

The project of vital personalism and the humanistic tradition

*El proyecto de personalismo vital
y la tradición humanística*

FRANCISCO S. PANTALEON*

Abstract: This article examines whether Julián Marías’s mature philosophical position —known to some as “vital personalism”— can function as a theoretical foundation for the humanities. The objective is to reassess Marías’s claim that philosophy serves as the “organizing center” of the humanistic disciplines and to determine whether this role is best understood through his later personalist anthropology rather than solely through José Ortega y Gasset’s philosophy of vital reason. Through an analysis of Marías’s anthropological categories, the study argues that vital personalism articulates a unified vision of “the person who lives”. By clarifying the distinction Marías makes of “human life”, “man”, and “human person”, and identifying the shared phenomenological orientation of personalism and the humanities, the article concludes that the humanities may be understood as concrete manifestations of a philosophy centered on the person who lives, thus strengthening the relationship between personalist thought and the humanistic tradition.

Keywords: Vital personalism, human life, human person, humanities, Julián Marías.

Resumen: Este artículo examina si la posición filosófica madura de Julián Marías —designada por algunos como “personalismo vital”— puede desempeñar la función de fundamento teórico de las humanidades. El objetivo es reconsiderar la afirmación de Marías según la cual la filosofía constituye el “centro organizador” de las disciplinas humanísticas y determinar si dicho papel debe interpretarse a partir de su antropología personalista tardía, más que exclusivamente desde la filosofía de la razón vital de José Ortega y Gasset. A través del análisis de las categorías antropológicas desarrolladas por Marías, el estudio sostiene que el personalismo vital articula una visión unitaria de “la persona

* University of Asia and the Pacific - University of the Philippines Diliman. E-mail: francisco.pantaleon@uap.asia - fspantaleon@up.edu.ph. ORCID: 0009-0007-3663-5883

que vive". Al esclarecer la distinción que Marías establece entre "vida humana", "hombre" y "persona humana", y al señalar la orientación fenomenológica compartida por el personalismo y las humanidades, el artículo concluye que las humanidades pueden comprenderse como manifestaciones concretas de una filosofía centrada en la persona que vive, fortaleciendo así la relación entre el pensamiento personalista y la tradición humanística.

Palabras clave: Personalismo vital, vida humana, persona humana, humanidades, Julián Marías.

Recibido: 07/02/2025

Aceptado:: 06/02/2026

1. Introduction

The Spanish philosopher Julián Marías believed philosophy to be the *organizing center* of the humanistic disciplines. In his memoirs, *Una vida presente*, he recorded: "I discovered my deep vocation... the profound connection, so unknown today, of all the disciplines of the humanities—with philosophy as their organizing center, from which I had to look at everything, which was to constitute, in a decisive dimension, the story [*argumento*] of my life"¹. This meant that philosophy served him the role of unifying the fields of literature, history, and art, through which he could see the humanities in their unitary wholeness.

The "philosophy" he referred to is doubtless Jose Ortega y Gasset's philosophy of vital reason, which he dedicated his early years to developing and extending². However, another reading of this passage could be elicited if we take Heliodoro Carpintero and Juan Manuel Burgos's claim

¹ J. MARIAS, *Una vida presente. Memorias*, 3rd ed., Madrid, Páginas de Espuma 2017, p. 76. "Me descubrió mi vocación profunda, por todo aquello junto —adiviné la honda conexión, hoy tan desconocida, de todas las disciplinas de humanidades—, con un centro organizador en la filosofía, desde la cual había de mirarlo todo, que había de constituir, en una dimensión decisiva, el argumento de mi vida". At least twice at different times and in different works, Marías referred to philosophy as the "organizing center" of the humanities. Firstly in Julián Marías, "The Situation of the Intelligentsia in Spain Today", *Daedalus* 89, no. 3, 1960, p. 629. The original Spanish text of this article is found in Julián Marías, *Obras*, vol. 7, Madrid, Revista de Occidente 1963, p. 193. The second instance this phrase is repeated is in his autobiography (cited above).

² For a brief and broad treatment of Jose Ortega y Gasset's philosophy of vital reason, see H. Raley, *A Watch Over Mortality: The Philosophical Story of Julián Marías*, Albany, New York, State University of New York Press 1997, pp. 29-30.

seriously. Carpintero and Burgos suggested that Marías, in his mature years as a philosopher —after developing Ortega’s analytical theory and his own empirical structure of human life— engaged an approach to personalism they call *vital personalism*³. This is characterized as the third phase in Marías’s philosophical trajectory.

In an excellent doctoral dissertation by Pilar Roldán, following the direction of Carpintero, we find a summary of the stages in the development of Marías’s thought⁴: first, the analytical structure of human life with the categories: self-transparency, worldhood, problematization, choice/decision, futurity, and task (or “something to do”). Second, the empirical structure of collective life with the categories: generations, beliefs, *vigencias*⁵, historical epoch, historical situation, historicity, majority/minority, social classes. Third, the empirical structure of human life with the categories: corporeity, concrete worldhood, human temporality, human sensibility, sexuate condition⁶, amorous condition, and linguistic installation. Fourth, the personal or projective structure of personal life with the categories: selfhood, authenticity, projectivity, freedom, responsibility, justification, *ilusión*⁷, and happiness.

It is in the last stage, the personal or projective structure of personal life, that Burgos identifies Marías as a personalist (while qualifying his philosophy as *vital personalism*, since his starting point is life and not the person). I propose that it is tenable to interpret Marías’s statement —that is, *philosophy as the organizing center of the humanities*— to mean the philosophy of vital personalism. This renders it possible to conceive of

³ J. M. BURGOS, “¿Es Marías personalista?”, in *El vuelo del Alcón. El pensamiento de Julián Marías*, eds. J. L. Cañas and J. M. Burgos, Madrid, Páginas de Espuma 2009, pp. 147-164. See H. Carpintero, “La originalidad teórica del pensamiento de Marías”, *Cuenta y Razón* 87, 1994, p. 90. It is in this article that the term “vital personalism” was coined by Carpintero, which summarized his description of Marías’s thought as “a personalist philosophy of life” [*una filosofía personalista de la vida*].

⁴ P. ROLDÁN, “Hombre y humanismo en Julián Marías. La dimensión psicosocial de su antropología”. Doctoral Dissertation, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 1998, pp. 27 & 445.

⁵ *Vigencias* is difficult to translate to English. It literally means “that which is in force” or “that which is vigorously apparent”, from the Latin *vigens*. It is that which has life—*quod viget*—in manifold ways: customs, norms, languages, beliefs, and ideas. José Ortega y Gasset, Marías’s mentor and friend, was the first to employ this word in a sociological way from its originally juridical context (i.e., laws being “in force” or “enforced”).

⁶ The “sexuate” condition should be strictly differentiated from the “sexual” condition. I must refer the reader to Marías’s account of this in his seminal work *Metaphysical Anthropology: The Empirical Structure of Human Life*, trans. F. M. López-Morillas, University Park, The Pennsylvania State University Press 1971, ch. 17, pp. 133-142.

⁷ *Ilusión* is another word that escapes suitable translation. Marías uses this to refer to the “hopeful anticipation” or “enthusiastic expectation” for the future, for what is not yet real but *can* be real.

personalism as having the adequate method, themes, and conceptions to serve as the organizing center, the theoretical foundation which gives a unitary vision of the humanities.

This proposition should hold water if we first explain what the humanities are—better yet, what they should be (ideally) in contrast to what they are now (actually). Second, I will elaborate on how personalism can be defended as the theoretical foundation of the humanities. Knowing what the humanities “should be” helps us juxtapose the humanities and personalism, whence we shall see how vital personalism—since it gives a unitary vision of the whole person—serves as the organizing center of the humanistic disciplines. Third, I will argue that, as the organizing center of the humanities, personalism possesses adequate methods and conceptual tools to discover, access, and comprehend the human person. If we accept personalism as the theoretical justification of the humanities—the ambit in which the humanities find their firm basis—then we can conclude that vital personalism is a philosophy for the humanities.

2. “Man” and “person” in the humanities

The object of investigation of personalist philosophy is the human person as such. But before the emergence of personalism in the twentieth century as a defined area of study, another area of study prevailed whose object of study is likewise the human person: the humanities. Only now have the humanities become more and more unfaithful to the original insight that was the very reason for the inception of literature, history, philosophy, and art. The method, themes, and conceptions of the humanities drew back from their grounding in the human person, and instead find their basis in the self-serving *ego*, which is nowhere near the original root in the *person*. The regretful decadence of the humanities is increasingly evident among contemporary practices and products: more novels and poems do not edify the human soul, music that does not nurture the human heart, films that do not enable us to imagine living in another circumstance, and historical writings that ascribe to impersonal forces, not personal agents, the movement of history, which all point to the loss of the sense of *persons* and a preference for *things*.

It is important to first clear the suspicion surrounding the term “humanities”. What I mean by “humanities” are those areas of study in which we find the enduring or classic works of literature, history, art, and philosophy. In this sense, the humanities constitute the greatest works by the greatest minds of mankind. This understanding of the humanities must not be confused with the general air of the humanities as they are

known today. For it is obvious that not all humanistic products at present align with what the humanities have meant originally: to be faithful reflections of human life, and to provide the wisdom needed for living.

The great irony is that the humanities have seemingly lost vision of the human person, even though it was within their area of study that the concept of “person” was born. Most contemporary humanistic pursuits and products are constructed by appealing to the easy comprehension of formulaic and often reductionist literary products, artistic works, and historical writings. At the origin of notion of person is ancient Greek drama, which employed the term *πρόσωπον*, *prosopon*, to refer to the mask worn by actors to assume a role or character. Later, ancient Rome appropriated the term and translated it into *per-sonare* (“to speak through [a mask]”) which by then referred to either two things: the one assuming the role or the role that is assumed⁸. That is to say, either the *subject* who takes on a role or the *role* taken on by someone. A more convincing reason to claim the humanistic origin of the notion of “person” is the fact that, in the humanities, the original means for understanding the human person was through literature and art, that is, Homer’s epic poetry and the dramas of the Greek tragedians and comedians. Long before philosophy knew the human person, the great literary tradition possessed a narrative vision of human life and therefore the human person, who is the only proper *subject* of human life. It consisted of “the creation of a splendid literature, that reached its maximum approximation to the personal in the novel of the nineteenth century”—undoubtedly Marías had the Russians especially in mind⁹.

Even today, according to Marías, when novels and films are the most convenient and effective channels for accessing human life, and ultimately the human person, such channels are often bastardized and reduced to functions beneath their excellent capacity to comprehend the reality of the human person. It is the misfortune of the day that the very disci-

⁸ J. RATZINGER, “Concerning the notion of person in theology”, *Communio* 17, n. 2, Fall 1990, pp. 439-443. See also H. U. von Balthasar, “On the concept of person”, *Communio* 13, n. 1, Spring 1986, pp. 18-23. We can be sure that the ancient Greeks and Romans had a crude understanding of the notion of “person” (it is enough to turn to Aristotle, among others, and censure his vision of the human person).

⁹ J. MARIAS, *Persona*, Madrid, Alianza Editorial 1996, 82. This and succeeding translation from this text were done by Paul Dumol. Marías said that literature preceded the birth of philosophy, which is conceptually—not simply chronologically—accurate. “No se olvide que el descubrimiento intelectual, filosófico, de la vida humana ha sido posterior a la creación de una espléndida literatura, que alcanzó su máxima aproximación a lo personal en la novela del siglo XIX, florecimiento de la visión narrativa de la vida humana. ¿Hubiese sido posible el descubrimiento de que la razón *vital* es esencialmente narrativa si no se hubiera ejercido desde las parábolas hasta la novela del siglo XIX?”.

plines that mothered the notion of “person” are the very disciplines that misconstrue this reality.

The situation of the humanities today is such that humanistic works are increasingly desensitized to the reality of the human person. Greater efforts are made to reduce persons to things, *res*, that is, to immovable objects—predictable, finite, and penetrable. In other words, a great majority of humanistic works that are being produced now prefer to petrify the person and confine him into a calculable entity. Contemporary humanistic works—novels, poems, films, artworks, architecture, sculptures, and music—veer further and further away from examining the mystery of the person. And such an attitude is the chief reason why doubt is cast on the effectiveness of the humanities in accessing and comprehending the human person, and it is becoming increasingly difficult to disagree with those who hold this position.

It suffices to observe the “humanistic” products that people—mostly the young—clamor for: Mark Rothko’s and Jackson Pollock’s art; Rupi Kaur’s and Lang Leav’s poetry; the overwhelming preponderance of coming-of-age films and young adult fiction obsessed with transmitting ideologies of all sorts; the Western film industry which is painted with voyeurism and promiscuity, bordering on pornography, ultimately polluting the person’s corporal condition; and the shallow lyricism of songs that fail to produce penetrating insights into human life and the human condition.

More may be said about the decadence of humanistic taste, but what is clear is that “humanistic” works are hardly ever concerned anymore about the human person. We know well that a vast chasm separates the *reality of human life* and the *reality of the human person*—a significant ontological and thematic difference, to say the least. However, the irony is that the humanities (that is, as they are practiced today) ponder the reality of human life but scarcely reach and proclaim truths about the human person. This has bred a kind of solipsistic vitalism that finds its concrete expression in relativism and materialism, and there are obvious harms to such attitudes.

I hold a particular view of the humanities because I am thinking of the humanities as they were originally understood: “the best which has been thought and said in the world”¹⁰. In them we find the world’s wisdom, the proper expressions for experiences about life that would have otherwise remained undisclosed. Most of all—and Marías believes

¹⁰ M. ARNOLD, *Culture and Anarchy*, ed. J. D. Wilson, London, Cambridge University Press 1960, p. 6.

this to be the more powerful capacity of the humanistic disciplines—they *abbreviate* human life and condense the narrative, the story of a person, into a few lines of prose or poetry, or a few minutes of moving images¹¹. And by this I mean the great works of the humanistic tradition, that is, those works that have endured and stood the test of time, e.g., Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey*, Virgil's *Aeneid*, Dante's *Comedia*, Mozart's symphonies, and Michelangelo's sculptures, among others. However, contemporary humanistic pursuits and products are becoming less and less faithful to the original insight of the humanities—hence the mismatch between what the humanities are now and what they ought to be (or rather, what they could be).

Thus, the humanities are in a terribly uncomfortable situation, and this area of study is searching for a philosophy that could justify and defend it from the contamination of reification, from the inconceivable barbarity to “thingify” the human person. It is not coincidental that another area of study entered the fray—parallel to the decadence of the humanities—that offers the conceptual tools now absent among the humanities disciplines, which we know as *personalism*. The humanities experienced an anthropocentric turn in the Enlightenment period not many centuries ago, which consisted of abandoning theocentricism. However, the humanities are now aggravated by a preference for methods and techniques over their original object of investigation, the human person.

It is well known that the humanities study man *qua* man. The initial attitude is to accept this without further hesitation. But if we are to take this seriously, we will find that there are methodological problems we encounter here. The chief difficulty lies in the fundamental issue of studying man *in and through man himself*¹². However, we know from recent progressions in personalist philosophy that interrelated concepts such as “man”, “human”, “individual”, and “person” cannot pass as mere synonyms. They are related but must remain distinct. All these terms save the last are, strictly speaking, *theories* since they are generally applied to realities as a genus contains a species. Only “person”, insofar as it refers to a concrete person—you and me—is what is real. In any case, for our purposes, we will only take up the distinction between “man” and “person”, the two terms that immediately come to mind when thinking of the object of investigation of the humanities.

¹¹ J. MARÍAS, *Imagen de la vida humana*, Buenos Aires, Emecé Editorial 1955, p. 28.

¹² P. O. KRISTELLER, *Renaissance Thought*, New York, Harper & Row 1961, pp. 124-5. “When the Renaissance humanists called their studies the ‘humanities’ or *Studia humanitatis*, they expressed the claim that these studies contribute to the education of a desirable human being, and hence are of vital concern for man as man”.

The term “man”, however much it is mindlessly used interchangeably with “person”, is still a concept, a theory, an idea¹³. It is not, strictly speaking, *real* in the sense that you and I are real. “Man” is general and abstract; it is a silhouetted concept conjured by the imagination that conveniently points us to the notion of “human being”, effectively erasing distinctions among individuals and, more dangerously, the differences between man and woman¹⁴. This stands in contradistinction to the term “person”—a term which has a long, contentious history of what it should mean, but which is slowly being refined by recent developments in personalist anthropology. Originally, the humanities, exemplified by the great works that issued from them, were concerned with the question, “Who is the person?”. This question is predated by the Psalmist’s perennial question, though a deeply troubling one for personalists, “What is man?”. However, this latter question is loaded with ontological presuppositions unfit to grapple with the reality in question, who is no less than *someone*.

Harold Raley follows Marías’s example to redouble the importance of posing with great accuracy the question with which we are concerned.

Marías insists that such a question involves a prior interpretation of human reality. We cannot ask *what* man is without presupposing in some form or fashion that human reality belongs to the metaphysical realm of things. *If it is true that in philosophy the solution to a problem is partially solved from the moment it can be accurately stated as a question, then it is also true that to pose it erroneously will necessarily lead to false conclusions*. This is why Marías believes that the traditional query (*what* is man?) should be replaced with a more personal and indeed quite common inquiry: *who* is man?, or better perhaps, *who* is this or that man? The latter is the question we would ask as men and not as philosophers [emphasis added]¹⁵.

¹³ J. MARIÁS, “The Idea of Metaphysics”, in *Contemporary Spanish Philosophy: An Anthology*, ed. & trans. A. R. Caponigri, South Bend, University of Notre Dame Press 1967, p. 352. Marías’s declaration merits serious reflection: “Strictly speaking, ‘man’, far from being a reality, is a theory”.

¹⁴ Marías, *Persona*, cit., pp. 106 & 146. Marías believes that the human person is realized in two distinct but reciprocally completing ways, that is, as man *or* woman. For him, it is possible for one to be “more” or “less” man or woman, to the extent that one is faithful to his irrevocable corporal inheritance. And this original distinction between the male and female sex, which since the beginning has been so enchanting a dynamic, is being disfigured by attempts to diminish if not erase their distinction.

¹⁵ H. RALEY, *A Watch Over Mortality: The Philosophical Story of Julián Marías*, New York, State University of New York Press 1997, p. 64.

3. Vital personalism and the humanities

A question we can pose as a precedent to the discussion that follows is, would Marías consider his final phase as a philosopher as “vital personalism”, as Carpintero and Burgos do? Early on in his career, he wrote of personalism almost indifferently in his first major work, *Historia de la filosofía* (1941), “Personalism’s most general feature is its insistence on the reality and value of the person and its attempt to interpret reality from this point of view... personalism affirms human freedom and the personal basis of reality, that is, the existence of a personal God”¹⁶. Considering Marías’s intellectual phase at this point, it is improbable that he would have guessed his philosophical trajectory to move decidedly to the reality of persons, to that superior category concerning *who* and not merely *what*. Although Marías does not explicitly call himself a personalist, his resolute attention to the person later in his career is enough to merit him the title.

As mentioned earlier, this specific personalist trajectory is derivable from Marías’s philosophical anthropology. When Marías said that he saw philosophy as the organizing center of all the disciplines of the humanities, we can interpret this to mean *vital* personalism—a philosophy that is personalist in everything but the *origin point* of its method. Ever since the completion of his seminal work *Antropología metafísica* (1970), with increasing pace and intensity, Marías’s philosophy was resolutely oriented to the person¹⁷. However, Marías’s way of “looking” at the person was not shared by other personalists. The difference lay chiefly in his deeply Ortegian slant as a philosopher, which moved him to look at the person *starting from human life*. Unlike the usual starting point to look at the person *from and through the person*, Marías takes an additional qualitative leap *from life* to reach the person. However, the personalist philosopher, Burgos observed, does not “reach” or “arrive” at the person, but rather begins from him—better yet, “I study *who I am* beginning with *myself*”—because the person is the “original and originating philosophical category”¹⁸.

“Vital personalism” appropriately captures Marías’s vision of personalist philosophy. Faithful to the genesis of his intellectual trajectory, Marías believed that human life is the radical reality—the *root* reality—in which I encounter the reality of persons and the reality of things, all of

¹⁶ J. MARIÁS, *Historia de la filosofía*, trans. S. Appelbaum & C. Stowbridge, New York, Dover Publications 1967, p. 398.

¹⁷ Cf. J. MARIÁS, *Mapa del mundo personal*, Madrid, Alianza Editorial 1994, p. 12.

¹⁸ J. M. BURGOS, “¿Es Marías personalista?”, cit., p. 91.

which I find within the irrevocable circumstance of my life. With Ortega's philosophy of vital reason and the emerging personalist philosophies in Germany, France, Spain, and Poland, the twentieth century was by far the most productive era in history that thought about human life and the human person. However, in retrospect it does not seem enough to settle for investigating the reality of the "human person" as such, in and through himself. In Marías's philosophy, we feel an urge to go beyond these categories of reality which, in the final analysis, can likewise risk closing in on itself—being obsessed with and about *the person as such*, to the extent that the person is solidified into a *concept*. Only if we ground our approach in human life, the root reality from which all other realities are encountered, will we safely comprehend the person in his integrity. "[T]he last redoubt of difficulty lies"—Marías said—"in thinking... about *the person who lives* [*la persona que vive*]", and not simply about the *human person* or *human life* alone¹⁹. (To understand the depth of the need to understand "the person who lives", it is expedient to recall that ancient adage: *Gloria enim Dei est homo vivens*, "the glory of God is the living man")²⁰.

Thinking about *the person who lives* is not the same as thinking only of "human life" and the "human person". They both point to different categories of reality, each bearing their respective ontological themes, and thus they cannot be interchanged. We can venture into dialogue about the "human person" by summoning the conceptual tools of "the I" or "self" or "personhood", but this still falters when faced with a thorny problem: they hardly shed light on the reality of *you* and *I*, much less the trickier notions of *we* and *us*, and instead offer general or universal categories or descriptions found in all human persons. Similarly, there is the equal risk of talking about "human life" but only vaguely as a nebulous concept without any real bearing on the here and now. But these realities must be brought to bear on concrete reality, for that is ambit in which the method of personalist philosophy moves and breathes.

By "concrete reality" I am referring to phenomenology, for we know that personalism is essentially phenomenological in its method. It consists of investigating *who I am*, the person each on is, from different perspectives. These perspectives are drawn together to coalesce into an integral whole, that is, a unitary vision of the human person—of *who* you and I are. These points of view consist, though not exhaustively, of the lens of the corporal condition (which, it must be remembered, is different from

¹⁹ MARIAS, *Persona*, cit., p. 134.

²⁰ ST. IRENAEUS OF LYON, *Adversus Haereses* IV, 20, 7.

the body), the amorous condition, the two ways of *being a person* we know as man and woman, the perennial human paradox of freedom and necessity, the irrevocable circumstance of each one's life, the constitutive neediness to live and be realized in a community. More may be appended to this list but the point is made: to know and access the reality of the human person, of you and I, we must wield multiple intellectual weapons to comprehend this superlative reality unlike any other.

This was the method of Marías, and this is probably one of the reasons why he was successful in building a structure of insights that somehow resembles if not partially embodies personalism, perhaps even without him intending to do so. Marías called his method, which he adopted from Ortega, the method of Jericho²¹. He described it as “taking repeated circles around things, approaching them spirally from perspectives which bind them closer and closer”²². There is a horizon of mystery that shrouds the human person from being naked to our comprehension, but this cannot justify discouragement in pursuing our object of investigation: the human person. The adequate method to unveil this seemingly endless horizon of mystery is to repeatedly encircle this reality, tightening our grasp at every turn and in every intellectual movement. It is the same sequence as how the Israelites of old destroyed the supposedly impenetrable walled city of Jericho²³. The phenomenological method consists of taking the same steps and committing to the same actions: the reality in question must be understood from different perspectives, securing our comprehension at every round, until the walls that obscure our knowledge of the person come tumbling down.

The phenomenological method is crucial to understanding in greater depth the relationship between personalism and the humanities, for it is this method that the two share. We can draw fresh inspiration from Edith Stein's claim that “the humanities are more closely allied to phenomenology than any other science of transcendent being”²⁴. With this, we could posit that the humanities were the original patrons of phenomenology, long before it became a defined philosophical methodology—that is, the starting point of the humanities is always either the experience of human life or a reflection of human life. In a word, human experiences and reflections of human life have been the seedbed of humanistic products and pursuits since ancient Greece. And this means, consequently,

²¹ MARIÁS, *Metaphysical Anthropology*, cit., p. 59.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ Cfr. *Joshua* 6:1-27.

²⁴ E. STEIN, *Philosophy of Psychology and Humanities*, ed. M. Sawicki, trans. M. C. Baseheart & M. Sawicki, Washington, D.C., ICS Publications 2000.

the anachronistic interpretation that the humanities moved in the ambit of the phenomenological method two millennia before personalist philosophy.

We cannot take this for granted, for this most certainly means that the humanities are those disciplines which are appropriately sensitized, that is, most adroit in discovering, accessing, and comprehending the reality of the human person. To be sure, the humanities does not exhaust the reality it purports to investigate, yet it has made leaps and bounds in doing so, almost as if setting the foundation from which personalism can take off. Again, we must not lose sight of what I mean by “humanities”—we should take this to mean only those products and pursuits which consist of the best that has been thought, said, and known in the world. In a word, those works which have established themselves as classics, and are therefore both timeless and yet timely.

In any case, the point is that the humanities are closely related to vital personalism, especially because they share the phenomenological method. It is not possible to provide at the moment an exhaustive demonstration of how the humanities employ the phenomenological method—the Jericho method, as Ortega and Marías liked to call it—but it should suffice to accept that the humanities do not make up a “system” (which we often call a “philosophy”). Rather, the humanities exemplify the profoundest expressions of *every* aspect of life. I dare say “every aspect of life”, but this must be qualified with a succeeding statement: “but not all aspects of life”, which should be taken to mean that there are experiences of life that may not yet have been captured, as it were, by humanistic works. And thus, the humanities cannot exhaust personal reality in the same way that personalism cannot, since the human person is always open, dynamic, dramatic, projective, and most especially, free.

4. A theoretical foundation for the humanities

It is important to establish that the humanities consist of those disciplines that, like vital personalism, begin from human life. In other words, the great works of literature, philosophy, history, and art are faithful reflections of human life. All humanistic disciplines take the human person and human life to be at once the source and end of their pursuits. Literature holds up a mirror to reality, art to the human heart (the inscrutable personal center of each one), and history to the person himself. They take the person as both the starting point and the terminus, the origin and the goal; they are from the person and for the person. This is clearly the case for the great novels, poems, films, histories, biographies, paintings,

sculptures, and architectural feats that have been produced by persons for persons. These are the stuff of the humanities, and their products confirm the human person as that reality far above and beyond the mere realm of things, and thus a reality that demands a wholly different order of explanation.

The same is said of vital personalism, which begins from human life—but, as we shall see, is not so far from starting with the human person. When we speak of “vital personalism”, I believe we must avoid conceiving of it as a distant branch of personalism. Vital personalism is very much personalist through and through. As we said, the difference is in the *method* which starts from human life, not from the human person; granted, it is a pronounced methodological difference that raises ontological and thematic concerns. However, we should not lose sight of the fact that—permit me to use a Scholastic adage—the final cause is the cause of all causes²⁵. This means that vital personalism is still thoroughly personalist since the *telos*, the end that is pursued, is the reality of the human person. Even if the issue is pressed to oppose this conclusion, it must be admitted that vital personalism begins from the person, at least to some degree. We know that vital personalism’s starting point is human life; but if so, the reality of life points to a root *in which life is discovered*—it must be grounded somewhere, in some locus, or more precisely, *in someone*: and that can be no less than a *person*.

Hence, the humanistic tradition is firmly rooted in the ambit of the notion “human life”, which, as we have seen, is inseparable from the project of vital personalism. Now we must take a step further in our investigation. Arriving thus far, I suspect that a question is itching to be answered: in our juxtaposition of the humanities and vital personalism, is *method* the only strong parallel between the two, or could there be more shared between them? We ought not to force similarities by imposing them as common features between vital personalism and the humanities; rather, their similarities must emerge spontaneously—organically, as it were—by juxtaposing them. In the succeeding section, I will take careful steps to clearly define the intellectual movements that allow us to find the commonalities between these two areas of study which, as we are beginning to see, are so intimately related.

A crucial aspect to vital personalism is to sight into Marías’s life, the real origin of the project of vital personalism, since a philosophy is

²⁵ T. AQUINAS, *Summa Theologiae*, I-I, q. 2, a. 5, obj. 1. “...*finis est causa causarum*”.

unintelligible without the life of its philosopher²⁶. But we must be brief. The important *vital* element in Marías's life is his deep-seated affinity with the humanities. In fact, beyond his reputation as an penetrating philosopher with "diamondlike"²⁷ clarity to his thought and style, some of his contemporaries identify him as "a great humanist who mastered all fields of culture, from philosophical thought to journalism, essay writing, and oratory"²⁸. Concretely, "Marías wrote across a wide variety of topics and themes apart from philosophy: sociology, history, historiography, politics, analyses of countries (Spain, America, India, Japan, and Israel), literary criticism, Christianity, and most impressively, film reviews—of which he wrote more than a thousand over the span of two decades"²⁹. This much alone merits him the title "humanist".

However, the real interest here is how Marías's work as a philosopher is not confined purely to his intellectual stages as a philosopher: his immersion in Ortega's philosophy of vital reason, his original development of the empirical structure of human life, and the foray into the personal or projective structure of human life. Rather, he really and truly *looks* at the person, starting with human life, through different elements—or better yet, perspectives—of personal reality. Hence, his vital personalism is rightly characterized as "a personalist theory of life and a foundational ethics of his humanism"³⁰. This is why the other names that Carpintero gives to Marías's culminating philosophical phase include, apart from "vital personalism", the idea of "a philosophy of personal life" and "a vital metaphysics of the human person"³¹. These imply very different realities but this is not the proper avenue to explore the weight these words hold. Nevertheless, the common thread among these nominal representations to describe Marías's philosophy contain two essential ingredients: *human life* and the *human person*. More precisely, the person as seen through the drama and dynamism of living.

From the considerations that emerged throughout, it begins to be apparent that the supposed difference in the methodology, as noted by Burgos —between *beginning from human life* versus *beginning from the human person*— ceases to incite strong feelings of apprehension toward

²⁶ H. RALEY, *A Watch Over Mortality*, cit., p. 5.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, cit., p. 2.

²⁸ G. PÉREZ, "Julián Marías, el cine y el teatro", *La huella de Julián Marías: un pensador para la libertad*, ed. Comunidad de Madrid, Madrid, Comunidad de Madrid 2006, p. 200. My translation.

²⁹ F. PANTALEON, "A Justification of the Humanities: The Philosophy of Julián Marías", Master's Thesis, University of Asia and the Pacific 2024, pp. 31-32.

³⁰ ROLDÁN, "Hombre y humanismo en Julián Marías", cit., p. 389.

³¹ CARPINTERO, "La originalidad teórica del pensamiento de Marías", cit., p. 90.

the philosophy of vital personalism as a legitimate mode of investigation. It has been necessary to lock horns with the opposing position because clarifying the methodological legitimacy is prerequisite to justifying vital personalism as a theoretical foundation, an “organizing center” (as Marías called it), of all the disciplines of the humanities. Now if vital personalism is taken as a philosophy to ground the humanities, it will serve the crucial role of arbitrating the practice, pursuit, production, and preservation of the humanities. Literature, art, and history must, in a certain sense, be regulated to ensure that they are faithful reflections of and about the human person. In a word, vital personalism safeguards the humanities from being contaminated by alien orders of explanation, preventing them from going awry, from entering foreign territory, and to sustain the onslaught of scientism and relativism.

Before approaching our conclusion, I wish to point out a concern that could be a starting point for further investigation. There is an impressive article by Burgos that outlines the genealogy of Marías’s understanding of the person; there, he suggests that a shift occurred in Marías’s focus: not necessarily from human life to the human person, but more specifically from human life to the *person who lives* [*la persona que vive*]³². This could very well be the main contention against the thesis we have been defending thus far. Burgos’s proposal is that, for Marías, “the problem now [in the final phase of his philosophical trajectory] is different: to think of the person who lives. *To think the person, this is the new priority; not to think life*”³³. In this regard, it would seem that Marías’s method no longer comes from human life but from the person already, which is the strictly personalist method: from the person to the person. Does this not contradict the argument we have built—that Marías’s concern was to think of the person *from human life*?

I believe a simple response may be given to this objection. We must distinguish between the vital personalism of Marías and vital personalism as a distinct personalist method. Evidently, Marías’s vital personalism has undergone certain stages, and reaches its maturest form in his projective structure of the human person. But at this point, human life is left in the domain of the empirical structure; what he is concerned with at that point is the person who *has* life, or more precisely, the living person (that is, *persona vivens*, to hark back to Irenaeus’ aphorism). Vital

³² J. M. BURGOS, “Vida humana, hombre y persona en Julián Marías: análisis de una transición conceptual y de sus resultados”, *Quién. Revista de Filosofía Personalista*, n. 4, 2016, pp. 37-41. My translation; cfr. Marías, *Persona*, cit., p. 134.

³³ J. M. BURGOS, “Vida humana, hombre, y persona en Julián Marías”, cit., p. 40.

personalism as a method of personalism, although it originates from Marías, may stand on its own as a legitimate approach to personalist thought even if Marías eventually leaves it behind. Marías's claim that human life is fundamental reality does not lose veracity simply because Marías moves beyond this ontological domain and into the personal domain. It remains the case, in other words, that human life can still appropriately be used as a starting point for looking at the person.

Thus, vital personalism offers personalist philosophy an openness to methodological variation, perhaps entertaining the possibility of examining the person not just from the person himself but from products of the humanities, or in other words, from human life itself. To be sure, the novelty of vital personalism is not restricted to its unique methodological approach to the person; rather, its novelty stems from the facility to see the person: as *living*, as *man*, and also as *person*. This is not to claim that vital personalism embraces all possible methods of personalist philosophy. But we simply affirm that vital personalism contributes an attitude of openness in personalist content and methodology.

5. Conclusion

Where does the project of vital personalism go from here? For one, the trajectory of this fresh offspring of personalist philosophy must mature and germinate among the discussions of philosophers of personalism. It offers a golden opportunity for personalism to simultaneously “reach out” and “take in” those features of personal reality that have not yet been explored—and by that I mean the deeply personal connection between humanistic works and the lives of persons (which clearly falls under the ambit of vital personalism). I believe that for personalism to move along, it must not have its barriers absolutely erect. It is understandable that efforts must be made to avoid anything that could detract from the authentic and real comprehension of personal reality; however, such an attitude risks letting go of the essential elements that are constitutive parts of the experience of persons.

In response to this, vital personalism tries to aid the personalist philosopher with a fresh pair of lenses by which to look at the human person. It is the same reality being contemplated and seen, but as we have been saying, there is an obvious methodological leap—or perhaps methodological regression, for some. Vital personalism begins not from the human person in himself but from human life. We must remember that these two are not the same: they are two distinct realities possessing categories of their own. In any case, since vital personalism pos-

sesses the adequate conceptual tools by which the human person can be accessed and comprehended. That is, given the understanding that by “conceptual tools” I refer principally to the humanities—those disciplines, which serve as perspectives through which the person is visible and made patent. After all, there is nothing in the humanities alien to the person, and hardly anything about the person that is alien to the humanities.

This attitude permits us to wield the philosophy of vital personalism as an exemplary way to not only study personal reality, but also wield it as a theoretical foundation for the humanities as an area of study. Vital personalism and the humanities share so much in common, as this study has tried to demonstrate. There are commonalities not only in method but also in the content of the respective domains. But even then, it is more appropriate to claim that the humanities constitute the maximum expression of vital personalism, that is to say, that the humanities are the most concrete manifestations of a personalist philosophy of life.

Bibliography

- ARNOLD, MATTHEW, *Culture and Anarchy*, ed. J. D. Wilson, London, Cambridge University Press, 1960.
- AQUINAS, THOMAS, *Summa Theologiae*, trans. Fathers of the English Dominican Province, New York: Benziger Bros., 1947.
- BALTHASAR, HANS URS VON, “On the concept of person”, *Communio* 13, n. 1, Spring 1986, pp. 18-26.
- BURGOS, JUAN MANUEL, “¿Es Marías personalista?”, in *El vuelo del Alcón. El pensamiento de Julián Marías*, eds. J. L. Cañas and J. M. Burgos, Madrid: Páginas de Espuma, 2009.
- , “Vida humana, hombre y persona en Julián Marías: análisis de una transición conceptual y de sus resultados”, *Quién. Revista de Filosofía Personalista*, n. 4, 2016.
- CARPINTERO, HELIODORO, “La originalidad teórica del pensamiento de Marías”, *Cuenta y Razón* 87, 1994.
- KRISTELLER, PAUL OSKAR, *Renaissance Thought*, New York: Harper & Row, 1961.
- MARÍAS, JULIÁN, *Historia de la filosofía*, trans. S. Appelbaum & C. Strowbridge, New York: Dover Publications, 1967.
- , *Imagen de la vida humana*, Buenos Aires: Emecé Editorial, 1955.
- , *Mapa del mundo personal*, Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1994.

- , *Metaphysical Anthropology: The Empirical Structure of Human Life*, trans. F. M. López-Morillas, University Park: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1971.
- , *Persona*, Madrid: Alianza Editorial, 1996.
- , “The Idea of Metaphysics”, in *Contemporary Spanish Philosophy: An Anthology*, ed. & trans. A. R. Caponigri, South Bend: University of Notre Dame Press, 1967.
- , *Una vida presente. Memorias*, 3rd ed., Madrid: Páginas de Espuma, 2017.
- PANTALEON, FRANCISCO, “A Justification of the Humanities: The Philosophy of Julián Marías”, Master’s Thesis, University of Asia and the Pacific, 2024.
- , “The Humanities as *Paideia* in Julián Marías”, *Philosophia: International Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 26, n. 3, pp. 449-466.
- PÉREZ, GUSTAVO, “Julián Marías, el cine y el teatro”, *La huella de Julián Marías: un pensador para la libertad*, ed. Comunidad de Madrid, Madrid: Comunidad de Madrid, 2006.
- RALEY, HAROLD, *A Watch Over Mortality: The Philosophical Story of Julián Marías*, Albany, New York: State University of New York Press 1997.
- RATZINGER, JOSEF, “Concerning the notion of person in theology”, *Communio* 17, no. 2, Fall 1990, pp. 439-454.
- ROLDÁN, PILAR, “Hombre y humanismo en Julián Marías. La dimensión psicosocial de su antropología”, Doctoral Dissertation, Universidad Complutense de Madrid, 1998.
- STEIN, EDITH, *Philosophy of Psychology and Humanities*, ed. M. Sawicki, trans. M. C. Baseheart & M. Sawicki, Washington, D.C.: ICS Publications, 2000.