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EDITED AND REVIEWED BY
Darren C. Treadway,
Niagara University, United States

*CORRESPONDENCE

Kleio Akrivou
✉ k.akrivou@henley.reading.ac.uk;
✉ k.akrivou@henley.ac.uk

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Editorial: Personalism and moral psychology: re-humanizing economies and organizations

Kleio Akrivou^{1*}, Caleb Bernacchio², Domenec Melé³ and Germán Scalzo⁴

¹Henley Business School, University of Reading, Reading, Berkshire, United Kingdom, ²California State University, Monterey Bay, Seaside, CA, United States, ³IESE Business School, University of Navarra, Barcelona, Spain, ⁴Panamerican University, Benito Juárez, México City, Mexico

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Editorial on the Research Topic

Personalism and moral psychology: re-humanizing economies and organizations

In late modernity, social and economic responses to ecological, health-related, and societal challenges have focused on the quest for production and profit. In doing so, they have relied on impersonal frameworks that result in environmental damage and consider human beings' very right to flourishing irrelevant or peripheral. Consideration of the person as the core catalyst for creating a more humane and sustainable future therefore remains a crucial task. In light of this, it needs to be asked whether our theoretical understandings of human beings, their action and their potentiality are genuinely fit for the complicated challenges we face.

Modern psychology has made significant empirical progress on the basis of an analytic tradition concerned with human personality, behavior and related traits, motivation, and cognition. Nevertheless, the associated logic of action minimizes the importance of life, wellbeing and human flourishing. Moreover, it puts communities and their social practices at the service of institutions that primarily seek external goods and their maximization, thereby narrowing work and human action and related potentialities by instrumentalizing or even commodifying agency and relationships. Despite valuable contributions, psychological theories have some limitations due to reductionist view of the human beings assumed. This can be overcome by a more complete view of the human provided by philosophical personalism.

Philosophical personalism (Burgos, 2018, 2021; Williams and Bengtsson, 2022) has further the notion of "person," which, from this perspective, is much more comprehensive than the usual term "individual." This philosophy sees the person in his or her wholeness, uniqueness, and dignity. Within this stream of thought, several prominent scholars are in the Aristotelian-Thomistic tradition often adding significant elements of modern philosophy. Among them, Emmanuel Mounier, Jacques Maritain, Dietrich von Hildebrand, Edith Stein, Max Scheler, Karol Wojtyła, Robert Spaemann, and Leonardo Polo. Others, as Martin Buber and Emmanuel Levinas, present their own perspectives, with some points in common with the former. Although with certain differences, these authors emphasize the human person as a substantive rational and free being, with a corporal, psychological and spiritual unity; someone unique and unrepeatably both because of genetics and personal biography

made by free choices. Relevant capacities of the person are having self-possession, which entails personal responsibility, self-governance to order values in making decisions, and self-determination, which allows him or her to flourish as a human being. The person is not an isolated individual, reduced to preferences and rationality to maximize them, but a relational and social being, with capacity of self-giving, friendship and communion with other persons. The person is someone who works, transforming the world, and not only adapting to the environment as do non-rational animals. Last, but not least, the human person is open to transcendence, with an ability to discover ethical values, beauty, and something divine, which can give full meaning to human life. Based on these features and sound arguments, the human person—man and woman—is endowed with an absolute intrinsic value, that is, as possessing “human dignity” and innate rights associated with this dignity.

In this light, the article from [Luis et al.](#) aims to explore a relatively new personalist virtue ethics theory of self and human action, the so called “Interprocessual-Self” (IPS) theory. A new explanatory framework for contemporary neuroscientific findings, it allows for a holistic consideration of all the key processes involved (ranging from optimally functioning cognitive processes, memory, flexibility, and the emotional work surrounding personal and interpersonal ethics, intimacy, identity and other important psychological mechanisms such as self-knowledge, and the capacity for agency), and their integration in personal growth in interpersonal relationships.

For its part, [Bernacchio’s](#) article brings insights from Tomasello’s work on moral psychology to critically assess whether MacIntyre’s social theory presupposes a personalist moral psychology. Bernacchio shows how Tomasello’s account complements MacIntyre’s by explaining how participation in social practices generates a sense of moral obligation, but fails to address the problem of relativism. Hence, he explores how a personalist moral psychology in MacIntyre’s work can provide the basis for a self-conscious sense of moral obligation that is not threatened by relativism.

Grounding the moral actor in a richer and more profound philosophical tradition like personalism allows for novel insights into individual and collective action that place ethical, cognitive, affective and practical aspects of wisdom at the heart of human action. This, in turn, contributes to a renewal of organizational psychology, which implies considering the person herself as the center of the social realm and an end in herself called to growth and flourishing with others; in other words, to understand interpersonal growth as both the means and end of human action. A realist ethics underpinned by a logic of the gift emphasizes forms of rationality that sustain human community through giving and receiving, and through participatory work and governance for the common good.

Through this lens, [Alonso-Bastarache and Vargas](#) analyze Game Theory (GT) to make explicit that it assumes an instrumental form of rationality underpinned by a logic of self-interest, which is inadequate for describing the entirety of human social existence and interaction. Aiming to amplify GT with another form of rationality based on realist ethics and a personalist anthropology reinforced by the logic of gift, their contribution provides a wider philosophical framework for GT with a series of non-mathematical axioms of what can be called a Game Metatheory (GMt).

How can we then reimagine what a personalist leadership approach to theory and practice looks like? Such a reimagination includes examining organizational level attributes that support a personalist leadership and organizational development. So, in order to address the first question, the article from [Murcio and Scalzo](#) focuses on the concept of person-centered leadership drawing from the personalism of Carlos Llano, particularly in his rediscovery of the “practical idea” as a dynamic principle for integrating the practice of management and ethical leadership to promote a humanistic, people-centered perspective. To address the second question, the article from [Ardelt and Sharma](#) aims to answer the question of whether wisdom benefits organizations by linking wise organizations to wise leadership. They also use empirical research guided by this framework, to test the extent to which wise organizations have a positive effect on employees’ wellbeing and how it is mediated by wise leadership and job satisfaction.

In different ways, all of these contributions demonstrate the urgent need for a deeper understanding of what human beings are in order to adequately face ethical challenges at a global level. In this regard, [Akrivou and González’s](#) article explores a movement beyond virtue ethics via a novel philosophical personalist approach and its implications for interpersonal communication. According to them, grounding the moral actor in a richer and more profound philosophical tradition—Polo’s transcendental anthropology—provides original insights into individual and collective action that places the person at the heart of human communicative action and theory.

In short, the present Research Topic is built around the premise that (late) capitalism’s dehumanizing effects on society and nature can be reversed through the adoption of a deeper philosophical and anthropological perspective that significantly shifts our understanding of human beings. A conscious effort was made to balance the theoretical, applied and empirical side of personalist philosophical approaches with other fields—including moral and organizational psychology, social and organizational theory, leadership, management and organizational studies, interpersonal communication—to explore how personalism can inform our economic and civic life. These contributions indicate potential paths for renewed ethical and organizational management that goes beyond traditional “know-what” and “know-how” to explore how personalism allows for ethically informed human and organizational action inspired by a form of wisdom that emphasizes happiness via “know-why” and “know-for-whom.”

Author contributions

All authors listed have made a substantial, direct, and intellectual contribution to the work and approved it for publication.

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