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EMMANUEL MOUNIER
ON COMMUNITARIAN PERSONALISM
*His Four Books of Prophetic Catholic Philosophical Challenge to
Liberalism, Capitalism, Marxism, Fascism, and Nihilism*

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SUMMARY



IN HIS FOUR BOOKS ON *Communitarian Personalism*, Emmanuel Mounier (1905-1950), the famous engaged French Catholic philosopher and founding editor of the also famous French Catholic journal *Ésprit*, wrestled intellectually and spiritually with the crisis of Modern Western Civilization.

Within that crisis and writing before World War II, Mounier sequentially challenged what he diagnosed as 1) the foundational emergence of “Decadent Liberalism with its political economy of Capitalism,” 2) the left-wing reaction of “Atheistic Marxism,” 3) the right-wing reaction of “Christian Fascism,” and 4) the final triumph of “European Nihilism.”

After World War II, Mounier faced the reinvigoration of Liberalism, due to the new military-industrial strength of the United States as the dominant global power. Nonetheless, he continued to describe Liberalism as “bourgeois and individualistic” and to diagnose it as the philosophical foundation for the “Crisis of the Twentieth Century.” Finally, he portrayed Liberalism and Capitalism as degenerating philosophically into “European Nihilism,” and he warned that “Christian Fascism” would return.

In response to those deep philosophical challenges, Mounier ultimately embraced Pierre Teilhard de Chardin’s then new evolutionary cosmovision of a “Personalizing Universe,” which Teilhard may have partly developed from Mounier’s philosophy of Personalism. (The two were colleagues and friends.)

In the second half of the twentieth century and after his early death in 1950, Mounier’s prophetic philosophical writings strongly influenced the social visionary Peter Maurin of the Catholic Worker Movement, the prophetic Trappist monk Thomas Merton, and the profound Polish Catholic philosopher Karol Wojtyla (later Pope John Paul II).

Today, Mounier’s writings can help us understand and challenge the return of “Christian Fascism,” which Mounier called “a perverted spiritual movement, perhaps even demonic, and one reaching into the unconscious depths of the human psyche.” More deeply, they can help us understand and challenge contemporary Modern Western Civilization’s renewed crisis, which now includes the global ecological devastation.



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RÉVOLUTION PERSONNALISTE ET COMMUNAUTAIRE

(Personalist and Communitarian Revolution)

Emmanuel Mounier, 1935

Fernand Aubier, Éditions Montaigne, 334 pages

MANIFESTE AU SERVICE PERSONNALISME

. (Manifesto for Personalism)

Emmanuel Mounier, 1936

Fernand Aubier, Éditions Montaigne, 198 pages

Available in English translation as

A Personalist Manifesto, trans. Monks of St. John's Abbey.

Longmans, Green, 1938, 332 pages

QU'EST-CE QUE LE PERSONNALISME ?

(What is Personalism?)

Emmanuel Mounier, 1946

Les Éditions du Seuil, 107 pages

LE PERSONNALISME

(Personalism)

Emmanuel Mounier, 1949

Les Presses Universitaires de France, 136 pages

Available in English translation as

Personalism, trans. Philip Marait

University of Notre Dame Press, 2010, 132 pages

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THE CRISIS OF MODERN WESTERN CIVILIZATION

IN HIS 1994 BOOK, *WORLD HISTORIANS AND THEIR GOALS*, author Paul Costello analyzed the world-historical interpretations of H.G. Wells, Oswald Spengler, Arnold Toynbee, Pitirim Sorokin, Christopher Dawson, Lewis Mumford, and William H. McNeill. About them, he wrote,

The perspectives of world historians in the twentieth century are dominated by an overwhelming sense of crisis, a feeling that Western Civilization may be doomed to destroy itself in a cataclysmic suicide or fall into a degenerate stagnation where 'the machine' will supersede the highest aspirations of humanity and society will sink into depersonalized automatism. (1994, p. 3)

Also writing during the first half of the twentieth century, the democratic-socialist and French-Catholic philosopher Emmanuel Mounier (1905-1950) similarly claimed that Modern Western Civilization was in crisis. He described the Modern World as “bourgeois and individualist,” and he saw it undermining the human person.

In response, Mounier developed his social philosophy of Communitarian Personalism,” which he abbreviated as “Personalism.” His philosophy was influenced by a Paris-based philosophical circle to which he belonged, and which included French, Russian, and Austrian philosophers then living in Paris. They nurtured him as a young philosopher, and its members later made significant contributions to Existentialism, Phenomenology, and Thomism.

Mounier’s literary vehicle for Personalism became his legendary French Catholic journal *Ésprit*, arising from the new French generation of the 1930s that was confronting the “Great Crash” of 1929. The French name *Ésprit* (Spirit) refers to spirituality, the loss of which Mounier saw as key to the twentieth century’s successive depersonalizing and dehumanizing philosophies of Liberalism, Marxism, and Fascism, and to the left-wing and right-wing technocratic-totalitarian threat of “the machine.”

Ésprit functioned from 1932 to 1950, although the French Vichy Government and World War II interrupted it. It was a creative and dynamic Paris-based Catholic journal for engaged philosophical dialogue and action-oriented inspiration. There was nothing comparable to it in the rest of the Catholic intellectual world. However, although *Ésprit* continued after Mounier's death, its Catholic identity and influence gradually weakened.

Across the 20th century, countless significant Catholic thinkers and activists drew on Mounier's philosophy of Personalism. In France, disciples of Personalism included Paul Ricoeur (1913-2005), the famous French Protestant philosopher who joined *Ésprit* when he was young and later produced important studies in hermeneutical phenomenology. (Ricoeur was also my teacher at the University of Chicago.)

In the United States, disciples of Personalism included the French-born Peter Maurin (1907-1949), co-founder with Dorothy Day (1897-1980) of the Catholic Worker Movement, and Thomas Merton (1915-1968), the prophetic Cistercian monk who so boldly opposed the US war in Vietnam (and Laos) and sought dialogue with Buddhism on behalf of world peace.

The most significant figure strongly influenced by Mounier's Personalism was the Polish Catholic intellectual Karol Wojtyla (1920-2005), the personalist and phenomenological Thomist philosopher, university professor, Catholic priest, and then bishop, who later became Pope John Paul II (1978-2005).

Perhaps more than anyone else, Wojtyla explored Personalism as a vital resource for Catholic Thomism in the late twentieth century. He also saw the crisis of Modern Western Civilization as caused by an anti-personalist philosophical Anthropology and, in response, he attempted to enrich Thomism with Personalism and Phenomenology.

However, as Pope John Paul II, Wojtyla moved to a deeper analysis, which Mounier had also espoused toward the end of his life. Both Mounier and Wojtyla ultimately concluded that the final drama of the Modern World's intellectual crisis was philosophical Nihilism.

MOUNIER AS AN ENGAGED CATHOLIC PHILOSOPHER ¹

BORN INTO A FERVENT CATHOLIC PROFESSIONAL FAMILY with peasant roots, Mounier attempted to open the French Catholic intellectual tradition to a non-Marxian, democratic-socialist, and philosophically engaged thought and action. (Note that Karl Marx [1818-1883] only learned about Socialism during his early exile in France. Thus, French Socialism was older than Marxism.)

However, Mounier was not initially shaped by the Aristotelean-Thomist philosophical tradition that became so dominant for Catholicism in the first half of the twentieth century. Instead, he was formed in the Platonic-Augustinian tradition, which remained strong in French Catholic intellectual life, and which had been present earlier in the revisionist and secularizing Platonic dualism of the French Catholic philosopher René Descartes (1596-1650), as well as in the deeper revisionist and secularizing Platonic dualism of the German Protestant philosopher Immanuel Kant (1724-1804).

The French Platonic-Augustinian tradition came to Mounier through the great French genius Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), a philosopher, mathematician, scientist, and deeply committed Catholic. Mounier admitted that Pascal would have been his philosophical hero had he not collapsed into what Mounier called the “extreme Augustinianism” of French Jansenism (condemned by Pope Clement XI in 1713).

But Mounier transformed his Platonic-Augustinian legacy by learning from the new developments being explored in the Paris philosophical circle that had welcomed him as a young scholar. In particular, he wove into his synthesis the “Philosophy of Action,” initiated by the French Catholic philosopher Maurice Blondel (1861-1949). After that, he always wrote from an *engaged* philosophy in service of action.

¹ For further reading on Mounier, I recommend the English, French, and Italian versions of Wikipedia’s excellent articles about Mounier, about his journal *Ésprit*, and about the several philosophical figures who influenced him. I have partly drawn on and am grateful to those Wikipedia sources.

Yet even before becoming part of the Paris philosophical circle, Mounier had begun to transform his philosophical formation by embracing new teachings from the French Jewish philosopher Henri Bergson (1859-1941), who interpreted evolution as a dynamically creative process of radical contingency. For years before his death, Bergson had wished to convert to Catholicism, but he held back out of solidarity with his fellow Jews who were suffering so deeply during the 1930s under murderous Nazi antisemitism.

Early on, Bergson had studied the classic Latin book-length poem *De Rerum Natura* (On the Nature of Things) by Lucretius (c. 99-55 BC), the famous Roman promoter of the Atomist Cosmology of reductionist Materialism taught by the classical Greek anti-religious philosopher Epicurus (341-270 BC). However, Lucretius added the romantic theme of Nature's beauty and creativity to Epicurus' reductionist Atomist Materialism, and he poetically personalized Nature as the goddess Venus.

Karl Marx had also studied Epicurus' reductionist Atomist Materialism. He even wrote his doctoral dissertation at the University of Berlin as a comparison of the Atomist Materialisms of Democritus (c. 460-370 BC) and Epicurus. Marx favored Epicurus over Democritus because Democritus had been a determinist and Epicurus had supported freedom (albeit a non-rational voluntarist freedom, based on his gratuitous doctrine of the atoms' spontaneous "swerve").

Mounier's first mentor had been Jacques Chevalier (1882-1962), a distinguished professor at Mounier's home university in Grenoble and an internationally prominent Catholic philosopher. Chevalier was also Bergson's working colleague and close friend. Chevalier must have thought that Bergson's understanding of evolution as creative action could be integrated with the Christian intellectual tradition.

Thanks to Chevalier's influence, Mounier appropriated two Bergsonian themes into his own philosophy: 1) evolution's "creativity," and 2) life as a dynamic process of creative action (themes coming more from the poet Lucretius than from the less lyrical Epicurus). Thus, we may initially describe Mounier as a Bergsonian-Lucretian process philosopher who emphasized life's creativity, but as radically contingent. (Radical contingency was a central theme in Epicurus' reductionist Atomist Materialism.)

However, at the end of his life, Mounier moved beyond Bergson's embrace of Epicurean radical contingency. In its place, he embraced the emerging cosmovision of evolution as teleological, then being developed by the Jesuit priest-geologist Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955), who also portrayed the Universe's evolution as "personalizing."

Though Teilhard had also read Bergson when he was young, he rejected Bergson's interpretation of evolution as Epicurean radical contingency. Instead, he implicitly rooted his interpretation of evolution in the Greek *Logos* tradition, especially in its Platonic-Aristotelean teleology. And Teilhard presumably took the word "Personalist" in his cosmovision of a "Personalizing Universe" from Mounier.

Unfortunately, Mounier's first mentor, Chevalier, later embraced the Christian-fascist Vichy government, and he even accepted a major educational position within it. In contrast, Mounier became a courageous critic of what he called "Christian Fascism." As a result, Mounier suffered brief imprisonment by the Vichy government and denial of the Catholic sacraments by pro-fascist French Catholic bishops. Later, Mounier reportedly became active in Lyon within the French Resistance against Christian Fascism and France's occupation by Nazis, and he became an inspirational figure for some Resistance fighters.

But back to Mounier's early formation. Following his undergraduate degree in philosophy from the University of Grenoble, he undertook doctoral studies in Paris at the Sorbonne. There, he completed his student days as an outstanding scholar in philosophy, graduating second in his class after the later-famous French intellectual Raymond Aron. Mounier then began his anticipated career as a professor.

However, like Peter Maurin of the Catholic Worker Movement, Mounier soon criticized the academic profession. He described university training as "a terrible disease from which it takes a long time to recover" (Rausch, 2010, ix). Mounier then ceased being an *academic* philosopher. Instead, he became an *engaged* philosopher, dialoguing through *Ésprit* with the leading philosophical currents of his time concerning what he called "the Crisis of the Twentieth Century."

Rooted in the Catholic tradition, working with a few other intellectuals, and seeking engagement with the Left, Mounier soon created the journal *Ésprit*. He used it as a public

pedagogical platform for his engaged philosophy of Personalism to dialogue with leaders of his time's two major philosophical currents, which he called "Existentialist Idealism" and "Marxist Materialism."

Mounier also found inspiration for his action-oriented engagement in the writings of Charles Péguy (1873-1914), the revered French patriot, romantic poet, and lyrical essayist who was tragically killed in combat as a young French military officer during World War I. Péguy had also been committed to Democratic Socialism and belonged to the French Socialist Party. Mounier found in Péguy the engaged intellectual model he failed to find in the Jansenist Pascal.

Péguy had been deeply committed to Catholicism, but he ultimately decided not to be baptized. If he were to be baptized, his wife Charlotte-Françoise Baudoin, raised by parents in the French anti-clerical revolutionary tradition, threatened to break up their young family.

The famous Thomist Catholic philosopher Jacques Maritain (1882-1973) and his also famous poet wife Raïssa (1883-1960) had pleaded with Péguy's wife on behalf of her husband's baptism. However, Péguy decided his first responsibility, even before baptism, was to loving unity with his wife and four children. The Maritains' unsuccessful attempt was futile and Péguy ended their friendship.

Years later, Jacques Maritain became Mounier's patron for founding *Ésprit* and sustaining it in the early years. He obtained offices for *Ésprit* with a French Catholic publisher and found financial support for the young and now-unemployed philosopher. However, Maritain and Mounier soon had a falling out, though Maritain held back from publicly criticizing Mounier.

Maritain had wanted a strictly Catholic journal, but Mounier developed a more open journal that engaged with non-Catholics and non-believers, especially thinkers and activists on the left. Maritain may also have been concerned about the young philosopher's left leanings.

After World War II, Mounier's promotion of engaged Communitarian Personalism would not continue long. In 1935, he had married the Belgian librarian Paulette Leclercq,

and their daughter Françoise was born in 1938. Then, at 2 years of age, little Françoise tragically entered a coma that lasted from 1940 until her sad death in 1954. Mounier's personal and familial suffering with little Françoise's illness apparently caused him increasing psychological and physical deterioration, including a series of heart attacks that culminated in his tragic 1950 death at the young age of 45.

MOUNIER'S ENGAGED PHILOSOPHY OF PERSONALISM

FOUND THROUGHOUT ISSUES OF HIS JOURNAL *ÉSPRIT* and his four books on Personalism, Mounier's core narrative is clear: *The anti-spiritual and reductionist Materialism of Modern Western Civilization was making human society ever more anti-human, ever more anti-personalist, and ever less communitarian, and, as he concluded in his last years, the Modern World was finally collapsing into philosophical Nihilism.*

Personalism's Five Core Themes

Within that core narrative, Mounier initially developed five core themes that engaged with modern ideologies.

1. *The Bourgeois Individual.* Mounier traced the Modern World's genealogy of Liberalism, and sequential reactions by Marxism and Fascism (including Christian Fascism), to what he saw as their common root in the *bourgeois individual*." For him, the bourgeois individual undergirded modern Liberalism with its political economy of Capitalism. He then saw both Marxism and Fascism, with the former reacting to Liberalism and the latter reacting to Marxism, continuing the same erroneous anthropological paradigm of modern depersonalization.
2. *Liberalism's and Capitalism's Materialism.* According to Mounier, after the emergence of the modern bourgeois individual, the next step in the historical process of Modern Western Civilization was intellectual construction of the modern materialist philosophy of individualist *Liberalism*, with its anti-spiritual, anti-personal, and anti-communitarian political economy of materialist *Capitalism*.

3. *Marxist Materialism*. According to Mounier, the following step was the “justified” reaction to the social injustices of Liberalism's political economy of Capitalism by left-wing *Marxism*. But he also criticized Marxism for its aggressively atheistic form of Materialism (even more de-spiritualizing than capitalist secularization, which only tended to privatize and marginalize religion). He also criticized the cruel authoritarian form of Marxism that emerged in the Dictatorial Communism of Vladimir Lenin (1870-1924) and Josef Stalin (1878-1953).

(Both Liberalism, with its political economy of Liberal Capitalism, and Marxism, with its political economy of Scientific Socialism, share common philosophical roots in Epicurus’ reductionist Cosmology of Atomist Materialism. But, Mounier seemed unaware of that shared philosophical debt.)

4. *Pseudo-Spiritual Fascism*. According to Mounier, the final step was the reaction to left-wing Marxism by right-wing Fascism, which he diagnosed as a false spirituality. In France (and in several other countries), it took the form of *Christian Fascism*. It arose, Mounier claimed, from “deep, and perhaps even demonic, cultural forces” making three false claims:

- Fascism will fill the despiritualized void caused by materialist Liberalism
- Fascism will challenge the pervasive destruction of community and tradition by individualist and deracinating Capitalism
- Fascism will protect the spiritual order and fight against atheistic Marxism

Mounier also pointed out that, although wealthy liberals were initially frightened by Fascism, they were more terrified by Marxism because it threatened their wealth. As a result, he stated, many wealthy liberals accepted Fascism’s false claims and allied themselves with the murderous fascist leaders who promised to protect their wealth.

5. *Personalism*. Mounier then identified the antidote to all the above as the philosophy of Communitarian Personalism, which he portrayed as seeking nourishment from transcendent spirituality and protecting both the human person and the human community, while also nourishing living spiritual traditions.

Further, he argued, the philosophy of Personalism needed to engage with the struggle against social injustice and for democracy in the name of the fully human person who is both material and spiritual.

Mounier also argued that, without simultaneously struggling for justice and democracy, transcendent spirituality alone would lead only to psychological and institutional narcissism and, worse, to Christian Fascism.

Personalism's Foundational Critique of the Bourgeois Individual

Mounier's critique of the bourgeois individual was foundational for his philosophy of Personalism. Viewing the bourgeois individual as foundational for the social philosophy of Liberalism and then carrying over into Marxism and Fascism (with the atomized individual massified in both), he drew on the philosophical work of *Nikolai Berdyaev* (1874-1948), an existentialist philosopher of Personalism from Kyiv in the Russian Orthodox Christian tradition.

Fleeing the Soviet Union after having been imprisoned, Berdyaev, with his wife Lydia Tushev, moved to Paris in 1923. There, he became part of the Paris philosophical circle that included Jacques Maritain and intellectually nurtured the young Mounier. One of Berdyaev's most popular books is an anthology translated into English and published in 1934 as *The Bourgeois Mind*. Members of the Catholic Worker Movement have continually looked to that book for philosophical guidance.

Mounier also insisted that his philosophy of Personalism was not a fixed system but only a developing perspective. He argued that the time for philosophical systems had ended with the great German philosopher G.W.F. Hegel (1730-1831), whom Mounier despised. Therefore, the philosophy of Personalism, he argued, must continually evolve in response to evolving historical conditions.

In response to those evolving historical conditions, Mounier wrote his four books on the engaged philosophy of Personalism (along with many other books). These four books on Personalism may be divided into two categories: 1) two books written before World

War II, and 2) two books written after that war. I will now briefly review all four books and comment on their evolution.

MOUNIER'S TWO PRE-WAR BOOKS ON PERSONALISM

MOUNIER'S PUBLISHED HIS FIRST TWO BOOKS ON PERSONALISM in 1934 and 1936. These two books' radical themes for engagement, building on his foundational philosophy of Personalism, are "*Renaissance, Revolution, and Civilization*."

In the pre-World War II situation, the young Mounier had early on joined a movement of young French intellectuals that emerged as an immediate response to Wall Street's "Great Crash" of 1929 and to World War I's more distant devastation. Like many other thinkers of that time, Mounier judged he was living within a deep crisis of Modern Western Civilization. In response, he proclaimed the philosophy of Personalism as the only solution to that crisis. In so doing, as we have seen, he identified three enemies for Personalism to challenge.

- *The Foundational Decadence of Liberalism.* First, there was what Mounier called the "decadence of Liberalism," which he saw as foundational and whose followers he saw supporting its exploitive economy of Capitalism and its manipulative parliamentary democracy. He also saw Liberalism as teaching a reductionist modern definition of the human person as the "bourgeois individual" who seeks only self-satisfied comfort and ignores the suffering of the working class. The Young Mounier despised the concept of an alienated modern bourgeois individual, though he, like many of us still today, was a member of the modern bourgeois intellectual class.
- *The Left-Wing Reaction by Marxism.* Second, for Mounier, Marxism is a justified reaction because it saw through Liberalism's bourgeois mystifications of politics and economics, and because Marxists joined with the working class to seek a more just socialist society. However, Mounier harshly criticized Marxism's reductionist Materialism and especially its militant atheism. At the same time, he hoped that some in the Marxist movement would soon join the Personalist movement by accepting transcendent spirituality.

- *The Right-Wing Reaction of Fascism.* Third, he saw Fascism emerging as a reactionary counter-revolution against the threat of Marxism. However, according to Mounier, Fascism is also a new defensive development of Liberalism, in which liberal elites give up their bourgeois pretension that liberal politics and capitalist economics serve everyone. He saw liberal elites abandoning that pretention and taking refuge in nationalist authoritarianism to protect their wealth and comfort against the rising threat of Marxism. Most importantly, and this may be unique to Mounier, he saw Fascism as a movement of *false spirituality*, which in France he named “Christian Fascism” and denounced for betraying true Christianity.

Responding through *Ésprit* to the above three challenges, Mounier appeared as a young Catholic intellectual warrior confidently *engaged* in a revolutionary philosophical battle against Liberal and Marxist Materialism and against Christian Fascism to save the future of Modern Western Civilization.

Book 1 in 1935

RÉVOLUTION PERSONNALISTE ET COMMUNAUTAIRE

(Personalist and Communitarian Revolution)

This first book, not available in English translation, is mainly composed of essays from *Ésprit* during the journal’s first four years (1932-1935). Following preliminary sections, the book has five parts, with their titles taken from the language of military warfare.

- *Lignes de départ* (Lines of Departure). This first part begins with a call for a new “*Renaissance*,” disassociating itself from reactionary fascist spirituality and calling upon faith to rehabilitate solidarity, community, and a “realistic” spirituality. It then elaborates on a “*Personalist Revolution*” as a “*Communitarian Revolution*,” and it proposes “*Principles for Rallying Together*.” Mounier’s themes of Renaissance and Revolution stand out in this part.
- *Lignes de positions* (Lines of Positions). This second part defines the enemies of Personalism. It states them in reverse chronological order: 1) *Christian Fascism*, with false spiritual values; 2) *Materialist Communism*; and 3) *Materialist Liberalism*. This second section also lays out personalist approaches to work and property, and it ends with a letter supporting democracy.

- *Lignes de méthode et d'action* (Lines of Method and Action). This third part distinguishes between reform and revolution, and it praises political force. (Mounier was not a pacifist.) It then calls for spiritual force to be employed as a higher means, along with material force, and it imagines a new form of action that will be spiritual, personalist, and communitarian.
- *Leçons de l'émeute ou la révolution contre les mythes* (Lessons on the Riot or Revolution against the Myths). This fourth part is brief and reflects on a riot in Paris on 6 February 1934, organized by the right wing. The left wing believed it was an attempted fascist coup.
- *Rupture entre l'ordre chrétien et le désordre établi* (Rupture between the Christian order and the established disorder). This fifth part is even briefer, with only a few pages. It reflects on the possibility of Christian politics becoming based on the philosophy of Personalism.

Book 2 in 1936

MANIFESTE AU SERVICE DE PERSONNALISME

(Manifesto for Personalism)

This second book was translated into English and published in 1938 as *A Personalist Manifesto*. The English translation was done by the monks of St. John's Abbey at Collegeville, Minnesota, in the United States. It contains a preface by Virgil Michael, himself a monk of St. John's Abbey and, in his time, a renowned leader in the Catholic liturgical movement and the Catholic social justice movement.

This book moves beyond the prior volume's focus on "renaissance and revolution" to call for a "*new civilization*." I believe this second book is Mounier's most powerful statement of his engaged philosophy of Communitarian Personalism. Unfortunately, the book's English translation is now out of print, and scarce used copies are prohibitively expensive. Therefore, there is a need for some publisher to do a reprint of this English translation, or even a new edition, in order to give English-speaking readers access to it.

Also, since the book has been translated into English, I will use English headings, although they may sometimes differ from the 1938 translation. The book has an introduction plus four parts that include seventeen chapters.

Introduction: Measure of our Action

In his introduction, Mounier identified as personalist “all teaching and all civilizations affirming the primacy of the human person over material necessities and collective devices that sustain one’s development.” He described Communitarian Personalism as “converging aspirations today searching in their vision beyond Fascism, Communism, and the bourgeois decadent world [Liberalism].”

Mounier also called Personalism “an inclusive term for various doctrines that, in our present historical situation, can be made to agree upon the elementary physical and metaphysical conditions of *a new civilization*” (italics added). He then described this book as a synthesis of all that *Ésprit* had done in its first four years.

Part One: The Modern World Against the Person

This first part, unique in its focus on “civilizations,” has three chapters: 1) “The Bourgeois and Individualist Civilization” (“Decadent Liberalism”); 2) “The Fascist Civilizations;” and 3) “The Marxist New Man.” Throughout Part One, Mounier constantly contrasted the human “person” with the modern bourgeois “individual.”

- *The Bourgeois-Individualist Civilization.* Mounier explored three fundamental problems with this foundational liberal form of Modern Western Civilization: 1) the “decadence of the bourgeois individual,” who he again sees as collapsing into the comforts of the “machine,” which he described as “global finance Capitalism;” 2) the “disincarnated spirit of modern humanism,” which he saw separating spirit and matter, as well as thought and action; and 3) the “dislocation of community,” which he saw including the loss of intellectual community, truth, and reason’s unity, as well as the loss of human social community caused by collapse into bourgeois individualism and isolation.

- *Fascist Civilizations*. Mounier described “Fascist Civilizations,” presumably in various European nationalist forms and with the French version taking pseudo-Christian form. He portrayed Fascist Civilizations as collapsing depersonalized individuals into a centralized national force that exercises “false spiritual power” and becomes a “theocracy of temporal power.” He further described them as imposing “the primacy of irrationality and power” and “the primacy of the national collective.”
- *The Marxist New Man*. As a democratic socialist, Mounier had a more nuanced position on Marxism that differed from his rejection of Bourgeois Individualist Civilization and Fascist Civilizations. He praised Marxism for taking up the cause of the poor and dispossessed. He also stated that resistance against Marxism can only be valid when it takes up that same cause of social justice. He then wrote favorably of dialogue with “humanist Marxism” but disparagingly of “Dialectical Materialism.” Finally, he condemned Soviet Communism and used powerful quotes from Berdyaev to strengthen his condemnation.

Parts Two, Three, & Four

The remaining parts of the Manifesto return to elaborations of Mounier’s philosophy of Personalism, which he defined as “principles” for a “new civilization.” In a long section, he first described the structures of a personalist regime for education, private life, culture, economics, politics, and what he called international and interracial society. I will not summarize these because they are secondary themes. Mounier then ended by briefly addressing three questions: 1) how to act (*Comment faire ?*), 2) what to do (*Que faire ?*), and 3) with whom (*Avec qui ?*). As expected, his responses to these three questions drew on his philosophy of Personalism.

MOUNIER’S TWO POST-WAR BOOKS ON PERSONALISM

MOUNIER’S FINAL TWO BOOKS ON PERSONALISM, published in 1946 and 1949, minimized his dramatic themes of renaissance, revolution, and civilization. Instead, they mostly offered practical and theoretical reflections on various aspects of

Personalism. For that reason, they may seem less challenging than his pre-war writings. But his 1949 book also carried two new and bold additions.

- *A Personalist Universe*. First, his 1949 book framed itself within Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's new cosmovision of a "*Personal Universe*," and it incorporated Teilhard's cosmovision within Personalism's philosophical foundation.
- *European Nihilism*. Second, at the end of that book, Mounier raised a new challenge for Personalism that he defined as "*European Nihilism*." (Decades later, Pope John Paul II, in his 1998 encyclical letter on philosophy, *Fides et Ratio* [Faith and Reason], came to that same conclusion.)

Because, in the post-World War II period, the position of Mounier's three philosophical enemies had dramatically shifted, his writings addressed three different challenges, which I will now describe.

- *Post-War Reinvigoration of Liberalism*. First, Liberalism became incredibly reinvigorated, thanks to the Allied Powers' industrial-military defeat of Fascism and the enormously expanded industrial-military power of the United States, which became the global center of Liberalism. The early 20th century's discussions about a crisis of Modern Western Civilization no longer made sense to post-war liberal elites, who were enjoying economic, cultural, and political triumph. However, as many now propose (myself included), the crisis of Liberalism had only been placed on temporary hold.
- *Post-War Defeat of Fascism*. Second, Fascism, which Mounier had so courageously fought against, was massively defeated. As a result, the Fascist Ideology seemed banished from liberal discourse, although Mounier warned of its future return. Also, with the pre-World War II Old Right withdrawing into the shadows, Mounier did not live long enough to see the re-invigorated New Right emerge out of the new social conditions of the late 20th century (reshaped by the Electronic Revolution and electronic "globalization" of Finance Capitalism).
- *Post-War Marxist Transformations*. Third, Marxism underwent significant transformations. Marxist-Leninism in Soviet Communism revealed itself as brutally anti-

democratic and dictatorial. Also, although Mounier did not note it, the Western industrial working classes had failed to develop international solidarity, despite Marx's earlier call for workers of the world to unite. Instead, they had embraced militarizing nationalism. In addition, white male industrial workers in the center countries were now building strong national unions and achieving modest prosperity. Further, the atomized individualism of post-war "consumerism" was undermining working-class solidarity, at least among upwardly mobile workers.

Most significantly, after Mounier's time, post-war generations of Marxist intellectuals became less "engaged" in solidarity with the working class. In particular, the bourgeois New Left intelligentsia became devoted to the Cultural Marxism of the German Frankfurt School (Critical Theory), many of whose members had sought refuge from the Nazis by fleeing to the United States. As bourgeois New Left intellectuals often forgot about working-class solidarity, some wrongly condemned the working class as reactionary and fascist.

(On the other side, contemporary bourgeois intellectuals of the New Right, fanning the flames of racism, have developed a misguided critique of Cultural Marxism that wrongly attacks legitimate social causes, for example, the Civil Rights Movement.)

When writing his two pre-war books, Mounier was still young, deeply engaged in current debates, and boldly on the offensive. Now, in these two post-war books, he was no longer young, and he seemed somewhat disengaged from action and more absorbed in his ideas about Personalism. He sometimes even appeared on the defensive, trying to clarify and defend "true Personalism."

A significant factor in Mounier's shift away from activist engagement was that post-war French politics had grown more complicated, and a consensual French center proved unfeasible. In response, Mounier supported a new and broad left-wing political coalition that sought to include the internally diverse Catholic left.

However, the French Communist Party, with its prestige from leadership in the French Resistance movement and from its strength in the French labor movement, closed its door to any such coalition. As a result, the future of French Politics passed to the right under the authoritarian leadership of General Charles De Gaulle. (Wolff, 1960).

In addition to changes in the social context, we need to remember that Mounier was suffering physically and psychologically from the long coma of his young daughter Françoise. Again, his little girl had fallen into a coma in 1940 at only 2 years of age. At the point when Mounier's first post-war book appeared, little Françoise had been in her coma for 6 years. Presumably, Mounier's lengthy suffering with Françoise's coma was taking its toll.

Remembering this changed the post-war background and Mounier's personal suffering, I now turn to his two post-World War II books about Personalism.

Book 3 in 1946 :
QU'EST-CE QUE LE PERSONALISME ?
(What is personalism?)

This third book by Mounier on Personalism, published in 1946, contains a preface, seven chapters, and a short final section. Notably, this book regularly uses the name "Personalism" without mentioning its "communitarian" dimension.

This book's preface and seven chapters largely restate Mounier's philosophical vision of Personalism that he had laid out in his two pre-war books, but without having any longer to face his cruel enemy of Christian Fascism. Also, the book's extended philosophical reflections perhaps occupy space left by Mounier's reduced social engagement.

The first two chapters address the "purity" of Personalism against misuses of the term. They also report on Mounier's re-engagement with *Ésprit* after ten years of interruption by "Christian Fascism" and World War II. The third chapter addresses spiritual transcendence. The following chapter reflects on the Crisis of the Twentieth Century, and the one after analyzes that crisis' two alienations of "reductionist Materialism" and "disembodied Spiritualism." The final chapter critiques equivocations about Personalism.

However, because much of Mounier's third book about Personalism repeats basic information found in his two pre-war books, I will not summarize its chapters here. Instead, I will report on new developments in how it views Marxism.

A More Sympathetic Approach to Marxism

Within this third book, Mounier's approach to Marxism became more sympathetic than before. That was probably because the French Communist Party had grown so strong due to its leadership in the Resistance against French Christian Fascism and the German Nazi occupation, and due to the Party's strong presence in the French labor movement. Nonetheless, Mounier still maintained his profound critique of Marxist Materialism's militant atheism, which he saw as foundationally opposed to Personalism's primary principle of the human person's spiritual dimension.

Mounier's more sympathetic approach probably also reflected the post-war Marxist-Christian dialogue that was beginning to emerge from Christian activists' cooperation with socialists and communists in the Resistance struggle against French Christian Fascism and the German Nazi occupation. Also, at a more intimately "personal" level, the shared fighting in the Resistance of so many young women and men from both Marxist and Christian backgrounds sometimes led to Marxist-Christian marriages.

In 1949, two years after the publication of Mounier's 1946 book, the Vatican condemned Catholic "adhesion to the Communist Party" or "collaboration which contributes to the establishment of a materialist and atheist Communist regime." But Mounier had not supported either of those condemned actions. Instead, he had limited his call for cooperation to projects for the wider common good (Wolf, 1960, p. 333).

More than a decade later, Pope John XXIII, in his famous 1963 encyclical letter on world peace, *Pacem in Terris*, took a position like Mounier's openness to practical cooperation with communists in projects serving the common good. Thus, John explained,

It is always perfectly justifiable to distinguish between error as such and the person who falls into error ... Catholics who, in order to achieve some external good, collaborate with unbelievers or with those who, through error, lack the fullness of faith in Christ, may possibly provide the occasion or even the incentive for their conversion to the truth ... Again, it is perfectly legitimate to make a clear distinction between a false philosophy of the nature, origin and purpose of men and the world, and economic, social, cultural, and

political undertakings, even when such undertakings draw their origin and inspiration from that philosophy. (Par. 158-159).

We may recall that Pope John XXIII, in his earlier role as Archbishop Angelo Giuseppe Roncalli, had been the Papal Nuncio to France and resident in Paris from 1944 to 1953. During those years, Roncalli certainly would have known Mounier, his journal *Ésprit*, and his challenging ideas about dialogue with Marxists.

Some Quotations about Marxism

It may be helpful to quote a few of Mounier's new statements about Marxism, plus a statement on Capitalism, as found in the final section of this book. These quotes are my translations, and I will render them with inclusive language. They show that Mounier's thought, always more sympathetic to Marxism than to Existentialism, now became even more sympathetic.

- *In Chapter IV*, Mounier stated that "Personalism is not opposed to Socialism or to Communism. Everything depends on which Socialism, or which Communism, that is the question." Here, Mounier speculated on the possibility that socialists and communists would accept the spiritual dimension of the human person. He then stated, "The Marxist critique of alienation and the life of the workers' movement are impregnated within Personalism," because of their defense of the human rights of members of the working class.
- *In Chapter V*, Mounier declared, "The merit of Marxist theory and practice is its being the most powerful modern reaction against [liberal] decadence." But he also stated that "this generation" should free Marxist Materialism "from the simplifications imposed by the initial struggles and the remnants of Positivism expanded by Science."
- *In Chapter VI*, Mounier offered the following philosophical reflection on Modern Materialism. "For medieval theology [led by Thomas Aquinas, who drew on Aristotle], the detour through the knowledge and practice of matter is necessary to access not only the knowledge of the Spirit but also the interior life and the knowledge of

God. Let us not forget that this theology won out against Platonic Idealism under the impact of the shock produced by the assimilation of Aristotle. At the time, this philosopher was considered very materialist."

In that same chapter, Mounier continued, "Marxism is not a system, but a method of analysis and a method of action." These words resonate with the famous saying that Friedrich Engels quoted from Marx's letter to a French socialist, "*Ce qu'il y a de certain c'est que moi, je ne suis pas Marxiste*" (If anything is certain, it is that for myself, I am not a Marxist). (Engels, 1882.)

- *In the final section*, Mounier offered a powerful critique of Capitalism: "Personalism, in fact, considers that the structures of Capitalism stand today in the way of the movement for human liberation and that they must be destroyed for the benefit of a socialist organization of production and consumption. We did not invent this Socialism ... [But we] must not replace the imperialism of private interests with the tyranny of collective powers. We must, therefore, find a democratic structure."

Thus, while Mounier moved away from his earlier and overriding intellectual combat with Fascism, he heightened here his socialist side and deepened his intellectual engagement with Marxism, yet without abandoning his fundamental critique of Marxists for denying the spiritual dimension of the human person and for its dictatorial form in Soviet Communism.

Thus, Mounier shifted his identification of the primary enemy from the "bourgeois individual" and "Bourgeois Individualist Civilization" to the modern bourgeois political economy of "Capitalism." In its place, he called for Democratic Socialism.

Book 4 - 1949 LE PERSONNALISME (*Personalism*)

This 1949 book on Personalism was Mounier's fourth and final one, with his death coming in the following year. It is a more carefully thought out and more systematically structured book than the prior one, which some may view as a series of rambling

reflections. Also, this book was translated into English and published by the University of Notre Dame Press under the title *Personalism* (Mounier, 1950).

This book's strongest theme is "*The Personal Universe*," a phrase Mounier took from Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, whose pioneering ideas were well known to him. This Teilhardian cosmic background constituted a dramatically new theme in Mounier's writings on Personalism.

The title of the book's Introduction is "Informal Introduction to the Personal Universe." The title of Part I, with seven chapters, is "The Structure of the Personal Universe," and the title of Part II (only the length of a chapter) is "Personalism and the Revolution of the Twentieth Century." In Part II, Mounier shifted from his earlier language about "The Crisis of the 20th Century" to "*The Revolution of the 20th Century*," which he saw as the negative philosophical triumph of European Nihilism.

Three New Themes

Within Mounier's last reflections in Part II of his fourth and final book on Personalism, we find three new core themes.

1. *Advent of European Nihilism*. Again, for Mounier, the challenge of the twentieth century was no longer simply the modern bourgeois individual, or modern Bourgeois Individualist Civilization, or even modern Capitalism, but now and more fundamentally, their philosophical climax in *European Nihilism*.
2. *New Interpretations of Existentialism and Marxism*. Also, Mounier now described major strands of *Existentialist Idealism as leading to European Nihilism*. He also revised his interpretation of Marxist Materialism, despite its profound philosophical errors, by viewing it as *more resourceful than Existentialist Idealism* in the struggle against European Nihilism, provided it becomes open to spiritual transcendence.
3. *The Teilhardian Personal Universe*. Most importantly, Mounier integrated into his philosophy of Personalism the holistic interpretation of matter/spirit as a "Personalizing Universe" that Pierre Teilhard de Chardin was then developing. In Teilhard's cosmovision, Earth's *matter* (Earth's Geosphere) has brought forth *life* (Earth's

Biosphere), and Earth's life has brought forth *thought* (Earth's Psychosphere, now developing into Earth's Noosphere).

Again, Part I of Mounier's fourth book on Personalism is organized around Teilhard's cosmovision of the "Personal Universe" (*l'universe personnel*). Teilhard's cosmovision became Mounier's new, yet not completely digested, philosophical foundation for his philosophy of Personalism.

To repeat: I presume Teilhard took the adjective "personal" in his "Personalizing Universe" from Mounier's philosophy of Personalism. Against this background, I will now briefly review the book's Introduction and the chapters in Part I.

Introduction

Following Teilhard but not referencing him until later, Mounier stated "the study of the objective universe shows that the personal mode of existing is the highest form of existence, and that the evolution of pre-human nature converges upon the creative moment at which this achievement is attained." He also stated, "The personal is the mode of existence proper to humanity." He then began a long philosophical narrative showing how Personalism had struggled to emerge in European history and later spread to the United States.

Chapter 1 on Embodied Existence

Here, Mounier put the human person back into nature as "wholly body and wholly spirit." But he also argued that the human person spiritually "transcends nature." Thus, he rejected the reductionist "mechanistic view" of the universe, which had claimed "Nature reveals nothing to our rational understanding but an infinitely tangled web of tendencies, and we cannot even tell whether this is reducible ... to any logical unity at all."

Describing that "mechanistic view" as now collapsing into European Nihilism, Mounier instead embraced the Teilhardian view of evolution as emerging consciousness, in which "one may discern a preparation for [human personalization] throughout the history of the universe."

However, later in this chapter and with a different spirit, Mounier wrote in a negatively anthropocentric tone about humans dominating nature. For example, he referred uncritically to “man’s exploitation of nature.” He also argued that, with the emergence of humans, “the belonging to nature turns into the mastery of nature.” He then drew on some elements from Marx’s writings that portrayed “man” as “overcoming nature.”

Finally, Mounier claimed that the “Spirit” (*Ésprit*) is promoting “human power over nature ... as a means for the liberation of humanity from natural servitude, and for the reconquest of nature.” Clearly, Mounier had not yet developed a fully ecological vision for his Personalism’s cosmological anthropology.

Mounier’s engagement with Teilhard’s cosmovision was partly problematic for three reasons. First, his access to Teilhard’s important writings was limited to privately circulating mimeographed copies of only some of those writings, due to harsh censorship by Jesuit and Vatican authorities. Second, Mounier’s deteriorating physical and psychological state presumably left him without sufficient energy for a more intensive study of Teilhard’s bold cosmovision.

Third, as the late great Catholic ecological visionary Thomas Berry (1914-2009) once argued, Teilhard’s technoscientific optimism was itself problematic. (Berry, 1982). Yale scholars Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grimm have helpfully summarized Thomas Berry’s critique as stating that “Teilhard’s laudatory reflections on scientific research and technology did not always account for its potential implications for disrupting Earth’s processes, as when he uncritically wrote about the marvels of nuclear power and genetic engineering.” (Tucker & Grimm, 2017, p. 400).

Chapter 2 on Communication

In this chapter, Mounier, reflecting new developments in European philosophy, employed the concept of “communication” in place of his earlier use of the word “communitarian,” as essential for Personalism. In this shift, he saw the human person opening to communication with others. Also, much of this chapter is devoted to his critique of the modern “individual,” whom he saw as closing in upon the self, in effect anti-communicative.

Mounier's major philosophical target in this chapter was *Jean-Paul Sartre* (1905-1980). That famed French philosopher had also been part of the earlier Paris philosophical circle with Maritain, Berdyaev, Ricoeur, and Mounier. But Mounier saw Sartre's writings radicalizing Existentialism's negative tendency to solipsism and despair. That negative tendency, Mounier claimed, had begun a century earlier with Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), the famed Danish philosopher-theologian, whom he saw as the first modern existentialist.

Mounier pointed out that "Sartre has spoken of the eye of another as something that ... curdles the blood; and of the presence of someone else as a trespass upon oneself, a deprivation or a bondage." For Mounier, such statements by Sartre constituted the anti-communicative opposite of Personalism's openness to communitarian communication among humans.

In contrast to Sartre's shutting others out, Mounier argued that personalism's openness to others supported "the unity of humankind" and found strong expression in Christianity. It also appeared, he stated, as "the animating principle of eighteenth-century cosmopolitanism, and later in Marxism." Further, he stated that Personalism "is flatly opposed to the idea of free [autonomous] spirits, as in Sartre."

Chapter 3 on Intimate Conversion

Mounier now turned to the interiority of the human person. Here, he defended contemplation, modesty, and secrecy of the inmost self, as well as privacy, personal private property, and a personal vocation. He also stated that Marx supported personal private property.

Chapter 4 on Confrontation

Mounier here argued on behalf of the sometimes-necessary resort to force and class conflict in defense of the dignity of the human person. He called this forceful defense "a sacred fire, which is fanned into flame by any wind that smells of servitude, rousing the person to defend, rather than life itself, the dignity of life. This is the mark of a free person." However, he also noted that the flaming of this sacred fire is "rare." He then wrote, "People in the mass prefer servitude in security to the risks of independence."

Chapter 5 on Freedom under Conditions

Mounier next began by noting how liberals, Marxists, existentialists, and Christians all claim to be bringing about “the true reign of freedom.” But, he argued, true freedom is “the affirmation of the person.” Mounier then drew on the work of the French Catholic existentialist philosopher Gabriel Marcel (1889-1973).

Marcel had been born to a Jewish mother and an agnostic father but was himself a convert to Catholicism in 1929. He had also been a member of the earlier Paris philosophical group that had intellectually nurtured the young Mounier and had included Sartre, Maritain, Berdyaev, and Ricoeur, as well as Maurice Merleau-Ponty.

Mounier then stated that the subatomic “indeterminism” discovered by Quantum Physics is undermining the determinism of modern Positivism. Then, again drawing on Teilhard, he stated, “Nature discloses a slow but sure development of conditions favorable for freedom.” Yet “absolution freedom,” Mounier wrote, “is a myth.”

Mounier criticized the notion that freedom is limited to negation (freedom from something). He directed that criticism at both liberals and anarchists, who think of freedom in this way. He also criticized the claim that freedom is “pure spontaneity” and “unlimited,” a doctrine that Sartre boldly taught. In addition, Mounier criticized the “philosophical myopia that tends to see the center and pivot of freedom in the act of choice, whereas it lies in progressive liberation to choose the good.”

Chapter 6 on the Highest Dignity

In this chapter, Mounier saw God as “the one supreme Person” but also as “transpersonal.” His main point in this chapter is that “personality does not remain closed within itself but relates to something transcendent dwelling amongst us.”

In contrast, Mounier stated, “Sartre wants [to view the self] as comprehending the whole of the human,” which Mounier also declared “is very nearly the Marxian” position.” He continued, “In affirming myself, however, I feel that my most deeply motivated and

most highly creative actions surge up from within, as it were unaware." He then quoted Marcel's statement, "I become aware that I am more than my life."

Raising the question of "the goal of this movement toward transcendence," Mounier responded by stating that "Several contemporary thinkers speak of 'values,' conceived as realities in themselves apart from their relations, and recognizable *a priori* (Scheler, Harman)." He then argued that "Personalists, however, cannot willingly surrender the person to anything impersonal, and most of them seek, in one way or another, to personalize these values. Christian personalism goes the whole way and deduces all values from the unique appeal of the one supreme Person [God]."

Chapter 7 on Engagement

Mounier again acknowledged his debt to Maurice Blondel's Philosophy of Action, which he saw as including an "interior spiritual experience." He then lamented the materialistic and determinist philosophy that leads one to accept whatever comes "so as to suffer as little as possible," a doctrine he linked with the ancient Stoics. He added that Marxist Materialism also carries this same danger but avoids it by rallying people to action through praxis.

Further, he stated that there are also those who refuse to act because they see the world as absurd, presumably referring to existentialists like Sartre. And he again proposed that there are those who see action as free from any restraint. They pursue, he wrote, a "frenzy of action" that can yield "to the subhuman in a time of terror."

According to Mounier, the alternative to these errors is "contemplative action," which he described as infused with "discernment." He also described contemplative action as arising, for example, from "monastic studies," which he linked to different sociological forms: "feudal with the Benedictines, collegiate with the Dominicans, military with the Jesuits."

Mounier also described what he called "prophetic action," which "maintains a relation between the contemplative and the practical" and aims "directly at the disruption of

existing practice.” Among his examples of prophetic action was the Indian non-violent leader of resistance to English imperialism, Mohandas Gandhi (1869-1948).

Having reviewed the preface and seven chapters in Part I of Mounier’s fourth book on Personalism, I now turn to this book’s final section, which he labeled Part II. In my judgment, Part II deserves special attention here because it stands out as the final contribution of Mounier’s four books on Personalism. Here, he develops a fuller and partly new explanation for what drove him to write all four books. Therefore, I give it a major heading, which now follows.

PART II.

THE REVOLUTION OF THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

A GAIN, WHAT MOUNIER LISTED AS PART TWO of this fourth book is only the length of a chapter. But he must have considered it most important to have given it such an overarching heading. Part II is divided into nine short sections. But I will comment only on five, which I consider more significant.

European Nihilism & Mounier’s Embrace of Teilhard

Again, Mounier had begun his first book on Communitarian Personalism by diagnosing the Crisis of the Twentieth Century as rooted in the modern *bourgeois individual*. In his second book, he had broadened that diagnosis by discovering a more powerful cultural root for that crisis in modern *Bourgeois and Individualist Civilization*. Now, in the first section of this fourth book’s Part II, he deepened his diagnosis by portraying the modern crisis as revealing itself in *European Nihilism*.

Again, in Mounier’s intellectual evolution, he had early on moved from his initial career as an academic philosopher to rejecting academic philosophy. He thus chose instead to subordinate his academic work in philosophy to engagement with the social world of economics, politics, and culture. But he suddenly shifted back to locating the Crisis of the Twentieth Century within philosophy itself. He now saw the crisis of Modern Western Civilization collapsing philosophically into European Nihilism.

Looking back over Mounier's three earlier books on Communitarian Personalism, I see his developing philosophy of Personalism carrying seeds of this final analysis. However, in those books, he mostly used his negative critiques of Existentialist Idealism and Marxist Materialism to illumine his engaged social analysis.

But now, Mounier expanded his Personalism by means of a positive cosmological affirmation rather than a negative social critique. This move led him to the deeper cosmological level beyond merely critiquing the modern social crisis' sequential expressions in Decadent Liberalism, Materialist Marxism, and Christian Fascism.

Again, in making this deeper cosmological turn, Mounier embraced Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's cosmovision, in which *thought* becomes the most powerful force in the Universe. He now made the Teilhardian cosmovision foundational for his engaged philosophy of Personalism.

Mounier came to this final realization from his exposure to Teilhard's concept of "Thought," later published in Part III of Teilhard's most famous book, *Le phénomène humain* (Teilhard, 1955). Here, Teilhard unfolded his concepts of the Psychosphere, the Noosphere, and the Personalizing Universe. (A recent and more accurate English translation of Teilhard's book by Sarah Appleton-Weber is now available as *The Human Phenomenon* [Teilhard, 2015].)

Of course, Teilhard's 1955 French text was not published until half a decade after Mounier's death. However, Teilhard had mostly finished the manuscript in 1940 and then reworked it after returning to Paris in 1946. During those years, mimeographed copies circulated in Paris, and I presume Mounier had a copy.

It is important to remember that, as with Mounier, Paris had become Teilhard's adult home. He spent many years living there, studying for his doctorate from the Sorbonne, working on geological research, and teaching at Paris' Institut Catholique. Also, when Teilhard returned to Paris at the war's end, he regularly published articles in the Paris-based Jesuit journal *Études*.

As a long-time resident in Paris, a member of the Parisian Catholic intellectual elite, a now-famous Catholic philosopher, and founding editor of the Paris-based review *Ésprit*,

Mounier certainly would have learned early on about Teilhard's ideas. Even more importantly, Teilhard and Mounier were Catholic intellectual colleagues and personal friends. Thus, Jean-Marie Domenach, editor of *Ésprit* from 1957 to 1977, wrote that Teilhard and Mounier shared "not only communications but also mutual esteem and friendship." (Domenach, 1963, p. 340).

Four Responses to European Nihilism

In the second section of Part II of this fourth and final book on Personalism, Mounier described three responses to European Nihilism, plus an unnumbered fourth response.

1. *The Way of Fear.* The first response, Mounier claimed, is fear. It appears in what he called "*the conservative appeal*" that exalts "a pseudo tradition." He also saw it as "a move for security, which exposes its flanks to vengeance and destruction." Mounier's discussion here of "fear" continued his earlier analysis of Christian Fascism, which described it as "a perverted spiritual movement, perhaps even demonic, and one reaching into the unconscious depths of the human psyche." His analysis of fear as a political foundation can help us to understand the neo-fascist irrationality into which sectors of the contemporary conservative movement have collapsed.
2. *The Way of Catastrophe.* Mounier described this second response as sounding "*the apocalyptic trumpet*" and as reflecting what he called "a neurosis that is typical of periods of crisis." He also stated that this "way of catastrophe" facilitated "the inspiration of innumerable mystagogues." Mounier's analysis here can help us understand contemporary apocalyptic responses to the still-expanding global ecological, social, and spiritual crisis – responses that implicitly justify tragic resignation and doing nothing.
3. *The Only Way Out.* This third response, of course, is Mounier's own philosophical path of *engaged Personalism*, now finding deeper philosophical and scientific grounding for the human person in the third stage of Teilhard's cosmovision (the evolution of matter into life and the further evolution of life into thought).

Mounier also warned about a fourth response to European Nihilism that he named the “*myth of blind adventurism*.” He wrote that it “has been the temptation of many young men and of some of the best in the earlier years of the twentieth century.” He identified it as the combination of being “active and at the same time pessimistic,” and with “the makings of a fascist” who lives in “a solitariness overshadowed by death.”

Mounier traced the philosophical foundation for this blind, adventurist, and death-obsessed proto-fascism to the German philosopher *Friedrich Nietzsche* (1844-1900). He also claimed that “Existentialism has a certain bias in the same direction.” Next, Mounier provided “a few rules for his personalist strategy.” These included:

1. *Remaining independent, at least initially, of groups and parties*
2. *Avoiding mystification of the spiritual dimension by not linking spirituality to personalist action*
3. *Comprehensively linking the spiritual and the material*
4. *Guarding against a priori dogmatism by integrating freedom with reality*
5. *Avoiding superficial and shallow understandings of revolution that constitute a substitute for serious thinking.*

Economic Society

In this section, Mounier began by stating that “Marxism is correct in giving a certain primacy to economics.” However, he added, “This does not mean that economic values are the only ones, or that they are superior to others.” He then commented on Capitalism in Europe, the United States, and the entire globe. I will now provide a long quotation since it represents an important part of Mounier’s final social analysis.

Capitalism in Europe, in all its diverse forms, is exhausted and at the end of its devices. American Capitalism, still in its phase of expansion, can keep that of Europe alive a little longer by affording it transfusions of credit, but sooner or later, living as it does on the same principles, it will encounter equally serious contradictions ...

The extension of Capitalism over the whole globe and its possible unification under one powerful empire render it improbable that this transition can be made without resistances

and crises. Parliamentary democracy, which has shown itself incapable of effecting profound economic reforms upon the national scale, can hardly be expected to do so in a far vaster sphere.

A 'labor policy without Labor,' springing simply from the conciliatory good-will of the enlightened section of the middle classes, has demonstrated its impotence throughout the European resistance movements. The attainment of Socialism must be, as it was originally formulated, a work of the workers themselves, of movements of peasants and workers organized with the more enlightened portions of the bourgeoisie.

In this section, Mounier used the powerful phrase “*priority of labor*,” which Pope John Paul II later adopted in his 1981 encyclical letter on human labor, *Laborem Exercens*. Mounier also stated that “the adoption of Socialism” must become the “general directive idea for social reorganization.” Yet Mounier insisted there is need for “a re-edition of Socialism,” which must be “at the same time democratic.” All this is necessary, he continued, for “a truly human economy.” The frightening alternative, he warned, is “dictatorship by technocrats, either of the right or the left.”

National & International Society

In this section, Mounier wrote that “Nationalism today appears in many respects superannuated, ruinous and regressive.” But he acknowledged that “the national sense is still a powerful corrective of the vital egoism of individuals.” I again insert here a lengthy quotation.

The nation becomes introverted, and a seedbed of war, if it is not built into a community of nations. The mistake made by the best minds after 1918, was to believe, on liberal, ideological grounds, that this international community could be simply built upon the foundations of sentiment, juridical agreements, and parliamentary institutions, while other passionate economic and social forces were arousing conflicts and leading to explosions.

This illusion persists in the second post-war period (United Nations Organization) with a more cynical attitude to force. Thus, evil is piled on evil. Nevertheless, the world is in

fact becoming more and more international: there are no more 'independent' nations in the old sense of the word.

The prevailing winds are all making towards world unity, and will sooner or later bring it about, if three conditions can be fulfilled, namely:

- 1. That nations give up their complete sovereignty, not for the benefit of some super-imperialism but to a democratic community of peoples*
- 2. That this union be achieved between the peoples and their representatives, and*
- 3. That the forces making for imperialism, especially the economic forces which sometimes act in national and sometimes in cosmopolitan disguise, can be kept under control by the united peoples.*

Until then, every international organization will be undermined from within by movements that tend to war.

Mounier also added the following comment on race:

In this epoch, particular mention must be made of interracial society. The doctrine of the equality of persons obviously excludes every form of racism and xenophobia ... The colonial period is ending.

The Position of Christianity

Here in his final section, Mounier began by critiquing what he called "the compromises of contemporary Christianity." He saw those compromises as including:

- 1. The theocratic temptation of state control of the conscience*
- 2. Sentimental conservatism" that links faith with an "out-of-date class system*
- 3. Logic of money that would override the interests it ought to serve*
- 4. Frivolous attempts to follow "the latest ideological success*

Along with those temptations, Mounier claimed the deeper problem is that "Christianity no longer holds the field." Again, this important section merits a lengthy quotation.

This crisis is not the end of Christianity, but only of a different kind of Christianity. Perhaps the decomposing hulk of a world that Christianity built, which has now slipped its moorings, is drifting away, and leaving behind it the pioneers of a new Christianity.

Christianity is slowly returning to its first position; renouncing government upon earth and the outward appearances of sanctification to achieve the unique work of the Church, the community of Christians in the Christ, mingled among all people in secular work – neither theocracy nor liberalism, but a return to the double rigors of transcendence and incarnation.

The crisis of Christianity is not only a historic crisis of the Church. It is a crisis of religious values throughout the white man's world. The philosophy of the Enlightenment believed that religious values were artificially maintained, and it was persuaded that they would shortly disappear. For some time, that illusion could be kept up on the rising tide of scientific enthusiasm.

But if one sure conclusion can already be drawn from the experiences of this twentieth century, it is that as fast as these values in Christian vestments disappear, they reappear under other, more obsessive images: the body is divinized, or the collectivity, or the evolutionary striving of the species, or the Leader, or the Party, and so forth.

All the regulative ideas that are set forth in the 'phenomenology' of religion come back again in novel cults and generally in debased forms, decidedly retrograde in comparison with those of Christianity, precisely because the personal universe and its requirement are eliminated.

Mounier then wrote a short paragraph to end his fourth and final book on his engaged philosophy of Personalism. He stated that his reflections share “the free, provisional character of a progressive disclosure of the human predicament of our time.” Finally, he shared his hope that “the word ‘Personalism’ will itself one day” no longer be needed because our human family will have returned to its deep meaning.

As a concluding note in this review of Mounier's final 1949 book, I would like to add one more quote. Though brief and unfortunately not further developed, it stands out in the

sections I passed over. It addresses *the position of women* within the crisis or revolution of the 20th Century. In that section, he wrote:

It is nevertheless true that our social world is one that man has made for men, and that the resources of feminine being are among those which [the male half of] humanity still largely neglects.

Taking seriously this terse statement would certainly require that Mounier write a full book on this subject.

But we will never know how Mounier, married to a woman and the father of a daughter, might have developed his inditement of the male construction and male control of Modern Western Civilization. For, as Mounier was writing those brief lines concerning women, death was closing in upon him. There would be no more books from this courageous philosopher, who had contributed so much through his engaged Personalism.

MOUNIER'S LEGACY FOR TODAY

TODAY, APPROXIMATELY THREE-QUARTERS OF A CENTURY after the early death of Emmanuel Mounier, the legacy of his engaged philosophical wisdom may now help us to discern a truly personalist path that will be rooted in Pierre Teilhard de Chardin's cosmovision of a "personalizing universe."

However, today, Mounier's rich philosophical legacy needs to take on a new challenge as we face what Pope Francis, in his 2015 encyclical letter *Laudato Sí - On Care for Creation*, called the still-expanding global crisis of "integral ecology."

At the same time, Mounier's rich philosophical legacy can help us with an old but renewed challenge, namely "Christian Fascism," whose return he warned about, and which has now taken the distinct form of Christian Neo-Fascism.



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ABOUT THE AUTHOR



JOE HOLLAND is an eco-philosopher and Catholic theologian who explores the interwoven ecological, social, and spiritual breakdown of the Modern World with its Industrial Civilization and Psychological Spiritual⁷. Correlatively, he explores the search for a regeneratively post-modern Ecological Civilization and Ecological Spirituality.

Joe completed his Ph.D. from the University of Chicago in the field of Ethics & Society, which was an interdisciplinary dialogue of Theology with Philosophy and Social Science. At Chicago, he studied Theology with David Tracy, Philosophy with Paul Ricoeur, and Social Science with Gibson Winter. He was also a Fulbright Scholar in Philosophy at the Universidad Católica in Santiago, Chile during the last year of the democratic-socialist government of President Salvador Allende, which was violently overthrown by the murderous dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet with US governmental backing.

Joe is Emeritus Professor of Philosophy & Religion at Saint Thomas University in Miami Gardens, Florida, where he was also Adjunct Professor in its College of Law; Honorary Visiting Professor at the Universidad Nacional del Altiplano in Puno, Peru; President of Pax Romana / Catholic Movement for Intellectual & Cultural Affairs - USA and Editor of its Pacem in Terris Press, with both based in Washington DC; and a member of the International Association for Catholic Social Thought, based at the Catholic University of Leuven in Belgium.

Earlier, Joe served as Research Associate at the Washington DC Center of Concern, created by the international Jesuits and the US Catholic Bishops to work with the United Nations on global issues. Later, he taught at New York Theological Seminary in New York City, the Theological School of Drew University in Madison, New Jersey, and the Florida Center for Theological Studies in Miami, Florida. For both the Center of Concern and Pax Romana, he served as NGO Representative to the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations in New York City.

Joe also served as Research Coordinator for the 1976 landmark event, Theology in the Americas Conference, which brought together a multi-racial inclusive community of liberation-oriented

theologians from Central, North, and South America and the Caribbean. Later, he co-founded the American Catholic Lay Network and the National Conference on Religion & Labor, co-sponsored by the AFL-CIO. Plus, he was founding Executive Director of the Pallottine Institute for Lay Leadership & Research at Seton Hall University, co-founder and Vice-Chair of Catholic Scholars for Worker Justice; and co-founder and current board member of the Spirituality & Sustainability Global Network (SSGN).

Joe has published 20 books and many articles. His book with Peter Henriot, SOCIAL ANALYSIS: LINKING FAITH AND JUSTICE, has more than 50,000 copies in print, including 2 US editions, plus 5 foreign-language editions, and 2 foreign English editions, and it is still used in practical theology courses around the world. He was also the ghost-writer for the 1975 document "This Land is Home to Me" (A Pastoral Letter on Powerlessness in Appalachia by the Catholic Bishops of the Region), and for its 1995 sequel document "At Home in the Web of Life" (A Pastoral Message from the Catholic Bishops of Appalachia on Sustainable Communities).

In the United States, Joe has lectured at Georgetown, Harvard, Notre Dame, Princeton, and many other universities. Internationally, he has lectured at Institut Catholique in Paris, France; Sophia University in Tokyo, Japan; Pontifical Catholic University in São Paulo, Brazil; Pontifical Catholic University in Porto Alegre, Brazil; Universidad Mayor de San Andres in La Paz, Bolivia; and Universidad Nacional del Altiplano in Puno, Peru.

In 1986, Joe received the Boston Paulist Center's Isaac Hecker Award for Social Justice; in 2002, the Athena Medal of Excellence from the Universidad Nacional del Altiplano in Peru; in 2013 an Irish Echo Award for contribution to the US labor movement; and in 2021, the first annual Thomas Berry Award from the Thomas Berry Institute for Ecumenical Dialogue at Iona College in New Rochelle, New York.

Joe is happily married to Paquita Biascoechea-Martinez Holland, a native of Puerto Rico and international leader in bilingual education. They have two wonderful grown children and four wonderful young grandchildren. His too infrequent hobby is sailing, especially in the warm green waters of the Caribbean Sea.

