

# **A History of Personalism**

By Kevin Schmiesing

## **Introduction**

It has been said of many schools of philosophy, from pragmatism to phenomenology, that it is impossible to arrive at a rigid definition of the school. Instead, the term *pragmatist* or *phenomenologist* represents an "approach," a "perspective," an "emphasis." The philosophical school of *personalism* is most exemplary of this problem. Personalism is not a philosophical system at all, insists André Ligneul, "it is more an attitude that branches out into nuanced perspectives, bound together by one central idea." On that one central idea, perhaps, all personalists might agree: personalism is, as one historian of the subject puts it, an "affirmation of the absolute value of the human person." This phrase hardly qualifies as a definition, however, and leaves plenty of space for a diverse group of philosophers to be huddled under personalism's capacious umbrella.

The amorphous nature of the term notwithstanding, personalism enjoys a storied past, and it continues to be invoked as the twentieth century draws to a close. Indeed, it has experienced something of a resurgence over the last two decades, ensured academic and popular attention alike by the accession of a prominent figure of its Polish persuasion, Karol Wojtyla, to the office of Pope of the Roman Catholic Church. This renewed popularity demands that some effort be made to understand personalism's historical development in an attempt to determine its contribution to academic as well as broader philosophical discourse.

While there have been sporadic attempts to capture a particular piece of the personalist phenomenon and subject it to scholarly scrutiny, there has been no effort to portray the personalist thrust as a whole, to investigate its history and precedents, and to draw together the various national strands of the movement into a coherent tale of personal and philosophical interactions. As an article-length treatment of the history of personalism, this essay can hardly claim to be a comprehensive telling of that tale. But it is an initial effort to outline the basic thinkers, themes, and events that would figure in a full analysis of this important piece of intellectual history.

## **Early American Personalism and its Antecedents**

The first historical surfacing of the term *personalism* appears to be Schleiermacher's use of the word "*Personalismus*" in his *Discourses* of 1799. That work was not translated into English until 1893, however, by which time personalism had already enjoyed some popularity among American thinkers. Bronson Alcott was the first to use the term on this side of the Atlantic, defining it in an essay of 1863 as, "the doctrine that the ultimate reality of the world is a

Divine Person who sustains the universe by a continuous act of creative will." In 1868, Walt Whitman penned an essay entitled "Personalism," and by 1903 the term had entered the French lexicon as well, with the publication of Charles Renouvier's *Le Personalisme*.

It was in the American context that personalism first assumed the character of a school of philosophy, the founder of which was Borden Parker Bowne, a professor at Boston University. Bowne (1847—1910) made of personalism a conscious philosophical method, and gathered around him a significant coterie of quality students, who carried the school to a second generation. The most important among this generation were Edgar S. Brightman (1884—1953), Albert C. Knudson (1873—1953), Francis J. McConnell (1871—1953), George Albert Coe (1861—1951), and Ralph T. Flewelling (1871—1960). Flewelling brought the personalist approach across the country to the University of Southern California, from which he launched the journal that would serve as the forum for American personalism, *The Personalist*.

Bowne's intellectual formation provides the first link between the seemingly disconnected schools of American and European personalism. Like so many Americans of his day, Bowne received much of his education in Germany. In Germany, Bowne's two major influences were Hermann Ulrich (1886—1884) and Herman Lotze (1817—1881). Of these, it appears Lotze exerted the most decisive influence, convincing Bowne of the importance of personality as the critical point of philosophical and theological inquiry. Lotze's work also had an impact on the thought of Edmund Husserl, who in turn was a seminal figure in the development of European personalism. (This connection will be described in more detail below.)

Describing the situation of late nineteenth-century intellectual life in the West, Lotze wrote in his *Microcosmus*, "We have advanced far beyond the childlike ingenuousness of mythological conceptions; we have not only given up personal nature-spirits, but made the possibility of any sort of personal existence one of the darkest of problems." The scientism of modern man, Lotze thought, had gone too far, mechanizing even the life of the mind to a point at which the notion of immaterial existence was anathema. For Bowne, Lotze provided a compelling defense of personality, of both human and divine sorts. Against Kant, whose distinction between the ontological and the empirical selves led to the dissolution of the soul, Lotze argued that reality corresponds to self-consciousness and that the soul, being conscious of its own unity and self-identity, is therefore real. Against Hegel, whose Absolute Spirit threatened to overwhelm all lesser spirits, he offered the possibility of the unity and indissolubility of the individual self.

Drawing on Lotze, then, Bowne generated a philosophical approach that allowed him to reconcile the fervent Methodism of his upbringing with the necessity of

coming to terms with the findings of modern science and philosophy. By positing an idealistic personalism, Bowne rendered evolution metaphysically irrelevant to the concerns of religion. If the personal were purely immaterial, Bowne reasoned, then changes in the material world were relatively unimportant.

Bowne's devoutly religious childhood was mirrored in the biographies of many of his students. Of the second and third generations of Boston personalists, Brightman, Knudson, Flewelling, L. Harold De Wolf (1905—1986), and Walter George Muelder (1907—) were all sons or grandsons of Methodist ministers. As it did for Bowne, religion retained a prominent place in the concerns of everyone in this group. As with Bowne, moreover, the religion described in their philosophical and theological writings was probably not that of their parents.

Albert Knudson, for instance, located himself in the Christian tradition, but his Christianity was not of an orthodox sort. Christianity was important because it gave philosophy the recognition of the personality of both God and man, and upheld the individual person as being of infinite worth, an end in himself. Knudson admitted that traditional conceptions of the Incarnation and the Trinity did not square with personalist idealism, but thought that "this may point to the need of a reformulation of these doctrines rather than any want of harmony between the personalistic philosophy and the Christian faith."

It was Knudson who first attempted to outline personalism's origins in the history of ideas. The thinkers and ideas to which Knudson drew attention point to radical disparities among the various strands of personalism. The Boston School to which Knudson belonged was characterized, on the whole, by an "idealistic personalism," or what he called a "typical theistic personalism." Leibnitz, Berkeley, Kant, and Lotze were the figures of utmost importance here. The only metaphysical reality is personal reality, the Bostonians argued, and personal reality is necessarily spiritual and immaterial.

Using Knudson as an exemplar of the Boston School, we can gain a basic understanding of this brand of personalism. Knudson's conception of the world was dualistic, insisting on a distinction between thought and reality. In this way, Knudson explained, personal idealists were like traditional theists. "Thought is valid for reality, but is not to be identified with it," Knudson wrote. Even from the divine standpoint, he maintained, a finite being is "not a mere idea," but is instead "more than the thought which it expresses or by which it is apprehended."

This dualism set personal idealists apart from absolute idealists, for whom thought *is* reality. Personalism, Knudson explained, "regards the soul as distinct from God and looks upon the world as a vast system of stimuli which serves as a medium of communication between God and man and between spirits in general." Concerning

the material world, he asserted, "We do not make it, but find it."

Yet, Knudson observed, personal idealists also differ from traditional theists. For personalists, only the personal is "metaphysically real." The material world is purely phenomenal. Beyond this assertion, Knudson could not say much about that world: "what its exact nature is we do not know." All objects of knowledge—even other personal beings, it seems—are at a distance from the knowing subject; "mere reason" cannot "bridge the gulf between thought and reality." Thus, "all knowledge rests on faith."

In this way, personalists such as Knudson attempted to tread a path between what they viewed as the extreme positions of empiricism and absolutism. Knudson followed Bowne here, who had sought to formulate a philosophy that avoided the poles of "apriorism" and "empiricism." The *a priori* approach, in Bowne's estimation, assumed the mind was "able to know things on its own account," while empiricists viewed the mind "as learner only." As for the other major philosophical alternative, realism, Knudson thought it was unavailable to the professional philosopher, who recognized its common-sense attraction as naïvete. Absolute idealism, meanwhile, did violence to the obvious fact that the material world was in some way independent of thought. Boston personalists could not, then, adequately describe the status or existence of the material world; to questions such as these they could only plead ignorance.

### **European Personalism I: Germany**

The foundations of what would become a distinct personalist school in Europe were laid mainly by philosophers working within the German national context. The key figures here were Edmund Husserl (1859—1938), Max Scheler (1874—1928), and Edith Stein (1891-1943).

While it would be difficult to classify Edmund Husserl as a personalist, he occupies an important place in the development of the school because of his position as a progenitor of phenomenology and mentor of several prominent personalists.

Trained as a mathematician, Husserl's early influences included Franz Brentano and Carl Stumpf. Eventually Husserl turned to more distinctly philosophical pursuits, publishing his massive two-volume critique of psychologism, *Logical Investigations*, in 1900 and 1901. From his position at the University of Göttingen, Husserl managed a growing movement toward a phenomenological approach to philosophy, urging a descriptive account of philosophical data rather than a metaphysical attempt to provide causal explanation. It was an emphasis epitomized in Husserl's own famous words: "To the things themselves!" At Göttingen he also taught two students who occupy crucial places in the history of personalism—

Edith Stein and Roman Ingarden.

In 1916 Husserl went to the University of Freiburg, where he made contact with various important figures, including Martin Heidegger. Stein and Ingarden, his former students, joined him on the faculty there. By the 1920s he was the leading philosopher in the nation, and had contact with many of the most prominent figures in philosophy from across Europe. By 1934, however, the fact of Husserl's Jewish ancestry began to elicit restrictions on his intellectual activity. Mercifully, he passed away in 1938, with the worst of Nazi persecution yet to come.

From the point of view of the rise of personalism, Husserl's main accomplishment was bringing phenomenology into its own as a distinct philosophical discipline. The origins of the term *phenomenology* are shrouded in debate and opposing theories, but the most compelling hypothesis offers a point of contact between the European and American schools of personalism. According to Karl Schuhmann, it is likely that Husserl was indebted to Herman Lotze for the idea of *phenomenology*. Lotze used the title "Phänomenologie" for one section of his *Grundzüge der Metaphysik*, and Husserl's own testimony pays tribute to the influence of Lotze.

Husserl's philosophical method involved "bracketing" or separating out from the rest of human experience a particular experience, or phenomenon, for the purpose of exhaustively analyzing its character and attributes. Exactly what status this approach granted to things independent of the knowing mind is a question still debated. The "idealist Husserl," according to Barry Smith and David Woodruff Smith, "is even more radical than Kant, insisting ... that there is no thing-in-itself beyond the reach of possible experience." The "realist Husserl," however, has some sympathy for the independent existence of objects.

This split between realist and idealist persuasions, as has already been adumbrated, is not only a tension detectable within Husserl's own thought, but is one of the lines of division among phenomenologists who followed him. Roman Ingarden, for instance, defended Husserl's "early realism," and built his own philosophical edifice on a theory of intentionality that assumes a distinction between autonomously existing objects and objects dependent on an act of consciousness.

Max Scheler was born in Munich in 1874. His mother was Jewish and his father Lutheran, but in his teens he began to be attracted to Catholicism, and was baptized in that faith in 1899. In 1894, Scheler matriculated at the University of Berlin, where he benefited from the teaching of Wilhelm Dilthey and Georg Simmel. One year later, however, he transferred to the University of Jena, and while there established a relationship with Edmund Husserl, who was at the time on the faculty at nearby Halle.

Scheler's divorce and notorious womanizing led to the loss of his license to teach in the German university system in 1910, but his failure to maintain an institutional position seems to have had little effect on his ability to exert influence over the intellectual life of the nation. This fact undoubtedly had much to do with Scheler's commanding personality, witnessed, for instance, by Dietrich von Hildebrand, a regular in Scheler's circle of friends in Munich. Recalling his first meeting with Scheler, Hildebrand attests, "I went home intoxicated, as it were." Edith Stein concurred, declaring that, "In no other person have I encountered the 'phenomenon of genius' as clearly."

Scheler's major philosophical project (as with that of many of his contemporaries) was conceived of as a response to Immanuel Kant. Borrowing heavily from Husserl, Scheler adopted a "nöological method" that viewed philosophy as a search for a concept of the mind that rose above the particulars of scientific inquiry in terms of its universality, but was nonetheless variable, shifting according to the "work world" (*Arbeitswelt*) in which one's existence occurred. As one commentator explains the method, it was "an attempt to achieve a reconciliation between the fixed, absolute, a priori of Kantianism and the relativism of historicizing psychology, a reconciliation in which elements of truth in both are appropriated and integrated." Scheler's consuming task led him to investigate the realms of ethics, religion, psychology, metaphysics, and more; Manfred Frings has thus called him "the most versatile and comprehensive thinker of contemporary philosophy."

One of Scheler's main concerns was to locate a sure objective footing for ethics that would not fall into the "empty and barren formalism" of Kant—an error that Scheler thought was a result of the "one-sidedness" of Kant's notion of duty. Scheler wished to preserve the "rigid ethical absolutism and objectivism" of the Kantian categorical imperative while avoiding the Kantian tendency to subjugate individual desires and motives to an all-encompassing idea of ethical duty. To this end, Scheler posited a "non-formal" system of values, a subjective axiology that nonetheless depended on an objective ontology. The result, to put it simply, was the personalization of Kantian ethics. Scheler's primary emphasis on the human person, the hallmark of the personalist philosopher, led him to recognize the subjective nature of the value judgments that played an important role in human decision-making.

Though Scheler's emphasis on the person is beyond dispute, there is some contention over Scheler's view of the nature of personhood. Many commentators have interpreted Scheler as denying the substantial quality of the person, thinking of the person as existing only in his actions. John Nota, S.J., has countered with a convincing argument that that position does not reflect the preponderant thrust of Scheler's writing. With respect to the claim that Scheler believed the person should never be conceived of as a substance, Nota explains, "Scheler does indeed make

such a statement at one point, but he also writes, perhaps more often, that the person is substance, the unitary substance of all his acts; he speaks of 'the metaphysical substantial existence of the spiritual person.'"

Nota takes issue with Manfred Frings, in particular, for his claim that those referring to Scheler's person as "act-substance" misrepresent the philosopher by "insinuating Thomistic phraseology." "[The] mode of expression here has nothing to do with Thomism," Nota declares; those who use this expression are simply "correctly translating Scheler's term *Aktsubstanz* and thereby correcting the one-sided interpretation served up by Heidegger, Frings, and many others."

Leaving aside the debate over personal substance, it is certainly true that a central theme throughout Scheler's writing is the definition and understanding of the phenomenon of human love. In his essay "Ordo Amoris," Scheler defines love as "the tendency or, as it may be, the act that seeks to lead everything in the direction of the perfection of value proper to it..." Love, in Scheler's estimation, is the basic fact of human existence. "Man," he insists, "before he is an *ens cogitans* or an *ens volens*, is an *ens amans*." Scheler's adherence to ethical objectivism can be understood in light of his understanding of love; for Scheler, love makes certain demands on the human person, which he or she is required to fulfill. "Man's love," he writes, "is restricted to recognizing the objective demands these objects make and to submitting to the gradation of rank in what is worthy of love." Though the placing of value on an object is a subjective process, the ethical imperative instructs persons to order their values according to an objective, ontologically rooted scale. Since human persons by their nature deserve the highest value, love is the only worthy response. It is love, then, according to Scheler, that ought to order human actions; it is love that provides the framework for ethical behavior.

Besides devoting an essay to the subject, Scheler returned to this seminal insight on the nature of love throughout his writings. For the phenomenon of love, in Scheler's view, demonstrates the fact that the heterogeneity of evaluative and logical-judgmental orders does not entail the irrationality or non-objectivity of evaluative judgments (such as love). This insight is of such central importance to Scheler's general project that one Scheler expert has asserted: "It would not be a complete exaggeration to say that the subject of 'Ordo Amoris' was always the leitmotiv of Scheler's thinking." Whether this is the case or not, it is certain that the human person remained at the center of Scheler's universe; as another expert testified, "...there is one subject in which ultimately all of Scheler's thoughts focus: MAN."

When Edmund Husserl moved from Göttingen to Freiburg in 1916, he took with him a particularly impressive graduate student to be his assistant. The young protégé was Edith Stein, a woman of Jewish descent destined to be a first-rate

philosopher, a Carmelite nun, a casualty of the Holocaust, and a canonized saint.

Stein began her education at the University of Breslau in 1911. During her stay there, she came upon a book that "revolutionized her intellectual life"; it was Husserl's *Logical Investigations*. In 1913, she managed to come under Husserl's tutelage at Göttingen, where she also befriended Adolf Reinach (1883—1917), and participated in the Göttingen Philosophical Society with Husserl, Reinach, and Scheler, among others. Reinach, she once observed, "was the link between [Husserl] and the students since he had a gift for dealing with people whereas Husserl himself was rather helpless."

Like other students of Husserl, she looked to the founder of phenomenology as "the Master," but, also like many other students, could not follow the leader's move from realism to idealism. Stein's own work focused on the notion of empathy (*Einfühling*), an idea Husserl mentioned but never investigated. In Stein's view, empathy was "an experience of other individuals, the prerequisite to knowing the objective outer world (only experienced intersubjectively, through a plurality of perceiving individuals who relate in a mutual exchange of information)." Empathy, then, was the key to understanding intersubjectivity, which was in turn the pivotal point of epistemology, since knowing took place in the context of personal relationships.

Influenced by her association with the Reinachs, who were devout Lutherans, and her encounter with Scheler (whose lectures were the "first push along the road to conversion"), Stein embraced the Catholic faith and was baptized into the Church in 1922. Prefiguring Karol Wojtyła's synthesis, she undertook a "phenomenological translation" of Aquinas, rendering the great scholastic's thought intelligible to modern German philosophy.

Although shielded somewhat by her adopted religion and Carmelite habit from the designs of the Nazis, she was transferred to Holland in 1936 to avoid the increasingly bold grasp of Hitler's minions. The border proved to be little protection and Nazi occupation of The Netherlands brought with it constant fear of deportation. That fear was realized in 1942, when the Dutch Catholic bishops issued a public protest against Jewish persecution. The fallout included reprisals against Jewish Catholic converts, and Sister Benedicta of the Cross was soon among the victims. She was last seen at a train stop in eastern Germany by a mail truck driver who noticed her religious dress. The train was bound for Auschwitz.

### **European Personalism I: France**

Concurrent with the development of German personalism, a school similar in some ways was evolving in France. It has already been mentioned that Charles Renouvier had used the term *personalism* by the first decade of the twentieth

century, denoting the emphasis on the individual human being that characterized Renouvier's approach. While Renouvier can be seen as one of the earliest French personalists, his thought differs in important respects from the most prominent exemplars of the school who would succeed him. Renouvier was, following Albert Knudson's terminology, a "relativistic personalist." For Renouvier the idea of the human mind as the constructor of reality trumped the notion of the human mind as needing to conform to objectively existing reality. Later figures in the French setting, in contrast, would be "realistic personalists."

Gabriel Marcel (1888—1973) was one such figure. Sometimes categorized as a "Christian existentialist," Marcel strenuously objected to the characterization during his life, and deliberately distanced himself from well-known existentialists such as Jean-Paul Sartre.

While studying at the Sorbonne, Marcel came under the influence of Henri Bergson, who, "among all those whose courses I took ... was the only one whose thought and words took a sure and lasting hold on me." Marcel finished his studies in 1911, and gained a post as professor at the Lyceé de Vendôme.

In 1929, through the influence of friends including Charles Du Bos, Marcel converted to Catholicism. Intending to give full consideration to the philosophical tradition of his new faith, he met weekly with Jacques Maritain. His attempt to understand and appreciate Thomism, according to his own testimony, met with success that was "meager indeed." Marcel went so far as to criticize Maritain, arguing thus:

In remaining so attached to the use of scholastic terminology, Maritain risked rendering a disservice to Christianity by supporting the notion that it remained bound to a medieval mode of thought and thus seemed unable to accommodate the conquests of science and modern philosophy.

However, the friendship between the two philosophers was such that, at Maritain's request, Marcel desisted from publishing the article in which this criticism was contained.

Marcel's difference with Maritain notwithstanding, his philosophical sympathies locate him firmly in the personalist camp. Departing from the Cartesian method, Marcel approached philosophy from the perspective of "I exist" rather than "I think." The indispensable recognition this foundation indicated was the reality of human embodiment, i.e., the person as incarnate being. "The starting point, the central datum, of his metaphysical quest," one treatment of Marcel's thought observes, "is embodied existence. More precisely, it the human person who exists bodily. My body, in its very mode of existing, carries with it an awareness of its intersubjective bond with the existing beings around it." His heavy emphasis on

intersubjectivity is, on the one hand, an indication of Marcel's consonance with the personalist tradition and, on the other, a sign of his difference with self-described existentialists.

Marcel's intellectual sources were clearly different from those of the Germans, for example, who borrowed extensively from phenomenology ("I am barely acquainted with Husserl's philosophy," he claimed near the end of his life). Yet his formulations on many key points were remarkably similar. For instance, he drew out the importance of intersubjectivity in the following passage from *Homo Viator*:

I establish myself as a person in so far as I really believe in the existence of others and allow this belief to influence my conduct. What is the actual meaning of believing here? It means to realize or acknowledge their existence in itself, and not only through those points of intersection which bring it into relation with my own.

As John O'Malley has commented, for Marcel understanding personal interaction was essential; he recognized that "all thinking, all acting, all talking takes place within the personal context..." A final point of commonality between Marcel and most other European personalists is a view of the person as both irreducible and oriented toward a transcendent end.

Emmanuel Mounier (1905—1950) was the first French thinker to embrace the personalist label consciously. Mounier was one of the catalysts in the creation and promulgation of the influential journal *Esprit*. As such, he was personally acquainted with many of the key figures in French intellectual life from the 1930s to the 1950s. He was also deeply involved in and influenced by the radical political transformations France underwent during that period.

Indeed, Mounier's personalism can be seen in many ways as a response to the assaults on personhood launched from various directions over the course of the twentieth century, assaults to which Mounier was not always unambiguously opposed. Mounier's peculiar politics, according to historian John Hellman's analysis, resulted from his attempt "to marry black France with red France, the priests with the Jacobins, and create a transcendent synthesis." For Mounier, personalist philosophy was a remarkably pliable system of thought in the political arena; it justified at first a friendliness with Nazism before and during the Second World War, and later a leftist (though anti-Communist) position after the war.

Whatever Mounier's political credentials, his *Personalism* of 1950 encapsulated his understanding of the term and the essential tenets of the personalist point of view. *Personalism* is a compact, if unsystematic, expression of the personalist perspective from one of its most prominent adherents.

In Mounier's estimation, the philosopher's focus on the person assumes the fact of "embodied existence." That is, the human being is both body and spirit: "*I exist subjectively, I exist bodily* are one and the same experience." Any system of thought that ignores the reality of body-spirit union is erroneous and often tends to be dangerous. The spiritual dimension of the human person led Mounier to posit a philosophical defense of the traditional Christian injunction against immodesty in dress and behavior: "Physical modesty signifies, not that the body is impure, but that I am immeasurably more than a body that can be seen or touched." It was just this kind of thinking that would inspire a later European personalist—Karol Wojtyła—of a different national background—Poland—to develop a full-blown philosophy of the body.

In *Personalism*, Mounier laid to rest the objection that an emphasis on the person easily veers into atomistic individualism. Personalism, Mounier avers, is "opposed to individualism." The key to Mounier's thought on this issue is his concept of what exactly human nature involves, i.e., what is necessarily implied in the term *person*. For Mounier, being a person *ipso facto* entails sociality: "Common opinion notwithstanding, the fundamental nature of the person is not originality nor self-knowledge nor individual affirmation. It lies not in separation but in communication."

This emphasis on communication dovetails with Mounier's stress on love as the fundamental fact of human existence. Displaying some affinity with Scheler, Mounier boldly proposes that "One may almost say that I have no existence, save in so far as I exist for others, and that to be is, in the final analysis, to love." For Mounier, as for many other personalists, intersubjectivity—the interaction of personal subjects—is an intrinsic and indispensable characteristic of the human individual.

On the subject of freedom, Mounier took up themes that had been and would continue to be central to European personalists. In Mounier's estimation, freedom is, like love, an essential feature of being human. Lest personalists slip into facile paeans to liberty that serve merely to justify license, Mounier qualifies his discussion of freedom by cautioning of the need for freedom to be exercised in relation to reality. "The free man," he explains, "is the man to whom the world puts questions and who responds accordingly; he is the *responsible* man." Again, Mounier's views resonate with later personalists, such as Wojtyła, for whom the key qualifying aspect of liberty is its being "ordered to truth."

Without delving into Mounier's convoluted political involvements, suffice it to say that the grounds for his flirtation with totalitarianism are evident in his outline of personalism. Because the nature of personhood demanded sociality, Mounier believed that coercion might be employed to achieve that end. His idea of freedom as not merely the ability to choose, but the act of choosing rightly, lent itself to

being distorted into a political principle that permitted governmental intervention to force citizens to "act freely." The importance of interpersonal cooperation and the destructive nature of individualism, moreover, justified the use of state power for the purpose of enforcing social values in the economic sphere. It is the pernicious applications of personalism to the political arena by thinkers such as Mounier that has led some commentators to view the personalist approach as a dangerous one, too readily allowing cooperation with totalitarian regimes of the left or the right.

Jacques Maritain (1882-1973), though never explicitly identifying with the personalist school, is an important figure in the development of French personalism. For one, he was a key influence on the thought of Emmanuel Mounier, the acknowledged champion of personalism in the French context. Like Mounier, Maritain was controversially active on the political front, being involved with Action Française until its papal condemnation in 1927. Through the 1930s, one commentator has noted, there was a "profound unity between Maritain's and Mounier's thought. Both were convinced that contemporary civilization was in crisis and a new humanism was necessary." Both hoped, moreover, for a "new Christian order of civilization."

Joseph Amato has observed the similarities between Maritain and Mounier, in both the philosophical and the political spheres. Maritain, like Mounier, "articulated his philosophy in opposition to individualism and collectivism." Maritain's stress on an "integral humanism," and Mounier's similar stress on "personalism" led them to reject the "bourgeois individualism" and the socialist collectivism that they saw as the major political systems vying for dominance of Europe during the interwar period.

Maritain, with Mounier, saw the concept of person as the antidote to excessive individualism. Sounding a theme that echoed in both German and Polish personalist circles, Maritain described love as the phenomenon that could and should unite persons on the most profound level. "We never love the person, but only his qualities," Pascal had said, and Maritain thought the venerable Christian Platonist wrong on this point. "We love the deepest, most substantial and hidden, the most *existing* reality of the beloved being." Love penetrated to the core of what it meant to be human: this core was a "metaphysical center deeper than all the qualities and essences which we can find and enumerate in the beloved." Contrary to individualism, then, Maritain's social philosophy preserved the centrality of interpersonal relations in human existence. Personality, as opposed to individuality, "requires the communications of knowledge and love." Personality, of its essence, Maritain asserted, "asks for a dialogue in which souls really communicate."

By the 1950s, however, Mounier and Maritain had parted political ways; World

War II prompted reassessments that "led Maritain in the direction of American liberalism, and Mounier in the direction of European humanist socialism." The diverging political views of Maritain and Mounier demonstrated the disparate applications that personalist philosophy admitted, even when embraced by two thinkers of the same religious faith, nationality, and—to some extent—intellectual background.

### **European Personalism I: Poland**

As noted above, one of Husserl's students at Göttingen was Roman Ingarden. Ingarden took the phenomenological approach with him to the Jagiellonian University in Krakow, where he would influence a new generation of philosophers, among whom was one who would catapult personalism to international and non-academic popularity as head of the Catholic Church. Ingarden can thus be seen as the progenitor of yet another variation on the personalist theme, a Polish exposition of personalist principles.

Ingarden's particular appropriation of Husserl's phenomenology emphasized the latter's realist tendencies. Anna Teresa-Tymieniecka, a student of Ingarden, a translator of Wojtyla, and an important player in the Polish personalist school, characterizes Ingarden's philosophical project as "at the same time a continuation of the line of thought inaugurated by Husserl and a revolution in the very principles of that philosophy." Ingarden's method was a departure from Husserl's insofar as he "reject[ed] the transcendental bounds of the phenomenological method and proceed[Ed] on the purely ontological grounds from which [Ingarden's] investigation starts and on which it remains."

One of the approaches Ingarden took to investigating the ontological reality of being human was a phenomenological analysis of human action. His praxiological theory enabled him to avoid the excessively communitarian leanings of a Mounier, the absolutist notions of a Bowne, and the radical individualism that all personalists eschewed:

In order to be 'independent' of the surrounding world in his decisions and in the actions issuing from them, the person must, above all, contain a center of action, which enables him to take initiative and at the same time to have defence mechanisms which prevent his being disturbed in his action. But he must also be sensitive to outside intrusions, insofar as his responsibility springs from a determinate form of his living together with the surrounding reality, and particularly with other people.

Ingarden thus appreciated the insight of phenomenologists who recognized the inescapable fact of a person's being in relation to others (Heidegger's "being-in-the-world"), without abdicating the position that the person preserved an

independent core, the source of human action and the basis of one's freedom (and thus responsibility).

This conception of personal freedom recalled Maritain's treatment of the subject, and was a key part of the philosophical project of Ingarden's student, Karol Wojtyla. While Ingarden and Wojtyla were always careful to nuance their presentations of freedom so as to distinguish their understanding from that of a radically individualist sort (both stressed the idea of responsibility as inextricably bound together with any discussion of freedom), it may be no accident that the Polish personalists (with Maritain) were more favorably disposed toward liberal democracy than were other personalist thinkers.

Karol Wojtyla's concern with the person as the object of philosophical investigation, may, like Mounier's, be seen as a response to the undermining of individual personal dignity that Wojtyla experienced firsthand as a native of Poland. Born in 1920, during the brief period of democratic Poland, Wojtyla's life from his teenage years on was dominated by totalitarian political systems, first Nazism and then Communism. Against the debasement of the individual person attending both fascist and Marxist regimes, Wojtyla advocated an intellectual and cultural rebellion that upheld personal dignity and freedom.

Wojtyla's earliest major work, *The Acting Person*, reflects these concerns. Explaining his rationale for investigating in such depth a subject as seemingly pedestrian as the human being itself, Wojtyla noted that

man is the first, closest, and most frequent object of experience, and so he is in danger of becoming usual and commonplace; he risks becoming too ordinary even for himself.... [This study] was borne out of that wonderment at the human being which, as we know, initiates the first cognitive impulse.... Man should not lose his proper place in the world that he has shaped himself.

Even while his corpus remains incomplete and Karol Wojtyla continues as Pope John Paul II, a debate has raged over the philosophical orientation of the Polish philosopher turned pope—that is, over whether he is indebted mainly to phenomenology or to scholasticism. Because of Wojtyla's eclectic education in, on the one hand, modern philosophy at the Jagiellonian, and, on the other, traditional Thomism at the Angelicum in Rome, powerful arguments can be made on both sides of the dispute. According to Ronald Modras, for instance, "Karol Wojtyla is a Thomist. He uses the methods of phenomenology to demonstrate and substantiate Thomistic principles." All commentators admit that both Thomism and some kind of phenomenology were synthesized in Wojtyla's approach to philosophy, but the debate centers on which school holds primary importance in the pope's view.

The dispute receives some impetus from the fact that Anna Teresa-Tymieniecka, the pope's colleague at Lublin in the philosophy department, was granted sole rights of translation for Wojtyla's most important work, *Osoba y czyn* (*The Acting Person*). It is generally agreed that Tymieniecka's translation was tendentious, emphasizing the phenomenological aspects of Wojtyla's thought to the neglect of the more metaphysical Thomistic elements.

In any case, it is perhaps most accurate to consider Wojtyla's work to be a true synthesis, in which the insights of personalism and the insights of Thomism were both given equal play, and something new created, that can properly be called personalistic Thomism, or Thomistic personalism. As one former student of Wojtyla's has put it, the Polish pope's philosophy might best be characterized as an "existential personalism, which is metaphysically explained and phenomenologically described."

### **Recent Developments in Personalism**

Thomas Bokenkotter has placed the apex of French personalism in the immediate post-World War II years, when Mounier and his colleagues offered a religiously meaningful alternative to the nihilistic tendencies of Sartrean existentialism, without sharing in the stigma of the conservative Catholic elements that had been implicated in the Vichy regime. Maritain, too, enjoyed significant influence in the postwar era, with his views providing the "principal ideological underpinning" of the new Christian Democratic parties. In some European circles, personalism remained a viable intellectual force through the end of the century, as the Polish example indicates. In the United States, moreover, personalism flourished as the inspiring philosophy of Dorothy Day and her Catholic Worker movement.

Dorothy Day (1897—1980) took her personalist cue not from the indigenous American brand of the Boston idealists, but from a variant of the French School, personified in Peter Maurin (1877—1949). Maurin, born in France and a devotee of the writings of, *inter alia*, Mounier and Maritain, provides one link between French and American modes of personalism.

By all accounts an eccentric figure, Maurin left France in 1909 for the New World, moved from Canada to the United States in 1911, and led a predominantly transient life thereafter. Like Mounier and the early Maritain, Maurin rejected both capitalism and Marxism. The foundation of the economy, he insisted, should be "person, not profit." Marxism accurately located the alienation of the worker in the division of labor and the separation of people from the land, but Maurin believed that Marxism's practical result was state socialism. Socialism, in Maurin's view, merely reorganized the material world, instead of calling for what was needed—a radical return to the recognition of the primacy of spiritual values.

Maurin idealized the pre-industrial economy and social order, and this aligned him with other American anti-modernist movements, such as the Southern Agrarians. At the same time, his political efforts, such as they were, could hardly be considered conservative. Maurin advocated a "personalist democracy," and the eclectic nature of his conception of personalism might be glimpsed by the participants in a symposium he organized in 1937; they included Roger Baldwin of the ACLU ("Personalist-Humanist"); Louis Finkelstein of Jewish Theological Seminary ("Personalist-Theist"); A.J. Muste of the Labor Temple ("Personalist-Christian"); and Carlton Hayes of Columbia University ("Personalist-Catholic").

Politically, the Catholic worker movement could be fairly consistently located on the left, though its anti-statist outlook distinguished it from many of its would-be allies. Day herself exhibited the political problem that John Hellman ascribed to Mounier: personalistic principles tend to allow unseemly coziness with totalitarianism. While personally a model of good will and respect for individual freedom, Day was favorably disposed toward Castro and the Cuban revolutionaries of 1959. Her position reflected both her concern for the long-neglected poor of the island nation and her naivete about the human abuse endemic to Communist regimes.

Meanwhile, the Boston personalist school, though dissipated, is not defunct. A third generation of Boston personalists arose in the 1930s and forties, including Brightman's student, Peter Bertocci (1910—1989), John Lavelly, and Richard Millard. Bertocci's interests were primarily in the philosophy of religion, ethics, and metaphysics. By the late 1970s, however, none of these was at Boston University, and the only explicitly personalist thinker there was Erazim Kohak. Kohak represented a twist in the Boston tradition. Whereas—as elucidated earlier in this essay—other Bostonians pointed to Berkeley, Kant, and Hegel as their intellectual predecessors, Kohak had intellectual roots in Husserl and Husserl's disciples in Czechoslovakia. Thus is noted a connection once again between the Boston trajectory of personalism and its European counterpart, a connection severed in the nineteenth century with the different philosophical directions taken by Husserl and Borden Bowne.

In philosophy, a fourth generation of Boston personalists can be found outside of Boston. Some of the following are still active: Thomas Buford at Furman University; John Howie at Southern Illinois University; Jack Padgett at Albion College, Michigan; Warren Steinkraus at State University of New York, Oswego; and Robert Beck at Clark University. Buford founded a successor to *The Personalist* entitled *The Personalist Forum*. The editor of that journal is currently Randall Auxier of Southern Illinois University, who might be considered a fifth generation Boston personalist.

Personalism continues to represent the main intellectual thrust of a number of

American and European thinkers arising out of the European tradition. A group associated with the International Academy of Philosophy in Liechtenstein, including Josef Seifert, John Crosby, and Rocco Buttiglione, have combined a phenomenologically-oriented personalist philosophy in the line of Scheler with a commitment to Catholicism.

In 1999, the European journal *Ethical Perspectives* devoted an issue to the question "Is Personalism Still Alive in Europe?," the cumulative effect of which was to answer in the affirmative. Besides the main centers already discussed in this paper, editor Luk Bouckaert introduced two other instances of recent personalism, including the "Prague personalism" of Jan Patočka and Vaclav Havel, and the "Leuven personalism" of Louis Janssens. Finally, Bouckaert pointed to the rise of "economics and ethics" research, including the work of 1997 Nobel Prize laureate Amartya Sen, as indications of a "tendency towards a more personalist economics."

## **Conclusion**

Given the foregoing discussion, several general points might be proposed as key characteristics of the personalist approach. First, the human person is taken as the starting point of philosophy (this in contradistinction, for example, to *a priori* truths or empirical scientific facts). Second, the fundamental structure of the human person is perceived as a combination of matter and spirit (this opens most personalists to the possibility of transcendence). Third, the person is conceived not as an atomistic individual, but as a being whose nature implies community (often described as "intersubjectivity"). While one or more of these points may be denied by some of the personalists treated here and may be considered rudimentary by most, they at least provide personalism some substance and a starting point for further reflection on the coherence of this philosophical movement.

Personalism continues to attract philosophers, theologians, and social ethicists who operate under its name and utilize its tradition but who do so in varying ways and to disparate ends. Its usefulness as a definition of a clearly delineated set of ideas is questionable; however, in its broad outlines, it remains a compelling approach to philosophical, political, and social issues. In light of the alternatives, an unmitigated insistence on the centrality and dignity of the human person is a promising guide to human thought and action.

Note that the present Pope comes from the personalist school...