THE PERSONALIST
FORUM

PERSONS AND TECHNOLOGY

The Personalist Forum

THE PERSONALIST FORUM is a bi-annual journal devoted to publishing scholarly work that addresses issues of being persons in this world. We share a common conviction that philosophy must take personal categories seriously, speak to issues that confront persons and do so in a language that strives for maximal comprehensibility. Organized around a theme, each issue will include articles and a review of philosophical works relevant to that theme.

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What We Are About*
The Editor

The Personalist Forum is offered as an act of
faith by those who believe that people matter. We
have no strict dogma to propagate, but we do share
a common conviction: philosophy should take per-
sonal categories seriously, speak to issues that
confront persons, and do so in a language that
persons, not only philosophical technicians, can
understand.

We are quite aware that these convictions go
squarely against the trend of contemporary philo-
sophy. In a technological age, philosophy in-
evitable faces a constant temptation to become a
techne. Much of contemporary philosophical writ-
ing is based on the unspoken assumption that ulti-
mate reality is impersonal, either infrapersonal,
matter in motion, drives and gratification, or
suprapersonal, whether "History" or "system." The
problems that occupy many contemporary philoso-
phers are again not the problems of persons, but
problems of textual scholarship or of conceptual
systems, and the language in which much philoso-
phical writing is done is not the language of per-
sons but the private language of philosophical
technicians.

We have no wish to deny the validity of phi-
losophy so conceived. We appreciate the crucial
need for rigorous scholarship without which philo-
sophy quickly degenerates into platitudinous pon-
tification. Nor do we deny the need for precision
and the special terminology that it at times
demands.

*This statement, articulated by Professor Erazim
Kohak of Boston University, declares the princi-
ples on which The Personalist Forum is founded.
The Editor.

However, we do deny the adequacy of philosophic techne. Something more is needed: philosophy done as if people mattered.

That we believe to be the broadest sense of the time honored term, "personalism." Personalism is a philosophy predicated upon the irreducibility and primacy of personal categories, that is, the kind of categories that govern the meaningful interaction among personal beings--categories of meaning rather than cause, of respect rather than force, of moral value rather than efficacy, of understanding rather than explanation. While we recognize the legitimacy of materialistic categories derived from the metaphor of matter in motion and of vitalistic categories derived from the metaphor of need and satisfaction for certain purposes, we regard them as derivative, special case theories legitimate within the basic framework of personal categories. It is moral categories that we consider epistemologically and ontologically fundamental, not merely a peculiarity of human subjects but most approximating the ultimate structure of reality. In a time honored metaphor, though reality can at times be treated as a system of matter in motion, ultimately it is a society of persons, and is so to be understood.

For that reason we regard personal (or "moral" in an eighteenth century sense of the word) problems as the proper focus of philosophic thought. Textual scholarship of the highest order is, of course, essential, though as a philosopher's homework rather than his work. A philosopher must do his homework to do his work properly, but ultimately his work is to confront the problems that confront persons, the problems of making sense and responding adequately to the challenge of being a moral subject in the cosmos. While other problems, too, are legitimately philosophical, we think the most pressing philosophical problems to be--in the words of Socrates--those of not only living but living rightly. Thus we consider the moral issues of dealing with, say, our

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environment prior to issues of utility, the moral issues of the relations of persons and society prior to issues of systems and structures. Philosophy must do a great deal more as well, but it must first speak clearly to persons amid the bewildering task of living rightly in a deeply disturbed world.

That, too, leads us to the conviction that philosophy must strive earnestly for maximal comprehensibility. The technical language of philosophic techne, inner code of philosophic systems, need not be always illegitimate, but its use must be justified by clear and present need. Wherever possible, philosophy must speak the language understood by persons, the language of ordinary experience. It must, to be sure, speak it better, more precisely, more sensitively, but its goal must be to evoke understanding, not to impress with obscurity.

In beginning The Personalist Forum we offer a journal committed to the irreducibility of personal or "moral" categories. Though we are quite prepared to print contributions questioning that assumption, our common commitment is to take it seriously, whether to derive its consequences or to criticize it, but to take it seriously. The second is the commitment to address issues that confront persons. Again we are prepared to print contributions devoted to problems of pure textual scholarship, when relevant to our shared concerns. We would, for instance, welcome an article on the meaning of the category "person," seeking less a consensus than a clarification of alternatives among us. However, our primary purpose is to publish papers that address issues of being human in this world. Finally, the third is our commitment to write in a language that can be understood by intelligent readers, strenuously avoiding jargon whenever possible. We expect our contributors, if at all possible without loss of clarity, to write of, say, "hearing a person speaking" rather than "locutionary behavior manifested by the subject was observed by the researcher."

In launching our journal, we are clearly building upon a tradition. Even the title, <u>The Personalist Forum</u>, is made up of the titles of two formerly personalist journals, one now defunct, <u>The Personalist</u> and <u>The Philosophical Forum</u>. However, our aim is not simply to perpetuate the tradition of Boston Personalism. We plan to draw on personalism in other traditions, East and West, including Max Scheler and Thomas Masaryk, Emmanuel Mounier and Karol Wojtyla, Nakamura Hajime and Watsuji Tetsuro. Our purpose is to present, in an age of increasing depersonalization of our world and our thought, a philosophical option committed to the irreducibility of personal being and categories, the reality of problems facing persons, and the intelligibility of the language of persons.

That is our aim and our hope, and we cordially invite the cooperation of all who believe, as we do, that persons and the cosmos as personal must not become obsolete even in an age of impersonal ideology and technology.