produced texts—be they books, political slogans, legislative justifications, or otherwise—that justified systems that later collapsed, as grown from within their own ideas and bodies of experience, but never tested against the essential nature of the human person and the structure of his potential.

Personalism’s profound illumination is that the subjectivity of the human person is one of the essential planes upon which reality evolves—for it is the human person who serves as the irrevocable instrument of and within this very reality—and this subjectivity can be acknowledged, understood, and formed. Stein remains, as far as I know, the only canonized saint who explored in a systematic way the notion of the formation of the human person—again observing and making concrete the reality that the making of our own persons is contingent upon others. Furthermore, she elucidates how our own development is subject to the instrumentality of other persons, a premise and theoretical body further solidified by the work of contemporary psychologists and psychiatrists, including Conrad Baars, Anna Terruwe, and J. Brennan Mullaney, each of whom suggest the true

⁵⁴ Id., p. 141.

depth of correspondence to the structure of reality discovered within personalistic philosophy with their own works.

Burgos demonstrates the relationship between this human subjectivity and philosophical development with great clarity by evaluating the lives, and thus, the bodies of experiences of those key personalists who were responsible for the articulation of its theoretical body. Karol Wojtyła, for example, experienced a change in plans to study theatre with the Nazi invasion of Poland and the Second World War, and as bishop “had to firmly take on Marxism on a pastoral and intellectual level”⁵⁵. Von Hildebrand, on the other hand, whose legacy is housed by the Hildebrand Project at Franciscan University⁵⁶, sought to engage the immense, intentional project of dehumanization in the creation and maintenance of concentration camps during World War II, among other violations.

Burgos fails, however, to provide the same exploration of the personal subjectivities of the key thinkers that brought into existence those systems, which the personalists came to reject—even as those thinkers, including men like Adolf Hitler and Joseph Stalin, became phenomenal instruments of “failed anthropologies” that he conflates, even if microscopically, with political or social movements, as if those movements were person-less.

Therefore, in some ways, *An Introduction* prompts the following theoretical questions about the nature, structure, and evolution of personalism’s philosophical potential and capacity. What, exactly, lies at the foundation of these failed anthropologies to which personalism responded? Is it a failure in ideas, or even a priori we need a rule about whether this term is italicized or not, is it a failure in the discovery and the development of a form of lived experience on behalf of those minds who brought those anthropologies and their associated systems into being? In other words, is it—actually—a failure to expose oneself to a potential for lived experience with potential to shatter those ideas to which one has been exposed?

When Burgos evaluates Europe of the 1970s, during which the continent “was swept by powerful currents of thought which significantly influenced the future ideological configuration of society”, including a rise of attacks on tradition manifested in a special way in the sexual revolution, “which increasingly promoted a way of understanding and living sexuality that was very different from the traditional one”⁵⁷, he neither proposes a framework for grasping the full causality that underlay these changes ideologically nor evaluates the personal subjects that, causally and undeniably, were the fundamental instruments of the rise of these problems in the first place. I assume here Burgos’ own first principle, that experience generates and shapes ideas: if Wojtyła’s lived experience as a Pole, a contemplative, a priest, and a pastoral leader were all conducive to the generation of his personalism, why is there no parallel exploration of the interiority of the lives of those who generated structures antagonistic to personalism’s mission? In the same way, when Burgos scaffolds out the collapse of Soviet Union in 1989, which led to certain cultural repercussions in Europe, he fails to break down and diversify the potential causes at work. In the same way that communism cannot arise without its members, it also cannot fall without certain ideological and

⁵⁵ Id., p. 104.

⁵⁶ I am grateful to James Beauregard, PhD, for the opportunity to write this reflection on Burgos’ text. Jim and I had the pleasure of a mutual participation in the inaugural residency of the Hildebrand Project in 2019. Note also that the historical context surrounding von Hildebrand’s work, as alluded to, is further explored in his biography, (2014). *My Battle Against Hitler: Defiance in the Shadow of the Third Reich*. NYC: Crown, written by founder and president of the project John Henry Crosby, son of John F. Crosby, whose work lies at the heart of North American personalism today.

⁵⁷ Burgos, *An Introduction*, p. 146.

experiential shifts in the subjectivities of those who are living within it—to suggest otherwise is to deny the very heart of personalism, that the person is the prime agent responsible for the shaping of reality.

Unfortunately, therefore, it's difficult not to read Burgos here as placing a sort of causality in and determinism to social movements, failing to work out the necessary conclusions to which his personalism should bring him. He almost forgets that those movements essentially arose from within the subjectivities of persons which were in some essential way different from the subjectivities of the personalists, phenomenologists, and religiously committed intellectuals of the time that lived out an intellectual, affective, and spiritual clarity about the human person to which personalism aspires. The others, in other words, obviously didn't, and so the unanswered question becomes why.

Human nature is such that one has the potential for living out what personalism deems to be a person's fullest potential. As such, humans possessed the potential for carrying out communism's destruction (in certain parts of Europe); where Burgos makes it evident that the structure of the formation of the personalist's experience is conducive to the generation of personalism's greatest content, the real question becomes what about the structure of the non-personalist's experience made participating in the personalist's experience impossible? For example, why, in their intelligence, did Hitler and Stalin never aspire to personalism's beauty, truth, and goodness or to its grace, substance, and generosity of spirit?

Given that history shows that systems continue to shape experience, as much as it shows that persons rebel against systems that foster abusive experience, as with Poland's Solidarity Movement, it seems that the essential question which personalism must engage that of the point of contact between objectivity and subjectivity, and how one responds to the other in the development and maintenance of the interior integrity of the human person involved in engaging reality.

A more apt scaffolding over the historiography provided in the book, over the development of personalism, would have included a greater sensitivity to the causal forces underlying the development of subjectivity. Where personalism continues to assume a sort of natural, in-born capacity to understand the fullness of subjectivity in a natural evolution from birth—even if most personalistic theory never engages with this developmental question (to its own detriment)—the diversity of externalizations of the human person, in action, in infrastructure, and more suggests, at least, the possibility of a more “complex” structure to and evolution of the human interior life. In other words, if personalism's beauty and potential is so intuitive for personalists, why is it not for those who never engage personalism's dynamism and interiority?

The development of this interiority, and its rising to consciousness through moral experience, lies at the heart of Wojtyła's *The Acting Person* as well as, in a sort of secondary way, Dietrich von Hildebrand's *The Heart*. Where Wojtyła assumes the life of integrated experience and consciousness in the agent he is exploring, von Hildebrand pushes beyond him to suggest a differentiation in interior, subjective content when he explores a spectrum of subjectivities of the heart, including loveless hearts, tyrannical in their morality, selfish, and sentimental, each a form of heart-level experience distinct from the heart fully spiritualized by grace in Christ.⁵⁸

It is with the lack of an underlying structural framework of the kind proposed above that Burgos moves beyond his fundamental historical and contextual analysis, which demonstrated in many ways ‘that personalism consists of a diffuse social and ideological movement which contributed

⁵⁸ See Dietrich von Hildebrand. (1977). *The Heart: An Analysis of Divine & Human Affectivity*, Chicago: Franciscan Herald Press.

original ideas in the middle of the twentieth century but which cannot demonstrate that it has a solid and common body of principles and ideas, “making it so that [one] cannot claim an uncontested ‘centre’ of personalism”⁵⁹. Entering the 21st century, the “school” of thought that has been deemed personalism did not itself propose or adopt a conceptual clarity regarding whether it might be considered a philosophy, a system, a movement, or some other type of intellectual and applied work. One remaining project for thinkers is the integration and classification of the different conceptual hierarchies within which personalism has evolved.

Within this diffusion of entry points, questions, and answers, Burgos judges it possible to make a proposal for the development of personalism moving forward. The substance of his proposal is as such: in being “structured around a modern concept of the person,” and with the concept “understood to be the anthropological perspective [which chooses to emphasize or study] some or all of the following elements [—the] person as ‘I’ and ‘who’; affectivity and subjectivity; interpersonality and the communitarian aspect”⁶⁰, etc., personalism can, in fact, be deemed a philosophy.

The fundamental qualifying characteristic of personalistic philosophy is that it “[announces] straight away [its] set of principles and ideas”⁶¹, as those engaging with the person. One fundamental principle to which personalistic thinkers adhere is the dignity of the person, given that experience, consciousness, and subjectivity in the human person all unfold in an internal, independently-directed dynamism beyond the choosing of persons themselves, both observable and testable by experience. Life is given to us rather than generated by us, and therefore, there exists a set of obligations imposed upon us by the telos, or end, moving within us. To deny that we move toward an end that is not of our own choosing is to deny the structure of our own experience, subjectivity, and consciousness. Another fundamental principle is the structure of relativity, or interpersonal community, into which persons are born and through which they develop. A third fundamental principle is the admission of the existence of a universal human nature. A fourth is the recognition of human freedom. A fifth is the generally causal recognition of the givenness that exists in personhood, which suggests a being—a person—of some kind, from whom the human person receives himself; here personalism respects its Judeo-Christian origins as well as aspires toward the fullness of religious experience, understood this way.

In its unfolding over time, personalistic thinkers—in some sense, with Wojtyła at their head—came to understand the need for a method through which the different conceptual strands would be read. Now “it [can] be said that the personalist method is an ontological analysis of reality based on an integral concept of experience which includes, simultaneously, objective and subjective elements”,⁶² and herein Burgos touches upon the phenomenal challenge of philosophical inquiry in the 21st century, one informed by philosophical currents over the past several thousand years, as well as by contemporary developments in non-philosophical disciplines. These disciplines include endocrinology and psychiatry, for example, and create a philosophical system, and a method for inquiry about reality, that can give a totally integrated and coherent objective, metaphysical, subjective, or personalistic and/or phenomenological grasp of the structure and evolution of the person. Here, endocrinology, might give categories that suggest that not all human bodies develop in the same way, and therefore, the possibility that not all embodied persons experience reality the same way; here, psychiatry might provide categories that suggest that the external infliction upon

⁵⁹ Burgos, *An Introduction*, p. 179.

⁶⁰ *Id.*, p. 194.

⁶¹ *Id.*, p. 195.

⁶² *Id.*, p. 207.

the human person of trauma or neglect, among other issues, means that not all human interiorities develop in the same way.

Burgos calls this kind of underlying methodology *integral experience*, and the challenge lies in developing the broadest and deepest metaphysical framework, as well as experiential body, to test the implications of a metaphysics in its concrete unfolding—ideally, in the integral experience of every human subject, and where the experience is not integral in a natural way, in the re-ordering of experiential bodies into their fullest integrity. Here lies the challenge of personalism applied: the development of formational, academic, pastoral, and other programs that profess the unity of the personal being, the potential of particular forms of experience, and the tools by which those experiences come to be.

A concrete example lies in Wojtyła's suggestion of a conjugal spirituality: if there is a potential for a fully integrated unitive-procreative act, ideally immersed in the integrity of deep contemplation, how do persons come to live within this sort of intellectual infrastructure over their entire lives? If Jacques and Raïssa Maritain could profess that marriage includes a sort of guardian angelship over the deepest corners of the heart and the unity of the incommunicable between two persons, personalism's concrete question must become How is this so? And how do we replicate this in the lives of those who aspire to personalism's potential?

Historically, the integration between metaphysics and personalism and/or phenomenology has been deemed impossible and unlikely by thinkers on both ends of the spectrum, but the evolution of interdisciplinary disciplines in conversation with personalism suggests the possibility of restructuring both problems by asking in new categorical ways how accounts of experience shape our metaphysics, and vice-versa.

This integration would give the set of ideas to which all behaviour and experience would be directed and experiential accounts would then testify to the ultimate internal potentiality of the human person as determined by his nature (sanctity, for example, or the fullness of interpersonal community), so that the fascination with—for example—technological development might come to be subject to a fascination with something like mysticism and integrated sexuality, both grounded in a human interior rather than exterior. It is personalism that has suggested this as the starting and ending place of human life and the abstraction of a metaphysical system that has forgotten the vitality of the interior life. The development of an adequate, integrated ontology “[restates] the primacy of personal being as the paradigm, the principal analogue, of any categorization of being”.⁶³

What is interesting about the intersection of metaphysics and personalism, and Burgos makes this explicit, is the challenge posed by a more deeply intimate and interior exploration of the interior life—and, specifically, the recognition of a third dimension to the human structure, that is, beyond the standard bipartite rational (intellect-will) faculties. This third dimension von Hildebrand and Stein called the heart, and others in this tradition, originating even in exegesis of the Pauline epistles, have suggested it to be the human spirit, definitions and systematizations of each outstanding. Additionally, personalism gives rise to unique questions about the nature and structure of the feminine and masculine lives, not just purely embodied but also deeply interior, so much so that Stein suggested—and this conceptual work deserves to be tested and integrated—the potential of gendered souls, to help explain different experiential contents in the lives of men and women.

⁶³ Id., p. 211.

In conclusion, it becomes evident that the foundational integrative work Burgos has done—opening personalism up to a deeper contemplation of the person and reality in the 21st century—suggests, as already alluded to, the following problems:

1. What is a fully integrated metaphysic of the 21st century? How do metaphysicians integrate in their abstracted systems all the variances and potentialities in the development of human nature and experience? In 2017, I wrote that it is essential to assume ‘a particular but vital relationship between lived experience and a philosophy of human nature: that, if a philosophy is accurate in abstracting and articulating the nature of man, it must necessarily—in its application—encapsulate the entire spectrum of possible human capacities and experiences, including disorder to the nature with which a person begins, and offer the framework by which to understand this spectrum. Capacities, experiences, and actions uncontained by any single philosophy of nature thus demonstrate its insufficiency or incompleteness, insofar as that activity seemingly originates unrooted in nature, absurd wherever nature is assumed’.⁶⁴ Personalistic thought, in studying these experiential bodies and building tools for this exploration, continues to source evidentiary bases to challenge standard historical metaphysical categories.

2. What are possible human experiences? What is the difference between different bodies of experience? Which ones are authentic and integral, and which ones give rise to the fullest form of the good, true, and beautiful, to the highest form of ecstasy and pleasure, to the highest manifestation of the human person in his/her engaging of reality? How do we discern the differentiations in experiences, in the structures of others’ experiences and our own?

3. How do we form the human person into the highest forms of experience?

Whether the questions begin after one finds a coherent metaphysical logic model in Aquinas, after one discovers new bodies of experiences in the personalists, in novels or films, in conversations with persons of all kinds, or after one discovers new metaphysical doors in thinkers like Stein, the project of integrating these different modes of thought continues without question into the 21st century.

I would insist that Burgos’ framework found within this introduction provides an essential scaffold for the personalistic project, even as his scaffolding illuminates those unanswered problems and needs, which now, here and otherwise, remain the fascination and challenge of many philosophers and intellectuals today.

⁶⁴ Weronika Janczuk. (2018). “The Place of the Heart in Integral Formation”, *Logos* 21, 1. In some ways, this paper paints a broadly personalistic picture of the problem posed by advances in research in psychology, and illuminates the metaphysical-phenomenological crisis suggested here, providing an incipient bibliography and case studies for thinkers looking to engage the problem.