

# APPRAISAL

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### CONTENTS

.....	.....
<i>Notes on this issue's contributors</i> .....	2
<b>Editorial</b> .....	3
<i>Three Papers from the Zoom Conference, November 2022</i> .....	
<b>Diana Prokofyeva</b> <i>Higher Education as a Part of the Service Economy</i> .....	4
<b>Henrieta Anisoara Serban</b> <i>Neopragmatism and Personalism</i> .....	8
<b>Richard Prust</b> <i>Introduction to Personal Meaning: How We Give Relational Significance, Relative Importance, Emotional Force and Moral Value to Our Action</i> .....	17
<b>Book Reviews</b> .....	
<i>Neopragmatism and Postliberalism: A Contemporary Weltanschauung</i> (Bilingual Edition): <i>Postliberalism Neopragmatism: un Weltanschauung Contemporan</i> <b>Henrieta Anisoara Serban</b> .....	28
<i>Humour and Cruelty Volume 1: A Philosophical Exploration of the Humanities and Social Sciences</i> <b>Giorgio Baruchello and Ársæll Már Arnarsson</b> .....	33
<i>Introduction to Personalism</i> <b>Juan Manuel Burgos</b> .....	36

## NOTES ON THE CONTRIBUTORS

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## Editorial

This issue begins with three full papers from our very successful Zoom Conference in November 2022. We had twice the number of persons attending (Not ‘attendees’, please!, because they *attend* and are not *attended*: cf. ‘employees’ and ‘employers’) our previous events. Although we had only four papers, the discussions filled the 30 mins. for the discussion of each of them. The author of the fourth paper could not complete it in time for inclusion in this issue but we may be hope to include it in the next issue in the Autumn.

First, Diana Prokofyeva from St Petersburg argues that Higher Education today is too much regarded as something to be ‘consumed’ (even on the BBC I have heard of ‘consuming music’), and that in disjointed bits of information, and so is losing its humanistic mission of enlarging the minds of its students. I find that this is certainly true of what is happening in Britain where university study is primarily valued in terms of its financial outcomes in terms of likely salaries and wages for graduates. So, what if graduates do not take up employment which requires a degree? Even if they have not acquired or depended an interest in some branch of knowledge or in literature or music, which can last a lifetime, they should have become to think in a more rigorous and disciplined manner and to be more discriminating (a dirty word these days!) between among the deep and the shallow, the genuine and the fake, and the fashionable and the permanent.

This ‘inversion of values’ occurs elsewhere. When a new economic project is proposed, it is valued in terms of the jobs that it will create, rather than the primary one of whether or not it will be profitable.

Next, Henrieta Serban from Bucharest traces connections between neo-pragmatism and Personalism, the former having a wider range of desirable outcomes than classical pragmatism and thus approaching a personalist outlook. In particular she explores convergences between Peirce and Husserl.

In the third article, Richard Prust from North Carolina, gives us the ‘Introduction’ to his forthcoming book, *Personal Meaning: How We Give Relational Significance, Relative Importance, Emotional Force and Moral Value to Our Action*, in which he seeks greatly to enlarge the terms by which we actually give meaning to our actions and seek to discern them in relation to the actions of others. In particular, he contrasts this richness of meaning with the poverty of meaning in the ‘behavioural sciences’.

Finally, we have reviews of three books of a personalist tenor:

Henerieta Serban’s bilingual *Neopragmatism and Postliberalism: A Contemporary Weltanschauung*.

Giorgio Baruchello’s and Ársæll Már Arnarsson’s *Humour and Cruelty Volume 1: A Philosophical Exploration of the Humanities and Social Sciences*.

And Juan Burgos’ *Introducción al Personalismo*. translated by myself with the assistance of the author and James Beauregard.

### Future Issues and Conferences

Later in 2023: Special Additional Issue of *Appraisal*: ‘Responses to Juan Manuel Burgos’ *Introduction to Personalism*, and the Author’s replies to them, collected by James Beauregard. ,

October 28th: Zoom Conference: Deadline for submissions :12th August.

November/December: Publication of *Appraisal*, Vol. 13, No. 2, Autumn, 2023.

*Appraisal* Vol. 13, No.s 3 and 4, 2024, Special Features on ‘Personalist Anthropology’.

Possible residential Conference in June/July with session on ‘Personalist Anthropology’.

Note: ‘Philosophical Anthropology’ is an established discipline in Continental Europe but is unknown in the English-speaking world, where only philosophy of mind has been pursued but it has included the ‘Mind-Body Problem’. In contrast, Philosophical Anthropology considers the whole person, thinking, feeling, desiring, acting, social, etc., and, in contrast to empirical anthropology, it considers what is universal and necessary to being a person. John Macmurray’s, *The Form of the Personal*: Vol. 1, *The Self as Agent*, and Vol 2, *Persons in Relation*, and Raymond Tallis’ trilogy, *The Hand, The Knowing Animal, and I Am*, are definitely examples of Anglophone Philosophical Anthropology, but are not currently ‘mainstream’. Charles Taylor’s *The Sources of the Self*, and *Philosophical Papers*, could also be mentioned.

## HIGHER EDUCATION AS PART OF THE SERVICE SECTOR.

*Diana Prokofyeva*

**Abstract.** In this article, the author discusses the phenomenon of higher education, as it could be seen in the 21st century, when the tendency to focus on the constant people's consumption of products of material and spiritual culture has become very bright. An important question is whether education is now perceived as a tool for a person to know the world and oneself, to reveal his / her creative abilities and spiritual horizons? Or has it turned into one of the utilitarian components of the service sector, having lost its humanistic purpose? Being a teacher of Philosophy at the university, the author reflects on the trends in education and its role.

**Keywords:**

philosophy of education, education, existential vacuum, Erich Fromm, Emmanuel Mounier, Viktor Frankl, personalism.

The tendency for constant consumption is a striking and obvious feature of modern society. It concerns both spheres of our life – material and spiritual, – and also many aspects of it. If the manifestation of the phenomenon of consumption in the material sphere is more obvious, then in the spiritual sphere everything may not seem so unambiguous. For example, it is the consumption of ‘products’, results, derivatives of the objectified spiritual sphere. This includes books, music, theatrical productions, films, TV-series, and so on. This is something that today is very quickly turning into a phenomenon that we unite with the concept of ‘popular culture’ or ‘mass culture’. On the one hand, this is something that, of course, can enrich spiritually and contribute to the development of each person. On the other hand, it is a way to relax, which is so necessary for all of us, and this is also an entertainment. Let’s also not forget that this can be a sort of escapism and avoiding reality for a person, or an attempt not to act intensively in one's own life, remaining passive and filling days with something pleasant for oneself. It may be a sort of hedonism. The mass embodiment of the spiritual sphere is obtained when the production and consumption of such derivatives of it are put on stream. Mass culture, or rather, its components (these are its products), are designed to entertain people, ‘pull’ us out of the routine life, and help to resist boredom.

Higher education also becomes part of the service sector today. It is designed to satisfy our needs in obtaining knowledge, certain skills and abilities, developing any inclinations, abilities of a person, in revealing and developing a person as such, as well as further adapting one’s life in society. It would seem nothing that new. But at the same time, education should be interestingly ‘delivered’ to students, it should captivate a person. Of course, the desire to make lectures interesting was present before, but for the most part it was based on the erudition and oratory skills of the lecturer, on new and unique information that the lecturer passed on to students.

Today’s world lives in a real endless stream of information and almost everyone has access to it. For example, it is an opportunity to use libraries (including e-libraries) and numerous Internet resources. Under such conditions, knowledge ceases to have uniqueness and value, it has become an ordinary part of people's lives, and an access to scientific knowledge is almost as easy to get as to trivial knowledge. Thus, not just information becomes important for students, but structured knowledge, the ability to systematize it, the method of transferring and presenting that knowledge, as well as the form of presenting information, which should be exciting and interesting. In addition, the key message here is the teacher’s ought. If the way of presenting information is not captivating, then student’s attention would be reduced. However, this is natural. And if we are talking about ‘teacher’s ought’, then this is a consequence of the fact that a modern person really has to perceive the world as an endless stream of information, but they also become a ‘victim’ of the desire for entertainment. In order to fix one’s attention on this or that fact, object or information, one needs a very strong internal motivation, as well as something that will help to break out of such a flow of information and keep this attention. Obviously, an involuntary attention can be held for a short time. A person needs bright points. As many bright points as possible. Arbitrary attention requires additional efforts from a person oneself.

Alvin Toffler called it a consequence of a blip culture. We are talking about the fact that people exchange certain pieces and fragments of information. Toffler wrote: ‘Instead of receiving long, related ‘strings’ of ideas, organized or synthesized for us, we are increasingly exposed to short, modular blips of information ads, commands, theories, shreds of news, truncated bits and blobs that refuse to fit neatly into

our pre-existing mental files. The new imagery resists classification, partly because it often falls outside our old conceptual categories, but also because it comes in packages that are too oddly shaped, transient, and disconnected.<sup>1</sup> And also: ‘Third Wave’ people, by contrast, are more at ease in the midst of this bombardment of blips – the ninety-second news-clip intercut with a thirty-second commercial, a fragment of song and lyric, a headline, a cartoon, a collage, a newsletter item, a computer printout. Insatiable readers of disposable paperbacks and special-interest magazines, they gulp huge amounts of information in short takes. But they also keep an eye out for those new concepts or metaphors that sum up or organize blips into larger wholes.<sup>2</sup> Toffler also notes that the need to constantly establish one's own understanding and vision of reality contributes to demassification, and this requires some effort and even courage.

In this regard, it is also appropriate to recall Erich Fromm and his work ‘Escape from Freedom’, where he noted that ‘the one side of the growing process of individuation is the growth of self-strength.... The other aspect of the process of individuation is growing aloneness.’<sup>3</sup> That is, on the one hand, individualization is always self-knowledge and the search for one's own path, including the path of development, the disclosure of one's own personality, but on the other hand, it is separation from others. After all, we become more different from each other, and, therefore, more alienated or estranged. Because the other one is not like me. And this causes an anxiety of a person. And, of course, such a barrier is more difficult to overcome, because it requires a free look at the other person, recognition that this Other has the right to their own individuality, which may be so different from mine.

Another important feature of a person in the modern world is that their attention is often scattered, they gradually lose the ability to concentrate on something. Here is how Fromm wrote about it in his other work ‘On Disobedience and Other Essays’: ‘The ability to concentrate has become a rarity in the life of a modern person. On the contrary, it seems that he does everything to avoid concentration. He likes to do several things at the same time, such as listening to music, reading, eating, talking with friends.’<sup>4</sup> The rhythm of life is accelerating, and people have a desire to make the most of it and spend as little time as possible on it. And in this regard, the ability of a person to concentrate their attention on several problems at the same time is very much appreciated, as if they are trying to follow this both at work and also in their usual everyday life. But doesn't this desire to concentrate on several things at the same time mean an inability to really concentrate on any of them? As if a person is busy with only one thing, they begin to feel uncomfortable, especially when it comes to daily activities that are familiar to us – eating, walking, and so on. This inability to concentrate on living life in the present moment makes people neurotic, makes them feel anxious and perceive the sudden silence as uncomfortable. Therefore, they strive to fill it with some kind of noise or background. This kind of distracted attention and lack of real concentration leads to the fact that a person is distracted from their own life, from what happens in it, as well as from the very course of this life. How often do students pick up phones during lectures and seminars? Of course, perhaps the whole point is that the teacher is not so talented and does not present the material very excitingly. But after all, we can often see people on their phones when they communicate with each other, and when they eat, and so on. Perhaps the point is just this scattered attention and dispersing it to different things, instead of concentrating on one thing?

Education also adapts to this feature, offering interactive lectures, presentations, video excerpts, cartoons, etc. This approach has many advantages: easier assimilation of information, increased interest on topic. The problem may arise when students are unable to perceive information in a different, ‘traditional’ and classical form.

Or maybe education should change over time? Of course, changes are normal, all living things develop over time. But an important question is what is the quality of these changes, and in what direction are they taking place? After all, adapting to the movement of time is completely healthy and natural. But on the other hand, is it right to treat students as consumers of information and knowledge, who only need to be attracted and whose attention needs to be kept?

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<sup>1</sup> Toffler, A., *The Third Wave*. P. 166

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Fromm, E. *Escape from Freedom*. Pp. 24-25

<sup>4</sup> Fromm, E. *On Disobedience and Other Essays*. 243

We can consider similar educational trends in the subject of philosophy, which is taught as an obligatory subject in almost all Russian universities. This means that it is not an elective subject for students. Despite attempts to unify philosophy and place it in a strict framework, as a university discipline, it retains its most important and organic properties, such as: self-criticism, the pursuit of truth, as well as the rejection of dogmatism, standardization and frozen forms. It not only gives the student a certain set of knowledge, but also aims to encourage reflection, makes it possible to directly ask basic existential questions, the answers to which contribute to the formation of a more mature and holistic worldview, develops critical thinking, logic, argumentation, and the ability to discuss. One of the consequences of philosophy's focus on itself and the motivation for a person to do this, is to raise questions about values – both individual and social.

Economic crises, political changes and other transformations in society provoke social conflicts, fluctuations and instability, including in the moral sphere. In my opinion, the term 'existential vacuum', proposed by the Austrian psychiatrist and psychologist Viktor Frankl, very accurately characterizes the state of a person in the late 20th – early 21st century '.... I turn to the detrimental influence of that feeling of which so many patients complain today, namely, the feeling of the total and ultimate meaninglessness of their lives.

They lack the awareness of a meaning worth living for. They are haunted by the experience of their inner emptiness, a void within themselves; they are caught in that situation which I have called the 'existential vacuum.'

This is how Frankl denotes the state of a person who has become lost, has lost the vector of movement, has been left without reliance on values and any strong social attitudes and models. He sees the reason for the emergence of an 'existential vacuum' as the decline of universal values, removal from the traditions of their ancestors and lack of understanding of what serves as a guide in their own lives. All this leads to a misunderstanding by a person of their goals, meanings and desires, with a formally large freedom of choice.<sup>6</sup> The spiritual component of the life of an individual recedes into the background, the usual values meaning lose their original signification, and there is a bias towards the satisfaction of material needs. What we call the desire for possession and consumption becomes a kind of response to this inner emptiness that needs to be filled.

Is any service capable of such filling? Should it strive for something like this, or is it enough that the service performs its function, responding to this or another human need? And again, the question arises – should education be part of the service sector, or does it involve something more?

Of course, education in itself will not 'cure' a person from the existential vacuum, crisis and other manifestations of existence in our periodically stormy life. And itself it is not a ticket to a happy and joyful life. But education is designed to contribute to the formation of a thinking human personality, which is able to set goals for itself in life and realize them, reflect, avoid possible manipulation of consciousness, realize one's own responsibility for free actions, and so on.

If the goal is to achieve material and moral comfort in the absence of any desire to develop and master new social, spiritual and cultural spaces, then this does not save from the appearance of an existential vacuum, which in a lighter form manifests itself in boredom and, as a result, in a new thirst for consumption, in a more severe version, it can degenerate into a depressive state of a person. A reflective person who does not try to escape from oneself into entertainment or fill time with routine and some strained deeds will feel this existential vacuum even having achieved a state of material well-being. This feeling of lack of something more will lead to the understanding that material well-being does not bring feelings of happiness and complete satisfaction with life, despite the constant retransmission of this talking point in the media. In addition, it will give an impulse to a closer examination of their own personal values and aspirations. In such cases, a person goes beyond the usual, begins to search for something more, sometimes they are even able to refuse the accumulated material wealth, realizing that it did not bring them the expected happiness, which will cause an undoubted misunderstanding of others. An example is the phenomenon of downshifting.

The spiritual component of life is a necessary condition for the development of society, the continuation of its normal functioning, and it requires a careful attitude towards itself. For its preservation and

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<sup>5</sup> Frankl, V.E. *Man's Search for Meaning*. 110-111

<sup>6</sup> Frankl, V. E. *Suffering from the meaninglessness of life. An actual psychotherapy*. 7.

development, our society (to the world community as a whole) should pay attention to the ideas of involving a person both in social life and in the processes of reflection and self-knowledge, responsibility, and focus on dialogue. This must be understood both at the level of an individual and at the level of the state, and, in this way, there will be a gradual overcoming of the features of an alienated person and an alienated society. Of course, an important problem that causes crises and conflicts is the mismatch of values and perceptions of values by governments of different countries, different societies. Probably, the idea of promoting Personalism itself sounds like a utopia. But not a utopia - the embodiment of the ideas and values of personalists, at least by individual individuals, for example, teachers, educators, statespeople, and so on. The French personalist Emmanuel Mounier repeats Nietzsche's idea that a person in the process of being must overcome oneself and their weaknesses, because it is precisely such constant overcoming that is an important part of the process of becoming, involving, active life and development of a person, revealing their talents and abilities, gaining own integrity<sup>7</sup>.

In the middle of the 20th century, personalists emphasized that humanity is experiencing a crisis of both moral values and a crisis of the Person as a whole. And this is extremely relevant now, in our days. And the meaning of the personalistic teaching is to help a person not only preserve oneself, their integrity, but also change oneself for the better, resist falling, decay and absurdity. Emmanuel Mounier supported the idea of support in a society based on free and involved individuals, but he also spoke of the need for discipline in society, which, however, becomes useless in the absence of spirituality.

Spirituality is a condition for the development of society, which has practically lost its significance today. This word seems to have become synonymous with backwardness and can only be adequately perceived in the context of Eastern mystical practices. But if we take into account that a person is not only a body, but also a spirit and soul, then spirituality becomes not just a word. And for its preservation and development, involvement, independence, responsibility, dialogue should be cultivated – qualities worthy of a real responsible person. By and large, this is all that education should be aimed at, in addition to the supply of information and the intellectual development of a person.

And here the special role of philosophy is manifested, which allows a person to link together their own views, beliefs, values, helps to reflect and critically comprehend reality and their own self, to understand the connection between freedom and responsibility, and develops inquisitiveness. The formation of a holistic worldview leads to harmonious development and the formation of a conscious, mature and responsible personality, as well as respect for other people. In fulfilling its critical function, philosophy will serve as a kind of filter for beliefs and principles.

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<sup>7</sup> Mounier E. *What is personalism?* /# Translation from French. I. S. Vdovina

## NEOPRAGMATISM AND PERSONALISM

*Henrieta Serban*

### **Abstract.**

In this investigation, neopragmatism is not something entirely different from classic pragmatism, but it only turns to new aspects that were not previously considered by pragmatism. Neopragmatism places a supplementary accent on language, meaning and experience - lived and sensed experience. The human being is a complete, tridimensional, semiotic animal, presenting the syntactic, semantic and pragmatic dimensions. At the same time the person unveils along the same co-ordinates. This conception about the human being is specific for both neopragmatism and personalism. In this respect, the common ground between phenomenology and pragmatism (I address several similarities between Husserl and Peirce) is relevant for a discussion of personalism. The person is the human being of expression and meaning (Ernst Cassirer and Lucian Blaga), who is different from the 'individual' in several important aspects, although the person is subject to rights and inherent dignity as is the individual, when conceived in political philosophy. I find a particularly interesting aspect in relating neopragmatism and personalism: The person is always a surprising, paradoxical and active participant in an ontological circle of actualisation and becoming which renders any philosophical discussion of 'new' asked personality, post personalism, deeply related to human expressivity, actualisation and becoming, is defined by the idea of authenticity behind the mask, unveiled in expressivity, in artworks.

### **Keywords:**

pragmatism, personalism, phenomenology, Husserl, Peirce.

Philosophical traditions are deeply expressive and meaningful; therefore, often, they function as interlocutors for one another the same way persons are. In this paper the central metaphor of the resounding man is meant to reveal a specific and meaningfully predicating concept of person situated at the intersection of, or, *within* the "conversation" among (neo)pragmatism, (post) personalism and phenomenology.

Neopragmatism is a more recent philosophical tradition than pragmatism, on which it is nevertheless based. To define *pragmatism*, we have to emphasize first that agency in the world is related to the possibilities of knowledge and the resulting knowledge. The person is the agent: a human being, a self, relating to herself, to the world and, eventually, to a community. In my view, considering in correlation personalism and neopragmatism, knowledge of self and the world is not so far apart from creation and creativity.

The starting point of pragmatism is identified in Charles Peirce's 1878 work, *How to Make Our Ideas Clear*. Charles Morris (1901-1979) defines pragmatics in *The Foundation of Theory of Signs* (1938), as the study of 'the relations between signs and their interpreters'.<sup>1</sup> The semiotic, social, educational implications of philosophy become central to this approach.<sup>2</sup> The human being, the self is engaged in the creation and the analysis of meaning via signs and symbols. For the pragmatic philosophers, knowledge and epistemology are no longer directions for an 'elite philosophy,' which for us does not necessarily mean that their theoretical importance is meant to disappear.

Classical pragmatism is represented by Charles Sanders Peirce (1839–1914) and William James (1842–1910) for the modern pragmatism and they remain very significant even for the neopragmatic directions as in the case of John Dewey (1859–1952), Jane Addams (1860–1935, Nobel Peace Prize in 1931), and George Herbert Mead (1863–1931). John Dewey brings to pragmatism particularly current concerns for democracy and democratic education with connections and continuations in important contemporary philosophical works, such as those of Ludwig Wittgenstein (1889-1951), Jürgen Habermas (b. 1929) and Richard Rorty (1931-2007). These timeline landmarks emphasize that the interest for pragmatism has been interlocked with an interest for the complexities of the human being, although maybe not in a linear or unitary manner. The philosophical contributions of a pragmatic and 'pragmatist' tradition in philosophy (indebted to the perspective of C. S. Peirce, 1990) and of the neopragmatic or neopragmatist type are part of a larger picture composed of much more numerous visions than those mentioned here.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Charles Morris. (1938). *The Foundations of the Theory of Signs*. Chicago: Chicago University Press, p. 6.

<sup>2</sup> Paul Cobley (editor). (2010). *Routledge Companion to Semiotics*. London, New York: Routledge, passim.

<sup>3</sup> There is another relatable direction of research associated to this investigation that I have conducted in my 2021 book,



On the other hand, neopragmatism is characterized by contextualism and contingency; it develops anti-essentialism and anti-representationalism through prominent representatives such as Richard Rorty, Hilary Putnam (1926-2016) and Robert Brandom (b. 1950); however, although I am acknowledging their important contributions, I shall not approach here these thought trajectories, for brevity reasons, since this is just a study.

Pragmatism in Peirce's terminology, or pragmatism as is widely termed can be defined as one strain of philosophy of action that capitalizes on rationalism in/of everyday life, which it associates in *neopragmatism* via a series of themes about contingency and responsibility (toward the self and toward others). Such themes are very important for personalism, too. Pragmatism implies a specific combination of fallibilism and intellectualism followed by the role of putting truth into perspective, as contextualized truth and not as absolute truth. Within the context described by this approach, Peirce (1990) outlines the "pragmatic maxim": *the meanings of philosophical hypotheses can be clarified only by correlation with practice* and, more precisely, with the *practical consequences* they produce. In other terms, the meanings of the philosophical hypotheses are consequential, or, resounding. The same goes for persons: in personalism, the person is resounding, too, the person makes a difference, the person creates meaning relevant for life and the others by expression of an interior, via lived life, in the outside world.

We consider the interests of neopragmatism and personalism connected to a 'subjective turn' – a return to examining the importance of the person oriented in the world by self-expression, via creativity and knowledge. The subjective turn could be better understood through *neopragmatism*, seen as a philosophy of meaning and truth, as well as of purpose; and even through phenomenology, as a philosophy of appearances which do not necessarily contradict the essences anymore. The purpose of whatever-is unveils for the most part via the how-is-it of the what-is-it, due to a perspective, or a certain starting point, or a situation, generated or infused with meaning due to a subjectivity (and personalist action).

The confluence between the phenomenological and semiotic aspects that we consider valuable for the neopragmatic profile of subjectivity has a main founding in the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) – his philosophy has placed in relation the things, the appearance of things to someone, the meaning, intuition and logic. We emphasize via Husserlian phenomenological approach, first, the meaningful unity of the person, second, the idea that there cannot be subjectivity without an ascendant of objectiveness inscribed in that very subjectivity and third, the confluences between phenomenology and pragmatism, relevant for the understanding of the person.

The person found in personalism at the centre of a philosophical system reunites aspects pertaining to phenomenology and pragmatism: personalist philosophy originates from an "intuition" about the person herself, about the personal reality and the personal experience that steams from the objects of this intuition. Deeper roots of personalism are present in existentialism and in German idealism, in the reactions to it as well as in ethics and in a philosophy of the moral sense. Self-awareness is with necessity central to personalism, as the highway of the significant values and meanings derived from unmediated experience. Producing knowledge, the person comes to terms with her or his original intuitions (as in phenomenology and existentialism), while validating frameworks for desirable action, moral action inclusively. It is important to emphasize that these intuitions cannot be disconnected from the value-meaning relationship, specific for the human being.

However, the personalist value-meaning relationship is not merely gnoseological and ethical. It is artistic, too. The cultural life of man reunites human knowledge, human ethics and human art. They are not entirely separated human universes, but they have in common this crucial value-meaning connection relevant both for the human interiority and for the human external world. It is in this sense that another etymological explanation of the term 'person' comes from the Latin *per sonare*. It opens a more meaningful perspective than the theatrical persona – actional but masked, hidden, not truly revealed. The person is, in the interpretative perspective defended here, open by *per sonare*, expressive in all the actional, gnoseological or ethical endeavours. The person is a resounding interior reaching out to the world. Edmund Husserl has in attention "the return from the naïve existential, objectivism, toward transcendental subjectivism, a return which is more Kantian than Cartesian<sup>4</sup>, in order to remedy the state of subordination of philosophy to science. However, this remedies to a certain extent the subordination of the person to either logic and reason or to psychology and dissolving psychologism.

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titled *Neopragmatism and Postliberalism. A Contemporary Weltanschauung* (published in Bucharest, in 2021, in a bilingual Romanian-English edition), in order to offer in a fair manner this 'image' of the complexity for the field of

<sup>4</sup> Alexandru Surdu. (2003). *Contemporary Philosophy*. Editor Viorel Vizureanu. Bucharest: Editura Paideia, p. 82.

The pure self should constitute the starting point and the foundation, as well for philosophy as for the sciences and also, Husserl believes, for the 'very existence of the objective world'. This scientific and ontic foundation of the world is called transcendental and it is the result of a transcendental experience that is maintained at the level of pure possibility, of the prescriptions of the a priori rules for realities, the respective theory is called 'phenomenological science'. It does not refer to, says Husserl the empty identity of 'I exist', but it contains the data of the transcendental experience included in a universal and apodictic structure of the self, regarding, for instance, the temporal and apodictic form of the experience of the self.<sup>5</sup>

As a result, human existence cannot be conceived as something explainable by science alone and human action correlates to an 'interiority' which calls for a complex view of subjectivity. A main concept of Husserl's phenomenology is intentionality or the directed character of our experience about things.<sup>6</sup> Experience is *about* something and it is a property of human conscience and of the manner in which we become conscious about our conscience, ensuring the possibility of *a conscience about something*.

Things are from their appearance to someone, yet, that appearance carries meaning, too. Phenomenological description of objects is a different interpretation from the simple description by considering the context of the experience of the respective thing, as well as the conditions of possibility of the experience.

Phenomena presuppose, for Husserl, as well contents that describe the manner of being for things (in Husserl's terms, this is the 'noematic' aspect) and acts accompanied by subjective modalities of conscience (that presuppose the conscience and consciousness of something; that is, the 'noetic'). As a consequence, a situation is organized through intentionality (*Sachlage*) and in correlation with a state of things (*Sachverhalt*). Schematics sustain reasoning and inferences. In Husserl, the object is involved in the conscience and the schematics and the organization in the description of the object belong to conscience. For this reason, a great part of the object and context perception is accomplished through the representational schemes.

The Husserlian method is the placement in between brackets of objects, things, or the world to arrive at the pure object, pure thing, pure world, at whatever the world (the thought things) transfers at the level of consciousness, along with thought, in an idealist and subjective manner. As Alexandru Surdu, who has mentioned *per sonare* as etymological a root for person at one occasion, has also shown in his works:

Husserl speaks explicitly about the 'transcendental constitution of an object', namely, about its reconstitution so that it corresponds to a certain category of objects, intentional objects. The typical structure or the formal general type is analogous rather to a skeleton that is going to be completed with ontic, psychical, logical determinations, according to the domain of intentionality that can take in attention natural objects or nature as a whole, psycho-physical beings, people, social communities, objects of culture, or, as Husserl says, an objective world in general, considered in a pure manner, as a world of a possible conscience. This is a world which is constituted in a pure manner, as an object of conscience, in the transcendental self.<sup>7</sup>

We see in this quotation how the self becomes a joint channel for subjectivity and objectivity, in the sense that objectivity and subjectivity are no longer the structuralist opposites. After all, it is the subject who puts selected aspects in between brackets. The method of placing things in between brackets leads Husserl to a form of accentuated subjective idealism, to a 'pure ego'. As well, the 'real world', as the 'real existence', is transferred into the world of the subjective conscience, into a world of the self, overrated.

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<sup>5</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 83.

<sup>6</sup> Edmund Husserl. (1962). *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology*. Translation by W. R. Boyce Gibson. New York: Macmillan.

<sup>7</sup> Alexandru Surdu. (2003). *Contemporary Philosophy*. Bucharest: Editura Paideia, p. 87.

He [Husserl] understands the role of Reality, of the scientific character and, especially, in the elaboration of the Real Existence, only that, starting from the self, he won't rely on an authentic brute Existence, but he would deduct it, too, from the conscience of the self. This is going to determine as well the corresponding diminishing of the function that the Being should play, as well in the psychological, as in the logical understanding. For the psychic is exercised through the action of every objectifying stimulus on the conscience, while the logical is involved through the action of the conscious man on the exterior objects. Besides these, an effective construction of the Real Existence cannot be. Through a pure psychology and a pure logic of a pure self only a pure world can be built, more precisely, a pure idea about the world.<sup>8</sup>

Husserlian investigation is a conceptualisation based on intuitions and categorical intuitions meant to restore a state of things (*Sachverhalt*). And this is not reserved for an elite, but it is within reach for any person with good intellectual and rational capacities. It is a person, a healthy and normal person who is presupposed to follow the categories formed, also such schematics and manners of organizations due to the formal categories. The interpretation as is usually conceived takes a second place in relation to the interest for the morphologies of formal and ontological-formal categories, in comparison to the preoccupation for the logic of the consequences and of the non-contradictions and against the meta-logical aspects involved in the construction of a theory of the theories.<sup>9</sup>

Charles Sanders Peirce (1839-1914) elaborated, independently from Husserl, a phenomenology as logic: a 'study that observed various elements implicated by what we are experimenting', by what they have in commune within the classes that they compose, in what they have different and in what they have relational, in order to "unveil the *fundamental structure* (emphasis added) of the experience that we experiment" (that is, not of the abstract experience).<sup>10</sup>

Investigating pragmatism and phenomenology, Herbert Spiegelberg found in his work from 1957<sup>11</sup> four common aspects for the phenomenological perspectives of Husserl and Peirce:

1. Both entertain a fresh and intuitive type of approach, both are introspective and descriptive in relation to whatever was observed, without theoretical preconceptions.
2. Both deliberately ignore the reality-unreality dichotomy.
3. The insistence regarding the radical differences between phenomenology and psychology.
4. The pretention that their phenomenology (distinct from psychology) could be able to play a role a scientific rigorous role as well for philosophy, as for logic.<sup>12</sup>

Also, Charles Dougherty identified in 'The common root of Husserl's and Peirce's phenomenologies', 1980, two common phenomenological sources for the two visions: 'the recognition of the active collaboration of the mind in the process of knowledge' and the 'use of a method for the separation of the parts that are not independent from a whole', something that Husserl called *boundless free variation*, and Peirce, *prescission*.<sup>13</sup> The person should be seen as whole, too, as the 'open totality'<sup>14</sup>, governed by 'integrative concepts'<sup>15</sup>.

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 88.

<sup>9</sup> In this sense, phenomenology is situated by Husserl at the basis of logic and philosophy. As Oscar Wilde said, only someone very superficial can afford to ignore appearances.

<sup>10</sup> Nathan Houser. (2010). "Peirce, phenomenology and semiotics". In Paul Cobley (editor), *Routledge Companion to Semiotics*. London, New York: Routledge, p. 95.

<sup>11</sup> Herbert Spiegelberg. (1956). „Husserl's and Peirce's phenomenologies: Coincidence or interaction?". *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research*. Vol. 17, pp. 164–185.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*. Charles Dougherty. (1980). 'The common root of Husserl's and Peirce's phenomenologies'. *The New Scholasticism*. Vol. 54, pp. 305-325.

<sup>14</sup> The human being is described as 'open totality' via twenty-seven categories taken as stages, or stairsteps of the 'real' understood as the core of 'reality': in Plato they are being, state, motion, identity and otherness; in Aristotle we have individual being, quantity, quality, relationship, space, time, modality, action, passivity possession; and in Kant we encounter the categories of unity, plurality, totality, non-existence, existence, limitation, substance, causality, community, possibility, reality and necessity. Constantin Noica. (1969). *Douazeci si sapte trepte ale realului [Twenty Seven Stair steps of the Real]*. Bucharest: Editura Stiintifica.

The object of study of phenomenology is in Peirce *phaneron*, derived from the Greek term *phaneron* which means *manifest* (character) and this is the reason why, for Peirce, an adequate name for phenomenology would be ‘phaneroscopy’ (a term formed to imply a thorough investigation of the *phaneron*). A *phaneronis* composed by ‘whatever is present in mind in any sense and in any modality, indifferently if that would be fact or phantasm’<sup>16</sup>.

*Prescission* is the preferred technique in the phenomenology of Peirce meant to separate (to distinguish in order to accomplish an inventory) off the identifiable component elements in what is manifest from what we experiment, in *phaneron*. Prescission is accompanied by other forms of phenomenological separation; the dissociation and the discrimination. Dissociation emphasizes ‘the consciousness about a thing without the necessity of a simultaneous consciousness about another thing’<sup>17</sup>. When something is presented dissociated, it registers this way, dissociated, in the manner in which it is ‘proposed’ by experience. The dissociation is a more powerful technique; the discrimination is weaker, but more subtle, dealing with the distinctions identified in meaning.

In my view, expression comes to restore the unity of the separated elements. The human person has the need or at least the nostalgia of the wholeness – the call of the *gestalt*. The resounding being aims to do exactly that: attempt at restoration of being and authenticity via expressivity of personal meaning.<sup>18</sup>

In Peirce, all the above logical operations are not reserved for the few, but for all interested and able to grasp semiotics and the Peircean idea that semiotics is a discipline which studies the semiotic phenomena and not only signs, conveying an understanding of the formation of relations, for the organisation of a system and for the dependence, among the systemic elements. Interpretation and interpreter become very important in this philosophical endeavour. Most persons understand that the world can be explained as a system of such organized systemic elements.<sup>19</sup>

The semiotic model of Charles Sanders Peirce is normative and formal, not descriptive and it surprises the *signs in action*. As a consequence, any knowledge model is founded on the “living” sign (we might say), that is a sign described as functional, active and involved in processes of signification and not on an inertial or abstract sign.

A remarkable facet of the dynamism of the semiosis (which is, in essence, the source of dynamism in the person) is surprised at the level of the three types of interpreting agents (interpreters, or ‘interpretants’, in Peirce’s terms):

- a. the immediate or emotional interpreter (for example, the one who is happy seeing a flower);
- b. the dynamic interpreter who relates her emotion with one or more reasoning models for the evaluation of the situation and for the personal positioning in relation with that (for instance, wondering why and when did it flourish, how to enjoy it more, how to take care that it lasts longer, or, that it flourishes more frequently etc., how to care for it better, how did I not see the bud etc.);
- c. the final interpreter takes a decision, actions and is influenced in her daily behaviour (or, for instance, in the habits formed).

The action is present explicitly or implicitly in all the hypostases of the process of semiosis. Again, in phenomenology, pragmatism and personalism we notice the centrality of the agency of the human being, as person. Charles Peirce as the founder of pragmatism introduced the term pragmatism derived from the Greek notion of ‘pragma’ (work, action, enterprise). This is relevant for the tradition of pragmatism since we should comprehend persons as actional expressive beings, through and beyond the metaphorical, theatrical and limited understanding of persons as “personas”. Expression is action and action is expression. People are resounding.

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<sup>15</sup> Angela Botez. (2015). *Concepte integrative antice, modern, postmoderne* [Integrative concepts, ancient, modern, postmodern]. Romanian-Spanish bilingual edition. Translation in Spanish by Cornelia Radulescu. Bucharest: Editura Pro Universitaria.

<sup>16</sup> C. S. Peirce. (1958). *Collected Papers of Charles Sanders Peirce*. Volumes 1–6. Editors C. Hartshorne and P. Weiss; volumes 7, 8. Editor A. Burks. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press. See, especially, vol. 8, section 213.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibidem*, vol. 1, section 549.

<sup>18</sup> Nathan Houser, *op. cit.*, pp. 89-100 (especially, p. 95).

<sup>19</sup> *Ibidem*.

Through ‘the idea about object’ Peirce understands the effects of the respective object (in a similar manner to considering the effects in the famous saying ‘we know the tree after the fruits’).<sup>20</sup> These effects are in relation to the experience of the knowing subject, which may be individual or collective – the experience of the community. In this sense, the validity of a logical inference depends on the experience of the knowing subject. Whatever is valid for one may not be valid also for another, in function of the experience of the community to which she belongs in a deeper sense of being ‘formed’ and ‘naturalized’ there.

Here is essential the establishing of a human purpose clearly stated. In the case of usual knowledge, we do not proceed in a formal-synthetical manner. Any result can be doubted and it happens to be caught by doubt. Contemporary philosophy stimulates the investigation and leads eventually to a conviction. But this conviction is merely an opinion.<sup>21</sup>

Differently from Husserl, Peirce emphasizes the *problem of pragmatism*, which stays in the *orientation* of pragmatism (we are talking here about Peircean pragmatism) toward opinions and convictions based on opinions, not necessarily true, but functional (from this aspect emerging also the *possibilities* of pragmatism). The logical and philosophical interpreter, who is critical and self-critical, is rather absent.

A false, but functional, useful attitude might be maintained indefinitely. ‘Truth is subordinated to use’ in this paradigm, underlines Alexandru Surdu, observing that this leads to complaisance and adaptation and, possibly, satisfaction – at a sub-philosophical level. Nevertheless, the understanding of pragmatism through the lenses of the usefulness and limit us all to the aspects less interesting of pragmatism. Thus, in this perspective the importance of truth as verifiable truth is eluded. Fact is that the rational being can understand completely the bases and the purpose of truth, as well as the fact that, at the same time, this orientation of pragmatism wants a ‘workable’ truth, disinterested by the grand Truth, eliminates the inadequacy, the revolt, the tyranny of the authoritarian point of view, the totalitarian dictate, occasioning an opening either toward the pluralism of opinions (I. Berlin).

From the perspective of Charles Peirce, man is a selfish being. Peirce’s selfish man asks ‘What good is this truth for me?’ ‘The model of truth as ‘working truth’ has its benefices, more than the ‘utility truth’ and it is suitable for the egotistic and pragmatic Peircean man. However, the variety of the human types makes possible as well the inquiring, atypical and even unadaptable versions of the human being, which, from our perspective, bring into the community other effects of the selfishness (some of these being, paradoxically, positive) and of the derivative forms of selfishness (such as envy and the desire for attention), leading thus, maybe unintentional, to new ideas, and thus to new perspectives of the world, new semiosis processes.

From the perspective of pragmatism man is a complete, tridimensional, semiotic and actional animal, presenting the syntactic, semantic and pragmatic dimensions.<sup>22</sup> This conception about the human being is also specific for neopragmatism. We can deduct from here that the epistemic “products” of a complete semiotic being are going to have (at least) a tridimensional structure, following the components enumerated above. The confluences between phenomenology and pragmatism are the confluences of a philosophy of subjectivity with increased epistemological relevance. From the perspective of phenomenology, man is an actional being able to access to categories a to a conscious knowledgeable standing via relations established among general characteristics about objects and the world.

In Romania, Alexandru Surdu (2003) refers to pragmatism ‘along the lines of English empiricism, Existence with knowledge.’<sup>23</sup> With the contribution of William James, what is true must be both verifiable and verified.<sup>24</sup> Neopragmatism, in the perspective of the same author, begins with J. Dewey as instrumental thinking, or as intellectualism concerned with the possible and actual consequences<sup>25</sup> and continues with

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<sup>20</sup> There is not at all an accident that these things were thought in the universe of the English language and culture, where functions a simple mechanism for the significance and for the definition of things: “X is what X does”, that is, X is as it is (in the sense that it has certain features, not in the tautological sense) and for that reason it does what it does (the features determine the possible manners of action).

<sup>21</sup> Alexandru Surdu, *op. cit.*, pp. 72-73.

<sup>22</sup> Paul Copley (editor), *op. cit.*, p. 159.

<sup>23</sup> Al. Surdu, *op. cit.*, p. 72.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 76.

<sup>25</sup> John Dewey. (1957). *Reconstruction in Philosophy*. Boston: Beacon, pp. 212-213.

Papinini, Vaihinger, Quine, and then Apel<sup>26</sup>, who emphasized ‘scientific community of interpretation’, with an impersonal subject of knowledge and a transcendental dimension.<sup>27</sup> Alexandru Boboc (2009) identified a ‘pragmatic turn’ a thought-action-language<sup>28</sup> unit, following the philosophy of Wittgenstein, ordered by the idea of language games<sup>29</sup>, by the action theory of language<sup>30</sup> and ordinary language<sup>31</sup>: ‘In short, the main thesis is the following: the meaning of an “act of speech” is its function; like the function of any linguistic expression, it is based on linguistic conventions, which, as they relate to modes of action, not to singular actions, become general rules.’ In a doctrine of ‘those-who-are-not-in-their-place,’ Austin establishes a number of rules that, if violated, ‘our factual utterance will be (in one way or another) unfortunate’.<sup>32</sup> ‘The meaning-function correlation is one of the updates of the language-thinking-action correlation, central in pragmatism and perpetuated in neopragmatism, with a plethora of nuances and conceptual reforms, including areas of philosophy of knowledge and epistemology. One should notice that all these aspects emerging from the pragmatic turn are relevant for nowadays personalism, too.

Almost as much as they interact, persons create. Via creations, persons validate and reassume their selves, their world and the others, in the sense of a holistic manner of belonging, in fact, metaphorically put, ‘reducing the distance’ between themselves and the others or the world. It is both liberation and connection overcoming the primal egotistic sense of self-centricity. Such a nuanced and enlarged view of personalism is called by Patrick Howe post personalism.<sup>33</sup>

In a slightly different perspective of personalism the person is more than the object of original intuition and personal experience, but a singular value with an essential role, with an even stronger accent on ethics and an anthropological-ontological personalist turn, orienting the metaphysics about person toward the ethical aspects of a ‘personal ontology’ with distinct dimensions of personal knowledge, meaning and art, and, or, culture.

The human being is a ‘resounding being’. Paraphrasing Lucian Blaga’s idea, noticing that in a word is not resounding only its meaning, but an entire universe; as in a shell, the entire sea, we can emphasize (via this dialogue among various philosophical traditions) that in a person is not resound merely an identity, but an entire universe that is centred on that specific and also dynamic resounding, forming, reforming or deforming identity. The actional person brings entire universes into existence, via creativity, expression, sensitivities and thought. On this foundation we may emphasize that experience and experienced phenomena, the objects, and eventually human life, matter. For instance, in the philosophical system of Lucian Blaga, we have in man a cultural mutation, singular in the universe. Everything “irradiates” culture and this takes place due to man, in Lucian Blaga: knowledge, science and art. This is the sense in which man cannot but create culture and history, since human creation are meaningful in the fullest sense.<sup>34</sup>

As an illustration, we can recall that in his work titled *Luciferian knowledge* (1933) Lucian Blaga makes a distinction between ‘paradisiac knowledge’ and ‘Luciferian knowledge’. In both cases, the ‘substance’ of knowledge is not reduced by (or to) its manifestations. Paradisiac knowledge comes from the mundane

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<sup>26</sup> Karl-Otto Apel. (1994). *Selected Essays*. New Jersey: Humanities Press. Karl-Otto Apel. 1981. “Social Action and the Concept of Rationality”. *Philosophical Topics*. Supplement, vol.12, p. 9-35.

<sup>27</sup> Karl-Otto Apel, *op. cit.*, p. 79.

<sup>28</sup> Benjamin L. Whorf. (1956). “Language, Thought and Reality. Selected Writings”. Ed. J.B. Carroll. New York: MIT, J. Wilky/London: Chapman & Hall. See also, H. S. Thayer. (1981). *Meaning and Action: A Critical History of Pragmatism*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. Indianapolis: Hackett.

<sup>29</sup> Ludwig Wittgenstein (2012). *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Translation Mircea Dumitru, Mircea Flonta. Foreword by Mircea Flonta. Notes on the edition Mircea Dumitru. Bucharest: Editura Humanitas.

<sup>30</sup> Austin, J. L. (1962). *How to Do Things with Words*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press.

<sup>31</sup> John Searle. (1979). *Expression and Meaning: Studies in the Theory of Speech Acts*. London, New York, Melbourne: Cambridge University Press. See also John Searle. (1995). *The Construction of Social Reality*. New York: The Free Press.

<sup>32</sup> Alexandru Boboc. (2009). “‘Pragmatic Turn’ in contemporary thought”. *Cogito*. No. 2, p. 9 [published in Romanian language].

<sup>33</sup> <https://www.theculturium.com/patrick-howe-post-personalism-in-art/>.

<sup>34</sup> See also Angela Botez, R. T. Allen, Henrieta Anisoara Serban (eds.), *Lucian Blaga: Selected Philosophical Extracts*, Vernon Press, 2018.

understanding of the term, and it is more based on the Kantian categories, while the Luciferian knowledge, revelatory, transcends the actual, concrete and pragmatic world, using the abyssal or stylistic categories. The object of Luciferian Knowledge provides 'fanc' dimensions (that-can-be-shown, in time) and "cryptic" dimensions (that-are-concealed). There is a stylistic field even in science and knowledge. As Angela Botez has noticed in the Preface to *Lucian Blaga: Selected Philosophical Extracts*, the concept of 'stylistic field' in Blaga and the concept of 'pattern', in Thomas Kuhn, are similar, as is the role of science in the two perspectives: 'The role of science [compared to art as product of human behaviour] should be seen within the intellectual history of mankind. And if science is an active factor that we cannot see how it could be totally separated from the context'. Historical phenomena, too, keep a stylistic hallmark that defines them, owed to the categories of the unconscious, termed by the philosopher as 'abyssal categories'.

Blaga's historical being is forbidden access to absolute, but through the various creations, as particular expressions of universality this being has access to universes of knowledge and culture.<sup>35</sup> This very limitation the human being is openness to relativity and creativity.<sup>36</sup> The human tendency towards historicism represents specifically the endeavour of conscious human agency to capitalize upon contingencies, not to bow to contingencies or get crushed by contingency, but to create and recreate, to change the contingencies and his universe – the world.

Most relevant for the study of persons, we were approaching above the pragmatic turn in the sense of a rhetorical turn, in the sense of a centrality of expressivity with the human being. Ernst Cassirer's symbolical man and Lucian Blaga metaphorizing man (most interesting are the revealing metaphors produced by man which set apart an intersection between art and revelatory knowledge, scientific or not.

These descriptions of man contribute to the big picture of the expressive and 'resounding' man, although Cassirer and Blaga are not exactly pragmaticists, nor truly personalists, nor phenomenologists in a total and mainstream understanding.

The human being, understood in depth and complexity, is always a person.<sup>37</sup> Scholars who study the person and place the human being in a privileged position considered a key ontological and epistemological starting point of philosophical reflection and understanding are personalists. Often, the focus of personalism is to examine the experience and the experienced convictions, emotions and world in integrity and in their expressive universes, the status, and the dignity of the human being as person, with the deepest roots in the 'resounding', expressive nature of man. Resounding is action, meaningful action which comprehension captures the person in depth.

The important lesson of the analysis of these 'turns' consists especially in understanding the modernist sources of neopragmatic challenges, detecting a holistic approach to the subject-centred, rationality, fashioned by historicity, by interests and affections, by the ethics of the right answer, by the ideas around a humanism *without* a 'new man' or *Übermensch*.

The human being is comprehended in personalism as a complex and becoming being, an open totality, constantly under change governed by personal awareness and constantly under renewal due to the above-mentioned value-meaning relations that builds the human being in a most profound manner. Values, meanings, shared values, duties and higher purpose are specific to a person and not to the 'new man' or *Übermensch*, who are at the end of their becoming, final and finite, or simply, done. The person is a promising and evolving phenomenon with a rich potential for actualization and renewal within an ethical circle of becoming impossible to predict.

Therefore, personhood or subjectivity mean much more than individualism. This is true especially in our interpretation of individualism as separation, focused on interest and individual rights, disconnected from relationship and communion, disconnected from community and shared values, from duties and higher purpose, thus the individual being caught, by choice, in an ontology of limited and prescribed meanings.

This expressive and resounding being is also a person most likely to live a mark in this world, to be meaningful in her own right and also for the others, to be a creator and a maker. Therefore, the metaphor of the resounding being represents a valuable interpretative framework to consider personalism in connection with pragmatism and, as well, neopragmatism in correlation with postpersonalism, in order to construe the person open to experience, choice and possibilities. The resounding being is a person not as much by

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<sup>35</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>37</sup> In Plato the unexamined life is not worth living; however, in Alphonso Lingis, the un-lived life is not worth examining. In our view, personalism is bringing these two dimensions together and reunited in the human person.

following a role (a persona, a mask), as she or he is a person by creating and feeling a sphere of meaning that can be shared and telling for others, too. A person is definable, yet, undefined; a work in progress and in terms of meaning, purpose, culture and civilisation, art and history, a person is a resource as much as a source.

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- <https://www.theculturium.com/patrick-howe-post-personalism-in-art/>.



**Introduction to *PERSONAL MEANING: HOW WE GIVE RELATIONAL SIGNIFICANCE,  
RELATIVE IMPORTANCE, EMOTIONAL FORCE AND MORAL VALUE TO OUR ACTION***  
*Richard Prust*

This is a book about the meaning of action and how we constitute that meaning. We're going to be guided by how we commonly use words like 'meaning.' For instance, we say that someone means to do something when they act intentionally, and that what they mean to do is the meaning their act has for them. It's also common to say that when we give meaning to an act, we 'characterize' it, and we speak of the meaning of an act as its character.

I draw attention to these patterns of everyday usage to indicate something foundational for the chapters ahead, since it is the logic of such common habits of speech that will propel our inquiry. My contention is that tracing the common ways we draw inferences about actions and actors shows us how an action's meaning can come to have relational significance, relative importance, emotional force and moral value. Moreover, tracing the logic of meaning-giving will show us certain systematic limitations in the way we understand people's actions when we think like behavioural and social scientists. Their logic forces us to ignore the meaning actors give to their actions. That, in turn, distorts discussions of these dimensions of our actions' meaning.

There are other features of our deeply embedded ways of thinking about actions that will also guide us. We say, for instance, that to act as opposed to merely behave is to be aware of acting in a certain way. Just now, I am aware of composing these sentences. Just now, you are aware of reading these sentences. Occasionally, part of the character of our action may be hidden from us for several reasons. People sometimes harbour dark intentions that they aren't fully aware of—like passive-aggressive people. Sometimes, we misunderstand what we're doing: 'I didn't know that I was signing up for a monthly contribution.' Sometimes we are absent-minded and forget what we're doing. But for the most part we go through life with an awareness of what we are doing sufficient to our purposes. I'm going to refer to this as our 'active awareness,' the awareness we have of moving to achieve something characterizable.

Something else worth noticing from the start is that we think of the person acting as determining the action's meaning. Another person looking on would be more or less successful in discerning actor's meaning of the action, but the standards for that 'more or less' is the latter. If you, someone I don't know, were to see me just now thumping away at the keyboard, you'd surmise that I was composing sentences. I am aware of doing that too, but I'm also aware of starting a book and trying to get clear about some ideas I've been toying with for decades. And you, just now reading these sentences, are indeed aware of reading these sentences, but perhaps it is also true that you are assessing whether they merit publication or deciding whether to read further, or maybe you are reading them before bed because they've always proven to put you to sleep. Those too are things you mean to be doing. Thus, what we will call 'personal meaning' is likely to have a more complex or multi-faceted character than what others are privy to.

If we are to fathom the logic of giving meaning to action, the place to begin is with an assumption we make when we call someone's movement an action in the first place. Several ways of stating that assumption come to mind, all of which say something about how we are aware of acting. We say that for someone's present movement to count as action, they must be *intending* to move that way. Action involves intending to do something. We also say that an actor must *mean* to be acting the way they do. And we say that they are *determining* the character of their movement. *Meaning* to do something, determining its *character*, and *intending* movement of that character all seem to converge on the distinctive quality our awareness of acting has.

Let me emphasize that the kind of awareness we are examining here—what I am calling active awareness—is a particular kind of awareness whose distinctive features I seek to account for. As a subset of awareness in general, it does not include awareness of the sound of rain or the awareness of the chair I'm sitting on. It is only an awareness of doing something that we will be interested in. I emphasize this because most of us tend to think like the great empiricists of modern philosophy by equating all awareness with experiencing. We are going to see how in several contexts that equation works against understanding the distinctive grasp we have of the meaning of our own action.

One way to site the fault line between the way we commonly reason about the character/meaning/intent of our action and the standard way students of human behaviour reason is to point out that the latter use

categories to characterize. Experimental psychologists, sociologists, demographers, and local news reporters all reason in statements that attribute categories or types of action to people. 'She refused to take her medicine.' 'Social media users of such-and-such profile respond most favourably to candidate C.' 'He is a one-issue voter.' 'She blew a kiss to the judge when the verdict was read.' In each case, because the action is identified by a category of action, the problem of categorization for our purposes is that it assigns the same meaning to an action no matter who is doing it.

Suppose A gives B a gift. A would agree that 'gave a gift' accurately says what he did. But as to what it meant to him personally, there was more to it than that. A, it turns out, was demonstrating his fondness for B. He was also trying to ingratiate himself with B's family for business reasons. Moreover, the gift was quite expensive and he meant to convey the impression that he was wealthy. All these intentions were factors in what he meant to be doing. If we think of A as a real person then we must admit that identifying his action by a kind of action, gift-giving, only begins to identify its *personal* character/meaning/intention.

There is, of course, an obvious answer to my complaint, and that is to define the personal meaning of A's action by conjoining multiple categories. A behavioural scientist, for instance, might insist that we could characterize the personal significance of A's gift-giving by compiling all the other categories of action he then had on his agenda. A was 'giving B a gift,' and 'trying to ingratiate himself,' and 'trying to give the impression,' etc.

Admittedly, for many purposes this does the trick. It provides, for instance, the premise of digital advertising. All those little categories of action revealed in our browsing habits contribute to an algorithmic ID for ad placements. We are, for that purpose, the sum of the categories of action we have revealed by our browsing. But, as an approach to accounting for what our action means to us, conjunction only gets us so far. There is something about our intentional life that no compilation of facts about us can grasp. Stated simply: compilation can comprehend multiple intentions motivating A, but it cannot disclose how he was *co-ordinating* the achievement of those intentions.

It doesn't take a great deal of self-monitoring to recognize that we are continually attempting to co-ordinate the elements of our life. Yet, that fact about us escapes notice in the behavioural sciences because of the logic of conjoining categories. This is limiting in a crucial way. By ignoring that co-ordinating function in human agency, scientific accounts ignore what distinguishes us among agents. One need only try to imagine a person lacking intentional co-ordination: we'd have to imagine someone who never tries to fit what he's presently doing with other elements of his intentional life. You'd be depicting an icon of irresponsibility, perhaps even someone too disintegrated to claim the status of a person.

This then is why I am proposing a departure from the standard patterns of reasoning adopted by students of human action. They cannot—logically cannot—focus on how people co-ordinate their intentional life and how that co-ordination informs the meaning of what they do. We co-ordinate our actions using a different reasoning process, one that obeys rules of inference other than those governing categories of action. That means our account will have to discern a different kind of logic. We will be tracing branches of that logic in the chapters ahead. In highlighting its rules and using them to explore how we co-ordinate action, we will come to see how action gets vested with personal meaning, and with its relational significance, relative importance, emotional force, and moral value.

To begin giving definition to this distinctive system of inferences, which I will call 'character logic,' we will contrast it with the logic that uses categories, the kind which Aristotle formalized millennia ago. As he laid it out, category logic is based on interpreting the factual claims we make as claims about category membership. 'All men are mortal' makes the claim that all beings the we categorize as 'men' can also be categorized as 'mortal.' The implied promise is that if we think about statements as claims about category inclusion and exclusion, we can draw inferences among statements syllogistically on any reasonable topic.

Aristotle didn't invent reasoning with categories; he discovered it. Category logic was operational before he codified it, as readers of Plato's dialogues can attest. But by highlighting how it works he made us more aware of what supports the sense of validity we have when we reason with syllogisms. It's the same with the character logic I am inviting us to accredit. We can glimpse its form by paying attention to how people draw inferences when, for instance, they deliberate about what to do next or discern someone's intentions in a moral or legal discussion. My objective in tracing such inferences is to articulate the rules that make them reasonable. Though it may sound presumptuous to say, though I did not invent character logic, I do propose to codify its rules and give an account of the sense of validity we have when we reason appropriately about actions

In distinguishing the character of an action for the actor from its character for a spectator, I suggested that the actor may be aware of having a variety of intentions: A's gift-giving was meant to do a variety of things. That observation tells us something distinctive about human agency: we are multi-intentioned agents. We may not be the only animals who do more than one thing at a time, but I trust you'll agree that our linguistic skills allow us to co-ordinate the achievement of more elements of our intentional life than dolphins, chimps and other clever animals can.

Imagine a person—we'll call her Jill—who leads a normally complex adult life. By calling her multi-intentioned, I mean simply that there are multiple accomplishments that she could now affirm intending if we asked her. 'Oh, are you leaving so soon?' 'Are you still paying off your student loan?' 'Are you seeing anyone these days?' 'Are you still reading that Iris Murdoch novel?' and 'Are you planning any travel this summer?' These are all questions about Jill's present intentional life. She presently projects each of them toward accomplishment over time. Though each of these present ingredients in her intentional life represents a course of movement into the future, they are deployed variously with respect to their timing. Some are projected to be completed in the near future, like the novel-reading. Others are ongoing indefinitely, like the relationship. Some are in their inception, like leaving the party, some are amid a long run, like paying off the loan, and some are projected for the future, like summer travel. But they all have in common that they are presently determining how she projects living her life going forward.

I noted earlier that we expect mature people like Jill to undertake her various achievements in a co-ordinated way. It's instructive to notice why we make that assumption. Our very nature as a multi-intentioned agent implies it. Consider: to be an agent is to act. Thus, we actualize ourselves more by achieving more of what we intend. This, I take it, is a mere ontological truism: the more of our intentional life being achieved as intended, the more fully actualized we are as agents. Because the term 'self-actualization' was used prominently by Abraham Maslow, we should note that our usage differs slightly. For Maslow, it is a process of fulfilling one's potentials by cultivating respect for things like truth and a sense of uniqueness, justice, peace, and playfulness. For us, the term designates a mere formal fact of doing ever more of what one intends. I tend to think that doing more would involve cultivating Maslow's qualities, but for our purposes the bare functional definition will suffice.

So then, what self-actualization requires of us as an agent is an intention to co-ordinate our intentional life as best we can. This follows from both the definitional truism—that to be more accomplished as an agent is to accomplish more—and the practical truism—that we get more done when we coordinate what we are doing. If to be is to act, and if acting to achieve as much as we can of what we intend can best be done by co-ordinating our multiple intentions, we can be said to be under a 'personal imperative' to do so. It is an imperative we cannot disobey without stumbling in our agentive task of best actualizing who we are.

Of course, there may be moments in Jill's life when her intentions get tangled so that she finds herself undoing or impeding something else she is intending to do. But these are likely to be rare occasions, and she blames herself whenever they arise. She seldom finds herself, for instance, planning her summer travel without budgeting for her loan payments or getting so immersed in her novel that dinner burns on the stove. Early in adolescence, she learned that her life would be filled with setbacks, frustrations, and disappointments if she didn't practice projecting what she did in mutually accommodating ways.

How might we imagine Jill trying to co-ordinate her life? Most of the time, it's realistic to expect her to be doing so on a small scale, that is, making little adjustments in how she is doing what she does. Take today. She's doing her weekly house-cleaning. Usually, that doesn't take much concentration, so she has leisure to direct her active imagination to plan, ponder, and day-dream. But not today. Her mother is arriving for a visit and she intends to impress her with a meticulously cleaned apartment.

We can say about Jill's intentional life just now, while she is cleaning, that she is intending to both clean and to impress her mother. Both characterizations of action reflect what she presently means to be doing. As we noted earlier, it is this complexity in the personal significance of her action that make it impossible to grasp with a category like 'house-cleaning.' Categorizing the character of her action fails to recognize *how* her intention to impress her mother is manifest *in the way* she is housecleaning. The way she is moving bespeaks her awareness of advancing both projects. Anyone can see that she is house-cleaning, but in the way she is doing so—exerting herself more, moving more furniture and dusting more shelves—she manifests the simultaneous advancement of her intention to impress.

This process of projecting two or more intended achievements in one course of action is an imaginative feat we will call 'resolving' her action. Much of our action is resolved in this sense, and by considering how such little acts of resolve co-ordinate our lives, we will understand better how our life is unified optimally.

We are going to use the term 'resolve' in a systematic way as we piece together our account of meaning-giving, so let me pause to mark what calling an action 'resolved' will mean in this account. An action is resolved provided it is intended to advance or accommodate more than one item in our agenda. Jill was resolved to impress her mother in the way she cleaned. In that sense, she acted with resolve. Though I am stipulating a formal meaning for the term, I believe that it squares nicely with common usage: if we asked Jill why she was cleaning in such a determined and thorough way, she might answer that she was resolved to show a clean apartment to her mother. The same goes for anyone who is highly resolved upon some great endeavour, say like running for President. We presume that they are accommodating a great many other parts of their life to support that resolved-upon action. Obversely, if I stumbled upon a TV show that looked interesting, I wouldn't say that I was resolved to watch it. But if I really got interested in it and decided to postpone dinner to see it through, it would be reasonable to say that I was now resolved to see it.

Let us call the occurrence of such decisions 'moments of resolve.' Each is a moment of revising our way of projecting action in the interest of other things undertaken. Such moments of resolve are hardly rare. We resolve anew as conflicts arise, and one arises whenever the way we are intending threatens to counteract some other element of our intentional life. That's why being conscious requires being present in the moment. Every active moment is not a moment of resolve, but for "active" people such moments are frequent. Our agential posture is to be always on our toes so that we can negotiate the conflicts as they arise. I find it reasonable, then, to depict our active awareness as refreshed continually by moments of new resolve. Such moments are needed to sustain our continuing co-ordination, or at least to approximate it. That means the vigilance of keeping such things in mind can also be seen as an obligation prompted by the personal imperative.

Perhaps it is already clear how personal identity emerges from such ongoing acts of resolve. If their moments create a measure of continuity in actions over time, and if enough of our intentional life is included in that continuity, we find ourselves supporting a sense of projecting a single course of action and thus attain agential individuality. The ongoing moments of resolve support identity as a global character of action, one that aims to co-ordinate the whole body of our action. That sense of an overall resolution, by identifying us as an individual, identifies us as a person. We will call it "personal resolve." Our personal resolve is the imagined trajectory of our life, projected as a coherent course of present action going forward, that we think will best accomplish what we presently intend.

Chapter one describes how we bring co-ordination to our agency and how we are aware of doing so. We will consider how successive acts of resolve come to support a sense of unifying personal resolve. Certain formal qualities are reasonable to ascribe to awareness of personal resolve. By doing so, we are able to understand how their presence together gives action its personal meaning. We're going to discover that our sense of personal resolve is narrative in form. But it is a distinctive kind of narrative, one that reflects its distinctive function in sustaining our aspirational integration. It spins out its developing sense of active meaning in episodic threads weaving our commitments to prevent them from getting snarled. We shuttle continually, and with each new pass we try to contextualize what we're doing in our life. Each resolution is an episode in the ongoing narrative project of integrating as much of our intentional life as we can. Since such continuity as we can muster is narrative in form, we make it our personal imperative to tell a 'personal' story.

We shall have to tread carefully in calling it a story though; the kind of imaginative projection we make of the overall resolution of our agency is unlike that of a conventional story in several respects. To avoid being misled, we will mark those differences the better to keep them in mind. But, the sense in which the character of our personal resolve qualifies as a story—by being the imagined resolution of our intentional life—justifies calling it a personal story. Because we can only intend present tense agential coherence by intending singularity as a character of resolve, we are determined to make ourselves coherent autobiographically, to project our life in a character of narrative resolve.

Assume for a moment that chapter one succeeds in describing a narrative form that functions to integrate our intentional life enough to make each of us an individual person. One conceptual advantage we then have is to avoid the 'which-came-first' puzzle. I can reasonably say that my personal story gives me my character and, in that sense, identifies *who* I am; yet I can also say that I author my identity, in that it is I, a multi-intentioned agent, who intentionally projects imagined courses of co-ordinated actions. My story authors me in that the resolution it achieves gives me the active coherence I need to understand myself as an individual, and I author it in that it is my act of resolve that co-ordinates my competing intentions and determines it as a character of resolve.

Another advantage of finding the character of a person in the character of their action is that it enables us to gainsay the post-modern denial that any narrative can have legitimate authority over anyone's life. Our account finds a personal story's legitimacy as 'authoritative' over us in its promise to actualize us more fully than any other way of putting our life together.

In outline, the first chapter argues that:

- a. To be an agent is to achieve intentionally.
- b. As multi-intentioned agents, we are achieving in multiple ways at any one time.
- c. Since our being as multi-intentioned agents is best actualized in accomplishing as many of those intentions as we can, the better we coordinate them, the more actualized we are aware of being.
- d. Thus, we are prompted by the distinctive form of our agency to coordinate as much of our intentional life as we can. This is our personal imperative.
- e. The narrative projection governing our life by virtue of actualizing us best has legitimacy as our personal story.
- f. That story contextualizes the meaning of our action so as to make it personal and in so doing makes us personally present in the meaning of our actions.

Chapter Two explores how the character of some of our action bears interpersonal significance. Some action does not, of course. When we brush our teeth or search a website, it is our intention to co-ordinate only our own movements. On the other hand, when we interact with someone—consult a doctor, sing a duet, have a dinner conversation—the character of our interaction is not exclusively ours to determine. Rather, it has significance as a collaborative project. This suggests that when we interact with people, we co-ordinate our movements with them in a way comparable to how we co-ordinate our own movements when we act on our own. We will explore the analogy between resolving our own intentions and co-ordinating our actions with those we interact with. In both cases, it is reasonable to recognize a shared intention as the basis of the co-ordination. Just as when we resolve our own actions, we are actively aware of enacting a greater body of intended movement, so when we interact successfully, we are aware of enacting a greater body of intended movement. In other words, the same logic of agentive expansion applying to moments of resolve applies to relationships. The greater the body of movement we mutually intend, the greater the range of movement we determine by the character of our individual resolve. That is the fundamental reason—if you will, the ontological reason—for why we are disposed to social and communal lives: healthy interactions—those intended by both parties to serve both parties' interests—exert a lure toward greater self-actualization for both parties. We are going to see how this works even in impersonal relationships, but it is only when we discern what it is to relate to another personally—by co-ordinating the characters of our personal resolves—that we project the greatest relational meaning for our actions.

Thinking about healthy interactions as shared intended accomplishments also underlies and justifies our sense that the boundaries of personal agency are more porous than the standard models of agentive identity allow for. When we think of a person as a character of resolve, we can account for the sense we have of living *into* one another's lives. We sense it because in interactive moments we are aware of the body of our own movement being determined in character by both of us. In the logic of agency, that means we are aware of actualizing what we intend in one another's movements. Momentarily then, in those moments of interacting, we share not just certain intentions but an intention to resolve two stories.

Accordingly, our agency expands; we become more actual. The greater richness of relational meaning is accompanied by a sense of 'getting more out of life.'

This correlation expresses itself poignantly when people react to losing a friend, particularly a life-partner. A widow may report feeling as though she's lost part of herself. Agentively speaking, that is exactly what has happened.

We shall test the descriptive advantage of this way of grasping personal self-actualization by using what we have discovered about human agency and the personal imperative to describe the nature of friendship. The imperative prescribes that friendships are limited to those who can enter them in good faith, that is, in the belief that it will enrich the meaning and aggrandize the scope of their agency. A friendship is only possible if it allows both parties to pursue courses of action that promise to actualize them to the greatest degree. As we will discover, that is true. Friends become friends when they believe they can make themselves accountable for the requirements of one another's personal story in good faith. I believe it can be insightful to describe how the personal imperative, being irrefragable, sets conditions for friendship—including marriage—both for when it can flourish and for when it must be broken.

In outline, the second chapter argues that:

- a. Healthy interactions—those intended to add to the life of both agents—involve shared intentions.
- b. Shared intentions represent an expansion of a body of intended movement and, accordingly, the enrichment of that movement's meaning.
- c. The personal imperative—to actualize our intentional life as much as we can—creates a telic pull toward interactivity.
- d. When personal interactions succeed in actualizing two people's characters of resolve optimally, friendship is possible and compelling.
- e. But, to be sustainable it must continue to promise each partner's greatest actualization.
- f. Both the telic pull of the imperative and the limitation it imposes determine the scope and meaning our friendships can have for us.

Chapter Three. Our argument so far has assumed that we discern our action as a body of movement, discern it in a way that assesses its volume relative to other possible courses of action. Now we examine that assumption and what justifies it. We follow the logic we employ in discerning volume in intended movement. That volume, by definition, is temporal in measure. It represents the combined moments of movement we intend in order to achieve what we intend to do. Since we are not aware of that temporal volume of movement in the tangible way that we are aware of our physical body's movement, we cannot measure those combined moments of what we intend mathematically. Yet, movements take time, so we must assume that the movement implicit in any resolute intention represents a multitude of temporal spans. Our ability to imagine them, we will find, is sufficient to justify us in making *relative* judgments. In our ordinary, non-systematic ways of thinking, making such judgments comes naturally. We perceive some actions as being "of little moment" and others as 'momentous'. Once we find ourselves able to accredit philosophically what we affirm in ordinary language, perhaps we can restate our understanding of the personal imperative yet again: it obliges us to project the most momentous character of action.

Having established how a measure of moment is implicit in an intended character of an action, we go on to observe the correlation of that measure with the relative personal importance we tend to attach to action. In many contexts, our use of 'momentous' and 'important' as interchangeable adjectives testifies to that measure for importance. By implication, what we are aware of as 'imported' into whatever action we see as 'important' is the cumulate moments of movement represented in how we characterize that action.

We put this account of relative importance to the test by seeing what it mandates about how people commonly deliberate about what to do in the present situation. The test is: does that entailment plausibly describe such deliberations? Can we plausibly represent the way we deliberate as aiming at our greatest self-actualization?

I hope you agree that there's at least initial plausibility in the claim that we can: if Jill reasoned, 'It's important for me to file my income taxes by the end of March since I'm going to be travelling the first two weeks in April,' she'd be voicing her awareness that filing early promises to achieve her intention to file *and* her intention to travel. If she filed at the last minute as she usually does, she could either file but not travel or travel but pay a tax penalty. The difference in the scope of the moments of movement she could make in satisfying her intentions makes commensurately more important for her to file early.

If the more textured illustrations we will explore bear this formula out, several doors open for us philosophically. One of them leads to a personalized understanding of practical reasoning. As it is typically represented, practical reasoning has a means-end form: we have some end in mind and we figure out what moves will best provide the means to achieve it. It's a time-honoured form of reasoning, but while it describes many of our moment-to-moment practical decisions adequately, it doesn't lend itself to describing the reasoning it takes to resolve intentions that would otherwise threaten to undo one another as they are now projected. Decisions at junctures like that tend to be relatively important, since they usually involve more moments of successful intentional achievement. That being the case, the form of reasoning going into important deliberations can better be described as means-ends (plural) reasoning: we project the course of resolve promising best to actualize multiple intended ends.

To clarify this means-ends deliberation, I'm going to contrast it with the means-end reasoning Elizabeth Anscombe describes in her influential work, *Intentions*. She invites us to think of an act's intention as the actor's answer to the question 'Why?'. A man is making up and down movements with his arm. Why? To operate a pump. Why? To replenish the household's water supply. Why? To poison the inhabitants. Why? To prevent bad people from seizing the reins of power. Why? To make it possible for good people to control the government and usher in the Kingdom of Heaven. Roughly speaking, Anscombe's illustrations do seem to bear out a correlation between the increasing importance of successive statements of intention and

increasing the range of movement intended. But when we consider multiple intentions being advanced by an action, gains in an action's importance grow in ways other than those indicated by her linear succession of 'Why?' answers. If Anscombe's political pumper is to count as a real person, we must assume that his pumping is co-ordinated with other of his intentions, that they are modified in time and mode to support that co-ordination. If he is a normally complex person, we might imagine him entering into this plot to impress his girlfriend. Maybe he fancies himself a new Hemming way and means to gather material for a novel. If so, we also need to count these other undertakings in the range of his intended movement. They too lend personal importance to his action.

Using this understanding of an action's importance to complement the one implicit in Anscombe's account, I think we have the basis for a better account of deliberation. It is a rational process, but not in the category-reasoning sense. As its etymology indicates, 'deliberations' make inferences based on "weighing." Our account designates what gets weighed as the relative moments of achievement that the possible courses of action promise to advance. The weighing counts as rational by virtue of our imaginative ability to access which option promises to actualize the most momentous achievement in our life.

In outline, the third chapter argues that:

- a. In intending to do something, we are aware of intending a body of movement that, in principle, has temporal measure. It is an achievement that fills the time it takes.
- b. Thus, intended movement is relatively momentous.
- c. Deliberations make relative judgments by projecting alternative courses of action to assess which promises to actualize us most. Those judgments can be seen to correlate with what we regard as the most important thing to do at the time.
- d. Because we deliberate with multiple intentions in mind, when we decide important matters, our reasoning is means-ends in form.
- e. Our deliberations yield informed judgments about the relative volume of moment implicit in the alternatives before us. Thus, personal importance can be reasonably assessed. Since that assessment is being made of a character of action, it represents another dimension of that action's meaning.

Chapter Four explores this sense of relative moment for what it reveals about our emotional life. To understand how emotions register in a person's active awareness, we need to highlight the shift in the temporal logic required to construe a 'moment' as a 'moment of action.' To keep this shift before us, I will sometimes refer to the moments resolved in a person's life by the etymological root of that word: emotions reflect changes in our *momentum*. Positive emotions like enthusiasm, joy, gratitude, and love are feelings of increased *momentum*, an inflation of agency; negative ones like fear, anxiety, and depression register decreased *momentum*, a deflation of agency.

To show how positive and negative emotions are correlated with agentive activation and deactivation, we will explore that connection on all the vectors of a person's agency—individual, interactive, and a third vector we will also discuss, the actualization of someone's resolve in others' future lives, or what I will call its 'legacy' meaning. Because all of them represent awareness of movement determined in character by the character of our resolve, all of them can register expansion or contraction. The positive emotion we will use to illustrate this formula is enthusiasm, and we will focus specifically on political enthusiasm. We'll look at how political enthusiasm waxes or wains according to how well candidates cultivate it on all three agentive of the vectors of those they appeal to.

Anger will exemplify negative emotion. Philosophers have long tended to classify all emotion-driven behaviour as irrational, but many of them have singled out anger with special opprobrium. Stoics in particular have urged people to dispel their angry impulses by putting whatever situation occasioned them into rational perspective. That advice endures and it continues to be honoured because, for the most part, angry responses do more harm than good to everyone involved.

But the rule doesn't isn't always wise to follow. We can imagine situations where angry action, agentively speaking, is helpful, rational, and constructive. Stoic abhorrence of all anger, I shall argue, stems from mistakenly seeing it as irrational rather than differently-rational. Angry action can qualify as rational in two ways. First, the surge of anger we feel, say at some 'slight,' registers an actual loss of agency. So, anger need not result from failing to see things rationally (though it can); an angry person's awareness of what has happened to his active possibilities can be judged to be reasonable or not according to whether their active possibilities really have been diminished. Second, an angry action qualifies as personally rational if it promises to actualize its agent most. That there are such unruly cases needs to be acknowledged. We're

going to see that under certain not-uncommon circumstances, expressing anger can be crucial to sustaining the health of a relationship. When it is, it determines the rational way for a person to behave.

Having recommended our change-in-momentum account as insightful in the way it leads us to describe emotional life, the chapter goes on to recommend it as useful in negotiating current discussions about whether emotions are rooted in feelings or evaluative judgments. By recognizing them as rooted in changes in personal momentum, we accommodate both sides of that dispute without contradiction. An emotion is a feeling—in that we are directly aware of changes of momentum in our agency—and it is an evaluative judgment—in that we judge that our momentum has increased or decreased based on our evaluation of the relative moment of our actions.

Interpreting 'feelings' and 'evaluative judgments' as discrete determinants of emotions has also confronted philosophers with the question of which causes which. But it's problematic to hold either that our feelings cause us to judge as we do or that our judgments cause us to have the feeling we have. To show how a momentum account of emotions avoids this which-causes-which problem, we will transpose the logic of an argument recently advanced by a philosopher of cognitive science. By restating its premises, we can preserve its force—which is to establish a cognitive basis for emotions—without resorting to a causal explanation.

In outline, Chapter 4 argues that:

- a. Our momentum rises and falls with the volume of movement we intend.
- b. Positive emotions register increased momentum and negative emotions decreased momentum.
- c. Understanding them in that way allows us to describe specific positive and negative emotions more insightfully.
- d. It also gives us a way to reconcile current positions on the nature of emotion.

Chapter 5 considers how action can take on moral significance. On the face of it, the topic may seem to pose a special problem for our account. Having established that every person is acting under an imperative to self-actualize in the most momentous way possible, we seem to have assigned ourselves to a position that can only be called ethical egoism. True, we've observed that healthy interactions, particularly personal ones, add to the moment of what we do, and that such additions recommend themselves as personally advantageous. But we've left a loophole: however richly our relational life might contribute to the momentary meaning of what we do, it remains an open question as to whether healthy interactions are always personally advantageous. Our account leaves open the possibility that someone could attain the most meaning and greatest momentum by exploiting people.

There is only one way to avoid drawing that conclusion. It begins with a stipulation that seems reasonable to assume—that to count as moral an interaction must be such that both parties intend for both of them to benefit personally. It must be what I am calling a healthy interaction, one that is meant to be mutually edifying. We're going to assume, then, that if one party betrays another by exploiting them—robbing them of active possibilities—that makes the interaction unhealthy and renders it immoral.

Adopting this 'healthy' requirement for moral interaction allows us to specify a claim that, if we have grounds to believe it, exonerates us from the egoism charge. Consider: our account leads to ethical egoism only if it is possible to extend our agency by exploiting others. That's because, if we could occasionally exploit another and gain agentive advantage, at those times our personal imperative would trump our moral imperative. In that case, our moral imperative—to have only healthy interactions—would lose its status as our personal imperative, meaning that our moral obligation wouldn't always be our personal obligation.

To avoid debasing moral reasoning that way, we have to find it reasonable to believe that no one could ever self-aggrandize at another's expense. Only if we have evidence for believing that can we make room in our account for the authority of moral value. I'm going to call this required belief a belief in 'universal moral community,' 'universal' because it holds that no person can profit from exploiting another, 'moral' because it fulfils our health condition for moral interaction, and a 'community' because healthy interactions integrate the lives of parties to them in ways that create community among them. Ultimately, whether we are always obliged to be moral depends upon whether we have evidence-based reasons for believing in a universal moral community (or UMC).

I have been describing UMC abstractly as the belief that all people can lead exclusively healthy interactive lives in good faith. We should remind ourselves, however, that the imaginative expressions of UMC are myriad and culturally specific. We can find the belief at the core of any number of philosophical and faith-based positions. Plato, for instance, argued in *The Republic* that injustice is not more profitable than justice. The Buddha taught compassion for all other beings as the way to Enlightenment. In the West,



the deepest running traditions of UMC have been fostered by the monotheistic religions, all of which, in their mature orthodoxies, teach that doing right by all people is God's will and that doing God's will is tantamount to personal salvation, one's ultimate actualization.

Today, most people are unschooled in any philosophical tradition and many are unaffiliated with any religious one. Yet, I would contend that most of us continue to reason with UMC as our assumed premise. The Golden Rule is still deferred to, one still hears unhealthy interactions called "bad karma," and people still ask about an immoral action, "how can he live with himself?" All of these reflect a commitment to UMC as the scope of mutual accountability wherein the parties to it are most fully actualized. There are always a few Nietzsche-like figures who deny the belief as a matter of principle, but the conviction that healthy relations are always better for us than unhealthy ones maintains its hold on most of us and—I hope you will agree—deserves to be interrogated as to whether it has a reasonable basis.

Much of the discussion in chapter 5 concerns how someone could rationally justify believing in UMC. We've admitted that it cannot be deduced from the fundamental claims about personal agency we began with. If we come to find it reasonable, it must be because we can imagine living in accord with any person who didn't intend to harm us. In earlier chapters, by representing movements as coordinated by an intention, then representing interactions as shared intentions, and then representing a personal relationship as a shared story, we discovered that each of the successive imaginative feats called for had to be more comprehensive than its predecessor. Each thereby adopted a more comprehensive level of accountability and each thereby intended to actualize a greater body of achievement.

The question of whether it is reasonable to believe in UMC turns on whether we can confirm its truth in the same way we confirm the truth of an intentional commitment, namely by enjoying an expansion of our agency in the exercise of its expanded accountability. Usually, when we talk about evidence for the truth of a belief, we are talking about the truth of stated facts. Scientific beliefs, historical beliefs, philosophical beliefs, economic beliefs: they all depend on the support of relevant facts. But UMC is a belief about the truth of intentional relationships. That means we must think in terms of how we confirm *relationships* as "true" or disconfirm them as 'false.' Truth claims about relationships, it also turns out, answer to a different logic of confirmation than claims made with categories.

To understand the logic of confirmation for UMC, we will begin with an examination of how people stay "true to" one another and how that truth is confirmed in their lives. We are going to see that in all agentic reasoning, the pattern of confirmation is consistent. A relationship is true if the increased accountability interactors take on is more than compensated by the enhancement that they become aware of in their agency. UMC obliges us to be accountable to a universal community of good-willed people, so its confirmation can only come with an awareness that living into this higher level of accountability enhances us personally. Whether it does, of course, can only be answered personally. If one commits to this UMC range of accountability and finds membership in it edifying, it is reasonable for them to believe in the truth of UMC. If that's the case, there is a reasonable basis for assigning moral value: an action is moral if it promises to actualize the most personal *momentum* in the character of our resolve.

If it is true that UMC, a belief in many guises, is wisely as well as widely held, it seems worth the challenge to examine how the dominant accounts of moral value appear in its light. We're going to see that the modernist limitation—always representing actions as kinds of action—bears part of the blame for the apparent inability to reach philosophical consensus about the source of moral value. Most ethicists take one of three positions on the matter: that an act's moral value is determined by its utility for creating happiness, that it is determined by its adherence to what reason determines as the actor's duty, or that it is determined by its accord with human virtues. What makes Ethics classes so endlessly intriguing is that utilitarian accounts confirm our moral sensibilities in some situations, but duty or virtue accounts confirm it in others. None of the three positions fully captures the logic of our reasoning in all moral matters.

We can break through this impasse by transposing each account of moral value by restating its crucial insight using the logic appropriate for reasoning about personal actions. In doing so, we derive an alternative version of utilitarian ethics, an alternative version of duty-based ethics, and an alternative version of virtue ethics, versions that are congenial with each other's insights. We will show this by substituting utility in actualizing moment for utility in occasioning happiness, by substituting the personal imperative for the categorical one, and by thinking of people's virtues as habits that keep them optimally actualized.

We gain two advantages by making these transpositions. First, the resulting versions of utilitarian reasoning, duty reasoning, and virtue reasoning track better with how we make moral judgments in practice. Second, they are immune to the standard criticisms each position on moral value seem to attract.

In outline, Chapter Five argues that:

a. Acting in obedience to the personal imperative in all cases need not make us ethical egoists, not if we have reason to believe in universal moral community, which is to say in the assurance that every person, each in obedience to their own personal imperative, is able to resolve their actions with those of any other person open to that healthy possibility.

b. UMC has roots in a variety of religious and philosophical traditions and it continues to inform the moral sensibilities of a great many people, even those who no longer justify it with reference to those traditions.

c. While we cannot prove or disprove UMC with the impersonal reasoning of this account, we can describe the form evidence would have to take in order to confirm or disconfirm the belief on rational grounds.

d. Those who do find the belief reasonable enough to live their lives trusting in its truth are able to adopt the doctrines of utility, duty, and virtue in ways that accommodate their core insights without incurring the standard vulnerabilities critics charge them with.

Chapter 6 closes out this account of personal meaning by taking on everyone's favourite philosophical question, one that's as inevitable as it is clichéd, 'What is the meaning of life?'. Given that we've represented the resolved character of a person's action as the only conceivable portal into their life's meaning, we should at least be able to address the question. If we think of the meaning of life as the meaning of an active life as a whole, our account determines it as the meaning of a story. This reframes the meaning-of-life question in a way that allows it to make better sense. We have seen that the function of our personal story is to contextualize our active moments *in the present*. Whether in an incremental retelling or in a major plot shift, that story is told to function in the present moment. It is a creature of that moment. It represents the way someone *presently* resolves their multi-intentioned life. In that sense, the meaning of our personal story is momentary.

We are pre-disposed by modern thinking to hear 'momentary' as 'ephemeral,' whereupon the notion of life having only momentary meaning sounds paradoxical at best. But when we transpose "momentary" into its active sense, we no longer ironize the question. Active presence as a character of resolve understands its moment according to a co-ordinated context of meaning, narrative in form, spanning time, and characterizing *who* we are. I'm going to contend that transposing the 'meaning of life' question into the temporal logic appropriate to agentive reasoning makes the question not just more manageable but one that we can answer cogently.

As usual, we will play referee among philosophical disputes on the topic. For example, those who celebrate the contingency of meaning are led to discuss the notion that someone's life could have meaning as a symptom of self-deception. But ironically, by trading on the notion of contingency, those post-structuralists have tended to adopt the modern meaning of "moment" as an instant and thereby rendered meaning as an event. Alternatively, those who do not reject the question of life's meaning out of hand tend to split between those who construe it as subjective and those who insist on its objectivity. But the temporal logic of active moment detaches us from the subjective-objective dichotomy at the root of that dispute. The source of life's meaning is whatever character of action we find it reasonable to resolve ourselves in advancing. If one person's life contains only his individual actions, its meaning is circumscribed as much as it can be without becoming impersonal. If one is embodied with others in friendships, life deepens in meaning. It deepens still further if the good acts one does promise to outlast them. Finally, as we will have seen in the previous chapter, it is at least conceivable that one can live in hope of acting in accord with the resolution of all the healthy personal resolutions projected by all informed people of good will. In that sense, we must recognize a spectrum of personal answers to the question, one that reaches from a life of little meaning to one of ultimate meaning.

In outline, chapter six argues that:

a. The question, 'What is the meaning of life?' makes sense if it is about active meaning.

b. Asking it in that way makes life's meaning momentary in an expansive reading of the term, and that allows us to avoid calling it either subjective or objective.

c. It also allows us to answer the question personally on the basis of the body of movement we act accountably to and share in the being of.

One more concluding remark:

By now, it's abundantly clear that I am well aware that what I am proposing represents a radical departure from the dominant professional ways of reasoning about people's actions. By showing how we

characterize our action other than with categories, I am inviting the reader to resist some of the dominant habits of modern scientific thinking. I am inviting you to listen for pre-modern ways of hearing the vocabulary we commonly use to discuss actions. When we reason about action in non-professional settings, it is these original meanings that will guide us. From the standpoint of how thinkers have reasoned about people's actions throughout history, the character logic I am calling attention to recalls old but enduring ways of reasoning. It is reasoning that may have been overshadowed in modern systematic contexts, but it persists in the way we real-life actors think real-life thoughts.

In one respect, that should make it easy to follow this account: you are already intimately familiar with the patterns of inference it explores. In another respect though, this account unavoidably puts a challenge before the reader. Because in reasoning about characters of action we can often revert to pre-modern meanings of action terms, we will occasionally find ourselves in an awkward tension with the current use of those terms in systematic contexts. That may make our usage sound stressed in spots, as we've already seen with regard to 'moment' and 'intention.' Since character logic is at least as long-established as category logic, we will occasionally try to recover the older usages and better hear them resonate in our common usage by calling etymology into service. However, if our exercise in linguistic originalism ever become disorienting as we explore its implications, you may find it helpful to consult the glossary at the end of the book.

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***Neopragmatism and Postliberalism: A Contemporary Weltanschauung (Bilingual Edition: Postliberalism Neopragmatism: un Weltanschauung Contemporan)***

**Henrieta Anisoara Serbans**

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*Motto:*

'Wonder is the beginning of philosophy and doubt is the beginning of political philosophy. Disagreement, antagonisms, and the questioning out of beliefs and, especially, hierarchies, questioning initiate and form political action. The more we discover our own standpoints against the background of the socialization the more we are able to take them apart the more equipped for political action' (p. 373)

This unique bilingual book (in Romanian and English) is an apt, most welcome extension of previous works by the author (in Romanian and English). The major issues here deal with what Dr Serban calls *neopragmatism* and *postliberalism*. Her capable and subtle analysis interweaving the two inter-related philosophical and political terms follows the reviewer's own social philosophical work operating at the intersection of self, time, and place. The book opens with a historical and intellectual origin note, an opening Argument ('Neopragmatism, postliberalism and subjectivity: our thought, our representation, our world'), eight essay chapters, and then closes the initial argument with a 'Conclusive discussion: On the evolution, involution and revolution of contemporary times'. Interestingly, placed after the general bibliography, and a 'Guiding and Selective Bibliography – Pragmatism and Neopragmatism', the book contains two easily overlooked self-contained articles in (perhaps) later-added 'Annexes', '*The political self – discursive interpretations*' and '*Reforming ideologies as a paradigm and a political stake*'.

Now, I shall walk the reader through these unnumbered chapters, making individualized comments on each as I go. I will close with some general observations connecting the finely-wrought theories presented in the book to the very uncertain political trends we in Europe, the USA and beyond face today,

*ARGUMENT: Neopragmatism, postliberalism and subjectivity: our thought, our representation, our world.*

This detailed opening to the book lays out the parameters of the specific discussions and illustrations that follow, drawing first from varied European thinkers, including Lucian Blaga, who defines the human being's interaction with philosophy ('*Philosophy represents the great opening, the great exit from 'the infinite sleep in which our being floats'*' (p. 196, emphasis in original), then from 20 C American philosopher Richard Rorty's work, does a very able job in summarizing his argument made there and applying to the topic at hand. As she states:

[T]hese philosophical ideas will be present throughout the work, by virtue of the continuities I announced earlier and which we are interested to follow (generated by the central continuity between thought, language, action and creation). Repeatedly, and in this sense systematically, too, almost methodologically, neopragmatism opens the possibility of whole approaches for the 'complete, big picture', although it is bound to generate almost a paradoxical image, so to speak, of unity in discontinuity, understood from the contemporary theoretical positions of subjectivity, with imperfections, limitations, erased areas, gaps and contrasts. (p. 212)

***1. Subjectivism, fallibilism, pragmatism. Phenomenological, semiotic and pragmatic confluences***

Walking the reader through the seminal works of authors such as William James, Edmund Husserl, and C. S. Peirce, the author leads us to the key definition of the human subject that the rest of the book builds upon, i.e., that humans are 'tridimensional, encompassing the syntactic, the semantic and the pragmatic dimensions' (p. 224), a highly phenomenological perspective.

***2. Pragmatism and action based on knowledge***

This chapter takes the reader through varied logical turns modern philosophy has taken since Descartes, culminating in neopragmatism, which is defined as a reconsideration of logos existing in a critical environment questioning 'foundationalism, realism, rationalism and representationalism,' in the service of explicating 'paradigms of difference' via 'the "linguistic turn' (p. 236). The author continues:

The ideas sustained by neopragmatism can be appreciated in correlation with a specific contemporary theoretical ‘landscape’, characterized by a series of ‘turns’ in the ways of reporting to the investigated problems, to the world and to others (linguistic turn, historical turn, social turn, humanistic turn etc.), all having in the centre of the approaches the ontological affirmation through discursiveness, a perspective of re-evaluation-recovery of rationality (J. Habermas, C. O. Schrag), poststructuralist aspects (R. Barthes, J. Derrida, M. Foucault) and, especially, (neo) pragmatic aspects (J. Derrida, R. Rorty, C.O. Schrag). A more complete image of the theoretical approaches, at least in contemporary philosophy, must include as well the postanalytic [sic] contributions (L. Wittgenstein, J.L. Austin, D. Davidson), the post-rhetorical or neo-rhetorical one (C. Perelman), the hermeneutic perspective axed on a ‘philosophy of reception and aesthetic experience’ (Gadamer) and ‘hermeneutic circle’ (Ricoeur), cultural and intercultural perspectives (Fred Casmir), the generalization of the antagonisms and the attempts of their resolution through discourse (Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe) and the preoccupation for the knowledge-power duet (Foucault), ‘the end of the grand narratives’ (J.-Fr. Lyotard), the perspective of the ‘philosophy without mirroring’ (R. Rorty), the aspects concerning “transparent society” (Vattimo), ‘the ecstasy of communication’ (Baudrillard), deconstructivism (différance’ and ‘trace’, in Derrida), ‘communicational praxis’ (C. O. Schrag) and the ‘principle of charity’ (Donald Davidson).’ (pp. 239-40)

Yet, while accepting contingency as detailed by all these theorists, the author claims in this sophisticated survey that neopragmatism does not deny the possibility of reaching truth. This is a welcome finding, in my view.

### ***3. The glance of God belongs exclusively to God. Turmoil and turns***

Drawing heavily from Heidegger, the author points to the fact that neopragmatism is something that is established by humans. ‘In the spirit of the uniqueness of the human ontological mode, neopragmatism brings to attention under various aspects the implications of the idea that being is something established by man’ (pp. 243-44), by a human that, driven by too much systematic structures and meaning structures, is drawn to a postmodern ‘interest for what is contingent, particular, different, marginal, secondary, ironic or contextual’ (p. 243). Birthed by the previously noted ‘linguistic turn’, theorists then considered the ‘social turn’ (which causes them to reconsider the role of social constructivism in the world of science), under what the sociologist Zygmunt Bauman termed ‘liquid modernity’. From this point, the author takes the reader through a winding progression of a ‘humanistic turn’, informed by Rorty and C. O. Schrag’s understanding of Foucault, Deleuze, Guattari and Derrida, and finally a ‘rhetorical turn’, informed by Ch. Perelman’s and L Olbrecht-Tyteca’s work on neo-Aristotelian ‘new rhetoric’ and closing with the hermeneutical circle as articulated by Gadamer and Ricoeur. I see a similarity here to George Kelly’s philosophy of constructive alternativism.)

### ***4. The resources of postliberalism***

This chapter is a complicated one. On one hand, the author states that postliberalism will provide a vision for progress, but one of constant reformations and improvements in an environment of fluidity, because as a vision, it cannot make any absolute claim of objectivity and truth along with the view of having the ‘last word’ and feasible in a policymaking way too. But when opposed to the ‘Will to Power’ vision, implying an embrace of monistic, operational ‘truth’, in practice if not in theory, this ambiguous stance becomes problematic. When one reads Foucault, who denies any transcendental truth, only an immanent power struggle remains. Behind the author’s optimistic perspective on postliberalism and its political enactment on the global stage is an embrace of a Habermasian view that assumes the practical achievement of an ‘ideal speech situation’ in a public sphere wherein no political party or persons will exercise ‘unnecessary domination’ upon others. I find this unrealistic giving current conditions in which ‘illiberal democracies’ are largely taking authoritarian right-wing forms.

### ***5. Intermezzo: postliberalism as nihilism and engagement***

The reviewer well appreciates the author’s close reading of Hannah Arendt, particularly considering her useful distinction between ‘common sense’ and what I would say is ‘good sense’. Yet, our recent experience with COVID-19 shows clearly that nonsense can easily coexist with intelligence. Indeed, if a brilliant person embraces the wrong starting point, it can be even harder to convince them of good sense. In fact, many intellectuals and advisers to the powerful have practised a ‘cynical distancing’ in the author’s words, between what they themselves know to be true and what ‘lines’ of falsehood their masters posit, simply because their life is too intertwined in the corrupt system they inhabit. So again, while I wish very much that the expressed hopes and goals of the author can realistically be obtained, I have my sincere doubts that they can be.

## **6. Rortian postliberalism**

This chapter returns us to a consideration of the work of Richard Rorty, via Lucian Blaga, one of the strongest aspects of this book. As the author states:

Creativity, emotion, feeling and will have significant roles in post-liberalism. In this sense, we are evoking once more the closeness between the philosophy of Richard Rorty and the philosophy of Lucian Blaga, a closeness that can be fully understood from the perspective of the important role given to creativity and subjectivity. The Romanian philosopher is led by a 'belief about the uniqueness of the human being'. Moreover, 'man [the human being] is a being who, in his eminently human capacity, exists in a certain horizon and for a certain purpose; man appears to us, by his purpose, engaged in an ontological way that separates him from the animals by a nothing less than an abyss: man exists in the horizon of mystery and in the intention of revelation. The result of this existential mode are the creations (...) Any creation of culture, from a poem to a metaphysical idea, from an ethical thought to a religious myth is in itself a small world, a universe. (...) 'Society' is, in the final analysis and in its most secret principle, a form of coexistence [emphasis added] that does not exist in order to (simply) be; it is a form of coexistence for the production of 'spiritual' universes (emphasis added) (pp. 291-92).

However, while it is very clear that the consequences of pragmatism show that we can make the world of others' experiences more satisfying in relation to our projects, interests, goals and hopes, I hold this happy equilibrium is more likely to be achieved on an individual basis and not a collective one. The author agrees with me here (somewhat), stating:

A source of misunderstandings was also the approach of 'public-private distinction'. The simplest way to understand the relativization, but not the annulment of this distinction from the perspective of Richard Rorty, is to interpret things precisely from the neopragmatist perspective with an emphasis on praxis and the narrative dimension. Quite simply, both the praxis and the narrative dimension are what correlate both the private and the public sphere. The ironist, as a human type, represents the most likely individual type to achieve the ironist culture (i.e. a more genuinely liberal and somewhat a more just society, from Rorty's perspective), is still an individualistic liberal and can be understood as well as an entrepreneurial spirit. (p. 296)

The main issue or challenge not addressed here is how this high hope of a humane collective politics can survive when the inertia of institutions and their operating principles (especially unstated covert ones), works precisely against such a goal in lieu of 'special interests', and have the upper hand because of manipulation by presently powerful, anti-democratic governments. 'The personal is political' stance does not avoid this dilemma, indeed, it compounds it, in my view, and my fear is that an ironist, unless very well placed in the hierarchy of powers, can be ignored or sanctioned.

## **7. An interpretation of postliberalism through the 'pragmatic turn', 'the paradigms of difference', 'reforming ideologies' and the symbolic forms**

This complex chapter attempts to walk the reader through the many variations and contestations of 'representation'. The author refers to 'paradigms of difference' and its relation to the pragmatic turn in philosophy, a turn taken to transcend the modernism that preceded it and makes its foundation from which it seeks liberation:

Postliberalism based on pragmatic turn is a response to the crisis of rationality, a result of rediscovering difference – a solution found in the spirit of embracing multiple options and in contradiction and contrast with the simplistic view of democratic egalitarianism (on a horizontal symbolic dimension) or hierarchies in communication between people (on a symbolic vertical dimension). Without the interest of completing truly an exhaustive big picture, we easily notice among the new concepts that are imposed in postliberalism, such as, holism, eclecticism, procedural bias, textual interest, along with the Rortian ones: rhetoric, ironism, indeterminacy, liberalism, communitarianism, pluralism, solidarity. (p. 305)

Similar to Kenneth Boulding, the author gives close attention to the centrality to the concept of the image. On one hand, she even points to the possible 'divinity' of the image. Yet, in the next paragraph she then states, that in the view of both pragmatism and neopragmatism, this 'crisis of representation' loses its stake, because the Platonic essence on which it depends no longer holds true. If this is the case, then competing political projects and their incommensurate

goals can only be regulated by existing ‘norms and legal structures’, which can change quickly. And not always for the best reasons.

The only optimistic note is when the author points to is a ‘symbolic-poetic invasion’ that can somehow survive and undermine cynical power plays in the political sphere. Only in this way do I agree that postliberalism can, in her words, create ‘lasting ideas’ in society, among other concrete settings.

#### **8. Other perceptions on postliberalism, different from the Rortian ones**

In this chapter, the author turns to consideration of authors writing about postliberalism from a top-down prospective. Beginning with Foucault, she considers the work of two professors (Laurence McFalls & Mariella Pandolfi) who wrote a series of articles discussing Foucaultian concepts of governance, wherein they admit that postliberalism ‘is a fragile social construct’. Instead, as she shows, in a frightening probable counter-scenario:

In this case important is governability and it is logically oriented extremely different, towards the multiplication and radicalization of control mechanisms (as fundamental as possible) dedicated to governing human life. ‘Even ontologically, this sort of postliberalism redefines the human experience, replacing the selfish liberal subject and the neoliberal entrepreneur with the self that Michael Dillon and Julian Reid call ‘biohuman’ (p. 340).

This stark concept is then linked to illustrations of therapeutic governance, all governed by the ‘logic’ of the marketplace. But this logical foundation of global systems found its Achilles Heel in the financial crisis of 2008, in my view. The abandonment of a coherent liberal governing order in favour of a postliberal one that seeks only to manage ‘chaos’ with fallible experts will be, as the author said, ‘short-term and short-lived’. Key quote: ‘Postliberalism that has in its conceptual centre the idea of biohuman it is a type of humanitarianism but not humanism’ (p.346). Given an international stage with much disarray and crises galore, the challenge of converting [an increasing] number of ‘ungovernable individuals’ into ‘manageable populations’ becomes central. As she concludes, ‘hence is issued the need for strategies for intervention and preparation of populations for adequacy to post-liberal leadership’ (p. 346).

#### **CONCLUSIVE DISCUSSION: *On the evolution, involution and revolution of contemporary times***

The author concludes the main text of the book by observing alongside Ernesto Laclau, ‘that the revolution of our times develops around a theoretical-practical axis represented by the revolutionary transformation of society, which involves ideological commitment and long-term activism, with a pronounced expressiveness in the antagonisms transposed discursively’ (p. 347). Despite its high ideals and goals in reforming empiricism following Plato and Descartes, pragmatism not only challenged ‘tradition’ in a productive knowledge-building direction, but also in a sceptical or cynical direction too. ‘Truth’, the author states, ‘is approached pragmatically as sum of statements – as functional, established, validated and justified in a coherent way statements –, but not as a principled ultimate foundation, nor as correspondence, and, not through the prism of rationality. Neopragmatism supports coherence, and it inherits and continues the epistemological directions drawn by pragmatism. The central value of the functionality and use of postliberal pragmatism and neopragmatism is nuanced by pluralism and a pluralistic ethics valid epistemologically and socio-politically’ (p. 348).

Most tellingly, given our sad state of current affairs in the world, the author, despite her innate positive mindset about a humane left emancipatory version of postmodernism and postliberalism articulated by Rorty, realizes it is ‘increasingly an outdated concern’ (p. 348), following the lead of ‘national liberation’ thinkers such as Michael Waltzer, and leading to the ‘rhetorical foundations of society’ as theorized by Laclau. As the author summarizes the idea:

The theory of rhetoric foundation of society elaborated by Ernesto Laclau establishes the general, ontological status of rhetoric and through it, a subtle correlation between ontologic and oneiric level, in which the oneiric level is constituted as a resource for the ontological one. In the context of this theory, ‘politics’ is [a process of] articulation of heterogeneous elements and this articulation is essentially tropological, because it presupposes the duality between the establishment and undermining of the positions of differentiation that we consider defining for rhetorical intervention. But social organization is not exclusively political: it largely consists of differentiating positions that are not challenged by any confrontation between social groups. (p. 352)

Upsetting (or reactivating) this ‘sedimentation’ of social structures is the point of politics, according to Laclau. Technocratic management exists to prevent this process of occurring, leading to a ‘dissolution of politics’ in his view. So, the author of this encompassing work of social and political theorizing ends on an ambiguous note:

[T]he dissolution of politics in community management, or the fact that democratic deficit is followed by democratic involution, in the sense of increased control, is exactly what we live today, all over the globe, at the dawn of a new *Weltanschauung*, emerging, so fast, with its long shadow of fear and the potential of passivity inducement, loneliness, de-socialization, as well as the deformation and reduction to bio- of the human ontological mode. With the nostalgia of dedication to Geist, within the “horizon of mystery” (Lucian Blaga), we notice that Rortian postliberalism (although neopragmatism not so much), already represents the ‘old’; although it is something “old” with a special statute, paradoxically, still contemporary. (p. 352)

**ANNEXES:**

***1. The political self — discursive interpretations***

***2. Reforming ideologies as a paradigm and a political stake***

Reading the conclusions in the first article that forms one-half of the Annexes, I am reminded of the work of George Kelly on philosophical alternativism, i.e., ‘to the living creature, then, the universe is real, but it is not inexorable unless he chooses to construe it that way’. The author states: ‘The accent of this is placed on the interpretation of the concept of the ‘political self’, in correlation with the explicit and implicit idea of self-determination, and an implicit contribution for the discussion of personal freedom’. She continues: ‘Social reality becomes political not only by the descriptions of the designated political actors and of the specialists in politics in politics (or the analysts) but by the first-hand experimentation of the world by the daily efforts of the individual’ (p. 372).

In the second article in the annexes, the link the author makes between feminism and ironism is very welcome. Usually, feminism, as a school of thought, has not been known for its ability to analyse itself in a detached way. So, bringing feminism into a dialectical relationship with ironism is a welcome step forward. Such a synthesis of individual seriousness and collective playfulness will in my view, be the only thing that can keep the postliberal political project a humane one. Thanks to these annexes, I can now close my review of this important book on a more positive note than I had thought possible.

In summation, a very worthy read, substantial and challenging.

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***Humour and Cruelty Volume 1: A Philosophical Exploration of the Humanities and Social Sciences.***

in the series *De Gruyter Studies in Philosophy of Humor*

**Giorgio Baruchello and Ársæll Már Arnarsson**

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To read this book is to take a series of deep-dives into oceans of historical literature on both topics, each dive fascinating on its own. Considered together, I find them particularly rich food for thought, in that what makes things funny or cruel seems to suggest something distinctive about us. Arguably, we alone among the world's creatures find things funny or cruel, so it is worth considering what it is about *us* that makes that true.

There are, then, at least two fruitful ways to use this book. One can consult it as an encyclopaedia, and one can read it through to reach philosophical conclusions about our personal nature.

As an encyclopaedia, the book offers diverse theories about, perspectives on, and approaches to humour and cruelty. Want to know about what humour was like in Addison's 18th Century London daily, *The Spectator*? It is covered: pp. 48-55. Interested in the Isotopy-Disjunctive model of how jokes work? Or in discovering what cruelty meant to the Marquis de Sade? Or, in what psychologists say about cruelty today? A sub-chapter is devoted to these topics too.

The book is well-ordered to function as a reference manual because its two halves, humour and cruelty, are each divided into a philosophy and humanities section and another on psychology and the social sciences. The authors enjoy something of that division of labour as well. Baruchello is a philosopher; Arnarsson, a biological psychologist.

It soon became apparent to this reader how useful it can be to consider each topic from each of these two clusters of disciplinary perspectives. But it was not immediately clear—and even now not entirely clear—why the authors chose to treat them in the same book. What do humour and cruelty have to do with one another? In this volume, their relationship is sometimes noted—that humour can be cruel, for instance—but no systematic account of their kinship is developed. That is by intent. *Humour and Cruelty*, it turns out, is the first of three volumes. The second and third, forthcoming, will show the two in conjunction—humorous cruelty and cruel humour—and in conflict—‘the use and abuse of cruelty against humour, and...of humour against cruelty.’ They are, respectively, *Dangerous Liaisons* and *Laughing Matters*. *Humour and Cruelty* stands complete as a survey of each topic independently; the next two volumes promise to explore their interface.

The second way to read this book is to use it as a foil for the features of agency that make it *personal*. This approach intrigues me, particularly with reference to humour. It is, as I said, a uniquely human trait, and that alone seems suggestive. But what if anything does our ability to find things humorous tell us about how we persons give meaning to our action, and what if anything do the distinctive ways we characterize action tell us about humour?

Baruchello and Arnarsson do not address the issue as I have framed it, at least not directly. But they do address it indirectly by how they assess what they find in their ‘dives.’ In an assumption they make, they are able to turn the two topics into portals into what it means to be a person. The crucial assumption is that all knowledge is personal, including knowing whether something is meant to be humorous or cruel.

As Michael Polanyi uses the term ‘personal knowledge,’ there is a tacit coefficient to any grasp of the meaning of anything, from a scientific theory to a joke. By operating with that Polanyian epistemology, the authors can account for a crucial formal feature of the meaning of anything we find humorous, namely its polysemy. Polysemy is a systematic ambiguity in meaning. It is meaning that cannot be disambiguated and still be understood. Humour is multi-layered in meaning in that it puts us in multiple active contexts at once, often incongruous ones. ‘Humour’ therefore has ‘measured fluidity.’ (For brevity's sake and because I find their treatment of the topic more thought provoking, I am focusing here mostly on the humour part of the book.)

The first thing to say about the claim that ‘humour is polysemic’ is that the claim is itself polysemic. It means both that if we are aware of something as humorous, we find it to be meaningful in more than one way, and it means that the word ‘humour’ has multiple means. By occasionally reminding us of polysemy of both kinds, the authors maintain a consistent and clear perspective on the accounts they study. Each

exploration takes us not only into an exotic world in its own terms, but it assesses its account at least partly according to whether it accommodates the polysemy of humour.

As our explorations of the various accounts add up, we observe that many of the humanists and scientists weighing in on the topic in the past tried and failed to grasp the nature of humour adequately because they did not accommodate its systematic ambiguity. Psychologists, for example, need clear definitions and quantifiable subject matter. Much the same can be said for social scientists. As the authors observe, the polysemy of humour has either tended to discourage them from working on the topic or, for those who have engaged it, at best to illuminate only a facet of it.

In reading this book, I have come to see why humour can be understood best if we recognize the role of personal knowledge and why persons can only reach their personal potential if they have a sense of humour. To flesh out my conclusions, let me highlight some commonalities that emerged for me as I read. These suggest themselves as tenets of personalism, though the book does not explicitly state all of them.

1) Like humour, persons cannot be identified conceptually. I mentioned earlier that the dominant ways to identify humour seem insufficient on their own. Baruchello and Arnarsson consider the possibility that some composite account might fill the bill, but I doubt it. Not unless there is a way for a composite account to credit the ambiguity of humour.

Persons cannot be identified with monosemic/unambiguous terms either. We cannot say explicitly *who* someone is. 'Churchill was a prime minister' does not identify *who* he was as a person. Nor does it help to identify him personally if we add that he was a cigar-smoker, painter, historian, and married man. No series of labels convey *who* he was because they cannot disclose how he *integrated* all those elements of his life. Such personal integration was present in his tacit awareness as a context of meaning for what he was doing, whether he was painting, writing history, or accomplishing any of his other intentions. This integrated bearing of intentional life gave him individuality as a personal agent.

So, just as one cannot explain jokes without making them unfunny, one cannot explain persons without making knowledge of them impersonal.

2) Like persons, humour only has meaning in a social setting with its distinctive mores, power arrangements, and interactive roles. It is in specific social contexts that humorous situations unfold. That is why we often type humour with reference to such settings: British humour, adolescent humour, Dad jokes, etc.

3) Likewise, persons are social creatures. Typically, they spend a good part of their lives interacting, and their interactive lives shape who they are. They bear the marks of parental upbringing, workaday roles, and the ways of doing things in the affinity groups and intentional communities they inhabit. The polysemy of their active life has as a key ingredient the relational meaning of their shared intentions. Their lives are not just co-ordinated individually but co-ordinated in families and tribes. Persons are part of the life of their relationships and interactive involvements, and that means their self-awareness is contextualized in a character identity with social specificity.

4) Persons and humour are both elusive to social scientists, and for the same reason. Social scientists, *qua* social scientists, can only think in categories. Their conclusions can only be demonstrated syllogistically. That puts a systemic constraint on their methods when they try to deal with polysemy. Categories are well-formed only if they have determined boundaries. Their function is to make clear determinations of, for instance, what counts as humour and what does not. That stipulation cancels any appreciation of the systematic ambiguity polysemy mandates. In the case of cruelty, they tend to back off, since 'no single, clear, agreed-upon definition of 'cruelty' exists, despite the many attempts.' In the case of humour, definitions have been nominated—most commonly in terms of superiority, incongruity, and relief—but as the authors point out, as ideal types these are not mutually exclusive, nor do all three pertain to all humour. Thus, none can be regarded as definitive.

Persons as agents resist conceptualization too, as we have seen. The personal meaning of action resonates with multiple elements of our intentional life. We are tacitly aware of swimming in the many currents of our present undertakings. We plunge forward sometimes, just float sometimes, but we are always moving ahead on a course that we hope will achieve our life as fully as we can. In short, our multi-intentioned agency makes us defiantly polysemic as characterizers of action.

5) Finally, persons and humour can only be identified by characterizing actions narratively. Narratives do what concepts cannot: they resolve many episodes into a single course, coherent as one arc of achievement. The only cognitive way to capture the polysemy of a person's action is to project it as a coherent course of action, which is to say to narrate it.

So too with humour. The only way to be funny is to tell a story, or to assume a background story for the action related. The narrative context of an action, *not* its categorization makes it funny and/or personal.

Maybe these inklings of mine will be born out when humour and cruelty combine forces and square off against one another in volumes two and three. Until then, this fine feast of a book can nourish our thinking abundantly.

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***Introduction to Personalism***

**Juan Manuel Burgos.**

trans. **R.T. Allen**

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This edition of Juan Manuel Burgos's *Introducción al personalismo* (2012), has, in collaboration with his translators and others, been thoroughly revised for the English translation, and includes new material on British and American personalism, tailored to an Anglophone audience. The first three chapters present a historico-biographical overview of the principal personalists in the tradition, while the fourth presents a 'proposal' for the development of personalism in the future.

In the first chapter, Burgos argues that personalism arose from a sense of crisis in Europe in the inter-war period – not merely the socio-economic crisis of the Wall Street Crash and the rise of totalitarianism, but also a sense of philosophical crisis, born out of a dissatisfaction with modernism and a perceived lack of a philosophy to address this. The way had already been paved by, on the one hand, Kierkegaard's rejection of Hegelian absolutism, and on the other hand by Pope Leo XIII's 1879 call for a return to Thomism as a philosophy capable of rebutting modernist ideology. As Burgos (25) notes, 'The cultural situation of Catholicism was essential both to the rise of personalism and to the configuration of its features, since the greater part of personalists were fervent Catholics, in such a way that their religious experience was interwoven with their thinking'. This is true, for example, of the Catholic convert Max Scheler, who, in his *Man's Place in the Cosmos* (1927), repeats the Kierkegaardian theme (originating in St Augustine) that man has 'become an enigma to himself'. The development of personalist thinking, at least in Europe, was, then, a response to the intellectual advances of various 'isms' which, although often being opposed to one another, were still constituents of the modernist malaise: scientism, positivism, nihilism, relativism, capitalism, collectivism, and individualism. Personalism, while introducing another 'ism', stood outside of this milieu, resuscitating an old idea from scholasticism, but also chiming with other contemporary 'excluded alternatives' (Buber) such as phenomenological experience, subjectivity, etc.

Having thus set the scene, Burgos then goes on to explicate the lives and works of various personalists in turn. He treats them chronologically, organised by geographical area (French, Italian, Polish, German, Spanish, British, and American). While this makes for a very clearly organised book, it sometimes gives the impression that each country has its own 'national personalism' somewhat removed from global currents. While there may be some truth in this (many personalists were living under totalitarian regimes, and had little access to global literature), it does somewhat interrupt the narrative flow of the development of personalism as a whole. Moreover, the 'life and work' approach conflates understanding a thinker's philosophy with understanding *why* that thinker arrived at his or her philosophy, in a manner that is hermeneutically questionable. For example, in the discussion of Maritain we are told (45) that he 'presented Aquinas's positions with a renewed vigour because he was able to perceive ... the real intuition that had illuminated the Angelic Doctor's writings', without being told what that 'real intuition' is. Meanwhile,

in ethics, especially to be stressed are, for example, [Maritain's] interest in practical reason, his innovative studies of natural law which were aimed at moving away from its presentation as a legalistic formalism, the importance he gives to experience as the starting point for ethics, his moving from a syllogistic understanding of moral judgment to an emphasis on the unrepeatability of each ethical decision because of its strictly singular character, his attempt to integrate values into the classical system of ends, and so on' (47).

While each of these listed items might well be stressed, it would be useful to know what Maritain's *argument* is in each case. For each philosopher explicated – not only Maritain – we are told what his interests were, and what he was trying to achieve, but we are left in the dark as to the logic of the argument behind each position articulated.

Sub-chapter 5.1, 'British Contributions to Personalist Philosophy', written by Burgos' translator, R. T. Allen, is happier in this respect. Allen identifies John Macmurray, Michael Polanyi, and Austin Farrer as the leading lights of British personalism. For Farrer, 'the logic of intentionality demands an "overplus", an owner-I of acts intended' (166), and Farrer extends this analogically to the cosmological relation, so that

Being-just-being-itself is exchanged for 'the God about whom we have something to do'. Real knowledge of Being is 'the product of deliberate interference with it' (167). Macmurray, meanwhile, in common with his French counterparts, reverses the Cartesian reflection on the reflective self, to insist on the reality of persons only being persons in relation to other persons (although Allen doesn't say so, this places Macmurray in alignment with Lévinas, as discussed by Burgos elsewhere in the book). Hence 'persons are agents first and knowers second', which leads to friendship being the purpose of all action. The target of Polanyi, on the other hand, is the so-called 'objectivity' of science: he argues that it requires the 'personal engagement and judgement of the scientist himself' (168).

The most significant part of Burgos' book is his final chapter, 'Personalist Philosophy: A Proposal'. A problem that Burgos identifies is that 'personalism' is not a unified doctrine: as Mounier himself pointed out, there are about as many personalisms as there are personalists. This means that personalism is not simply another 'ism' to be compared to the many 'isms' it opposes: it hovers between being a coherent philosophy, and an attitude towards other modes of thinking, particularly individualism on the one hand and collectivism on the other, neither of which respect the singular autonomy of the person in the face of the Other (to borrow a Lévinasian terminology). As Burgos notes, it is for this reason (what Ricoeur calls personalism's 'inner demons', which include its ongoing fascination with defining itself) that Ricoeur, for example, abandoned personalism in his own philosophy of the person. And Burgos is also aware that 'If personalism does not present a moderately unitary profile, but only a myriad of relatively disparate authors, every one of whom fights on his one account, then there will be a danger that none of them has sufficient strength to make himself heard in the coming decades' (193), which is a nice way of saying that, if one were to play the parlour game of 'Name the ten most important philosophers of the twentieth century', Lévinas would be the only personalist to make the list, and not for his personalism.

Burgos' response to this is to propose what he calls a 'modern ontological personalism'. A modern concept of the person, for Burgos, includes thinking the person as an 'I' and a 'who' endowed with affectivity and subjectivity. The person's ontology encompasses interpersonal, corporeal, the distinction of three basic dimensions (bodily, psychological, and spiritual), and masculinity or femininity. The personalist recognises the primacy of love, freedom as self-determination, the narrative character of human existence, and transcendence as the relationship with a Thou. This is quite a list, and Burgos' attitude to each of the items on it tends to follow that of his philosophical hero, Karol Wojtyła. Historically, personalism has been firmly rooted in the Judaeo-Christian tradition, and especially in the (Thomist) teachings of the Catholic Church: for all his 'modernity', Burgos sees no reason to depart from this tradition. This becomes problematic, for example, in the 'transcendental' dimension: personalism excludes any philosophy that might describe itself as atheist or agnostic. But such an exclusion precludes the possibility that an atheistic philosophy could have an adequate concept of the person. A pressing issue of our times is gender identity: on this point, Burgos is resolutely essentialist, claiming that 'The person, in effect, not only has a masculine or feminine biology but *is* man or woman; is a masculine person or a feminine person, because having a sexual identity affects, configures, and modulates all human structures, as neurology is currently demonstrating in an undeniable way' (230). Unfortunately, Burgos' 'undeniable' demonstration relies on Louann Brizendine's discredited *The Female Brain*, awarded the Becky Award in 2006 for 'outstanding contributions to linguistic misinformation'.

Burgos ends his book by nodding towards personalism's 'expansion' into bioethics, communitarian politics, and psychology (Carl Rogers and the logotherapy of Viktor Frankl). While these are certainly worthwhile topics of discussion, surely any philosophy worthy of the name, as personalism claims to be, must address the most pressing existential questions of our time, which, I would say, are the destruction of the environment, and the advance of so-called Artificial Intelligence (it's not actually intelligent). The philosophies best equipped to address these issues so far have been philosophies of the person that are not personalist: on the environment, philosophy of the anthropocene as exemplified by Steven Best or Zoe Todd; on AI, theories of the posthuman in the wake of Lyotard. If personalism is to remain relevant in the twenty-first century, it is to these challenges that it must rise.

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