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Hartmann's Personalism?

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I. Preliminary Questions and Considerations

1. What is personalism?
2. Is Hartmann a personalist?
3. If he is, what significance does it have?

Personality and Personalism

-Personality – being human in one's own way. [Herder: Each of us has an original way of being human.]

-What matters concerning personality is not what we *do* or what we *have* but what we *are*. The emphasis is on the *lived experience* (as opposed to abstract concepts, formulas, and statistics).

-The word 'personalism' [*Personalismus*] was used first by Friedrich Schleiermacher in his book *Über die Religion* in 1799; the earliest known English use was in the *Oxford English Dictionary* in 1840.

-Personalism is not a doctrine, but rather a cultivation of a level of awareness, a depth of consciousness, and a certain quality of life.

-Personalism as an experiment in a way of living, the goal of which is the reaffirmation of the value of reality, centrally including the value of a person.

-Personalities both are and are not of central significance to the universe.

Notable Historical Examples:

-Martin Buber (1878-1965): "I and Thou" [vs. I and It] as a valuable model.

-Albert Schweitzer (1875-1965): "Reverence for life" as a notable modern personalist experiment.

-Taoism as an inspiration:

a. Oswald Spengler (1880-1936), *The Decline of the West*, I, 190, on why a Chinese temple is not an isolated object, why the environment is an important part of it: "The temple is not a self-contained building but a lay-out, in which hills water trees, flower, and stones in definite forms and dispositions are just as important as gates, walls, bridges and houses."

- b. The Taoist thinking, the separation of heaven and earth is not a *polarity thinking*. For the Chinese consciousness, heaven and earth are nothing but halves of the macrocosm, without opposition; each is a mirror image of the other.
- c. Becoming appears in the unconstrained reciprocal working of two principles: the *yang* and the *yin*, which they perceived more as *periodical* than as *polar*.
- d. More importantly, there are two kinds of souls in me: the *kwei*, corresponding to the *yin*, the earthly, the dark, and the *sen*, which is higher, light, and permanent.
- e. In addition, there are innumerable multitudes of souls of both kinds outside of man. Troops of spirits fill the air and the water and the earth.
- f. The life of nature and that of man are in reality made out of the play of such units – all of this is concentrated in the basic word TAO.

Interlude 1:

-Is the Axial age essentially personalistic? [Should not the relationship of Brahman and Atman be understood in personalistic terms? Should not the message of the “Chandogya Upanishad” “*Tat twam assi!*” be understood in a personalistic way?]

-Were not the American Indians personalists as well? [Cf. the letter of Chief Seattle to the President of the US, 1854?]

The Anti-Personalistic Orientations:

1. [Reductive] Materialism.
[Treating everything in the world, persons included, as reducible to matter.]
2. Instrumentalism.
[Here considered as an ancient pragmatic approach focused on the question: What is good for me? A personalistic question, as seen through the prism of Taoism, may be: What am I good for?]
3. Nominalism.
[C.S. Pierce: Since the late Middle Ages, the West has suffered “a tidal wave of nominalism”; “all modern philosophy of every sect [Descartes, Locke, Hume, Leibniz, Hobbes, Kant, Hegel] has been nominalistic.”]
4. Subjectivism.
[The subjectivist turn of modernity; yet subjectivity and personality are fundamentally different.]
5. The Mechanistic Way of Thinking.
[A machine as a model for man.]
6. Behaviorism
[External causes of our behavior and our choices.]
6. Atomistic Individualism.
[Western humanism led to individualism but not to personalism.
Against Locke’s possessive and atomistic individualism.]

P.S. A good illustration of an anti-personalistic attitude is offered by Shel Silverstein’s (1930-1999) animated book for children, *The Giving Tree* (1964).

Interlude 2:

-Do we recognize Hartmann in any of these viewpoints advocating Personalism?

-Is there any of the seven potential characteristics of Anti-Personalism that Hartmann does not criticize?

II. Kohák's Characterization of Personalism

-My understanding of personalism is inspired by Erazim Kohák (1933-2020), *The Embers and the Stars* (1984).

[Kohák takes Francis of Assisi, Walt Whitman (*Song of Myself*), and Martin Luther King, Jr. as his examples.]

-The basic premises of Kohák's personalistic approach:

- (i) There are persons (or personalities).
- (ii) Not everything that exists (not even every human being) is a person.
- (iii) Not every person lives in a personalistic way.

Interlude 3:

-Is a personalistic way of life necessary for someone to be a person?

[What makes someone be {or become} a personality?]

Kohák's General Views

a. Especially in the last several centuries, the development of Western thought is an ongoing, systematic depersonalization of both our conception of the world and of the world of our ordinary life itself. We have progressively built up around us an impersonal world, social as well as physical, in which no respect for the integrity of its objects need constrain our arbitrary will. [210-11]

b. The impersonality of our world is not more than a mask of a real world, a personal world that can be the home of persons.

c. "The re-personalization of our relationship to our animal world means ... approaching it with respect, as ordered by a moral law, not only by our convenience. Yes, there will again be compromises, but let them be perceived clearly as compromises. We need to recognize that the suffering we impose on animals is not automatically justified by our convenience ... Again, we may be less affluent for it, much as the feudal lord would have been much less affluent if he recognized the moral claim of his subjects, but we shall be much richer, much more human for it." [213]

d. The great personalist inversion: the reaffirmation of the validity of being human in the cosmos. "It is an act of trust, and, as all acts of trust, a gift." [130]

-Inspired by Kant's second formulation of the Categorical Imperative and following Kohák, we can offer the following preliminary characterization of Personalism:

P1. Treat reality (in all its manifestations, personal as well as non-personal) always as an end, and never as a means only.

P2. Treat reality as having an intrinsic and not an instrumental value only.

III. What Difference Does Personalism Make?

-Personalism as a reaffirmation of the real, which goes against sharp, irreconcilable polarization and separation of things. Personality is a matter of degree: the identity of things is relative, rather than absolute. (Ortega: When we are in love, for example, we are metaphysically porous toward another person.)

-it affirms the thesis of the continuity of being, understood as seeing ourselves as part of a larger integral framework [or order], rather than belonging to a random [contingent] world.

-The developing maladies of modern man: dissociation (splitting up, breaking up, disintegrating) and loneliness (an increasing sense of isolation). Could (not) Personalism lead us toward healing both maladies?

-The falsehood of the "mass man" and the superficial truth of individualism are both rejected. For what, exactly? [Thomas Merton: "The person must be rescued from the individual."]

-Personalism brings an increased experience of the joy of being alive. It relies on an expanded role of imagination and spontaneity (as opposed to the calculating and instrumental intelligence and self-interested will).

Interlude 4:

-Does Personalism imply the primacy of meaningful being (=being infused with values) over the mechanical connections?

Why Do We Resist Personalism?

-Fear of losing control (which we do not have anyway)? Lack of trust?

-An exaggerated insistence [and reliance] on rationalism?

-Is the ordinary language sufficiently suited for a personalistic approach? Is this language not tailored for the pragmatic approach?

An "Antinomy" of Personalism

(T) According to the opponents of personalization, all personified thinking is a remnant of childhood (either of a race or of an individual) and manifests itself in a childish-like irresponsibility, while more is expected from mature and rational human beings.

(AT) According to the proponents of personalism, the approach they champion demands more of us than the 'mature' and 'efficient' approach of anti-personalism and instrumentalism.

On the Alleged Naivety of Personalism

Does personalism represent a childish way of thinking that we should overcome as we grow up (individually and collectively)? Is personalism, as a way of thinking, related to myths and religion only?

A. Cf. Giambattista Vico's three stages as a possible way of resolving the Personalistic antinomy:

1. Mythical or metaphorical; ends with Homer;
2. Conceptual or metonymic; begins with Plato and ends with Kant;
3. Empirical or factual; the development of natural sciences.

[Would Vico be a champion of personalization by emphasizing the first stage (myth as "*vera narration*" – "telling as it is")?]

B. Schweitzer's two kinds of naïveté as a possible solution: non-reflective and reflective.

Interlude 5:

-Does Personalism imply a new conception of humanism, adequate for the challenges of our age but without losing sight of either practical or eternal values?

IV. Hartmann's Thought Through the Prism of Personalism

-Hartmann criticizes Max Scheler's (1874-1928) "personalist metaphysics" and "metaphysical personalism" in *Ethik*. [chs. 24-25].

-Hartmann, *Einführung in die Philosophie* [26-27]:

The year 1600 as the turning point at which new metaphysics begins, a metaphysics that transforms itself into a theory of knowledge. The highest point of that turnaround happened in 1871 with the publication of Kant's *Critique of Pure Reason*.

-Aporias, antinomies: Problems which cannot be rationally and definitively solved. *Grundzüge*: the presence of the irrational; the influence of Aristotle.

-Hegel's dialectic ["real dialectic"] and descriptive phenomenology [a conviction in the mind-independent reality of the outside world; *intentio recta*].

-Hartmann, *Einführung* [25]: How not to return to the anthropomorphism? [Hartmann there refers to Kant's suggestion that we approach nature as an appointed judge, rather than as a scared and ignorant pupil.]

-Cognition as grasping [*Erfassung*], rather than as making of an object. Cognition as a transcending act [relevance of personal experience rather than of pre-conceived abstractions].

-The secondary role of cognition among transcending acts. Lived experience vs. cognition. The pathos of wonder and the richness of experience. [*Grundlegung*, chs. 27-32]

-A blending of perception and beholding, of reception and spontaneity, of imitation and creation, and of the rational and the irrational. [*Ästhetik*]

-A partial overlap of categories of being and the categories of cognition. The laws of thinking are not the laws of logic, nor are either of them the laws of real being. [*Die Aufbau*]

-Hartmann accepts the modern view that being does not imply value, that no real entity need be valuable in itself. [*Ethik*]

Interlude 6:

-Kohák's view of the meaningful being seems to presuppose a close tie between being and values. How does Hartmann's separation of real and ideal being square with this view?

-In his criticism of historicism, Kohák believes in the essential intrusion of the eternal into the temporal. Could Hartmann accept a view like that?

VI. Some Quotes and Further Thoughts from Hartmann's Works

-*Das Problem*, 12b: "The life of a person is a single unbroken chain of situations in which he must find his way."

-*Ethik*, 17e: "The naïve view always regards the world anthropocentrically; everything in it turns upon man, who is the essential kernel of the whole. The critical and scientific view sets up the antithesis: man in comparison with the whole is a speck of dust, an ephemeral, a negligible phenomenon. Ethics synthesizes these extremes; the cosmic insignificance of man is not the last word; besides the ontological there is still an axiological determination of the world, and, in this, man plays an integrating role. In this, his insignificance is overborne – without a reintroduction of anthropocentric megalomania."

-*Ethik*, 24d: "A personal being is metaphysically possible only at a boundary line between ideal and real determination – that is, at the point of their reciprocal impact, their opposition and their union, only at the connecting point of two worlds, the ontological and the axiological. Their intermediate position between the two, the non-merging of either into the other, as well as participation in both, is the condition of personality."

-*Ethik*, 57h: “Moral life is life in the midst of conflicts. [It is] concentration upon them, a constructive solution of them through the commitment of the person; and all ignoring it is a sin, an irrevocable injury to an ethical being – even to that of one’s own personality.”

-*Ästhetik*, 3a: “Perception is not in itself pure looking; it is not uninvolved. It conveys to human life a sense of things as ‘effective.’ Looking is secondary; it is based initially on the disengagement of the emotional element. Perception is inherently as little theoretical as it is aesthetic. It becomes both only when it is released from actuality.”

“But while in theoretical ‘observation’ responsiveness is completely disconnected, it appears that something of it is preserved in aesthetic experience. For the tonality of feeling of perception, the pleasant and the unpleasant, is essential to it. The tonality of feeling is, however, conditioned by the attitude of responsiveness.”

-*Ästhetik*, 3b: [on beholding as the higher form of seeing] “It is directed upon what hovers before consciousness as the most meaningful and signifying element, what appears to come from above, laden with meaning and value. It receives its direction not from sensory impressions, but from another sphere. And in this sphere, other forces reign that have seized consciousness in a different way. Even at this point commences, in the last analysis, that mysterious directness of perception in the aesthetical realm ... for this one is directed primarily at the detail, unnoticed in everyday perception and present in the sensory material, which are most capable of transmitting what is laden with meaning.”

-*Ästhetik*, 20a [on imitation and creativity]: “Even the most perfect forms of nature, of living things and human beings, only become aesthetic objects when there arises a subject capable of understanding them properly. The act of the artist, therefore, as over against forms in nature possessing beauty, is precisely that of first discovering them. To ‘imitate’ what is perfect is perhaps in fact the lesser part of the aesthetic mission; the greater and more primary is to lean to see, to seek and find, to dwell with and learn to gaze lovingly.”

-*Neue Wege der Ontologie*:

“The world is not ordered toward man, but he is ordered toward the world.”

-*Grundzüge einer Metaphysik der Erkenntnis*

Ch. 29: Within the sphere of objects, the most rational are cognitive objects, the least rational are the objects of aesthetics. The sphere of subject is not so easily reachable; they are, in principle, foreign to cognition. Only a small part of that sphere is cognizable.

-Ch. 30: Being in itself and rationality are mutually indifferent.

-Ch. 33: The finite mind becomes overwhelmed by the multiple, multidimensional infinity. Reverence in front of the eternally inexhaustible “depth of things,” wonder in front of the greatness of problems, wonder [*thauma*] which never ends, is the true pathos of a philosopher.

-Ch. 34: If reason assigns laws to being, being could only be a phenomenon [an appearance]. But if it turns out that reason cannot grasp the laws of being, or even its own laws, then it could not

assign it either to itself or to being. And if so, being is being in itself, and cognition, if it exists, is a representation of being in itself.

VII. Is Hartmann a Personalist?

-Would (not) Hartmann subscribe to the following two descriptions of Personalism?

P3. Treat anything in the presence of which you find yourself as a thing in itself and not as an appearance only.

P4. Treat anything in the presence of which you find yourself in terms of its bonds and not in terms of what distinguishes it only.

-Is Hartmann closer to Confucius or Lao-tse?
Heraclitus or Parmenides?
Plato or Aristotle?

-Or are there two sides in Hartmann?

-Hartmann seems to stand with one foot in the Personalist door, but not with both.

-Our choice as to whether Hartmann is a Personalist may be personal: we can see him more this way or that way. We can consider this or that side of his philosophy as more important, or even as decisive.

-But do we have to make that choice, and is it not better to keep the tension open? Is that tension, rather than a decision one way or another, not going to stimulate us to examine Hartmann's thought further?

-Can we imagine, can we re-envision a way of relating to the world from a personalistic point of view?

-Guided by the personalistic approach, can we imagine and envision a new conception of humanism that would be suitable for our age and its challenges?

-Does Hartmann help us in this process? Can he?

Appendix 1: Some Notable Personalists (?)

-Hermann Lotze (1817-1881)
-William James (1842-1910)
-Borden Parker Brown (1847-1910)
-George Santayana (1863-1952)

- Nikolai O. Lossky (1870-1965)
- Nikolai Berdyaev (1874-1948)
- Dietrich von Hildebrand (1889-1977)
- Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973)
- Dorothy Day (1897-1980)
- Roman Ingarden (1893-1970)
- Edith Stein (1891-1942)
- Jan Patočka (1907-1977)
- Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005)
- Karol Wojtyła (Pope John Paul II; 1920-2005)
- Roger Scruton (1944-2020)

Appendix 2: Further Quotes and Thoughts of Interest

(a) Henry Bugbee (1915-1999), *The Inward Morning*

[129] Reverence as the heart of action; perception of things with love and respect.

[173] Personalism – like the ancient unity of all virtues ... some kind of integrity [which cannot be proved but is felt].

[176] There is no givenness that is not value experience and experience of fact as well.

[C: no fact-value distinction; no experience of one without the other.

[194] It may be that the personal condition demands more than the human condition: it may demand actions that would be fitting for a man, they would benefit him, in so far as they were a fulfilment of his destiny.”

(b) José Ortega y Gasset (1883-1955), *Mediations on Quixote*

[45] The ultimate reality of the world is neither matter nor spirit; it is no definite thing, but a perspective. God is perspective and hierarchy.

[46] “For there is nothing on earth through which some divine nerve does not pass: the difficulty lies in reaching this nerve and making it react.”

[88] Structure – the interlocking of things and their meaning

[89] Love – putting someone or something else [besides myself] in the center of the world.

[105-6] In the last analysis, each race is an experiment in a new way of living, in a new sensibility: “When a race succeeds in developing its particular energies fully, the earth is enriched in an incalculable way: the new sensibility promotes new uses and institutions, new architecture and new poetry, new sciences and new aspirations, new sentiments and new religion. On the contrary, when a race falls, all this possible innovation and accretion remain irrevocably unborn because the sensibility which creates them is not transferable. A people is a way of life

and, as such, consists of a certain simple and differential modulation which gradually organizes the surrounding matter.”

[143] “In the same way as the outlines of rocks and clouds contain allusions to certain animal forms, all things from their inert materiality make signs, as it were, which we interpret. These interpretations coalesce into an objectivity which is like a duplication of the primary, or so-called real, objectivity. An over-lasting conflict originates from this: the ‘idea’ or ‘sense’ of each thing and its ‘materiality’ trying to fit into each other. But this implies the victory of one of them. If the ‘idea’ triumphs, the ‘materiality’ is superseded and we live under a hallucination. If the materiality wins out and, penetrating the vapors of the idea, reabsorbs it, we live disillusioned.”

(c) Julián Mariás (1914-2005), *The History of Philosophy*

[398] “Personalism’s most general feature is its insistence on the reality and value of the person and its attempt to interpret reality from this point of view ... personalism affirms human freedom and the personal basis of reality, that is, the existence of a personal God.”

(d) Lin Yutang (1895-1976), *The Importance of Living*

[99-100]: “Somewhere in our adult life, our sentimental nature is killed, strangled, chilled, or atrophied by an unkind surrounding, largely through our own fault in neglecting to keep it alive, or our failure to keep clear of such surroundings. In the process of learning ‘world experience,’ there is many a violence done to our original nature, when we learn to harden ourselves, to be artificial, and often to be cold-hearted and cruel, so that as one prides oneself upon gaining more and more worldly experience, his nerves become more and more insensitive and benumbed – especially in the world of politics and commerce. As a result, we get the great ‘go-together’ pushing himself forward to the top and brushing everybody aside; we get the man of iron will and strong determination, with the last embers of sentiment, which he calls foolish idealism or sentimentality, gradually dying out in his breast. It is that sort of person who is beneath my contempt. The world has too many cold-hearted people.”