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On the lack of explicit internal criticism of contemporary personalists. An outline of the problem

Abstract. *Contemporary personalism was born out of a certain anthropological disagreement with certain concepts that arose on the basis of naturalism and scientism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, as practice shows, personalism has not achieved spectacular “success” in the world of philosophy in the form of neither clear external criticism from opponents (be it from the Frankfurt School or representatives of postmodernists), nor internal criticism within the framework of discussions within personalism itself. And yet it is difficult to deny the representatives of this trend a clear contribution to the development of such concepts and terms as: value, person (as a corporeal and spiritual being with social orientation), common good, commitment. The aim of this article is to try to answer the question why criticism within personalism could result in a certain exposure of views “outside” the world of philosophy.*

Keywords: *personalism, criticism, method, methodology, philosophy, theology, differences*

Introduction

From antiquity, through the Middle Ages, to the modern era and the present day, philosophy was built on two pillars: asking questions and trying to find answers to these questions. However, what made certain philosophical trends appear, and later the representation came to the fore, was criticism understood in a positive way.



Considering only the scope of modernity and the present day, attention should be paid to several critical disputes, which resulted in the highlighting of the philosophical trends which constitute the basis for not only re-understanding the term “man,” but also all the ethical implications associated with it. Beginning with the most general issue, it is difficult to ignore the large dispute that just breaks down on mutual criticism both in terms of conceptual and objective background – the dispute between realism and idealism. This dispute resulted not only in the development of other currents of philosophy (e.g. analytical philosophy and the philosophy of language), but also sharpened the position on both sides (Hegel and his successors).¹ There are also instances of criticism that can be called both detailed and internal as it has been conducted within one field of philosophy. An example may be the internal dispute over the understanding of the social contract in liberalism (Hobbes, Lock, Rousseau), as well as the detailed dispute over the term “social justice” and equity within the issue of “the welfare state and the minimal state” (Rawls, Nozick).²

Personalism, understood today, was also born of a certain anthropological disagreement with certain concepts that arose on the basis of naturalism and scientism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. However, as practice shows, personalism has not achieved a spectacular “success” in the world of philosophy in the form of neither clear external criticism from opponents (be it from the Frankfurt school or representatives of postmodernists), nor internal criticism as part of a discussion within personalism itself. And yet it is difficult to deny the representatives of this trend a clear contribution to the development of such concepts and terms as: value, person (as a corporeal and spiritual being with social orientation), common good, commitment. Does this mean that these concepts, terms, ways of understanding contemporary man and his problems proposed by personalism are of little value?

The aim of this article is to try to answer the question why criticism within personalism could result in a certain exposure of views “outside” the world of philosophy. The article consists of three parts: methodological (criticism in the humanities as a certain value), substantive (the status of personalism today in the world and in Poland) and critical (possible “fruits” of internal criticism for personalistic thought).

¹ See more: W. Krzysztosiak, *Analiza opozycji idealizm-realizm*, “Filozofia Nauki” 1996, no. 1, pp. 17–40; L. Allais, *Manifest Reality: Kant’s Idealism and his Realism*, Oxford University Press, 2015; *Idealism, Relativism, and Realism: New Essays on Objectivity Beyond the Analytic-Continental Divide*, ed. P.M. Livingston, De Gruyter 2020.

² See more: J. Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, Rev Sub 1999; R. Nozick, *Anarchy, State and Utopia*, Wiley-Blackwell 2001.

1. Criticism of views as one of the research tools in the humanities

Lorenzo C. Simpson, one of the contemporary researchers of issues related to the broadly understood criticism (based on the example of hermeneutics), criticism in the humanities is one of the basic foundations conducive to its development, both in terms of developing one's own position within the expressed thoughts and views, as well as allows for some modification these views as a result of dialogue with other currents, with representatives of other humanities schools. In the preface to one of his latest books, he writes that:

I elaborate a hermeneutic account of linguistic meaning and of progress that allows us to understand the evolution of scientific knowledge as a progressive learning process, thus refuting claims to the effect that hermeneutic analyses are necessarily relativistic or critically impotent. I deploy hermeneutic accounts of cultural identity and of rationality to develop modalities of engagement that will sustain critical dialogues about questionable, although culturally endorsed, practices—practices such as female excision—without invidious ethnocentrism. Forging modalities for dialogues that would bridge the gap between a merely culturally bound interpretation and a respectful transcultural criticism seems to me to be one of the central challenges facing us now.³

Criticism, therefore, fulfills various functions in relation to the world of the humanities: on the one hand, it begins an internal dialogue about how, within a similar or the same branch of science, we understand concepts, problems, but also ways of solving them; on the other hand, this criticism opens a given group of researchers to the possibility of arguing with completely oppositional trends. Such a way of practicing the humanities, including philosophy, can free individual trends and currents of thought from dogmatism, which closes to other views, and can itself make the truths proclaimed (even if understood in an objective way) incomprehensible or even understood as dangerous ideologically.

It is also worth emphasizing here that modern and contemporary philosophy allows for criticism at various levels and levels, but it is received differently. Usually, when presenting criticism of certain thinkers, the author presents himself as “someone who is on the other side of the critic.”⁴ Criticism, however – especially in the light of philosophy – does not necessarily evoke negative feelings. From the very beginning, philosophy has existed because questions have been asked and answers have been sought, also in the context of the views already presented. An example may be a critical view of Christianity as a certain anthropological and ethi-

³ L.S. Simpson, *Hermeneutics as Critique: Science, Politics, Race, and Culture*, Columbia University Press 2021, p. X.

⁴ P. Terzi, *Rediscovering Leon Brunschvicg's Critical Idealism: Philosophy, History and Science in the Third Republic*, Bloomsbury Academic 2022, p. 31.

cal system from the perspective of a person who belongs both structurally, mentally and spiritually to the Christian religion. There is no shortage of such studies both in the world⁵ and in Europe. It should also be noted that unused – as it seems – in the right way in the world of broadly understood humanities, are reviews in its various varieties. Reviews of scientific books (already published) could result in indicating both valuable content and elements on which the author should rethink or work on something. This issue is similar in the case of reviews of scientific articles and reviews in connection with the procedure for awarding the degree of doctor, the degree of habilitated doctor or the title of professor. Critical reviews are usually perceived as a kind of personal “attack” on the person presenting the article or doctorate. However, if the review meets certain formal and substantive requirements, such as lack of bias or a sense of omnipotence in terms of one’s own knowledge, then criticism in the review should fulfill dialogical functions in science.⁶

Of course, in the aspect of the proposed position on the need for criticism in the humanities, at least two problems of a methodological nature should be signaled. The first problem focuses on the issue of “the right to criticize,” and the second thread concerns the risks associated with possible “excessive” criticism, both internal (within one trend in the humanities / philosophy) and external (where the response to criticism or accusations of representatives of completely different currents of thought is undertaken). As far as the “right to criticize” is concerned, it is worth emphasizing that from the juristic side it is difficult to imagine a certain compulsion to both cultivate criticism and respond to criticism. This means that criticism and its possible “acceptance” in the form of expressing a dissenting opinion from the critical one is a possibility, not an obligation. It is worth emphasizing here, however, that the above positive remarks rather suggest that criticism practiced in a common-sense manner may constitute “added value” for the humanities, including the world of philosophy. When writing about the dangers of criticism, one problem should be signaled: substantive preparation of the person undertaking the criticism. The contemporary public sphere, along with the most radical understanding of freedom, has accustomed society to the fact that every human being, regardless of the level of knowledge (not necessarily formal education), has a “duty” to express a critical opinion. In the world of philosophy, however, there are positive examples where the thinker undertakes a critique of the problem that is or has been the subject of many years of research for him. These examples can be multiplied and it is good,⁷ because they prove that criticism is needed.

⁵ See more in: J.W. Loftus, *Christianity in the Light of Science: Critically Examining the World’s Largest Religion*, Prometheus Books 2016.

⁶ P. Chmielecki, *Recenzje naukowe – błędy, pułapki i postulaty*, “Przegląd Pedagogiczny” 2019, no. 1, pp. 262–266.

⁷ K. Jasiński, *Buberowska krytyka “Boga filozofów”*, “Nurt SVD” 2014, no. 2, pp. 91–109.

2. The contemporary state of personalistic thought in the world and in Poland – selected perspectives

In this part of the article – in a perverse way – the layer of content related to the program of personalism will be shown first, and then the formal perspective. This arrangement is adjusted in such a way as to first familiarize the reader with the positive layer of personalistic philosophy, and then indicate his – as it seems – an important drawback – formal issues.

2.1. The content perspective – anthropology, ethics, social problems⁸

What does contemporary personalism give the world of philosophy? The following answer could be given to such a question: a positive image of a human being as a moral subject capable of assessing their own behavior and decisions who want to live for themselves and for another human being. This answer, however, is one of many possible, and in this case original, definitions of personalism. Contemporary personalism, rooted in classical philosophical thought (Aristotle and Thomas Aquinas) and Christian ethics, has the possibility of influencing in a more detailed way the world and the man that it co-creates. In a synthetic way, drawing on specific examples, the program of personalism (anthropology, ethics, society) will be presented, which – although in a certain subjective way – seems to be interesting in terms of explicit content and also, in a way, hidden in specific texts by representatives of this trend, and in selected studies.

When looking for an answer to the question of how man is defined in personalism, one should give voice to one of the oldest contemporary precursors of personalism, Emmanuel Mounier. In one of the texts, he gives the following descriptive definition of a human-person, with two interpretative perspectives that function within one system he represents: negative and positive. So who is not man? (negative outlook). Mounier writes that: “The person is not the most marvellous object in the world, nor anything else that we can know from the outside. It is the one reality that we know, and that we are at the same time fashioning, from within. Present everywhere, it is given nowhere.”⁹ Therefore, a person is a being that should, in the first place, demand from himself and strive for a state not of self-satisfaction, but of a state related to a certain moral condition, proper to his nature. This “negative”

⁸ The author of this article assumes that the potential reader is familiar with the philosophical concept of personalism. Therefore, it is limited to discussing selected issues. The author, on the other hand, proposes the following studies in English and Polish: D.F. Weaver, *The acting person and Christian moral life*, Georgetown University Press 2011; Cz. Bartnik, *Personalizm*, KUL, Lublin 2008.

⁹ E. Mounier, *Personalism*, University of Notre Dame Press 1989, p. 7, ebook.

view is related to the positive response that we also find in Mounier. The human person is created out of love and for love, and the source of love is God the Creator. He points out that in this the unity of the human species is visible, that each participant of this species is called to individual development, which should also be used – in a positive way – for the social cause.¹⁰ Can it be concluded that, due to the fact that God appears in anthropology understood in this way, he discredits personalism as a line of philosophy? Such a concept of a man who should develop in various areas of life (physical, intellectual, social) may constitute a counterbalance to liberal thoughts, where freedom is placed on the pedestal as an individual's way of being (which, in the opinion of some researchers, began with the freedom of conscience and religion or lack of it),¹¹ but also collectivist thinking, where, in the case of Marx, work is one of the main engines of human development. In both cases the concept of mine, yours and ours as a society disappears from the horizon.

The issue is similar when looking at issues related to ethics and axiology. A positive aspect of contemporary personalism in the perspective of various ethical disputes is that this trend has an objectively defined concept of value (it may be subject to polemics or criticism, for example, regarding the source of these values, but it is difficult to deny personalism a coherent ethical system). One of the American researchers of personalism – John F. Crosby – emphasizes in the context of a certain dramaturgy of human life (between good and evil) that a person, as a unique being due to the original act of creation, but also due to the natural ability to interpersonal relations, should act according to good. moral both for oneself and also in the context of another human being. And just as moral good has specific effects within itself, moral evil brings such effects both on a personal and social level.¹² Of course, the authors of contemporary personalism do not hide that nowadays living with values is an easy matter. The constant choices between good and evil are demanding and sometimes make it difficult in everyday prose. In this context, however, it is worth referring to an interesting and important definition of value by Gabriel Marcel. Although it is poetic in nature, it contains some essence and the core of what is the ethical value for personalism. In one of his books, he points out that: “The value lies in the faithful following, through darkness, of a light by which we have been guided and which is no longer visible to us directly; indeed, it can be said that it is because there is a darkness, an eclipse, that there can be testimony-attestation.”¹³ Personalism assumes that it is a certain perspective linking immanence with transcendence that can give hope that faithfulness to values will

¹⁰ Ibidem, p. 12, ebook.

¹¹ D. Ivison, *Locke, liberalism and empire*, in: *The Philosophy of John Locke*, ed. P.R. Anstey, Routledge 2003, p. 94.

¹² J.F. Crosby, *Zarys filozofii osoby*, transl. B. Majczyna, WAM, Kraków 2007, p. 264.

¹³ G. Marcel, *The Philosophy of Existentialism*, transl. Manya Harari, Citadel Press 2013, p. 98.

bring the expected result. Also in this aspect, personalism can “compete” with other views on ethical issues. An example is one of the representatives of postmodernism – Richard Rorty. On the one hand, this author points to clear shortcomings of the ethical system, the source of which is Christianity.¹⁴ On the other hand, in one of his books he promotes a completely different vision of understanding how to look at ethical matters in the contemporary world:

It seems to me that the notion of a universal truth and of a transcendent dimension are both expressions of the hope that there is something large and powerful on our side. Something large and powerful working on our behalf. Something in reality which is sympathetic to our goals. Religion is the traditional expression of that belief. As secularist politics gradually replaced theocratic politics in the West, it became more and more possible to substitute hope that there was something powerful on our side with simple hope that human beings would do certain things, that they could freely cooperate in certain ways. I think of the philosophy common to Mill, Dewey, and Habermas as saying: Now that we have made politics secular, let us also make politics nonmetaphysical. Let us give up even secular ways of trying to assure ourselves that there is something large and powerful on our side. Let us try to make progress simply through hope for cooperation with one another, rather than in hope of achieving universal truth or contact with the transcendent.¹⁵

While personalism seeks a certain objectivism of universalism in the way man behaves towards himself and towards other people, Rorty proposes to reject the search for truth for the sake of benefits, which in the ethical sense, traditionally goes back to utilitarianism.

The last issue (although all of them are related to each other in some way) concerns socio-political issues, and more broadly speaking, public ones. Personalism, which makes the “subject” of its research, the human person as a fully-fledged intellectual, spiritual and social subject, convinces through its views that there is a possibility of linking private needs with social needs. The term that connects these two spaces is “common good.” An interesting interpretation of this term is provided by Jacques Maritain. In one of his books, he points out that:

[...] the public welfare and the general order of law are essential parts of the common good of the body politic, but this common good has far larger and richer, more concretely human implications, for it is by nature the good human life of the multitude and is common to both the whole and the parts, the persons into whom it flows back and who must benefit from it. The common good is not only the collection of public commodities and services which the organization of common life presupposes: a sound fiscal condition, a strong military force; the body of just laws, good customs, and wise institutions

¹⁴ R. Rorty, *Philosophy as Cultural Politics: Philosophical Papers*, Cambridge University Press 2007, p. 33.

¹⁵ R. Rorty, *An Ethics for Today: Finding Common Ground Between Philosophy and Religion*, Columbia University Press 2010, pp. 21–22.

which provides the political society with its structure; the heritage of its great historical remembrances, its symbols and its glories, its living traditions and cultural treasures.¹⁶

It is therefore a value that carries both features relating to a specific person (in liberalism – an individual), but also features that allow to build (constitute) a strong community based both on a certain interest and on certain ethical foundations. The common good, therefore, provides a space for development that neither disturbs the safety of a person in terms of a certain autonomy of functioning in private and public life, as well as enables the development of a community (e.g. nation, state) on various required levels. Undoubtedly, this concept responds to certain postulates, which were exposed due to the disagreement between the views expressed by both liberal representatives of the political world and a certain group of collectivists (and here I mean Hegel and Marsk as well as the Hegelian left).

2.2. Formal perspective – the position of personalism in the world of humanities (between theology and philosophy)

The formal perspective reveals two elements of this reflection: positive and negative. First of all, it should be emphasized that formal issues in the humanities, and therefore also in philosophy they play a remarkable meaning. It is difficult to argue in a scientific way with the thesis that personalism is not a philosophy or is not a “scientific” philosophy, because in its structure it has both the subject of research (which is not of a contractual nature), has a research goal, and uses research tools that were developed over the centuries. Personalism is also not a field of theology. This thesis is strongly argued by the fact that representatives of this trend do not directly use revealed truths, as is the case in theology, but rely on reason and also use certain elements of logic to provide their own arguments. Thus, the positive side of the formal perspective is revealed in the fact that some researchers of the history of philosophy, appreciating a certain potential of personalism, present the fundamental theses of this trend as one of the philosophical trends of the 20th century.¹⁷

There is, however, a negative aspect of the formal perspective. In most studies on individual thoughts of representatives of personalism, they are classified into the group of studies on Christian theology. This is a big obstacle to promoting their thoughts, but on the philosophical side. Philosophy – by its nature – is open to various views and positions, especially when they are substantively argued. Argumentation from the authority that is sometimes used by various Christian denominations

¹⁶ J. Maritain, *Man and the State*, The University of Chicago Press 1966, pp. 11–12.

¹⁷ See more: A. Kenny, *Philosophy in the Modern World: A New History of Western Philosophy*, Oxford University Press 2007, pp. 305–309; S. Lunn-Rockliffe, *Early Christian Political Philosophy*, in: *The Oxford Handbook of the History of Political Philosophy*, ed. G. Klosko, Oxford University Press 2011, pp. 157–171.

is negatively perceived in the world of science, and thus, unfortunately, important and factual arguments of personalism regarding the dignity of the human person, the value of every human life, objectivity in the pursuit of truth, good and beauty, go down in the background or are not noticed at all. This poses a big problem in deepening personalistic thought as a philosophical thought. The issue of the lack of internal criticism between the representatives of personalism may also contribute to the deepening of this negative state of affairs (of this perspective).

3. Criticism and personalism – three selected issues (author's interpretation of the problem)

3.1. About the fact that there is no visible criticism in personalism

Personalism as a line of philosophy is not uniform. There are various divisions, including those resulting from the places of life and work of individual philosophers. Thus, there is French, German, Italian, American and Polish personalism. However, divisions in most situations have a negative impact on the perception of how a given philosophical direction is perceived in the aspect of a certain well-explained system. Of course, it is not the authors' fault directly. However, it is difficult to ignore the fact that in this particular line of philosophy, everyone has somehow joined the building of this system, but in a more autonomous way.

An example can be the aforementioned socio-political thought. In his book *Man and the State*, Maritain shows man's problems in society in various ways, also from a political perspective. In an interesting, but also original (taking into account the time when the book was written), it presents a vision of a personalistic approach to human rights, which, however, historically came into being thanks to liberalism. And although in this book you can find examples of critical references to some representatives of liberal philosophy, it is difficult to find examples of polemics or discussions within his own current, which was represented by Maritain. One could ask if, in terms of content, he could engage in a polemic with another representative of his philosophy. Taking into account the already mentioned Mounier, the answer seems to be in the affirmative. This polemic could find its place in the context of not only understanding what politics is, but also how politics in the aspect of the common good should be pursued. Mounier in one of his program essays (*What is personalism?*) Explains the most important personalistic principles, but does not articulate, for example, the principle of the common good as clearly as Maritain does. The polemic of "this" lack of its predecessor could positively affect the contemporary reception of this term.¹⁸ The same applies to another representative of

¹⁸ There is evidence that there was correspondence between Mounier and Maritain (example: J. Maritain, E. Mounier, *Correspondance Maritain-Mounier*, Desclée De Brouwer 2016). Unfor-

personalism – Dietrich von Hildebrand. In a phenomenological way, in his book on community, he explained the most important areas of community functioning. There is no shortage of references in this book to the personalistic concept of the person, the ethical system, and so on. However, even this author lacked a certain “methodological” courage to refer explicitly to his personalistic predecessors and to engage in polemics with them.

Due to the lack of polemics among individual authors, although personalism can be considered a certain holistic anthropological, ethical and social system, it leaves a certain methodological and substantive lack.

3.2. Why is criticism necessary for personalism?

When looking for an answer to the question why criticism is needed by personalism, two fundamental areas should be highlighted: internal and external. Internal criticism, i.e. between the representatives of the individual camp of personalism, could help to detail the problems that have become the subject of some objections of Western (and not only world) philosophy. Some contemporary philosophers accuse personalists that, although they promote the world of universal values, at the same time they would like to impose a religious lifestyle on societies. Of course, this objection is flawed. However, the lack of a clear discussion, for example, about the place of religion in public life in personalism, makes the above thesis more difficult to disprove. And yet there are examples in personalistic thought, where ethical principles are shown, the sources of which can be found in Christian ethics, and at the same time they can be universal, i.e. available to both believers and non-believers. It is enough to refer to the thoughts of the French thinker Jean Vanier, who in one of his books writes that it is not necessary for Christians to impose their own lifestyle by force. There is only one rational way to argue the ethics of such a life: the power of the argument and the testimony of life.¹⁹

It should also be pointed out that the discussion within a given trend, in this case of personalism, also allows for the correction of some systemic views, which, due to technological development or social development, as well as legal development, require a certain reinterpretation. Such a lively discussion also influences the fact that it is then difficult to ignore the external criticism, that is, between personalism and other trends in philosophy. Therefore, it seems that criticism, if it only aims at development in the positive sense of the word, deserves recognition and a place in personalistic thought.

tunately, however, in the texts of individual philosophers there are no clear, critical references to their views on personalism.

¹⁹ See more: J. Vanier, *Becoming human*, Paulist Press 2008.

Summary

The topic discussed in the article points to two basic issues: general and specific. Criticism in the humanities, especially in philosophy, is needed because it protects against dogmatism and here we can indicate the general nature of criticism. From the perspective of personalism, both internal and external criticism could more clearly result not only in clarifying certain views, but also locate personalism more in the world of modern and Western philosophy. While it seems that the aim of the article has been achieved, the subject of research has probably not been exhausted. It is hoped that this article will be the beginning of a further fruitful discussion.

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