

It could be added that large distributors are constantly benefiting the poorer sectors of the population by the virtue of cutting prices in a competitive process, whereas guilds and other restraints to the market, of the sort advocated by distributists, typically have the effect of damaging consumers.

By targeting conservative Catholics and engaging them in a constructive dialogue for the very purpose of bringing them to adopt a more solid economic theory, *The Church and the Market* fills a gap. A reader who is intellectually honest cannot take its points with indifference. If disagreements on economic matters are the rule, and rightly so, within the Catholic Church, Catholic advocates of the free market surely have a valuable instrument in this book.

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Personalist Papers

John Crosby

Washington, D.C.: Catholic University of America Press,
2003 (280 pages)

These collected papers, by an eminent philosopher at Franciscan University of Steubenville, are recommended as perhaps the best introduction to personalism in any language.

What is personalism? It is a philosophical movement or attitude that may be defined either in terms of characteristic doctrines or in terms of a system of influence. Defined in terms of doctrine, a personalist is someone who insists that the traditional philosophical inventory of existing things is seriously incomplete. The standard such inventory comes from Aristotle and is called the “categories”: existents are ultimately substances, qualities, quantities, or relations. Aristotle thought that this scheme comprehended even God and minds: They were substances, he asserted.

A personalist maintains that, to account adequately for these, an entirely new category, *persons*, needs to be added, orthogonal to Aristotle’s *summa genera*. The reason is that persons are distinctive in being marked by their subjectivity. Give a third-person account of the attributes of things and of the laws that govern them, and you leave out (as Thomas Nagel has observed) *what it is like* to be someone. This subjectivity is incommunicable, in the sense that it could not be captured by a list of attributes, such as a detailed description of someone’s personality and idiosyncratic preferences. We gain access to it, not by any objective study of someone, but rather by a subjective identification with another, through acts of sympathy, empathy, and fellow-feeling. That human persons have an incommunicable subjectivity is not some strange curiosity about us but rather an additional source of human dignity over and above our being rational. In fact, that we have incommunicable subjectivity, personalists hold, is the best philosophical basis for the Kantian norm that persons are to be treated as ends rather than mere means.

Defined in terms of a system of influence, personalism is a philosophical attitude that originates within the realist branch of phenomenology, especially in the writings of Max Scheler (*The Nature of Sympathy; Formalism in Ethics*) and that includes philosophers who have been directly or indirectly influenced by Scheler, such as Edith Stein, Dietrich von Hildebrand, Joseph Seifert, and Karol Wojtyła. This second way of defining personalism is necessary because its characteristic doctrines are too general to amount to anything like a philosophical system.

Personalist Papers nicely incorporates this dual approach, by containing first papers that are systematic in nature, “Studies on the Human Person,” and then expository studies of particular personalist philosophers, “Sources of Personalist Thought.” A recurring theme in the book is that there are real aspects of human experience—as a “phenomenological realist” who takes as his motto “back to the things themselves,” Crosby simply draws attention to these and takes them as given—that cannot adequately be accounted for by a classical outlook, in which human beings are regarded as falling fully within a natural cosmos; rather, we need to turn to the human person in order adequately to explain such things. For instance, in “The Personal Encounter with God in Moral Obligation,” Crosby argues that our experience of moral obligation cannot be captured solely as a choice among natural or objective goods (even moral goods, such as the *bonum honestum*). In “Dietrich von Hildebrand on the Fundamental Freedom of Persons,” he argues that human freedom amounts to more than a capacity to choose among objects of desire or need, even of natural desires. In “A Neglected Source of the Dignity of Persons,” Crosby maintains that the classical Greek concept of human dignity, as flowing from our rationality and natural equality, is insufficient to explain our true duties to one another.

Crosby’s argument for this last point is representative of this approach. He starts with a scenario posited by Peter Singer: Imagine a woman who gives birth to a Down syndrome baby; this woman already has a child and (we assume) is able to have another child who would be healthy in all respects, and (we further assume) she will not be able to raise her first child well if she has to give lots of attention to a Down syndrome child. Suppose furthermore, contrary to personalism, that the only source of human dignity is that we are rational beings. Crosby agrees with Singer that, in the scenario described, the right thing for the woman to do would be to kill her Down syndrome child and conceive a healthy child. Why? This would lead to a world with the best realization of the dignity found in human rationality.

The conclusion is objectionable, Crosby agrees, because it supposes that we can treat human beings as if they were fungible. They would be so, he says, if the only thing that mattered about us were our rational nature, in which we all share equally. We should indeed treat one another as irreplaceable; however, our irreplaceability must derive from something incommunicable about us that is bound up with the fact that we are *persons*.

Crosby’s reflections on the ineffable uniqueness of each human being otherwise seem correct. Yet, one wonders whether one really does need to appeal to this argument

to get the correct conclusion in Singer's scenario. Would not, for example, an appeal to the Golden Rule suffice? As I would not want to be killed, so I should not kill. Whether the world would be better off in some respect if I were killed, even better off by way of human dignity, may indeed be true; only, no person equal to me may reasonably act for that reason (nor may any government charged with protecting such equality). Indeed, someone who took this classical approach might object that personalism takes a formal, relational feature of human persons—our natural equality—and misguidedly deals with it as if it were an attribute, indeed, a curiously ineffable and incommunicable attribute. Moreover, is not there *some* sense in which the world would be significantly better off if no one had Down syndrome?

I said that I regard Crosby's book as the best available introduction to personalism. This is true not simply because of its dual approach, already mentioned, so appropriate to personalism but also because of Crosby's remarkable virtues as a philosophical writer. He is painstakingly clear and, in a personalist style that takes the reader as an interlocutor, he anticipates objections with patience, always seeking what is right about alternative views and aiming to take this appropriately into account.

Yet, as an introduction, it has two shortcomings, presumably because an introduction can accomplish only so much. First, *Personalist Papers* deals solely with matters of ethics. It gives no inkling as to the directions in which personalism would need to be developed to provide insight into political philosophy or economic theory. Second, the book deals with personalism as if it were inevitably a submovement in realist phenomenology. This is unfortunate because there is no reason in principle why there could not be an Aristotelian personalist, or an analytic philosopher who was a personalist, and not through the mere addition of phenomenological techniques to some other philosophical basis. The book's implicit and incorrect assumption seems to be that the subjectivity of the human person, which personalism must affirm, can be dealt with solely through phenomenological methods.

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The Politics of Human Frailty: A Theological Defence of Political Liberalism

Christopher J. Insole

Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press,
2004 (200 pages)

This book is a lucid presentation of the modern confusion over the concept of political liberalism. Political philosophy textbooks convey a varied picture of what liberalism has meant through the ages. Some authors claim that we should speak about liberalisms rather than liberalism. Notwithstanding that fact, much harsh criticism directed at liberalism treats it as a homogeneous term that breeds only “destructive individualism and