6. *Critique of Pure Reason*, p. 547.

7. Ibid., p. 550.

8. "Idea for a Universal History," p. 24.

9. Ibid., p. 15.

10. Ibid., p. 15.

11. Ibid., p. 22.

12. Ibid., p. 25.

13. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, trans. Werner Pluhar, (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1987), pp. 14-15.

14. Kant, *Perpetual Peace*, trans. Lewis White Beck, (Indianapolis: Bobbs-Merrill, 1957), pp. 25-26.

Francisco Romero's Philosophy of the Person and of Culture

John Haddox

Francisco Romero, who was born in Sevilla, Spain on June 16, 1891 and while still a youth in 1904 accompanied his parents to Argentina, became one of Latin America's most important and original thinkers—clearly Argentina's greatest philosopher of this century.

One of the few Latin American philosophers to achieve world-wide recognition, still Romero remains relatively unknown in the United States (though one of his major works *Teoría del hombre* has been published in English translation, which is more than can be said of two of Mexico's most important philosophers, José Vasconcelos and Antonio Caso).

Here after a brief look at his life and career, Romero's view of the task of the philosopher (as revealed in both his words and his works—his publications and his actions) will be examined, along with his philosophical position on the nature of the person and of culture.

In 1910, at the age of nineteen, the young Argentine immigrant initiated a military career and, after twenty-one years of service (during which time he became a self-taught philosopher), he retired. Then when the distinguished educator/physician/philosopher, Alejandro Korn, (who was his close friend though his elder by thirty-one years) retired from *his* positions at the Universities of Buenos Aires and La Plata, Romero succeeded him. He was soon widely recognized as the legitimate heir to Korn's greatness, carrying forth the latter's opposition to a form of Positivism that had long dominated Argentina philosophy.

Hugo Rodríquez-Alcalá (after noting that Korn believed the missions of the philosopher of his time in Argentina should be two: to oppose the restrictive positions of the positivists and to support as strongly as possible the freedom and dignity of the human spirit) explains that his successor, Francisco Romero, was "above all . . . an apostle of a new vision of the world and of life that would extol creative action and an elevated ideal of liberty."[1] (Concerning his inspiration from Korn,

Romero once remarked: "When you were with him you breathed a clear and stimulating air, the atmosphere of the heights."[2])

It is not surprising, then, that in 1946, during the regime of Juan Peron, Romero resigned from his positions at the two universities where he had taught with such enthusiasm because of governmental moves against their autonomy. At that time he suffered economically and, even worse, was imprisoned for a time—but at least this period of forced academic inactivity provided him the opportunity to write his *Teoría del hombre*.

This experience of official repression (among others) inspired this ringing proclamation:

> "Authoritarianism of the totalitarian type has already given abundant evidence, in all countries where it has imposed itself, of its efficacy in the destruction of spiritual values; and of all these values, that which is concerned with the search for truth is one of the most vulnerable."[3]

In presenting his view of the task of the philosopher, as "defender of the spirit," Romero argued that there are two kinds of philosophers: those who are content to observe and interpret reality, and those who attempt to transform it. Since he decisively belonged to the second group his pedagogical zeal extended far beyond the limits of university teaching, and, as a voice to and for the people of Argentina, Romero was a popular public lecturer who wrote for newspapers and reviews with a wide audience. He was not just an activist for activism's sake, but was a creative optimist about the positive potential of his adopted *patria* (despite unfortunate conditions there that provoked uniformly pessimistic attitudes among his contemporaries).

Romero's interest in the history of ideas (influenced by figures like Dilthey, Brentano, and Scheler) was inspired at least partly by the need that he felt to trace the origins and development of Positivism in Latin America, especially in Argentina, the better to reduce its influence there.

As to the philosophy that he did develop, Rodríquez-Alcalá summarizes it well when he notes: "Liberty, spiritual dignity, the realization of the values of knowledge, of conduct, and of beauty; here in brief formula is the sense and direction of the philosophy of Francisco Romero."[4] Although he never gave his philosophy a definitive formulation, believing that reality cannot be summed up, there *were* several key concepts that were essential in Romero's thought; these included transcendence, the distinction between individual and person, the character of person, and the ethical and cultural consequences of these concepts.

In his *Papeles para una filosofía* he describes the ascending scale of reality from inorganic matter, to living being, to psyche, and, finally, to the level of spirit—(which scale reveals an ever-increasing transcendence); and once transcendence reaches the spiritual it leaves the realm of nature, having reached the supreme level of reality which is the level of genuine autonomy.

Later Romero characterized immanence as "confined within one's own particular reality,"[5] with the subject a virtual prisoner of her/his private interests. From this point of view, in contrast, transcendence involves a giving of oneself, a going out from oneself, yet, paradoxically, at the same time, a discovering of one's true self.

Further, in the advance from the inorganic, to the organic, and, finally, to the intentional level of the psyche there is a movement from the more determined to the less—from determinism toward freedom—and, at an even higher level, to that of spirit where freedom is at its maximum.

Finally, from an axiological point of view, the level of transcendence also determined the degree of value for Romero; that is, the organic is more valuable than the physical and intentional more than the organic, and the spiritual is at the summit of value because only in spirit is the highest form of transcendence realized.

In the sphere of spirit the self-centered intentionality of the subject disappears and human action completes its trajectory toward the objective, remaining there without a return to the subjective. This realm is devoid of all utilitarian motives. Action here moves from particular motives to universal aspirations. (It is important to note that for Romero "spirit" is peculiarly human.) In any event, the spiritual act is for the other, not for the self. The "natural" person, in clear contrast to the "spiritual" person has not yet transcended to the level of universality; the natural person is still basically ego-centric.

Solomon Lipp in his *Three Argentine Thinkers* explains very well another aspect of the diverse levels of transcendence in noting:

> "The spirit depends and feeds on the psyche, but cannot be reduced to psyche, just as the psyche, in turn, depends on life itself but is not identified with life; or just as life itself is nourished by inert mass or substance, but is never confused with that substance."

In his *Filosofía de la persona* Romero concentrated on such dualisms relating to human beings as those between individual and person, psyche and spirit, face and mask, egoism and altruism, along with subjective utilitarianism and objective universalism.

Relating this to his view of transcendence, Romero wrote: "By means of his [her] personal attitude a human being overcomes his [her] subjectivity and adheres to a super individual order, an order that transcends him [her] and to which he [she] voluntarily submits."[7] A person is, then, a self in whom the individual transcends herself or himself in knowledge and value. Persons can transcend their subjectivity to achieve objective truth and can transcend their psychophysical, individual selfish desires to achieve spiritual life.

A little later Romero characterized an individual as one in whom a self-centered intentionality prevails with the psyche dominating, and a person as one who transcends the subjective, going beyond selfish interests and toward the universal and objective.

The psyche is to the individual, as the spirit is to the person—and, while at times the spirit of the person appears to be dormant allowing the individual psyche free reign, ideally the spirit should let the psyche know what should be done. However the spirit cannot *force* the psyche to do anything, leaving the individual and the person in steady conflict as one oscillates between these poles. Further, Romero explained that the dualism of "face" and "mask" is analogous to that of "individual" and "person." After noting that the Latin term *persona* stood for a character portrayed by the actor (with the Greek equivalent word referring to the mask that covered the actor's face), he remarked that the mask was used to hide the actor's individuality and to give the actor another personality.[8]

Then he explained that the individual should endeavor to become a person, just as an actor strives to transcend his [her] own self and become the character portrayed by the mask. The person is realized by aspiring to the future state of "ought-ness" not the present state of "is-ness."[9] The "person" is in a sense a role that is played; but we are not mere "actors" because we write *our own* role in choosing our conduct.

Later Romero reiterated and elaborated the ethical contrasts between the individual and the person: the individual is egoistic and centripetal—interested in things and persons only because of the usefulness that they have for her or him; the person in centrifugal—interested in the essential reality of things and other persons. The person respects and preserves things; the individual uses and destroys them.

Since the person is centrifugal, he or she establishes and follows a "universal order of law" of which there are two aspects: 1) the recognition of what *is* and 2) the awareness of an "order of value," that is to say, of what *ought* to be—and if these are in conflict the latter should take precedence. In fact ethical action is precisely active intervention in order to achieve what ought to be.[10]

Finally in a chapter on "culture" in his *Teoría del hombre*[11] Romero cogently applied the aforementioned concepts to that area of human achievement, starting with an extensive examination of what he terms "objective culture," after which "cultural life" is treated. The former consists of the substantial, relatively autonomous, results of the creative activities of persons. These objects of culture include what he termed "a common treasure" such as "institutions, norms, language, works of art, formulated knowledge, artifacts, and so on"—and later he even added: "a boat, a street, or a cultivated field."[12]

Romero emphasized that the object of culture must be "made fully external." As an example he notes that a poem may be complete in a poet's imagination but it is not a cultural object until it is presented in oral or written form *outside* the poet.

Culture is the result of the human propensity to objectify. As an interesting illustration of this point, Romero noted that a stone becomes a paperweight (a cultural object) when it has been placed on a table for that purpose.

In explaining the necessity of cultural objects he reminded us that religious activities would be unimaginable without dogma, ritual, and religious institutions, nor could there be artistic activities without literary, plastic, and musical works (that are accessible to many). Thus he remarked "Culture is much more than the series of cultural objectifications, but it cannot even be imagined without them."[13]

Romero also commented on the paradox that "when man, through love of 'nature,' of what is alive and spontaneous, attempts to defend untouched nature from himself, he only achieves his goal by contradiction—that is, by making it a cultural object."[14] (like a national park with signs, designated camping or picnicking areas, rangers, and visitor centers).

The cultural object has a material base, but this is not its essence, which is more psychological. For example a table or chair is what it is not primarily because of the material of which it is made, but because of the purpose *for which* it was made. Thus every cultural object has a value; it is *for* something and *worth* something.

For Romero cultural *life* is the life that persons live in the midst of the objects that they or other persons have created. Actually though it is created by the person (as he puts it, "by the average man in his infinitesimal contributions and by the exceptional man with his outstanding conquests"[15]), in a sense culture creates the person through its influence on her/him. Literature, the arts, and religion satisfy personal needs and develop sensitivities; rules, regulations, and laws imposed by society influence human conduct (for the better ordinarily). Culture and the person cannot be separated just as values and culture cannot be divorced.

To conclude, it is significant that shortly before his death in 1962 Francisco Romero (in a letter to a friend) decried the "absurd pessimism" of his time and remarked "I have infinite faith in man . . . All life, especially the spiritual aspect, is overflowing, generous, creative, and self-giving."

NOTES

1. H. Rodríquez-Alcalá, *Korn, Romero, Güiraldes, Unamuno, Ortega...* (México: Ediciones de Andrea), 1958, p. 65 (my translation).

2. Quoted W. Rex Crawford, *A Century of Latin-American Thought* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger Publishers), 1966, p. 218.

3. F. Romero, "Las Alianzas de la Filosofía," *La Torre*, Universidad de Puerto Rico, año II, núm. 6, junio de 1954, p. 17.

4. H. Rodríquez-Alcalá, op. cit., p. 67. (my translation).

5. F. Romero, *Papeles para una filosofía* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Losada), 1945, p. 27.

6. S. Lipp, *Three Argentine Thinkers* (New York: Philosophical Library), 1969, p. 160.

7. F. Romero, *Filosofía de la persona* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Losada), 1951, 2nd ed., p. 13.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 18.

9. *Ibid.*, pp. 19-20.

10. *Ibid.*, pp. 39-40.

11. All of the following quotations will be from William F. Cooper's translation, published as *Theory of Man* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press), 1964.

12. *Ibid.*, p. 103.

13. *Ibid.*, p. 113.

14. *Ibid.*, p. 99.