

**Juan Manuel Burgos.** *Ética de la persona*. Ediciones Universidad de Navarra 2025. 334 pp. €21,90 EUR (Paperback 9788431340117); €14,99 EUR (eBook 9788431343880).

The publication of a new book on ethics may initially appear superfluous in an intellectual landscape already saturated with countless works devoted to the discipline. Can anything genuinely new still be said? *Ética de la persona* (Ethics of the Person) by Juan Manuel Burgos responds to this question with both competence and depth, positioning itself as a well-structured and original contribution to the field of contemporary personalist ethics. One of its most noteworthy achievements lies in its systematic articulation of a personalist ethical framework, an endeavour that had previously remained largely undeveloped within the classical personalist tradition. While influential thinkers such as Emmanuel Mounier, Jacques Maritain, Dietrich von Hildebrand and Karol Wojtyła offered significant insights into ethical questions, none provided a fully developed, cohesive system. Building on their legacy, Burgos constructs an ethics of comprehensive scope, firmly rooted in the philosophical anthropology of personalism and in rigorous dialogue with both Aristotelian virtue ethics and Kantian deontology. The book will be of particular interest to scholars of personalist philosophy, moral theorists seeking alternatives to utilitarian or deontological paradigms, and readers concerned with the anthropological foundations of ethics.

One of the central contributions of *Ética de la persona* is its reorientation of ethical reflection away from external categories and toward the concrete moral experience of the individual. Burgos contends that ethics is rooted in the immediate awareness of good and evil that each person encounters in conscience and daily moral life. This experience is neither learned nor culturally contingent. It is universal, anterior to any theoretical framework, and serves as the foundational material for ethical inquiry. From this perspective, moral knowledge is not deduced from abstract, universal principles but is instead the result of a comprehensive induction grounded in inner experience and validated through dialogue with others. In this way, Burgos affirms the inherently communal character of ethical knowledge without succumbing to subjective relativism.

Another core concept in the book is the idea of *autotheology*, inherited from Wojtyła and further developed by Burgos. According to this view, the human person does not act solely for an external goal but is simultaneously the author and the end of his or her own moral action. Ethical behavior becomes a process of self-construction. We are simultaneously actors, authors, and ends of the actions we perform. Thus, good action is not merely norm-compliant, but transformative: it perfects the agent as a person.

This ethical framework is, therefore, explicitly anti-utilitarian. Whereas utilitarianism reduces the good to what is useful or pleasurable, Burgos argues that the good is intrinsically linked to the value of the person as such. In this respect, he aligns partially with Kant in affirming persons as an end in themselves. Yet he distances himself from the rigorism of “duty for duty’s sake”, which he views as culturally conditioned and anthropologically incomplete.

One of the most original contributions of the work lies in its treatment of the moral norm as the core of ethical dynamism. The norm is defined as “the expression of becoming aware of the action that improves or perfects the person as a person” (164). From this perspective, the norm is the



concrete, situated, and biographical expression of the good that actualizes a person in a given situation. The human being does not create the norm but discovers it within. So, the voice of conscience becomes the voice of the person, which is internal, intrinsic, and autonomous. This approach allows for a conception of the norm as both personal and personalist: a rule dictated by the subject to themselves based on a deep understanding of what builds or undermines them as a person. Nonetheless, this does not entail relativism. There is a universal ontological foundation—the dignity of the person—which sustains moral validity, though its concrete application must be adapted to the existential situation of the subject.

Building on these premises, Burgos offers a critique of the traditional Thomistic theory of the sources of morality, which distinguishes between the object (*finis operis*), the end (*finis operantis*), and the circumstances. In its place, he proposes an alternative model that he calls the “keys to morality” (*claves de la moralidad*) centered on the notion of the *objective* of the action, that is, “what the person seeks or intends to carry out freely and consciously by means of an action or by initiating an action” (234). The author prefers the term *objective* over *intentional object* because it more effectively integrates “the actual reality the person seeks to attain (object) and the fact that the person intends to attain it (end or intention)” (236). This shift reflects the replacement of the traditional “sources of morality” with a personalist conception grounded in the “keys to morality”.

An additional and highly significant contribution lies in Burgos’s treatment of axiology. According to his account, values do not exist as abstract, independent entities but as generalizations that serve the personal growth and perfection of the individual. Value does not hover above reality; rather, it emerges from personal experience and is validated within the subject’s moral development. In this regard, the author departs both from pure axiological objectivism and from postmodern subjectivism. Personalist axiology is presented as a middle path that anchors value in the person without absolutizing or relativizing it. Ultimately, moral value is apprehended within the horizon of the person’s potential for fulfillment and in their dynamic striving toward self-construction.

Throughout the work, the influence of classical authors such as Aristotle and Kant is acknowledged, yet Burgos does not simply repeat or synthesize their ideas. Drawing inspiration from the thought of Karol Wojtyła, he integrates certain elements, such as the notion of virtue and the centrality of duty, into a new framework that does justice to contemporary moral experience. His ethics also represents a response to postmodern approaches, which, while valuable in certain respects, often tend toward relativism and the dissolution of the subject.

Burgos’s perspective remains firmly rooted in the affirmation of the subject as the center of ethics, not as an isolated individual, but as a person-in-relation, whose inner development necessarily entails commitment to others.

Yet some potential objections could be raised regarding Burgos’s reconfiguration of moral evaluation around the notion of the objective rather than the classical triad of object, end, and circumstances. One concern is that eliminating the traditional *finis operis* may blur the distinction between the intrinsic moral meaning of an action and the agent’s subjective orientation toward it, since certain actions appear to possess a significance not wholly reducible to the objective the agent

chooses. It may also be questioned whether this account underplays the role of *synderesis* or practical truth as a precondition for moral judgment, thereby leaving open the issue of whether the personalist model can secure a sufficiently objective foundation for normativity. Further difficulty arises in the evaluation of actions with multiple ends or layered structures, where the classical distinction between *finis operis* and *finis operantis* has traditionally enabled more nuanced moral specification. These concerns do not undermine the coherence of Burgos's proposal, but they do highlight conceptual tensions that merit further clarification, particularly regarding the status of objective moral meaning within a framework centered on the agent's self-determining intention.

Despite the philosophical density of its content, *Ética de la persona* is far from abstruse. Its writing is rigorous yet clear, reflecting the author's vocation as an educator. He skillfully guides the reader from anthropological foundations to practical implications without sacrificing either clarity or depth. The chapters are carefully structured and titled, enabling a coherent and progressive reading. The argumentation unfolds with a remarkable balance between academic precision and philosophical accessibility.

*Ética de la persona*, by Juan Manuel Burgos, stands as a reference work within the personalist tradition and a vital contribution to contemporary ethical debate. It systematically and creatively articulates an ethics centered on the person, on moral experience, on the vocation to fulfillment, and on the irreducible dignity of the human being. Rather than merely reproducing inherited moral categories, it transforms them from within remaining faithful to the acting subject who decides and constructs themselves through action. In times marked by moral disorientation, rigid normativism, or hollow relativism, this proposal offers a solid and hopeful path for rethinking the meaning of the good, the norm, value, and, above all, the moral life as a journey of personal fulfillment. Its systematic scope and engagement with universal questions of moral philosophy make it a work of genuine international relevance, deserving attention beyond the Spanish-speaking world.

A valuable contribution for those engaged in contemporary debates in moral philosophy.

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