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Personalist Art Criticism : an Outline of a Concept

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Joanna Winnicka-Gburek

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Abstract

In contemporary debates concerning the status of art criticism, the crux of the matter is the legitimacy of critical judgments of art, and the issue of what should and may be judged in an artwork. I intend to present a number of arguments with regard to these two questions with reference to the philosophy of personalism. I am going to demonstrate that, on the basis of a personalist approach, a critical judgment of art is justified and necessary, and at the same time, critical judgments are aimed not only at a narrowly understood aesthetic conception of the value of an artwork, but also at its ethical value. Hence, personalist art criticism can be understood as entailing an ethical critique.

It is not uncommon to find in discussions about the aim and status of art criticism that a disregard for the concrete *situation of the author of criticism* inevitably leads to a theoretical failure. When considering art criticism, which is a kind of interpersonal communication, one may not justifiably ignore the question of who is speaking about what, and of the purpose and the subject addressed. A well-thought out statement on any phenomenon at all is necessarily a product of a mind with its own world-view, that is a collection of opinions concerning the fundamental issues of the world and human life, including the emotional attitude towards them. Any such world-view arises out of the history of individual experience, and may be defined as comprising a set of specific, elaborated principles organising this experience. The particularity of a world-view has little importance when judgments are made on matters touching upon everyday, practical objects and activities. When, nevertheless, one is confronted with a work of art, or any other important human communication, there occurs a unique, unrepeatable *situation*. A situation – in this case, an aesthetic situation – is always someone's situation. No two situations are alike, because there are no two identical world-views.¹ The world-view contains not only the concept of the human being, but also

1 M. Gołaszewska, *Zarys estetyki*, PWN, Warsaw 1984. The author describes the aesthetic situation in the following way: "One can speak of the aesthetic situation in the sense of an individual, concrete, unique situation. Each act of contact between the viewer and the work of art takes place in different, individual conditions: the circumstances of the reception are different; the type of emotional engagement is different; the personality of the viewer, with all its fleeting emotions and moods, is qualitatively different," p. 29.

the way of understanding value. As such, it also includes the concept of art and art criticism.

If we accept this reasoning, we shall have to agree that all criticism is ideological to the extent that it stems from a particular world-view. An art critic whose world-view is personalist would therefore engage in personalist art criticism. The centre of personalist philosophy is the "person" – unique, free, and, at the same time, oriented towards the other human being, yearning for the common good. These characteristics of the person situate personalism beyond individualism and contextualism, both of which inevitably lead toward relativism.

In formulating this issue for myself, I began by asking the following questions:

What would the consequences be for the practice of art criticism, in the light of a personalist world-view?

What would be the significance for critical judgments on works of art, of a personalist commitment to the priority of the human being?

Must a personalist approach imply a critical evaluation of the product of another human being or, to the contrary, are such evaluations to be avoided precisely owing to the personalist attitude towards others?

If critical judgments are to be accepted within the personalist framework, what are they directed at?

1. The Tradition of Personalist Criticism

The author of the first pioneering outline of personalist criticism in literature was the nestor of Polish emigration literature, Tymon Terlecki,² who based his work on the philosophy of Emmanuel Mounier. In his small study, published in London in 1957, Terlecki uses the phrase "personalist criticism" for the first time. In his view, the most important task of personalist criticism is to establish the following:

(a) The "individual, unique and unrepeatable" element in the artist and his work;

(b) The debt the artist owes in his uniqueness to the community, and;

(c) The contribution of the artist to the world of persons and the ways in which he increases the set of existing values.³

Let us bear in mind that, according to this model of criticism, the critic's task, usually defined as a reflection on a work of art, acquires a broader prerogative of examining the creative process and its significance. Terlecki

2 The notion of "Polish war emigration literature" includes the work of all those writers who found themselves in emigration outside Poland in 1939, and, who, either during the war, or immediately after it, created a literary circle of patriotic convictions in support of the cause of Polish independence. Tymon Terlecki was one of those who established the direction for all the post-war patriotic literature in emigration. See: "Do emigracji polskiej 1945 roku," in: *Święty płomień*, Biblioteka "Wczoraj i Dziś", J. Rolls Book Co., London 1945.

3 T. Terlecki, *Krytyka personalistyczna. Egzystencjalizm chrześcijański*, Biblioteka "Więzi", Warsaw 1987, p. 32. Krzysztof Dybciak referred to Terlecki's concepts in his literary-critical studies, see his: *Personalistyczna krytyka literacka. Teoria i opis nurtu z lat trzydziestych*, Ossolineum, Warsaw 1981.

names this mutual dependence of artist and viewer (or critic) a drama. Hence, the critic is not only an interpreter of the meaning of the artwork, but also a legitimate participant in an unfolding inter-subjective drama. The personalist requirement that the person-critic treats both the artist and the viewer as persons in a world of persons is therefore the necessary and sufficient pre-condition of art criticism.

Among Terlecki's other theses, we encounter a controversial statement claiming that an artist is an *arch-person*, and that the work of art is the best example of the movement of personalisation. The analysis of features attributed to a person in personalism, which I shall further present, is intended to demonstrate that the predicated unique position of the artist amongst others remains at odds with the spirit of personalism, which regards every person as endowed with unconditional dignity.⁴

2. The Characteristics of a Person

In order to understand the consequences for the practice of art criticism, of adopting the model based on mutual relations of persons involved in *the personalist situation of contact with a work of art*, we should begin by defining the person according to personalism. A detailed discussion of the concept, however, would not only exceed the scope of this article, but would also prove too difficult not the least owing to the proliferation of different schools and trends within personalism.⁵ I shall start by presenting the characteristic features of a person, common to all these existing trends, in order to later select a number of them for further analysis in the light of their importance, as I shall argue, for art criticism.

It is important to stress at this point that personalism, in the form it today assumes, was created as a result of a protest against two dominant views on the human being: liberal individualism, which led into, among others, French existentialism; and Marxist materialism. Individualism brings to the forefront the good of an individual focused on himself in his individuality, whereas Marxist materialism aims at subjecting a human being to the social order. In the first case, an individual is constrained by "others;" in the other, individualism is perceived as a threat to the common good. Personalist philosophers emphasise that these two paths of thinking about the human being have given rise to the crisis of culture and the erosion of the fundamental value of human community. The personalists see these two anthropological conceptions as reductionist and,

4 J. Winnicka-Gburek, "Znaczenie personalistycznej krytyki artystycznej w poszukiwaniu sensu sztuki" ("Meaning of the Personalistic Art Criticism in Quest for the Sense of Art"), in: *Estetyka i krytyka*, 21 (2/2011), pp. 165-178. In my essay, I subject Terlecki's conception to criticism, and analyse the validity of such categories as: artistic freedom, personalist freedom, and the role of art in the movement of personalisation. I also attempt to demonstrate that, should the artist be and *arch-person*, all art criticism would be futile.

5 See e.g.: J. M. Burgos, *Personalizm. Autorzy i tematy nowej filozofii*, trans. K. Koprowski, Centrum Myśli Jana Pawła II, Warsaw 2010. S. Kowalczyk, *Personalizm-podstawy, idee, konsekwencje*, Wydawnictwo KUL, Lublin 2012.

as a response, they proposed the fundamental value of the phenomenon of a "person," its freedom, responsibility and inalienable rights.

Personalist theorists point to two basic sources of the concept of a person. One is the well-known definition formulated by Boethius: a person is "an individual substance of a rational nature" (*persona est rationalis naturae individua substantia*),⁶ and the other is the elaboration of the same in Roman law, *persona est sui iuris et alteri incommunicabilis*, meaning that a human being – a person – possesses free will, is a master of himself and exists in a way unique to himself. The person is ineffable and inalienable, which is suggested by the term "incommunicability."

A person is free, rational and responsible. He or she possess a dignity, which is an absolute value, i.e., meaning that it is not dependent on the person's achievements, talents or attitude. The human being as a person constitutes a bodily-psychic-spiritual unity, surpassing himself in the movement of realising ever higher values.

Common to all personalist conceptions of the person, notwithstanding some negligible and minor differences, is the emphasis on the person as a social subject. Persons fulfil themselves primarily by cooperating with others and for others. Personalist self-experience is an understanding experience. A human being expects an unconditional understanding from others and desires to understand them in turn.⁷

A personal life is most fully characterised by: on the one hand, the act of personalisation towards the realisation of the highest personal values; and on the other, the process of depersonalisation defined as everything that poses an obstacle to the dynamic urge towards good.⁸

3. Communal Personalism and Individual Engagement as a Justification for Judging Others

All culture theorists are in agreement that art criticism is an act of communication. But opinions remain divided as to the possibility of communication between people. Emmanuel Mounier's theory concerning the significance of communication for the communal life may constitute a model for a critic's action in the public space; a critic who is to be an interpreter, an agent and, first and foremost, a partner in dialogue. Mounier decisively distances himself from the objectification of a human being which manifests itself in a disbelief in the capacity of mutual understanding between people, a position which has its sources in the philosophies of Friedrich Nietzsche and Jean-Paul Sartre. Mounier takes up Sartre's notion of the gaze of the other,⁹ but only to interpret it in a radically different manner – in contradistinction to, as he says, the "thieving"

6 A. M. Boethius, *Liber de persona et duabus naturis contra Eutychem et Nestorium* (Roma, 512), II. 4-5.

7 A. Węgrzecki, *O poznawaniu drugiego człowieka*, Akademia Pedagogiczna w Krakowie, Cracow 1992, p. 25.

8 E. Mounier, *Personalism*, trans. P. Mairet, Routledge & Kegan Paul Ltd, London 1962.

9 From translator: J. P. Sartre's "le Regard" is translated into English as "the gaze." In the English translation of E. Mounier, this term is rendered as "the stare." Accordingly, this translation follows the latter.

language of the philosopher, which ascribes to the stare of the other a power to rob a person of his or her subjectivity. A human being objectified by the stare of the other feels shame, senses a threat to his freedom and wishes to take revenge.

The French personalist speaks a different language, in which a word of utmost significance is detachableness, that is a readiness to take criticism and a preparedness to offer to others a benevolent, evaluating stare. This demonstrates that the opinions others have about us, if they wish to share them with us, are invaluable. Everyday experience teaches us this – an awareness of the stare of the other is often sufficient for me to discover a truth about myself. Our self-knowledge is always inadequate and partial, and so also is our evaluation of others. “The person only exists thus towards others, it only knows itself in knowing others, only finds itself in being known by them,”¹⁰ writes Mounier adding that even in rumours there is more adequacy than in introspection. The philosopher calls this stare an overwhelming stare, one that renders you distressed, fearful, causing you to doubt your current situation. Owing to this, the stare of the other is beneficial, because it disrupts the hazardous, destructive and egocentric obscurity of a human being left to his own devices.

In order to change something for the better, one first needs to doubt his current situation. Mounier cites several examples of such a critical “stare,” which contribute to the “persistence” of the criticised areas: a stare of atheism cast upon religion (this is what Nietzsche did), of opposition upon the government and of students upon their teachers.

Let us add to these examples the art critic’s stare at a work of art, or more precisely at the artist. Mounier advocates the total stare at the person and his or her creations. For Mounier, the person is important regardless of the fact whether he is a craftsman, an intellectual or an artist; and the work of the person is to advance personalisation, that is a movement towards the realisation of ever higher values.

The judgment made on a work is, simultaneously, a critical stare at the person of the artist. The position of a critic, by definition, involves an element of interest, a will to influence what is happening in the surrounding reality, a readiness to stare at the other and to express opinions about him. Terlecki observed that the critic’s particular position within the dramatic tension between the artist and the world, compels him to engagement. Existence is action; and present in every action should be, to a greater or lesser extent, one of the following elements: a) transformation of external reality, b) self-formation, c) enrichment of our world of values or d) bringing us closer to other people.¹¹

Mounier decries the attitudes of alienation, conformism and lack of interest in the lives of others. In relation to those who think that the world is absurd and there is no sufficient reason to act, he employs a rather inelegant comparison: “The insect that mimics the branch, in order that it may be overlooked in its vegetative immobility, prefigures the man who buries himself in conventionalities

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 19.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, pp. 86-90.

rather than answer for himself; or the man who gives himself up to abstract ideas or sentimental effusions to escape the confrontation of events or other men".¹²

Interestingly enough, amongst those who refuse personalist engagement, are included "artistic dilettantes."

Mounier opposes such personalist engagement towards the increase of value to dogmatic regimentation, one example of which is the engagement of a war correspondent who, whether he wants to or not, supports one party to the conflict; or political engagement. An art critic presenting such an attitude could be called an "embedded critic," which not only signifies a rigid normativity and prescriptive criticism, but also a lack of objectivity in his judgments.

Personalist detachableness and engagement, characteristic of the movement of personalisation, entails an expectation to be judged by others and a readiness to judge them in turn.

This analysis of the French personalist's views encourages us to pose the following questions of fundamental importance for personalist aesthetics. How is a judging and total stare at the other person and his or her creations (an artist and his works) inscribed in the two extremes of the treating of a work of art in the history of aesthetic thought: Should a work of art be treated as an existential communique, an expression of personality and a manifestation of the author's real convictions? Should we treat a work of art as an autonomous object?

In the first case, the critic interpreting a work takes into consideration the artist's intentions, and employs to this end the methods available to him (biographical facts, the author's commentary, etc.) In the other case the person of the author remains beyond the critic's scope of interest, and the work of art itself undergoes interpretation with reference to its artistic quality. Both these positions seem reductionist and both diminish either the meaning of the work of art, or the person of the artist.

At this stage of our considerations, which still require further elaboration, let us just say that personalist aesthetics, for which I suggest the working name of *the aesthetics of action*, would rather adopt a position close to the first of the two above-mentioned options. Standing in the centre of aesthetics understood as such, there is a human being – a person – and his or her experience implicated in the creation and reception of a work of art. As opposed to the critics of intentionalism, it is not difficult, after a detailed interpretation, to recognize the intentions of the artist, especially that they are often manifest in the work of art.

In personalist art criticism, judgments are made of a person, but they are fundamentally inspired by a work of art, artistic performance, or a published artistic programme. The critic does not judge ethically the artist's life apart from his art, but he does judge the ethical content of the artwork which forms the pretext for the "conversation" thanks to its high aesthetic quality. In my opinion, the specific characteristic of personalist criticism can be felt in the difference between "he does not judge the morality of the artist beyond art" and "he is not interested in the artist's morality." A personalist critic is interested in

¹² *Ibidem*, p. x.

the person of the artist. When a work of art is immoral, the personalist critic disqualifies it as an aesthetic object, but he cannot *not* be interested in the person of the artist. In other words, his engagement does not allow him to remain indifferent to such a manifestation of depersonalisation.

4. The Unconditional Dignity of a Person, according to Personalism, as an Argument for the Legitimacy and Necessity of Ethical, Critical Judgments

Among the features constitutive of personalism, one of the most salient for personalist criticism is the incommunicability of the human person. The notion of incommunicability may be taken in two senses. The first sense refers to limitations at the level of actual communication which are often experienced by people of different cultures; the other sense, which could be called philosophical, points to the idea, simply put, that people are unable to change the essence of what they really are, even though they can alter some of their qualities.

The notion of incommunicability, which has its origins in Roman law, subsequently analysed by Thomas Aquinas and later by neo-thomists, has been more recently the subject of an interesting reading by John Crosby. The idea of incommunicability with its Christian roots, seems intelligible and may prove useful to scholars working from positions far removed from Christianity and theism; however, there are two conditions to this use: a) that a person is treated as something more than merely an instance of human kind, and b) that the person must not be treated as a means to some end.

Incommunicability is often used interchangeably with the notion of being unrepeatable, despite a subtle difference in meaning. "Incommunicability" express individual being by means of an antithesis to what is *general or universal*. "Unrepeatable," by contrast, expresses individual being by means of a certain antithesis to *other individual beings of the same kind*.¹³ The fact that a human person is *alteri incommunicabilis* – that is incommunicable and inaccessible to the other, is something more than being "unrepeatable." That something is unique or unrepeatable can be said of an animal, a plant or a stone, whereas the incommunicability or inaccessibility of a person is most inherent to the person's interiority, self-determination, free will. Each person desires to be recognised by the other person exactly in his or her incommunicability, independently of the personality and skills which can be communicated.

J. F. Crosby nicely explains the meaning of incommunicability, i.e. a personal quality which guarantees a person's dignity and value:

Whoever does not understand how much worth person have by being persons and what a relatively small value difference arises from one of them having some talent and another lacking it, does not really understand the dignity of persons. (...) How often it happens that, sensing our value as incommunicable persons and sensing at the same time that it is endangered by being ignored, we try to affirm it by *extraordinary achievements that set us apart from all others*

¹³ J. F. Crosby, *The Selfhood of the Human Person*, The Catholic University of America Press, Washington 1996, p. 44.

and that awaken their astonishment. We thus confuse what is rare and unusual in the realm of the communicable with our incommunicable selves. We try to affirm our value as persons by trying to realize in ourselves values which, when compared with this fundamental value, are in a sense negligible. We think that, without special talents and achievements, we are in danger of being a defective person, a bad draft fit to be discarded and replaced; with this we absurdly overestimate the importance of special talents and at the same time underestimate the importance of simply being a person.¹⁴

This passage throws a new light on both artistic creation and related criticism. The personalist understanding of a human value is an exact antithesis to the Romantic myth of the artist as demiurge and genius, as the apotheosis of *The will to power*. According to this interpretation of dignity, even a perfect realisation of aesthetic values cannot have any influence on the judgment of a human being as a person. In Crosby's opinion, the only things which are not veiled by the inalienable value of the person, are moral virtues or their absence. Consequently, the thesis advanced earlier in this paper, that an artist most fully realises his movement of personalisation during the creative process, is unacceptable. Treating an artist as a "better version of a human being" could lead us to laxity in our ethical judgments. Artistic talents, or any other advanced skills, should not be used to situate a human being *Beyond good and evil*.

Thus far, we have discussed the critic's stare at the artist through the work of art. The personalist attitude requires of the critic the same detachableness and respect for the person of the viewer. The artist and the viewer both deserve equal treatment and the acknowledgment of their right to all personalist values. One obstacle to this could be the fact that the viewer is often a mirror image of Mr Testadura from Arthur Danto's famous essay. Testadura, as we recall, was unable to tell the difference between a work of art and an ordinary object. Danto writes: "Testadura is not at that stage. To see something as art requires something the eye cannot decry – an atmosphere of artistic theory, a knowledge of the history of art: an artworld."¹⁵

Moreover, Mr Testadura most probably has not achieved very much and does not possess any particular talents comparable to the artist's or critic's achievements and talents. In the light of personalist philosophy, Mr Testadura, despite his lack of "greatness," has dignity and deserves respect just because he is a person, and this fact alone calls for a careful interest on the part of the artist and the critic.

A personalist critic should apply the same rule as a historian inspired by personalism, who, says Crosby, when describing a military conflict, tries to present it not only from the point of view of "generals and princes," that is, the privileged elites, but also from the point of view of "infantry and civilians." An art critic must not dwell exclusively in the hermetic circle of aloof considerations, intelligible only to the insular art world. He will not dwell there, prevented by the awareness of being a part of the personalist community, and by his respect for personalist values.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 68.

¹⁵ A. C. Danto, "The Artworld," in: *The Journal of Philosophy*, (19): 61(1964), p. 580.

Mounier's "request for a stare," for personalist engagement, and his requirement of an unconditional imperative to respect personal dignity, direct us towards one more conclusion: personalist criticism is not a game. To demonstrate this, it suffices to refer to the basic principle of any game, regardless of its different historical interpretation. The aim of the game is not to reach the truth, the aim is the game itself and the pleasure of playing it, or – a situation frequent in the art world and beyond – the aim is gratification. The nestor of Polish art criticism, Mieczysław Porębski, for example, compared art critique to a game of poker, and a critic to a gambler.¹⁶ The comparison may sound attractive from the literary point of view, nevertheless one should bear in mind that it is usually not the player with real assets who wins the game, but the one who knows how to bluff. Seasoned poker players say that poker is a kind of psychodrama, in which the decisive factors are shrewd intelligence, perceptiveness, strength of character and good luck: the cards one receives are of the least importance.

It was David J. Getsy who recently noticed the increasing importance of the game in the art world. The game has become a synonym for art, a metaphor for creativity and a model for art criticism. When I say "I play" (because I am an artist, and art is a game, or I am a critic and criticism is a game), I immediately secure for myself an indulgent acceptance for my activity (artistic, critical). Does not a game, by definition, have little in common with obligations and responsibilities in the real world? It seems, however, that this conviction, that the game is innocent, is incorrect. "Quite the contrary, play activities such as flirtation, mock fighting, imitation, or parody can at times fundamentally reorder the social relations that they are supposedly apart from. Furthermore, play and games can also provide critical reflection on actual events and situations."¹⁷ What we have to contend with in the case of a game are apparently trivial activities which may result in serious consequences.

In my opinion, when used in artistic actions, this subversive technique, completely lacking in seriousness – a game – is less problematic than in its practical application by critics in art criticism, since the method of "diversion and subversion" remains at odds with the personalist approach; this kind of approach excludes any element which could obfuscate or relativize communication between people. One could say that the model for personalist art criticism is not a subversive game but a rational discussion. The critic wants to understand the artist as fully as possible, and to be understood by the addressee of his communication.

16 M. Porębski, *Krytycy i sztuka*, Wydawnictwo Literackie, Cracow 2004, p. 24.

17 *Games, Play, and Twentieth-Century Art. From Diversion to Subversion*, ed. D. J. Getsy, Pennsylvania State University Press, Philadelphia 2011, (introduction).

Conclusion

Art criticism may be perceived as a manifestation of depersonalisation in at least three aspects, each of which corresponds to the three participants who communicate with each other in the situation defined in terms of a pretext which is the critical judgment of a work of art.

A critic as a person engages himself "on one side of the conflict" (the side of authorities governing an art institution whose particular aims contradict those of personalist criticism). Otherwise, a critic may present himself as not engaging in the personalist sense, thus refusing to test his views against those of others, abandoning any effort to understand the person of the artist or, more often, the person of the viewer. Finally, a critic may simply be a dilettante, which, according to Mounier's intention, is to be understood as an individual enclosed in his own, well-known but limited conceptual framework.

Depersonalisation of the artist takes place when he is objectified by the critic and the viewer; when neither the critic nor the viewer wish to enter into the unrepeatable and detachable dimension in the person of the artist. In line with what we have already seen, it would be superfluous to add that any kind of criticism, whether positive or negative, is to be expected and is legitimate. The artist, in submitting his work to critical judgment, demands understanding and a response from the critic and the viewer. A lack of well-founded critical judgment must be seen as an objectification of the person of the artist.

We can speak of a depersonalising treatment of the viewer in the situation where the artist deliberately employs such artistic means that cause embarrassment, shock or otherwise offend the viewer. The viewer should also try not to be a dilettante out of respect for the artist and the effort he devotes to the artwork. The viewer should desire to understand the artist, even if his only reason for doing so is the fact that the person of the artist, in the world of persons, expects it.

This essay is but an introduction to, or sketch of, the contemporary conception of personalist art criticism. As such, the arguments that I have presented are open to further development and a deeper elaboration. By way of conclusion, I shall attempt to indicate non-personalist arguments for the presence of 1) critical judgments in art criticism at all, 2) ethical evaluation. It would be interesting to compare arguments used in the on-going debate over ethical criticism, with the aims and principles of personalist art criticism I have presented. The leading participants in the debate are Georges Dickie, Wayne Booth, Martha C. Nussbaum, Noël Carroll and Berys Gaut.¹⁸ The last author in particular, Berys Gaut, draws similar conclusions to the ones argued for in this

¹⁸ See for example: G. Dickie, "The Triumph in *Triumph of the Will*," in: *British Journal of Aesthetics*, 45, 2005; W. Booth, *The Company We Keep: An Ethics of Fiction*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1998; M. C. Nussbaum, *Cultivating Humanity: A Classical Defense of Reform in Liberal Education*, Harvard University Press, Harvard 1997, N. Carroll, "Art and Ethical Criticism: An Overview of Recent Directions of Research," in: *Ethic*, 110 (January 2000); B. Gaut, "The Ethical Criticism of Art," in: *Aesthetics and Ethics: Essays at the Interpretation*, ed. J. Levinson, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1998 and B. Gaut, *Art, Emotion and Ethics*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2007.

paper, even though his philosophical assumptions have a different starting point. A detailed confrontation of these two positions is beyond the scope of this article; let me simply signal the main lines of argument in Berys Gaut's very interesting remarks on ethics in criticism.

Berys Gaut enumerates three arguments in favour of ethical art criticism:¹⁹

(a) The moral beauty argument: moral perfection corresponds to the beauty of personal character; the author's character, in its beauty, partly constitutes the beauty of the work of art.

(b) The cognitive argument: an artwork is capable of transmitting knowledge, thus carrying out the function of moral education which, once certain conditions are met, has a positive impact on the aesthetic value of the work.

(c) The merited response argument: this argument is regarded by Gaut's opponents as the most restrictive; an emotional response to a work of art is unmerited when it elicits an immoral response; that the work of art is unethical justifies the lack of response otherwise anticipated by the artist.

Gaut correctly observes that, when a work of art is evaluated with respect to its beauty, cognitive function and emotional dimension, then it has to be admitted that each of these elements implies an ethical aspect.²⁰

The stance of personalist art criticism with respect to the legitimacy of art evaluation is in agreement with the theory of ethical art criticism proposed by Gaut. However, personalism goes beyond Gaut by extending the significance of the impact which criticism of an artwork has on the person of the artist and, particularly, on the person of the viewer. In a culture marked by an aversion towards any expression of opinion about someone's work, action, utterance or achievement – a culture in which these are viewed as a usurpation of power and an attempt to subjugate the other – personalism offers an alternative, consisting in the mutual inspiration of persons in a movement of personalisation, leading to the realisation of ever higher personal values (especially moral values). Art, and all the relations it creates between the artist, critic and viewer, just may be one way to bring this about.

Translated by
Joanna Szymańska
and Gregory McCormick

¹⁹ B. Gaut, *op. cit.*

²⁰ *Idem, op. cit.*, p. 252.